

NITI Signs Pact With UNICEF

New Delhi(KCN): NITI Aayog and UNICEF India signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a focus on children. Reiterating a mutual commitment towards realizing the rights of children in India, the SoI seeks to formalize a framework of cooperation to launch the first report on the 'State of India's Children: Status and Trends in Multidimensional Child Development'. The SoI was signed by Ms Sanyukta Samaddar, Nodal Officer -SDGs, NITI

Aayog, and Ms Hyun Hee Ban, Chief of and CEO Amitabh Kant, and Arjan de



development priorities under the SDGs, development priorities under the SDGs,

Wagt, Officer-in-Charge Deputy Representative, UNICEF India.

To achieve the child

UNICEF India and NITI Aayog are developing a comprehensive measure to

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India never posed threat to any country; has followed Sikh Gurus' ideals: PM Narendra Modi

NEW DELHI(KCN): India has never posed a threat to any country or society and it thinks for the welfare of the entire world even today amid global conflicts, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday, asserting that the country is following the ideals of Sikh gurus. Addressing an event from the Red Fort to celebrate the 400th birth anniversary of Sikh Guru Tegh Bahadur, Modi said the Gurudwara Sis Ganj Sahib near the Red Fort stands a symbol of the immortal sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur. "This holy Gurudwara reminds us how great was the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur ji to protect our great culture. At that time there was a storm of religious fanaticism in the country. India, which considered religion as a matter of philosophy, science and self-reflection, was facing people who had committed violence and atrocities in the name of religion," he said. At that time, there was a

great hope for India to save its identity in the form of Guru Tegh Bahadur, he noted. "In front of Aurangzeb's tyrannical thinking, Guru Tegh Bahadur ji, becoming 'Hind di Chadar', stood like a rock," Modi said. Red Fort is witness that Aurangzeb and tyrants like him might have beheaded many people but our faith could not be separated from us, the prime minister said. "The sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur has inspired many generations of India to live and die to protect the dignity of their culture, for its honour and respect. Big powers have disappeared, big storms have calmed down, but India still stands immortal and is moving ahead," Modi asserted. "India has never posed a threat to any country or society. Even today we think for the welfare of the whole world. When we talk about a self-reliant India, we keep the progress of the whole world in front of that goal," he said.

Political reasons behind BJD holding out Central schemes: BJP

BHUBANESWAR(KCN): The BJP on Wednesday came down heavily on the State government for not preventing the agitating

"If the State government has any concern for the low paid drivers, it should have covered them by paying the premium of `330 per an-



num per insurer," she said. Listing out all schemes implemented by Modi after coming to power in 2014, Samantasinghar said the drivers could have got the benefit of the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana for accident and disability benefit, Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan scheme for old-age protection and social security of unorganised workers had the State government taken the initiative. "It is matter of concern that the many of the agitating drivers are not covered under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna despite the Centre liberally releasing assistance to the State," she said. All the social security schemes launched by the Prime Minister since 2014 is meant for the poor and economically backward people. However, the benefit is not reaching to intended beneficiaries due to political motive of the BJD government, she said.

In India, amid calls to resign over Partygate, Johnson announces new deals worth £1 Billion

NEW DELHI(KCN): Even as the Partygate debate continues back home, Boris Johnson is on a two-day official visit to India with business in mind. His first stop at Ahemdabad on Thursday saw him meeting industrialist Gautam Adani and inaugurating JCB India's sixth manufacturing plant in Vadodara.

"As I arrive in India today, I see vast possibilities for what our two great nations can achieve together. From next-generation 5G telecoms and AI to new partnerships in health research and renewable energy – the UK and India are leading the world," PM Johnson said.

The British Prime Minister is expected to announce commercial deals worth £1

Billion in new investments and export deals in areas from

Asia Pacific Headquarters in Chennai, generating over 1000

business Scott Bader opening a new resins factory to supply top



UK businesses and driving jobs and growth at home," said a statement issued by the British High Commission in India.

The business where investments/collaborations are to be announced include:

A new Switch Mobility electric bus R&D centre in the UK and the opening of their

over the UK.

Business consultancy FirstSource opening new offices in South Wales, the Midlands and cities in the North-East and North-West and, Hertfordshire-based firm Smith & Nephew agreeing a major export deal to sell robotic surgical systems in India, and Northamptonshire

ing jobs, growth and opportunities for our people, and it will only go from strength to strength in the coming years," PM Johnson said.

The UK will confirm major new science and tech collaboration, including a Digital Health partnership and a joint investment fund for

CONTINUED ON: P-7

Odisha steps up vigil for new Covid-19 surge

BHUBANESWAR (KCN): Even as active Covid-19 cases hover around 100 and daily caseload remains below 10, the Odisha government has asked district authorities to step

states. Director of Public Health, Dr Niranjana Mishra said the districts have been advised to regularly review new cases/clusters, case positivity, population affected, geo-

risk and vulnerable population like healthcare providers, educational institutions and residential hostels and enforce Covid protocol. The guidelines were issued in the

for senior citizens through door-to-door campaign. An analysis of CoWIN database shows that around 6,43,450 beneficiaries aged 60 years and above are due for second dose



up surveillance and maintain the testing target in view of a surge in other states.

The Directorate of the Public Health has alerted all local administrative authorities, including municipal commissioners, collectors and CDMOs to enhance precautionary measures. A set of guidelines has been issued to keep a close vigil on people coming from high burden countries and

graphical spread of cases and hospital infrastructure preparedness. "Surveillance on ILI and SARI will be continued as before as part of an early warning system for detecting rise of cases besides in-house strengthening of testing, surveillance and treatment mechanism to face any upsurge of cases," he said.

The local authorities will also continue periodic surveillance of high-

wake of sudden rise in new Covid cases and positivity rate in Delhi and some other north Indian states. Odisha reported eight new cases and one death in the last 24 hours. Meanwhile, the Centre has flagged sub-optimal performance of the State in administration of second dose and precautionary dose among the 60 years plus population and asked the State government to accelerate the booster dose

while another 6,47,051 beneficiaries above 60 years are due for precautionary dose. Union Additional Secretary of Health and Family Welfare Manohar Agnani has urged Additional Chief Secretary of State Health department RK Sharma to revive the ongoing Covid-19 vaccination drive through a detailed plan at district-level to cover all senior citizens due for second dose and precautionary dose.

AMFI-WB organizes the 6th Eastern India Microfinance Summit 2022

Kolkata(KCN): Association of Microfinance Institutions West Bengal (AMFI-WB) organized the 6th Eastern India Microfinance Summit 2022 in Kolkata. The Theme of the Summit was 'Reimagining Microfinance in Light of the Emerging Regulatory Paradigm'.

The conference was organized in the backdrop of the announcement of a new regulatory framework for microfinance in India, which was announced by the Reserve Bank of India in March 2022. This announcement marks a paradigm shift in regulations for the MFIs and recognizes their growing importance and maturity. It is expected that the MFIs would now be in a better position to serve their clients through well suited products for various segments.

The Industry has now weathered over two years of COVID 19 crisis, which has severely impacted the lives and livelihood of everyone. Lockdowns and resultant loss of income resulted in disruption of economic activity. The impact was particularly severe for the microfinance clients who had to face significant loss of income, being dependent on the informal economy to a large extent.

