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MUNDKA FIRE INCIDENT: 27 DIED IN FIRE, DELHI CM VISITS SITE, ANNOUNCES RS 10 LAKH EACH FOR FAMILIES OF DECEASED

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AMENDMENT IN DEFENCE ACQUISITION PROCEDURE WILL BOOST DOMESTIC MANUFACTURING: MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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FILM DIRECTOR ROHIT SHETTY'S 'CIRKUS' BOOKS CHRISTMAS 2022 RELEASE

Polls to 57 RS seats on June 10, result same day

The biennial poll for 57 Rajya Sabha seats will be held on June 10 and the counting of votes will be done on the same day, the Election Commission announced on Thursday.

It said that the notification will be issued on May 27, last date for nomination is May 31, scrutiny will be held on June 1, polling is on June 10 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and the counting of votes will begin at 5 p.m. on the same day.

The term of office of 57 Rajya Sabha members elected from 15 states is due to expire from June to August.



These comprise 11 from Uttar Pradesh, six each from Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, five from Bihar, four each from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Rajasthan, three each from Madhya Pradesh and Odisha, two each from Telan-

gana, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Jharkhand, and Haryana, and one from Uttarakhand.

The Commission also said that Broad Guidelines of Covid-19 issued by it to be followed, wherever applicable, during the entire election process by all persons.

The Chief Secretaries of all 15 states have been directed to depute a senior officer to ensure that the extant instructions regarding Covid-19 containment measures are complied with while making arrangements for conducting the election, the poll panel added.

Assam effectively tackling illegal migration, Bengal not cooperating with Centre: Shah



Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said that Assam government was very effectively tackling the illegal migration and alleged that the West Bengal government was not cooperating with the Centre in dealing with the illegal infiltration from across the border.

Praising the Assam government for strongly tackling illegal migration, Shah, also a senior BJP leader, said that the central government has been trying to curb the illegal migration both in Assam and West Bengal, but the Bengal government is not cooperating with the Centre in dealing with the problem.

"While Assam showed much success in tackling the illegal migration (from across the border), but in Bengal not much progress was found in dealing with the problem," he said while addressing a public rally to mark the first anniversary of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma-led BJP government in Assam. The Home Minister said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to resolve the infiltration problem and added that Assam is standing rock-solid behind the Centre in tackling the problem.

Referring to his visit to the India-Bangladesh border at

Mankachar in western Assam on Monday, he said that much efforts including border fencing were taken in the state to curb the illegal migration and as the efforts were on, this problem would be fully resolved within a year.

Noting that the BJP government since 2016, replaced the agitation, violence and militancy by peace and development, Shah said that the cattle smuggling to Bangladesh through Assam, has been almost stopped.

Highlighting the various flagship schemes of the Assam government, Shah said that over 33, 000 Bighas of land had been freed from the illegal encroachment and activities of the land mafia and poaching of rhino have been curbed.

Declaring that Assam and the northeastern region would be made a health hub, the Home Minister said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who according to him visited 50 times in the northeastern region, the states of the region would be at par with the other states of the country in terms of growth and development.

'Only Congress governs for welfare of poor, middle class families'

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday stepped up his attack on the government over the hike in price of domestic LPG cylinder, and said only his party governs for the welfare of poor and middle class families.

Cooking gas LPG prices were on Saturday hiked by Rs 50 per cylinder, the second increase in rates in just over six weeks following the firming of international energy rates. Non-subsidised LPG now costs Rs 999.50 per 14.2-kg cylinder in the national capital, up from Rs 949.50 previously, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. In a tweet, Gandhi compared the price of domestic LPG cylinder of about Rs 410 with a subsidy of Rs 827 in 2014 under a Congress-led government to that of over Rs 999 with "zero subsidy" in 2022 under the BJP-led Centre.

Gadkari says committed to construct 18000 km of National Highways in 2022-23 at record speed of 50km per day

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari has said ambitious targets to fulfil the ambitions of New India under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi we are committed to expanding the National Highways(NHs) network across the country with the aim of constructing 18,000 km of NHs in 2022-23 at a record speed of 50km per day.

In a tweet he said overall target is to develop 2 lakh Kms of National Highway Network by 2025.

Campbell Wilson appointed CEO and MD of Air India



Tata Sons on Thursday announced the appointment of Campbell Wilson as the Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director (MD) of Air India.

The Air India board approved the appointment of Wilson subject to requisite regulatory approvals, the company said in a statement.

Wilson, 50, is the CEO of Scot, the wholly-owned low-cost subsidiary of Singapore Airlines. He has 26 years of aviation industry expertise across both full service and low-cost airlines, it added.

Tata Sons and Air India Chairman N Chandrasekaran said, "I am delighted to welcome Campbell to Air India. He is an industry veteran having worked in key global markets cutting across multiple functions. Further, Air India would benefit from his added experience of having built an airline brand in Asia. I look forward to working with him in building a world-class airline."

Earlier in February this year, Tata Sons had announced the appointment of former chairman of Turkish Airlines Ilker Ayci as the CEO and MD of Air India. However, he declined to take up the position amid controversies over his views related to India.

Sonia targets PM at Cong's Chintan Shivir, says minorities being 'brutalised'

UDAIPUR: Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Friday launched a blistering attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, charging that it has become clear that his mantra of «minimum government, maximum governance» means keeping the country in a permanent state of polarisation, «brutalising» minorities and «threatening» political opponents.

In her inaugural address at the party's «Chintan Shivir» here, she urged delegates to deliberate with an open mind and send out a clear message of strong organisation and unity. She said the Shivir is also an occasion to deliberate on the many challenges ahead of us and bring organisational changes.

It is both «Chintan» about national issues and meaningful



«aاتمchintan» (self-introspection) about our party organisation, she said.

Gandhi charged that it has become painfully clear what Prime Minister Modi and his colleagues really mean by their frequently used slogan of maximum governance, minimum government.

It means keeping the country in a permanent state of polarisation, compelling people to stay in a constant state of fear and insecurity.

Internal strengthening first, alliance talk later: Kharage

UDAIPUR: The Congress on Friday said it will discuss alliance issues after strengthening its own organisation and unifying its cadres as no partner will come if you don't have any investment.

Ahead of the three-day «Chintan Shivir» here, senior Congress leader Mallikarjun Kharage said the party will decide on alliances with those parties that subscribe to its ideology and are concerned over the «attack» on democracy and the Constitution and want to save them. Kharage said the Shivir will usher in a clear message that nationalism and love for India is the core philosophy of the Congress.

Terrorists kill policeman in J-K's Pulwama

A policeman was shot dead by terrorists at his residence in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday.

Constable Reyaz Ahmad Thokar was shot at in Gudoor in the district this morning, a police spokesman said.

The injured cop was rushed to the Army's 92 base hospital in the city but succumbed to injuries. This is the second attack by terrorists within 24 hours. A Kashmiri Pandit gov-



ernment employee was shot dead by terrorists inside his office at Chadoora in Budgam district on Thursday.

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Ashwini Vaishnav flags off Jaipur-Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Jaipur Sainik Express



Ashwini Vaishnav, Union Minister of Railways, Communications, Electronics and Information Technology, Government of India flagged off the Train No. 14021/14022 Jaipur-Delhi Sarai Rohilla-Jaipur Sainik Express via video conferencing from Rail Bhavan today. Sainik Express is now extended to Delhi Junction with increased frequency from tri-weekly to daily. It will boost the rail connectivity of

Shekhawati region of Rajasthan (Sikar and Jhunjhunu districts). On this occasion, public representatives along with senior railway officials were present at Sikar station.

Speaking on the occasion, Ashwini Vaishnav said, "Today is a historic day as this train is being extended to Delhi Junction from Sikar with increased frequency. This will facilitate our Sainik brothers to visit the Capital city."

India prohibits wheat exports with immediate effect

India has banned wheat exports with immediate effect as part of measures to control rising domestic prices, according to official notification.

However, the export shipments for which irrevocable letters of credit (LoC) have been issued on or before the date of this notification will be allowed, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification dated May 13.

"The export policy of wheat is prohibited with immediate effect," the DGFT said.

It also clarified that wheat exports will be allowed on the basis of permission granted

by the Government of India to other countries to meet their food security needs and based on the request of their governments.

In a separate notification, the DGFT announced the easing of export conditions for onion seeds.

"The export policy of onion seeds has been put under the restricted category, with immediate effect," it said. The export of onion seeds was earlier prohibited.

Official data released this week showed that retail inflation surged to an eight-year high in April due to high prices of fuel and food items.

Merchandise Exports scale a new high in April: crosses USD 40 billion, 30% growth over last year

After a record performance in the last financial year, the exports continued robust growth in April, 2022 with merchandise exports scaling a new high by crossing USD 40 bn. This is an increase by over 30% vis-à-vis April 2021. Petroleum products (127.69%), Electronic goods (71.69%), cereals (60.83%), coffee (59.38%), processed food (38.82%) and leather product (36.68%) exports led the way in achieving the record performance. Services performed extremely well to reach USD 27.60 bn, which is an increase of 53% over April 2021.



India's overall exports (Merchandise and Services combined) in April 2022* are estimated to be USD 67.79 Billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 38.90 per cent over the same period last year.

the same period last year. Overall imports in April 2022* are estimated to be USD 75.87 Billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 36.31 per cent over the same period last year.

Delhi HC expresses concern over hair transplant procedure sans medical supervision at salons

Delhi High Court has expressed concern over the mushrooming of salons extending hair transplant procedures by unqualified people without any medical supervision which puts customers at great risk.

The court said it is imperative that necessary steps are taken by Centre and Delhi government to ensure that such practices are checked, people are made aware that such procedures can be fatal, and medical protocols be framed at the national level.

Justice Anoop Kumar Mendiratta, who was dealing with a petition concerning the death of 35-year-old man allegedly on account of negligence during the process of hair transplantation at a salon in Rohini, asked the Delhi Police commissioner to ensure that similar incidents of medical malpractice are not repeated.

He also asked the top cop to ensure that action is taken against salons which are extending hair transplantation

treatment/aesthetic surgery by unqualified professionals without any medical supervision in defiance of established protocols and norms.

The judge sought a status report from the authorities, including the National Medical Commission and Delhi Medical Council, and asserted that hair transplant being an aesthetic surgery needs to be performed by qualified dermatologists or trained surgeons with informed consent of the patient.

In the present case, the deceased -- who paid Rs 30,000 for the procedure -- developed a painful scalp followed by swelling on the face and shoulders and subsequently passed away during the course of treatment at a hospital.

According to the treatment papers, the cause of death was Septic Shock with multi-organ failure in case of Stevens-Johnson Syndrome, the court noted.

Kerala to get monsoon rains by May 27: IMD

Southwest monsoon, considered the lifeline of India's agri-based economy, is likely to bring first showers to Kerala by May 27, earlier than the normal onset date, the weather office announced on Friday.

The normal onset date for monsoon over Kerala is June 1. This year, the onset of southwest monsoon over Kerala is likely to be earlier than the normal date of onset. The monsoon onset over Kerala

is likely to be on May 27 with a model error of four days, India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The early arrival of the southwest monsoon comes at a time when parts of north-

west India are experiencing extremely high maximum temperatures.

Monsoon is likely to make early onset over Andaman and Nicobar Islands by May 15, the weather office said.

Nidhi Chibber appointed CBSE chairperson



Senior bureaucrat Nidhi Chibber has been appointed as the chairperson of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) as part of a senior-level bureaucratic reshuffle effected by the Centre on Friday. Chibber, a 1994 batch IAS officer of Chhattisgarh cadre, is currently Additional Secretary, Ministry of Heavy Industries.

She has been appointed as chairperson of the CBSE in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary to the government of India, an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said. Vivek Kumar Dewangan, a 1993 batch IAS officer of Manipur cadre, has been named Chairman and Managing Director, REC Ltd., Ministry of Power. He is currently Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Power. S Gopalakrishnan, Additional Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), has been appointed as Additional Secretary, Department of Health and Family Welfare.

A total of 17 joint secretary and Additional Secretary-level officers have been appointed to different posts in the central government departments and organisations in Friday's reshuffle.

Danish Siddiqui among 4 Indians wins Pulitzer prize

Danish Siddiqui and his colleagues Adnan Abidi, Sanna Irshad Mattoo and Amit Dave from the Reuters news agency have won the Pulitzer award, for their "images of COVID's toll in India that balanced intimacy and devastation, while offering viewers a heightened sense of place."

Siddiqui, 38, an award-winning journalist was killed during an assignment in Afghanistan July last while covering clashes between Afghan troops and the Taliban in Spin Boldak district of Kandahar city.

This is Siddiqui's second Pulitzer Prize. He received the prestigious award in 2018 as part of the Reuters team for their coverage of the Rohingya



crisis.

Among the awardees is Sanna Irshad Mattoo, a Kashmiri girl who has won the award. Sanna holds Masters in Convergent Journalism from the Central University of Kashmir.



She has her work published in international media outlets including Al Jazeera, TIME and TRT World. She has also done a fellowship with the prestigious Magnum Foundation in 2021.



She is the fourth photographer from Jammu and Kashmir who has won a Pulitzer. In 2020, three photographers from the Union Territory working for the AP won the award.

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Mundka fire incident: 27 died in fire, Delhi CM visits site, announces Rs 10 lakh each for families of deceased

NEW DELHI: At least 27 people were killed and 12 were injured in a fire at a four-storey commercial building in Delhi's Mundka on Friday evening. At least 50 people have been rescued from the building and some are still reported to be missing, police said, adding that the ongoing search operation is likely to be completed in the next 3 to 4 hours. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal today visited the fire incident site. Kejriwal said that the Delhi government has ordered a magisterial enquiry into the incident and the culprits will not be spared. He announced a compensation of Rs.10 lakh each for the families of those who



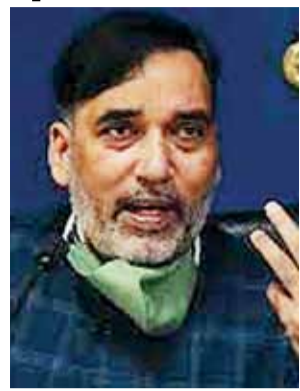
were killed. The injured will be given Rs. 50,000 each, he said. Police said that 11 of the 12 people who were injured have

been identified. At least 50 people have been rescued from the building and around 29 are still reported to be missing, police said, adding that the ongoing search operation is likely to be completed in the next 3 to 4 hours. The Delhi Fire Service deployed cranes to rescue those trapped in the blaze. However, smoke from the fire spread to the entire building and some people jumped off through the windows to save themselves, while some others used ropes to climb down. The fire started on the first floor of the building, which houses the office of a CCTV camera and router manufacturing company, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (Outer) Sameer Sharma has said. The owners of the company -- Harish Goel and Varun Goel -- have been arrested, police

said. Their father Amarnath Goel was among those who were killed in the fire. The owner of the building, which did not have safety clearance from the fire department, has been identified as Manish Lakra and he is on the run, police said. A motivational speech event was being held on the second floor when the fire broke out. Many people were attending this programme. So most deaths took place on this floor, the preliminary probe has indicated. According to fire department officials, information about the blaze was received around 4.40 pm following which 24 fire tenders were rushed to the spot.

