

POLITICS

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**CONGRESS-LEFT-ISF ALLIANCE, FIGHTING FOR POLITICAL RELEVANCE, HOPES TO BE KINGMAKER**

# 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Edition

POTPOURRI

8



**AMRUTA KHANVILKAR: ACTORS MUST FOCUS ON WORK, NOT PLATFORM OF RELEASE**

## Core sectors' output shrinks 4.6 per cent

**NEW DELHI:** The output of eight core sectors declined by 4.6 per cent in February, the steepest contraction in the last six months which experts said could drag the overall industrial production in the month into the negative territory. All the key segments, including coal, crude oil, natural gas, and refinery products, witnessed a decline in production, according to the official data released on Wednesday. The growth rate of the eight infrastructure sectors -- coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity -- stood at 6.4 per cent in February 2020. Last time in August 2020, the sectors had recorded a negative growth of 6.9 per cent. In January this year, the segments have registered a positive growth of 0.9 per cent. According to the data, coal production declined by 4.4 per cent, crude oil by 3.2 per cent, natural gas by 1 per cent, refinery products by a steep 10.9 per cent, fertilisers by 3.7 per cent, steel by 1.8 per cent, cement by 5.5 per cent and electricity by 0.2 per cent in February. According to Commerce and Industry Ministry data, during April-February 2020-21, the eight sectors' growth declined by 8.3 per cent as compared to (+) 1.3 per cent in same period of the previous fiscal. Commenting on the figures, ICRA Ltd Principal Economist Aditi Nayar said that given the sharp base effect, the core sector output is expected to expand by 9-11 per cent in March 2021, which should result in a modest growth of around 2 per cent in Q4 FY2021. **AGENCIES**

## Centre defers labour codes' implementation

**NEW DELHI:** The four labour codes will not come into effect from April 1 as States are yet to finalise the relevant rules, which means that there will be no change in take home pay of employees and provident fund liability of companies for now. Once the wages code comes into force, there will be significant changes in the way basic pay and provident fund of employees are calculated. The labour ministry had envisaged implementing the four codes on industrial relations, wages, social security and occupational health safety & working conditions from April 1, 2021. The ministry had even finalised the rules under the four codes. "Since the states have not finalised the rules under four codes, the implementation of these laws are deferred for the time being," a source told PTI. According to the source, few states had circulated the draft rules. These states include Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Uttarakhand. Since labour is a concurrent subject under the Constitution of India, both the Centre and the states would have to notify rules under the codes to bring those into force in their respective jurisdictions. Under the new wages code, allowances are capped at 50 per cent. This means half of the gross pay of an employee would be basic wages. **AGENCIES**

## Wipro set to acquire Aussie firm for \$117m

**NEW DELHI:** IT services major Wipro on Thursday said it will acquire Ampion, an Australia-based provider of cyber security, DevOps and quality engineering services for \$117 million (about Rs 857 crore). The acquisition of Ampion is an important step for Wipro in this direction, and strengthens the commitment towards clients and stakeholders in Australia and New Zealand (ANZ), Wipro said in a regulatory filing. The acquisition is subject to customary closing conditions and regulatory approvals and is expected to close in the quarter ending June 30, 2021, it added. "The purchase consideration is \$117 million (1 AUD=0.78 USD)," the filing said. Ampion was formed through the merger of IT services providers 'Revolution IT' and 'Shelde'. Revolution IT was an IT services company in Australia founded in 2004 and Shelde was a digital IT security company founded in 2010 in Australia. **AGENCIES**

## 'Clean water flows from Haryana, gets polluted in Delhi'

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

Legal department Haryana state government has already prepared a reply along with necessary evidences to produce in Supreme Court of India against a writ moved by Delhi Water Supply Board over supply of Yamuna river water to Delhi administration accusing Haryana for supply of not only polluted but also reduced quantity of water. Refusing allegations, Haryana state government has already prepared reply to submit in the court on the next date of hearing in the case on basis of information by an economic survey. Survey revealed, when Yamuna river water flowing in Haryana the quantity of biological oxygen demand (BOD) in the water at the time of en-



try into Delhi territory at Palla was recorded as 2.56 mg each litre water and the quantity of dissolved oxygen (DO) was recorded as 7.19 mg each litre water in the river, and after covering nearly 54 km distance in Delhi area BOD in river water was recorded as 37.36 mg each litre water and DO recorded as 2.60 mg each litre water at Okhla Bairaaj. According to information,

Water Supply Board allegations as regard supply of reduced quantity of polluted water containing household garbage and industrial wastes thrown in the river at various places in Haryana while on way to Delhi said that Haryana state government will produce all evidences in the court confirming that the river water gets polluted during its 54 km journey inside Delhi for which only Delhi administration is responsible for increased pollution in river water due to neglects. Dalal said that the quantity of water in Yamuna river in Haryana state has been reduced nearly 50% in past one year, in spite of the fact Haryana government is supplying 1050 cusec water daily to Delhi Water Supply Board as per Supreme Court of India directions. According to data available

with Haryana state government, during five months with effect from October 2019 to February 2020 Haryana state was able to get total quantity 18,05,884 cusec water in Yamuna river which included 12,74,048 cusec water from Bhakhra Dam and 5,31,806 cusec water in Yamuna river flowing across the state and sharing water with Delhi Water Supply Board. The data further revealed that the quantity of supply of water in Yamuna river between October 2020 to February 2021 was reduced to 14,46,281 cusec which included 11,86,687 cusec water from Bhakhra Dam and 2,59,594 cusec water from Yamuna river but the quantity of supply of water to Delhi Water Supply Board has not been reduced by Haryana state government, Dalal said.

## Covid kills 58 more in Punjab

THE COUNTRY SEES 81,466 NEW CASES, THE HIGHEST SINGLE-DAY RISE IN SIX MONTHS



**AS MANY AS 81,484 NEW INFECTIONS WERE RECORDED IN A SPAN OF 24 HOURS ON OCTOBER 2 WHILE 482 DAILY DEATHS WERE REGISTERED ON DECEMBER 6.**

**NEW DELHI:** India saw 81,466 new coronavirus infections being reported in a span of 24 hours, the highest single-day rise in six months, taking the COVID-19 tally of cases to 1,23,03,131, according to the Union Health Ministry

data updated on Friday. The single-day rise in cases is the highest recorded since October 2, 2020, while the death toll increased to 1,63,396 with 469 daily new fatalities, the highest since December 6, the data updated at 8 am showed. Registering a steady increase for the 23rd day in row, the active cases have increased to 6,14,696 comprising 5 per cent of the total infections, while the recovery rate has further dropped to 93.67 per cent, the data stated. As many as 81,484 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours on October

2 while 482 daily deaths were registered on December 6. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 11525039. The case fatality rate stood at 1.33 per cent, the data stated. According to the ICMR, 24,59,12,587 samples have been tested up to April 1, and 11,13,966 samples were tested on Thursday. The 469 new fatalities include 249 from Maharashtra, 58 from Punjab, 34 from Chhattisgarh, 19 from Tamil Nadu, 18 from Karnataka, 11 from Kerala and nine each from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. A total of 1,63,396 deaths

have been reported so far in the country, including 54,898 from Maharashtra, 12,738 from Tamil Nadu, 12,585 from Karnataka, 11,036 from Delhi, 10,331 from West Bengal, 8,820 from Uttar Pradesh, 7,220 from Andhra Pradesh and 6,926 from Punjab. The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities. "Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation. Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on Friday said the situation in 11 states and union territories is a matter of 'serious concern'. Taking note of the continuous deterioration of the Covid scenario over the fortnight, Gauba pointed out that India's current case growth rate of 6.8 per cent in March 2021 has surpassed the previous record of 5.5 per cent (June 2020). India has also reported 5.5 per cent growth rate in daily Covid deaths in this period. While the country was reporting about 97,000 daily new Covid cases at the peak of the pandemic in September 2020, it has now reached the critical figure 81,000 daily new cases. **AGENCIES**

## Farmers plan Parliament march

**NEW DELHI:** Announcing their plans for the upcoming two months, farmers, who have been protesting against the new farm laws at the Delhi borders, said they will march to the Parliament on foot in May, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha said on Wednesday. "The Sanyukt Kisan Morcha met yesterday, and decided that the farmers will be undertaking a march to the Parliament. The date for the march is yet to be decided. "It will be joined not just by farmers, but also by women, and unemployed individuals, and labourers who have been supporting the movement," farmer leader Gurnaam Singh Chaduni said. Addressing a press conference, he said that the march would be carried out in a "peaceful" manner, and special care would be taken that "what happened on January 26 is not repeated". The leaders also shared their plans of forming a committee to control protesters if there is police action in parliament march. We will form a committee to let the protestors know what to do in case there is police action during the march. "It will also be made clear to



"We will be blocking the KMP expressway on April 10 for 24 hours, that is from 11 am on April 10 to 11 am on the next day. "We will be doing this because the government has not been listening to us. It has been sleeping. This is to wake up the government," another farmer leader said. An event to honour the farmers who have lost their lives during the agitation will be organised on May 6. "Soil from different parts of the country will be brought to these borders and a memorial will be created for all our brothers who have lost their lives while participating in this movement," a farmer leader said. **AGENCIES**

## Order to cut rates on small savings schemes withdrawn

**NEW DELHI:** The government on Thursday revoked a steep interest rate cut on small savings schemes such as PPF and NSC, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman saying it was an oversight -- a move being seen as an attempt by the BJP to contain the fallout of such a decision hitting common people amid the ongoing elections in West Bengal and Assam. Elections are also slated in the coming days in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. While the government routinely announces interest rates for small savings schemes at the end of every quarter, Wednesday's decision to cut interest



rates by up to 1.1 per cent across various small savings schemes, including Public Provident Fund (PPF) and National Savings Certificates (NSC), had come a day before the second phase of polling in West Bengal, including at political hotbed Nandigram from where West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata

Banerjee is contesting. It has been decided that the rate of interest on various small savings schemes for the first quarter of 2021-22 starting from April 1 and ending on June 30, 2021 shall remain unchanged from those notified for the fourth quarter January 1, 2021 to March 31, 2021 of 2020-21, the finance ministry said in an office memorandum on Thursday. "This has the approval of competent authority," it said. The ministry's office memorandum to roll back cut in rates on small savings scheme came hours after the finance minister termed Wednesday's notification as "oversight". **AGENCIES**

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# 'Adopt Test, Track, Treat strategy'

CENTRE ADVISES PUNJAB & CHANDIGARH TO ESCALATE TESTING IN ALL DISTRICTS

**CHANDIGARH:** The Union Health Ministry on Wednesday urged Punjab and Chandigarh to effectively implement the "Test, Track and Treat" strategy and escalate testing till the positivity rate comes down below 5 per cent.

The state and the UT were also asked to significantly increase testing in all districts with a minimum of 70 per cent RT-PCR tests, and use of Rapid Antigen Tests as screening tests in densely populated areas as well as areas where cluster of cases are reported.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan held a high-level meeting with NITI Aayog member Dr V.K. Paul to review the COVID-19 situation in Punjab and Chandigarh and the measures taken by the health authorities for surveillance and containment. Dr Balram Bhargava, DG ICMR and Dr Sunil Kumar, DGHS, MoHFW were also present.

Both the state and the UT were asked to mandatorily subject those who have tested negative in Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) to RT-PCR test. The health ministry further directed to ensure prior-



ity vaccination of the eligible population groups in districts reporting higher cases and transfer unused vaccine doses from one district to another for optimum utilization of available vaccine doses.

The health authorities should ensure that no sedimentation of vaccine takes place at any level of cold chain storage. They should also ensure maximum utilisation of

vaccination capacity in the public and private sector health facilities.

"The Centre is regularly reviewing vaccine stock, and vaccine doses will be continually replenished by the Centre also based on the consumption level of the States/UTs," said a health ministry statement.

All district officers and the local administration in Punjab and Chandigarh were

asked to refocus on effective house-to-house surveillance to identify active cases with focus on timely testing, prompt contact tracing and swift isolation so as to break the chain of transmission. They were also asked to identify clusters, focus stringent implementation of micro-containment zone approach.

Punjab has reported nearly 21 per cent week-on-week increase

in new COVID cases and about 2,740 average daily cases in the last seven days. During the same time period, the State has also seen a 30 per cent week-on-week increase in new COVID deaths and is reporting about 53 average daily deaths.

Chandigarh has also followed similar pattern in the last week. The UT has reported nearly 27 per cent week-on-week increase in new cases and 180 per cent week-on-week increase in new daily deaths. An average of 257 daily cases and 14 daily deaths have been reported during the last week.

"Dr Paul re-emphasised the importance of stringent and continued measures to break the chain of transmission and not frittering away the gains of collaborative efforts of last year," the health ministry statement said.

On Tuesday, the Punjab government had extended restrictions to tackle coronavirus with schools and colleges to remain shut for another 10 days. On March 19, the Punjab government had ordered the closure of educational institutes besides gathering restrictions till the month-end. **AGENCIES**

## Kirron Kher diagnosed with blood cancer; Anupam Kher optimistic

**MUMBAI/CHANDIGARH:** BJP MP and actor Kirron Kher has been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer, and is on her path to recovery, her actor-husband Anupam Kher said on Thursday. On Twitter, Anupam Kher released a statement, also on behalf of son Sikandar, that the 68-year-old actor is currently undergoing treatment in Mumbai.

"Just so that rumours don't get the better of a situation Sikandar and I would like to inform everyone that Kirron has been diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer. "She is currently undergoing treatment and we are sure she will come out of this stronger than before. We are very blessed that she is being looked after by a phenomenal set of doctors. She's always been a fighter and takes things head on," Anupam Kher said in the statement. Prayers poured in for Kirron



Kher from various quarters, with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah, and actors Sunil Shetty, Juhi Chawla and Parineeti Chopra sending their best wishes.

"As far as I know, Kirron Ji is a true fighter and she is definitely going to beat the cancer. I pray to the Almighty for her full and speedy recovery," the MP chief minister said in a tweet. "Sorry to hear about this. Best wishes & prayers for @ KirronKherBJP for a complete & speedy recovery," wrote Abdullah. Shetty also wished a

speedy recovery to the "inspiring, strong, courageous and amazing" actor. Chawla said she hopes Kirron Kher will surely overcome this hurdle.

"Kirronji always radiates positivity. With her spirit and strength & a support as strong as you Anupam ji & Sikandar, she will surely overcome all adversity (sic)" she said. "Sir we are praying for her," wrote Chopra. Anupam Kher also thanked her fans for their constant support and asked them to keep praying for Kirron Kher's speedy recovery.

"She's all heart and that's why she has so many people that love her. So keep sending your love to her in your prayers and in your heart. "She is well on her way to recovery and we thank everyone for their support and love," he added. The family's statement comes a day after Chandigarh BJP chief Arun Sood shared Kirron Kher's diagnosis. **AGENCIES**

## BJP flays attack on party MLA

**CHANDIGARH:** The Haryana BJP on Tuesday held protests in the state, burning effigies of Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and demanding his resignation over last week's attack on party MLA Arun Narang in Muktsar.

Narang, BJP MLA from Abohar in Punjab's Fazilka district, was allegedly thrashed and his clothes ripped off by a group of protesting farmers at Malout in Muktsar district on Saturday. On Tuesday, Haryana BJP leaders and workers held protests and raised slogans against the neighbouring state's chief minister in Jhajjar, Fatehabad, Panchkula and Yamunanagar among other places.

