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DISNEY PLUS SETS AUGUST PREMIERE FOR 'SHE-HULK'

CBI raids wrong, party stands behind Chidambaram: Congress

Congress today put its weight behind party leader P Chidambaram, saying the CBI raids against him and his son in connection with an 11-year-old case are "wrong" and aimed at diverting attention from the key issues of inflation and unemployment.

The party also said P Chidambaram is a nationalist and patriot whose commitment to the country is beyond question.

The CBI registered a fresh case against Lok Sabha MP Karti Chidambaram to probe the allegation of facilitating visas of 250 Chinese nationals in lieu of Rs 50 lakh when his father P Chidambaram was Union home minister.

The agency also conducted



coordinated searches at 10 locations in multiple cities including the Chidambarams' residences in Chennai and Delhi. Senior Congress spokesperson Ajay Maken told reporters at a press conference here that the "raids were wrong".

"The Congress party stands

behind P Chidambaram. This is being done to divert the attention of people from the issue of rising inflation and unemployment," he told reporters. "The issue is being raised 12 years later and Chidambaram has also raised questions on the timings of the

raids," Maken said.

Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said, "Mr P Chidambaram is a nationalist and a patriot, whose commitment to the country is unquestionable." "To plant source-based preposterous allegations against a former Home Minister and Finance Minister by CBI reflects the lowest ebb in political discourse," Surjewala said on Twitter.

Chidambaram has also raised questions over the timing of the raids which were conducted on charges dating back 11 years. He said a CBI team searched his residence in Chennai as well as his official residence in Delhi but "found nothing and seized nothing".

"The team showed me an FIR in which I am not named as an accused. The search team found nothing and seized nothing," he said. "I may point out that the timing of the search is interesting," he added. The searches are being conducted at three locations in Chennai, three in Mumbai and one each in Delhi, Karnataka, Punjab and Odisha.

"I have lost count, how many times has it been? Must be a record," Karti tweeted immediately after the CBI raids, without specifying much. Later, he tweeted, "My office has just updated on the 'record' twice in 2015, once in 2017, twice in 2018 and today.

Apex court orders release of Rajiv Gandhi assassination case convict A G Perarivalan

Invoking its extraordinary power under Article 142 of the Constitution, the Supreme Court Wednesday ordered the release of A G Perarivalan, who has served over 30 years in jail in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.

A bench headed by Justice L Nageswara Rao said the Tamil Nadu state cabinet's advice recommending the premature release of all seven convicts in the case was binding on the governor.

The apex court also discarded the Centre's argument that the president exclusively has the power to grant pardon in a case under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code, saying this would render article 161 (power of governor to grant pardon) functionless.

The bench, also comprising Justice B R Gavai, held that states have the power to advise and aid the governor in case of pleas of pardon under article 161 made by convicts in murder cases.

Article 142 of the Constitution deals with the Supreme Court's power to exercise its jurisdiction and pass order for doing complete justice in any cause or matter pending before it. The article was also used in the Ram Jannabhoomi-Babri Masjid land dispute case.

The Centre had earlier de-



fended the Tamil Nadu governor's decision to send the mercy plea of Perarivalan to the president. Additional Solicitor General K M Nataraj had said that only the president can decide the plea regarding remission, commutation and mercy plea of an individual convicted under the central law.

On March 9, the top court had granted bail to Perarivalan while taking note of his long incarceration and no history of complaints when out on parole.

The top court has been hearing pleas including the one in which Perarivalan sought suspension of his life sentence in the case till the Multi-Disciplinary Monitoring Agency (MDMA) probe is completed.

The CBI, in its affidavit of November 20, 2020, had told the apex court that the Tamil Nadu governor has to take a call on grant of remission to Perarivalan.

Later, the governor referred the mercy plea to the President of India saying he does not have the power to decide it.

The mercy plea has been pending since then and the apex court said till the time the legal issue over the power to grant remission is decided, it would grant the bail to the convict.

The CBI had said Perarivalan was not the subject matter of further investigation carried out by the CBI-led MDMA which is conducting a probe on the aspect of larger conspiracy as per the mandate of the Jain Commission report.

BJP works to create divide, Cong to connect with all: Rahul Gandhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday accused the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of trying to create two Hindustans, one for the rich and the other for the poor.

Addressing a rally here, he also lashed out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the state of the economy, accusing him of destroying the economy which was "strengthened" by the former UPA government.

"The Congress, he said, works to connect with all while the BJP works to create a divide.

The BJP and Modi want to create two Hindustans, one for the rich and select two-three industrialists, and the other of Dalits, farmers, the poor and underprivileged while the Congress wants only one Hindustan, he said, adding, "This is the fight in the country". The Congress leader said there is a fight between two ideologies in the country.

The Congress says that we have to move forward while



connecting with all, respect and protect the culture of all. The BJP works to divide, 'crush' and 'suppress'. (BJP) works to remove history and culture of tribals, he said in the tribal dominated area of southern Rajasthan. We work to connect while they work to divide. We help the weaker and they help selected top industrialists, he said.

The Congress leader, who has been targeting the government over the state of the economy and issue of unemployment, said, "The BJP government has attacked our economy. PM did demonetisation, wrongly implemented GST due to which the

economy got destroyed. UPA worked to strengthen the economy but Narendra Modi caused harm to our economy". Every youth knows that they cannot get jobs in Hindustan today. Inflation is increasing, he said.

Gandhi said the Centre brought three laws against farmers which had to be withdrawn after protests and charged that two-three select industrialists were supposed to get full advantage of the laws.

Noting that there is a very old and deep relation of the Congress with tribals, he said, "We protect your history, we don't want to suppress or delete your history. When we had the UPA government at the Centre, we had brought historic laws to protect the forest and water of tribals".

Praising the Ashok Gehlot led Congress government, Gandhi said it is working for the interest of farmers, tribals, Dalits and all sections of society.

Yasin Malik convicted in terror funding case

A Delhi court on Thursday convicted Kashmiri separatist leader and Yasin Malik in a terror funding case. The quantum of the sentence will be announced on May 25.

Malik had earlier pleaded guilty to all charges, including those under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), in a terror funding case.

Malik had told the court that he was not contesting the charges levelled against him. Special Judge Praveen Singh directed the NIA authorities to assess Malik's financial situation to determine the amount of fine to be imposed.

The court had earlier also formally framed the charges against Kashmiri separatist leaders including Farooq Ahmed Dar alias Bitta Karate, Shabbir Shah, Masarat Alam, Md Yusuf Shah, Aftab Ahmad Shah, Altaf Ahmad Shah, Nayeem Khan, Md Akbar Khanday, Raja Mehrajuddin Kalwal, Bashir Ahmad



Bhat, Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali, Shabir Ahmad Shah, Abdul Rashid Sheikh and Naval Kishore Kapoor.

The charge sheet was also filed against Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) founder Hafiz Saeed and Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Salahuddin.

Malik is the chief commander of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front and was one of the first militants who started militant campaign in Kashmir in 1989.

No decision yet on joining BJP or AAP: Hardik Patel

AHMEDABAD: A day after resigning from the Congress, Patidar leader Hardik Patel on Thursday said he has not taken any decision yet on joining any other party, be it the ruling BJP in Gujarat or the new entrant AAP.

Addressing a press conference here, Patel (28) claimed the Congress had no vision and that leaders of the party were biased against Gujarati people.

Ahead of the Gujarat Assembly polls due later this year, Patel on Wednesday resigned from the Congress, claiming top leaders of the party were distracted by their mobile phones and that



Gujarat Congress leaders were more interested in arranging chicken sandwiches for them.

Asked if he would join the BJP or the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party, Patel on Thursday said, "I have not taken any decision as of now on joining any

political party, be it the BJP or AAP." Hitting out at the Congress, he said the party never speaks anything on the issues concerning Hindus, such as the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) or on the issue of a Shilving (said to be) found in a mosque in Varanasi. «Moreover, the Gujarat Congress is too much into caste-based politics. I wasted my three years in this party,» Patel said.

He claimed the Congress had no vision and that leaders of the party were biased against Gujarati people, like «Adami and Ambani». **AGENCIES**

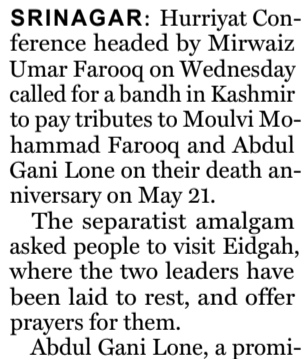
Kashmiri Pandit employees will be posted in safer districts LG Manoj Sinha

SRINAGAR: Hurriyat Conference headed by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Wednesday called for a bandh in Kashmir to pay tributes to Moulvi Mohammad Farooq and Abdul Gani Lone on their death anniversary on May 21.

The separatist amalgam asked people to visit Eidgah, where the two leaders have been laid to rest, and offer prayers for them.

Abdul Gani Lone, a prominent Hurriyat leader, was assassinated in 2002 during a rally to mark the death anniversary of former Mirwaiz of Kashmir Moulvi Mohammad Farooq in Srinagar. Moulvi Farooq, the father of Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, was assassinated in 1990.

Hurriyat calls for bandh on May 21 in Kashmir, to pay tributes to Moulvi Mohammad Farooq & Abdul Gani Lone



Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has said that Kashmiri Pandit employees will be posted in safer districts following the killing of Rahul Bhat, a Kashmiri Pandit who worked in the revenue department in the Valley's Budgam district. Sinha made the decision in response to the growing outcry over the killing of civilian and minority killings in Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits have staged protests across Jammu and Kashmir demanding protection and posting outside Kashmir.

The Hurriyat Conference also condemned the continued detention of its leaders since August 2019 and slammed the recommendations of the delimitation commission.

It also criticised the government for sacking government employees on charges of terror

Cong tried to suppress my nationalist voice: Jakhar after joining BJP

Former president of the Punjab Congress, Sunil Jakhar, who joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday, said that an attempt was being made to suppress his nationalist voice in the grand old party.

BJP's national president JP Nadda inducted Sunil Jakhar into the party at the national headquarters in New Delhi.

Talking to the media after joining the BJP, Jakhar said that it was not easy to break 50 years of relationship with the Congress, from 1972 to 2022, my three generations worked considering the Congress as their family. "Stood with the party in every good and bad time. But an attempt was made to suppress my nationalist voice in the Congress. I was given a notice to speak in the interest of Punjab and the country," he said.



Jakhar said that fingers were pointed at him because he talked about not dividing Punjab through caste and religion.

Taking a jibe at the Congress high command, Jakhar said that he did not leave the Congress because of any individual or any personal dispute, but an attempt was made to suppress

his voice. He said that his voice cannot be stopped, neither can it be mortgaged.

Referring to his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the past, Jakhar said that although it is not constitutionally possible, he has given special status to Punjab in practical terms. Thanking the BJP high command for the open-hearted welcome, he said that he never used politics for his personal gain. "I have always worked not to break but to unite and even after joining the BJP, I will always work for the betterment and unity of Punjab," he added.

Welcoming Sunil Jakhar into the BJP, the party's national president J P Nadda said that due to Punjab being a border state and the attitude of Pakistan, it is necessary to strengthen the nationalist forces in Punjab. Describing Jakhar as a nationalist leader with an honest image, Nadda said that he will take Punjab to a new level with us. "Taking advantage of his experience, BJP will work to strengthen the party and Punjab," he added.

Jakhar, who was angry with Rahul Gandhi, had resigned from the Congress on Saturday.

Pakistani woman, separated during Partition, reunites with Indian siblings after 75 years

Seventy-five years after she was separated from her family during the violence at the time of the Partition, a woman born in a Sikh family who was adopted and raised by a Muslim couple met her brothers from India at Kartarpur in Pakistan's Punjab province, according to a media report on Wednesday. At the time of the Partition, Mumtaz Bibi, who was born in a Sikh family, was an infant who was lying on the dead body of her mother killed by a violent mob, the Dawn newspaper reported.

A couple named Muhammad Iqbal and Allah Rakhi adopted the baby girl and raised her as their own daughter, naming her Mumtaz Bibi. After the Partition, Iqbal settled at Varika Trian village in Sheikhpura district



of Pakistan's Punjab province. Iqbal and his wife did not tell Mumtaz that she was not their daughter. Two years ago, Iqbal's health suddenly deteriorated and he told Mumtaz that she was not his real daughter and she belonged to a Sikh family.

After Iqbal's death, Mumtaz and her son Shahbaz started

searching for her family through social media. They knew the name of Mumtaz's real father and the village (Sidrana) in Patiala district of Punjab (India) where they settled after being forced to leave their native home.

Both the families got connected through social media.

Subsequently, Mumtaz's brothers Gurmeet Singh, Narendra Singh and Amrinder Singh, accompanied by other family members, reached Gurdwara Darbar Sahib at Kartarpur. Mumtaz along with her family members also reached there and met her lost brothers after 75 years, the report said.

The Kartarpur corridor links Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan, the final resting place of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev, with the Dera Baba Nanak shrine in Gurdaspur district in India's Punjab state. The 4 km-long corridor provides visa free access to Indian Sikh pilgrims to visit the Darbar Sahib.

Joint committee on Sikh prisoners decides to meet PM & HM

AMRITSAR: During the first meeting of the 11-member high-powered joint committee formed by Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) on the directions of Sri Akal Takht Sahib, it has been decided to strongly raise the issue of release of Sikh prisoners lodged in different Indian jails by holding meetings with the Prime Minister (PM) and Home Minister (HM). At the same time, it was also decided to hold meetings with Karnataka and Delhi Chief Ministers (CM) asking them to immediately take decision on the release of Sikh prisoners under their respective state jurisdictions.

In this meeting held at the SGPC's office, those present included Head of Damdami

Taksal Sant Baba Harnam Singh Khalsa, Head of Tarna Dal Harijan Velan on behalf of Nihung Singh jathebandis (organisations) Baba Nihal Singh, SGPC President Advocate S. Harjinder Singh Dhani, Shiromani Akali Dal President S. Sukhbir Singh Badal, S. Jaskaran Singh Kahan Singh Wala on behalf of Shiromani Akali Dal Amritsar President S. Simranjeet Singh Mann, prominent Sikh pracharak (preacher) Baba Baljit Singh Daduwal, Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) President S. Harmeet Singh Kalka, Shiromani Akali Dal Delhi President S. Paramjit Singh Sarna, former DSGMC President S. Manjit Singh GK, President of Takht Sri Harmandar Ji Patna Sahib

management committee President S. Avtar Singh Hit, and S. Paramjit Singh Chahal on behalf of President of Takht Sri Abchnagar Hazur Sahib management board S. Bhupinder Singh Minhas.

Addressing the press conference after the meeting, SGPC President S. Harjinder Singh said that the committee formed under the joint Panthak efforts for the release of Sikh prisoners has decided to raise this issue with unity at all levels and initially, very soon, the meetings will be held with the country's Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi and Home Minister Shri Amit Shah.

"Efforts will be made to hold these meetings with the PM and HM within 15 days," said S. Harjinder Singh.

Delhi LG Anil Bajjal resigns

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal has resigned citing personal reasons, a senior official said on Wednesday. He was appointed the national capital's LG in December, 2016.

"He (Bajjal) has submitted his resignation to the president," the official said.

Bajjal, 76, has resigned for personal reasons, sources said. The 1969-batch IAS officer's tenure as L-G was 5 years and 5 months. He was earlier the vice-chairperson of the Delhi Development Authority and Union Home Secretary during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. He retired in 2006 as Union Urban Development Secretary.

His tenure was marked by

regular run-ins with the AAP-led Delhi government. The biggest face-off happened in 2018 when CM Arvind Kejriwal and his cabinet of ministers sat on a dharna in Bajjal's office, alleging that IAS officers posted with the state government were not working in tandem with elected officials. He was also at loggerheads with the government over the implementation of the doorstep delivery of services and ration schemes.

While the Delhi government was also locked in battle with Bajjal's predecessor Najeeb Jung, Bajjal was the L-G for the majority of the seven years that the AAP government has been in power. In 2021, the Government of National Capital



Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 was passed by the Parliament, which effectively made the L-G the overall head of the Delhi government, meaning all files would have to be passed through him. Sources said that while the

government was apprehensive that Bajjal would try to take control of the government following the amendment being passed, he continued to work in tandem with elected representatives. The biggest issues arising

lately was over the appointment of special public prosecutors in the Delhi riots, anti-CAA protest and Red Fort violence cases, where he cleared the panel put forth by the Delhi Police instead of going with the Delhi government's panel.

