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Blinken to convene virtual COVID Ministerial on Nov 10

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has announced that he will convene a virtual Covid-19 Ministerial on November 10 as "this global pandemic requires global action and continued focus". Foreign Ministers must play a central role to bring this pandemic to an end and prepare for the future. Together with my counterparts and leaders from regional and international organisations, we will assess the current state of the global response to Covid-19, the virus's impact, and the threat of future pandemics," Blinken was quoted as saying in a statement issued by the State Department late Friday. "We will discuss efforts to accelerate toward vaccine equity and impact. We will discuss the need for sustainable financing for global health security. "We will also assess the role of enhanced regional collaboration and co-ordinated political leadership in current and future preparedness and response," he added. According to Blinken, the upcoming Ministerial will build on the momentum generated by President Joe Biden's Covid-19 Summit, and it aims to establish a platform for regular engagements among Foreign Ministers to address health security".

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AGENCIES

Modi, Shah, Rajnath greet nation on Bhai Dooj



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and BJP National President J.P. Nadda greeted the nation on the occasion of Bhai Dooj on Saturday. Taking to Twitter, Modi said: "Best wishes to everyone on the auspicious occasion of Bhai Dooj." "Best wishes to countrymen on the auspicious occasion of Bhai Dooj," Shah also tweeted. Taking to microblogging site, Rajnath Singh posted: "Heartfelt greetings to all the countrymen on the occasion of 'Bhai Dooj', a symbol of the

strength of the sacred bond of brother and sister and the affection between them. Congratulations." Nadda tweeted: "Heartly greetings to all the countrymen on the occasion of Bhai Dooj, a festival symbolising the unwavering love of brother and sister." "On this festival of mutual harmony, just wish that mutual brotherhood and affection increases and everyone's life is filled with joy, gaiety and good health." The festival of Bhai Dooj, a symbol of affection between a brother and sister, is being celebrated with enthusiasm, zeal and gaiety in the country on Saturday.

AGENCIES

Young climate leaders demand action to prevent catastrophe

GLASGOW: Young climate leaders came together in Glasgow with negotiators, officials and ministers from across the world, to make their voices heard and demand the action needed to prevent catastrophic climate change in their lifetimes. Events across COP26 focused on harnessing the expertise of young people and putting their views directly to the negotiators and officials working to agree global action on climate change.

The day was co-chaired by YOUNGO, the Official Children's and Youth constituency of the UNFCCC which opened with a session called Unifying for Change: Global Youth voice at COP26. YOUNGO also presented the COY16 Global Youth Position Statement, representing the views of over 40,000 young climate leaders from across the world. The statement presented their priorities directly to ministers, including action on climate finance, mobility and transportation, through to wildlife protection conservation.

COP26 President Alok Sharma said: "Wherever I have been in the world, I have been



struck by the passion and the commitment of young people to climate action. The voices of young people must be heard and reflected in these negotiations here at COP. The actions and scrutiny of young people are key to us keeping 1.5 alive and creating a net-zero future. "I am also aware of the fear and anxiety many of them feel

about the future of the planet, including my own children. That is why we must act on the COY16 Global Youth Position Statement from COY16 and the manifesto from the Milan Youth4Climate Summit."

YOUNGO Global Focal Points, Heeta Lakhani and Marie-Claire Graf, said: "YOUNGO has been working

closely with the UK. Presidency and the UNFCCC Secretariat to co-design Youth and Public Empowerment Day. We successfully profiled global youth voices through the COY16 Global Youth Statement, and brought together four generations to share best practice examples of achieving climate justice

"We successfully profiled global youth voices through the COY16 Global Youth Statement, and brought together four generations to share best practice examples of achieving climate justice collectively"

collectively." The UK also announced its draft Sustainability and Climate Change strategy to equip and empower young people with the skills they need to drive the future of climate action. This includes the introduction of a Primary Science Model Curriculum, to include an emphasis on nature and the recognition of species, supporting the youngest pupils to develop conservation skills.

Education ministers from

around the world also pledged to do the same with nations such as South Korea, Albania, and Sierra Leone pledging to put climate change at the heart of their curriculum. The UK and Italy, in partnership with UNESCO, Youth4Climate and Mock COP co-ordinated new global action to equip future generations with the knowledge and skills to create a net-zero world.

As Education Ministers and young people gathered together, over 23 countries put forward impressive national climate education pledges, ranging from decarbonising the school sector to developing school resources. The event also unveiled a new statement titled 'Learn for our planet: Act for the climate' which committed countries to revisit progress made on their pledges in advance of COP27. The UK also announced a new 85,000 pound research grant to support the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre to produce better information on the education needs of refugee children and enable a more effective international response.

AGENCIES

Cong still not able to resolve issues between Sidhu & Channi

NEW DELHI: The Congress party has still not been able to resolve issues between Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and State President Navjot Singh Sidhu as the latter has come up with another condition to resume his work as state President. Sidhu has been pushing for appointment of new advocate General. Sidhu has now withdrawn his resignation after Congress high command intervened on the issue, but has not resumed work. He said he would resume work in office the day a new Advocate General is appointed and the panel on the new DGP is received. His announcement comes days after Advocate General A.P.S. Deol resigned from his position and the Punjab government



has sent a list of 10 names to the Union Public Service Commission for appointment of the Director General of Police. Sidhu said: "Posts do not matter when you are on the path of truth". Appointed the state chief on July 19, Sidhu re-

signed as party chief minutes after allocation of portfolios to ministers in the new government headed by Charanjit Channi who succeeded Amarinder Singh as the Chief Minister. It was Sidhu who made the high command to replace former Chief Minis-

ter Amarinder Singh but the Congress appointed Channi as the Chief Minister. Congress appointed new In charge of the state Harish Chaudhary who was also instrumental in Amarinder Singh operation but could not resolve the issues till now. The former Congress Chief Minister has floated a new party and is eyeing the Congress elements who are unhappy and has claimed that many leaders are in touch with, him much to the headache of the Congress.

The Congress is closely watching former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's moves and the leaders who have close ties with him. The state unit has been tasked to placate such leaders or arrange a meeting with

Indian companies skip China expo



NEW DELHI: Even as more than 3,000 global businesses from over 120 countries and regions are keenly showcasing their products and services at the China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai and eyeing potential business deals, no Indian company is listed as participant in the world's largest fair that focuses on imports, the Global Times reported. India's absence from the event that kicked off on Thursday, for unclear reasons, also contrasts with robust growth in China-India bilateral trade this year, a trend that is increasingly irresistible for the South Asian economy despite its growing political hostility toward China, experts said, as per the report. The number of Indian companies that attend the CIIE has been decreasing progressively in recent years and dropped to zero at this year's CIIE, according to an official catalog of participants for the event. The catalog of 4th CIIE exhibitors displayed at the exhibition halls showed that no Indian company is listed. A search for Indian exhibitors in the expo's digital catalogue, presented on the CIIE's official website, also showed no results.

AGENCIES

IMF welcomes India's resolve at COP26

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Thursday welcomed India's announcement with regard to addressing the climate change challenges at the COP26 summit in Glasgow. "We welcome India's announcement at the COP26 of new targets to increase reliance on renewables and reduce the carbon intensity of its economy, including to adopt net zero target by 2070," Gerry Rice, Director, Communication Department, IMF, told the media. "As you know, India is currently one of the world's largest



"We are heartened by India's focus on achieving progress in the current decade given the urgent need for global mitigation action"

emitters, still heavily reliant on coal for electricity generation. And so, its actions may help catalyse action in other emerging market

economies as well," he said. "India's significant investment in renewables and climate change adaptation policies suggest it is well positioned to take further steps to reach this new target." Rice said responding to a question. "We are heartened by India's focus on achieving progress in the current decade given the urgent need for global mitigation action. And as with other countries, it will be important to follow through with specific actions to contain emissions over the current decade," he added.

AGENCIES

Three member NIA team in Canada to probe funding routes of pro-Khalistan groups

NEW DELHI: A three-member team of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrived in Canada on November 5 to probe the funding routes to Sikh for Justice (SFJ) and other Khalistan supporters there. According to sources, an Inspector General level officer led team will investigate the sources of funding by various organisations abroad for the creation of Khalistan out of India by the banned outfits like SFJ and other terrorist organisations.

The probe team will investigate the connection of these anti-Indian outfits' funding links of terrorist organisations -- SFJ and other pro-Khalistani groups like Khalistan Zindabad Force, Babbar Khalsa International, Khalistan Tiger Force, who have become active in the recent past. Sikh For Justice is backed by Pakistan's intelligence wing the Inter State Services (ISI) which has been trying to revive militancy in India. SFJ has been banned by

the Indian government for involving in terror-related activities. The central probe team would also investigate the Khalistani terrorist organisations funding source from different foreign countries including the US, the UK, Australia and Germany.

During the farmers agitation against the three farm laws in Delhi in January and February, it was reported that some NGOs like 'Khalsa Aid' and others were funded by these Sikh



organisations and supported the agitation for long. Around 40 persons including a Punjabi actor Deep Sidhu and Khalistani sympathizer Baldev Singh Sirsa were summoned by the NIA for questioning in the 'Sikhs For Justice Referendum' case. Recently on November 1, the SFJ organised a referendum in London to carve out Khalistan in India, which badly failed to garner support of the Sikhs due to punitive actions taken by the Indian

government. The Indian authorities have cancelled the visas of 12 Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) status for their involvement in anti-India activities abroad. The US based SFJ deliberately tried to organise a referendum in London on November 1, 2021 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in the UK, attending a global summit on Climate Change in Glasgow.

AGENCIES

Amarinder resigns from Cong, names new party Punjab Lok Congress



CHANDIGARH: Former Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh on Tuesday resigned from the Congress, accusing party president Sonia Gandhi and Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of hatching a midnight conspiracy to oust him.

The 79-year-old leader timed his bitter resignation letter with an announcement on the name of his new party. The Punjab Lok Congress will

be formally launched after the Election Commission registers it and allots a poll symbol. Amarinder Singh's seven-page letter to Sonia Gandhi, made public on Twitter, lashed out at Navjot Singh Sidhu, the new Punjab Congress president whom he described as an acolyte of the Pakistani deep state, and "dubious individual" Harish Rawat, the former AICC in-charge for the state. Singh also felt that the government led by Charanjit

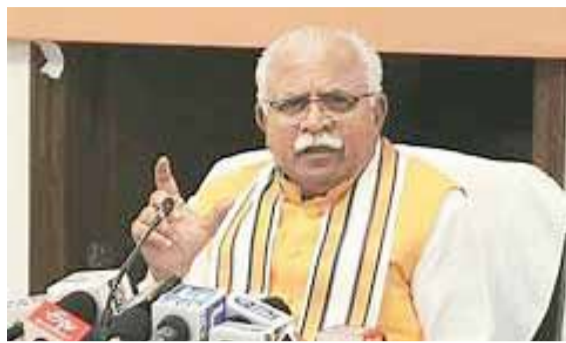
Singh Channi, his replacement as CM, was too inexperienced for the job of handling a border state. The letter also carried a veiled threat to reveal the names of those in the Channi government who were allegedly involved in illegal sand-mining trade.

The former CM claimed he had inputs on this from intelligence agencies, but he didn't act because he did not want to embarrass the party. I actually felt deeply hurt by your conduct and that of your children who I still deeply love as much as my own children, having known their father, since we were in school together since 1954, which is for 67 years now, he wrote on the party's action.

He resigned as the Punjab chief minister in September amid a bitter power tussle with Sidhu, the ex-cricketer favoured over him by the party high command. Days later, he had made clear that he will quit the Congress and float his own party, not ruling out a tie-up with the BJP ahead of next year's assembly polls.

AGENCIES

Higher compensation for crops damaged by recent hailstorm: Khattar



JALANDHAR: Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar on Saturday said farmers whose crops were damaged due to the recent hailstorm will be given a compensation higher than the current rate of Rs 12,000 per acre. This will be announced at the next cabinet meeting, he said in Jharothi village in Sonapat district. The chief minister was speaking in a programme related to crop failure, according to an official statement.

Khattar made several announcements for the farmers in Jharothi village, and said he himself is a farmer's son and the entire Haryana is like his family. Haryana is a land

of farmers. When farmers are happy, then only shopkeepers, workers, traders, and people running factories will be benefited, he said. Taking a dig at the previous Congress government, Khattar said when crops were damaged due to rains back then, money used to be deposited in the accounts of the farmers after one and a half months. During the previous governments, cheques of only up to Rs 2, Rs 4 and Rs 10 were also given to the farmers, he claimed. When the new government was formed in the state, it was decided that no farmer's cheque would be made less than Rs 500, Khattar said.

AGENCIES

Word 'terrorist' inscribed on back, alleges prisoner in Punjab



CHANDIGARH: A prisoner in a jail in Barnala in Punjab has accused the jail superintendent of torture and inscribing the word 'terrorist'

on his back with an iron rod. Taking cognizance of the incident, Deputy Chief Minister Sukhjinder Randhawa has ordered a thorough

inquiry and a medical examination of prisoner Karamjit Singh, 28. DIG Ferozpur, Tajinder Singh Maur, will conduct the inquiry.

The prisoner, who is facing life sentence in a murder case, has alleged that a word 'aatwadi' or terrorist is inscribed on his back.

AGENCIES

Gurugram admin cancels Namaz permission at 8 designated places

GURUGRAM: Due to the objection by local people and various Resident Welfare Associations (RWA) the district administration of Gurugram on Tuesday cancelled permission to offer Namaz at 8 designated places.



