

CITY TALKS

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SIDHU SLAMS CENTRE OVER MSP HIKE, ASKS IF FARMERS' INCOME MATCHED SPENDING



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TELECOM RELIEF PACKAGE MAY PROVIDE 4-YEAR MORATORIUM ON AGR



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AYUSHMANN FINISHED THREE NEW FILMS DURING THE PANDEMIC



Talks fail, farmers ready for long haul

KARNAL PROTEST Officials and farmer leaders stated that talks between protesting farmers and the Karnal Administration had failed for the second time that day, as the farmers prepare for a long protest outside the district's mini secretariat. The protest in Karnal is part of the larger farmers protest against three central laws—The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, and The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act.

Midnight tea, cards, discussions keep farmers busy in Karnal

CHHAVI BHATIA
Karnal

It is 2 in the morning and Mahendra Kapoor blares Mere Desh Ki Dharti Sona Ugle from a loudspeaker close by, piercing through the dead of the night of the town that otherwise goes to sleep by 10. Outside the mini-secretariat where thousands of farmers have dug in their heels since September 7, however, the flurry of activity doesn't show any sign of abating. After three rounds of talk between farmers and the Haryana government failed, around two lakh farmers marched towards the DC office to gherao it indefinitely. The farmers are demanding suspension of IAS officer Ayush Sinha who was caught on camera giving orders to "break heads of farmers" during the August 28 protest. A farmer reportedly died due to injuries sustained in the lathicharge by cops. Kisan flags fly high on light poles along with tricolour—countering the slander that farmers are "anti-national".



Young and old are sitting on durries as a large number of cops keep a watchful eye on them. While some try to catch a few winks, a lot of them are discussing the events of the day and the strategy ahead. Few tams are playing cards while gurgling on hookahs. Keeping their energy levels high are endless rounds of tea being served by Khalsa

Aid volunteers, who make an announcement every half an hour that tea and biscuits langar is on. Ration has started to come in from locals and people from Chandigarh and Mohali after word spread on social media that agitation here will go on indefinitely. "We were prepared that the egoistic Khattar government won't agree to sack that officer

and we won't be left with much choice but to camp here. So we started to mobilise food and water from morning itself. A lot of help has started to arrive from nearby cities too," said Ajay Pal Singh, a farmer from Charkhi Dabri. Earlier in the day, farmers had broken barricades set up by the district police to prevent them from reaching



"The protests will not stop. The government will not accept our demands. We will sit here till our demands are met. This is a struggle for the freedom of farmers from a government of corporates. Karnal will be another centre of protest like the Delhi borders if our demands are not met."



RAKESH TIKAIT,
a leader of the Bharatiya Kisan Union

HIGHLIGHTS

- Haryana Minister Anil Vij says govt ready for impartial probe into 'entire Karnal episode' as farmers' protest enters day 3
- They were demanding suspension of the then Karnal SDM Ayush Sinha for his briefing to police personnel on August 28 where he told them to "crack their (farmers') heads". The same day, protesting farmers were lathicharged at Bastara toll plaza as they were opposing a state-level meeting of the BJP.

the district administration a few hours later, the protesting farmers had converted those barricades into beds, telling sign of their ingenuity; some are sleeping outside shops opposite the mini-secretariat that were shut

in the morning ahead of the On one of the pavements, a young man is fanning someone sleeping under a tree at a furious pace. A group of farmers, on the other hand, have huddled around the person who turns out to be Bharatiya

Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait. On the other end of the protest, BKU(Charuni) chief Gurnam Singh Charuni is sleeping. Supporters of both the leaders gush about them for being with them since morning. "They are sleeping on the road when they could have easily slept at someone's house. Media won't show this or write about it because it only wants to portray us in bad light," Sandeep Singh, a farmer from Hisar lashes out at government-friendly media. Meanwhile, a few cops ask for bottles of water from farmers, refusing offer to have tea. By crack of the dawn, the loudspeaker is turned off and people assemble to do paath. Word is doing the round that pukka morcha is to be set up as the government is in "no mood to relent". The hymns soothe the atmosphere and frayed nerves. Preparations are on for morning tea and breakfast. Farmers who had slept at local gurudwaras start arriving at the protest site. Tikait and Charuni address the farmers for next days ahead, exhorting them to brace up for a long fight. "Khattar is an arrogant man. He will do anything to protect that rogue officer. We will not budge from here till Sinha is suspended and booked for murder," thunders Tikait.

It is like rubbing of salt on wounds of agitating farmers: Amarinder

DOLLY CHOPRA
Chandigarh

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh lambasted the Union Cabinet's meagre wheat MSP raise, calling it "pathetic" and accusing it of "rubbing salt in the wounds" of struggling farmers who have been demonstrating against agricultural rules for the past ten months. At a time when India's agriculture sector is passing through a distress phase and the farmers are agitating for a remunerative MSP, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led Government of India has played a cruel joke on the 'annadaatas', said the Chief Minister. Demanding MSP of wheat to



be fixed at Rs 2,830 per quintal (as against the meagre Rs 2,015/quintal announced today by the Centre), Amarinder said the farmers should not be forced to subsidise the consumers, which they have been doing since long. "It is time the government at the Centre heeds the problems of the farmers and gives them their due," he said, adding that the BJP-led

government's continued apathy towards the farmers had brought the farming sector, which has been one of the country's biggest economic strengths, to the brink of disaster. "Why is the Centre treating our farmers so obnoxiously," he asked. Terming the MSP for wheat at Rs 2,015 per quintal as "far below the expectations of the farmers of Punjab," the Chief Minister said his government has suggested the MSP of Rs 2,830 per quintal depending on the cost of production of wheat in the State. Pointing out that the CACP estimates project an increase of 3.5% only in the comprehensive cost of production (C2) over the last year, he said this does not even cover the inflation in cost of inputs.

FEARLESS AFGHAN WOMAN



This powerful picture says it all—a fearless Afghan woman standing face-to-face as a Taliban armed man points a gun at her chest. This was one of the many compelling images that emerged from the protests in Kabul on September 7. The Taliban fired shots into the air to disperse hundreds of people who had gathered at several rallies on the streets. AGENCIES

HIGHLIGHT OF THE WEEK

- 1 Shouldn't become sanctuary for terror groups to attack others: Brics on Afghanistan
- 2 Deadline to file Income Tax Returns extended to December 31
- 3 Former Army Officer Gurmit Singh Appointed Uttarakhand Governor

Women cadets now allowed into NDA



NEW DELHI: The Union government informed the Supreme Court that it has decided that women, too, can join the Pune-based National Defence Academy (NDA). The Centre's submission in the top court came as a 2-judge bench took up a plea seeking directions for necessary steps to be taken to allow eligible female candidates to appear in the upcoming NDA examination, which is scheduled to be held on November 14. "There's some good news. A decision has been taken at the highest level of forces and government that girls will be inducted for permanent commission through the National Defence Academy. The deci-

NSA, CIA chief meet Doval a week after MI-6 chief's visit

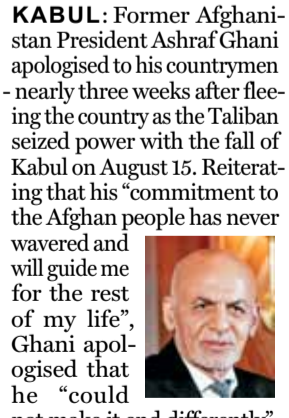


NEW DELHI: Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief William Burns and Russian National Security Advisor General Nikolai Petroshov have met NSA Ajit Doval and other top security managers over the past two days. Their conversation came a week after the visit of British intelligence chief Richard Moore. The visits are part of a flurry of exchanges between world leaders, particularly the US, as they try to develop and understand the implications of the takeover of Afghanistan by a covert terrorist group. Former diplomat Burns met

Doval on Tuesday. Sources said the purpose of his visit would logically be to share intelligence, but the veteran diplomat would have touched on an expanded G-7 that could capture the Taliban's assurances before it is recognized. The US State Department has said it is concerned about the affiliations and backgrounds of some members of the Taliban cabinet. Patrushev, the other prominent visitor, held talks with Doval and Jaishankar, and later on Wednesday met PM Modi. Russia has a functional embassy in Kabul and is one of a handful of countries in-

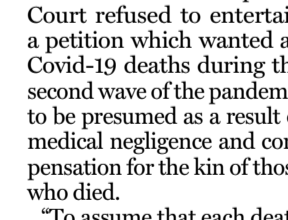
vited by the Taliban for the swearing-in ceremony. With Russia, India has more parallels on Afghanistan, including ensuring that it does not become a breeding ground for jihadi groups targeting either of the two countries. Both Russia and India want the new Kabul government to be more liberal to ethnic minorities. As members of the UN Security Council, Russia, the US, the UK and India will play a key role in mainstreaming Taliban leaders by listing them as UN-designated terrorists. The US will also have to remove him from its wanted terrorists list to help Afghanistan get about \$9 billion in reserves as well as \$340 million in IMF aid. UN representatives met with Taliban Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Baradar to resume food shipments, while an Emirati plane landed in Kabul with about 30 tonnes of food and medical supplies from the United Arab Emirates. China has announced its intention to invest \$14 billion in Afghanistan, a figure seen as "title management" similar to the announcement of \$60 billion investment in Pakistan. AGENCIES

Could not make it end differently: Ashraf Ghani apologises to Afghans



KABUL: Former Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani apologised to his countrymen - nearly three weeks after fleeing the country as the Taliban seized power with the fall of Kabul on August 15. Reiterating that his "commitment to the Afghan people has never wavered and will guide me for the rest of my life", Ghani apologised that he "could not make it end differently". "I owe the Afghan people an explanation for leaving Kabul abruptly on August 15 after Taliban unexpectedly enter the city. I left at the urging of the palace security who advised me that to remain risked setting off the same horrific street-to-street fighting the city had suffered during the Civil War of the 1990s," Ghani said in the statement that he shared on Twitter. "I offer my profound appreciation and respect for the sacrifice of all Afghans, especially our Afghan soldiers and their families, through the last 40 years," he concluded. AGENCIES

Can't presume all Covid deaths during second wave were due to negligence: SC



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court refused to entertain a petition which wanted all Covid-19 deaths during the second wave of the pandemic to be presumed as a result of medical negligence and compensation for the kin of those who died. "To assume that each death due to Covid-19 took place due to negligence is too much. The second wave had such an impact across the country that it cannot be presumed that all deaths happened due to negligence. Courts cannot have a presumption that all Covid deaths happened due to medical negligence, which your petition does," a Bench led by Justice DY Chandrachud said. It asked the petitioner Deepak Raj Singh to approach the competent authority with his suggestions. The Bench said it has already passed an order in June to the National Disaster Management Authority to recommend within six weeks appropriate guidelines for ex-gratia assistance on account of loss of life to the family members of persons, who died due to Covid-19. "The government is yet to come out with the policy. If you have any suggestion with



regard to implementation of that policy, you can approach the competent authority," it said. The Bench also refused to pass a general order to the authorities for door-to-door vaccination, saying it was "not feasible". "With one brush you want an order for the entire country. The vaccination drive is already in progress and over 60 per cent of the population has been administered the first dose," the Bench told counsel for petitioner Youth Bar Association. Terming it a matter of governance, the Bench said it can't scrap the existing policy. It sought to highlight the fact that the situation in Ladakh was different from that in Kerala, Uttar Pradesh or any other state. Similarly, in urban areas, the situation was different from that in rural areas, it said, adding "There are different kinds of problems in every state in this vast country." AGENCIES

Sidhu slams Centre over MSP hike, asks if farmers' income matched spending

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu attacked the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre over the MSP hike for wheat and asked whether farmers' income grew in proportion to their expenditure.

He also termed the promise of doubling farmers' income by 2022 as a 'jumla' while stressing that the Centre framed its contentious farm laws without having any data about farmers' financial position.

The Centre on Wednesday had hiked the minimum support price (MSP) for wheat by Rs 40 to Rs 2,015 per quintal. "Central Govt promised to double farmer income by 2022 but increased FRP on sugarcane by 1.75% (just Rs 5) MSP on wheat by 2% (just Rs 40). Meanwhile, in last one year expenses have increased diesel by 48% DAP by 140% Mustard Oil by 174% sunflower Oil by 170% LPG cylinder by 190 Rs," said Sidhu in a tweet.

In a video uploaded on his Twitter handle, Sidhu said the Union government led by PM Narendra Modi had said that it wanted to double farmers' income but Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Tomar had



said his ministry had no data related to farmers' financial position. "If you do not have data related to farmers' financial position, then how could you frame three farm laws by giving a 'jumla' of doubling their income," he said.

He said the wheat MSP hike of Rs 40 per quintal was just two per cent increase and lowest in the past 12 years.

Citing rising cost of items,

including diesel and mustard oil, in the past one year, Sidhu asked the Centre whether the income of farmers grew in the same proportion.

While hitting out at the Centre for the three farm legislations, Sidhu said in another tweet, "Farmer Income-No Data Available, Farmer Suicide -No Data Available, Job Loss-No Data Available, Migrant Labour - No Data Available,

Now NDA means No Data Available." He alleged that the three farm laws were brought to "benefit" some corporates.

"NDA means No Data Available about Farmers, Labour & Small Traders...Govt only knows about its rich corporate friends, whose debt it waives-off, whose planes it travels in & who make their Policies, such as the three farm laws, which benefit 0.1%, while looting the

70% of Indians," he alleged in another tweet.

The cricketer-turned-politician also took on the Badals over the issue of farm laws and accused them of "shedding crocodile tears", saying they first backed the legislations and later took a U-turn under public pressure.

