BANKING & FINANCE



CENTRE ASKED TO LOOK INTO PIL SEEKING UNIFORM **BANKING CODE FOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE TRANSACTIONS**



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

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

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

RBI's 6-member Monetary Policy Committee voted to hold the benchmark repurchase or the 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 prepandemic levels but continues to steadily recover, Das said the central bank will engage in a

gradual withdrawal of liquidity over a multi-vear 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.

SMALL FIRE ARMS

THIS YEAR

MANUFACTURING UNIT AT

HISAR TO START PRODUCTION

Das said the global economy is seeing "tectonic shifts" from the war and extreme volatility in commodity and financial markets. "Caught in the crosscurrent of multiple headwinds, the shock supported by its forex

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 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

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

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 PS 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

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.

killings in the Ukrainian city of

there. This is an extremely

serious matter and we support

the call for an independent

attributing a political colour

to India's actions vis-a-vis the

Ukraine situation was unfor-

AGENCIES

Jaishankar also said that

investigation," he said.

Talking about the civilian

governments, etc. Where do under the DV Act (Protection 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

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

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

Exports of agricultural prod ucts (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 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,



har, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra etc. India has captured nearly 50% of the world market for

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 ers in Karnataka, Kerala and with exporters.

Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bi- 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/ realisations for coffee grow- FPCs, cooperatives to interact

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

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 approach 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



and diplomacy are the right answers to any disputes."

One should bear in mind

Leading Press Clubs condemn the unlawful

action of the Madhya Pradesh Police

Joining the Press Club of India, Indian Women's Press Corps and

other journalists' bodies, the Chandigarh Press Club condemns the

action of the Madhya Pradesh Police and demands that the victims

be released and compensated for the mental agony and physical

harassment they have endured at the hands of the Madhya Pradesh

Government. It also urges the National Human Rights Commission

to take suo moto notice of all such atrocities against journalists and

civil societies. Leading Press Clubs condemns the unlawful action of

the Madhya Pradesh Police, who arrested, stripped and humiliated a

local journalist, theater artistes and other members of the civil society.

Bucha, Jaishankar said India is "deeply disturbed" by the reports. killings that have taken place

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

> **Power Minister, Punjab meets Union Coal Minister**



achal Pradesh was tradition-**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-onone 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

Union Govt assures

return of assets to

Kashmiri migrants



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

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

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

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

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

The construction of about

13 roads has provided better reach in the state. Prior to 2019, the speed of construction was at 6.54 km per day, which has increased to 20,68 km per day now. AGENCIES

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**

Card-less Cash withdrawal facility across all banks' ATM

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.

network soon: RBI

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 **AGENCIES** policy review.

Now, it's time to uproot corruption from Himachal: Kejriwal development of people." Him-

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

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



you can change us, "the AAP's national convener said.

He said first they eradicated corruption in Delhi, then in Puniab. "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

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

ally 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

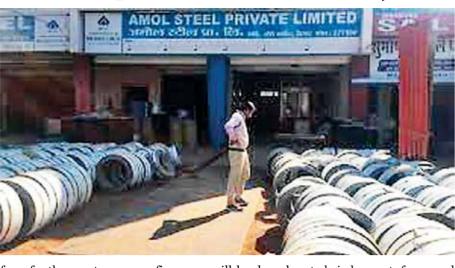
BJP and the Congress in Punjab. A strong anti-incumbency wave against the ruling BJP -- evident from the loss of three Assembly and one parliamentary seat in the October 2021 bypolls -- and the absence of veteran Chief Minister faces may work for the party that is already ruling in two states.

AGENCIES

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

Union Home Ministry of our country has already granted second license to manufacture small fire arms including 32 Bore Pistols & Rivolvers, 38 Bore Rivolvers, 9 mm Pistols, Sports Rifles, Assault Rifles, Carbines, Sniper Rifles and AK47 Rifles under Prime Minister Narender 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 fire arms will be done by the world. According to Inder Sain Managing Director and Arun Garg Executive Director of Amol Steel Private Limited, their firm is altrady dealing with Steel Authority of India Limited and National Steel Corporation Limited and designing of automatic

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 by the end of this year.

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

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 100day 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'.

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 Harvana Vidhan Sabha Bhupinder 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 Sing 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 be-tween 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-



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 activi-ties 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 politi-

cal 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 ried under heavy debts and chief minister soon after taking oath has started making demand from Prime Minister for financial assistance by Inion Government.