The demanded dismissal of the Congress government in Punjab over the law and order situation in the state. Addressing a gathering in Yamunanagar, BJP MLA Ghan-shyam Das Arora said an attack on an elected representative

was not acceptable in a democracy. He alleged that the attack on Narang was perpetrated at the behest of the Congress. "We are holding a protest against the Congress-led government in Punjab," Arora added.

In Panchkula, protesting BJP workers condemned the incident and said it indicated a "complete failure" of law and order in Punjab under the Congress regime. They also demanded the Punjab chief minister's resignation and called for strict action against those involved in this incident.

Several political parties in Punjab have condemned the Muktsar incident. Punjab Governor V P Singh Badnore too had condemned the attack on Narang and sought a report from the state government. BJP leaders in Punjab have been facing the ire of protesting farmers, who are demanding the withdrawal of the Centre's three new agricultural laws for the last four months. **AGENCIES**

## Search begins for uranium in Haryana

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

Department of Atomic Energy in the country has started search for Uranium in mines buried under hilly area at Narnaul in Mohindergarh district in Haryana state.

A team of specialists from Geological Survey of India has started preliminary survey in the area with helicopter from 60 meters height from surface in search of stocks of Uranium mineral with the help of 24 meter wide ring and in case the mission proves successful Narnaul will become an important centre for atomic energy in the country.

Information reveals, stocks worth Rs 2.50 lakh ton Uranium exist in the country to be extracted from mines underground in the country at present, which include nearly 1.44 lakh ton to be recovered in Andhra Pradesh, 75000 ton in Jharkhand, 10000 ton each in Rajasthan and Meghalaya states and nearly 5000 ton in other parts in the country buried underground sufficient to meet the demand for about 40 years.

In case, Atomic Energy Department succeeds in procuring Uranium stocks at Narnaul and adjoining area in Rajasthan our country will become Nuclear King.

Atomic Energy Research & Development Directorate in India Geological Survey of India conduct regular surveys to find out new sources of availability of Uranium in different parts in the country to strengthen nuclear power programmes presently doing survey at Narnaul in Haryana



and adjoining area at Khetri in Rajasthan.

According to information, To meet demand of nuclear energy in the country India presently also importing Uranium from Kazistan, Canada and Australia against conditional supply that all metals other than Uranium will be returned after extracting Uranium.

According to Hisar Airport officers, permission has been granted by Aviation Department to undertake survey with the help of helicopters for a period of six months presently involved in search of Uranium at Narnaul, followed by survey work to be continued in adjoining area in Rajasthan.

The officers of Atomic Energy Department as well as Geological Survey of India told that there is possibility for availability of Uranium stocks in this area at Loharu, Mohindergarh and Narnaul in Haryana state as well as in adjoining Rajasthan state at Khetri, Neem ka Thana, Udaipurwati, Khandela, Srimadho Pur, Ramgarh, Makrana, Pisanagan, Beawar, Nathdwara, Sojat, Bilara, Medta City, Didwana, Seekar, Nawalgarh, Jhunjhunu, Chidawa and Pilani.

## Punjab assures support to 'arhtiyas' on MSP

**CHANDIGARH:** Under the Centre's pressure for the MSP payments directly to farmers' bank accounts, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday assured 'arhtiyas' of his government's full support for the restoration of the older system of payment through them.

Singh gave the assurance to 'arhtiyas' following the Centre's latest directive ruling out any further relaxation to the state on the direct benefit transfer, involving direct online payment to farmers, bypassing "arhtiyas", for the wheat crop to be bought by the government agencies on the minimum support price.

The chief minister told "arhtiyas" or the commission agents, who met him under the



banner of the Federation of Arhtiya Association of Punjab, that they would remain an integral part of the procurement system in the state.

"My doors are open for you," the CM told the "arhtiyas" during a virtual meeting, in which they raised the issue of the continuance of the existing system of MSP payments to farmers through them.

Punjab "arhtiyas" are up in arms against the Centre's latest directive for direct payment to farmers for grain procurement. Union Food Minister Piyush Goyal on March 27 had written to the Punjab government, asking it to implement the direct payment of the minimum support price (MSP) to farmers.

The chief minister told the commission agents that he has been seeking time to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who, he said, appeared to be busy with election campaigns in various states. He told "arhtiyas" that though he did not expect the prime minister to give him time to meet on the DBT issue, he and his government would

keep writing to the central government and knocking on its door on the issue.

The chief minister told commission agents that he had already written to the prime minister on March 19, and had also spoken to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who, he claimed, has assured him of all help in the matter.

He further disclosed that Punjab's Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Bharat Bhushan Ashu too had met Shah to discuss the issue. At the meeting, the Federation of Arhtiya Association of Punjab accused Haryana of "betraying" them by accepting the DBT proposal of the central government. **AGENCIES**

## Farmers exchange culture and colour on Holi

CHHAVI BHATIA  
Tikri Border

On Monday morning, Sukha Bar was engrossed in a discussion around harvesting when he felt a whip hitting him. Taking a few seconds to gather his senses as he processed the sharp pain, he saw his friends, instead of defending, running for cover. Bemused and somewhat taken aback, the 42-year-old followed suit with women on hot pursuit, all in celebratory fun though.

This was the first time Bar and many farmers from Punjab were tasting Haryanavi way of celebrating Holi called *Kordha* Holi. As per the tradition in Haryana, sisters-in-law playfully beat their brothers-in-law on Holi for all the mischief and pranks they play with them all year through. The weapon of assault is *Kordha* (hunter), wet



odhins woven into a rope, hence the name *Kordha* Holi.

The Kisan Aandolan which has completed more than four months on Delhi borders, is offering enriching lessons in cultural awareness for Punjab and Haryana. From cuisine, attire, lifestyle to festivals, the factions between the two cultures are blurring with people from both the sides embracing the new insights. "Back

in Punjab, we celebrate Dulendi with dry colours and our main festival is Holi Mohalla. I found this ritual of beating men rather amusing but also felt happy for the women that they can vent their ire, mock or otherwise," grinned Bar. "We are happy to be sharing our customs with our brothers from Punjab. Our *bhabhis* would have never got the opportunity to thrash their

dewars from Punjab if not for the *morchha*," Rambir Singh from Nilokheri said. Womenfolk, who are asserting their presence at the protest since it began, played *Kordha* Holi with the same feisty spirit they are holding the fort with. Riding on the principle of a battle well-prepared is half won, they had brought lot of spare dupattas and soaked them in water overnight. While Haryanvi men knew what was in the offing when the tais gheraoed them, witty scenes were played every time the women went after the Punjabis. "Ae vi vadiya shugal mela aa. Sahnu taan pata hi hum chaley ki Holi te kutt vi paindi aa"(This is great fun too. We got to know today that you also get beaten up on Holi)," smiled 62-year-old Gurnam Singh

Tikri border has a lot of farmers from Hisar, Rohtak, Jind,

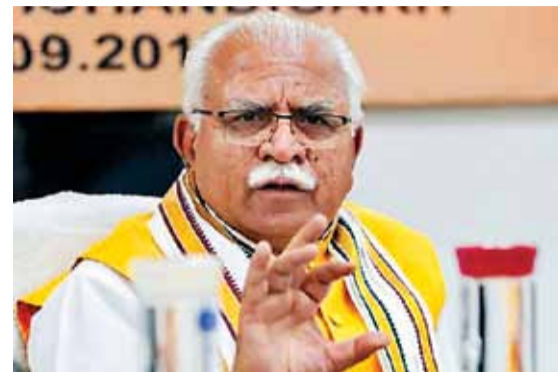
## CM, industrialists discuss job quota in Haryana

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar today said that the state government was committed to providing ample employment opportunities to the local youth through 75 per cent quota in private jobs but if required amendments to the policy would be made.

Khattar presided over a meeting with major industrial associations, chambers, entrepreneurs and other stakeholders on Thursday. Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala also attended the meeting.

"The industry plays a pivotal role in the state's development. The stakeholders gave many important and valuable suggestions at the meeting which would certainly be incorporated before framing the policy. If required, amendments to the policy would be made so as to ensure that it is industry-friendly," he said. Among those entrepreneurs present in the meeting were R.C. Bhargava, Chairman Maruti Suzuki, Nikhil Nanda, Chairman Escorts Limited, Nishant Arya from JBM Group, Nirmal Midha from Minda Group and several other prominent industry entrepreneurs. While addressing gath-



ering, Khattar said state government is not willing to force implementation of approved ordinance when entrepreneurs present in the meeting demanded to roll back the rule likely to harm industry in the state when Khattar tied to convince those present in the meeting suggesting to work out a proposal mutually agreed to solve the issue beneficial for the industry as well as government in the state.

The entrepreneurs said, trade and industry in Haryana passing through severe economic crisis since past over a year and most of the industrial units have either been closed down or facing sever sickness thus not prepared to bear implementation of any rule forced by the government at this stage.

Industry entrepreneurs raised a question over implementation of job quota rule approved by the state government when majority of industry in the state is unable to get technical as well as skilled workers and employees of their choice.

Khattar assured entrepreneurs that government wants to create sources of employment for unemployed youths in the state but in no case prepared to cause inconvenience to industry entrepreneurs in the state. He agreed to revise rules in this regard that reservation in jobs will be applicable for jobs only up to the monthly salary ranging between Rs 20000 to 25000 instead of Rs 50000 per month and will not be applicable in case of technical staff or skilled workers.

## AAP to oppose high power tariffs in Punjab

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab's main opposition party AAP on Wednesday announced it will launch an agitation from April 7 against rising electricity tariffs in the state.

Punjab Aam Aadmi Party chief Bhagwant Mann said the party would force the state government to provide free power to people on the lines of Delhi.

Mann said the rising electricity rates have made life miserable for the people in the state. "The Captain government is increasing power prices day by day instead of reducing them," he added. The AAP will launch a mass agitation across Punjab over power bills and force the Amarinder Singh-led government to reduce the tariffs, Mann said.



"The mass movement will be launched next week. This movement will reach every street, every village, town and city," he said in a statement here. Mann added that volunteers and workers of the AAP would go door to door to get information about electricity bills.

Power bills will also be burnt as a symbolic protest, the AAP leader added.

"Earlier the Akali Dal government and now the Congress have entered into costly agreements with private companies keeping in view their personal interests," he alleged.

Party leader Jarnail Singh claimed that the Punjab government would have to "pay crores of rupees" to the three private thermal plants even if it did not buy electricity from them. **AGENCIES**

## Sirsa a hot spot for drugs in Haryana

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

Preliminary information reveals that Sirsa district in Haryana state adjoining Punjab and Rajasthan states has become a hot spot for smuggling and supply of drugs mainly poppy husk, opium, charas, heroine and intoxicated drugs including tablet, capsule and injection.

In and adjoining areas of Haryana, including Delhi-NCR, have witnessed largest number of drug smuggling cases mainly 'Chitta' a drug consumed by young generation supplied in schools, colleges and universities in the state through a mafia network. Both Haryana and Punjab police officers jointly had several meetings to wipe out drug smug-

gling and sale. Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij ordered HNCB as well as state police to adopt geo-coding system to collect data at every police station level to fight smuggling and supply of drugs in the state.

Haryana state police gathered some important information as regard recovery of drugs in the state during year 2019 and observed that out of total number of drug smuggling cases reported in Haryana state 22% cases of smuggling and sale of poppy husk were registered in Sirsa district, nearly 25% cases of smuggling and sale were reported in Palwal district which included 16% cases of charas as well as nearly 16% cases each for recovery of charas were reported in Jhajjar and Karnal districts.

NEWSBRIEF

**DMK slams Centre for 'IT searches'**  
**VELLORE:** The DMK on Friday condemned the Central government for 'searches' by income tax officials in the residence of party chief M K Stalin's daughter Senthamarai in Chennai and alleged it has a 'political objective.' Party general secretary, Duraimurugan said when parties were on the verge of completing the campaign and looked forward to the day of polling, the income tax searches in the residence of Senthamarai, daughter of his party chief Stalin was done with a 'political objective.' Income tax officials neither confirmed nor denied the searches. **AGENCIES**

**UP govt withdraws case against ex-DSP**  
**LUCKNOW:** The Uttar Pradesh government has ordered the withdrawal of a case against former deputy superintendent of police Shaileendra Singh who had slapped the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) on mafia don-turned politician Mukhtar Ansari Anari during the term of the SP government, an aide of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday. A case of vandalism and assault was filed in 2004 against the former circle officer, who was allegedly made to resign under political pressure. Singh thanked Adityanath, lauding his government's "zero tolerance" against crime. "My family and I shall forever remain indebted to CM Adityanath for his kindness. **AGENCIES**

**Jagan's cousin seeks fast probe in father's murder**  
**NEW DELHI:** Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's cousin Suneetha Narreddy Friday demanded the CBI expedite the probe into the alleged murder of her father and former minister Y S Vivekananda Reddy, claiming any further "delay" may put witnesses' lives in danger. Vivekananda Reddy -- the younger brother of former Andhra Pradesh CM the late Y S Rajasekhara Reddy and the paternal uncle of the present CM -- was killed on March 15, 2019 at his home in Pulivendula, YSR Kadapa district. It has been one year since the CBI has been investigating the high-profile "murder" case but not much progress been made as no charge sheet has been filed yet, Narreddy told the media. **AGENCIES**

# Few in fray hope to be kingmaker

CONGRESS-LEFT-ISF ALLIANCE SEEMS TO BE FIGHTING FOR POLITICAL RELEVANCE

**KOLKATA:** With the poll narrative for the assembly poll in West Bengal sharply polarized between the ruling TMC and opposition BJP, the Congress-Left-ISF alliance is fighting to prove the political relevance of the parties in it and is pinning its hopes to be the kingmaker in case of a fractured mandate.

The Congress and CPI-M-led Left Front, which has been pushed to the margins of politics in Bengal after ruling it for 34 long years, has waived their ideological and political differences and came together for the second time after the 2016 assembly polls.

The Indian Secular Front (ISF) of cleric Peerzada Abbas Siddiqui is the new entrant to the "unlikely" coalition of the former rivals of secular, communist and religious forces.

For Congress and the Left, the Bengal assembly poll this time is a battle for political survival after being squeezed out of the state's poll arena.

For ISF, a first of its kind political outfit in Bengal formed by a religious leader, it is a fight to prove that it is



not a "one election wonder" and is here to stay.

The alliance christened as "Samyukta Morcha" hopes to grow at the expense of both the ruling TMC and opposition BJP by eating into their votes.

The saffron party had pocketed the opposition votes for the past few years in the absence of a credible opposition.

With ISF of firebrand religious leader Siddiqui in it, the 'Samyukta Morcha' hopes to eat into the 30 per cent minority vote bank, which had

since 2011 slowly but steadily shifted to the TMC.

The minority has in fact acted as a bulwark for the Mamata Banerjee-led party in the wake of the saffron surge in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

However, the alliance with ISF has its own set of pitfalls as the Congress and the Left are facing the threat of losing out on the perception of its secular credentials.

Siddiqui's outfit is being equated with All India Muslim League of pre-independent India and AIUFD in Assam

and is in turn pushing towards the consolidation of Hindu votes thus benefiting the BJP.

Although both TMC and the BJP have blamed the alliance partners for being a "stooge" of each other, the saffron camp is happy with ISF's entry into the poll fray.

It hopes that ISF's advent will break TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee's grip on the minority vote bank, over which it has failed to make a mark despite unprecedented success in the 2019 Bengal elections.