Delhi to form panel to overcome shortage of land for tree plantation in city: Rai

Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai on Friday said the city government will set up a nine-member committee to suggest alternatives to overcome shortage of land for tree plantation in the national capital. The minister made the announcement while rejecting a request by the Delhi Development Authority to revise the guidelines for the number of trees to be planted under the compensatory plantation scheme from 10 saplings to two for every tree that is cut. "The DDA wrote to the Delhi forest department saying they do not have land for compensatory plantation. They have requested us to make changes in the guidelines. We are rejecting the request



considering the status of the environment in Delhi," he said. Instead, the government will ask the DDA to inform how much land is available for plantation in the capital. The government has also decided to set up a nine-member

"Green Cover Development Committee" to suggest alternatives to overcome shortage of land for tree plantation, Rai said. The panel will have members from the public works department, DDA, forest department, municipal corporations, School of Planning and Architecture, Central Public Works Department, Delhi Urban Arts Commission and the IARI-PUSA. It will look at options like space available on the roofs of government buildings, vertical greening etc. Gopal Rai also said that the government will ask Dehradun-based Forest Research Institute to conduct a third-party audit of tree transplantation in Delhi.

Minimum temperature in Delhi settles above normal: IMD



A fresh spell of heatwave is likely to sweep the national capital on Friday with the maximum temperature likely to touch 44 degrees celsius, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The minimum temperature settled at 28.1 which is three notches above normal. The relative humidity at 8:30 was recorded at 62 per cent, the

weather office said. The city air quality was recorded in the moderate category. The AQI was 158 at 9:47 am, according to the data from SAFAR-India Air Quality Service. An AQI between zero and 50 is considered good, 51 and 100 satisfactory, 101 and 200 moderate, 201 and 300 poor, 301 and 400 very poor, and

401 and 500 severe. The IMD has issued a yellow alert, warning of a heatwave at most places in the capital on Friday and Saturday. An orange alert has been issued to caution people about a severe heatwave on Sunday. The IMD uses four colour codes -- green (no action needed), yellow (watch and stay updated), orange (be prepared) and red (take action)--for weather warning. The maximum is predicted to touch the 45-degree mark at the Safdarjung Observatory on Sunday. Temperatures may leap to 46-47 degrees Celsius at isolated places, weather experts said. A heatwave spell was predicted over Delhi from Sunday last, but easterly winds prevailing in the national capital under the impact of Cyclone Asani shielded the city against it.

Jailed Khalistani operative alleges torture, HC seeks status report

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Monday sought a status report from jail authorities on a plea on behalf of Hardeep Singh alias Shera, who is accused of trans-national Khalistani operations among other charges by the NIA, alleging discrimination and torture in prison. Directing the prison authorities to file their reply in the matter, Justice Chandra Dhari Singh posted the case for further hearing on August 18. The plea, moved by his father through advocate Harpreet Singh Hora, contended that the jail authorities deprived him of his 'Right to Life' by not providing the basic amenities and medical assistance despite being aware of the fact that he has several injuries and body aches. The plea also sought medi-



cal treatment, telephonic calls, the conduct of an X-ray, and a chair/stool to sit on. During the course of the hearing, the petitioner's counsel submitted that his client is unable to communicate from jail with his father and family members in Punjab where other inmates are provided with telephonic calls as per the jail manual. It is settled law that the prisoners cannot be made laboratories of torture, warehouses in which human com-

Haryana declares high alert against terrorism

SATISH HANDA Chandigarh In view of recent incidents of terrorist activities in Haryana including arrest of four terrorists along with recovery of explosive material at Karnal, recovery of hand grenades manufactured in Pakistan near Ambala and incident of attack on the office of Punjab Police Intelligence Wing at Mohali in neighbouring Punjab state, Haryana government has constituted an Anti-terrorist Wing in the state comprising of senior police officers of SP and DIG ranks declaring high alert against terrorism in the state. In a recent meeting held at Chandigarh presided by Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij in which state Home Secretary Rajiv Arora and DGP Haryana P.K. Aggarwal along with several senior police officers in the state were also present, Vij announced formation of wing to wipe out terrorism from the state, provide security to the residents in Haryana state, keep strict watch over the activities of anti-social elements in the state and search for key persons functioning as mastermind involved in anti-social activities including those trying to harm internet media network making announcements against the

country and disturb peace through terrorism especially in thickly populated areas. Vij said, there is a proposal to install night vision CCTV cameras in highly sensitive areas, in court complex, near government office s, bus stands, railway station, maus, hotels, hospitals, cinema halls, thickly populated public places and markets. Among other senior police bureaucrats present in the meeting were Alok Mittal Additional Director General CID, Srikant Jaghu Additional Director General Police Ambala cum State Narcotic Bureau, Kalramchandra Commissioner Police Gurugram, Vikas Arora Commissioner Police Faridabad and other senior police officers in the state. Decision was also taken to impose ban over sale of fake as well as pre-activated sim cards with immediate effect and all police officers in districts were directed to keep strict watch over the activities of mobile phone dealers in view of increasing cases of on-line frauds. DGP Haryana P.K. Aggarwal suggested campaigns to bring awareness among public to avoid such frauds. Aggarwal suggested police stations all over in the state should carry identity verification of all tenants as well as servants in their area.

Delhi man held for stalking woman on social media

NEW DELHI: A 25-year-old man was arrested from west Delhi for allegedly stalking a woman on social media, police said on Friday. The accused has been identified as Surpreet Singh, a resident of Tilak Nagar here, they said. The woman lodged a complaint alleging that since February 14, she was being stalked on social media by an unidentified man, according to the police. The woman alleged that she was also receiving messages from unknown mobile numbers and various social media accounts, police said. The police conducted a technical analysis and found that the stalker was using different fake IDs to conceal his identity, a senior police officer said. The police tracked and nabbed Singh based on his live location analysis from west Delhi, Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Ghanshyam Bansal said. Interrogation revealed that the accused saw the victim somewhere and was attracted to her. He started stalking her on social media. The victim never responded to the advances of the stalker, police said. Singh runs a business of auto parts at Kashmere Gate here, police added.

Sisodia urges Amit Shah to stop demolition drive in Delhi

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia has written to Union Home Minister Amit Shah urging him to stop the 'destruction' ensuing in the national capital due to the anti-encroachment drive being carried out by the three BJP-ruled municipal bodies. In an online briefing, Sisodia claimed that the civic bodies have a plan to raze 63 lakh dwellings in the national capital. "Of these, 60 lakh houses are in unauthorised colonies while the remaining three lakh are those where people have extended their balconies or covered them. We have learnt that notices have been sent to them, Sisodia said.



This will lead to a huge destruction in the national capital. Almost 70 per cent of the population of Delhi will be rendered homeless," he added. The Aam Aadmi Party will oppose the demolition

drive and I have written to the Union home minister to seek his intervention in the matter, he said. "I have written to him (Shah) saying that this (demolition drive) should be stopped. If bulldozers are used to demolish the houses of those BJP leaders and civic body representatives who took bribes to allow such structures to be constructed," he said. An anti-encroachment drive in Delhi's Madanpur Khadar on Thursday sparked protests and pelting of stones where the locals claimed that legal structures were bulldozed. AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan, who was a part of a protest in the southeast Delhi locality, was arrested on charges of rioting and obstructing public servants in discharge of their duty, police officials said.

Embezzlements in nearly 64000 property registration cases in Haryana

SATISH HANDA Show cause notices were served to nearly 230 revenue officers including 133 Tehsildar, Naib-Tehsildar and 97 Sub Registrar working in Haryana state allegedly involved in embezzlements detected in nearly 64000 property registration cases in the state between year 2018 and 2022 when thorough investigation of each and every property registration case was made in this period by the government when question was strongly raised in Vidhan Sabha session by all political parties in opposition. Information reveals, most of the irregularities by the concerned officers took place during lock down period declared by the government during epidemic outbreak in the state as well as in entire country and government was busy in facing the same.

Road crash on Yamuna Expressway leaves 5 dead

NOIDA: Five people, including four from Maharashtra and one from Karnataka, were killed in a road crash on the Yamuna Expressway in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida on Thursday morning, police said. Two other people who were along with the deceased in an SUV have been hospitalised with injuries, the police said. "The seven people were in a Mahindra Bolero. They were



on the way from Agra towards Noida when their car hit a dumper truck from the rear side near Jewar toll plaza," a Gautam Buddha Nagar police spokesperson said.

Sixteen years old girl raped at gunpoint in UP's Saharanpur

SAHARANPUR: A 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped at gunpoint at a village here, police said on Friday. The girl had gone to work in a farm along with a woman on Thursday when a youth dragged her aside and raped her, SP (City) Rajesh Kumar said quoting the complaint. As the locals working in nearby fields started reaching the spot on hearing her shrieks, the youth fled. The girl informed about the incident to her family members, after which a complaint was lodged. The youth is absconding and police are searching for him, the SP said, adding the girl has been sent for a medical examination. Meanwhile, Hindu activists demanded the arrest of the accused, who they said belongs to another community.

Punjab government working undemocratically: Dinesh Sharma

NOIDA: The AAP government in Punjab is working in an "undemocratic manner" and "not following due legal process", former Uttar Pradesh deputy chief minister Dinesh Sharma said here commenting on BJP leader Tajinder Pal Singh Bagga's arrest last week. Bagga was arrested from his Delhi home by a Punjab Police

team, which was stopped in Haryana's Kurukshetra and the leader brought back to the national capital by the Delhi Police, an episode that snowballed into a political slugfest between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the BJP. The Punjab Police had booked Bagga on charges of making provocative state-

Haryana's first govt Atal Cancer Care Centre inaugurated at Ambala



SATISH HANDA Ambala Prime Minister Narendra Modi shortly. Among those present at the occasion were Kanwar Pal Education Minister, J.P. Dalal Agriculture Minister, O.P. Yadav Social Justice Minister, Sandeep Singh Sports Minister, Kamlesh Dhandha Women & Child Development Minister, Ratan Lal Kataria MP, As-eem Goel MLA Ambala City and O.P. Dhankhadh BJP state president. Nadda appreciated the role of Health Minister Anil Vij and Manohar Lal Khatter for presenting such a high tech cancer hospital to treat cancer patients in the state also help in treating cancer patients in neighbouring states at subsidised rates. Vij told that this cancer care centre will treat patients medically, with the help of surgery and radiation system.

Bangladesh envoy meets UP CM

High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India Muhammad Imran met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at his official residence here on Tuesday and discussed ways and means to further strengthen the relations between the two countries and especially promote trade with Uttar Pradesh, an official release said. Adityanath said India and Bangladesh have strong relations of history, language, culture, and there are wide possibilities of investment and employment in the Uttar Pradesh, it said. Bangladesh can become a natural partner of the state, he said. Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia and India is Bangladesh's second-largest trading partner. Uttar Pradesh with a population of 24 crore is the largest consumer and labor market in the country. Uttar Pradesh, endowed with abundant natural resources, is the largest producer of food grains and milk in the country. As a result of which wheat, sugar, dairy-related machinery and cotton yarn are exported from Uttar Pradesh to Bangladesh, the chief minister said.

State Vigilance Bureau arrested 2 Excise & Taxation officers accepting Rs 2 lakh bribe

SATISH HANDA Gurugram/Faridabad : Special team of State Vigilance Bureau comprising of Inspector Sumit Kumar and Inspector Saroj on the direction by Vigilance Commissioner Rajesh Fauget from Karnal arrested two officers of Excise & Taxation Department Roshan Lal ETO at Faridabad and Inspector Sumitra Godara Excise Inspector in a raid on Monday late evening when she was accepting part payment of Rs 2 lakh bribe against total demand for Rs 7 lakh from a businessman Mohit applied for GST license for running construction material business at Faridabad but having objection on his application again and again for one reason or other due to demand for bribe when Mohit made a complaint to State Vigilance Bureau at Toll Free number and a vigilance team was deployed to investigate the complaint. Information reveals, vigilance team in alliance with complainant conducted surprise raid when Sumitra Godara Excise Inspector was arrested red-handed in her office at Gurugram while accepting advance amount Rs 2 lakh towards bribe and on her information vigilance team also arrested Roshan Lal ETO at Faridabad. According to information, earlier both Roshan Lal ETO and Sumitra Godara were residing in a same building at Sector 39 Gurugram and there were several complaints against both in past also as revealed during preliminary investigation.



Two SC judges to take oath of office

NEW DELHI: Chief Justice of India (CJI) N V Ramana on Monday would administer the oath of office to Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia and Gujarat High Court Judge Justice Jamsheer B Pardiwala as Supreme Court judges.

Two days after the apex court collegium headed by the CJI recommended the names of the two high court judges, the Union Law Ministry swiftly announced their appointments on Saturday in separate notifications. With the appointment of Justice Dhulia and Justice Pardiwala, the top court will regain its full strength of 34 judges which had come down to 32 after the retirement of Justice R Subhash Reddy on January 4 this year.

Instead of the CJI's courtroom, the usual place for such events, the swearing-in ceremony will be held in the newly-built auditorium of the additional building complex of the apex court at 10.30 AM on Monday. The CJI would be creating a history of sorts by administering oath of office to 11 apex court judges. Justice Pardiwala will go on to



serve as the CJI for over two years, sources aware of the procedure to appoint members of the higher judiciary said.

Justice Dhulia, who will be the second judge to be elevated from Uttarakhand, is the sibling of national award-winning film director and actor Tigmanshu Dhulia. He will have a tenure of a little over three years.

Justice Pardiwala will be the fourth judge from the Parsi community to adorn the top court bench and the first high court judge from the minority community who has been elevated in the last five years, after Justice S Abdul Nazeer. Justice Nazeer was elevated to the Supreme Court in February 2017. With the retire-

ment of Justice R Subhash Reddy on January 4 this year, the total strength of apex court judges had come down to 32 against the sanctioned strength of 34.

Justice Dhulia, born on August 10, 1960, is from Madanpur, a remote village located in Pauri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand. He joined the Bar at Allahabad High Court in 1986. An alumnus of Sainik School, Lucknow, he did his graduation and Law from the University of Allahabad. Justice Dhulia was the first chief standing counsel in the High Court of Uttarakhand and was later an additional advocate general, and was elevated as the judge in the same high court in November 2008.

State of economy cause of 'extreme concern': Chidambaram

UDAIPUR: Asserting that the state of the economy is a cause of "extreme concern", senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Saturday said taking into account global and domestic developments, it may be necessary to contemplate a reset of economic policies.

Addressing a press conference, Chidambaram said a slower rate of growth has been the "hallmark" of the present government in the last eight years, and the post-pandemic recovery has been "indifferent and halting".

Chidambaram, who heads the panel on economy constituted by Congress president Sonia Gandhi to lead discussions at the three-day 'Chintan Shivir' here, also said the time is ripe for a comprehensive review of fiscal relations between the Centre and the States.

The consequences of the poorly drafted and unfairly implemented GST laws brought in by the Modi government in 2017 are there for everyone to see, the Congress leader said.