On asking about future olans 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, Bhupinder Singh Hooda is generally known as mastermind for forming as well as falling a government in the

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

TMC on Thursday slammed 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 Raiva 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 runup 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

Chairperson Andrabi meets PM Modi

J&K Waqf Board



BJP deliberately misleading

people in Rajasthan: Gehlot

JAIPUR: Rajasthan Chief will increase. We are being

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

cused the BJP of creating a

law and order problem in the

state, saying that the oppo-

sition party is deliberately

Referring to violence in

Karauli and BJP national

president JP Nadda's visit

to Sawai Madhopur, Gehlot

said, "They (BJP leaders)

come to set fire. They are

setting the whole country

on fire...He came and fire

erupted. They are creating

Gehlot was talking to

reporters after flagging off

Mobile Investigation Unit

vans of Rajasthan Police

from the Secretariat here.

The BJP has been cornering

the chief minister, who also

holds Home portfolio, in the

assembly and outside, for the

rise in criminal activities in

Gehlot said that the num-

ber of cases has increased

made it mandatory to regis-

mandatory, then the number

such an atmosphere.

misleading the people.

community land and properties. Prime Minister's Office

tweeted, "Dr. Darakhshan Andrabi, Chairperson of the JK Waqf Board and others called on PM Narendra **AGENCIES**

"As per the data of the

National Crime Records Bu-

reau, crime has come down

Cong stages protest against Centre over price rise



in Rajasthan in 2019-20 and 2020-21. But opposition party **NEW DELHI:** Congress leaders are deliberately misworkers staged protests leading the people. Gehlot reiterated that Prime Minister against the BJP-led Cen-Narendra Modi and Home tre across the country on Minister Amit Shah should Thursday over the rise in appeal to the people to esthe prices of petrol, diesel, tablish peace in the country. cooking gas, feritilisers and

Rajasthan chief minister essential medicines. The agitation was part of said the entire country had hailed the prime minister the party's state and districtwhen he had once said that wise "Mehngai Mukt Bharat lynching is a work of anti-Abhiyan".

Former Congress chief Rasocial elements. But when the BJP or the RSS put pressure hul Gandhi hit out at the Cenon him, he stopped speaking tre over what he described as about it. A violence had erupt-"Direct 'Benefit' Transfer to Modi-Mitr". ed in Karauli on Saturday at a Using the hashtag #JanDbike rally on Nav Samyatsar

(Hindu New Year) passing by hanLootYojana, Gandhi ala Muslim-dominated area. leged on Twitter that the Centre has collected Rs 26.51 The rally was taken out by right-wing organisations, lakh crore from people as after the state government including Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya of writing off loans worth Rs ter FIR in the state. "When Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) 10.86 lakh crore of the rich. registration of an FIR is made and Bajrang Dal, police had

state headquarters under the aegis of the pradesh Congress

"Mehngai Mukt 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 Mukt 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 "fuel tax" and also accused it statement issued by the party

The party also held a spe-Party workers and leaders cial press conference at the crore on the people of the took put protest rallies 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 Bharativa 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

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

vear, the Delhi government has issued 14.82 lakh challans amounting to over Rs 154 tions 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.

lans 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 ficient amount to pay the of insufficient money in their



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'

"Till last month, one had to pay a fine of Rs 2,000 for not wearing masks. It was a big amount. Many times violators did not have a suffine. So in that case, we used

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

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 Jantar Mantar 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

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 **AGENCIES** and autos were also available.

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said. "Learning a global language

Delhi government schools.

Delhi government schools to offer German language course **NEWDELHI:** The Delhi is not just the acquisition of Board of School Education a skill but also an association (DBSE) signed an agreement with the culture of a particular with Goethe Institut on Tuescountry. This partnership with day for offering German lan-Goethe Institut Max Mueller Bhavan will open many guage course to students of new jobs as well as academic "We are committed to proopportunities for students of viding global exposure to all Delhi government schools in its students studying in Delhi future," said Sisodia, who is overnment schools and giving also Delhi's Education Minister, at the Memorandum of flight to their dreams. As a part of our programme to introduce Understanding (MoU) signing

a prominent global language in ceremony government schools, German Appreciating the governone of the first languages ment for providing an opporthat students will learn," Delhi tunity 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 man language will be intro-

open routes to job opportunities for Delhi government school students in many EU

countries, not just Germany". In the pilot phase, the Ger-

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

duced in 30 schools under 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 KVs 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**