Sidhu said Harsimrat Badal resigned as Union minister not voluntarily but under public pressure and asked her to make public the "dis-sentencing note" given on farm ordinances.

He also criticised the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP government in Delhi over the farm law issue, alleging it notified one of the three farm laws last year.

Sidhu asked the Delhi government whether it had denotified it.

"Sukhbir Badal supported farm laws at all-party meet in June 2020, Prakash S. Badal & Harsimrat Badal made videos favouring farm laws up till Sept 2020 before U-turn under public pressure... AAP's Delhi govt implemented farm laws in private mandis while faking support to farmers," said Sidhu in another tweet. **AGENCIES**

SAD Chief Sukhbir Singh Badal gets bail in forgery case

BADAL HAD MOVED AN APPLICATION FOR INTERIM BAIL, SAYING NO CUSTODIAL INTERROGATION OF HIM WAS REQUIRED AND A CO-ACCUSED IN THE CASE, DALJIT SINGH CHEEMA, IS ALREADY ON BAIL

HOSHIARPUR: A court in Hoshiarpur granted interim bail to Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal in a forgery case, involving allegations that his party submitted a false undertaking to seek recognition from the Election Commission of India.

Badal, who appeared before the court in Hoshiarpur, got bail on a personal bond and surety of Rs 1 lakh each.

Social activist Balwant Singh Khara had filed a complaint against Badal and others in 2009, alleging that the SAD has two constitutions, one that it submitted to the Gurdwara Election Commission and the other to the Elections Commission of India (ECI) to seek recognition as a political party.



He had alleged that the SAD had given a false undertaking to the ECI that it had amended its constitution to incorporate principles of socialism and secularism, whereas it continued its activities as a 'Panthic' party and participated in Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) elections.

The court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Rupinder Kaur fixed September 28 as the next date of hearing in the case.

Badal's counsel appealed for exempting him from personal appearance on the next date but the court asked him to

move an application in this regard on the same day.

On September 2, the court of Additional Sessions Judge Jatinder Pal Singh Khurmi had directed Badal to surrender in the trial court here on or before September 13 to get interim bail, subject to his furnishing a personal bond and surety.

Badal had moved an application for interim bail, saying no custodial interrogation of him was required and a co-accused in the case, Daljit Singh Cheema, is already on bail.

The complaint against Badal and others has been filed under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code. **AGENCIES**

Over 7 lakh complaints registered on CM window in Haryana in past nearly six years

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

According to available data more than 7.39 lakh complaints have been registered on CM window in every district in Haryana state which was started with effect from December 25, 2014 to provide immediate justice to residents of the state and a study reveals the scheme failed to provide desired results to complainants so far, which include maximum number of complaints reported against state police department recorded as 2,09,359 (28.39%) complaints.

Among other complains include 88,837 (12.01%) complaints against Panchayat department 54,612 (7.38%) complaints against Urban Developments Authority, 44,897 (6.06%) complaints against State Revenue department, 38,195 (5.16%) complaints against Education department, 21,995 (2.63%) complaints against DTP, 20,505 (2.77%) complaints against Public Health department, 20,148 (2.72%) complaints against District Food Supply Control (DFSC) department, 20,095 complaints (2.63%)



complaints against Social Justice department, 18,444 (2.49%) complaints against Agriculture department, 4,715 (1.99%) complaints against Irrigation department, 14,335 (1.93%) complaints against Health department 12,112 (1.63%) complaints against Labour department, 9,837 (1.33%) complaints against PWD, besides 1212 complaints registered against Sports department, 1,420 complaints registered against Mining & Geology department, 1,687 complaints registered against Old Heritage department, and 1,830 complaints registered against state Home department

and Chief Secretary.

Scenario reveals, during year 2014, with effect from December 25 when scheme was launched in the state till August 31 as many as 3383 complaints were recorded on CM window in different districts across the state within few days, followed by 1,11,662 complaints registered in the year 2015. During year 2016, 97,573 complaints were registered. In the year 2017 the number of complaints registered on CM windows in the state was recorded as 1,26,299 and during year 2017 the number of complaints was 1,34,810 in year 2018.

PGI Chandigarh second-best medical college after Delhi's AIIMS

NEW DELHI: The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras retained the top spot among institutes in the country, while the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, ranked the best among research institutions, according to the Ministry of Education's NIRF ranking announced on September 8.

In the sixth edition of the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) announced by Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, eight IITs and two National Institutes of Technology (NITs) figured in the top 10 engineering institutions in the country. As per the NIRF ranking, AIIMS Delhi has bagged the top spot among medical colleges, followed by PGIMER, Chandigarh, and Christian Medical College, Vellore.

The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad ranked as the best B-School, while Jamia Hamdard was declared the top institution for pharmacy studies.

In the colleges category, Miranda House in Delhi bagged the first rank, followed by Lady Sri Ram College for Women, Delhi, and Loyola College, Chennai. **PTI**

'Cow Task Force' in every Haryana district to collect stray animals



SATISH HANDA

In a notification, Haryana state government took decision to constitute 'Cow Task Force' in every district in order to make state stray animals free under a committee comprising of 11 members including five officers from different departments and six members of social welfare organizations under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner of the district to collect stray animals on the roads and lodge these animals in cow sheds. According to Shrawan Garg Chairman State Gau Sewa Commission, 11 members committee hold a meeting every month and submit report to the commission.

The campaign to make state stray animals free was started in 10 districts in the state Fatehabad, Sirsa, Charkhi Dadri, Jhajjar, Rohtak, Hisar, Karnal, Kaithal, Kurukshetra and Yamunanagar in which 2234 stray animals were collected

from roads and highways. According to available date, 140 stray cows were collected out of total number of 450 identified as stray animals on roads at Fatehabad, 465 cows were collected out of total number of 600 stray animals at Jhajjar, 200 cows were collected out of total number of 1800 stray animals at Rohtak, 250 cows were collected out of total number of 500 stray animals at Charkhi Dadri, 70 cows were collected out of total number of 2500 stray animals at Sirsa, 50 cows were collected out of total number of 2000 stray animals at Hisar, 100 cows were collected out of total number of 700 stray animals at Kaitahl, 150 cows were collected out of total number of 1000 stray animals at Kurukshetra, 100 cows were collected out of total number of 1200 stray animals at Karnal, and 9 cows were collected out of total number of 23 animals at Yamunanagar.

Chandigarh gets country's tallest air purifier tower

DOLLY CHOPRA
Chandigarh

To mark the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies, the tallest air purification tower of the country was inaugurated by UT Adviser Dharam Pal on September 8.

The Chandigarh Pollution Control Committee (CPC) had taken an initiative to install the tower at Transport Chowk, Sector 26.

This is the highest air purifier of India, which will cover around a 500-metre radius around Transport Chowk. Polluted air enters the inner casing of the mist chamber, wherein a number of mist nozzles spray water in the form of mist on the polluted air. Heavy polluted air particles are drained into a drain tube, which collect in a water tank. Fitted with a system to suck polluted air through inlets, particulate matter (PM) 2.5 and PM 10, along with various oxides of sulphur and nitrogen, are filtered by the purifier and the purified air exhausted in the environment.

This purifier has been installed by Pious Air Pvt Limited without any cost to the UT Administration. It will also operate and maintain it for five years without any cost.

According to the company, with the commissioning of the tower, the air quality around Transport Chowk will improve substantially. It is estimated that about 1.5 lakh vehicles ply on this chowk every day. The trial found that air pollution in and around Transport



Chowk has come down by 70 to 80 per cent. The temperature around the chowk is also expected to drop by 10-12 degrees below the rest of the city.

According to the manufacturer, the air purifier is a 24-metre-high tower-like structure, which will clean 3.88 crore cubic ft of air from the surrounding environment.

The tower will pull in polluted air from the surrounding environment and release clean air into the atmosphere. A board installed at the tower will display how much polluted air is being sucked by the tower and also how much clean air has been released into the atmosphere.

Among those present on the occasion were Deben-

dra Dalai, Secretary, Environment, Anindita Mitra, Commissioner, Municipal Corporation, Mandip Singh Brar, Deputy Commissioner, and other senior officers of the Administration.

Followed by the inauguration, a water sprinkler machine was also flagged off by UT Adviser Dharam Pal. The sprinkler will be used to wash roadside plants and also to suppress dust along the roads. A bicycle rally of around 100 students from prominent schools of the city was also flagged off by the Adviser to raise awareness among the public to curb air pollution and sensitise them to use bicycle as their local mode of conveyance.

A prize distribution ceremony was held at Paryavaran Bhawan, Sector 19-B, Chandigarh, to distribute prizes among the winners of a poster-making competition on the theme of the International Day of Clean Air for Blue Skies this year i.e. healthy air, healthy planet.

How it works

Polluted air enters the inner casing of the mist chamber, wherein a number of mist nozzles spray water in the form of mist on the polluted air. Heavy polluted air particles are drained into a drain tube, which collect in a water tank. Fitted with a system to suck polluted air through inlets, particulate matter (PM) 2.5 and PM 10, along with various oxides of sulphur and nitrogen, are filtered by the purifier and the purified air exhausted in the environment.

From cooking delicacies to personally serving them, Capt Amarinder hosts Olympians for dinner

CHANDIGARH: The atmosphere was joyous, the occasion truly memorable. It was the much-awaited dinner hosted by Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh for Olympic medallists and participants from the state, and some others, including gold medallist Neeraj Chopra.

Pleasure intermingled with pride, as India's celebration of the Olympic glory continued days after the return of the heroes. The laws of the chief minister's farmhouse in Mohali were lit up with the spirit of revelry and the aroma of the savouries that Capt Amarinder had painstakingly prepared for his cherished guests.

Capt Amarinder's special touch was unmistakable. It could be seen (and tasted) in every dish of the lavish spread on the table. And the smile of



satisfaction on his face, even after hours of hard work as the chef of the moment, was enviable.

"I started at 11 in the morning. Most of it was done by around 5 pm, and then it was

time for some final touches. But I loved every minute of it," said the chief minister, with the enjoyment of it all sparkling in his eyes.

"They (the sportspersons) worked so hard to win us glory,



what I have done for them is nothing in comparison," he remarked, looking his usual dapper self as he greeted the

guests personally, with no sign of fatigue from all those hours of cooking and supervising the arrangements. **AGENCIES**

NATION

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Spike in viral fever cases among children in Bihar, many hospitalised

PATNA: Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, cases of viral fever among children are rising in Bihar and many of the patients have been hospitalised.

Cautioning against unnecessary panic, doctors associated with major state-run facilities have assured people that there is no shortage of infrastructure at present. Symptoms of COVID-19 have not yet been seen among the children who are under treatment for viral fever, they said.

In Patna, all four major hospitals -- All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Patna Medical College and Hospital, Nalanda Medical College and Hospital and Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences -- are crowded with children suffering from viral fever.

Talking to PTI, Dr N R Biswas, Director and Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences (IGIMS), said the surge in viral



fever cases among children has been reported in several hospitals in the state capital.

The number of children affected with viral fever is also rising in other districts, including Muzaffarpur, Dr Biswas said.

"But there is nothing to panic about. It is a seasonal fever that happens every year. We are taking all possible mea-

sures to handle the situation. "At present, there is no shortage of beds in IGIMS, and we have sufficient oxygen cylinders for children," he said.

The state government is already on high alert and as of now, the situation is completely under control, Dr Biswas said.

"We are quite hopeful that the number of viral fever cases

Children dying of dengue, viral fever but Adityanath claiming 'all is well': Akhilesh

LUCKNOW: Children are dying of viral fever and dengue, but Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is making false claims of "all is well", Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav alleged on September 6.

There is an outcry in the state due to dengue and viral fever. There are huge crowds in hospitals, and children are dying due to a lack of proper and timely treatment, he said in a party statement. The BJP government is, however, not paying attention to the collapsed health services in the state, he added.



Dengue fever has claimed the lives of hundreds of innocents in western Uttar Pradesh, and the outbreak is now visible in the eastern part of the state as well, Yadav alleged. In state capital Lucknow itself, there is a rush in hospitals, he said, adding that the disease has hit Firozabad, Mathura, Mainpuri, Kanpur and Farrukhabad among other places badly.

The cries of mothers who have lost their children is a reality which is far away from the tall claims being made in government advertisements, the SP chief said.

Citing various cases of hardships being faced by family members of patients in getting medical attention, Yadav alleged that the BJP government lacked sensitivity, and said dengue has exposed the reality of its claims of having improved medical facilities. There is widespread public anger against the BJP as it has shown disregard towards the health and the welfare of the people, he said. AGENCIES

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PM Modi may visit the US in late September

NEW DELHI: A visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US later this month is likely to depend on the finality over hosting of the first in-person summit of the Quad leaders by the Biden administration, people familiar with the development said.

The tentative schedule explored for the visit was between September 22-27 and the preparations were focused on three segments—Modi's address at the UN General Assembly in New York, participation at the proposed Quad summit in Washington and a bilateral meeting with President Joe Biden, they said.

However, the sudden decision by Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga to step down by the end of September triggered uncertainty over the US hosting of the in-person Quad summit as Tokyo is learnt to have requested for a hybrid format for the talks.

The people cited above said there was no final decision yet on the proposed visit to the US by Modi in view of the uncertainty over the holding of the Quad summit among the leaders of the US, India, Japan



and Australia in Washington. Suga, who became prime minister of Japan a year ago after Shinzo Abe stepped down, announced on Friday that he will not seek re-election as leader of the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP) at the end of September.

His announcement and the political turmoil in Tokyo have also thrown into doubt the holding of the in-person India-Japan summit for the third consecutive year.

