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SMALL FIRE ARMS MANUFACTURING UNIT AT HISAR TO START PRODUCTION THIS YEAR



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I'M SCARED OF DOING BIG BUDGET FILMS, SAYS SHAHID KAPOOR



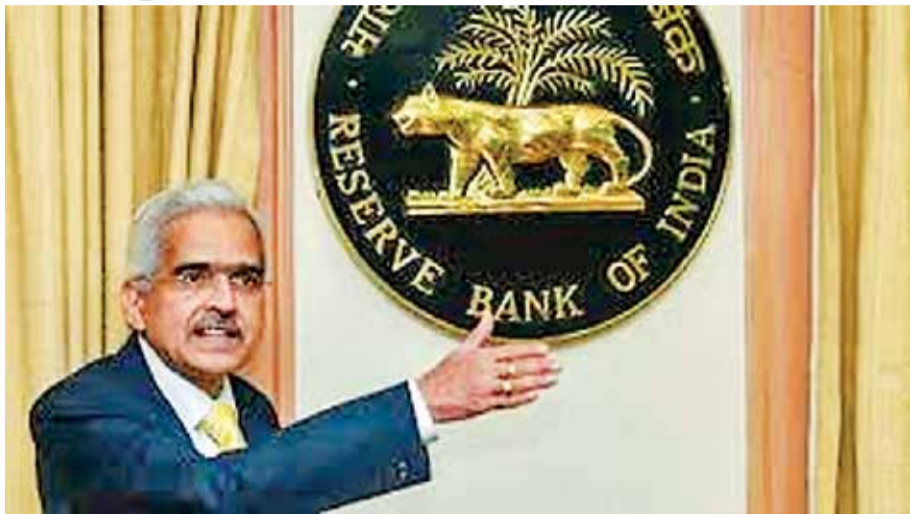
RBI keeps interest rate unchanged, cuts GDP growth forecast to 7.2%

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**

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 benefitted 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. The Department has made special efforts to engage State Governments and district administrations in promoting agriculture exports. In order to ensure that the farmers benefit from exports, Department of Commerce has made special efforts to provide export market linkage directly to farmers and FPOs. A Farmer Connect Portal has been set up for providing a platform for farmers, FPOs/FPCs, cooperatives to interact with exporters. **AGENCIES**

Ukraine Crisis: If India has chosen side, it is side of peace says Jaishankar

NEW DELHI: Asserting that India is strongly against the Russia-Ukraine conflict, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday said if New Delhi has chosen a side, it is the side of peace and for an immediate end to violence.

Replying to the discussion in the Lok Sabha on the situation in Ukraine, Jaishankar said all members would agree that India's approach should be guided by its national beliefs and values, national interest and by its national strategy.

Elaborating on what India is advocating in Ukraine, Jaishankar said, "We are strongly against the conflict, we believe that no solution can be arrived at by shedding blood and at the cost of innocent lives. In



this day and age, dialogue and diplomacy are the right answers to any disputes."

One should bear in mind that the contemporary global order has been built on the UN Charter, on respect for international law and for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, he asserted. "If India has chosen a side, it

is a side of peace and it is for an immediate end to violence. This is our principled stand and has consistently guided our position in international forums and debates, including in the UN," Jaishankar said.

Talking about the civilian killings in the Ukrainian city of Bucha, Jaishankar said India is "deeply disturbed" by the reports.

"We strongly condemn the killings that have taken place there. This is an extremely serious matter and we support the call for an independent investigation," he said.

Jaishankar also said that attributing a political colour to India's actions vis-a-vis the Ukraine situation was unfortunate. **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. **AGENCIES**

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**

Small Fire Arms manufacturing unit at Hisar to start production this year

SATISH HANDA

Union Home Ministry of our country has already granted second licence to manufacture small fire arms including 32 Bore Pistols & Revolvers, 38 Bore Pistols, 9 mm Pistols, Sports Rifles, Assault Rifles, Carbines, Sniper Rifles and AK47 Rifles under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream project 'Make in India' to make country not only self-sufficient but also export manufacturing products to other countries. The license has been given to Amol Steel Private Limited at village Talwandi Rana near Hisar Airport in Haryana state likely to start production of arms by the end of this year.