"Despite their disagreements over several issues, the Delhi government had a cordial working relationship with him. Bajjal being a mild-mannered officer, who had spent a great deal of time in the bureaucracy, handled the fraught relationship between the two wings well, especially during Covid as he headed the Delhi Disaster Management Authority," said a Delhi government official who did not wish to be named.

Nine Delhi High Court judges take oath of office



Nine new Delhi High Court judges on Wednesday took oath of office, taking the total strength of the court to 44.

Acting Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi administered the oath of office to Justices Tara Vitasta Ganju, Mini Pushkarna, Vikas Mahajan, Tushar Rao Gedela, Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora, Sachin Datta, Amit Mahajan, Gaurang Kanth and Saurabh Banerjee. The central government had notified the appointment of the newly sworn-in

judges — who were practising lawyers on May 13.

The swearing-in ceremony took place in the court of the Chief Justice in the presence of other high court judges, lawyers and family members of the newly sworn-in judges.

The Supreme Court collegium had approved the proposal for elevation of Justices Ganju and Pushkarna as judges of the high court in August 2020.

The apex court collegium had recommended the names of the other judges earlier this month.

The new appointments take the total number of judges in the high court to 44, including 12 women judges. The sanctioned strength of the high court is 60.

Man shot dead in central Delhi



A 48-year-old man was shot dead allegedly by unidentified persons in central Delhi's Daryaganj area, police said on Wednesday.

The deceased has been identified as Moinuddin Qureshi, they said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Shweta Chauhan said on Tuesday, Daryaganj police station received information from a man named Kamal Ahmad about the firing on Qureshi.

"The injured was shifted to the Lok Nayak Hospital where the doctors declared him dead," the DCP said.

Qureshi received two gunshot injuries, police said.

"We have registered a case of murder under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code and other relevant section of Arms Act based on the statement of Rukmuddin, the deceased's brother," the senior police official said.

The police said the footage of CCTV cameras are being scanned to ascertain the people involved in the incident.

"We are scanning through CCTV camera footage to identify the culprit and ascertain the sequence of events. Teams have been formed and an investigation is underway to know the motive behind the murder," the official added.

Rly employee crushed by train in Greater Noida

A railway employee died on duty after he was allegedly run over by a train in Greater Noida on Wednesday, police said. Sunil Kumar Verma (33) was working on the rail track segment near Dadri when the incident involving the Ranchi Garib Rath



Express train occurred around 10.30 am, they added. "Verma hailed from Ballia district in Uttar Pradesh. He was staying at a rented accommodation in Dadri. He was working with the railways as technician grade one (signal)," a police spokesperson said.

"He was working at signal 1412/23-25 when he got hit by train number 12877 Ranchi Garib Rath and died," the official said. The family members of the deceased are being contacted and further legal proceedings are being carried out by the Dadri police, the official added.

Fire breaks out in Bawana factory, 1 dead, several injured

A fire broke out at a factory in outer Delhi's Bawana Industrial Area on Thursday, the Delhi Fire Services said. No casualties have been reported so far, they said. "A call about a fire at a factory in Bawana Industrial Area was received at 11:45 am and so far, 17 fire tenders have been rushed to the site," said



Atul Garg, Director, Delhi Fire Services. A person was killed and at least 7 others have been injured after a massive fire broke out on the first floor in electric item chasis of a factory in Bawana Industrial Area. "7 people sustained injuries and rushed to GTB Hospital. Out of the 7 injured, 1 person was

declared dead and 1 person is in serious condition. The cause of the blaze is yet to be ascertained, however, there was a massive loss of property. Thick plumes of smoke could be seen billowing out of the top floor of the building.

Bus rams into truck on Yamuna Expressway, 3 killed

MATHURA: Three pilgrims were killed and 36 others injured when a bus carrying 60 people rammed into a truck on the Yamuna Expressway here, police said on Wednesday. Superintendent of Police (Rural), Shrish Chandra, said the accident took place near Bajna on Tuesday night when the bus carrying pilgrims from Shahdara area of Delhi rammed into a truck laden with building material from behind. The bus passengers were returning after offering prayers in Vrindavan. Police said the



front portion of the bus was completely damaged in the accident and the devotees sitting in the front suffered serious injuries. The deceased were identified as Manak Chandra (55), resident of Ram Nagar, Shahdara, Subhash Chandra Sharma (60), resident of Mansarovar Park, Shahdara, and Harpal Singh, resident of Gubari, district Hathras. The injured have been admitted to various hospitals where the condition of six was stated to be critical, police said, adding the bodies have been sent for postmortem.

Arrested terrorists admitted received Rs 50 lakh for delivery of explosive, arms & drugs

SATISH HANDE KARNAL

Four terrorists Gurpreet, his brother Amardeep both residents of Amritsar district, Bhopinder resident of Ludhiana district and Parminder resident of Ferozpur district arrested by Karnal police on the information of Punjab police at Bastada Toll Plaza from whom police recovered explosive material, a pistol, 31 cartridges and currency noted for amount worth over Rs One lakh during search of Inova car in which they were travelling on May 5, 2022. A case was registered against them at Madhuban police station Karnal.

Ganga Ram Poonia SP Karnal told that during 10 days police remand arrested youths disclosed several secrets and admitted that they were going to deliver explosive material, arms and cartridges at Adilpur in Telgana but they were unaware of consignee to whom the consignment was to be delivered. They told that the consignment of arms, explosive material and cartridges was supplied by ISI in Pakistan through drone near Indo-Pak border near Ferozpur. They also admitted earlier supplied explosive material and drugs and collected amount worth over Rs 50 lakh in person as well as through Hawala. They also admitted that they were be-



ing paid amount worth Rs One lakh for delivery of a packet. After 10 days police remand, two terrorists were sent to judicial custody whereas police remand of another two both real brothers also mastermind in the racket has been extended further for a period of three days as a police party has taken them to Adilpur in Telgana to find out where the consignment of explosive material and arms was to be delivered. SP told that several investigation teams are yet working in this regard.

Information also reveals, police is searching bank accounts of family members and relatives of arrested Khalistani terrorists trying to find out the detail of amount transferred to their accounts. Information also reveals that arrested terrorists had earlier delivered consignment containing explosive in two IED, three grenade and three pistols at Nanded in month March this year which was collected from Chamkaur area.

Newly-wed couple murdered in sleep



KANPUR: A newly-wed couple was found dead with their throats slit in their room here, police said on Thursday.

The bodies have sent them for post-mortem examination, they said. Additional DCP (west) Brajesh Srivastava said that Shivam Tiwari (27), a vendor, and his wife Julie Tiwari (24) were sleeping inside their room while the deceased's father Deepak Kumar and brother Monu slept on the roof.

Some tenants also live in the house, he said. On Thursday, one of the tenants found the door of Shivam's room open and on entering it, they found the bodies of the couple lying in a pool of blood, the ADCP added.

Prima facie, it appears that the victims' throats were slit with a sharp edged weapon and looks like an insider job, claimed the officer. A case has been registered and investigation initiated, police added.

Massive fire at godown in central Delhi

A major fire broke out in a godown at the Jhandewalan cycle market in central Delhi on Friday afternoon, officials said.

The information about the blaze in the godown was reported at 2.05 pm following which 27 fire tenders were rushed to the spot, they said, adding that efforts are on to douse the flames. No causality has been reported so far, they said.

Tree felling in Delhi not permitted: HC

The Delhi High Court on Thursday stayed any further felling of trees in the national capital, saying there is no other way to mitigate the ecological and environmental degradation in the city.

Justice Nazmi Waziri, who was hearing a contempt case concerning the preservation of trees, noted that over 29,000 trees were cut down in the past three years in the city and questioned if Delhi has the luxury to bear such numbers. We have stopped felling of trees... Till the next date, no felling of trees, the judge said as the case was listed for further hearing on June 2.

A total of 29,946 trees were allowed to be cut in the past



three years, which on computation comes to 27 trees per day i.e. 1.13 per hour, the judge noted. The court stated that there is no record with respect to the girth and the age of the trees that were allowed to be cut down or the status of the corresponding transplantation of trees and emphasised that large scale denudation

of fully grown trees worsens the ecology.

It would therefore in the fitness of things in the public interest as well as for the sake of the environment for present and future generations that tree felling in Delhi is not permitted till the next date so as to ensure that felling is done only when it is fully assured by

the applicant that the trees would at least be transplanted. Surely there is no other way to mitigate the ecological and environmental degradation in the city, the court ordered. Ex facie it is evident that large scale denudation of fully grown trees only worsens the ecological balance of the city. Air pollution needs to be mitigated on an urgent basis. Trees are a great source for mitigation, the court added.

The status report filed by the Deputy Conservator of Forests for the central zone informed that in total, 13,490 trees were permitted to be cut and 16,456 trees were directed to be transplanted in the years 2019, 2020, and 2021.

Ambala Rail Division earns Rs 3.20 crore revenue on Kalka-Simla sector in 3 months



SATISH HANDE

Past couple of years scenario reveals that the graph of tourists on Kalka-Simla rail track having status of World Heritage witnessed more than 33% drop due to epidemic outbreak not only in India but also all over in the world and the number of tourists from the country as well as from all over the world drastically reduced in past two years because of limited traffic on roads, railway tracks and in the air due to cancellation of road transport, trains and flights. According to railway authorities, in past three months with effect from January 1 till March 31 this year Ambala rail Division has attracted large number of tourists on Kalka-Simla rail sector earning revenue worth Rs 3.20 crore in this period with the arrival of summer season having heavy rush of passengers

in the trains as well as advance booking of rail tickets in all 12 UP and DOWN trains daily on this rail track.

Information reveals, revenue earnings on Kalka-Simla rail sector was adversely affected witnessing drop in summer season in past two years with effect from November 1, 2019 to February 28, 2020 and from November 1, 2020 to February 28, 2021 due to less number of passengers travelling in trains when the railway earnings were only Rs 1.72 crore and Rs 1.59 crore during both seasons respectively due to limited number of passengers travelling in trains and railways suffered heavy revenue loss in this period. According to information, revenue worth Rs 72.58 was collected from nearly 3400 passengers travelled in this rail sector in month January 2022 and collected revenue worth Rs 1.17 crore from 44797 passengers in month February 2022 earning revenue worth over Rs 1.33 crore. Similarly, Ambala Rail Division was able to earn revenue worth over Rs 1.33 crore from 46712 passengers in month March 2022.

Gehlot dials Punjab CM for quick repair of Sirhind canal



JAIPUR: Rajasthan Chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Friday spoke to his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann over the phone, requesting him to get the repair of the damaged portion of the Sirhind canal done.

Gehlot made Mann aware of problems faced in Rajasthan after part of the Sirhind canal was damaged on April 1.

In a tweet, Gehlot said they were scheduled to start the distribution of water from the Indira Gandhi canal from May 21. But this cannot be done now as the water from the Sirhind feeder could not be released into the Indira Gandhi canal due to the damaged portion, he said.

"Keeping in view the need of drinking water in the scorching summer, this work should be completed soon as it provides drinking water to about two and a half crore people of 10 districts of Rajasthan," Gehlot tweeted.

UP Govt not to give grant to any new madrasa

No new madrasa will be given a grant by the Uttar Pradesh government, the state cabinet has decided.

UP minister of state for minority welfare Danish Azad Ansari said on Wednesday that the decision was taken at the state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath a day earlier.

The minister said that the madrasas currently receiving government grants will continue to get it, but no new beneficiary will be included in the list.

The decision came days after the singing of the national anthem was made compulsory at all madrasas in the BJP-ruled state.

Asked about the reason behind this decision, Ansari said that at present 560 madrasas are getting government grants in the state.

"It is a big number. The focus of the government is on providing quality education in madrasas. That is why now no new madrasa will be included in this list," the minister said. On whether the restriction



could be lifted in the future, the minister said, "This is what is now. What will happen later will be seen later."

There are a total of 16,461 madrasas in the state, out of which 560 are receiving government grants.

Meanwhile, Mohsin Raza, chairman of the State Haj Committee and a former state minister, welcomed the decision of the state government.

Raza claimed that the previous governments had given recognition to madrasas and included them in the grant list, but they were not able to provide quality education.

He alleged that the previous SP and BSP governments included madrasas in the grant list to benefit those they favoured, but this did not do any good to madrasa education.

Security beefed up outside CM's residence, Delhi Police tells HC on vandalism matter

NEW DELHI: The city police on Tuesday informed the Delhi High Court that security outside Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, where an incident of vandalism occurred in March, has been beefed up with the deployment of additional armed guards.

The police said the proposal to curtail entry on the road where the chief minister's residence is located is also under consideration and discussions are on with the residents welfare associations (RWA).

The court was informed by the counsel for police that the status report is under preparation and sought some time to file it on record.

A bench of Acting Chief Justice Vipin Sanghi and Justice Navin Chawla granted time to the police to file the status report and said it shall be filed positively before the next date, that is, May 30.

The Delhi government standing counsel (criminal) Sanjay Lau submitted that the status report of Delhi Police was under preparation and it could not be filed as Additional Solicitor General Sanjay Jain was not available.

He further said more police personnel have been deployed



outside the CM's house and they were talking with RWAs to install two gates on both sides of the road and that no assembly or protests will be allowed near the Civil Lines metro station.

The court was hearing a plea by AAP MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj about the March 30 attack during a protest against Kejriwal's remarks on 'The Kashmir Files', a film on the plight of Kashmiri Pandits.

Scores of protesters belonging to the Bhartiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), the youth wing of the BJP, had allegedly breached the barricades to reach the entrance of the chief minister's residence and destroyed public property in the presence of police. Senior advocates Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for the petitioner, urged

the court to direct the police to provide them a copy of the report so that they are able to assist the court properly.

To this, the bench said, first let us see it. If we feel it is something to be shared with you, we will. Senior advocate Rahul Mehra, also representing the petitioner, suggested that the authorities can consider imposing section 144 of CrPC in the area around the CM house like Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Earlier, the high court had termed it a "very disturbing state of affairs" and voiced displeasure over the "failure" of police to prevent the incident of vandalism at the CM's and directed the city police commissioner to fix responsibility for the "serious lapse". It had taken note of the earlier status report filed by the

police on the incident which said certain people breached the barricades and reached the gate of the residence.

This kind of incident happening at the residence of any constitutional functionary -- whether it is the CM, it could be a judge of the high court or Supreme Court, it could be any other Union Minister -- this is a very disturbing state of affairs that this kind of a thing could in the first place occur or such miscreants should succeed in their endeavour," the court had said.

Wondering how could the protesters breach three layers of barricades, the court had said, if it so happened, the police should look at its own efficiency and functioning.

Bhardwaj, in his petition filed through advocate Bharat Gupta, has sought constitution of an SIT to probe the attack and argued that the vandalism of the official residence of the chief minister during a protest against his remarks on "The Kashmir Files" appears to have been carried out with Delhi Police's "tacit complicity".

On March 30, 2022, several BJP goons, in the garb of a protest, launched an attack on the official residence of the Delhi CM.

Political leaders start lobbying for 2 Rajya Sabha seats in Haryana

SATISH HANDE

With the announcement of filling up 57 Rajya Sabha seats in Lok Sabha on June 10, 2022, which include two seats for Haryana state to be vacant due to completion of tenure of BJP supported Rajya Sabha members Dushyant Gautam and independent Rajya Sabha member Subhash Chandra large number of heavy weight political leaders in the state has already started lobbying for these seats.

According to information, there is likely one each of these seats will be occupied by BJP-JJP alliance ruling candidate and other by Congress candidate. Political rumours reveal, Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala is willing to have this seat in favour of his party president Ajay Chautala his father or his brother Digvijay Chautala.

The present scenario reveals, there are 40 BJP, 31 Congress, 10 JJP, 7 independent, one each INLD and HALOP MLAs in Haryana Vidhan Sabha. Information reveals that large number of BJP as well as Congress political leaders including few former ministers and MLAs are in the race to occupy Rajya Sabha seat to be vacated by Subhash Chandra occupied by him in June 2016 with BJP support, whereas the second Rajya Sabha seat was in favour of former BJP minister Ch, Virender Singh later submitted resignation

during 2019 Lok Sabha polls for the sake of his son Brijinder Singh won polls. Dushyant Gautam a 'Dalit' leader from Delhi won Rajya Sabha seat in March 2020 on behalf of BJP. Both Retired Lt. Gen. Dr D.P. Vats from BJP and Deepender Hooda from Congress will hold their chairs till April 2024 whereas Ram Chander Jagra from BJP will continue as Rajya Sabha member till April 10, 2026.