Microfinance Institutions supported their clients in these difficult times, extending much required moratorium on the repayment of installments to the clients. They also helped the clients in multiple other ways. The MFIs themselves faced unprecedented liquidity stress, but this has not deterred them from taking initiatives to enable their clients to rebuild their livelihoods.

The Microfinance institutions and their clients have displayed noteworthy resilience during the crisis. They were supported by suitable regulatory interventions and liquidity support from the government.

The crisis has helped MFIs to look at risks from a new perspective which will help in building resilient institutions. Adoption of technology in all facets of MFIs' operations has helped them in increasing efficiency in improving sustainability. The focus now has to be on using technology to improve the experience clients have while accessing service. A fundamental requirement would be to ensure that technology related risks for clients are minimized and they have recourse to adequate grievance redressal. With rapidly progressing vaccination coverage, we can now expect that the worst is behind us. These trying times have given MFIs the opportunity to better understand the clients and build lasting relationships with them. It is now time for them to use this understanding to tailor their product offerings in a manner that allows their clients not only to rebuild their livelihoods but achieve much greater financial success in the future.

This year's session was attended by the MFI practitioners, regulators and funders to discuss

most pertinent issues facing the sector. Microfinance industry works on a crude principle of 'Close Contact, Trust and Financing Sustainable Livelihoods'. On one hand it fuels micro and small enterprises; while on other hand generates employment opportunities in unorganized and organized sector.

In 2020, the lockdowns necessitated by the spread of COVID-19 brought almost every business to a halt, except essential services. The worst affected were enterprises with little or no reserves and high liquidity turnover operations, which was the case for typical micro and small businesses. This, in turn, adversely impacted their lenders: Prior to the lockdowns, many microfinance institutions (MFIs) still depended on physical interactions with customers, and door-step collections and disbursements. Their liquidity framework also depended heavily on steady cash flows — i.e., a stream of loan repayments from customers for upstream payments to banks and financial institutions from whom they had borrowed. When these MFIs faced a shutdown in collections and disbursements due to restrictions on mobility in the early months of the pandemic, the effect was devastating. By May 2020, nearly 98% of their accounts were under moratorium, confirming that the inflow of funds from these borrowers would not be forthcoming for the next three months. As they were already under pressure from their financiers to meet their obligations, these MFIs were crushed under liquidity issues.

Inaugural Session: The inaugural session has discussed the key issues around the main theme of the Summit to reimagining microfinance in light of the emerging regulatory paradigm. The key issues has discussed in this session includes

- How will the new regulations serve to enhance the cause of financial inclusion in the country?
- What will be the specific impact of these regulations on banks, NBFCs, BC Companies and not for profit companies?
- Will the new regulations enable enhanced capital flow in the sector?
- To what extent are the new regulations recognition of resilience displayed by the MFIs and clients during the COVID-19 crisis
- How will the MFIs be better equipped to deal with a COVID-19 like crisis, under the new regulatory framework?

Session 1: The New Regulatory Framework - opportunity to serve the clients better- The new regulatory framework announced by the RBI arguably brings the most significant changes in the regulations for the MFIs after 2011. It is already being acknowledged that the new framework recognizes the growing maturity and importance of the MFIs in financial

inclusion. This also recognizes the growth, innovation and resilience displayed by the MFIs and their clients in the existing regulatory framework. Key topics has discussed by the participants in this session includes

- In what ways will the new regulations enable innovations in product development?
- In what ways the new regulations enable outreach to the underserved geographical areas or population groups?
- In what way will these regulations encourage adoption of new technologies?
- How can the clients be protected from the risks arising out of use of digital technology for doing transactions?

Session 2: Challenges of financial inclusion in Eastern India- Eastern India is home of over 50 microfinance institutions. The region is also densely populated with a large proportion of population engaged in agriculture and micro enterprises. Eastern India had proved their growth potentiality and repayment track record of micro finance clients over the past several years. High growth potential of microfinance in the eastern sector has also attracted MFIs from across the country. Most of the prominent MFIs in India have operations in Eastern India. This session has discussed the issues specific to the microfinance ecosystem in the Eastern India with focus on the following aspects.

- Economic growth, demand and market size
- Support from the government and local authorities
- Complementarity with government programs
- Law and order and physical infrastructure
- Portfolio quality related aspects
- Role of national level SROs (Sa-dhan and MFIN) in Eastern India

Session 3: Serving clients with diverse product offerings- Microfinance Institutions serve a variety of financial needs of their clients. While most of the loans have traditionally been provided to the clients for income generation purposes, the MFIs now offer a variety of cross-sale products for their clients besides loans for housing, education, water and sanitation and energy requirements. Varieties of insurance products are also being offered through the MFIs. In this session, among other things, the panelists has discussed the following important issues

- Building household level resilience through micro insurance products
- Making products more efficient and effective with more appropriate use of technology.
- Serving the missing middle segment through micro enterprise financing
- Promoting carbon reduction by encouraging use of solar products

The Association of Micro Finance Institutions

- West Bengal (AMFI - WB): AMFI-WB is an institution which endeavors to promote and develop microfinance in the state of West Bengal. Founded as a self-regulatory organization, and registered as a Public Charitable Trust in 2010, AMFI-WB encompasses a community of microfinance organizations that operate in West Bengal. It was formed to deliver better services to the poor, thereby helping these populations improve their standards of living. AMFI-WB envisions a community of microfinance institutions who are committed to initiating a significant change in the lives of the poor, especially women. AMFI - WB currently caters to around 96.35 lakh poor women by providing them with financial services, especially micro credit. With a membership of 43 Micro Finance Institutions, bank especially micro credit through approximately 24055 employees who hail from lower economic background. Their primary goals include: encouraging MFIs to maintain healthy relationships with banks, ensuring that MFIs stay on track and focused with the guideline prescribed to them, and mediating between various government officials and other important sector stakeholders. AMFI - WB regularly conducts stakeholder meets at the district level, management development programs for its members, microfinance industry-related seminars & workshops, and member meetings on matters of mutual interest.

Breaking the Gender Barrier, One Goal at a Time

Kolkata(KCN): While Kolkata maybe known for its love for football, it is on very rare occasions that one spots women casually taking control of the football in this city. Upon the request of the final year girl students, The Heritage Academy hosted its first ever Women's Cup on 11th April 2022, which was not only wholeheartedly welcomed by both



the Professors and the Principal Prof. (Dr.) Gour Banerjee of The Heritage Academy but the overwhelming participation from the women pertaining to all batches made this event an annual affair.

Professor Banerjee stated during the inauguration of the event, "When the request was made before me, I was delighted to learn about how passionate they are about this game. I'm very happy to see that the students of this college are breaking stereotypes and taking action towards sports. The Heritage Academy is glad to be able to provide a platform that promotes and encourages women's



participation in sports."

The tournament was carried out following the knockout system. Physical Education teachers from The Heritage School - Mr. Sanjeev and Mr. Sunil volunteered as referees to judge the matches closely. Each team consisted of 5 members (excluding the substitutes) and 7 teams participated in total from the three departments - BBA, BCA, and BMS. The matches had a time limit of 10 minutes following which a penalty kick shoot-out took place in a situation of a tie.

The Women's Cup was one of the activities that were conducted during the Fresher's week as a means of ice-breaking amongst the first, second, and third years who are meeting for the first time this semester after the lockdown periods of the pandemic. Following the success of Women's football, The Heritage Academy is looking forward to host more sports tournament for women. What better way to promote fraternity than sports!

