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VIJAYAWADA 9
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 BRITISH ACTRESS

SPORTS 12
 RED BALL
 CHALLENGE

VIJAYAWADA, THURSDAY AUGUST 22, 2019; PAGES 12 ₹3



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HRITHIK HELPS
 SAMEERA REDDY
 OVERCOME
 STAMMERING
 Page 10

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BJP retains 'World biggest party' tag

Enrolled 3.78 cr new members against target of 2.2 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP has enrolled 3.78 crore new members during its membership drive that ended on Tuesday, bringing almost 1.6 crore more people under its fold than the target. Dushyant Kumar Gautam, a party vice president and co-convenor of the membership drive, described the over one-and-a-half month long exercise as "very successful" and expressed confidence that the total number may get close to 5 crore when the party collects data from the across the country in the next few days.

The membership drive had started on July 6 with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah launching it from Varanasi and Telangana respectively on the party ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee's birth anniversary. The party claims to have 11 crore members and had fixed a target of adding 20 per cent more members, 2.2 crore, during the drive. The number of new members stand at 3,78,67,753 and will be revised upwards as more details are collected.

INX MEDIA CASE

CHIDAMBARAM ARRESTED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Finance Minister and Congress leader P Chidambaram was on Wednesday night arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) from his Jor Bagh residence in New Delhi, an hour after he made a dramatic appearance at the All India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters. He was taken to the CBI headquarters.

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday had rejected the leader's anticipatory bail plea, after which he immediately moved the Supreme Court. The top court, however, listed his appeal for Friday.

Earlier on Wednesday, Chidambaram appeared at a press conference in the party's headquarters, almost 24 hours after going intocommunicado in the wake of the Delhi High Court turning down his anticipatory bail plea in connection with the INX Media scam case. Minutes after his appearance, teams from both the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate arrived at his residence. In unprecedented drama, CBI officials scaled the wall of his house ostensibly to gain access.

The Supreme Court earlier listed for August 23 Chidambaram's anticipatory bail plea seeking protection from arrest in the INX Media case. No mention of Chidambaram's plea was made in court after the Ayodhya land dispute hearing came to an end

'Schadenfreude' terms Karti



Former Union Home Minister P Chidambaram being taken in a car by sleuths of CBI, who arrested him after scaling the compound wall of his house on Wednesday

“My father has been fully compliant with the law. The arrest has been done to divert attention from other important issues. Now, agencies must file a charge-sheet. We will follow judicial procedure”

— KARTI CHIDAMBARAM, Son of P Chidambaram

on Wednesday. According to reports, Chidambaram, who has reached the CBI headquarters, will be produced in court on Thursday morning.

"My father has been fully compliant with the law," Karti Chidambaram was quoted by a channel as saying. According to Karti, the arrest has been done to divert attention from "other important issues". Now, agencies must file a charge-sheet. "We will follow judicial procedure," the former finance minister's son added

Late on Tuesday night, a

team of officers from the CBI arrived at Chidambaram's residence but could not find him home. This happened after the High Court denied the anticipatory bail plea to Chidambaram, saying he seems to be the "kingpin" and "key conspirator" in the case and needs to be interrogated in custody for the investigation to be effective.

Holding that the INX media scam was a "classic case of money laundering", the court said the twin facts which have weighed to deny pre-arrest bail

to Chidambaram are "gravity" of the offence and "evasive" replies given by him to questions put to him, while he was under protective cover extended to him by the court.

Chidambaram, 73, also failed to get any immediate relief from the Supreme Court that was approached shortly after the high court cancelled the interim protection from arrest, paving the way for the CBI and the ED to apprehend him.

The CBI team, which reached Chidambaram's home hours after the high court verdict, left the premises after confirming he was not present. A team of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) also arrived later. The CBI team, which comprised a few officials of the SP rank, initially did not make clear if it had gone to his residence to arrest Chidambaram for alleged irregularities in foreign investment clearance to INX media during his tenure as finance minister. Officials said that the team returned to the CBI headquarters and discussed with senior officers the future course of action.

Later on Tuesday night, the CBI again visited Chidambaram's house and pasted a notice on the gate. Signed by CBI investigating officer and Deputy Superintendent of Police R Parthasarathy, it directed the former minister to present himself within two hours of the receipt of the notice for further investigation in the case.

POST-BOTSA CAPITAL UTTERANCES

YSRCP in fire-fighting mode

G RAVI KIRAN ■ VIJAYAWADA

A day after Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development Botsa Satyanarayana's controversial comments on Capital city of Amaravati have triggered a big debate in the State, the ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) seems to have gone into a fire-fighting mode with the Opposition TDP getting the handle to go hammer and tongs against the government.

Botsa Satyanarayana has indeed stirred a hornet's nest with his views on capital construction at Amaravati. It may be recalled that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy did not even drop a hint of such a decision during the Diplomatic Outreach convention in which delegates from 40 countries participated.

The entire Opposition, including the BJP, Congress and the Left parties, have lambasted the YSR Government for what they called dampening the spirit of Capital Amaravati.

YSRCP MLA Ambati Rambabu has tried to cover up Botsa Satyanarayana's comments saying, "The Municipal Administration Minister has mentioned only the report of the Sivaramakrishna Committee. But, the media has distorted his comments. There is no



The entire Opposition, including the BJP, Congress and the Left parties, have lambasted the YSR Government for what they called dampening the spirit of Capital Amaravati

such decision by the government to shift the Capital city."

But, the farmers who have given lands for the Capital city construction are angry with Botsa Satyanarayana.

K Prasad, a farmer from Tulluru, said "There is no chance of floods to 29 villages in the Capital city region.

From Undavalli to Vykunthapuram, there is a river bund. Only the fields which are in the river flood zone are prone to floods. This time around, only Madduru and Kolluru villages, which are not in the Capital region, were affected due to floods. Seed Capital

villages Lingayapalem and Velagapudi have not been affected by the floods. The minister has made a misleading statement."

BJP leaders have felt that the fields in the river flood zone were inundated only due to mismanagement by the government.

Sujana Chowdary, MP, said, "The Central Water Commission (CWC) had warned the AP Government. But, they have neglected it. Because of their mismanagement, the farmers have lost crops in island villages in Krishna and Guntur districts."

Continued on Page 3



'Packaged food unhealthiest in India'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A global survey has found that when it comes to having the healthiest packaged food and drinks, India ranks the lowest among 12 countries.

The UK topped the charts, followed by the US and Australia. Published in the journal Obesity Reviews, the researchers analysed more than 400,000 food and drink products from 12 countries and territories around the world. The survey highlights the high levels of sugar, saturated fat, salt and calories/kJ in several of our favourite food items. The countries were ranked using Australia's Health Star Rating system which measures the levels of

the nutrients such as energy, salt, sugar, saturated fat as well as protein, calcium and fibre and assigns a star rating from half -- least healthy to five -- the most healthy. It was found that the UK had the highest average Health Star Rating of 2.83, followed by the US at 2.82 and Australia at 2.81.

Among the lowest were India with just 2.27 rating, China with 2.43 and Chile 2.44. The research also found that China's drinks were among the healthiest with an average Health Star Rating of 2.9 but packaged foods scored low at just 2.39. South Africa on the other hand scored low with its drinks at an average 1.92 rating while its foods came in at 2.87.

Kishan Reddy debunks reports of capital shifting

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy said Centre has not taken any decision regarding shifting of Andhra Pradesh capital from Amaravati.

"Central government has not taken any decision regarding shifting of Andhra Pradesh capital from Amaravati. It is in the purview of AP government to decide on the state capital and Central government has no role in it and did not receive any such proposal. Government decisions are not taken on social media. Everyone should remember this," said G Kishan Reddy, responding to media persons queries, on the talk doing rounds in political circles of Telugu states about AP capital.

Kishan Reddy comments assumed significance, as he is the lone Telugu minister in PM Narendra Modi's cabinet at Centre and representing both Telangana and AP.

Speaking in Hyderabad Kishan Reddy also clarified



“Not just about Amaravati, but the talk of Hyderabad being made the UT or the second capital of India is also doing rounds. Even TV channels are conducting debates on the topic. This is absolutely baseless, Central government has no such proposal”

— G KISHAN REDDY
 Union Minister of State for Home Affairs

on the occasion that there is no proposal to make Hyderabad as Union Terriorty or the second capital of India. "Not just about Amaravati, but the talk of Hyderabad being made the UT or the second capital of India is also doing rounds. Even TV channels are conducting debates on the topic. This is absolutely baseless, Central government has no such proposal," stated Kishan Reddy.

After YSRCP assumed

power in AP, doubts are looming large over the future of AP capital Amaravati, which was a brainchild of former CM and TDP president Chandrababu Naidu. With the new CM of AP YS Jaganmohan Reddy even going for reverse tendering in government projects, the shifting of Capital from Amaravati to some other new city has become a hot topic in not just political circles but even among general public.



Naidu making a visit to flood-hit areas in Guntur district

Get proofs of badly-hit fields, Naidu to farmers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu urged farmers to send photos and videos of inundated fields to the government otherwise the officials will try to avoid compensation of flood relief.

He toured in Thotlavalluru, Penamaluru and other villages of Krishna District on Wednesday and lashed out at officials for not visiting the flood-affected fields until now. Naidu alleged that damage

by Krishna floods was due to the negligence of the government. He said that there was no rainfall in the state and even recorded a meagre 25 percent. "Only due to rains in Maharashtra and Karnataka, these floods occurred", he added.

He said State Government violated suggestions of Central Water Commission, for which the people are suffering.

Several senior TDP leaders accompanied with party chief in the tour.

BJP plans nationwide campaign on Art 370

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP will carry out a nationwide campaign on the Union government's decision to abrogate Jammu and Kashmir's special status under Article 370 of the Constitution, and will reach out to 2,000 prominent personalities from the fields of film, sport and academia among others.

The party has started working on organising a 'Jan Jagran Abhiyan' (public awareness campaign) on the matter and will hold indoor meetings at state and district levels across the country, a party leader said. With assembly elections in four states around the corner, the party is keen to keep the emotive issue alive among the masses as it seeks to draw maximum political mileage following the decision which, it believes, has popular endorsement.

At the same time, the party also wants to check the opposition's propaganda on the issue.

TODAY

ALMANAC
 Month & Paksham: Shravana & Krishna Paksha
 Panchangam
 Tithi : Shashthi: 07:06 am
 Nakshatram: Bharani 02:36 am
 Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
 Rahukalam: 01:52 pm - 03:26 pm
 Yamagandam: 06:03 am - 07:37 am
 Varjyam: 11:07 am - 12:50 pm
 Goolika: 09:11 am - 10:45 am
 Good Time: (to start any important work)
 Amritakalam: 09:27 pm - 11:10 pm
 Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:53 am - 12:43 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
 Forecast: Thunderstorm
 Temp: 32/26
 Humidity: 87%
 Sunrise: 06:00
 Sunset: 06:38
 Current Weather Conditions Updated August 21, 2019 5:00 PM

Status of infra projects to be reviewed

PATRI VASUDEVAN ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government is contemplating to review the progress of construction works related to IAS officers' quarters and seed access roads, as 60 percent of the works have already been completed in both the cases.

Following speculations over the proposed shifting of Capital city from Amaravati to elsewhere in the State, infra majors are now in a dilemma as to how to go about the next phase of works in and around the Capital. In fact, another infra major, which had initiated a dialogue with the previous TDP government over the setting up of a real-time control system similar to what Japan has for rail traffic management, has now reportedly stepped back from its propos-

al, according to sources. In fact, Tokyo had built the system using an autonomous decentralised architecture, support-safe, secure, and precise railway traffic round the clock. The bureaucrats team, which studied both the road and rail traffic systems, identified certain important features of the real-time traffic control systems, and proposed to initiate similar measures in the Capital of Amaravati.

Tokyo city has a population of three crore, but there are no traffic jams, according to the findings of the team of officials. Japan follows 'Chakra' (circular) roads system to decongest traffic, said a bureaucrat. "This system across the Tokyo city has been supporting the road traffic to move in real time," an officer said, and added that their team had studied the road traffic procedures in Tokyo and is also contemplating on how the same could be incorporated here to bring in more glamour and richness to the Capital city. In fact, Tokyo's metropolitan area traffic management system is considered as the world's largest real-time control system, and the previous TDP government had also planned such a system for Amaravati to showcase the Capital in an elegant way on global platforms.

US Coast Guard ship for India

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

United States Coast Guard Ship Stratton is making its maiden visit to India and Indian Coast Guard is hosting its visit for strengthening international cooperation, said an official release issued here on Wednesday.

Stratton is scheduled to arrive at Chennai on August 23 and will leave on August 27. This visit will provide an opportunity to strengthen cooperation and address maritime security threats, including human trafficking, smuggling of drugs, firearms and piracy. During the stay, Indian Coast Guard Ships and US Coast Guard Ship will take part in a joint harbour and sea exercise off Chennai for promoting interoperability between the two maritime forces. The Commander Coast



United States Coast Guard Ship Stratton seen in Indian waters

Guard Region (East) will oversee the joint exercise. Apart from exercise Indian Coast Guard has planned various other sports

and cultural activities for the visiting guests. This visit is in continuation of the efforts by the governments

of both countries to enhance cooperation between the two Coast Guards in areas of maritime safety and security.