CPI(M) Politburo member Mohammed Salim said, "We are hopeful that the alliance will be a game changer in Bengal election. The BJP and TMC wanted to make the poll a bipolar fight. But we have made it a three-cornered contest. The people are fed up with the misrule of TMC in the state and by BJP at the Centre".

Congress leader Pradip Bhattacharya echoed him and exuded confidence that the alliance will come up with "astounding results" and can no longer be ignored. "Going by the response we have received, we are confident of winning the election. We will be the kingmaker after the poll. No one can form the government without our support," Siddiqui told PTI.

Despite a few glitches in the "rainbow alliance", the Left Front is contesting in 177 seats, the Congress 91 seats and ISF in 26. According to sources in both Congress and the Left, the alliance was the need of the hour. The two parties, who had fought the 2016 assembly election as an alliance and bagged 36 per cent vote share, witnessed a sharp decline in its vote percentage within the next three years. **AGENCIES**

# Kerala minister quits electoral politics



**KANNUR:** Senior CPI(M) leader and Kerala Industries Minister E P Jayarajan on Tuesday said he has decided to bid adieu to electoral politics.

A three-time MLA, Jayarajan is one of the several senior leaders who did not get a ticket this time as the Left party decided not to field those who have completed two terms.

While addressing the media here, Jayarajan made it clear that he would not contest in any form of election from now onwards. "The party has decided not to field those persons who have already completed two terms. I have completed my term... I have been elected an MLA thrice and become a minister also," he said.

Citing his advanced age and related ailments as reasons to quit electoral politics, the 70-year-old leader said he would not contest even if the party demands. "I hope the party will accept my stand. Otherwise, I will try to convince the party about my position. I am getting old and suffering from various health problems... So, I cannot contest in elections anymore," the senior leader added.

Asked about Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan who was contesting at the age of 75, Jayarajan said he was a "great personality" having exceptional caliber and energy. Serving as the party's district secretary in politically volatile Kannur for long, E P Jayarajan was once known as the close confidant of Pinarayi Vijayan.

The Kannur strongman had to resign as industries minister in October 2016 over alleged nepotism charges soon after the LDF government came into power. He ran into rough weather after the appointment of his nephew P K Sudheer Nambiar -- son of Kannur MP P K Sreemathi -- as the managing director of Kerala Industrial Enterprises Ltd. However, the vigilance and anti-corruption bureau, which probed the case, had absolved him of the charges, following which he had been reinducted into the ministry in 2018. **AGENCIES**

# Cong fields Ajit Mangaraj for Pipili by-election

**BHUBANESWAR:** With the Congress announcing the name of Ajit Mangaraj as its candidate for the by-election to the Pipili Assembly seat, polling for which is scheduled to take place on April 17, the battle lines are now clearly drawn.

The by-election is likely to witness a triangular fight between the BJD, Congress and BJP.

Earlier both the ruling BJD and opposition BJP had announced the names of Rudrapratap Maharathy and Ashrit Pattanayak as their candidates for the by-election respectively. While Pattanayak has already filed his nomination papers, the BJD and Congress candidates will file their papers on the last date of filing nomination.

Ajit Mangaraj had contested from the Pipili assembly segment as a Congress candidate in 2019 election and as a BJP candidate in 2009 polls.

Similarly, BJP candidate Ashrit Pattanayak, has also unsuccessfully contested from the Pipili seat twice earlier in 2019 as a BJP candidate and as an Independent candidate in 2014.

The by-elections for the Pipili seat was necessitated following the demise of the seven time MLA and former minister Pradeep Maharathy in October, 2020.

The ruling BJD headed by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has fielded Pradeep Maharathy's son Rudrapratap Maharathy in the by-election.

While both Pattanayak and Mangaraj have previous experience of contesting the polls from Pipili assembly segment, BJD candidate Rudrapratap Maharathy is new to electoral politics. However, Maharathy said he too has experience in the election management while working with his father in previous elections.

Apart from being a fresh and youth candidate, Rudrapratap also expects sympathy votes as he is contesting from his late father's constituency which he represented in the Odisha assembly seven time. Maharathy family also has a sizeable followers and network across the constituency, a BJD leader said.

BJD vice-president Debi Prasad Mishra said: "Pipili-Delanga segment is a strong fort of BJD. The party's target is that Rudrapratap's winning margin will be more than his later father Pradeep Maharathy, who was popular in the region."

BJP deputy leader in Assembly B C Sethi claimed that their candidate Ashrit Pattnaik is popular and had lost the elections last time just by about 15,000 votes. "The BJP candidate has recently won a gram panchayat in Pipili which indicated that the people of the segment want change," Sethi said. **AGENCIES**

# Kejriwal seeks farmers support in Haryana

SATISH HANDA Chandigarh

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal Chief Minister Delhi now makes another attempt to strengthen his party's network in Haryana with the support of farmers in the state.

He announced to hold a 'Maha Panchayat' in support of farmers on April 4, 2021 at Jind a prominent 'Jaat' area in which he has also invited senior farmer leaders Rakesh Tikait and Gurnam Singh Chanduni.

Past scenario reveals that every political party or a political leader in the state usually starts political new venture or his political career from Jind in the state. Kejriwal too now making attempts to have farmers blessings to launch his political party AAP in Haryana state once again. Past scenario also reveals that Kejriwal had attempted to develop AAP network together in Punjab and Haryana years ago.

However, He succeeded in building his party's network in Punjab to some extent but remained completely unsuccessful to give a identification to his party in Haryana state.

Kejriwal attempted to develop party's network in Haryana



organising few rallies in the state and appointed a group of industrialist at Ambala as party's office bearers but they failed to bring an identification to party in the state, which was dissolved after some time.

Then AAP state president Naveen Jaithind too tried hard to establish party's network in the state. He attempted to attract media persons in the state and organised several meetings with media persons but all in vain.

Past political scenario in Haryana reveals, most of political leaders in the state usually start their political activities from HUDA ground in sector 9 at Jind. Former Union Minister Ch. Virender Singh

after leaving Congress when joined BJP as state president started his new career holding a public rally preside by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in this ground. Dushyant Chautala Deputy Chief Minister Haryana launched his own Jan Nayak Janta party after saying good bye to INLD from Jind.

Former Haryana Chief Minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda prior to ruling in the state for 10 years started 'Padyatra' in support of farmers in the state from Jind. Now Arvind Kejriwal too holding 'Maha Panchayat' in support of farmers at Jind on April 4 in order to seek their blessings hoping to have success in launching his party in Haryana state.

# AIUFD, ISF and IUML 'new secular syndicate' of Cong

**GUWAHATI:** Senior BJP leader and Union Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi Tuesday termed the All India United Democratic Front in Assam, Indian Secular Front in West Bengal and Indian Union Muslim League in Kerala as the "new secular syndicate of the Congress".

Naqvi, who is here to campaign in the Assam Assembly elections, told PTI in an exclusive interview, "This new secular syndicate is the height of hypocrisy of the Congress." Congress is partnering with the three parties mentioned in the ongoing elections in Assam, West Bengal and Kerala respectively.

The assembly elections in the four states including Assam and Union Territory of Puducherry is a battle for mandate between "communal vote bank owners" and "inclusive development practitioners", asserted the union Minorities Affairs minister. When asked about winning prospect of his party, he exuded confidence that the Assam election results will be "good" for the BJP which will form government again for



the second time. Naqvi said Assam has achieved newer heights of development under the leadership of Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal in the last five years as well as due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "determination of inclusive development" ending "appeasement politics".

"The impact of remarkable changes by Modi in political work culture are being witnessed on every front - be it economy, national security, internal security and foreign affairs", he said appreciating the prime minister's efforts. Saying the prime minister is synonymous with "good governance and inclusive development", the union minister said the Modi government has made every section of the society an equal partner in progress with the commitment to "reform, perform and transform". **AGENCIES**

# Victim's family continue to blame Shivakumar



**BENGALURU:** Once again blaming Karnataka Congress President D K Shivakumar for the 'sex scandal' allegedly involving their daughter and former Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, the family of the woman in the purported video on Monday said their daughter was under a lot of pressure.

They also requested the courts not to record her statement as she is 'under duress', she be given at least four days time to be with them, or kept in a place under court supervision and provided counselling. Reacting to the charges, Shivakumar said he doesn't know anything and he has nothing to do with it.

"...Let the investigation happen, they (family) were speaking under pressure...if they have proof, let them give it." The family's statement came amid reports that she would appear before a judge to record her statement, as her lawyer on Monday moved an application of requisition before a magistrate court and said they are awaiting directions on producing her before it.

"We got to know through the media that our daughter will appear before the court. Through you (media), we urge the Chief Minister, all the Judges in Karnataka and the Home Minister... you have to consider that our daughter is under pressure for the last 20-25 days and has been forced to make statements," the woman's father said.

Speaking to reporters in Belagavi, he said if she appears before the court, she would be relieved from that pressure and her statement should then be recorded. "This is our request... she should be given time."

The woman's brother alleged that his sister was acting according to Shivakumar's dictates, was given some money by him and had not been in touch with the family for 20 to 25 days. He said the family's request to the court was to send her to them for at least four days to free her from the 'torture' and 'pressure' she was undergoing. If this could not be done, the court should make arrangements for her peaceful stay under its supervision. **AGENCIES**

# 'State poll results to decide course of national politics'

**MUMBAI:** Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday said the results of Assembly polls in four states, specially Assam and West Bengal, will decide the next course of national politics.

Talking to reporters here, Raut said the BJP is in power in Assam, but the Congress has put up a tough fight.

In West Bengal, even though the BJP has put all its might to defeat (Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress head) Mamata Banerjee, she has fought like a tigress and is "sure to emerge the winner", he claimed.

"We can also gauge the mood in Kerala and Tamil Nadu," the Rajya Sabha member said. Banerjee on Wednesday wrote a letter to non-BJP leaders, including Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, saying time



has come for a "united and effective" struggle against the BJP's alleged attacks on democracy and the Constitution, and that opposition leaders should try present a "credible alternative" to the people of the country.

When asked about the letter, Raut said, "The results of polls

in four states, specially Assam and West Bengal, will decide the next course of national politics. After the elections, the nature of alliances will be discussed and a clarity will be there."

Even Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has received a letter from her, he said. **AGENCIES**

# Politics - A turf Rajinikanth chooses to skip despite promises

**CHENNAI:** When he thundered in 1996 that "even God cannot save" Tamil Nadu if the then Chief Minister J Jayalithaa won a successive term in elections, many saw it as Rajinikanth's prelude to the political entry of the uncrowned king of Tamil cinema known for his sureshot hits.

For, cinema to politics transition was nothing new in Tamil Nadu as former chief ministers--CN Annadurai, M Karunanidhi, M G Ramachandran and Jayalithaa had successful cinema stints before blending with politics to lead the state. But ever since it was a guessing game, occasional punch dialogues in films, an

assertive statement in 2017 and a 2020 marked with flip-flops which culminated with the actor finally saying a big no to politics, citing his frail health.

Named for India's highest cinema honour, the Dada Saheb Phalke Award on Thursday for the year 2019, Rajinikanth's larger than image life in screen, his mega hits that raked in the moolah and finally a frenzied fan base that often hailed him as 'Thalaiva' (Leader) turned him into a colossal figure in the celluloid world.

But his roar of "now or never" in politics last year ended with a whimper in the same when he finally said he would not take the political plunge owing to his



frail health. This, after a 2017 assertion that he would launch a political party and fight from all 234 assembly seats in the 2021 elections in Tamil Nadu which enthused his die hard fans who had been awaiting an

announcement that their 'Thalaiva' who beat up evil men on screen black and blue was now ready to clean up the 'system' with his political avatar.

However, their joy was to be short-lived when in March

2020, he announced in a press conference that he never desired to be Chief Minister and that he would enter politics when he saw an upsurge among the people yearning for a change ushering in clean politics, prompting intense debates of "will he or won't he."

However, within months, he seemed to have a change of heart and categorically announced floating a party in January 2021. He even named two seasoned politicians, Tamilaruvi Manian and Arjuna Moorthy, to see through the birth of his outfit ahead of the elections this year, now slated for April 6. This was the best time to take the shot, he had said with a catchy Tamil phrase "ippo illana eppovum illa," meaning if not now then never.

With the spirited fans once again rallying behind the veteran, Rajinikanth made another u-turn in December, when he said he will not enter politics in view of his frail health, putting an end to his long-nurtured plans and describing his then hospitalisation as a God's warning. "Only I know the pain behind making this announcement," the 70-year old actor then said, days before he was to spell out the contours of his party based on spiritual politics aimed at bringing a total change in the Dravidian heartland Tamil Nadu in the 2021 assembly elections. **AGENCIES**

## Only peace can bring progress and prosperity

Pakistan's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) has allowed the import of cotton and yarn from India. It is a definitely step in the right direction. Islamabad's decision to suspend bilateral trade with New Delhi in August 2019 was primarily a fallout of India's decision to scrap Article 370 — the constitutional provision that recognised the special status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir and afforded it a certain amount of autonomy. Another underlying reason for suspending trade between the two countries was also the 200 per cent tariff imposed by New Delhi on Pakistani imports — a move that India implemented earlier that year after revoking its status as a Most Favoured Nation following the suicide bomb attack on the CRPF in Pulwama. Trade between the two countries suffered greatly in 2019-20, with India's exports to Pakistan dropping nearly 60.5 per cent to \$816.62 million, and its imports plummeting around 97 per cent to \$13.97 million. The proposal to lift the ban on cotton imports came in the backdrop of a shortfall in raw material for Pakistan's textile sector, which has reportedly been facing issues due to a low domestic yield of cotton in the country. On top of this, imports from other countries like the US and Brazil have reportedly been more expensive, and take longer to arrive in the country. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's letter greeting Pakistan on its national day and his counterpart Imran Khan's response to it have also seem to have eased the atmosphere. The need right now is to move forward with guarded optimism as hawks on both sides — who thrive on confrontation — may well try and derail matters. Both nations should start building on the ceasefire pact and resume a comprehensive dialogue. For only peace can bring progress and prosperity in the two neighbouring countries and also the region and the world.



ANUBHUTI MAURYA SLAMS POLICY DOCUMENT ON UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION FOR AN 'ILL-JUDGED VIEW'

## Distorting India's historical narratives

The University Grants Commission (UGC) document on Learning Outcomes-based Curriculum Framework (LOCF), 2021 for undergraduate education in history begins with the declaration: "History, as we all know, is a vital source to obtain knowledge about a nation's soul". The document seeks to create a student body that will compete globally and be aware of its glorious past — one that will reclaim its history as it takes its rightful place in the new global order. It argues that a "new narrative" about the nation needs to emerge through a dialogue between the past and the present.

The document is a policy directive to mould undergraduate history education to these ends. However, a critical examination of the curriculum reveals that it falls short of its own stated goals.

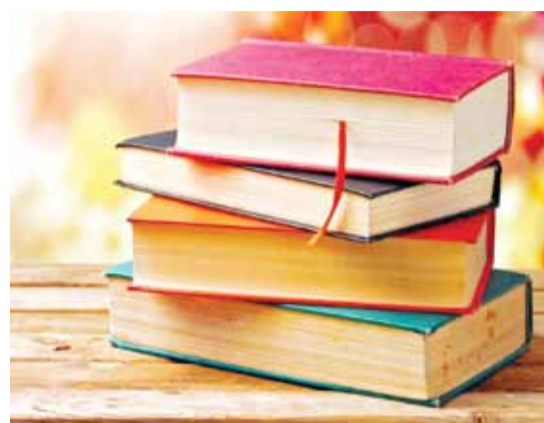
The LOCF makes an argument for inculcating "national pride". The first paper of the course is titled the 'Idea of Bharat' and seeks to study the "primitive life and cultural status of the people of ancient India". The five units of the course cover the concept of Bharatvarsha; Indian knowledge traditions, art and culture; dharma, philosophy and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'; science, environment and medical sciences; and Indian economic traditions.