These locations include Bengali Basti Sector-49, V-Block DLF-III, Surat Nagar Phase-1, Outside Khedi Majra village, on Dwarka Expressway near Daulatabad village, Sector-68 near village Ramgarh, Near DLF Square Tower and village Rampur to Nakhola Road. Apart from this, a committee has also been constituted by the Deputy Commissioner Gurugram to identify the places to offer Namaz, in which Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM), Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP), members of Hindu/Muslim organization and other social organizations have been included. After talking to all the parties, this committee will decide which places will be used to offer Namaz in the fu-

ture ensuring that local people do not face any problem. This committee will also ensure that Namaz is not offered on any road or public place. Also, local people do not have any objection to identifying a place for Namaz.

"Namaz can be offered only at Idgah, Masjid or designated places. Due to the decision taken by the committee in this matter, the brotherhood and social harmony of both the organizations should be maintained for which the district

administration is committed. For this the cooperation of both the organizations is also required," Subhash Boken, spokesperson of the Gurugram police said. Both organizations are bound to maintain law and order. Consent from the administration is necessary for Namaz in any public and open place. "Special security arrangements have been made by the Gurugram Police in this regard and the police are keeping a vigil," Boken said.

AGENCIES

Channi vows to restore glory of Punjab

CHANDIGARH: Vowing to restore the pristine glory of Punjab, Chief Minister Charanjit Channi on Friday said the state would be soon transformed into "Golden Sparrow of India". Addressing a gathering in Phagwara town on the occasion of Sri Vishwakarma Pooja Utsav, he said concerted efforts would be made for the holistic development of the state on one hand and prosperity of its people on the other.

Evoking Lord Vishwakarma, he said with the blessings of Lord, a mechanism is being evolved to put the state on trajectory of high economic growth. "No stone is being left unturned for comprehensive development of the state." Terming his government as the government of common man, for the common man, and by the common man, the Chief Minister said from day one his major thrust is only ensuring transparent, responsive and citizen-centric administration.



He said several path-breaking initiatives, including cheap power, Basera scheme, ownership rights to people living within 'Lal Lakeer' and others, have been already initiated by his government. Not only this, but several other decisions

will be taken in the coming days, Channi said. The Chief Minister also said that gone were the days when the common man, peasant, farmers, employees and others have to look towards the government for their problems.

AGENCIES

Maintain strict vigil in border areas: Pb DGP to his men

CHANDIGARH: Punjab's officiating DGP Iqbal Singh Sahota on Saturday asked all the border district police chiefs to maintain a strict vigil along the border area and keep a check on smugglers' activities. The director-general of police, who was chairing a crime review meeting with officials of Jalandhar range and border range in Jalandhar, directed all senior police officers to adopt a zero-tolerance policy against drugs, illegal mining and corrupt practices, the Punjab government said in a statement.

Sahota also asked border officials to keep a close tab on drones being used for smuggling of arms, ammunition, explosives and drugs from across the border. He also ordered district heads to install CCTV cameras at all police stations and religious places. During the meeting, the DGP also asked all commissioners and senior superintendents of police to launch a crackdown against drug smugglers, suppliers and bootleggers in

their areas. He directed them to identify hotspots infamous for drug smuggling in their areas and launch suitable operations to nab all those smuggling or selling drugs.

AGENCIES

Chautala wins by-election in Haryana



CHANDIGARH: Abhay Singh Chautala of the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) on Tuesday won the by-election of Ellenabad in BJP-JJP ruled Haryana with a margin of 6,708 votes. He defeated Govind Kanda of the BJP. Congress nominee Pawan Beniwal finished third and lost his deposits.

The bypoll was necessitated with Chautala's resignation as the legislator in January in protest against three central farm laws. After winning the bypoll in 2010, Chautala retained the seat in 2014 and 2019. BJP's Gobind, brother of Haryana Lokhit Party chief and legislator Gopal Kanda, had joined the party just before the bypoll. Beniwal, who had unsuccessfully contested the previous Assembly poll against Chautala, switched to the Congress from the BJP too, ahead of the bypoll.

AGENCIES

Navjot Sidhu obstructing functioning of govt, spreading misinformation: Punjab AG APS Deol

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Advocate General A P S Deol on Saturday attacked Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu, accusing him of obstructing the functioning of the state government and his office as well as "spreading misinformation to gain political advantage". Deol's remarks came a day after Sidhu withdrew his resignation as Punjab Congress chief but declared that he will not re-assume charge till Deol and a panel set up for the appointment of the new director general of police (DGP). Sidhu had resigned from the post on September 28.

In a statement, Deol said Sidhu's "repeated utterances seek to derail the earnest efforts of the state government to ensure justice in the drugs matter and the sacrilege cases". "Navjot Singh Sidhu is obstructing the functioning of the government and the office of the advocate general," he alleged. "Navjot Singh Sidhu is spreading misinformation to gain political advantage over his political colleagues." There is a concerted attempt by vested interests to malign the functioning of the Congress party in view of coming elections in Punjab for their selfish political gain by politicking the constitutional office of the Advocate General of Punjab," he



added. Sidhu, the Amritsar East MLA, has been opposing Deol's appointment as the state AG and Iqbal Preet Singh Sahota's as DGP. Both Deol and Sahota are considered Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi's choices. Last month, Sidhu had said that the Congress would have "no face" if the AG and DGP were not removed. Deol had represented former Punjab DGP Sumedh Singh Saini in cases related to the 2015 sacrilege incidents and police firing on protesters, while Sahota was the head of the special investigation team formed by the previous SAD-BJP government to probe the sacrilege incidents. Deol had replaced Atul Nanda, who had stepped down in September following the resignation of Amarinder Singh as Punjab chief minister. Early this week, there were reports that Deol had offered to resign as AG. However, the senior advocate refuted the reports.

AGENCIES

Haryana records 30 pc increase in GDP, 90 pc increase in per capita income in 7 years

SATISH HANDA Ambala

According to Haryana state government information, nearly 30% growth in GDP increased from 6.24 to 8.5% and nearly 90% growth in per capita income increased from 1.32 lakh per annum to 2.49 lakh has been recorded in past seven years in the state witnessed improvement in every sector including education, employment, health, industry, agriculture and law and order in the state. Manohar Lal government started ruling over in the state from October



2014 as an independent BJP government in first tenure and had alliance with Jananayak Janta Party to form government in the state in 2019 having large number of achievements in past seven years which made state first in the country as kerosene free, ban over toilet in open

and formation of educated village 'Panchayats' all over in the state. In spite of severe economic crisis due to COVID-19 epidemic outbreak, Haryana state has been ranking as second in the country for collecting highest revenue towards GST and ranking as fifth in exports to various countries. Information reveals, during year 2013-14 when Hooda government was ruling in Haryana state the total annual budget in the state was Rs 32,731 crore which has been increased to Rs 1,55,000 crore during current year 2021-22. Accord-

ing to information, Haryana state contributes 4.07% share in country's GDP although the state is holding only 1.34% of total area and 2.09% of population in the country. Information also reveals, to increase GDP in Haryana state, service sector including real estate have 52% share, industry sector have 30% share and agriculture sector possesses 18% share. As regard industry in the state out of total production of automobiles in the country Haryana state have 67% share in production of passenger cars, 60% share in production of motorcycles,

50% share in production of tractors as well have 50% refrigerators in the country are being manufactured in Haryana state. While having a look at per capita annual income in Haryana, in the year 2012-13 it was identified as Rs 1,19,185, which increased to Rs 1,32,089 in the year 2013-14 and witnessed further increase to Rs 1,35,007 in the year 2014-15, whereas per capita annual income reached to Rs 2,47,628 in 2019-20 and was identified as Rs Rs 2,49,535 in 2020-21 as against national per capita income Rs 1,35,050.

Thousands cases illicit liquor seized at Ambala, illegal factory unearthed at Rohtak

SATISH HANDA Ambala

Haryana police sealed a godown at Mohra on the National Highway near Ambala Cantt having thousands cases liquor being smuggled to other states and a factory illegally manufacturing and packing illicit liquor in a residential house at Meham near Rohtak on October 29 late night.

Team of Punjab police accompanied by Ambala police and members of Excise & Taxation Department raided the godown at Ambala Cantt late evening and recovered thousands cases illicit liquor and also impounded two trucks parked outside the godown along with few cases of liquor loaded in a truck without having a permit. The raid was conducted when Punjab police caught a truck in which 550 cases liquor were loaded



and on information by driver that stock were collected from Ambala godown police raided the premises. Jashandeep Singh Randhawa SSP Ambala told

that all illegal stocks of liquor were counted in the presence of Deputy Excise & Taxation Commissioner A. Passi and other members of his staff and

counting of thousands of liquor cases continued till late night. He said, police is trying to find out the owner of godown and illicit liquor. This is not the first

case of seizing illicit liquor at Ambala, Excise department and police has traced out several illegal liquor godowns as well as units manufacturing fake liquor being smuggled to other states in past few months.

In another case, team of CM Flying Squad on a clue raided a fake liquor manufacturing unit in a residential house near old by-pass at Meham near Rohtak and seized 25344 small and 1716 large liquor bottles. Uday Singh Meena SP Rohtak told that illicit liquor manufacturing business was going on since a long time. The workers filling liquor in bottles attempted to flee but nabbed by the police. During preliminary investigation, arrested staff members disclosed that illicit liquor was being sold in other districts in the state as well as smuggled to other states and the factory was said to be filling RO water.

From 'Bua-Babua', UP poll narrative shifts to 'Baba-Babua'



LUCKNOW: From the famous 'Bua-Babua' narrative that dominated the Uttar Pradesh politics in 2019 when the BSP and SP forged an alliance, the focus is now shifting to 'Baba-Babua' -- Baba being Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Babua remains Samajwadi chief Akhilesh Yadav.

Akhilesh Yadav had referred to Yogi Adityanath as 'Baba' at an event and the Chief Minister retaliated by taking a jibe at the SP chief and saying: "Babua, ye Twitter hi vote bhi de dega (This Twitter hi vote bhi de dega)" The Chief Minister was in Akhilesh

Yadav's home district Etawah on Saturday to inaugurate and lay foundations for projects worth about Rs 475 crore.

The projects he inaugurated included the Central jail in Etawah. Hours before, Akhilesh Yadav, referring to Yogi Adityanath, had said: "Baba Mukhya Mantri should not contest an Assembly seat, he is already on his way out." In retaliation, Yogi Adityanath said: "I had come here (Etawah) twice during corona. But people of other parties were in home isolation even when you were in a crisis. They should remain confined to

their homes even during polls.

They need to be given replies by people in this manner only. Tell them, 'Babua, ye Twitter hi vote bhi de dega'. He asked BJP supporters to ensure the leaders who sat at home during Covid should be made to remain there' in the elections. They were busy on Twitter. So, tell them, Babua, Twitter will vote for you," the Chief Minister added. Yogi Adityanath also hit out at Akhilesh Yadav for frequently accusing the BJP and him of "re-laying foundation stones and inaugurating or re-inaugurating previous SP

government projects".

"It happens only in the BJP government that we lay the foundation and then inaugurate the projects. When the intent is not clean, dishonesty and corruption rule. Even if power is attained by deceit, and foundation stones are laid, the public does not leave them in a position to inaugurate the projects." The Chief Minister also mentioned Ayodhya to attack the SP without directly naming it. "The sparkle from the lamps in Ayodhya are shining across the world.

This is the same Ayodhya where people used to be scared to go earlier and where Ram bhakts (devotees of Ram) were fired at (in 1990 when Akhilesh Yadav's father Mulayam Singh Yadav was the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister)," he said. The war of words between BJP and SP leaders is already touching a new low with both the parties lashing out at each other, using derogatory languages. The Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections are due early next year along with Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur. Political parties have already started campaigning for the polls in right earnest. **AGENCIES**

Amit Shah holds review meeting in his Gandhinagar constituency

THE VOTER LIST CORRECTION PROGRAMME WILL KICK OFF FROM NOVEMBER 11 IN THE STATE. ACCORDING TO PATEL, SHAH OFFERED GUIDANCE TO ENSURE THAT NO ELIGIBLE VOTER IS LEFT OUT OF THE VOTERS' LIST



constituency.

GANDHINAGAR: Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who represents the Gandhinagar constituency in the Lok Sabha, on Saturday held a review meeting at the residence of a local BJP MLA and offered his advice to ensure that no eligible voter is left out of the electoral rolls.

The meeting was held at the residence of Arvind G. Patel (Dalal) in Ahmedabad, whose Assembly constituency falls within the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat. The voter list correction programme will kick off from November 11 in the State. According to Patel, Shah offered guidance to ensure that no eligible voter is left out of the voters' list. "Shah was also here to directly interact with the party workers from his

He carries out such review meetings once every three months in the presence of the MLAs from his constituency and other officials of Municipal Commissioner and District Collector levels," Patel told the media. The meeting was also attended by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, whose Ghatlodia Assembly seat is part of the Gandhinagar constituency. Patel said that his area was earlier congested with lots of railway lines and it was due to Shah's efforts that all the underbridges and overbridges proposed to ease the traffic got approved.

