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PUNJAB CM MANN CALLS UPON FARMERS OF HIS NATIVE VILLAGE TO ADOPT DSR TECHNOLOGY FOR PADDY



Punjab is land of Gurus-Fakirs, seeds of hatred don't bloom here: CM Mann

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday said hate mongers have no place in Punjab and seeds of hatred don't bloom on this land, remarks which come days after two groups clashed in Patiala. Anything can be planted in the fertile land of Punjab but not the seeds of hatred, he said addressing a gathering in Malerkotla after offering prayers at the local Idgah on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. Mann said, «Punjab's social bonding is very strong. We live in brotherhood and those who spread hatred find no place here.» «Punjab is the land of gurus, pir, fakirs, poets and martyrs, seeds of hatred don't bloom here,» he said giving a stern warning to elements trying to disturb peace and harmony of the state.



Two groups had clashed on Friday last in Patiala over an anti-Khalistan march, hurling stones at each other and brandishing swords, forcing police to fire in the air to bring the situation under control. Beginning his speech by saying «Assalamualaikum, Eid Mubarak», Mann said he was happy to come to Malerkotla on the occasion of Eid. He also talked about the significance behind the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The Eid festival symbolises universal brotherhood, peace and amity, he said. In his address, Mann said his government has started taking action against the corrupt and land encroachers. Noting that his government

is about 45 days old, he sought time to put the «spoilt system» back on track. «We have started the work to go after those who are corrupt, against the encroachers,» he said, adding, «You will find good results». Mann said those who looted Punjab will be held accountable and every single penny will be recovered and used in development works and in improving health and education and roads. «You have reposed trust in me and this has added to my responsibility even more,» he said. Mann said that people can give suggestions and promised that in the coming time they will see a positive change in Punjab. «Inshallah, in the coming one or two years you will find a changed Punjab, a rangla (vibrant) Punjab,» he said.

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ADANI WILMAR BUYS SEVERAL BRANDS, INCLUDING 'KOHINOOR' TO STRENGTHEN FOOD BIZ



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AKSHAY KUMAR THANKS FANS ON COMPLETING 30 YRS IN CINEMA, CALLS IT 'LIFETIME FILLED WITH YOUR LOVE'



Economy faces headwinds from global spillovers: RBI

MUMBAI: The RBI on Wednesday cautioned that while the Indian economy appears capable of weathering the deterioration in geopolitical conditions amid the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, it faces headwinds from global spillovers from geopolitical tensions, elevated commodity prices and moderating external demand. The RBI, however, did not tinker with the GDP growth projection made in April. It had slashed the GDP growth projection for the fiscal 2022-23 to 7.2 per cent from its earlier forecast of 7.8 per cent. The Reserve Bank's rate-setting panel Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to hold an off-cycle meeting on May 2 and 4, and raised the benchmark lending rate (repo) by 40 basis points and hiked CRR by 50 basis points to contain the rising inflation. The MPC decision was announced by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Wednesday afternoon. «I would, therefore, like to emphasise that our monetary policy actions today aimed at lowering inflation and anchoring inflation expectations will strengthen and consolidate the medium-term growth prospects of the economy. We remain mindful of the possible near-term impact of higher interest rates on output. Our actions will, therefore, be calibrated,» the governor said in a statement.



The committee said that in this high-voltage global environment, it is useful to take stock of the domestic macroeconomic and financial conditions. The rebound in domestic economic activity that took hold with the ebbing of the Omicron wave is turning out to be increasingly broad-based. «As regards the outlook for domestic economic activity, the forecast of a normal southwest monsoon brightens the prospects for kharif production. The recovery in contact-intensive services is expected to be sustained, with the ebbing of the third wave and the growing vaccination coverage,» the central bank said. Also, investment activity should get an uplift from the robust government capex, improving capacity utilisation, stronger corporate balance sheets and congenial financial conditions. «On the other hand, the worsening external environment, elevated commodity prices and persistent supply

RBI raises CRR by 50 bps to 4.5% from May 21

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank on Wednesday announced a hike in cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points to 4.5 per cent, effective May 21, which will take out Rs 87,000 crore liquidity from the system. The decision was announced by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das after an off-cycle meeting of the rate-setting panel -- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC). CRR is a percentage of a bank's total deposits that it needs to maintain as liquid cash. The MPC also decided to raise the repo rate or the short-term lending rate by 40 basis points to 4.4 per cent.

bottlenecks pose formidable headwinds, along with volatility spillovers from monetary policy normalisation in advanced economies,» the committee said. On balance, the Indian economy appears capable of weathering the deterioration in geopolitical conditions, but it is prudent to continuously monitor the balance of risks, said the six-member panel headed by Governor Das. **AGENCIES**

EIH Chairman Prithvi Oberoi steps down, nephew Arjun Singh Oberoi takes over

Prithvi Raj Singh Oberoi, Chairman and Director of East India Hotels (EIH), who is credited with placing Oberoi Hotels & Resorts on the international luxury travellers' map, has decided to relinquish his position, effective May 3, due to his deteriorating health, EIH said in a filing on Wednesday.



His nephew, Arjun Singh Oberoi has been appointed in his place as executive chairman with immediate effect. He has been an executive director of the company for over two decades and has over 30 years of experience in the hotel industry. He worked closely with his uncle on planning and development of a number of Oberoi and Trident Hotels. Fondly addressed as «Bikki,» PRS helped EIH—the third largest hospitality firm now, to become one of the most respected hotel companies in India. During his two decades at the helm he opened several iconic luxury hotels in India and overseas, which went on to set new standards for luxury and service globally. The Padma Vibhushan awardee (2008) established «The Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development» in 1967. «PRS Oberoi's passion for people and for their growth and development is as strong 55 years later.»

GST collections for April highest ever at Rs 1.68 lakh Cr.

Gross GST revenue collected in the month of April, 2022 is Rs 1,67,540 crore of which CGST is Rs 33,159 crore, SGST is Rs 41,793 crore, IGST is Rs 81,939 crore (including Rs 36,705 crore collected on import of goods) and cess is Rs 10,649 crore (including Rs 857 crore collected on import of goods). The gross GST collection in April 2022 is all time high, Rs 25,000 crore more than the next highest collection of Rs 1,42,095 crore, just last month. The government has settled Rs 33,423 crore to CGST and Rs 26,962 crore to SGST from IGST. The total revenue of Centre and the States in the month of April 2022 after regular settlement is Rs 66,582 crore



for CGST and Rs 68,755 crore for the SGST. The revenues for the month of April 2022 are 20% higher than the GST revenues in the same month last year. During the month, revenues from import of goods was 30% higher and the revenues from domestic transaction (including im-

port of services) are 17% higher than the revenues from these sources during the same month last year. For the first time gross GST collection has crossed Rs 1.5 lakh crore mark. Total number of e-way bills generated in the month of March 2022 was 7.7 crore, which is 13% higher than 6.8 crore e-way bills generated in the month of February 2022, which reflects recovery of business activity at faster pace. Month of April 2022 saw the highest ever tax collection in a single day on 20th April 2022 and highest collection during an hour, during 4 PM to 5 PM on that day. On 20th April 2022, Rs 57,847 crore was paid through 9.58 lakh transactions and during 4-5 PM, almost Rs 8,000 crore was paid through 88,000 transactions. The highest single day payment last year (on the same date) was Rs 48,000 crore through 7.22 lakh transactions and highest one hour collection (2-3PM on the same date last year) was Rs 6,400 crore through 65,000 transactions.

Punjab Police arrests Delhi BJP leader Tajinder Bagga, gets held up in Haryana

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Police on Friday said it has arrested Delhi BJP spokesperson Tajinder Pal Singh Bagga from his residence in the national capital in connection with a case registered against him in Mohali last month.

However, vehicles bringing Bagga, who has been highly vocal against Kejriwal on social media, from Delhi to Mohali got held up in Haryana's Kurukshetra. Sources said that Haryana police officials were talking to their Punjab counterparts over some issues. There is no official word from the Haryana police yet. As the situation escalated with the AAP and the BJP trading charges, the Delhi Police registered a case of kidnapping based on a complaint by Bagga's father that some people came to his house in Delhi's Janakpuri around 8 am and took away his son. The Punjab police, in a



statement, said Bagga is being brought to Punjab and will be produced before a court. Bagga (36) was arrested in the morning from his home following due process of law, the Punjab Police said while claiming that despite being served five notices, he did not join the investigation. Last month, the Punjab Police booked him on the charges of making provocative statements, promoting enmity and criminal intimidation. The case was registered on a complaint of AAP leader Sunny Ahluwalia, a resident of Mohali. The FIR registered on April 1 referred to Bagga's remarks on March 30, when he was part of a BJP youth wing protest outside the chief minister's residence in Delhi. The Delhi BJP spokesperson came under fire from the AAP, which is ruling both Delhi and Punjab, for his tweet against

Kejriwal over «The Kashmir Files» movie. Bagga's arrest triggered a strong reaction from the BJP which accused Kejriwal of having a «dictatorial mindset» and «misusing» the police force of Punjab which is ruled by his party. BJP leader from Punjab and the party's national general secretary Tarun Chugh tweeted, «The manner in which Kejriwal is misusing Punjab Police is condemnable. The Punjab Police has arrested Bagga from his home.» «They behaved inhumanly with Bagga and his father. But remember (Arvind) Kejriwal Ji, your such acts cannot scare a true Sikh,» he said in the tweet. Delhi BJP chief Adesh Gupta said a complaint has been lodged at the Janakpuri police station in the national capital over the Punjab police allegedly beating Bagga's father. **AGENCIES**

Tata Technologies offers to set up EV Production Centre in Punjab



CHANDIGARH: In a major initiative aimed at giving a fillip to the industrial development of the state on one hand and opening new vistas of employment for youth on the other, the Tata Technologies has offered to set up its ambitious Electric Vehicle Production center in Punjab. A delegation of the Tata technologies called on the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday here at his official residence. During the deliberations, the delegation comprising Global CEO of Tata Technologies Warren Harris, President Global HR, and IT Pawan Bhageria and others evinced keen interest to set up this unit in the state with current investment of Rs 250

ISRO plans mission to Venus, eyes Dec 2024 launch window



NEW DELHI: After sending missions to the Moon and Mars, the ISRO is now readying a spacecraft to orbit Venus to study what lies below the surface of the solar system's hottest planet, and also unravel the mysteries under the Sulfuric Acid clouds enveloping it. Addressing a day-long meeting on Venusian science, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman S Somnath said the Venus mission has been conceived, a project report made and «money identified». He urged scientists to focus on high-impact outcomes. «Building and putting a mission on Venus is possible for India in a very short space of time as the capability today exists with India,» Somnath said in his inaugural address. The space agency is eyeing the December 2024 window for its launch with orbital maneuvers planned for the following year when earth and Venus would be so aligned that the spacecraft could be put in the neighbouring planet's orbit using a minimum amount of propellant. The next similar window would be available in 2031. Somnath cautioned against repeating experiments conducted by previous missions to the Venus and focus on unique high-impact outcomes as were achieved by Chandrayaan-I and Mars Orbiter Mission. Among the experiments planned include an investigation of the surface processes and shallow subsurface stratigraphy, including active volcanic hotspots and lava flows, studying the structure, composition, and dynamics of the atmosphere, and investigation of solar wind interaction with the Venusian Ionosphere.

Over 50% drop in industry production due to power cuts in Haryana

SATISH HANDA Frequent power cuts has adversely affected industry in Haryana state and night shifts in almost every industrial town in the state including Panipat handloom industry, plywood & metal industry at Yamunanagar - Jagadhari, nut-bolts industry at Rohtak, shoes & rubber goods industry at Bahadurgarh, automobile industry at Gurugram, steel industry at Hisar and scientific goods & mixi industry at twin city Ambala are facing more than 50% drop in production and most of the units working in three shifts have already discontinued night shift in their factory due to power cuts declared by the government. According to industry entrepreneurs it is not possible for them to continue production on diesel generating sets due to unaffordable diesel prices as such production in most of the industrial units in the state has dropped from 40



to 70%, besides large number of workers have become jobless and started shifting to their native places posing a threat to industry in the state, many of these are incurring heavy financial loss. The Financial World team while visiting few prominent industrial sectors in the state observed that large numbers of units in the state are using hardly 50% of their production capacity. Nearly 30000 workers employed in handloom industry Panipat producing nearly 15 lakh meter cloth daily are facing danger to their employment. The owners of most of the textile units told that it is better to close down their units rather working on diesel generating sets increasing production cost. The Financial World found that nearly 50 plants manufacturing Polar blankets, over 100 plants manufacturing Mink blankets, nearly 125 plants manufacturing 3D bed sheets and curtain cloth and more than 300 dyeing units involved in dyeing nearly 12 lakh kg thread daily were found closed. More than 40% production

was found dropped in industrial units at Sonapat, Rai and Kundli industrial areas due to unscheduled power cuts in the state in spite of the fact government has declared daily eight hours power cut. Rakesh Devgun President of Rai Industrial Manufacturing Association said, production remains suspended for a long time due to sudden power cuts damaging not only machines but also produced material. Similarly, the entrepreneurs of plywood industry Yamunanagar and metal industry Jagadhari expressed unhappiness over unscheduled power cuts. State General Secretary of Haryana Chamber of Commerce & Industry Raj Chawla said that that night shift in more than 80% manufacturing units have been discontinued due to power cuts as such units are able to produce hardly 60% of their production capacity facing severe economic crisis due to non-supply of goods against orders.

World Food Program to study Punjab wheat storage facility

CHANDIGARH: A team of the World Food Program (WFP) on Wednesday started a visit to Punjab to understand the process of procurement, testing and transportation of wheat to Afghanistan so that a similar procedure can be adopted by it. State Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Lal Chand Katarachak said the five-member team of Sandro Banal, Filippo Zunino, Stephanie Heard, Amit Wadhwa and Shruti will be visiting Amritsar to take a first-hand assessment of how long term storage of wheat is undertaken in Punjab, without deterioration in its quality. Terming the recognition by the WFP for preserving the foodgrain by the state a matter of pride, the minister said Punjab, the food bowl of the nation, has been feeding the nation and now the grain produced in Punjab is



feeding people abroad also. It was also creditable that the western nations are now looking towards India to study preservation techniques for foodgrains and it speaks volumes of the progress made by the government of Punjab in this regard, he added. Senior officials of the state government and the FCI will be accompanying the team, he said, while assuring full cooperation to the team. In a separate communication by the Ministry of External Affairs to the Department of Food and Public Distribution of the government of India on April 27 it had been conveyed that «WFP is highly satisfied with the quality of 10, 000 metric tons of wheat provided by India to Afghanistan as humanitarian assistance». **AGENCIES**

Mann calls upon farmers of his native village to adopt DSR technology for paddy

SANGRUR: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, on Tuesday, kick started the ambitious drive, Direct Sowing of Rice (DSR), which promotes cultivation of paddy by using lesser amount of water from his native village Satauj.

Exhorting the farmers of his native village to go for this new technique of paddy sowing in a big way, the CM said that since the residents of Punjab have given a massive mandate to form

AAP Government in the state and now it was our bounden duty to take path breaking initiatives like DSR and several more for state's overall development and prosperity, for which people's wholehearted cooperation and support is immensely needed.

