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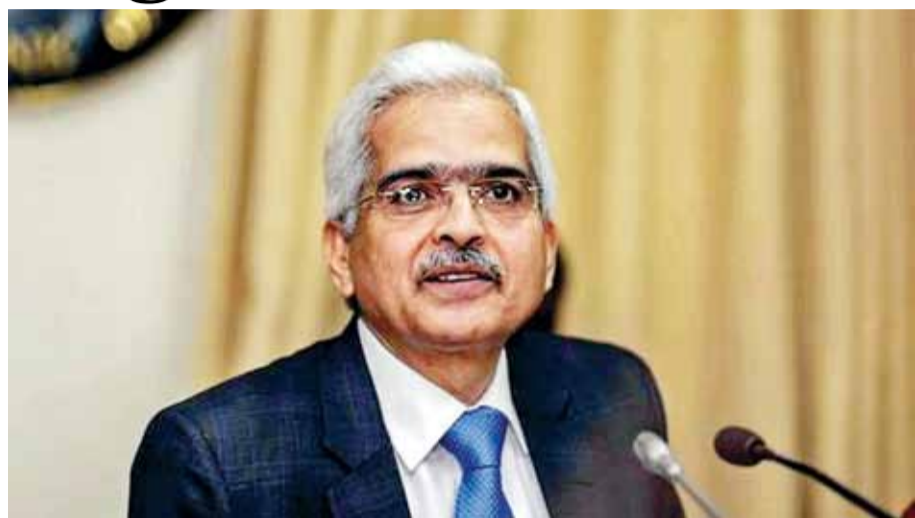
## RBI keeps interest rate unchanged, cuts GDP growth forecast to 7.2%

**MUMBAI:** Reserve Bank of India on Friday kept borrowing costs unchanged at a record low for the 11th time in a row in a bid to continue supporting economic growth despite inflation edging higher in the aftermath of Russia's war in Ukraine.

RBI's 6-member Monetary Policy Committee voted to hold the benchmark repo rate at 4%, Governor Shaktikanta Das said. The panel decided to stick to an accommodative stance "while focussing on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward while supporting growth". As it now anticipates a much faster rise in inflation than earlier - the inflation forecast has been raised to 5.7% for the fiscal that started on April 1, up from its 4.5% estimate in February.

The RBI also lowered the economic growth forecast to 7.2% for the current 2022-23 fiscal from the previous outlook of 7.8%. This compares to real GDP growth of 8.9% in 2021-22.

Stating that the economic activity is barely above pre-pandemic levels but continues to steadily recover, Das said the central bank will engage in a



gradual withdrawal of liquidity over a multi-year timeframe beginning this year. The RBI announced a new tool that will soak up excess cash in the banking system, restoring the width of the liquidity adjustment facility to 50 basis points - a step seen as moving away from the ultra-loose monetary policy embraced during the pandemic.

Das said the global economy is seeing "tectonic shifts" from the war and extreme volatility in commodity and financial markets. "Caught in the cross-current of multiple headwinds,

our approach needs to be cautious but proactive in mitigating the adverse impact on India's growth, inflation and financial conditions," he said.

Inflation has held above the targeted 6% levels so far this year, casting doubts on the RBI's strategy of keeping interest rates low to bolster growth.

The geopolitical scenario on the global front and other challenges have led the RBI to lower its growth forecast but the Indian economy appears to be well placed to withstand the shock supported by its forex

reserves and stable financial sector. The governor said global crude oil prices remain volatile at elevated levels while food, as well as metal and other commodity prices, have also hardened significantly.

Private consumption and fixed investment - key drivers of domestic demand - however, remain subdued.

"Escalating geopolitical tensions have cast a shadow on our economic outlook," he said. "Sharp increase in domestic pump prices (of petrol and diesel) could trigger broad-based

second-round price pressures."

Among other measures announced included a discussion paper on climate risk and sustainable finance, a committee to examine and review the current state of customer service in the RBI regulated entities, extending card-less cash withdrawal through ATMs across all banks, and rationalisation of the net worth requirement for operating units on the interoperable platform for bill payments Bharat Bill Payment System.

"As the daunting headwinds of the geopolitical situation challenge us, the RBI is braced up and prepared to defend the Indian economy with all instruments at its command," he said. "As we have demonstrated over the last two years, we are not hostage to any rulebook and no action is off the table when the need of the hour is to safeguard the economy."

The goals of price stability, sustained growth and financial stability are guiding factors. During the pandemic, the RBI offered liquidity facilities of Rs 17.2 lakh crore, of which Rs 11.9 lakh crore was utilised. So far Rs 5.0 lakh crore has been returned or withdrawn on the lapse of various facilities on their due dates.

**AGENCIES**

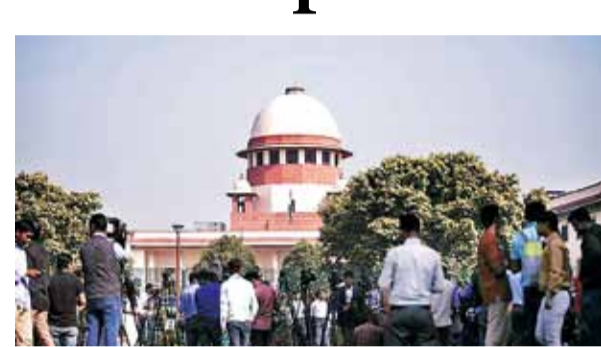
## Govt should have financial impact in mind while coming up with schemes: Apex Court

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court Wednesday said the government should always have the financial impact in mind while coming up with any scheme and referred to the Right to Education Act by observing that it is a classic example where a right has been created but where are the schools.

The observation was made by a bench headed by Justice U U Lalit which was hearing a plea seeking adequate infrastructure across the country for providing effective legal aid to women abused in matrimonial homes and creating shelter homes for them. We would advise you and take it as unsolicited advice that whenever you come up with these kinds of schemes or ideas, always have the financial impact in mind....., the bench, also comprising Justices S R Bhat and P S Narasimha, said.

The bench told Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati, who was appearing for the Centre, that the classic example is the Right to Education Act.

You have created a right. Where are the schools? So, therefore, the schools are to be put up by various authorities, including municipalities, state



governments, etc. Where do they get the teachers? the top court said. The bench observed that in some states, there are Shiksha Mitra and these persons are given about Rs 5,000 as against the regular payment.

It said when the court asks the state about it, they say there is a budget constraint. One has to see this in totality, the bench observed, adding, Otherwise, it becomes lip service only.

At the outset, Bhati told the bench that they have circulated a letter seeking some time to place the details as directed by the court earlier. The apex court had in February asked the Centre to file an affidavit giving details, including regarding the nature of central programmes/plans outlining assistance to support the efforts

under the DV Act (Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005) by various states, including the extent of funding, conditions of governing financial support and the control mechanisms in place.

During the hearing on Wednesday, the ASG told the bench that a lot of progress has happened. The bench told the ASG that they can file a status report along with a note giving the details.

I can assure your lordships that substantial work has happened. There were a lot of parleys and consultations with all states. There was one conference held collectively with all states ..., Bhati said, adding the Centre has to keep the states in the loop in the matter.

**AGENCIES**

## AAP govt in Punjab accused of creating rift between people of Punjab & Haryana states

**SATISHHANDA**

Newly formed Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Punjab making tall announcements to attract people in the state allegedly taking wrong decisions under the influence of power which is likely to cause rift between people in Haryana and Punjab state. Maan government in Punjab recently after coming to power approved proposal in their Vidhan Sabha session for handing over Chandigarh to Punjab, which was strongly condemned by all political parties in Haryana state.

Talking to media persons, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said, Punjab government has no power to take such decisions themselves which are to be taken only by government in the centre. He said, instead of having dreams to take over Chandigarh Punjab government first solve other long pending issues between both states which include supply of SYL canal water to Haryana state of their share for which Supreme Court of India has already given decision in favour of Haryana state being violated by Punjab state



government which is merely a case of contempt of Court against Punjab government. He said, there are nearly 400 Hindi speaking villages adjacent to Punjab which are to be handed over to Haryana state with immediate effect.

Information reveals, this is not first time Punjab government has been making claim over Chandigarh as their capital but seven times in past about two decades, besides having a separate High Court in their Vidhan Sabha sessions in the year 2002, 2005 and 2017 and such claims have no value unless approve by the government in centre. Haryana Chief Minister cautioned people in Punjab state presently having an unbalanced

government taking steps to raise differences between people of both Punjab and Haryana states by taking wrong decisions soon after forming the government instead of taking beneficial steps welfare of residents in their state.

Meanwhile, on the issue of claim over Chandigarh, Himachal government too has demanded 7.19% share over Chandigarh as well as Bhakra Beas Management Board and are going to have a meeting in this regard in their Vidhan Sabha session on April 15, 2022 and in case of having no action all political parties in Himachal will hold a protest till having its share on Chandigarh.

## India's Agriculture Export touches a historic high of USD 50 billion

Exports of agricultural products (including marine and plantation products) for the year 2021-22 have crossed USD 50 billion, highest level ever achieved for agriculture exports. As per the provisional figures released by DGCI&S, the agricultural exports have grown by 19.92% during 2021-22 to touch \$50.21 billion. The growth rate is remarkable as it is over and above the growth of 17.66%, at \$41.87 billion, achieved in 2020-21 and has been achieved in spite of unprecedented logistical challenges in the form of high freight rates, container shortages etc. This achievement over past two years will go a long way in realising the Prime Minister's vision of improving

farmers' income.

Highest ever exports have been achieved for staples like rice (USD 9.65 billion), wheat (USD 2.19 billion), sugar (USD 4.6 billion) and other cereals (USD 1.08 billion). Wheat has recorded an unprecedented growth of more than 273%, jumping nearly four-fold from \$568 million in 2020-21 to touch close to \$2119 million in 2021-22. Increase in exports of these products has benefited farmers in states like Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra etc. India has captured nearly 50% of the world market for rice. Export of marine products,

at USD 7.71 billion, is also the highest ever, benefitting farmers in the coastal states of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Spices exports has touched USD 4 billion for second year in a row. Despite facing tremendous supply side issues, coffee exports have crossed USD 1 billion for the first time, which has improved realisations for coffee growers in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

This achievement is the result of sustained efforts on the part of the Department of Commerce and its various export promotion agencies like APEDA, MPEDA and various commodity boards.

**AGENCIES**

## Union Govt assures return of assets to Kashmiri migrants



**NEW DELHI:** Modi government is capable and making efforts to restore assets to Kashmiri migrants and so far properties of 610 applicants have been returned, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityananda Rai said in Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Responding to queries during the Question Hour in the Upper House, the Minister said the District Magistrate has been designated as the custodian of the migrants' properties. The state government has also started a portal to resolve the complaints of migrants.

"The Modi government and Home Minister is capable of returning the assets to migrant Kashmiris. Constant efforts are being made," he said.

If the complaint of migrants is genuine and correct, their assets will be returned. So far, the assets of 610 applicants have been returned, he added.

Asserting that Jammu and Kashmir is on a development track, the Minister while responding to a supplementary query said that the state has received an investment proposal of Rs 51,000 crore for industrial development which will help create employment opportunities for 4.50 lakh people.

The construction of about 13 roads has provided better reach in the state. Prior to 2019, the speed of construction was at 6.54 km per day, which has increased to 20.68 km per day now.

**AGENCIES**

## Card-less Cash withdrawal facility across all banks' ATM network soon: RBI

**MUMBAI:** In a bid to check fraud, the Reserve Bank on Friday decided to permit all banks to introduce card-less cash withdrawal through ATMs.

Currently, card-less cash withdrawal through ATMs is a permitted mode of transaction offered by a few banks in the country on an on-us basis (for their customers at their own ATMs). "It is now proposed to make card-less cash withdrawal facility available across all banks and ATM networks using the UPI. In addition to enhancing ease of transactions, the absence of the need for physical card for such transactions would help prevent frauds such as card skimming, card cloning, etc." RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said while announcing bi-monthly monetary policy review.

**AGENCIES**

## Now, it's time to uproot corruption from Himachal: Kejriwal

**MANDI (HP):** Boosted by its landslide win in Punjab, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Wednesday launched its campaign for the state assembly polls scheduled by November this year. The party began the campaign for the 68 assembly seats from this town, the home turf of the BJP's incumbent Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, by saying, "It's time to uproot corruption from Himachal Pradesh."

In a massive show of strength, the party's two Chief Ministers -- Arvind Kejriwal of Delhi and Bhagwant Mann of Punjab -- held a roadshow with the former pleading with the public saying, "AAP will uproot corruption from Himachal Pradesh too, if it comes to power."

"You have given 30 years to the Congress and 17 years to the BJP to rule the state, all looted Himachal. Just give me



five years. If you are not satisfied, you can change us," the AAP's national convener said.

He said first they eradicated corruption in Delhi, then in Punjab. "Now, it's time to uproot corruption from Himachal Pradesh." "We are common people, we don't know how to do politics. Instead, we know how to work for people, build schools and end corruption. We have

ended corruption in just 20 days in Punjab since Bhagwant Mann became the chief minister. Now, 'kranti' (revolution) should happen in Himachal Pradesh too," Kejriwal added.

Accusing both the BJP and the Congress of promoting dynasty politics, Punjab Chief Minister Mann said, "AAP promotes common man in politics to end corruption and ensure

development of people." Himachal Pradesh was traditionally dominated by the Congress and saw its first non-Congress chief minister, Shanta Kumar, in 1977, when the Janata Party came to the helm.

After demolishing the citadels of all the major political parties in Punjab, the AAP is now preparing to conquer the hills of Himachal Pradesh in the November Assembly polls.

The conditions, on the face of it, are not averse for the party that swept away the traditional political outfits of the Akalis, the BJP and the Congress in Punjab.

A strong anti-incumbency wave against the ruling BJP -- evident from the loss of three Assembly and one parliamentary seat in the October 2021 bypolls -- and the absence of veteran Chief Minister faces may work for the party that is already ruling in two states.