"The States' fiscal position is fragile like never before and needs urgent remedial measures," said the former finance minister, flanked by some other members of the panel such as Gourav Vallabh and Supriya Shrinat.

Noting that the Congress-led government ushered in a new era of liberalisation in 1991, Chidambaram said the country has reaped enormous benefits in terms of wealth creation, new businesses and new entrepreneurs, a huge middle class, millions of jobs, exports and lifting 27 crore people out of poverty during a 10-year period.

"After 30 years, it is felt that taking into account global and domestic developments, it may be necessary to contemplate a reset of the economic policies.

Taking different stands does not help: SC to Centre on identification of minorities

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said the issue of identification of minorities, including Hindus, at the state level needs a resolution and observed that taking different stands doesn't help.

In supersession of its earlier stand, the Centre had on Monday told the apex court that the power to notify minorities is vested with the Union government and any decision in this regard will be taken after discussion with states and other stakeholders.

A bench of Justices S K Kaul and M M Sundresh on Tuesday said these are matters which require resolution and everything cannot be adjudicated.

What I am unable to understand is Union of India is not able to decide what to do. All this thought should have been given before. This creates uncertainty and all this comes into public domain before we put our eyes on it. This creates another

problem," the bench said.

As the hearing commenced, a junior counsel sought pass over saying that Solicitor General Tushar Mehta was busy in some other court. Senior advocate C S Vaidyanathan, appearing for the petitioner, referred to the affidavit filed by the Centre.

The bench then observed, If the Centre wants to consult states, we will have to take a call. Solution can't be that everything is so complex, we will do so. This cannot be answer from the Government of India. You decide what you want to do. If you want to consult them

do it. Who is stopping you from doing so? These are matters which require resolution. Taking different stands doesn't help. If Consultation is required, it should have been done before the affidavit was filed. Let the Solicitor General come here, the bench said.



Amit Shah reviews Indo-Bangla border situation in Assam, interacts with locals



Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday reviewed the situation along the Assam-Bangladesh border from the Mankachar sector of the state.

Shah, who arrived at the Kamakhya Hilltop via a chopper earlier in the day, offered prayers at the temple there before leaving for the Mankachar.

He was welcomed by officials of the BSF and the state government at the border outpost.

The home minister, accompanied by BSF officials,

reviewed the border situation from an observation tower set up for the occasion. He was also seen interacting with local villagers, who had gathered in the area.

A flag march was conducted by the border personnel of both India and Bangladesh in the presence of the Union minister.

Shah is likely to discuss issues related to infiltration, cattle-smuggling, boundary fencing, river patrolling with senior BSF officials at the Sadartilla camp, sources in the paramilitary force said.

The home minister, who is in Assam on a two-day visit, is scheduled to attend several programmes on Monday and Tuesday.

Scientists discover almost 35 million years old rare snake fossil from Ladakh Himalaya

Scientists have reported spotting of the fossil of a Madtsoiidae snake from the molasse deposits of Ladakh Himalaya for the first time indicating their prevalence in the subcontinent for much longer time than previously thought.

Madtsoiidae is an extinct group of medium-sized to gigantic snakes, firstly appeared during the late Cretaceous and mostly distributed in the Gondwanan landmasses, although, their Cenozoic record is extremely scarce. From the fossil record, the whole group disappeared in the mid-Paleogene across most Gondwanan continents except for Australia where it survived with its last known taxon Wonambi till late Pleistocene.



Dr. Ningthoujam Premjit Singh (corresponding author), Dr. Ramesh Kumar Sehgal, and Abhishek Pratap Singh from Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, Dehradun, India in association with Dr. Rajeev Patnaik and Wasim Abbas Wazir from Panjab University Chandigarh; Dr. Navin Kumar and Piyush Uniyal from Indian

Institute of Technology Ropar, and Dr. Andrej eransky of Comenius University Slovakia have reported for the first time a Madtsoiidae snake from the late Oligocene (part of the Tertiary Period in the Cenozoic Era, and lasted from about 33.7 to 23.8 million years ago) of India or the molasse deposits of Ladakh Himalaya.

Heroin worth Rs 15 cr seized, 2 held in Assam

DIPHU: Heroin worth Rs 15 crore was seized and two people were arrested in Assam's Karbi Anglong district on Monday, police said.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of Assam Police and CRPF conducted a vehicle search at 12 Mile in Dillai police station area along the Assam-Nagaland inter-state boundary, and seized around two kg of heroin concealed in 152 soapboxes from a vehicle, Karbi Anglong Deputy Superintendent of Police Nahid Karishma said.

Two occupants of the vehicle, who hail from Manipur and Nagaland, were arrested, the officer said.

"In a big and smart op, @assampolice intercepted a car at 12 Mile under Dillai PS and recovered 152 soapboxes containing 1.995 kg suspected Heroin. Two persons of 2 neighbouring states apprehended. Further investigation is on. Keep it up Assam Police," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma tweeted.



NEWS BRIEFS

Centre committed to develop Bodo majority areas: Shah

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to all-round development of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam with both the Centre and the state government fulfilling 90 per cent of the Bodo Accord clauses.

BTR comprises Bodo community majority districts of the North-eastern state. Seven years ago, the BJP had promised to drive out insurgency from the boundaries of Assam and the home ministry under the guidance of the prime minister have brought most militant outfits to sign peace accords with 9,000 militants having surrendered so far, Shah said here. **AGENCIES**

Congress will form next govt in Gujarat: Rahul Gandhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday expressed confidence that his party will form the next government in Gujarat, as he attacked the BJP-led central government for creating one India for the rich and one for the poor. In the BJP model, which has created two Indias, one for the rich and one for the poor, resources of the country belonging to poor people are being given to a few rich people, he said. Addressing a tribal rally, the Congress leader also said that the BJP-led government in the state had deprived tribals of their rights. The BJP government will not give you anything, but take away everything from you. You (tribals) have to snatch your rights and then only you will get what is yours, he said. Tribal people through their hard work build roads, bridges, buildings and infrastructure in Gujarat. But what did you get in return? You got nothing, neither good education nor health service, he said. Attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gandhi said, PM Modi is doing in India what he did in Gujarat as chief minister: creating two Indias, one for the rich and another for common people. **AGENCIES**

Journalist found hanging at his house in Indore

Journalist Ganesh Tiwari age 40, was found hanging in the house late on Wednesday night, Lasudia police station in-charge Santosh Doodhi said.

Tiwari's wife called him the night but the call remained unanswered. She then contacted his neighbours to find out about him and when they peeped inside the house, they saw him hanging inside, the official said.

The police were subsequently alerted and the door of the house was broken down to recover the body, which was sent for post-mortem, Doodhi said.

Prima facie, it appears that Tiwari hanged himself, but no suicide note was recovered from the spot, he said, adding that the police were probing all angles.

Tiwari, who had worked with different news channels, had posted a news item five days ago on Facebook about alleged corruption, in which some per-



sonnel of Lasudia police station are involved.

Local scribes associated with the Indore Press Club demanded an impartial probe into Tiwari's death.

According to officials, a case of extortion was also registered against Tiwari and four others at Lasudia police station in October 2021 for allegedly running a negative news story about a roadside eatery owner and later arrested him.

However, Tiwari after getting bail in the matter had alleged that Lasudia police had registered a false FIR against him because of a personal grudge.

Mamata bats for creation of more districts in Bengal

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said there is a need to create more districts in the state for expediting development work, but it has been constrained by lack of manpower and infrastructure.

Speaking at a meeting with West Bengal Civil Service officers at the renovated Town



Hall here, she said the area of the existing 23 districts in the

state is vast, so there is a need to divide them and increase the number. The state needs more manpower and infrastructure for this purpose.

"We need to divide the districts as these are very large. The state will have more districts. This will help expedite development work, she said. The chief minister also ac-

used the Centre of not releasing funds to the state.

"I came to know that the Centre has not released funds for 100-day work since December last year. Tell me, how people will work if they are not paid. The central government collects revenue from states and shares a meagre part of it, Banerjee said at the meeting.

NIA detains Chota Shakeel's associate Salim Fruit in Mumbai after raids at multiple places

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday morning detained gangster Chhota Shakeel's aide Salim Qureshi aka Salim Fruit in Mumbai after conducting raids at over 20 places here and in adjoining Thane district against associates of fugitive underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, an official said.



The NIA picked up Qureshi, the husband of Shakeel's sister-

in-law, from his residence in Bhandi Bazar area of south Mumbai, he said.

The central agency conducted raids at a housing society in Mumbai's Nagpada area, Bhandi Bazar, Santacruz, Mahim, Goregaon areas of Mumbai, Mumbra in Thane and other places against associates of Dawood Ibrahim.

Sangh special training programme begins

More than 700 RSS swayamsevak are participating in a special 25-day training programme which commenced on Monday at the Hedgewar Smruti Mandir here in Maharashtra.

A Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh functionary informed that Sangh volunteers from various states in the age group of 18 to 40 years have been selected to participate in the 'Sangh Shiksha Varg-Tritiya Varsha' training programme.

Former RSS general secretary Bhaiyyaji Joshi was present at the inauguration function.

The Sangh functionary said that 735 swayamsevak are participating in the training programme with 35 Prant Pramukhs and 96 teachers. The training session will conclude on June 2.

Hedgewar Smruti Mandir is a memorial located in the Reshimbagh area dedicated to K B Hedgewar and M S Golwalkar, who were the first two leaders of the RSS.

SC stays further proceedings before HCs in matters involving challenges to IT Rules

The Supreme Court Monday stayed further proceedings before the high courts in matters involving challenges to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 or the Cable Television Networks (Amendment) Rules 2021.

A bench of Justices A M Khanwilkar and A S Oka passed the order while hearing a batch of petitions, including those raising the issue of hate speech and seeking regulations for OTT (over-the-top) platforms.

We direct stay of further proceedings pending before the high courts in the respective cases or to be filed hereafter until the next date of hearing involving a challenge to the IT Rules or Cable TV (Amendment) Rules, which are the subject matter of proceedings in these cases, the bench said and posted the matter for hearing on May 19.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told the bench that there are several petitions in the matter pending before the apex court.

He said some high courts have stayed the statutory regulations and the Centre has filed special leave petitions (SLPs) against those orders. Can your lordships consider granting stay so far as transfer petitions are concerned so that no further orders are passed, Mehta said.

The bench also issued notices on the petitions before it in which notices were not yet issued. After the apex court stayed further proceedings before the high courts in these matters, one of the advocates appearing in the matter said they had

Goswamys explore 19th-century Pahari paintings in book

Art historian couple B N Goswamy and Karuna Goswamy have authored an illustrated book on 19th-century Pahari paintings that depict the journey of five pilgrims to the land of Lord Shiva.

"A Sacred Journey: The Kedara Kalpa series of Pahari paintings and the painter Purkhu of Kangra", published by Niyogi Books, features detailed descriptions of the paintings, their subtle nuances and spiritual significance and includes over 170 images of the Kedara Kalpa series of paintings from leading museums and collections around the world.

The present volume of paintings is based on Karuna Goswamy's research and her identification, for the first time, of the little-known ancient Shaivite text Kedara Kalpa.

The authors state that there are long and smaller versions of the Kedara Kalpa text. The long version asserts that Kedara is the foremost among tirthas; visiting Kedara and performing puja there are beneficial for devotees.

In the long version, Shiva narrates past events to Parvati. However, there is a slight gap in the narrative here and one comes upon a small group of five Brahmins who decide to venture on the 'great path'. It is from this point that the shorter version of Kedara Kalpa, as in other copies of the text begins.

B N Goswamy calls the venture a "sthala purana to Kedarnath. A sthala purana is about a place - a pilgrimage; what it entails and what it leads to".

The authors have ascribed it to Pahari painter Purkhu and they appear to be made between 1815 and 1820. The paintings are in two series.

The authors through these paintings have also provided details about the cities the sadhaks travel to, their way of life and the ambience in which the sadhaks and the king pay homage to each other.

The book not only details interpretations of the paintings but also gives ample information about how painstakingly the works were acquired and curated from all over the world.

Karuna Goswamy had to travel to several countries across the world to collate data about the series. She died in 2020 before seeing the completed work. But her husband continued the work and launched it.



filed a petition before the Kerala High Court which had passed an interim order. We are not interfering with those interim orders as of now, the bench observed.

At the outset, the Solicitor General told the bench that the government has provided some regulations for OTT platforms, online platforms, intermediaries, and online news. He referred to the fresh petition where a stay of proceedings pending before various high courts has been sought. Some high courts have stayed the statutory regulations. We have filed SLPs, he said. The bench asked whether notices have been issued on those SLPs. Mehta said notices have not been issued in these SLPs and he believes that the respondents are before the apex court on caveat. We will issue a notice in all fresh matters including transfer cases, the bench said. Issue notice in all cases where it is yet to be issued, it said. The top court noted in its order that the Solicitor General has assured to prepare a chart of cases involving a challenge to the IT rules, challenge to the Cable TV amendment rules, and petitions generally seeking directions for evolving mechanism which would be touching upon the subject matter of IT rules.

Cutting fuel taxes to help stabilise macroeconomy

As the ruling BJP marks the eighth anniversary of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, retail inflation has accelerated close to the 8.3% level last seen in May 2014, when Modi assumed office in the last week of the month. For a government that prided itself on its inflation taming successes in the first five years, a combination of factors including the COVID-19 pandemic, high crude oil prices and now the war in Ukraine have created a perfect storm that sent the Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation racing to a 95-month high of 7.79% in April. Food and fuel were the biggest culprits fanning last month's furious pace of price gains that seem unabating. Food inflation as measured by the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) quickened to a 17-month high of 8.38% last month, with rural consumers experiencing it at 8.5%, a pace that was 41 basis points faster than that experienced by their urban counterparts. Ten of the 12 items in the food and beverages basket of the overall CPI registered sequential acceleration as well. Of concern are the prices of cereals and products, which constitute almost a tenth of the CPI and account for the key staples of wheat and rice that are essential for ensuring food security. Inflation in cereals accelerated by more than 100 basis points to 5.96% last month. With inflation now having turned far more broad-based and logging a strident pace in excess of 8% for four of the six sub-groups in the CPI, policymakers have their task cut out. While the RBI must continue to tighten monetary policy in order to protect the vast majority who have no hedge against inflation, the pass-through of high oil costs, reflected in double-digit price gains in the transport and fuel and light categories, leaves the Government with little option but to cut fuel taxes if it is serious about taming inflation so as to ensure overall macroeconomic stability.

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THE FINANCIAL WORLD

RNI NO. DELENG/2011/38860
PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY SWINDER BAJWA
ON BEHALF OF FW MEDIA
PRINTED AT JAGJIT PUBLISHING CO. PVT LTD
D-12, INDUSTRIAL AREA, PHASE-1, MOHALI,
PUNJAB 160059
PRINTER & PUBLISHER SWINDER BAJWA
OWNER : FW MEDIA
PUBLISHED AT: BUILDING NO-23, NEHRU PLACE
NEW DELHI 110019; PHONE: 9888040061
EDITOR* ABDUL WASEY
(*RESPONSIBLE FOR SELECTION OF NEWS UNDER THE PRB ACT)



GAUTAM I. MENON EXPLORES WHY THERE IS NO GETTING PAST THE PANDEMIC TILL WE CREDIBLY COUNT COVID-19 DEATHS

Covid death count is crucial

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently released a report that estimated global deaths from COVID-19 across 2020-2021. It suggested that about 14.9 million deaths could be attributed to the pandemic worldwide during that period, further estimating that about 4.7 million of these deaths were in India alone. For comparison, the official Indian COVID-19 toll for that period is 0.48 million, a number smaller than the WHO number by a factor of about 10.