Showing deep concern over the fast depleting groundwater at the alarming level, Bhagwant Mann said it is the need of hour to motivate our farmers to switch over from traditional paddy transplantation to the advanced technology of DSR. Moreover, it is a high time to adopt an alternate technique for paddy cultivation thus saving the much scarce and precious



natural resource water as almost half of the land being cultivated by the farmers and they could play a pivotal role in this regard. "To promote the DSR technology, our government has also decided to provide financial assistance of Rs. 1500 per acre to the farmers who adopt this water saving method of cultivating paddy," CM Bhagwant Mann said.

Calling upon the farmers of Satauj, Mann said that they will have to set an example for the entire Punjab by sowing paddy with DSR method on maximum area of land.

To encourage crop diversification in Punjab, the CM said that their government will provide MSP on alternative crops

including maize, pulse and bajra and will sell the produce of these crops on their own responsibility.

The CM also assured the farmers that during the tenure of their government, they will be getting superior quality of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides.

To ease the power supply situation in the state, Bhagwant Mann said that there will be no problem of electricity supply as their government is going to resume mining of coal from Punjab's allotted mine in Jharkhand which was shut since 2015. He pointed out further that with un-interrupted supply of coal, there will be normal supply of power for agriculture, domestic and industrial sector, as well.

Aus keen to forge pact with Punjab in agriculture, skill development

CHANDIGARH: In a bid to give fillip to bilateral trade, Australian High Commissioner Barry O'Farrell on Wednesday evinced keen interest to forge collaboration especially in the field of agriculture and skill development with Punjab on the pattern of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Responding to O'Farrell's proposal, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann assured him of all cooperation and support in this regard so as to propel Punjab in the high growth trajectory by concretizing these plans of mutual interest. A three-member Australian delegation led by O'Farrell, including Member



Parliament Gurmeh Singh and Second Secretary Political Jack Taylor, called on the Chief Minister here.

Apprising Mann about the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement

(IndAus ECTA), O'Farrell said it is the India's first bilateral trade agreement with a large, developed economy in 10 years, which aims to double two-way trade. He mentioned that Australia's goal is to lift India into

their top three export markets by 2035 and make it third largest outward investment destination in Asia.

Pointing out further, O'Farrell said Punjab could be immensely benefitted by forging collaboration with Australia especially in the field of agriculture and agro-industry as its progressive farmers have a proven track record of vast experience and expertise in food production.

Taking part in the deliberations, Mann said that Punjabis due to their enterprising and resilience nature have fairly contributed in the overall socio-economic development of

all the major countries across the globe, including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the UK, the US, Italy, etc. Mann said: "Punjab has several franchises in the different parts of the world viz. there is a big Punjab in Vancouver, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland, besides a mini-Punjab in the UK".

The Chief Minister asked the visiting delegation to be in touch with his team of officers headed by his Additional Chief Secretary A. Venu Prasad, who was also present in the meeting, to fructify these proposals of mutual interest between the both sides on the ground. **AGENCIES**

Car falls into gorge in Shimla, four killed



SHIMLA: Four members of a family were killed after their car fell into a gorge in Himachal Pradesh's Shimla district, a senior state disaster management official said on Thursday.

The four were returning to their home after attending a wedding function when the ac-

cident took place at 11.30 pm on Wednesday, state disaster management director Sudesh Mokhta said.

The deceased hailed from Bholad village in Shimla district. The bodies have been taken to civil hospital Rohru for postmortem **AGENCIES**

Hooda a challenge for BJP in 2024 polls in Haryana

SATISH HANDA

Appointment of Udai Bhan four times winner in Vidhan Sabha polls from Hodal constituency in Palwal district as president Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee (HPCC) also quite near and dear to former Haryana Chief Minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda who has become a challenge for ruling BJP government in Haryana in coming 2024 Vidhan Sabha as well as Lok Sabha polls. It cannot be denied that all political parties in Haryana were wiped out from the state in 2014 polls due to Modi wave in the country.

Information reveals, both newly appointed HPCC president as well as former Chief Minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda jointly has now assured Congress high command to bring back lost reputation as well as lost power in the state in coming 2024 polls. He blame absence of a powerful organisation and rift between senior Congress leaders in the state were prime reasons for party's downfall in the Haryana and every effort will be made to unite all party leaders once again as well as bring back all those leaders said good-bye to Congress prior to coming 2024 polls.



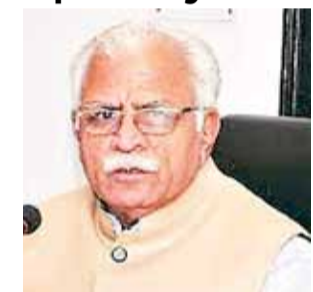
Talking to media persons, Hooda accused HPCC president Shejla responsible for Congress in the state failed to form government in the state in 2019 polls when Congress was able to win majority of seats in Vidhan Sabha polls when BJP in spite of ruling in the state making tall claims for victory over nearly 75 to 80 out of total number of 90 Vidhan Sabha seats was able to form government in the state having alliance with newly born Janhit Janta Party (JJP). Hooda said, Congress would have been in power in the state today in case right selection of candidates to contest 2019 polls would have been made by HPCC president instead of dividing senior party leaders in groups and refusing tickets to influential, winner candidates to contest poll.

Sources reveal, Congress high command hoping for successful comeback again in Haryana state

after 2024 Vidhan Sabha polls have now left all important decisions on Bhopinder Singh Hooda to appoint Udai Bhan a 'Dalit' leader having strong grip over large number of 'Dalit' voters in Southern part of Haryana state as HPCC president Geeta Bhukkal MLA at Hajaraj also quite near and dear to Hooda was recommended for the appointment of party president in the state and decision was changed for the welfare of party when Bhukkal is sure to get another important portfolio in the party.

In reply to a media question, Bhopinder Singh Hooda blame change in leadership prior to 2019 polls by Congress high command adversely affected party network in Haryana state when tickets to contest Vidhan Sabha polls were refused to large number of winning candidates and over a dozen heavy weight Congress leaders refused tickets to contest polls were expelled from the party allegedly not sincere to party or provided no support to Congress contestants in polls, besides few influential Congress leaders facing neglect by the party president or high command left party caused severe damage to Congress.

Haryana CM seeks separate high court



Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said on Saturday that Haryana and Punjab have demanded the setting up of a separate high court for both the states and both would duly send their proposals to the Union Home Ministry.

While interacting with the media after attending the Joint Conference of Chief Ministers and Chief Justices of High Courts here, Khattar said the demand for setting up a separate high court for Haryana has been made in the joint conference.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has also demanded the setting up of a separate high court for Punjab, said Khattar.

At the conference, the Haryana Chief Minister demanded setting up of a separate high court for Chandigarh also.

Khattar said that Haryana has also demanded that the selection of judicial officers should be done through the Haryana Public Service Commission.

Former Chairman Bar Council in favor of separate High Court of Haryana

KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Chandigarh

Former Chairman Bar Council in favor of separate High Court of Haryana supported the statement of Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar Advocates and litigants will get justice soon from a separate High Court: Randhir Singh Badharan

Due to the statement of the Chief Minister, the pending demands of the advocates got strength Panchkula. The demand for a separate High Court of Haryana has been going on for a long time. This demand has been raised in the previous governments also. After the demand of former Chief Minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda in 2013, now in the last days Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal has also demanded a separate High Court of Haryana in Delhi. Regarding this statement, Randhir Singh Badharan, former President Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana, Chandigarh and the convener of Janshakti Awaaz Manch, said that in the conference of judges and chief ministers in Delhi, Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal, after the statement of the separate High Court in Haryana, the advocates of Haryana. Long pending demands got strength. The Punjab and Haryana High Court is a joint of both the states and the Union Territory of Chandigarh.



After this statement, both the legal fraternity as well as the plaintiffs of Haryana are very happy. There are more than 1 Lakh Advocates enrolled in Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana and practicing as Advocate in Punjab and Haryana Chandigarh. At present, due to the problem of parking, lawyers and litigants are also facing problems. Other problems including advocates' cabins will also be resolved. It will also be better for new advocates coming into the legal profession. Both the governments should resolve this issue from time to time without any political in the larger public interest. Otherwise this issue will never be resolved.

After the formation of separate High Courts of Punjab and Haryana, the long demands of advocates and litigants will be fulfilled. Randhir Singh Badharan said that when he was the President of the Bar Council, he himself raised the demand for a separate High Court but it could not be fulfilled due to political reasons.

Digital Media Association condemn murderous attack on journalist Alok Verma

CHANDIGARH: The Digital Media Association today strongly condemned murderous attack on Amar Ujala reporter Alok Verma at Zirakpur.

Baljit Balli Chief Patron, Chairman Satinder Bains, President Devinderjit Singh Darshi and other members of the association demanded immediate arrest of the accused. The said that it was

attack on freedom of the press and also expressed concern over rising attacks on media persons.

The association said that though FIR was lodged yesterday but no efforts are made to arrest the culprits. The association urged the Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann to intervene and ensure arrest of the culprits. **AGENCIES**

SGPC President honours Sikh jatha that arrive from Pakistan



AMRITSAR: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) President Advocate S. Harjinder Singh Dhami today honoured jatha (group) of Sikh pilgrims that recently arrived India from Pakistan recently to pay obeisance at Sachkhand Sri Harmandar Sahib. This jatha reached India via Wagha Border on April 22 under the leadership of S. Pritam Singh of Sri Nankana Sahib, which came to Amritsar yesterday after paying obeisance at the Sikh shrines in Delhi and Sri

Anandpur Sahib. Honouring the Sikh jatha from Pakistan on their arrival at the information center of Sri Darbar Sahib, SGPC President Advocate S. Harjinder Singh said it is a matter of great pleasure that majority of Sikhs residing in Pakistan are Sabat Soorat Amritdhari (initiated with unshorn hair).

S. Harjinder Singh said 100 year anniversary centenary of Shaheed Saka (Martyrdom Massacre) of Sri Panja Sahib is being marked by the Sikh Qaum (nation) on October

30, this year, and efforts will be made to send a large jatha of Sikh pilgrims from India to Pakistan.

On this occasion, the leader of jatha, S. Pritam Singh said 48 Sikh pilgrims have arrived in India on 15-day visa for paying obeisance at the Gurdwara Sahibs and the Sangat is very happy to visit Sri Anandpur Sahib and the Sikh shrines in Delhi. They also thanked the SGPC President S. Harjinder Singh for the honour and invited him to visit Pakistan for paying obeisance at the Sikh shrines there.

Those present on this occasion include SGPC members S. Jagsir Singh, S. Gurmeet Singh, Bhai Manjit Singh, additional secretary S. Partap Singh, assistant secretary S. Kulwinder Singh, S. Balwinder Singh, S. Tejinder Singh, information officer S. Jaswinder Singh, S. Amritpal Singh, Sikh pilgrims from Pakistan S. Ranjeet Singh, S. Kirpa Singh, S. Ram Singh, S. Kirpal Singh and others.

SC asks Centre to decide on Balwant Singh Rajoana's mercy plea in 2 months



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday gave two months to the Centre to decide on the mercy plea of Balwant Singh Rajoana, who was sentenced to death for his role in the assassination of then Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh in 1995.

A bench, headed by Justice U.U. Lalit and comprising Justices S. Ravindra Bhat and P.S. Narasimha, said the decision by the Centre should be taken as early as possible, "preferably within two months from today".

Additional Solicitor General K.M. Nataraj, representing the Centre, submitted that the mercy petition cannot be considered as it has been filed by another organisation and not by the convict.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has also argued that the mercy petition cannot be decided until the appeals filed by other convicts in the case before the apex court are not disposed of. Also, Rajoana has not challenged his conviction or sentence, either before the high court or the Supreme Court.

However, the bench noted that the fact that another organisation has filed the mercy petition is not an obstruction to the consideration of the matter, telling the Centre's counsel that it had decided in September 2019 to commute the death penalty of Rajoana to a life sentence on the special anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev. It further added that more than two years have passed but a decision has not been taken in the matter.

Nataraj did not agree that in 2019, a final decision was taken to commute Rajoana's death sentence. He added that it was decided that the proposal for commutation of death sentence, has to be processed under

Article 72.

As he submitted that Rajoana had given a statement to the trial court that he had no faith in the judiciary and the Constitution, Justice Lalit observed: "They are all citizens of this country... need to deal with compassion."

The bench pointed out that the Centre's communication had directed the state to grant remission to other convicts. As Nataraj replied that states have their independent power under Article 161, the bench said: "Show us the orders which show states have decided independently of this communication...either this communication was made without rational application or it was an empty exercise."

The bench told Nataraj that when the Centre has to take a decision in the matter, how would the state government process the matter under Article 161? "It is something to be processed...what have you done in these years on this," it asked.

Justice Lalit asked Nataraj if this would have to be taken as a populist announcement with no follow up action? Citing his instructions, Nataraj said only four out of the other eight persons were given remission.

The bench observed, this is a writ petition under Article 32 and the court can take it that Rajoana has endorsed the mercy petition.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing the petitioner, argued that mercy petitions have been filed by several organisations on Rajoana's behalf, and when it was required from government what has happened, the government replied that mercy petitions are under consideration. He pointed out that the top court has also held that the non-consideration of mercy petition is a ground to commute death penalty. **AGENCIES**

Punjab CM Mann holds meeting with AAP MLAs

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday held a meeting with AAP MLAs who were asked to seek suggestions from people of their constituencies for the state budget 2022-23.

He is also learnt to have asked the legislators to propagate the recent decisions of the state gov-

ernment in their constituencies. In the meeting, the chief minister also heard issues raised by the MLAs of their constituencies and assured to resolve them.

AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha was also present during the interaction. Almost all legislators of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and cabinet ministers

participated in the meeting, said party sources. It was basically an interactive session, said Amritsar East legislator Jeevan Jyot Kaur. The Bhagwant Mann-led government in Punjab had on Monday said it would seek suggestions from the general public for the state budget for the year 2022-23 and called it the 'Janta budget'.

LPU Chancellor Dr Ashok Mittal takes oath as Rajya Sabha member

The recently elected Rajya Sabha Member of the Parliament, Dr Ashok Mittal, Chancellor of Lovely Professional University (LPU) took the oath, today, on May 2, 2022, at 11:00 am in New Delhi. The oath swearing ceremony was administered by the Hon'ble Vice President of India, M. Venkaiah Naidu at the Rajya Sabha.

Thanking the Indian Government for the responsibility entrusted to him, LPU Chancellor and Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) Dr. Ashok Mittal shared, "It's an honor to accept the responsibilities laid upon me at the upper house of the Parliament of India. I will strive to fulfill the duties delegated to me to the best of my abilities."

Create movement to ensure release of Sikh prisoners: Sukhbir Badal

CHANDIGARH: Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) President Sukhbir Singh Badal on Wednesday appealed to all Panthic organisations to unite on a common platform to create a movement to ensure the release of 'bandi-Sikhs' (Sikh prisoners), who have been languishing in jail even after expiry of their life sentences.

Addressing the media here, Badal appealed to the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) President to take the lead and call a meeting of Panthic organisations to devise a joint strategy to fulfill the demand of Punjabis worldwide to free the Sikh prisoners on humanitarian grounds.

"We may have individual and political differences, but let us shed them aside for the cause of the bandi Sikhs," he said.

He asserted that the coor-



dated approach would be adopted in consultation with all Panthic organisations and parties as well as Singh Sabhas and the Sant Samaj. This could include leading a delegation to the Prime Minister to ensure the speedy release of the Sikh prisoners, Badal said.

He thanked Akal Takht jathedar, Giani Harpreet Singh, for taking the lead in this direction by setting the tone for

Panthic unity on this crucial issue which concerned the sentiments of Sikhs worldwide.