CAPSULE

DISCIPLINE IS KEY FOR SUCCESS, DC TELLS SHUTTLERS

VIJAYAWADA: District Collector Md. Imtiyaz said that discipline and hard work transform players into great sports personalities. He was inaugurating the three-day Krishna District badminton championship at DRRMC Indoor Stadium here on Wednesday. Speaking on the occasion he said international players like P.V. Sindhu and Kidambi Srikanth made the state and country proud as sports personalities. "Players participating in this championship should emulate them". He said efforts were made for the development of sports in the district. "Facilities are provided in schools. Indoor stadiums are developed at main places in the district with the support of District Sports Development Authority". As many as 500 players are participating in the age groups 13,15,17 and 19 years. Krishna District Badminton Association president R. Rammohana Rao, secretary E. Thirumurthy, other office bearers and parents took part in the inaugural function.

KRISHNASHTAMI CELEBRATIONS AT CCVA

VIJAYAWADA: Children dressed as little Krishna's and rhythmic 'Kolattam' will be the main features of the Krishnashtami celebrations to be held at Cultural Centre of Vijayawada and Amaravati (CCVA) today at 5 p.m. The programme is organised jointly by CCVA and Young Indians (YI- Amaravati) and will be inaugurated by Satwik Chukkupalli, Chair, YI. Nityacharya Uma Venkata Rama Krishnan will be felicitated on the occasion. Madiraju Madhava, Susruta Optical, CEO of Malaxmi Properties Sandeep Mandava, and Recharla Realcon Private Limited will attend as guests of honour.

No extension for filing of annual returns under GST: Piyush Kumar

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Commercial Taxes Chief Commissioner Piyush Kumar on Wednesday stated that the last date for filing of GST returns was August 31 and that no more extensions would be provided.

Talking part in a seminar on "Filing of annual returns under GST" in the city, the Commissioner clarified the doubts of traders, business associations, businessmen, business federations, chambers and financial experts. Several commercial tax officials also took part in the meeting meant to increase filing of returns among registered taxpayers in the district.

"GST filing was extended twice, so there will be no more extensions," said Kumar. He said that the seminar was held to clarify doubts and offer suggestions to encourage registered taxpayers to file their returns before the deadline. An audiovisual presentation was also organised to help traders and businessmen understand the intricacies of filing.

Kumar admitted that the percentage of filing stood at single-digits now and that efforts were being made to achieve an encouraging percentage.

"The returns filed under composition category is just 20 percent. We are making efforts to increase the percentage. Composition scheme is a segment opted by a taxpayer whose turnover is less than Rs one crore," he stated. He also said that traders and businessmen who had a turnover of less than Rs two crore were still anticipating postponement, which was the reason just 1,000 registered taxpay-



Commercial Taxes Chief Commissioner Piyush Kumar addressing the media on the filing of GST returns in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

Traders and businessmen who had a turnover of less than Rs two crore were still anticipating postponement, which was the reason just 1,000 registered taxpayers had filed their returns.

The Commercial Taxes Chief Commissioner also emphasised on consumer awareness and the responsi-

bility of the services sector in the implementation of GST. He said that the GST regime had completed two years and that Andhra Pradesh

implemented the new tax format in an encouraging manner. "The initial period was very stressful for trade and the government, but over a period of time it has stabilised to a large extent, even though many issues still remain unresolved," he said.

Kumar observed that shopkeepers were found charging GST over and above the MRP of the products. "This is especially true in rural areas where consumer awareness is low regarding GST rules," he stated and suggested consumers to refuse to pay if the shopkeepers were found overcharging on GST. "We are also keen to take action against bogus registrations," he opined.

He stated that most items of consumer use have been brought in the 18 percent, 12 percent and even 5 percent category, and that the GST Council was India's first statutory federal institution in which the Centre and the states pooled their fiscal rights in a collective forum to create a common market.

AP doing well in GST returns filing: Official

VIJAYAWADA: Commercial Tax Chief Commissioner Piyush Kumar on Wednesday said that the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was introduced two years ago to provide better services.

Participating as chief guest of the 'Annual Returns Filing' programme, organised by the Vijayawada Chamber of Commerce and Industries, here on Wednesday, he said Andhra Pradesh is doing well in registrations and filing of returns when compared to

other states in the country. Stating that several programmes are being organised to create awareness on GST, he said annual returns for the financial year 2017-18 should be filed before August 31. He called upon traders to keep the State on top in prompt filing of returns. To create awareness on GST, the Commercial Tax Department had uploaded Telugu videos on YouTube for better understanding of the process, he added.

Chamber president Vakkalagadda Bhaskar said they have been organising various seminars and programmes for the convenience of the business fraternity to clear their doubts on GST since its launch.

AP Tax Practitioners' Association president A V S Krishna Mohan, Commercial Tax Commissioner T Ramesh Babu, GST Joint Commissioner J V S Sharma and others participated in the programme.



Andhra Pradesh Governor Bishwabhusan Harichandan inaugurating a help desk for Income Tax returns e-filing in Vijayawada on Wednesday.

Governor inaugurates IT returns e-filing help desk

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A help desk for Income Tax returns e-filing was inaugurated by Andhra Pradesh Governor Bishwabhusan Harichandan as part of Kardaata e-Sahyog Abhiyan on Wednesday. Mukesh Kumar Meena, Secretary to Governor, initiated the proceedings.

Bhupal Reddy, Principal Commissioner of Income Tax, Vijayawada explained the necessity of filing IT returns before August 31 to avoid penal interest up to Rs10,000. He said that e-filing was a simple process, wherein once logged to the Income Tax e-filing website, the ITR would be visible with pre-populated

For the financial year 2018-19, Rs 9047 crore was collected by way of IT and the target set for the financial year 2019-20 is Rs 11308 crore for Andhra Pradesh.

details and it would take five minutes to file and submit the returns. Filing of IT returns helps

taxpayers obtain housing loans, education loans, loan for studying abroad, wherein Income Tax Returns for at least three years are insisted.

For the financial year 2018-19, Rs 9047 crore was collected by way of IT and the target set for the financial year 2019-20 is Rs 11308 crore for Andhra Pradesh. The number of IT payers in the State is 7.32 lakh.

The Governor lauded the efforts of the IT department regarding revenue collections and in roping in more taxpayers. President, Tax Bar Association, G Satyanarayana and Chairperson, SIRC, Vijayawada Chapter, Nagavalli, participated on the occasion.



Hare Krishna Movement to celebrate Janmashtami on a grand note

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Hare Krishna Movement is all set to celebrate Krishna Janmashtami at Mana Kalyana Mandapam in Kanuru on August 23 and 24.

The organisers, in a release, said that abhisheka will be performed in the evenings as part of rituals during the festival. Devotees are likely to throng in huge numbers to watch this eye-catching ritual with soul-stirring kirtans.

The abhisheka will be performed by Sri Satya Gaura Chandra Dasa, President, Hare Krishna Movement and Akshaya Patra Foundation Vijayawada.

Hari Nama Sankirthana Yagna will be organised from 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 9pm. A special mandapam will be created to perform Hari Nama Japa Yagna. Visitors will enter the mandapam with a vow to chant Hare Krishna Mantra for 108 times. "Last time around 20,000 devotees chanted the mantra," said the release.

Lord Krishna in his baby form will be gently rocked on a grand cradle on this day.

Hari Nama Sankirthana Yagna will be organised from 10am to 2pm and 4pm to 9pm. A special mandapam will be created to perform Hari Nama Japa Yagna.

Devotees will participate in rocking the lord event thus marking his divine appearance.

Cultural programmes will be organised on both days such as Sri Krishnashtami Youth Fest and Utti Mahostavam. Darshan will be available to devotees from 9 a.m. Free food distribution will be taken up at Sikamani Centre at Moghalrajapuram, Benz Circle near flyover, Pallem Peddeswara Rao Street at Governorpet. Prasadam will also be distributed to the devotees. Endowments Minister Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao, MLA Penamaluru Parthasarathy, High Court Chief Justice Chagari Praveen Kumar will grace the event.

Emphatic win for North Zone

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

North Zone defeated South Zone by nine wickets in the ACA U-16 Women's Inter-Zonal 40-overs Aside Match at ACA Women's Academy in JKC College campus in Guntur on Wednesday. Batting first, South Zone was all out for 63 in the 28th over with Navya and Mohana picking up three wickets apiece. In reply, North Zone reached the target in the 20th over by losing one wicket.

The scores: South Zone 63 in 27.4 Overs (B. Navya three for 13, P. Vennala Mohana three for three) lost to North Zone 64 for one in 19.1 overs (K Mahanthi Sri, 35).



P. Srinivas, Divisional Rly Manager

Safety seminar to rail staff conducted

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

South Central Railway's Vijayawada Division conducted safety seminar for guards, loco pilots and online staff at Divisional Railway Auditorium on Wednesday in which P. Srinivas, Divisional Railway Manager, was the chief guest.

Speaking on the occasion, he advised the field staff to adopt stress-free life, practice yoga, physical exercises and good sleep to remain active and healthy.

He briefed the field staff on the importance of leading healthy lifestyle, which would have a positive impact on an individual's performance in dealing with crisis situations.

Pratyusha Subba Rao, President, A.P. Psychologists Federation, counselled the staff and their family members on issues of stress and gave suggestions on stress management.

M.V.S. Ramaraju, ADM (Infrastructure), G. Sumana, ADM (Operations), P. Bhaskar Reddy, Senior DCM, V. Anjaneyulu, Senior DOM, P. Nehemiah, Senior DPO, S. Muni Reddy, Senior DEE and staff were present on Wednesday



NSS volunteers take up relief operations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers of Velagapudi Ramakrishna Siddhartha Engineering College visited Vedadri village in Jaggaiahpet Mandal on Wednesday to help

the flood victims. They collected funds from the staff and students for the relief work.

They purchased blankets, clothes, biscuits, water bottles and mosquito repellents and donated to the villagers affected by floods.

Ministers should not comment on capital shifting while CM is away: CPI

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPI State Secretary K Ramakrishna on Wednesday found fault with the Cabinet Ministers of Andhra Pradesh government for making statements on shifting the capital city from Amaravati, in the absence of the Chief Minister who is away on tour in the US.

Ramakrishna met Minister of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development Peddiredy Ramachandra Reddy at the Secretariat and expressed his anguish over the fate of more than 30,000 farmers who had given land for the development of the capital city.

"Shifting of the capital city to another place will harm the image of the Chief Minister and people would call him a Thuglaq," he added.

He also discussed about the shortage of the sand and said that lakhs of construction workers were facing hardships owing to the restrictions. He asked for the reduction of sand prices as they were not



within the reach of the common man, and added that his party was of a view that the capital city should not be shifted any other city and the gov-

"Shifting of the capital city to another place will harm the image of the Chief Minister and people would call him a Thuglaq"

ernment should take corrective measures and develop the city as per its vision.

Poor maintenance of public urinals bothers road users

G RAVI KIRAN ■ VIJAYAWADA

The public urinals spruced up by VMC in the city are causing more discomfort than comfort to people owing to their improper maintenance.

The foul smell emanating from these urinals are making the walking experience of road users a nightmarish one.

Last year, as a part of Swatch Survekshan guidelines, VMC built public urinals to avoid open urination.

But as days passed maintenance of these urinals took the backseat and gradually they became an object of neglect by VMC authorities.

Whoever crossed these places encountered stomach-turning bad smell.

Says Chief Medical Health Officer Arjuna Rao: "Engineering Department is meant for maintenance. They have outsourced the works to private agencies who are not doing a proper job".

But the truth is public urinals were not allocated to any outsourcing agency.

The Engineering Department is filling the tank with water and the maintenance is the responsibility of the Public Health Department.

Mr Rama Krishna, Chief Engineer said: "We take care of filling the water tank in the public urinals. Cleaning is the job of the Public Health Department. We came to know that they are not doing the job properly. We will dis-



"Engineering Department is meant for maintenance. They have outsourced the works to private agencies who are not doing a proper job"

ARJUNA RAO
Chief Medical Health Officer

and we will allocate maintenance to an agency so that it can be maintained properly". Almost in 18 places, public urinals were installed in the city. Urinals at Kaleswararao Market and NTR complex are top in the list of poor maintenance.

Says G. Koteswara Rao, a retired teacher: "The public urinals are needed in several other places in the city. Open urination is rampant in

Krishnalanka Road, Bus Station Road, roads near railway Station and walkers undergo a torrid time. Because of poor maintenance of the existing public urinals, citizens are not able to use them and thus resorting to open urination."

Citizens are requesting the VMC to maintain public urinals properly and arrange more in the city to avoid open urination.

CAPSULE

NEW EO FOR DURGA TEMPLE
VIJAYAWADA: The State government has made major changes in the Endowments sector. IRS officer V Koteswaramma has been transferred from the post of Executive Officer for Sri Durga Malleswara Swami temple and MV Suresh Babu will take charge as the new EO. Babu had previously worked as Annavaram EO and brought in many changes in the temples, such as the dress code.