The annual summit between Modi and his then Japanese counterpart Abe was cancelled in December 2019 in Guwahati in the wake of massive protests rocking the Assam city over the amended citizenship law. AGENCIES

Sectarian politics at bay, farmers avow to oust BJP in UP

CHHAVI BHATIA
New Delhi

On September 5, when lakhs of farmers gathered at the Government Inter College (GIC) ground in Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh for the Kisan Mahapanchayat, the meeting scripted a new chapter in the Jat-Muslim ties, severed eight years ago by one of the worst Hindu-Muslim riots India had ever seen. Organised by the voluntary efforts of the Samayukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), the congregation was, according to SKM leaders, a show of strength, unity and focus of farmers that they are united in their struggle for repealing of laws, irrespective of caste and religion.

Through the mega event, the farmers also declared that they will take the Bharatiya Janata Party head-on in the state which goes to polls early next year. From the stage of the mahapanchayat, SKM leaders Rakesh Tikait, Balbir Singh Rajewal, Joginder Singh Ugrahan among others asserted that Mission UP (Uttarakhand) has started. It is clear that the farmers want



to hit the ruling party where it hurts the most: its votebank in the politically most critical state. For the first time since the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots, Jats and Muslims were seen as comrades-in-arms at GIC, leaving behind their sectarian identities that came to dominate the agrarian concerns of the two communities. Years of polarisation seemed to have come to an end as peasants from both the sides hugged each other in an apparent display of burying the hatchet. "This government

operates on politics of hate and division. The unity of farmers scares them. BJP must suffer electoral losses," said Tikait while addressing a sea of farmers at the venue. The SKM aims to paint the BJP as "anti-farmer" in the Hindi heartland that sends the maximum number of MPs to the Parliament—80. He further said, "The slogan of faslon ke daam nahi, to vote nahi (no fair price for crops, no votes) will have to be raised." Echoing his views, Rajewal reiterated, "BJP should know that if it does not yield to our demands, its days in power are numbered."

Farmers' leaders also said that farmers will campaign against the BJP across all districts and villages of Uttar Pradesh, including Varanasi, Lucknow and Gorakhpur, the home turf of chief minister Yogi Adityanath. Besides the upcoming assembly election in Uttar Pradesh, they are firm on their demands for repeal of the new farm laws and assurance of MSP. "We want the government to ensure an MSP on our farming produce," Ugrahan asserted from the stage.

In UP, Asaduddin Owaisi's foolishness barb at Akhilesh Yadav, Mayawati

SULTANPUR: Narendra Modi became the prime minister of the country twice because of the foolishness of the Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party chiefs, AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi asserted.

He made the assertion in response to the two parties' presidents, Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati, earlier dubbing him as the "vote spoiler" for their parties.

Owaisi made the claim while addressing a public rally during his ongoing tour of Uttar Pradesh, aimed at consolidating his electoral position months ahead of the assembly poll in the politically crucial state.

"Narendra Modi became the prime minister of the country twice because of the "nasamjhi" (foolishness) of Akhilesh (Yadav) and Mayawati," Owaisi said, addressing a public meeting in Odara village of the Sultanpur district. A day earlier, he had launched his party's campaign for the upcoming state assembly elections in Ayodhya.

Sultanpur, situated about 140 km from the capital Lucknow,



is believed to be built by Lord Rama's son Kush. Contesting the allegations that by fighting polls in UP, Owaisi would spoil votes of the BJP's rivals, the Hyderabad MP asked "when you all (Muslims) voted for Akhilesh Yadav's party, how come a BJP candidate won from here in the last assembly polls?"

"Similarly, how did the BJP win the Sultanpur Lok Sabha seat in 2019 when no AIMIM candidate had contested from here?" he asked. Making a scathing attack on the Samajwadi Party president, Owaisi asked, "Are Muslims your slaves?" "The BJP did not win the

two consecutive general elections in 2014 and 2019 with the Muslims votes as they got only six per cent of their votes in the two polls," the AIMIM chief said, seeking to junk SP's claim that Mr Owaisi was jumping into the UP poll fray to eat into their votes and to help the saffron party.

The Hyderabad MP said his party has been contesting elections across the country to safeguard Muslims' interest and pointed to their victory at three Lok Sabha seats of Hyderabad, Aurangabad in Maharashtra and Kishanganj in Bihar in the 2019 election. AGENCIES

Bypolls announced, Didi to fight from Bhabanipur

NEW DELHI: The byelection to the Bhabanipur Assembly seat in West Bengal, from where Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee intends to contest, will be held on September 30, the Election Commission announced. The bypoll to two other Assembly seats of West Bengal and one of Odisha will also be held on September 30.

Polling in Samsernganj and Jangipur in West Bengal and Pipli in Odisha could not be held due to various reasons, including the death of candidates during electioneering earlier this year.

The counting of votes will take place on October 3. The EC says it has kept "much stricter" norms as a caution against the Covid-19 pandemic. The Bhabanipur bypoll will allow Mamata a chance to become a member of the state legislative assembly.

Banerjee had moved out of her traditional seat in Kolkata's Bhabanipur to fight in Nandigram during the Assembly polls earlier this year, but lost to his former close aide Suvendu Adhikari, who contested on the BJP ticket.

According to an Election Commission press note, the West Bengal Chief Secretary had urged that in view of administrative exigencies and public interest and to avoid a vacuum in the state, byelection to Bhabanipur may be conducted. Mamata has to become a member of the state legislature by November 5. AGENCIES



PM to lay foundation stones of university: UP CM

ALIGARH: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay foundation stones of a state university named after noted freedom fighter Raja Mahendra Pratap and the Aligarh node of the defence corridor on September 14, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on September 7.

Yogi Adityanath reviewed preparations for PM Modi's visit with senior officials of the district in Aligarh.

He told reporters that the prime minister would lay the foundation stone of the Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh State University, named after the noted freedom fighter who belonged to Lodha town, 40 km from the district headquarters. "This university will fulfil a long-standing demand for a state university in this region. All colleges in Aligarh division and some other adjoining districts will be affiliated to this university," the chief minister said. Yogi Adityanath, who was accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, said that the foundation stone of Aligarh node of the defence corridor would also be laid by the prime minister. The Aligarh node of the defence corridor project will initially host 19 industrial units with a total investment outlay of Rs 1500 crore. A total area of 200 acre has been acquired for this, he said, adding that this project would complement and boost the growth of lock and builders hardware industry for which Aligarh is famous all over the world. It would also provide major employment opportunities to the youth in this area, the chief minister said. AGENCIES



Rahul voices support for protesting farmers, BJP hits back

NEW DELHI: A day after thousands of farmers gathered at a mahapanchayat in Uttar Pradesh's Muzaffarnagar, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi voiced support for the protesting farmers and said they are fearless and standing resolutely.

The BJP attacked Gandhi and alleged that he was trying to fuel propaganda by tweeting an old picture "to claim success of the mahapanchayat". "Standing resolutely and fearlessly, here are the Bharat

Bhagya Vidhata", Gandhi tweeted in Hindi along with a photograph of a massive public gathering.

Gandhi used the hashtag #FarmersProtest along with his tweet. Attacking Gandhi, the BJP's Information and Technology Department head Amit Malviya tweeted, "That Rahul Gandhi has to use an old picture to claim success of the Mahapanchayat just shows how the propaganda to call it a well attended 'farmer' agitation hasn't worked." AGENCIES

Megacity Mumbai's mangroves under CCTV against encroachment

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

With space being at a premium, the megacity of Mumbai is under constant pressure and threat from illegal developers, who do not hesitate to even encroach upon the sea's beach front "mangroves" that are a nursery habitat to marine life species.

In tackling this challenge, the Maharashtra government has decided to set up a CCTV system to curb encroachments in the mangrove areas. This decision was taken at a meeting recently of office bearers of the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation of Maharashtra chaired by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray and comprising Environment Minister Aditya Thackeray, MLA Vaibhav Naik, Principal Secretary of the Environment Department Manisha Mhaikar, Principal Secretary to the Forest Department Venugopal Reddy and others.

The three-phase, Rs 35-crore project highlighted consultants emphasizing total 279 CCTV cameras being installed, including at 106 sensitive places in the Mumbai metropolitan area with Bhiwandi in the first phase, West and Central Mumbai in second, and Navi Mumbai and Thane creeks Flamingo Sanctuary in the third phase.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray urged for a large-scale public awareness campaign to save and also plant mangroves in coastal areas including nature areas being developed by the Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Thane Bay Flamingo Sanctuary and other activities that highlighted boosting tourism.

Bollywood actor JOHN ABRAHAM in +MERCY FOR ANIMALS CAMPAIGN+

Bollywood heartthrob, "Satyameva Jayate 2" Star and proud animal lover John Abraham recently appealed to the Central Government to strengthen existing Animal Protection Laws during the Monsoon Session of Parliament. The actor, who appears in a new "Mercy For Animals India" advertisement encouraging people to be kind to animals, highlights the advert's tagline which reads, "In a world where you can be anything, be nice."

"Animals deserve our love, respect, and freedom," Abraham said while adding "Through this campaign, I am giving out a message that the least one can do



to help animals is to be nice to them. I am excited to be a part of Mercy For Animals India's campaign and assure you that I have and always will stand up for animals in need." The actor - who is in the forefront

of animal protection by lending his star power to various animal welfare campaigns -- had recently urged his fans to support the fight against animal cruelty by signing a petition that will be sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"John's compassion knows no boundaries and he has always stood by animals when needed. He truly is a hero for animals," Nikunj Sharma, CEO of Mercy For Animals India, said while pointing out that the actor's recent appeal to fans to support stronger animal protection laws displayed his deep concern for animals and their rights.



Other activities highlighted in the meeting included: the MMRDA financing Rs. 10 crore for setting up a Mangrove Research and Training Center under MTHL project at Bhakti Park, Wadala; The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) signing an MOU with the Mangrove Foundation for a five-year project to study birds migratory routes along Maharashtra's coast; Mangrove and Marine Biodiversity Conservation Foundation of Maharashtra budget of Rs. 30 crore for 2021-22 and expenditure of

Rs. 25 crore for various activities implemented by mangrove foundation being approved; and a three-year extension of the NBFGR for further technical improvements in the fish hatchery at Airoli. About Rs 1.75 crore was approved for purchase of seven marine life rescue vehicles by the Sanjay Gandhi National Sanctuary for rescuing sea turtles, dolphins, while also protecting marine life in areas like Dahanu, Sanjay Gandhi National Sanctuary, Thane, Alibag, Roha, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg.

Alliance govt causing Maharashtra economic downturn: BJP

MUMBAI: BJP MLA Atul Bhatkalkar has stated that there has been a "sharp decline" in Maharashtra's GST collection and that if the alliance government continues its "ruinous administration", the state will go into "economic depression." The MLA told media at the BJP's state office recently that GST collection data for August 2021 witnessed Maharashtra's revenue "decreased" by almost Rs 3,728 crore -- as against July 2021. Describing the sharp "decline" in revenue of one of the advanced states like Maharashtra as a cause for "concern" when the GST collection of the other states had improved in August, Bhatkalkar stated that "the alliance government is responsible for the drop in GST collection of the state, which is one of the largest economies in the country."

Maharashtra readying youth for WorldSkills C'ship Shanghai 2022

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Even as job skills become crucial for survival globally in the wake of COVID-19, the Maharashtra Government is going one step forward with the Minister for Skill Development, Employment and Entrepreneurship, Nawab Malik recently announcing the state's biggest skill competition "IndiaSkills Maharashtra 2021" to prepare the youth for competing successfully in the +WorldSkills International Competition 2022+.

India had won one gold and silver medals each, two bronze and 15 Medallions of Excellence - besides ranking 13th among 63 countries -- at the WorldSkills International 2019, held in Kazan, Russia.

WorldSkills -- which is the equivalent of the Olympics in skills -- is the world championship of vocational skills and is held every two years in different parts of the world. The next edition of WorldSkills International is scheduled to be held in October 2022 in Shanghai, China in which over 60 countries are expected to participate.

Meanwhile, around 100 winners of the Maharashtra state skill competition will participate at the IndiaSkills 2021 regional competition to be held in September-

October, and later at the IndiaSkills National Competition in December 2021. The competition has been organized by the Maharashtra State Skill Development Society (MSSDS), in skill trades like: Floristry, Print Media Technology, Landscape Gardening, Industrial Control, Aircraft Maintenance, IT, Agriculture, among others.

Highlighting the Maharashtra State Skill Competition finals in 45 skill categories to be held from September 3 to 5 at multiple locations across the state, Minister Nawab Malik said that around 20,090 youth in the age group of 17-25 years from 36 districts participated in the competition, where eligible candidates from each stage would be given free training and cash prizes by the government. This year's competition witnessed a whopping 700% increase against the last state skill competition in 2018, which saw 2,400 registrations, he said.

The skills competition witnessed three rounds beginning August 17 at various district level ITIs and training centres, and second level on August 23-24 seeing 263 participants qualifying for international standards orientation and skill training - to compete for the final level finale from September 3 to 5 in Mumbai, Pune and other cities.