For the untiring effort for the development of Art & Culture for last three decades

Niladri Vihar Youth and Cultural Association is felicitated

Bhubaneswar (KCN): For the untiring effort for the development of Art &

Mahaveer Natya Gourav Samman. In a glittering function organized by the

president of the association Dr. Prakash Chandra Panigrahi and Gen-

quet and received this prestigious honour. Upholding the rich jatra tradi-

local artists and 'Kali ra Bandhan

president of the association Dushasan

"CONFERRED WITH MAHAVEER NATYA GOURAV SAMMAN"

Kala Chandan' by Maa Gouri Club on 2nd night was displayed. To note the association was established in the year 1994 is working in

Swain, Secretary and former chairman of the block Kailash Chandra Swain, Treasurer Bhagaban Sahoo, members of the Mahaveer com-



Culture and to spread its wings in nook & corner of the state and outside in general and in order to keep alive the Jatra culture by encouraging and providing support to the newly established organizations in particular the Niladrivihar Youth & Cultural Association (NYCA) is being felicitated and conferred with



Mahaveer Kriya eral Secretary Shri Anusthan Committee and Mahaveer Youth & Cultural Association the

tion a two days long Biswajit Pattnaik is being felicitated with a shawl, citation & flower bou-



this field relentlessly for last three decades. The Jatra Director Trideb Chhotray & Music Director Binaya Kumar Das were also felicitated during the occasion. The entire programme was co-ordinated by the culture lover, actor and organizer Pradeep Kumar Swain and among others the

mittee were extended their helping hands to the smooth conduct of the programme. Art & Culture is the celebration and it is everybody's duty and responsibilities to uphold expressed in reply to felicitation. The people of the locality applauds the effort and initiative of the association.

whole night play 'Sukha pakhe Dukha Bandha Padichi' on 1st night taking the

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NRI accuses Shilpa Shetty, hubby Raj Kundra of cheating in 'gold scam'

MUMBAI(KCN): Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty and her husband Raj Kundra

Mumbai. When contacted, an official of Khar Police Station told

deemable in stages with attractive discounts -- 15 per cent after two years, 26

However, when Joshi attempted to redeem his one-kilo golden asset on the due date

Andheri West, but again he encountered the same reply that these addresses did

Kundra had resigned as the company directors in May 2016 and November 2017 re-



have been named in another alleged scam -- this time, concerning the Satyug Gold Pvt. Ltd, a gold trading company of which they are ex-directors.

A Non-Resident Indian businessman, currently in Mumbai, Sachin J. Joshi has claimed in a police complaint that he was reportedly lured and then cheated by SGPL's 'Satyug Gold Scheme', launched around 2014.

Joshi has lodged a criminal complaint of cheating, fraud and other charges against Shilpa Shetty, Raj Kundra and officials of SGPL such as Ganpati Chaudhary, Mohammed Saifi and others with the Khar Police Station in

complaint is currently under investigation" but declined to elaborate. Despite repeated attempts by IANS, Shilpa Shetty was not available for her comment.

According to Joshi, under the five-year gold plan, sold as 'Satyug Gold Scheme' the buyer was offered a 'Satyug Gold Card' at a discounted rate and promised a certain fixed quantity of gold redeemable after a five-year period.

As per Kundra's statements at the 'gold dream' launch, an investor who bought a certain sum of gold at the then current rates with full advance payment would be entitled to a Satyug Gold Card, re-

per cent after three years, 30 per cent after four years and 37 per cent after five years.

Joshi had purchased One kg gold for nearly Rs 18.58 lakhs in March 2014 at the then prevailing rates. It would be redeemable on or after March 25, 2019 at the promised discount on presentation of the Satyug Gold Card to the SGPL, his spokesperson told IANS.

Explaining the stakes, the spokesperson said that at current rates, the original investment would have fetched around Rs 44 lakhs or more than double as today the gold prices crossed the Rs 4.40 million per kg mark.

in March last year, he discovered that the SGPL office in Bandra Kurla Complex, suburban Mumbai, was shut with no employees or representatives available at its address. Upon enquiring he learnt that the office had been closed down a long ago, the SGPL website showed a new office address, at Shalimar Morya Park in Andheri west.

When Joshi's team visited the new office, they were informed that the addressed did not belong to SGPL. Further online searches and scanning the company's annual returns revealed more office addresses at Andheri east, Malad West and

not belong to SGPL. Ditto was the experience with the company's help-desk and customer care numbers (18002679090) which elicited no response, Joshi said. In November 2019, Joshi's representative happened to meet one of the company officials at the Malad West address who claimed that it was not possible to redeem the claim as the company was processing multiple claims, and suggested he should return in December 2019.

A search on the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) website pertaining to the company revealed more shocking details: that Shetty and

spectively. "It became clear from all these facts that SGPL was a fraudulent entity being used to run the fake 'Satyug Gold Scheme' using the name of celebs like Shilpa Shetty. I have suffered a loss of Rs 18.58 lakh on my gold investment," Joshi said. Sources in the gold industry hinted that many more such investors may have been lured by SGPL and only a detailed police investigation would reveal the extent of the alleged scam. SGPL was formerly known as Aavyaan Gems & Jewellery Pvt Ltd with its offices in Bandra Kurla Complex.



The Bharat Ratna is India's highest civilian award and recognises 'exceptional service/performance of the highest order'.

Climatic Fallout of Ukraine Crisis: An Earth Day reminder

Earth Day is a celebration held every year on April 22 to show support for environmental protection. It began on April 22, 1970, and has since grown to include a diverse range of events coordinated globally by EarthDay.org (previously Earth Day Network) involving over a billion people in over 193 nations. Invest In Our Planet is the official theme for 2022.

Peace campaigner John McConnell proposed a day to honour the Earth and the concept of peace at a UNESCO Conference in San Francisco in 1969, and it was first honoured on March 21, 1970, the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere. This day of natural equilibrium was later recognised by the United Nations in a proclamation written by McConnell and signed by Secretary General U Thant.

A month later, on April 22, 1970, United States Senator Gaylord Nelson proposed holding a countrywide environmental teach-in. He hired Denis Hayes, a young activist, to be the National Coordinator. The event was christened "Earth Day" by Nelson and Hayes. Denis and his team expanded the event from its humble beginnings as a teach-in to cover the entire United States. The first Earth Day drew more than 20 million people to the streets, making it the greatest single-day protest in human history. Non-environmental partners played a significant role. The United Auto Workers (UAW), for example, was the most important outside financial and operational sponsor of the first Earth Day under the leadership of labour leader Walter Reuther. The United States was the focus of the first Earth Day. Denis Hayes, the 1970 national coordinator, took it international in 1990, organising events in 141 countries. On Earth Day 2016, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and 120 other countries signed the historic Paris Agreement. This signing fulfilled a fundamental criterion for the historic draught climate protection treaty to enter into force, which was accepted by

consensus by the 195 countries present at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris. Several localities participated in Earth Day Week festivities, a whole week of activities

Pratap Kishore Mohanty

(IPCC), the world will need to capture carbon from the atmosphere to keep under 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming. Climate activists are concerned about this contradiction, claiming that

on their product, it is evident that this is not in our best interests.