A number of independent news reports have suggested that there was pressure from the Indian government on the WHO to suppress their estimates. Indeed, once the report appeared, it was immediately criticised by a number of prominent government representatives. A government press release called the report "statistically unsound and scientifically questionable".

India's rejection of the report makes it the only country to do so, out of the 194 member states of the WHO. However, the estimates for India are broadly consistent with estimates from a number of independent groups, all falling in the broad range of 2.2 million to 6 million deaths.

At the core of all such estimates, especially in situations where official numbers might not align with reality, is a quantity called "excess mortality". This compares estimates of the actual death toll with the number of deaths expected in the same year but without the mortality caused by the pandemic, an obvious counterfactual. There are thus two estimates here — an estimate of the actual number of deaths, and the "counterfactual" estimate. The difference between these is the number of excess deaths that we should attribute to the pandemic.

For the counterfactual estimate, one should extrapolate from the number of deaths in previous pre-pandemic years, but with additional statistical corrections that represent how the population changes from year to year. Somewhat subtly, one must account for the indirect impacts of the disease as well. These should include the



fact that fewer deaths from road accidents occur during periods of a lockdown, for example. Accounting for those who died simply because medical treatment was hard to access in the pandemic period, even if from non-COVID-19 causes, is also important.

For the actual death toll, one must rely on official data, if it is believed to be accurate, or estimate the number by other means, as the WHO did for India.

The government's issue with the WHO report involves both these separate estimates. It argues that the model used by the WHO to estimate deaths in the counterfactual scenario is flawed. Further, it suggests that the way in which the actual deaths are calculated — from a combination of official reports, numbers from external non-government websites and news reports — is questionable.

The official response from the government is short on specifics. It provides no alternative routes to these estimations, apart from insisting that the official record should be trusted.

In its response to the WHO, the Indian government has argued that its own Civil Registration System, or CRS, is of sufficiently high quality that the numbers it provides can be used in place of model estimates. Data from the CRS for 2020 are now available, but were released just two days before the

WHO released its own report and could not therefore be incorporated in its estimates. The CRS numbers point to an increase of 470,000 deaths in 2020 over 2019, although these are very unlikely to all be COVID-19 deaths. The WHO's estimates for deaths from the pandemic in 2020 yield numbers that are larger by a factor of about 2.

The available CRS data do not estimate how many deaths actually took place in India in 2020, but only those that were registered, a number known to have a distinct urban-rural divide. Because the CRS only counts registered deaths, the quality of its numbers can only be understood by comparison to other methods. India's Sample Registration System tracks a set of representative households to estimate deaths in a given year. This could have been a useful point of comparison. However, in 2020, the SRS did not take place.

The CRS has been argued to undercount deaths in some of India's most populous States, especially deaths of women and children. Low levels of death registration are believed to occur in the highly populous states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and are likely to have slipped further during the pandemic. Given these, it is possible that the discrepancy between the official and the WHO estimates may simply reflect inadequa-

cies in our mechanisms for counting deaths.

There is universal agreement that the bulk of the deaths from COVID-19 across the span of the pandemic can be associated with the Delta wave, which struck India between February and June of 2021. Even in the WHO calculation, the year 2021 contributes more than 80% to the overall estimate of pandemic mortality. On this, government representatives have so far been silent. The CRS data for 2021 will only be available next year.

Why is it important to count the dead? One reason is, of course, closure. It is hard to find an Indian who has not experienced a direct COVID-19 death of a family member, or an untimely death as an indirect consequence of an infection. To insist on the sanctity of an official record that potentially undercounts them, without providing an adequate reason for believing that record, would ignore our responsibilities to the dead and to those they left behind.

We could ask whether any possible undercounting of deaths indicates deliberate mismanagement or whether it simply points to the difficulty of maintaining accurate records in a country of India's size and complexity. We could ask how the Indian public health system fared in the defining public health event, so far at least, of this century, in comparison to other countries.

But here's the larger question: How should the Indian government respond to independent, external measures of its performance on any issue where these measures diverge from the official narrative? In recent years, the Indian government has demonstrated some prickliness in such matters. In this particular case, it has been largely bolstered by a relatively unquestioning media that has supported the government's refusal to acknowledge the potential toll of the pandemic as an act of "patriotic defiance", in the words of the mathematician and COVID-19 modeller Murad Banaji.

Gautam I. Menon is a Professor of Physics and Biology at Ashoka University, Sonapat. Views are personal



NILMADHAB MOHANTY EXPLAINS HOW A CIVIL SERVANT'S PLIANT STANCE AFFECTS SERVICE NEUTRALITY

Actions that corrode the steel frame of India

A letter war between two sets of retired public officials (civil servants, judges and army officers), concerning the prevailing political and social situation in the country, has been widely reported in the media. In the last week of April 2022, a group of these retirees, calling themselves as the Constitutional Conduct Group (CCG) sent an 'open letter' to the Prime Minister. In the letter, they appealed to him to call for an end to the politics of hate and violence against the minorities, particularly Muslims.

Very soon thereafter, another rival group of Concerned Citizens (CC) surfaced and rubbished the allegations as a 'false narrative', inspired by western and international lobbies.

Unfortunately, in neither of the formulations, is there any reference to the role of the civil service (of which they all were distinguished members in the past) in whatever is happening or not happening in the country, concerning law and public order and the security of citizens. It is the police and magistracy, judicial courts and other regulatory agencies — not politicians — which have been authorised and empowered by law to take preventive action against potential troublemakers, enforce the laws relating to criminal, economic and other offences, and maintain public order. In mature democracies, self-respecting public officials normally discharge their constitutional and legal responsibilities with honesty, integrity and their own conscience, firmly resisting the dictates of the vested interests. What is happening in our country?

Perhaps, a reference to the recent events in Great Britain will serve to clarify things, as



the main features of our governance system — the cabinet system with accountability to Parliament and a permanent civil service with political neutrality as its hallmark — are patterned on the English constitutional model.

Recently, Britain's two top Ministers, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Finance Minister), Rishi Sunak, were accused of violating their own lockdown regulations for COVID-19 by attending Christmas and other parties at 10, Downing Street, London (Prime Minister's residence) in the months of November to December 2020.

A career civil servant, Sue Gray, was asked to inquire into the veracity of the charges. Of Ms. Gray, it was said that she would never want to tarnish her reputation by claims of a cover-up or a shoddy investigation.

She came to the finding that against the background of the restrictions on all citizens, the gatherings held were inappropriate and represented a serious failure to observe the high standards expected from top public functionaries. The public and the political

establishment accepted the integrity of the exercise. Then, another wing of the civil service, the London Metropolitan Police, imposed fines on the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of Exchequer for their misdemeanour, and again both the top Ministers accepted the penalty.

Can this happen in India? It might have been possible in the early years when Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel created independent India's civil services, but no longer. The deterioration in standards was very visible during the National Emergency declared in 1975. The civil services, like other institutions including the judiciary, just caved in; the trend might have accelerated over the years; now, no one even talks of civil service neutrality, although there is the rare purist who could be sticking to the old standards of behaviour.

Earlier, during communal or caste riots, the Administration focused on quelling the disturbances and restoring peace in the affected locality, without ever favouring one group over the other. Now, there are allegations of local officers taking sides in a conflict. For civil servants who work with ruling politicians directly, following a political master's diktats and identifying with his interests, anticipating his views in official work and acting on them and pandering to his narrow political interests, often become easy options that put them out of harm's way.

The politician, lacking the vision and intellectual grasp of a Sardar Patel, could also reward a compliant bureaucrat by offering prized and lucrative assignments both within and outside the country. He could also have him placed in an inconvenient

position or even punish him if he does not follow his line. This can happen despite the protection and safeguards in Article 311 of the Constitution. That a civil servant's pliant and submissive behaviour means an end to civil service neutrality and the norms and values that this trait demands, does not seem to bother either the political or bureaucratic leadership.

The norms that define neutrality are: independence of thought and action; honest and objective advice; candour and 'speaking truth to power' even if it is done in the privacy of a Minister's chamber. Associated with these norms are the personal values that a civil servant cherishes or ought to cherish, namely, self-respect, integrity, professional pride and dignity. All these together contribute to the enhancement of the quality of administration that benefits society and the people.

This objective may, however, be at a discount when politicians are eager to serve their personal and party interests, and overzealous and ambitious officials dance to their tune, thereby leading to a dilution of standards. It could also create favourable conditions for both political and bureaucratic corruption.

"Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment," wrote B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution and added, "It has to be cultivated. We must realise that our people have yet to learn it. Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic."

Nilmadhab Mohanty has worked in senior positions in both national and international bureaucracies. Views are personal

BOOKS: REVIEW

New book explores Pahari paintings of 19th-century

Art historian couple B N Goswamy and Karuna Goswamy have authored an illustrated book on 19th-century Pahari paintings that depict the journey of five pilgrims to the land of Lord Shiva.

"A Sacred Journey: The Kedara Kalpa series of Pahari paintings and the painter Purkhu of Kangra", published by Niyogi Books, features detailed descriptions of the paintings, their subtle nuances and spiritual significance and includes over 170 images of the Kedara Kalpa series of paintings from leading museums and collections around the world.

The present volume of paintings is based on Karuna Goswamy's research and her identification, for the first time, of the little-known ancient Shaivite text Kedara Kalpa.

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and they appear to be made between 1815 and 1820. The paintings are in two series.

The authors through these paintings have also provided details about the cities the sadhaks travel to, their way of life and the ambience in which the sadhaks and the king pay homage to each other. The book not only details interpretations of the paintings



but also gives ample information about how painstakingly the works were acquired and curated from all over the world. Karuna Goswamy had to travel to several countries across the world to collate data about the series. She died in 2020 before seeing the completed work. But her husband continued the work and launched it. "Karuna was way more adventurous than me in research. She put the work together but before she could finish the work, she was gone, so I decided to complete it," he says. The mystical journey, the illustrations of detailed paintings,

the aesthetically composed text all combine to make the book a valuable work on Indian art.

"Each of these works intrigues and informs, and in some ways expands our awareness, for nothing quite like these do we see elsewhere in the range of Indian paintings. There is something here for everyone to savour for sure," says B N Goswamy.

The Kedara Kalpa is a relatively little-known Shaiva text; and only slightly better known than it are the two dispersed series of paintings to which this study is devoted. But both raise questions that are at once elegant and deeply engaging. Ostensibly, they treat of a journey by five seekers who set out to reach the realm of the great god, Shiva — walking barefoot through icy mountains and deep ravines, frozen rivers and moon-like rocks, running on the way into temptations and dangers the like of which no man before them had encountered — and, in the end, succeed.

Capricot Technologies is now a part of VinZero

Having worked together for the past few years under a Global Alliance agreement, Capricot India, A2K Technologies and Cloud A2K ANZ, U.S. CAD The Americas and Cadline EMEA and UK, announced the formalization of this brand partnership as VinZero.

The formalization and formation of VinZero is driven by a desire to leverage capacity and experience to serve their local and global customers at scale. The VinZero name stems from the Italian word Vincero, meaning "to be victorious".

Paul Laycock, VinZero CEO says, "As VinZero, we are passionate about helping our customers win not only their digital journey, but also now win when it comes to their own, net zero journey. We believe the increased adoption across Construction and Manufacturing of digitalization represents one of the biggest opportunities for the net zero journey and we are excited to formally combine our strengths and experience to lead the market."

Chakresh Jain, Chairman Capricot India, and Global CCO VinZero, adds, "Capricot has been pioneering digitalization in AEC and Manufacturing in-

dustry for more than 3 decades and improving productivity, collaboration, and driving sustainability across India.

Our clients are increasingly having their sustainability credentials judged as a critical factor for success. Capricot can now offer global expertise in such area to its clients."

VinZero has a focus on bringing together knowledge and advice from around the world to deliver a thought leadership framework that can lead their customers and partners on their digital pathway to net zero.

Venkatesh, Managing Director, Capricot India, comments, "Digitalization gives an instant boost to productivity, efficiency and accuracy. Our manufacturing clients are working hard to deliver more sustainable net zero operating environment, and digitisation is changing how products are designed, produced, used and maintained. It is also helping in transforming the operations, processes and energy footprint of factories and supply chain.

Capricot is currently assisting clients in increasing their output efficiency, and VinZero



will allow us to ensure that our customers get the best ROI from their technologies."

"Adoption of digitalization will be the key driver for rapid transformation and for maintaining competitive advantage across AEC and Manufacturing. This adoption is where we will see the biggest wins in reducing

carbon emissions. Digitalization is the fastest way for us to achieve more, and use less, and for everyone to be able to

combine both profit and purpose. There is a real drive across industry now for all of us to play our part and we have a world class C Level team to drive our business and customer suc-

cess to the next level," says Paul Laycock.

With over 550 employees across 32 offices globally and covering some 25 languages, VinZero capacity to support increased adoption across construction and manufacturing is significant.

The combination of our Brand Partners under VinZero makes us one of the largest Platinum Partners for Au-

odesk globally, and a technology partner of choice for leading AEC and Manufacturing companies. VinZero designs and delivers sustainable digital processes, bespoke services, and SaaS solutions, to help customers maintain their competitive advantage and achieve their technological and sustainability leadership goals

About Capricot Technologies : Capricot Technologies, a VinZero company, having a legacy of over 3-decade, has now become a partner of choice for AEC industry. We provide software technologies covering entire building life-cycle from conceptualization, design, engineering, construction, and Operation & Maintenance, including consultancy, training, implementation and technical support. Today, with over 10 offices across India and 300+ inspired team members, Capricot is serving over 20,000 customers in building, infrastructure, manufacturing, media & entertainment, geospatial, graphic and education industry. Capricot Technologies is one of the biggest Platinum Partner of Autodesk along with Authorized Training Centre.

Coal Production Increases by 29% to 66.58 MT during April, 2022

As per the provisional statistics of Ministry of Coal, the total coal production increased by 29% to 66.58 Million Ton (MT) from 51.62 MT in April, 2022 as compared to April, 2021. During April, 2022, Coal India Ltd. (CIL), Singareni Collieries Company Ltd. (SCCL) and Captive mines/Others registered a growth of 27.64%, 9.59% and 59.98% by producing 53.47 MT, 5.32 MT and 7.79 MT of coal respectively.

At the same time, coal despatch increased by 8.66% to 71.30 MT from 65.62 MT during April, 2022 as compared to April, 2020. During April 2022, CIL, SCCL and Captive/Others registered a growth of 6.01%, 5.53% and 35.69% by despatching 57.50 MT, 5.74 MT and 8.06 MT respectively.