Asserting that the release of the 'bandi Sikhs' was a long pending issue and that the entire Khalsa panth as well as Punjabis in general were pained at the delay being shown in releasing them, Badal said it was most unfortunate that the release was not taking place despite a

national commitment made by the Union government in this regard by approving the release of Sikh prisoners on the occasion of the 500th Parkash Purb of Guru Nanak Dev in October 2019.

He said around 50 Sikh prisoners were incarcerated in various jails across the country and they should all be released immediately.

Badal said the way had also

Telangana HC orders IAS officer to refund Rs 15 lakh to govt over defamation case

HYDERABAD: Telangana High Court has directed an IAS officer to refund Rs 15 lakh sanctioned to her by the state government for meeting the legal expenses in a defamation case against an English news weekly, noting that it was not for any public purpose.

Two PILs were earlier filed challenging the Telangana Government Order (GO) issued in August 2015 granting the amount to IAS officer Smita Sabharwal for payment of court fee and expenses for filing a civil suit seeking damages against the management of the magazine for publishing a news report along with a cartoon allegedly defaming her.



Allowing the PILs, a division bench comprising Chief Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Abhinand Kumar

Shavili, (in the order recently), directed the bureaucrat to refund Rs 15 lakh sanctioned by the government within 90 days

from the date of the order.

In the case, if the said amount is not refunded by the officer within 90 days, the state shall recover the same from her within a period of 30 days thereafter, the order said.

The court, in its order, observed that it is a case where the IAS officer had participated in a private event, an article was published by the magazine and some comments had been made against the officer and the Chief Minister.

The IAS officer wanted to file a suit claiming damages and it is certainly not at all the action of the state government against the magazine and therefore, exercise of power by

the government in sanctioning the amount to the bureaucrat can never be included under the term grant for any public purpose keeping in view Article 282 of the Constitution of India, the High Court said in its order.

Earlier, after the publication of the news report, Sabharwal had made a representation to the government for grant of financial assistance to file a civil suit of defamation against the magazine and accordingly, the GO was issued granting financial assistance.

A civil suit was filed (against the magazine) in a local court, and the same was dismissed in December 2021. **AGENCIES**

Booking Rana couple for sedition was stupidity: Fadnavis



NAGPUR: Mumbai Police's decision to invoke the sedition charge against Independent MP Navneet Rana and her husband and MLA Ravi Rana was stupidity, BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis said on Wednesday.

The legislator couple, arrested on April 23 amid a row caused by their announcement that they would recite the Hanuman Chalisa outside Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray's residence in Mumbai, got bail earlier in the day.

"There can be nothing more stupid than arresting

someone for reciting the Hanuman Chalisa. This was foolishness of the government and the grant of bail establishes that," Fadnavis, a former chief minister, told reporters here.

The Rana couple were arrested on April 23 by the Mumbai police under various provisions of the IPC, including sedition and "promoting enmity between groups", even after they dropped their plan to recite the Hanuman Chalisa outside the Thackeray residence. On Wednesday, a court allowed their bail plea.

Nobody can be forced to undergo COVID-19 vaccinations: SC



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday said that no person can be forced to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and asked the Centre to make public the effect of such an immunisation.

A bench of Justices L. Nageswara Rao and B.R. Gavi said bodily autonomy and integrity are protected under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The top court said the current COVID-19 vaccine policy cannot be said to be manifestly arbitrary and unreasonable.

"Till numbers are low, we suggest that relevant orders are followed and no restriction is imposed on unvaccinated individuals on access to public areas or recall the same if already not done," the bench said.

Regarding segregation of vaccine trial data, subject to privacy of individuals, all trials conducted and to be subsequently conducted, all data must be made available to the public without further delay, it said.

The apex court also directed the Union of India to publish reports on adverse events of vaccines from the public and doctors on a publicly accessible system without compromising data of individuals.

The court delivered the judgement on a plea filed by Jacob Puliyl seeking directions for disclosure of data on clinical trials of COVID-19 vaccines and post-jab cases.

TMC appoints Kirti Azad as party's Goa in-charge



KOLKATA: TMC on Wednesday appointed Kirti Azad as the new in-charge for its Goa unit. Azad, a cricketer-turned-politician, had switched over to the TMC from Congress last year. He was earlier a BJP MP from Bihar.

Azad replaced TMC MP Mahua Moitra who was the in-charge of the Goa unit.

The appointment will come into force with immediate effect, the party said in a statement.

Even as the TMC inducted several senior leaders from the Congress ahead of the assembly polls in the coastal state earlier this year, it drew a blank. **AGENCIES**

After a gap of two years, Bihar celebrates Eid with abandon

PATNA: The festive ambience of Eid ul Fitr was back in Bihar on Tuesday when the believers came out of their homes to celebrate the victory of faith over the gloomy spectre that the global pandemic had brought in its wake.

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was back in the sprawling Gandhi Maidan in Patna, a practice he has followed all through his 16 years long tenure, to join the "namazis" in the thanksgiving prayer that marks the conclusion of the gruelling austerities during the holy month of Ramadan.

"I have been coming here on Eid since 2016. For the last two years, the ceremony could not be held because of coronavirus. The festival teaches us the importance of mutual respect among people of different affiliations which is essential for the harmonious growth of a society," Kumar, who donned a skullcap offered by one of the clerics present on the occasion, told reporters.

It was a busy day for the septuagenarian whose mettle stood proven this Ramadan as the state, where his ally BJP is the numero uno party in terms of numerical strength, remained relatively free of the communal conflagrations and controversies around relay of azaan through loudspeakers.

After being through with the Gandhi Maidan function, Kumar, whose reverence for Sufi saints is well known, travelled to Phulwarisharif in another corner of the city and paid his homage at Khanqah Mujibia, a shrine built in the memory of 18th century saint Hazrat Mujibullah Qadri. **AGENCIES**

Will not allow Census till demand on OBC headcount met: Tejashwi

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Wednesday upped the ante on the issue of headcount of Other Backward Classes by declaring that he will not allow any census in Bihar unless the Centre acceded to the demand for coming out with the numbers of OBCs, besides the SCs and the STs.

Yadav also lambasted the BJP for having displayed an anti-social justice mindset by getting Union minister Nityanand Rai, incidentally an OBC from Bihar himself, to give a written statement in Parliament that the gov-



ernment will not take up a headcount of social groups other than Dalits and tribals. BJP has been an anti-social justice party. Two times have

resolutions been passed unanimously by the Bihar assembly in favour of a caste census. But the Centre, and Union minister Mr Rai have shown their reluctance in writing. Without this, we will not allow any census in Bihar, Yadav tweeted. Notably, Yadav was part of a delegation headed by the Bihar Chief Minister, that met Prime Minister Narendra Modi last year to press the demand for caste census.

The RJD leader, who is the leader of the opposition in the state assembly, was also of the view that if the Centre did not

agree, the state government should consider an exercise making use of its own resources. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has, in principle, agreed to such a state-specific exercise though it has been hanging fire for want of the BJP's willingness to attend an all-party meeting to discuss the modalities. Of late, Yadav has been charging Kumar with dragging his feet and wondering where was the need for yet another meeting after two unanimously passed resolutions in the state legislature where BJP members had also voted in tow.

Rahul Gandhi slams Modi govt, accuses it of misgovernance

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday hit out at the Modi government, alleging that its "misgovernance" is a case study of how to ruin what was once one of the world's fastest growing economies.

His tweet came in the midst of a power and coal shortage in the country amid peak summer demand.

"Power Crisis. Jobs Crisis. Farmer Crisis. Inflation Crisis. PM Modi's 8-years of misgovernance is a case study on how to ruin what was once one of the world's fastest growing economies," the former Congress chief



said on Twitter. Gandhi and his Congress party has been attacking the BJP government over rising inflation and unemployment.

ACJ awards for journalists presented

CHENNAI: The Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) awards for journalists in various categories have been announced, with Shyamal Yadav and Sandeep Singh bagging the honours for their investigation into the land deals in Ayodhya post the Supreme Court verdict on the Ram Temple issue.

The winners were chosen by the final jury comprising among others, senior journalist Ayaz Memon, a release from ACJ said. While Yadav and Singh were declared winners of the Asian College of Journalism's Award for Investigative Journalism, Prema Sridevi and Himanshu Kala won the K.P. Narayana Kumar Memorial Award for Social Impact Journalism at the schools' annual award ceremony and convocation of the class of 2022.

"The winning entry titled 'Ayodhya land deals', published in The Indian Express



newspaper in December 2021, investigates the wrongdoings of families of public officials (who) bought land after the apex court verdict, all within a 5-km radius of the Ram temple site," the release said. Sridevi and Kala's winning entry is an account of the lives and deaths of sanitation workers in Delhi, focusing on the human condition. The documentary feature film was produced by The Probe, it added. The awards were presented to

the winners by Memon, noted journalist, editor and author. He spoke on the «Benefits and Challenges for the Media in the Age of Technology» at the event, which was attended by over 250 faculty, students and guests here.

Both awards comprise trophies and citations. Prize money for the Investigative Journalism Award is Rs 2 lakh and the Social Impact Award winner receives Rs 1 lakh, it said.

Punjab and Haryana HC stays arrest of Kumar Vishwas

CHANDIGARH: The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Monday stayed the arrest of former AAP leader Kumar Vishwas over "inflammatory statements" against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, terming it a fit case to prevent the "abuse of the process of law".

Vishwas, a poet too, was booked by the Rupnagar police in Punjab after the complainant in the case alleged that he and AAP supporters were called Khalistani.

The complaint claimed that the incident took place on April 12 after Vishwas made the remarks, accusing Kejriwal of supporting separatists. Vishwas had moved the High Court last week, seeking the quashing of the FIR registered against him.

The court in its order observed that the penal provisions under which the petitioner stands arraigned are not

prima facie made out against him. "The submission that the FIR is politically motivated cannot be ruled out," the HC said.

"Even if all allegations made in the complaint and the prompt investigation, which has covered almost all aspects, are hypothetically believed as gospel truth, still prima facie the evidence collected does not disclose the commission of any cognizable offence qua the petitioner," the HC said.

"The filing of the complaint by naming petitioner as the principal accused does not appear to have been done to seek action against the legal injury," observed the court.

The court said "a perusal of the complaint and the investigation do not point out that the interviews of the petitioner triggered the incident".

"The arraigning of petitioner by linking his interviews with the stray incident occurring

after eight weeks, falls in the category of the exceptional cases where non-interference would result in a miscarriage of justice," the court said.

"In the light of the judicial precedents, and the observations made above, it is a fit case for this court to prevent the abuse of the process of law because the allegations made in the complaint and the investigation carried out by associating the spot witnesses do not contain any material which even remotely links the incident of April 12 with the interviews of the petitioner," the court said.

"Given above, further proceedings qua the petitioner, including arrest of Kumar Vishwas shall remain stayed, said the court order.

Mayank Aggarwal, one of the counsels for Kumar Vishwas said the court of Justice Anoop Chitkara fixed July 4 as the next date of hearing.

Centre seeks time from SC for filing response to pleas challenging sedition law

NEW DELHI: The Centre has sought time from the Supreme Court to file its response on a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity of the colonial era penal law on sedition.

A three-judge bench of Chief Justice N.V. Ramana and justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli, on April 27, had directed the Central government to file the reply saying it would commence the final hearing in the matter on May 5 and would not entertain any request for adjournment.

In an application filed before the court, the Centre said while the draft of the affidavit is ready, it was awaiting confirmation from the competent authority. The top court, in its last order, had noted that senior advocate Kapil Sibal will lead the arguments from the petitioner's side against the validity of section 124A (sedition) of the IPC in the matter. Concerned over the enormous misuse of the penal law on sedition, the top court in July last year had asked the Centre why it was not repealing the provision used by the British to silence people like Mahatma Gandhi to suppress



the freedom movement. Agreeing to examine the pleas filed by the Editors Guild of India and former Major-General S.G. Vombatkere, challenging the Constitutionality of Section 124A (sedition) in the IPC, the apex court had said its main concern was the "misuse of law" leading to rise in number of cases.

The non-bailable provision makes any speech or expression that brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India a criminal offence punishable with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. While issuing the notice on the petitions in July last year, the top court had referred to the alleged misuse of the provision and had asked if the colonial era law was still needed after 75 years of Independence. This dispute about law is concerned, it is a colonial law. It was meant to suppress the freedom movement. The same law was used by the British to silence Mahatma Gandhi, Tilak etc. Still, it is necessary after 75 years of Independence, the CJ had asked. **AGENCIES**

Cinema can play a major role in nation branding initiative: Anurag Thakur



Union Minister for Information & Broadcasting Anurag Thakur has said that Cinema, as a soft power can play a major role in nation branding initiative. Addressing the valedictory session of the two-day Seminar in Mumbai through video message, Thakur said "Indian film industry and the Government today recognizethethe potential of culture at the highest level. Depiction of one's culture is a very strong component -of any country's soft power"

Union Minister further said that the capacities of nation to make themselves attractive in a global market place for ideas has become an important aspect of contemporary international relations. "Cinema can play a major role in doing this by aiming for nation branding initiatives" he added.

The Minister observed that rapid liberalization, de regulation, privatization of media and culture industry have transformed the film industry in India over the past few decades.

Haryana sees highest unemployment: CMIE

DR. HARVINDER KAUR

According to the data published by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), in the month of April, Haryana reported the highest rate of unemployment in the country in the second successive year. The unemployment rate was reported to be 34.5% for April 2022 and was 23% in the month of January. In April one of the major reasons is power cuts in Northern India. Because of weak economic activities, 38 lakh people joined the army of unemployed in India. Moreover, the eligible people left the search for employment as they know that there is no opportunity for employment in the market. About 4.25 lakh people in the private sector became unemployed in Haryana because of the Russia-Ukraine war and power cuts in the month of April.

Other states like Rajasthan, Delhi, and Goa have unemployment rates above 27%. Overall, India's unemployment rate stands at 7.3%, with Urban unemployment of 9.30%. Nearly one-fourth of Haryana's workforce employable over the age of 15 was jobless at the end of 2021. Educated people in the urban areas took a bigger



hit, the CMIE found. Around 20 lakh people are in the state who are willing to work but are unemployed.

In urban areas, more than 23% of the workforce was without any employment compared to 21% in rural areas, and age-wise unemployment distribution shows, that fresh graduates and drop-outs in their early twenties are the job seekers. Analysis of unemployment also found a huge gap between the gender, while 18% of the male workforce was found jobless, 66% of employable females were jobless.

In fact, the other way around unemployment rate is increasing in Haryana and it is among one of the wealthiest and most economically developed regions of India. Haryana is basically an agrarian state and constitutes 1.5% of India's area, yet contributes 15% of its agricultural produce, which has grown 7 times since the foundation of

Haryana in 1966. About 86% of the area in the state is arable, and of that 96% is cultivated. About 75% of the area is irrigated. Haryana's agricultural GDP contribution to the nation's agricultural GDP is 14.1%. Haryana is the 'Basket of Food grain' and bowl of rice, having a lion's (63%) share in Basmati exports and contributing 7% of India's agricultural exports, which places Haryana in 14th place on the list of Indian states and union territories by GDP behind only much bigger states that are significantly larger in both area and population.

Haryana is at 3rd position in nationwide ranking in terms of ease of doing business and the leader in North India with 7 operational SEZs and an additional 23 formally approved SEZs (20 already notified and 3 in-principal approval.