RAVI CHANDRA IS TRIBAL WELFARE PRINCIPAL SECRETARY
Vijayawada: Mudda Ravi Chandra assumed charge as Principal Secretary, Tribal Welfare Department at the Secretariat in Velagapudi on Wednesday. After assuming charge, he held discussions with officials of his department over Navaratnas, election manifesto and Budget allocations to Tribal Welfare Department. Ravi Chandra advised the officials concerned to take steps to ensure that Navaratnas are implemented for the welfare of tribals and other downtrodden sections. He also discussed the appointment of village volunteers and village secretariat posts. Every government scheme should reach the tribals through village volunteers, he added. The Principal Secretary also discussed prevalence of seasonal diseases in the Agency areas and the condition of tribal welfare schools.

BE CREATIVE, MINISTER EXHORTS STUDENTS
Vijayawada: Minister for Endowments Vellampalli Srinivas, while inaugurating a three-day science expo at KBN College on Wednesday, said that students can turn innovative if they pursued creative skills. Addressing the students, he said the world was experiencing advanced technical innovations and the students should acquire knowledge for their overall development. The present generation should come up with inventions keeping in mind issues such as pollution, calamities, human needs and climate change. He said apart academics students should excel in fields related to their subjects. "Human development is possible only with science and knowledge. One should learn to think out of the box," said the minister and added that all exhibits were related to science. He appreciated the college management for striving to impart quality education to students for the last five and a half decades. College principal Dr V Narayana Rao, treasurer A Ramakrishna Rao, vice-principal E Varaprasad, Dr Naveen Kumar and others were present.



Minister for Industries, Commerce and Information Technology Mekapati Goutham Reddy at the Ease of Doing Business seminar in Nellore on Wednesday

New Industrial Policy soon: Mekapati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Industries, Commerce and Information Technology Mekapati Goutham Reddy released the white paper on Industries in Nellore on Wednesday. He said that the State Government would release a new Industrial Policy in two or three months time and that it would help to set up world-class industries in the State. Addressing a seminar on "Ease of Doing Business," the Minister said that the problems of the industries would be addressed every three months and the unemployed would be given training for skill development with international standards. He also said that the State Government was planning to lift industrial incentives soon as they act as a burden for the revenue deficit State. "We are planning to bring in the new

It will provide a solution to the questions related to industries, including 75 percent local quota in industrial jobs"

Industrial Policy in the next three months. It will provide a solution to the questions related to industries including 75 per cent local quota in industrial jobs" Goutham Reddy said. Also present at the seminar were Irrigation Minister Anil Kumar Yadav, APIIC Chairperson RK Roja, Gudur MLA Varaprasad, Industries Department Chief Secretary Rajat Bhargava, Industries Commissioner Siddharth Jain and Nellore District Collector MV Seshagayati.

Long hours take toll of TSRTC workers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Long stressful hours of work, traffic snarls, double duty, delay in revising wages and delay in salaries have all contributed in taking a toll on the health of RTC workers employed in 29 depots in the GHMC limits. They say they can scarcely lead a normal life because of the stressful working conditions. The drivers and conductors say that they are becoming vulnerable to various air-borne and infectious diseases.

Since 2011, there has not been any recruitment of new staff in RTC, some 7,000 workers even retired from service in that period. As a result, workload for the existing employees has increased, especially the drivers and conductors. In fact, overload and other working conditions for woman conductors are said to have become severe.

A conductor with Kachiguda bus depot, Jyoti, said there aren't any rest rooms and toilet for women. The uniforms which they wear every day are four years old. According to rules, duty hours of women should end by 8 pm, but they end up working till 11 pm.

Lakshmi, a conductor attached with the BHEL bus depot says there is a shortage of at least 2,500 conductors and drivers. She says 3,500 city buses make about 42,000 trips, but there is no corresponding increase in the staff.



Chief Secretary L.V. Subramanyam, DGP Gautam Sawang and Principal Secretary of Revenue Dr Manmohan Singh in a video conference with officials in Vijayawada on Wednesday

CS reviews arrangements for exam for village secretariat posts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary L V Subramanyam, in a video conference on Wednesday, reviewed the arrangements for written examinations for various categories of jobs at Village Secretariats, identification of land for house plot distribution to eligible beneficiaries by Ugadi and the functioning of village volunteers. Subramanyam instructed the officials to conduct the exams for Village Secretariat employee posts from September 1 in a transparent manner on the lines of the UPSC examinations. As many as 21,69,000 candidates are set to attend the examina-

As many as 21,69,000 candidates are set to attend the examinations. The DGP instructed police officials to take care of security arrangements

tion of house plots to the poor by the coming Ugadi festival. He asked the officials to identify lands for the purpose. Principal Secretary of Revenue Department Dr Manmohan Singh briefed the Chief Secretary about the functioning of the newly-appointed village and ward volunteers. From August 26 to September 20, village or ward volunteers will collect the data of beneficiaries for Navaratnalu. Later, based on the data, Navaratnalu will be distributed to the beneficiaries, he added. DGP Gautam Sawang, all District Collectors, Principal Secretary of Revenue Dr Manmohan Singh and other officials participated.



CAMPUS HIGHLIGHTS

- Total built-up area when spread out will span over 68 acres (approx. 65 football fields)
- The campus contains over 2.5 times more steel than the Eiffel Tower, measured by weight
- The building meets stringent safety standards, with 110 km of fire protection system conduit
- The 86-metre buildings are accessed by 49 elevators with high-rise elevators that can move at the speed of one floor per second



- The campus has one conference room seat for every 3.25 workstations, higher than the global ratio of 1:5
- First Amazon facility to create an Alexa Pod and experiment the Inside Day 1 Alexa Skill (Beta)
- Campus is built to offer agile-based environment to maintain well-being of employees and foster inclusion
- The construction was awarded the Golden Trophy and Certificate from the National Safety Council for safe construction practices in 2018.

Amazon opens world's largest campus in Hyderabad

AMAZON ON WEDNESDAY OPENED ITS FIRST OWNED AND WORLD'S LARGEST 9.5-ACRE CAMPUS IN FINANCIAL DISTRICT

NAVEENA GHANATE ■ HYDERABAD

E-commerce giant Amazon opened its first company-owned and world's largest campus spread over 9.5 acres in Financial District on Wednesday. For a campus of its mammoth size, the related approvals would have typically taken nine to 12 months, but with the investor-friendly policy TS-iPass in force here, all necessary permits were given in just 11 days flat.

Amazon's office which can house 15,000 employees was the first test-case for TS-iPass and built in three years. Of the 3 million sq ft, 1.8 million sq ft comprises the work area while the rest is earmarked for recreation and parking facilities. The Seattle-headquartered company has 62,000 employees working in India, of which one-third are stationed in Hyderabad. About 4,500 employees have been moved to the new campus already. The other employees, who operate from various other campuses, will be moved here when leases of those buildings expire.

The Hyderabad campus was inaugurated by Home Minister Mohammad Mahmood Ali along with Principal Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, vice-president of Amazon's Global Real Estate and Facilities John Schoettler and Amazon's country manager for India Amit Agarwal. The foundation stone was laid in March 2016. Since then, 2,000 workers worked on the site every day, and constructed the building within 39 months. Speaking on the occasion, Amit Agarwal said, "Over these last 15 years, we have invested significantly in India across 30 office spaces, the AWS-APAC region in Mumbai, 50 fulfilment centres in 13 states as well as hundreds of delivery stations and sort-

'We won't get distracted by Jio Cloud entry'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Following the announcement of Jio Cloud in partnership with Microsoft by Reliance Industries, the cloud giant Amazon said that it "does not get distracted by what is changing in the markets or its competition". Amit Agarwal, SVP and Country Head, Amazon India on Wednesday said, "Amazon's approach to its businesses is based on three principles - obsess with customers, invent on their behalf thinking of long term. We like our approach of obsess with customers and not get distracted by what's changing around us or the competition. Genuinely we are so busy looking at how we can serve

customers better". He pointed that to build that kind of service like Amazon web services (AWS) requires a lot of innovation and long-term thinking. He said, "We know that any customer would like to use us, until a moment they find a better experience elsewhere. AWS has done a fabulous job on focusing on things that developers or customers most care about - be it availability, reliability or security, choice of services. It has one of the most feature rich available low latency, low cost stack out there. To build that kind of service requires a lot of innovation and long term thinking". It can be mentioned here that Reliance Industries Ltd, on August 12, announced a

partnership with Microsoft's Azure cloud platform, which poses a direct challenge to rival cloud services providers such as Amazon.com and Alphabet's Google. As part of the 10-year alliance, Jio will build data centres across India that will be hosted on Microsoft's Azure cloud, Reliance Chairman Mukesh Ambani said.

AWS is used by most startups out there in India irrespective of sectors. Amit said, "We are very excited about the adoption we are seeing and AWS is growing in India very fast. We have launched data center in Mumbai which has bought services closer to the developers and have more choice and continue with us."

Hyderabad has a geographical advantage as the Deccan Plateau is considered a safe zone for data centres, back-up and disaster recovery. I request Amazon to consider Hyderabad for setting up data centre too

MOHAMMAD MAHMOOD ALI
 Home Minister

Telangana is home to a rich textile tradition and Amazon is creating separate space for promoting handlooms. We ask Amazon to extend the facility to textiles and handicrafts from Telangana. We want it to play a key role AI and Machine Learning by partnering with COE

JAYESH RANJAN
 Principal Secretary

ing centres, creating nearly 200,00 jobs in India.

"This facility will build services globally," Agarwal said, citing examples like AWS, Kindle, Alexa, Amazon.in and Amazon Home Services, which is "innovating on things like doorstep pick-up and electronics repair."

Amazon also has the biggest fulfillment centre at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in the city. It is spread over 4 lakh sq ft and will be expanded to 5.8 lakh sq ft by 2020.

John Schoettler said, "What started as a think-big exercise 12 years ago, is now realized as largest owned campus. Inter-faith prayer rooms, mothers' rooms, quiet rooms, showers, helipad and an all-day open cafeteria are designed to facilitate inclusion and diversity. The campus contains 2.5 times more steel than Eiffel Tower when measured in weight. The largest buildings in Seattle house over 5,000 employees."

E-commerce is still small in India relative to total con-

sumption, less than 3%, and this largely untapped segment is critical to the global domination plans of Amazon. The company, which is locked in an intense battle for market leadership in India with Walmart-owned Flipkart, has also focussed on sustainability while designing the new facility.

The campus has more than 300 trees dotting its grounds - with three specimens aged over 200 years. It has a 8,50,000-litre water recycling plant too, Schoettler said.

Furniture row puts Kodela in the dock

■ Authorities informed, says former Speaker

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Former Speaker Dr Kodela Siva Prasada Rao has landed into deep trouble with TDP's official spokesperson Varla Ramaiah too finding fault with the former in taking home furniture from the Assembly building in Hyderabad.

With this, the already beleaguered Kodela is not in a position to counter criticism from the ruling YSRC leaders. Ramaiah categorically said it is a mistake on the part of Kodela to indulge in such an activity. He said this had dented the image of the party to considerable levels.

On his part, Kodela explained that he had taken the furniture in a transparent manner and is ready to hand it over.

Speaking to media persons here on Wednesday, he said, "I don't have any camp office in Vijayawada, Guntur or Amaravati. My home in Sattenapalli is used as my camp office. The furniture at AP Assembly building in



Hyderabad had not been in use then. That is the reason why I took it to my present camp office."

He further said that he had tried to bring the issue to the notice of the new government.

"I have written two letters in this regard immediately after the new government took charge," he added.

He said he wants to either keep the furniture at his home by paying for it or return it to the authorities.

The former speaker said that due procedures were followed before taking the furniture to his residence and it is there in the Assembly records.

JNTUH Agri engineers' talent going unrecognised

THEY ARE FINDING IT HARD TO GET JOBS AS THE COURSE IS NOT ICAR RECOGNISED

SUSHMA NAGARAJU ■ HYDERABAD

Agriculture engineers from JNTUH are volunteering their efforts to bring about improvement in agriculture and irrigation. They put in diligent hard work out of love for scientific farming and making a career out of it. These qualified youth yearn to become instruments of change and growth in the agriculture sector. They do this by helping farmers adapt to new farming methods which bring far better yield than traditional methods. Valuable contribution from the agro engineers, and that's the way to go for the farm sector too, you would think. Yes, but these youths have not been able to land a proper job in the industry, at a time when farming needs a thorough overhaul with adoption modern tools, methods and techniques.

The graduates, however, are continuing to volunteer in agriculture related works without giving up for three years now, all the while gain-



ing useful exposure in the field. The downer has been that neither the state agricultural department nor private organisations have shown interest in hiring them. As of now, the talent is going unrecognised and optimal use of their knowledge unrealised. "Where do we go from here? Why does the government seem unbothered?" These questions are beginning to haunt the agricultural engineers. To be clear, not all of

Neither the state agricultural department nor private organisations have shown interest in hiring them. As of now, the talent is going unrecognised and optimal use of their knowledge unrealised.

the agricultural engineers have completed B.Tech agricultural engineering in JNTUH affiliated colleges. But a majority of them have. Yet, they are neither employed nor can they pursue higher education. Reason: The Indian Council of Agricultural Research is not recognised by the prestigious JNTUH, and hence their four years degree certificate is not considered good enough by the agriculture industry, both

government and private. Despite several representations to state government, the problem persists for the agri graduates for past three years. According to the records, about 1,400 agriculture engineering graduates have passed from JNTUH and its affiliated colleges. These colleges only have AICTE recognition but are not ICAR certified. Without ICAR certification, they too are unable to apply for jobs. After volunteering services for projects for years, they are

now eagerly waiting for opportunities. "We all have the skill set necessary to work in agricultural departments where the contribution of agriculture engineers helps increase yields and profits for farmers. How are we to blame if the university hasn't applied for and got ICAR recognition. We have worked for water forum management, rain water harvesting through the tranches system and as volunteers for Khadar Valli programmes to gain experience," said B Vijay Kumar, an agriculture student.