Of the top 37 coal producing mines, 22 have performed more than 100% and another 10 mines' production stood between 80 and 100 per cent.

The Power utilities coal despatch has gone up by 18.15% to 61.81 MT during April, 2022 as compared to 52.32 MT in April, 2020. Fall in import prices of coal have been observed since the end of October last year. However, international prices are still at high level.

Coal based power generation has registered a growth of 9.26% last month as compared to April 2021 and growth of 2.25% as compared to Mar 2022. The overall power generation in April, 2022 has been 11.75% higher than the power generated in April, 2021 and 2.23% higher than power generated in Mar 2022. Coal based power generation in the month of April, 2022 has been 102529 MU in comparison to 100276 MU in March, 2022 and registered a growth of 2.25%. Total power generation has also increased in April, 2022 to 136565 MU from 133584 MU in March, 2022.



Piyush Goyal invites the Government of Oman to increase their pharma trade with India



The Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Textiles, Shri Piyush Goyal today said that India was considering entering into a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Oman.

He was delivering the Keynote Address at the 10th Meeting of

India-Oman Joint Business Council (JBC) in New Delhi today. He also added that India was already looking at a comprehensive trade agreement with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations, of which Oman is an important member.

The Minister said that the Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) that took place yesterday between India and Oman, that had been long overdue, was a very productive one. He expressed confidence that the discussions with business leaders on both sides would complement the discussions under JCM, come up with new ideas to boost our already deep bonds of friendship, and turn our vision into reality.

Observing that India and Oman have been connected for more than 5,000 years

through friendship and brotherhood and very warm and strong people-to-people ties, the Minister said that despite such close relations, the bilateral trade and investment in the two nations were yet to reach maximum potential. Shri Goyal stressed that all the engagement that happened in the JCM, the friendship between him and his counterpart in Oman, the visionary leadership of the heads of both nations and the warm people to people ties between the two nations should and must lead to significant increase in business to business engagement.

Paying his respects to Late HM Sultan Qaboos, Shi Piyush Goyal said that he was held in very high esteem in India and was conferred the Gandhi Peace Prize. He was one of the architects of close India-Oman bilateral relations, the Minister added. We owe it to him to strive to transform his vision into reality and take the partnership between India and Oman to the heights it truly deserves, the Minister noted.

He expressed confidence that the Joint Business Council (JBC) will supplement the ef-

forts of govts of both countries to deepen engagement. He underscored that these agreements would only reach their true potential if businesses display that enthusiasm which will in turn help political leadership take bold decisions. He urged businesses in both nations to look at new opportunities, especially in services, investment, food security, sustainability, renewable energy and startups.

The Minister acknowledged the care, concern and love that was showered on expatriate Indians by the people of Oman, especially during the pandemic. He added that Oman was the 1st country in the GCC to authorize the use of India made Covaxin. Referring to cultural and culinary affinities between the two nations, the Minister said that these ties have brought the people of both the nations even closer.

The Minister invited Government of Oman to increase their pharma trade with India. Mentioning the market study on the cooperation in the pharma sector that was unveiled at the JCM yesterday, the Minister expressed confidence that the report would be invaluable to Indian companies wishing to enter Omani market. Our pharma companies will bring quality products at competitive prices to consumers in Oman and help bring down the cost of healthcare, he assured. He also thanked Oman for agreeing to fast-track approval for Indian medicines that had already been cleared by strong regulatory environments like UK, EU AND USA.

The Minister urged both nations to leave no stone unturned when it comes to working together to improve lives of people in India and Oman.

Sany India Completes 20 yrs of operations in India

Sany India, one of the leading manufacturers and suppliers of Construction Machinery announced completion of 20 years of operations in India. Starting off with just 4 motor graders in 2002, the company has captured majority market share in multiple product verticals like Excavators, Cranes, Piling Rigs, Mining Equipment, Road and Port Machinery. Having invested more than Rs. 750 crores in their state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Pune, Sany has made a successful transition from a global to local company with over 50 models being manufactured locally in their Pune facility. The company has added 210 touch points with over 41 dealers in across India and south Asia. Another significant milestone achieved by Sany India which coincides with their 20th anniversary celebration is the sale of 22000 plus machines till date. To mark this momentous occasion Sany India is launching an array of new equipment at the EXCON which are Built



to Change the world around us and achieve our vision of a new India.

Speaking on the colossal occasion Deepak Garg, Managing Director, Sany India & South Asia said, We are extremely happy to complete 20 successful years in India building machines that have changed our country's landscape to enable a better new India. These Bemisaal 20 saal has been made possible, thanks to the steadfast support and trust rendered by our customers, channel partners, funding partners and team Sany. We reaffirm our commitment to customers by delivering top-notch prod-

ucts that ensures high value proposition and more earnings. Speaking about Sany's contribution to the development of our country, he said, With localization being the prime focus of our company, most of the new generation machines are being manufactured as part of the Make in India' initiative. At present, our equipment are being used in various infrastructure, mining, port and road construction projects across the country. We are also contributing to all major irrigation projects by offering products that are unmatched in the industry as far as technology, productivity and efficiency is concerned.

Having contributed to various infrastructural projects in our country, Sany India's success story has been commendable. With country's progress and development being their focal point, Sany India is contributing towards many major developmental projects by offering products that are unmatched in the industry as far as technology, productivity and efficiency is concerned. With long term and satisfied customers Sany India has established a firm foothold in the Indian market with several new projects likely to commence in the next few months.

Glimpse into Sany's journey :The story of Sany India began with importing 4 motor graders dating back to 2002. It was the first time when Sany entered Indian market. Building further on the entry in India, Sany India was established, with setting up branch offices in 6 central cities, with a promise to serve customers in every state. In 2006, Sany entered

into a contract with Maharashtra Government for investment of USD 60 million in Pune. In 2007, the investment of Sany in India laid the foundation stone for Sany India, with intention to build and create a production base of construction equipment machinery in Pune. Since then, Sany's growth trajectory has been commendable. Sany became the no. 1 brand of concrete machinery in India after acquiring Putzmeister in 2012. Sany is the undisputed market leader in Piling Rigs and Slew Cranes since 2015. It has also secured a place amongst the top 3 players for products like Excavators, Mining Trucks and Port Machinery. Sany India has not only achieved a leadership position in India but also established itself as an export hub of construction equipment for Africa, Middle East, and South & South East Asia. In the coming time, with continued focus on localization and introduction of technologically superior products Sany India is bound to gain more traction.

Screwvala Backed insurejoy.com becomes the fastest-growing Insurtech Startup

In 8 months insurejoy.com has grown 5X with over 100 products offered by 30+ insurance partners. The company has created a significant presence in 80 cities, with 800+ employees and is also recruiting a large force of Point of Sales agents, to take insurance to Bharat. The insurtech startup will cross 300 CR ARR in Premium this fiscal.

insurejoy.com is the Life insurance-focused one-stop solution in India. While most of the other insurtech players focus mainly on the Motor business, insurejoy.com has taken the harder but more

lucrative route of Life Insurance. insurejoy.com does more than 70% of its premiums through Life Insurance whereas, other players have less than 10% Life insurance in their business portfolio.

There has been an uptake over the last 2 years due to COVID, India is still

one of the most underinsured and vulnerable markets in the world.

Arvind Shivahare, Co-Founder & CEO, insurejoy.com, said, India has one of the highest mortality protection gaps. Only 17 out of

100 people have the difference between the cover typically required by a family and the resources they have available, should a wage-earner pass away suddenly. To add to it, India has the highest ratio of dependents per family.

Unlike most other insurtech players that are general on the commoditized general insurance segment, Insurejoy is focused on solving for life insurance in India.

About Insurejoy.com :insurejoy.com is an Insurtech platform

managed & operated by Insuregram Insurance Brokers Private Limited, a registered Direct Insurance Broker (Life & General) with the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India ("IRDAI"). Focused on taking insurance to the large & underserved addressable population in India, Insurejoy.com wants to transform the way insurance has been distributed in the country. Founded in August 2021, Insurejoy.com is now one of the fastest-growing insurtech companies in India, with a presence in 13 states and over 80 cities.

insurejoy.com

Khadi Eri Silk Training cum Production Centre in Tawang to Revive Silk Industry & Boost Local Economy

Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) has taken yet another historic step to revive the Silk Industry in Arunachal Pradesh and create sustainable local employment. KVIC has set up another "Khadi Eri Silk Training cum Production Centre" at Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh bordering China and Bhutan. Nestled in the snow-clad Himalayan peaks at an altitude of nearly 14,000 feet, the Silk training cum production centre was inaugurated by KVIC Chairman Vinai Kumar Saxena. The centre has been set up with assistance of Buddhist Culture Preservation Society, Bomdila, which has provided the building for the Silk Centre. KVIC, on the other hand, has provided the required infrastructure like handlooms, Charkha, Silk reeling machines and warping drums, etc. The centre is providing direct employment to 20 women artisans of Tawang and West Kameng districts.



Setting up of the Khadi Silk Centre in Arunachal Pradesh is inspired by the Prime Minister's vision of creating sustainable development in the remotest of Indian places and creating livelihood for the locals under "Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan". This is the second Silk Training cum Production Centre set up by KVIC in Arunachal Pradesh in less than 2 years' time. Earlier, KVIC had inau-

gurated Eri Silk Training cum Production Centre in Village Chullyu of Arunachal Pradesh on 17th September 2020. In December 2020, KVIC had also revived the 1000-years old heritage Monpa Handmade Paper Industry in Tawang, a step that was also appreciated by the Prime Minister in his radio program "Mann ki Baat". Chairman KVIC said the "Khadi Eri Silk Training cum

Production Centre" aims at reviving the Silk Industry in the entire North East which was almost destroyed in the last few decades. "This facility in Tawang will be a big boost to spinning and weaving activities in the entire region. Training of artisans and supporting the production of Eri Silk, which is indigenous to the North Eastern states, will create local employment and sustainable development in the region. Young designers and professionals of NIFT will also provide training to Khadi artisans at this centre to introduce new designs and develop trendier clothing to suit the modern taste of tribal youths," he said.

For centuries, Silk has been intrinsic to the life of people in the North East but the flooding of low-quality silk in these markets also destroyed the Silk industry from North East. The development assumes significance as the tribal population in Arunachal Pradesh, men and women alike, traditionally wear Eri Silk and Khadi Cotton clothes which carries a deep significance to their egalitarian tribal society.

Linking of innovation with industry must for growth: MSME

NEW DELHI: Innovation happening both at the grassroots or at the level of higher educational institutions must be linked directly to the industry for its commercialization and the government is looking at means to link the same stated Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma, Minister of State- Ministry of MSME at an event organised by the Associated Chambers of Industry and Commerce of India (ASSOCHAM).

Speaking at webinar on "5th ICT Startups Awards and Conference BUILDING FOR THE WORLD: Accelerating IP Readiness for INDIA" organized by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), where he was the chief guest, Verma further stated that there has

been an appreciable spurt in policy support for young startups in different sectors. A large number of startups based on e-commerce-based platforms have attracted venture capital support in the last few years. Some of them have succeeded and created niche for themselves.

"The central government's 'Make in India' initiative aims to boost and encourage the MSME sector as well as local manufacturing," he said. Under the National Manufacturing Competitiveness Programme, the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) is implementing a Scheme "Building Awareness on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises". In this scheme, setting up of Intellectual Property facilita-

tion center (IPFC) is one of the main activities. The objective of setting up of IPFC is to guide MSME and startups regarding utilisation of IP tools and technologies for better management of their intellectual property related needs, said Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma Minister of State, Ministry of MSME.

"Innovation has reached center-stage in policy - making in the science and technology domain. This has strengthened the resolve of the government to encourage innovation and innovation-based enterprises. At the same time, it has helped in unlocking the latent creative energy of our billion plus people. I take this opportunity to applaud the efforts of the ASSOCHAM."

India is poised to take the fruits of development through initiatives like Aatmanirbhar Bharat India, Digital India and Swachh India to all corners of the country. Ideas of innovators will make a true difference only if all of us in different roles and institutions join hands in creating samvedna-sheelta and srijan-sheelta (compassion and creativity) in the country, said Verma.

Ford shelves plans to manufacture EVs in India



NEW DELHI: US auto major Ford has shelved plans to manufacture electric vehicles in India for exports despite getting approval from the government for production-linked incentives.

The company, which in September last year had announced that it would stop vehicle production at its two plants in the country as part of a restructuring exercise, said it is exploring other alternatives for its manufacturing facilities at Chennai and Sanand in Gujarat.

As part of the on-going business restructuring in India, Ford has continued to explore possible alternatives for its manufacturing facilities. This included applying for the production-linked incentives scheme, which allowed us to explore utilising one of the plants as a potential EV manufacturing base, a Ford India spokesperson said.

"After careful review, we have decided to no longer pursue EV manufacturing for exports from any of the Indian plants. We remain grateful to the government for approving our proposal under the Production-Linked Incentives and for being supportive while we continued our exploration," the spokesperson added.

Ford was among the 20 automotive firms, along with the likes of Tata Motors, Suzuki, Hyundai, Kia and Mahindra & Mahindra, that got approval for the Rs 25,938 crore Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the automobile industry in February this year.

NEWSBRIEFS

SC refuses to grant interim relief on pleas seeking stay on LIC-IPO share allotment

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to grant any interim relief and stay the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) IPO share allotment on a batch of pleas filed by some policy holders. A bench of Justices DY Chandrachud, Surya Kant and PS Narasimha said that the court should be reluctant to grant any interim relief in matters of commercial investments and IPO. We are not inclined to grant any interim relief, the bench said as it issued notice to the Centre and LIC on the batch of pleas seeking their response within eight weeks. The bench said that on the aspect of interim relief the court must be guided by the well settled principle of prima facie case, balance of convenience and whether there is any irreparable injury. The LIC-IPO opened on May 4 for retail and other investors and is set to be allotted on Thursday. The bench noted that one of the pleas has challenged the interim order passed by the Bombay High Court and disposed it, saying the writ petition before the high court will be transferred to the apex court. The top court tagged the batch of pleas with a pending matter referred to a Constitution bench on the issue of passage of the Finance Act, 2021 as a money bill.

SBI Q4 profit jumps 41% to Rs 9,114 cr on fall in bad loans

NEW DELHI: The country's largest lender SBI on Friday reported a 41% surge in stand-alone net profit at Rs 9,114 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2022, helped by decline in bad loans. State Bank of India (SBI) had registered a profit of Rs 6,451 crore during January-March period of 2020-21, the lender said in a regulatory filing. Total income of the bank during the March quarter increased marginally to Rs 82,613 crore, from Rs 81,327 crore in the same period of the previous fiscal. On a consolidated basis, the bank reported a 56 per cent increase in net profit at Rs 9,549 crore, compared to Rs 6,126 crore in the fourth quarter of the previous fiscal. With regard to asset quality, gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of the bank declined to 3.97 per cent of gross advances as on March 31, 2022, as against 4.98 per cent by the same period of 2021. Net NPA or bad loans too came down to 1.02 per cent as on March 31, 2022 from 1.50 per cent in the year-ago period. For the entire financial year 2021-22, the bank reported a 55 per cent rise in stand-alone profit at Rs 31,676 crore, from Rs 20,410 crore in the previous financial year.