Information reveals, Kumari Shejla a former Rajya Sabha member recently removed from the chair of Congress President in the state being near and dear to Sonia Gandhi is likely to be adjusted as Rajya Sabha member again by Congress high command. Sources reveal, there is a long list of senior BJP leaders including few former ministers attempting to occupy Rajya Sabha seat and the names of few of them include former BJP state president Om Parkash Dhankad, former BJP state president Subhash Barala, former industry minister Vipul Goel, former education minister Ram Bilas Sharma, former finance minister Capt Abhimanyu, former urban development minister Kavita Jain, 'Dalit' leader Krishan Panwar also a former minister, former MLA Bhawan Das Kabirpanthi, former BJP convener Sudesh Kataria, Meenu Benival and Subhash Chandra wanting to retain this seat again.

GYANVAPI SURVEY

Report submitted to Varanasi court

A commission appointed by a court here to conduct a survey of the Gyanvapi Mosque-Shringar Gauri complex filed its report on Thursday, submitting documents, videos and photographs.

Special Advocate Commissioner Vishal Singh said he has submitted the report on the survey conducted on May 14, 15 and 16.

"I do not have the right to tell what is in the survey report. Now the court will take further action on it," he told the media outside the court.

The Supreme Court, meanwhile, asked the Varanasi court to not proceed with hearing the Gyanvapi case till the apex court takes up the matter on Friday.

Some parts of the complex were also surveyed on May 6 and 7 under a team led by advo-



cate Ajay Mishra, who has since been removed by the court as the advocate commissioner.

Mishra also filed a report on the survey he conducted in the court of the District Civil Judge Ravi Kumar Diwakar late Wednesday evening, said Madan Mohan Yadav, who represents the Hindu side in the case.

Mishra was removed by the court Tuesday as the advocate commissioner. After removing him, the court had appointed Vishal Singh as the special advocate commissioner and Ajay Prasad Singh as the assistant advocate commissioner.

The reconstituted commission had carried out the survey on May 14, 15 and 16. Vishal Singh refused to divulge details on the report, saying he has submitted documents, and sealed boxes containing chips of videos and photos.

"From my side this is the final report. If the court feels it is sufficient then fine, otherwise we will go by the directions of the court," he said.

The Gyanvapi mosque is adjacent to the iconic Kashi Vishwanath temple and the court is hearing a plea by a group of women seeking permission for daily prayers before the idols on its outer walls of the masjid.

The court had given the new commission time till May 17 to file the survey report. It had extended the deadline by two days on the request on the survey team.

Appeal filed in SC against Delhi HC's split verdict on criminalisation of marital rape

NEW DELHI: An appeal has been filed in the Supreme Court challenging the Delhi High Court's split verdict on the issue of criminalisation of marital rape on a batch of petitions challenging the exception in the law that exempts husbands from being prosecuted for non-consensual sexual intercourse with their wives.

The appeal has been filed by Khushboo Saifi, one of the petitioners before the high court. The high court on May 11 had delivered a split verdict on the issue.

However, both the judges --Justice Rajiv Shukdhakar and Justice C Hari Shankar--on the bench concurred with each other for granting a certificate of leave to appeal to the Supreme Court in the matter as it involves substantial questions of law which requires a decision



from the top court.

While Justice Shukdhakar, who headed the division bench, favoured striking down the marital rape exception for being "unconstitutional" and said it would be "tragic if a married woman's call for justice is not heard even after 162 years" since the enactment of the IPC, Justice Shankar said the exception under the rape law is not "unconstitutional and was based on an intelligible differential".

The petitioners had challenged the constitutionality of the marital rape exception under Section 375 IPC (rape) on

grounds that it discriminated against married women who are sexually assaulted by their husbands. Under the exception given in Section 375 of the IPC, sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his wife, the wife not being minor, is not rape.

The bench delivered a 393-page split verdict in the matter. Justice Shukdhakar, in the 192 pages penned by him, regretted that he was not able to persuade Justice Shankar to his point of view and said he, perhaps, hears a beat of a different drummer. I respect that.

Justice Shankar, who gave dissenting views in 200 pages written by him, said the challenge to the vires of the second exception to Section 375 and Section 376B of the IPC and Section 198B of the Code of Criminal Procedure, as raised in these petitions, must fail.

1988 road rage case: SC sentences Navjot Singh Sidhu to 1 yr rigorous imprisonment



The Supreme Court on Thursday sentenced Congress leader Navjot Singh Sidhu to one year rigorous imprisonment in a 1988 road rage case, saying victims of crime are humiliated when the offender is let off with a relatively minor punishment.

In 2018, Sidhu was let off with a meagre fine of Rs 1,000. The review plea was filed by the family members of 65-year-old Gurnam Singh, who had died in the road rage incident involving Sidhu.

A bench of Justices A.M. Khanwilkar and Sanjay Kishan Kaul said: "A disproportionately light punishment humiliates and frustrates a victim of crime when the offender goes unpunished or is let off with a relatively minor punishment as the system pays no attention to the injured's feelings."

It observed that indifference to the rights of the victim of crime is fast eroding the faith of the society in general and the victim of crime in particular in the criminal justice system.

The bench pointed out that the sentencing philosophy for an offence has a social goal that the sentence has to be based on the principle that the accused must realise that the crime committed by him has not only created a dent in his life but also a concavity in the social fabric.

Allowing the review petition, the bench said: "We consider it appropriate to impose a sentence of imprisonment for a period of one-year rigorous imprisonment to be undergone by respondent No.1 (Sidhu)."

5G set to spawn massive job opportunities: Telecom Secretary

The advent of 5G and new services that it would usher, will spawn fresh job opportunities in the market, requiring suitable skilling of manpower in new technologies, Telecom Secretary K Rajaraman said on Wednesday.

Rajaraman, who was speaking at an event of Telecom Sector Skill Council (TSSC), said that from BharatNet to space communications, and from 5G to fixed-line broadband services, the telecom sector would unlock new job requirements of various categories. He exhorted the industry to look closely at creation of the talent pipeline to address these emerging opportunities.

"5G growth will come from number of use case it would permit in various industrial settings...5G, because of nature of technology and capability it offers, will open up new range of skills," Rajaraman said. The top



DoT official affirmed that 5G will spur jobs in areas like Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Internet of Things and other areas. Fixed wireline broadband too, where penetration levels are low, in fact, far below the global benchmarks, has the clear headroom for double-digit growth, he pointed out.

"Soon we hope to address the policy constraints which are facing fixed wireline industry and see how we can provide the push needed to take the industry forward," he said adding that the high growth rates can absolutely be afforded given the potential and the current small base. "...the jobs that can be provided, are phenomenal," he emphasised.

Indrani Mukerjea gets bail by SC in Sheena Bora murder case

The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted bail to Indrani Mukerjea, the prime accused in the murder of her daughter Sheena Bora, saying that six-and-a-half years years in prison is too long a term and that the trial will not be completed anytime soon.

A three-judge bench headed by Justice L Nageswara Rao noted that Indrani Mukerjea has been in jail since 2015, and said the trial is not going to be completed anytime soon as out of 237 witnesses cited by prosecution only 68 have been examined till date.

"The petitioner is charged with kidnapping with an intention to murder her daughter after entering into a criminal conspiracy. The petitioner is wife of Peter Mukerjea, who is co accused in the case. The allegation made against the



petitioner is that she planned the murder in view of the live in relationship of her daughter with Rahul Mukerjea, who is the son of Peter Mukerjea through his earlier wife," the bench said.

"We do not intend to make comments on the merits of the case as it might be detrimental to the interests of the parties. Taking into account that petitioner has been in custody for six-and-a-half-years and even if

50 per cent witnesses are given by prosecution, the trial would not be over soon, we are of the considered view that the petitioner is entitled to be released on bail.

"Petitioner is directed to be released on bail subject to satisfaction of the trial court and the same conditions imposed earlier (on Peter Mukerjea)," the bench also comprising Justices B R Gavai and A S Bopanna said.

SC directs issuance of Aadhaar cards to sex workers

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the issuance of Aadhaar cards to sex workers based on a proforma certificate issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and observed that every person has a fundamental right to be treated with dignity.

A bench headed by Justice L Nageswara Rao said there should be no breach of the confidentiality of the sex workers and their identity should not be revealed.

"Aadhaar cards shall be issued to sex workers on the basis of a proforma certificate issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) and submitted by a gazetted officer at the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) or the project director of State AIDS Control Society along with the enrolment form," the bench also comprising Justices B R Gavai and A S Bopanna said.



and A S Bopanna said. While passing the order, the bench observed that "every person has the right to be treated with dignity irrespective of activity. This should be kept in mind."

UIDAI had earlier suggested to the top court that Aadhaar Card could be issued to sex workers without insisting on proof of identity, subject to their producing a certificate issued by a Gazetted Officer of NACO or a Gazetted Officer of Health Department of the respective State Governments/ Union Territory.

Security tightened as MNS, BJP call for uprooting Aurangzeb's grave

MUMBAI: The security in and around the grave of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in Khuldabad was tightened following calls by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) to 'uproot' it, here on Wednesday.

While MNS activist Gajanan Kale on Tuesday questioned the need for preserving Aurangzeb's grave, BJP MLC Prasad Lad threatened to remove the small monument which is one of the major tourist attractions in and around Aurangabad.

In the wake of the potential



threats to the grave, the Maharashtra Police and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) have deployed additional guards and a van at the site, though it is still open for public.

Demanding that the extra security must be immediately removed, Lad asked whether

this is the 'Hindutva brand' of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, when chanting Hanuman Chalisa is considered sedition.

"This is the same Aurangzeb who executed Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj (the son of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj), demolished Hindu temples to construct mosques. Now, the CM is providing security to Aurangzeb's grave. Is this Sonia Gandhi-Sharad Pawar style of Hindutva or the Hindutva of the late Balasaheb Thackeray," Lad asked.

Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan released from prison

Senior Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan walked out of the Sitapur Jail in Uttar Pradesh on Friday morning, a day after the Supreme Court granted him interim bail in a cheating case.

Khan's son and MLA Abdullah Azam, Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohiya) leader Shivpal Singh Yadav and a large number of supporters welcomed the senior SP leader upon his release after 27 months.

Azam Khan had 88 cases, including that of land grabbing, registered against him. On Thursday, the Supreme Court granted him interim bail in a cheating case, paving the way for his release.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav welcomed Khan's release.

"Hearty welcome to senior SP leader and MLA Azam Khan on his release on bail. With this bail decision, the Supreme Court has set new standards of justice. He will certainly be acquitted in all



other false cases. Lies have moments, not centuries," Yadav said in a tweet in Hindi.

Shivpal Singh Yadav posted on Twitter pictures with Khan outside the jail. The jailor of Sitapur prison, R S Yadav, said the release order was received around 11 pm on Thursday and after following all procedures, Khan was released around 8 am on Friday.

A Supreme Court bench headed by Justice L Nageswara Rao directed Khan to file for regular bail within two weeks and asked the trial court to decide it on merits without being influenced by any of the observations of the top court.

Senior official Himachal reviews preparations ahead of Modi's visit

Himachal Pradesh Chief Secretary Ram Subhag Singh on Tuesday held a review meeting with the officials to take a stock of the preparations ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to the hill state on May 31.

Earlier, on Sunday (May 15), Himachal Pradesh BJP president Suresh Kashyap said Modi will visit Shimla on May 31 to celebrate the completion of eight years of the government at the Centre.

Meanwhile, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur has visited the well-known Ridge Maidan in Shimla.

He inspected and reviewed the preparations for the Prime Minister's public rally.

The state government is trying to make the proposed event in Shimla a 'launch pad' for the upcoming Assembly elections. Meanwhile, the Chief Secretary has said the state government has implemented various welfare schemes to fulfil the needs of poor people. He added that during the May 31 programme, the Prime Minister is scheduled to hold a virtual interaction with the beneficiaries of 11 such schemes.

In the virtual programme, along with 773 districts of the country, 40 beneficiaries from Himachal Pradesh's 12 districts will also participate in the dialogue session with Modi.

Ram Subhag Singh added that the Prime Minister will also release the 11th installment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana during this programme.

He said digital screens would be installed to ensure the participation of the beneficiaries in the virtual programme. Several other top officials also participated in the review meeting of the preparations related to the PM Modi's public event.

India successfully flight tests naval anti-ship missile



The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Navy Wednesday successfully conducted the maiden flight-test of indigenously-developed Naval anti-ship missile launched from a Naval helicopter from Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur off the coast of Odisha, DRDO sources said.

The mission met all its objectives. It is the first indigenous air launched anti-ship missile system developed for the Indian Navy, they said.

The missile followed the desired sea skimming trajectory and reached the designated target with high degree of accuracy,

validating the control, guidance and mission algorithms, they said.

Stating that all sub-systems performed satisfactorily, DRDO said that sensors deployed across the test range and near impact point tracked the missile trajectory and captured all events.

The missile employed many new technologies, including an indigenously developed launcher for the helicopter. The missile guidance system includes state-of-the-art navigation system and integrated avionics. The flight test was witnessed by senior officers of DRDO and the Indian Navy.

CBI books Karti Chidambaram over illegal gratification

The CBI has registered a new case against Lok Sabha MP Karti Chidambaram, son of former finance minister P Chidambaram, for allegedly receiving illegal gratification, officials said on Tuesday.

Following the registration of the FIR, the CBI on Tuesday morning started searches at nine premises of Chidambaram in Chennai and other cities in the country, they said.

Gujarat Patidar leader Hardik Patel quits Congress



Gujarat Patidar quota agitation spearhead Hardik Patel on Wednesday said he has resigned as the Gujarat Congress working president as well as from the party's primary membership. Patel submitted his resignation letter to Congress president Sonia Gandhi. "Today, after mustering courage, I am resigning from the party post and primary membership of the Congress. I hope my followers and people of Gujarat will welcome my step. I believe that I will be able to serve the state better after this step," he tweeted.

Mamata lashes out at Modi over price hike

Hitting out at the Centre over hike in domestic gas and fuel prices, TMC supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday accused the BJP-led government of "looting" the common people. She also accused the Narendra Modi government of engineering communal disturbances to divert people's attention from issues affecting them such as price rise. "The Centre is looting the common people by hiking prices of domestic gas, petrol and diesel. To divert attention of the common people, the Narendra Modi government is engineering communal disturbances," Banerjee claimed while speaking at a party programme at Medinipur College ground here. Banerjee is on a tour of the western district.



Floods affect nearly 2 lakh people in Assam

Around 2 lakh people in 20 districts of Assam have been affected by floods, with the hill district of Dima Hasao getting cut off from the rest of the state after landslides triggered by incessant rain snapped rail and road links, an official bulletin said on Monday.

Two flood-related deaths were reported in Cachar district, while three fatalities due to landslides were earlier recorded in Dima Hasao.

Around 1,97,248 people have been affected by the deluge, with Hojai and Cachar being the worst hit with 78,157 and 51,357 people affected population respectively, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) bulletin said.

Altogether 652 villages in 46 revenue circles in 20 districts have been affected so far, it said. Around 55 relief camps have been opened in seven districts, sheltering 32,959 people. Another 12 relief distribution centres are also operational in different affected districts.



National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Fire and Emergency Services, besides locals, have been carrying out rescue operations in the flood-hit areas.

Embankments have been breached at 16 locations in different districts in the last 24 hours. Roads, bridges and houses have been completed or partially damaged in several areas.

Communication channels have also been snapped in Dima Hasao.

"Due to landslides, the dis-

tribut cannot be approached from outside. All roads and railways leading to Haflong is blocked since May 15," the bulletin said.

A Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) release in Guwahati said evacuation of about 2,800 passengers of two trains, which were stranded along the Lumding-Badarpur section in Dima Hasao for the last two days due to landslides and waterlogging on tracks, was completed on Monday.

Many passengers were airlifted by the Indian Air Force even as incessant rain impeded



rescue operations which were underway since Saturday, it said.