PLI scheme may weave success for textile sector

The recent Cabinet's approval of a Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the textile sector, which targets at the man-made fibre (MMF) and technical textiles segments, is a belated acknowledgment by the Government that the ground has inexorably shifted in the global textiles trade. A relentless shift in consumer preferences and fashion trends saw MMF surpass cotton as the fibre of choice in the 1990s, since vaulting its share in worldwide textile consumption to about 75%. India's textile and clothing exports on the other hand have continued to remain dominated by cotton and other natural fibre-based products, with MMF having contributed less than 30% of the country's \$35.6 billion in overall sectoral exports in 2017-18. And MMF's share remained relatively unchanged in the last fiscal as well when the sectoral exports were about \$33 billion. While policy makers have been cognisant of the need to bolster support for the MMF segment, the task of crafting a meaningful initiative that would engender enhanced investment in capacity creation, leading to increased exports, has been a while in coming. Wednesday's decision on the focused PLI scheme, with a budgeted outlay of Rs 10,683 crore, is the second time in 11 months that the Cabinet has approved what is broadly the same plan, with the Government using the intervening period to incorporate amendments to the incentive structure based on industry feedback. The aim of the scheme is to focus investment attention on 40 MMF apparel product lines, 14 MMF fabric lines and 10 segments or products of technical textiles. The scheme's operational success is likely to hinge on how new entrepreneurs and existing companies weigh the risk-reward equation, especially at a time when the pandemic-spurred uncertainty has already made private businesses leery of making fresh capital expenditure.

FIVE OBSERVATIONS
NOW DEADLY NIPAH VIRUS ASCERTAINED IN KERALA

- 1 SURGE IN COVID CASES**
The state, solely accounting for over 50 per cent of the country's Covid-19 caseload for the past few weeks, is already struggling to contain the surge of coronavirus cases.
- 2 CHALLENGING**
Now, it also has the unenviable challenge of another health catastrophe that looms if strict preventive measures are not followed.
- 3 NO CURE**
Given that the fatality rate of Nipah-infected patients is a steep 70 per cent, and there is no cure yet, it is essential that the spread of the virus is nipped in the bud.
- 4 NIPAH RO**
The fact that Nipah is mainly a localised outbreak and, with a reproductive rate (RO) of 0.48, less transmissible (than Covid), contributes to a more effective containment strategy.
- 5 MANY CASES WITH INFECTION**
In the previous year, when Kerala had been struck by this virus, it had suffered a loss of 17 lives out of the 18 cases of infection. It had then equipped itself with a better response for future.

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HARSH V. PANT HIGHLIGHTS EMERGING CONSENSUS ON NEED TO FUNDAMENTALLY REASSESS ASSUMPTIONS

The changing security discourse

The global security landscape is undergoing a churn, creating complexities and new realities unlike any time in the recent past. From a rising China to the pressures of climate change; from the challenges of counter terrorism to a seemingly never-ending COVID-19 pandemic (the four Cs), the old order is collapsing much faster than the ability of nations to create the foundations of a new one. National security debates and discourse are, quietly but surely, undergoing an almost revolutionary transformation. While the academic world has long talked about the need for a 'holistic' conception of national security, much of that debate was considered far too esoteric by practitioners. Today, it is the policymakers and practitioners themselves that are leading the emerging consensus on the need to fundamentally reassess our assumptions about national security thinking.

Change in the U.S.
The U.S. policymakers have started changing their cognitive lens when it comes to national security policy making. A process that was started by former U.S. President Donald Trump has been taken forward with gusto by the Biden Administration. Asserting that "foreign policy is domestic policy and domestic policy is foreign policy," U.S. President Joe Biden's National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has suggested that his team's task is to re-imagine American "national security for the unprecedented combination of crises we face at home and abroad: the pandemic, the economic crisis, the climate crisis, technological disruption, threats to democracy, racial injustice, and inequality in all forms". He has gone on to argue that "the alliances we rebuild, the institutions we lead, the agreements we sign, all of them should be judged by a basic question. Will this make life better, easier, safer, for working families across this country?"
The U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, too has reiterated this message



in his comments that "more than at any other time in my career — maybe in my lifetime — distinctions between domestic and foreign policy have simply fallen away" and that "our domestic renewal and our strength in the world are completely entwined, and how we work will reflect that reality".

Both Sullivan and Blinken have taken their cue from their boss, President Biden, who had campaigned on a "foreign policy for the middle-class" and has been unabashed about the need for the U.S. "to invest in our people, sharpen our innovative edge, and unite the economic might of democracies around the world to grow the middle-class and reduce inequality and do things like counter the predatory trade practices of our competitors and adversaries".

There is a growing bipartisan acknowledgement in the U.S. today that if the requirements of American national security during the Cold War could be largely met by its fleets of bombers, nuclear missiles, aircraft carriers and overseas bases, today's strategic environment requires a different response: one that shores up domestic industrial base, helps in maintaining pre-eminence in critical technologies, makes supply chains for critical goods more resilient, protects critical infrastructure from

cyberattacks, and responds with a sense of urgency to climate change.

Not a novel idea
The idea that foreign and domestic policies are tightly intertwined is not a novel one. All serious grand strategic thinking in democracies, at the end of the day looks for sustenance in popular public support. Trump's rise and his ideas challenged both the liberals and the conservatives in the U.S. foreign policy establishment as they underscored the widening gulf between the policy community and the American hinterland. Biden and his team have learned their lessons. Sullivan is working towards integrating the National Security Council with the other components of the White House such as the National Economic Council, with the Domestic Policy Council, with the Office of Science and Technology Policy. This will inevitably present its own sets of challenges but there is no shying away from this new reality.

The Indian situation
In India too, we have seen a greater recognition of the challenges emanating on national security from domestic vulnerabilities. One of the most significant consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, has been to reveal how deeply India has been dependent on Chinese manufacturing for critical supplies. At a time when Indian armed forces were facing the People's Liberation Army across the Line of Actual Line, this exposed India to a new realisation that dependence on overseas supply chains is a national security challenge of the highest order, one that cannot be overlooked any more. India has since moved towards shoring up domestic capacities in critical areas and also started looking at free trade agreements through a new lens.
The Indian Army chief, General M.M. Naravane, in his remarks, has also made it apparent that views of the military leader-

ship in this country are also evolving. He has argued that "national security comprises not only warfare and defence but also financial security, health security, food security, energy security and environment security apart from information security" and suggested that instead of viewing national security "primarily from the perspective of an armed conflict, there is a need to take a whole-of-government approach towards security".

Highlight the synergies
In the post-pandemic world with a serious strain on national resources, it will be important for policymakers to underline the synergies between the civilian and the military spheres. The Army chief has rightfully pointed out a range of tangible and intangible ways in which investment in the armed forces contributes to the national economy such as indigenisation of defence procurement, providing an impetus to indigenous industries, aid to civil authorities or Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations protecting infrastructure, demand for hi-tech military products by the armed forces spurring entire industries, and transportation and logistics capacities of the armed forces acting as force enablers for the Government in times of emergencies.
The Army leadership has done well to highlight the role of armed forces in sustaining a broader conception of national security than primarily focusing on war fighting. As nations across the world reconceptualise their strategic priorities to bring their ends, ways and means into greater balance, questions of resource allocation will become even more contentious and policymakers will need to think more creatively about the roles of various instruments of statecraft. National security thinking is undergoing a shift. India cannot be left behind.

Harsh V. Pant is Director of Research, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi and a Professor of International Relations, King's College London. Views are personal



PRITAM SINGH EXPLORES HOW GREEN HYDROGEN MAY ACT AS AN ALTERNATIVE, TRULY CLEAN FUEL

A new ally for a zero-carbon future in making

Scientists and technocrats have for years been engaged in the quest of discovering alternative fuels to fossil fuels which are responsible for the production of over 830 million tons per annum of carbon dioxide, in turn catalysing human-induced global heating. The latest studies by a battery of scientists representing about 195 countries have signalled the crucial issue of climate vulnerability, especially for the Asian countries. The forthcoming 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow from November 1-12, 2021 is to re-examine the coordinated action plans to mitigate greenhouse gases and climate adaptation measures.
In order to achieve the goal of an alternative source of energy, governments are placing large bets in the hope of adopting a multi-faceted practical approach to utilise 'Green hydrogen' as a driving source to power our industries and light our homes with the 'zero emission' of carbon dioxide.

Energy-rich source
Hydrogen is the most abundant element on the planet, but rarely in its pure form which is how we need it. It has an energy density almost three times that of diesel. This phenomenon makes it a rich source of energy, but the challenge is to compress or liquify the LH2 (liquid hydrogen); it needs to be kept at a stable minus 253°C (far below the temperature of minus 163°C at which Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is stored; entailing its 'prior to use



exorbitant cost'.
The production techniques of this 'Energy-Carrier' vary depending upon its applications — designated with different colours such as black hydrogen, brown hydrogen, blue hydrogen, green hydrogen, etc. Black hydrogen is produced by use of fossil fuel, whereas pink hydrogen is produced through electrolysis, but using energy from nuclear power sources.
'Green hydrogen', the emerging novel concept, is a zero-carbon fuel made by electrolysis using renewable power from wind and solar to split water into hydrogen and oxygen. This 'Green hydrogen' can be utilised for the generation of power from natural sources — wind or solar systems — and will be a major step forward in achieving the target of 'net zero' emission. Presently, less than 0.1% or say ~75 million tons/year of hydrogen capable of generating ~284GW of power, is produced.

The obstacle of cost
The 'production cost' of 'Green hydrogen' has been considered to be a prime obstacle. According to studies by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IREA), the production cost of this 'green source of energy' is expected to be around \$1.5 per kilogram (for nations having perpetual sunshine and vast unused land), by the year 2030; by adopting various conservative measures.
The global population is growing at a rate of 1.1%, adding about 83 million human heads every year on the planet. As a result, the International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts the additional power demand to be to the tune of 25%-30% by the year 2040. Thus, power generation by 'net-zero' emission will be the best solution to achieve the target of expert guidelines on global warming to remain under 1.5°C. This will also be a leap forward in minimising our dependence on conventional fossil fuel; in 2018, 8.7 million people died prematurely as result of air pollution from fossil fuels.
A power hungry India
India is the world's fourth largest energy consuming country (behind China, the United States and the European Union), according to the IEA's forecast, and will overtake the European Union to become the world's third energy consumer by the year 2030. Realising the impending threats to economies, the Summit will see several innovative proposals from over

the world in order to reduce dependence on use of fossil fuels.
The scale of interest for 'plucking the low hanging fruit' can be gauged by the fact that even oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia where the day temperature soars to over 50° C in summer, is prioritising plans to manufacture this source of energy by utilising 'idle-land-banks' for solar and wind energy generation. It is working to establish a mega \$5 billion 'Green hydrogen' manufacturing unit covering a land-size as large as that of Belgium, in the northern-western part of the country.
India is also gradually unveiling its plans. The Indian Railways have announced the country's first experiment of a hydrogen-fuel cell technology-based train by retrofitting an existing diesel engine; this will run under Northern Railway on the 89 km stretch between Sonepat and Jind. The project will not only ensure diesel savings to the tune of several lakhs annually but will also prevent the emission of 0.72 kilo tons of particulate matter and 11.12 kilo tons of carbon per annum.
It is high time to catch up with the rest of the world by going in for clean energy, decarbonising the economy and adopting 'Green hydrogen' as an environmentally friendly and safe fuel for the next generations.
Pritam Singh is a retired Officer from an R&D institution in Dehradun. He delivers scientific lectures in colleges and universities on vehicular pollution. Views are personal

BOOKS: REVIEW

Father's death during isolation toughens Siraj

Mohammed Siraj is a beautiful story that can always invoke an entire gamut of emotions — sadness for the tragedies he has endured, thrill for the way he is attaining mastery over his craft and joy for his success at the highest level.
A match-haul of eight wickets at Lord's recently was a testimony that success Down Under earlier this year wasn't a mere flash in the pan and the Indian cricket team's most adorable "miyaan" is here to stay for some years.
Siraj is one of the multiple stories of grit and glory chronicled in a new book on Indian cricket — 'Mission Domination: An Unfinished Quest' — co-authored by Boria Majumdar and senior PTI sports journalist Kushan Sarkar.
The book has been published by Simon & Schuster.

The manner in which Siraj scythed through the lower-order with two sets of double breakthroughs just when it seemed the match was meandering to a draw, not only spoke volumes about his high skill-sets but also gave a peek into his mental fortitude in pressure situation.
This Indian team management always knew that Siraj is cut out for the big league having watched him from close quarters during the tour of Australia, when he lost his father Mohammed Ghaus, who died after a brief illness.
An excerpt from the new book reads: "Siraj had lost his father during the statutory period of 14 days hard quarantine in Australia in November. What this meant was that none of his teammates could even go to his room to give him a shoulder to cry on. At the time there were cops outside every

At the time there were cops outside every room just in case the Indians tried to violate protocol. They were being guarded as prisoners who could export Covid to Australia!
room just in case the Indians tried to violate protocol. They were being guarded as prisoners who could export Covid to Australia!"
"As a result, his teammates were on video calls with him all day and were concerned he wouldn't do something drastic or damaging to himself. Only the physio could go to his room to treat him, and Nitin Patel used the window to go and console the young man who was in mourning."
"Siraj broke down on multiple occasions, which is only natural but never gave up. He was steadfast and resolute. He wanted to fulfil his father's wish of doing his best for India and when the opportunity came his way at the MCG on the huge occasion of the Boxing Day Test, he just did not want to let it go."
Before his Test debut on the Boxing Day, Siraj had played a few white ball games for India without much success and wanted to make it count.
"In fact, he said to us he was abusing himself for failing and coaxed himself to push harder on debut. I was telling myself that I had done nothing worthwhile in the white ball games. And here are the same batsmen Travis Head and



Mission Domination: An Unfinished Quest
By Boria Majumdar & Kushan Sarkar
S&S India
173 pages; Rs339

Marnus Labuschagne, who I had bowled to and had success against while playing for India A. Then why couldn't I do so at this stage? I had to. There was no turning back'.
The 13 wickets in Australia earned Siraj overnight stardom.
"Siraj did not turn back. 13 wickets later he ended up as India's highest wicket-taker. It was only fitting that his teammates handed him the tricolour during the team's victory march. He was so much more than a cricketer. He was a young boy who had turned into a man in the course of the two months in Australia."
The book also has anecdotes on how Rishabh Pant and Navdeep Saini performed in the most hostile confines of Delhi District & Cricket Association and how Dinesh Lad convinced a teen-aged Shardul Thakur's father to allow him to come to Mumbai to give himself a fair shot at top flight cricket.
Arvind Pujara spoke at length about how his son Cheteshwar went and played an U-19 match days after his mother's death, without shedding a drop of tear.