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

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

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

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

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

Vinay Mohan Kwatra

is India's next Foreign

NEW DELHI: Seasoned

diplomat and India's current

envoy to Nepal Vinay Mohan

Kwatra was on Monday ap-

pointed as the new foreign

secretary, succeeding Harsh

Vardhan Shringla who retires

Known to be having exten-

sive expertise in dealing with

India's neighbourhood as well

as the US, China and Europe,

the 1988-batch Indian Foreign

Service (IFS) officer pipped

nearly half-a-dozen others in

the race for the coveted post

including Indian High Com-

missioner to UK Gaitri Issar

Kumar (1986-batch IFS) and

Ruchira Kamboj (1987 batch

India's Am-

bassador to the

US Taraniit

Singh Sand-

batchmate of

Kwatra, was

Secretary

on April 30.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He said that the govern-

good quality and affordable healthcare to our citizens.

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

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



poverished, he said: "I feel very as 'PM Jan Aushadhi'. Our happy when I interact with beneficiaries of schemes such has ensured significant sav-

focus on affordable healthcare

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Union Home Minister in- used.

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

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

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

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

ED attaches Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut's linked assets



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

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

The attachment is linked to a money laundering probe Madhuri.

linked to a Rs 1.034 crore worth land 'scam' related to the re-development of a 'chawl' in Mumbai ED had arrested Maha-

rashtra-based businessman Pravin Raut in this case in February and later filed a chargesheet too.

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

Government orders blocking of 18 Indian,4



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

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

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

Governor sitting on files related to key appointments: Mamata



KOLKATA: West Bengal recommendation for appoint-Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee Monday accused Governor Jagdeep Dhakhar of mer Additional Chief Secretary dilly-dallying over files related to appointments to key state government posts.

pertaining to appointments of ing agencies like the CBI and Lokayukta member, chairman ED against opposition parof the Human Rights Commis- ties, Banerjee said in order to sion and Right to Information safeguard democracy in the commissioners have been lying country, she has written to chief with Dhankhar for his approval ministers of all non-BJP ruled

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

Everywhere (in non-BJP ruled states), they are rundone that and sent a copy to ning a parallel government him. If we have coordination by appointing governors, the Trinamool Congress boss told be able to highlight our point reporters at the state secretariat. She also said the apex court sometimes directs the state government to fill up im- the governor. The same is the portant vacancies, but with case in Telangana and Andhra Dhankhar not clearing files, the appointments are stuck.

Dhankhar had earlier said

ment of former Director General of Police Virendra and for-Naveen Prakash as information commissioners was "flawed". Alleging that the BJP-led

Banerjee said documents central government was usstates and other leaders Banerjee also said she re-

ceived a letter from her Chhattisgarh counterpart Bhupesh Baghel on Monday, in which state was not getting its share of the GST. Bhupesh Baghel asked me to flag this matter. I have already

among all the CMs, we will of view. In Maharashtra, too, they (the BJP) is disturbing (the state government) through Pradesh,Some can protest while some cannot. But, this cannot be allowed to continue,

NIA carries out raids at multiple locations in Kashmir

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

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

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

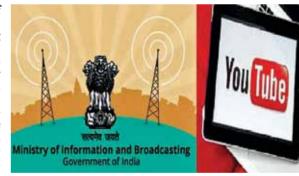
Pakistani YouTube-based news channels Information and Broadcasting has directed the blocking of 22 YouTube-based news channels, of which four are

sistan, for al spreading fake news to mislead This is the first time that action has been taken against the

Indian YouTube-based news publishers since the notification of the IT Rules, 2021 in February last year, it said. In an official statement, the ministry said that it issued an

order on Monday to block 22 YouTube channels, three Twitter accounts, one Facebook account and one news website.

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



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



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

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

The content ordered to be blocked also included certain Through the recent blocking anti-India content posted from

operated in a coordinated manner from Pakistan.

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

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

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

Parliament approves accountancy bill



NEW DELHI: Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2022 with on Tuesday approved a bill to revamp the functioning of the institutes of chartered accountants, cost accountants and company secretaries, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman asserting that the changes will not impact the autonomy of these

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

a voice vote after negating all amendments moved by the Opposition. Lok Sabha had cleared the

bill on March 30, 2022.

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

and YSRCP opposed the bill, conduct.