"Having rescued and evacuated all the passengers, the Railways is now putting its efforts in restoring the damaged line and re-starting the train services to South Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram," it said.

The New Haflong Railway Station is completely inundated with debris and an empty passenger train standing at the station has been washed off from the tracks due to a massive landslide, it said.

Fiscal dilemmas and GST concerns of various states

Pronouncing its verdict on a protracted dispute over the levy of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on ocean freight charges paid by importers, the Supreme Court recently held that such a tax was untenable. Its 153-page judgment has also dwelt at length on the nature of the recommendations of the GST Council, the constitutional body set up to oversee the operations of the indirect tax regime. Invoking the spirit of cooperative federalism, the Court has held that both the Union and State legislatures have “equal, simultaneous and unique powers” to make GST laws, and the recommendations of the Council, where they have a one-third and two-thirds voting share, respectively, are not binding on them. While amending the Constitution to pave way for the tax system that subsumed multiple central and State levies, Parliament had intended for the Council’s recommendations to only have ‘a persuasive value’, as per the Court. This has sparked fears that individual States can start vetoing the Council’s recommendations that they do not agree with, and refuse to implement them, thus threatening the ‘One Nation, One Tax’ edifice of a reform that took years to bring about. Opposition-ruled States have hailed the verdict as upholding their rights vis-à-vis what a few termed as the ‘arbitrary imposition’ of Centre’s decisions in the Council. While North Block undertakes a detailed review of the verdict, it is pertinent that it had argued that if the Council’s recommendations were not binding, it would lead to an impasse and the entire GST structure would crumble. This does not hold water, the Court averred. That it has struck down a tax notified two days prior to the launch of the GST regime just as it is on the verge of completing five years, is perhaps, a fortuitous nudge for introspection on its journey and the way ahead. Meanwhile, the taxpayers keep their fingers crossed.

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NISSIM MANNATHUKKAREN ON WHY AN EMPTY CELEBRATION OF THE CURRENT SOUTHERN BLOCKBUSTERS ISN'T GOOD

The real ‘Pan-Indian’ cinema



The recent South Indian films, Pushpa, RRR, and KGF 2 are rewriting Indian film history. A few years ago, it would have been unthinkable that a Telugu and Kannada film, dubbed in Hindi, would become the highest all-time grossers in Hindi. This has led to an animated discussion about not only the supposed decline of Bollywood but also the emergence of a new “pan-Indian” cinema.

The rise of the southern film industries, hitherto marginalised as “regional” cinema, and the challenge to the domination of Hindi cinema is indeed a welcome development. But its celebration as pan-Indian cinema, breaking language and culture barriers, is premature without discussing what these films represent. These three recent films (two of which have crossed the stratospheric collection record of 1,000 crore), and Baahubali before, indicate that they do not challenge dominant ideas of a homogenous nationalism, caste hierarchies, toxic masculinity, or gratuitous violence. Neither do they offer any cultural authenticity.

Such “massified” commercial films (albeit in new linguistic registers and with vastly superior technical quotient and cinematic experience) targeting the national market and the “lowest common denominator”, may in fact be counterproductive to the idea of linguistic/cultural plurality and the exploration of novel and progressive themes. Because the barriers to better, and world-class cinema is not merely the domination of Hindi films. Recently, Telugu superstar Chiranjeevi spoke about the insult he felt in the 1980s at a national award function where Indian cinema was portrayed as Hindi cinema, and how the recent South films have become a vehicle to correct that notion. The same was also reflected in Kannada star Sudeep’s comments on the claim of Hindi as the national language.

Yet, this “regional” claim for an equal place in Indian cinema does not refer to the exclusions, and cultural homogenisation performed by the mega-budget, pan-Indian film emerging from the South.

Thus, RRR, for example, is steeped in a religious-inflected nationalism with a cartoonish and melodramatic take on colonialism:

the evil British versus the good Indians. It is perfectly in sync with the present climate of aggressive nationalism even though it seeks to speak from a linguistic marginality. In this nationalism, while Subhas Bose, Sardar Patel, Bhagat Singh, Shivaji, and others from the South are unsurprisingly present, Gandhi, Ambedkar and Nehru are missing.

More seriously problematic is the appropriation of the trope of Adivasi liberation to the nationalist cause, and thus making it seem that the oppressors of Adivasis were merely the British. This is a move, as I have argued before, seen in movies like Lagaan. One of the two heroes Bheem, who is purportedly based on the legendary — but ignored — Gond leader Komaram Bheem, is shown in the film as asking the other protagonist Ram, a savarna Hindu, to educate him. This, writer Akash Poyam (a Gond himself) points out, casts Bheem as an innocent “noble savage” while in reality it was Komaram Bheem who coined the slogan, “Jal, Jangal, Jameen” which is shown as being inscribed by Ram in the film.

Other films like Pushpa and KGF are also not breaking any new ground, but reinforcing many of the tired masala conventions like a poor hero taking on the state-criminal nexus and as a saviour of the toiling masses, etc. Yet, they have been lauded as catering to small-town India, and the so-called

masses, something which Bollywood has largely moved away from with its focus on the urban middle classes, the elite, NRIs and multiplexes. But this is a reductive understanding which posits the masses as capable of appreciating cinema only with excessive violence, misogyny and the low brow, and the urban rich as not the purveyors of the same. Yet, the recent blockbusters drew big crowds in the multiplexes as well as in the diasporic audiences.

Similarly, some scholars have argued that the success of Pushpa and KGF is that they exemplify the local against the nationalist rhetoric of the Hindi cinema, a contention that is questioned by the success of Baahubali and RRR.

There is a need to go beyond such simple/only binaries of local vs. national, class vs. mass and Hindi vs. non-Hindi, or the anointing of new formulaic productions with monster budgets and targeting the national market as a pan-Indian film. Instead, there is a need to conceive pan-Indian cinema as one which is socially and cinematically expanding boundaries, culturally rooted and yet nationally/global resonant, and as one which is a conversation among the languages. The seeds of such a pan-Indian cinema were already present before the market success of the recent South blockbusters.

Pushing the envelope

For a decade now, the “new generation” films in Malayalam have rewritten Indian cinema history in their own way, and have captured national attention, especially since the flourishing of OTT platforms. There has been an explosion of films, especially small ones, dealing with an array of subjects and pushing the envelope in so many directions. Films like Maheshinte Prathikaram, Ozhiyudivasathe Kali, Ottal, Angamaly Diaries, Kumbalangi Nights, Jallikattu, The Great Indian Kitchen, Pada, and so many others became successful because they moved away from male superstar-driven formulas.

Yet, if new Malayalam cinema has not fully contended with caste, there has been a veritable revolution in tackling caste oppression in Tamil cinema from the 2010s with films like Attakathi, Madras, Kabali, Kaala, Pariyerum Perumal, Asuran, Karnan, Sarpatta Parambarai and Jai Bhim. They also showed that films with radical themes are not dichotomous with superstars starring in them or mass commercial success. The latter was also proved with the huge all-India success of the Marathi film Sairat.

An empty celebration of the present southern blockbusters as pan-Indian cinema is scotching the above trends besides ignoring other possibilities within Kannada and Telugu industries themselves which produced excellent small films and cultural nuggets like Thithi and C/o Kancharapalem.

Thus, the scope for a real pan-Indian cinema is immense but can be only realised by the infrastructure (theatrical, and not just OTT) to experience the best cinematic content across different Indian languages. Until the Indian audience is able to, for instance, watch the National Award winning Byari, in the tiny Beary language, or the internationally acclaimed Khasi film lewduh in their own languages (not just in English), the idea of a real pan-Indian cinema would be stillborn.

Nissim Mannathukkaren
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Views are personal



ERIC FALT BELIEVES MORE BIOSPHERE RESERVES IN SOUTH ASIA TO WARD OFF A DOOMSDAY ECOLOGICAL SCENARIO

Pockets of hope, linking nature and humanity

Biodiversity is the living fabric of our planet. It underpins human well-being in the present and in the future, and its rapid decline threatens nature and people alike.

According to the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services released in 2019 by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the main global drivers of biodiversity loss are climate change, invasive species, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution and urbanisation.

Because of our collective excesses, the ecological carrying capacity of planet earth has largely been exceeded. This trend needs to be redressed, with cleaner air, high quality drinking water, and enough food and healthy habitats to ensure that ecosystem services continue to benefit humanity without critically affecting nature’s balance. Whether we look at nature from an environmental, from a cultural or even from a religious point of view, it is our responsibility and clearly in our interest to respect the environment.

In fact, the possibilities exist, and all is not lost. In the last 50 years or so, much has been accomplished for the protection of nature, including the establishment of conservation areas, and a number of international conventions have been signed and ratified.

One of the best mechanisms that has been created is the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, created in 1971 by UNESCO. Biosphere reserves are plac-



es where humans live in harmony with nature, and where there is an effective combination of sustainable development and nature conservation. They represent pockets of hope and proof that we are not inexorably headed towards a doomsday ecological scenario, provided we take appropriate action.

In South Asia, over 30 biosphere reserves have been established. The first one was the Hurlu Biosphere Reserve in Sri Lanka, which was designated in 1977 and comprises 25,500 hectares within the tropical dry evergreen forest.

In India, the first biosphere reserve was designated by UNESCO in 2000 within the blue mountains of the Nilgiris. It stretches across the States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. The network has gone from strength to strength, and it now counts 12 sites, with Panna, in the State of Madhya Pradesh, as the latest inscription in 2020.

We need many more biosphere reserves and pockets of hope, and the region offers countless options.

Diverse systems

South Asia has a very diverse set of ecosystems. To begin with, Bhutan, India and Nepal combined have thousands of glaciers, surrounded by lakes and alpine ecosystems.

The Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, established in 2018, is a good model. It includes some of the highest ecosystems in the world, with elevations up to 8,586 metres. The reserve is home to orchids and rare plant species. At the same time, more than 35,000 people live there. Their main economic activities are crop production, animal husbandry, fishing, dairy products and poultry farming.

Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka all have extensive coastlines, with coral reefs and mangrove forests. These areas are exposed to extreme weather events (storms, floods, droughts), and sea-level rise.

The Maldives are recognised as the lowest-lying country in the world, with a mere elevation of 1.5 metres above the high tide mark. Together with UNESCO, the archipelago has embarked on a plan to establish pilot sites for the conservation and restoration of coastal ecosystems, and to enhance the population’s knowledge on climate change adaptation. Separately, three biosphere reserves have already been created in the Maldives.

Run on science-based plans

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves have all developed science-based management plans, where local solutions for sustainable human living and nature conservation are being tested and best practices applied. Issues of concern include biodiversity, clean energy,

climate, environmental education, and water and waste management, supported by scientific research and monitoring. The aim is to detect changes and find solutions to increase climate resilience.

All biosphere reserves are internationally recognised sites on land, at the coast, or in the oceans. Governments alone decide which areas to nominate. Before approval by UNESCO, the sites are externally examined. If approved, they will be managed based on an agreed plan, reinforced by routine checks to ensure credibility, but all remain under the sovereignty of their national government.

Some of the countries in South Asia do not yet have any or enough biosphere reserves. In most if not all cases, the political will is certainly there but there is a lack of know-how and financial resources. Of course, more financial support from richer nations and from the private sector would be desirable for establishing biosphere reserves in these countries.

The priority countries

Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal are on the priority list of UNESCO, because they do not yet have any biosphere reserves. Their governments are already working on their first nomination files. Our organisation also believes that it would be important to increase the number of biosphere reserves in India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Eric Falt is the Director of the UNESCO New Delhi Office, which covers Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Views are personal

BOOKS: REVIEW

Start-up author Nistha launches her new book

Nistha Tripathi, a bestselling start-up author, announces the release of her new book titled ‘Unstartup’. This book uncovers the factors that led Unacademy to grow from a small YouTube channel to a start-up valued at \$3.5 billion in a short span of 6 years. Along the way, they have done multiple experiments, taken bold bets, but most importantly innovated.

Nistha had already documented Unacademy’s journey as a section in her earlier book No Shortcuts, so she has seen the company’s rise up close. She was granted extraordinary access to writing this book, making it a one-of-a-kind insider perspective on the edtech behemoth.

Speaking on the announcement, Nistha Tripathi, Author of Unstartup says, “As India crosses

100 unicorns, we need better startup literature so that our next milestone comes sooner. I aim to write books that not only tell the stories of entrepreneurship in modern India but dig deeper into the strategies that characterize high-growth startups. In my interviews with people associated with Unacademy, I discovered insider accounts and anecdotes that reveal the day-to-day thinking, decisions, and discipline of a unique (un)startup.” She further added, “Unstartup offers a ringside view of how Unacademy ignored conventional advice and created its own playbook for success.”

The book Unstartup is published by Rupa Publication and is set to launch on 5th June 2022. Pre-orders are now open and are available on Amazon India.

Unstartup offers a ringside view of how Unacademy ignored conventional advice and created its own playbook for success

Nistha is an active career coach (certified with NeuroLeadership Institute, USA), acclaimed author, and prolific speaker. She has given talks at leading startup events and college start-up fests. Her first novel, Seven Conversations, interpreted Bhagavad Gita in a modern context and gathered rave reviews. With 120,000 plus followers and more than 16 million views on her content across Quora, LinkedIn, and Instagram, Nistha actively writes on



UNSTARTUP: How Unacademy Ignored Conventional Advice to Become a \$3.5 Unicorn
By Nistha Tripathi
Rupa Publications
280 pages; Rs395

entrepreneurship, career advice, and pursuing one’s passion. Her articles have appeared on Entrepreneur, Time, DailyO, DNA, The Tribune, and other leading media outlets.

Apart from running Scholar Strategy, she conducts aspirational talks for students and writing workshops for bloggers.

The journey started when Gaurav Munjal and Hemesh Singh quit their jobs at CommonFloor and Roman Saini quit the Indian Administrative Service to start a YouTube channel that helped students prepare for competitive exams. Six years and 49 million users later, Unacademy

has changed the way Indians learn and also democratized access to high-quality education.

If COVID-19 was a trial by fire for every industry, edtech was one of the sectors perfectly poised for a boom. Many online education startups were in the fray but only a few survived. Unacademy not only outsmarted the competition, but also surpassed every projection and created a new yardstick of success, becoming a \$3.5 billion valued edtech startup.

In Unstartup, bestselling startup author Nistha Tripathi traces the gravity-defying ascent of Unacademy. Drawing on numerous conversations with people in and around Unacademy including its founders, board members, advisors, current and ex-employees, Nistha takes the reader through a page-turning rhapsody of startup strategies and lessons. These insider accounts and anecdotes reveal the day-to-day thinking, decisions and discipline of a unique (un)startup.

American Brew Crafts Launches BlockBuster Beer in a CAN

American Brew Crafts Pvt. Ltd. a modern and authentic beer manufacturing company announced the launch of the BlockBuster beer in a CAN. The all-new BlockBuster beer CAN will come in both Lager & Strong variants offering a refreshing experience to customers. The CAN will accentuate the experience of social interactions, parties, travel, and events by offering convenience and ease of consumption. Everybody can now enjoy the thrill of pure chilled beer anytime, anywhere. The new CAN will be available in stores across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Pondicherry and Andaman.

The new beer CAN will add to the BlockBuster SKU basket offering convenience and comfort for beer connoisseurs to use while on the move. BlockBuster beer CAN is available in 500ML packs which are easy to carry and look trendy and cool.

We are happy to announce the launch of BlockBuster beer CAN in Telangana. Our objective is to introduce a trendy and appealing SKU for the brand. With this launch, we are looking at offering ease of consumption and storage to our customers," said Mr.Satya Siva Athi, Director of American Brew Crafts Pvt. Ltd.

Adding to this, Sri Nagen-



draTayi, Chief Executive Officer, American Brew Crafts Pvt. Ltd. said. We hope this unique CAN will attract the millennial that are constantly looking for

innovations and trying out new tastes. With these new SKUs, we aim to increase our reach and offer convenience to our customers. BlockBuster offers

a unique taste and fizz and is fast emerging as one of the leading brands in the sector.

CANS have always been the chic and cooler cousins of the bottles. While the bottles come in 650ML and 330ML, the 500ML CAN provide an additional option for consumers who strictly go by portions. Today's CANS can retain the actual taste and authenticity of the brew for much longer. While the true essence of the beer remains in all our SKUs the CAN will provide us with a window to the next-gen consumers.