Another student Prashanth, who is also president of Telangana Agricultural Students' Association, said "We studied crop water requirements, tank irrigation system, micro irrigation, etc. Agriculture engineers are very capable of handling lift irrigation water. It is unfair to not consider us just because our degree is not ICAR certified."

YSRCP in fire-fighting mode

Continued from Page 1

A few members of the general public opined that the State government is trying to dilute the flavour of Capital Amaravati. YSRC leaders are trying to bring down land prices in the Capital region, they opined. J Krishna, an auditor, said, "First, they have stopped works in the Capital city of Amaravati. The real estate is down now. A few people belonging to the ruling party have tried to procure lands after the prices have come down. But, nobody is willing to sell lands at low prices. To further down the prices of lands, the YSRC has played the trick with Botsa Satyanarayana's statement, but it will not work for them."

Meanwhile, the buzz is that the State government is planning to run the administration from Acharya Nagarjuna University (ANU) where 200 acres of land is available. The government may not t6ake up further works in Amaravati.

According to sources, the government may announce setting up a SEZ at Donakonda in Prakasam district where industries and business hubs would come up.

CAPSULE



2 KILLED IN MISHAP, WOMAN DIES OF SHOCK

Visakhapatnam: Two youngsters were killed in a road accident when their bike hit a divider and turned turtle near Chakalapeta area of Paderu in Vizag Agency. The deceased, who were returning from G Madugula, were identified as K Mani Kumar Deepak (24) and M Ashok Kumar, both residents of Paderu. Sources said that Ashok's grand-mother Ramanamma died of cardiac arrest in Paderu after she came to know that her grandson died in the road accident.

GANJA SEIZED FROM TRIBALS

Visakhapatnam: City Task Force personnel raided Rythu Bazaar opposite petrol bunk near Gopalapatnam and arrested four persons, who were in possession of ganja. They included Gajula Anand (30), Araku, Samareddy Subba Rao (30), Rangasila Village, Hukumpeta mandal, Setti Appala Swamy (42), Gavara Kancharapalem of Nimmagada village, Araku and Mandyakad Bharghav (23), Madagada village, Araku Valley. The CTF personnel seized 42 kgs of ganja, four mobile phones. They were handed over to SHO, Gopalapatnam PS for further action.

TWO SEVERELY HURT IN GANG WAR

HYDERABAD: Two men sustained grave injuries and three others received minor bruises and cuts in an alleged gang war reported Narsingi area on early Wednesday morning. According to the police, the incident took place at Gandipet Pochamma Temple when two groups belonging to Manchirevula and Kollur got involved in a fight during a party. "They attacked each other with beer bottles in inebriated condition. Two persons were seriously injured in the incident in which, the condition of a youngster is said to be critical," said the police, adding that a statement will be taken and the men will be identified post their medical treatment. On receipt of information, police rushed to the spot and shifted the injured persons to a nearby private hospital. The police will be booking a case to probe further.

SEPT 1 ONWARDS, PAY RS 1K FOR RIDING WITHOUT HELMET

HYDERABAD: Beware of new traffic rules coming into force from September 1. A rider failing to give way to the emergency vehicles such as ambulances would be slapped with a fine of Rs 10,000. The new fines slated to come in force have been put up on display with a slogan 'Observe the traffic rule, and save the fine amount'. The penalty prescribed for not wearing a helmet is Rs 1,000, while a car driver not wearing seat belt would have to shell out a similar figure. Talking on cell phone while driving will attract a fine of Rs 5,000, drunken driving Rs 10,000, signal jumping Rs 5,000 and triple-riding Rs 5,000.

Cops seize old currency, fire arm; 13 arrested

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The city police on Wednesday busted a gang of 13 persons for allegedly threatening a real-estate businessman P Guranatha Nooka Raju with a fire-arm to make arrangements for exchange their demonetized currency notes with valid notes. The police seized Rs1,00,97,000 in demonetized currency notes and one revolver and six dummy bullets from the gang.



Commissioner of police RP Meena displaying seized demonetized currency notes in police barrack in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday

Based on information from them, the police nabbed seven others and seized the demonetized currency and the revolver from the gang. The police launched manhunt for one more person of the gang

Commissioner of Police, RK Meena said that the gang led by S Monohar, PV Nageswara Rao and M Umamaheswara Rao procured demonetized currency notes from various sources after one person promised them that he would exchange the demonetized currency with new currency in the ratio of 7:1. The gang has been waiting for exchange of the demonetized currency, but they failed to trace Mahesh, who promised the deal.

However, the gang had gone to his friend P Guranatha Nooka Raju's office at

Parawada and demanded new currency on August 18 and they fled from the spot. Sensing danger, Nook Raju

approached the police the next day. The Parawada police, led by Raghuvver Vishnu, nabbed six members of the gang near Agagampudi toll gate when they were travelling in a car with the demonetized currency.

Based on information from them, the police nabbed seven others and seized the demonetized currency and the revolver from the gang. The police launched manhunt for one more person of the gang.

In another incident, the MVP Police arrested four persons, including two women, for circulating fake currency and cheating people that they would supply Rs three lakh worth fake currency for Rs one lakh genuine currency. Believing them, one Bella Nagesh gave them Rs one lakh but never got back the original currency. Realizing that he was cheated, he approached the police a couple of days back. The police nabbed the gang leader K Padmavathi and her accomplices M Lakshmi, M Rajeswara Rao and MS Narayana.

Football course launched in city

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The AIFF Grass Roots Leader Course (from August 21 to August 24) was inaugurated by Kosaraju Gopala Krishna, President APFA, at Railway Football Grounds here on Wednesday. The sessions were conducted by Anju Turambekar - Lead Instructor from New Delhi and Gyan Moyon - Assistant Instructor from Manipur and the theory classes were conducted at Jubilee English Medium School. The philosophy of grassroots course is Play-Practice-Play, a philosophy coaches learn about in the introduction to Grassroots Coaching module.

This approach will focus on the player experiencing and learning through play while also empowering them to support his or her player's learning and developmental needs. These courses take place over eight hours per day with four hours dedicated to classroom learning and four hours to field work. Senior AIFF C - license and D - License coaches have expressed their happiness in conducting the Grass Roots Leader Course for the first time in Andhra Pradesh. A Jagannadha Rao, Secretary VDFDA and K Laxmana Rao were also present.



ACB team raids expose poor facilities in hostel

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Officials of Anti-Corruption-Bureau (ACB) on Wednesday exposed the irregularities at the boys' hostel of Andhra Pradesh Social Welfare College, Bobbili in Vizianagaram district.

The ACB team led by DSP, BVS Nageswara Rao carried out a surprise raid at the hostel and observed the mismatch of hostel boarders' attendance (inflating student strength to draw excess amount from the government) and substantial variations in the quality of grocery items such as rice, pulses, edible oil and few others. Apart from the mismatch in attendance, lapses were found in the

records of stores also, he added. The raids also exposed lack of basic amenities like water, proper sanitation and quality food at the hostel. The staff also are deviating the regular food menu as they are not supplying eggs, bananas, milk, curd to the students regularly. The students were not happy with the quality of food being served in the hostel and the quantity was also low, Rao added.

It was also found that hostels warden and few others manipulating the accounts to swindle funds meant for spending on students' welfare. The poor sanitation at the hostel and toilets is one more concern, the ACB officials said.

Vizag Film Society to screen Rythu Bidda

FILM WAS BANNED BY BRITISH GOVERNMENT

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vizag Film Society, affiliated to Federation of Film Societies of India and member National Film Achieve of India will screen first banned Telugu film Rythu Bidda (1939) on August 27 (Tuesday) at 6 pm at Visakha Public Library Hall located at Dwarkanagar in the city. The entry is free for all.

The film was released on August 27 and has completed 80 years of its release and to celebrate this occasion, VFS has decided to screen the film. The film is based on social reformation movement during the period of British India at the time of battle against Zamindari system. The film was directed and produced by Gudavalli

The film was released on August 27 and has completed 80 years of its release and to celebrate this occasion, VFS has decided to screen the film

Ramabrahmam who brought in many revolutionary changes in the Telugu film industry those days.

The film is all about contemporary politics existing during that time in India. The director of the film was reformist and had firm conviction that the films would bring a change in the minds of peo-

ple. He created a new history in Telugu film industry by introducing new reforms in the industry. The film though censored but released in year 1939 in 11 centers in AP. It was banned first time during the year 1940 due to the fight between Zamindaries and farmers during that time. The movie incurred heavy losses to the film director and producer Gudavalli Ramabrahmam forcing them to abandon such adventures. Through this film singer Tanguturi Surya kumari, Kosaraju, B Narasimha Rao (music) Tapi Dharma Rao and Tripuraneni Gopi Chand were introduced. Veteran film actors Ravi Kondala Rao, SK Misro and VFS president Prof P Viswanadham will grace the occasion.

PHOTO EXHIBIT



Tourism Minister M Srinivasa Rao going around the photographs put up by Vizag Photo Journalists Association commemorating World Photography Day at Visakha Museum in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. Photo: G Tirupathi Rao

Youth accused of multiple offences held

Hyderabad: A 25-year-old youth involved in several chain snatching offences was nabbed by North Zone Task Force team along Bowenpally police near Old Airport road on Wednesday. Following a tip-off, police teams laid a trap and intercepted a car bearing the number TS 10 UA 9774, driven by the accused Mohd. Faisal. A dagger was seized from his possession.

The accused has a criminal record since 2013 and is involved in 18 cases, which include 14 snatching, one murder case, a robbery case, a theft and an attempted house burglary.

Faisal is a habitual chain-snatching criminal who runs a gang of offenders. The accused's involvement was detected in three cases, pertaining to Bowenpally, Malakpet and Kukatpally, said the police.

Joel Reifman is new US Consul General in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Joel Reifman on Wednesday took charge as the new US Consul General in Hyderabad.

"It feels wonderful to have arrived in Hyderabad as US Consul General. I'm already experiencing the warmth and hospitality for which this region of India is so fittingly famous," commented Consul General Reifman.

"The US-India partnership is strong, especially in this region, and we are proud to collaborate with the people of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha on a range of issues that are important to both our countries, from US-India industry and defense ties, to entrepreneurship, to women's empowerment. I look forward to building on the work of my predecessors and making continued progress together with our fantastic team at the Consulate," he added.

Making his first public appearance, Reifman attended



the opening of e-commerce giant Amazon's largest global campus in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

Prior to his present assignment, Reifman served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

His assignments at the State Department in Washington DC include Senior Liaison in the Bureau of Intelligence and

Research and Deputy Director of the Office of Aviation Negotiations in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.

Consul General Reifman's other overseas assignments, include Senior Deputy Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs at the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, Charge d' Affaires at the US Embassy in

Prior to his present assignment, Reifman served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Asmara, Eritrea, Provincial Reconstruction Team Leader in Iraq's western Anbar province, and Economic Counselor at both the US Embassy in Panama and the US Embassy in Islamabad. He was a Pearson Fellow in the Office of Senator Joseph Lieberman.

Before joining the State Department, Consul General Reifman served as an Assistant Staff Judge Advocate in the US Air Force. He earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from the University of Michigan and a Juris Doctorate from Southern Methodist University.

Garden City to host Neev litfest for kids

PNS ■ BANGALORE

It is that time of the year again when children, parents, and teachers come together to experience the magical world of books and share a common love for the written word as the Neev Literature Festival (NLF 2019) for children turns another page with its third edition here next month.

With another year of reading, conversation between children, adults and authors, workshops, book launches and a curated book exhibition of over 1,000-plus titles, the much anticipated Neev Book Award, this edition will see exclusive workshops for parents.

This year's Neev Book Award will include 4 distinct categories - Picture Books, Emerging Readers, Junior readers and Young Adults, the organisers said in a statement.

What is new this year is that the jury will also consider the voice of children while deciding the winners.



50 celebrated international and Indian authors, illustrators and academicians such as Devdutt Pattanaik, Paro Anand, Veera Hiranandani, Ranjit Lal, Nandana Dev Sen, Bhakti Mathur, Susan Perrow, Katie Smith Milway, David Melling, and Samhita Arni, to name a few. The authors will be part of the festival to meet and interact with the children.

This year's Neev Book Award will include 4 distinct categories - Picture Books, Emerging Readers, Junior readers and Young Adults, the organisers said in a statement

ics of discussion in 2019 will be the digital brain vs the text brain, impact of languages on children, the ever-pressing subject of visual communication vs text, how does missing stories from history impact the world view of children, the complexity of teaching and writing history in India, the ongoing debate of why history needs to be captured only through books, the need to discuss and break down topics such environment and sustainability for children, the kind of superheroes the modern generation is looking for, among many more thought evoking issues.