Shah is in Ahmedabad to celebrate Diwali with his family members. On Friday, he held a public programme at his bungalow in Thaltej to exchange greetings on the occasion of Gujarati New Year. **AGENCIES**

CBI gives report to Kerala HC: Fazal killed by CPM, not RSS



THE COURT IN AUGUST 2021, DIRECTED THE CBI TO INVESTIGATE THE MATTER. THE CBI QUESTIONED SUBHEESH AND HIS FRIEND SHINOJ AND THE DUO CONFESSED THAT THEY WERE TORTURED BY THE KERALA POLICE AND FORCED TO RECORD A STATEMENT THAT THEY HAD MURDERED FAZAL

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has given its concluding report to the Kerala High Court stating that it was a CPM gang led by Kodi Suni who had killed the Islamic organization National Democratic Front (NDF) worker, Fazal at Thalassery. The CBI presented its report to the court on Friday and ruled out the involvement of the RSS in the murder.

The CBI report is a major setback to the ruling CPM as the party has been continuously maintaining that it was the RSS that was behind the murder. Fazal, who was a newspaper vendor, had switched his political allegiance from the CPM to the NDF. He was found murdered in the early morning of October 22, 2006, at Saidarpalli in Thalassery in Kannur district. Thalassery is the hometown of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and politburo member and former state secretary, Kodiyeri Balakrishnan and a CPM bastion.

The CBI investigated the case after Fazal's widow Mariyu petitioned the Kerala High Court requesting for a CBI probe which the court agreed to. The CBI arrested eight CPM workers including party senior leaders Karayi Rajan and Karayi Chandrashekar.

After the CPM came to power in Kerala and Pinarayi Vijayan became the Chief Minister in May 2016, a video clip had come out in July 2017, in which an RSS activist Subheesh was seen claiming that it was the RSS who had done away with Fazal. Subheesh however denied this and on the very next day after the video was circulated, he addressed a press conference stating that the police had tortured him after he was arrested in another murder case. He said the police threatened him to make him state that the RSS was behind the Fazal murder.

The confession of Subheesh and his later denial prompted the family members of Fazal to approach the Kerala High Court for a further investigation by the CBI. The court in August 2021, directed the CBI to investigate the matter. The CBI questioned Subheesh and his friend Shinoj and the duo confessed that they were tortured by the Kerala police and forced to record a statement that they had murdered Fazal. The CBI found that Fazal was murdered at 3.30 a.m. but according to the statement of Subheesh in the video it was stated that the murder took place at 1.30 a.m.

The agency also found that there were discrepancies in the statement of Subheesh regarding the weapon used for the murder when compared to the wounds on the body of Fazal. The CBI filed its report in the court stating that Subheesh was forced by the Kerala police to give false statements and said that the murder was committed by CPM cadres led by Kodi Suni. He is now in jail in the murder case of Revolutionary Marxist leader T.P. Chandrashekar. Meanwhile, CPM Kannur district secretary, M.V. Jayarajan said that the party would take legal recourse against the CBI report. **AGENCIES**

Leaving BJP, actor Joy Banerjee tells PM Modi

KOLKATA: The exodus from BJP continues in West Bengal. After Rajib Banerjee, it is the turn of actor-turned-politician Joy Banerjee, who wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi informing him of his decision to leave the party. However, Banerjee didn't make it clear whether he would join Trinamool Congress or not.



In a two-page letter written to the Prime Minister, Banerjee said that he has been trying for the last two years to get an appointment but he failed and so he chose to write to him. In his letter, he was critical about the party's decision to nominate Rajib Banerjee to its National Executive, noting that despite this, Rajib Banerjee left the party. Wishing the Prime Minister 'Happy Diwali', the actor-turned-politician wrote: "I have been trying for the last two years to meet you but I was not given an appointment.

I have asked for medical funds several times but I did not get anything. In 2016 I was made the National Executive Member but this year I was left out, and Rajib Banerjee was included. He (Rajib Banerjee) joined TMC. "I joined BJP in 2016 and have

been working for the party since then. I was even beaten by the goons during my campaign for the party. Unfortunately, despite my efforts, I was treated as an outsider. My security guards were withdrawn and I was neglected. I told you all this at Kalaikunda airport in 2016. Ten days later you made me the National Executive Member.

Now I want to leave BJP and so I need your permission. Please allow me to leave." Banerjee, who has been critical of the state BJP leadership for long, said that he had never believed in corruption. "I was in a position where I could have earned a lot but the police never came to my house. The central leadership knows this and so they love me. I was ill and now I am recovering slowly. I shall decide my future once I am physically fit"

"I was in a position where I could have earned a lot but the police never came to my house. The central leadership knows this and so they love me. I was ill and now I am recovering slowly. I shall decide my future once I am physically fit"

and now I am recovering slowly. I shall decide my future once I am physically fit.

Now I want to shred my ties with the party," he said. BJP national Secretary Rahul Sinha said: "Anyone has the right to leave the party but one thing I must admit that we failed to stand beside him. This is true. We should have stood beside him when he was in trouble." **AGENCIES**

Centre's free grains distribution scheme to end November 30

NEW DELHI: Banking on revival of economy and claiming its market interventions to keep prices in check are working, the Centre on Friday announced the ending of free distribution of ration under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) from November 30.

The scheme - initiated in wake of the nationwide lockdown due to Covid pandemic - envisaged distribution of 5 kg food grain (wheat or rice) per person per month free of cost for maximum 81.35 crore beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) (Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Priority Households), including those covered under Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). "Since the economy is reviving, our OMSS (Open Market Sales Scheme) disposal is also being exceptionally good because of extremely good and consumer friendly OMSS policy this year.

So there is no proposal to extend this scheme," Secretary, Food and Public Distribution, Sudhanshu Pandey told media persons. Under the OMSS,



the Food Corporation of India releases wheat and rice at predetermined prices in the open market from time to time to enhance their supply, especially during the lean season, to moderate the open market prices. Asked about the Uttar Pradesh government starting a free ration scheme from this month, Pandey said: "We would be happy if any state runs the scheme entirely on its own. They are actually distribut-

ing rations from the share of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) pool, which has a 90 per cent subsidy by the Centre." Starting in 2020, the Centre had announced the 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana' (PMGKAY) for all beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) as part of the pro-poor PM Garib Kalyan Package for the period April-November 2020. **AGENCIES**

K'taka lifts night restrictions, allows horse racing

BENGALURU: The Karnataka government on Friday lifted the night curfew between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. as the state is seeing a dip in Covid-19 cases. The government has also allowed horse racing in the state. With the lifting of these curbs, the state is now free from Covid-19 restrictions. However, strict vigilance will continue in the border districts on the movement of people especially from Kerala.

The government has ordered the reopening of Anganwadis and UKG, LKG classes from November 8. Taking a serious view of the gathering of people in large numbers in Bengaluru



recently following the death of Kannada actor Puneeth Rajkumar, it has decided to ramp up Covid testing. Chief Secretary P. Ravikumar has issued orders for lifting night curfew and allowing horse racing. The order calls for stricter implementation of Covid guidelines and entry only to persons who have taken both doses of Covid vaccination. **AGENCIES**

Anil Deshmukh's son skips ED summons, to move court

MUMBAI: Hrishikesh Deshmukh, the son of former Maharashtra minister Anil Deshmukh, on Friday skipped summons by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and is likely to move court seeking anticipatory bail, his lawyer said here.

Advocate Inderpal Singh said Hrishikesh Deshmukh was called for questioning by the ED, but he did not appear as he is likely to move the sessions court or the Bombay High Court for bail. Singh added that he has sought a week's time to appear before the ED and he also may approach the courts for anticipatory bail. Earlier, Hrishikesh Deshmukh had also avoided several ED summons and was called again after his father Anil Deshmukh was arrested early on November 2 after 13 hours questioning on ED, and was later sent to ED custody till November 6.



The father-son duo is being probed for the alleged money-laundering case filed against them arising out of the letter alleging corruption written by ex-Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh in March. The ED followed up by attaching properties worth around Rs 4.2 crore linked with the Deshmukh family and also arrested several of his aides for involvement in the alleged money-laundering racket. **AGENCIES**

Maharashtra highlights Futuristic transport, Fort Conservation, Zoo Safari

DOMINICK RODRIGUES

Close on the heels of earlier providing financial assistance to the tune of Rs 2,860 crores to 14 flood-hit villages in Maharashtra, Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray announced Rs 774 crores to nine other districts in the State along with increased compensation to farmers, while assuring that the Government firmly stands with Maharashtra's farmers.

August to September 2021 had witnessed farmers facing a huge loss due to their crops being destroyed by heavy rains. These farmers will be given compensation from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) and State government.

The Chief Minister recently gave a clarion call here for ensuring public worthiness of the State's transport system, roads and environment, even as he released the MMRDA's Comprehensive Transport Study-2 final report of Mumbai's futuristic transport system.

Assuring government support for the MMRDA's works, Thackeray highlighted the need for an ideal "trustworthy, neat, clean and quality" transport system -- in view of the growing population -- free from potholed roads, traffic jams, speedy and efficient public transport, Maharashtra Minister for Urban Development Eknath Shinde praised the USA's transportation system while

announcing a decision to build concrete roads in the State's areas that experienced heavy rainfall and road damage.

Reiterating the need for +ward-level micro-planning+ instead of focusing on intra-city transport and traffic system, Maharashtra Minister for Environment Aaditya Thackeray noted the need for finding the "missing links" in regard to traffic. Besides Mumbai's transportation likely to increase from present 3,500 buses to 10,000 in catering to the growing population, another key element to be factored in was the use of alternative fuel like electricity or other environment-friendly fuel, he said.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister also announced a Rs50 lakh fund allocation to the Central Archaeological department for the conservation of the +Gingee Fort+ in Tamil Nadu -- where Maratha ruler Chhatrapati Rajaram Maharaj had ruled for eight years.

Announcing this during the steering committee meeting for conservation, restoration and preservation of forts in Mumbai, Thackeray noted that the Gingee fort in Tamil Nadu was recognised as the "fourth capital of the Maratha kingdom" during the eight-year reign of Chhatrapati Rajaram Maharaj.

The requisition for the funds had been made by special invitee to the meeting of the steering committee headed by the Chief



Minister and Member of Parliament Chhatrapati Sambhaji Rajee. Describing protection, conservation and restoration of forts essential due to them being "legacies of history," Thackeray urged for a social public campaign themed as 'My Forts, My Responsibility', besides also individual budgetary plans for every fort and the biodiversity of their regions through focused afforestation drives.

+Phase One+ of the steering committee focuses on the Raigad and Shivneri forts in Pune, Sudhagad (in Raigad district) and Sindhudurg and Vijaydurg forts (in Sindhudurg district) for conservation, restoration and ensuring the region's biodiversity for tourism. The steering committee has also set up six independent committees to focus on the six forts in the first phase of efforts to conserve forts in Maharashtra. Maharashtra Cultural Affairs

MAHARASHTRA NEWSLETTER

'Artists and Writers - in Residence', 'Deptt of Dance', Gallery of Maharashtra Revolutionaries

Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari said music and dance transcend geographical boundaries while offering the soul much-needed solace, and artists and writers are "God-gifted" creative individuals who need to help elevate and uplift the society through their work.

The Governor was addressing the valedictory session of the first-ever 'Artists and Writers in-Residence' programme hosted by Raj Bhavan, Maharashtra recently and curated by writer/historian Dr Vikram Sampath. Highlighting Maharashtra's rich and heroic history of armed struggle against British Colonialism, Dr Vikram Sampath suggested curating a Gallery dedicated to the Revolutionaries of Maharashtra inside the Raj Bhavan +Underground Bunker+.

Maharashtra's bravehearts included: Vasudev Balwant Phadke, the Chapkesh brothers, Savarkar brothers, Madam Bhikaji Cama, Ganesh Vaishampayan, V B Gogate, and also the Naval Mutiny of Bombay (1946), Sampath said, adding that creating this Gallery during India's 75th year of Independence would be an apt tribute to the revolutionaries. Taking note of the observation made by Dance choreographer Madhu Natraj that the University of Mumbai does not have a department of Dance that is an integral part of Music and Fine Art, Vice-Chancellor Dr Suhas Pednekar stated that he will take steps to create a separate "Department of Dance" at the University shortly.

Describing his creation of an "Archive of Indian Music" -- which is India's "first" Digital Sound Archive for vintage gramophone records with 15000 recordings, Sampath announced donating the digital copy of the archival collection to the University of Mumbai to facilitate research and provide access to scholars and artists.

in setting up related projects and work completion, while making it the centre of attraction for tourists and wildlife lovers.

While animals and birds from different countries would be tourist attractions in this Zoo, local villagers should be provided employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, besides also facilities for tourists and taking local entrepreneurs and businessmen on board these efforts, Thackeray said, adding that the "Prosperity Corridor Highway" is nearing completion and there will not be any lack of funds for implementing initiatives like +African Safari+, +Night Safari+ to attract tourists.

A virtuous cycle for the economy is need of hour

The latest string of official numbers, including almost-record GST collections, healthy direct tax inflows, strong manufacturing and exports, provide some confidence that the economy has lurched back from the danger zone for the second time in less than a year owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the healing is still too uneven. GST revenues in October, for transactions done in September, crossed Rs 1.3-lakh crore. The Finance Ministry believes this kitty would have been higher if sales of cars and products dependent on chips were not afflicted by shortages. If September's activity reflects pre-festive stocking, the actual festive spending (October-November) may keep GST numbers propped up, but it would be critical to wait for the post-celebration trajectory. October has offered mixed signals so far — manufacturing has seen a surge in output and new orders, domestic and global, but continues to shed jobs, as per the IHS Markit Purchasing Managers' Index. Growth engines will remain throttled rather than go full throttle towards the Centre's \$5 trillion goal for the economy, unless consumption and investment bounce back. With the token tax cuts on petrol and diesel, the Government is clearly changing tack from narratives about the high fuel taxes funding free vaccines and welfare schemes that can only hold legs for some distance. It may need to follow up with more tax cuts as global prices are expected to firm up further. The urban poor have been hit the hardest by the high inflation prevailing since the pandemic's onset in 2020. They, along with the much-celebrated Indian middle class, have the highest propensity for upward spending on consumer durables, homes, two-wheelers, and so on. Beyond a point, people would also like to be self-reliant just as the nation aspires to be, and that would trigger a virtuous cycle for the economy.