Haryana is one of the leading states in terms of industrial production also, especially pas-

senger car two-wheelers, mobile cranes, and tractors. Haryana is a preferred destination for auto majors and auto-component manufacturers. The state is host to many large automotive players. The state produces two-thirds of passenger cars, 50% of tractors, 60% of motorcycles, and 50% of the refrigerators manufactured in the country. Automobiles and auto component exports from Haryana were about US\$ 1,070.81 million in FY20 and have reached US\$ 515.3 million in FY21.

Haryana along with states like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu are considered hubs for manufacturing automobiles and related parts in India. Leading automakers like Maruti Suzuki India Ltd, Hero MotoCorp Ltd, Honda Motorcycle, and Scooter India Ltd have factories in places like Gurgaon and Manesar.

The northern cluster is around the National Capital Region and contributes 32% of total automobile production. Gurgaon and Manesar, in Haryana, are where the country's largest car manufacturer, Maruti Suzuki, is based, still, about 34% of people in Haryana are unemployed in April 2022. Then what are the reasons for this contradiction? Unemployment is Perhaps the biggest problem Haryana facing today. **AGENCIES**

141 arrested so far for Jodhpur violence



JAIPUR: Rajasthan police has arrested 141 persons have been arrested so far over the communal violence which erupted in Jodhpur on Monday midnight and continued till Tuesday midnight, said officials.

Director General of Police ML Lather said that the situation in Jodhpur is now under control. "Police are taking all possible steps to maintain peace and order. A total of 141 persons have been arrested by the police so far. "Of these, 133 have been arrested under section 151 and 8 persons in other cases," he informed adding, "So far, 4 FIRs have been registered by the police and 8 FIRs have been registered by the public."

"A total of nine policemen were injured in the disturbance, however, all are okay now. Three persons were hospitalized and all three are out of danger," he added. An appeal has been made by the Police Headquarters to maintain peace, not to believe in rumours and to immediately inform the police about any rumours. **AGENCIES**

RBI's increase in interest rates was long overdue

The Indian currency has dropped. After stubbornly holding off from acting to tame inflation, which has steadily eroded consumers' purchasing power and derailed broader economic momentum, the RBI's rate setting panel on Wednesday announced an 'off-cycle' increase in benchmark interest rates. The Monetary Policy Committee voted to raise the policy repo rate by 40 basis points to 4.4 percent with immediate effect. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das rationalised that letting inflation remain elevated at current levels for too long risked 'de-anchoring inflation expectations' and consequently hurting growth and financial stability. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent western sanctions on Moscow have roiled the outlook for prices on a range of commodities, including wheat, edible oil, crude oil and coal, Indian households' perception and expectations of inflation have been running well above the RBI's upper tolerance threshold of 6 percent for more than two years. That the RBI has been forced to act now, after insisting that price pressures were 'transitory', is a belated yet welcome acknowledgment that the economic costs of failing to anchor price stability can potentially be far more deleterious to growth than a relative decrease in the availability of low-cost credit. With central banks in advanced economies led by the United States Federal Reserve pursuing a path of policy normalisation, the prospects of volatility in capital flows adding pressure on the exchange rate and consequently heightening the risks of imported inflation have also surely queered the pitch for the apex bank. The onus is now squarely on the RBI and fiscal authorities to move in lockstep and take every possible measure including cutting fuel taxes to keep inflation from running away and landing the economy in stagflation.

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OPRAH WINFREY

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PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN EXPLAINS HOW PLACING AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION ON A STEADY FOOTING WILL HELP ECONOMY

Inflation control needs another model

Inflation is back as a talking point in the public arena, some would say belatedly, for wholesale price inflation has been in the double digits for over 12 months. India's official measure of inflation, the rate of change of the consumer price index, has now breached the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s upper target of 6% for three months continuously. At the conclusion of the April meeting, the Monetary Policy Committee had already warned that the focus will henceforth be on inflation. Yesterday it raised the repo rate somewhat sooner than was expected by the market.

It may appear contradictory to ask whether the RBI's stated policy of 'inflation targeting', implemented through changes in the interest rate, can control inflation, but we show here why that would be justified.

The discourse on inflation engaged in by the western central banks, which has been adopted in toto by their Indian counterpart, is so abstruse that it is not understood even by many economists. So, we begin with an explainer.

The starting point of this discourse is that inflation reflects an excess of output over its 'natural' level. Inflation targeting refers to the policy of controlling inflation by raising the interest rate over which the central bank has control, i.e. the rate at which it lends to commercial banks, the so-called 'repo rate'. This, it is argued, will induce firms to stay their investment plans and reduce inventories, lowering production. As economy-wide output declines, becoming equal to the natural level of output, inflation will cease. This story does not just legitimise a policy of output contraction for inflation but sees it as optimal. The natural level of output itself is the productive counterpart of the natural level of employment, the level that obtains in a freely functioning labour market. So, at the natural level of output, the economy is deemed to be at full employment.

It is left unstated, but salient in the context, that the natural level of output is unobservable. Hence inflation as a re-



flexion of an "overheating" economy is something that must be taken on trust. Surely it is disturbing that India's official model of inflation control is based on so unscientific a foundation. At least, the view of inflation that had ruled the central banks of the west before they adopted inflation targeting was based on something tangible, namely, the growth of the money supply.

Not surprisingly for a theory based on an unobservable variable, the proposition that inflation is due to an overheating economy fares poorly when put to a statistical test for India. We are not aware of a single demonstration of the empirical validity of the model of inflation presented in the RBI report of 2014, which recommended a move to inflation targeting. On the other hand, in our published research, we explain inflation in India in terms of the movement of the prices of agricultural goods and, to a lesser extent, imported oil. The implication of this finding is damaging for the claim that monetary policy can control inflation, for neither the price of agricultural goods nor that of imported oil is under the central bank's control. The only route by which monetary policy can, in principle, control inflation is by curbing the growth of non-agricultural output, which would in turn lower the growth of demand for agricultural goods. As the

demand for agricultural goods slows, so will inflation, but this comes at the cost of output and employment. At least, this is the theory. Whether this takes place in practice depends upon the extent to which changes in the repo rate are transmitted to commercial bank lending rates.

Agricultural goods prices

The implication for the policymaker that inflation is driven by agricultural goods prices, as is the case in India presently, is that the focus should be on increasing the supply of these goods. This could be a win-win solution, for as agricultural production grows faster, the economy expands without inflation. Ideally, food prices should decline, for the consequent rise in demand for other goods will propel the economy forward. But the product mix of agriculture becomes relevant here. Growing per capita income in India has shifted the average consumption basket towards foods rich in minerals, such as fruits and vegetables, and protein, such as milk and meat. But the expansion of the supply of these foods has been lower than the growth in demand for them. So a concerted drive to increase the supply of food other than rice and wheat holds the key. There was a time when the leadership of the RBI understood this, but

now its leadership appears unwilling to acknowledge native wisdom.

Increasing agricultural supply at steady if not declining prices is not going to be easy for political reasons. The States have not shown themselves to be particularly sensitive to the charge that they do little to ensure a supply of cheap food for the rest of the country, or even themselves in some cases. When they do produce surpluses, their only concern is that these be procured by the central government at the highest price. The stances of the leaders of wheat-producing northern States and rice-producing southern ones reflect this. Under these circumstances, a nation-wide project for producing food cheaply remains a distant dream. Now that the farm laws have been repealed, it is the time to initiate a discussion on how such a project can be taken forward. Costly food threatens the health of the population, as people economise on their food intake, and holds back the economy, as only a small part of a household's budget can be spent on non-agricultural goods.

Monetary policy manoeuvres, typified by the RBI's raising of the repo rate yesterday, is not an efficient solution for an agricultural price-driven inflation. Any lasting inflation control would require placing agricultural production on a steady footing, with continuously rising productivity. This would require a re-orientation of farm policy. Since the time of the Green Revolution, the focus has been on raising output, that too of the superior cereals. The inflation caused by continuously raising procurement prices for these crops and slow growth elsewhere in the food-producing sector has been swept under the carpet. The time has come to end this folly. Till then, inflation targeting by a committee accountable to no one will remain a charade.

Pulapre Balakrishnan is at Ashoka University, Sonipat and M. Parameswaran is at the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. Views are personal



MAHESH VYAS SAYS WOMEN AND SALARIED WORKERS HAVE BEEN AFFECTED THE MOST BY THE PANDEMIC IN INDIA

Covid crisis: The workers hit the hardest

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE)'s Consumer Pyramids Household Survey, employment in India fell from 408.9 million in 2019-20 to 387.2 million in 2020-21 and then recovered to 401.8 million in 2021-22.

Evidently, the recovery in 2021-22 was inadequate. Employment was still 1.7%, or 7 million short of the employment level of the pre-pandemic year of 2019-20. But this overstates the impact of the pandemic. Employment was on a declining trend even before the pandemic: it was falling at the rate of about 0.31% per annum. If that trend had continued uninterrupted by the pandemic, employment would have fallen by about 2.5 million from 408.9 million in 2019-20 to 406.3 million in 2021-22. And so, the hit to employment that can be attributed to the shock of the pandemic is about 4.5 million jobs.

This loss of 4.5 million jobs because of the pandemic is the more lasting net impact. The immediate impact was much bigger. Nearly 78 million jobs were lost during the quarter of June 2020, which roughly coincides with the first wave of COVID-19. Similarly, 13 million jobs were lost during the second wave during the quarter of June 2021. Most jobs lost during lockdowns or other mobility restrictions are of the informal kinds. These come back when the restrictions on mobility are lifted.

If the economy expands by about 7.5% in 2022-23, we expect about 6 million jobs to come back. That would still leave a deficit of a million even as many more get added to the working age population and the labour force.



As India struggles to generate the jobs it requires to engage all the additional people who enter the labour force in a year, the count of the unemployed and those out of the labour force keeps rising. In 2021-22, the unemployed who were actively seeking work but were unable to find any were estimated at 33 million. This was higher than the pre-pandemic levels. The 7 million jobs lost over the two years since the COVID-19 outbreak is unevenly distributed, so it may be difficult to cover most of this loss anytime soon.

Working from home

It has been seen in the past that women suffer job losses disproportionately during economic shocks. The phenomenon repeated itself during the pandemic. Women accounted for less than 11% of all jobs in 2019-20, but they accounted for nearly 52% of the 7 million job losses since then. In urban India, it was worse: women accounted for only 9% of total employment but accounted for a massive 76% of the job losses. The impact of this is a sharp fall in the labour

participation of women. The female labour force participation rate among urban women was abysmally low at 9.4% in 2019-20 and fell to 7% in 2021-22.

Hopes that working from home would facilitate women to join the labour force in large numbers have been belied. Working from home with the rest of the family also at home made it harder for women compared to the hardship of commuting to work. It has been difficult to raise women's participation in the labour force and offer appropriate jobs in adequate numbers to aspiring women. It would be difficult to cover the 3.6 million loss of employment among women during the pandemic.

Working from home also does not help those who have to necessarily go to work for a living as well, such as small traders/vendors and daily wage labourers. The immediate impact of the lockdowns and other restrictions on mobility was very severe on them. The earnings of these people depend entirely upon their ability to reach markets and trade their goods or services for daily earnings. They account for the largest share of employment in India. Before the pandemic, in 2019-20, about 131 million or 32% of the total employment was in this form.

In April 2020, when India was subjected to the most stringent lockdown, 79 million small traders and daily wage labourers lost employment. By July 2020, most of them were back to work. The lockdowns demonstrated both the vulnerability and the flexibility of this category of workers. They could enter and exit the labour markets with ease. Employment in the form of small traders and daily wage labourers was declining at the rate of

9.3%. In the two years of the pandemic, this rate of fall fell to 2.4% per annum.

The pandemic has reversed a trend of rising entrepreneurs. The count of entrepreneurs who, like small traders and daily wage labourers, also have the freedom to work when conditions permit has also come down - from 78 million in 2019-20 to 75 million in 2021-22. This fall of about 1% is in sharp contrast to the 13% per annum growth in entrepreneurs before the pandemic. It is possible that the lockdowns dealt a fatal blow to the younger enterprises that had entered the markets only recently. But we expect entrepreneurship to rise again principally because of a lack of salaried jobs.

The biggest relative fall in employment is in the category of salaried employees (6.8%). About 5.9 million salaried employees have lost employment in the two years of the pandemic. Unlike daily wage labourers, small traders and entrepreneurs, salaried employees cannot go back to work at will. A loss of a salaried job in hand can be regained only if an appropriate new job is found. But except for a few high-skill jobs, finding a new salaried job is difficult. Investments into new large enterprises make this task particularly difficult. A salaried job is also the most coveted form of employment. But until the investment cycle restarts, it may be difficult to see any uptick in salaried jobs. Employing women and providing salaried jobs are the two big challenges that the pandemic has posed that are going to be difficult to tackle soon.

Mahesh Vyas is Managing Director and CEO, CMIE. Views are personal

BOOKS: REVIEW

New book joins the dots to complete Partition puzzle

The trend of hijacking and distorting huge amounts of India's history by the British was faithfully followed by the Congress for decades after Independence - in fact till it finally got pushed out of power in 2014. Iqbal Chand Malhotra who, through his earlier works on Pakistan and China, proved to be a determined history hound has once again been able to provide his readers many important and so-far unreported facts. This time, Malhotra's findings relate to the Great Game.

The British were indeed shocked when they discovered a battalion of Cossack troops in Kashgar, more than a decade before it was "incorporated" into the Peoples Republic of China

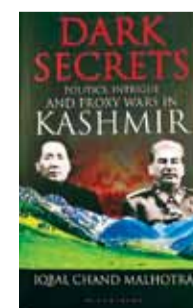
in 1949. And the installation of nuclear-related devices by the Russians in Aksai Chin, which they motivated the Chinese to take over from a then ignorant Indian government, only amounted to a temporary setback for the British in the extended Great Game.

The author maintains that the Soviets desperately needed access to Aksai Chin's uranium ores and transport them by road to their uranium extraction plant in Khoj and Tajikistan. The Soviets used the Chinese as a decoy. Both hid their secret and also brought in a third party to act as buffer between them and the Muslim insurgents in Sinkiang, led by Osman Bator, who staunchly opposed them with covert US

This book is a must read for all concerned with India's security and politics and will greatly interest Indians, by and large, as well as readers of all other countries featuring in it

help. Stalin's suggestion to Mao to invade uninhabited western Tibet provided the smokescreen to build the road from Aksai Chin to Khoj and kill many birds with one stone.

One wonders how many Indians are aware of the fact about the first war between India and Pakistan (1947-48), which the



Dark Secrets: Politics, Intrigue and Proxy Wars in Kashmir
By Iqbal Chand Malhotra
Bloomsbury
277 pages, Rs.799

British chiefs of the Indian and Pakistani armies "directed" much like fixing matches and much to the advantage of Pakistan. Whatever it resulted in was a course of events for which India is dearly paying till date.

This book, yet again, significantly joins many dots and answers many questions that have not been addressed by anyone else so far, namely, why India was given independence without a fight by the British; why Partition took place; why the date for transfer of power was advanced by the British to August 15, 1947;

why Kashmir was invaded; why Aksai Chin was invaded and so on.

A matter with important long-term implications brought out in the book is Nehru's refusal to an India-US partnership offered by the US in 1949, which would have proved to be a game-changer for India. Monitoring the nuclear theft by Russia and China eventually benefited Britain enough to acquire nuclear knowhow. India remains a major loser in the Great Game till date.

This book is a must read for all concerned with India's security and politics and will greatly interest Indians, by and large, as well as readers of all other countries featuring in it.