Earlier, a small fire arms manufacturing license was given to another firm Jindal Defence Company under foreign direct investment (FDI) scheme. The manufacturing of high-tech automatic small fire arms will earn name and



fame for the country across the world. According to Inder Sain Managing Director and Arun Garg Executive Director of Amol Steel Private Limited, their firm is already dealing with Steel Authority of India Limited and National Steel Corporation Limited and designing of automatic

fire arms will be done by design export weapon engineers already engaged by the company to start designing of high tech arms.

Arun Garg told that there are high hopes expected from this project, which will not only meet domestic requirement of automatic small fire arms with

technical support of renowned manufacturers from Israel, Germany and Russia besides export of manufactured fire arms to other countries. He said, work to install unit including proof testing has started on war-footing basis likely to start full fledge production by the end of this year.

Congress completely damaged in Punjab due to Captain left prior to Vidhan Sabha polls

SATISH HANDA

Former Haryana Chief Minister and leader of opposition in Haryana Vidhan Sabha Bhopinder Singh Hooda while talking to media as regard Congress completely wiped out from power in Punjab was of view exit of former Punjab chief minister Captain Amrinder Singh from party prior to Vidhan Sabha polls was prime reason for party's downfall in Punjab state. There is no doubt Hooda was a successful chief minister in Haryana state for about a decade, but Modi wave spread across the country wiped out Congress government in the state led by Hooda who during media discussion admitted, accepting resigning of Capt Amrinder Singh by high command prior to Vidhan Sabha polls was a wrong decision and in case Congress high command wanted to remove Capt Amrinder Singh the decision should have been taken about two year prior to polls. He admitted, Congress in Punjab state would have never lost government in case Capt Amrinder Singh would have been chief minister.

On a question, if he is attempting to fill up gap between G-23 group of dis-satisfied senior Congress leaders and the high command Hooda said don't call them G-23 group but Great G-23 group and all differences will be over shortly. When asked about political activities by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) try-



ing to expand its network in Haryana state and have already joined hands with few heavy weight political leaders in the state as well Arvind Kejriwal himself screening many dis-satisfied BJP as well prominent leaders from other political parties in Haryana, according to Hooda, there will not be no effect in political activities by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal surrounded by Haryana state from three sides and according to him Kejriwal will be able to win hardly few seats in coming Vidhan Sabha polls to be held in 2024.

According to senior political leaders, decision by AAP chief minister approved proposal in Vidhan Sabha session soon after forming government in Punjab having claim over Chandigarh and making large number of developmental announcements by chief minister Bhagwant Maan in a short period after forming new government to attract public attention in Punjab has not only disturbed people in Haryana but has compelled people in Punjab to think from where funds for such a large number of announcements will be arranged when Punjab

government is already buried under heavy debts and chief minister soon after taking oath has started making demand from Prime Minister for financial assistance by Union Government.

On asking about future plans by Congress to come to power again in Haryana state, if Congress will have alliance with other regional political parties, Hooda was of opinion not to join hands with any regional political party to avoid situation as in case of U.P, moreover in Haryana Congress does not need alliance with any regional political party. In a direct question over rumours of rift between BJP-JJP alliance since few JJP political leaders feel themselves neglected are unhappy and in touch with Arvind Kejriwal, Hooda was of opinion that alliance between both will continue during present tenure. When asked about his opinion as regard recent BJP seminar held at Chandigarh recently releasing Mission-10 and Mission-70 slogans, Hooda replied, time will tell since BJP during previous Vidhan Sabha polls had also claimed nearly 80 seats. He said, he is not in favour of Congress to have alliance with any other regional political party during 2024 polls like BJP running government in the state on JJP crutches.

After former Haryana chief minister late Ch. Bhajan Lal, Bhopinder Singh Hooda is generally known as mastermind for forming as well as falling a government in the state.