BINOY VISWAM EXPLORES HOW PEGASUS VERDICT PROVIDES AN ANSWER TO QUESTION OF PRIVACY

A court order for the ages



In a democracy, how far should the Government be allowed to peep into a citizen's privacy? The Government of India has always maintained that there is no limit to this, as long as the act is carried out in the interest of national security. The expert committee instituted by it is mandated by stringent terms of reference. It is worth noting that the court refused to accept the Government's suggestion for a Government-sponsored commission to investigate the matter. As a result, "we the people" would like to call it a landmark decision. It elevated the country's honour and democratic values to new heights. The ruling was made in accordance with the fundamental right to privacy. Article 21 of the Constitution states, "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."

The top court said national security was not a pass for the Government to spy on its own citizens. The expert committee instituted by it is mandated by stringent terms of reference. It is worth noting that the court refused to accept the Government's suggestion for a Government-sponsored commission to investigate the matter. As a result, "we the people" would like to call it a landmark decision. It elevated the country's honour and democratic values to new heights. The ruling was made in accordance with the fundamental right to privacy. Article 21 of the Constitution states, "No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."

The Supreme Court had on an earlier occasion interpreted the Constitution and its emphasis on the primacy of privacy. In the Aadhaar case, which the author was also a party to, the court determined privacy to be a fundamental right. The current Government has always had a different perspective on this crucial issue. There were allegations that the Government was tapping citizens' phones utilising numerous agencies at their disposal and infringing on the citizens' right to privacy.

Given its nature and proficiency, the advent of the Pegasus malware brought the issue to a more dangerous level. The disclosure by the Pegasus Project, a media consortium, was so alarming that it shook the entire world. According to their analysis, Pegasus was utilised in India as well as over 45 other nations. The unfortunate list

included journalists, politicians, judges and activists. Even Ministers in the Union Cabinet were not spared. It was debated vehemently in our country. Initially, the Government bolstered its argument by issuing a blanket denial of the report. When it failed, their strategists worked around the clock to save themselves from a catch-22 predicament.

Parliament's monsoon session arrived in the midst of this controversy. The Government's main objective was to prevent any discussion on Pegasus. The Opposition, on the other hand, was eager to hold the Government accountable. But the MPs' customary avenues for airing their concerns were systematically diluted. Naturally, Opposition members attempted to ask as many questions as possible on Pegasus.

My experience in this regard is worth mentioning here. Strictly following the procedures, I gave a notice for the following questions: "The number of memorandum of understandings [MoUs] the Government has entered into with foreign companies and the details sector-wise; whether any of these MoUs with foreign companies has been

in order to curb terror activities through cybersecurity and the details of the same; and whether the Government has entered into an MoU with NSO Group in order to curb terror activities through cybersecurity across the nation and, if so, provide details thereof."

With appropriate caution, the Rajya Sabha Secretariat temporarily approved the questions and set a date for them to be included during the Question Hour. As per routine, the questions were directed to the relevant Ministry for answers. But that was the end of it. These questions were never brought before Parliament. Moreover, the rights of the MPs were suppressed by the authoritarian arrogance of the Government. The monsoon session was marred with unpleasant incidents, owing to the Government's unwillingness to discuss the matters related to the spyware. An MP may be compelled to question the relevance of Parliament when it is not permitted to examine vital topics, including the Pegasus issue, the farmers' struggle and price rise. When Opposition members tried to talk about Pegasus, their microphones were turned off.

We have heard Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterating that Parliament is an avenue to debate national concerns. On the eve of the monsoon session, he also spoke about the Government's readiness to offer necessary room for Parliament's democratic functioning. These assurances are like lines drawn on water. Under the cover of national security, they built a fortress to prevent any discussion on Pegasus. Even the spyware's country of origin, Israel, has launched an investigation into it, as have countries such as France and Hungary. However, the Government of India, which talks a lot about transparency, was adamant to ensure that no mention of Pegasus was made in the House. They used national security as a trump card. An "atmanirbhar [self-reliant]" Government is preaching the ideology of hyper-nationalism and then handing over the key of national security to a spyware controlled by a foreign country.

As far as national security and a citizen's fundamental rights are concerned, the Supreme Court's terms of reference were clear. The state cannot be an adversary in the defence of basic rights. The Government defends its operations by using the term "lawful interception" to justify its acts under the guise of national security. If that argument is permitted to do its rounds indefinitely, the country will devolve into a police state, with civil liberties becoming a thing of the past. The significance of the top court's historic decision is that it underlines that restrictions on the right to privacy must pass constitutional scrutiny. Citizens will definitely look up to this verdict as a protective measure in defence of their civil liberties and fundamental rights. But they are anxious to know how the Government will cooperate with the fact-finding voyage of the expert committee appointed by the court.

Binoy Viswam is an MP and Secretary of the CPI National Council

ATANU BISWAS ON WHY STATISTICAL EXPERTISE KEY TO CHURNING FOR TRUTH FROM THE OCEAN OF DATA

Data and the quest for truth



Whenever I think about 'Data', I think of Brent Spiner. The android of Star Trek was self-aware, sapient, sentient, and had striven for his own humanity. Today, 'Data' is already 'Big' and ever-expanding and has the potential to influence every bit of human lifestyle. However, "There is terror in numbers," as Darrell Huff wrote in *How to Lie with Statistics*. The task of statisticians is to churn the data and obtain summary measures, diagrams and figures, rankings and indices, and make conclusions. Is this the much-desired 'human chip' to make 'Data' human?

In reality, statisticians are often like the blind men of the parable, standing in front of an elephant. And inadequate or partial analysis of data may lead to an incorrect portrayal of the elephant. As H.G. Wells is known to have said: "Statistical thinking will one day be as necessary for efficient citizenship as the ability to read and write." Yes, understanding the meaning of statistical and probabilistic conclusions is very important. This was exemplified by the case of Stephen Jay Gould who explained how the statistic that peritoneal mesothelioma, the form of cancer with which he was diagnosed, has a "median survival time of eight months" is misleading given the distribution of that data, and relevant data regarding his individual prognosis. Gould showed a positive outlook to beat the odds. Some of the fighting spirit, he proposed, was



the result of his proper understanding of statistics. For once, he argued, statistics manifested itself as a source of optimism, rather than the sterile methodology that most people associate with the term.

Misleading statistics maybe produced due to limitations of the concerned statisticians, or it may even be deliberate, or both. "Misinforming people by the use of statistical material might be called statistical manipulation," Huff wrote. Huff pointed out seven common tactics to knead statistical data into 'dough', which include polling a non-representative group, small sample sizes, and averaging values across non-uniform populations. Huff illustrated

how statistical graphs could be used to distort reality. If the bottom of a line or bar chart is truncated, differences look larger than they are. Also, the proportion between the ordinate and the abscissa is sometimes changed for this purpose. With the help of several real examples, Huff also discussed the 'post-hoc fallacy', which incorrectly asserts a direct correlation between two findings. In his 2001 book, *Damned Lies & Statistics*, Joel Best also used fascinating examples from leading newspapers and television programmes to unravel the use, misuse, and abuse of statistical information.

The goal of statistics is to search for 'truth' amid the randomness of nature. "Uncertain knowledge + Knowledge of the amount of uncertainty in it = Usable knowledge," wrote C.R. Rao in his book *Statistics and Truth: Putting Chance to Work*. Prof. Rao discussed how statistics can be used to judge whether a newly discovered poem is composed by Shakespeare or to mix blood samples from different persons together to test for certain rare diseases to reduce the number of tests.

Churning for truth from the ocean of data sometimes demands finer statistical expertise. It also needs innovation. During the communal riots in Delhi after Independence, many people from a minority community took refuge in Red Fort, and some in Humayun Tomb. The government had no exact count of the refugees, and contractors responsible to feed them

charged high amounts. A team from the Indian Statistical Institute was asked to estimate the number. They estimated the number of persons inside a given area without having an opportunity to look at the concentrations of persons inside the area and without using any known sampling techniques for estimation or census methods. In fact, based on an idea suggested by J.M. Sengupta, they divided the quantities of rice, pulses, and salt used per day to feed all the refugees, as quoted by the contractors, by the respective per capita requirements of rice, pulses, and salt known from consumption surveys, and got three widely different estimates of the number of refugees. The estimate obtained by salt was the smallest and the estimate from the rice was the largest. As rice was the most expensive, its quantity was probably exaggerated. They proposed the quantity obtained from salt as an estimate of the number of refugees. The method was verified to provide a good approximation in the Humayun tomb.

The lesson is clear. In order to extract 'truths' by using statistics, one needs expertise and innovation from the concerned statisticians. Ideal statistical thinking and proper understanding of statistics of the common people, of course, is no less important. A pinch of salt is needed, indeed.

Atanu Biswas is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata. Views are personal

FIVE OBSERVATIONS

INDIA'S PM OUTLINES FIVE COMMITMENTS FOR HIS COUNTRY AT COP26

- INDIA CAN DELIVERED ON PARIS AGREEMENT**
Prime Minister Modi "The entire world admits that India is the only major economy which has delivered on the Paris agreements in letter and spirit."
- RAILWAY TO BECOME 'NET ZERO' BY 2030**
"More passengers than the entire population of the world travel by Indian Railways every year. This huge railway system has set itself a target of making itself 'Net Zero' by 2030.
- DEVELOPED COUNTRIES TO RAISE CLIMATE FINANCE GOALS**
"India expects developed nations to make climate finance of one trillion dollars available at the earliest.
- INDIA RESPONSIBLE FOR ONLY 5 PC EMISSIONS**
PM Modi shared that India has around 17 per cent of the world's population but is responsible for only about 5 per cent of the total emissions.
- PM'S ONE-WORD MOVEMENT - LIFE**
In his speech, PM Modi gave a new mantra for sustainable development. He said 'LIFE', that is, Lifestyle for Environment, can be the foundation for the same.

BOOKS: REVIEW

Cricket fraternity marks life of Bishan Singh Bedi

A fierce competitor but an equally warm person, a crusader who stood up for his and others' rights, but most importantly for India, a magician with a cricket ball in his hands — Bishan Singh Bedi has meant many things to many people whose lives he has touched.

And as the spin legend turned 75, the best of Indian cricket, including Kapil Dev, Sachin Tendulkar and Sunil Gavaskar, came together to marvel at his artistry and fierce personality in a book titled 'Sardar of Spin'.

Published by Roli Books to mark Bedi's 75th birthday, the book is a reflection of the goodwill and respect that Bedi earned for his skills on the field and no-holds-barred opinions off it.

Tendulkar has written about the

times when Bedi was the coach of the Indian team in the 1990s and the affection he showered on the players after being a hard taskmaster in training.

"Bishan paaji was ahead of the times in terms of preparing us for the matches. The nets were conducted in a serious manner, and he would, many a time, join by bowling to the batsmen. Fiercely competitive, he would challenge the batsman to step out or hit him to a specific target. It was a great sight when he won those battles. I had the privilege of facing him in the nets and it was evident that he was still working on setting up a batsman, and I had to be at my absolute best while facing him," writes Tendulkar. Talking about his relationship with Bedi, Tendulkar adds: "I always had this feeling that he treated me like his son. He would greet me as 'Sashoo,

'When one was down, he would try to strike a conversation and make one feel comfortable. I have had some great times with him and his family, and it is nice to see Anag (Bedi's son) doing well in his chosen profession'

my son', and I could always feel the warmth in his tight hug.

"When one was down, he would try to strike a conversation and make one feel comfortable. I have had some great times with him and his family, and it is nice to see Anag (Bedi's son) doing well in



Sardar of Spin
By Venkat Sundaram & Sachin Bajaj
Roli Books
276 pages; Rs595

his chosen profession."

Bedi has endured a rough few months. He spent three weeks in hospital in February-March this year after complaining of heart problems and subsequently also underwent an operation to remove blood clotting in his brain.

The 75th birthday celebration that took place on Friday here was an ode to the fortune of the man and was attended by his family, and close friends and former players.

In the book, the great Gavaskar described Bedi as the best left-arm spinner to have played the game. Bedi took 266 wickets in 67 Tests. "Until Wasim Akram came on the scene, Bishan Singh Bedi was the best left-hand bowler I had seen. I guess, one can now say that Bishan Singh Bedi is the

best left-arm spinner, and Wasim Akram, the best left-hand pacer," Gavaskar said.

"During the last Test match of India's triumphant tour of the West Indies in 1971, I was floored and honoured when, in Trinidad, Bishan Singh Bedi, who had become a father during the game — decided to name his firstborn, Gavas Inder Singh. Gavas Inder Singh completed his Golden Jubilee in April while Bishan Singh Bedi celebrates his seventy-fifth birthday in September. I am thankful to the organisers of the celebration, and the book publishers for giving me the opportunity to send my greetings and good wishes to both on the momentous occasion."