Amendment in Defence Acquisition Procedure will boost domestic manufacturing : Ministry of Defence

NEW DELHI: MSME is the very structure or the base of any country and without it, development of any country is impossible. The Indian government has taken several proactive measures to not only actively support MSMEs, but also help them grow, stated the honourable Minister of State (MoS) of the Ministry of Defence and Tourism, Ajay Bhatt.



Speaking at a webinar on "AEROSPACE & DEFENCE Future of Make-I, Make-II, Strategic Partnership Model & iDEX Projects" organised by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) on 5th May 2022, where he was the chief guest, Bhatt stated that India will soon become a self-reliant nation and will have less dependency on imports. "The central government's 'Make in India' initiative aims to boost and encourage the MSME sector as well as local manufacturing," he said.

Cosmo Films Q4 profit up 45 pc to Rs 108 cr

Cosmo Films has reported an increase of 45.30 per cent in consolidated net profit at Rs 108.18 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2022, helped by higher sales and better operating margins.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 74.45 crore for January-March period a year ago, Cosmo Films said in a BSE filing.

Revenue from operations was at Rs 820.88 crore as against Rs 671.80 crore in the year-ago period.

«The Q4FY22 EBITDA has increased by 31 per cent on the back of higher speciality sales, better operating margins and uptick performance by subsidiaries. Enhanced EBITDA together with lower effective tax rate led to increasing in PAT by 45 per cent,» said an earning statement from Cosmo Films.

Total expenses were higher 20.77 per cent at Rs 705.46 crore as against Rs 584.13 crore.

For the fiscal year ended March 2022, Cosmo Films consolidated net profit was up 67.41 per cent at Rs 396.61 crore. It logged a net profit of Rs 236.90 crore in 2020-21. Revenue from operation was at Rs 3,038.39 crore in 2021-22. This was 32.96 per cent higher than Rs 2,285.18 crore in the previous year. In a separate filing, Cos-

mo Films said its board in a meeting held on Monday approved the change in name of the company from Cosmo Films Ltd to Cosmo First Ltd and consequent alteration in the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the company.

This has been done considering that the company's business activities have expanded beyond films into speciality chemicals (master batches, coatings, textile chemicals and soon-to-launch adhesives), D2C Pet care and soon-to-launch

films for consumer applications, it said. The decision is subject to the approval of shareholders.

The board has also approved issue of bonus equity shares in the proportion of one equity share of Rs 10 each for every two existing shares of Rs 10 each held by the shareholders of the company as on the record date.

«We have made inspired diversifications into Speciality Chemicals, Consumer care and D2C retail, aiming to be a pioneer in previously fragmented industries. In coming years, the company's growth will be driven by Films Division (Specialized Polyester line, largest CPP and BOPP line) as well as growth into consumer care, specialty chemicals & Pet care business, Cosmo Films Group CEO Pankaj Poddar said.



Public sector general insurers may get capital infusion of Rs 3,000-5,000 cr

NEW DELHI: Union government may infuse Rs 3,000-5,000 crore additional capital in the three public sector general insurance companies based on their performance and requirement during the year, sources said.

The capital infusion would help improve the financial health of the general insurance firms—National Insurance Company Limited, Oriental Insurance Company Limited and United India Insurance Company.

In the last financial year, the government made capital infusion of Rs 5,000 crore in these three insurance companies.

During 2020-21, Rs 9,950 crore was infused in three PSU general insurers by the government out of which Rs 3,605 crore was infused in United India Insurance, Rs 3,175 crore in National Insurance and Rs 3,170 crore in Oriental Insurance.

Fund support was given to the weak general insurance companies last financial year, some more fund requirement is there to bring them back on profitability path, sources said.

Capital infusion of Rs 3,000-5,000 crore may be done in these companies based on their performance, sources said, adding, the government has already



enhanced their authorised capital keeping further fund infusion in mind.

The three public sector general insurers are short of solvency margin and to improve operational efficiencies an external consultant will be appointed soon.

Four public sector firms through General Insurers' Public Sector Association of India or GIPSA have issued a request for proposal (RFP) to reorganise the insurers, and achieve profitability and employee development.

«There is a proposal for restructuring the organisation to bring in profitable growth and employee development through performance management and capability management, in alignment with the Key performance indicators (KPIs) devised by the Public Sector

General Insurance Companies (PSGICs),» the RFP said.

The last date for submission of bids is June 2, 2022.

Of the four state-run general insurance companies only New India Assurance Company is listed on the stock exchanges; the remaining three are wholly owned by the government.

It is to be noted that the government has already announced intention to privatise one general insurance company. To facilitate privatisation, Parliament has already approved amendments to the General Insurance Business (Nationalisation) Act (GIBNA). Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Budget 2021-22 had announced a big-ticket privatisation agenda which included two public sector banks and one general insurance company. **AGENCIES**

Cryptocurrency market crashes since past fortnight

Cryptocurrency market has endured a face-ripping freefall over the past fortnight. Fear and panic gripped the market as Bitcoin, the world's first digital currency, tanked below \$30,000 twice in a week, its lowest level in 16 months. Other blue-chip cryptos fell, with losses ranging from 30 percent to 90%.



There was also a setback for the Terra Protocol and its ecosystem, which were supposed to maintain stability in the crypto market. The UST – the protocol's algorithmic stablecoin – lost its peg and dropped to about \$0.001. Amid the Terra Luna crash, Binance, one of the largest crypto exchanges, delisted the UST-linked \$LUNA token. The cryptocurrency fell by over 99 percent.

Here's a look at the reasons for the crash, whether this is a good time to buy, and what investors can expect from the markets in the future.

Reasons behind the crash : Inflation, the US Federal Re-

serve raising interest rates, and the war in Ukraine pumping up oil prices have all dampened market sentiment, which spread to crypto as well.

Cryptocurrencies were presented as an asset class separate from the financial markets, untouched by the instabilities of the stock markets. However, the past two weeks have shown that cryptos are not insulated from the broader market sentiment. An estimated \$200 billion of investor wealth was wiped out last week.

Strategy for those invested in crypto : For those invested in the crypto markets, there is no need to panic even though things may not look good now.

DRI foils attempts of gold smuggling, seizes 11 kg gold worth more than Rs 5.88 crore in Lucknow & Mumbai

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has successfully foiled attempts of organised gold smuggling through air route by effecting two successive seizures in Lucknow and Mumbai last week, which had a common method of concealment of gold.

After having developed precise intelligence, on 06.05.2022, officers of Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) inspected a consignment which had arrived

from Dubai at Air Cargo Complex, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai.

In the import documents, the item was declared as "sectional & drum type drain cleaning machines", but on careful examination, 5.8 kg gold valued at Rs. 3.10 crore in disc form was found concealed inside two motor rotors of the machine imported in the said consignment. The importer was located in south Mumbai and



was arrested in swift action. The importer has been sent to judicial

CGST Mumbai West Zone busts tax fraud on bogus bills of around Rs. 60 Crore

CGST Commissionerate, Mumbai West Zone has busted a fake GST Input Tax Credit (ITC) racket and arrested the proprietor of a Versova based company.



Acting on a tip off received from Central Intelligence Unit of CGST Mumbai Zone, an investigation was initiated against M/s NECIL Metal Dealers Pvt Ltd, which deals in trading of ferrous metal and scrap.

The company was involved in fraudulent availing and passing of GST Input Tax Credit (ITC) of Rs 10.01 Crore without receiving or supply of goods, in gross violation of the provisions of CGST Act, 2017. Bogus bills of around Rs. 60 Crore were issued for this tax fraud. One of the director of this company was arrested in January 2022 but another director was absconding. He was traced on 11.05.22 and his statement was recorded wherein he admitted his role in tax fraud.

He was arrested under Section 69 of CGST Act, 2017 for contravention of Section 132 of CGST Act, 2017 and produced

before the Hon'ble Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Esplanade on 11.05.2022. The Magistrate has remanded him to 14 days judicial custody. Further investigation is under progress.

This case is a part of special drive initiated by CGST Mumbai Zone to stamp out fake ITC networks and tax evaders. As a part of this drive Mumbai West Commissionerate has unearthed fake ITC amounting to Rs.465 Crore, recovered Rs. 35 Crore and arrested five tax evaders, during last six months.

The CGST officers are using data analysis and network analysis tools to identify potential fraudsters. Department is going to intensify the drive against tax evaders in this financial year.

DRI seizes 62 kg heroin with estimated worth of Rs. 434 crore at Air Cargo Complex, IGI Airport, New Delhi

Continuing its crackdown on the trafficking in narcotic drugs, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has unearthed yet another novel modus operandi and affected seizure of 62 kg Heroin on 10.05.2022 after interdicting an air cargo consignment. This is one of the biggest seizures of Heroin till date through courier/air passenger modes in India.



In an operation code-named "BLACK & WHITE", the DRI seized 55 kg of Heroin from an imported cargo consignment, which was declared to contain "Trolley Bags". The offending cargo, originating from Entebbe in Uganda, had arrived at the Air

Cargo Complex, Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport, New Delhi via Dubai. Swift follow up operations in two States, namely Punjab and Haryana, led to

recovery of yet another 7 kg of Heroin and Rs. 50 Lakh in cash. The value of the 62 kg seized Heroin is estimated at Rs. 434 crore in the illicit market.

Escorts Q4 net drops 28% to Rs 190 cr

NEW DELHI: Farm machinery and construction equipment major Escorts Ltd on Friday reported a 28.42 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 189.98 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2022, impacted by lower sales.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 265.41 crore in the same quarter of the previous fiscal. Escorts said in a regulatory filing.

Consolidated revenue from operations during the quarter under review stood at Rs 1,878.51 crore as against Rs 2,228.75 crore in the year-ago period.

For the quarter ended March 2022, tractor volumes were at 21,895 units, down 32.8 per cent as against 32,588 units in the year-ago period, the company said.

Construction equipment sales in the fourth quarter were at 1,286 units, down 19.8 per cent from 1,604 units earlier.

For the fiscal ended March 31, 2022, Escorts said its consolidated net profit was at Rs 735.61 crore as compared to Rs 871.63 crore in the previous

fiscal, down 15.6 per cent.

Revenue from operations for FY22 came in at Rs 7,238.43 crore as compared to Rs 7,014.42 crore in FY21.

Escorts Ltd Chairman and Managing Director Nikhil Nanda said the farm sector is seeing some positive tailwinds.

«With prediction of a normal monsoon and good news on crop prices and production, we hope this sector will continue to flourish,» he said, adding the construction and railway sectors have also shown signs of improvement.

With government spending focused on these sectors, the situation shall only improve from here, Nanda added.

However, he said, «Continued inflation is a big cause of worry, both in terms of suppressing potential demand as well as for ecosystem profitability.»

Escorts said its Board of Directors has recommended a final dividend of 70 per cent, at Rs 7 per share of face value Rs 10 for the financial year 2021-22.

SpiceJet, Axis Bank launch co-branded credit card

SpiceJet and Axis Bank on Thursday launched a co-branded credit card that will come in two variants, the airline said in a statement.

The card is designed to enable customers use the rewards earned on their daily spends for booking flights and add-ons, thus encouraging both travel and digital payments embedded with benefits of the SpiceJet frequent flyer programme, SpiceClub, it said.

SpiceJet CMD Ajay Singh and Axis Bank CEO and MD Amitabh Chaudhary unveiled a special livery based on this credit card on the airline's Boeing 737 Max aircraft, the statement said.

The two variants of the card have been named SpiceJet Axis Bank Voyage and SpiceJet Axis Bank Voyage Black, it added. Singh said SpiceJet is the pioneer of the frequent flyer programme for budget airlines in the country, and the partnership with Axis Bank significantly strengthens the value offering of SpiceClub. «The two teams (SpiceJet and Axis Bank) will work together to bring in the synergies, with best of offers and services, thereby truly making a difference to the customers and their travel experience,» Chaudhary said.

ADB hints at providing USD 2.5 billion loan to cash-strapped Pakistan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has indicated that it will provide USD 2.5 billion in additional loans to Pakistan, including USD 1.5 billion before the end of this year, to help the cash-starved country which is in dire need of foreign assistance due to its depleting forex reserves and growing repayments and import financing requirements.

Ghous Pasha and Country Director of the ADB Yong Ye, The Express Tribune newspaper reported on Friday.

The ADB indicated the additional support of USD 2.5 billion for the next fiscal year, from which USD 1.5 billion to USD 2 billion can be available in the ongoing calendar year, according to the finance ministry.

The finance ministry sources said the ADB indicated that it could provide USD 1.5 billion under the Counter-Cyclical



Finance Facility and another roughly USD 400 million under the energy sector policy loans, the report said.

However, it will be an uphill task to secure the USD 1.5 billion facility on priority due to

L&T bags order from Rajasthan govt

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Friday said it has bagged a significant order from the Rajasthan government for executing a parallel carrier system to the Rajiv Gandhi Lined Canal.

According to L&T's project classification, the value of the order falls between Rs 1,000-2,500 crore.

The project will serve the water demands of districts of Jodhpur, Pali and Barmer and also supply raw water to Delhi Mumbai Industrial Corridor and Rajasthan State Industrial Development Investment Corporation Ltd (RIICO). «The water and effluent treatment business of L&T Construction has secured a design and build order from Public Health Engineering Department, Jodhpur Rajasthan to execute a Parallel Carrier System to the Rajiv Gandhi Lined Canal (RGLC Phase III) on a single point responsibility basis,» the company said in a statement. The scope of work under the project includes 213 kilometre of raw water mild steel transmission mains, four pump houses along with associated electrical works.

L&T is an Indian multinational engaged in engineering, procurement, and construction projects, hi-tech manufacturing and services. The company operates in over 50 nations across the world.

Dalmia Bharat Q4 profit down 6% to Rs 600 cr

Cement maker Dalmia Bharat has reported 6.10% decline in consolidated net profit at Rs 600 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2022.



It had clocked a net profit of Rs 639 crore in the year-ago period, Dalmia Bharat said in a regulatory filing.

However, revenue from operations was up 7.26 per cent to Rs 3,380 crore during the quarter under review as against Rs 3,151 crore in the same period a year ago.

Total expenses were at Rs 3,077 crore as against Rs 2,770 crore. Sales volume was also up 3.12 per cent in January-March 2021-22 to 6.6 million tonne as against 6.4 million tonne in the year-ago period.

For the fiscal year ended March 2022, the consolidated net profit was marginally down at Rs 1,173 crore from Rs 1,183 crore in 2020-21.

Revenue from operation was at Rs 11,288 crore in 2021-22. This was 11.65 per cent higher than Rs 10,110 crore in the previous year.

In 2021-22, sales volume was 22.2 million tonne, up 7.3 per cent from the previous year's.

Through proactive cost containment measures, our teams have successfully mitigated the adverse inflationary impact and delivered one of the lowest total costs per tonne of cement alongside a volume growth in line with the industry. The recent strong recovery in demand and prices across all our operating regions is highly encouraging.