Rangareddy has highest number of vehicles in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The number of vehicles in Telangana state, barring the Hyderabad district, increased to 60 lakh from the previous 35 lakh since 2014.

A study has been conducted in undivided districts of Telangana on the number of vehicles during 2014-2019 (till August 2). The statistics show that the people are raring to go to acquire vehicles - both two and four-wheelers.

In Medak district alone, the number of vehicles have

The statistics show that the people are raring to go to acquire vehicles - both two and four-wheelers

been doubled, while Nalgonda district figured at the other end of the spectrum with a mere 25% increase.

Warangal district ranked number one by registering almost 500 vehicles per day,

the Khammam figured at the other end of the spectrum with registration of only 139 vehicles.

Rangareddy district placed in top position for having the highest number of vehicles - 2,65,000 - while Nalgonda district ranked the last with a mere 24,141 vehicles.

Everyone feels to have at least one vehicle or the other with the growing needs of the people. Loan facility to acquire vehicles and offers from automobile companies are luring the people to acquire vehicles.

Opposition speaking in Pakistan's language on Kashmir: Kishan

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister of State for Home Affairs G. Kishan Reddy on Wednesday said that the number of violent protests in Jammu and Kashmir has come down lately. He also slammed the opposition for speaking in the language of Pakistan.

Speaking on the sidelines of an event here, the Central minister said, "In Jammu and Kashmir it is not the first time that these small incidents of violence are taking place. These have been happening for years." "But now the number of these violent protests has come down," he said.

To a question on when the opposition parties will be given



permission to hold meetings in the Valley, the Minister said, "Looking at the actions of Pakistan we are taking precautionary measures in Jammu and Kashmir."

He said the opposition parties would have a lot of time to

visit Kashmir and hold meetings there. "So the opposition parties need to have patience for a few days and then they can hold meetings here," he said. Taking a jibe at former Congress President Rahul Gandhi over his wish to visit

The opposition parties would have a lot of time to visit Kashmir and hold meetings there

G KISHAN REDDY
Minister of State for Home Affairs

Kashmir, Reddy said, "Even Rahul Gandhi can hold a meeting there and visit Kashmir and no one will stop him to visit there." Describing the government's move of revoking Article 370 as a step towards the integration of the country, he said, "We have taken the step for the integration of the country. The Constitution of India has now been implemented there.

Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar's Constitution has been launched there. We have done good work for the country. Now the Dalit reservation can be launched there."

Hitting out at opposition parties for speaking in Pakistan's language, the Minister said, "Pakistan is trying its best to provoke unrest there (Kashmir) to tell the world that there is no peace.

And now the opposition parties also want to go with Pakistan as they are speaking in its language which is wrong." When asked about the release of the detained Kashmiri political leaders, he said, "The call on this issue will be taken by the administration there. We have no role in it."

SHORT READS



NDTV's Roys, former CEO booked for FDI norms of violation

NEW DELHI: The CBI has booked NDTV promoters Prannoy Roy and his wife Radhika Roy, and others in connection with alleged violation of foreign direct investment rules, officials said on Wednesday. The agency has also booked the media outlet's former CEO Vikramaditya Chandra under charges of criminal conspiracy, cheating and corruption, they said. It is alleged that the company floated 32 subsidiaries in several tax haven countries to bring foreign funds to India through sham transactions, they said.

Three killed as chopper crashes in Uttarkashi

DEHRADUN: A helicopter engaged in relief and rescue operations in the rain-ravaged Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand crashed on Wednesday, killing all three persons on board. A private helicopter with three persons on board crashed near Moldi in the rain-hit Uttarkashi district after getting entangled in cables, Uttarakhand's DG (law and order) Ashok Kumar said. The pilot, co-pilot and a local were killed in the crash, he said. Torrential rains in the Mori area of the district caused large-scale damage and demolished a number of houses on Sunday. Sixteen people were killed and around half a dozen are missing. The helicopter, belonging to Heritage Aviation, was among the ones engaged in relief and rescue operations in the affected villages spread over 70 square km area of the district. The crash occurred when the helicopter was returning after distributing the relief material among the affected people, Uttarkashi Disaster Management officer Devendra Patwal said.

Srinagar, Jammu mayors get MoS status

JAMMU: The mayors of Srinagar and Jammu civic bodies have been granted status equivalent to that of Minister of State (MoS), according to an official order. The order, issued by additional secretary Subash Chhibber on Tuesday, said the hospitality and protocol department shall make necessary insertion in the J&K State Warrant of Precedence with the approval of the competent authority. "Sanction is hereby accorded to the grant of status equivalent to Minister of State (MoS) to the Mayors of SMC (Srinagar Municipal Corporation) and JMC (Jammu Municipal Corporation) within their territorial jurisdiction," the order said. The elections for the municipal corporations were held in four phases in October last year after a gap of 13 years. People's Conference leader Junaid Maattu and BJP leader Chander Mohan Gupta are the mayors of SMC and JMC, respectively. On August 5, the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre scrapped the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and split it into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.

Yogi brings in 18 new ministers, many first timers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In what can be termed as a near-total revamp of the Yogi Adityanath government, 23 new ministers were sworn in on Wednesday at the Raj Bhawan by Governor Anandiben Patel.

The newly inducted ministers include six Cabinet Ministers, six Ministers of State with Independent charge and 11 Ministers of State.

The most significant aspect of Wednesday's reshuffle is that majority of the newly inducted ministers are first timers with almost no administrative experience. Yogi Adityanath will face an uphill task in making these ministers perform. Four Ministers of State, who held Independent charge, have been promoted as Cabinet Ministers.

The Cabinet Ministers, who were sworn in are Mahendra Singh, Bhupendra Chaudhary, Anil Rajbhar, Suresh Rana, Kamal Rani and Ram Naresh Agnihotri. Except for Kamal Rani and Ram Naresh Agnihotri, the remaining four have been elevated.

Those sworn in as Ministers of State with Independent charge are Kapil Dev, Ashok Katehria, Neelkanth Tiwari, Ravindra Jaiswal, Shri Ram Chauhan and Satish Dwiwedi — the latter had defeated former Speaker Mata Prasad



Of the 23 new ministers inducted — six are Brahmins, four Thakurs, three Vaishyas and 10 Dalits. Western Uttar Pradesh has been given a sizeable representation in the council of ministers

Pandey in 2017.

Neelkanth Tiwari, who has been given Independent charge, and Ravindra Jaiswal both belong to Varanasi, which is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency.

The 11 Ministers of State are Anil Sharma, Mahesh Gupta, Anand Swarup Shukla, Vijay Kashyap, Giriraj Singh Dharmesh, Lakhn Singh Rajput, Nilima Katiyar, Chaudhary Udaybhan Singh,

Chandrika Prasad Upadhyaya, Rama Shankar Singh Patel and Ajit Singh Pal.

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A surprise development was that names of Pankaj Singh, son of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Vijay Bahadur Pathak, party General

Secretary and Ashish Patel (Apna Dal) were dropped at the last minute.

The dropping of Ministers including Chetan Chauhan, Swati Singh and Mukut Bihari Varma was also deferred, following a late night meeting between the Chief Minister, party state President Swatantra Dev Singh and Sangh leaders.

The Yogi Council of Ministers had more than 20 vacancies after some ministers were asked to resign on Tuesday. These include Rajesh Agarwal who was the finance minister, Dharampal Singh (irrigation), Anupama Jaiswal (Basic education) and Archana Pandey (mining).

Earlier on Monday, Swatantra Dev Singh (Transport) had quit the ministry after being appointed state BJP president.



Yamuna continues to flow over danger mark

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Yamuna continued to flow above the danger mark with the water level at 206.60 metres. The river breached the danger mark of 205.33m on Monday night, and the authorities are expecting the level to go up to 207m by Wednesday.

However, the river has been showing a steady trend since the wee hours of Wednesday, the Flood Control Department official said. "Although the river is showing a steady trend, the situation is critical and we are keeping a close eye on it," the official said. The water level was rising due to rains in

Delhi witnessed the worst floods in 1978 when the river's level touched a record 207.49m

northern India and discharge of water from Hathni Kund Barrage in Haryana. "Water is being released from the barrage every hour since Saturday," the official said, adding Haryana released 8.28 lakh cusecs of water on Sunday evening.

The water discharged from the barrage — which provides drinking water to Delhi — normally takes 72 hours to reach the capital, the official

said. Thousands of people living along the banks of the Yamuna were being moved to safer places since Sunday.

The rail and vehicular traffic on the Old Yamuna Bridge have been suspended as the water level rose. The Yamuna crossed the "warning mark" of 204.5m late on Sunday night. Delhi witnessed the worst floods in 1978 when the river's level touched a record 207.49m.



TREKKING AND MOUNTAINEERING

India opens up for foreigners 137 Himalayan peaks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has opened for foreigners 137 Himalayan peaks, including the mighty Kanchenjunga located at a height of 8,589 metre, for mountaineering expeditions and trekking in a major boost to tourism, officials said Wednesday. Presently foreigners have to seek permission from the ministries of defence and home to climb these peaks. With the government opening them up, foreigners can now directly apply to the Indian Mountaineering Foundation for permits. The decision comes following a proposal from the tourism ministry.

The list of peaks include, Dunagiri (7,066 m) and Hardeol (7,151 m) in Uttarakhand; Kabru South and North in Sikkim, both of which are at a height of over 7,000 metre; Mount Kailash (6400 m) in Jammu and Kashmir; and Mulkila (6,571 metre) in Himachal Pradesh.

Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel said it was a historic step, which will give a big boost to tourism. The home ministry in an order said that proposal for

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opening up mountaineering and trekking in all Himalayan states was under consideration.

"Now it has been decided to open 137 mountain peaks located in Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim to foreigners desirous of obtaining mountaineering visa for climbing, trekking on these 137 mountain peaks (sic)," it said. Of the 137 peaks, 51 are in Uttarakhand, 24 in Sikkim, 15 in Jammu and Kashmir, and 47 in Himachal Pradesh.

ED NOTICE TO RAJ THACKERAY

Uddav backs MNS chief, sees 'no solid outcome' of probe

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A day ahead of Raj Thackeray's scheduled appearance before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) here in connection with an IL&FS probe, the MNS chief seems to have found an unexpected support from his estranged cousin and Shiv Sena president Uddhav Thackeray on Wednesday.

Sena is the ruling partner of the BJP in the Central and Maharashtra governments. Raj has been summoned by



Raj has been summoned by the anti-money laundering agency in connection with its probe into the alleged irregularities relating to loans and equity investment worth over Rs 450 crore by IL&FS in Kohinoor CTNL Infrastructure Company

the anti-money laundering agency in connection with its probe into the alleged irregularities relating to loans and equity investment worth over Rs 450 crore by IL&FS in Kohinoor CTNL Infrastructure Company. The firm was founded by former

Maharashtra chief minister Manohar Joshi's son Unmesh, Raj Thackeray, and latter's close aide and builder Rajan Shirodkar to purchase and develop the land of the defunct Kohinoor Mill.

Raj had reportedly exited

from the company in 2008.

Questioning of Unmesh has been going on at the Mumbai office of the ED since August 19. "I do not expect any solid outcome from the inquiry," Uddhav told reporters in a brief reply when asked about the ED's notice to Raj. Uddhav's comments assume significance given that assembly elections in the state are round the corner.

Earlier, Sena leader Sanjay Raut had said Raj getting the notice should not be viewed through the prism of politics.

Army HQ recast: 206 officers sent to field units

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday approved the relocation of 206 Army officers from here to their original field units as part of reorganization of the Army headquarters.

The approval to relocate the officers, apart from the creation of a separate vigilance cell under the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), were among the decisions approved by Singh on the basis of an internal study conducted by the Army Headquarters.

Besides, a unit will be formed under the Vice Chief of Army Staff (VCOAS) to focus entirely on issues of human rights.

The Army officers who will be relocated to their field units include three Major Generals, eight Brigadiers, nine Colonels and 186 Lt Colonels. The vigilance cell under the COAS will have tri-services representation. At present, the vigilance function for the COAS has multiple agencies and there is no single point interface. An independent vigilance cell will be made functional



under COAS. The Additional Director General (Vigilance) will be placed directly under the COAS and the cell will have three officers not below the rank of a Colonel, drawn from each of the services. The cell to be formed under the VCOAS will focus on human rights convention and values. It will be headed by an officer not below the rank of Major General and will examine reports of human rights abuses. A police officer of the rank of Superintendent or Senior Superintendent will be deputed to this agency for investigative work.

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Kullu-Manali road reopens for light vehicles

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Several roads which were blocked in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu district due to landslides and flash floods triggered by heavy rains were reopened for light vehicles on Wednesday, police said. Only light vehicles were allowed to ply on the Kullu-Manali route from Patlikulhal to Manali as the road is still damaged near Green Tax barrier, Kullu Superintendent of Police Guarav Singh said. However, the road via Naggar from Patlikulhal has been reopened

for heavy vehicles as well, he said. The Banta Morh road near Gulaba in Manali and the Kullu-Anni road have also been reopened only for light vehicles, the SP said, adding the latter is badly damaged near Saujha.