The foreword of the book has been written by Kapil, who was star-struck by the iconic bowler growing up.

"Among my early memories of Bishan paaji is the image of a player with his collars up and shirt buttons open. I was a kid and was watching the Duleep Trophy match between North and Central. Bishan paaji was a star. I just could not take my eyes off him," Kapil Dev wrote.

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)

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NEWSBRIEF

Go First completes 16 yrs of service, starts discount scheme

MUMBAI: Airline major Go First, formerly known as GoAir, has started a 16 per cent discount offer on airfare for passengers of both domestic and international flights to mark the completion of its 16 years of operations. The bookings under the offer can be made between November 2-9, for travel between November 24, and March 31, 2022. Founded in 2005, the airline has grown from four aircraft to 58 and from four destinations to 38. Recently, it became the first airline in India to transform to ULCC (ultra-low cost carrier) from LCC (low cost carrier).

AGENCIES

Weekly storage of natural gas in US up: EIA

HOUSTON: Working gas storage in the contiguous United States was 3,611 billion cubic feet (bcf) in the week ending October 29, a net increase of 63 bcf from the previous week, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in a report. Stocks decreased by 8 per cent from this time in 2020, or 2.7 per cent below the five-year average, according to the data from the Weekly Natural Gas Storage Report. The storage of working gas usually turns to decrease in November and continues to drop in April when heating season ends in the country, according to previous data. Working gas is defined as the amount of natural gas stored underground that can be withdrawn for use. Its storage capacity can be measured in two ways: design capacity and demonstrated maximum working gas capacity. Xinhua news agency reported. The contiguous United States consists of the 48 adjoining states of the United States, plus the District of Columbia, and excludes the non-contiguous states of Alaska and Hawaii, and all off-shore insular areas.

AGENCIES

Retail edible oil prices drop by ₹5-20/kg in major mkts: Food Secy

NEW DELHI: Edible oil prices in the major retail markets across the country have declined by Rs 5-20 per kg after various measures, including an import duty cut, by the government, Food Secretary Sudhansu Pandey said on Friday.

The official said that branded oil makers have also revised the rates for new stock. Domestic edible oil prices have soared in tandem with the global prices which shot up due to reduced availability of edible oils for food use following diversion for biofuel in Indonesia, Brazil and other countries.

"The government has taken a number of steps to ensure consumers get relief from high prices. We are happy to share the trend from 167 centres. Edible oil prices have declined quite significantly in the range of Rs 5 and 20 per kg in the major retail markets across the country," Pandey said during a press briefing. For instance, retail palm oil price in Delhi declined by Rs 5 to Rs 133/kg on November 3 from Rs 139/kg, while it fell by Rs 18 to Rs 122/kg from Rs 140/kg



in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, while by Rs 7 to Rs 125/kg in Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu from Rs 132/kg in the said period, he said.

Even retail price of groundnut oil declined by Rs Rs 5-10/kg, while soyabean oil by Rs 5-11/kg, and sunflower oil by Rs 5-20/kg between October 31 and November 3, he added. The government monitors retail prices of six edible oils from 167 centres across the country. In the case of mustard oil, the Secretary said, "we have not seen a significant reduction in prices," but the

steps taken by the government including import duty rationalisation will have an impact on prices of mustard oil as well. "We are going to see a southward trend in mustard oil prices too," he said, adding that ongoing sowing of mustard seed is better than last year.

The area sown to mustard seed, a rabi crop, is 11 per cent better than the year-ago period, he added. Asked by when the branded cooking oils will revise the rates, the Secretary said, "I have spoken to the industry and they have con-

firmed that they have revised the P for new releases." In fact, the industry body SEA has advised its distributors, retailers and wholesalers to pass import duty cut to consumers even on the old stock, he said. Major edible oils players, including Adani Wilmar and Ruchi Industries, have cut wholesale prices by Rs 4-7 per litres to give relief to consumers during the festival season, a government statement said. The other players that have reduced the wholesale prices of edible oils are Gemini Edibles and Fats India, Hyderabad, Modi Naturals, Delhi, Gokul Re-foils and Solvent, Vijay Solvex, Gokul Agro Resources and N K Proteins, it added.

While the global edible oil prices have stabilized at higher levels in the last ten days, but the reduction in import duty and other steps like imposition of stock limits to curb hoarding has helped cool down domestic prices, the secretary said. Pandey said the reduction in petrol and diesel rates will also have an overarching impact on local edible oil prices as distribution cost will get reduced.

AGENCIES

Ambani not relocating to London: Reliance

NEW DELHI: Billionaire Mukesh Ambani has no plans to relocate or reside in London or anywhere else in the world, his flagship firm Reliance Industries Ltd said on Friday as it sought to scotch speculations over India's richest family dividing time between the UK and Mumbai. It termed reports of the Ambani family looking to make the 300-acre country club in Buckinghamshire, Stoke Park their primary residence, as "unwarranted and baseless speculation".

"Reliance Industries Limited will like to clarify that the Chairman and his family have no plans whatsoever to relocate or reside in London or anywhere else in the world," the firm said in a statement. Post Reliance acquiring the London property for Rs 592 crore, Ambani and his family's visit abroad have been linked to them making Stoke Park their second home. They live in a 400,000 square feet Altamont road residence, Antilia, in Mumbai. "RIL group company, RIIHL, which acquired Stoke Park estate recently, would like



to clarify that its acquisition of the heritage property is aimed at enhancing this as a premier golfing and sporting resort, while fully complying with the planning guidelines and local regulations," the statement said. It, however, did not comment on Am-

bani's reported frequent visits abroad. "This acquisition will add to the fast-growing consumer business of the group. Simultaneously, it will also expand the footprint of India's famed hospitality industry globally," the statement added.

AGENCIES

'Joblessness top concern of urban Indians in Oct 2021'

NEW DELHI: Joblessness is the top concern of Urban Indians in October 2021 while global citizens are more worried about poverty and social inequality, Ipsos What Worries the World global monthly survey has said. According to the survey, unlike earlier, concern around Covid-19 has receded both for global citizens and Urban Indians. It sat on top as the top worry of global citizens (28 markets including India) for 18 months. Among the Indians, the urban citizens are more concerned about unemployment (42 per cent), coronavirus (35), financial and political corruption (30 per cent), poverty and social inequality (26 per cent), crime and violence (24 per cent), education (20 per cent), among others. For global citizens, the



top concerns included, poverty and social inequality (33 per cent), unemployment (30 per cent), coronavirus (29 per cent), financial and political corruption (29 per cent), crime and violence (27 per cent), etc.

"Our biggest issue is of joblessness and it remains a major area of concern for most Urban Indians. Job creation and job openings need to keep pace with expectations. Right now,

there is a disconnect. But there is this happy tiding in the form of worry around the coronavirus receding which could lead to more return to normalcy and for the job market to look up. Graft and social inequality are other concerns for citizens," said Amit Adarkar, CEO, Ipsos India.

The survey shows that the majority of Urban Indians (68 per cent) believe India is moving in the right direction. India is second in pecking order in optimism, Saudi Arabia remains most optimistic (83 per cent). Global citizens stay circumspect with 64 per cent believing their country is on the wrong track. And the markets most downbeat were Colombia (90 per cent), Peru (83 per cent) and Argentina (82%).

AGENCIES

Share of organised players in Indian used car market to reach 30 pc



MUMBAI: As the used car market grows in the country, the share of organised players too is set to rise in this fast-growing segment. According to a recent report, the share of organised players in the pre-owned car market, including digital platform sales, which now stands at 20 per cent,

will reach 30 per cent in the next five years. The pre-owned market has been outpacing the new car market, and the industry is expected to clock a healthy growth rate of 15 per cent in FY22, showed the 'OLX Autos -CRISIL Study 2021'. The prospects continue to be bright on

the longer horizon, with a 12-14 per cent CAGR expected over the next few years, taking the size of the market to more than 7 million (70 lakh) vehicles by FY26, from 3.8 million (38 lakh) units in FY21," it said.

In contrast, the new car market is expected to grow at around 10 per cent CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate). With many people preferring socially-distanced personal mobility, because of the pandemic, the pre-owned car market is expected to continue to be a sunrise sector. In addition, the accelerating trend of digitalisation will lead to an increasing share of sales through digital classifieds, which will move to 25 per cent from 15 per cent currently.

IANS

Brand 'Cairn' is now exclusively owned by Vedanta



NEW DELHI: Vedanta Limited (Cairn Oil & Gas business) has reiterated that it is a separate entity with no connection to Cairn Energy PLC. Cairn Energy PLC, the Scottish oil and gas exploration company, that is also commonly referred to as Cairn Energy, will discontinue the use of the brand name 'Cairn' as part of its corporate identity by December 2021. The brand 'Cairn' is exclusively owned by Vedanta Limited, the company said in a statement. Discussing the change, Vedanta CEO Sunil Duggal said, "When Cairn Energy PLC exited its Indian operations in 2011 after selling its stake to Vedanta Group, it continued to use the brand name 'Cairn' though the brand 'Cairn' is owned by Vedanta Limited (erstwhile Cairn India Limited). At Vedanta, we have since then extensively invested in the company and expanded its footprint across the length and breadth of the country." After being taken over by the Vedanta Group, the company, Cairn India Limited, disassociated itself from Cairn Energy PLC -- the former having no association with Cairn Energy PLC and with both companies being separate legal entities with different promoters/shareholders. Cairn India Limited was later merged into Vedanta Limited in 2017.

AGENCIES

Investors exposed to \$59bn of climate risk from coal firms on Mumbai exchange

NEW DELHI: A whopping \$110 billion of coal plants owned by listed Asian utilities could become uneconomic as the world takes action to meet climate targets, and more than half the risk is concentrated in 10 companies, finds a new report from the financial think-tank Carbon Tracker released on Thursday. Mumbai is the exchange with the greatest risk of asset stranding with \$59 billion of coal assets at risk, followed by the Tokyo exchange with \$22 billion at risk. Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Seoul each have around \$6 billion at risk.

Carbon Tracker Power Analyst and report author, Lorenzo Sani said: "This report is a warning to investors: if you invest in listed companies which own coal plants, there's a significant risk you may not recoup your investment or achieve the return you expected." Passive investors



should also beware because several companies that are most exposed are part of mainstream benchmark indexes."

Risk is highly concentrated in a few companies. NTPC, India's largest power utility whose main shareholder is the Indian government, is the single most exposed company with \$19 billion of assets at risk 96 per cent of its market capitalisation. Just 10 Asian companies account

for \$65 billion of stranded asset risk. Six are Indian, including four of the top five. After NTPC, Adani is the company most exposed with \$12 billion of risk, nearly double its market capitalisation.

Two are Japanese, including J-Power, with \$4 billion at risk, 1.5 times the company's market capitalisation. South Korea's largest utility KEPCO is exposed to \$6 billion of risk.

Malaysian electric power utility TNB is exposed to \$4 billion of risk, a year's operating earnings. UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres has called phasing out coal from energy generation "the single most important step to get in line with the 1.5-degree goal of the Paris Agreement", urging OECD countries to phase out coal by 2030 and non-OECD countries by 2040. Exchanges across Asia face stranded asset risk if listed coal utilities close plants early. Hong Kong has \$3.4 billion at risk and Singapore \$1.6 billion despite having little or no domestic coal capacity. Jakarta has \$2 billion, Bangkok \$1 billion, and Shanghai and Shenzhen with \$0.8 billion. The report warns investors should learn the lessons from the energy transition in Europe, where most coal plants are no longer economically viable.

AGENCIES

Uber hit with \$2.4 bn net loss in Q3 as rides return to normal

SAN FRANCISCO: Ride-hailing company Uber witnessed wider losses to the tune of 2.4 billion dollars in the third quarter (Q3), owing to a drop in the value of its investment holdings and particularly in China-based online mobility firm Didi. For the third quarter of 2021, Uber reported a net loss of 2.4 billion dollars or 1.28 dollar per share, compared to a loss of 1.1 billion dollar or 0.62 dollar per share in the year-ago period.

The net loss was partially offset by unrealised gains related to the revaluation of Uber's Zomato, Aurora and Joby stakes. Revenue grew 72 per cent (on-year)



to 4.8 billion dollars, or 69 per cent on a constant currency basis, the company said on Thursday.

"Our early and decisive investments in driver growth are still paying divi-

dends, with drivers steadily returning to the platform, leading to further improvement in the consumer experience," said Uber CEO Dara Khosrowshahi.

"This is especially important as mobility reignites. Mobility gross bookings are up 18 per cent over just the last two months and this Halloween weekend surpassed 2019 levels," he said. Gross bookings on Uber reached an all-time high of 23.1 billion dollar, up 57 per cent year-over-year. Uber saw 1.64 billion trips in the third quarter and monthly active platform consumers reached 109 million."

AGENCIES

Oct services' output expands at fastest pace in over 10 yrs

NEW DELHI: India's services sector output grew at the fastest rate in over 10 years in October, the IHS Markit India Services PMI said on Wednesday. According to the PMI report, the recovery of India's service sector was extended to October, with companies indicating a notable pick-up in new businesses which led to the fastest expansion in output in over a decade.

"More jobs were created as a result, though business confidence remained subdued due to growing concerns surrounding price pressures," the report said. "With input costs again rising sharply, companies lifted their fees at the fastest pace in close to

four and a half years." Consequently, the seasonally adjusted India Services Business Activity Index showed that output expanded at the rate of 58.4 (index reading) in October from 55.2 in September.