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

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

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

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

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

Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray Highlights Alternative Fuel Vehicles **DOMINICK RODRIGUES** Describing the effects of pol- Metro, while emphasizing that

Mumbai

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray has urged for providing a conducive environment for industries producing alternative fuel vehicles and reiterated that - by removing difficulties in the setting up $% \left(1\right) =\left(1\right) \left(1$ of industries - facilities would be provided to industrialists coming here.

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

Highlighting the fact that

people are looking for options

impediment to Industry.

cive environment for indus-

like alternative fuels, the Chief tries and Maharashtra which Minister urged industries is always moving ahead is a torch-bearer for the country as to come forward as growth slowed down if there was any Keeping this in mind, steps are being taken at government level to avail a condu-

the development of the state is being followed by the whole country, he said while observing that Maharashtra would also perform well in the field

of alternative fuels

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

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

the overall development of Mumbai would be carried out by the Maha Vikas Aghadi government through maintaining the environmental balance.

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

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



India-Australia ties get a boost with trade deal

he 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

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THE FINANCIAL WORLD

RNI NO. DELENG/2011/38860

PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY SWINDER BAJWA
ON BEHALF OF FW MEDIA

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

PRINTER & PUBLISHER SWINDER BAJWA **OWNER:** FW MEDIA

PUBLISHED AT: BUILDING NO-23, NEHRU PLACE

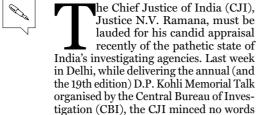
NEW DELHI 110019; PHONE: 9888040061

EDITOR* ABDUL WASEY

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

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

The misuse of the 'caged parrot'



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.

in condemning the utter subordination of

agencies to the executive and its disastrous

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 were 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 ruling 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, Sonepat, Haryana



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

The UGC needs to get its credits right in first place



s 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 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.

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 tures and tutorials T 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.

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 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 Waknis 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

nil 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 players were 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.

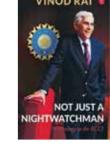
"In my conversations with the captain and team management, it was conveyed that Kumble was too much of a disciplinarian and hence the team members were not too happy with him," Rai has written in his book.

"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.

Chandigarh

ASSOCHAM Punjab State

Development Council sug-

gested various measures to

boost export import manu-

facturing sectors in Punjab.

The representation made and submitted on the advice

of A S Mittal Chairman,

ASSOCHAM North Region

drew attention to the Pun-

jab Manufacturing sector's

plights, over the decades

due to some fundamental

constraints and many dis-

being a landlocked border

state. A major constraint

is location—distance from

seaports has a crippling im-

pact on industrial growth.

Mittal added "Punjab manu-

freight burden — first they

pay to access dry ports and

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 buving 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

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

NEW DELHI: The country's

price hike.

largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Wednesof 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 in April and the hike will vary for different models. However, the company did not disclose the quantum of the proposed **AGENCIES**

ahead of the assembly elec-

tions in states like Uttar

Pradesh and Punjab -- a pe-

riod 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 retail-

ers' commission and freight

charge count up to a third of the petrol price. Even when

international crude oil prices

lower demand, Indians kept

paying higher rates for petrol

Since India follows a dy-

69% followed by Italy.

NEW DELHI: India's sugar dicate that global market is export may touch 85 lakh tonne in the ongoing 2021-22 marketing year ending September, as per the estimates of global trade houses, industry

tracted 72 lakh tonne of sugar export, the physical exports have been around 56-57 lakh tonne till March-end this year,

from October to September. had stopped the crushing



ASSOCHAM suggests measures to boost Export Import manufacturing sectors in Punjab

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 facturers also face a double clusters of southern and western coastal line states, which

Sugar export may touch 85

advantages that come with then, dry to seaports. It has location. Additionally, Seaports play a crucial role in reducing domestic logistic costs and facilitating Eximoriented manufacturing by reducing time and variability. logistically, Punjab's main hinterland is at an average distance of 1,300km from (the reap the benefits of near-port ICD Ludhiana to Mundra)

News from the

houses indicate

is expecting 85

in the current

season'

ago period.

27 this year.

international trade

that global market

lakh tonne of sugar

exports from India,

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-

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

date is 402.66 crore litres as

against LoIs of about 416 crore

Contracted quantity as on

AGENCIES

On the ethanol front, ISMA

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 must own freight trains (ei-

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 governmen 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

ther solely or in PPP mode)

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 secsuggest, the government tor into export engines for its economic growth.