Don't need lessons on law and order from Shah: TMC

TMC on Thursday slammed Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his remarks on the law and order situation in West Bengal and said that the party doesn't need lessons from him.

Speaking on the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill at Rajya Sabha on Wednesday, Shah had recalled that he was attacked with firebombs in Bengal during his campaigns for 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

"I had gone there in 2019 and was attacked with firebombs (aag ke gola). Our party president J P Nadda's convoy was also targeted (in the run-up to the assembly polls)," he had said.

The home minister further continued his attack on the West Bengal government, stating that its acts "changed even the harshest definition of the word Fascist".

Reacting to Shah's comment, senior TMC leader Sougata Roy said that neither the party nor the state government needed lessons from Shah on maintenance of law and order.

"Amit Shah should be the last person to talk about law and order. We are very well aware of his track record as a minister in Gujarat and in the Union government.

"We have seen how he failed to control the riots that shook Delhi in February 2020. We have also seen lawlessness in BJP-ruled Uttar Pradesh. The situation in Bengal is far better than any other state of the country," Roy said.

Echoing him, TMC state general secretary Kunal Ghosh said Shah's comments reflected his "frustration" over his party's defeat in assembly polls despite a high-pitched campaign. AGENCIES

J&K Waqf Board Chairperson Andrabi meets PM Modi



NEW DELHI: A delegation from Jammu and Kashmir, including its Waqf Board chairperson Darakhshan Andrabi, called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday. Darakhshan Andrabi was recently elected the head of Waqf

Board which manages Muslim community land and properties. Prime Minister's Office tweeted, "Dr. Darakhshan Andrabi, Chairperson of the JK Waqf Board and others called on PM Narendra Modi. AGENCIES

UP Govt unveils its 100-day action plan

LUCKNOW: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said his government's aim is to make it the number one state in the country. Asserting that Uttar Pradesh has huge potential for development in the presence of UP Chief Minister Yogi and cabinet colleagues, newly appointed Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra presented a 100-day action plan of the government, Yogi further said that a comprehensive framework should be made for achieving this target, according to an official release issued here.

He asked all departments to prepare a detailed and practical action plan by setting the targets for 100 days, six months and a year. He stressed on implementing the promises made by the BJP in the run-up to the assembly elections.

Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra presented the 100-day action plan of the government before the cabinet. The Chief Minister said that to give concrete shape to the action plan, "we all have to work as 'Team UP'". AGENCIES

Cong stages protest against Centre over price rise



NEW DELHI: Congress workers staged protests against the BJP-led Centre across the country on Thursday over the rise in the prices of petrol, diesel, cooking gas, fertilisers and essential medicines.

The agitation was part of the party's state and district-wise "Mehngai Mukht Bharat Abhiyan".

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi hit out at the Centre over what he described as "Direct 'Benefit' Transfer to Modi-Mittir". Using the hashtag #JanDhanLootYojana, Gandhi alleged on Twitter that the Centre has collected Rs 26.51 lakh crore from people as "fuel tax" and also accused it of writing off loans worth Rs 10.86 lakh crore of the rich.

Party workers and leaders took part in protest rallies at the

state headquarters under the aegis of the Pradesh Congress committees.

"Mehngai Mukht Bharat" marches and dharnas were held in front of Raj Bhavans, with the Congress workers raising their voice against the "constant exploitation" of the common people by the Narendra Modi government.

"Mehngai Mukht Bharat" rallies were taken out in New Delhi, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Guwahati, Thiruvananthapuram, Chandigarh and Mumbai, among other cities, where PCC presidents, senior leaders, MLAs, MLCs and party functionaries, along with Congress workers and volunteers, participated, a statement issued by the party said.

The party also held a special press conference at the All India Congress Commit-

tee (AICC) headquarters in Delhi, where its leaders and chief whips in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha charged the Bharatiya Janata Party-led (BJP) Centre with running away from discussing the issue of inflation by adjourning Parliament "two days in advance".