NEWS BRIEF

Chip shortage could derail PV sales, warn auto dealers

NEW DELHI: Automobile dealers' body Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) expressed concern that the chip shortage issue could derail passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales during the festive season...

SEBI unveils T+1 settlement cycle on optional basis

NEW DELHI: Capital markets regulator SEBI introduced T+1 settlement cycle for completion of share transactions on optional basis...

Maruti Suzuki hikes vehicle prices by up to 1.9 per cent

NEW DELHI: The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said it had increased prices of its entire product range, except Celerio, by up to 1.9 per cent with immediate effect...

Telecom relief package may provide 4-year moratorium on AGR

NEW DELHI: The much-awaited relief package for the telecom sector may bring about a moratorium of around four years on the payment of Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR).

The moratorium may also be applicable on spectrum payments, sources said. The measures, if implemented, would be most beneficial for debt-ridden Vodafone Idea...

The government has been in talks with several stakeholders, including banks, for a package for the sector amid the concerns of a possible duopoly in the Indian telecom sector...

People in the know said that the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has proposed the measures along with lowering of spectrum usage charge (SUC) which has been a long standing demand...

Dabur billionaire says SPAC mergers are here to stay

NEW DELHI: Gaurav Burman, who hails from a billionaire Indian consumer-goods family, says the boom in blank-check company mergers may have eased...

"Obviously, there are a lot of SPACs out there looking for deals, and there've been some public and visible retreats," Burman, 49, said in an interview. But "sponsors that have a lot of credibility" will "be able to separate themselves from the pack."

There are 578 active special purpose acquisition companies, with a combined capital of about \$172 billion, according to the website SPACResearch.com. But the market for SPAC mergers has cooled and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission has stepped up scrutiny of them...

Jupiter Acquisition, a SPAC co-founded by Burman, listed on the Nasdaq last month. While Burman acknowledges that he's coming late to the party, he says his team is looking to build a long-term business, rather than just achieve a quick share-price pop.

Future-Reliance deal: SC stays proceedings in Delhi HC

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court stayed all the proceedings before the Delhi High Court for four weeks related to implementation of an award by Singapore's Emergency Arbitrator (EA) restraining Future Retail Ltd (FRL) from going ahead with Rs 24,731 crore merger deal with Reliance Retail.

A bench headed by Chief Justice N V Ramana, in a consent order, also directed the statutory authorities like National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Competition



the definition of AGR to exclude non-telecom items from its coverage, in a prospective manner.

Some of the relief measures were expected to be approved by the Union Cabinet on Wednesday. However, no decisions were taken on the same.

Official sources said that the government is of the view that competition must prevail in

the sector and any chances of a duopoly should be averted.

Last week, Vodafone Idea's former Chairman, Kumar Mangalam Birla met Union Communications Minister Ashwini Vaishnav. During the meeting on September 1, Birla and Vaishnav discussed about the health of the sector and the urgent need for government intervention.

On August 4, the board

of Vodafone Idea accepted the request of Birla to step down as the Non-Executive Director and Non-Executive Chairman of the Board. Days before Birla's resignation as the Chairman, it became public that he had written to the government that he is willing to hand over his stake in the debt-ridden company to government entities in a bid to keep the company operational.

In a letter to Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba on June 7, Birla said that, with a "sense of duty" towards 27 crore Indians connected with Vodafone Idea, he is willing to hand over his stake to public Sector Unit (PSU), a government entity or any domestic financial entity, or any other entity that the government may consider worthy of keeping the company as a going concern.

In the letter, Birla sought clarity on adjusted gross revenue (AGR), adequate moratorium on spectrum dues and floor pricing, adding that without immediate and active government support, VIL's operations will be at an "irretrievable point of collapse".

AGENCIES

Mukesh Ambani races toward world's exclusive \$100 billion wealth club

AT THE SAME TIME, SAUDI ARAMCO IS LOOKING TO ACQUIRE A STAKE IN RELIANCE'S OIL REFINING BUSINESS IN A DEAL SAID TO BE WORTH AS MUCH AS \$25 BILLION

NEW DELHI: Mukesh Ambani added \$3.7 billion to his net worth on September 8 as shares of his flagship company surged after the tycoon doubled down on his clean-energy goals. Asia's wealthiest person is now worth \$92.6 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. The tycoon is closing in on L'Oreal's Francoise Bettencourt Meyers at \$92.9 billion, as both move closer to a rarefied group of men with fortunes of \$100 billion.

Ambani's jump was due to a surge in the shares of his Reliance Industries after he said the company will "aggressively" pursue production of cheaper green hydrogen.

Known for disrupting businesses he enters, Amba-



ni's telecommunications unit has become the dominant player in the Indian market while his digital operation has expanded with backing from investors including Facebook Inc. At the same time, Saudi Aramco is looking to acquire a stake in Reliance's oil refining business in a deal said to be worth as much as \$25 billion.

Ambani this year unveiled

an ambitious plan to invest \$10 billion in clean energy, marking a new pivot for India's most valuable company. The goal aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitions to combat climate change and slash imports into the world's third-biggest oil consumer.

Reliance shares surged 4.1 per cent to a record in Mumbai. AGENCIES

Ford Motor to shut down both its manufacturing plants in India

NEW DELHI: US auto major Ford Motor Co will shut its two manufacturing plants in India and will sell only imported vehicles in the country as part of a restructuring exercise, according to people aware of the development.

The company, which invested about USD 2.5 billion at its Chennai (Tamil Nadu) and Sanand (Gujarat) plants, will stop selling vehicles such as the EcoSport, Figo and Aspire which are produced from these plants.

Going ahead, it would only sell imported vehicles like Mustang in the country.

"This is a restructuring decision, where the company will shift to imported vehicles," said a person in the know of the development.

A formal announcement by the company is expected soon. Ford has been struggling



for years to make a mark in India's automotive market. Ford India has an installed manufacturing capacity of 6,10,000 engines and 4,40,000 vehicles a year. It also exported its models such as Figo, Aspire, and EcoSport to over 70 markets around the world.

In January this year, Ford Motor Co and Mahindra & Mahindra had decided to scrap their previously an-

nounced automotive joint venture and instead chose to continue independent operations in India.

In October 2019, the two companies had announced an agreement under which Mahindra & Mahindra would acquire a majority stake in a wholly-owned arm of Ford Motor Co (FMC) that will take over the automotive business of the US auto major in India. AGENCIES

Jio completes five years of operations

NEW DELHI: From Google India to Zomato, and Netflix to Paytm — the who's who of the tech world lined up to congratulate a company's five years of operations.

No surprise, they have been a beneficiary of the data revolution that Reliance Jio brought with its dirt cheap rates.

Data usage in India has zoomed 1,300 per cent and the number of broadband users grew four times since September 5, 2016, when billionaire Mukesh Ambani marked re-entry into the telecom space with Jio.

While HDFC said "saruthake jeena koi tumse seekhe", Hotstar said: "From asking 'What's the score?' to watching it LIVE, cheers to #5YearsOfJio."

Google, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, PhonePe, Apollo Hospitals, Ashok Leyland, Tinder India, Voot, Zee5, Samsung India, Vivo, Oppo, Dominos India, and Sony Liv were among the lot that took to Twitter to congratulate Jio on its 5th anniversary.

While Mi India said "5 years of fueling the Internet revolution in India", Nokia said "kudos to your commitment on keeping India connected."

"Tum jio karodo saal! (May you live billion years)," said India's biggest digital wallet firm Paytm.

E-learning platform Unacademy said, "Here's to helping India learn and grow digitally!"

Online food ordering app Zomato, which had in its IPO prospectus mentioned of the digital connect that Jio created, said, "Birthdays cake is on its way!" "It's #5YearsOfJio kicking off the mobile internet revolution in India," Micromax said.

Jio's entry disrupted the Indian telecom market, forcing rivals to match its dirt cheap rates. AGENCIES

Future seeks early hearing of appeal against Amazon over merger deal: Report

NEW DELHI: Future Retail Ltd (FRL) urged the Supreme Court for an early hearing of its appeal against the Delhi High Court order. The order was related to the implementation of its earlier direction restraining FRL from going ahead with its merger deal with Reliance Retail.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India, NV Ramana said it will look into the file and will give a date of hearing, after senior advocates Harish Salve and Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for FRL, requested for early hearing of the appeal. The lawyers said that the High Court would go ahead with the enforcement of Singapore's Emergency



Arbitrator (EA) award in case stay is not granted in its favour by the top court. They contended that FRL's appeal will be heard on September 9 as the matter before the High Court is listed for hearing on

September 16. On August 17, the High Court said that it would implement the earlier order of the single-judge bench issued on March 18 that restrained FRL from going ahead with the merger. The statement came while hearing the plea of US-based e-commerce giant Amazon, seeking enforcement of the award by EA restraining FRL from going ahead with the deal.

Further, it said that in the absence of any stay from the top court, it has no option but to enforce the order passed by its single judge. The FRL then moved the top court against the order issued on August 17. AGENCIES

Byju's to raise \$400- \$600 million ahead of IPO amid booming tech sector

NEW DELHI: India's most valuable startup, the online education provider Byju's, is in talks to raise between \$400 million to \$600 million and then accelerate plans for an initial public offering next year, according to people familiar with the matter. The Bangalore-headquartered company could close the pre-IPO fundraising in a few weeks at a valuation of about \$21 billion, said one of the people, asking not to be named because the details are private. The fundraising is likely to be split roughly evenly between equity and debt.



its financial year in March, two of the people said. It had previously looked at a timeline of 12 to 24 months. The startup and its bankers are discussing a valuation of \$40 billion to \$50 billion, although the final determination will depend on fi-

nancial results and investor demand, the people said.

Among the banks in the talks are Morgan Stanley, Citigroup Inc. and JPMorgan Chase & Co., one of the people said. The same banks are involved in the current fundraising.

Investment bankers have also pitched alternatives such as an IPO in the U.S. or a merger with a special purpose acquisition company, or SPAC, but those options are less likely than a listing in India, two of the people said.

India's technology sector has soared this year, with IPO fundraisings on track to reach record levels. Venture capital firms have also stepped up their investments in the country, driven in part by a Communist Party crackdown in China that has made that market less hospitable.

Byju's was valued at \$16.5 billion after raising about \$150 million from UBS Group AG, Bloomberg News reported in April. That puts it just ahead of the second-most valuable startup in the country, digital payments

provider Paytm, according to the market research firm CB Insights. Paytm has, meanwhile, filed its initial document for what could be India's largest IPO to date at \$2.2 billion.

Byju's has the potential to become a global leader in education technology, especially because Beijing's recent reforms put severe restrictions on similar startups in China, one person said. That has drawn high levels of investor interest and suggests the new target valuation of \$21 billion is achievable, the person said.

The online education startup, formally called Think & Learn, has prominent global investors including Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative, Naspers, Tiger Global Management

and private equity giant Silver Lake Management.

In a recent conversation with Bloomberg News, founder Mr Raveendran said the startup is targeting 100 billion (\$1.4 billion) in revenue in the year ending March 2022, with a 20 per cent margin. Byju's has been on an acquisition binge in the past year, acquiring startups offering coding lessons, professional learning courses and test prep classes for competitive Indian exams.

The company added 45 million students to its platform as the pandemic peaked in India last year and said in July it has more than 100 million users on the app. Some 6.5 million are paid subscribers and its annual renewal rate is 86 per cent. AGENCIES

PayPal heats up buy now, pay later race with \$2.7-billion Japan deal

NEW DELHI: U.S. payments giant PayPal Holdings Inc said it would acquire Japanese buy now, pay later (BNPL) firm Paidy in a \$2.7 billion largely cash deal, taking another step to claim the top spot in an industry witnessing a pandemic-fueled boom.

The deal tracks rival Square Inc's agreement last month to buy Australian BNPL success story Afterpay Ltd for \$29 billion, which experts said was likely the beginning of a consolidation in the sector. The BNPL business model has been hugely successful during the pandemic, fuelled by federal stimulus checks, and upended consumer credit markets.

These alternative credit firms make money by charging merchants a fee to offer small point-of-sale loans which shoppers

repay in interest-free instalments, bypassing credit checks. Heavyweights like Apple Inc and Goldman Sachs are the latest heavyweights that have been reported to be readying a version of the service.

Paypal, already considered a leader in the BNPL market, also entered Australia last year, raising the stakes for smaller companies such as Sezzle Inc and ZIPAX Co Ltd, stocks of which were down in midday trading on Wednesday. "The acquisition will expand PayPal's capabilities, distribution and relevance in the domestic payments market in Japan, the third largest e-commerce market in the world, complementing the company's existing cross-border e-commerce business in the country," PayPal said in a statement. AGENCIES

ALSO READ | SHOOTER AVANI FIRST INDIAN WOMAN TO WIN GOLD IN PARALYMPICS * P8 | FARAH KHAN TESTS CORONA POSITIVE * P8

El Salvador becomes first country to adopt Bitcoin as national currency

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador's historic adoption of bitcoin as legal tender on September 7 was beset by teething problems, as an angry protest by mistrustful citizens, technological glitches and a dip in the cryptocurrency clouded the rollout.