He said Sarsari road on the Manikaran-Bhuntar route has been reopened for light vehicles and the Public Works Department is working to clear it for heavy vehicles too.

The traffic is, however, blocked on the Manali-Leh highway due to fresh landslides at Marhi between Manali and Rohtang, Singh added.



UP: Cong stages statewide protests against fuel price hike

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress leaders and workers on Wednesday staged demonstrations at all district headquarters in the state to protest the increase in diesel and petrol prices, a party leader said.

In Lucknow, the protesters rode rickshaws from Ravindralaya to Vidhan Sabha as part of the protest held on the directives of party national general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Congress spokesman Mukesh Singh Chauhan said.

Similar protests were held in other districts of the state including Sitapur, Kanpur, Faizabad, Balrampur and Basti,



Chauhan said. Congress Legislature Party leader, Ajay Singh Lallu said the country was witnessing an economic slowdown with the auto and textile sectors being particularly hit hard and lakhs of people were on the verge of losing their jobs.

"Under such a scenario, by hiking the petrol and diesel prices the government has further increased the hardships of

the common people, burdening them to fill the coffers," Lallu said.

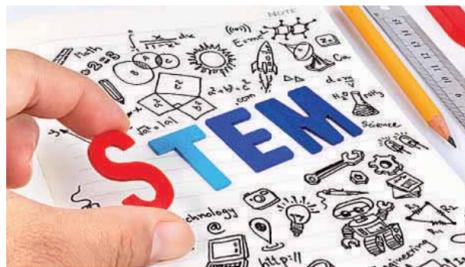
A report from Gorakhpur said Congress workers held a protest march from Golghar to town hall. Congress district president of Gorakhpur, Rakesh Yadav, said since the BJP came to power, people are being exploited with the price of essential commodities continuously rising. We demand that the fuel price hike be rolled back, Yadav said.

Petrol and diesel prices in Uttar Pradesh were hiked by Rs 2.5 and Re 1 respectively from Monday midnight as the government increased Value Added Tax.

STEM careers show growing interest but lack encouragement

PNS ■ MUMBAI

As the world faces a skilled workforce gap, younger generations believe that STEM jobs (science, technology, engineering, math and medicine) are important, however, they don't feel encouraged to pursue them, according to a survey. "Nearly 84 per cent respondents believe that STEM jobs are important to the country's future, while fewer Gen Z respondents said they felt encouraged to pursue a STEM-based career than millennial respondents, which make up the generation above them," according to the fifth annual STEM survey by Emerson.



US-headquartered Emerson is a global technology and engineering company providing innovative solutions for customers in industrial, commercial and residential markets. Atomik Research did the survey

commissioned by Emerson commissioned online with 2,003 adults in India, half of whom were parents of school-aged children (5-18 years). The survey revealed that with technology

accelerating many industries, the skilled workforce gap is growing and to keep up with the rapid pace of change, workers are increasingly looking to their employers to address these upskilling needs.

About 87 per cent of Indian respondents said they believe that companies should do more to train and prepare their STEM workforce, it added. "As automation and technology become truly ingrained in our workplaces and schools, there's a growing urgency to prepare the workforce with STEM skills that will be critical to the continued strength of the global economy," Emerson chairman and chief executive officer David N Farr said.

'PM diverting people's attention from economic slowdown'

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

The Congress in Assam on Wednesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of diverting the attention of the people from the economic slowdown by bringing up issues such as Article 370, triple talaq and Ram Mandir. There are signs of severe slowdown in the Indian economy under the Narendra Modi government, state Congress president Ripun Bora told a press conference here. The GDP growth rate has declined to 5.8 per cent between January-March this year, inflation rate is 3.2 per cent, Bora claimed.

PAPER WITH PASSION
Chidambaram in a spot

Politically motivated or not, the ex-FM must cooperate. Otherwise the Congress can go down a slippery slope



In the end, Palaniappan Chidambaram, the former Home and Finance Minister of India and one who artfully played power games to his benefit so long, should have surrendered with grace to the investigative agencies on the INX media case. For politics is never about right or wrong but smart positioning in a set context. He could have made a virtue of the rather incriminating accusations against him by willfully surrendering under the law, flagged his honour, howsoever fake, instead of hiding out for hours after a lookout notice was issued against him. Which is why his drive to the AICC headquarters, claiming he was being framed, that the investigative agencies had not filed a chargesheet and that he was the victim of a political witch-hunt, didn't wash with anybody. The drama was not quite stage-managed to suit the image he had carefully cultivated over the years. Earlier in the day, every senior advocate in Delhi was either trying to figure out the whereabouts of or appearing for or against him in the Supreme Court. For a man regularly used to being feted in the media, a source of salacious gossip, himself a senior advocate and one of the cogs of the Lutyens' Delhi machine, he simply winced at a moment of crisis. His role in several scams and scandals has long been suspected and many of them reported diligently in this newspaper for years. His intervention in deals, the extent of its propriety and the legality or illegality of his actions, however is something for the courts to decide. That said, his battery of lawyers — all of whom are his senior colleagues in the Congress — has always managed to ensure that Chidambaram remained on bail for years, free from prosecution. This frustrated the attempts of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to question him and his son, Karti Chidambaram, who, too, is accused in several cases alongside him. But this sudden rash of actions against Chidambaram now, as the carefully cultivated Congress ecosystem collapses in the capital after a successive election loss, seems to have caught him and his friends off guard, thus making the man nothing more than a common fugitive who feared arrest.

Chidambaram's refusal to surrender on very tenuous grounds actually strengthens the case against him. The man, who accused the Narendra Modi Government of letting economic offenders like Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi escape, has been doing the same thing. While the Congress has closed ranks and accused the Government of vindictiveness, this argument has been shot down by the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court as well. And herein lies the rub for the Congress — Chidambaram, while a colossus in his own constituency of Sivaganga in Tamil Nadu, now held by his son, has never been a popular leader. While he was feted by a pliant media, particularly the business Press while he was the Finance Minister, rumours of his escapades, some of which would make Mallya blush, have been damaging to him in the long-run. By not surrendering, Chidambaram looked no better than any other on the wanted list. And if the Congress encourages this, the entire party could be badly damaged at a time where it is extremely weak and ruin any argument against the horrendous handling of the current economic situation by the government. Cases against Chidambaram are not all watertight. He can still be acquitted. It is also true that political winds could one day blow in his favour again. However, for any potential recovery, he had to craft his response to look like a victim yesterday. In fact, if he wants to play up the "political vendetta" theory, he should posit himself as the recipient of a hitback. During Chidambaram's tenure as the Home Minister in 2010, the CBI had arrested Amit Shah in a fake encounter case. When he applied for bail, the CBI opposed the move in the Gujarat High Court arguing that Shah might use his political influence to tamper with the evidence or threaten witnesses. Today, Shah is the Home Minister. Clearly, there is a full circle of an eye-for-an-eye by either side. While we do not see Chidambaram jumping off a dam like Harrison Ford did trying to escape from the law in order to clear his name, the current prognosis is grim.

Delhi roads unsafe

A report reveals how one person dies in an accident every five hours because of rampant behaviour



As a signatory to the Brasilia declaration on road safety, India intends to reduce accidents and traffic fatalities by 50 per cent in the next three years. So when a most damning report on the state of Delhi roads was released by the traffic police, revealing that one person died in a road accident every five hours on an average in 2018, it raised a million eyebrows. Not only that, fatalities rose to a five-year high and remained the highest for any city in the country, the report added. Breaking down the bone-chilling statistics, the report concluded that nearly half of these crashes, 46 per cent to be precise, were hit and run cases where the vehicle could not be identified. Of the 1,690 deaths, one-third were caused by speeding and 7-10 per cent due to dangerous driving, usually reckless lane-changing and stunts. In other words, driving behaviour and the Delhiite's gross indiscipline were diagnosed as reasons for the nightmarish state of affairs and something which no existing policy or penalty has clearly been able to rein in. The report also highlighted the role played by defective road designs, pathetic street lighting (33 per cent) and callously unguarded civic works (40 per cent) in causing accidents. Shockingly, 20 per cent of road deaths were attributed to bumpy roads and potholes, a severe indictment of the city's planners and the Public Works Department.

While the Delhi government and civic bodies need to hang their heads in shame, the fact remains that the situation in the rest of the country is not much different. As per data given by the government in reply to a question in the Lok Sabha recently, almost 1.5 lakh people lost their lives in road accidents in 2017. This means every hour 17 people died on Indian roads due to an accident. The number of fatalities is one third the number of accidents, which amounts to 53 road accidents every hour. Uttar Pradesh is the worst affected state with 20,124 people losing their lives, followed by Tamil Nadu with 16,157 fatalities. Such alarming figures prompted the Union Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways to announce that 63 clauses of the Motor Vehicle Act, which include stiffer penalties for traffic violations, drunken driving and over speeding, will be implemented from September 1 after due vetting by the Law ministry. Pointing out that road engineering was primarily responsible for road accidents in the country, the ministry said that a ₹14,000 crore project had been prepared by the government to identify accident black spots and plug gaps in highways to reduce casualties. Assuming the Delhi Government and the Union government collectively provide safe, better designed and world-class roads in the national Capital, would the errant driver mend his ways or roadroll every civil corrective?

A haunting silence

It is the telling silence of nations in the immediate east of Pakistan that has given Islamabad a resounding wake-up call to go beyond change in nomenclatures



BHOPINDER SINGH

International diplomacy and issues are expressed in semantics and subtle wordsmithing that require to be carefully deconstructed and deciphered for its real intent. In any dispute, contrarian positions are publically posited by competing parties and a virtual race for endorsement of either of the competing narratives ensues. The cue to reading the reaction to conflicting arguments lies in the deployment of certain keywords, expressions and tonality that is expressed by the receiving audience at the end of the conflicting pitches.

In the tense and hyphenated domain of India-Pakistan realm, the 'K' (Kashmir) word dominates above all. Herein, the operative library of preferred words from New Delhi's perspective has been "bilateral", "cross-border terrorism" and "internal affairs" among others; whereas, from Islamabad's perspective, it has been "international mediation", "plebiscite" and "UN resolution." Even the language syntax, emotions and phraseology in the war-of-words between India and Pakistan is decidedly more escalatory, shriller and beseeching when it emanates from Islamabad.

Historically, irrespective of the merits in the topical India-Pakistan arguments, the audience would typically respond in favour or against either of the countries — on the basis of a certain predisposed equation and preference. It's only some unrelated country with negligible stakes which would occasionally partake an unbiased assessment of the arguments involved, as indeed, would some of the multilateral formations. Therefore, the inevitable play of certain "blobs" or realpolitik considerations resulted in a pre-decided tilt at least till now.

Post the recent revocation of the "special status" for Jammu and Kashmir as well as the planned bifurcation of the State into two "Union Territories", diplomats from both sides of the Line of Control have been expectedly scurrying across the global capitals to posit their respective sovereign positions. The lines and angularities of the arguments are standard with Pakistan aggressively goading other nations into either condemning the Indian action or seeking mediation. As usual, India has been posturing "bilateral" note, defending its actions as rote "internal matter", whilst cuttingly alluding to the recurring concerns of "cross-border terrorism." Barring this time, the Pakistanis are caught by surprise by the unfolding script not toeing the usual "divide" that accompanied Islamabad's earlier pitches on Kashmir. Global reaction has not only tilted heavily in India's favour or at best elicited bored disinterest and homilies but has hit a new low of "telling silence" or "zero reaction" from the supposed allies of Pakistan.

Undeniably, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan had inherited a country with its economy in shambles and a discredited sovereign perception as the "terror nursery" of the globe. With traditional allies like the US openly castigating Islamabad for its dupli-



ous role in the terror industry and multilateral bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) breathing down its neck to further "blacklist" it — Imran Khan had gone ahead with ostensible "course-correction", austerity-drive and personal charm-offensives to posture "Naya Pakistan" onto the global stage.

Khan made quick dashes to China and to the Gulf sheikhdoms and made sure that he personally drove the visiting Princes from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE when they visited his country. As money started trickling in and the noose of corruption tightened against his political opponents, Khan felt even more confident of his own position, success and that of his country. He postured conciliatory accent (whilst still undertaking a Pulwama in parallel), yet his eye on the global map with a changed "Naya Pakistan" was clearly work-in-progress.

Serendipitously, Washington's U-turn in Afghanistan offered yet another opportunity to Islamabad to thaw its freeze with the US and leverage its imminent pivot in Kabul towards its strategic advantage. Suddenly, the move by the Indian Government to revoke Article 370 and 35A in Jammu and Kashmir put the worth of "Naya Pakistan" and its global efficacy to litmus test. Islamabad went into yet another round of

“ EVEN THE UAE HAS INVOKED THE BILATERAL CHORUS. AMID PAKISTANI CALLS FOR BANS, SUSPENSION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS AND SOLIDARITY MOVES FOR OSTENSIBLE CONCERNS IN KASHMIR, SAUDI ARABIA ANNOUNCED MEGA DEALS WITH A MAJOR INDIAN CONGLOMERATE ”

competitive pitching *vis-à-vis* India, brandishing the "K" card.