This despite the fact that a combined Opposition and specifically, the Congress had expressly demanded a discussion on price rise, the prices of petroleum products, edible oils and medicines, the party said.

It alleged that on top of the Rs 26 lakh crore that the Centre has earned through unprecedentedly high excise rates, the recent spate of taxes are going to put an additional burden of Rs 1.56 lakh crore on the people of the country. AGENCIES

Over Rs 154 cr fine imposed for COVID violations in Delhi, Rs 16 cr collected

NEW DELHI: In the last one year, the Delhi government has issued 14.82 lakh challans amounting to over Rs 154 crore for various Covid violations in the city but managed to collect only Rs 16.79 crore from the fine, according to official data. The maximum number of fines was imposed for not wearing masks in public places.

As many as 13.81 lakh challans for violating the mask mandate (93.31 per cent of the total) were issued by the district authorities between April 17, 2021, and April 6, 2022. Shahdara district recorded the highest number of such offences at 1,85,354, followed by the east district at 1,84,618 and the north district at 1,78,563 offences.

The least number of such offenders were in the Central district where 80,496 challans were issued for not wearing masks. In New Delhi, 90,293 challans and in the south district 91,572 challans were issued, the data showed.

The total fine imposed for various COVID-19 violations between April 17, 2021, and April 6, 2022, was Rs 154.75 crore. However, the amount collected was only Rs 16.79 crore. Explaining the reason for the disparity between the fine imposed and collected, a senior official from the south district administration said many people generally do not pay fines on the spot because of insufficient money in their pocket.



“Till last month, teams were busy issuing challans against violators and now the process of identifying those who have not paid the fine will be started. We will take necessary actions against those who have not paid the due fines”

The official said that till last month, teams were busy issuing challans against violators and now the process of identifying those who have not paid the fine will be started. "We will take necessary actions against those who have not paid the due fines," the official said. AGENCIES

to issue challan orders and send them to the violator's residence or email them. "This would contain all payment details. Violators would also be given options to either pay online or physically at the DM office concerned," the official said requesting anonymity.

The official said as the fine for not wearing masks has now been lifted, district authorities will start working on clearing pendency and reassessing cases who have not paid the fine. Similar views were echoed by another administrative official at the southeast district magistrate office.

The official said that till last month, teams were busy issuing challans against violators and now the process of identifying those who have not paid the fine will be started. "We will take necessary actions against those who have not paid the due fines," the official said. AGENCIES

Delhi cab, auto drivers stage protest at JantarMantar against rising CNG prices

NEW DELHI: Opposing the steep hike in CNG prices, hundreds of cab and auto drivers staged a protest at JantarMantar on Friday and demanded revision of fares even as they threatened to go on a strike if their demands were not met.

President of Sarvodaya Drivers Welfare Association Ravi Rathor said that the government should either slash CNG prices or revise fares. "Prices of CNG are nearing Rs 70 per kg but we are still plying our cabs and autos on old fares. So now it has become tough for us to operate with skyrocketing CNG prices. We need fare revision which is pending for the last 7-8 years. If fares cannot be revised then rates of CNG should be reduced, Rathor told PTI. Rathor, who claims to have around 4 lakh drivers as members in Delhi-NCR, added a decision on an indefinite strike will be announced after the protest is over.

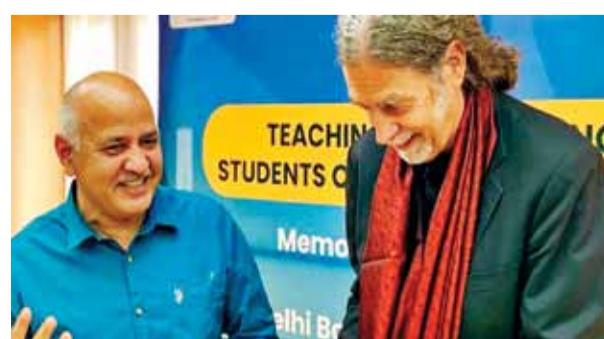
Today's protest is a symbolic one. We will hold a meeting after the protest and decide whether to go on an indefinite strike. Auto and cabs are operating today, Rathor added. Ola and Uber cabs and autos were also available. AGENCIES

Delhi government schools to offer German language course

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE) signed an agreement with Goethe Institut on Tuesday for offering German language course to students of Delhi government schools.