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



NEW DELHI: Tata Motors

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 enlowest total cost of ownership and our widest service network in India, the UK, South Korea, will ensure best-in-the-industry service support in all corners of the country. We look forward network of 103 subsidiaries, to a fruitful partnership with nine associate companies, four VRL Logistics and will offer joint ventures and two joint the best support for their seam- operations as on March 31,

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, SampoornaSeva, a bouquet of service offerings including repair time assurance, breakdown assistance, insurance and accidental repair time, extended warranty, and other add-on services for ve-

The company has operations

Mitsui to invest in ReNew Power's project



NEW DELHI: Japanese conglomerate Mitsui has agreed to take a 49 % stake in ReNew Power's roundthe-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 ca-pacity 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

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

government-owned entity.

ReNew, through its affiliates, will also undertake EPC, O&M, and project manage ment 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 projects, and hydro projects. the remaining period of the had a total portfolio of 10.2

largest emitter of greenhouse commissioned and commitgases globally, made commit- ted projects.

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

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 emissionfree 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 deelopment".

"We view India as an ex-

tremely 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 Re-New, 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 in-

dustries," Rvoichiro Uno said. ReNew develops, builds, owns, and operates utilityscale wind and solar energy

project," the statement said. GW of renewable energy proj-India, being the third- ects across India, including

early Monday. AGENCIES

body ISMA said on Monday. While the country has con-

Sugar marketing year runs

Releasing the latest sugar

expecting 85 lakh tonne of

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 yearago period. Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka are the top three sugar producing states in the country.

sugar exports from India, in

the current season.

As per the ISMA data, sugar Crushing operation is still on production in Maharasthra as 366 mills were operating rose to 118.81 lakh tonne till till March-end, while 152 mills March from 100.47 lakh tonne litres issued by oil marketing

In Uttar Pradesh, sugar on an average has achieved a production figures, Indian production remained lower blending percentage of 9.60 Sugar Mills Association at 87.50 lakh tonne till March per cent between December (ISMA) said: "News from the this year compared with 93.71 2021 and March 2022, it international trade houses in- lakh tonne in the year-ago pe- added.

lakh tonne this year: ISMA

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.

less operations," Tata Motors 2021.

compared to its neighbours.

direct impact on inflation

of India or Consumer Price

smaller revenue.

Higher oil prices have a

gineer our vehicles to offer the hicle maintenance and upkeep.

Thailand, South Africa, and In-

Effects of fuel prices: slow growth and high inflation

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

consumption levels among 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 unjus-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 2021only 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-

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 is 4th largest producer of wind energy.

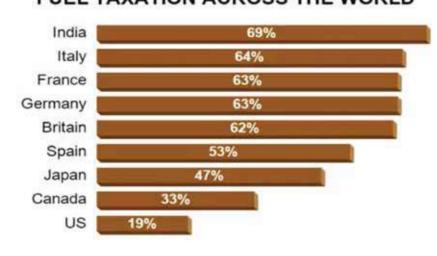
Government must also emphasize the efficient use of energy. India consumes more energy for every unit of GDP when compared to many other countries.

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



Views are personal

Fuel prices had been on a **FUEL TAXATION ACROSS THE WORLD** freeze since November 4



Source: Petroloum Planning & Analysis Cell, IOC

nies are mostly responsible 29 and a state tax of Rs 16.3 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.

were stable in 2020 due to Rates differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes.

and diesel due to the layers of taxes levied. At the moment. Indians pay the highest taxes Petroleum Planning and Analon fuel in the world about ysis Cell under the petroleum ministry, In Delhi for Rs 100 worth of petrol, the customer pays a tax of Rs 45.3, which are higher than the central namic system for altering fuel rates, oil marketing compaincludes a central tax of Rs

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 cus-According to the data from tomers pay is collected as tax, according to stats of India

In three states, Maha-

rashtra, Andhra Pradesh

and Telangana, state taxes

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 108per litre in Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. It is important to note that petrol excise duty tax. Petrol and and diesel prices are retailing

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. 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 in the country — as vehicle sales may see a sharp drop.

Budget. Prices of many com-

Passenger vehicles and twowheeler sales have already witnessed a dip in 2021. A to get costlier.

at the highest price in India as further contraction in demand for vehicles will have a major impact on the automotive industry and the lakhs of MSMEs that supply goods to figures. The retail inflation

the sector.