**AGENCIES**

## Power Minister, Punjab meets Union Coal Minister and Union Power Minister at Delhi



**NEW DELHI:** Power Minister of Punjab Harbhajan Singh met Union Minister for Coal and Mines Pralhad Joshi at Parliament House in national capital and also called upon R.K. Singh, Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy to discuss the concerns of the State of Punjab over ongoing coal crisis and power related issues on Wednesday.

This was their first one-on-one meeting in a formal setting. During the meeting, the Punjab Power Minister stated that the State witnesses maximum power demand during paddy season and they have to run all the units of thermal power stations under state sector to meet the increased power demand.

**AGENCIES**

## Revival of Congress is essential for democracy: Sonia Gandhi



**NEW DELHI:** Congress interim President Sonia Gandhi while addressing the parliamentary party on Tuesday said that the revival of the party is essential for democracy and the results of elections were "shocking" and "painful".

In her address she said, "Our dedication and determination, our spirit of resilience is under severe test. Unity at all levels of our vast organisation is of paramount importance and speaking for myself, I am determined to do whatever is needed to ensure it. Our revival is not just a matter of importance to us alone... it is, in fact, essential for our democracy itself and indeed for our society as well."

"I am very well aware how disappointed you are at the recent election results. They have been both shocking and painful. The Congress working committee (CWC) has met once to review our performance. I have met with other colleagues too. I have received many suggestions on how to strengthen our organisation. Many are pertinent and I am working on them."

She said that it was important to put forth a roadmap and for that a 'Shivir' (meeting) should be held.

**AGENCIES**

# Punjab CM asks DCs to convene meetings in villages



**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Monday asked Deputy Commissioners to regularly convene outdoor meetings in the field, especially in villages, to ensure on-the-spot redressal of people's grievances.

Chairing a meeting of the Deputy Commissioners, he asked them to organise special camps, along with their team of officials, in a particular village or town at their doorsteps for prompt resolution of pending issues or problems faced by the public in a result-oriented manner.

In recognition of the best performance of Divisional Commissioners, DCs, SSPs, SDMs and other field officials, Mann also announced such officers or officials will be honoured with the 'Best Performing Award' to further motivate them to serve the people with missionary zeal.

In a bid to bring the drug addicts in the mainstream, he gave a target to start and upgrade all the drug de-addiction and rehabilitation centres in all districts within a month so as to effectively rehabilitate the youth, who had gone astray and fell prey to the vice.

He also urged them to conduct surprise checks at the 'Saanjh Kendras' as they have been primarily set up for the convenience of the public and asked them to provide citizen-centric services.

Terming the Deputy Commissioners as eyes and ears of the administration, Mann said: "You are the real face of the government because people have direct interface with you rather than us (government) as they repose unflinching trust and confidence in you."

He also urged them to conduct surprise checks at the 'Saanjh Kendras' as they have been primarily set up for the convenience of the public and asked them to provide citizen-centric services.

# Chandigarh belongs to Punjab: Navjot Sidhu



**CHANDIGARH:** Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu on Monday said Chandigarh belongs to Punjab and will always remain so and predicted that its next big battle with Haryana will be over river waters.

Sidhu's comments came after recent remarks by Haryana leaders demanding the completion of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal for getting the state's river water share from Punjab. They have also sought the transfer of 400 Hindi-speaking villages to Haryana.

Haryana government has summoned a special ses-

ion of the assembly here on Tuesday, days after the Punjab assembly passed a resolution seeking immediate transfer of Chandigarh to the AAP-ruled state.

Union Territory of Chandigarh is the common capital of Punjab and Haryana. Built on 27 villages of Punjab, Chandigarh belonged to Punjab and will remain so, he tweeted in Hindi.

Kahin pe nigahein, kahin pe nishana, Sidhu tweeted, suggesting that the real target for Haryana was not Chandigarh, but the river waters.

Chandigarh is just an ex-

cuse, the target is Punjab's river waters. Beware the next big battle is for the river waters of Punjab, he said.

Sidhu, who lost during the recent Punjab assembly elections from Amritsar East, also tagged AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, state Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar with his tweet.

SYL canal issue has been a bone of contention between Punjab and Haryana for several decades.

In the past, Punjab had been demanding a reassessment of its share of the Ravi-Beas river waters while Haryana had been seeking completion of the SYL canal to get its share of 3.5 million acre-feet (MAF) of water.

Punjab government's move to bring a resolution in the state assembly came in the wake of the Centre's announcement that the Central Service Rules will apply to the employees of the Union Territory of Chandigarh. **AGENCIES**

# AAP protests against increased water tariffs in Chandigarh



**CHANDIGARH:** Hundreds of AAP volunteers protested against the steep increase of water tariffs by the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, in spite of the assurance by the wrongly elected Mayor, that her party will not allow any increase and will take with her all the 35 councillors.

AAP city President Prem Garg said that the Aam Aadmi Party will not remain silent on the issue of water tariffs and has demanded that there should be an open debate in the MC House on this issue and whatever the 35 councillors collectively decide, will be acceptable to all and the public will also know the reality of situation. This protest was against the increased water

tariffs from April 1.

Aam Aadmi Party, which gave a guarantee of providing 20KL free water to every household in the municipal elections, tried to raise the voice of the common man by protesting. Prem Garg says that Aam Aadmi Party will not sit silent on the issue of water. At this time, not only all the political parties but the residents of the city are also opposing the increased rates of water.

Prem Garg says that the residents of the city do not need water 24 hours a day, by taking a loan of crores of rupees and repaying it in foreign currency in later years, as is being planned by the Chandigarh Administration. The city residents will have to bear the heavy brunt. **AGENCIES**

# British Dy High Commissioner Caroline Rowett calls on Bhagwant Mann

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday asked the British Deputy High Commissioner Chandigarh Caroline Rowett to take up the issue with British High Commissioner to India for starting direct flights to and fro between London and Chandigarh on top priority.

Taking part in the deliberations, Caroline Rowett who paid a courtesy call to the Chief Minister at his official residence this afternoon said she would certainly take up this matter with British High Commissioner to start these flights to facilitate the Punjabi diaspora settled in UK besides people residing in neighbouring states to enable them to have a seamless journey to Punjab and UK. **AGENCIES**

# Punjab government's resolution is meaningless: Manohar Lal

**CHANDIGARH:** Haryana Chief Minister, Manohar Lal said that Chandigarh is and will remain the capital of Haryana and Punjab. Both the states have several other issues to talk about apart from Chandigarh, he added.

The Chief Minister said that while considering the demand and interest of the employees working in Chandigarh, the Central Government has taken the decision to implement Central Service Rules. The Punjab government is misleading the public on this issue, said Manohar Lal.

He said that the employees of Chandigarh would be greatly benefited from this decision. Earlier, the employees of Chandigarh had to depend on the Punjab government for every single government order,



he added.

Previously, the orders regarding allowances or other benefits issued by Central Government were implemented in Chandigarh only after when Punjab used to issue notification for the same but now after this decision, all these orders would be directly applicable to the UT employees, added Manohar Lal.

He said that Punjab has not

ana, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh came into existence through the Punjab Reorganization Act passed in the year 1966. There is a provision in this Act that 60% of employees of Chandigarh will be from Punjab and 40% will be from Haryana. Since that time Chandigarh is the capital of Haryana and Punjab, he added.

Manohar Lal also said that not only Punjab and Haryana but the people of Himachal Pradesh also claim their shares in Chandigarh. In one case, the Supreme Court in one of its judgments had also stated that under the Punjab Reorganization Act Himachal Pradesh too has the right to 7.19% of Chandigarh's land. It is a different matter that Himachal Pradesh has declared Shimla as its Capital. **AGENCIES**

# PTC Channel's MD Rabinder Narayan arrested on charges of sex assault

**CHANDIGARH:** Mohali police arrested Rabinder Narayan, Managing Director of PTC News Channel on charges of sexual assault and other criminal charges on a complaint filed by a contestant of PTC Punjabi competition.

The arrest was made in a case registered in FIR No.2, dated 17.3.2022 U/S 341, 342, 343, 354, 354-A, 354-B, 354-C, 328, 420, 120-B against Rabinder Narayan, Nancy Ghuman, Niharika Jain Assistant Director PTC Miss Punjabi, Bhupinder Singh Managing Director JD Residency hotel Mohali, Producer Lakshman and 22 others.



Mohali police in a statement said that the case was registered on the complaint of Gian Singh father of a girl who was participant in the PTC Miss Punjabi contest. Gian Singh had on March 15 approached Punjab and Haryana High Court for rescue of his daughter from JD residency hotel where she was taken captive and being forced for sexual favour or Rs.12 lakh to remain in competition. The High Court had appointed a warrant officer and girl was rescued. **AGENCIES**

# Punjab CM seeks direct flights between London, Chandigarh



**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday asked British Deputy High Commissioner Caroline Rowett to take up the issue of direct flights to and fro between London and Chandigarh with the British High Commissioner on priority.

Rowett, who paid a courtesy call at the Chief Minister at his official residence here, said she would certainly take up this matter to facilitate the Punjabi diaspora settled in Britain, besides people residing in neighbouring states to enable them to have a seamless journey to Punjab.

She also congratulated Mann for securing a massive mandate for the formation of the state government under his stewardship.

Emphasising the need of immediate direct air link between Chandigarh and London, Mann apprised Rowett that the Chandigarh International Airport caters to the growing demand of the people of neighbouring states of Haryana,

Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Chandigarh.

Apprising the Chief Minister about the latest technologies to combat the menace of straw burning and bio-waste management, Rowett evinced keen interest for technology transfer in these fields as the UK has the time-tested and the most advanced expertise to effectively handle them. She also apprised Mann that the UK has certain advanced postgraduate courses which could be run in collaboration with some local universities and prestigious institutions of higher education to enable the state youth to be gainfully employed across the globe.

Likewise, she also expressed her desire to tie up with the state sports university to start courses on a mutual basis to equip students from both the sides with the advanced courses in sports to promote sports education in sports sciences, sport technology, sports management and sports coaching by adopting best international practices. **AGENCIES**

# Punjab assembly Speaker Sandhwan bats for adopting organic farming

**CHANDIGARH:** Speaker of Punjab assembly Kulkar Singh Sandhwan today underscored the need for adopting organic farming to ensure healthy and hygienic living standards.

Chairing a discussion with the experts of organic farming here in Punjab Vidhan Sabha, the Speaker said that the anomalies in our eating habits have resulted in enhancement of physical and mental ailments. He said that the only solution for overcoming these problems is to adopt organic food. Sandhwan said that the need of hour is to adopt naturally ripened fruits and vegetables along with lost grains or millets.

Speaker said that the state government led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann is very sensitive on this issue. Sandhwan said that he will personally flag the points raised by the experts with the Chief Minister in the coming days. He also said that the Committee of Vidhan Sabha on Agriculture will also hold such detailed parleys in the coming days to sensitise the members of state assembly on this crucial issue.

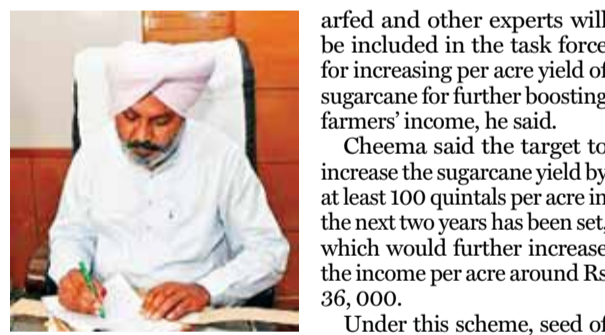
Experts of Kheti Virasat Mission including Ominder Dutt Sharma, Dr Davinder Sharma, Dr Amar Singh Azaad, Dr Khadir Wali and others also highlighted several issues with the health, Agro and environmental experts besides sharing their ideas with progressive farmers.

MLAs Manjit Singh Bilaspur, Kulwant Singh Pandori, Dr Amandeep Kaur Arora, Rajinder Pal Kaur Cheema, Randejit Kaur Mann, Anmol Gagan Mann, Santosh Kataria, Manvinder Singh Gaspura, Ashok Prashar, Madan Lal Bagga, Hardeep Singh Mundian and Chetan Singh, Additional Chief Secretary Forests Seema Jain, Principal Secretary Industry Tejveer Singh, Secretary Agriculture Dilraj Singh and secretary Punjab Vidhan Sabha Surinder Pal were also present. **AGENCIES**

# Punjab sets up task force to increase income from sugarcane: Finance Minister Cheema

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema on Monday announced formation of a task force to work out a comprehensive plan, within three months, to increase the income of sugarcane farmers.

Representatives of the Punjab Agricultural University in Ludhiana, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, the Sugarcane Breeding Institute in Coimbatore, Punjab Sug-



arfed and other experts will be included in the task force for increasing per acre yield of sugarcane for further boosting farmers' income, he said.

Cheema said the target to increase the sugarcane yield by at least 100 quintals per acre in the next two years has been set, which would further increase the income per acre around Rs 36,000.

Under this scheme, seed of

high-breed varieties to be provided, besides imparting the farmers knowledge on modern techniques in sugarcane cultivation and training on mechanisation, an official statement said.

Cheema said the government would draft a plan to modernise the cooperative sugar mills to make them self-reliant for improving performance. A committee will be set-up for this. **AGENCIES**

# Youth had to pay heavy price to accept friendship request on Face Book

**SATISH HANDA**  
*Ambala*

32 years old youth resident of Sector 10 Ambala City became victim in honey trap net and a case was registered at Sector 9 police station on his complaint against four persons including a female prime accuse a female identified herself as Aarti Sharma along with three others identified themselves Rahul Sharma, Goswami introduced himself a police officer at Delhi and Sanjay Singh introduced himself working in U-Tube. Police started investigation after registering the case.

According to complainant, he had contacted Aarti on his mobile phone made friendship request on the Face Book for accepting friendship with her and received confirmation from her side accepting his friendship on March 26, 2022 when both started video chatting on Watts up talking to each other number of times in a day and became intimate friends. According to complainant youth, he received a video call from his face book friend Aarti on March 28 late night when he was in the bed and found his female face book friend lying completely nude on the bed



in an attractive posture suspected under the influence of liquor in video. She requested him to remove his clothes too since she wants to see him undressed similar to her and the youth followed her request and in the meantime video call was disconnected.