"We are committed to providing global exposure to all its students studying in Delhi government schools and giving flight to their dreams. As a part of our programme to introduce a prominent global language in government schools, German is one of the first languages that students will learn," Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said.

"Learning a global language is not just the acquisition of a skill but also an association with the culture of a particular country. This partnership with Goethe Institut Max Mueller Bhavan will open many new jobs as well as academic opportunities for students of Delhi government schools in future," said Sisodia, who is also Delhi's Education Minister, at the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signing ceremony.



Appreciating the government for providing an opportunity to the state-run school students to learn global languages, German Ambassador to India Walter J. Lindner said, "This linguistic partnership with the Delhi government will open new horizons to culture, art, education and many other partnerships in future. Learning German will

open routes to job opportunities for Delhi government school students in many EU countries, not just Germany".

In the pilot phase, the German language will be intro-

duced in 30 schools under the Directorate of Education including Schools of Specialized Excellence (SoSEs). Under this partnership, students will be trained by faculty from Goethe Institut/ Max Mueller Bhavan in communicative German language which will help students strengthen their professional skills and explore a new culture.

"Along with students, Goethe Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan will also train and support teachers and resource persons teaching German language in schools of DoE and gradually enable them to independently take over German

language education, with Max Mueller Bhavan playing an advisory role," said Education Director Himanshu Gupta.

Last year, the German embassy had reached out to the Ministry of Education to explore possible ways to increase German lessons in all Kendriya Vidyalayas noting that the number of students studying the language in KVVs has considerably gone down and as a result, over 270 language teachers have been laid off. The development comes following Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan's decision two years ago to teach German only outside school. AGENCIES

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, Rs595

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.

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 with 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.

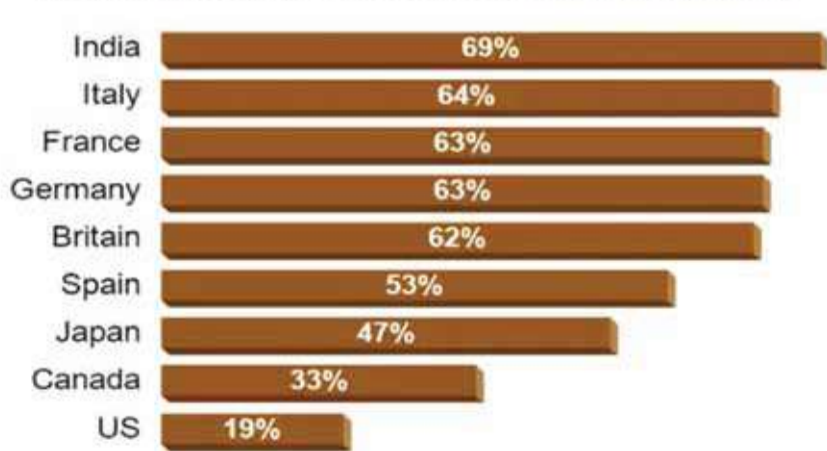
The company has operations in India, the UK, South Korea, Thailand, South Africa, and Indonesia, supported by a global network of 103 subsidiaries, nine associate companies, four joint ventures and two joint operations as on March 31, 2021. **AGENCIES**

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.

Since India follows a dynamic system for altering fuel rates, oil marketing compa-

FUEL TAXATION ACROSS THE WORLD



Source: Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell, IOC

nies 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 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.

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 sought direction to ensure that Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS), National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT) and Instant Money Payment System (IMPS) are not used for depositing foreign money in Indian banks.



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.

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 coun-

tries. 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 In-

dia'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**

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 lend-

ing 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

COVID-19 provoke lockdowns like the one now in place in Shanghai, the country's biggest megacity.