Moreover, the current sequence of expansion was extended to three months. As per panel members, ongoing improvements in demand boosted growth of sales and subsequently output. "Indeed, new work intakes increased at a sharp and accelerated rate, the strongest since July 2011. Moreover, the latest upturn was the third in successive months. Survey participants commonly linked sales growth to better underly-



ing demand and successful marketing." Indian firms were able to secure

a healthy intake of new work despite charging more for their services.

Output prices rose at a solid rate that was the strongest since July 2017.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that additional cost burdens were passed on to clients. "Besides, the overall private sector output in India increased at a sharper rate in October as growth quickened among both manufacturers and service providers. Resultantly, the Composite PMI Output Index rose from 55.3 in September to 58.7 in October, signalling the strongest monthly expansion since January 2012. The upturn in business activity was supported by a substantial rise in new work intakes, said the report which added that aggregate sales increased at a sharp rate that was the quickest since early-2012. "October data pointed to a second suc-

cessive monthly increase in private sector employment, but the rate of expansion was only slight as growth among service providers was partly offset by job shedding at goods producers."

"Price pressures intensified in October, with the aggregate rate of input cost inflation climbing to the joint-highest in over nine years. The rate of charge inflation was moderate in comparison, but nevertheless the fastest since mid-2017." According to Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at IHS Markit: "A substantial rise in prices charged for the provision of services in India had no detrimental impact on demand, as

companies signalled the strongest monthly expansion in new business in over a decade."

"Hence, the recovery of the sector entered its third straight month, with firms scaling up activity at the fastest pace in ten-and-a-half years and creating more jobs. That said, service providers were concerned that persistent inflationary pressures could deter growth in the coming year." Business confidence remained subdued in the context of historical data. Companies' expenses rose notably from September, which survey participants mainly linked to higher fuel, material, retail, staff and transportation costs."

AGENCIES

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NEWSBRIEF

US trade deficit hits record high in September

WASHINGTON: The US trade deficit hit a record high of \$80.9 billion in September as American exports fell sharply, the US Commerce Department has reported. US exports fell by 3 per cent to \$207.6 billion in September while imports rose by 0.6 per cent to \$288.5 billion. The goods and services deficit rose by 11.2 per cent from a revised \$72.8 billion in October, according to the department on Thursday. "Solid domestic demand has caused import growth to outpace exports for the better part of the past year. The deficit has widened in eight of the past 12 months as a result." Tim Quinlan and Shannon Seery, Economists at Wells Fargo Securities, said on Thursday in an analysis, adding net exports have been a drag on US gross domestic product (GDP) growth for the past five consecutive quarters, Xinhua news agency reported. AGENCIES

Samsung, SK hynix tipped to share biz info amid US pressure

SEOUL: South Korea's top two chipmakers — Samsung Electronics and SK hynix are expected to submit information on their chip businesses to the US government by the November 8 deadline, industry sources said. In late September, the US Department of Commerce asked major chip companies and automakers to "voluntarily" share business information to address the global chip crisis, following President Joe Biden's executive order to secure and strengthen America's supply chains for key products. Kim Ki-nam, Vice Chairman and CEO of Samsung's device solutions division, said the company was "calmly" preparing answers to the request during a meeting with reporters at the Korea Electronics Show (KES) last week. AGENCIES

US Fed to start tapering asset purchases

NEW DELHI: The US Federal Reserve has announced that it will start tapering its asset purchases later this month amid great concerns over elevated inflation levels. "Inflation is elevated, largely reflecting factors that are expected to be transitory. Supply and demand imbalances related to the pandemic and the reopening of the economy have contributed to sizable price increases in some sectors," the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), the central bank's policy-making committee, said in a statement on Wednesday after a two-day meeting. In light of the "substantial further progress" the US economy has made toward the Fed's goals since last December, the committee decided to begin reducing the monthly pace of its net asset purchases by \$10 billion for Treasury securities and \$5 billion for agency mortgage-backed securities, according to the statement. AGENCIES

ATSG contracts with Boeing for converted freighter order

SAN FRANCISCO: Boeing has announced that Air Transport Services Group, Inc., the world's largest lessor of 767-300 converted freighters, has contracted with the company for the conversion of four aircraft to 767-300 Boeing Converted Freighters (BCF). The 767-300BCF now has more than 100 orders and commitments from customers around the globe, providing widebody converted freighter capability to meet growing market demand, and building on a record year for customer orders of Boeing's family of freighters, the announcement said on Wednesday. ATSG is operating a fleet of 106 Boeing aircraft, including more than ninety 767 converted freighters, according to the announcement, Xinhua news agency reported. "Our continued confidence in the 767-300 platform, now coupled with the services and support of the OEM, reinforces our commitment to deliver best-in-class reliable services to our customers," said Mike Berger, Chief Commercial Officer of ATSG. AGENCIES

SBI reports highest quarterly profit of ₹7,627 cr in Q2 FY22



NEW DELHI: The country's largest bank, the State Bank of India (SBI) has reported a record 67 per cent year-on-year jump in its net profit to Rs 7,627 crore in second quarter period of fiscal year 2021-22.

The bank had reported net profit of Rs 4,574 crore in Q2 of fiscal year 2020-21. The net interest income of the bank during this period un-

der review also increased by 10.65 per cent year-on-year. The SBI shares traded in the green and closed 1.14 per cent higher at Rs 527.65 a piece on the BSE on Wednesday. As per an official statement, the SBI's total deposits grew at 9.77 per cent year-on-year in the second quarter, while current account deposits grew by 19.20 per cent in Q2, and saving bank deposits grew by

10.55 per cent. The bank also cut down its NPA further with its net non-performing asset ratio coming down by 7 bps (basis points) to 1.52 per cent YoY. Gross NPA ratio at 4.90 per cent also came down to 38 bps YoY. The bank's advances grew by 6.17 per cent YoY mainly driven by personal retail advances and foreign office advances. Domestic advances growth stood at 4.61

HIGHLIGHTS

- The net interest income of the bank during this period under review also increased by 10.65 per cent year-on-year. The SBI shares traded in the green and closed 1.14 per cent higher at Rs 527.65 a piece on the BSE on Wednesday. Gross NPA ratio at 4.90 per cent also came down to 38 bps YoY. The bank's advances grew by 6.17 per cent YoY mainly driven by personal retail advances and foreign office advances. Domestic advances growth stood at 4.61 per cent YoY, the bank said in a statement. Home loans, which constitute 24 per cent, of the bank's domestic advances rose 10.74 per cent year-on-year during this period. AGENCIES

FM shares video to highlight digital payment revolution

HYDERABAD: The revolution in digital payment is sweeping through India with even petty shops and even roadside vendors using QR code but a video shared by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Twitter shows even alms-seekers are not left behind. The 30-second video shows a traditional alms-seeker using a QR code scanner which is tied to the head of his decorated ox while a man is scanning the code on his mobile phone to make the payment.



"Read a video of a Gangureddulata, where alms are given thru a QR code! India's #digitalpayment revolution, reaching folk artists," tweeted Sitharaman. She wrote that in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Gangureddulavallu, a nomadic tribe in the states, dress up old oxen which are no longer helpful on farms, walk door to door during festivals and

performing with their nadaswarams (musical instrument). In the video posted by the minister, a man is seen scanning the PhonePe QR code tied to the head of the decorated ox carried by the folk artist, playing his instrument. "It's done," the man is heard saying in Telugu after entering some amount and making the payment. Playing nadaswarams, the uniquely-dressed folk artists with specially decorated oxen visit houses and shops during festivals to seek alms. They are usually seen going around in the villages during Sankranti, the colourful harvest festival celebrated with pomp and gaiety. People give them money, clothes or grain as alms. AGENCIES

Diwali Deal: PNB to reduce home loan, EV financing rates

NEW DELHI: Lending major Punjab National Bank (PNB) will reduce home loan rates with effect from November 8, 2021. Accordingly, the home loan rates will start from 6.50 per cent. Besides, PNB will slash the interest rate on financing EVs and CNG vehicles to 6.65 per cent. "To meet the customers' demand during the ongoing festival season, the interest rate on Personal Loans is reduced by 5 basis points (bps) to 8.90 per cent," the lender said in a statement.



Internet Banking, PNB One Mobile App, etc, can avail of this benefit, thereby enhancing their online banking experience."

"Additionally, the limit on personal loans has been revised upwardly to Rs 20 lakh with a repayment period of 72 months." Furthermore, PNB will give an additional discount of up to 5 bps on home loan and 10 bps on car loan to customers applying through PNB's various digital channels. "The customers onboarding through various digital channels like

In addition, on the occasion of Diwali, PNB will offer a full waiver of service charges or processing fees on home, vehicle, personal, gold, and property loans. "With the reduction in the interest rate and zero processing fee, funds are available at a very competitive rate on a range of retail loan products for PNB customers." AGENCIES

Centre releases Rs 17K cr more to states as GST compensation



NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry on Wednesday released an amount of Rs 17,000 crore of GST compensation to states and Union Territories with legislature under the back-to-back loan facility to meet the shortfall in GST compensation. The total amount of compensation released to the states/UTs so far including the aforesaid amount during 2021-22, now stands at Rs 60,000 crore. As per the

decision of the GST Council, back to back loans of Rs 1.59 lakh crore has already been released in lieu of shortfall in release of GST compensation during the current financial year. With the release of additional amount of GST compensation, the Centre has further reduced chances of it meeting the GST shortfall of states through additional borrowings. GST compensation is being released

to states and UT every 2 months out of actual cess collection. In the latest compensation release, Maharashtra is the highest beneficiary as it has received over Rs 3,000 crore from the Centre. Other states with over Rs 1,000 crore compensation include Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh.. AGENCIES

FII's outflows of \$2.3 bn in Oct after two straight months of inflows

NEW DELHI: The increase in volatility in the Indian markets in October was on the back of weak global cues, stretched valuations, and FIIs turning net sellers, according to a report by Motilal Oswal Financial Services. FII outflows of \$2.3 bn were seen after two consecutive months of inflows. FIIs saw inflows for the eighth consecutive month of \$0.6 bn. In the last 12 months, midcaps have risen 79 per cent v/s a 52 per cent rise for the Nifty. In the last five years, midcaps have underperformed by 14 per cent. In P/E terms, the Nifty Midcap 100 is trading at a 14 per cent premium to the Nifty, the report said.

The Nifty continued to reach new highs (18,604) in October 2021. The index oscillated 1,150 points before closing 54 points (or 0.3 per cent) higher MoM at 17,672. The Nifty is up 26 per cent in CY21YTD. The 2QFY22 earnings season has thus far been above estimates, benefiting from strong growth in the Technology sector, steady recovery in loan growth as well as recovery and an upgrade in the asset quality of most private sector banks, higher commodity prices and volume growth in the Energy and Metals sectors. In the last 12 months, MSCI India (50 per cent) has outperformed MSCI EM (15 per cent). In the last 10 years as well, MSCI India has outperformed MSCI EM by 167 per cent. In P/E terms, MSCI India is trading at a 94 per cent premium to MSCI EM, above its historical average of 58 per cent. Among the sectors, PSU Banks (14 per cent), Automobiles (7 per cent), Media (5 per cent), Utilities (4 per cent), and Private Banks (4 per cent) were the top performers in Oct'21. AGENCIES

Petrol, diesel prices fall sharply in line with Centre's duty cut

NEW DELHI: The Diwali morning has brought an early sparkle for fuel consumers as retail prices of petrol and diesel fell between Rs 5-10 per litre on Thursday in line with the Centre's announcement to cut excise duty on the two petroleum products to contain surging rates.



Accordingly, the pump price of petrol in Delhi fell to Rs 103.97 a litre at 6 a.m. on Thursday from the previous day's level of Rs 110.04 a litre. The diesel prices fell by a bigger margin to Rs 86.67 a litre in the city from the earlier level of Rs 98.42, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. In the financial capital Mumbai, petrol prices fell to Rs 109.98 a litre from Rs 115.85, while diesel fell to Rs 94.14 a litre

from Rs 106.62, which was also the highest among all metros. Across the country as well, fuel prices fell between Rs 5-10 per litre after the Centre on Wednesday announced that the excise duty will be reduced by Rs 5 for petrol and Rs 10 for diesel from November 4. The cut is larger in some states such as Uttar Pradesh and Goa which have also announced VAT cut on petrol and diesel. The Centre has said that massive reduction in excise on diesel will come as a boost to the farmers during the upcoming Rabi season. It would lose revenue to the tune Rs 40,000-45,000 crore in balance period of FY22 due to excise reduction. Before Thursday's price fall, there was a pause on fuel price increase on Wednesday but

petrol and diesel prices had spiked for seven consecutive days prior to this to take up the retail rate of petrol by Rs 2.45 per litre in Delhi. Similarly, diesel prices also increased in last week by Rs 2.10 a litre. Diesel prices have increased on 30 out of the last 41 days taking up its retail price by Rs 9.90 per litre in Delhi before Thursday's cut. The fuel is available at over Rs 100 a litre in several parts of the country and even after the cut it is above this level in several parts of the country. AGENCIES

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OMCs plan mega EV charging infra push at pumps



NEW DELHI: Oil marketing companies, IndianOil and BPCL, have planned to give a mega push to set-up e-vehicle charging infrastructure at existing fuel pumps. Both the OMCs have bet big on EVs becoming a major segment of the country's automobile sector. The BPCL has planned to offer charging stations at around 7,000 petrol pumps over next few years. At present, the company has a distribution network involving over 19,000 retail outlets (fuel stations) across the country. The company said that EV charging infrastructure will provide it with a new business opportunity as well as a hedge against the risk of displacement of auto fuels.