In a complaint to police, youth in his statement told that he received video recording from his female face book friend after sometime in which he was seen lying with her on the bed in a highly intimate nude posture with her and the call was disconnected. In early next morning youth received a phone call from his face book friend Aarti to deposit amount worth Rs 20000 in the PayTM account in the name of Rahul Sharma, failing which she will be compelled to release video on social media. She got another call from her after about 24 hours demanding Rs 12000 since she was in urgent need of money and the youth had to remit the amount in the account of Rahul Sharma as desired by her.

# Haryana adopts resolution against Punjab's claim on Chandigarh

**CHANDIGARH:** Days after the Punjab assembly adopted a resolution to shift Chandigarh to the state, its neighbouring state Haryana on Tuesday too passed a similar resolution unanimously by urging the Centre not to take any step that would disturb the existing balance till all issues emanating from the reorganisation of Punjab are settled, besides reiterating its claim over joint state capital Chandigarh.

The House in Haryana also urged the Central government to take measures for the construction of the Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal (SYL) in compliance with the Supreme Court's directions. Like Punjab, Haryana called a one-day special Assembly session that passed the resolution to stake claim for Chandigarh. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar moved the resolution in the assembly, asking the Centre not to take any steps until all concerns related to the Punjab Reorganisation Act were addressed.

The House also urged the Centre to prevail upon Punjab to withdraw its case and permit the Hansi Butana Canal to be able to carry waters to deficient areas of Haryana.

"This House notes with concern the resolution passed in the Legislative Assembly of Punjab on April 1, recommending that the matter for transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab be taken up with the central government," reads the resolution moved by the Chief Minister. The resolu-



tion demanded that the central government should not take any steps that would disturb the existing balance between the two states and maintain harmony till all the issues emanating from the reorganisation of Punjab are settled.

After a three-hour discussion, Khattar, while thanking the members for unanimously supporting the resolution, said the provisions of Section 3 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, through which the state of Haryana came into existence and several measures that came into effect due to it.

"The right of Haryana to share waters of Ravi and Beas rivers by the construction of the SYL canal were is historically, legally, judicially and constitutionally established over time. The au-

gust House has unanimously on at least seven occasions passed resolutions urging the early completion of the SYL canal," reads the resolution.

Leader of Opposition and Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda questioned the AAP's intention in Punjab to pass such a resolution, terming it as a "political jujumla" that holds no meaning.

"Punjab should not disrupt communal harmony between the two states by taking such undemocratic steps," said Hooda.

Saying Chandigarh belongs to Haryana too and that Punjab and Haryana have 60:40 representation in the Chandigarh administration, Hooda extended the Chief Minister his party's support in the fight against Punjab. Expressing concern over

divert people's attention from the pre-election promises made to grab power. We need to understand the designs of the Punjab government."

The Punjab Assembly on April 1 besides adopting the resolution to transfer Chandigarh to Punjab also implored the Central government to honour the principles of federalism enshrined in the Constitution and not to take any steps which may disturb the balance in the administration of Chandigarh and that of other common assets like the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB). Interestingly, the passing of a resolution in the Punjab Vidhan Sabha is not the first such resolution.

Earlier, six resolutions were passed in the legislative assembly. The first one dating back to May 18, 1967, and that was non-official resolution moved by Acharya Prithvi Singh Azad, who sought inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab. The resolution was carried. The previous one before the latest was of December 23, 2014. It was also a non-official resolution for transfer of Chandigarh and other Punjabi-speaking areas to Punjab. The resolution was agreed by everyone.

The flashpoint between both the neighbouring states is Union Home Minister Amit Shah's announcement on March 27 that the Centre notified Central Service Rules for employees in the Union Territory of Chandigarh instead of the Punjab Service Rules. **AGENCIES**

## Lakhimpur : SC questions detailed examination of evidence, reserves order on bail cancellation plea

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Monday referred to the Allahabad High Court verdict in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence matter and questioned the detailed examination of evidence like postmortem report while granting bail to Ashish Mishra, son of Union minister Ajay Mishra, in the case.

A special bench comprising Chief Justice NV Ramana and Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli also reserved its verdict on the plea seeking cancellation of bail granted to Ashish Mishra in the case.

How can the judge go into postmortem report etc. We are hearing a bail matter, we do not want to prolong. This way of going into merits and going into wounds etc. is unnecessary for the question of bail, the bench observed.

Senior advocate Dushyant Dave and lawyer Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the farmers, sought cancellation of the bail alleging that the high court overlooked the probe report and went by the FIR while granting the relief to



the accused.

The state government though termed the offence grave and said that all the witnesses have been granted protection.

On March 16, the top court had sought responses of the Uttar Pradesh government and Ashish Mishra, on a plea challenging the grant of bail to him.

It had also directed the state government to ensure protection of witnesses after the counsel, appearing for farmers, referred to the attack on a key witness on March 10.

On October 3 last year, eight people were killed in Lakh-

impur Kheri during violence that erupted when farmers were protesting against Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya's visit to the area.

Four farmers were mowed down by an SUV, in which Ashish Mishra was seated, according to the UP Police FIR. Following the incident, the driver and two BJP workers were allegedly lynched by angry farmers. A journalist also died in the violence that triggered outrage among opposition parties and farmer groups agitating over the Centre's now-repealed agricultural reform laws. **AGENCIES**

## Govt working tirelessly to augment India's health infrastructure says PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that the government was working tirelessly to augment India's health infrastructure.

In a series of tweets on 'World Health Day', Modi said: "Greetings on World Health Day. May everyone be blessed with good health and wellness. Today is also a day to express gratitude to all those associated with the health sector. It is their hard work that has kept our planet protected."

He said that the govern-

ment's focus is on ensuring good quality and affordable healthcare to our citizens.

"The Government of India is working tirelessly to augment India's health infrastructure. The focus is on ensuring good quality and affordable healthcare to our citizens. It makes every Indian proud that our nation is home to the world's largest healthcare scheme, Ayushman Bharat," Modi said.

Highlighting how affordable healthcare has ensured significant savings for the im-



poorised, he said: "I feel very happy when I interact with beneficiaries of schemes such

as 'PM Jan Aushadhi'. Our focus on affordable healthcare has ensured significant sav-

ings for the poor and middle class. At the same time we are strengthening our Ayush network to further boost overall wellness."

Addressing medical education in the country, Modi added: "In the last eight years, the medical education sector has undergone rapid transformations. Several new medical colleges have come up. Our government's efforts to enable study of medicine in local languages will give wings to the aspirations of countless youngsters." **AGENCIES**

## Govt committed to act against smuggling, narcotics, says Home Minister Shah



Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said the Central government is committed to strictly act against the supply and smuggling of narcotics in the country.

Addressing a meeting of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on the issue "Drug Abuse, Its Challenges and Regulation", he added on Wednesday that in the last three years, 17, 20,574 kg of drugs worth Rs 12,142 Cr. were seized in just five operations.

"I want to assure you that the government is committed to strictly stopping the supply

and smuggling of narcotics and with a lot of sympathy, also trying to bring out the children who have become victims of it," Shah said.

He added that several steps have been taken to destroy illegal cultivation (opium, poppy and cannabis), and the opium cultivation on nearly 2, 100 acre was destroyed in 2013, 7, 602 acre in 2017 and 10, 798 acre in 2021.

Similarly, the cultivation of cannabis in 1, 000 acre in 2013, 8, 515 acre in 2017 and 26, 717 acre in 2021 were destroyed by the government agencies.

Union Home Minister in-

formed the Committee that an inter-ministerial committee constituted to prevent misuse of dual-use prescription drugs and precursor chemicals through dark net and crypto-currency while a task force has been set up to address this issue.

During the meeting, Shah said a comprehensive drug training module is being prepared at the national level to train police, armed police force personnel and public prosecutors.

"As on date, India has bilateral agreements with 27 countries, Memorandum of Understanding with 15 countries and has signed two agreements on security cooperation with Germany and Saudi Arabia," the Minister informed the parliamentary panel.

He said the government has taken a slew of stringent measures to check smuggling in the border areas, various border guarding forces like BSF, SSB and Assam Rifles have been empowered to prohibit narcotics' smuggling under the NDPS Act, 1985, while the border mapping and specialised surveillance tools are being used. **AGENCIES**

## ED attaches Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut's linked assets



**NEW DELHI:** The ED (Enforcement Directorate) has attached eight land parcels in Alibaug and a flat in Mumbai's Dadar suburb linked to Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut and his family under the anti-money laundering law, officials said on Tuesday.

The federal probe agency issued a provisional attachment under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to freeze the land parcels (plots) and flat, they said.

The attachment is linked to a money laundering probe

linked to a Rs 1,034 crore worth land 'scam' related to the re-development of a 'chawl' in Mumbai.

ED had arrested Maharashtra-based businessman Pravin Raut in this case in February and later filed a chargesheet too.

The agency had also questioned Sanjay Raut's wife Varsha Raut last year in connection with another money laundering case linked to the PMC Bank fraud case and for her purported links with Pravin Raut's wife Madhuri. **AGENCIES**

## Vinay Mohan Kwatra is India's next Foreign Secretary

**NEW DELHI:** Seasoned diplomat and India's current envoy to Nepal Vinay Mohan Kwatra was on Monday appointed as the new foreign secretary, succeeding Harsh Vardhan Shringla who retires on April 30.

Known to be having extensive expertise in dealing with India's neighbourhood as well as the US, China and Europe, the 1988-batch Indian Foreign Secretary (IFS) officer pipped nearly half-a-dozen others in the race for the coveted post including Indian High Commissioner to UK Gaitri Issar Kumar (1986-batch IFS) and Ruchira Kamboj (1987 batch IFS).

India's Ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu, who is a batchmate of Kwatra, was also seen as a contender for the post.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved his appointment, an order by the personnel ministry said.

There is a possibility that Shringla may get an assignment after his retirement and he could be considered for the post of coordinator for the G-20 summit which India is hosting in late 2023.

Kwatra will take charge as the foreign secretary at a time India is grappling with various geopolitical developments including the Ukraine conflict, the severe economic crisis in Sri Lanka and situation in Afghanistan and developments in the Indo-Pacific. **AGENCIES**

## Governor sitting on files related to key appointments: Mamata



**KOLKATA:** West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Monday accused Governor Jagdeep Dhakhar of dilly-dallying over files related to appointments to key state government posts.

Banerjee said documents pertaining to appointments of Lokayukta member, chairman of the Human Rights Commission and Right to Information commissioners have been lying with Dhankhar for his approval since six months.

"The governor is not clearing files. Even a day before, he refused clear the budget. I had to ring him up to remind the governor that it's his obligation... For approving the budget, too, he has queries. What is going on?"

Everywhere (in non-BJP ruled states), they are running a parallel government by appointing governors, the Trinamool Congress boss told reporters at the state secretariat. She also said the apex court sometimes directs the state government to fill up important vacancies, but with Dhankhar not clearing files, the appointments are stuck.

Dhankhar had earlier said the West Bengal government's

recommendation for appointment of former Director General of Police Virendra and former Additional Chief Secretary Naveen Prakash as information commissioners was "flawed".

Alleging that the BJP-led central government was using agencies like the CBI and ED against opposition parties, Banerjee said in order to safeguard democracy in the country, she has written to chief ministers of all non-BJP ruled states and other leaders.

Banerjee also said she received a letter from her Chhattisgarh counterpart Bhupesh Baghel on Monday, in which he has mentioned that the state was not getting its share of the GST.

Bhupesh Baghel asked me to flag this matter. I have already done that and sent a copy to him. If we have coordination among all the CMs, we will be able to highlight our point of view. In Maharashtra, too, they (the BJP) is disturbing (the state government) through the governor. The same is the case in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. Some can protest while some cannot. But, this cannot be allowed to continue," she added. **AGENCIES**

## NIA carries out raids at multiple locations in Kashmir

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) carried out raids with the assistance of J&K Police and CRPF in Srinagar, Budgam and other areas in connection with a case linked to militant activities, official sources said on Thursday.

In Srinagar, a NIA team raided the residence of Arsalan Feroz Ahanger, a resident of Zaldagar. Arsalan has been in NIA custody since December. NIA sleuths also raided the house of Ajaz Ahmad Dar, a resident of Mustafabad Zainakote area of Srinagar outskirts.

Similarly, a team from the premier investigation agency raided the house of Sameer Ahmad Ganie, resident of Bonapora Nowgam and that of a retired government employee Mohammad Maqbool Bhat, a resident of Alnoor Colony at Chanapora in up-town Srinagar. **AGENCIES**

## Government orders blocking of 18 Indian, 4 Pakistani YouTube-based news channels

**NEW DELHI:** Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has directed the blocking of 22 YouTube-based news channels, of which four are from Pakistan, for allegedly spreading fake news to mislead viewers.

This is the first time that action has been taken against the Indian YouTube-based news publishers since the notification of the IT Rules, 2021 in February last year, it said.

In an official statement, the ministry said that it issued an order on Monday to block 22 YouTube channels, three Twitter accounts, one Facebook account and one news website.

With this action, the ministry has, since December 2021, issued directions for blocking 78 YouTube-based news channels and several other social media accounts on grounds related to national security, sovereignty and integrity of



India, public order, etc.

The blocked YouTube channels had a cumulative viewership of over 260 crore, the ministry said in an official statement, adding that they were spreading fake news and coordinated disinformation over social media on subjects sensitive from the perspective of national security, India's foreign relations, and public order.

Through the recent blocking

order, 18 Indian and four 4 Pakistan-based YouTube news channels have been blocked, the ministry said, without naming them.

According to the ministry, multiple YouTube channels were used to post fake news on various subjects such as the Indian Armed Forces, Jammu and Kashmir, etc.

The content ordered to be blocked also included certain anti-India content posted from

multiple social media accounts operated in a coordinated manner from Pakistan.

It was observed that a significant amount of false content was published by the Indian YouTube channels related to the on-going situation in Ukraine, and aimed at jeopardising India's foreign relations with other countries, it said.