The bold experiment got off to a bumpy start when shortly after midnight, the Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele complained the government-backed bitcoin app was not available on various internet platforms including Apple and Huawei.



Bukele used his Twitter account to press online stores to stock the app, or digital wallet, known as Chivo, and Huawei later began making it available. But when the app proved unable to cope with user registrations, the government unplugged it in order to connect to more servers and increase capacity. Still, as the app began appearing on more platforms, Bukele was by afternoon retweeting videos posted on social media with people making payments using bitcoin at retailers in El Salvador including McDonald's Corp and Starbucks Corp.

"El Salvador is taking a great step forward today," said Carlos Garcia, who went to a booth at a San Salvador shopping mall giving out advice on how the new currency would work. Starbucks El Salvador unit said it was accepting bitcoin for purchases at its restaurants, drive-through facilities or to go. Promising \$30 of bitcoin for each user, Bukele has pushed for its adoption, saying it will help Salvadorans save \$400 million a year on commissions for remittances, while giving access to financial services to people with no bank

account. "We must break the paradigms of the past," Bukele tweeted. "El Salvador has the right to advance towards the first world." Bukele, 40, is one of the most popular presidents in the Americas, but has been accused of eroding democracy. Opinion polls showed Salvadorans are skeptical about using bitcoin, fearing its volatility and unsure of how it will work. More than 1,000 people held a protest in San Salvador on Tuesday against the adoption of bitcoin, burning a tire and setting off fireworks in front of the Supreme Court. As the currency's price wobbled, the government purchased an additional 150 bitcoins on September 7, worth around \$7 million. Still, the poorest may struggle to access the technology needed to make bitcoin work in El Salvador, where nearly half the population has no internet access and many more only have spotty connectivity. "I'm going to continue suffering with or without bitcoin," said sweets seller Jose Herrera, who said he had trouble accessing a mobile phone. Some say the adoption of bitcoin may fuel illicit transactions and financial instability. It has already muddied the outlook for more than \$1 billion in financing that El Salvador is seeking from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Ahead of the launch, El Salvador bought 400 bitcoins worth around \$20 million, Bukele said, helping drive its price above \$52,000 for the first time since May. Hours later, bitcoin had weakened and last traded down 0.51 per cent at \$46,561.74. Ethereum, another crypto currency, fell 0.32 per cent to \$3,404.05, while crypto exchange Coinbase Global slid 4.18 per cent after reporting delays in some transactions on its platform. The change means businesses should accept payment in bitcoin alongside the U.S dollar, which has been El Salvador's official currency since 2001 and will remain legal tender. It remains unclear whether businesses will be penalized if they do not accept bitcoin. In the run-up to the launch, the government installed ATMs that allow bitcoin to be converted into dollars and withdrawn without commission from the digital wallet Chivo. Bukele blamed Apple Inc, Alphabet Inc's Google and Huawei's app download platforms for the initial Chivo delay. "Release him! @Apple @Google and @Huawei," Mr Bukele wrote in a tweet, which was accompanied by a red-faced "angry" emoji. The wallet was later available from Huawei and Apple. A spokesman for Huawei said the company's platform showed less than a thousand installations. **AGENCIES**

ICICI Bank allows customers to pay credit card dues via iMobile Pay app

NEW DELHI: ICICI Bank on September 6 announced that it has enabled its savings account holders to pay and manage dues of credit cards of any bank instantly using the lender's mobile application 'iMobile Pay'. The private lender in a release stated that "customers can add credit cards of any bank to the app within a few seconds and thereafter pay and manage their dues from the same app." The new facility offers improved convenience to customers, who typically use multiple credit cards, by providing them a one-stop solution for managing all their cards with ease, ICICI Bank added.



Lenders usually come up with fresh initiatives before the arrival of festive season every year. For instance, State Bank of India (SBI) is offering EMI or equated monthly instalment facility to its debit card holders. The new ICICI Bank facility offers improved convenience to customers, who typically use multiple credit cards, by providing them a one-stop solution for managing all their cards with ease, the lender said. Some of the other benefits offered by the bank included setting of bill payment reminders, viewing payment history of all cards, sharing payment confirmation through WhatsApp, and managing/changing due dates as per the billing cycle. Bijith Bhaskar, Head - Digital Channels & Partnership said, "With a large section of customers using multiple cards for their various needs, this new solution aims to help them decongest the process of their credit card bill payments. It offers them the convenience of a one-stop payment solution for all their credit cards on one platform, and saves them the hassle of

juggling between multiple portals for payments." Here's how customers can avail the facility:
 Login to iMobile Pay and select 'Cards and Forex' section
 Go to 'Other Bank Credit Card'
 Tap on 'Add a card' and enter the required details
 Authenticate the OTP (one time password) sent on the registered mobile number and card will be added instantly
 Once the card is added, it can be viewed and managed under the 'Other Bank Credit Card' tab
 Meanwhile, ICICI Bank shares settled 0.50% lower on September 6. **AGENCIES**

NEWS BRIEF

FII may be allowed to buy up to 20% in LIC

NEW DELHI: The government is considering allowing foreign institutional investors (FIIs) to buy up to a total of 20% stake in state-owned Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), a government source said, as it presses ahead with a stake sale. The listing of LIC is set to be India's biggest ever IPO, with the government aiming to raise up to \$12.2 billion from its stake sale. At present, even though FIIs are allowed to hold up to 74% of private insurance companies and up to 20% of state-owned banks, they are not permitted to own shares in LIC. Enabling this would allow foreign pension funds, insurers and mutual funds to participate in the IPO of India's largest life insurer. 10 bankers appointed for managing IPO. The government has appointed 10 merchant bankers including Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities India to manage the mega IPO of LIC. Other selected bankers include SBI Capital Market, JM Financial, Axis Capital, BofA Securities, JP Morgan India, ICICI Securities, and Kotak Mahindra Capital Co Ltd. **AGENCIES**

Cairn accepts \$1-bn refund offer, to drop cases against India: CEO

MUMBAI: UK-based Cairn Energy PLC said it will drop litigations to seize Indian properties in countries ranging from France to the US, within a couple of days of getting a \$1-billion refund resulting from the scrapping of a retrospective tax law. The firm termed "bold" the legislation passed last month to cancel a 2012 policy that gave the tax department power to go back 50 years and slap capital gains levies wherever ownership had changed hands overseas but business assets were in India. The offer to return money seized to enforce retrospective tax demand in lieu of dropping all litigations against the government "is acceptable to us," Cairn CEO Simon Thomson said in an interview from London. Cairn will drop cases to seize diplomatic apartments in Paris and Air India airplanes in the US in "a matter of a couple of days" after the refund, he said adding Cairn's shareholders are in agreement with accepting the offer and moving on. "Some of our core shareholders likes BlackRock and Franklin Templeton agree (to this). Our view is supported by our core shareholders (that) on balance it is better to accept and move on and be pragmatic. Rather than continue with something negative for all parties which could last for many years," he said. Seeking to repair India's damaged reputation as an investment destination, the government last month enacted new legislation to drop Rs 1.1 lakh crore in outstanding claims against multinationals such as telecom group Vodafone, pharmaceuticals company Sanofi and brewer SAB-Miller, now owned by AB InBev, and Cairn. About Rs 8,100 crore collected from companies under the scrapped tax provision are to be refunded if the firms agree to drop litigations, including claims for interest and penalties. Of this, Rs 7,900 crore is due only to Cairn. **PTI**

NEWS DELHI: Kotak Mahindra Bank has reduced interest rates on home loans to an all-time low of 6.50 per cent per annum for a limited festive season offer, which will begin from September 10 and will continue till November 8, 2021. With this, the private lender has reduced the interest rate by a further 15 basis points (bps) from 6.65 per cent to 6.50 per cent per annum. In a statement on September 9, Kotak Mahindra Bank said that the interest rate is applicable on both fresh home loans as well as balance transfer loans and that it is available across all loans amounts and is linked to the borrower's credit profile. The rates are applicable for both the salaried and self-employed customer segments. Uday Kotak, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Kotak Mahindra Bank informed in a tweet today that the bank will offer home loans at an interest rate of 6.50 per cent for the limited period in the festive season. Additionally, with Kotak Digi home loans, home loan applicants can now apply for and receive an instant in-prin-

Kotak Mahindra Bank cuts home loan interest rates to 6.5%

NEWS DELHI: As many as 1.19 crore income tax returns (ITRs) for the current fiscal 2021-22 have been filed so far and more than 8.83 crore unique taxpayers have logged in to the income tax portal till September 7, said the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) - the apex body which heads the Income Tax (I-T) department. In a statement on September 7, September 8, the Income Tax department highlighted that a number of technical issues on the new ITR portal are being progressively addressed, to resolve any grievances at the earliest. The I-T department added that the daily average of taxpayers logging into the portal has increased to 15.55 lakh in September 2021 and the daily average of returns on income filed for the current fiscal has increased to 3.2 lakh. More than 76.2 lakh taxpayers have used the online utility of the portal to file the returns, according to the Central Board of Direct Taxes. An average of 8,285 notices for the e-proceedings are being issued and as many as 5,889 responses were filed this month on a daily basis. More than 10.60 lakh statu-



"We are delighted to add to the festive cheer for millions of home buyers and help make their dream of owning their ideal home a reality. As the world has changed and we are spending more time at home, our lifestyles have also evolved" end completely digital, contactless, and paperless process. "We are delighted to add to the festive cheer for millions of home buyers and help make their dream of owning their ideal home a reality. As the world has changed and we are spending more time at home, our lifestyles have also evolved" principle sanction letter along with their loan amount eligibility, interest rate, the tenure of the loan, and EMI in an end-to-

forms were submitted, including 7.86 lakh TDS statements, among other such documents. The Aadhaar-PAN linking has been done by around 66.44 lakh taxpayers, according to the government statement. In 2019, software major Infosys was given a contract to develop the new income tax e-filing portal - www.incometax.gov.in, which was launched on June 7, 2021. Taxpayers reported glitches and technical difficulties since the day of the portal's launch. Last month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman summoned Infosys CEO Salil Parekh over the technical glitches that continue to plague the portal. The finance minister has given time till September 15 for resolving all issues. **AGENCIES**

1.19 crore ITRs filed for current fiscal, daily average at 3.2 lakh

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HDFC Bank to provide credit support to MSMEs

NEWS DELHI: The country's largest private lender - HDFC Bank has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the National Small Industries Corporation or NSIC to provide credit support to MSMEs across the country, according to a statement shared by the bank of September 7. As part of the financial arrangement, HDFC Bank will provide a set of specially tailored schemes for the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Various branches of HDFC Bank will extend support to the MSME projects in the areas where they are located, or at other important industrial sectors across the country. HDFC Bank will accept the loan ap-



plications forwarded by NSIC and will consider sanctioning loans on a merit basis and as per the lending norms in its lending policy. The bank will be involved in

"We believe this partnership with NSIC will help expedite the MSME sector growth which is the backbone of the country both in terms of economic development and job creation" financing projects related to the MSME sector at different places where its branches are located across the country. "As a bank we are happy to be part of this big initiative to reboot and give required fil-

Govt mulling foreign institutional investment in LIC

NEWS DELHI: The government is considering allowing foreign institutional investment (FII) of up to 20 per cent in Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), according to a government source. The listing of LIC is set to be India's biggest ever IPO, with the government aiming to raise up to Rs 90,000 crore from its stake sale. The Union Cabinet had recently approved the disinvestment of equity in LIC and the process is on to appoint merchant bankers to launch the IPO. The government has for the second time invited bids from law firms to advise it on the mega initial public offering of LIC. A panel headed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will de-



cide on the size of the share sale. For LIC's IPO, the Centre had amended the LIC Act of 1956. After the amendment, like any other listed company, the corporation, now governed by the Companies Act and markets regulator Act (post-IPO), has to prepare its quarterly balance sheet with profit or loss figures and make public, key developments. **AGENCIES**

lip to the economy. We believe this partnership with NSIC will help expedite the MSME sector growth which is the backbone of the country both in terms of economic development and job creation," said Rahul Shukla, Group Head - Commercial and Rural Banking, HDFC Bank. On September 7, shares of HDFC Bank settled 0.15 per cent higher at Rs 1,569.15 apiece on the BSE. HDFC Bank opened on the BSE at Rs 1,566.80, touching an intra day high of Rs 1,581.95 and an intra day low of Rs 1,555.25, throughout the trading session today. The bank aims to regain its lost market share in credit cards in the next three-four quarters after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lifted the ban imposed on it more than eight months ago. **AGENCIES**

RBI hopeful of 9.5% GDP growth for 2021-22: Shaktikanta Das

NEWS DELHI: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das said that the central bank is positive about 9.5 per cent GDP growth estimate for the current financial year. Speaking in a media event, Das said that several economic indicators were showing upward growth due to opening up of economic activities and this gives RBI confidence that the GDP growth will be in the estimated range in 2021-22. He said that the debilitating impact of the second wave of Coronavirus infection was on

the wane and economic growth will be better from the second quarter onwards. The central bank governor further said that RBI has decided to focus more on growth due to the conditions created by the pandemic and will operate in the 2 per cent to 6 per cent inflation band set by the government for it. On cryptocurrencies, Das said the RBI has conveyed its "serious and major concerns" about digital currency to the government and now the government will have to decide on how to deal with the proliferation of such platforms. **AGENCIES**