The course sits separate from the paper on ancient India (from the earliest time to 550 CE) while exploring ancient philosophical, cultural and material traditions under the umbrella of the term Bharat.

The course presents Bharatvarsha as an "eternal" concept, as an originary moment of the nation that lies in its ancient past. If one places this course within the entirety of the curriculum framework, it appears as a period untouched by invasions — be it Kushan or Sunga people of the early historical period, Timur and Babur of the medieval times, or the British in the modern period. It suggests an origin to the nation that is in a pristine ancient past.

In this schema, Bharat is an exclusionary concept with little space for land and people south of the Vindhyas, or from the east and the northeast. Further, it communicates no sense that this nation has a history as Bharat, Hindustan, or India, that as a nation it was crafted into being through the struggle of its people. Instead, it reads the nation into a deep past and renders it into a narrative stuck in the stasis of an autochthonous origin. Across the curriculum, changes in history are mapped through the rise and fall of empires, kings and royal dynasties and acts of violence and movement of armies. There is a preoccupation with violence as a motive force of change, whether it is through the examination of the Aryan invasions or the invasions by Timur and Babur.

The curriculum cleaves closely to the categories and modes



of history-writing effectively utilised by colonial historians. Terms like the 'Aryan Age', 'Hindu society', and 'Muslim rulers' were deployed in colonial historiography to delineate periods as well as causation in Indian history. These were used to pose a contrast between the secular, modern Europe and the backward 'oriental' states, with their irrational adherence to religion. By bringing these terms back into use, the curriculum undoes the work of generations of historians to challenge colonial frames of history-writing and foreground socioeconomic and political processes.

The paper on medieval and early modern India (History of India, 1206-1707) best demonstrates the ideological bias in the LOCF. It treats the "Hindu society" and the "Muslim society" as discrete entities in the medieval past, replicating the understanding that these communities existed as separate nations, an understanding that last had valence in the run-up to the partition of India.

Further, it presents a history of only north India. In contrast, existing history syllabi currently followed in universities across India have been studying the processes of sociocultural, economic and political changes in different regions like Odisha, the peninsular India, and the Rajasthan, Gujarat, Malwa, Bengal regions, among others. But this latest curriculum framework ignores the rich work in regional history and introduces some regions in the syllabus simply as political formations.

### Pedagogical issues

Inherent in the LOCF is a pedagogical critique of current forms of history education. It forcefully argues that young minds are not "empty vessels" to be filled with "static narratives". Young minds, it declaims, must be participants

in knowledge production. This would make history an attractive area of study. However, the pedagogy suggested in the course outlines and recommended readings would achieve just the opposite.

The introduction of primary material in the classroom — parts of historical texts, archaeological artefacts, coins, visits to monuments and museums — bring the subject alive for students. Engagement with these allows students to parse historical analysis and make their own judgments. However, the readings prescribed in the curriculum do not contain a single reference to primary archives for history-writing. Further, the suggested readings are devoid of some of the most important works in different areas of history-writing. Readings in history, or any academic discipline for that matter, are central to building the discipline. We look at older writings and follow the evolution of historiographical understanding through critiques and the new questions posed. To develop critical thinking, students must be encouraged to read divergent opinions and engage with different ideological hues of historians. A curriculum framework that does not encourage this only provides faulty foundations for disciplinary education. This curriculum framework, quite egregiously, omits some of the finest writings in Indian history. Instead, a bulk of suggested readings span from the 1900s to, at best, 1980s, with a heavy dependence on the work of Indologists. The omissions seem deliberate and ideologically motivated. Most importantly, rather than enabling students to critically engage with diverse schools of historiography and reaching their own conclusions, it seeks to curtail the resource base available to them.

What are the challenges facing a young student in the 21st century? Climate disaster, democracy, freedom of speech and movement, equity in rights and social justice are issues that must be considered. This curriculum, with its colonial underpinnings, is inadequate in preparing students of the 21st century. New modes of thinking about Big Data, digital mapping and visualisations, critical study of the environment, health and society are all missing from this curriculum.

Seen in its entirety, the LOCF is determined to project into the past majoritarian and divisive conceptions of contemporary Indian politics. It is limited and narrow in its understanding of processes of historical change, out of touch with the current state of research in the discipline of history, and dated in its pedagogy. In 2021, this curriculum framework seeks to make history education a space for passive rote-learning of ideas that had their heyday in 1921.

Anubhuti Maurya teaches history at the Shiv Nadar University. Views expressed are her own.



VIKRAM SONI HIGHLIGHTS THERE ARE ONLY TWO UNPOLLUTED FRESH WATER SOURCES LEFT IN THE COUNTRY

## Water remains the looming frontier

While we are still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is airborne, we have forgotten that another such blight could well come from contaminated water. NITI Aayog and WaterAid, amongst others, have found that over 70% of India's surface and groundwater is contaminated by human and other waste and is likely to carry viruses. Indiscriminate human activity is often the reason for environmental degradation and pandemics. The practice of keeping animals locked together for mass production of meat produces an artificial environment that can birth mutations in erstwhile dormant viruses. Earlier, in the wild, animals were far away from human habitats. The viruses they harboured remained isolated. But today's practices can spawn viruses that can easily transfer to the human population.

Once the virus has found its way into the human population, it is bound to proliferate in wastewater. For example, in England, Wales and Scotland, several wastewater samples were tested and were found to carry traces of SARS-CoV-2. Remnants of the virus have also been detected in raw sewage across Sydney. Research at the University of Stirling in Scotland indicates that the SARS-CoV-2 virus can spread through sewage water.

But such water is often discharged into water bodies in India. This is an alarming prospect for us as river water or lake water, which carries human waste, sewage, and toxic waste, can be a very generous host for viruses of different kinds and we do not know where and how they can mutate and strike. Some water-transmitted viral pathogens are astrovirus, hepatitis A and



norovirus. Unlike in the developed world, a huge section of the population in India uses polluted water from sources like rivers, lakes, or groundwater for drinking.

Are we prepared for this? Certainly not. Can we be prepared? Very unlikely, even if we understood the viruses, and we are not there yet. Can we decontaminate our water bodies and groundwater? This could take several decades. The Rhine river in Germany, after 50 years of cleaning and stopping the inflow of pollutants and human waste, is still not fit for drinking. But despite the poor quality of water in India, the government has announced a ₹3 lakh crore 'Nal se Jal' scheme to provide drinking water connections to every rural household by 2024. Since most of the water sources are contaminated, the only way to purify water is through reverse osmosis (RO). But though RO removes contaminants, it also takes out all

the healthy minerals and nutrients required by the human body. This is an unhealthy and exorbitantly priced proposition. To neutralise the virus, we would need at least an ultraviolet aquaguard treatment. While this won't take out chemical contaminants, it is also costly.

So, what is the solution? The simple answer is that there is no technological substitute for living natural resources like pristine natural water and soil. This means that we must conserve and use our natural living resources. The water beneath our forests is as good as natural spring water. We must safeguard it for our own lives and for future generations. We have destroyed our natural living resources in our rush for development. Our development model is always focused on artificial infrastructure, building highways, industrial plants, high-rise structures. In doing this, we kill our natural resources. As a result, we are running out of

natural infrastructure at an alarming pace. Let's not forget that developed countries have stable landscapes and populations whereas India has a growing population, which means there will be growing consumption. There are two unpolluted fresh water sources left in the country. The first is the water lying below our forests; the second is the aquifers that lie below the floodplains of rivers. Both these sources provide natural underground storage and are renewable — the rains provide natural recharge year after year and it is this recharge which can be used to water our cities and towns. There is one sacred conservation condition: we should use only a fraction of the annual recharge.

The aquifers underlying forests can provide healthy mineral water purely for drinking purposes. Since a person drinks only 2-3 litres of water a day, the mineral water requirement is modest. Such a scheme can provide quality natural mineral water, comparable to Himalayan mineral water at ₹2 a litre, 20 times less than the market price. The river floodplains are a great source of water for cities. The Yamuna floodplains in Delhi already use such a scheme to provide water to a million people each year. Forests and floodplains must be declared as water sanctuaries. Such schemes work with nature rather than against it. They can be used around the globe. It is important to remember that these evolutionary resources, once lost, will be lost forever. It is time we understood this is natural infrastructure bequeathed to us by nature. If we don't realise this, it will only be our loss.

Vikram Soni is Emeritus Professor at Jamia Millia and Jawaharlal Nehru University. Views are personal.

### FIVE OBSERVATIONS

ON WHY NEW COVID-19 VACCINES SHOULD BE CLEARED

- COVID CONCERNS MOUNT THIS YEAR**  
The rise in Covid-19 cases as part of India's 'second wave' has the government and public health authorities truly worried. In many ways, the concern is larger than during last year.
- VACCINATIONS TOO INTENSIFY**  
India has so far administered nearly 6.3 crore doses of Covaxin and Covishield and since March 20, the country has been inoculating a little over 2 million every day.
- MORE RESEARCH WORK REQUIRED**  
More research needs to be conducted on whether mortality in the second wave is biased towards the group yet ineligible for vaccination, and whether reinfections are an emerging problem.
- GATHERINGS SHOULD BE BANNED**  
It is hypocritical on the government's part to allow large religious gatherings and political melas in election-bound States and also blame normal movement for the second wave.
- NEW VACCINES ARE NEED OF HOUR**  
What is needed is messaging that emphasises the realistic protective abilities from vaccination and physical distancing measures. We also need fresh research and new vaccines.

### 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

RNI NO. CHAENG/2001/03736

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY SWINDER BAJWA  
ON BEHALF OF FW MEDIA

PRINTED AT JAGJIT PUBLISHING CO. PVT LTD  
D-12, INDUSTRIAL AREA, PHASE-1, MOHALI,  
PUNJAB 160059

PRINTER & PUBLISHER SWINDER BAJWA  
OWNER\* : FW MEDIA

PUBLISHED AT: PLOT NO-F5, IT PARK, CHANDIGARH  
CHANDIGARH 160101; PHONE: 9888040061

EDITOR\* ABDUL WASEY

(\*RESPONSIBLE FOR SELECTION OF NEWS UNDER THE PRB ACT)

### BOOKS: REVIEW

## New book traces India's fight against COVID-19

From the 'janata curfew' to the country's first Covid-19 vaccination drive, a new book gives readers detailed account of India's battle against the coronavirus pandemic.

The book, "Billions Under Lockdown: The Inside Story of India's Fight Against Covid-19", is written by senior journalist Abantika Ghosh. Published by Bloomsbury, the book claims to be a "thrilling tale" of unnamed thousands battling against a little-understood virus from the frontlines, bringing that "gripping theatre and its dramatis personae to life".

When WHO first declared COVID-19 a global pandemic in March 2020, there was a great deal of apprehension about how India — the country with the highest TB cases and diabetes, inadequate health infrastructure and a population of 1.3 billion — would fare.

"Journalists are usually accused

of having very short memories. Of course, this is not unfair criticism as we, far too often, look at issues only fleetingly and superficially. Having said that, in the twenty years that I have been in this business, 2020 was the first year in which, for ten months, I followed one story: COVID-19.

"I may even go as far as to say that I lived in a COVID bubble. I was writing about it, reading about it and, in whatever time I had left, I was answering questions from friends and family. So this book was perhaps destined to happen," writes Ghosh in the book.

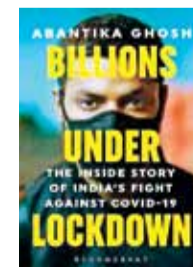
It was on March 23 last year that Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the nationwide lockdown against COVID-19. A year on since the country went into a 'janata curfew' (people's curfew), it is facing a second wave of coronavirus cases.

The fresh infections and deaths

**The author offers an insight into India's massive machinery working seamlessly — despite some missteps and missed infections — against the greatest challenge the world is facing in decades**

have pushed the country's infection tally to over 11.68 million and the death toll has now risen to 1,60,166.

The author, with a ringside view of India's fight against the deadly virus, offers an insight into India's massive machinery working seamlessly — despite some missteps and missed infections — against the greatest challenge the world has encountered in decades.



*Billions Under Lockdown: The Inside Story of India's Fight Against Covid-19*  
By Abantika Ghosh;  
Bloomsbury;  
406 pages; Rs699

Ghosh tracks the pandemic in the country with accounts from epidemiologists from the National Centre for Disease Control, describing them as India's "disease detectives", bureaucrats, who became the face of the government's Covid-19 response, and public health experts.

But despite the government's seemingly dogged resolve to keep the virus at bay, its armour was ever-evolving, and sometimes even faulty in the face of an unlikely and unknown enemy.

"When cops replace health workers in the field and cardiologists replace epidemiologists on the policy high table, it spells serious trouble for a country. And trouble erupted soon," Ghosh writes.

Then there are accounts from

states like Bihar, whose dismal health infrastructure had everyone guessing if it would survive a pandemic, and the controversy around the prescription of hydroxychloroquine as prophylaxis for healthcare workers, despite the lack of evidence.

The 406-page "Billions Under Lockdown", priced at Rs 699, is available for sale on offline and online stores. The author is one of the most well-regarded reporters in the public health domain in the country and has more than 20 years of experience.

After graduating from Presidency College, Kolkata, she did her masters in Physiology from the University of Calcutta and has worked with The Statesman, The Times of India and the Indian Express in the past. Currently, she is with ThePrint, where she heads the team covering COVID-19.

She is keenly interested in non-cricket sports, is a voracious reader and loves to explore the intersection of politics and society. She lives in New Delhi with two dogs and some books, and can be found on Twitter @abantika77. This is her first book.

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# My conscience is clear: Mistry

PERSONALLY DISAPPOINTED, SAYS EX-TATA SONS CHAIRMAN CYRUS MISTRY ON SUPREME COURT VERDICT

**NEW DELHI/MUMBAI:** Ousted Tata Sons Chairman Cyrus Mistry on Tuesday expressed disappointment over the Supreme Court order in the fight against the conglomerate over his ouster, but asserted his conscience was clear and he had no doubt about the direction he took regarding the generational change in leadership during his tenure.

The apex court order on Friday had set aside National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order restoring Mistry as executive chairman of the conglomerate, while allowing appeals filed by the Tata Group.

"Every member of society looks to institutions such as courts to validate and endorse the appropriateness of his or her actions and beliefs. As a minority shareholder of Tata Sons, I am personally disappointed by the outcome of the judgement with respect to our case," Mistry said in a statement.

He further said, "Although I will no longer be able to influence the direction of governance of the Tata group di-

rectly, I hope that the issues I have raised will cause deeper reflection and influence individuals concerned to catalyse change. I sleep with a clear conscience."

On Friday a bench of Chief Justice SA Bobde and Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian allowed appeals filed by Tata Group.

The court said, "All the questions of law are liable to be answered in favour of the appellants Tata Group and the appeals filed by the Tata Group are liable to be allowed and those by Shapoorji Pallonji Group are liable to be dismissed."

The apex court had on January 10 last year granted relief to the Tata group by staying NCLAT order by which Mistry was restored as the executive chairman of the conglomerate.