The ministry said that the blocked Indian YouTube channels were using templates and logos of certain TV news channels, including images of their news anchors to mislead the viewers to believe that the news was authentic.

False thumbnails were used, title and thumbnail of the videos were frequently altered to increase the virality of content on social media. In certain cases, it was also observed that systematic anti-India fake news was originating from Pakistan, it said. **AGENCIES**

## Parliament approves accountability bill



**NEW DELHI:** Parliament on Tuesday approved a bill to revamp the functioning of the institutes of chartered accountants, cost accountants and company secretaries, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserting that the changes will not impact the autonomy of these bodies.

Rajya Sabha passed the Chartered Accountants, the Cost and Works Accountants and the Company Secretaries

(Amendment) Bill, 2022 with a voice vote after negating all amendments moved by the Opposition.

Lok Sabha had cleared the bill on March 30, 2022.

The legislation seeks to appoint non-Chartered Accountant (CA), non-cost accountant and non-company secretary as the presiding officer of the disciplinary committees of the respective institutes.

The Congress, TMC, DMK and YSRCP opposed the bill,

citing «infirmities» and alleging that it was a blatant attack on professional autonomy.

The three institutes are the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Institute of Cost Accountants of India (formerly known as ICWAI), and Institute of Company Secretaries of India (ICSI).

The bill amends the Chartered Accountants Act, 1949, the Cost and Works Accountants Act, 1959, and the Company Secretaries Act, 1980.

Among other things, the bill provides for the setting up of a coordination committee headed by the Secretary of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs. It will have representations from the three institutes.

Union Finance Minister said that the bill also provides for registration of firms with the institutes and it will help in paving the way for Indian accountancy firms to grow big. It also proposes to enhance the quantum of fines for partners and firms found guilty of misconduct. **AGENCIES**

## Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray Highlights Alternative Fuel Vehicles

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has urged for providing a conducive environment for industries producing alternative fuel vehicles and reiterated that - by removing difficulties in the setting up of industries - facilities would be provided to industrialists coming here.

He was addressing a video conference inauguration of a conclave of Alternative Fuel Entrepreneurs and investors in Pune, that featured Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, Niti Aayog, Industry Minister Subhash Desai, Energy Minister Nitin Raut, Environment minister Aditya Thackeray, Minister of State Aditi Tatkare and others.

Highlighting the fact that people are looking for options



like alternative fuels, the Chief Minister urged industries to come forward as growth slowed down if there was any impediment to Industry.

Keeping this in mind, steps are being taken at government level to avail a conducive environment for indus-

tries and Maharashtra which is always moving ahead is a torch-bearer for the country as the development of the state is being followed by the whole country, he said while observing that Maharashtra would also perform well in the field of alternative fuels.

Describing the effects of pollution as harmful like the "corona virus," Thackeray noted that serious consequences of climate change are being experienced globally and the emphasis was required on sustainable development without harming the environment. Alternative fuels need to be considered for sustainable development without harming the environment," he said, adding that vehicles on alternative fuels should be introduced throughout the State through the Alternative Fuels Conclave. Congratulating the Department of Environment, Industry and Energy for organizing the Conclave, he said finding an alternative to fuel is not an easy task and needed large-scale public awareness and huge infrastructure.

The Chief Minister also dedicated line 2A and 7 of the

Metro, while emphasizing that the overall development of Mumbai would be carried out by the Maha Vikas Aghadi government through maintaining the environmental balance.

Describing the continuous development of Mumbai and increasing population needing facilities as a challenge, Thackeray said the MVA government remains committed to provide facilities to the common man for their remarkable contribution including the metro project among the many development projects going on in Mumbai.

He said priority is being given to infrastructure development and these included the Mumbai Trans Harbour Link, coastal route, Nava Sheva to Shivdi and other projects that would enable Mumbai to travel speedily and comfortably.

## India-Australia ties get a boost with trade deal

The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) signed recently is a key step in enhancing bilateral economic ties between the two major Indian Ocean littoral states and reflects the growing strategic alignment between New Delhi and Canberra. While India's strongest ties with Australia had hitherto largely centred around their common colonial legacy of cricket. This was manifested in the June 2020 virtual summit when Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Scott Morrison decided to elevate the relationship to the level of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Defence and strategic ties have gained significant traction and the latest ECTA has been hammered out in just six months since negotiations restarted in end-September. Envisaged as an 'early-harvest' agreement, the ECTA covers the gamut of economic and commercial relations including trade in goods and services, rules of origin, technical barriers to trade, dispute settlement and customs procedures. Targeting a goal of doubling bilateral trade to about \$50 billion in five years, from the \$27.5 billion logged in 2021, the partners have set about dismantling or lowering tariff barriers. The agreement aims to support access for a range of Australian and Indian skilled service providers, investors, and business visitors and also, crucially, seeks to address an area linked to another major Australian export — education. Canberra has now agreed, on a reciprocal basis, to ease visa restrictions, enabling students at varied levels of higher education to stay on for periods ranging from 18 months to four years to pursue work opportunities on a temporary basis. With past FTAs having proved less than beneficial to domestic industry, India's negotiators have set a meaningful precedent in including the feature to periodically reappraise the economic gains from such trade pacts.

### LETTERBOX

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R.K. RAGHAVAN EXPLAINS WHY CBI SHOULD HAVE STRONG LEADER WITH DISTINCT BELIEF IN LAW AND ETHICS

## The misuse of the 'caged parrot'

The Chief Justice of India (CJI), Justice N.V. Ramana, must be lauded for his candid appraisal recently of the pathetic state of India's investigating agencies. Last week in Delhi, while delivering the annual (and the 19th edition) D.P. Kohli Memorial Talk organised by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), the CJI minced no words in condemning the utter subordination of agencies to the executive and its disastrous consequences for the cause of justice.

D.P. Kohli was the first Director of the CBI after the agency was renamed the CBI in 1963 from the earlier Special Police Establishment. A man of impeccable character, he was faceless and fearless, and a model to be emulated by his successors.

The CJI has not said anything new at the lecture that we in India do not already know. But coming as it did from the head of the Indian judiciary, his stern warning that investigating agencies will pay a heavy price for their utter willingness to stoop to please politicians should be taken seriously by all outfits, especially the CBI, which has had a patchy record with regard to political interference in sensitive investigations. The CJI called upon investigators to stand up to unethical pressures in order not to betray the trust reposed in them by the public. He even dropped a hint that if middle- and senior-level investigators deviated from the path of objectivity and neutrality, they would pay for it dearly. We have already seen how the Supreme Court of India and High Courts have often admonished investigators for their sloppiness and deviation from ethics. Therefore, we need a strong Supreme Court and equally strong High Courts to keep our investigators on the straight and narrow path.

There is no denying the fact that the CBI has been grossly misused by successive governments. This is why in December 1997, another fearless judge, Justice J.S. Verma had lambasted the then CBI Director in the so-called Hawala case, rebuking him for stalling the investigation at will, thereby sending inappropriate signals to his subordinates in the crucial investigation. Justice Verma was so provoked by state



of affairs that he went on to prescribe a new clinical procedure for the selection of the CBI chief, giving him also a much needed and fixed tenure of two years during which he could not be removed by the government. It may not be an exaggeration to say that earlier, CBI Directors were changed at will almost like how one would wear new garments every day. This mandatory tenure was meant to insulate the CBI Director from the caprice of the executive. This process has since been expanded to include the CJI in the selection panel.

It will be incorrect to assert that all this has transformed the CBI into an apolitical and objective body. Meticulous supervision by the Supreme Court in some important cases has made more than a marginal difference to the honesty of investigation. There is palpable fear among CBI officers that the judiciary could intervene when an aggrieved person to prove that an investigator had been arbitrary and dishonest. It will be unfair to the CBI to say that its investigation has not acquired any greater uprightness than before even after the many reprimands it had received from the higher judiciary. My view is also that the allegation of political interference has been blown out of proportion, because only about 10% of cases handled by the CBI have political overtones.

The CBI now has some of the brightest Indian Police Service officers in its higher echelons. None of them may be expected to be reckless and sacrifice their careers by bending to unethical pressures from their Director or from the government's echelons. However, it is not enough if the middle-rung supervisors alone are straightforward. There needs to be a strong and virtuous leader who will not only be honest but also stick his neck out to protect his deputies if and when confronted by an unscrupulous political heavyweight. If the CBI has to tread the path of virtue, it should have the strongest leader with a distinct belief in the law and ethics.

Unfortunately, in recent years, at least two Directors brought ignominy to the CBI. This has proved that whatever the courts may do to enforce discipline and adherence to the law, there are the odd leaders who could subvert the system. Little can be done to move away from this unfortunate situation unless there are bold and enlightened persons heading investigation agencies, and who will be firm with the executive if it tries to intimidate junior officers.

My own experience is that if one stands up and explains to a Prime Minister why a particular course of action suggested by a junior Minister or someone in the rul-

ing party was unacceptable, then one has shown the right path to one's subordinates within the organisation. It is equally true that a Prime Minister will support you nine times out of 10 if you present your view in a rational and reasonable manner. If a Director is unable to display even this element of courage he should not be heading the organisation. If this honest approach to investigation does not get fused internally, mere tinkering with the criminal law and the procedure to appoint heads of important criminal justice organisations will be of no avail.

It is not that the CJI and the other judges are unaware of some investigating officers swerving from the right path at the instance of a small-time politician. But they are helpless in their efforts to stem the rot because many in the higher judiciary do not want to exceed their brief and upset things.

There have also been some big fish who have been caught in the net of investigators — a former Chief Minister of Bihar and a former Home Minister of Maharashtra, are examples. But given the magnitude of the problem, the steps taken so far to check dishonesty in the higher echelons of the government are only cosmetic. This is why I am still cynical: however much the judiciary stands by law enforcement outfits, little will change in terms of the public servant (including popular and elected Ministers) curbing the unabated corruption in the country.

Finally, I do not endorse the CJI's proposal of an umbrella organisation that will oversee all investigating agencies. This idea was meant to avoid having multiple agencies looking into the same set of allegations. Apart from its impracticality, such a novel body could generate its own problems — of turf wars and ego clashes. I would rather have the focus on weeding out the dishonest among officers and rewarding those who have shown and proven themselves to be honest and professionally innovative.

R.K. Raghavan is a former CBI Director who now teaches Policing and Criminal Justice at the Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana



PARAG WANKNIS ON WHY HAVING COURSE CREDITS PROPORTIONAL TO TEACHING HOURS WILL IMPACT FACULTY

## The UGC needs to get its credits right in first place

As I waded my way through various documents that are generally referenced in any discussion on a four-year undergraduate degree programme in India — starting with the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), the Learning Outcomes-Based Curriculum Framework (LOCF), and the University Grant Commission (UGC)'s latest draft National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) document — the lost undergraduate student in me was happy.

Anyone who has gone through the rigid and terribly outdated course structure of degrees such as B.Com or B.A. in most Indian universities, would be really happy to see the choice, flexibility, and liberal ethos embedded in its vision. Following on with the proposed changes in higher education under the New Education Policy (NEP), it seems like Indian students are finally poised to receive an actual education and not just meaningless pieces of paper masquerading as degree certificates. Despite this bold vision, however, there seem to be quite a few kinks that need to be ironed out at the conceptual level before embarking on its implementation. Here I deal with the implications of the credit system as currently envisaged in these documents vis-à-vis the teaching quality and research productivity of faculty espoused by the NEP.

While the NHEQF attempts to provide much-needed clarity on a variety of issues, from the types of courses in initial and later years of a four-year degree and the associated nomenclatures for multiple exit options, it continues to equate one credit to one teaching hour. If the CBCS or LOCF credit structure



of core courses of six credits and electives of four credits each is to be followed, then it has serious implications for the teaching workload (about which there is not much discussion in any of these documents). At six credits for a core course, with an emphasis on tutorials in sections of not more than 20 students, a faculty member would end up teaching about eight hours per week per course. If as outlined by the NEP, a faculty is responsible for course content, assessments, and grading, it would require at least double the hours of preparation. Given the considerable ambiguity in the UGC's description of faculty workload, many institutions inadvertently might end up burdening a faculty member with two such courses mechanically, adding the hours to 16 per week.

### Interpreting the credit

Before we delve into the issue any further, let us think about the concept of academic credit. Though often used as a unit used to describe the workload for students, its meaning and interpretation differ across continents. In the United Kingdom or under the Bologna Process, a core undergraduate course might be listed as six to seven credits, indicating the total expected engagement from the student including the time spent in lectures and tutorials. The implications for the faculty teaching load are very different from students. A seven-credit course might mean approximately two hours of teaching per week, with the remaining hours credited for preparation and assessment. The standard workload for a faculty is typically decided via negotiations between faculty unions and the university administration, making it difficult to get the information officially. But a quick search on Google shows that a faculty in a typical U.K. university is expected to teach about two hours per week.

In the United States, the situation is a bit different. The credits listed for a course typically indicate the hours of classroom engagement, with the actual workload on students left undefined. On an average, in most U.S. universities, a typical undergraduate course is three credits and, therefore, about three hours of total classroom teaching for a faculty per course. Depending on the nature of the employing institution, the faculty workload could vary between two courses per year in a research-intensive university to four or five courses per semester in a community college. Obviously, faculty with lower teaching loads

have higher research productivity, and possibly better content and delivery in teaching. A credit also signifies the minimum skill attainment for graduating from one level to another in education. Based on a personal experience of teaching in U.S. universities, a three-credit course would mean at least four additional hours of engagement for the student, making it a six to seven credit equivalent of a core course in the U.K.

Despite these differences between the treatment of credits on the two sides of the Atlantic, one thing they have in common is that faculty teaching hours per course are much lower than what is currently practised in Indian universities and outlined in several UGC documents. If the higher education regulatory bodies in India are serious about boosting research productivity of faculty while staying true to the liberal ethos of NEP, then we cannot have course credits directly proportional to the teaching hours. Or reduce credits per course in line with the practice in North American universities. We must make sure that faculty have enough time to create quality teaching content and engage in research. For this we will have to train students to take more responsibility for their learning. Given the very high number of students that need to be educated in India, creative solutions such as technology-aided larger classrooms for introductory courses in universities with the help of graduate students as teaching assistants can be implemented to economise on faculty time and effort.