About American Brew Crafts Pvt. Ltd.
American Brew Crafts Pvt.

Ltd. was established in 2017 with a mission to create alcohol products for a fast-growing economy with very limited options and little innovation. They acquired breweries from Lilasons Brewery in Telangana and Arthos Brewery in AP and upgraded the infrastructure by installing state-of-the-art German machinery and a packing zone. BlockBuster beer is the flagship brand of American Brew Crafts Pvt. Ltd. It is a new brand crafted for the next generation of customers. The current portfolio of American Brew Crafts Pvt. Ltd. has BlockBuster Lager, BlockBuster Strong Ultra Lager, and Ultra-Strong to name a few.

NTPC mulls girl empowerment mission in 35 project locations



Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM), the flagship CSR initiative of NTPC Ltd in empowering young girls, to realise their dreams has achieved the newer heights of success.

NTPC Ltd, India's largest integrated energy company, has received widespread acclaim for supporting the upliftment of girls, with focus on girl child from the villages around NTPC projects. Further, it is planning to conduct its GEM initiative in about 35 project locations during this year.

GEM programme has empowered girls from across the country and made them aware of basic education, health and self-defence. With this initiative, NTPC aims to help these girls break the glass ceiling and dispel the misconception about female foeticide in rural areas. The initiative has created a space for the children to showcase their talents and capabilities.

As a responsible corporate citizen, NTPC started Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) back in 2018 and contributed

to the empowerment of unfortunate girls in the vicinity of its project locations.

By 2019, Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) benefited 2300 girls across 20 project locations. NTPC oversaw the enrolment of girl students between the age of 10-12 years from different locations such as Dadri, Korba, Farakka, Sipat, Singrauli, Kawas, Ramagundam, Simhadri and other project areas. These girl students have gotten exposed to not only academics but also yoga, self-defence, fine arts and much more. These girls have imbibed a creative mindset and also learnt the importance of team spirit.

GEM ensures that the girl child grows into a well-rounded adult; with ample curiosity and quality communication and social skills. Additionally, it motivates the girl child to nurture their creativity, sharpen psychological, social and emotional growth, and makes learning a lively, engaging, and impactful experience.

Green bonds catching up fast in India, on way to sustainable development: ASSOCHAM

In sync with the rising global investor interest in sustainable development, India's green bond issuance is expected to reach new milestones in 2022, following an exceptionally strong 2021 which saw financing of USD 6.11 billion through these instruments, in the first 11 months of the year, an ASSOCHAM study has pointed out.

2021 was the strongest year since green bonds from the country were first issued in 2015. India will need USD 10.103 trillion by 2070 to be carbon neutral, the ASSOCHAM study stated, adding that the green bonds have emerged amongst the most prominent financial vehicles catering to climate action specifically for projects requiring long-term finances.

It said long-term investors including pension and insurance funds now prefer bonds which invest in green assets. Worldwide, labelled green bond issuance amounted to USD 167.6 billion, led by the United States followed by PRC, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

We expect bond markets in India to witness further deepening by inclusion in global indices and allowance to diversify investment opportunities, ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood said. He said India has been amongst the world champions to follow the path of environment-friendly development.

As part of an integration effort of the country's financial priorities into measurable metrics, the Bombay Stock Exchange



has launched two such indices: S&P BSE Greenex and the S&P BSE Carbonex. The Greenex comprises top 25 stocks having minimum carbon footprint along with market capitalization and turnover from the BSE 100. It assesses the energy efficiency of firms.

The BSE Carbonex is a thematic index which measures companies' ability to address climate change risk and opportunity. The index is based on the S&P BSE 100, with the constituent weights modified in accordance with the companies' relative carbon performance as measured by the level of their greenhouse gas emissions and carbon policies.

Product innovation in bond markets has helped in bridging the funding gap. We have seen a lot of vibrancy in several new structures like Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs), Coobligor Structures, Covered Bonds, Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM), Sustainability Linked Bonds, Green Bonds, Partially Guaranteed Bonds, Masala Bonds and Foreign Currency Bonds, the study noted.

India aims to roll out 6G telecom network by end of decade: PM

India is targeting the rollout of 6G telecom network, which will provide ultra high speed internet connectivity, by the end of the decade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday.

India currently has 3G and 4G telecom networks and companies are gearing up to launch 5G over the next few months.

Speaking at the silver jubilee event of telecom sector regulator TRAI here, he said it is estimated that the 5G network rollout will add USD 450 billion to the Indian economy.

This is not just increasing internet speed but also the pace of development and creating jobs, he said, adding the 5G technology will bring positive change in governance of the



country, ease of living and ease of doing business. It will boost growth in agriculture, health, education, infrastructure and logistics, he said. Connectivity, Modi said, will decide the progress of the country in the 21st century and so modern day

infrastructure needs to be rolled out. According to the prime minister, a task force has started work on rolling out 6G network by the end of the decade.

Indigenous 5G test bed in telecom sector is an important step in India's self-reliance, he added.

Sumil Chemical Industries launches TRION ZFS & BLACK BELT insecticides

KULBIR SINGH KALSJI
Chandigarh

Sumil Chemical Industries Private Limited, launched two New 9(3) Insecticides named as TRION ZFS and BLACK BELT at a programme held at hotel Radisson Zirakpur today. TRION ZFS was launched in the presence of Rajender Akhni, President, Sales, Hitesh Patel, VP Marketing, NB Patel, National Sales Manager, Radhey Shyam, Head Crop Protection and Chirag Darji, Marketing Services.

Bimal Shah, MD, SML group mentioned that SML Group is a

technology leader in advanced formulation, serving more than 85 global farming countries for 5 decades having one of the world's largest ultra-modern manufacturing capacity of environmentally friendly, high quality and biologically efficient formulations like WDGs, CSs, EWs, SCs, ZCs. A dedicated State-of-the-Art R & D Center with expertise in developing novel formulation platform technology with growing Global Patent Portfolio.

TRION ZFS is world's first insecticide and nutrient combination in the form of W.G. formulation developed by Sumil Chemical



Industries to combat the deadly Yellow stem borer. The product details were shared by Radhey Shyam, Head Crop Protection at Sulphur Mills limited. He said that the product is one of a kind

because the inert materials used for the formation of insecticides are replaced with Sulphur 70% and Zinc Oxide 13%, replacing the inert/non active compounds with nutrition leading to protection

of plants from harmful insects. It also leads to providing required nutrition to the plants not only that but it is also beneficial for soil health. Hence getting its tagline - "Anokha Sangam Duniya Me Awwal".

TRION ZFS being a WG based product makes its application easier. It is suggested to apply 4 Kg/Acre after 15 to 20 days of transplanting in paddy and in direct sown paddy after 25 to 30 days of sowing by uniformly mixing in soil or fertilizer. This time slot is the most effective to provide a protective shield against the stem borer and as this initial tillering is

critical stage of crop for Nutrition perspectives as well, so TRION ZFS is the best choice of farmers as its World's first insecticide and nutrient combination product.

BLACK BELT: is a dry cap technology-based product having water-dispersible granules (WDG) formulation with controlled release properties is the unique differential factor along with other benefits like quick knock down, longer residual control and no smell, hence its tagline is "Chadhi Jawani Badde Ko". It is suggested to apply it 270-300 gm/acre and with 200 liters of water for controlling Stem borer in Paddy.

Healthcare is the gov's responsibility

BY NARVIJAY YADAV

Last year people were so scared of Covid that the profits of the insurance industry increased manifold. Because of this, health insurance premiums in India registered a growth of 25 percent last year. A report by the National Insurance Academy, which works under the Union Finance Ministry, revealed that in the year 2020-21, insurance companies collected Rs 58,572 crore as medical insurance premium, while in the next financial year this figure increased to Rs 73,330 crore. The report, released at an event of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said that the health insurance market in India has been growing steadily at a compound annual growth rate of 24 percent, but it grew by around 34 percent during the phase of pandemic. According to NITI Aayog, 69 crore people are members of Ayushman Bharat scheme, while



26 crore people in the country are already associated with some health insurance scheme. That is, 70 percent of the citizens of the country are part of some health insurance scheme, the remaining 30 percent of the population, that is, around 400 million people are not yet part of any health insurance.

The central government also wants to connect 400 million uninsured Indians with the Ayushman scheme. The Na-

tional Health Authority and NITI Aayog have prepared its draft on the subject. To take advantage of the scheme, each of these individuals will have to pay an annual premium of Rs 250 to 300, in return for which each of them will be able to get free treatment of up to Rs 5 lakh in a year. This will also include the facility of being treated in a private ward. This facility is not available in the current Ayushman scheme. The new scheme

may be implemented in the next few months. Under the Ayushman scheme, treatment can be done in any hospital associated with the PM-JAY scheme of the government. Even medical facilities will be available in other states. Meanwhile, the Rajasthan government is promoting its own insurance scheme through advertisements. For the first time, a state government has done a work of winning the hearts of the people by announcing the same free facility for all the citizens.

Health is a matter related to everyone and in the changed circumstances, health care has become a very costly affair, which is not available to everyone. Health insurance is expensive and not reliable either. The problems related to health insurance of private insurance companies come out every day. In such a situation, the Chief Minister Chiranjeevi Health Insurance Scheme of Rajasthan government is a commendable initiative.

Tata Projects appoints VinayakPai as CEO, MD designate

Infrastructure firm Tata Projects Ltd on Wednesday announced the appointment of VinayakPai as its CEO and managing director designate.

Pai has been recently inducted into the company's board as executive director.

Before joining Tata Projects, Pai was the group president at Worley, based out of Hague, the Netherlands, the company said in a statement.

He was responsible for Worley businesses in the EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) and APAC (Asia Pacific) regions. He was the president of the energy, chemicals and resources business at Jacobs before its acquisition by Worley.

He has been part of the energy, chemicals and natural resources industry for over three decades and has experience in executing complex



projects. He has held key positions in engineering design, technology licensing, project management, business development and operations.

Pai holds a bachelor of engineering degree from the College of Engineering, Pune and post-graduation in management from Symbiosis, Pune and IIT Mumbai.

Tata Projects has expertise in executing large and complex urban and industrial infrastructure projects. It is currently executing some of the most marquee projects across the country, including the new Parliament building

Assam CM Himanta Biswa affirms to welfare of tea garden communities



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday reaffirmed his commitment to ensure the welfare and progress of the tea garden communities, whose toil leads to the famous Assam Tea.

In a Tweet on the occasion of International Tea Day, he wrote: "For millions every morning begins with a refresh-

ing cup of tea!" He added that toil and sweat of the tea garden workers results in the world famous Assam Tea and affirmed once again to ensure their well-being.

"On #InternationalTeaDay, I reaffirm our commitment to continue working for welfare & progress of our tea garden communities," Sarma wrote.

Talview Wins HR Tech Award 2022

Talview, the global talent measurement leader for AI-powered hiring and proctoring solutions, is proud to announce they have received the 2022 HR Tech Award for Talent Acquisition: Best Comprehensive Solution. Talview is both excited to receive this affirmation of their progress in enhancing and simplifying recruiting workflows for talent acquisition (TA) and recruiting teams.

"With more and more companies hiring remote workers than ever before, talent leaders need a solution to give them confidence in the abilities of those hires," said Ben Eubanks, Chief Research Officer, Lighthouse Research & Advisory. "Talview tackles that common need with a unique solution, offering remote proctoring, assessments, and support for employers as they screen candidates. We were definitely intrigued by this offering."



According to their data, Lighthouse Research & Advisory, the company behind the HR Tech Awards, more than 5,000 providers exist across the HR technology landscape, with more entering the space every single day. This year, the HR Tech Awards is recognizing approximately 1% of those firms for their focus on creating solutions that solve problems their customers care about.

"We see this award as a validation of our efforts to meet the demands of talent acquisition in the new digitized world," said Sanjoe Tom Jose, CEO, Talview. "There is a tremendous opportunity to disrupt traditional methodologies in favor of new, innovative solutions that improve the

speed and efficiency of the hiring process, provide talent insights to identify best-fit candidates, and boost employee retention. This award shows that Talview is leading the way."

The Talview Measurement platform centralizes and orchestrates hiring and proctoring workflows into a seamless process, resulting in:

Reduced Time to Hire: With top candidates on the market for less than 10 days, automating manual tasks for recruiters and removing any friction in the process has become vital.

Improved Candidate Experience: With large majority of candidates dropping out due to poorly crafted experiences, personalized experience with storytelling is super critical.

Reduced Cost per Hire: A focus on significant time-savings for HR and TA staff simultaneously reduces operational costs.

SATISH HANDA
Yamunanagar

Haryana Vyapar Kalyan Board while organizing Haryana Plywood Conclave presided by Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khatter in which Kanwar Pal Gurjar state forest minister was chief guest a review was made to bring new life in collapsing Yamunanagar plywood industry in Haryana state having nearly a thousand manufacturing units in the town producing plywood board, saw mills as well as associated industries providing employment to thousands of workers. J.K. Biyani president of Yamunanagar Plywood Manufacturers Association told that the industry is presently doing export of plywood for value worth Rs 400 crore only as against expected amount worth Rs 5000 crore in case given assistance by the government. He said, plywood



industry in the town is using hardly 30-40% of their production capacity and facing severe slump since past few years.

While addressing a large gathering of plywood manufacturers in the area and traders from all over in the state, Chief Minister Khatter announced several schemes for welfare of plywood manufacturers as well as exporters in the town to bring identification to plywood industry like in past not only in the country

but all over the world. He declared to waive of 2% market fee on manufacturing of plywood to be exported, which will be refunded to the manufacturers immediately after despatch. Announcing relief to plywood manufacturers in the state, Khatter announced rebate on electricity duty as well as on stamp duty, besides offering 1.5% subsidy for a period of 10 years to newly set up plywood industry in the district. Khat-

ter said, Haryana state government will also provide benefit of value Rs 48000 annually to each youth employee originally hailing from Haryana state employed by the manufacturers.

Khatter said, Yamunanagar plywood industry may achieve lost identification by increasing exports for which state government has already prepared a road map. He said, in case of wood export Kerala state is leading in the country. Chander Mohan Patwari Industry Minister from Assam was also present at the occasion and suggested use of bamboo readily available in his state used as raw material in manufacture of plywood as an substitute for popular not easily available and being arranged by plywood manufacturers from other districts in the state as well as from U.P. Among other bureaucrats present in Conclave were senior officers from industry department in the state, Ministry

of MSME, representatives from Indian Embassy in Thailand and Indian Embassy in Behran.

Khatter announced opening of first most awaited Forest Research Institute in Haryana state at Yamunanagar on which amount worth Rs 50 crore will be spent by the government since plywood manufacturers had to visit Forest Research Institute at Dehradun quite often to seek technical guidance. Plywood manufacturers said, Forest Research Institute at Yamunanagar will provide oxygen to collapsing Yamunanagar plywood industry. They told that earlier nearly 500 trucks containing plywood manufactured in the town were being despatched to other states daily, which have now been reduced to hardly 200-250 trucks at present and most of the migrant labourers from U.P, Bihar and M.P has started leaving for their home states in search of work.

How to Curb Inflation in India

BY DR. HARVINDER KAUR

The ghost of inflation is always a big threat to every ruling party's economic and political stability, not only in India but in the whole world. Inflation may be beneficial for big corporates in the short run, but it is always harmful and puts a dent in the middle class's savings and ruins the poor class. The weightage of food items is 47% of the Wholesale Price Index (April 2022) in India.

Although the abundance production of food grains, pulses, and vegetables break all records in the last few years, still their prices are very high and vegetables and fruits are out of the reach of poor men and gulping the savings of the middle class. Food inflation is set to explore new heights (Food, and oil prices push inflation to 8 years high) after 2014. The reason behind all this is the increasing fuel prices as the transportation cost of every product is increasing. Some economists suggest that to control inflation govt. should use contractionary monetary and fiscal policies by increasing interest rates and reducing public expenditure but they do not want to see the elephant of inflation in the room. Inflation always doesn't mean an excess supply of money; it may be because of a shortage of production of goods and services as in Sri Lanka.