According to analysts, European countries can quickly reduce their reliance on gas by implementing energy efficiency measures and increasing renewable energy investments, which are already in line with Europe's goal of stopping the release of new greenhouse gases into the atmosphere by the middle of the century. Some of this could be accelerated by the situation in Ukraine. It might also lead to "a tectonic change," as Lisa Fischer, an energy policy analyst at E3G, put it: "using renewables rather than substantial gas storage to ensure energy security."

It is important to notice that it is tough to handle the war-torn population of Ukraine after more than a month of fighting; what about the circumstances of all other life forms? In this arena, I believe a treaty is necessary, and individuals from all over the world must step up to assist such innocent creatures. We have treaties like the CBD, CM,S, and CITES—perhaps we now need a pact on "Species Conservation during the War" (CSDW).

Earth Day Promise

Earth Day is the first holy day that transcends all national borders while maintaining all geographical integrity, spans mountains, oceans, and time belts while bringing people from all over the world into one resonating accord, is dedicated to the preservation of natural harmony while drawing on technological triumphs such as time measurement and instantaneous communication through space, and is devoted to the preservation of natural harmony while drawing on the triumphs of technology, time measurement, and instantaneous communication through space.

The Vernal Equinox, the time when the Sun crosses the equator, making the length of night and day equal in all parts of the Earth, is used to commemorate Earth Day in a new – and also the most ancient – way. Let's hope and pray that good sense prevails amongst all the stakeholders, especially the Russians and this barbarism comes to an end with no further damage to our mother earth.

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centred on the world's environmental challenges. Over 100 million people throughout the world celebrated the 50th anniversary of Earth Day in 2020.

The Ukraine Fallout and Earth Day

The Biden Administration has made bringing more fossil fuels to Europe a primary goal in order to wean European Union members off Russian energy as a result of the Ukraine conflict. However, both Europe and the United States are falling behind on their pledges to reduce carbon emissions swiftly in order to avoid the worst effects of climate change. According to the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

increasing fossil fuel exports will result in more global warming emissions.

The awful, horrifying invasion of Ukraine by Russia has brought attention to Russia's status as one of the world's top three fossil fuel suppliers. The United States, Saudi Arabia, and Russia are the top three countries in terms of greenhouse gas sales. As our economy has become increasingly reliant on energy as a daily requirement, the need for a stable and economical source of energy has become increasingly apparent. Despite their drawbacks, fossil fuels remain our primary source of energy. Although the fossil fuel business would like us to become more reliant

Indian actor turns Buddhist monk in Bangkok

Indian actor Gagan Malik, who gained international fame when he played Gautama Buddha in a 2014 film shot in Sri Lanka titled Sri Siddhartha Gautama, made waves when he donned Buddhist robes to undertake a two-week-long monkhood at the famed Wat That Thong temple in Bangkok.

The two-week monkhood is behind him, but Malik (now called Asoko) does not seem ready to give it up yet. He plans to go as a Buddhist monk, complete with orange robes and shaven head, to various cities in India, at the end of this month, and share what he has learnt with Buddhist monks there, and then return to Bangkok, for a further extension of his monkhood penances.

"I've learnt a lot, but I need to learn a lot more. That's why I plan to go to the forest to learn Vipassana meditation. I have a long way to go," he told this writer, when I met him for an interview at his temple, which was kindly arranged by one of his Buddhist advisers, Dr Pongsak Tangkana, who had made a film called Buddhism The Message with Malik. "Earlier, even sitting still for long spells used to be difficult for me," confessed Malik. "But I've improved on all that. Breath control is another important task, which I'm working on."

So what is the toughest part of monkhood? "This is not a sport about toughness, like karate," says Malik. "It's about concentration and focus."

He described meditation as a "medicine for good health".

Yet it is the Dhamma which he considers to be Buddhism's most important feature.

"Buddha's Dhamma is not about religion, it's about improving one's life," says Malik, adding, "Buddhism is not about religion, it's about humanity. "If you follow Dhamma, you can become a better individual, whether you're Hindu or belong to any other religion," he

says. And that's why he does not think that his plans to spread the Dhamma in India will be considered "conversion".

"It's simply about awareness, to become a better human being," Malik says. Malik feels that Dhamma lessons should be given to young children at school. "The ages 5-13 years are very important for a child. Love, peace and compassion are the qualities that



should be instilled in them then. Also, the habit of giving." That is why when he started the Lotus World Project at Sri Lanka in 2014, the year he converted to Buddhism, Malik gave out books to tots wherein they could record their daily good deeds. He called it the "one good deed a day project".

"Dhamma should be taught as a subject, like Science or Maths, and they should have 'practical' classes, too," he says.

One of the most important laws of Buddhism, for him, is the Law of Impermanence. Malik believes that the recent pandemic had drawn attention to this law, around the world. "Everything, from health to environment, to human interaction, during Covid, taught one about the Law of Impermanence," he states. Malik admits that it was a huge learning curve for him, to move through so many professions – businessman, cricketer (he played for Ranji Trophy) and show business, including mod-

Lekha Shankar

elling. He is a TV star and movie actor.

"They are just different phases through the journey of life," he simply says.

The climax, of course, came when he was selected to play the lead in the Buddha film, at Sri Lanka, after more than 300 people had auditioned for it from around the world. That is when his life took a new turn.

"The story of his life moved me totally. I had many questions, and wanted the answers."

That is when Malik decided to convert to Buddhism. The actor said he was moved by the amazing response to the film around the world. Everyone, from the President to the chief monk of Sri Lanka, attended the opening. He received many accolades, including an award from the UN, during a World Buddhist Film Festival that UN conducted. Thus, his recent monkhood training in Bangkok was only an extension of his Buddhist faith that had started nearly a decade back.

Malik admits that, for an actor, "his chief assets are his looks", and it was not easy for him to shave his hair and eyebrows, and wear Buddhist robes. "But it's part of my total commitment to Dhamma," he said

Was it easy to convert from a star to a bhikshu? "I'm not a superstar like Shah Rukh Khan, so it was no problem for me," says Malik simply.

Malik has also started an organisation, the 13 Ratana Bhoomi project in Bangkok, which is a one-stop place, including a site, for people to learn about Buddhism.

A part of this project was to collect many Buddha statues to distribute in India. Malik informs that he has presented as many as 60 statues to Muslims in Bodh Gaya, the sacred Buddhist town in India, which he visits often.

Would it be easy for the actor to get back to his "job" as movie star, after his spiritual life

as a monk? "It won't be easy, but of late I've only chosen films with a message, and that will continue!" he answers.

He shares that his wife is also very spiritual, and supported him totally in his monkhood phase.

Needless to say, the Indians he admires a lot are Emperor Ashoka, who spread Buddhism around the world, and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, who revived Buddhism in the country.

According to Malik, Mayawati, who served as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for four terms, is a Buddhist. "Our Prime Minister also admires Buddhism," he says.

Malik has just created a song on Buddhism, which will be translated into several languages, including Hindi, Bengali, Thai, Vietnamese and Sinhalese.

Does the recent communal unrest in his country bother him? "Of course. Religion is not just a stamp that you get when you are born. You need to understand its right meaning, one of which is not to hurt other people but to be compassionate," he states.

He didn't see anything contradictory in him playing the role of Rama, on Zee TV. "I was born a Hindu, and the stories of Rama are an important part of my psyche," he says.

Just like the stories of Buddha have now become important to him.

According to the Hindu actor-turned Buddhist monk, "People are worried about the past, which is finished. They worry about the future, which we can't predict. Let's be mindful of the present, and make every moment count," he declared.