Parag Wanknis is an Associate Professor of Economics at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi. Views are personal.

### BOOKS: REVIEW

## Anil Kumble felt he was unfairly treated: Book

Anil Kumble felt that he was treated "unfairly" and forced to resign as head coach of the Indian team but then skipper Virat Kohli opined that Kumble was not happy with his "intimidating" style of enforcing discipline, according to former Committee of Administrators head Vinod Rai. In his recently published book 'Not Just A Nightwatchman: My Innings with BCCI', published by 'Rupa', Rai touched upon various issues that he dealt with during his 33-month tenure.

One of the issues and perhaps the most controversial, was when Kohli complained about his breakdown of relationship with Kumble, who announced his resignation publicly just after

Champions Trophy in 2017. Kumble was handed a one-year contract in 2016.

"In my conversations with the captain and team management, it was conveyed that Kumble was too much of a disciplinarian and hence the team members were not too happy with him," Rai has written in his book.

"I had spoken to Virat Kohli on the issue and he did mention that the younger members of the team felt intimidated by the way he worked with them," Rai reveals that the then Cricket Advisory Committee comprising Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, VVS Laxman had recommended Kumble's re-appointment.

"Soon, the CAC met in London and interacted with the two sepa-

**In my conversations with the captain and team management, it was conveyed that Kumble was too much of a disciplinarian and hence the team members were not too happy with him**

rately in a bid to resolve the issue. After deliberations over three days, they decided to recommend Kumble's reappointment as the head coach." However it was evident from what followed was that Kohli's point of view was given



Not Just A Nightwatchman: My Innings with BCCI By Vinod Rai Rupa 240 pages, Rs95

more respect and hence Kumble's position became untenable.

"We had long conversations with Kumble after he had returned from the UK. He was obviously upset about the manner in which the entire episode had panned out. He felt he had been unfairly treated and a captain or team should not be given so much importance.

"It was the duty of the coach to bring discipline and professionalism into the team and as a senior, his views should have been respected by the players." Rai also wrote that Kumble felt

that more credence was given to following protocols and process and less emphasis was laid on how the team performed under his guidance.

"He was disappointed that we had given such importance to following process, and that, in view of the team's performance over the previous year, he deserved an extension." Rai had further written that he had explained to Kumble as to why he didn't get an extension.

"I explained to him that considering the fact that even his earlier selection in 2016 had followed a process, and that his one-year contract had no extension clause, we were bound to follow process, even for his reappointment. And that is exactly what was done." Rai however found it mature and prudent on both Kohli and Kumble's part to maintain a dignified silence on the issue or else the controversy would have continued.

## THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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EDITOR\* ABDUL WASEY

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## NEWSBRIEFS

**Tesla CEO Elon Musk takes 9.2% stake in Twitter**



**SAN FRANCISCO:** Tesla CEO Elon Musk is taking a 9.2% stake in Twitter. Musk purchased approximately 73.5 million shares, according to a regulatory filing Monday. Musk's stake in Twitter is considered a passive investment, which means Musk is a long-term investor that's looking to minimise his buying and selling of the shares. However, Musk has been raising questions about the ability to communicate freely on Twitter, tweeting last month about free speech and the social media platform and industry analysts were skeptical about the mercurial CEO remaining on the sidelines anywhere. We would expect this passive stake as just the start of broader conversations with the Twitter board/management that could ultimately lead to an active stake and a potential more aggressive ownership role of Twitter," Dan Ives of Wedbush Securities wrote in a client note early Monday. **AGENCIES**

**Maruti Suzuki to hike vehicle prices this month amid rise in input costs**

**NEW DELHI:** The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Wednesday said it will increase prices of its entire model range this month amid rise in input costs. Over the past year, the cost of company's vehicles continued to be adversely impacted due to increase in various input costs, the auto major said in a regulatory filing. "Therefore, it has become imperative for the company to pass on some impact of the above additional costs to customers through a price hike," it added. The company has planned to increase the prices in April and the hike will vary for different models. However, the company did not disclose the quantum of the proposed price hike. **AGENCIES**

## ASSOCHAM suggests measures to boost Export Import manufacturing sectors in Punjab

SATISH HANDA  
Chandigarh

ASSOCHAM Punjab State Development Council suggested various measures to boost export import manufacturing sectors in Punjab. The representation made and submitted on the advice of A S Mittal Chairman, ASSOCHAM North Region Development Council and Vice Chairman, Punjab State Planning Board. Northern drew attention to the Punjab Manufacturing sector's plights, over the decades due to some fundamental constraints and many disadvantages that come with being a landlocked border state. A major constraint is location — distance from seaports has a crippling impact on industrial growth. Mittal added "Punjab manufacturers also face a double freight burden — first they pay to access dry ports and



then, dry to seaports. It has forced them either to shift base or shut operations. He said, the state's manufacturing sector needs a level playing field to compete with manufacturing industrial clusters of southern and western coastal line states, which reap the benefits of near-port

location. Additionally, Seaports play a crucial role in reducing domestic logistic costs and facilitating Exim-oriented manufacturing by reducing time and variability. logistically, Punjab's main hinterland is at an average distance of 1,300km from (the ICD Ludhiana to Mundra)

the nearest seaport, which is the main reason why logistic cost on export and import is about three times higher than that in southern and western coastal line states". Chairman said "hence, keeping these factors in mind we suggest, the government must own freight trains (ei-

ther solely or in PPP mode) to boost the state industry by minimising rail freight burden from dry ports to seaports and vice versa. This move will have following effects on the existing scenario, firstly, the Punjab government can own 8-10 freight trains to facilitate the Exim-oriented state manufacturing sector. It will strengthen and promote the MSMEs which are instrumental in creating local entrepreneurship and employment. Secondly, As an agrarian state, Punjab has a long way to go in developing effective processing units to prevent crop wastage, improve supply chain, marketing, and logistics. Increasing production and export are correlated and hence, state-owned freight trains will help in addressing these structural constraints in the export realm and transform the manufacturing sector into export engines for its economic growth.

## Mitsui to invest in ReNew Power's project



**NEW DELHI:** Japanese conglomerate Mitsui has agreed to take a 49% stake in ReNew Power's round-the-clock renewable power project, the Indian firm said on Wednesday.

ReNew signed a 400 MW Round-The-Clock (RTC) PPA last year to supply electricity to the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI). For the 400 MW PPA (Power Purchase Agreement), the company will install 1,300 MW of renewable energy capacity and up to 100 MWh of battery storage.

"ReNew Power has finalised a partnership with Mitsui & Co Ltd, a leading global general trading and investment firm.

"The partnership will see Mitsui invest in the RTC renewable energy project being developed by ReNew," the company said in a statement. It did not give the financial details about the deal.

The RTC project will consist of three newly-built wind farms and one solar plus battery storage farm (1,300 MW in total plus up to 100 MWh battery storage) across the states of Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, and provide 400 MW of electricity to SECI, an Indian central government-owned entity.

The project's commercial operations are expected to start in the third calendar quarter of 2023.

ReNew, through its affiliates, will also undertake EPC, O&M, and project management for the RTC project.

"The 25-year PPA for the project, the first-of-its-kind renewable energy PPA in India, was signed last year when SECI for supplying electricity at Rs 2.90 per kWh (or unit), which will increase by 3 per cent annually for 15 years after which it will stabilise for the remaining period of the project," the statement said.

India, being the third-largest emitter of greenhouse gases globally, made commit-

ments at the Glasgow COP26 summit last year to reach 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based installed capacity by 2030, and to source 50 per cent of all its energy from renewables by then.

The RTC project will feed into this target and support the government's policy of scaling up the renewable energy sector as part of the country's historic clean energy transition.

"The RTC project, the first of its kind in India, provides the lowest cost and emission-free 24x7 renewable electricity. We are proud to partner with Mitsui, a leading global conglomerate, to support India's green energy transition and look forward to strengthening this partnership in the future," Sumant Sinha, founder, chairman and CEO of ReNew Power said. Ryoichiro Uno, General Manager in charge of infrastructure projects in India, the Middle East, and Africa of Mitsui, said, "Our mission is to build brighter futures for people around the world through infrastructure development".

"We view India as an extremely promising market for many reasons, including its high economic growth and strong commitment towards decarbonisation. Through this project, Mitsui will accelerate India's clean energy transition together with ReNew, and contribute to the project's successful development by leveraging our extensive global experience in power project development, as well as our wide-ranging business network across industries," Ryoichiro Uno said. ReNew develops, builds, owns, and operates utility-scale wind and solar energy projects, and hydro projects.

As of February 1, 2022, it had a total portfolio of 10.2 GW of renewable energy projects across India, including commissioned and committed projects. **AGENCIES**

## Sugar export may touch 85 lakh tonne this year: ISMA



News from the international trade houses indicate that global market is expecting 85 lakh tonne of sugar exports from India, in the current season"

**NEW DELHI:** India's sugar export may touch 85 lakh tonne in the ongoing 2021-22 marketing year ending September, as per the estimates of global trade houses, industry body ISMA said on Monday.

While the country has contracted 72 lakh tonne of sugar export, the physical exports have been around 56-57 lakh tonne till March-end this year, it said.

Sugar marketing year runs from October to September. Crushing operation is still on as 366 mills were operating till March-end, while 152 mills had stopped the crushing.

Releasing the latest sugar production figures, Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) said: "News from the international trade houses in-

dicate that global market is expecting 85 lakh tonne of sugar exports from India, in the current season."

According to the industry body, sugar production reached 309.87 lakh tonne till March of the ongoing 2021-22 marketing year, higher than 278.71 lakh tonne in the year-ago period. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka are the top three sugar producing states in the country.

As per the ISMA data, sugar production in Maharashtra rose to 118.81 lakh tonne till March from 100.47 lakh tonne in the year-ago period.

In Uttar Pradesh, sugar production remained lower at 87.50 lakh tonne till March this year compared with 93.71 lakh tonne in the year-ago pe-

riod. Sugar output in Karnataka, the country's third-largest sugar-producing state, rose substantially to 57.65 lakh tonne till March as against 42.38 lakh tonne in the year-ago period.

On the ethanol front, ISMA said against the total Letter of Intent (LoI) for supply of 416.33 crore litres, 131.69 crore litres of ethanol have been supplied as on March 27 this year.

Contracted quantity as on date is 402.66 crore litres as against LoIs of about 416 crore litres issued by oil marketing companies, it said. The country on an average has achieved a blending percentage of 9.60 per cent between December 2021 and March 2022, it added. **AGENCIES**

## Tata Motors bags order for 1,300 commercial vehicles from VRL Logistics



**NEW DELHI:** Tata Motors on Thursday said it has bagged an order for 1,300 commercial vehicles from VRL Logistics. The order comprises medium and heavy commercial vehicle and intermediate & light commercial vehicle range, suited for logistics operations of VRL Logistics, the Mumbai-based automaker said in a statement.

The vehicles were selected basis the superior drivability, high fuel efficiency and low total cost of ownership, which will enable VRL Logistics to increase its fleet efficiency, it added. "We endeavour to engineer our vehicles to offer the lowest total cost of ownership and our widest service network will ensure best-in-the-industry service support in all corners of the country. We look forward to a fruitful partnership with VRL Logistics and will offer the best support for their seamless operations," Tata Motors

Commercial Vehicle Business Unit Vice President, Sales & Marketing Rajesh Kaul noted. Tata Motors said its commercial vehicles are designed and engineered on the Power of 6' philosophy, which delivers driveability, total cost of operations, comfort and convenience, and connectivity.

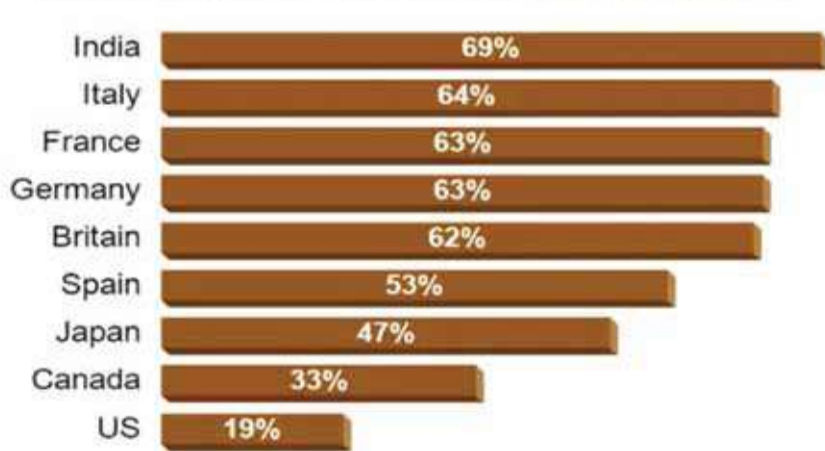
It also offers its flagship initiative, SampurnaSeva, a bouquet of service offerings including repair time assurance, breakdown assistance, insurance and accidental repair time, extended warranty, and other add-on services for vehicle maintenance and upkeep.

The company has operations in India, the UK, South Korea, Thailand, South Africa, and Indonesia, supported by a global network of 103 subsidiaries, nine associate companies, four joint ventures and two joint operations as on March 31, 2021. **AGENCIES**

# Effects of fuel prices: slow growth and high inflation

Fuel prices had been on a freeze since November 4 ahead of the assembly elections in states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab -- a period during which the cost of raw material increased by \$30 per barrel. An increase in international crude oil rates is not the only sole reason behind the exorbitant fuel prices in India. Evident from the fact that the country's fuel rates were significantly lower in the past even at a time when international crude oil prices were higher than current levels. Therefore, the biggest reason behind higher fuel prices in the country is the high rate of central and state taxes. Excise duty – It is levied by the Centre. This comprises a major part of the price of petrol. It has doubled since the year 2014. Value-added tax – It is collected by the state. It is charged on the price of petrol and the dealer's commission. Both the taxes together amount to up to 63% of the cost. The retailers' commission and freight charge count up to a third of the petrol price. Even when international crude oil prices were stable in 2020 due to lower demand, Indians kept paying higher rates for petrol and diesel due to the layers of taxes levied. At the moment, Indians pay the highest taxes on fuel in the world about 69% followed by Italy.