After the pandemic, the maximum number of people lost their employment. 52% of people were either with no income or have



decreased income. Because of this demand for poor people decreased as they have no money to spend and on the other side cash became king for the middle class. The overall effect was that the aggregate demand decreased in the economy and because of the lack of any demand booster the investors stopped investment and demand for blue-collar and white-collar workers decreased and this multiplied the unemployment in the economy. In Haryana, the unemployment rate was a maximum of about 34% in April 2022 more than the national average.

If income increases the people will demand more, although its immediate effect that prices may increase if income and supply of goods and services will increase simultaneously than overall effect will be that growth and investment rate will increase in the economy.

How to curb inflation :

We have to adopt practical methods instead of traditional methods to curb inflation and

methods that are appropriate for the Indian economy as this economy is a developing economy. European economies are developed economies so their methods to control inflation are not suitable for the Indian economy.

We can give boosters to the middle class to spend more with the tools of expansionary fiscal and monetary policy. By expansionary fiscal policy govt. can increase employment opportunities in the economy and purchasing power of people will increase and demand will also increase and will stimulate investment in the private sector. In this way, two birds will be killed with one stone. A new start-up will do net investment or will use already excess production capacity will produce more, more production can control inflation but the condition is that the prices of raw material and intermediate inputs should remain constant.

For the desired results fuel prices and Agri products Prices

should be controlled. We cannot blame the Russia-Ukraine war anymore for rising fuel prices. Farmers should be compensated for low agriculture product prices by giving them more direct benefits or subsidies, as America does. Indian economy is an agrarian economy.

If the aggregate supply of output does not increase proportionately in the short run, this will cause demand-supply imbalances which will lead to demand-pull inflation in the economy, that is, the general rise in the price level.

Demand-pull inflation can occur when there is an increase in any component of aggregate demand, namely, consumption demand by households, investment by business firms, increase in government expenditure unmatched by an increase in taxes (that is, deficit spending by the government-financed by either creation of new money by the central bank or borrowing by the government from the market).

Let us assume the government adopts an expansionary fiscal policy under which it increases its expenditure without levying extra taxes to finance its increased expenditure by borrowing from the Reserve Bank of India. Demand-pull inflation can be neutralized by more consumer and capital goods production.

The govt. should decrease the rate of direct taxes to boost aggregate demand as the disposal income of the salaried class will increase and they will spend more

and the consumption of one person is the income of others and induced investment increase in the economy. On the other side if govt. does not want to decrease direct taxes and that amount of tax collection should be used for a productive purpose not on extravagant expenditures of the govt.

To illustrate the above point, let us assume that the government adopts an expansionary fiscal policy under which it increases its expenditure on education, health, and defence and finances this extra expenditure by borrowing from the Reserve Bank of India which prints new notes for this purpose. This will lead to an increase in aggregate demand (C + I + G). When aggregate demand for all purposes—consumption, investment, and government expenditure—is in the tune of the supply of goods at current prices, there will be no inflation. For a very short period, there can be supply bottlenecks but after some time when the supply of goods will increase because of new investment or use of excess capacity in production, it will be self-corrective. Since inflation is a continuous increase in the price level, not a one-time rise in it. Before full employment, there is a full possibility in an economy like India as it has not reached the level of full employment like developed economies. According to Credit Vidya agency 10%, the higher industrial output can ease retail inflation by 40 bps. Fuel duty cuts by at least Rs 5 per liter are likely to lower 15-20 bps inflation.

RBI's criticism for 'delayed' rate hike unfair, says D Subbarao



The criticism that the Reserve Bank of India was behind the curve in hiking interest rate to tame rising inflation is unfair, former RBI Governor D Subbarao said on Wednesday and asserted that it is difficult for any central bank to anticipate the future more accurately.

Earlier this month, Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the central bank's rate-setting panel, surprised the markets with a 40 basis points hike in repo rate in an off-cycle policy meeting. It was also the first rate hike after August 2018, amid spiralling inflation. Subbarao further said given that monetary policy acts with a lag, this rate hike, by itself, is unlikely to bring inflation down in a hurry.

"I saw that the hurried action to tighten monetary conditions through an off-cycle MPC meeting raised several questions," he told PTI in an interview. Subbarao was responding to a question why RBI did not raise

interest rate much earlier despite rising inflation. "Was the RBI sleeping at the wheel even as inflation was soaring? Did it go overboard in prioritizing growth over inflation? Won't the delayed action cost heavily in macroeconomic terms? Will this scrambling hurt RBI's credibility?"

"I believe that this criticism is unfair," he said. Retail inflation surged to an eight-year high of 7.79 per cent in April this year while inflation galloped for the seventh straight month. RBI has been mandated by the government to ensure that inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. While pointing out that the RBI, like other central banks around the world, had to act under astonishing uncertainty brought on by rapidly unfolding geopolitical developments, Subbarao said in early April when the last scheduled MPC meeting took place, the war in Ukraine had been on for weeks, but even

seasoned military experts and experienced diplomats were wrong in predicting its course.

"It's unfair to expect central banks to anticipate the future more accurately," Subbarao asserted. The former RBI Governor noted that the inflation trajectory going forward will depend on the pace and quantum of policy tightening over the next few cycles.

"With credit growth currently only around 9-10 per cent, the recent repo rate hike is unlikely to transmit very strongly," he said, adding that nevertheless, the rate action by RBI will help subdue inflation indirectly - by ensuring that inflation expectations don't get unhinged.

To a question if inflation stays above the RBI's target band, the central bank may have to explain why it is unable to bring it down, he opined that the RBI may face that prospect by September. "Should that contingency arise, the RBI must see that as an opportunity to explain the challenges of policy navigation in extraordinarily uncertain times," Subbarao suggested. According to its inflation targeting mandate, if average inflation rules above the target band for three consecutive quarters, the RBI is enjoined to write a letter to the government explaining the reasons for failure to deliver inflation within the target band and the remedial action taken to get back on target.

Money View eyes INR 1500 Cr Revenue Run Rate by year end

Bengaluru headquartered fintech platform Money View turns profitable and ends FY22 (March'22) with an annualized revenue run rate of INR 600 Cr. Money View has grown 4X year-over-year with strong unit economics while being profitable through FY22. The company is disbursing loans at an annualized run rate of 850 million and is on a trajectory to reach more than 1 billion AUM by the end of the year.



d deserved large economies when it comes to access to credit. More than 70% of the credit provided by banks is only given to the top 10% of affluent Indians. The most underserved segments are people who earn less than 5L a year. Money View aims to bridge this credit gap by providing personalized loan offers for its customers through its robust data and risk assessment model. The company's proprietary data models provide a 360-degree risk assessment, enabling credit for the underserved segments.

Co-founded by Puneet Agarwal and Sanjay Aggarwal in 2014, Money View, a leading fintech company has partnered with over 15 financial institutions to offer credit/financial products on its platform. Puneet Agarwal, co-founder and CEO, Money View said, "In the age of cash burning businesses, we are one of the very few fintech startups to be profitable for more than a year now. With the continued growth we are experiencing, we expect to end FY23 with more than INR 1500 Cr in revenue run rate. One of the primary reasons behind Money View's growth and profitability is the robust risk management capabilities that allows us to service a wide range of users across income range and bank scores, while maintaining positive economics for our loans." India is one of the most un-

HDFC Bank carves out rural banking as separate vertical

Largest private sector lender HDFC Bank on Thursday announced that it has carved out rural banking as a separate vertical and will be opening 1,060 branches in mofussil areas and semi-urban pockets as part of the increased focus in FY23.

Earlier, rural banking was a part of the wider retail branch banking vertical, and the bank has appointed Anil Bhavnani, who has been working with it for 19 years, to head the newly-carved rural banking vertical, according to a statement.

It can be noted that there seems to be an increased focus on the rural banking business among lenders, especially in the private sector who were earlier blamed for focusing only on the cash-spinning urban pockets which had prompted policy to mandate rural presence.



Axis Bank had last year announced the 'Bharat Banking' initiative aimed at the same market while a slew of others have invested in the predominantly rural market-focused microfinance institutions.

The largest private sector lender said the move is a part of making the bank future ready, and will address the untapped opportunities in the market.

Bhavnani said this is both a challenge as well as an opportunity, and added that the increased focus will see more branches getting opened in

the rural and semi-urban areas which he will look after.

According to the statement, the bank will open 1,064 branches under the rural banking vertical in FY23 as against 1,000 branches opened in the last two fiscal years. At present, the semi-urban and rural areas have 6,342 or 50 per cent of its branches. The bank has tied up with Institute of Rural Management, Anand to chalk its rural initiative strategy which will look at consumer behaviour, customer satisfaction, service design, and service delivery.

It is looking to build new products and services related to rural transport economy, forest economy, agri economy, and other allied activities, it said, adding that the focus is also on providing one stop shop solution to small farmers, workers, and traders.

Top executives' salaries may jump 8.9% in 2022, highest in 5 yrs: Survey

Salaries of senior executives in India are likely to increase by 8.9 per cent in 2022, highest in five years, amid a recovery in business sentiments post pandemic, according to leading global professional services firm Aon plc.

The Aon's 11th Annual Executive Rewards Survey in India, which analysed data across 475 companies from more than 20 industries, further noted that the median CEO compensation has reached Rs 7.05 crore.

With fundamentals of the economy remaining strong and



business sentiments positive, there were strong tailwinds which resulted in top executives' salary increase to be projected at 8.9 per cent from 7.9 per cent in 2021, it said. Moreover, the pay mix for chief executive officer (CEO) and key CXO roles continue to move

towards higher pay at risk, as per the survey.

CXO roles refer to common c-suite executives including CEO, chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), and chief information officer (CIO). Pay at Risk - which is the sum of variable pay and long-term incentives (LTI) to total compensation - for CEOs stands near 80 per cent, while C-level executives including COO, CFO, sales head and chief human resources officer follow closely behind at 50 per cent, as per the survey.

RBI to pay Rs 30,307 crore dividend to govt for FY22

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said its board has approved a dividend payment of Rs 30,307 crore to the government for the financial ended March 2022.

The board approved the transfer of Rs 30,307 crore as surplus to the central government for the accounting year 2021-22 while deciding to maintain the Contingency Risk Buffer at 5.50 per cent, RBI said in a statement.

The decision on the divi-



dent payment was made in the 596th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of RBI, headed by Governor Shaktikanta Das, held on Friday.

Last year in May, RBI declared a dividend of Rs 99,122 crore for the nine-month peri-

od (July 2020 to March 2021). The dividend was paid for that period as RBI aligned its financial year with the government's financial year.

Earlier, RBI used to follow July-June period earlier as against government's April-March financial year.

During its meeting, the board reviewed the current economic situation, global and domestic challenges and the impact of recent geopolitical developments.

Odisha govt approves Rs 429cr for mega aluminium park

BHUBANESWAR: Odisha government Wednesday made a budgetary provision of Rs 428.95 crore for development of a mega aluminium park in Angul.

The decision in this regard was taken at a state cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik here.

It also approved a new scheme - Financial Assistance for Development of Mega Aluminium Park at Angul, along with the budgetary support for IDCO (Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation), the implementing agency. The project will be implemented during the period from 2021-22 to 2023-24, Chief



Secretary S C Mohapatra told reporters here.

Among other decisions, Mohapatra said the cabinet approved proposals for creation of land bank for industry and infrastructure, sanctioned grant-in-aid in favour of 24 private upper primary schools and enactment of a separate legislation for setting up of a self-financed private university.

Sensex tanks over 1,400 pts amid global market rout



MUMBAI: Equity benchmarks fell sharply on Thursday, mirroring a sell-off in global markets, with the Sensex and Nifty tumbling over 2.60 per cent on across-the-board selling.

Persistent foreign fund outflows also continue to dampen sentiment. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex dived 1,416.30 points or 2.61 per cent to settle at 52,792.23. During the day, it tumbled 1,539.02 points or 2.83 per cent to 52,669.51.

The broader NSE Nifty tanked 430.90 points or 2.65 per cent to end at 15,809.40. From the Sensex firms, HCL Technologies, Wipro, Infosys, TCS, Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the major laggards. ITC and Dr Reddy's emerged as the gainers. Barring Shanghai, other Asian markets ended lower, with Seoul, Hong Kong and Tokyo settling in the red. Equity exchanges in Europe were also trading sharply lower in the afternoon session. Stock markets in the US had ended deep in the red on Wednesday.

"US markets saw the worst sell-off since June 2020 as inflation fear looms," said Mohit Nigam, Head - PMS, Hem Securities. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.29 per cent to USD 107.7 per barrel. Foreign institutional investors offloaded shares worth a net Rs 1,254.64 crore on Wednesday, as per stock exchange data. "Deteriorating macro sentiments such as soaring inflation, recession fears, and the prospect of the Federal Reserve getting even more hawkish will continue to keep benchmarks on the edge."

Sri Lanka receives USD 160 mln from World Bank; PM says looking at possibility of using some of it to buy fuel

Sri Lanka has received USD 160 Million from the World Bank and is looking at the possibility of using some of it to buy fuel, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe told Parliament on Wednesday, as protests continued in the country against the ongoing fuel and gas shortages caused by the economic crisis.

"160 million dollars has been received from the World Bank and a grant from the ADB (Asian Development Bank) is also expected," Wickremesinghe said. He said the money received from the World Bank cannot be used to buy fuel. We are trying to see if we can use some of it for fuel purchases," he said. Wickremesinghe in his address to the nation on Monday said that two more petrol shipments under the Indian credit line were due this week and by May 29. His remarks came as angry protesters blocked several roads here on Wednesday as part of the protest against ongoing fuel and gas shortages caused by the economic crisis.

Rs 14.10 lakh crore of taxes collected this year shows that more and more people are complying with the law voluntarily: Shri Kamlesh Varshney

NEW DELHI: "This year we have collected Rs 14.10 lakh crore of taxes. I am really thankful to all the taxpayers because it's reflection of the fact that more people are getting aware of their tax responsibility and understanding the importance of TDS (Tax Deducted at Source)," said Kamlesh Varshney, Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), Ministry of Finance Joint Secretary at the national seminar on Tax Deduction at Source (TDS). The event was organised by the apex industry body, Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM).

Shri Varshney stressed that there should be a movement to make people realise that tax is your responsibility for nation-building. He said, "It is not something that you have to do because the law requires you to do, but as a citizen of your country it is your responsibility to pay taxes in nation-building. A good collection this year is a reflection of the fact that more people are coming into the formal economy and more people are paying their taxes. And TDS has played a major role in that."

While giving details on how the

TDS operates, the Joint Secretary of CBDT stated one should avoid comparing India with other countries, which are formal economies and have few TDS provisions for resident taxpayers. "India still has a large cash economy and we are moving in that direction, but have not yet reached that stage where most people pay their taxes voluntarily."

To encourage voluntary compliance, the government plans to initiate an e-verification scheme in the next few months. Giving details, Varshney said, "With e-verification scheme, what we plan to do is that the information we have gathered will be given to you about like your spendings, credit card usage, amount won on gamings etc. We are moving away from that stage where whenever we receive information, we reopen your case. The idea is we will do the reopening in the third year."

"For the first two years, it will convey electronically that this is the information. The taxpayer can reply that he has already included this in tax return or it can file updated return, which is why the provision of updation of return was introduced this year.

LPG price hiked by Rs 3.5, crosses Rs 1,000 mark

NEW DELHI: Cooking gas LPG price was on Thursday hiked by Rs 3.50 per cylinder, the second increase in rate this month following the firming of international energy rates.

Non-subsidised LPG now costs Rs 1,003 per 14.2-kg cylinder in the national capital, up from Rs 999.50 previously, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers. This is the second increase in LPG rate this month and the third in less than two months. The price was hiked by Rs 50 per cylinder on March 22 and again by the same quantum on May 7. Since April 2021, prices have risen by Rs 193.5 per cylinder. Petrol and diesel prices however continue to be on freeze for the 43rd day in a row. The pause followed rates being hiked by a record Rs 10 per litre in a matter of 16 days beginning March 22.

Non-subsidised cooking gas is the one that consumers buy after exhausting their quota of 12 cylinders at subsidised or below-market rates.

However, the government pays no subsidy on LPG in most cities and the price of the refill that consumers, including the poor women who got free connection under the



much-talked Ujjwala scheme, is the same as that for non-subsidised or market price LPG.

Non-subsidised LPG costs Rs 1,002.50 per 14.2-kg cylinder in Mumbai while it is priced at Rs 1,018.50 a bottle in Chennai and Rs 1,029 in Kolkata. Rates differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes such as VAT. Prices are higher in states with higher taxes.