He added that "mindfulness" also meant being mindful of other people. "War is not an answer," said Malik, referring to the current war in Ukraine. "We all need each other. Peace and compassion are the only answers that matter today."

7th Death Anniversary of Former Chief Minister of Odisha J. B. Pattnaik Celebrate in Khordha

Khordha(KCN): Leaders cutting across political parties and people from several quarters of the society on Thursday paid homage to former Odisha Chief Minister Jannaki



Ballabha Pattnaik on his 7th death anniversary. Remembering former Odisha Chief Minister and former Assam Governor Jannaki Ballabha Pattnaik on his 7th death anniversary Editor SAMBAD and MLA, Khandapada Soumya Ranjan Pattnaik said a person can overcome obstacles and achieve fame. He believes his work and has the will power. This was the ideology of J. B. Pattnaik and everyone must follow the same and thanked all the personalities who helped in setting up a park in the memory of J. B. Pattnaik at his birth place in Khordha. The memorial park is an appropriate tribute to the veteran leader. Participating in a ceremony organized at the

Jannaki Ballabha memorial park Khordha to celebrate the 7th death anniversary MLA, Jatni and Senior Congress Leader Suresh Kumar Routray said " J. B. Pattnaik proved that strong will power and hard work can help someone overcome any obstacles." Among others MLA, Khordha, Joytrindra Nath Mitra, former MLA, Khordha, Dr. Dillip Srichandan, former Vice-chancellor North Odisha University, Maj. Khirod Prasad Mohanty, Pruthibi Ballabha Pattnaik son of late- Janaki Ballabha Pattnaik, Collector, Khordha, Sangram Keshari Mohapatra, Senior Advocate Khordha, Sisir

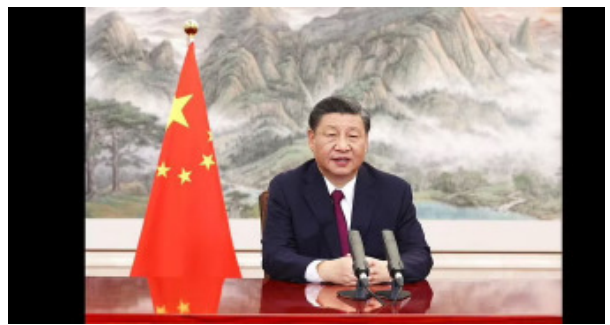


Kumar Parida, Secretary Jannaki Ballabha Smruti Committee, Trust, Sanjaya Pattnaik, Cashier Prakash Samantaray and other eminent personalities paid floral tribute's to the statue of J. B. Pattnaik and remembered his rich contributions.

Xi calls for Asian unity against outsiders; proposes Global Security Initiative amidst Ukraine war

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday called on Asian nations to keep the future of the region in their hands and proposed a Global Security Initiative respecting the sovereignty of all countries amidst Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in a veiled attack on the US' forays into the region with the Indo-Pacific strategy. President Xi, speaking via video link at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2022, outlined a six-point proposal for global security, which broadly confirms China's stand on Russia's war against Ukraine to protect what Moscow states its security interests against Kyiv joining the NATO alliance. China has declined to condemn Russia's military offensive against Ukraine and highlighted Moscow's concerns over NATO expansion threatening its security. In his proposals, Xi said that countries should respect the sovereignty and territorial integ-

city of all countries, uphold non-interference in internal affairs, and respect the independent choices of development paths and social systems made by people in different countries.



"The countries should stay committed to taking the legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously, uphold the principle of indivisible security, build a balanced, effective, and sustainable security architecture and oppose the pursuit of one's own security at the cost of others' security," he said.

Non-supply of wood for Rath Yatra miffs carpenters

B A R I P A D A : Akshaya Tiritiya is hardly a few days away, yet logs for construction of three chariots for Trinity of Haribaldev Jew temple here have not been supplied. This has irked the carpen-

Rath Yatra in Dwitiya Srikhetra in the absence of wood. Ratha Mohapatra M r i t y u n j a y Mohapatra said every year, by the order of the Endowments Department, which is accountable for

good number of wood and accessories in the inventory got damaged due to poor protection by the department concerned. "Even now, those are lying in the open rendering those damaged. Unless more

Though both assured them to look into the matter, no action seems to have been taken. The Rath Yatra at Dwitiya Srikhetra is unique for its tradition of women pulling the chariot of



ters who blame the Endowments Department of negligence and lack of will. Since chariot construction work for car festival begins on the auspicious Akshaya Tiritiya on May 3, Ratha Mohapatra (head carpenter) and carpenters have expressed their displeasure on not being able to start the work for

temple matters, and district administration, the Forest Department supplies required wood for construction of chariots for the Trinity. "But no one seems to be concerned about the grand event this year which was stalled for the last two years due to the pandemic," Mohapatra said. He also alleged a

wood is supplied to us before Akshaya Tiritiya, we will not be able to complete the work on schedule," asserted Mohapatra. Some days ago, a group of carpenters along with Ratha Mohapatra had met Collector Vineet Bhardwaj and sub-collector cum temple in charge Anya Das to discuss the issue.

Devi Subhadra and also for being a 10-day event while the festival is celebrated for eight days in Puri and other places. Collector Vineet Bhardwaj, however said, wood has already been identified in Baripada and Karanja sub-divisions and will reach before Akshaya Tiritiya.

Now, SPOs can impose penalties against traffic norm violations

BHUBANESWAR: The Odisha government has empowered special police officers (SPOs) deployed for highway

tions like drunken driving, speeding, non-wearing of helmet and seat belt and use of mobile phone while

way patrolling teams comprising retired police and ex-servicemen have been engaged as SPOs on different routes in Angul, Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Cuttack, Khurda, Nayagarh, Puri, Ganjam, Bargarh, Koraput, Sonepur and

Sundargarh districts. Principal Secretary of Transport department Bishnupada Sethi has also asked the Crime Branch of Police, which is monitoring road accident cases, to regularly review performance of highway patrol teams.



patrolling to impose penalties against traffic rule violations. In a notification, the Commerce and Transport department stated SPOs of and above the rank of assistant sub-inspector (ASI) deployed on national highways can impose fines for safety rule viola-

driving. The State government had launched highway patrolling in February 2021 on 18 accident-prone stretches of national highways. The number of stretches was later increased to 36 and as many patrolling teams were deployed. The high-

Strike continues at Kasia mines, Blames blooms

Barbil KCN): Dissatisfaction is growing day by day in Jindal-owned Kasia Mines under Joda mining zone of Keonjhar district.. According to reports, Jindal had agreed to give priority to locals in employment, environmental improvement and transportation, when the company started its operation. They too had an agreement with the company in presence of Sub Collector.. People alleged that after getting in to operation even after many months ,compay got reluctant to carry its promise and doing of his own .People too alleged that the former MLA Dhanurjay Siddhu has illegal nexus with the company and helping company to work against ethics. Some company officials and Siddhu are the main villain behind the scene .They are all getting good comission from the

transporter engaged by the company. The transporter being an outsider is feeding these catfish illegally..When asked to Siddhu, he denied the fact saying ,he was out of station and quite unaware of this strike.As he came today and got to know all these incident.He has never been against the people.. He will speak to the people and company as well to bring back the congenial environment in the area and will see too to employees get back to work said Siddhu. Jayanti Banara ,the former member Zilla parishad has also given assurance to see local to get employment and other benefit like peripheral development , transportation etc with due discussion with the company and administration .The statement of both the party seems contradictory and unmatched .But the fact is yet to unveil,said one intellectual.