Reflecting on the Supreme Court order, Mistry said, "Life is not always fair, but we are still the lucky ones - I am lucky to have the unwavering support of my family, friends, colleagues - past and present. I am grateful to my legal team that has remained steadfast



and committed beyond the call of duty, through this journey. "This is another step in the evolution of life for me and my family. We will celebrate the good times and take the knocks on our chins."

Mistry, who had raised several raised issues related to corporate governance and transparency, including alleged Rs 22 crore fraudulent transactions involving non-existent entities in India and Singapore in Tatas' joint venture with Air Asia, besides

accusing Ratan Tata of feeling insecure about his legacy, said he has reflected on his actions since his exit from the Tata Group.

"Over the last four years, I have had the opportunity to reflect on my actions and on whether I could have handled the generational change in leadership better. In hindsight, while I may have had many imperfections, I have no doubt or erosion of conviction about the direction I chose, the integrity behind my actions and

the consequences," he said.

Mistry said his aim at Tata Group, "an iconic institution undergoing a generational change in leadership, was to ensure a robust board-driven system of decision-making and governance that is larger than any one individual".

A key focus was to enable the directors on various boards to discharge their fiduciary duties without fear or favour, while still ensuring that shareholders views were reflected in strategy and actions, he added. "It continues to be my belief that it is by such a model, that one would protect value for all stakeholders in Tata Sons and its various group companies," Mistry said.

To this end, he said, "My performance was reviewed by nearly 50 independent directors across multiple Tata boards that I served. Beyond the performance metric that speaks for itself and the documented appreciation for my initiatives, I am humbled by the continued support I have received from my former colleagues and other board members".

AGENCIES

# JNPT inaugurates Inter Terminal Route

DOMINICK RODRIGUES  
Mumbai



In a major push for seamless trade, the new Inter Terminal Route connecting BMCT Terminal with the other four Container Terminals of JNPT was inaugurated at Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), India's premier container port in Navi Mumbai, recently.

The Inter Terminal Route was inaugurated by Sanjay Sethi, IAS, Chairman, JNPT in the presence of Unmesh Sharad Wagh, IRS, Deputy Chairman, JNPT and HODs, JNPT Terminal Operators and other stakeholders.

The newly-inaugurated route is expected to reduce container movement distance between BMCT and the other JN Port Terminals from the existing 5 kms to 2.5 kms in one direction. This route is exclusively for the movement of TP (Transhipment) & ITRHO (Inter Terminal Rail Handling Operation) containers between BMCT and other terminals of JN Port, in offering a smooth and continuous flow of ITRHO and TP containers.

Noting that the inauguration of this Internal Terminal Route will help in smoothing the overall trade cycle and further enhancing efficiency, Sanjay Sethi, IAS, Chairman, JNPT

said this will further streamline the movement of rail containers between BMCT with all the other four Container Terminals at the port. "JNPT has also taken various other initiatives under 'Ease of Doing Business' that has helped save significant amount of time and cost for the EXIM community," he said.

The ITRHO aims to maximize train placement, track productivity, efficiency and cost-effective handling, while reducing dwell time of import ICD boxes, connecting export ICD boxes to respective terminals in time and also increasing rail quotient at JNPT.

Trade will be benefitted, as the new route would ensure timely connection of export containers arriving by trains in mixed condition to the particular vessel in any of the terminals

and also enhancing the train handling time at JN Port.

Overall, the new route is expected to increase the rail share and volume of Transhipment containers in JN Port, Sethi said, adding that this is a yet another significant move by JNPT -- to provide ease of doing business to the EXIM community -- in its endeavour to be among the best container port globally.

The Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) at Navi Mumbai is the biggest container handling Port in India -- accounting for around 52% of the total containerised cargo volume, across the major ports of India. Commissioned on 26th May 1989, in less than three decades of its operations, JNPT has transformed from a bulk-cargo terminal to become the premier container port in the country.

## NEWSBRIEF

**Coal India sees marginal production de-growth**

**KOLKATA:** World's largest miner Coal India is likely to post a marginal contraction of its output for the year 2020-21 by 5-6 million tonne in 2020-21 as its production will fall below the 600 million mark, sources said on Sunday. In 2019-20, the miner produced 602 million tonne down from 606.9 million in 2018-19 when it registered its highest production. It will be the second year in a row when the miner will register de-growth. The miner had projected a 660 million tonne production target and by mid-year the company had been expecting to attain 630-640 million tonne of output. Officials attributed Covid-19 disruptions as the key factor behind lower demand resulting in a stockpile building up, compelling the mining giant to moderate output.

AGENCIES

**Curbs sought on cotton yarn exports**

**NEW DELHI:** The Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPCC) on Saturday urged the government to impose restrictions on exports of cotton yarn in order to curb prices and increase supply for domestic manufacturers. AEPCC Chairman A Sakthivel said despite several efforts by the government to reduce the price of cotton yarn, it has consistently increased in the last four months and was affecting the entire value chain. "We request immediate intervention to increase the supply of yarn to domestic manufacturers. We suggest that quantitative restrictions should be imposed on exports of cotton yarn, specifically on cotton yarn of 26 counts and above," he said.

AGENCIES

**TVS Motor reports sales of 3,22,683 units in March**

**NEW DELHI:** Chennai-based TVS Motor Company on Thursday reported total sales of 3,22,683 units in March. The company had sold 1,44,739 units in March 2020, when sales were impacted by the lockdown due to COVID-19. The total two-wheelers sales were at 3,07,437 units in March 2021. It was 1,33,988 units in the same month last year, TVS Motor said in a statement. Domestic two-wheelers sales were at 2,02,155 units last month. It was at 94,103 units in March 2020. Motorcycle sales stood at 1,57,294 units in March. It was at 66,673 units in March 2020. Scooter sales were at 1,04,513 units last month. It was at 34,191 units in March 2020, the company said. Three-wheeler sales were at 15,246 units last month. It was at 10,751 units a year ago.

AGENCIES

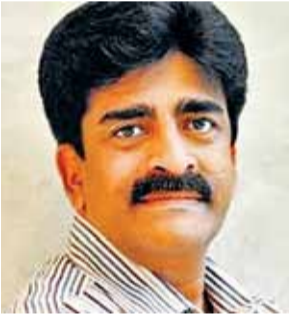
# GS Krishnan takes over as 'ABLE' chief

**BENGALURU:** G S Krishnan, formerly regional president & MD, Novozymes South Asia Pvt Ltd, a Danish biotech company, has taken charge as the new President of India's leading biotechnology industry organisation, the Association of Biotechnology-Led Enterprises (ABLE).

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, the Executive Chairperson of Biocon Limited, will continue as the association's honorary non-executive chairperson, an ABLE statement said.

Krishnan will head a nine-member executive council that was elected last January for a three-year term starting on April 1, 2021.

The other office-bearers are Anand Anandkumar of Bugworks Research as Vice President & Treasurer, and Ravi Bholia of K&S Partners will be



the new General Secretary of ABLE.

Aiming to further catalyse the growth of India's USD 70 billion BioEconomy, the Association has also set up an ABLE Business Council, that will be chaired by former ABLE President and founder of biotech startup Janancom, P M Murali.

This Council will comprise all the past presidents of ABLE such as Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw,

K K Narayanan, Vijay Chandru and Shrikumar Suryanarayan. "India's BioPharmaceutical segment has played a commendable role in the discovery and manufacturing of COVID-19 vaccine during the pandemic and we need to build on this great momentum and lead the world in playing a critical role, identifying our capabilities," said Krishnan while taking over as the new ABLE President for 2021-24.

Krishnan added that opportunities in the BioIndustrial and BioAgriculture are also highly promising and require a conducive regulatory framework.

The 4,300-plus Biotech startups too will contribute significantly for the growth of the biotech industry and requires all the support to grab near-to-market opportunities, he said.

AGENCIES

# Minda plans Rs 250 crore expansion

**MUMBAI:** Minda Industries, the flagship of UNO Minda Group, on Saturday said it will invest over Rs 250 crore in expanding its four-wheel lighting and alloy wheel business to meet the increased demand as its existing units are operating at near capacity.

As part of this expansion, the automotive components maker will set up a new manufacturing plant at Bhagapura in Gujarat at an investment of Rs 90 crore to cater to increased demand for four-wheeler automotive lighting, Minda Industries Ltd said in a release.

The plant is expected to commence operations by the quarter ending March 2022 and will stabilise in subsequent couple of quarters, it said.

The company currently has manufacturing facilities at



Pune, Chennai and Manesar, which are operating at near capacity.

"The automotive lighting industry is witnessing a gradual shift in technology into more LED-based lighting products. With strengthened technical capabilities in next level of lighting technologies, we are well positioned to benefit from these technological shifts and to achieve leadership in the segment," said NK Minda, Chairman and managing Director, UNO Minda.

Similarly, in 4W alloy wheels, customer preferences are moving towards alloy wheels. Though penetration of alloy wheels has increased in the last few years, it is still very low in comparison to developed countries providing ample opportunities for our growth in future, he said.

AGENCIES

# Increase in aviation security fee opposed

**NEW DELHI:** Global airlines body IATA has requested the Centre to suspend the planned increase in aviation security fee (ASF) for domestic and international passengers as it will be detrimental to the aviation industry's recovery efforts, an official document said.

On March 19, the Civil Aviation Ministry had said the ASF would be increased from Rs 160 to Rs 200 for domestic passengers and USD 5.20 to USD 12 for international passengers from April 1.

Conrad Clifford, Regional Vice President, Asia Pacific, International Air Transport Association (IATA) wrote a letter to Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Tuesday, stating that "the aviation industry is facing the biggest challenge of its history" due to the pandemic and it is trying to restart itself while ensuring it does not become a vector for COVID-19.

Airlines collect the ASF from passengers when they book their tickets and then give it to the government. The ASF is used to fund the security arrangement at airports across the country.

Clifford told Puri COVID-19 has devastated the air transport industry and any such costs escalation - the increase in the ASF - in such uncertain times will be detrimental to its collective recovery efforts. "It is worthwhile to note that various other governments and service providers are freezing or reducing charges in response to the current crisis to facilitate a quicker recovery of traffic," he noted.

"The IATA would respectfully request the government of India to consider delaying or suspending the planned increase in ASF rates effective April 1, 2021," he stated.

The aviation sector has been significantly impacted due to the travel restrictions imposed in India and other countries in view of the coronavirus pandemic. All airlines in India have taken cost-cutting measures such as pay cuts, leave-without-pay and firings of employees in order to conserve cash.

AGENCIES

# Kirloskar Brothers to be debt-free company

**NEW DELHI:** Leading pump makers Kirloskar Brothers Ltd (KBL) is close to be a debt-free company and will continue its growth journey into domestic and international markets, said a top company official.

After being debt-free, the company will focus on cash flow and will not chase topline (revenue) numbers at the cost of profitability, said KBL Director Alok Kirloskar.

"As part of that strategy, we will be a debt-free company. And, if you look at the numbers at the end of this year in March, we are almost debt-free as a company," Alok Kirloskar told PTI.

On a standalone basis, KBL is close to being debt-free and the next objective is to enhance its ROCE (return on capital employed), over 25 per cent and ROE (return on equity) about 20 per cent, added.

"The next objective is, of course, enhancing the profitability and enhancing our growth after we are estab-



lished to be debt-free because we are not comfortable with having large amounts of debt, which was the case in 2010," he added.

When asked about the growth, Kirloskar said, "We will continue on the CAGR (compound annual growth rate), that is our objective. Even in the times of coronavirus, if you see our third-quarter numbers, we have still shown that we are doing better than last year, even though coronavirus."

In 2019-20, KBL, a flagship company of the USD 2.1-billion Kirloskar Group, had reported a revenue of Rs 2,097 crore.

However, he also added, "Growing the turnover is important but not at the cost of profitability and cash flow. Our first objective No. 1 is cash flow, No. 2 is profitability and No.3 is turnover."

The key sectors in which KBL operate are water and wastewater, irrigation, industrial, commercial building services, and oil & gas.

KBL gets half of its business directly from consumers under the business-to-consumer route, and the rest half from the institutional buyers from business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government (B2G) channels, Alok added.

AGENCIES

# Vistara rolls back staff's salary cut

**NEW DELHI:** Full-service carrier Vistara has decided to roll back the pay cut, implemented by the airline last year, for certain categories of employees from April while the reduced salaries will continue for the management-level executives, including the CEO, according to an e-mail to the airline staff.

The Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines joint venture airline had in June 2020 announced a reduction in salary of nearly 40 per cent of the total workforce till December 31 to deal with low cash flow amid weak passenger demand in the wake of the pandemic. This was later extended to March 31.

"Our board has approved to cease the pay cut that was implemented for level-1 to level-3 staff from April 1, but the leadership team (level 4 and level-5) and I will continue with our pay cuts at 15 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively," Vistara CEO, Leslie Thng said in the communication, reviewed by PTI.

A Vistara spokesperson confirmed the developments to PTI when contacted. Thng, in



"We must remain vigilant in controlling our costs and be nimble and flexible in our plan and should be able to take difficult decisions if the need arises"

the e-mail, also said the airline definitely was not out of the woods yet with operating capacity and revenue still below pre-COVID level, adding that, the road ahead will continue to be challenging, given the current state of the pandemic.

"We must remain vigilant in controlling our costs and be nimble and flexible in our plan and should be able to take difficult decisions if the need arises," Thng said.

Vistara will not be paying any annual increment in April this year but will review it in October based on the airline's financial position in the first two quarters of the new fiscal year, he informed the employees. However, for staff, which is eligible for variable performance for financial year 2020-21, payments will be made in May based on company and individual staff performance in this financial year, he added.

AGENCIES

# Tech services eye \$300-350b in revenues by 2025: Nasscom

**NEW DELHI:** India's technology services industry's growth can accelerate by 2-4 per cent over the next five years, reaching USD 300-350 billion in annual revenues on the back of a cloud, artificial intelligence AI, cybersecurity, and other emerging technologies, a report by Nasscom said on Wednesday.

The report - whose research and analysis was conducted by McKinsey & Company Knowledge Partners - noted that technology-driven companies are leading the path to a faster recovery globally.

With the consumers' ever-evolving needs, enterprises are keeping up with continuous innovation, leading to a shifting global marketplace and 10 per cent annual growth in the IT services sector, generating high returns for shareholders and investors in the last decade, it added.

Being valued at roughly USD 1 trillion, the technology services sector is now among the most significant contributors to economic growth worldwide, especially in India - the industry now produces about 27 per cent



of the nation's exports and provides livelihoods to about 4.4 million people.

"...India's technology services industry could accelerate growth by 2-4 per cent over the next five years, reaching USD 300-350 billion in annual revenues if it can win in the cloud, AI, cybersecurity, and other emerging technologies. This will require closer collaboration among stakeholders across the private sector, academia, and the government," it said.

Fueling over 50 digital initiatives across sectors like banking and finance, health-care, governance, etc, the technology services industry continues to be a prime driver of India's digital dream with a contribution of 8 per cent to the overall economy, the

report said. "The Indian Technology services sector can utilise the potential of deep technologies like cloud, AI, ML, IoT, etc, through effective transformational practices, thereby contributing to the overall economy in the coming decade. The government needs to encourage and support digital literacy and skilling to ensure its talent, energy, imagination, knowledge, and unmatched commitment unites to address the customers' surging needs," Nasscom President Debjani Ghosh said.

As the competition intensifies, scale and specialisation will be critical to succeed in the next decade of technology services, the report said.