Alongside, oil firms also hiked the price of commercial LPG cylinders - the ones used by establishments like hotels

and restaurants - by Rs 8 per cylinder to Rs 2,354 per 19-kg bottle. On May 1, the price of a commercial LPG cylinder was increased by Rs 102.50 to Rs 2,355.50 but on May 7 it was reduced to Rs 2,346.

International oil prices have been on the rise this year. They jumped to a 13-year high of USD 140 per barrel in March before shedding some of the gains. Brent was trading at USD 110.13 per barrel on Thursday. To compound things, the Indian rupee tumbled to Rs 77.74 to

a dollar, making imports costlier. India relies on overseas purchases to meet about 85 per cent of its oil requirement, making it one of the most vulnerable in Asia to higher oil prices.

While India has surplus oil refining capacity, it does not manufacture enough LPG to meet domestic demand and imports significant quantities from nations such as Saudi Arabia. On Wednesday, an oil ministry official stated that the Saudi LPG prices have gone up by 33 per cent while domestic rates have increased by only 11 per cent.

Biden praises Greece for leadership after Russia invasion

US President Joe Biden on Monday thanked Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis for his country's moral leadership in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as the two held talks at the White House on Monday about the ongoing conflict.

Mitsotakis was in Washington to mark a COVID-delayed commemoration of the bicentennial of the start of the Greek War of Independence, a more than eight-year-long struggle that led to the ouster of the Ottoman Empire. He will deliver an address to a joint session of Congress on Tuesday.

But the celebratory moment was shadowed by the most significant fighting on the continent since World War II, and as Biden seeks to keep the West unified as it pressures Russia to end the war. Biden praised Greece for showing moral clarity



by quickly imposing sanctions against Russia following the February 24 invasion, providing Kyiv with military assistance and taking in Ukrainian refugees fleeing the conflict.

"We're helping Ukrainians say no to Russian aggression," Biden said. "And we're saying no to tyranny, to the idea that autocracies will outpace democracies in

the 21st century, because that's what is at stake here in my view.

As Europe looks to wean itself off Russian energy, Mitsotakis has pushed the idea of Greece becoming an energy hub that can bring gas, as well as renewable energies, produced in southwest Asia, the Middle East and Africa to eastern Europe. "Greece plans to play an im-

portant role as a gateway for electricity produced from cheap, renewable sources," Mitsotakis said.

A new Greece-to-Bulgaria pipeline built during the COVID-19 pandemic, tested and due to start commercial operation in June is slated to bring large volumes of gas flow between the two countries in both directions to generate electricity, fuel industry, and heat homes.

The new pipeline connection, called the Gas Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria, will give Bulgaria access to ports in neighbouring Greece that are importing liquefied natural gas, or LNG, and also will bring gas from Azerbaijan through a new pipeline system that ends in Italy. Russia announced last month it was cutting off natural gas exports to Bulgaria and Poland over the countries' refusal to pay in rubles.

N Korea's Kim faces 'huge dilemma' on aid as virus surges



During more than a decade as North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un has made self-reliance his governing lynchpin, shunning international help and striving instead for domestic strategies to fix his battered economy.

But as an illness suspected to be COVID-19 sickens hundreds of thousands of his people, Kim stands at a critical crossroad: Either swallow his pride and receive foreign help to fight the disease, or go it alone, enduring potential huge fatalities that may undermine his leadership.

Kim Jong Un is in a dilemma, a really huge dilemma, said Lim Eul-chul, a professor at Kyungnam University's Institute for Far Eastern Studies in Seoul. If he accepts US or Western assistance, that can shake the self-reliance stance that he has steadfastly maintained and public confidence in him could be weakened.

Doing nothing, however, could be calamitous.

Since acknowledging a COVID-19 outbreak last week, North Korea has said an explosively spreading fever has killed 56 people and sickened about 1.5 million others. Outside observers suspect most of those cases were caused by the

coronavirus.

Whatever North Korea's state-controlled media says about those who are sick, the outbreak is likely several times worse. North Korea lacks sufficient COVID-19 tests, and experts say it is significantly understating deaths to avoid possible public unrest that could hurt Kim politically.

Some observers say the stated death toll is low for a country where most of the 26 million people are unvaccinated and medicine is in short supply.

The North's apparent under-reporting of deaths is meant to defend Kim's authority as he faces the first and biggest crisis of his decade of rule, Nam Sung-wook, a professor at Korea University, said.

The North Korean outbreak may be linked to a massive military parade in Pyongyang in late April that Kim organised to feature new weapons and loyal troops. The parade drew tens of thousands of soldiers and residents from around the country.

After the event, Kim spent several days taking dozens of commemorative group photos with parade participants, all of whom were without masks. Most of the photos involved

dozens or hundreds of people.

North Korea may be able to publicly hide the real number of deaths, but the country's strengthened restrictions on movement and quarantine rules could hurt its agricultural cultivation. Its economy is already battered by more than two years of pandemic-caused border shutdowns and other curbs.

North Korea is also worried about a shortage of medical supplies and food and daily necessities that have dried up in markets during the border closures, Yang Moo-jin, a professor at Seoul's University of North Korean Studies, said.

They are experiencing another arduous march," Yang said, referring to the state's euphemism for a devastating famine in the 1990s that killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Kim has previously rebuffed millions of doses of vaccines offered by the UN-backed COVAX distribution programme. After the North admitted to an outbreak, South Korea and China offered to send vaccines, medicine and other medical supplies to North Korea. The United States said it supports international aid efforts, though it has no current plans to share its vaccine supplies with the North.

Receiving outside help would put the North, which is always intensely proud, despite its poverty, in a difficult position. Kim had repeatedly touted his country as impregnable to the pandemic during the past two years. On Saturday, however, he said his country faces a great upheaval and that officials must study how China, his country's only major ally, and other nations have handled the pandemic.

UK strongly supports Sweden, Finland joining NATO



LONDON: The UK government has said it strongly supports the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as Sweden and Finland confirmed their intention to apply for membership of the military alliance, in a historic shift of foreign policy stance in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said on Monday evening that the two Nordic countries should be integrated into NATO, which operates on a collective defence basis under which an attack against any one ally is considered as an attack against all allies.

The UK strongly supports applications for NATO membership from Finland and Sweden. They should be integrated into the alliance as soon as possible; their accession will strengthen the collective security of Europe, said Truss.

We look forward to working with them as new NATO Allies and stand ready to offer them our every assistance during the accession process. Our mutual security declarations signed with Sweden and Finland last week by the Prime Minister [Boris Johnson] demonstrate our steadfast and unequivocal commitment to both countries during this process and beyond, she said.

UN envoy: Talks on now to extend Yemen's 2-month cease-fire



With just two weeks left in a two-month cease-fire in Yemen, the UN envoy to the war-torn country said Tuesday that talks with the government and Houthi rebels are going on right now and he hopes the truce will be extended.

But Hans Grundberg was wary of making any prediction, saying that agreement on an extension would depend on the talks that he and his office are having with the warring parties.

During these past six weeks we have seen considerable positive impact on the daily lives of many Yemenis, he told reporters after a closed briefing to the UN Security Council. First, and most importantly, the truce is holding in military terms.

The two-month truce is the first nationwide cease-fire in six years in Yemen's civil war, which erupted in 2014. That year, the Iranian-backed Houthis seized the capital, Sanaa, and forced the internationally recognised government into exile. A Saudi-led coalition entered the war in early 2015 to try to restore the government to power.

PM Modi to attend Tokyo Quad meet

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will participate in the third Quad leaders summit in Tokyo on May 24, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. MEA Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said the forthcoming Quad summit will provide an opportunity for the Quad leaders to exchange views about developments in the Indo-Pacific and contemporary global issues of mutual interest. In Tokyo, Modi will have bilateral meetings with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and US President Joe Biden, Bagchi said. He is also likely to hold a bilateral meeting with his Australian counterpart.

Canada to Showcase Healthcare Expertise at Medical Fair India 2022

KULBIRSINGH KALSI
Mumbai

Canada will participate at the 27th edition of Medical Fair India taking place from 20th to 22nd May 2022 in Mumbai to explore collaboration opportunities with Indian healthcare businesses.

Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) in Mumbai, in collaboration with the Ontario Trade & Investment Offices in India and the Quebec Government Office in India, is bringing together a delegation of 13 Canadian companies to showcase their technology, products, services and solutions to the life sciences industry in India. Members of Canadian Trade Commissioner Service will be present on Canada Pavilion (booth no. C-28) to provide on-the-ground assistance and facilitate business interactions between participating Canadian delegates and Indian local contacts.

Canada offers an innovative environment for life sciences companies, with first-rate academic institutions, wide-reaching research networks, numerous partnership op-

portunities and low costs. Canada's key strengths are in the areas of research & development, with over 50 excellent research hospitals, 23 life science networks and 40 incubators and accelerators. Canada supports growth in med-tech innovation. The Government of Canada has invested \$950 million to create five industry-led superclusters in Canada, including digital technologies (Vancouver), advanced manufacturing (Toronto) and artificial intelligence (Montreal).

Diedrah Kelly, Consul General of Canada confirms that "Canada is keen to further strengthening trade ties in the life sciences sector. This delegation of 13 companies visiting the Medical Fair India further depicts the optimism and interest of Canadian companies within India's healthcare sector. Key areas of interest include biotechnology, diagnostics, laboratory, hospital infrastructure, e-health/health IT, medical technology and analytical equipment. I look forward to further collaborations and new synergies from Canada's participation at the 27th edition of Medical Fair India.

NEFSP exports GI agro products to Vietnam

GUWAHATI: The North East Farms Sales Promotion (NEFSP), incubated at the Assam Startup hub here, has exported for the first time 20 GI agro-products to Vietnam.



present on the occasion.

The products include Orthodox Assam tea, large cardamom, Naga chilli, black rice and bathing soaps made from fruits and they were exported to Ho Chi Minh City from the Lokpriyo Gopinath Bordoloi International airport's cargo terminal on Thursday, according to a release issued by the startup on Friday.

NEFSP's exports of the GI food products to Vietnam is a step towards promoting North East's agro-heritage globally.

Assam Industry Department Secretary Dr Laxmanan and India's Consul General to Vietnam Dr Madan Sethi were also

This is the first time, export by air took place from Assam to a South East Asian country and this activity was partnered by the office of Indian Consul General at Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It is also supported by Airports Authority of India, Guwahati. NEFSP has further plans to export North East's GI food products to Europe, Africa, Singapore and other South East Asian countries in the near future.

President Kovind inaugurates street named after Ambedkar in Jamaican capital



President Ram Nath Kovind has inaugurated a street named in the honour of Dr B R Ambedkar here in the Jamaican capital and a monument highlighting the work of the architect of India's Constitution.

The newly-inaugurated avenue is the part of Tower Street in downtown Kingston, according to the Jamaica Information Service, a government agency responsible for disseminating information about government programmes, projects and services.

A monument highlighting the work of Dr Ambedkar was also unveiled by Minister of Local Government and Rural Development Desmond McKenzie and President Kovind,

he said. President Ram Nath Kovind inaugurated Dr Ambedkar Avenue in downtown Kingston in honour of Babasaheb Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the President's office said on Twitter.

On the occasion, President Kovind said: It fills me with great pride that one of the ablest sons of India has been recognised so far away from his home.

Dr B R Ambedkar is formally known as the architect of the Indian Constitution. He introduced progressive ideas for the social and economic empowerment of the depressed classes into the Indian Constitution. Dr Ambedkar educated and inspired the people towards

the goal of removing inequality, he said.

He noted that some people may wonder about the relevance of Dr Ambedkar to Jamaica.

Let us always remember that icons like Dr Ambedkar and Marcus Garvey cannot be limited to just one nation or community. Their message of equality for all and their appeal to end all forms of discrimination has universal resonance.

Therefore, Dr Ambedkar's message is as relevant to Indians as it is to Jamaicans and to people in every part of the world, Kovind said.

President Kovind, accompanied by his wife Savita Kovind, arrived here on Sunday on a state visit, the first by an Indian President to the Caribbean country.

The Presidential visit is happening in the 60th anniversary year of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Jamaica and India have friendly relations. Jamaica is also one of the Girmitya countries with a 70,000 strong Indian diaspora, which acts as a living bridge with India.

UN envoy warns that Iraq's streets are about to boil over

The UN special envoy for Iraq warned its political leaders Tuesday that the streets are about to boil over because of their deadlock and failure to address a host of issues, including the suffering of ordinary people and armed groups firing rockets with impunity.

Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert told several reporters after briefing the UN Security Council that Iraq and the region cannot afford to go back to October 2019. That is when young men and women fed up with an Iraqi political elite they blamed for many grievances launched mass demonstrations that were met with bullets, water cannons and

tear gas that plunged the country into renewed instability just as it was starting to emerge from war against the Islamic State extremist group. In her briefing to the council, Hennis-Plasschaert warned that notorious aspects of Iraqi political life are repeating themselves in a seemingly incessant loop of zero-sum politics.

Russia: Nearly 1,000 Ukrainian fighters left Mariupol plant

The Russian Defence Ministry says that nearly 1,000 Ukrainian troops holed up in their last stronghold in Mariupol have handed themselves over.

Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Wednesday that 694 Ukrainian soldiers at the Azovstal steel plant have surrendered over the past 24 hours.

That brings the total of Ukrainian troops who have left the plant this week to 959. The Russian Defence Ministry reported Tuesday that 265 Ukrainian troops, including

51 wounded, had surrendered during the previous 24 hours. Ukrainian authorities did not confirm the latest numbers.

Konashenkov said that there were 29 wounded soldiers among the 694 troops who had surrendered over the past 24 hours.



Routine datasets, such as death registers and certificates indicating cause of death, are likely to be limited and of low quality. Public reporting may be non-existent, and if surveillance data is revealed, the accuracy of the findings should be given very careful consideration. This COVID outbreak is likely to create a high burden of disease in North Korea, putting huge pressures on the health system. The population will undoubtedly suffer greatly, whether or not public reporting of health outcomes shows the full fallout.

There is an urgent need for widespread COVID vaccination, particularly of older and vulnerable people. Now would be a very good time for North Korea to overcome its usual suspicion of the outside world, and accept international offers of help.

COVID has reached N-Korea, threatening a humanitarian emergency

The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020. But it's only in recent days, in May 2022, that the secretive North Korea has reported its first confirmed cases of the virus.

While it may seem somewhat astounding that a country has managed to get so far into the pandemic without an outbreak, North Korea has reportedly had its borders sealed since January 2020, with no movement in or out of the country. So it is plausible that they've had no COVID until now.

But now, the country, which has a population of roughly 26 million people, looks to be facing a very sizeable and rapidly-spreading outbreak of the omicron variant.

As of May 17, 1.4 million cases of fever had been reported, with 56 deaths since late April. The country is treating fever as indicative of COVID infection owing to reported shortages of testing supplies.

Of course, we don't know how many of these cases of fever

are definitely COVID, which in theory could lead to an overestimation of case numbers. At the same time, a proportion of cases are likely to be asymptomatic, and a lack of reporting coupled with limited surveillance means there is a likelihood of under-reporting. Either way, these numbers are unlikely to be accurate.

There has been some testing taking place, with an unspecified number of omicron cases confirmed. But ultimately, there are huge gaps in our knowledge about this outbreak. This includes the index case the case which was the source of this outbreak.

North Korea is ill-equipped for a COVID outbreak: The COVID pandemic has highlighted the need for national and global presentations of high-quality real-time data, along with rigorous and mass-scale testing infrastructure, to underpin surveillance and healthcare decision-making. North Korea does not appear to have any of that in place.



Importantly, there is also no known COVID vaccination programme in North Korea, despite previous offers of supplies from China and COVAX, a global initiative which aims to provide equitable access to COVID vaccines.

The government has previously turned down three million Sinovac doses from China, along with shipments of the AstraZeneca vaccine, the latter reportedly due to concerns around side effects.

Now, South Korea has offered

to donate vaccine doses, but North Korea is yet to accept. To some extent, North Korea is in the same position the rest of the world was in early to mid 2020.

The government has ordered a national lockdown. This will have socio-economic consequences for residents but, overall, is probably a sensible move, given the population will have little immunity against the virus, whether through prior infection or the safer route of vaccination.