Centre panel recommends emergency use authorisation for Biological E's Corbevax for 5-11 age group

NEW DELHI: An expert panel of India's top drug authority has recommended granting

of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) has, however, sought more

emergency situations in adults on December 28 last year and in the 12 to 17 years age group, subject to cer-

been granted Emergency Use Listing (EUL) by the DCGI for the age group of 12 to 18 years on De-



emergency use authorisation (EUA) for Biological E's COVID-19 vaccine Corbevax for children in the 5 to 11 years age group, official sources said Thursday. According to the sources, the Subject Expert Committee (SEC) on COVID-19

data from Bharat Biotech to review its emergency use authorisation (EUA) application for use of Covaxin among those aged between two and 11 years. The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had approved Covovax for restricted use in

tain conditions, on March 9 this year. The Hyderabad-based biotechnology and biopharmaceutical company Biological E's Corbevax is being used to inoculate children against COVID-19 in the age group of 12 to 14 years. Covaxin has

December 24, 2021. India began inoculating children aged 12-14 on March 16. So far, more than 2.53 crore children have been administered with the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine. On January 3, vaccination was opened for children in the age group of 15-18.

State Sanctions Cancer Care Projects SUMUM Deploys Bravos

Bhubaneswar: The State Government has approved three cancer care unit projects worth Rs 155.92 crore to be established in three

other auxiliary infrastructures like electricity, water, drainage, etc. and does not include cost of any medical equipment, sources said.

ings will be set up at each of SLN Medical College and Hospital, Koraput and VIMSAR, Burla, with an estimated cost of Rs 41.14 crore

Cancer hospitals at Bargarh and Jharsuguda. Besides, the Government is straightening the premier Acharya Harihar Post Gradu-



medical colleges and hospitals at Berhampur, Burla and Koraput. The Department of Health and Family Welfare has issued three orders giving administrative approval for these projects. This approved cost is meant only for civil and

According to the orders, a cancer care centre will be set up at MKCG Medical College and Hospital in Berhampur with an estimated cost of Rs 76.29 crore. A G+3 building will be constructed along with other required infrastructure there. Similarly, G+1 build-

and Rs 38.48 crore, respectively. Notably, the State Government has been giving focus on healthcare services and particularly cancer treatment as the State has lakhs of cancer patients. The Government has already initiated steps to set up specialized

ate Institute of Cancer in Cuttack. Recently, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for the Bagchi-Sri Shankara Cancer Hospital & Research Centre and Bagchi-Karunashraya Palliative Care Centre here to boost cancer care in the State.

R Srikanth New Tech Director OCA

Cuttack: Pankaj Lochan Mohanty, President Odisha Cricket Association (OCA) has announced appointment of R Srikanth as Technical Director of Odisha Cricket Academy for the season 2022-23. The CAC meeting held today reviewed all the profiles applied for the post of Tech. Director & decided to appoint R Srikanth for the post based on his rich Coaching Experience, Expertise & Credentials. Mr. Srikanth is the only BCCI Level-3 certified Coach from

Odisha having rich experience in coaching for about 20 years. Prior to joining Odisha Cricket Association, he has worked as a Coach with various states, NCA & ZCA. He has also coached different age group teams of Odisha & was In-Charge of Odisha Cricket Academy. Mr. Srikanth was a former Ranji Trophy player of Odisha. He has also educated the aspiring Level-1 & Level-2 coaches of Odisha for the NCA programs.

Master Plan for Cuttack Chandi



Cuttack: Top Mandarin V K Pandian has directed officials to prepare a Master Plan for the development of the famous Chandi Mandir at Cuttack. Secretary to Chief Minister, Mr. Pandian has said the Master Plan would be prepared within a week and submitted for the approval of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. An ardent devotee of Adi Shakti, Mr. Pandian on Thursday morning visited the

temple and discussed various development works of the temple with the Sevayats, Senior officials of the District Administration of Cuttack and senior citizens of Cuttack were present. The Chief Minister has given a clear direction for the development of Chandi Mandir, a symbol of faith and devotion of lakhs of devotees. Officials said the Temple Committee will hold discussion

with the Cuttack District Administration about various developmental projects of the temple. During the discussion with Mr. Pandian, the temple authorities brought about various issues of the temple particularly the problem of water logging, parking and repairing of the temple. The officials further said various projects have been taken up for the beautification of the temple. Be-

sides beautification of the temple, new developmental projects will be started for the convenience of the visiting devotees. RDC Suresh Chandra Dalai, Collector Bhabani Shankar Chayani, CDA Chairman Anil Kumar Samal, CMC Commissioner Ananya Das, DCP Prateek Singh and others were present during the visit of Secretary to CM to the temple.



Bhubaneswar: Oncologists at the SUM Ultimate Medicare (SUMUM) here have deployed bravos brachytherapy, a type of radiation therapy, with commendable success in treating a man suffering from tongue cancer. The treatment involves placement of a sealed radiation source inside the targeted area. Raghunath Mohanty (45) had come to the hospital for treatment of an ulcer on his

tongue, found to be cancerous, after doctors in another hospital had advised for partial or complete removal of the tongue. It would have meant loss of speech for him for his entire life. Seeking a second opinion, Mr. Mohanty came to SUMUM where he was admitted for treatment under the care of the Radiation Oncologist, Dr. Chira Ranjan Khadanga. "Triple endoscopic and PET-CECT tests

confirmed that the cancer was in preliminary stage. Members of the hospital's Multidisciplinary Tumour Board recommended that the patient should undergo the latest bravos brachytherapy treatment," Dr. Khadanga said. A per-cutaneous catheter implant was placed for sometime on the left side of patient's neck under anesthesia which contained high radiation iridium isotope

directly impacting the ulcer. The patient was discharged soon after. SUMUM is the first hospital in South East Asia to procure bravos brachytherapy equipment which has a high success rate, he said. Tests conducted on the patient after about two months as also MRI has revealed that there was no trace of cancer and he was able to live a normal life. He was able to take food and liquid normally, Dr. Khadanga said.

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Government may take fresh look at BPCL privatisation

NEW DELHI: The government may take a fresh look at BPCL privatisation, including revising the terms of sale, an official said.

cluding one from billionaire Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Group, have been received. Financial bids are yet to be invited. The official said the

An email sent to the Finance Ministry seeking comments on the story did not elicit a response. At the current market price, the 52.98 per cent

Gas -- were thereafter allowed physical inspection of assets such as refineries and depots as part of the due diligence process.



"We need to go back to the drawing board on BPCL. There are issues in terms of consortium formation, geopolitical situation and energy transition aspects," an official said.

The government is selling its entire 52.98 per cent stake in BPCL for which three expressions of interest (EOIs), in-

transition towards green and renewable fuel has made privatisation difficult in existing terms. "The total stake that may be offered to potential buyers too needs a rethinking in current conditions and easing of terms to help investors in forming a consortium," the official said.

stake is valued at about Rs 45,000 crore. The government invited Expression of Interest from bidders in March 2020 for selling BPCL and by November 2020 at least 3 bids had come in. The three bidders -- Vedanta, private equity firms Apollo Global and I Squared Capital's arm Think

The government was to seek financial bids once bidders completed due diligence and the terms and conditions of the share purchase agreement were finalised. The government has pegged disinvestment receipts at Rs 65,000 crore in the current fiscal, up from Rs 13,531 crore mopped up last fiscal.