Providers will need to refresh their service lines and offerings and stay relevant to cater to these more digitally adept enterprises, who expect higher-quality services and have very different buying behaviour, it added.

Talent will also be a key differentiator, and the war for acquiring and retaining the next-gen talent will aggravate in the future.

AGENCIES

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# Bank credit to rise 10% this fiscal

## FASTER GDP EXPANSION AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS TO BOOST CREDIT GROWTH, SAYS RATINGS AGENCY CRISIL

**MUMBAI:** Banking system's credit growth will almost double to 10 per cent in 2021-22 on the economic recovery and policy interventions, ratings agency Crisil said on Thursday.

The quantum of gross non-performing assets (NPAs) will rise up to 10.5-11 per cent by the end of 2021-22, which is about a percentage point lower than what was initially expected, the agency said.

The GDP growth is expected to stand at 11 per cent for the newly begun fiscal year, after a 7.7 per cent contraction in the pandemic-impacted 2020-21, it said. The second and third waves of COVID-19 infections are a risk to economic recovery but it may not result in widespread lockdowns and a faster vaccination drive will also help, the



agency said. From a banks' credit growth perspective, the agency said the expansion will accelerate by 4-5 percentage points to 9-10 per cent in 2021-22.

The faster credit growth will be led by retail loans, which are expected to grow in mid-teens,

while corporate loans, which de-grew during 2020-21, are also likely to show a 5-6 per cent jump, it said. The agency said corporate loans, which account for nearly half of the overall bank credit, were subdued in 2020-21 because of low

capital expenditure (capex) and also impact on demand which curtailed the need for working capital. With the revival in the economy, stimulus measures by the government and the RBI and the Budget's focus on infrastructure, the same is expected to see an uptick, it said.

In 2020-21, the emergency credit guarantee loans scheme has been a key factor which drove the overall credit growth for the banking system, it said. Bank credit has shown a 'V-shaped' recovery during the second half of the fiscal, the rating agency added.

From an asset quality perspective, the corporate loans will show more resilience, and it will be loans to the retail and micro, small and medium enterprises segment which will drive up

the overall NPAs for banks to 10.5-11 per cent, it said.

The agency, however, said the NPAs would have been higher by one percentage point if not for the policy interventions like a moratorium, one-time debt restructuring and keeping the bankruptcy proceedings on hold. In the non-banks space, the overall assets under management (AUM) are estimated to grow by a slower rate of 5 per cent in 2021-22 and are yet to touch the pre-pandemic levels, the agency said.

The biggest inhibiting factor for the non-banking financial company (NBFC) industry will be funding sources to take care of the liabilities side, it said. Schemes like targeted long-term repo operations have helped the sector, it added. **AGENCIES**

# Zero-coupon bond not to be used to recap PSU banks

**NEW DELHI:** The government is unlikely to take zero-coupon bond route to further recapitalize public sector banks after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) expressed some concerns in this regard, sources said.

The government, they said, would resort back to recapitalisation bonds bearing a coupon rate for capital infusion in these banks.

To save interest burden and ease the fiscal pressure, the government last year decided to issue zero-coupon bonds for meeting the capital needs of the banks.

The first test case of the new mechanism was a capital infusion of ₹5,500 crore into Punjab and Sind Bank by issuing zero-coupon bonds of six different maturities last year. These special securities with tenure of 10-15 years are non-interest bearing and valued at par.

However, the RBI raised some concerns with regard to calculation of an effective capital infusion made in any bank through this instrument issued at par, sources said.

Since such bonds usually are non-interest bearing but



issued at a deep discount to the face value, it is difficult to ascertain net present value, they added.

As a result, sources said, it has been concluded to do away with zero-coupon bond for recapitalisation.

These special bonds are non-interest bearing and issued at par to a bank, they said adding that it would be an investment that would not earn any return and rather depreciate with each passing year.

This innovative mechanism was adopted to ease the financial burden as the government has already spent ₹22,086.54 crore as interest payment towards the recapitalisation bonds for PSBs in the last two

financial years. During FY 2018-19, the government paid ₹5,800.55 crore as interest on such bonds issued to public sector banks for pumping in the capital so that they could meet the regulatory norms under the Basel-III guidelines.

In the subsequent year, according to the official document, the interest payment by the government surged three times to ₹16,285.99 crore to PSBs as they have been holding these papers.

For the current financial year, interest payment for re-cap bonds have been reduced to ₹19,292.77 crore from ₹25,239.4 crore pegged in the Budget estimate. **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

### Govt tells RBI to check retail inflation at 4%

**NEW DELHI:** The government on Wednesday asked the Reserve Bank to maintain retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side for another five-year period ending March 2026. To control the price rise, the government in 2016 gave a mandate to the RBI to keep the retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side for a five-year period ending March 31, 2021. "The inflation target for the period April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2026 under the Reserve Bank of India Act 1934 has been kept at the same level as was for previous 5 years," Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj said. As a result of inflation targeting mandate, the RBI has been able to keep consumer price index averaging 3.9 per cent during October 2016-March 2020. The six-member MPC, which had its first meeting in October 2016, was given the mandate to maintain annual inflation at 4 per cent until March 31, 2021 with an upper tolerance of 6 per cent and a lower tolerance of 2 per cent. Not only did the headline CPI inflation averaged closer to the target at 3.9 per cent during this period, inflation volatility, measured by its standard deviation, also declined to 1.4 during October 2016-March 2020 from 2.4 in 2012-16, as per the BofA Securities report quoting the RBI data. **AGENCIES**

### SBI digital services hit

**MUMBAI:** The country's largest lender State Bank of India's customers had to face issues on Thursday due to the unavailability of various digital services on account of upgradation of the bank's digital banking platforms. The bank informed its customers on Thursday morning that it is upgrading its digital banking platforms, including Yono, Yono lite, internet banking, Unified Payments Interface (UPI). "We will be undertaking maintenance activities between 2:10 PM to 5:40 PM on April 1, 2021. During the period, INB/YONO/YONO Lite/UPI will be unavailable. We regret the inconvenience caused and request you to bear with us," the bank said on Twitter. SBI has the largest network with over 22,000 branches and more than 57,889 ATMs across the country. As of December 31, 2020, it had 85 million internet banking and 19 million mobile banking users. The bank's number of UPI users stood at 135 million at December-end. At present, the bank has 35 million registered users of Yono, the digital lending platform. It can be noted that on March 29, customers of the country's largest private sector lender HDFC Bank faced problems in accessing its services due to glitches in its digital banking platform. "Some customers are facing intermittent issues accessing our NetBanking / MobileBanking App. We are looking into it on priority for resolution. We apologize for the inconvenience and request you to try again after sometime. **AGENCIES**

# Realty firm owner grilled over Yes Bank loan fraud

**NEW DELHI:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a charge sheet in connection with its money laundering probe against Mumbai-based realty group Omkar Realtors and Developers linked to alleged illegal diversion of Yes Bank loan funds

worth over Rs 400 crore. In a statement, the central probe agency said the prosecution complaint (charge sheet) has been filed under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) before a special court



in Mumbai.

The charge sheet names chairman of Omkar Realtors and Developers Kamal Kishore Gupta, its managing director Babul Varma, actor-producer Sachin Joshi (also the promoter of Viiking Group) and their companies. **AGENCIES**

# UBI launches 'uni-carbon card'

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

Union Bank of India launched its 'UNI - CARBON CARD' -- an HPCL co-branded credit card -- on the RuPay platform of NPCI recently. This co-branded credit card is Union Bank of India's maiden joint venture.

Describing it as an opportunity to create value for customers, Rajkiran Rai G, MD&CEO, Union Bank of India, said "It is a unique card designed with association one of the largest Public Sector Bank, Union Bank of India and HPCL -- a leader in fuel retail and RuPay -- India's largest card payment network.

"Union Bank of India is committed to customer centric products and processes that enhance ease of living. As a Bank, it is our desire to understand needs of our



customers and provide them solutions catering to their needs. The Union Bank HPCL Co-branded credit card takes us another step closer to making India a less-cash economy, realizing 'Digital India' vision of our Honorable Prime Minister," he added. While the Union Bank of India has total network of 9590+ branches and 13280+ ATMs across India, use of this card at HPCL retail outlets ensures the cardholder getting

Cashback/Rewards in addition to waiver of fuel surcharge, besides many freebies and offers brought out by NPCI such as Entertainment, Lifestyle, Travel, Shopping, Food delivery, etc., Dinesh Kumar Garg, Executive Director, Union Bank of India said "The present co-branded card is first of its kind with HPCL, a major player in fuel retail and the cardholder certainly be benefited."

# ICICI Pru Life confident to double biz premiums

**MUMBAI:** Despite hit by the coronavirus pandemic, ICICI Prudential Life is confident of meeting the 2022-23 target of doubling the value of new business premium over the 2018-19 numbers, and has set an annual growth rate of around 30 per cent for the same.

To attain the objective set in April 2019, the second-largest private sector life insurer will continue to increase its focus on protection and savings products.

ICICI Prudential Life Chief Financial Officer Satyan Jambunathan told PTI in a recent interaction that the company is well on track to meet the 2022-23 target of doubling the value of new business (VNB)



premium over the same in 2018-19. "For this, we have also set a target of growing around 30 per cent annually over the next two years." Its VNB for the nine months of 2020-21 stood at Rs 1,030 crore with a margin of 25.7 per cent, of which Rs 428 crore came in the third quarter. The company's main focus will be on protection products to meet the target of doubling of VNB by 2022-23. **AGENCIES**

# Payworld eyes 60% rise in gross transactions

**NEW DELHI:** Fintech firm Payworld expects the gross transaction value carried out from its platform to increase by over 60 per cent to around Rs 12,000 crore in the upcoming financial year.

The company expects to close the current financial year with gross transaction value (GTV)

of Rs 7,500 crore by providing payment interface to sell train tickets, Aadhaar enabled payment services, mutual funds, insurance, among others.

"Payworld's retail points have become more than 5 lakh, we conduct almost 2 lakh transactions every day. Payworld GTV is about Rs 7,500 crore. With



this current run rate, next financial year Payworld plans to

touch Rs 11,000-12,000 crore," Payworld CEO Praveen Dhabhai told PTI. Payworld is looking to double its distributors as well as headcount on the field to widen its payment network.

"We have right now around 3,500 distributors. So we want to double our workforce from the sales point of view because

there are a lot of areas which we have seen are yet to be covered, like the states of Odisha, Assam, as people do need these services and the competition is less," Dhabhai added.

He said that COVID-19 has fast tracked the retailers' boarding process on the platform through webinars and video calls compared to the earlier mode of physically reaching out to them. **AGENCIES**

# Indian Bank seeks to boost efficiency

**MUMBAI:** State-owned Indian Bank on Thursday launched a slew of initiatives including new HR vision, chatbot and smart offices to strengthen its efficiency.

These announcements were made on the completion of one year of amalgamation of erstwhile Allahabad Bank with Indian Bank. In February this year, the lender achieved IT integration of all the branches of erstwhile Allahabad Bank with itself.

"The foundation (of the bank) has been strongly laid while going through the change process. The bank is

poised for better growth," its Managing Director and CEO Padmaja Chunduru.

She said the bank's primary focus is on customer service and satisfaction.

The lender's Executive Director V V Shenoy said the new HR vision aims to foster excellence through a journey of growth, individual development, and robust employee experience.

He said the bank has already identified high-level initiatives to be implemented over the next two-three years on the HR front.

"Going forward, the plan is



to focus on leadership development and implementation of HR initiatives, policies and processes to enable the delivery of a commitment towards our

employees," he said.

The lender has initiated a leadership development plan to build a leadership pipeline for the future, Shenoy added.

Its smart office is a complete green initiative which will assist in cost saving on printing and stationery, improved turnaround time (TAT) and increased productivity of employees, among others.

The bank, as an amalgamated entity, reported a stand-alone net profit of Rs 514 crore for the December 2020 quarter, against a net loss of Rs 1,739 crore in the year-ago period.

Its gross non-performing asset (NPA) improved to 9.04 per cent of gross advances in the October-December 2020 quarter, from 12.69 per cent a year ago. Net NPA came down to 2.35 per cent, from 4.22 per cent. **AGENCIES**

# Rajasthan govt launches health insurance scheme for all

**RAJASTHAN HAS BECOME THE FIRST STATE IN THE COUNTRY, WHERE EACH FAMILY WILL GET HEALTH INSURANCE OF RS 5 LAKH EACH YEAR. PEOPLE CAN GET REGISTERED AND BE ASSURED OF CASHLESS TREATMENT**

**JAIPUR:** Rajasthan on Thursday began the registration for an insurance scheme under which each family in the state can claim up to Rs 5 lakh every year for medical expenses.

The state began the registration for Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme, announced by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot in the state budget 2021-22.

"Rajasthan has become the first state in the country, where each family will get health insurance of Rs 5 lakh each year. People can get registered and be assured of cashless treatment," Gehlot claimed in a tweet.

He said the registrations for the government's cashless treatment for all have begun in the state from today. "It is one of our biggest health care schemes aimed at providing

medical relief to all residents of Rajasthan," he said.

"Development works, water, electricity, education, irrigation, social welfare and other sectors are also on the government's priority list, but health is the topmost priority area for us," Gehlot said.

He said the state government had launched the "Nirogi Rajasthan" campaign and the preparations for it, which started in December 2019, proved to be crucial in March 2020 at the time of the coronavirus outbreak.

"The corona management of the government was excellent, due to which the recovery rate was the highest and the mortality rate was the lowest in the state. We have strengthened our medical infrastructure and the per-day corona test-



ing capacity is 70,000 now," the chief minister said. He said Rajasthan's "Bhilwara model" was praised worldwide and the "No Mask, No Entry" slogan was followed in the UK also. Highlighting the medical facilities in the state, Gehlot said his government is explor-

ing the possibility of tie-ups with foreign universities for nursing-training courses. He said the numbers of medical colleges, seats in the MBBS and MD courses have increased in the state and the government is developing model community health centres (CHCs).

Expressing concern on the second wave of coronavirus cases, Gehlot said the state government has imposed certain restrictions, which would be made stricter if the situation worsens. However, he ruled out the possibility of clamping a lockdown, saying it causes losses and is not a solution.

The chief minister said if required, the state government would impose stricter restrictions without clamping a lockdown.

Health Minister Raghu Sharma, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shanti Dhariwal, Transport Minister Pratap Singh and senior officials attended the programme during which the foundations of various projects were laid and a few other projects were inaugurated. **AGENCIES**

## Gig economy may support 90m jobs, add 1.25% to GDP



**MUMBAI:** The gig economy can serve up to 90 million jobs in the non-farm sectors in India with a potential to add 1.25 per cent to the GDP over the "long term", a report said on Tuesday. The gig economy, where workers get hired typically for short durations, can lead to transactions of over USD 250 billion over the long term, the report by the consultancy firm BCG said. The firm said gig economy is not a new concept but has seen greater adoption following the advent of technology. A few years ago, when concerns were being raised about a "jobless" growth, the government had pointed to the growth in gig economy jobs. In the short-to-medium term, nearly 24 million jobs in skilled, semi-skilled and shared services roles could be delivered via gig economy, including nearly 3 million shared services roles and around 8.5 million roles meeting household demand, it said.

A majority 70 million "gigable jobs" are in the construction, manufacturing, transportation and logistics, and personal services sectors, it said adding that these will be primarily driven by small business and household demand.