Khan has been running from pillar-to-post and personally calling up the leaderships in the Gulf sheikhdoms, Iran, Indonesia and various other supposed "allies". He also sought an emergency meeting at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). But so far, it has come a cropper. The US, the UN and the EU have instead suggested "maximum restraint" and embarrassingly so from Pakistan's perspective, "bilateral resolution and engagement".

Reportage in Pakistan is full of actions taken by the Government to escalate the issue with various Governments but there is a virtual silence, which is attributable directly to the leaderships in pitched countries. Even nations like the UAE have invoked the "bilateral" chorus. Amid Pakistani calls for bans, suspension of diplomatic relations and "solidarity moves" for ostensible concerns in Kashmir, Saudi Arabia announced mega deals with a major Indian conglomerate.

Barring China, which has come out with its loaded statements in favour of its "all-weather friend" Pakistan, it continues grappling with its own imploding destiny in Hong Kong. Basically, Pakistan remains stunningly isolated and ignored.

Sabre-rattling by the Pakistani deep state (military)

and its local political classes notwithstanding, the reality of a persisting trust deficit and perceptions of sovereign incorrigibility still abound the Pakistani narrative. The transactional equation with China is also premised on the strategic investments of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which necessitates that Islamabad remains reciprocally mum on the fate of Uighur repression in China.

The recent round of tensions between India and Pakistan has driven home the importance of political morality, economic relevance and stability as opposed to regressive pandering to co-religiosity in forums like OIC or charm offensives. These are clearly not bankable levers in times like this.

While China will continue to indulge Pakistan for its own strategic rationale, the Pakistani "model" is an inherent anathema to Chinese sensibilities. Even the US may pander to some Pakistani whims as it will seek to extricate itself from Afghanistan. However, it has been the telling silence of all the countries in the immediate east of Pakistan that has given a resounding wake-up call to Islamabad to go beyond change in nomenclature and its insincere concerns in Kashmir.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry)

SOUNDBITE

<p>Modi Government is using the ED, CBI and sections of a spineless media to character-assassinate Chidambaram. I strongly condemn this disgraceful misuse of power.</p> <p>Congress leader —Rahul Gandhi</p>	<p>Making music is a creative process, which means you have to leave it to creative people to come up with a good tune. This power must not be stripped away from them.</p> <p>Music producer —Nucleya</p>	<p>Kashmir is a very complicated place. You have Hindus and you have the Muslims and I wouldn't say they get along so great. I will do the best I can to mediate.</p> <p>US President —Donald Trump</p>	<p>If you work actively to destroy social harmony and inject venom into society as the BJP has done, there is no chance of any jobs being available.</p> <p>CPI(M) general secretary —Sitaram Yechury</p>
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A garb of concern

Sir — The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has rubbished a *Lancet* editorial (Fear and uncertainty about Kashmir's future) published on August 17) where the journal expressed concerns about the mental health of Kashmiris, saying that it had no *locus standi* in the matter and that its interference was not welcome. It is unfortunate that the reputed medical journal *The Lancet* — founded by an English surgeon in 1823 — has committed breach of propriety in commenting on this political issue. This amounts to interference in an internal matter of the Union of India.

The vexed Kashmir issue is a legacy that the British Empire left behind. *The Lancet* has unnecessarily reacted to an internal administrative decision of the Government of India under the garb of concern of health of Kashmiris. Where was it when the Kashmiri Pandits were massacred and driven out of Kashmir? Or the Uighur Muslims, who are locked away in China's anonymous prisons? Did it study their mental health, too? At a time when there has been a fair

The evils of bad economics

This refers to the report, "Economic slowdown 'very worrisome', new set of reforms needed: Rajan" (August 19). On finding that the "adjusted" data on economic growth failed to camouflage the "worrisome" economic slowdown, the ruling dispensation shifted the narrative from outright denials to wholesome praise of the economy's resilience to meet the "cyclical" downswings. Did non-linear past events converge to construct the current crisis? Some years ago, when the story of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in the banks exploded, it was dismissed as an aberration. In reality, NPAs led to multi-headed problems for the banks.

On a cold night in November, demonetisation of high value currency was announced. Though it was laced skillfully with lofty goals, it strangled small businesses and petty shopkeepers besides blowing away whatever little cash the common man had. On another fateful night, the supposedly monumental Goods and Services Tax (GST) was hoisted on a weak platform, which in effect brought the goods and services to its knees instantly. The liquidity crisis in Non-Banking Financial Companies, now unfolding, sent the monetary situation into a tail-



spin. And the collapse of the IL&FS, Jet Airways, Amrapali Group and Jaiprakash Associates dealt body blows to the economy. While former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Raghuram Rajan and former Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian read the Riot Act to the Government repeatedly, it indulged in efforts to cloak the disturbing discords with new hymns on national integration. A new set of reforms remains a far cry.

Haridasan Rajan
Kozhikode

them to return to their land. Naik is known for making inflammatory speeches and is also the most wanted man in India for several money laundering cases. While the Malaysian Government has currently banned him from making public speeches, it should take appropriate action against him. If charges against him are upheld, his permanent residency status could be revoked. This bodes well for India.

SC Panda
Bhubaneswar

Music genius

Sir — The man behind some of Hindi cinema's most celebrated melodies is no more. Khayyam *sahib* was truly a musical magician. Unlike today's composers, who lack skill to fuse Hindustani classical music with Indian film music, Khayyam was an expert with a midas touch. Even today, the sweet melodies of Khayyam from films like *Kabhie Kabhie*, *Noorie* and *Bazaar* stir the soul of listeners.

M Pradyu
Hyderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Perils of supping with the devil

Even if the Doha talks result in a ceasefire and a pact leading to a Taliban takeover, it may not ensure a conflict-free Afghanistan



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Two important developments occurred last week which bode ill — if that is any longer possible — for Afghanistan and its people. The first was the conclusion of the eighth round of talks between the United States and the Taliban at Doha, capital of Qatar, on August 14. The second was the suicide bombing of a wedding in Kabul on August 17, which left 63 people dead and 182 wounded. There are indications that the talks are close to yielding a ceasefire and a peace agreement. According to a recent report by Shereena Qazi in *Al Jazeera*, a Taliban representative, who is a part of the organisation's negotiating team told the channel, "This round of talks has been very productive and we are near to an agreement that will be finalised and hopefully announced in the next coming weeks."

Further, Qazi's report quotes the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, as saying in a Twitter post, "They (the talks) were productive. I am on my way back to (Washington) DC to consult on next steps." All this may have been regarded as a welcome indication that peace would be coming soon to war-devastated Afghanistan, but for the strong possibility that the outcome of the talks would mean defeat for the United States and a victory for the Taliban who would, sooner than later, take over Afghanistan.

There are three reasons for believing that it would be so. First, the US President Donald Trump's determination to withdraw from Afghanistan at all cost suggests that he may agree to a peace settlement that is tantamount to selling the present democratically-elected government in Kabul down the river. That this is likely to happen is suggested by the fact that his administration has abandoned the resolutely-held US position that the talks would have to include representatives of that government. On the other hand, the Taliban, who have steadfastly refused to have talks with the Kabul government on the ground that it was a "puppet regime," have had their way. Third, the US continues the Doha talks notwithstanding the fact that the Taliban continue to launch vicious ground attacks and terror strikes.

The Trump administration's holding of talks with the Taliban without the Kabul government's participation has further eroded the latter's already diminished authority caused by the Taliban's sustained large-scale offensives from their bases in Pakistan, with the full support of the Islamabad government. According to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), as of January 31, 2018, 229 districts were under the Afghan government's control, which is about 56.3 per cent of the total. Fifty-nine districts, approximately 14.5 per cent of all, were under the Taliban's control. The remaining 119 districts, about 29.2 per cent, remained contested — controlled by neither the Afghan government nor the rebels. Even if the Afghan government is still able to maintain its grip over 229 districts, it is to a large extent because of the security umbrella provided by the presence of 14,000 American and 17,000 troops from 39 countries which are the US' NATO allies.

Understandably, the Taliban want these troops out even though they are in a non-combative role. According to Qazi's report, the Taliban representative it had cited had further stated, "The main part of the discussion is the withdrawal timeline and the technicalities of it." The Taliban, according to another report, have made it known that they will make no commitments unless a timeline for troops withdrawal within months is announced. Of course, there still are hurdles in the way. The Taliban are not a monolith. Its military leaders may push for a delay to secure a more favorable situation on the ground. Its more fanatical factions, divided by leadership rivalries and professions of varying degrees of fanaticism, may not want any deal at all unless it is on terms that enable them to re-impose on Afghanistan the fundamentalist Islamist nightmare that had characterized their earlier incarnation in power, which had ended with their military defeat in 2001. Also, the Afghan government may not agree to the settlement on offer.

Besides, even a ceasefire and a peace agreement leading to a Taliban takeover may not ensure a conflict-free Afghanistan. Some of the more fanatical Taliban groups may continue fighting to restore the pre-2001 order which reduced women to domestic slavery and banished all forms of entertainment. Also, the Islamic State has established a growing presence and mounted a number of attacks including that on the Kabul wedding on August 17. Its bitter rivalry with the Taliban is well-known and it is unlikely to leave a government led by the latter in peace.

Far from becoming a land of peace, Afghanistan may, post a "peace settlement," turn into battleground of contesting Islamic fundamentalist groups each with its own sphere of influence. Given their intense hatred for the US, some of these areas may well turn into launching pads for strikes against it. While they may not be able to strike mainland America, they may target Americans and their interests worldwide. In that case, a peace agreement signed by the Trump administration in haste may turn out to be a cause for profound regret later.

(The writer is Consultant Editor, The Pioneer, and an author)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

CHIDAMBARAM IS A LEGAL EXPERT. HE WILL FOR SURE FACE THE CASE LEGALLY. THESE (ACTIONS) ARE HAPPENING DUE TO POLITICAL VENDETTA.

—DMK CHIEF MK STALIN



THE BJP HAS NO INVOLVEMENT IN THE MATTER. ACTION WILL BE TAKEN AGAINST THOSE WHO INDULGE IN CORRUPTION.

—UNION MINISTER KIREN RIJJU

Upping deterrence ante?

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's statement on revising India's No First Use nuclear policy in the future is open to interpretation



VIVEK MISHRA

The Indian Defence Minister's recent statement, anticipating a possible change in India's nuclear policy in the future, is open to interpretation, and what it means for its nuclear doctrine in coming times is contingent on how the contours of India's conventional escalation with its neighbour Pakistan shapes up.

The statement by Rajnath Singh signals a facile if not deep thought within the Narendra Modi Government for some time now on the need to revise India's No First Use (NFU) policy, especially when seen as a corollary to the former Defence Minister, the late Manohar Parrikar's statement in 2016 about being open to revision of India's NFU policy.

Rajnath Singh's recent statement on NFU seems only a step forward, as unlike previously, it does not come with "personal opinion" caveat.

India first adopted a NFU policy after its second nuclear tests at Pokhran in 1998. Soon after, in August 1999, the Indian government released a draft of the doctrine which asserts that nuclear weapons were solely for deterrence and that India would as a nation pursue a policy of "retaliation only."

The document also maintains that India "will not be the first to initiate a nuclear first strike, but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail" and that decisions to authorise the use of nuclear weapons would be made by the Prime Minister or his 'designated successor(s)'.
 That the Defence Minister's NFU comment came in Pokhran, the site of the 1998 nuclear tests, gives wings to speculation. It also comes days within the Modi Government's decision to change the status of Jammu and Kashmir, but most noticeably, amidst an ongoing diplomatic and cross-border escalation with Pakistan.

If this is any indication, it shows that the rungs of conventional escalation between India and Pakistan may be reaching the fag end, and the Indian government wants to come out of the retaliation-counter-retaliation cycle with a conventionally inferior power, which is on a quest to gain conventional parity with India. Pakistan's constant threat of battlefield nuclear weapons further complicates India's conventional superiority gap assessment vis-à-vis Pakistan, setting foundations of a strategically revisionist thought process within India.

Chances of nuclear policy revision seem more plausible in the light of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) historical assessments about making India a credible nuclear power through a directly proportional relationship between the country's political will to revise its nuclear policy and deterrence-based posturing.

The Vajpayee Government's decision to conduct the 1998 nuclear tests and project India as a credible nuclear power is a case in point. The Pokhran link to Rajnath Singh's comments further underpins this government's conviction about the aforementioned proportionality.

The Defence Minister's assertion has

“ IF BALAKOT LOWERED THE THRESHOLD FOR INDIA'S CONVENTIONAL RESPONSE TO PAKISTAN AND ALTERED THE NATURE OF RESPONSE, A DOCTRINAL SHIFT FROM NFU TO FU MIGHT GO A LONG WAY IN USHERING AN ALTERED DETERRENCE-INDUCED BEHAVIOUR IN PAKISTAN, HOPEFULLY LEADING TO A BETTER FUTURE TIES BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN ”



reignited the debate on the need for India's nuclear policy revision but whether it means that India is ready for a change in its NFU policy and will move to a First Use (FU) strategy is debatable.

Currently, there are various technological and financial constraints for New Delhi in erecting an effective first strike capability against Pakistan or China. A credible FU nuclear strike capability, before anything, would require significant investments in Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) and Target Acquisition (TA) capabilities. The essence of FU strike capability is pre-emption and accuracy, and would require an unflinching intelligence and shorter time-gap in the readiness sequence: passing of intelligence, civil-military decision-making, mating weapons with warheads, leading to final pre-empting strike on the enemy.