Kashmir's conventional history has often told us how the last ruling king of the region Hari Singh was cornered into signing the Instrument of Accession so that the Army of India could be sent to Srinagar to "liberate" it from Pakistani forces.

Adani Wilmar buys several brands, including 'Kohinoor' to strengthen food biz

Adani Wilmar Ltd (AWL) on Tuesday announced the acquisition of several brands, including the renowned 'Kohinoor' brand from McCormick Switzerland GMBH to strengthen its leadership in food business.

The deal size was not disclosed. The acquisition would give AWL exclusive rights over the brand 'Kohinoor' basmati rice along with 'Ready to Cook', 'Ready to Eat' curries and meals portfolio under the Kohinoor brand umbrella in India, the company said in a statement.

The addition of Kohinoor's domestic brand portfolio strengthens AWL's leadership position



in the food FMCG category by augmenting a strong product

basket with premium brands along with potential to scale value added products.

The acquisition will fuel the next level of growth for AWL and widen the portfolio to cater to premium customer segments across rice and other value-added food businesses, it added.

The Kohinoor brand portfolio comprises 'Kohinoor' - for premium basmati rice, 'Charminar' - for affordable rice and 'Trophy' for HORECA (Hotel, Restaurant and Cafe) segment.

We are pleased to welcome the Kohinoor brand to the Fortune family. This acquisition is in sync with our business strategy to ex-

pand our portfolio in the higher margin branded staples and food products segment.

"We believe the packaged food category is under-penetrated with significant headroom for growth. The Kohinoor Brand has a strong brand recall and will help accelerate our leadership position in the Food FMCG category, AWL Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director Anshu Mallick said.

On Monday, AWL reported a 26 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 234.29 crore for the quarter ended March compared to Rs 315 crore in the year-ago period on higher tax expenses.

Total income increased to Rs 15,022.94 crore during the January-March period of last fiscal year from Rs 10,698.51 crore in the corresponding period of 2020-21. During the full 2021-22 financial year, the company's net profit rose to Rs 803.73 crore and total income grew to Rs 54,385.89 crore compared to the previous year.

Adani Wilmar, a 50:50 joint venture between business conglomerate Adani Group and Singapore-based Wilmar, recently got listed on the stock exchange after raising Rs 3,600 crore through an Initial Public Offer (IPO). **AGENCIES**

Hyundai drives in Creta Knight Edition at Rs 13.51 lakh



Hyundai Motor India on Tuesday said it has launched a new variant of its popular SUV Creta priced between Rs 13.51-18.18 lakh (ex-showroom).

With the launch of the new Creta Knight Edition, the automaker is once again offering customers an exciting choice of SUV that matches their aspirations with bold and sporty design enhancements, the company said.

The petrol trims, paired with both six-speed manual and automatic (iVT) transmissions, are priced at Rs 13.51 lakh and Rs 17.22 lakh, respectively.

The diesel variants, with manual and automatic transmissions, are tagged at Rs 14.47 lakh and Rs 18.18 lakh (all prices ex-showroom).

"It has been our steadfast endeavour to induce customer delight at every juncture of the company's 25-year rich

legacy in India. With CRETA, Hyundai has elevated the aspirations of lakhs of Indian SUV buyers looking for the ultimate SUV," Hyundai Motor India Director (Sales, Marketing & Service) Tarun Garg said in a statement.

The new Creta Knight Edition comes with aesthetic upgrades in the form of black gloss colour application to multiple exterior and interior design elements as well as Knight Edition Logo on the tailgate.

The company said it has also introduced iMT (intelligent manual transmission) in the Creta Petrol S trim for Rs 12.83 lakh. The automaker has also introduced a new S+ trim for the 1.4 turbo GDi petrol engine, it added. Hyundai said it has introduced multiple features in the new version of Creta including tyre pressure monitoring system as standard across trims.

Tesla can benefit by manufacturing EVs in India: Gadkari



NEW DELHI: Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday said that if the US-based EV maker Tesla manufactures its electric vehicles in India then the company will also get benefits.

Addressing an event here, Gadkari said days are not very far when the prices of all electric vehicles will be less than the cost of petrol vehicles in the country.

"Agar Tesla India me electric car manufacture karega toh unka bhi fayda hoga (If Tesla manufactures its electric vehicles in India then they will also get benefits)," he said.

Earlier on April 26, Gadkari had said, if Tesla is ready to manufacture its EVs in India then there is 'no problem', but the company must not import cars from China.

"If Elon Musk (Tesla CEO) is ready to manufacture in India then there is no problem... Come to India, start manufacturing, India is a large market, they can export from India," he had said at an interactive session at the Raisina Dialogue.

Last year, the heavy industries ministry had also asked Tesla to first start manufacturing its iconic electric vehicles in India before any tax concessions can be considered.

At present, cars imported as Completely Built Units (CBUs) attract customs duty ranging from 60-100 per cent, depending on engine size and cost, Insurance and Freight (CIF) value less or above USD 40,000.

Last year, in a letter to the road ministry, the US firm had stated that the effective import tariff of 110 per cent on vehicles with customs value above USD 40,000 is "prohibitive" to zero-emission vehicles. It had requested the government to standardise the tariff on electric cars to 40 per cent, irrespective of the customs value, and withdraw the social welfare surcharge of 10 per cent on electric cars.

Startup Buddy parent company announces Real-Time Accelerator Fund with a target of INR 100 Cr

Gurugram-based Startup Buddy's parent company Real Time Management Consultancy Services Private Limited announced the launch of its first fund "Real-Time Accelerator Fund" with a corpus of INR100 Crore with a green shoe option of another INR 100 Crore.

Startup Buddy was incorporated by CA Amit Singal & CA Manish Aggarwal in 2015 with the aim to provide a one-stop solution for the startups in the field of finance, legal & compliance services. The company has served more than 500 Startups as clients and consulted more than 2,000 entrepreneurs in the last 7 years.

The Fund is the next step to support the Startup founders through funding and mentorship. Manish Aggarwal will lead the fund as Managing Director and Pranay Mathur will be the CEO. The fund will invest in 20 startups every year with an average cheque size of INR 1 Crore. The fund will handhold the startup in its 10 weeks accelerator program.

"A startup needs more than funding and our program is designed to accelerate their 0 to 1 journey and also, with angel fund structure, a single entity will be on the cap table that brings ease to raise large round of institutional capital without



managing and planning exits for various individuals. And for angel investors, their focus shall remain only on investing and we will manage their investments, diligence and timely reporting", says Manish Aggarwal, Managing Partner, Real Time Management Consultancy Services Private Limited

RealTime has invested in 25+ early-stage startups at the seed stage, starting with Burger Singh (QSR) marked as the first investment and then followed by Advantage Club (Rewards & Recognition Platform), PeeSafe (Health & Hygiene Consumer Brand), Junio (Fintech), Chqbook (Neobank), Original4Sure (Deep-Tech), Redcliffe LifeSciences (Healthcare), OroWealth (Fin-Tech), MentorKart (EdTech), O2 Nails India (RetailTech), Fitspire (Alternative Proteins), United We Care (Mental Health Space), we360.ai (Employee Monitoring), Livofy (Health-tech) and more.

Hero Moto Corp shares decline 3% post Q4 earnings

Shares of Hero MotoCorp fell by 3 per cent on Wednesday, a day after the company said its consolidated profit after tax declined by 30 per cent in the fourth quarter ended March 2022.

The stock went lower by 3 per cent to settle at Rs 2,411.90 on the BSE. During the day, it declined 3.48 per cent to Rs 2,399.75.

At the NSE, it dipped 2.78 per cent to Rs 2,417.95 apiece.

Hero MotoCorp on Tuesday said its consolidated profit after tax (PAT) declined by 30



per cent to Rs 621 crore for the quarter ended March 2022 on account of lower sales.

The country's largest two-wheeler maker had reported a PAT of Rs 885 crore in the January-March quarter of 2020-21 fiscal.

Revenue from operations declined to Rs 7,497 crore, as

against Rs 8,690 crore in the fourth quarter of FY21, Hero MotoCorp said in a regulatory filing.

The company's total sales in the fourth quarter of FY22 stood at 11.9 lakh units, a drop of 24 per cent from 15.68 lakh units in the year-ago period.

For the 2021-22 fiscal, the company reported a consolidated PAT of Rs 2,329 crore, down 21 per cent from Rs 2,936 crore in 2020-21. Revenue from operations also dropped to Rs 29,551 crore from Rs 30,959 crore in FY21.

Titan shares fall over 3 pc post earnings



NEW DELHI: Shares of Titan Company Ltd tumbled over 3 per cent in morning trade on Wednesday, a day after the company reported a 7.21 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit in the fourth quarter ended March 2022.

The stock declined 3.59 per cent to Rs 2,300.80 on the BSE. At the NSE, it went lower by 3.58 per cent to Rs 2,301.10 apiece.

The Tata group firm on Tuesday reported a 7.21 per cent decline in its consolidated net profit at Rs 527 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2022.

It had posted a net profit of Rs 568 crore in the January-March quarter of FY21, Titan Company said in a regulatory filing.

Its total income was up 4.25 per cent to Rs 7,872 crore during the period under review, as against Rs 7,551 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal.

The company's revenue from sales of products was down 1.14 per cent to Rs 7,267 crore in the fourth quarter of FY22, as against Rs 7,351 crore a year ago. **AGENCIES**

India's manufacturing sector sees faster growth amid high inflation in April : PMI

NEW DELHI: India's manufacturing sector activities witnessed faster growth in April amid quicker increases in production as well as factory orders, and renewed expansion in international sales, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) rose from 54.0 in March to 54.7 in April, as a retreat of COVID-19 restrictions continued to support demand.

The April PMI data pointed to an improvement in overall operating conditions for the tenth straight month. In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"The Indian manufacturing PMI remained well inside positive territory during April, recovering some of the ground lost in March. Factories continued to scale up production at an above-trend pace, with the ongoing increases in sales and input purchasing, suggesting that growth will be sustained in the near-term," said Pollyanna De Lima, Economics Associate Director at S&P Global.

April data showed a rebound in new export orders, following the first contraction for nine months in March. The rate of increase was solid and the



strongest since last July. Inflationary pressures meanwhile intensified, owing to rising commodity prices, the Russia-Ukraine war and greater transportation costs. Input prices increased at the fastest pace in five months, while output charge inflation hit a 12-month high.

"A major insight from the latest results was an intensification of inflationary pressures, as energy price volatility, global shortages of inputs and the war in Ukraine pushed up purchasing costs. Companies responded to this by hiking their fees to the greatest extent in one year," Lima said.

Lima further added that this escalation of price pressures could dampen demand as firms continue to share additional cost burdens with their clients.

On the job front, the survey said there was only a mild increase in employment during April.

With capacity pressures among Indian manufacturers remaining negligible, shown by a marginal rise in backlogs, there was only a mild increase in employment during April, the survey said, adding that a vast majority of survey participants reported unchanged workforces from March's levels. The April data pointed towards some improvement in business confidence. However, the overall degree of optimism remained subdued by historical standards.

"Some firms foresee further improvements in demand and economic conditions, while others noted that the year-ahead outlook was difficult to predict," the survey said.

Union Power Minister holds round table meeting with major German energy companies

Union Minister for Power and New & Renewable Energy, R.K Singh, held a virtual round table meeting today with major German energy companies about their expansion in India. He invited all major German companies to come and invest in India. Union Secretary for Power Alok Kumar, Joint Secretary MNRE Dr Vandana Kumar and other senior officials from India and Germany also joined the meeting.

Singh highlighted that India has emerged as the most attractive destination for investment in Renewable Energy. India has focused programs for capacity



addition and accelerating the Energy Transition, he added.

The Minister informed that India already has one of the largest RE capacities in the world, and India also has the fastest rate of growth of RE Capacity addition.

Singh emphasized that India Will also add some of the largest capacities in battery storage, green hydrogen and green ammonia for its own use and also meet the growing global demand.

He stated that India will be

one of the largest producers of green hydrogen in the world. We will manufacture green hydrogen at the most competitive prices, he informed the German companies.

The Minister informed the German companies that India's plans will create significant opportunities in Offshore wind. We plan to have a capacity of 30,000 MW of Offshore wind in our country, he said. He also added that German companies are welcome to participate and compete in manufacturing of high efficiency solar cells and modules of which India is going to set up 50,000 MW capacity.

Philips accessories launched in India

NEW DELHI: TPV Technology recently announced its foray into a new category with the launch of Philips accessories in the Indian market. The product portfolio offers a wide range of Philips Audio, Video, Mobile and Home Power accessories for its quality conscious and performance-driven consumers. There is a huge potential in the Indian market for the Mobile and Audio accessories category. This category is growing at 6% -7% CAGR every year in India and has already reached INR 300+ billion (approx). Philips accessories are amongst the fastest growing brands in global markets like Europe and Latin America. With the India launch, TPV plans to grow the business further through strategic alliances and a strong presence in both online and offline markets.



dio cables; Office and Home-use Power Extension boards, Network cables and Type-C Docking stations. Philips HDMI 2.1 Cables come with 8K resolution support providing an immersive viewing experience to the consumers. The Power Extension boards include the universal socket that can connect all kinds of plugs,

making it the go-to option. The Type-C Docking Stations are equipped with premium minimalistic finish and come with a wide range of ports that give the flexibility of connecting multiple devices. These docking products are a convenient solution apt for travelling professionals and those who need to connect multiple de-

vices on their work desk. The Philips Power Bank comes with Qi Technology wireless charging which is widely being adopted by smartphones and other smart device users. The entire Philips accessories product portfolio ranges from a price point of INR 11,999/- to INR 150/- as per the product category and offers multiple variants to meet the diverse demand of consumers with no compromise on technology and innovation.

The product assortment has been curated post mapping the day-to-day requirements of the consumers. Hence these products are suitable for a varied set of people ranging from working professionals, students, tech enthusiasts, gamers and home users providing them a hassle-free experience. Further, this range also offers ideal connectivity and streaming solutions for large format discussions, conference calls and meetings rooms to fulfil the requirements of enterprises and firms. The brand is planning to come up with more

innovative products within the same category in the near future.

Commenting on the launch, Shailesh Prabhu, Country Head, TPV Technology India Pvt. Ltd., said, "We see a great potential in the Indian Market for our accessories range. After becoming a leading brand in the audio video segment, we believe our entry into this new category will help in elevating the consumer's experience with better connectivity and operability. Backed by the Philips legacy of trust and innovation across sectors, our vision is to offer the best products in the Philips accessories range and become the preferred brand choice of Indian consumers."

The Philips accessories are manufactured as per the global quality standards at the TPV manufacturing facilities across the globe. To cater to the Indian market smoothly, TPV has partnered up with Supertron Electronics as the National Distribution Partner. The products will be available at all leading e-commerce

platforms, large format retail stores, Apple Premium Sales Channel and other key retail outlets across India.

Vibhor Agarwal (Director Marketing), Supertron, added, "Our association with TPV for Philips accessories is one more step towards our commitment to provide quality products to Indian consumers through our strong partner network. We are confident that with our distribution strength coupled with the Philips brand promise of reliable innovation, we will be able to offer the best solutions to our customers. We are excited and look forward to a great journey that can revolutionise the accessories market in the coming future."

Supertron is a leading IT & Telecom distribution & services intermediary in India. From servers to laptops, from components to accessories, Supertron boasts of a wide and deep national network, with a reach of more than 750 cities and more than 11,000+ partners across India.