The consultancy said its estimates are based on a detailed mapping of job-types across industry sectors to identify opportunity areas and barriers to unlocking demand for gig-based services.

The potential of the gig economy was determined using interviews with corporations, including large corporations and medium, small and micro enterprises (MSMEs), a survey of over 600 urban households, and inputs from industry experts.

Over the long term, there will be around 35 million skilled and semi-skilled jobs across sectors, it added. **AGENCIES**

## Growth forecast raised to 10.1%

INDIA'S REAL GDP GROWTH TO RANGE BETWEEN 7.5% AND 12.5%, WORLD BANK PREDICTS

**NEW DELHI:** The World Bank has raised India's growth forecast to 10.1 per cent from the earlier 5.4 per cent for FY 2021-22. It further estimated the country's GDP growth to range between 7.5 per cent and 12.5 per cent.

The Washington-based global lender, in its latest South Asia Economic Focus report released ahead of the annual Spring meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), said that the economy was already slowing when the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded.

After reaching 8.3 per cent in FY17, growth decelerated to 4.0 per cent in FY20, it said. The slowdown was caused by a decline in private consumption growth and shocks to the financial sector (the collapse of a large non-bank finance institution), which compounded pre-existing weaknesses in investment, it said.

Given the significant uncertainty pertaining to both epidemiological and policy developments, the real GDP growth for FY21/22 can range from 7.5 to 12.5 per cent, depending on how the ongoing vaccination campaign proceeds, whether new restrictions to mobility are required, and how quickly the world economy recovers, the World Bank said.

It is amazing how far India has come compared to a year ago. If you think a year ago, how deep the recession was unprecedented declines in ac-



## HIGHLIGHTS

- India is bouncing back, has opened up many of the activities, started vaccination and is leading in the production of vaccination, says officials.
- As economic activity normalises, domestically and in key export markets, the current account is expected to return to mild deficits and capital inflows are projected by continued accommodative monetary policy and abundant international liquidity conditions, they say.

tivity of 30 to 40 per cent, no clarity about vaccines, huge uncertainty about the disease. And then if you compare it now, India is bouncing back, has opened up many of the activities, started vaccination and is leading in the production of vaccination, Hans Timmer, World Bank Chief Economist for the South Asia Region, told PTI in an interview.

However, the situation is still

incredibly challenging, both on the pandemic side with the flare up that is being experienced now. It is an enormous challenge to vaccinate everybody in India, the official said.

"Most of the people underestimate the challenge," he said.

On the economic side, Timmer said that even with the rebound and there is uncertainty here about the numbers, but it basically means that over two

years there was no growth in India and there might well have been over two years, a decline in per capita income.

"That's such a difference with what India was accustomed to. And it means that there are still many parts of the economy that have not recovered or have not fared as well as they would have without a pandemic. There is a huge concern about the financial markets," Timmer said.

"As economic activity normalises, domestically and in key export markets, the current account is expected to return to mild deficits (around 1 per cent in FY22 and FY23) and capital inflows are projected by continued accommodative monetary policy and abundant international liquidity conditions," the report said.

Noting that the COVID-19 shock will lead to a long-lasting inflexion in India's fiscal trajectory, the report said that the general government deficit is expected to remain above 10 per cent of GDP until FY22. As a result, public debt is projected to peak at almost 90 per cent of GDP in FY21 before declining gradually thereafter.

As growth resumes and the labour market prospects improve, poverty reduction is expected to return to its pre-pandemic trajectory.

The poverty rate (at the USD 1.90 line) is projected to return to pre-pandemic levels in FY22, falling within 6 and 9 per cent, and fall further to between 4 and 7 per cent by FY24, the World Bank said. **AGENCIES**

## 28th Hunar Haat opens in Goa

DOMINICK RODRIGUES  
Panjim

The 28th edition of "Hunar Haat" — displaying products by indigenous artisans and craftsmen — was inaugurated by the Goa Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant at the Kala Academy in Panjim on March 27.

Former Goa Chief Minister and Lok Sabha MP Shri Francisco Sardinha; Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Union Minister of State (I/C) Shripad Nayak; Rajya Sabha MP Shri Vinay Dinu Tendulkar; Goa Dy Chief Minister Shri Chandrakant Kavlekar were also present on the occasion.

Noting that "Hunar Haat" strengthened "Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" with the message "Jaun Bhi, Jahaan Bhi", Sawant said Hunar Haat has been providing financial benefits to needy artisans and craftsmen by not only promoting artisans and craftsmen, but also promoting the tourism sector of Goa.

Describing "Hunar Haat" as a platform strengthening India's cultural unity and diversity, he appealed to people of Goa and tourists visiting the state to visit "Hunar Haat" to encourage the artisans and craftsmen.

Former Goa Chief Minister and Lok Sabha MP Francisco Sardinha said that "Hunar Haat" highlighted India's "Unity in Diversity" through



the country's art and culture showcased under one roof.

Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, said that "Hunar Haat", which is held at different venues in India, has witnessed participation and employment for over 5.5 lakh artisans, craftsmen and others, besides on virtual and online platforms <http://hunarhaat.org> and on GeM Portal for buyers.

Union Minister of State (I/C) Shripad Naik said "Hunar Haat" emphasized "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" and "Vocal for Local" while being an effective platform for providing large-scale employment opportunities to artisans and craftsmen of the country.

Rajya Sabha MP Vinay Dinu Tendulkar lauded Union Minister for Minority Affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi for organising "Hunar Haat" and encouraging artisans and craftsmen. Goa Deputy Chief Minister Chandrakant Kavlekar said "Hunar Haat" displayed art

and craft of different states of the country and would provide benefits to artisans and craftsmen of Goa.

The 28th "Hunar Haat" has been organized under the theme "Vocal for Local" from March 26 to April 4 with over 500 artisans and craftsmen from around 30 states/UTs participating.

These artisans are showcasing products like Kalamkari, Bidriware, Udaigiri Wooden Cutlery, products made from cane-bamboo-ute, Madhubani painting, Moonga Silk, Tussar Silk, Leather products, marble products, sandalwood products, embroidery, Chanderi saree, Black Pottery, Kundan jewellery, glass products, wooden-clay toys, brass products, Handloom etc.

Besides various musical cultural programmes, traditional foods from various states such as Mughlai, South Indian, Goa, Malayali, Punjabi, Bengali food etc are being displayed at "Bawarchikhana" in the "Hunar Haat".

## Investors' wealth rises massively

**NEW DELHI:** Investors' wealth grew massively by Rs 90,82,057.95 crore in 2020-21 driven by an extraordinary rally in the equity market, where the benchmark Sensex jumped 68 per cent.

In an unprecedented rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 20,040.66 points or 68 per cent this fiscal year, braving many uncertainties due to COVID-19-led disruptions.

Market analysts termed 2020-21 a roller coaster ride for not only Indian markets but also for equity indices globally due to the pandemic. But with markets making a



comeback towards the latter part of the fiscal year, investors were rewarded with high returns.

Thanks to the improved investor sentiment, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies zoomed Rs 90,82,057.95 crore to reach

Rs 2,04,30,814.54 crore in 2020-21.

On March 3 this year, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies had reached its lifetime high of Rs 2,10,22,227.15 crore. "The bull-run got further strength with the progressive unlocking and sharp rebound in the economy. Discovery of vaccines and optimism it generated gave further strength to the bulls. Globally, markets witnessed a huge rally in November. Emerging markets continued to be flooded with FPI money," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said. **AGENCIES**

## Monaco Organises Virtual Economic Mission To India

DOMINICK RODRIGUES  
Mumbai

The Principality of Monaco successfully organized a "Virtual Trade Mission to India" recently as part of its long history of friendship and cooperation with India, which moved up a gear in 2019 after an Official Visit by HSH the Sovereign Prince Albert II to India.

The Monaco Economic Board (MEB), as the government's operational arm for business policy, held the "virtual Trade Mission comprising a 30-strong delegation of key players in the Monegasque



economy and signed two cooperation agreements with counterparts in the Indo-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IFCCI) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI).

The E-Mission was organised under the aegis of the Monaco Embassy in India, in partnership with the Indian Embassy in France and Monaco, the Indo-French Chamber of Commerce & Industry, and the Promotion Bureau of

the Principality of Monaco in New Delhi.

Besides bilateral presentations on both countries' economies, besides sector-specific focus on finance, innovation, renewable energy, trade and raw materials, presented by Indian experts to Monaco companies, the event witnessed the MEB interacting directly with Indian professionals working at: Credit Agricole Corporate & Investment Bank, Link Innovation, Total India and TATA Steel Mining, and targeted pre-arranged individual B2B meetings online between Monegasque and Indian companies.

## India biggest recipient of FPI inflows at ₹2.6L cr

**NEW DELHI:** India has emerged as the biggest recipient of foreign portfolio investments this fiscal with net inflows worth Rs 2.6 lakh crore, driven by ample liquidity in global markets and hopes of faster economic recovery, according to experts.

The current financial year, which witnessed significant disruptions due to the coronavirus pandemic, is ending on Wednesday.

Investments in the equities segment touched Rs 2,74,503 crore, which is the highest quantum of money recorded ever since the National Securities Depository Ltd began making FPI data publicly available.

Previously, the highest inflow of Rs 1.4 lakh crore into the equities space was witnessed in the financial year



2012-13.

V K Vijay Kumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said financial sector, mortgage lenders, fintech companies and private insurance players, attracted significant FPI inflows.

Going forward, he said that IT, financials, cement and pharma have high earnings

visibility, and therefore might attract increasing FPI inflows in FY22.

In 2020-21, foreign portfolio investors have put in a net sum of Rs 2.74 lakh crore into equities and pulled out a total amount of Rs 24,070 crore from the debt segment while hybrid instruments saw an inflow of Rs 10,238 crore,

as per data available with the depositories.

Together, the total net FPI inflow this fiscal is Rs 2.6 lakh crore as on March 30, 2021.

Between March 2020-March 2021, foreign portfolio investors have been net buyers in all months except March, April, May and September 2020.

"The massive fiscal stimulus by governments and monetary stimulus by central banks has led to inflows into select emerging markets. India has been the biggest recipient of FPI flows in FY21 amongst emerging markets because of the stronger recovery in the economy and surprise in earnings growth," Rusmik Oza, Executive Vice President and Head of Fundamental Research at Kotak Securities, said. **AGENCIES**

## Economic output may stay below 2019 level

**NEW DELHI:** India's economic output in 2021 is expected to remain below the 2019 level despite roll-out of the vaccine to deal with the menace of the coronavirus pandemic, said a report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) released on Tuesday.

India, according to the 'Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2021: Towards post-COVID-19 resilient economies', is estimated to record an economic growth of 7 per cent in 2021-22, over a contraction of 7.7 per cent witnessed in the previous fiscal on account of the pandemic's impact on normal business activity.

Observing that India entered the pandemic with subdued GDP growth and



investment, the report said, "Following one of the most stringent lockdowns in the world, the economic disruptions that the country experienced mounted in the second quarter of 2020."

It added that a subsequent change in lockdown policies and success in reducing infection rates supported an impressive economic turnaround in the third quarter.

"However, the pace of recovery moderated in the fourth

quarter with estimated year-on-year growth still close to zero. "Despite a robust reduction in new COVID-19 cases and the start of vaccine roll-out, India's 2021 economic output is expected to remain below the 2019 level," it added.

Meanwhile, maintaining low borrowing costs while keeping non-performing loans in check would be a challenge, it added.

In its second advance estimates of national accounts, the National Statistical Office (NSO) has projected an 8 per cent contraction in 2020-21, showing the pandemic impact. The report further said China's swift and effective response to COVID-19 enabled it to become the only major economy worldwide to achieve a positive annual economic growth rate in 2020. **AGENCIES**

## Dr Reddy's, Cipla invest in ABCD Tech



**NEW DELHI:** Drug majors Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Cipla on Wednesday said they have entered into a partnership agreement with ABCD Technologies LLP which is to be renamed as IndoHealth Services LLP.

The two firms are contributing up to Rs 40 crore each corresponding to the contribution by the other partners in the target entity which is a newly incorporated limited liability partnership (LLP) and has not commenced any business activities, they said in regulatory filings.

The proposed business of the target entity will be carried out with an objective to facilitate the digitisation of the healthcare infrastructure in India towards enhancement of good distribution practices in support of the National Digital Health Mission of the government, they added.

While Cipla said the nature of consideration is cash infusion as capital contribution towards partnership, Dr Reddy's said the nature of consideration is cash infusion as capital contribution and/or loan. Contribution of up to Rs 40 crore is for up to 20 per cent share of profit/loss in the target entity, the firms said. **AGENCIES**

## Muthoottu Mini Financiers to raise Rs 250 crore via NCDs

DOMINICK RODRIGUES  
Kochi

Muthoottu Mini Financiers Ltd. ("Muthoottu Mini"/"MMFL"), announced here today the opening of its public issue of Secured and Unsecured Debentures ("NCDs") of the face value of Rs. 1,000 each. The 14th NCD Issue opens on March 30, 2021 and closes on April 23, 2021, with an option of early closure or extension.

The 14th NCD Issue aggregates to Rs125 crore, with an option to retain over-subscription upto Rs. 125 crore, aggregating upto a total of Rs. 250 crore. The Issue offers various options for subscription of NCDs with coupon rates ranging from 9.00% - 10.25% p.a.

The terms of each options of NCDs offered under Issue

Include: Net proceeds of the Issue will be utilized for the purpose of onward lending, financing, and for repayment/prepayment of principal and interest on borrowings of the Company (Atleast 75%) - and the rest (up to 25%) for general corporate purpose.

Addressing media virtually, Matthew Muthoottu, MD, MMFL, said the company is a pioneer in gold loans business and was established as a +One Stop Financial Services Provider+ for the common man. "About 24,000 tonnes of gold is lying with family households and needs to be tapped for liquidity in requirements, including strategizing our investments in specific areas to cater to middle and lower class populations," he said.

Highlighting MMFL's business as gold loan busi-



ness (93.37%), microfinance (4.54%) and other businesses (2.09%), Muthoottu said the present business figures were Rs 2,000 crores with increase targeted at Rs 3,500 crores including Rs four crore per branch. "There are no problems in servicing existing debt due

to lots (40%-50%) of recurring customers," he replied to a question.

Due to movement restrictions for customers during the pandemic, MMFL had made tie-ups with banks for customers to access online/gold loans etc, he said, add-

ing that MMFL is planning to open new branches in Delhi, Mumbai while moving up further in North India. "Private equity is on the table and we hope to go public by 2025-26. But gold loans remain our strength as primary portfolio and we were ranked among top NFDCs nationally," he noted.

Describing this issue as the 5th issue this year, P Mathai, CEO, MMFL, said the company's increasing rating in moving forward highlighted investor confidence. "One lakh new pledges are taking place every month. There is growth in gold loan business in rural and semi-urban markets for tapping potential large market gold loans," he said.

To a question as to why the company was visiting the debt markets so frequently, Mathai said "We are getting good re-

sponse from people due to the awareness about us. Investors are drawn to such NCDs because of the company's good track record, high liquidity and external rating by India Rating as IND BBB/Stable," he said, adding that the company maintained 804 branches with 3200 employees in 10 states and one Union Territory.

Reacting to questions about fluctuating gold prices, Mathai said the company had foreseen gold prices dropping and had therefore reduced the tenure of its gold products to 180 days and later to 90 days.