«While the margins may continue to remain under pressure, we are undertaking proactive measures to retain our cost leadership and deliver sustainable earnings growth. We continue to be on track to reach capacity of 48.5 million tonne by March '24,» Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Managing Director and CEO Mahendra Singhi said.

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INTERNATIONAL

NEWSBRIEF

Russian ambassador to Poland hit with red paint



Protesters threw red paint on the Russian ambassador on Monday as he arrived at a cemetery in Warsaw to pay respects to Red Army soldiers who died during World War II. Ambassador Sergey Andreev arrived at the Soviet soldiers cemetery to lay flowers, where a group of activists opposed to Russia's war in Ukraine were waiting for him.

AGENCIES

UAE Minister of Economy meets Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

H.E. Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri, UAE Minister of Economy, United Arab Emirates made a courtesy call on Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister in New Delhi, today. Both sides discussed the strong economic and commercial engagement between the India-UAE and the comprehensive strategic partnership which is driving the multifaceted bilateral relations. H.E. Abdulla Bin Touq Al Marri and a high-level UAE delegation are in New Delhi for India-UAE Economic Partnership Summit - "India-UAE CEPA: Unleashing the Golden Era". Such regular exchanges and bilateral meetings further deepen India's engagement and harness newer areas while maximally exploiting the existing institutional arrangements.

Zelenskyy says Ukraine to soon have Victory Day

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy released a video address to the war-ravaged nation on Monday, marking the defeat of the Nazi Germany in the World War II, and promising that Ukraine will soon have two Victory Days. We will never forget what our ancestors did in World War II. Where more than 8 million Ukrainians died. And every fifth Ukrainian didn't return home. In total, the war claimed at least 50 million lives, Zelenskyy said.

AGENCIES

Sri Lanka's new PM Wickremesinghe says he is looking forward to closer ties with India

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has said that he looks forward to closer ties with India during his tenure and thanked India for its economic support as it is the worst economic crisis since independence. "I want closer ties and I want to thank Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi," said Wickremesinghe, referring to Indian economic aid to his country.

His remarks came during a religious ceremony held after he was sworn in here last night. India has pledged more than USD in loans, credit lines and credit swaps to debt-ridden Sri Lanka since January this year.

India said on Thursday that it was looking forward to working with the new government of Sri Lanka, a democratic process, and that New Delhi's commitment to the people of the island would continue.

The 73-year-old leader of the



United National Party (UNP) took over as prime minister because the country had no government since Monday when President Gotabaya Raja Pakshe's elder brother and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa attacked his opponent after violence erupted. Had resigned Government protesters on behalf of his supporters. The attack sparked widespread violence against Raja Pakshe's loyalists, killing nine people and injuring more

than 200. Wickremesinghe said his focus was on dealing with the economic crisis.

Wickremesinghe said, "I want to solve this problem to ensure the supply of petrol, diesel and electricity to the people." Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis since gaining independence from Britain in 1948, doing. The crisis is partly due to a shortage of foreign exchange, which means the country cannot afford to pay for food and fuel imports, short-

ages and high prices.

"I will do what I set out to do." Asked if he could retain his PM post in the 225-member parliament, which has only one seat, he said: "When it comes down to it, I will prove a majority." Citing protests across the island, Wickremesinghe said the central protest, which had been going on for more than a month near the secretariat of President Gotabaya Raja Pakshe, would now be allowed to continue.

"I will talk to them (the protesters) if they want," he said. Asked if he feared for his life, he said he would face them. "If I can work on the economic crisis, I will handle it," he said. Wickremesinghe was appointed Prime Minister as the main opposition party. What Wickremesinghe is the head of the interim government in which all political parties have to become stakeholders for a limited period before facilitating parliamentary elections.

Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif meets brother Nawaz Sharif in London

LONDON: The first session of the crucial Pakistan Muslim League (N) huddle in London decided that there will be no early elections in Islamabad and the primary focus of the Shehbaz Sharif-led government should be on providing economic relief to the citizens and taking long-term economic decisions.

The six-hour-long meeting was held among Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, his brother and the party supremo Nawaz Sharif and other leaders, including Khwaja Asif, Miftah Ismail, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Atta Tarar, Rana Sanaullah, Ishaq Dar, Ayaz Sadiq, at an undisclosed location in London, The News International citing sources.

Notably, the former Prime Minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan has been continuously calling for early general elections in the country since he lost the no-confidence motion in the National Assembly.

Sources said that Nawaz Sharif sought suggestions on various issues, including early elections from all the party leaders, and everyone agreed that the PML-N should implement the economic agenda for the remaining term and then announce the next elections in consultation with the coalition partners.

Soon after the meeting, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said that the party leaders and Prime Minister presented a full report on Pakistan's social, economic and political situation to the



supremo and briefed him on the agenda of the government and its planning.

"Nawaz Sharif is our Quid. The meeting between Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif was long overdue. We have inherited today's Pakistan in a written-off situation and we needed to review the whole situation to formulate a plan. This was a private delegation," she said, as per The News International.

Shehbaz Sharif arrived in London to meet his brother Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday.

Nawaz, who is convicted in a corruption case, has been living in London on the pretext of ill health since 2019. The former Pakistan PM sought extensions to prolong

Nawaz Sharif former PM of Pakistan, who is convicted in a corruption case, has been living in London on the pretext of ill health since 2019.

his stay in London on medical grounds.

According to Nawaz, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government had left Pakistan in a deep economic crisis. Last month, Nawaz had also conducted meetings with PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, who was later appointed Pakistan's federal minister. The two allies had agreed to work closely to "repair the rot across the board," read a joint statement.

Sri Lankan PM Mahinda Rajapaksa resigns

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned on Monday, hours after his supporters attacked anti-government protesters outside embattled President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office, leaving at least 78 people injured and prompting authorities to impose a nationwide curfew and deploy army troops in the capital. At least two Cabinet ministers have also announced their resignations.

Prime Minister Mahinda, 76, sent his resignation let-



ter to the President Gotabaya Rajapaksa after violent scenes

were witnessed in Colombo.

The violence occurred as pressure mounted on the embattled government led by his younger brother and President Gotabaya to form an interim administration to overcome the worst economic crisis facing the country.

Sri Lanka is currently in the throes of unprecedented economic turmoil since its independence from Britain in 1948. The crisis is caused in part by a lack of foreign currency, which has meant

that the country cannot afford to pay for imports of staple foods and fuel, leading to acute shortages and very high prices.

Thousands of demonstrators have hit the streets across Sri Lanka since April 9 seeking resignation of President Gotabaya and Prime Minister Mahinda, as the government ran out of money for vital imports; prices of essential commodities have skyrocketed and there are acute shortages in fuel, medicines and electricity supply.

Pak returns body of minor Indian boy in J-K's Poonch

Pakistani authorities on Tuesday handed over the body of a 12-year-old Indian boy who drowned in a river in his home town in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir last week and swept away across the Line of Control (LoC) by the strong current, officials said.

Zamin Rasool, a resident of Surankote, drowned while taking a bath in Pulas river near S K Bridge on May 3 and his body could not be traced by the rescue parties, the officials said.

The rescue operation was stopped Monday evening when the Pakistani Army informed



their Indian counterparts about the recovery of a body from Tetrinote area in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the officials said.

PM Modi to visit Lumbini in Nepal on May 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay an official visit to Lumbini in Nepal on May 16 on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday.

Modi is visiting the neighbouring country at the invitation of Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba.

It will be Prime Minister Modi's fifth visit to Nepal since 2014. "At Lumbini, the prime minister will visit the sacred Mayadevi temple to offer prayers. The prime minister will also deliver an address at a Bud-



dha Jayanti event organised by the Lumbini Development Trust under the aegis of the Government of Nepal," the MEA said.

Separately, the prime minister will participate in the "shilanyas" (foundation stone laying) ceremony of a centre for

Buddhist culture and heritage in a plot belonging to the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), New Delhi within the Lumbini Monastic Zone, it said.

Both the prime ministers will hold a bilateral meeting. "Prime Minister Modi's visit continues the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between India and Nepal in furtherance of our Neighbourhood First policy," the MEA said.

"It underscores the shared civilisational heritage of the people of both countries," it said in a statement.

Poonawalla woos Musk to invest in making Tesla cars in India



Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla on Sunday wooed Elon Musk to invest in India to manufacture Tesla electric cars, saying it will be the best investment he would have ever made.

Musk, who has made a successful USD 44 billion acquisition bid for Twitter, had in the past asked India to reduce import duties to sell Tesla electric cars but the government has insisted on local manufacturing.

In a post on Twitter, tagging Musk, Poonawalla said, "... just in case you don't end up buying @Twitter, do look at investing some of that capital in INDIA for high-quality large-scale manufacturing of @Tesla cars."

He further said, "I assure you this will be the best investment you'll ever make." Last month, Union Road

Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari had said if Tesla was ready to manufacture its electric vehicles in India then there was 'no problem' but the company must not import cars from China.

In August last year, Musk had said that American electric vehicle maker Tesla may set up manufacturing unit in India if it first succeeds with imported vehicles in the country.

He had said Tesla wanted to launch its vehicles in India "but import duties are the highest in the world by far of any large country!"

Currently, India imposes 100 per cent import duty on fully imported cars with CIF (Cost, Insurance and Freight) value more than USD 40,000 and 60 per cent on those costing less than the amount.

Trump, emboldened after Ohio victory, faces challenges ahead

Fresh off a victory in the first real test of his power as GOP kingmaker, former President Donald Trump enters the next stretch of the mid-term campaign emboldened and facing new risks.

Trump's late-stage endorsement of JD Vance in Ohio's GOP Senate primary catapulted the Hillbilly Elegy author to victory in last week's election, reinforcing the deep ties the former president holds among the most loyal Republican voters.

Every single candidate that I endorsed won their primaries on Tuesday, Trump crowed at a Friday night rally in Pennsylvania, where he held up Vance



as a trophy of his achievement.

Tuesday's primary results are just the latest proof that we have transformed the face of the Republican Party. Thank goodness."

With Trump trying to assert his dominance over the party ahead of another potential presi-

dential run, some allies say the Ohio victory could encourage him to step up his involvement in other bitter primary fights from Arizona to Missouri, where a former governor and current US Senate candidate, Eric Greitens, is facing allegations of abuse. But there's also caution that the coming phase of the campaign, which continues on Tuesday with a tight GOP race for governor in Nebraska, could be more complicated for Trump.

Round one to Trump, but I think it gets an awful lot harder from here, said Dan Eberhart, a GOP donor who spent time last week at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club.

Union Agriculture Minister visits Agri companies in Israel

A delegation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, led by the Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar, on a visit to Israel, visited Israel based Green 2000 - Agricultural Equipment and Know How Ltd. and NETAFIM Ltd. During the interaction with the Israeli representatives, Tomar said that the relations established between India and Israel in the agricultural sector will give new dimensions to the Indian agriculture sector. In recent years, our ties have further strengthened and the future



vision of cooperation is in the form of a strong hi-tech partnership for both knowledge-based economies.

The delegation led by Union Minister Tomar interacted with the experts of these companies on various developmental aspects related to modern

farming practices. During the visit, nursery practices, planting material of fruit-trees and vineyards, post-harvest technology, greenhouse farming, micro and smart irrigation systems and improved dairy and poultry farming were the main topics of discussion.

Asian stocks mixed, China gains ahead of US price data

Shares were mixed in Asia on Wednesday with Chinese benchmarks pressing higher after a rally in technology companies helped reverse most of an early slide on Wall Street.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 1.1 per cent to 19,853.66 and the Shanghai Composite index climbed 1.4 per cent to 3,079.40.

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 added 0.3 per cent to 26,249.83 while the S&P 500 edged 0.1 per cent lower to 7,041.20. In Seoul, the Kospi was unchanged at 2,596.63.

Investors are awaiting the release later Wednesday of the Labor Department's report on consumer prices for April.

On Thursday, it will release its report on producer prices, or wholesale prices that impact businesses, for April.

The pace of price increases will influence the Federal Reserve's strategy on interest rates and other monetary policy.

The concern is that aggressive action to tame inflation might cause the economy to tip into recession.

Some wait-and-see is largely in place, as participants refrain from taking on excessive risks while awaiting how markets will react to the expected decline in US CPI - the first in seven months," Jun Rong Yeap of IG said in a commentary.

Stocks ended mixed on Wall Street Tuesday after a rally in technology companies helped reverse most of an early slide.

Hong Kong leader says China patriots now firmly in charge

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam on Monday said Chinese patriots are now firmly in charge of the city following the election of its new leader, who ran unopposed in a process controlled by Beijing from start to finish.

Lam's comments came a day after a carefully vetted election committee voted overwhelmingly to approve John Lee, a hard-line security chief who oversaw a crackdown on Hong Kong's pro-democracy movement.

The crackdown led to the imposition by Beijing of a sweeping National Security Law and the reorganization of the regional legislature. Political opponents were subsequently jailed, dissenting voices silenced and the organized opposition quashed.

Appearing with Lee, Lam said such changes were necessary to restore order and stability in the Asian financial hub. I want to thank the central government again for taking resolute measures when Hong Kong faced unprecedented challenges," said Lam, who



is stepping away after a single five-year term as leader. It formulated the National Security Law, which helped Hong Kong transform from chaos to order, and also improved Hong Kong's electoral system so that we can achieve long-term peace and stability, Lam said.

Lee won more than 99% of the vote cast by the 1,500 members of the election committee. While China cited the need to restore order as the motivation for political change in Hong Kong, the demand that only patriots defined as

those loyal to the ruling Communist Party could hold office was a central theme.

The establishment of the political system of patriots running Hong Kong is vital for Hong Kong's future, Lam said.

Lee will replace Lam on July 1 and take over a city that has in the past five years been through the tumultuous days of the 2019 pro-democracy protests, the ensuing crackdown and the recent coronavirus outbreak that overwhelmed Hong Kong's health care system and prompted Beijing to send in medics and

build temporary quarantine facilities. The handover of power will incorporate the formation of a new government, continuation of epidemic control measures and preparations for the 25th anniversary celebration of Hong Kong's return to Chinese rule.

Lee said he and Lam exchanged views on forming a new government during their Monday morning meeting, but gave no indication of any new direction for his administration.

Lee has said he wants to ensure Hong Kong's position as a center for financial deal-making while improving quality of life for the 7.4 million citizens of one of the world's most expensive cities. However, national security concerns are expected to trump all other issues, fueling speculation about a further deterioration of civil rights, free speech and the rule of law.

Lam said her government would render all the necessary assistance and support to assist with the handover, ensuring Lee will lead Hong Kong to a greater height in the next five years.

Elon Musk puts on hold \$44 billion deal for Twitter

Elon Musk tweeted that his \$44-billion deal for Twitter Inc was "temporarily on hold" on Friday while he waits for data on the proportion of its fake accounts, sending shares in the social media platform plunging.

Elon Musk, the world's richest man, had said that one of his priorities would be to remove "spam bots" from Twitter.

Tesla CEO Musk, who added that he was still committed to the acquisition, decided to waive due diligence when he agreed to buy Twitter on April 25, in an effort to get the San Francisco-based company to accept his "best and final offer".