United Airlines loses \$1.4B in 1Q, but expects profit in Q2

CHICAGO: United Airlines reported Wednesday that it lost \$1.38 billion in the first quarter of 2022 but said it expects to return to profitability in the

8% in after-hours trading following the earnings report. The number of miles flown by paying passengers fell 27% from a year earlier. However United is

mask mandate on planes, trains and travel hubs but the Justice Department said Wednesday it is filing an appeal seeking to overturn the order.

this quarter, paying on average \$2.88 for fuel, up 40% from a year earlier. The airline forecasted an operating gross margin of 10%, which was above analysts'



current three-month period as post-pandemic travel ramps back up. The Chicago-based airline posted revenue of \$7.67 billion in the quarter that ended March 31. That was down 21% from the first quarter of 2019.

The airline is still running fewer flights than before the pandemic. But it said it had reopened all of its lounges, resumed 19 international routes and restarted services to six cities that haven't been served since the pandemic began. Shares in United Airlines Holdings Inc. jumped almost

flying with roughly 73% of its available seats full. While not as high as the 81% of all seats before the pandemic, it is much better than it was in 2021 first quarter, when roughly half of all seats were filled with paying passengers.

The first quarter started off troubled for the airline industry, dominated in the early weeks by omicron variant of the Covid-19 virus. The virus abated, and caseloads across the U.S. have been low for some time. A federal judge this week put an injunction on the government's

"We continue to believe we will see a strong spring and lead into summer as restrictions disappear and more people travel," said analysts at Cowen & Co. "We believe if the U.S. testing mandate were to be eliminated, we would see strong pent-up demand for the summer on transatlantic routes." The airline appeared optimistic that its pandemic-related losses were behind it. United said it expects to post a profit for the second quarter and for the full year 2022. This is despite United facing higher fuel costs

expectations. "The demand environment is the strongest it's been in my 30 years in the industry ... we're now seeing clear evidence that the second quarter will be a historic inflection point for our business," United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby said in a statement. United's quarterly loss amounted to \$4.24 a share and compared to a loss of \$1.36 billion, or \$4.29 a share, in the same period a year earlier. Analysts had been expecting a loss of \$4.22 a share in the latest quarter, according to FactSet.

RBI prohibits upgradation of existing card without customer's consent

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India on Thursday asked card companies not to issue unsolicited credit cards or upgrade an existing card without the explicit consent of the customer, failing which they will have to pay double the billed amount as penalty. It also asked card issuers and third-party agents not to resort to intimidation or harassment during recovery of dues from customers. In its master directions on credit card and debit card issuance, the RBI said "the issue of unsolicited cards/upgradation is strictly prohibited". These directions will be effective from July 1, 2022.

It further said in case an unsolicited card is issued or an existing card upgraded and activated without the explicit consent of the recipient, the card issuer will have to reverse the charges and pay a penalty double the billed amount. According to the master directions, commercial banks with net worth of over Rs 100 crore can undertake credit card

business either independently or in tie-up arrangement with other card issuing banks/NBFCs.

Regional rural banks (RRBs) are also permitted to issue credit cards in collaboration with their sponsor bank or other banks. "In addition, the person in whose name the card is issued can also approach the RBI Ombudsman who would determine the amount of compensation payable by the card-issuer to the recipient of the unsolicited card as per the provisions of the Ombudsman Scheme, for loss of complainant's time, expenses incurred, harassment and mental anguish suffered by him/her," the central bank said.

The RBI further said that non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) shall not undertake credit card business without its prior approval. "Without obtaining prior approval from the Reserve Bank, NBFCs shall not issue debit cards, credit cards, charge cards, or similar products virtually or physically," he

said. With regard to recovery of dues from customers, the RBI has asked the issuers to ensure that they and their agents adhere to the fair practices code for lenders.

In particular, with regard to appointment of third-party agencies for debt collection, the card-issuers shall ensure that their agents refrain from actions that could damage their integrity and reputation and observe strict customer confidentiality, it added.

"Card-issuers/their agents shall not resort to intimidation or harassment of any kind, either verbal or physical, against any person in their debt collection efforts, including acts intended to humiliate publicly or intrude upon the privacy of the credit cardholders' family members, referees and friends, making threatening and anonymous calls or making false and misleading representations," it said.

With regard to issuance of debit cards, RBI said banks should not force a customer to avail debit card facility and should not link issuance of debit card to availing of any other service from the bank. Further, the apex bank said a co-branded credit/debit card shall explicitly indicate that it has been issued under a co-branding arrange-

ment. "The co-branding partner shall not advertise/market the co-branded card as its own product. In all marketing/advertising material, the name of the card-issuer shall be clearly shown," it said.

NBFCs desirous of entering into a co-branding arrangement for issue of credit cards will also come under the guidelines. Among others, the RBI asked card issuers to put in place a grievance redressal mechanism and publicise it widely.

It added that card issuers shall ensure that their call centre staff are trained adequately to competently handle and escalate a complaint, if necessary.

Further, it said card issuers will be liable to compensate the complainant for the loss of his/her time, expenses, financial loss as well as for the harassment and mental anguish suffered for the fault of the card issuer and where the grievance has not been redressed in time.

"If a complainant does not get satisfactory response from the card-issuer within a maximum period of one month from the date of lodging the complaint, he/she will have the option to approach the Office of the concerned RBI Ombudsman for redressal of grievances," it added.

In India, amid calls to resign over Partygate, Johnson announces new deals worth £1 Billion

Continued from page-1

Indian deep-tech and AI start-ups, supported by the UK and Indian governments; new AI scholarships for Indian students jointly funded by the UK Government's Chevening programme and India's Adani Group; and a £6m investment from AI healthcare specialists Qure-ai to open a Centre of Excellence in the UK.

"Work is already progressing on cutting red tape for businesses following the UK-India Enhanced Trade Partnership launched by both Prime Ministers last year, and today our governments will announce new measures to make it easier to export UK-made medical devices to India. This will support UK jobs and create opportunities for British med-tech companies like Redcar-based Micropore Technologies to sell their lifesaving products in India, an import market worth £2.4bn," British High Commission said.

London and New Delhi last year agreed on a UK-India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to boost investment and jobs as part of a plan to double trade by 2030. This announcement will take the two nations closer to that target.

Meanwhile, in Westminster, MPs are debating whether to investigate Mr Johnson over lockdown parties held in No 10. They will vote on whether to open a probe into whether the PM misled MPs, BBC reports.

ALSO READ | UK PM Boris Johnson to begin two-day India visit on Thursday, won't lecture Delhi on Ukraine crisis

According to The Guardian, En route to India, Johnson had played down Partygate, saying he would concentrate on what he said were more pressing matters. "I think politics has taught me one thing -- that you're better off talking about and focusing on the things that matter, the things that make a real difference to the electorate and not about politicians themselves," he said, adding, "I'm focused on jobs, growth and a fantastic partnership with India."

Asked whether there were circumstances in which he could resign over Partygate, he said: "Not a lot springs to mind at the moment." Instead, Johnson stressed the importance of securing a free trade deal with India, hinting that the UK might be prepared to relax its immigration regime in order to do so, the report said.