That is likely to affect many Asian countries whose trade relies on demand from China. These shocks are likely to magnify existing post-COVID difficulties," the report said.

The 8 million households whose members fell back into poverty during the pandemic, will see real incomes shrink even further as prices soar." The report noted that regional economies fared better during the 2021 Delta variant waves of coronavirus than in the initial months of the pandemic in 2020, largely because fewer restrictions were imposed and widespread vaccinations helped limit the severity of the outbreaks. On average, countries with a 1 percentage point higher vaccination rate had higher growth, it said. **AGENCIES**

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.

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**



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".

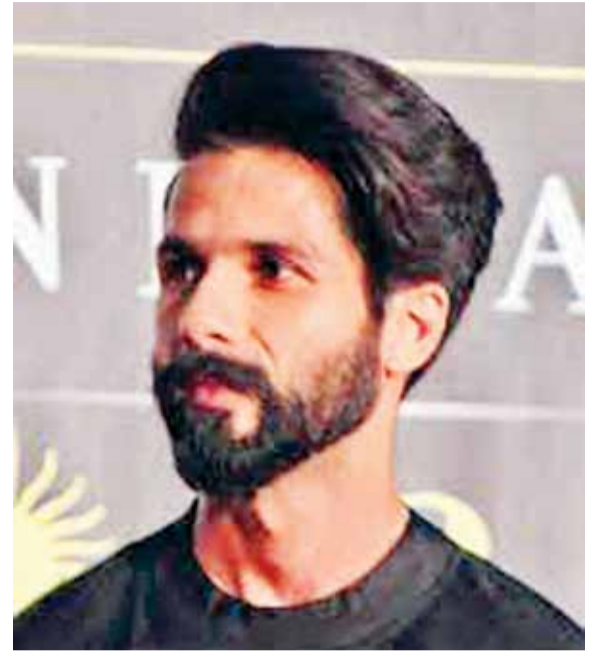
The film has been called out for its problematic politics by some critics and authors but that has not affected its box office collection as the movie, released on March 11, has minted Rs 331 crore, according to the figures given by the producers in a tweet.



Akshay Kumar, known for his pro-establishment stand as opposed to his wife's, had last month at an event said "Agni-hotri 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.

"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.

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.

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. AGENCIES

Modi congratulates to Grammys award winner Falguni Shah



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi has congratulated Falguni Shah on winning the award for the Best Children's Music Album at the Grammys.

In a tweet, the Prime Minister said; "Congratulations to Falguni Shah on winning the award for the Best Children's Music Album at the Grammys. Wishing her the very best for her future endeavours." AGENCIES

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.

Sanaa 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 Jungle 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. AGENCIES

Naga Chaitanya to star in filmmaker Venkat Prabhu's bilingual film



MUMBAI: Actor Naga Chaitanya is set to star in filmmaker Venkat Prabhu's upcoming film, the makers announced on Wednesday. The untitled film, which will be the actor's 22nd project, will be in Tamil and Telugu and is billed as a «commercial entertainer». The movie will be produced by Srinivasaa Chituri and presented by Pavan Kumar. Prabhu, who directed the blockbuster sci-fi thriller «Maanaadu», said he has prepared a «winning script»

for the 35-year-old star, best known for hits like «Bangaraju», «Majili» and «Love Story». «I am aware of Naga Chaitanya's strengths and the sensibilities of Telugu audiences and hence I have prepared a winning script for the movie. It is an out and out commercial entertainer. The film will not only have many noted actors but also have signed some popular technicians who will take care of different crafts,» Prabhu said in a statement. The official Twitter ac-

count of production house Srinivasaa Silver Screen shared also announced the project and shared pictures of the filmmaker with the «Venky Mama» star. «This one will be special. Get ready for the fun ride,» the post read. The film will be Chaitanya's first Tamil project and also marks the debut of Prabhu in Telugu. Chaitanya will soon make his debut in Hindi cinema with superstar Aamir Khan's upcoming «Laal Singh Chaddha», scheduled to release in August. AGENCIES

A complete **KNOWLEDGE CAPSULE**

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