Wipro shares decline nearly 3 pc after earnings announcement

NEW DELHI: Shares of Wipro on Monday declined by nearly 3% after the company's quarterly earnings failed to cheer investors.

The stock declined 2.84 per cent to Rs 494.50 on the BSE. At the NSE, it went lower by 2.81 per cent to Rs 494.50.

IT company Wipro on Friday posted a 4 per cent increase in its consolidated profit to Rs 3,092.5 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2022, on account of continued demand for IT services. The company had registered a profit of Rs 2,974.1 crore a year ago. The March 2022 quarter was the sixth straight quarter of revenue growth for Wipro at over 3 per cent. The company's annual revenue crossed the USD 10 billion mark for the first time. For the year ended March 31, 2022, Wipro posted a 12.57 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 12,232.9 crore compared to Rs 10,866.2 crore it recorded a year ago. "Crossing USD 10 billion in revenue is a significant landmark for us. So, we are now aiming higher. Revenue growth has been our fastest ever. In absolute terms, we have added one-fourth of our total revenue just this year," Wipro CEO and managing director Thierry Delaporte said. Wipro's consolidated revenue from operations during the January-March quarter grew by about 28 per cent to Rs 20,860 crore from Rs 16,245.4 crore. Talking about the quarterly outlook, the Wipro CEO said that he expects the company's revenue to grow by 1-3 per cent. "We have guided for revenue growth of 1 to 3 per cent, which will translate to a growth of 16 to 18 per cent on a year-on-year basis in constant currency. While we don't provide annual guidance, I want to confirm that we expect to grow in double digits for the 2023 fiscal year as well," Delaporte said. **AGENCIES**



NEWSBRIEFS
Ashok Leyland sales up 42 per cent in April

NEW DELHI: Hinduja flagship firm Ashok Leyland on Monday reported 42 per cent increase in total commercial vehicle sales at 11,847 units in April. The company had sold 8,340 units in the same month last year, Ashok Leyland said in a regulatory filing. Domestic sales were higher 41% at 11,197 units, against 7,961 units in April 2021, it added. Medium and heavy commercial vehicle sales rose 78% to 7,073 units compared to 3,983 units in the year-ago month. Sales of light commercial vehicles in the domestic market were up 4 per cent at 4,124 units, against 3,978 units in April 2021, the company said. **AGENCIES**

RBI hikes interest rate by 40 bps to 4.40%

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank on Wednesday increased the benchmark lending rate by 40 basis points (bps) to 4.40% in a bid to contain inflation, which has remained stubbornly above the target zone of 6% for the last three months. The decision follows an unscheduled meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), with all six members unanimously voting for a rate hike while maintaining the accommodative stance. While the inflation has remained above the targeted 6% since January, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said the inflation print in April is also likely to be high. **AGENCIES**

Banks need to be generous to SHGs, says Tripura Dy CM

AGARTALA: Asserting that banks have become nodal agencies for development, Tripura Deputy Chief Minister Jishnu Dev Varma on Wednesday asked bankers to be a little generous in disbursing assistance to the Self Help Groups (SHGs). At present, the state has around 34,000 SHGs, the members of whom earn a livelihood by taking up various self-employment schemes. In Tripura, SHGs have become a movement and they need help from banks. **AGENCIES**

LIC raises Rs 5,627 cr from anchor investors led by domestic institutions

NEW DELHI: Insurance behemoth LIC on Tuesday said it has garnered a little over Rs 5,627 crore from anchor investors led primarily by domestic institutions ahead of its mega initial public offering (IPO).

Anchor Investors' (AIs) portion (5,92,96,853 equity shares) was subscribed at Rs 949 per equity share, the insurer said in an early morning filing to exchanges.

Out of the allocation of about 5.9 crore shares to AIs, 4.2 crore shares (71.12%) were allocated to 15 domestic mutual funds through 99 schemes, the filing said.

Akshaya Tritiya begins on +ve note; jewellers expect biz of up to 30 tonne

The auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiya has begun on a strong note as jewellers are witnessing good footfalls and being a public holiday on Tuesday, consumers are flocking to the stores early before the temperature soars.

"Jewellers across the country have opened their stores early across the country and there is a strong momentum in footfalls since morning. There has been positive sentiment in the market since the last 10-15 days and we expect it to continue on the day of Akshaya Tritiya. We expect to do 25-30 tonne business on this auspicious day," All India Gem and Jewellery Domestic Council Vice Chairman Shyam Mehra said.

Asked if the high prices will become a hurdle on sales on this Akshaya Tritiya, he said, gold prices have come down to around Rs 50,500 per 10 gram from Rs 55,000-58,000 per 10 gram, giving boost to consumer sentiment.

"It usually takes around 10-15



days for people to accept price movement. And since the prices have come down, there is generally a positive sentiment in the market, which is expecting gold prices to rise going forward. This will also help boost sales," he added.

Echoing similar views, PNG Jewellers managing director and CEO Saurabh Gadgil said footfalls are strong and are expected to grow as the day progresses for the next 1-2 hours. "We are expecting a good

number of people before it becomes too hot in the afternoon. This will again pick up in the evening as the temperature cools down. Being a bank holiday, footfalls are not restricted to office hours and people are coming to the stores at their ease," he added.

Kalyan Jewellers Executive Director Ramesh Kalyanaraman said gold-buying as a tradition has been an integral part of Akshaya Tritiya and this coupled with the ongoing

wedding season, has created a positive market sentiment.

"Though earlier Akshaya Tritiya was more of a South and East centric occasion, we are now seeing it being celebrated at a pan-India level. After two years of lockdown or partial lockdown, this year 100 per cent of our showrooms are operational. Offline purchases still account for a significant majority of sales for the jewellery industry, and we are expecting robust customer footfalls across our showrooms," he added.

This Akshaya Tritiya will be fruitful for the industry, setting new milestones with respect to demand for gold jewellery, he added.

CaratLane COO and co-founder Avnish Anand, on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, said with the consumer sentiment improving with each passing day, the purchasing capacity of the Indian market has increased this year due to the pent-up demand for the season.

RRA recommends withdrawal of 225 more circulars: RBI

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said the Regulations Review Authority has recommended the withdrawal of additional 225 redundant circulars.

The Reserve Bank of India had set up the Regulations Review Authority (RRA 2.0) with an objective to reduce the compliance burden on regulated entities (REs).

"Regulations Review Authority (RRA 2.0) has recommended withdrawal of additional 225 circulars in the third tranche of recommendations," the central bank said in a statement.

The notifications containing the list of specific instructions recommended for withdrawal are being issued separately, it added.

The RRA had recommended the withdrawal of 150 circulars in the first tranche of recommendations in November 2021 and 100 circulars in the second tranche of recommendations in February 2022.

In the second tranche, the RRA had also recommended discontinuation/merger/conversion to online submission of 65 returns along with the creation of a new Regulatory Reporting 'link in the RBI website to consolidate information relating to regulatory reporting.

RRA 2.0 was set up by the Reserve Bank of India to review the regulatory instructions, remove redundant and duplicate instructions and reduce the compliance burden on Regulated Entities (REs).

RRA 2.0 focuses on streamlining regulatory instructions, reducing the compliance burden of the regulated entities by simplifying procedures and reducing reporting requirements, wherever possible.

Inflationary pressures likely to continue going forward on geopolitical tensions: RBI



MUMBAI: The adverse effects of the unprecedented high global food prices due to the ongoing geopolitical situation is reflecting in the domestic market as well, and going forward inflationary pressures are likely to continue, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Wednesday.

In an off-cycle Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting during May 2-4, the Reserve Bank on Wednesday announced a hike in the key repo rate -- at which it lends short term money to banks -- by 0.40 per cent to 4.40 per

cent with immediate effect.

However, the central bank has not tinkered with its inflation projection announced in April this year. Das said that the action of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should be seen as "growth positive" aimed at containing inflation and supporting growth.

The retail inflation that has remained stubbornly above the RBI's upper tolerance level of 6 per cent for the last three months and the ongoing war between Russia-Ukraine has pushed the inflation in almost commodities across the globe.

RBI projected the retail inflation to be at 5.7 per cent in the current fiscal year. "Confronted by elevated inflationary pressures that have shifted the future trajectory of inflation upwards, we have announced our intention to engage in withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains aligned to the target," Das said.

Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based retail inflation rose to nearly 7 per cent in March mainly due to the impact of adverse spillovers from unprecedented high global food prices, RBI said.

Nine out of the twelve food sub-groups registered an increase in inflation in March.

"High frequency price indicators for April indicate the persistence of food price pressures. Simultaneously, the direct impact of the increases in domestic pump prices of petroleum products beginning the second fortnight of March is feeding into core inflation prints and is expected to have intensified in April," Das said while reading out his statement. **AGENCIES**

EOW urges people not to download illegal loan apps

The Economic Offence Wing (EOW) of Odisha Police Crime Branch has urged people not to take loans from unregistered or illegal loan apps available on the internet.

The agency issued the advisory after freezing Rs 6.57 crore of a company following an investigation into fake loan apps.

The EOW had received a series of complaints from people and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on illegal loan apps not registered as non-banking finance company (NBFC) under the RBI Act, a statement issued by the nodal agency for dealing with economic offences said.

The amount was frozen after carrying out an investigation during which it was found that over 1.5 lakh people, including many from Odisha, had downloaded two fake apps.

Investigations revealed that once a person downloads these fake loan apps, small amounts, such as Rs 3,000-Rs 5,000, are credited through links or UPI to the customer's bank account.

Then within a week, the customer is asked to repay the amount with a high-interest rate, an EOW official said.

Customers are then harassed and abused by recovery agents to repay the loan amount. Obscene messages,



indecent pictures, and abusive texts are sent to the person's WhatsApp number and others on his or her contact list, the EOW statement said.

These apps of the company were not registered with the RBI as an NBFC, the EOW said, adding that the company collected the money from people through one of its Gurgaon-based firms.

Three special teams of EOW are working on this case in different states like Maharashtra, Bihar, UP and New Delhi.

The apps, on the pretext of advancing a loan, used to access or hack all information from the customers' phones which could later be used by the company to perpetrate some other financial crime, the EOW said.

"To contain these types of crimes and create general awareness among the pub-

lic, it is hereby advised that people do not take loans from unregistered or illegal loan apps available on Internet and Playstore, the statement said.

It also came to the notice of the EOW that many times the money is credited just after downloading the App without the person actually asking for it.

"In some states, many people have died by suicide after being blackmailed or continuously humiliated by recovery agents of these illegal loan apps. Not only the borrowers, but their family members are also harassed," it said.

Suggesting people to avoid downloading using these illegal loan apps, the EOW said, even if someone has already taken a loan, he should not tolerate the abusive behavior but instead report the matter to the police.

Markets go into tailspin after RBI's rate hike surprise; Sensex, Nifty slump over 2 pc



MUMBAI: Equity markets fell sharply in late afternoon trade on Wednesday, with the Sensex and Nifty diving over 2% each after the RBI in a surprise move hiked the benchmark lending rate to 4.40% to contain inflation.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tumbled 1,306.96 points or 2.29% to settle at 55,669.03. During the day, it plummeted 1,474.39 points or 2.58% to 55,501.60.

The NSE Nifty tanked 391.50 points or 2.29% to finish at 16,677.60. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) increased the benchmark lending rate by 40 basis points to 4.40 per cent in a bid to contain inflation, which has remained stubbornly above the target zone of 6 per cent for the last three months.

The decision follows an unscheduled meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), with all six members unanimously voting for a rate hike while maintaining the ac-

commodative stance.

"The MPC's decision, in an unscheduled meeting, to raise the repo rate by 40 bps and CRR by 50 bps is a surprise since it came on the LIC IPO opening date. MPC's proactive move is justified from the perspective of inflation management, but the timing leaves a lot to be desired.

"The above 1,000 point crash in Sensex has soured the sentiments on the opening day of India's largest IPO," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. From the Sensex pack, Titan, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank, RIL, Asian Paints, Maruti and Dr Reddys were the prominent losers. In contrast, PowerGrid, NTPC and Kotak Mahindra Bank closed in the green. Markets in Seoul and Hong Kong settled in the red. Bourses in Europe were also trading lower in the afternoon session. **AGENCIES**

ED seizure: Karnataka High Court breather for Xiaomi India

BENGALURU: The High Court of Karnataka has given a breather to Xiaomi Technology India Private Limited by staying the April 29 order of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) by which Rs 5551.27 crore of the company was seized under the provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.

The vacation bench of Justice Hemant Chandangoudar stayed the ED order on Thursday, while also issuing notices to the respondents including the Ministry of Finance and various officers of the ED.

Xiaomi India, the subsidiary of the Chinese firm Xiaomi Group can now operate its bank accounts for carrying out the day-to-day activities of the company, the High Court ordered.

Xiaomi, which sells mobile phones in India under the brand name MI, is accused by the ED of violating Section 4 of the FEMA Act by transferring money in the name of 'Technology Royalty' to three companies outside India—two in the US and one in China.

ED had seized the sum of Rs 5551.27 crore in the bank accounts of the company and initiated action for alleged illegal remittances made by the company in February 2022.

India's small businesses remain upbeat on demand revival

NEW DELHI: Confidence amongst India's small businesses remains high with an overwhelming majority of the SME executives expecting improvement in the second quarter of 2022 on most of the parameters including sales, capacity utilisation and hiring, according to the ASSOCHAM-Dun & Bradstreet Small Business Confidence Index (SBCI).

The index, which measures the level of optimism of small and medium businesses on key business parameters such as sales, employment, prices, inventory and investment, stood at 87 in Q2 2022. An index value above 50 signals an improvement or increase in the forthcoming quarter compared to the same quarter in the previous year. All indicators suggest a likely expansion in economic growth during Q2 2022.

"As is clear from the latest IMF World Economic Outlook, the Indian economy is projected to be the fastest growing amongst the leading economies of the world. Our



survey amongst the SMEs executives clearly points towards significant contributions from the small businesses" said ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood. He said, an important highlight of our survey is that the small businesses have gathered enough confidence to add to their workforce.

One of the primary findings of the ASSOCHAM-D&B SBCI

survey is that export demand is projected to increase. The percentage of the SMEs expecting an increase in their net sales and new export orders stood at 77 and 86, respectively, suggesting export-led demand growth in Q2 2022. On the other hand, 75% of SMEs expect an increase in their domestic orders, it pointed out.

"The high level of optimism

on export orders could be a result of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement that India signed with the United Arab Emirates and the Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement with Australia, as well as the prospects of similar agreements with the UK and Canada in 2022 and 2023. These agreements are expected to boost India's ex-

port of agricultural products, footwear, gem & jewellery, leather, and textiles. Supply chain disruptions caused by the Russia-Ukraine crisis has improved India's export prospects of iron ore, iron & steel products, and wheat. In addition, businesses are increasingly looking for alternate suppliers to de-risk their operations since the outbreak of COVID-19. Cost competitiveness makes India an attractive destination for sourcing. These factors will lead to India's export momentum in Q2 2022" said Avinash Gupta, Managing Director, Dun & Bradstreet India.

On improved prospects for sales, businesses see an increase in their average capacity utilization rate to 63 per cent in Q2 2022, up from 57 per cent in Q1 2022. An overwhelming 77% of SMEs expect an increase in their new fixed capital investment, which is indicative of optimism for future demand.

As many as 76% of SMEs expect an increase in their

workforce, even as they have to deal with the price pressure. 80% of the SMEs expect raw material prices to increase, whereas 75% see upward revision in their selling prices. Consequently, the percentage of SMEs expecting an increase in their net profits stood a tad below other indicator at 77.