### FUEL TAXATION ACROSS THE WORLD



Source: Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell, IOC

panies are mostly responsible for the recent hikes and the government has no control over it.

Being the third-largest importer of oil in the world, the recent firming of international crude oil prices has severely impacted India, where citizens are paying extremely high rates for fuel in comparison to neighbouring countries. Rates differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes.

According to the data from Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell under the petroleum ministry, in Delhi for Rs 100 worth of petrol, the customer pays a tax of Rs 45.3, which includes a central tax of Rs

29 and a state tax of Rs 16.3. The information has been posted by a Twitter handle named "Stats of India." Similarly, in Maharashtra, for every Rs 100 worth of petrol, almost half the amount that people pay will be taxed.

In seven states --- Maharashtra (Rs 52.5), Andhra Pradesh (Rs 52.4), Telangana (Rs 51.6), Rajasthan (Rs 50.8), Madhya Pradesh (Rs 50.6), Kerala (Rs 50.2), and Bihar (Rs 50) --- half of what customers pay is collected as tax, according to stats of India.

In three states, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, state taxes are higher than the central excise duty tax. Petrol and

diesel prices are a burning issue for a long time now in India. With the latest budget announcements, petrol prices are soaring to record levels reaching Rs 106 per litre mark in the metro cities. This pushes middle-class families to reduce their spending to manage their expenses and budget.

The rise crossed all measures and has increased 80 paise on daily basis for the last 15 days. This pushed the prices of all the retailers across the country. Petrol rates crossed over Rs 108 per litre in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. It is important to note that petrol and diesel prices are retailing

at the highest price in India as compared to its neighbours.

Higher oil prices have a direct impact on inflation figures. The retail inflation of India or Consumer Price Index (CPI) has already touched 6.07% per cent in February. This is the highest in five months. On the other hand, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) rose to 8.47% per cent. This rise in inflation pushes the government to cut the taxes on oil, leading to a smaller revenue.

India imports over 85 per cent of its oil requirements. If the prices rise, so does the government's bill of oils. This may lead to a Balance of Payment (BoP) imbalance, which becomes a big problem in the Budget. Prices of many commodities are expected to go up due to rising fuel costs.

Continuous increases in fuel prices will have a widespread spillover impact on citizens and the overall economy.

There are many ways in which rising fuel prices can impact citizens in the country. The initial impact of the rise will be felt by people who own personal vehicles. A recent hike in prices has increased the monthly budget of people on fuel. The high rate of fuel prices will have an impact on the automotive sector — a large source of employment in the country — as vehicle sales may see a sharp drop.

Passenger vehicles and two-wheeler sales have already witnessed a dip in 2021. A

further contraction in demand for vehicles will have a major impact on the automotive industry and the lakhs of MSMEs that supply goods to the sector.

Lower demand will, therefore, lead to widespread unemployment in the auto and ancillary sectors. More people are pulled into the poverty line making the situation adverse. Not just the poor but the middle class is also squeezed and many find it difficult to make both ends meet. People who do not own a personal vehicle will be impacted as they will have to pay more towards availing of public transport. The public transportation sector is already mulling a hike in rates in view of rising operational costs.

Companies engaged in the logistics and transportation of goods are also expected to increase their service rates soon due to the fuel price hike. Demand for increasing product delivery rates has already put consumer-oriented companies in a tough spot. According to an Economic Times Report, transporters and freighters are seeking a 10-15 per cent increase in freight costs.

Considering that most products and goods that people use on a daily basis are transported from different parts of the country, their costs are likely to rise further. From the food you order to the delivery boy and the fruits you buy, everything is likely to get costlier.

If fuel prices remain continuously on an increasing mode, especially diesel — experts say that it will lead to a rise in headline inflation. Although inflation has softened over the past few months, higher fuel costs could again stoke inflation.

In such a scenario, India's economy is expected to witness a delay in recovery as it will directly impact the consumption levels among citizens.

However, there is no negative impact on government employees, rich and corrupted. Business-class transfers the burden to the common man and the chain reactions widen. So, the hike is unjustified.

But there is a second thought also, that cannot be ignored and at the same time justifies the fuel price hikes. Locally the prices hiked in June 2020, after the stringent lockdown of 82 days. With already 80 per cent of imports, India's crude oil requirement went soaring month by month. An increase in Global prices on the other hand has a direct impact on fuel prices in India. In December 2021 only the imports were 29% more than in November. This was also 11.6% more than last year.

Indian economy is at a stage of slow growth & high inflation. Although the government's decision to hike the prices of petrol is unavoidable, it invariably affects the com-

mon man.

With the current situation of the economy after the pandemic, there is a lot of uncertainty in forecasting the future. Even though there was a fall in international prices last year, Indian citizens could not reap the benefits as the prices were not lowered for crude oil in India in response to this fall.

This is probably the peak of oil prices and there is an utmost need for research and analysis of alternative fuels & energy sources. This will reduce India's reliance on oil imports. Solar & wind energy can be taken into use as India is also 4th largest producer of wind energy.

Government must also emphasize the efficient use of energy. India consumes more energy for every unit of GDP when compared to many other countries.

For such situations, there is a need for innovative technologies like green technology.



DR. HARVINDER KAUR,  
S.D. College, Ambala  
Views are personal

# HDFC Ltd to merge with HDFC Bank



**NEW DELHI:** HDFC Chairman Deepak Parekh today addressed a press conference on the merger. Mortgage lender Housing Development Finance Corporation (HDFC) on April 4 said its

board has approved merger of its wholly owned subsidiaries HDFC Investments Limited and HDFC Holdings Limited with HDFC Bank Limited. HDFC will acquire 41% stake

The country's largest housing finance company HDFC Ltd will merge with the country's largest private sector lender HDFC Bank, according to a regulatory filing. The scheme of amalgama-



tion will be subject to various regulatory approvals, including from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), HDFC Bank said in the filing on Monday. Under the proposed deal, share exchange ratio will be 42 equity shares each of HDFC Bank for every 25 equity shares held in HDFC Ltd. "After considering the recommendation and report of

the Audit Committee and the Committee of Independent Directors, the Board of Directors of HDFC Bank, at its meeting held on April 4, 2022 approved a composite scheme of amalgamation of HDFC Investments and HDFC Holdings, into and with Housing Development Finance Corporation Limited (HDFC Ltd); and HDFC Ltd into HDFC Bank, and their respective shareholders and creditors," the filing said. **AGENCIES**

# Centre asked to look into PIL seeking uniform banking code for foreign exchange transactions

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi High Court on Tuesday asked the Centre to seriously look into the issue raised in a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking implementation of a Uniform Banking Code for foreign exchange transactions to control black money generation and benami transactions.



A bench of Acting Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Navin Chawla issued notice to the Centre through ministries of Home Affairs, Law and Justice and Finance, and asked them to respond to the petition. Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma, representing the Centre, submitted that the petitioner has raised a serious issue which shall be looked into by the government. Delhi High Court, which listed the matter for further hearing on May 25, asked the Centre to seriously look into the issue raised by the petitioner.

**Foreign Inward Remittance Certificate (FIRC) must be issued and all international and Indian banks must send the link through SMS to get FIRC automatically in case foreign exchange is being deposited in the account as converted INR**

whether it is export payment in a current account or salary in a savings account or donation in charities current account or service charges payable in YouTuber's accounts. The format should be uniform whether it is converted by Western Union or National Bank or an India-based foreign bank, the plea said. "Foreign Inward Remittance Certificate (FIRC) must be issued and all international and Indian banks must send the link through SMS to get FIRC automatically in case foreign exchange is being deposited in the account as converted INR. Moreover, only a person or company should be permitted to send Indian rupees from one bank account to another bank account inside the territory of India through RTGS, NEFT and IMPS and international banks should not be allowed to use these domestic banking transactions tools," it said.

Petitioner and advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay raised loop holes in the system in relation to transfer of foreign funds which could be used by separatists, Naxals, Maoists, fundamentalists, and terrorists. During the hearing, the ASG said, He (petitioner) has raised a serious issue. We will consider it and get back. The issues are serious and important, they do require detailed consideration.

The petitioner said it is not only harming the foreign exchange reserve of India but is also being used to provide money to separatists, fundamentalists, Naxals, Maoists, terrorists, traitors, conversion mafias and radical organisations like the SIMI and PFI. He submitted that immigration rules for a visa are the same whether a foreigner comes in business class or economy class, uses Air India or British Airways, and comes from USA or Uganda. Likewise, the deposit details in Indian banks, including foreign bank branches for foreign exchange transactions, must be in the same format

Moreover, only a person or company should be permitted to send Indian rupees from one bank account to another bank account inside the territory of India through RTGS, NEFT and IMPS and international banks should not be allowed to use these domestic banking transactions tools," it said. The plea also sought direction that foreign exchange transactions through Indian banks and foreign bank branches in India must have information like the name and mobile number of the depositor, International Money Transfer (IMT) and not RTGS/NEFT/IMPS and name of currency. **AGENCIES**

# Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India modifies risk rating for Sri Lanka



of export credit guarantee offers revolving limits and is normally valid for a year after being approved on a case-to-case basis.

However, the premium rates for the shipments insured under the insurance covers will remain unchanged.

The Corporation said that this change has been made to ensure that ECGC is able to assess and monitor risks covered under its export credit insurance policies and to place appropriate risk mitigation measures. This measure will assist ECGC customers in improving payment realization prospects from buyers in Sri Lanka. The change is effective from 7th April 2022, tomorrow.

ECGC has also asked to contact their servicing branch of ECGC for cover on shipments to Sri Lanka. "ECGC continues to monitor the situation and further review of the underwriting policy will be undertaken based on future developments," it said. **AGENCIES**

**NEW DELHI:** The Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (ECGC) has modified its underwriting policy for export transactions to Sri Lanka. After carrying out a review of the rating of Sri Lanka in view of prevailing situations, ECGC, which offers credit guarantee has changed the cover category from Open Cover to Restricted Cover category—RCC 1. This category



# SEBI chairperson appears before parl panel



**NEW DELHI:** SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch on Tuesday appeared before the parliamentary standing committee on finance over regulatory issues concerning the capital market.

According to sources, Buch is also expected to be questioned about the recent National Stock Exchange (NSE) scam.

The panel chaired by former minister of state for finance Jayant Sinha has called Buch to deliberate upon regulatory issues related to initial public offerings, international financial services centres and alternate investment fund, according to a notice issued by

the Lok Sabha Secretariat. Members in the committee said they would like to know about the investigation being done by the SEBI in the NSE scam in which several of its top officials including former chief executive officers Chitra Ramakrishna and Ravi Narain are being investigated. Sinha had said that Buch has been called by the parliamentary panel to deliberate upon the orderly functioning of the market in the recent volatility and turbulent flow of cash. This is the second meeting of SEBI officials with the parliamentary panel in the last week, after March 30. **AGENCIES**

# Air India cancels Delhi-Moscow flight over insurance issues



**NEW DELHI:** Air India on Thursday cancelled its Delhi-Moscow service over the fear that its flight insurance may not be valid in Russian skies amid the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, sources said.

Flight insurance is generally provided by companies based out of western countries. Western countries banned all Russian airlines from their airspace after Russia started a war against Ukraine on February 24. However, Air India has been operating Delhi-Moscow flights twice a week. India has not banned Russian airlines from its airspace. The Air India's Delhi-Moscow flight that was scheduled to operate on Thursday stands cancelled, the sources said. They stated that the flight was cancelled as it was feared that the insurance may not be valid in Russian skies. Air India did not respond to PTI's request for a statement on this matter. **AGENCIES**

Overall economic growth in developing East Asia and Pacific countries is projected to slow to 5 per cent in 2022, 0.4 of a percentage point less than expected in October, the World Bank noted, adding that if global conditions worsen and national policy responses are weak, growth in the region could slow to 4 per cent. To mitigate the risks and grasp the opportunities, the World Bank urged governments to

# World Bank projects East Asia Pacific to grow 5 per cent in 2022

**WASHINGTON:** The developing East Asia and Pacific countries is projected to grow by 5 per cent in 2022 amid the resurgence of Covid-19 pandemic, tighter financial conditions and the Russia-Ukraine war, the World Bank said.

"Shocks emanating from the war in Ukraine and the sanctions on Russia are disrupting the supply of commodities, increasing financial stress, and dampening global growth,

"Xinhua news agency quoted the global lender as saying in its newly released East Asia and Pacific Economic Update. "Just as the economies of East Asia and the Pacific were recovering from the pandemic-induced shock, the war in Ukraine is weighing on growth momentum," said World Bank Vice President for East Asia and Pacific Manuela V. Ferro.

"The region's largely strong fundamentals and sound policies should help it weather these storms." Surging US inflation could provoke faster-than-anticipated financial tightening, perhaps timely in the US but "too early" in many East Asia and Pacific countries where recovery is "incomplete", according to the report. The risk of capital outflows, which could put pressure on some countries' currencies, could induce "premature" financial tightening.

Overall economic growth in developing East Asia and Pacific countries is projected to slow to 5 per cent in 2022, 0.4 of a percentage point less than expected in October, the World Bank noted, adding that if global conditions worsen and national policy responses are weak, growth in the region could slow to 4 per cent.

To mitigate the risks and grasp the opportunities, the World Bank urged governments to

enhance efficiency of fiscal policy for recovery and growth, and strengthen macroprudential policies to mitigate risks from global financial tightening. It also called on policymakers to reform trade-related policies in goods and, especially, in still-protected services sectors to take advantage of shifts in the global trade landscape, and encourage diffusion of technology. **AGENCIES**

# World Bank says war shocks to drag on Asian economies

Disruptions to supplies of commodities, financial strains and higher prices are among the impacts of the war in Ukraine that will slow economies in Asia in coming months, the World Bank says in a report released Tuesday.

The report forecasts slower growth and rising poverty in the Asia-Pacific region this year as multiple shocks compound troubles for people and for businesses.