RBI removes UCO Bank out of corrective action list after 4 years

NEWS DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) lifted UCO Bank out of the prompt corrective action (PCA) list after a gap of four years. The banking regulator found that the state-run lender was not in breach of its rules on regulatory capital, bad loans, and leverage ratio, according to a statement released by the RBI on September 8. In 2017, UCO Bank was placed under PCA framework restrictions due to its poor financial health, when several other lenders in the country battled unsecured assets. Further, the RBI had to tighten thresholds and under

the PCA, it imposed business restrictions on banks with weak financial parameters. Prompt corrective action is triggered if any bank's net non-performing loans ratio crosses a level of six per cent or if the capital requirements to be maintained are breached, under RBI norms. The central bank, in its circular, added that UCO bank has committed to complying with its norms of minimum regulatory capital, net NPA (non-performing assets) or bad loans, and leverage ratio on an ongoing basis. UCO bank has also apprised the RBI of the systemic and



structural improvements that it has put in place which would help the bank to meet the com-

mitments. The Kolkata-headquartered lender had requested the RBI to lift the PCA framework restrictions after it had posted profits for three quarters in the financial year 2020-21. UCO Bank's gross NPA reduced to 9.37 per cent of gross advances in the April-June quarter of the current fiscal, compared to 14.38 per cent in the year-ago period. Shares of UCO Bank settled 0.16 per cent higher at Rs 12.81 apiece on the BSE. UCO Bank opened on the BSE at Rs 12.85, touching an intra day high of Rs 12.96 and an intra day low of Rs 12.79, throughout the trading session today. **AGENCIES**

NEWSBRIEF

Inflation is likely to remain high in India

NEW DELHI: India's economic growth will remain strong in the coming quarters while inflation is likely to remain at elevated levels, analysts at Standard and Poor's (S&P) said on September 7. S&P has a 'BBB-' rating with a stable outlook on India. The economy is expected to clock 9.5 per cent growth in the current fiscal year, followed by 7 per cent expansion in the next year, it said, adding high nominal GDP growth would be important for ensuring fiscal consolidation going forward. "Given India's weak fiscal settings and high stock of debt around 90 per cent of GDP, the nominal GDP growth is going to be very important to prevent any further erosion of fiscal settings in the country and to enable some degree of fiscal consolidation going forward," S&P Global Ratings Director (Sovereign) Andrew Wood said. He said the fiscal deficit would remain elevated over the next two years but debt to GDP ratio is expected to stabilise or flatten out. Wood further said India's external position has strengthened in the context of the pandemic and India has been generating forex reserves at record pace. **AGENCIES**

New Rs10,000 crore scheme for textiles, 7.5 lakh new jobs: Centre



NEW DELHI: The government approved the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme worth Rs 10,683 crore for the textiles sector on September 8, to boost domestic manufacturing and exports. The scheme will help in creating direct additional employment of more than 7.5 lakh people and several lakhs more for supporting activities. The payout will be spread over a period of five years, as part of the incentives approved for the textiles sector. The decision was taken by the Cabinet chaired by Prime

Minister Narendra Modi. The PLI scheme is approved for textiles, MMF (man-made fibre) apparel, MMF fabrics, and 10 segments or products of technical textiles. The scheme will result in the production of high-value MMF fabric, garments, and technical textiles in the country.

The government estimates that over five years, the PLI Scheme for textiles will result in a fresh investment of more than Rs.19,000 crore, along with a cumulative turnover of over Rs.3 lakh crore.

The production-linked incentive scheme for textiles is part of the overall announcement of the scheme for 13 sectors made earlier during Budget 2021-22, with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore.

With the PLI schemes for these 13 sectors, the minimum production in the country is expected to be around Rs 37.5 lakh crore over a period of five years.

The scheme will prioritise

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Cabinet approved the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme worth Rs 10,683 crore for textiles sector with an aim to boost domestic manufacturing and exports, Union Minister Anurag Thakur said.
- The decision was taken at a meeting which was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi here.
- The Cabinet has approved the PLI scheme for textiles for MMF (man-made fibre) apparel, MMF fabrics and ten segments/products of technical textiles with a budgetary outlay of Rs 10,683 crore.
- PLI scheme for textiles is part of the overall announcement of the scheme for 13 sectors made earlier during the Union Budget 2021-22, with an outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore.

investment in aspirational districts, tier 3, tier 4 towns, and rural areas. Predominantly, the textiles industry employs women, so the PLI scheme will encourage women and increase their participa-

tion in the formal economy. It will impact specially states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Odisha, among few others, according to the government. **AGENCIES**

Domestic air passenger traffic up 31% at 66 lakh in Aug on higher capacity deployment: ICRA



MUMBAI: Domestic air passenger traffic continued on the growth trajectory in August with volumes growing up to 31 per cent to 66 lakh over the previous month, helped by higher capacity deployment and a downward trend in the pandemic, credit ratings agency ICRA said.

The domestic passenger traffic in July 2021 was 51 lakh, ICRA said in a release. Domestic passenger traffic on a year-on-year basis, however, spiked around 131 per cent over August 2020 traffic of 28.3 lakh, it said.

The ratings agency said despite the continued recovery in the previous month, there is continued stress on demand, driven largely by the second wave of the pandemic, limiting travel to only necessary travel. "The air travel demand has continued to register improvement and the same grew by around 30-31 per cent at around 65-66 lakh in August, compared to around 50.1 lakh in July 2021, signifying a y-o-y growth of around 131 per cent," Kinjal Shah, Vice President and Co-group Head for Corporate at ICRA, said.

The airlines' capacity deployment for August 2021 was around 99 per cent higher at around 57,500 departures, as against 28,834 departures in August 2020, Shah said, adding that on a sequential basis, the number of departures in August 2021 were higher by around 22 per cent, as Covid-19 infections demonstrated a downward trajectory. "For August 2021, the average daily departures were at around 1,900, significantly higher than the average daily departures of around 900 in August 2020, and higher than around 1,500 in July 2021, though it remains lower than around 2,000 in April 2021," Shah said.

The average number of passengers per flight during August 2021 was 114, against an average of 106 passengers per flight in July 2021, she said. Though the recovery continued in August 2021, there is continued stress on demand, driven largely by the second wave of the pandemic, limiting the demand to only necessary travel, while both leisure and business travel have been curtailed due to various state-wide restrictions, despite the decline in infections, she said.

The Civil Aviation Ministry permitted increasing the capacity deployment on domestic routes, gradually from 33 per cent, with effect from May 25, when domestic travel resumed after the first wave last year, to 80 per cent, with effect from December 3, 2020.

However, it reduced the permissible capacity deployment to 50 per cent of pre-Covid levels, with effect from June 1, 2021 due to the resurgence of the second wave of the pandemic.

It had again increased the permitted capacity to 65 per cent with effect from July 5, which has subsequently been increased to 75.2 per cent from August 12 this year, ICRa said. In addition, the ministry has also increased the minimum and maximum fare band by 10-13 per cent for domestic flights with effect from August 12, 2021 until August 31, 2021.

"In ICRA's view, the price increase may not materially impact the passenger traffic demand as in the current scenario, travel is limited to only necessary travel while both leisure and business travel have been curtailed due to various state-wide restrictions and the spread of the infections. However, it will allow airlines to recoup some part of the increase in jet fuel prices, thereby cushioning some impact on the airlines' losses," it stated. **AGENCIES**

Union Cabinet clears hike in MSP for Rabi crops

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet on September 8 approved the increase in minimum support price (MSP) of Rabi crops, under which the highest absolute increase in MSP has been suggested for lentil (masur) as well as rapeseeds and mustard (Rs 400 per quintal each). Some other crops for which MSP has been hiked are gram (Rs 130 per quintal), safflower (Rs 114 per quintal), wheat and barley (Rs 40 and Rs 35 per quintal respectively). Government has increased the MSP of Rabi crops for Rabi marketing season 2022-23, to ensure remunerative prices to the growers for their produce and is in line with the Union Budget 2018-19 announcement of fixing the MSPs at a level of at least 1.5 times of the all-India weighted average cost of production. **AGENCIES**

China's factory inflation hits 13-year high as materials costs soar

BEIJING: China's factory gate inflation hit a 13-year high in August driven by roaring raw materials prices despite Beijing's attempts to cool them, putting more pressure on manufacturers in the world's second-largest economy.

The producer price index (PPI) rose 9.5% from a year earlier in August, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said, faster than the 9.0% increase tipped in a Reuters poll and the 9.0% reported in July. That was the fastest pace since August 2008.

China's economy has recovered strongly from last year's coronavirus slump but has been losing steam recently due to domestic Covid-19 outbreaks, high raw material prices, tighter property curbs and a campaign to reduce carbon emissions. Commodity prices have

been on a tear in recent months, hurting the bottom lines of many mid- and downstream factories. China's coal prices soared to a record high on Tuesday over supply concerns as major coal regions started fresh rounds of safety checks. Earnings at China's industrial firms have slowed for five straight months.

But coal and metals prices will likely drop back as construction activity falls amid restrictions on the property sector and slowing credit growth, Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a note.

And the higher comparison base towards the end of last year will also pull down overall inflation. "We doubt producer price inflation will rise much further," he said. The coal, chemicals and metals industries drove much of the

price increases in August, according to a statement released alongside the data by Dong Lijuan, an NBS official.

Prices in the coal mining and washing sector grew 57.1% in August from a year earlier.

A separate NBS statement showed that the consumer price index (CPI) in August rose 0.8% from a year earlier, compared with a 1.0% gain in a Reuters poll and below the government target of around 3% this year. China tightened social restrictions to curb the Covid-19 Delta variant including travel limits, which have hampered service-sector demand, although Beijing has largely contained the latest coronavirus outbreaks.

Declines in airfares, travel and hotel room prices due to the pandemic slowed consumer inflation on a monthly basis, according to NBS's Dong.

Service-sector activity plunged in August to the lowest level since the pandemic's first wave in April 2020, a recent survey showed, as Covid-19 restrictions threatened to derail the recovery.

Many analysts expect the People's Bank of China to deliver a further cut to the amount of cash banks must hold as reserves later this year to lift growth, on top of July's cut, which released around 1 trillion yuan (\$6.47 trillion) in long-term liquidity into the economy. "We expect monetary policy to remain prudent with a slightly loosening bias for the rest of the year," said Jing Liu, senior economist for Greater China at HSBC, in a note. China's consumer price inflation, which is likely to stay muted, will not constrain a slight loosening stance, she added. **AGENCIES**

Indian Fintech sector to witness three times growth by 2025: Minister



NEW DELHI: Owing to several initiatives taken by the government, the fintech sector is set to witness three-times growth in terms of value by 2025 to reach Rs 6,20,700 crore. This was stated by Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Karad, who was addressing a virtual event organised by industry body Assocham.

"In 2019 India's fintech market was valued at Rs 1,92,000 crore. By 2025, it is expected to grow into a Rs 6,20,700 crore market. Skilled workforce and technological enormity in India makes it a great destination to develop financial technology," he said.

The junior minister for finance added that India has been on top of the rankings in terms of digital transactions, which have crossed more than 25 billion. Referring to the fintech ecosystem available in the country, Karad said that access to bank accounts under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, digital lockers and scalable platforms including UPI provide a lot of scope to the financial market.

"The government is making efforts to build a strong and safe technology ecosystem and we are confident that the public private partners will increase financial inclusion and provide modern financial services for all Indians," the minister said.

Financial Inclusion has also played an important role during the pandemic for cash transfer to poor and vulnerable sections of society, he added. **AGENCIES**

Sugar output may drop to 30.5 million tonne next season with more cane diversion to ethanol



NEW DELHI: India's sugar production is likely to decline marginally to 30.5 million tonne in the next 2021-22 season as more sugarcane will be diverted for ethanol making, a senior government official said.

Sugar production is estimated to have reached 31 million tonne in the 2020-21 season (October-September), he said. India is the world's second biggest sugar producer after Brazil.

"Sugarcane crop by and large is good this year. We are expecting diversion of more cane for ethanol making and as a result sugar production will be slightly lower at 30.5 million tonne during 2021-22 season," Joint Secretary in the Food Ministry Subodh Kumar Singh told PTI.

In the current season, cane meant for production of 2 million tonne sugar was diverted for ethanol making, while in the 2021-22 season cane meant for production of 3.5 million tonne of sugar will be diverted, he said. However, sugar produc-

tion will be sufficient to meet the domestic consumption, which is expected to increase by 3,00,000-4,00,000 tonne at 26.3-26.5 million tonne in 2021-22 season, he added.

The domestic consumption in the 2020-21 season is estimated to be 26 million tonne. With the likely opening stock of sweetener is estimated at 9-9.5 million tonne and expected production of 30.5 million tonne, the total availability of sugar in the 2021-22 season will be 39.5 to 40 million tonne.

The domestic consumption is seen around 26.5 million tonne, while exports at 7 million tonne in the next season. The closing stock at the end of the next season would be around 6-6.5 million tonne.

According to the official, about Rs 83,000 crore cane dues have been cleared so far against the total Rs 91,000 crore payable in the current season.

"The balance of Rs 8,000 crore is left. In the next one month, arrears may come down further," he added. **AGENCIES**

Equity MFs' net inflows falls sharply to ₹8,667 crore in August: AMFI

MUMBAI: The mutual fund industry witnessed a big upturn in investor preference for schemes with inflows into equity-linked MFs falling sharply from Rs 22,583 crore in July 2021 to around Rs 8,677 crore in August, the latest monthly data released by the Association of Mutual Funds of India (AMFI) showed.