"Energy prices have reached their highest level since 2008 as a result of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, while base metals prices have reached a record high. The combination of rising input costs and increasing freight expenses is a key source of concern for businesses. Given that the majority of newly ordered tonnage is not planned for delivery until 2023, global container freight rates will continue to remain elevated in the coming months. As the survey indicates, not all producers will be able to pass on the increased costs to their customers, eroding profit margins" said Dr Arun Singh, Global Chief Economist, Dun & Bradstreet

Panipat, Gurugram & Faridabad identified as export hubs in Haryana

SATISH HANDA

On completion of 75 years of independence, government of our country celebrating 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' and has selected as many as 75 districts having industrial developments in country to be identified as Export Hubs aiming to boost export business in the country, which include three districts in Haryana: Panipat, Faridabad and Gurugram. Information reveals, Foreign Trade Directorate of government of India along with state government will provide special attention to boost exports from identified export hubs. Faridabad district will be identified as hub for manufacturing and export of automobile and engineering products. Panipat district will be identified as hub for hand woven carpets, 3D cloth and handloom products in much demand all over in world. Gurugram will be identified as hub for engineering goods as



well as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) centre for which government has already completed necessary preparations.

Foreign Trade Directorate has also selected few other industrial towns in neighbouring states identified as Export Hubs which include Chandigarh, Solan in Himachal Pradesh, Dehradun and Haridwar in Uttaranchal, Jalandhar, Ludhiana and SAS Nagar (Mohali) in Punjab and Gautam Budh Nagar, Moradabad, Kanpur, Varansi in U.P. Information reveals, Foreign Trade Directorate has selected districts identified as Export Hubs on the basis of industries in the area having opportunities for export business.

INTERNATIONAL

NEWSBRIEF

Civilian who inadvertently crossed LoC sent back to PoK

JAMMU: A man, who had inadvertently crossed the Line of Control and entered India, was sent back to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) on humanitarian grounds on Tuesday, officials said. Mohammad Hussain, a resident of Kotli (PoK), entered Indian territory on April 28 via Tarkundi area of Poonch, they said. Indian Army officials along with civilian officials handed over Hussain to authorities in PoK at the Poonch-Rawalakote crossing point in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Tuesday, they said. **AGENCIES**

Italian foreign minister begins 3-day visit to India

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio's three-day visit to India from Wednesday will provide an opportunity for both sides to further expand bilateral ties in trade and investment, defence and security, and clean and green energy, the Ministry of External Affairs said. It said the visiting dignitary is scheduled to hold talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday. This will be Di Maio's first visit to India, and he will be accompanied by a high-level official and business delegation. **AGENCIES**

US announces 1.5-year extension for some expiring immigrant work permits

The Biden administration has announced that certain categories of immigrants, including those seeking green cards and spouses of H-1B visa holders, would be permitted to use their expired work permits for an additional 18 months, offering a reprieve to thousands of Indians working in this country and prevent further disruption for US employers. **AGENCIES**

Baseball signed by Zelenskyy to be sold for Ukraine relief

When Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy autographed a baseball for an American collector in 2019, he likely had no idea it would one day be used to help his nation during a time of need.

The official Rawlings Major League baseball is being sold by Randy Kaplan, a renowned collector of balls signed by world leaders, with a portion of the proceeds going to war relief efforts in Ukraine, auctioneer RR Auction of Boston said Tuesday.

The ball was expected to sell for at least USD 15,000 but the leading bid as of Tuesday had already exceeded that amount, an RR spokesperson said.

"With what's going on in the world right now it makes sense to auction it at this point because the proceeds will help the people in Ukraine," Kaplan said in a telephone interview.



"What's going on in Ukraine is a disgrace and it's breaking my heart to see the people dying there. Their needs are just so dire right now."

The ball is signed with black felt tip both in Ukrainian Cyrillic and in Latin letters. It is accompanied by a transmittal letter signed by Volodymyr Yelchenko,

Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, which reads: "Dear Mr. Kaplan, Please find enclosed a baseball, signed by the President of Ukraine, H.E. Mr. Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the visit to New York in September 2019."

In addition to the unspecified percentage of the sale that

will be donated through the global nonprofit Americares, RR Auction will contribute its buyer's premium and seller's commission to war relief efforts. Americares' website describes its humanitarian response in Ukraine as focused on the medical needs of millions of refugees.

Kaplan is a governmental affairs specialist from New York who has many contacts with the U.N. and in U.S. politics. He doesn't buy his baseballs at auction, instead acquiring them himself through those contacts.

He started his collection in 1996 when former President Bill Clinton signed a baseball for him at a meeting in Washington, D.C. The collection, which now numbers more than 500 items, has been displayed at museums and presidential libraries around the country.

Beijing closes 10% of subway stations to stem COVID spread



Beijing on Wednesday closed around 10% of the stations in its vast subway system as an additional measure against the spread of coronavirus.

The subway authority in a brief message said only that the measure to shut 40 mostly downtown stations was being taken as part of epidemic control measures. No date for resumption of service was given.

Beijing has been on high alert for the spread of COVID-19, with restaurants and bars limited to takeout only, gyms closed and classes suspended indefinitely. Major tourist sites in the city, including the Forbidden City and the Beijing Zoo, have closed their indoor exhibition halls and are operating at only partial capacity.

A few communities where cases were discovered have been isolated. People residing in controlled areas have been told to stay within city limits, including 12 areas deemed high-risk and another 35 considered medium-risk. City residents are required to undergo three tests throughout the week as authorities seek to detect and isolate cases without imposing the sort of sweeping lockdowns seen in Shanghai and elsewhere. A negative test result obtained within the previous 48 hours is required to gain entry to most public spaces.

Authorities in Shanghai are slowly beginning to ease lockdown restrictions that have confined most of the city's 26 million people to their apartments, housing compounds or immediate neighbourhoods for close to a month.

quired to gain entry to most public spaces.

Beijing on Wednesday recorded just 51 new cases, five of them asymptomatic.

The subway closings should have relatively little impact on city life, with China observing the Labour Day holiday this week and many commuters in the city of 21 million already working from home. In one downtown neighbourhood categorized as high-risk on Wednesday, the streets were practically deserted apart from a few delivery drivers on scooters and the occasional pedestrian and car.

All businesses were shut except for supermarkets and fruit and vegetable stores. Outsiders generally avoid high-risk areas to avoid the possibility of their presence registering on the tracing apps installed on virtually all mobile phones, creating potential problems for future access to public areas.

While taking a lighter touch in Beijing, China has overall stuck to its strict zero-COVID approach that restricts travel, tests entire cities and sets up sprawling facilities to try to isolate every infected person. Lockdowns start with buildings and neighborhoods but become citywide if the virus spreads widely.

EU leader calls for Russian oil ban in new set of sanctions



The European Union's leader on Wednesday called on the 27-nation bloc to ban oil imports from Russia in a sixth package of sanctions targeting Moscow for its war in Ukraine.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also proposed that Sberbank, Russia's largest bank, and two other major banks be disconnected from the SWIFT international banking payment system.

Von der Leyen, addressing the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, called on the EU's member nations to phase out imports of crude oil within six months and refined products by the end of the year.

We will make sure that we phase out Russian oil in an orderly fashion, in a way that allows us and our partners to secure alternative supply routes and minimizes the impact on global markets, von der Leyen said.

The proposals need to be unanimously approved to take effect and are likely to be the subject of fierce debate. Von der Leyen conceded that getting all 27 member countries some of them landlocked and highly dependent on Russia for energy supplies to agree on oil sanctions will not be easy.

Beijing preps COVID-19 hospital spaces, though new cases low

Beijing is preparing new hospital facilities to deal with a spike in COVID-19 cases, even though the numbers of new cases remain low.

State media reported Tuesday a 1,000-bed hospital at Xiaotangshan in the northeastern suburbs built for the 2003 SARS outbreak has been refurbished in case it's needed.

Unofficial reports online say thousands of beds have been prepared in a centralized quarantine center near the airport, but state media has not confirmed those preparations in what could be an attempt to avoid stoking public fears.

New cases in Beijing have remained steady, with another 62 recorded on Monday, 11 of them showing no symptoms, up just slightly from about 50 per day over the weekend. Beijing



has reported about 450 cases in the two-week-old outbreak.

China has stuck to its strict zero-COVID approach that restricts travel, mass tests entire cities and sets up sprawling temporary facilities to try to isolate every infected person.

Lockdowns start with buildings and neighbourhoods but

become citywide if the virus is spreading widely.

That has come as many other countries relax pandemic restrictions. Experts have questioned the usefulness of China's hardline policy, saying vaccines and new treatments for COVID-19 make them redundant.

Beijing has ordered restaura-

nts and gyms closed for the May Day national holiday that runs through Wednesday, while major tourist sites in the city, including the Forbidden City and the Beijing Zoo, will close their indoor exhibition halls starting Tuesday.

Another three rounds of testing have been ordered for most of the city's 21 million people starting Tuesday, following a similar requirement last week. A negative test result obtained within the previous 48 hours is required to gain entry to most public spaces.

Authorities in Shanghai are slowly beginning to ease lockdown restrictions that have confined most of the city's 26 million people to their apartments, housing compounds or immediate neighbourhoods for close to a month.

India, Australia discuss ways to combat terrorism

India and Australia have strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms including the use of cross-border terrorist proxies and emphasised the need for strengthening global cooperation to deal with the challenge in a comprehensive manner.

The two sides discussed ways to combat terrorism at the 13th meeting of the India-Australia joint working group on counter-terrorism that took place in Canberra on Wednesday.

A joint press statement said Australia reiterated its condemnation of terrorist attacks in India, including the 26/11 Mumbai, Pathankot and Pulwama attacks, and extended its support for the people and the government of India in the global fight against terrorism. In the meeting, both sides underlined

their commitment to coordinate and collaborate on tackling terrorism in line with the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

"India and Australia strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and emphasised the need for strengthening international cooperation to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner," said a joint press statement.

It said both sides condemned the use of terrorist proxies for cross-border terrorism, seen as a reference to Pakistan.

"India and Australia underlined the urgent need for all countries to take immediate, sustained, verifiable and irreversible action to ensure that no territory under their control is used for terrorist attacks and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks," it said. "Australia reiterated its condemnation of terrorist attacks in India, including 26/11 Mumbai, Pathankot and Pulwama attacks, and reiterated its support for the people and the government of India in the global fight against terrorism," the statement said.

World Press Freedom Index: India slips to 150th rank, becomes 'one of most dangerous nations for media'

Bad news for the country's media, India's press freedom ranking has fallen to 150 from 142 last year with the latest World Press Freedom Index saying that press freedom is in "crisis in the world's largest democracy".

With an average of three or four journalists killed in connection with their work every year, the index placed India as "one of the world's most dangerous countries"



for the media.

The 2022 edition of the World Press Freedom Index, which assesses the state of journalism in 180 countries and territories, showed that the state of media is on a

downfall with India ranking 133 in 2016 and not improving its ranking over the years. The index is released every May 3, the World Press Freedom Day.

India has reached 150th position in the World Press Freedom Index, dropping further from its last year's 142nd rank out of 180 countries.

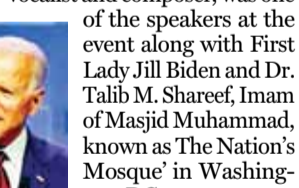
Muslims being targeted with violence around the world: Joe Biden

Around the world, Muslims are being targeted with violence, US President Joe Biden said on Monday asserting that Muslims make America stronger every single day even as they still face real challenges and threats in the society that they live in.

At a White House reception to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, Biden said he has appointed the first Muslim to serve as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom.

It's especially important because today, around the world, we're seeing so many Muslims being targeted with violence. No one, no one should discrimi-

nate against oppressed or be oppressed for their religious beliefs, he said to applause from the select gathering at the White House. Arooj Aftab, a Pakistani vocalist and composer, was one of the speakers at the event along with First Lady Jill Biden and Dr. Talib M. Shareef, Imam of Masjid Muhammad, known as The Nation's Mosque' in Washington, DC.



Today, we also remember all those who are not able to celebrate this holy day, including Uyghurs and Rohingya and all those who are facing famine, violence, conflict, and disease, Biden said.

North Korea launches suspected missile toward sea

North Korea has launched a suspected ballistic missile toward its eastern waters on Wednesday, South Korean and Japanese officials said, days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to bolster his nuclear arsenal at the fastest possible pace and threatened to use them against rivals.

The launch, the North's 14th round of weapons firing, also came six days before a new South Korean president takes office for a single five-year term.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a brief statement that the launch was made off the North's eastern coast but gave no further details.

Japan's Defence Ministry said



North Korea has fired a possible ballistic missile without providing further details. North Korea's unusually fast pace in weapons testing this year underscores its dual goal of advancing its missile programs and applying pressure on Washington over a deepening freeze in nuclear negotiations, experts say.

Media in the Philippines bite back against Duterte

Duterte's presidency rapidly eroded press freedom in the Philippines. Media organisations see the May elections as a chance to set things right.

Threats, assault, red-baiting even deaths: the Philippines is a dangerous place to be a journalist. Ahead of the May elections, journalists are moving to restore public confidence in the media after six years of President Rodrigo Duterte's punitive populist rule.

More than 400 journalists and 50 media organisations have pledged to provide critical coverage of the elections, hold themselves to high standards of journalism and stand together if harassed by state agents, political parties, candidates, or private groups.

Two fact-checking coalitions, Tsek.Ph and Facts-FirstPH, sift through the election-related falsehoods, disinformation and conspiracy theories that overrun social media platforms.

Released before the start of the election campaign, the pledge represents the media's attempt to reposition itself as a credible and authoritative source of information, after losing ground to trolls, hate-



speech mongers and other bad-faith actors who support Duterte.

The multi-platform, multi-format fact-checking initiatives are intended to counteract a firehose strategy of disinformation that uses various platforms, influencers, trolls, bots and fringe media organisations to relay posts and narratives. This strategy was seen in the viral outbreaks of disinformation that favoured presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos Jr (son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos Sr) and his running mate, Sara Duterte (the current president's daughter).

Red-baiting is a form of disinformation that alleges a link however unfounded between journalists or media organisations and the clandestine Communist Party of the Philippines.

Evacuations under way in Mariupol, Pelosi visits Ukraine

A long-awaited evacuation of civilians from a besieged steel plant in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol was under way Sunday, as U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi revealed that she visited Ukraine's president to show unflinching American support for the country's defense against Russia's invasion.

Video posted online by Ukrainian forces showed elderly women and mothers with small children bundled in winter clothing being helped as they climbed a steep pile of debris from the sprawling Azovstal steel plant's rubble, and then eventually boarded a bus.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said more than 100 civilians, primarily women and children, were expected to arrive in the Ukrainian-controlled city of Zaporizhzhia on Monday.

Today, for the first time in all the days of the war, this vitally

needed (humanitarian) corridor has started working, he said in a pre-recorded address published on his Telegram messaging app channel.

The Mariupol City Council said on Telegram that the evacuation of civilians from other parts of the city would begin Monday morning. People fleeing Russian-occupied areas in the past have described their vehicles being fired on, and Ukrainian officials have repeatedly accused Russian forces of shelling evacuation routes on which the two sides had agreed.