Growth for the region is estimated at 5%, down from the original forecast of 5.4%. The low case scenario foresees growth dipping to 4%, it said. The region saw a rebound to 7.2% growth in 2021 after many economies experienced downturns with the onset of the pandemic.

The World Bank anticipates that China, the region's largest economy, will expand at a 5% annual pace, much slower than the 8.1% growth of 2021.



Russia's invasion of Ukraine has helped drive up prices for oil, gas and other commodities, eating into household purchasing power and burdening businesses and governments that already are contending with unusually high levels of debt due to the pandemic, the report said. The development lending institution urged governments to lift restrictions on trade and services to take advantage of more opportunities for trade and to end fossil fuel subsidies to encourage adoption of more green energy technologies.

The succession of shocks means that the growing economic pain of the

people will have to face the shrinking financial capacity of their governments, said the World Bank's East Asia and Pacific Chief Economist Aaditya Mattoo. A combination of fiscal, financial and trade reforms could mitigate risks, revive growth and reduce poverty. The report pointed

**“**The 8 million households whose members fell back into poverty during the pandemic, will see real incomes shrink even further as prices soar”

to three main potential shocks for the region: the war, changing monetary policy in the U.S. and some other countries and a slowdown in China. While rising interest rates make sense for cooling the U.S. economy and curbing inflation, much of Asia lags behind in its recovery from the pandemic. Countries like Malaysia may suffer outflows of currency and other financial repercussions from those changing policies, it said. Meanwhile, China's already slowing economy could falter as outbreaks of

# ED questions Omar Abdullah in J&K Bank case



**NEW DELHI:** Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah was questioned by the Enforcement Directorate Thursday in connection with the purchase of a building by the J&K Bank about 12 years ago, officials said here. **AGENCIES**

The National Conference leader arrived at the federal probe agency's headquarters this morning where his statement in being recorded, they said. The case was registered by the ED earlier this year, they said. **AGENCIES**

# Air Asia resumes flights between India and Malaysia, Thailand

**NEW DELHI:** Air Asia on Wednesday said it is resuming flights connecting India with Malaysia and Thailand from this month. After two years of coronavirus-induced suspension, India resumed regular international flights on March 27.

In a press release, Malaysian carrier Air Asia said flights will gradually resume on six routes between India and Malaysia.

While the flights on Bengaluru-Kuala Lumpur and Chennai-Kuala Lumpur routes began on April 1, the flight on the Tiruchirapalli-Kuala Lumpur route began on April 5, it mentioned.

The flights on Kochi-Kuala Lumpur, Kolkata-Kuala Lumpur and Hyderabad-Kuala Lumpur routes will commence from April 18, April 23 and May 1, respectively, it noted.

The Malaysian carrier said flights on five India-Thailand



routes will begin in May. The flights on Bengaluru-Bangkok, Chennai-Bangkok, Kolkata-Bangkok, Kochi-Bangkok

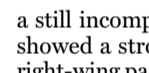
and Jaipur Bangkok will commence on May 4, May 4, May 2, May 1 and May 1, respectively, it mentioned. Air Asia

is different from Air Asia India airline, which is based out of India and owned by the Tata group. **AGENCIES**

## PM Modi congratulates Hungarian counterpart on poll win

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday congratulated Hungary's leader Viktor Orban on his party's victory in parliamentary elections, and said he looked forward to continue working with him to further strengthen the close and friendly India-Hungary ties.

Hungary's nationalist Prime Minister Orban declared victory in Sunday's national elections, claiming a mandate for a fourth term as a still incomplete vote count showed a strong lead for his right-wing party Modi tweeted, «Congratulations, Prime Minister Viktor Orban, on your victory in the Parliamentary elections in Hungary. Look forward to continue working with you to further strengthen the close and friendly India-Hungary ties. **AGENCIES**



The UN Food and Agriculture Organization said Friday its Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in international prices for a basket of commodities, recorded a double-digit percentage-point increase in March from the record level already set the previous month.

## Ukraine war underpins record food prices: UN

United Nations says prices for world food commodities like grains and vegetable oils reached their highest levels ever last month due to fallout from the war in Ukraine.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization said Friday its Food Price Index, which tracks monthly changes in international prices for a basket of commodities, recorded a double-digit percentage-point increase in March from the record level already set the previous month.

FAO said the index came in at 159.3 points last month, up 12.6 per cent from February's all-time high since the index was created in 1990.

The Rome-based agency says the war in Ukraine was largely responsible for the 17.1 per cent rise in prices for cereals, including wheat and all coarse grains. **AGENCIES**

# Myanmar orders foreign money held by banks changed to kyats

**BANGKOK:** An order by Myanmar's central bank that all foreign currency in bank accounts must be converted into the local currency has many in the military-ruled country worried over potential losses.

Businesses and individuals were told in a notice issued Sunday that as of Monday they must convert dollars and other foreign currency into kyats within one day or face legal consequences. Foreign currency can only be sent overseas with government approval, it said. It said further details of the rules would follow.

Myanmar's military leaders are facing a raft of sanctions after they seized power on Feb. 1, 2021, ousting the country's elected government. The order to hand over foreign exchange suggests the authorities may be running short of hard currency needed to pay debts and purchase key supplies such as oil, gas and weapons.

Hard currency is also needed to repay foreign debt, which for Myanmar stands at about 10-11 billion. The central bank order instructed holders of foreign currency accounts in Myanmar to open new accounts to convert funds into kyats (pronounced CHUHTs).

People earning foreign currency are supposed to also convert their money into kyats, which are not a convertible currency and are not supposed to be taken out of the country.

An official from Kanbawza Bank said Tuesday that some traders and sailors had come in to inquire about opening the required new business accounts but most said they



would think about it.

The bank staffer, who spoke on condition they not be named because they were not authorized to speak to media, said account holders were worried they would lose money since the exchange rate set by the central bank, 1,850 kyats per dollar, is below the prevailing black market rate of 2,030 kyats per dollar.

One unauthorised money changer consulted Tuesday said they were not doing any exchanges.

Of seven people with foreign currency accounts asked about the order, most said they had not opened new accounts and were unsure about the consequences.

A businessman at a trading company said major businesses already have such accounts and banks have been converting their export earnings into kyats.

One businessperson said in a Facebook post that the bank had sent him a box of cakes as a gift after converting his foreign exchange holdings into kyats, joking that it was worth millions of dollars and that the name of the cakes was exporters' tears. **AGENCIES**

After the military took power last year, Western governments imposed targeted sanctions on the military, military affiliated companies, officials and their families. Their foreign assets were frozen, at a time when the country had lost a large share of earnings from tourism due to the pandemic.

Myanmar's foreign reserves stood at nearly 7.8 billion as of December 2020, according to the World Bank. The military leadership has also sought to relieve pressure on its foreign exchange reserves by encouraging the use of Thai baht, Indian rupees and Chinese renminbi, or yuan, for trade in border areas.

Last year, authorities moved to stem a plunge in the kyat's value against the dollar. The administration recently said it plans to re-open the borders to foreign tourism in mid-April.

That might alleviate pressures on the country's finances somewhat, though its unclear how much tourism can be expected at a time when experts say widespread resistance to the coup has left the country on the brink of civil war. **AGENCIES**

# Piyush Goyal reaches Australia on 3-day visit, days after inking India-Australia ECTA

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Textiles, Piyush Goyal left New Delhi on a 3 day visit to Australia today. His visit comes days after India and Australia signed the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (IndAus ECTA) on Saturday, 2nd April. During the visit, I will take the ECTA to people, Goyal said, adding that interactions had been planned with Business leaders, Indian students, diaspora, etc.

During the visit Goyal will hold wide-ranging discussions with his Australian counterpart, Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, on carrying forward the ECTA. ECTA is the first trade agreement of India with a developed country after more than a decade and provides for an institutional mechanism to improve trade between the two countries. Goyal will also hold talks with Tony Abbott, Australian PM's Special Trade Envoy this evening.

Goyal will also be meeting Jason Wood, MP, Assistant Minister for Customs, Community Safety and Multicultural Affairs, Alex Hawke, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Roger Cook, MLA, Deputy Premier of Western Australia and Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade, Tourism, Commerce and Science and Madeline King, Shadow Trade Minister.

During his packed schedule, Goyal will visit the University of Melbourne and Australia India Institute tomorrow. He will address



a Public conversation with Minister Dan Tehan and Alan Myers, Chancellor, University of Melbourne, at the Melbourne Law School in The University of Melbourne. Goyal will also visit the landmark Melbourne Cricket Ground and address the Australia-India Chamber of Commerce and Austrade, along with Minister Dan Tehan, besides interacting with the Indian media. He will later visit the Shiva Vishnu Temple in Melbourne and attend a Community event with the Indian Diaspora.

On Thursday, 7th April, Goyal and Minister Dan Tehan will address and interact with students at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and pay tributes at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the University campus. Goyal will later address the Emerging Diaspora Business Leaders Reception hosted by India-Australia Business and Community Awards (IABCA). Later in the evening, Goyal, accompanied by Minister Dan Tehan and Minister Alex Hawke, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, will attend a Community event at the Swaminarayan Temple in Sydney.

Before leaving Sydney on Friday, 8th April, Goyal will also meet Alan Joyce, CEO & MD, Qantas Airways.

Goyal will meet with the Australian Agricultural Producers and hold talks with Deputy Premier Roger Cook and Madeline King, Shadow Trade Minister in Perth. He will visit the Western Australia Cricket Ground (WACA) in Perth and attend a Tourism event in conjunction with Tourism Western Australia, besides holding a Press Interaction with the Indian Media Delegation. On Friday evening, Goyal will address the Community Centre Indian Society of Western Australia (ISWA).

Australia is the 17th largest trading partner of India and India is Australia's 9th largest trading partner. The ECTA is expected to almost double the bilateral trade from \$ 27.5 bn (2021) to about \$ 45 to \$ 50 Billion in next 5 years. ECTA is expected to create new employment opportunities, raise living standards and enhance the overall welfare of the peoples of both the countries. Additional employment generation is expected to be 10 lakhs within the next 5 years. **AGENCIES**

## 'COVID case rates hit new high for England'



**LONDON:** Coronavirus infections in England climbed to a new record high with one in 16 or 6.37 per cent testing positive for COVID-19 last month -- more than double the one in 35 reported in February, according to a new study. Experts behind the long-running Real-time Assessment of Community Transmission (REACT-1) analysis in the UK by Imperial College London found that infections were doubling every 30 days with an estimated reproduction number, or the rate at which infections multiply, above the cut-off mark of one at 1.07.

According to the surveillance data of the study, released on Wednesday, based on almost 110,000 swab tests taken between March 8 and 31, the vast majority of the analysed positive samples were the Omicron BA.2 "stealth variant", named due to the absence of certain genetic changes that can distinguish this variant easily from others.

"These trends are concerning since when a very high number of people are infected, this may lead to more people becoming seriously ill and needing to go to hospital," said Professor Paul Elliott, director of the REACT programme from Imperial's School of Public Health. "Although restrictions have ended, I would urge people to still behave cautiously to help protect others who might be vulnerable, and avoid contact with other people if you have symptoms. **AGENCIES**

# UN panel to release report on efforts to curb climate change

**BERLIN:** UN-backed panel will release Monday a highly anticipated scientific report on international efforts to curb climate change before global temperatures reach dangerous levels.

Reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are considered the most authoritative assessments of the state of global warming, its impacts and the measures being taken to tackle it.

Negotiations between governments and scientists to finalize the summary for policymakers dragged on past the original deadline until late Sunday, pushing back the planned publication by several hours.

Governments agreed in the 2015 Paris accord to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) this century. But with temperatures already more than 1.1C higher than the pre-industrial baseline, many experts say that's only



possible with drastic cuts to greenhouse gas emissions.

The cut-off point for data in the report was last fall, meaning that the impact of the war in Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions on Russia weren't included by the authors.

Rouven Stubbe, an analyst at the consultancy Berlin Economics who wasn't involved in the report, said there is a risk that the geopolitical and economic turmoil caused by the conflict could disrupt efforts to reduce emissions.

I think the difficult thing

will be that politically we have to maintain course," he said. Especially now with this high energy prices, there are already voices that say we should ease the (European) emissions trade system that encourages companies to avoid heavily polluting forms of energy.

Last August, the IPCC said climate change caused by humans was an established fact and warned that some effects of global warming are already inevitable. In March, the panel published a report that outlined how further temperature

increases will multiply the risk of floods, storms, drought and heat waves worldwide.

In the last years, we have seen that every report has confirmed the gravity of the situation, and in some cases, it has also underlined not the current gravity but the fact that things are going to be getting worse," the head of the U.N. climate office, Patricia Espinosa, told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

In some cases also, it has confirmed that some of the consequences are happening earlier than previously thought, she said. "Unfortunately what I think we will be seeing is, again, a call for urgent and determined and transformational action.

Last week U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appointed a 16-member panel to scrutinize emissions reduction pledges made by companies, cities and regions amid concerns that they don't do what they claim. **AGENCIES**

# Ukraine accuses Russia of massacre, city strewn with bodies of civilians

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelenskyy in a video address said Russian soldiers who killed and tortured civilians were responsible for concentrated evil."

Even if you raised looters, how did they also become butchers? he said. You couldn't overlook that they are deprived of everything human. No soul. No heart. They killed deliberately and with pleasure.

Zelenskyy said his government would take steps to create a special justice mechanism to investigate every crime committed by the Russian forces in Ukraine Bodies with bound hands, close-range gunshot wounds and signs of torture lay scattered in a city on the outskirts of Kyiv after Russian soldiers withdrew from the area.

Ukrainian authorities accused the departing forces on Sunday of committing war crimes and leaving

behind a scene from a horror movie. As images of the bodies emerged from Bucha, European leaders condemned the atrocities and called for tougher sanctions against Moscow.

In a sign of how the horrific reports shook many leaders, Germany's defense minister even suggested that the European Union consider banning Russian gas imports.

Ukrainian officials said the bodies of 410 civilians were found in Kyiv-area towns that were recently retaken from Russian forces.