Kim Jong-un has also offered

the army to distribute medicines and supplies, while criticising officials and the public health sector for what he has deemed an inadequate pandemic response.

The healthcare system in North Korea is reported to be fragile, especially away from the capital city of Pyongyang.

An outbreak could easily overwhelm the health facilities in some areas. This would have a knock-on effect to other areas of healthcare, further limiting access to care for non-communicable diseases, for example.

A lockdown will at least buy the country some time to implement other public health measures, such as vaccination campaigns. It is thought that North Korea has a lower prevalence of some of the conditions which we know increase the risk of severe COVID, such as obesity, compared with many other Asia and Pacific countries.

However, more than ten million people in North Korea are considered to be food insecure (where having access to suffi-

cient safe and nutritious food is not guaranteed). And we know malnutrition increases the risk of severe disease with COVID.

Another factor which increases risk is older age. An estimated 10 per cent of the population in North Korea is aged 65 or over, and roughly another 19 per cent aged between 50 and 64. So there are a large number of people who may be vulnerable to severe illness if they contract COVID.

How will things play out? New variants of concern may emerge from this outbreak, though given the lack of contact with the rest of the world, they may not be easily exported.

There have been several humanitarian catastrophes related to uncontrolled COVID outbreaks, perhaps most notably in India, where it is likely that hundreds of thousands, if not millions, died in just a few months.

With uncontrolled outbreaks on such a large scale, the true death tolls can only ever be estimated. The situation in

North Korea threatens a similar humanitarian catastrophe. We know infection numbers can get very large very quickly, particularly with omicron being even more infectious than previous variants.

Routine datasets, such as death registers and certificates indicating cause of death, are likely to be limited and of low quality. Public reporting may be non-existent, and if surveillance data is revealed, the accuracy of the findings should be given very careful consideration. This COVID outbreak is likely to create a high burden of disease in North Korea, putting huge pressures on the health system. The population will undoubtedly suffer greatly, whether or not public reporting of health outcomes shows the full fallout.

There is an urgent need for widespread COVID vaccination, particularly of older and vulnerable people. Now would be a very good time for North Korea to overcome its usual suspicion of the outside world, and accept international offers of help.

Disney Plus sets August premiere for 'She-Hulk'



Comedy series "She-Hulk: Attorney at Law" will start streaming on Disney Plus from August 17.

According to Deadline, Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige made the announcement at the Disney's Upfront event on Tuesday.

The streaming platform also dropped the trailer of the upcoming series, starring Tatiana Maslany in the title role, on its official Twitter page.

"She-Hulk: Attorney at Law, an Original series from Marvel Studios, starts streaming August 17 on #DisneyPlus," they captioned the post.

Maslany stars as She-Hulk/Jennifer Walters, a lawyer who specialises in superhuman-oriented legal cases.

The series will also feature Marvel characters including the Hulk, played by Mark Ruffalo, and the Abomination, played by Tim Roth.

"She-Hulk: Attorney at Law" is directed by Kat Coiro and Anu Valia, with Jessica Gao attached as head writer.

Rajpal Yadav to play 'TRANSGENDER' in web film 'Ardh'



Bollywood actor Rajpal Yadav will be soon seen in the web film 'Ardh' where he will play a small-town guy named Shiva who struggles to become an actor despite being a thespian. The trailer of the film was released on Wednesday. The story is set in Mumbai. To survive in the city of dreams and to earn his bread and butter, he

pretends to be a transgender called Parvati with the support of his wife.

Talking about the film, Rajpal Yadav said in a statement, "Ardh" is the story of those people who struggle day and night to make their dreams come true. Shiva and Parvati represent those survivors. In our country, there are millions of such Shiva and Parvati who are fighting for their survival. So, this is their story, and I am honoured to be telling it."

The film, directed by Palash Muchhal, also stars Rubina Dilaik, Hiten Tejwani and Kulbhushan Kharbanda. Rubina plays Rajpal's wife in the film.

Rubina Dilaik, who makes her film debut, said, "As my debut project, I am all prepared to soak in the experience and learning that will come along the journey."

AR Rahman in Cannes market with two films



The opening night party of Marche du Film Festival de Cannes, co-hosted by country of honour India, unleashed late night fireworks that lit up the Cannes sky. In the course of the next week, several Indian films will be hoping for prospects just as bright and impactful. Among the Indian films being showcased in the Cannes Film Market, is two-time Oscar-winning music composer A.R. Rahman's directorial debut "Le Musk". The film is premiering in the market's XR programme. Based on an idea from Rahman's wife Saira, the film is a sensory experience that employs

haptics, aroma and motion.

I am in the marketplace, the composer-turned-film director joked outside the India Pavilion in the festival's International Village. He indeed is. A Tamil film Iravin Nizhal for which he scored the music is also playing in the Cannes Film Market this year.

"Le Musk", a 36-minute English-language drama that revolves around an heiress and musician who, two decades after being orphaned, goes in search of the men who changed her life. In her quest, she banks upon the memory of smell.

Because of the complex technology involved in its making,

"Le Musk" took more than five years to come to fruition. The cast of the film is led by French actress and singer Nora Arnezeder, who plays the protagonist.

The film, which has to be seen from specially designed chairs, was originally meant to be a 75-minute film but has been trimmed to half of that to sharpen its crucial sensory qualities.

Besides Rahman and the six films -- "Rocketry: The Nambi Effect", "Godavari", "Alpha Beta Gamma", "Boomba Ride", "Dhuin", "Tree Full of Parrots" -- selected by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to represent India in the ever-busy Marche du Film, several directors from the country, most of them first-timers, are in the Market with new films or projects.

The Bengali film "Manikbabur Megh" (The Man and the Cloud), directed by Abhinandan Banerjee, is scheduled to be screened on Saturday. It had its world premiere at the 2021 edition of the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival, playing in the First Features Competition section.

"Manikbabur Megh" has been produced by the National Award-winning director Baudhayan Mukherji, whose in-the-works "Marichjhapi" was in Cannes Cinefondation's Atelier in 2020, the year the festival had to be called off because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Marvel star Jeremy Renner in India, posts photos with children playing cricket in Alwar

Marvel star Jeremy Renner on Tuesday let his Indian fans know that he is in the country as he shared a picture on social media in which he can be seen playing cricket with children. Renner, best known for playing Clint Barton aka Hawkeye

in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, is currently in Alwar, Rajasthan.

The 51-year-old actor shared the picture on his Instagram account on Tuesday. "What a blessing of life to discover, learn and be inspired by people and



places across this planet!" he captioned the photograph. It is currently unclear if Renner is in the country on a personal tour or professional visit. It is also unknown if this is his first visit to India. The actor, who has played one of the six original Avengers in the MCU, was

in New Delhi three days ago. "Another avenger added Name and super power please?" he wrote alongside a video showcasing a plate of desserts at a city hotel. Renner was recently seen in "Hawkeye", a Disney Plus series.

Over 50 years after its release, Hrishikesh Mukherjee's cult classic "Anand" is headed for a remake. Sameer Raj Sippy, grandson of N C Sippy, the producer of the 1971 hit, is working on a new version of the film along with producer Vikram Khakhar.



Regarded as one of the finest films in Hindi cinema, Mukherjee's "Anand" featured the late superstar Rajesh Khanna in the title role of a terminally ill cancer patient and megastar Amitabh Bachchan as Dr Bhasakar, fondly called "Babumoshai" by Khanna's character.

According to the makers, the project is in the scripting stage and a director is yet to be finalised. Sameer Raj Sippy said stories like "Anand" need to be narrated

to the new generation. "Keeping in mind the sensibilities of the original film and the emotions attached, I felt the current generation needs to be retold the many stories that are so relevant today and especially when there is a great appetite for good content," the producer said in a statement on Thursday.

Khakhar, who has produced films such as "Main Aur Charles", said the COVID-19 pandemic has made people more aware about the fickle nature of life and the story of "Anand", originally co-written by Mukherjee, Bimal Dutt, D N Mukherjee and Gulzar, will resonate with them.

Mike Tyson joins thriller 'Black Flies'



Boxing legend Mike Tyson has booked his next acting job in "Black Flies", a thriller drama based on Shannon Burke's novel of the same name.

Tyson's previous film credits include "The Hangover" franchise, in which he most famously played a fictionalised version of himself, and "Ip Man 3".

He will play the men's superior officer in the movie, to be directed by Jean-Stephane Sauvaire.

Tyson, who will next be seen in the pan India film "Liger", joins previously announced cast members Sean Penn and Tye Sheridan in the project which revolves around lifesaving paramedics and the toll the job takes on them.

Sheridan will essay the role of an idealistic young man who is prepping for medical school and gets a street-side view of things when he drives an ambulance alongside a grizzled veteran (Penn) who is considered to be one of the city's best emergency medics.

IIFA Awards advanced to June first week

MUMBAI: Days after the International Indian Film Academy postponed the 22nd edition of the IIFA Weekend and Awards to July, the organisers announced that the three-day extravaganza will now kick off on June 2.

The annual gala was previously scheduled to be held in May at Yas Island, Abu Dhabi but was later delayed to July after the UAE declared a 40-day mourning period following the demise of UAE President and ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

In a press statement issued on Tuesday night, the International Indian Film Academy announced the new date of the awards ceremony. "Uniting the world to showcase cinematic excellence, IIFA is pleased to confirm the final new dates of June 2 to 4, 2022 (and not in July as our



previous communication mentioned)," the organisers said in a statement.

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan and actor Riteish Deshmukh will host the much anticipated event, which will see performances by cine personalities, including Ranveer Singh, Kartik Aaryan, Varun Dhawan, Sara Ali Khan, Ananya Panday, Divya Khosla Kumar and Nora Fatehi.

Hrishikesh Mukherjee's 'Anand' to get a remake

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Anurag Thakur experiences A.R. Rahman's VR film 'Le Musk' at Cannes

Information and Broadcasting, and Youth Affairs and Sports Minister Anurag Thakur experienced the next generation of filmmaking on Thursday when he donned VR headsets to watch the music maestro A.R. Rahman's multi-sensory virtual reality film, "Le Musk", sitting in an immersive VR chair designed by the Los Angeles-based company Positron at Cannes XR.

The minister was joined by the two-time Grammy winner, Ricky Kej, and the celebrated lyricist and Censor Board chief Praseon Joshi. Cannes XR is the segment of the Cannes Film Market focusing on cinematographic content that uses immersive technologies.

"Le Musk" is a technical masterpiece with inter-disciplinary expertise coming together from around the world," the minister commented after his immersive experience. The minister also

delivered the keynote address on 'India: The content hub of the world' at the India Forum, where he pointed out that "the advent of AI, virtual reality and immersive technology such as the metaverse presents immense possibilities to India's IT-enabled services and IT-skilled workforce." Declaring that the "land of storytellers," in the "spotlight of the cinematic world today," is "ready to engage and collaborate," the minister reiterated: "We will take all the necessary measures to speed up co-production collaborations from around the world and also offer the best locations and historical locations in India for film shoots."

Umran will be a great bowler for India says Chaminda Vaas

Former Sri Lankan pacer Chaminda Vaas reckons rookie speedster Umran Malik, who has thrilled everyone with his pace in the IPL, will become a "great bowler" for India.

Playing for the Sunrisers Hyderabad in IPL-15, the fast bowler from Jammu has been impressive with his pace and consistently clocked above 150 kmph in the speed gun. He has so far taken 21 wickets, with best figures of 5/25 and is the



fourth highest wicket-taker in the tournament.

"I think he (Umran) is getting better day by day and I saw him

playing in the last IPL as well. He is bowling consistently and accuracy is important when it comes to T20. And he will be a great bowler for India. He will be there with (Jasprit) Bumrah, I guess if India gives him a chance. He will go a long way," Vaas told reporters here.

The ex-left-arm seamer, who has 355 wickets in 111 Tests, is in the city to coach children of the 'Mumbai Cricket Club' led by coach Jwala Singh.

KKR will invest in Rinku in coming years, says McCullum

Kolkata Knight Riders head coach Brendon McCullum says young batter Rinku Singh has been their find of the ongoing IPL season and the franchise will invest in him in the coming years.

Rinku, who nearly pulled off an epic win with his breathtaking batting against Lucknow Super Giants here on Wednesday, earned high praise from McCullum.

"Absolutely he (Rinku) sure has (been the find of the season).

Rinku is a player who KKR will invest in, no doubt, over the next few years and we will see him really progress and may even challenge for higher honours in time," McCullum, who is set to take over as England's next Test head coach, said at the post-match press conference.

Rinku, who scored 40 off just 15 balls, almost took his team to victory in their last league game against LSG at the DY Patil Stadium on Wednesday.



Alankrita Shrivastava to direct a movie on Paki social media star Qandeel Baloch



MUMBAI: Filmmaker Alankrita Shrivastava is set to direct a film on the late Pakistani social media star Qandeel Baloch, the makers announced on Tuesday.

Producers Vikas Sharma and Sunny Khanna, along with Shrivastava have acquired the rights to the book "The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch" by Pakistani journalist Sanam Maher and published by Aleph. Fouzia Azeem, better known by her stage name Qandeel Baloch, was a model, actress, social media celebrity and activist. She rose to prominence due to her videos on social networks discussing her daily routine, her rights as a Pakistani woman, and various controversial issues. She was strangled to death by her brother Muhammad Waseem.

Nawazuddin Siddiqui to star in American indie film 'Laxman Lopez'



Indian Actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui is set to play the lead role in Laxman Lopez, an American independent production.

According to Variety, the film is a Christmas-themed movie to be directed by Mexican filmmaker Roberto Girault, known for local hits La Leyenda Del Diamante (2017),

Los Arboles Mueren de Pie (2015) and El Estudiante (2009).

Siddiqui, who is attending the 75th Cannes Film Festival as part of the Indian government delegation to the festival and the rights market where India has been named as the country of honour, said the script of Laxman Lopez made him curious when it was first narrated to him.

The narration had me excited for multiple reasons. For starters, the opportunity to work in a Christmas movie is something very different and immediately had my attention. The director, Roberto Girault, has shown his power and command over the camera, and the way he can unveil new sides to an actor.

Kourtney Kardashian, Travis Barker reportedly married

Reality television personality Kourtney Kardashian and musician Travis Barker got legally married over the weekend. According to a report in People magazine, the couple exchanged vows in Santa Barbara, California in an intimate ceremony in the presence of a few close friends and family members.

Kardashian's younger sister Kylie Jenner, however, didn't make it to the wedding as she was attending the 2022 Billboard Music Awards with partner-rapper Travis Scott and daughter Stormi Webster. People reported that Kardashian, 43, and Barker, 46, are planning to have a larger wedding ceremony in Italy.

Their legal marriage follows a "practice" marriage the couple undertook in a Las Vegas chapel



wedding ceremony in early April.

The pair announced their engagement last October after eight months of dating. Kardashian has three children Mason, 12, Penelope, nine, and Reign, seven, who she co-parents with former husband and Talentless founder Scott Disick.

I don't plan my career, want to be better: Jaaved Jaaferi

Bollywood actor Jaaved Jaaferi says he swears by the mantra of going with the flow and staying excited about the work he does in life. Known for his work in films such as Meri Jung, Jajantaram Mamantaram, Dhamaal, 3 Idiots and Bala, the actor will next be seen in the social thriller series Escapee Live from Disney+ Hotstar.

A multi-hyphenate personality, Jaaferi is a dancer, TV host, voice artiste, narrator and dance show judge, and said he doesn't



chalk out a plan for how his career should pan out.

"I don't plan my career, I just go with the flow. I wanted to be happy with what I was doing.

Most of the work I did, I did connect to it but sometimes you do things as you need to do it. What I have always followed is that to stay excited about your work, you need to love your work and look forward to doing something new," Jaaferi told PTI in a Zoom interview.

"I learnt a lot and competed with myself in bettering what I did last. I want to be better. You have to enjoy what you do and give your 100 per cent for whatever work you do," he said.

Set in contemporary India, Escapee Live explores the different journeys of six regular Indians as they struggle to win fame and fortune on a social media app called Escapee Live which promises big money to the winning contestant. Will the lines between the real and virtual begin to blur as they gear up for the contest?

In the show created and directed by Siddharth Kumar Tewary, the actor plays Ravi Gupta, CEO of Escapee Live.

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