Later Sunday, one of the plant's defenders said Russian forces resumed shelling the plant as soon as the evacuation of a group of civilians was completed. Denys Shlega, the commander of the 12th Operational Brigade of Ukraine's National Guard, said in a televised interview Sunday night that several hundred civilians remain



trapped alongside nearly 500 wounded soldiers and numerous dead bodies. Several dozen small children are still in the bunkers underneath the plant, Shlega said. We need one or two more rounds of evacuation.

Sviatoslav Palamar, deputy commander of the Azov Regiment, which is helping defend the steel plant, told The Associated Press in an interview from Mariupol on Sunday that it has been difficult even to reach some of the wounded inside the plant.

There's rubble. We have no special equipment. It's hard for soldiers to pick up slabs weighing tons only with their arms, he said. We hear voices of people who are still alive inside shattered buildings.

As many as 100,000 people may still be in blockaded Mariupol, including up to 1,000 civilians hunkered down with an estimated 2,000 Ukrainian fighters beneath the Soviet-era steel plant the only part of the city not occupied by the Rus-

sians. Mariupol, a port city on the Sea of Azov, is a key target because of its strategic location near the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized from Ukraine in 2014.

U.N. humanitarian spokesman Saviano Abreu said civilians who have been stranded for nearly two months at the plant would receive immediate humanitarian support, including psychological services, once they arrive in Zaporizhzhia, about 140 miles (230 kilometers) northwest of Mariupol.

Mariupol has seen some of the worst suffering. A maternity hospital was hit with a lethal Russian airstrike in the opening weeks of the war, and about 300 people were reported killed in the bombing of a theater where civilians were taking shelter.

A Doctors Without Borders team was at a reception center for displaced people in Zapor-

izhzhia, in preparation for the U.N. convoy's arrival. Stress, exhaustion and low food supplies have likely weakened civilians trapped underground at the plant.

Ukrainian regiment Deputy Commander Sviatoslav Palamar, meanwhile, called for the evacuation of wounded Ukrainian fighters as well as civilians. We don't know why they are not taken away, and their evacuation to the territory controlled by Ukraine is not being discussed, he said in a video posted Saturday on the regiment's Telegram channel.

Video from inside the steel plant, shared with The Associated Press by two Ukrainian women who said their husbands were among the fighters refusing to surrender there, showed men with blood-stained bandages, open wounds or amputated limbs, including some that appeared gangrenous.

Ukrainians wait in Mexico City for US entry

Hundreds of Ukrainian refugees are camping out in Mexico City and waiting for the US government to allow them into the country.

About 500 evacuees were waiting on Tuesday in large tents under a searing sun on a dusty field on the east side of Mexico's sprawling capital. The camp has been open only a week and from 50 to 100 people are arriving every day.

Some refugees have already been to the US border in Tijuana where they were told they would no longer be admitted. Others arrived at airports in Mexico City or Cancun.

The US government announced in late March that it would accept up to 1,00,000 Ukrainian refugees. Hundreds entered Mexico daily as tourists in Mexico City or Cancun and flew to Tijuana to wait for a few days to be admitted to the US at a San Diego border crossing on humanitarian parole.

Giorgi Mikaberidze, 19, arrived in Tijuana on April 25 and found the US border closed. He went from being just yards from the United States to some 600 miles (966 kilometers) away in the Mexico City area. He said he travelled to Mexico alone. «It's very difficult to wait. We don't know how the programme will work,» he said.





AKSHAY KUMAR thanks fans on completing 30 yrs in cinema, calls it 'LIFETIME FILLED WITH YOUR LOVE'

of the 1990s, featuring in hits like the «Khiladi» series, and switched gears to doing comedies with Priyadarshan's «Hera Pheri» in the next decade.

Kumar delivered several hits in the comedy genre, which includes films such as «Mujhse Shaadi Karogi», «Garam Masala», «Welcome» and «Singh is King». With «Toilet: Ek Prem Katha» (2017), «Padman» (2018), and «Mission Mangal» (2019), the 54-year-old actor became synonymous with films endorsing social issues and nationalism. «Prithviraj» also stars Sanjay Dutt, Sonu Sood and marks the screen debut of Miss World 2017 Manushi Chhillar, who plays the role of Sanyogita.

Superstar Akshay Kumar thanked his fans for their unconditional love over the years as he celebrated three decades in the Indian film industry.

Ahead of the release of his latest film «Prithviraj», based on the life of Samrat Prithviraj Chauhan, production house Yash Raj Films celebrated the actor's special milestone event by launching a new poster of the historical drama that featured every movie he has starred in.

The Twitter account of Yash Raj Films posted a video, in which Kumar unveils the special

poster in the presence of «Prithviraj» director Chandraprakash Dwivedi.

«I didn't even realise that I had completed 30 years. Thank you Aditya Chopra for gifting me this. I still remember that I gave my first shot in Ooty, it was an action shot with Bob Christo,» Kumar, who has starred in over a 100 films, said in the video.

«It is your journey, from «Saugandh» to «Prithviraj,» Dwivedi, best known for directing and starring in television epic «Chanakya» and the Partition film «Pinjar,» added.

Akshay Kumar also shared the video on Twitter.

«Thirty years of cinema, a lifetime filled with your love! Thank you for this amazing journey and thank you @yrf for piecing it together so beautifully with #Prithviraj, releasing in cinemas on 3rd June,» he captioned the post.

Kumar, whose real name is Rajiv Bhatia, made his film debut with Raj Sippy's romantic-action «Saugandh», which released on January 25, 1991.

The actor went on to become one of the biggest action stars



Thank God for these years of happiness : Hema Malini on her wedding anniversary

Veteran actor-MP Hema Malini on Monday assured fans that her husband and cinema icon Dharmendra was doing well after a brief

hospital stay for back pain.

Dharmendra said in a video shared on his official Twitter account that he has returned home after three-four days of hospitalisation

POTPOURRI

due to a "big muscle pull at the back".

In her post, Hema Malini also expressed her gratitude to well wishers for enquiring about Dharmendra's health.

"I would like to thank thousands of well wishers who have been enquiring about Dharmendra's health. Yes, he was in hospital for a few days but he is ok now and thankfully back home," she wrote.

"Thank you all once again for your anxious calls and enquiries about his health. God has been kind," she added.

In her previous tweet, Hema Malini shared a photograph with her husband and co-star of films such as "Sholay" and "Seeta Aur Geeta", among oth-

ers, on the occasion of their wedding anniversary.

"Our wedding anniversary today. I thank God for all these years of happiness, our darling children and grandchildren, our well wishers everywhere! I feel truly blessed," the Mathura MP captioned the picture.

The couple, who tied the knot in 1980, are parents to daughters Esha and Ahana Deol.

After reports of his hospitalisation and subsequent discharge started doing the rounds on social media, Dharmendra spoke to worried fans through a video on Twitter and asked them to not worry.



Border Security Force (BSF) Commandant Jasbir Singh presents sweets to Pakistani Rangers Wing Commander Amir on the occasion of the Eid al-Fitr festival, at the India-Pakistan Attari-Wagah border, around 35 kms from Amritsar on Tuesday. PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL

'Govinda Naam Mera' is a trippy film: Kiara Advani



Describing her forthcoming feature "Govinda Naam Mera" as a "unique film", actor Kiara Advani says she is thrilled to part of the project.

Also starring Vicky Kaushal and Bhumi Pednekar, "Govinda Naam Mera" is expected to be released on June 10.

"Govinda Naam Mera" is directed by Shashank Khaitan and is produced by Karan Johar of Dharma Productions.

"Govinda Naam Mera is a unique film. It is quite trippy, in fact I still have to figure out the name of the genre because it is absolutely different. I was thrilled to be a part of that world. We have tried something new with the film. I hope people find it as interesting as we did," the 29-year-old actor told PTL.

Advani is currently awaiting the release of her next film "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2". She will also be seen in the multi-starrer

comedy drama "Jug Jugg Jeeyo" and an untitled project with filmmaker Shankar, headlined by "RRR" star Ram Charan.

Directed by Raj Mehta, "Jug Jugg Jeeyo" stars Anil Kapoor, Neetu Kapoor, Varun Dhawan, Prajakta Koli and Manish Paul. It will be Advani's second Dharma project of the year.

With all her upcoming releases rooted in different genres, the "Shershaah" actor said it is an exciting space for her to be in as an actor. "Jug Jugg Jeeyo" is a family entertainer about relationships. It is a story of relationships. It is everybody's story and that's what makes it truly special.

"I am still shooting for the film with Shankar sir, he is such a legendary director. It is my honour working with him and Ram Charan, who is a fantastic actor. It is my first pan India film and I am truly excited about it," she added.

Renowned Film Director Shekhar Kapoor inaugurates National Seminar on Indian Cinema and Soft Power

MUMBAI: Renowned Film Director Shekhar Kapoor today inaugurated the National Seminar titled 'Indian Cinema and Soft Power' organised by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in Mumbai. Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari and ICCR President Vinay Sahasrabudhe graced the inaugural function held at the Raj Bhavan.

Addressing the gathering, Shekhar Kapoor said it is opportune time for the Asian countries to become the prime culture of the world. He said 'There was a time during my youth when I aspired to become like Americans. This was only due to the influence of American media.' Now it is our turn; Asia is rising and India and China are



two nations who can cultivate on their soft power to become major influencers in the world. Kapoor added that China is already making all out efforts to achieve that.

Stressing upon the need for technology upgradation, Shekhar Kapoor said "If India has to use Cinema as a soft power, we have to win the minds and hearts of the future generations around the world".

Mika Singh chooses place close to his ancestral village to shoot his music video



Mika Singh recently shot the music video for his upcoming show Swayamvar - Mika Di Vohti in Ropar, Punjab. He chose the location as it is close to his ancestral village Sahauran.

He says the place holds a special place in his heart as he has spent most of his childhood in

Ropar which created an emotional bond between him and that place.

Mika shares: «Ropar is very near and dear to my heart as I grew up here and I have an indescribable emotional attachment to this village. The very first thing that came to my mind when I was searching for locations to shoot the music video was that it should be the beginning of a beautiful journey that I am on right now.»

He goes on: «So, naturally I had to do the shoot here in Ropar. What better way to start this important journey than my origins.»

The singer is all set to begin searching for the right partner on national television through 'Swayamvar-Mika Di Vohti'. It will be coming soon on Star Bharat.

TIGER SHROFF starrer Heropanti-2 show solid growth



Actor Tiger Shroff, Tara Sutaria and Nawazuddin Siddiqui starrer Heropanti 2 released on 29th April with mixed reviews and tough competition from Runway 34 and KGF Chapter 2, despite staggering odds, the film has managed to collect approximately Rs. 7 crore on the opening day and now shows a huge jump on Sunday.

Ahmed Khan's directorial, Heropanti 2, a stand-alone sequel to Heropanti, took the root franchise to a whole new international vibe, with stellar ensemble and hit music. And now shows a massive jump of 40 percent in term of business.

According to industry trade pundits, if the film holds its ground till Eid, it will clock massive number at the box-office, and given the steady growth at box-office, the film is definitely headed towards clocking double digits collection.

Recently released Runway 34, posed a massive threat to the opening of the film, plus KGF: Chapter 2 is still ruling the ticket window, despite tough competition, Heropanti 2 has managed to clock great progress at box-office.

Captaincy pressure was affecting Jadeja's game: Dhoni

Talismanic Mahendra Singh Dhoni feels the pressure and demand of captaincy took a toll on Ravindra Jadeja and affected the all-rounder's mind, resulting in his below-par outing in Chennai Super Kings colours in the ongoing IPL.

Jadeja was appointed as CSK skipper for the ongoing season after Dhoni decided to step aside but the all-rounder failed to cope with the pressure and eventually gave up the job, forcing the franchise to fall back on their most trusted lieutenant.

Back at the helm of affairs, Dhoni produced instant results as CSK notched up a 13-run



win over Sunrisers Hyderabad to keep themselves afloat in the tournament.

"I think Jadeja knew last season he'd be captaining this

year. For the first two games, I oversaw his work and let him be later. After that, I insisted he'd take his own decisions and responsibility for them.

"Once you become captain, it means a lot of demands come in. But it affected his mind as the tasks grew. I think captaincy burdened his prep and performances," Dhoni said at the post-match presentation ceremony. Dhoni said Jadeja taking over the mantle of the side was a gradual transition, which he wanted.

"He knew and got enough time to prepare, what is important is you want him to lead the side and I wanted that transition to happen. At the end of the season, you don't want him to feel as the captaincy was done by someone else and I'm just going for toss.

Majumdar can't interview players for 2 years, no access to stadiums: BCCI

BCCI has imposed a two-year ban on Boria Majumdar for bullying senior wicket-keeper Wriddhiman Saha, barring the sports journalist from interviewing registered players and entering stadiums in the country.

Majumdar won't be given media accreditation for two years as part of the sanctions ratified by the BCCI Apex Council.

On February 25, the BCCI had formed a three-member committee to probe the threat messages given to Saha for declining an interview request.

While Saha had initially refused to name the journalist in a series of tweets on February 23, he later identified the journalist as Majumdar while deposing before the three-member committee, which comprised BCCI vice president Rajeev Shukla, BCCI



treasurer Arun Singh Dhumal and BCCI councillor Prabhtej Singh Bhatia.

On May 3, BCCI interim CEO and IPL COO Hemang Amin in a letter to the state units wrote, "Mr Wriddiman Saha has shared screenshots of messages sent by a journalist on social media platform, Twitter, wherein he stated that he felt bullied by the conduct of the said journalist. Mr Saha in the hearing named Mr Boria Majumdar as the journalist.

Nadal, Djokovic slam Wimbledon ban on Russian players

Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic criticized Wimbledon's decision to exclude players from Russia and Belarus from taking part in this year's tournament following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The two tennis greats said Sunday that Wimbledon had acted unfairly.

I think it's very unfair of (on) my Russian tennis mates, my colleagues ... it's not their fault what's happening in this moment with the war, Nadal, a 21-time Grand Slam winner, said in Spain where both he and Djokovic are preparing to play in the Madrid Open.

I'm sorry for them, Nadal said. Wimbledon just took their decision ... the government didn't force them to do it."

Nadal added: Let's see what happens in the next weeks, if the players will take some kind of decision in that regard.

The ATP and WTA tennis tours have both publicly criticized the All England Club's decision which was announced April 20.

Wimbledon starts on June 27. The prominent players affected by the ban include reigning U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev, Andrey Rublev, and French Open runner-up Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, who are all from Russia.

KARAN JOHAR says 'Koffee with Karan' not to return for new season



A week after reports claimed that a seventh season of "Koffee with Karan" was under production, host and filmmaker Karan Johar on Wednesday said his popular celebrity chat show will not return for a new chapter.

The show, which first premiered on TV channel Star World in 2004, ran for six seasons till 2019.

"Koffee with Karan" featured some of the biggest names from the world of Indian entertainment opening up about their personal and professional lives on the show, which would often hit the headlines.

Amid speculation that the cameras will start rolling in May for season seven, the 49-year-old director issued a denial in a Twitter note.

"Koffee with Karan" has been a part of my life, and yours, for 6 seasons now. I'd like to think we've made an impact and even found our place in pop culture history. And so, it is with a heavy heart that I announce that 'Koffee with Karan' will not be returning..." Johar said in the statement.



Broken houses, shattered shelters, uncertain future and a long wait: the remnants of a demolition drive carried out by Chandigarh administration to raze Colony number 4. The authorities bulldozed the largest slum cluster in the city, vacating 65 acres of government land estimated to be worth 2000 cr. The land was illegally occupied by over 10000 people who had put up 2500 shanties over the past 50 years.

PHOTOS: TANNY KALER

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