A resident, who refused to give his name out of fear for his safety, said that Russian troops went building to building and took people out of the basements where they were hiding, checking their phones for any evidence of anti-Russian activity before taking them away or shooting them.

Some bodies, that of a man and a woman, wrapped in plastic that resi-



dents said they had covered and placed in a shaft until a proper funeral could be arranged.

Zelenskyy also appeared in a video message at 3rd April Grammy Awards, contrasting the lives of those attending the award ceremony in Las Vegas with the lives of musicians in his battered homeland.

Our musicians wear body armor instead of tuxedos. They sing to the wounded in hospitals, even to those

who can't hear them, he said. But the music will break through anyway.

Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement that photos and videos of dead bodies have been stage managed by the Kyiv regime for the Western media.

Some European leaders said the killings in the Kyiv area amounted to war crimes. The U.S. has previously said that it believes Russia has committed war

crimes, and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called images of what happened near Kyiv a punch to the gut on CNN's State of the Union. It is a brutality against civilians we haven't seen in Europe for decades, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said on the same show. Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko called on nations to immediately end Russian gas imports, saying they were funding the killings.

Russia provides 40% of Europe's gas and 25% of its oil, and until now many EU nations have resisted calls to scale back or fully end reliance on Russian fossil fuels. Giving them up would mean even higher prices at the pump and higher utility bills, potentially creating an energy crisis and a recession.

The U.S. has previously announced a ban on Russian oil, but it imports only a small share of Russia's oil

exports and doesn't buy any of its natural gas.

In that region, Mariupol, a port on the Sea of Azov that has seen some of the war's greatest suffering, remained cut off. About 100,000 civilians less than a quarter of the prewar population of 430,000 are believed to be trapped there with little or no food, water, fuel and medicine.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said that a team sent 1st April to help evacuate residents had yet to reach the city.

Ukrainian authorities said Russia agreed days ago to allow safe passage from the city, but similar agreements have broken down repeatedly under continued shelling. The mayor of Chernihiv, which has also been cut off from shipments of food and other supplies for weeks, said that relentless Russian shelling has destroyed 70% of the northern city. **AGENCIES**

# Not possible to hold general elections in three months, says Pak election commission

**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's election commission has expressed its inability to hold general elections within three months due to legal, constitutional and logistical challenges, according to a media report.

Pakistan's embattled Prime Minister Imran Khan stunned the Opposition on Sunday by recommending snap elections within three months, minutes after a no-confidence motion against him was dismissed by the deputy speaker of the National Assembly.

According to the Dawn newspaper, a senior official of the Election Commission said due to fresh delimitation of constituencies, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the number of seats was increased under the 26th Amendment, and bringing district-and constituency-wise electoral rolls in con-

formity were the major challenges, the preparations for the general elections would require some six months.

Delimitation is a time-consuming exercise where the law provides for one month's time just to invite objections, the report said quoting the official.

The official said procurement of election material, arrangement for ballot papers and appointment and training of polling staff were among the other inherent challenges.

He said that under the law, ballot papers with watermark were to be used which were not available in the country and hence they would have to be imported, and revealed that the top election body had proposed to amend the law to provide for ballot papers with security features, instead of water mark, the report said. **AGENCIES**

# Twinkle Khanna comes under attack for her remarks on THE KASHMIR FILES

**MUMBAI:** Author and former Bollywood actor Twinkle Khanna is being criticised on social media for making a tongue-in-cheek remark about the film "The Kashmir Files" in her Sunday column for a leading daily.

In her satirical column published on April 3 with the headline 'Did Will Smith learn one-tight-slap lesson from India?' on the shocking turn of events at the 2022 Oscars ceremony, Khanna also wrote about how she was planning to register 'Nail Files', a title inspired by Vivek Agnihotri's recently released film based on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Valley in the 1990s.

Under her nom de plume 'Mrs Funnybones', Khanna wrote that the potential film 'Nail Files' may revolve around a "disastrous manicure", which she said would be "better than putting the final nail into the communal coffin".

The film has been called out



for its problematic politics by some critics and authors but that has not affected its box office collection as the movie, released on March 11, has minted Rs 331 crore, according to the figures given by the producers in a tweet.

The 47-year-old Khanna, who is the daughter of prolific Hindi cinema stars Rajesh Khanna and Dimple Kapadia, was called out on social media by users who described her as a "shallow" Bollywood personality "devoid of morals".

**“**She does seem daft and insensitive to say this. All the Bollywood fraternity are shallow and devoid of morals”

Filmmaker Ashoke Pandit, a Kashmiri Pandit, appealed to the columnist to not be insensitive towards the plight of the community.

Commenting on her column, Pandit tweeted Monday evening, "@mrsfunnybones ma'am, you are too late. This film (#KashmirFiles) on the genocide of #KashmiriPandits has already hit the nail on the communal coffin of #IslamicTerrorism. Request

you not be so insensitive towards the genocide of 7 lac #KashmiriPandits." Another user wrote, "She does seem daft and insensitive to say this. All the Bollywood fraternity are shallow and devoid of morals."

Khanna's comments come weeks after her husband and Bollywood star Akshay Kumar congratulated "The Kashmir Files" director on the success of the film, also quipping how it affected the box office business of his film "Bachchan Paandey", which released on March 18.

Akshay Kumar, known for his pro-establishment stand as opposed to his wife's, had last month at an event said Agnihotri has brought a "harrowing truth to light" through his film.

Twinkle Khanna has been away from social media since Sunday after she shared the link to her column and retweeting it on her Twitter page

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## I'm scared of doing big budget films: Shahid Kapoor

**MUMBAI:** Bollywood Actor Shahid Kapoor says his intent is to chase the «heart of a film» and not the «size» as big scale movies often run the risk of going out of control.

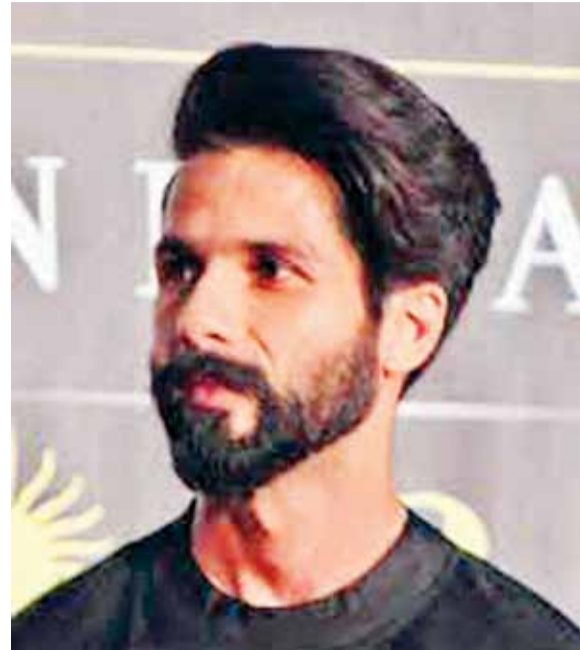
Shahid Kapoor, who delivered his career's biggest hit with «Kabir Singh», said he was advised to follow the movie's success with a big scale project but he wasn't interested.

After «Kabir Singh», everyone said I should do a 150 cr film, people will back me up with money. I thought, sure they will put money, but what will the film be? There's a difference between making a scaled film and a good film,» Kapoor told reporters ahead of the release of his film «Jersey» on April 14.

Shahid Kapoor, 41, said he doesn't believe that a film mounted on a big scale would be a sure shot crowd puller.

A film has to connect with the audience to work at the box office, irrespective of the scale, he added.

«It's still possible for me to do a big film, but why am I doing this («Jersey») and not that? Because I am chasing the heart of a film, not the size of the film. To me, the heart of the film is the size of the film.



«I don't come from that thinking that if you spend a lot of money, audiences will turn in huge numbers... I actually always get scared of doing high budget films, because in those, things go out of your hands. There are a lot of factors in it,» he added.

«Jersey» will clash at the box office with the much awaited actioner «KGF: Chapter 2». Kapoor, who

returns to the screen three years after «Kabir Singh», said a good film will always find its audience.

«If «KGF 2» is a good film, it'll surely work. If «Jersey» is a good film, it'll definitely work. There is an audience which wants to watch our film, another wants to watch the other film that's coming out and then there is also that audience which simply wants to watch a film.

AGENCIES

## Thalapathy Vijay-Rashmika Mandanna starrer begins production



**MUMBAI:** South star Thalapathy Vijay on Wednesday began filming for his upcoming yet-untitled film in Chennai.

The film, which also features «Pushpa» star Rashmika Mandanna, is directed by Vamshi Paidipally and produced by Dil Raju and

Shirish of Sri Venkateswara Creations.

According to a note shared by the makers, the film's production began with a prayer ceremony.

The film's soundtrack will be composed by S Thaman. The movie's story and screenplay is credited to Paidipally,

Hari and Ashishor Solomon, with dialogues and additional screenplay by Vivek.

Vijay is currently awaiting the release of his next, «Beast». The action thriller features him as a spy on a mission to rescue people held hostage in a shopping mall by terrorists.

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## Harrry Sandhu opens up on his new single 'Kudiyan Lahore Diyan'



**MUMBAI:** The well-known singer Harrry Sandhu talks about his newly released song «Kudiyan Lahore Diyan» featuring Aisha Sharma.

Harrry says: ««Kudiyan Lahore Diyan» is an extremely special song for me because it's very true to my artistry and brings me closer to my Punjabi roots. Jaani has outdone himself with penning these lyrics, B Praak composed a beat that I instantly fell in

love with, and Arvind Khaira undoubtedly conceptualized a larger-than-life video that does absolute justice to the song.» Sandhu made his acting debut in «Yaaran Da Katchup» and his song «Soch» was remade for the movie «Airlift». The singer shares that he hopes to get positive response for his latest track.

«I loved working on it from the first time we made a draft and I would like to thank my

team for bringing «Kudiyan Lahore Diyan» to life. I hope the fans give it all their love and it finds a spot on your playlist,» he adds.

The song is directed by Arvind Khaira, music is composed by versatile B Praak and the song is written by lyricist Jaani. Desi Melodies released the official music video of «Kudiyan Lahore Diyan» on their official YouTube channel.

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## 2nd Sufi Sangeet Sammelan



**CHANDIGARH** (Kulbir Kalsi): A group of eminent people from the legal fraternity enjoyed soulful songs sung by popular Sufi singer Ustad Neelay Khan of Patiala Gharana during the 2nd Sufi Sangeet Sammelan in everlasting memory of Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh Dhillon on his birth anniversary Organized by Gurbakhsh Singh Dhillon Foundation at the Law Bhawan Chandigarh.

The Inaugural lamp lighting was done by Dr. Anmol Rattan Sidhu (Worthy Advocate General, Punjab) in the presence of Dr. Harpreet Dhillon Dhillon Dental Care, MI, U.S.A., Gurdeepinder Singh Dhillon Advocate, President, Gurbakhsh Singh Dhillon Foundation.

A short article on the lifestyle of Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh was also narrated by Niyamat Kaur, granddaughter of Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh.

According to Indian tradition after the end of the program, all the guests had evening tea.

## Pooja Bhatt joins Radhika Madan-starrer 'Sanaa'

**MUMBAI:** Bollywood actor Pooja Bhatt has been roped in to play a key role in social drama Sanaa, starring Radhika Madan. The film is written and directed by Sudhanshu Saria of Loev fame and produced by his Four Line Entertainment.

According to the official synopsis, «Sanaa» follows the story of a headstrong and ambitious girl (Madan), who is raging against an internal battle that is rooted in unhealed trauma.

Bhatt, who returned to acting last year with Netflix show Bombay Begums said she is thrilled to be part of an important film like Sanaa, which examines the lives of women in true sense.



Sanaa' is a deeply moving and astonishingly perceptive film that captures society's judgments around women in a way that is going to jolt a lot of people out of their preconceived notions and comfort zone.

«I am thrilled and honoured that Sudhanshu made me a part of this truly important film—one that examines the lives of women as we actually live it and not in a way the world thinks or wishes that we do, Bhatt said in a statement.

Saria without divulging details about Bhatt's character said it is tailor-made for her.

Pooja thoroughly fits the bill for this tailor-made role in «Sanaa». I'm sure the legacy she carries as an actor and as the voice of women will add dimensions to the part she will be seen playing in the film. I'm thrilled that she has boarded this journey with all of us at Four Line Entertainment, he said. Madan began shooting for the film last month in Mumbai. Sanaa also stars Sohum Shah and Shikha Talsania. Besides Sanaa, Saria was recently announced as the director of high-octane female-led espionage, Ulajh, with Junglee Pictures. He is also writing, co-directing and show-running Masoom, a series for Amazon Prime and is co-producing and writing Delhi Crime Season 3 for Netflix.

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## Shubman Gill is one of the finest talents in world cricket: Ravi Shastri

**MUMBAI:** Former India coach Ravi Shastri has called young batter Shubman Gill «one of the finest talents in world cricket», someone who is tailor-made for the game's T20 format because of his wide range of strokes.

Gill, 22, who is playing for Gujarat Titans in the IPL, is using the ongoing season as an opportunity to make the Indian team for the ICC T20 World Cup in Australia.

Speaking on Gill's performance in the early stages of the tournament, Shastri said on Star Sports' Cricket Live, «Gill is one of the finest talents in the country and in world cricket, to be honest. If he gets going, he can score big. He makes it (batting) look easy when he's set.

«He's got the punch, he's got the time, and he's got the power to clear the ground. He's just made for this format of the game. It's just his shot selection, his rotation of the strike which helps him take the pressure away.»

Gill has impressed with his game in the ongoing IPL and looks set to play a few influential knocks in the coming weeks. «He's the guy who's



**“**He's got the punch, he's got the time, and he's got the power to clear the ground. He's just made for this format of the game. It's just his shot selection, his rotation of the strike which helps him take the pressure away”

capable of putting bad balls away. Very good on the short ball and the short-arm jab,» Shastri said.

«Early stages in the tourna-

ment, good batting tracks, you get to your highest score, you're playing for a new franchise, it can only boost your confidence.

AGENCIES

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