NITI Signs Pact With UNICEF

Continued from page-1

understand the multidimensional attainments and deprivations among children across health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation, household living standards; and protective environment, with the aim of analyzing the status of children around critical child related SDGs to establish recent trends. This effort will contribute to the realization of India's commitments on the 2030 Agenda and provide a set of policy recommendations for concerted action in terms of accelerating progress towards the SDGs to 'leave no child behind' and achieving their holistic development.

In his address, NITI Aayog Vice Chairman Dr Rajiv Kumar said, 'This child-focused SDG initiative builds on our effort of monitoring progress through the SDG India Index and Dashboard, which continues to be a unique data-driven initiative for triggering policy action. This new initiative with UNICEF is built on the ethos of SDG attainments for children and ensuring that no child is left behind.'

Mr Arjan de Wagt, Officer in Charge Deputy Representative UNICEF India said, 'Addressing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children is vital to recovery efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Agenda. Comprehensive measurement of the status of children will pave the way for multi-sectoral policies and programmes across health and nutrition, education, safe water and sanitation, child protection, social protection and climate action to reach the most vulnerable children. We congratulate NITI Aayog on this pioneering step and stand committed to provide all support.'

Articulating the way forward, Ms Hyun Hee Ban, Chief of Social Policy, UNICEF India, said, 'We commend NITI Aayog for this initiative to develop a multidimensional measure of attainments and deprivations among children. It's a demonstration of India's strong commitment to achieve the SDGs, by focusing on child related SDGs. One in every third person in India is a child below the age of 18, while one in every fifth person is an adolescent between the ages of 10 to 19. Through this process, we look forward to engaging with various stakeholders particularly children, adolescents and young people.'

The collaboration between NITI Aayog and UNICEF India will draw up the methods, technical analysis, reporting, and action planning for the first report on the 'Status of India's Children', with a focus on the multidimensional aspects of child development like health, education, nutrition, protection, and other relevant areas. This project will undertake a whole-of-society approach of involving all stakeholders ranging from Union Ministries, State Governments, Civil Society Organizations, and child rights collectives.

Sarita, Sushma take bronze at Asian Championship

ULAANBAATAR: Defending champion Sarita Mor was not at her best but still managed to win a bronze medal while Sushma Shokeen also earned a podium finish at the

high-altitude city, I did not feel active on the mat. Plus, hardly there was any gap between my bouts," she added.

Also winning bronze was Sushma in 55kg category, which also featured only five wrestlers.

She lost by technical superiority to Japan's Umi Imai but bounced back with a 5-0 win over Kazakhstan's Alty Shagayeva in the next round.

Then she enjoyed a stupendous bout against Uzbekistan's Sarbinaz Jienbaeva, winning by fall.

However, she ended with a heavy defeat against local girl Otgonjargal Ganbaatar, to whom she lost by technical superiority.

The two wins were enough for her to secure a bronze.

Manisha was also in reckoning for a bronze in the 50kg but lost the medal match by fall to Uzbekistan's Jasmina Immaeva.

Sonika Hooda (68kg) and Sudesh Kumari (76kg) could not reach the medal round.

India have so far won seven bronze medals at the championships.

The Greco Roman wrestlers had won five bronze on the first two days of the continental championships.



Asian Wrestling Championship here on Thursday. Competing in the five-wrestler 59kg category, Sarita, the 2021 World Championship bronze medallist, began with two defeats -- against Mongolia's Shoovdor Baatarjav (1-2) and Japan's Sara Natami (VSU) -- but made a comeback by winning her last two bouts.

She first beat Uzbekistan's Dilfuza Aimbetova by technical superiority and then followed that up with a 5-2 win over Diana Kayumova.

"I could have won that bout against Mongolian girl. But since she was from home team, she got some favour from the referees. She was fleeing the mat but was not given any caution, she benefitted from that," Sarita told PTI. "That Japan wrestler was also beatable. It was just not my day. I could not perform the way I wanted to. Maybe because of weather. It is

IPL 2022; MI vs CSK: Mukesh Choudhary wreaks havoc before Tilak Varma lifts Mumbai to 155/7

NAVI MUMBAI: Chennai Super Kings pacer Mukesh Choudhary wreaked havoc with the new ball before Tilak Varma's responsible half-century lifted Mumbai Indians to 155 for seven in the IPL here on Thursday. Invited to bat,

unbeaten 19, helped Mumbai cross the 150 run-mark. While Rohit offered an easy catch to Mitchell Santner at mid-on, Kishan was undone by a swinging yorker, which rattled his off-stump. Brewis (4) became

Theekshana (1/35), sweeping him for a maximum. Mumbai were at 42/3 after the power-play. But it was Mitchell Santner (1/16), who dismissed Surya, whose sweep was easily caught by Choudhary at long-leg and Mumbai

Shokeen, who had three boundaries, top-edged a Dwayne Bravo (2/36) short-ball only to be caught at Robin Uthappa at mid-on. Wickets kept tumbling for Mumbai with Kieron Pollard (14) and Daniel Sams (5) also falling cheaply. But thanks



Choudhary (3/19) accounted for Rohit Sharma (0) and Ishan Kishan (0) in the first over and then dismissed Dewald Brewis (4), leaving Mumbai reeling at 23/3.

However, Varma's unbeaten 51 off 43 balls, in which he struck three fours and two sixes, along with Jaydev Unadkat's blazing

Choudhary's third victim. Brewis tried to chase a delivery outside the off stump, but ended up nicking to Mahendra Singh Dhoni. Suryakumar Yadav (32) started with a boundary, an on drive. He creamed another drive off Choudhary and then launched into mystery spinner M a h e e s h

were reduced to 47/4. Then Tilak and debutant Hrithik Shokeen (25), tried to rally the innings, but managed to add only 41 runs for the fifth wicket.

The duo was brutal on Ravindra Jadeja (0/30), who bled 13 runs in the 11th over, with Varma hitting a six with a slog-sweep. Mumbai lost half their side for 85.

to a quick-fire 35-run eight-wicket stand off 16 balls between Tilak and Unadkat, Mumbai gave their bowlers something to defend.

Brief Scores: Mumbai Indians: 155 for 7 in 20 overs (Tilak Varma 51 not out, Suryakumar Yadav 32; Mukesh Choudhary 3/19, Dwayne Bravo 2/36)

Five-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova announces first pregnancy on her 35th birthday

WASHINGTON: Former world number one Maria Sharapova an-

nis player enjoys a massive following of 4.2 million followers on Instagram.

fans started pouring congratulatory messages on her Instagram account

British Businessman Alexander Gilkes. The couple has been dating since 2018 and



nounced on Tuesday that she is pregnant with her first child on the occasion of her 35th birthday.

The five-time Grand Slam champion retired from sports back in 2020 after battling injuries and overcoming a 2016 suspension. The former Russian Ten-

taking to Instagram Maria wrote, "Precious beginnings!!!" and added a photo of her standing on the beach. "Eating birthday cake for two has always been my specialty," she further added.

As soon as Sharapova announced the news,

including many celebrities. This wasn't the first big reveal Sharapova has made on Instagram, in the year 2020, the Tennis queen also announced her engagement on the platform.

Back in 2020, Sharapova revealed that she is engaged to

got engaged in December 2020. Sharapova competed under the Russian flag and is the only Russian woman to have won a career in Grand Slam. Sharapova has lived in the United States since she came to the country as a young tennis prodigy in 1994.




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