Index (CPI) has already Lower demand will, theretouched 6.07% per cent in fore, lead to widespread un-February. This is the highest employment in the auto and in five months. On the other ancillary sectors. More people hand, the Wholesale Price are pulled into the poverty line Index (WPI) rose to 8.47% making the situation adverse. per cent. This rise in inflation Not just the poor but the middle class is also squeezed and pushes the government to cut the taxes on oil, leading to a many find it difficult to make both ends meet. People who do not own a personal vehicle India imports over 85 per cent of its oil requirements. will be impacted as they will If the prices rise, so does the have to pay more towards government's bill of oils. This availing of public transport. The public transportation may lead to a Balance of Payment (BoP) imbalance, which sector is already mulling a hike in rates in view of rising becomes a big problem in the

Companies engaged in the modities are expected to go up 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 The initial impact of the rise an Economic Times Report, will be felt by people who own transporters and freighters

increase in freight costs. Considering that most products and goods that people use on a daily basis are transported from differlarge source of employment ent 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

If fuel prices remain contin- mon man. uously on in 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 In such a scenario, India's economy is expected to witness a delay in recovery as it will directly impact the

operational costs. are seeking a 10-15 per cent

HDFC Ltd to merge with HDFC Bank Centre asked to look into PIL



man Deepak Paresh today addressed a press conference on the merger.Mortgage

NEW DELHI: HDFC Chair- board has approved merger of its wholly owned subsidiaries HDFC Investments Limited and HDFC Holdings Lim-

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 the Audit Committee and the Committee of Independent regulatory approvals, including from the Reserve Bank of 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,

"After considering the recommendation and report of the filing said. AGENCIES



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

India (RBI) and the Securi-

ties and Exchange Board of

India (SEBI), HDFC Bank

said in the filing on Monday.

share exchange ratio will

be 42 equity shares each

of HDFC Bank for every

25 equity shares held in

HDFC Ltd.

Under the proposed deal,

According to sources, Buch

The panel chaired by former

Memebers in the committee said they would like to know

Indian banks. Air India cancels Delhi-Moscow



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

Flight insurance is generally provided by companies based out of western coun-

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

dia's Delhi-Moscow flight that was scheduled to operate on Thursday stands cancelled, the sources said. They stated that the flight

ited with HDFC Bank Limlender Housing Developited. HDFC will acquire 41 ment Finance Corporation (HDFC) on April 4 said its Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India modifies



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



of export credit guarantee offers revolving limits and is normally valid for a year after being approved on a case-to-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," **AGENCIES**

SEBI chairperson appears before parl panel

HDFC BANK



is also expected to be questioned about the recent National Stock Exchange (NSE)

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 30.

the Lok Sabha Secretariat.

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 **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 fasterthan-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

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 tighten-

It also called on policymakers to reform traderelated policies in goods and, especially, in stillprotected services sectors to take advantage of shifts in the global trade landscape, and encourage

The 8 million

households whose

members fell back

into poverty during

the pandemic, will

shrink even further

to three main potential

shocks for the region: the

war, changing monetary

While rising interest

rates make sense for cool-

ing the U.S. economy and

curbing inflation, much of

Asia lags behind in its re-

Countries like Malaysia

covery from the pandemic.

may suffer outflows of cur-

rency and other financial

repercussions from those

policy in the U.S. and some

other countries and a slow-

see real incomes

as prices soar"

down in China.

diffusion of technology.

AGENCIES

seeking uniform banking code for foreign exchange transactions 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 A bench of Acting Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and

benami transactions.

the petition.

government.

petitioner.

terrorists.

consideration.

Justice Navin Chawla issued

notice to the Centre through

ministries of Home Affairs,

Law and Justice and Finance,

and asked them to respond to

Additional Solicitor Gen-

eral Chetan Sharma, repre-

senting the Centre, submit-

ted that the petitioner has

raised a serious issue which

shall be looked into by the

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 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

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 impor-

tant, they do require detailed

The petition sought direc-

tion to ensure that Real Time

Gross Settlement (RTGS),

National Electronic Funds

Transfer (NEFT) and In-

stant Money Payment Sys-

tem (IMPS) are not used for

depositing foreign money in

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

The petitioner said it is not only harming the foreign exchange reserve of India but is also being used to provide money to separatists, fundamentalists, Naxals, Maoists, terrorists, traitors, conversion mafias and radical organisations like the SIMI and PFI.