Since then, technology stocks have plunged amid investor concerns over inflation and a potential economic slowdown.

The spread between the offer price and the value of Twitter shares had widened in recent days, implying less than a 50% chance of completion, as investors speculated that the downturn would prompt Musk to walk or seek a lower price.

"Twitter deal temporarily on hold pending details supporting calculation that spam/fake accounts do indeed represent less than 5% of users," Musk told his more than 92 million Twitter followers.

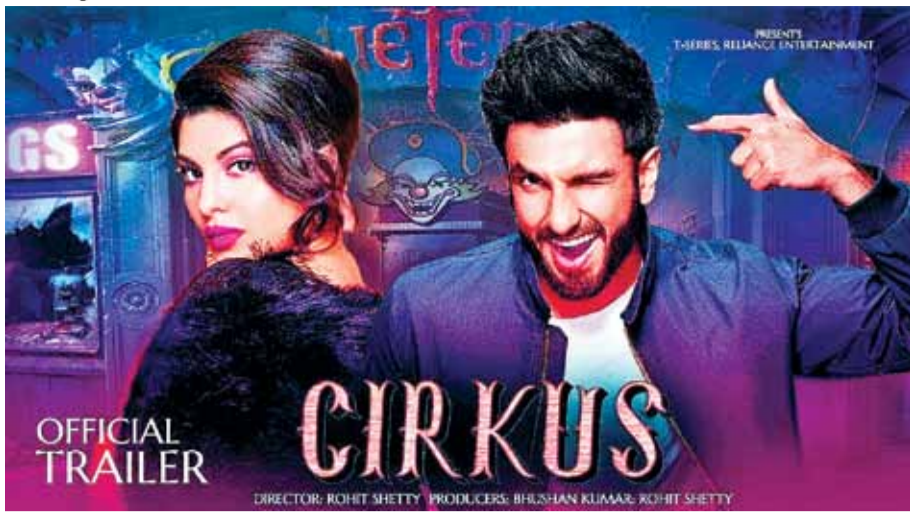
Twitter did not immediately respond to a request for comment. There was no immediate reaction from the investors that Musk tapped last week to raise \$7.1 billion in funding.

Musk tweeted a Reuters story from ten days ago that cited the fake account figures. Twitter has said that the figures were an estimate and that the actual number may be higher.



Rohit Shetty's 'Cirkus' books Christmas 2022 release

MUMBAI: Filmmaker Rohit Shetty's upcoming comedy «Cirkus», headlined by Ranveer Singh, is set to release theatrically on December 23. The film is based on William Shakespeare's classic play «The Comedy of Errors», which revolves around two sets of identical twins, who were accidentally separated at birth. «Cirkus» also stars Pooja Hegde, Jaqueline Fernandez and Varun Sharma. This will be Shetty's third collaboration with Singh after their blockbuster «Simmba» and last year's «Sooryavanshi», in which he featured in an extended cameo.



«Cirkus» is a complete family entertainer. There's no better time than the Christmas holidays to celebrate the film in cinemas everywhere,» the filmmaker said in a statement. Shetty, known for his hit comedies like the «Golmaal» franchise and his cop universe films «Singham» and «Sooryavanshi», also shared the film's poster on his Instagram page. «It's time to bring our audience back to the cinemas... Once again! «Golmaal» released 16 years ago and the love you all gave me made me what I am today! «Cirkus» is a Christmas gift for you and your family! Kyunki iss «Cirkus» mein bohut

sara Golmaal hai,» Shetty, who has also produced the film, wrote. «Cirkus» is presented by Bhushan Kumar led T-Series. The film also features Siddhartha Jadhav, Johnny Lever, Sanjay Mishra and Vrajesh Hirjee, among others. Shetty had described «Cirkus» as an «extremely sweet film». «What you felt for «Golmaal» and «All The Best», you'll feel the same for this one. It's not like a «Sooryavanshi» with a message. When people come out of the theatre watching the film, I want a smile on their face. It is an extremely sweet film,» he had said. **AGENCIES**

POTPOURRI

Vidya Balan-starrer 'Neyyat' shoot commences in UK



Bollywood actress Vidya Balan's next movie, suspense thriller titled 'Neyyat', went on floors in the U.K. on Tuesday. The film, an Amazon Prime Video co-production with Abundantia Entertainment, will see Vidya reuniting with her 'Shakuntala Devi' director Anu Menon. Billed as a nail-biter, the official logline of 'Neyyat' reads: "When guests start dropping dead at exiled billionaire Ashish Kapoor's birthday getaway, detective Mira Rao must unravel devious motives as the suspects are Kapoor's close friends and family." 'Neyyat' is directed by Anu Menon, who has also co-written the story with Advaita Kala and Girvani Dhyani. The screenplay is by Menon, Priya Venkataraman, Kala and Dhyani, and the dialogues by Kausar Munir. The cast comprises Ram Kapoor, Rahul Bose, Mita Vasishth, Neeraj Kabi, Shohana Goswami, Amrita Puri, Dipannita Sharma, Shashank Arora, Prajakta Koli and Danesh Razvi.

'Zidd' Empowers Women ! Daisy Ridley to lead noir thriller 'Magpie'



MANMOHAN SINGH NAULA

It's a melodic way to depict one of the most shameful and horrendous acts: outraging the modesty of children. Sounds ironical, doesn't it! 'Zidd' - portrays in most crudest way the prurient mindset of a society that boasts of having high moral values.

The children receives lascivious wink at their very homes that too by their close relatives, cousins, uncles, aunts, etc., believes Sunetra Palav, granddaughter of legendary actor Bhagwan Dada.

With conviction rate abysmally low, 35 percent, the legal recourse fails to send strong signal to the offenders. This emboldens the perpetrators who keep on committing crime with ruthless impunity. The court should give priority to such cases and provide exemplary punishment to

mom regarding «bad touch» by a stranger. Shocked, the mother started shivering with anger and pain.

She asked her kid about the man's appearance, height and dress. The guards identified the man and he was immediately handed over to the cops.

A friend, on her insistence, took her to a lawyer who advised her not delay and visit social activist....

The lady activist explained her about the POSCO Act. She successfully removed the blinkers that obfuscate the act. She also encouraged her to lodge complaint against the perpetrator to the police and magistrate

Women police officer asks whether there's need to do medical examination. In this case, there wasn't.

The scar on little girl's mind was so deep that she started screaming once the thought recur.

Mother consoles her child and asks her to be courageous and strong. She convinces her that it wasn't her fault so there's no need to budge under guilt conscience.

Sunetra Palav cautions against victim blaming and victim shaming. This defeats the very purpose for which POSCO Act was legislated.

Geeta Kapoor, a prominent choreographer says, «POSCO ACT is an instrument that spurns child abuse but awareness remains a prerequisite. "This act has empowered the women".

It's emotionally heart-wrenching to talk to victims, says Sunetra Palav.



«Star Wars» alum Daisy Ridley will topline an upcoming noir thriller movie, titled «Magpie». The 30-year-old actor will star with Shazad Latif, known for featuring in «Spooks» and «Star Trek: Discovery», in the movie.

According to Deadline, Award-winning British theater talent Sam Yates will make his feature directorial debut with the film, which will also feature actor Matilda Lutz.

Divya Dutta says I was at first hesitant to play a 60-year-old mother on screen

As her latest released Punjabi film 'Maa' is winning many hearts, the protagonist Divya Dutta says even though initially she refused to do the film, eventually she realised it would have been a big mistake to let go of a unique female-centric Punjabi film which is a rare opportunity. The story of the film revolves around Manjot Kaur and her journey from a young bride to a mother of two sons and a series of incidents, ups and downs in her life she deals with till the age of 65.

Divya shared why more than portraying a certain age bracket on-screen, the perspective of the narrative was important for her. «Honestly speaking, initially, I refused to play a mother, that too aged 65 with wrinkled skin and grey hair; but then Gippy (Grewal, producer and actor of the film) came in. He wanted me to hear the whole script before taking the decision. With 15 minutes of narration, I made up my mind to do the film. "It was a complete story of the transformation of a young bride into an older lady and how the duty and love of a mother changed everything in her. It is her story. In a Punjabi film, a story entirely based on a woman's journey does not happen often. Manjot Kaur (her character) is the face of the film." She went on adding, "That



way we can say, this is the first time, in Punjabi cinema, a full-fledged woman-centric film is made and 'Maa' sets the milestone." However, the actress shares how challenging it was for her to play the older version of the character because she believes that the experience of life that comes with time, is tougher to portray on-screen. "While I enjoyed the whole process of prosthetic, grey hair and everything on the surface to look like the character, bringing the feel, the nuances into the performance was tough. But I think, like the way in every difficult situation we look up to our mother, here, I did the same. Perhaps that is why after the release of the film, everyone, who knew my mother Dr Nalini Dutta, told me that they saw the reflection of my mother in the film.

First ever Jammu and Kashmir film festival to be held in June

The Film Development Council in collaboration with the National Film Development Corporation and the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is organizing the first-ever National Film Festival of Jammu and Kashmir.

The festival will commence on June 15 and end on June 20. This is going to be the first time that the Jammu and Kashmir National Film Festival is



going to take place in the UT. This development will be an opportunity to bring the films, music, artists, and filmmakers

to the Valley.

Indian filmmakers and music producers, and artists have been invited to submit their original films - fiction, documentary, OTT Films or shorts, and Music Videos for the first National Film Festival of Jammu and Kashmir.

Other than this, the festival would organize a Film Award ceremony with 42 awards being distributed in various categories.

Rupinder to lead second-string India in men's Asia Cup hockey

Veteran dragflicker Rupinder Pal Singh, who recently came out of retirement, will lead a second-string Indian men's hockey team in the Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Jakarta from May 23 to June 1.

The 20-member Indian team will have vice-captain in Birendra Lakra, who too has returned from retirement.

Part of India's bronze medal-winning team at the Tokyo Games, both Rupinder and Lakra had announced their retirements after the Olympics but made themselves available for selection later on.

Asia Cup is a World Cup qualifier but India, being the hosts, have a confirmed entry in the big-ticket event, which will



be held in January next year. The top-3 teams in Asia Cup will qualify for the World Cup. The Indian squad includes another veteran in SV Sunil, who too returned from retirement and is regarded a livewire on the field. He, however, was

not part of the Tokyo Olympics squad due to an injury. Defending champions India have been clubbed along side Japan, arch-rivals Pakistan and hosts Indonesia in Pool A, while Malaysia, Korea, Oman and Bangladesh have been grouped in Pool B.

Shooting on 'Mr and Mrs Mahi' begins



Filming on cricket drama «Mr and Mrs Mahi» has started, production house Dharma Productions announced Monday.

The movie reunites «Roohi» (2021) co-stars Rajkummar Rao and Jahnuvi Kapoor. «The field is set and team #MrAndMrsMahi is all geared up! Day 1 of shoot begins!» a tweet shared by the production banner read. Rao and Kapoor will play characters named Mahendra and Mahima, respectively, in «Mr And Mrs Mahi», whose tagline reads: "No dream is ever chased alone."

The film is directed by Sharan Sharma, who made his directorial debut with the 2020 film «Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl» starring Kapoor in the title role. Sharma has collaborated with his «Gunjan Saxena» co-writer Nikhil Mehrotra on this project. Hiroo Yash Johar, Karan Johar and Apoorva Mehta have backed the film for Dharma Productions. The production banner announced «Mr And Mrs Mahi» in November. The film is scheduled to be released in theatres on October 7, 2022.

Badshah's new addition: A luxury car worth Rs 1.23 cr

Popular rapper Badshah has added a new luxury car into his enviable collection. The 'Abhi Toh Party Shuru Hui Hai' hit-maker has bought an Audi Q8 worth a whopping Rs 1.23 crore.

Badshah posted the picture on Instagram. In the image, he is seen posing with his new car dressed in a jacket and black pants as he stood next to the new purchase with one of his hands on it.

He wrote: "Dynamic, sporty, versatile, this car is just like me. I'm excited to start my journey with the #AudiQ8. Thank you for welcoming me to the #AudiExperience @audiin@dhillon_balbir #FutureIsAnAt-



titude." On the work front, Badshah has composed and penned Kargana Rana's 'Dhaakad' song 'She's on Fire'.

He sang the track with Nikita Gandhi. Helmed by Razneesh Ghai, 'Dhaakad' also stars Arjun Rampal and Divya Dutta. It will release on May 20.

Netflix sets premiere date for 'Never Have I Ever' season 3



The third season of coming-of-age dramedy «Never Have I Ever» will premiere on August 12, Netflix said. The streaming platform made the announcement on Sunday as part of the Netflix Is A Joke Fest.

Netflix also released new photos featuring cast Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, Darren Barnet, Jaren Lewison, Richa Moorjani, Poorna Jagannathan, Lee Rodriguez, and Ramona Young.

According to season three stills, it appears that Devi (Ramakrishnan) and Paxton (Barnet) are doing well after he accidentally hit her with his car in the finale of the second season. Created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher, the fourth and final season is expected to premiere sometime in 2023.

The show also stars tennis great John McEnroe who serves as the narrator.

Kiara Advani on comedies: Unfortunately, you can't compare what male co-stars get to do

MUMBAI: Bollywood actor Kiara Advani says it's rare for a female protagonist to do heavy lifting in comedy films as most of the punches and jokes are reserved for male characters.

Advani, who made her debut in 2014, has so far featured in two comedies, the 2019 hit «Good Newwz» and her upcoming «Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2», a mix of horror and humour.

Women in Hindi film comedies are mostly a passive participant unless it is a rare female-led genre film like «Queen» or «Tanu Weds Manu» and Advani agrees that there is scope for women to do more.

«It's very rare that a female protagonist adds a punch. I am still craving to do that. I'm part of these films, they all have had an interesting arc to the characters. But if I've to compare it to what your male protagonist is doing (in the film), then you just can't compare,» Advani, who has found success in romance and drama,



with films like «Kabir Singh», «Guilty» and «Shershaah», said the fact that female actors can't compare with what their male counterparts get to do in comedies is because sometimes «unfortunately that's how (the script) is written». «It definitely does disappoint. Maybe now's the time you start speaking up and telling your director that you want more. Maybe now I will start doing that going forward,» she added.

Advani, 29, believes comedy is a difficult genre to crack and doesn't often get the credit it deserves.

Amazon Studios greenlights third season of 'Upload'

MUMBAI: Amazon Studios on Thursday announced that it has renewed the fan favourite sci-fi comedy series «Upload», from Emmy Award-winning writer Greg Daniels, for a third season.

Daniels is best known for his work on hit shows such as «The Office» and «Parks and Recreation».

The second season of «Upload» premiered March 11, this year. «Upload» is a sci-fi comedy series set in a technologically advanced future where hologram phones, 3D food printers, and automated grocery stores are the norm. Most uniquely, humans can choose to be uploaded into



a virtual afterlife. «Upload» has become a bonafide hit that continues to be one of the most watched comedy originals on Prime Video, said Vernon Sanders, head of global television, Amazon Studios.

The series continues to connect and provoke endless possibilities for the future of technology and humanity.

A complete **KNOWLEDGE CAPSULE**

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