The company said that EV charging infrastructure will provide it with a new business opportunity as well as a hedge against the risk of displacement of auto fuels.

"Over the next few years, we are aiming at reaching the count of 7,000 stations to support the growing EV industry and these stations would be known as 'Energy Stations'," BPCL Chairman Arun Kumar Singh said. "EV charging infrastructure is one of the five focused segments that BPCL is working on along with Petchem, Gas, Consumer Retailing, Renewables, and Biofuels that will serve the energy needs of the nation." IndianOil will install EV charging facilities at 10,000 fuel stations over the next three years. The proposed 'EV Charging Network' will facilitate an uninterrupted driving experience for EV users and boost the country's EV manufacturing ecosystem. Presently, IndianOil has 448 EV Charging Stations and 30 Battery Swapping Stations across the country. IndianOil Chairman S.M. Vaidya said: "Electric Vehicles are now a reality, and IndianOil is geared up to tide over challenges and leverage opportunities in this area. Our bouquet of services will now include alternative energy offerings, including EV charging at our fuel stations." AGENCIES

Muthoot Finance's Q2FY22 standalone net profit up 11 per cent YoY

MUMBAI: Gold loan company Muthoot Finance on Thursday reported a rise of 11 per cent in its Q2FY22 standalone net profit on a year-on-year basis. It also reported that its loan assets rose to Rs 55,147 crore as compared to Rs 47,016 crore in Q2FY21, registering a growth of 17 per cent on a YoY basis. Notably, during the quarter, gold loan assets increased by Rs 2,613 crore, which represents an increase of 5 per cent. The company's consolidated loan AUM stood at Rs 60,919 crore as of end September 2021, clocking a growth of 17 per cent on a YoY



basis. Muthoot Finance Managing Director George Alexander Mut-

hoot said: "The demand environment remains strong and as we enter

the festive season, we remain optimistic about growth momentum

in gold loan over the second half of FY22. We are optimistic about growing our gold loan book further and maintain 15 per cent growth guidance for FY22." "We are witnessing improved collections across Micro finance, vehicle finance and home loans. In the last quarter, we had consciously decided to go slow on non-gold lending business, we continue to remain conscious and monitor the space for emerging opportunities. We will continue to follow the strategy of balanced growth while maintaining overall asset quality." AGENCIES

Google Cloud invests \$1 bn in derivatives marketplace CME Group

SAN FRANCISCO: Google Cloud has announced to invest \$1 billion in CME Group, the world's leading derivatives marketplace, as part of a 10-year strategic partnership between the two companies. The move will help accelerate CME Group's move to the cloud and transform how global derivatives markets operate with technology, the company said in a statement late on Thursday.

"CME Group has a century-long track record of helping investors access new markets and is known for innovation in financial markets," said Thomas Kurian, CEO, Google Cloud. "Bringing together CME Group's best-in-class financial talent with Google Cloud's deep engineering expertise will help accelerate technological innovation in capital markets infrastructure," he added. Under the agreement, CME Group will migrate its technology infrastructure to Google Cloud beginning next year with data and clearing services, and eventually moving all of its markets to the Cloud.

CME Group will be able to scale its infrastructure, while increasing access for more market participants, optimising costs, and helping onboard new users more easily and quickly. "Through this long-term partnership with Google Cloud, CME Group will transform derivatives markets through technology, expanding access and creating efficiencies for all market participants," said Terry Duffy, Chairman and CEO, CME Group.

AGENCIES

Bumper Diwali Sales: Not revenge buying but sustainable demand, says CAIT



NEW DELHI: The bumper Diwali sales in 2021, touted as the highest recorded till now, was not triggered by 'revenge buying' but a 'sustainable demand' trend, according to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT).

As per CAIT, rising vaccination levels along with lower transmission levels instilled confidence in buyers. Besides, more choices at offer in retail

outlets also ensured plenty of buying opportunity for the customers. Explaining in detail the reasons behind the whopping Rs 1.2 lakh crore worth of sales recorded this Diwali

season, CAIT's Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal told IANS: "Pent-up demand as well as lesser Covid related restrictions and more choices were some of the reasons behind this year's bumper Diwali sales, which broke a 10-year record. "This trend is sustainable and completely viable as the country has achieved a high vaccination rate and is poised to control the pandemic completely." The massive sales recorded during this Diwali season had baffled one and all with Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra tweeting: "Is this just short-lived revenge buying? Or is it the return of the 'feel-good' factor? What are your views?" As per CAIT, its research arm CAIT Research & Trade Development Society (CRTDS) conducted a survey on estimation of Diwali sales across states.

The survey with trade leaders of all states and in particular from 20 different cities which are considered as leading distribution centres revealed that Diwali festive season this year generated a sales of more than Rs 1.25 lakh crore across India. "It also transpired that the lacklustre attitude of the state governments about having a firecracker policy resulted in the loss of around Rs 10,000 crore of business to small manufacturers and sellers of firecrackers," the confederation said.

Khandelwal expects the sales upswing to continue. "It is hoped that about Rs 3 lakh crore will be infused in the markets by the end of December, which will not only improve the economy, but will also relieve the business community from great financial crunch," Khandelwal said.

AGENCIES

Real GDP expected to grow at 8-9 pc YoY in Q2FY22

NEW DELHI: India's real GDP is expected to grow at 8-9 per cent year-on-year (YoY) in Q2FY22, Motilal Oswal Financial Services (MOFSL) said.

The real GDP is the inflation adjusted figure of all the finished goods and services produced in a country within a specific time period. In a report, MOFSL said its in-house estimates suggest India's real GDP grew at 8-9 per cent YoY in Q2FY22, marginally higher than "our expectations".

The second quarter GDP numbers have not yet been released. The macro-economic data points are slated to be released on November 30. MOFSL said: "Looking at our EAI estimates, we believe that better growth was largely supported by massive government spending in 2QFY22." Besides, the report said the economic activity for October 2021 appeared promising. "Most of the



indicators - PMI manufacturing, toll collections, e-way or vahaan registrations, mobility indicators, and power generation - improved last month." However, the brokerage house's preliminary estimates indicate that Economic Activity Index (EAI) for India's GVA posted a seven-month low growth of 5.4 per cent YoY in September 2021 versus 11.7 per cent YoY in August 2021.

"Consequently, EAI-EVA grew 9.2 per cent YoY in 2QFY22 on account of lower growth in the aFarm and Non-Farm sectors. This further indicates the favourable base effect is waning off." AGENCIES

Tough time for Munsiyari's rajma, potato growers as heavy rainfall damages crops

PITHORAGARH: Over 1,500 rajma and potato growers of the Munsiyari sub-division of the district have suffered heavy losses with 30 per cent of their crops already got damaged due to the heavy rainfall from October 17-19. The roads damaged in the rains have only compounded their problems leading to extra transportation costs to take their produce to local markets.

"The 5-km road from our village to the Mandir market has got badly damaged, we will have to carry rajma on

horseback that will cost us Rs 450 per quintal," Kammu Rawat, a rajma and potato grower from Bona village said. According to the farmer, the motor road from their village to the market is fully damaged up to Thapki. Over 450 families of three rajma and potato producing villages of Bona, Tomik and Golph have suffered damages to the cash crops, he said.

"On average, each of these families earns Rs 10,000 per annum from these crops but due to damaged crop and

higher transportation costs from respective villages, the profits will go down to 50 per cent this year," Rawat said. According to agriculture department sources, over 1,500 quintals of potato and 500 quintals of rajma are grown by Munsiyari farmers alone in the district.

According to the villagers, these days they are busy cutting the grass but after 10 days, they will start digging out potatoes. Despite a good crop of potato this year, the organic potato of Munsiyari will cost more due

to the increased transportation costs, said Purnan Singh Rawat, another villager of Tomik. The villagers of Golph are dependent on a trolley for transportation of their cash crops of potato and rajma after the permanent bridge constructed on the Golph rivulet was swept away in the 2013 rains.

A temporary bridge constructed at the same place was also swept away by the river four months ago this year. "Over 500 families of the village grow rajma and potato for their livelihood." AGENCIES

Economic recovery, healthy corporate earnings to drive equities in Samvat 2078

MUMBAI: India's key equity indices are expected to be driven by economic recovery as well as healthy corporate earnings during Samvat 2078, experts opined. The Hindu New Year Samvat 2078 has started. A special hour-long session was held on Thursday, Diwali day, to mark the start of the new year for the domestic equity market.

In Samvat 2077, both the Sensex and Nifty delivered around 40 per cent returns. "Healthy corporate earnings, high forex reserves and economic growth should support the market in Samvat 2078," said Anuj Gupta, VP, IIFL Securities.

According to Krishna Kumar Karwa, Managing Director - Emkay Global Financial Services: "Macro headwinds like high oil prices, supply chain disruptions, the debate on transient versus structural inflation, the possibility of hardening



interest rates across the globe, internal economic challenges in China and its global ramifications, and the ongoing US-China spat will keep global and local markets volatile."

"The markets are currently not fully discounting these headwinds but having said that stocks will track earnings and valuations, and to that extent companies whose stock prices are reflecting the optimistic outlook 3-4 years down the line

are most vulnerable to price and time corrections. "In terms of expected sectoral growth, Motilal Oswal Financial Services' Head of Retail Research Siddhartha Khemka said: "Some of the themes which we expect to play out during Samvat 2078 are certain segments where we can see earnings normalisation with improving economy, increasing spending to benefit companies in Technology, Travel, Tourism, leisure and QSR segment." AGENCIES

Gold prices remained stable on Dhanteras even as demand soared

NEW DELHI: Prices of gold remained stable on the auspicious occasion of Dhanteras even as sales of the precious metal is estimated to have risen by over 15 per cent above the pre-pandemic level of 2019. As per the India Bullion and Jewellers Association (IBJA), gold sales on Dhanteras across the country this year was about 50 tonnes, valued at over Rs 20,000 crore, whereas it was Rs 12,000 crore in 2019. The IBJA's data showed that the average price of gold of 24-carat purity (999 purity) was over Rs 49,000 per 10 grams (with GST) which was lower than last year's price of around Rs 55,000 per 10 grams (with GST).

"Gold prices did not rise this year due to the commencement of the vaccination process and the growth of the global economy," said Dr. "Fear due to the coronavirus pandemic has subsided and industrial activity has risen therefore safe haven demand for gold has faded." According to Navneet Damani, VP -



Commodity Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services: "Gold price has been consolidating in a tight range since last Diwali, though the choppiness increased in the last couple of months amidst volatility in dollar and bond yields."

"Last year, gold prices performed well as the impact of pandemic and

other uncertainties gave a boost to the overall precious metal pack; although since the start of 2021, developments in vaccine, optimism regarding the global growth; geo-political uncertainties being in the sidelines, rise in US dollar and yields, outflow in 'SPDR' holdings, have capped the gains for the

bullion." Amidst all these factors, Damani said that riskier assets like equities have received a healthy boost whose impact was also seen on the safe haven assets.

In addition, Tapan Patel, Senior Analyst, Commodities for HDFC Securities, cited that gold prices have given negative returns in India till now for the year 2021 losing more than 5 per cent compared to the broad rally in the year 2019 and 2020 with 13 per cent and 26 per cent returns respectively. "Gold prices have traded under pressure since January 2021 as the reopening of global economic activate and large-scale vaccination improved investment sentiment in riskier assets."

"The economic growth optimism with ease of Covid-19 restrictions and major central banks' policy shift boosted buying in dollars which is trading around 5 per cent up for the year from December 2020 closing levels." AGENCIES

Prices of onion cheaper than last year: Centre



NEW DELHI: Prices of onion are now cheaper than last year with all India retail price at Rs 40.13 kg and wholesale price at Rs 3,215.92 per quintal. Onion prices had started rising from the first week of October, due to rains that disrupted the supply chain. In order to cool down prices, the Department of Consumer Affairs had taken up calibrated and targeted release of onions from the buffer on First-in-First-Out (FIFO) principle, guided by the twin objectives of moderating prices and ensuring minimal storage loss, the Centre said. As a result of these steps, the all India retail price of onion on Wednesday was Rs 40.42 per kg while the all India wholesale price was Rs 3,253.53 per quintal. AGENCIES

Half the world's fossil fuel assets will be worthless by 2036

NEW DELHI: About half of the world's fossil fuel assets will be worthless by 2036 under a net-zero transition, The Guardian reported. It highlights the risk of producing far more oil and gas than required for future demand, which is estimated to leave \$11tn-\$14tn in so-called stranded assets -- infrastructure, property and investments where the value has fallen so steeply they must be written off, the report said. Countries that are slow to decarbonise will suffer but early movers will profit; the study finds that renewables and freed-up investment will more than make up for the losses to the global economy. The lead author, Jean-Francois Mercure of the University of Exeter, said the shift to clean en-



ergy would benefit the world economy overall, but it would need to be handled carefully to prevent regional pockets of misery and possible global instability, the report said. "In a worst-case scenario, people will keep investing in fossil fuels until suddenly the demand they expected does not materialise and they realise that what they own is worthless."