He submitted that immigration rules for a visa are the same whether a foreigner comes in business class or economy class, uses Air India

or British Airways, and comes from USA or Uganda. Likewise, the deposit details in Indian banks, including foreign bank branches for foreign exchange transactions,

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.

whether it is export payment

in a current account or salary

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 must be in the same format name of currency. AGENCIES

flight over insurance issues



flights twice a week. India has not banned Russian airlines from its airspace. The Air In-

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 **AGENCIES**

World Bank says war shocks to drag on Asian economies

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-

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 tech-

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

people will have to face the shrinking financial capacity of their governments,

financial and trade reforms could mitigate risks, revive growth and reduce poverty.

said the World Bank's East Asia and Pacific Chief Economist Aaditya Mat-A combination of fiscal,

changing policies, it said. Meanwhile, China's already slowing economy The report pointed could falter as outbreaks of

downs 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 mag-nify existing post-COVID difficulties," the report

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 about 12 years ago, officials said here.

The National Conference leader arrived at minister Omar Abdullah the federal probe agenwas questioned by the cy's headquarters this Enforcement Directorate morning where his state-Thursday in connection ment in being recorded, with the purchase of a they said. The case was building by the J&K Bank registered by the ED earlier this year, they **AGENCIES**

Air Asia resumes flights between India and Malaysia, Thailand

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

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

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

The flights on Kochi-Kuala Lumpur, Kolkata-Kuala Lumpur and Hyderabad-Kuala Lumpur routes will commence from April 18, April 23 and

May 1, respectively, it noted. The Malaysian carrier said flights on five India-Thailand



flights on Bengaluru-Bangkok, Chennai-Bangkok, Kolkata-

mence on May 4, May 4, May 2, May 1 and May 1, respec-Bangkok, Kochi-Bangkok tively, it mentioned. Air Asia

routes will begin in May. The and Jaipur Bangkok will com- is different from Air Asia India airline, which is based out of

PM Modi congratulates **Hungarian counterpart** on poll win

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

Hungary>s nationalist Prime Minister Orban declared victo-



ry in Sunday>s national elections, claiming a mandate for a fourth term as a still incomplete vote count

showed a strong lead for his right-wing party Modi tweeted, «Congratulations, Prime Minister Viktor Orban, on your victory in the Parliamentary elections in Hungary. Look forward to continue working with you to further strengthen the close and friendly India-Hungary ties. AGENCIES

Ukraine war underpins record food prices: UN

United Nations says prices for world food commodities like grains and vegetable oils reached their highest levels ever the war in Ukraine.

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

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

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

Myanmar orders foreign money held by banks changed to kyats

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

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

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

Hard currency is also exchanges. which for Myanmar stands at about 10-11 billion.

The central bank order instructed holders of foreign currency accounts in Myanmar to open new accounts to convert funds into kyats (pronounced CHUHTs).

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

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



would think about it.

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

One unauthorised money changer consulted Tuesday

eign currency accounts asked about the order, most said they had not opened new accounts and were unsure about the consequences.

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

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

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

Myanmar's foreign reserves stood at nearly 7.8 billion as of December 2020, according to the World Bank. said they were not doing any The military leadership has also sought to relieve presreserves by encouraging the use of Thai baht, Indian rupees and Chinese renminbi, or yuan, for trade in border

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

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

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

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

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

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

During his packed schedule, Goyal will visit the University of Melbourne and



Minister Dan Tehan and Allan Myers, Chancellor, University of Melbourne, at the Melbourne Law School in The University of Melbourne.

Goyal will also visit the landmark Melbourne Cricket Ground and address the Australia-India Chamber of Commerce and Austrade, along with Minister Dan Tehan, besides interacting with the Indian media. He will later visit the Shiva Vishnu Temple in Melbourne and attend a Community event with the Indian Diaspora. Thursday,7th

April,Goyal and Minister Dan Tehan will address and interact with students at the University of New South Wales in Sydney and pay tributes at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in the University campus. Goyal will later address the **Emerging Diaspora Business** Leaders Reception hosted by India-Australia Business and Community Awards (IABCA). Later in the evening, Goyal, accompanied by Minister Dan Tehan and Minister Alex Hawke, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, will attend a Com-Australia India Institute munity event at the Swamitomorrow. He will address narayan Temple in Sydney. 5 years.

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

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

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

'COVID case rates hit new high for England



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

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

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

UN panel to release report on efforts to curb climate change

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

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

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

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



greenhouse gas emissions. The cut-off point for data in

the report was last fall, meaning that the impact of the war in Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions on Russia weren't included by the authors.