The sharp decline could be attributable to launch of a number of large equity-oriented schemes (new fund offers) in July as compared to August. But the fall has been much starker for debtoriented funds and schemes where net inflows in August reduced to a mere Rs 1,074 crore in comparison to Rs 73,694 crore inflows seen in July. This is largely on account of increased influx in liquid and market funds where money keeps moving in and out at frequent intervals.

The inflows into index funds including Gold ETFs, however saw a marginal increase in August to Rs 11,592 crore, higher from previous month's inflows of around Rs 10,000 crore.

"Overall positive flows in the open-ended MF schemes and market indices touching all-time



high, helped the Indian MF Industry Net AUMs (asset under management) to breach record Rs 36 lakh crore milestone in August 2021.

"Retail AUM at Rs 17.15 lakh crore, almost half of total industry AUMs, SIP AUMs at record high Rs 5.26 lakh crore, which now forms a third of Retail AUM, healthy rise in SIP accounts at record Rs 4.32 crore and monthly SIP contribution at an all-time high at Rs 9,923.15 crore is reflective of established and rising retail preference towards mutual funds as a long-term wealth creation avenue," said AMFI Chief Executive N.S. Venkatesh.

"Continued robust month on month fund mobilisation in arbitrage and dynamic asset allocation schemes and affinity towards thematic/sectoral and diversified Flexicap schemes since the start of the new fiscal, FY22, including through SIPs has over-shadowed profitbooking during the last few months," he added.

Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Chief Investment Officer, Debt and Head, Products Lakshmi Iyer said: "August month saw continued flows in floating rate category in fixed income with net sales of nearly Rs 10,000 crore." **AGENCIES**

Homebuyers fume over regulators in some states allowing developers more time to complete projects

NEW DELHI: Homebuyers' body FPCE has strongly objected to extension given by Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka's real estate regulators for completion of projects, saying this will put flat owners under financial stress.

The Forum for People's Collective Efforts (FPCE) has written to Housing and Urban Affairs Secretary Durga Shanker Mishra, demanding that the Centre should intervene in this matter and direct these three states to roll back their decisions.

FPCE president Abhay Kumar Upadhyay said that RERA authorities of Maharashtra, UP

and Karnataka have "arbitrarily" extended registration of real estate projects and given more time for completion.

In the letter, FPCE said the Union housing ministry last year provided extension (zero period) of 6 months to real estate projects across the country, with an option for a further extension of three months given to State RERA Authorities.

This was done by the Central Advisory Council (CAC) under RERA only with the sole purpose of giving relief to builders during the Covid pandemic, it added. "This was aimed at scuttling homebuyers rights enshrined under RERA to get their



homes on time," said, Upadhyay who is a member of the FPCE.

Upadhyay said the FPCE, which has played an important role in passage and implementation of realty law RERA, had

unequivocally opposed such a blanket extension.

In the CAC meeting, he said the FPCE had sought relief for homebuyers but the same was not even considered. "It is also

pertinent to mention that the CAC has not met since, possibly because the handle to give relief to builders has been handed over to the RERA Authorities in the States....

"...and as an unwritten rule homebuyer's agenda is not considered to be worth taking up for consideration by the CAC, which certainly smacks of pro builder bias," the letter said.

FPCE said Maharashtra, UP and Karnataka have "recklessly, in blatant disregard to homebuyer rights", have given another extension to the real estate projects under the garb of Covid-19 second wave.

On August 6, 2021, Maharashtra RERA extended time-

lines for project completion by 6 months, while on August 18, UP RERA by nine months and on August 27 Karnataka RERA by 6 months.

"Needless to say, that your 2020 advisory, obviously under pressure from builders, has opened floodgates of extension."

"Taking leaf from your book, RERA Authorities are randomly giving blanket extensions even when there was no work stoppage nor complete lockdown announced either by Central Government or by any State Government," Upadhyay said. The entire second wave lasted for merely 2-3 months while extension has been granted for 6-9 months, he said. **AGENCIES**

Ayushmann Khurrana finished three new films during the pandemic

Ayushmann Khurrana has swiftly finished three big films during the pandemic and he can't wait for these to release in theatres! The versatile actor's Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui, directed by Abhishek Kapoor, Anek, directed by Anubhav Sinha and Doctor G, directed by Anubhuti Kashyap, are among the most-awaited films that are set to be released on the big screen. Ayushmann says, "I'm fortunate to have finished three new films during the pandemic. I can't wait for audiences to watch these real gems, as they are diverse and

will give people a new viewing experience." The star credits all the film-makers of his projects for providing a safe shooting experience for everyone. He says, "Producers and directors of all these projects have achieved a massive feat during such tough times. They have run a tight ship and ensured that the shoots happened smoothly in a perfect bio-bubble." Ayushmann is confident that his projects will play a hand in bringing people back to the theatres. He says, "I'm hugely excited about Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui, Anek and now Doctor G — all the projects have unique scripts." **AGENCIES**



PREITY ZINTA unveils poster of Vikash Verma's next, No Means No

Preity Zinta recently unveiled the poster of No Means No on social media. Releasing on November 5 this year, the film is the first Indo-Polish sports thriller based on a story of women empowerment. Preity herself has always championed the cause of sports, as she is the co-owner of cricket team Punjab Kings in the IPL. Sharing the poster, Preity Zinta wrote, "Congrats and all the best Vikash & Dhruv for your movie. Looking forward to seeing the film on 5th of Nov..." Directed by Vikash Verma, the movie marks the Bollywood debut of Dhruv Verma. Interestingly, Preity Zinta and



Vikash Verma, both are from Army families. While Preity's father was a Colonel, Vikash's father was a Naval officer. Thus, the two have a strong bond. In fact, Preity had recently posted a video message for Vikas' film. Since the film is an Indo-Polish joint venture, it will see a lot of well-known stars from India as well as Poland. The story of the film takes a beautiful turn when Dhruv, playing the role of a skiing champion, goes to Poland and falls in love with a Polish girl, and soon realises that his fate is no longer in his hands. **AGENCIES**

Manchester test to go ahead after Indian players test negative for Covid-19



THE TRAINING SESSION WAS CALLED OFF AND ALL THE PLAYERS HAVE UNDERGONE NEW TESTS.

NEW DELHI: The fifth Test between England and India in Manchester starting is set to go ahead as scheduled after the England and Wales Cricket Board announced Thursday there had been no further positive coronavirus cases within the Indian camp. The match



was under threat after the tourists cancelled a training session and media commitments following reports Thursday of a fresh

Covid-19 case involving a support staff member. But an ECB spokesman said later Thursday that all subsequent PCR tests from within the India squad had produced negative results and that the Test match "goes ahead". India head coach Ravi Shastri, bowling coach Bharat Arun and fielding coach Ramakrishnan Sridhar had already been ruled out of attending the Old Trafford match following positive Covid-19 tests in

London. India beat England by 157 runs in the fourth Test at the Oval on Monday -- a result that left the tourists 2-1 up with one match to play. But media reports in India said another member of the backroom staff had now tested positive following a fresh round of testing on Wednesday. The ESPNcricinfo website named assistant physiotherapist Yogesh Parmar as the affected individual. Earlier, a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) source told AFP: "The training session today was called off and all the players have undergone new tests." And the negative results now appear to have enabled the showpiece match to go ahead, with India bidding for just their fourth series win in England and the hosts looking to avoid losing two series -- they were previously defeated by New Zealand - in a home season for the first time since 1986. Parmar had to take charge during the fourth Test after lead physio Nitin Patel was forced to self-isolate after being identified as a close contact of Shastri. **AGENCIES**

Afghanistan's acting PM appeals to past govt officials to return; assures 'full protection'

PESHAWAR/KABUL: Afghanistan's acting Prime Minister Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhund has appealed to former officials of past governments to return to the country and assured them "full protection", saying the period of bloodbath is over and they face a humongous task to rebuild the war-ravaged nation. "We paid a heavy price for seeing this historic moment in Afghanistan," Mullah Hasan said on Wednesday, a day after the hardline Islamic insurgents unveiled an interim Cabinet after seizing power in Kabul. "We appeal to the officials of past governments to return to their country as we will give them full protection of their lives. We are faced with the huge task of rebuilding and reconstruction of war-ravaged Afghanistan," he said. He said the period of bloodbath was over in Afghanistan and reiterated the Taliban's promise of amnesty for anyone who has worked alongside the previous governments following the US-led invasion in 2001, Al-Jazeera news channel reported. The Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in mid-August, ousting the previous elected leadership which was



backed by the West. The interim Cabinet consists of high-profile members of the insurgent group. Citing a Taliban spokesman, TOLO news reported that the new government will be led by the insurgent group's chief Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada. The spokesman did not disclose Mullah Hibatullah's designation in the interim government or his role in the state affairs. At least 14 members of the Taliban's interim government are on the UN Security Council's terrorism blacklist, including acting Prime Minister Mullah Hasan and his both

deputies. Specially designated global terrorist Sirajuddin Haqqani, who carries a reward of USD 10 million US bounty on his head, is the acting interior minister. The 33-member interim Cabinet includes four of the five leaders known as the "Taliban Five" who were once held at the Guantanamo Bay prison. The Afghan Cabinet members are expected to take oath on September 11, the day marking the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. However, the Taliban leaders said it is not final. Meanwhile, former Afghan

prime minister and Hizb-e-Islami leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has announced unconditional support to the interim government of Afghanistan led by the Taliban. Citing former officials of the Taliban, Khaama news said they believe that the interim cabinet will last for six months and then the official cabinet will be announced. It also said that the Taliban officials and technical teams from Qatar and Turkey are busy working in Hamid Karzai International Airport and the airport will be fully ready for international flights in the next three days. **AGENCIES**

Latin American films win big at KASHISH 2021

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The Chilean film "Forgotten Roads" (by Nicol Ruiz) won the Best Narrative Feature film, the Argentinian film Canela (by Cecilia del Valle) won the Best Documentary film, and young Brazilian trans actress Maria Eduarda Maia won the Best Performance in a Lead Role (for her role in Advent of Mary) at the recently-held 12th edition of KASHISH Mumbai International Queer Film Festival, South Asia's biggest LGBTQI film festival. The awards were announced at a glittering online Closing & Awards Ceremony on September 5th, which also featured performances by LGBTQ+ community members and allies like popstar Shalmali & dancer/choreographer Sandip Soparrkar. "Latin American films are exquisite since they have a certain filmmaking aesthetic that is raw and palpable, and convey complex emotion with a simplicity that is unique. Most of the winners -- spread across three continents -- went against all odds and faced many challenges to tell these beautiful stories that the jury chose not only for their diverse ethnicity, but also in the LGBTQIA+ communities they represent," said



Sridhar Rangayan, founder festival director. The winners in the Indian categories are "Are We There Yet?" by Bhanu Ballal & Kashyap Swaroop as Best Indian Narrative Short, while Radhika Prasadha won the Riyad Wadia Award for the Best Emerging Indian Filmmaker for her film Begum Parvathi. Receiving special jury mentions are: Kirnay Bhatt's "Keep Punching" in the Indian Narrative Shorts category and Swati Jaiswal's "Nothing But A Human" in the Documentary Shorts category.



The other awardees include Cypriot film "The Man With The Answers" (by Stelios Kammitis) for Best Narrative Screenplay, the Macedonian film "Snake" (by Andrej Volkashin) for Best International Narrative Short, the Portugal/USA film "Tracing Utopia" (by Nick Tyson & Catarina de Sousa) for Best Documentary Short, and the Israeli film "On A Path" (by Lihi Lubetkin) for Best Student Short. Special jury mentions include the UK film "Rebel Dykes" (by Harri Shanahan & Siân A. Williams) in the

Documentary Feature category, the Pakistani film "Stray Dogs Come Out At Night" (by Humza Bangash) in the International Narrative Shorts category, and the French film "Today" (by Francis Chillet) in the Student Shorts category. Nicol Riuz, director of the winning feature Forgotten Roads, a heartwarming film about two elderly women falling in love in the small Chilean countryside, expressed hope in connecting based on love and compassion, and speaking about freedom in kindness. Maria Eduarda Maia won the best actor award for her role of a transgender youth in "Advent of Mary," directed by Vinicius Machado. Radhika Prasadha, who won the Riyad Wadia Award for Best Emerging Indian Filmmaker, thanked 'KASHISH 2021' for creating the

platform, and the jury for instituting the prestigious award that supports and encourages debut filmmakers telling queer stories. The super eminent jury members who announced the award winners were Ritesh Batra, Gauri Shinde, Satya Rai Nagpaul, Cary Sawhney & Selvaggia Velo (Narrative Jury); Bina Paul, Gargi Sen & Nandan Saxena (Documentary Jury); Dr. Anjali Monteiro, Ketki Pandit & Viveck Vaswani (Student Shorts Jury); Jerome Marrel (Poster Design Contest) and Roy Wadia (Riyad Wadia Award). The festival partners were Morgan Stanley, IBM, General Mills, Consulate General of Canada, the Québec Government Office in Mumbai, AtEase, Consulate General of Sweden, Consulate General of the Kingdom of Belgium in Mumbai, Embassy of Israel, and Danish Cultural Institute. The award partners were Lotus Visual Productions, K.F.Patil Charitable Trust, Anticlock Films, Wadia Movietone, Whistling Woods International, Abhay Kulkarni and Jerome Marrel. KASHISH 2021 screened 221 LGBTQIA+ films from 53 countries -- out of which 55 films were in competition -- from August 19 to September 5 with the closing ceremony featuring festival team song 'Let's All Unlock With Pride'.

A complete **KNOWLEDGE CAPSULE**

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