Then we could see a financial crisis on the scale of 2008," he said, warning

oil capitals such as Houston could suffer the same fate as Detroit after the decline of the US car industry unless the transition is carefully managed. The challenge is evident at the ongoing Cop26 climate conference, where some of the nations most at risk of being left with stranded assets such as the oil and gas exporters Russia and Brazil are likely to try to slow down the transition as they have done at previous climate meetings, while those most likely to gain such as the fuel-importing EU are pushing for faster action, the report added. The new paper, published in Nature Energy, illustrates how a drop in demand for oil and gas before 2036 will reshape the geopolitical landscape. AGENCIES

India-led International Solar Alliance in new pact to speed up energy transition

'WE'RE EXCITED TO BE PARTNERING WITH THE GLOBAL ENERGY ALLIANCE FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET AS PART OF OUR ONGOING MISSION TO ACCELERATE OUR MISSION TO SOLARIZE THE WORLD BY 2030'

GLASGOW: India-led International Solar Alliance (ISA) on Wednesday announced a partnership with the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP), for accelerating energy transition in

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

The partnership - announced at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow - will champion significant solar capacity generation globally while supporting grid-based and distributed renewable solutions. Over the next decade, it aims to unlock USD100 billion in public and private capital and tackle three profound human problems simultaneously: Power reaching one billion people with reliable, renewable energy; Climate avoiding and averting four billion tons of carbon emissions;



and Jobs building an on-ramp to opportunity by directly creating more than 150 million jobs. "We're excited to be partnering with the Global Energy Alliance

for People and Planet as part of our ongoing mission to accelerate our mission to solarize the world by 2030," said Dr Ajay Mathur, Director General, International

Solar Alliance.

"With the right investment and regulatory conditions, solar power has the potential to mobilize billions of dollars in green investments, em-

power billions of people while averting billions of tons of emissions, he said.

The ISA chief said through the new partnership with the GEAPP, ISA will create an enabling policy and regulatory environment by building capacity of government, convening and research, and provide best-in-class project development support to build a strong pipeline of investable solar projects. The partnership with GEAPP will provide much-needed support to LDCs and SIDS Member Countries in the implementation of innovative solar projects and in building resilience

in key sectors such as agriculture and health with solar. The projects supported through this partnership will also help enable faster replication across other countries. "Through a large host of such interventions, I am confident that this partnership will make measurable progress in bringing clean, renewable energy to underserved communities around the world, he added.

As part of the engagement, ISA will act as a global delivery partner for GEAPP, providing project development and policy support across distributed renewable and grid-based energy

transition in LDCs and SIDS member countries. More specifically, ISA is set to engage across the following four key areas enabling the breadth and depth of impact.

The Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet was launched during the COP26 World Leaders Summit (WLS) on Tuesday, simultaneously also announcing a Call for Proposals, which will incorporate a mechanism to ensure countries submitting energy access and energy transition proposals receive technical advice throughout the process to maximise viability and implementation success. AGENCIES

Muted luxury weds comfort at Courtyard by Marriott Amritsar



CHHAVI BHATIA

Amritsar prides itself as the crown jewel of Punjab, presenting itself as a befitting case for top billed luxury hotels to set shop here. Latest to foray into the holy city is Courtyard by Marriott which opened its doors about a year and half ago. This tranquil, homely hotel ticks all the boxes of a weary traveller looking to merge comfortable stay with some touristy things to do here: centrally located, pleasant interiors, delectable food and a staff that is never found without a smile. A picture of slick, understated elegance and warm hospitality, the property,

essaying its role as sustainable luxury, can potentially become a favourite with weekenders and staycationers alike.

THE LOCATION

Courtyard by Marriott sits on the Mall Road, minutes away from the busy Ranjeet Avenue and Golden Temple under 30 minutes, given your dexterity to maneuver through annoyingly unruly Amritsar traffic. Highlights like Maharaja Ranjeet Singh Museum, Partition Museum, Jallianwala Bagh too do not feel like the other end of the world besides the place offering quick access to Sri Guru Ram Das Jee International Airport (9.8 km away) and Amritsar Junction

railway station (five km away).

THE ROOMS

All 104 rooms and three suites have calming sophisticated interiors, replete with trappings of modern functional luxury: an LED screen with free viewing channels, in-house phone, alarm clock, spacious cabinets. The rooms ooze a peaceful, snug feeling, immediately washing you over with its muted palettes. You don't hear a pin drop despite the hotel being located in the middle of a busy district. Everything is immaculately clean, its crisp, pristine white sheets beckoning to tuck yourself in after a hard day of sight-seeing. You can also curl up with a hot cup of tea and

a book on the very comfortable sofa that doubles up as an extra bed too, occasionally glancing at the panorama view of the cityscape: a delight that comes with every room. Those with an eagle eye can also spot the golden dome of Darbar Sahib scintillating gloriously in the mid-morning sun. A massive window brings liberal dose of daylight inside that can be veiled with remote controlled blinds. Our only peeve? The blinds don't close half way through. It is a go big or not at all.

STYLE, STAFF AND STUFF

Charming and luminous is how we would describe the hotel. From the rooms to the restaurant, rooftop bar and the lobby, Courtyard by Marriott is invitingly swathed in natural light. We walk into a well-lit and spacious lobby, furnished with comfy sofas and overlooking Amritsar Kitchen. Check-in is efficient; the front desk is very to the point. Rest of the staff—Panjab Singh darban, Tara and Anny servers at the restaurant, chefs Bipin and Hardik—indulge in witty conversations, helping guests with food and cultural insights on the city and few sporadic comments on current affairs.

The hotel architecture pays an impressive tribute to the rich culture of Punjab in its modern-art-deco-meets-tradition in rooms, corridors and its restaurant aptly called Amritsar Kitchen. The overall scheme of artworks for the hotel revolves around local influences, architectural features and handmade paintings narrating the city's evolution from its historic opulence and diorama. The art-



THE ROOMS OOOZE A PEACEFUL, SNUG FEELING, IMMEDIATELY WASHING YOU OVER WITH ITS MUTED PALETTES. YOU DON'T HEAR A PIN DROP DESPITE THE HOTEL BEING LOCATED IN THE MIDDLE OF A BUSY DISTRICT

works in rooms have an interesting feature of textile motifs from days of yore—a technique followed by craftsmen of the Maharajas of Punjab which depicted tree motifs. Local monuments and famous places also catch your eye while moving around the lobby in the form of beautifully crafted wooden pieces. At Amritsar Kitchen, original hand painted canvas art panels display the valour, vigour and adventure Punjab and Punjabis are known for through local games that have greatly influenced the demography.

A well-equipped gym, rooftop swimming pool and a spa—Courtyard by Marriott has all amenities in place. The service is prompt but not business-like



over-the-top; the vibe here is more relaxed, friendly and laid-back, like staying with a friend or family.

Courtyard by Marriott minimises use of plastic in kitchen—doing its bit for sustainable luxury. However, it would also be nice to see the hotel offer a more sustainable option to toiletries than single-use miniatures and use glass water bottles.

FOOD AND DRINK

Amritsar Kitchen is as close as you can get to know Punjab at its culinary best. The menu

has Punjabi staples: Butter Chicken, Fish Tikka, Amritsari Kulcha, Dal Makhni with supporting cast of Asian and Western dishes. Be prepared for your scales to go north if chef Hardik is in-charge. A local lad who was brought in from JW Marriott Delhi to season the food at the restaurant with his Punjabiyat, he will find you and he will feed you an entire year's supply of makkhan and desi ghee in just one meal. Protest and he laughs gregariously, "This land does not believe in dieting or frugal eating." Ask him

for Amritsari Kulcha (dripping with white butter, of course) and Tawa Fish—both rendering new definition to finger licking good. Breakfast is a good collection of north and south Indian, and continental spread. The chefs are more than happy to spoil you with special of the day. Do it at your own risk or buy a new pair of clothes before you depart. Another experience not to be missed is the special Amritsari thali curated by the chefs: you deep dive into the food culture the city of lions is famous for.

Unwind with single malt or a Cosmopolitan at Vue Bar and Grill, soaking in the twinkling of city lights. The rooftop bar is a great place to gaze at the stars as a live band belts out indie rock every Wednesday.

THE BOTTOM LINE

With its muted luxury, appealing interiors and affable hospitality, Courtyard by Marriott is hard to beat for those who are looking for a family getaway or a place to relax without a hefty price tag; ideal for couples and safe for single women travelers too.

Taapsee shares her love for London as she prepares for Mithali Raj biopic



MUMBAI: Fresh from the release of 'Rashmi Rocket', Taapsee Pannu took to Instagram to express her love for London. Posting pictures of her at the iconic St James's Court hotel,

she wrote in the caption: "Miss my hot coffee in cold London mornings with a home away from home to come back to. Already sure Im gonna be back soon." It's pretty much

an established fact that Tapsee loves to travel. The actress works hard, but always makes it a point to find some time to unwind before setting off on a new film's journey. After work-

ing through a packed schedule of back-to-back films, Tapsee was recently in London for her vacation where she shopped, roamed around and soaked up the city's flavours to her heart's content.

Some time back, the actress had shared pictures and stories from her last trip to London. She also visited the Lord's and posted a picture of herself donning the jersey of Mithali Raj, looking super impressed by the memorabilia of the Indian women's cricket captain. Tapsee will be next seen essaying the role of Mithali Raj in the upcoming biopic 'Shaabaash Mithu', directed by Srijit Mukherjee. She has a number of other interesting projects lined up, such as the Telugu film 'Mishan Impossible', whose poster she shared on Diwali, the 'Run Lola Run' adaptation 'Loopo Lapeta', Anurag Kashyap's 'Dobaaraa', and 'Blur', the Hindi remake of the Spanish 'Julia's Eyes'. **AGENCIES**

EU warns UK as talks stall over N.Ireland

BRUSSELS: European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic on Friday warned of "serious consequences" if the UK sought to renegotiate the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. Following talks with the UK's Brexit Minister David Frost on how goods can be shipped between Northern Ireland and Britain, Sefcovic called for more sincerity from the latter side, reports Xinhua news agency.

"Until today, we have seen no move at all from the UK side," Sefcovic said at a press conference following the meeting. "I find this disappointing and once again I urge the UK government to engage with us sincerely. We hear a lot about Article 16 at the moment. Let there be no doubt that triggering Article 16—to seek the renegotiation of the Protocol would have serious consequences. "Serious for Northern Ireland, as it would lead to instability and unpredictability. And serious also for EU-UK relations in general, as it would mean a



rejection of EU efforts to find a consensual solution to the implementation of the protocol," he added. Invoking Article 16 of the Protocol would allow the UK to reconsider the lack of a border with Ireland if it believes it is causing serious economic difficulties. It could also suspend customs checks across the Irish Sea and this

may threaten the European Single Market. Sefcovic said the Commission had proposed a whole new model for how goods can be moved from Britain to Northern Ireland, creating a sort of express lane that could cut customs-related red tape by half.

"A significant range of retail goods would also benefit from

simplified certification. This would result in a reduction of up to 80 per cent of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) checks," he said. Northern Ireland is at the centre of the post-Brexit trade dispute between Britain and the EU.

As part of the Brexit deal, the Protocol stipulates that Northern Ireland remains in the EU single market and customs union to avoid a hard border between the region and the Republic of Ireland. However, this leads to a new "regulatory" border between Britain and Northern Ireland. For months, the UK has complained the rigid operation of the protocol, part of the Brexit deal, is unacceptable because it has severely disrupted trade, affected consumers and contributed to political instability. **AGENCIES**

T20 World Cup: van der Dussen, Markram power South Africa to 189/2 against England

SHARJAH: Fantastic unbeaten fifties by Rassie van der Dussen (94* off 60) and Aiden Markram (52* off 25) powered South Africa to 189-2 against England in a Super 12 match of the 2021 ICC Men's T20 World Cup at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium, here on Saturday. Along with Dussen and Markram, Quinton de Kock also played a vital knock (34 off 27) for South Africa while Moeen Ali (1/27) was the most economical bowler for England. South Africa can finish in the top two and qualify for the semi-final if they keep England inside 131. England will qualify if they score at least 87.



Asked to bat first, South Africa lost the wicket of Reeza Hendricks (2) in the 3rd over of the innings. Hendricks went down on a knee and attempted to sweep the ball towards square but he completely missed the line and was cleanly bowled by Moeen Ali. De Kock and Van der Dussen then joined hands and took South Africa to 40/1 after six overs. Both batters cleverly chose attacking strokes and

kept on hitting occasional boundaries to keep the scoreboard ticking. The solid 71-run stand for the second-wicket was finally broken by Adil Rashid in the 12th over as De Kock (34) looked to go big against the spinner but he didn't get the timing right and was caught at long-off, leaving

South Africa to 86/2 after 11.2 overs. The wicket didn't affect Proteas' momentum as new batsman Markram and van der Dussen kept the run-counter ticking at an impressive rate. While Dussen brought South Africa's 100 with a gigantic six against Wood in the 13th over, Markram joined the

party by hitting a six against Rashid. The pair went particularly hard after England's seamers in the middle overs, targeting the returning Mark Wood, who was playing in the tournament for the first time after replacing the injured Tymal Mills. Wood finished with figures of 0/47 off his four

overs, with Chris Woakes faring a little better with 0/43, as England's seamers struggled in Sharjah. Overall, Markram and van der Dussen had a brilliant 103-run unbeaten stand for the 3rd wicket and they took South Africa to a commanding 189/2 in 20 overs. **AGENCIES**

A complete **KNOWLEDGE CAPSULE**

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