Ann Mary George, CFO, MMFL, said the company's 2018 PAT stood at Rs 1,424 lakhs, Gross NPA ((2.00 percent of Assets), Financial Assets (1,75, 430.71 lakhs), and Capital Adequacy Ratio at 29.65 (2020).

As on 30th September 2020, MMFL had 3,69,019 gold loan accounts -- predominantly from rural and semi urban areas -- aggregating to Rs 1825.55 crores, which accounted for 97.27% of its total loans and advances. Its net Non-Performing Assets for six-month period ended September 30, 2020 stood at 0.59%, lower from the March, 2020 reported net Non-Performing Assets of 1.34%.

The Secured and Unsecured NCDs offered through Prospectus dated March 25, 2021 are proposed to be listed on the BSE.

The Lead Manager to the Issue is Vivro Financial Services Private Limited. Vistra ITCL (India) Limited is the Debenture Trustee and Link Intime India Private Limited is the Registrar to the Issue.



# Sunny Deol's SON TO MAKE BOLLYWOOD DEBUT

DHARMENDRA REQUESTS FANS TO 'SHOWER LOVE' ON HIS GRANDSON RAJVEER

"THE MORE TIME WE SPENT TALKING ABOUT THE PROJECT, THE MORE I BEGAN TO SEE RAJVEER AS THE PROTAGONIST IN MY FILM"

The Deol clan is nothing but excited to have the youngest Deol entering the Bollywood industry. Sunny Deol's youngest son—Rajveer Deol—is all set to make his acting debut.

The film, a coming-of-age love story, will also mark the debut of Avnish S Barjatya, Suraj Barjatya's son, as a writer and director. It will be Rajshri production's 59th film.

The official Instagram page of Rajshri Productions also announced Rajveer Deol's association with the project and wrote: "Rajshri Productions proudly announces the collaboration

of Rajveer Deol and Avnish Barjatya in a coming-of-age love story. A beautiful journey awaits ahead."

Announcing his grandson's debut, Dharmendra took to the microblogging website, and said: "Introducing my grandson #RajveerDeol to the world of cinema along with #Avnishbarjatya directorial debut. I humbly request you all to shower the same love and affection on both the kids as you have on me. Good luck and Godbless #Rajshrifilms #barjatyas #Deols #RajveerDeol."

Sunny also shared the announcement and wrote, "My son Rajveer starts his journey as an

actor. Rajshri Productions proudly announces the collaboration of Rajveer Deol and Avnish Barjatya in a coming-of-age love story. A beautiful journey awaits ahead."

Rajveer's uncle Bobby Deol also extended his support. "On the way to realise his dream...Rajshri Productions proudly announces the collaboration of Rajveer Deol & Avnish Barjatya in a coming-of-age love story. A beautiful journey awaits ahead," he tweeted.

Rajveer has studied theatre in the UK and has worked as an assistant director. He has been training under the guidance of theatre and film director Feroz Abbas Khan, known for directing plays like "Mughal-e-Azam" and "Tumhari Amrita".

Avnish said he decided to cast Rajveer as the newcomer hard-working and has a charisma about him. "Rajveer speaks with his eyes. He has a silent charisma and is tremendously hard-working," he said.

"The more time we spent

talking about the project, the more I began to see Rajveer as the protagonist in my film," Avnish said in a statement here. The makers are yet to finalise the female lead.

The yet-to-be-titled film is expected to go on floors in July this year and is slated for a release in 2022.

The movie not only marks Rajveer's debut but also marks director Sooraj R. Barjatya's son Avnish S. Barjatya's debut as a director. He also penned the script. The movie marks the banner's 59th production.

Rajveer's older brother Karan Deol made his acting debut with Pal Pal Dil Ke Paas, in 2019, with Sunny helming the movie. He will soon appear in Apne 2 co-starring Sunny, Bobby and Dharmendra. AGENCIES

## POTPOURRI

### AMRUTA Khanvilkar: ACTORS MUST FOCUS ON WORK, NOT PLATFORM OF RELEASE



Actress Amruta Khanvilkar is gearing up for the release of her Marathi film "Well Done Baby" on OTT. She says her job is to act well and not be concerned about which platform her project releases.

"I feel any kind of work that gets a bigger audience is a win-win situation. I think I am getting the best of both worlds. Before lockdown, two of my very big films were released. One was 'Malang' in Hindi and 'Choricha Mamlu' in Marathi, and both did really well. I think for actors it is important to do our job and not think about which platform (the work) is going to be released. When you work with dedication, everyone sees it. Across platforms, what I can do is see what I bring to the table," she told IANS.

She added: "For me, choosing scripts does not depend

on whether it is a feature film or an OTT project. For me, the script, the director, the story and the entire ensemble is important and not where it's going to be showcased."

The actress has worked in digital space earlier, in the series "Damaged". Reflecting on why digital platforms can have an edge over feature films, Amruta feels it has to do with the availability of stronger content.

"I feel very confident while doing my work and choosing my character. It is irrespective of it being a project on OTT or feature films. It's just that OTT gives you an edge over choosing bolder and more content driven films. I think when I choose a character, I look at it as a challenge and if it is something that I have done before, I try to make it better," she says.

Talking about "Well Done Baby", which also stars actor Pushkar Jog, Amruta says: "My character is a very strong, stubborn, career oriented girl, who is working through a failed marriage and in the process of that, she gets pregnant. How she has to tackle her dreams and aspirations along with her baby along with the baby starts taking a toll on her. A very common thing between me and my character is that she is very connected to her mom. I had a blast performing this character."

## Six held plotting attacks on army



LAHORE: Pakistan's security agencies have arrested six terrorists belonging to Afghanistan-based Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), but now they were working for the masterminds based in Afghanistan.

The terrorists were getting funds from Afghanistan for terror activities. They had planned to attack the army personnel in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, it said.

In a separate raid, the CTD arrested two TTP terrorists in Lahore on Wednesday.

The terrorists - identified as Abdul Karim and Abdul Basit - were planning attack on law enforcement agencies in Lahore, it said. The CTD recovered IED, a 30 bore pistol with ammunition, prima cord and a mobile phone from their custody. AGENCIES

said. "The arrested terrorists were planning to target the law enforcement agency and army personnel," the CTD said.

Explosives, detonators, cell phones and other articles to be used for militancy were recovered from them, it added.

During interrogation, the terrorists disclosed that they had been radicalised and motivated by ideology of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), but now they were working for the masterminds based in Afghanistan.

The terrorists were getting funds from Afghanistan for terror activities. They had planned to attack the army personnel in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, it said.

In a separate raid, the CTD arrested two TTP terrorists in Lahore on Wednesday.

The terrorists - identified as Abdul Karim and Abdul Basit - were planning attack on law enforcement agencies in Lahore, it said. The CTD recovered IED, a 30 bore pistol with ammunition, prima cord and a mobile phone from their custody. AGENCIES

## 7 convicted in HK for democracy protests



HONG KONG: Seven Hong Kong pro-democracy advocates were convicted on Thursday on charges of organizing and participating in an unlawful assembly during massive anti-government protests in 2019 that triggered a crackdown on dissent.

The seven include media tycoon and founder of the Apple Daily tabloid Jimmy Lai, as well as 82-year-old Martin Lee, a veteran of the city's democracy movement. Lai had already been held without bail on other charges related to his pro-democracy activities.

They were convicted for their involvement in a protest held on Aug. 18, 2019. Organizers said that 1.7 million people marched that day in opposition to a proposed bill that would have allowed suspects to be extradited to mainland China for trial.

The activists, apart from those who have been remanded in custody on other charges, were granted bail on condition they do not leave Hong Kong and must hand in all their travel documents.

They will next appear in court on April 16, where mitigation pleas will be heard before sen-

ences are handed down. Taking part in an unlawful assembly or a riot in Hong Kong can result in a maximum sentence of up to 10 years imprisonment for serious offenses.

Ahead of the trial, supporters and some of the defendants gathered outside the court, shouting "Oppose political persecution" and "Five demands, not one less," in reference to demands by democracy supporters that include amnesty for those arrested in the protests as well as universal suffrage in the semi-autonomous territory.

"So on this day, in a very difficult situation in Hong Kong, political retaliation is on us," Lee Cheuk-yan, one of the defendants, said ahead of the court session.

"We will still march on no matter what lies in the future. We believe in the people of Hong Kong, in our brothers and sisters in our struggle, and the victory is ours if the people of Hong Kong are persistent," he said. AGENCIES

## Antetokounmpo brothers enter record books

LOS ANGELES: Giannis Antetokounmpo made it a family affair on Wednesday night scoring 25 points and joining his two brothers on the court as Milwaukee Bucks beat Los Angeles Lakers 112-97 at Staples Center arena.

Giannis joined forces with Bucks teammate Thanasis Antetokounmpo against the Lakers' Kostas Antetokounmpo to become just the second brother trio in NBA history to play in the same game.

Jrue Holiday scored a game-high 28 points for the Bucks who snapped a three-game losing skid.

The Bucks also spoiled the Lakers debut of Andre Drummond as the American centre finished with just four points. In Boston, Luka Doncic scored 36 points, including seven three-pointers, as Dallas Mavericks held on for a 113-108 win over the Celtics.

"I thought when things got a little hairy down the stretch,



the great thing we did was keep our poise," Mavs coach Rick Carlisle said. "We were able to get fouled, make free throws and get a key basket when we needed."

Elsewhere, Kyrie Irving scored 31 points and finished with a season-high 12 assists as Brooklyn Nets stormed back in the final quarter to beat Houston Rockets 120-108 despite losing James Harden to an injury in the third quarter. AGENCIES

## ICC retains 'Umpire's Call'



DUBAI: The contentious 'Umpire's Call' will continue to be a part of the Decision Review System, the International Cricket Council ruled on Thursday, but introduced a few changes to the current DRS protocols.

As per the existing rule, 50% of the ball should be hitting at least one of the three stumps for the batsman to be adjudged LBW on review in case an umpire's not out call has been challenged.

"The Cricket Committee had an excellent discussion around Umpire's Call and analysed its use extensively," ICC's Cricket Committee head Anil Kumble said in statement issued by the governing body after the end of its board meetings on Wednesday.

"The principle underpinning DRS was to correct clear errors in the game whilst ensuring the role of the umpire as the decision-maker on the field of play was preserved... Umpire's Call allows that to happen, which is why it is im-

## China expands virus origin search beyond its border

BEIJING: Chinese health officials pushed on Wednesday to expand the search for the origins of the novel coronavirus beyond China, one day after the release of a closely watched World Health Organization report on the issue.

They also rejected criticism that China did not give enough data to a WHO team of international experts that visited Wuhan, the Chinese city where the first cases were detected, earlier this year.

"If we limit the study of origin within China, I think this is a scientific misunderstanding, because the source is still unclear," said Liang Wannian, the head of the Chinese team that worked with the WHO group of experts.

He said the experts agreed that the place where the first case was identified is not necessarily where the virus emerged. "Based on this scientific consensus, we should have a broader viewpoint in terms of sourcing," he said.

Experts agree that the virus



could have come from elsewhere, with neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia a prime possibility, but China's

insistence on broadening the research seems partly politically motivated in the face of Western criticism.

The WHO report concluded that the virus or a progenitor of it was most likely carried by a bat, which infected another animal that infected a human.

Researchers have not been able to trace the bat or the intermediate animal yet, but suspicion has fallen on bat habitats in southwest China or nearby Southeast Asia.

European nations' immunisation campaigns against COVID-19 are "unacceptably slow" and risk prolonging the pandemic, a senior World Health Organisation official said Thursday.

Hans Kluge, WHO's regional director for Europe, said vaccines "present our best way out of this pandemic," but noted that to date, only 10% of Europe's population has received one dose and that only 4% have been fully protected with two doses. AGENCIES

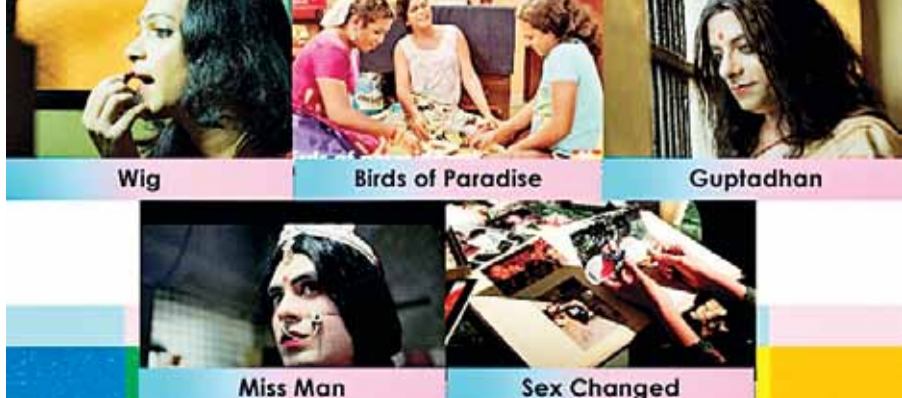
## Mumbai fest focuses on transgender community

DOMINICK RODRIGUES

Mumbai, Mar 31: The Kashish Mumbai International Queer Film Festival celebrated International Transgender Day of Visibility here today with a daylong online program of film screenings and discussion titled Kashish Trans\*Fest.

"This one-day festival of LGBTQ films from India and around the world highlights the life of Transwomen and Transmen, not only their struggles, but their small little victories in finding love and acceptance by families and society. We are happy to be doing our bit to support the Transgender community in India," said Sridhar Ranganay, festival director of Kashish.

Four programmes -- International Shorts, Indian Shorts, a Panel Discussion



and a National Award winning documentary -- were organised under this event, where films were streamed on BookMyShow platform for global audiences viewing at a very modest cost with proceeds going to Tweet Foundation, a NGO in Delhi working for the welfare of the transgender community.

The documentary Ladli, which recently won the National Award for Best Social Issue at the recent 67th National Awards, was screened here.. Director Sudipto Kundu said, "At a glance Ladli is a story about an individual, but in a broader context it tells about the acceptance and adversity faced by the community from the society."

Other Indian short films being screened here include: Guptadhan by Makarand Sawant, Birds Of Paradise by Rahul MM, Sex Changed by Ankit Gupta, Wig by Atanu Mukherjee and Miss Man by Tathagata Ghosh. The international selection include Mrs.McCutcheon (USA) by

John Sheedy, The Family Album (USA) by Anthony Chapman, I'm Alex (Spain) by Joss Manz & Itzuri Sanchez, Plunge (UK) by David James Holloway & Samuel Lawrence, The Summer Of 12 (Taiwan) by Kuan-Ling Kuo and Sunken Plum (China) by Roberto F. Canuto & Xiaoxi Xu.

The day-long festival also featured a Live Panel Discussion that explores how corporate India is including transgender professionals at workplace and what more is required to create a more trans inclusive work environment and society. The panelists were transgender men and women professionals working with corporates, and NGO representatives focused on skilling trans people to be career ready. The panel discussion was moderated by Anupama Easwaran from InHarmony, a Mumbai based Diversity & Inclusion consultancy.

Recalling the journey of working with the transgender community three and half years back, Anupama Easwaran said, "One of the first events I attended during my research was the Kashish QUEER FILM FESTIVAL where I watched this beautiful Kannada movie Naanu Avanalla...Avalu based on the life of the trans woman, Living Smile Vidya. This was also my first solo movie viewing experience and this movie, the film festival and interacting with many wonderful people transformed my life."

The 12th edition of Kashish Mumbai International Queer Film Festival is scheduled from May 20 - 30, 2021 as an online event and will feature 150 films from 50 countries.