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

I think the difficult thing

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

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

increases will multiply the risk of floods, storms, drought and heat waves worldwide. In the last years, we have

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

behind a scene from a horror movie. As images of the bodies emerged from Bucha, European leaders condemned the atrocities and called for tougher sanctions against Moscow. In a sign of how the horrific reports shook many leaders, Germany's defense minister even suggested that the European Union consider banning Russian gas imports. Ukrainian officials said

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

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

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



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

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

armor instead of tuxedos.

They sing to the wounded

in hospitals, even to those

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

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

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

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

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

The U.S. has previously announced a ban on Russian oil, but it imports only a small share of Russia's oil exports and doesn't buy any

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Twinkle Khanna comes under attack for her remarks on 'The Kashmir Files'

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

MUMBAI: Author and for- learn one-tight-slap lesson mer Bollywood actor Twinkle from India?' on the shocking Khanna is being criticised on 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 low" Bollywood personality

authors but that has not af-

fected its box office collection

as the movie, released

on March 11, has minted Rs 331 crore, according to the figures given by a tweet.

The 47-vearold Khanna, who is the daughter of prolific Hindi cinema stars Rajesh Khanna and Dimple Kapadia, was called Sunday after she shared

'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 "Bachchhan Paandey", which released on March 18.

Akshay Kumar, known for his pro-establishment stand as opposed to his vife's, had last

month at an event said Agnihotri has brought rowing truth to light" through his film.

Twinkle Khanna has been away from social media since out on social media by users the link to her column and who described her as a "shal- retweeting it on her Twitter 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

I'm scared of doing

big scale movies often run the risk of going out of control. Shahid Kapoor, who delivered his careers 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 «Jer-

sey» 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

«I don»t come from that thinking that it you spend a lot of money, audiences find its audience. will turn in huge numbers... I actually always get scared

he added. box office with the much out and then there is also that awaited actioner «KGF: audience which simply wants

of doing high budget films,

because in those, things go

out of your hands. There

are a lot of factors in it,»

years after «Kabir Singh», said a good film will always

«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 «Jersey» will clash at the the other film that s coming Chapter 2». Kapoor, who to watch a film. AGENCIES

Thalapathy Vijay-Rashmika Mandanna Harrdy Sandhu opens up on his new starrer begins production



pathy 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

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

The movie's story and screenproduced by Dil Raju and play is credited to Paidipally, by terrorists.

MUMBAI: South star Thala- Shirish of Sri Venkateswara Hari and Ashishor Solomon, with dialogues and additional screenplay by Vivek.

Vijay is currently awaiting the release of his next, Beast". The action thriller features him as a spy on a be composed by S Thaman. mission to rescue people held hostage in a shopping mall

single 'Kudiyan Lahore Diyan'



ore Divan' fea-

turing Aisha Sharma. Harrdy 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 beat that I instantly fell in and I would like to thank my nel.

MUMBAI: The well-known love with, and Arvindr Kh-team for bringing 'Kudiyan singer Harrdy Sandhu talks aira undoubtedly conceptual- Lahore Diyan' to life. I hope about his newly released song ized a larger-than-life video the fans give it all their love bsolute justice to the song." Sandhu made his playlist, "he adds. 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 lyrics, B Praak composed a the first time we made a draft

The song is directed by Arvindr 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 chan-**AGENCIES**

Modi congratulates to Grammys award winner Falguni Shah



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

In a tweet, the Prime Min-

to Falguni Shah on win-Children's Music Album at the Grammys. Wishing her the very best for her future endeavours."

ister said; "Congratulations

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

Saria without divulging details about Bhatt's character said it is tailormade for her.

Pooja thoroughly fits the bill for this tailormade 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 highoctane female-led espionage, Ulajh, with Junglee Pictures. He is also writing, co-directing and show-running Masoom , a series for Amazon Prime and is co-producing and writing Delhi Crime Season 3 for Netflix. **AGENCIES**

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



MUMBAI: Actor Naga Chaitanya is set to star in filmmaker Venkat Prabhus upcoming film, the makers announced on Wednesday.

The untitled film, which will be the actors 22nd project, will be in Tamil and Telugu and is billed as a «commercial entertainer». The movie will be produced by Srinivasaa Chitturi and presented by Pavan

Prabhu, who directed the blockbuster sci-fi thriller «Maanaadu», said he has Prabhu said in a statement. prepared a «winning script»

for the 35-year-old star, best known for hits like «Bangarraju», «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,»

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

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 re-The official Twitter aclease in August. AGENCIES