India's first strike aspirations also face structural constraints, particularly apropos the decision-making paradigm that exists as of now. The civil-military gap in India's strategic forces decision-making is deliberately made to create a non-provocative yet punitive reassuring second strike towards the enemy and, most importantly, to avert any rash decision leading to catastrophe. Such a doctrinal posture makes a lot of sense when viewed in the light of India's non-alignment past, but is increasingly losing currency in the eyes of a revisionist government and a rallying nation.

India's current civil-military gap is

ideal for a country with a NFU policy. It's a purposeful decoupling to mandate civilian supremacy in strategic decision-making and create checks and balances. In direct contrast to this, the FU force structure would possibly require an ever-vigilant and ready strategic posture with quick and decisive calls for action when needed, which in turn would need a smaller gap between the civilian go-ahead and the military's final call, leading to the targeting and firing of the weapons with nuclear warheads.

New Delhi's lessening of the civil-military gap can be seen in the context of the government's recent decision to appoint a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), a five-star General with possibly a Cabinet rank whose role would supersede the three armed forces chiefs.

The centralization of power through the office of the CDS will not only consolidate general decision-making in one office, but is likely to reduce intra-forces rivalry on issues of budget and government favourability between the three wings of the armed forces.

In the strategic context and in relation to the country's nuclear force posture, the office of the CDS is likely to be more in tune with its FU strategy than it will be with its current NFU strategy. As such, the Defence Minister's statement hinting at a possible revision of India's nuclear strategy could also be seen in the context of India's decision to appoint a CDS.

While it is unlikely that India will go for a doctrinal alteration anytime soon, it could serve as an extremely potent plank to fight the next general elections in 2024. Given the kind of

investments needed for readying a FU force structure, a revision anytime soon will be difficult.

However, to the extent that deterrence behavior in nuclear states is as much psychologically induced as it is from concrete, stated and factored capabilities, the Defence Minister's statement has caused visible concerns in Pakistan.

Locating India's overall NFU strategy, its force posture towards hostile neighbours, the number of warheads and the escalatory potential in a comparative context, paints a picture of a benign nuclear giant.

Doing away with NFU will repaint this picture, besides possibly affecting stability in the region.

That is a price this government is considering to pay in the light of New Delhi's increasing fatigue with a rapidly lessening conventional gap with Pakistan, especially with Pakistan's increasing tendency to factor Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNW) within conventional escalation spectrum, and with the solidifying China-Pakistan axis.

If Balakot lowered the threshold for India's conventional response to Pakistan and altered the nature of response, a doctrinal shift from NFU to FU might go a long way in ushering an altered deterrence-induced behaviour in Pakistan, hopefully leading to a better future for bilateral ties between India and Pakistan.

(The writer is Visiting Fellow at the Stimson Center in Washington D.C & Deputy Director Kalinga Institute for Indo-Pacific Studies)

An overlooked solution to climate crisis

Grasslands are, perhaps, the most neglected ecosystem in the world. However, their ability to meet the climate change challenge must galvanise nations into putting them high on the conservation agenda. The Government must take note



KOTA SRIRAJ

Grasslands across the globe, especially in India, have played a silent but stellar role in reining in the process of climate change. But according to a study by Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) journal, climate change, pollution and various environmental alterations across the globe are changing their identity. One of the key contributions made by grasslands is their inconspicuous role in containing carbon levels in the atmosphere. It is this storage capacity for carbon that makes grasslands effective warriors against climate change.

Nearly, 30 per cent of the world's carbon is stored in these grasslands,

which makes them crucial in combating climate change. But their ecology is shifting due to human activities, says a new study.

The PNAS team conducted 105 experiments in different grasslands around the world. Each experiment focussed on particular global change factors like rising carbon dioxide, hotter temperatures and drought. Grasslands showed resilience to these factors in the first ten years of exposure, after that their species began to alter, the study said.

Half of the PNAS experiments, lasting ten years or more, showed a change in the number of species in grasslands. The study also found that their identity can change rapidly without a reduction in the number of plant species but due to the change in individual plants. Even though the grasslands are resilient towards global change for around ten years, they are vulnerable due to the fast pace of global change.

Increasingly, the scientific community across the world is forming the opinion that the role of grasslands needs to be acknowledged. They



should be protected from human intervention so as to arrest their degradation. They occupy more than 40 per cent of all the ice-free land in the world. These assets of nature have sustained humans for the past 300 million years — right from the time when the first homo sapiens appeared in Africa. They also provide food and shelter to various other species, including zebras and giraffes.

Closer home, grasslands happen to be the least understood habitat of nature. There is also a paucity of effective studies on their efficacy. Still, the fact that they play a pivotal

role in keeping a check on climate change cannot be ignored.

Grasslands in India share their existence with some trees, shrubs and herbs. They are found at various altitudes and in various geographical regions under different climatic conditions.

Thus, grasslands are also found in altitudes higher than 2,100 metres where the temperature is cold. Some are found at an altitude between 150 to 300 metres where the temperature is warm. Apart from the climatic conditions where the grasslands exist, there are other variants, mainly five major types.

Each of these has its own characteristic. The most widespread grassland in India are the Imperata type. Our country has no dearth of diversity of greens but there is certainly a shortage of robust policies to protect them against human exploitation. This usually happens when grasslands are misrepresented as barren lands and usurped by land sharks and land mafia.

In a country where standing trees in a forest are being felled to encroach land, grasslands naturally don't stand a chance. But matters such as these are of public knowledge. This is why it is even more puzzling that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) or even the Central Government has not come out with a forceful protection policy.

The apathy can be judged from the fact that semi-arid open areas are now being classified as wastelands, leaving them vulnerable to human intervention and encroachments. These so-called wastelands are, in fact, grasslands but neither are they given due recognition nor proper classification. The Government must

not shift the burden of land requirement to cater to a burgeoning population onto the grasslands by labeling them as wastelands. Unless we course-correct, we will lose many hectares of grasslands forever.

Additionally, the wildlife that is found on these grasslands needs to be recognised and categorised so that it get chances for survival. Currently, there is little or no study or data available for the rich flora and fauna available in India. The Government must also increase awareness and recognise the support of indigenous local people so that India can benefit from their efforts to conserve grasslands. In order to do this, we must take a cue from other nations where vast savannahs have been respected and conserved over centuries. The methods and systems followed by these countries are in public domain and available to be implemented in the Indian context. Grasslands are the life breath in the fight against climate change. They must be protected and conserved.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)



VENTING HATRED

The original fury of Gamedge was sparked by the emergence of games as a cultural form which could be used to convey more than the simple pleasures of blasting imaginary enemies — and was beginning to attract newly diverse audiences. This process continues. No one subculture — not even teenaged white boys — now owns games. This opening remains, a source of fury. But perhaps, five years on, it should also be viewed as a reason to hope. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



US-based software co Synchro opens second centre in B'lu

NEW DELHI: Mid-tier infotech company Synchro Wednesday opened a second facility in Bengaluru which can seat 2,000, and announced plans to open another centre in Pune. The financial services sector-focused company, which already employs over 8,000, however, did not specify its hiring plans after creating additional space nor the investment that has gone into the new Bengaluru centre. Faisal Husain, the India-born co-founder and chief executive of the New York-based USD 500-million company, said India is a "crucial part of its growth story. I am sure that through this new facility, we will continue to be on the forefront of accelerating digital and empowering our clients to stay ahead of the digital transformation curve," he said in a statement.



Nippon Life Insurance raises stake in RNAM to 54 pc

NEW DELHI: With the closure of open offer, Nippon Life Insurance stake in Reliance Nippon Life Asset Management (RNAM) has risen to 54 per cent. The open offer was part of the stake sale process. Nippon Life floated open offer to acquire nearly 22.49 per cent stake in RNAM for Rs 3,179 crore under a deal with Reliance Capital which is exiting the mutual funds business. The mandatory open offer tendering period was from July 23 to August 5, sources said, adding that approximately 11 per cent shares were tendered in the open offer.

Asian markets drop as traders await Powell speech

PNS ■ HONG KONG

Equities stuttered in Asia Wednesday as investors took a step back after recent gains, with focus now turning to a key speech by Federal Reserve boss Jerome Powell at the end of the week.

Rising hopes for China-US trade talks have provided a much-needed lift to markets over the past two days but with few fresh catalysts, dealers are keeping their powder dry ahead of Friday's address.

After positive signals from Donald Trump and some of his top advisers on Monday over progress in the talks with Beijing, and an olive branch with the delay of a ban on Huawei purchases, there have been few developments for traders to buy on.

"Our trade-war headline-inspired relief rally appears to have run its course as I suspect there is still a lot of nervousness among US investors as the global economic realities are just too hard to ignore," said Stephen Innes at Valour Markets.

Hong Kong added 0.2 per cent, Shanghai was barely moved and Tokyo ended down 0.3 per cent. Sydney fell almost one percent, Singapore shed 0.3



per cent and Wellington was 0.9 per cent lower. Taipei finished flat and Seoul added 0.2 per cent.

In early trade, London rose 0.5 per cent, Paris added 0.8 per cent and Frankfurt was up 0.5 per cent.

The Fed releases minutes of its July meeting later Wednesday which will provide an insight into its deliberations when cutting interest rates for the first time since the financial crisis.

But Powell's talk at the central bankers' gathering in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is the key event and will be closely pored over for clues about the bank's plans for next month,

with experts unable to agree on whether or not he will announce further cuts.

There has been increased speculation that central banks and governments will step in with stimulus support to head off a global downturn, but analysts warn they could be disappointed by what Powell has to say regarding Fed action.

Wall Street and Trump "are anticipating that Mr Powell will signal that the Federal Reserve is about to embark on a reinvigorated wave of easing, following its global peers," said Jeffrey Halley, OANDA senior market analyst for Asia-Pacific. "The US data of late simply does not support the need for

The Fed releases minutes of its July meeting later Wednesday which will provide an insight into its deliberations when cutting interest rates for the first time since the financial crisis

an aggressive easing cycle. Despite the US-China trade tensions making their presence felt in European and Asian data prints, this has simply not happened with the United States to any significant degree."

Also, Trump on Tuesday insisted the economy was doing well, denying warnings from some quarters - including top economists - that the US was heading for a recession within two years.

"I think the word recession is inappropriate," he told reporters at the White House. "We're very far from recession."

On currency markets, the euro was struggling against the dollar as a political crisis in Italy - the eurozone's number three economy - offset hopes that Germany's government would unveil measures to avert a downturn. Italian Prime Minister

Giuseppe Conte resigned and hit out at far-right Interior Minister Matteo Salvini for pursuing his own interests by bringing an end to the government coalition.

President Sergio Mattarella must now decide to form a new coalition or call an election, throwing up more uncertainty and another possible budget standoff with the European Union.

However, the single currency and the dollar were well up against the pound as Britain's exit from the EU without a divorce deal grows increasingly likely.

Oil prices extended gains as data showing a drop in US stockpiles indicated improving demand for the commodity. Both main contracts have risen about five per cent over the past week, with support also coming from trade talks hopes.

Gold hits new high of Rs 38,820; silver jumps Rs 1,140

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices on Wednesday appreciated Rs 50 to hit a new high of Rs 38,820 per 10 gram at the bullion market here on account of consistent buying support from jewellers, according to the All India Sarafa Association.



Silver also soared by Rs 1,140 to Rs 45,040 per kg on fresh offtake by industrial units and coin makers.

Traders attributed the gain in gold to increase in the domestic spot market demand. However, a weak trend in the international market restricted the gains, they said.

Besides, the decline in equity markets also aided the rally in the precious metal as investors moved towards safe-haven assets such as gold, they added.

Gold prices traded weak with international spot gold prices but continue to hover around USD 1,500 an ounce.

In New York, spot gold was trading lower at USD 1,499.20 an ounce and silver was down at USD 17.08 an ounce.

"Globally, gold prices are awaiting key events of the week including tonight's (Wednesday's) FOMC minutes, which will set the tone for

future rate cut expectations. Gold prices may keep the steady trade ahead of Jackson Hole meeting where US Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's speech will be crucial to anticipate risk pertaining to the markets," said HDFC Securities Senior Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel.

In the national capital, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity rose Rs 50 each to Rs 38,820 and Rs 38,650 per 10 gram, respectively.

Sovereign gold advanced by Rs 200 at 28,800 per eight grams. Meanwhile, silver ready surged Rs 1,140 to 45,040 per kg, while weekly-based delivery gained Rs 210 to Rs 43,632 per kg.

Silver coins were in good demand and traded higher by Rs 2,000 to Rs 91,000 for buying and Rs 92,000 for selling of 100 coins.

Essar Ports Apr-Jun cargo volume up 17.4 pc

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Essar Ports on Wednesday reported a 17.4 per cent growth in cargo volume across its four terminals at 13.5 million tonne for the quarter ended June 30, 2019.

The company's first quarter cargo handling performance has been very strong and brought it closer to achieving its target throughput by the end of the current financial year, Essar Ports said in a statement.

The company said that higher capacity utilisation at its recently commissioned terminals at Salaya and Vizag and an increase in third-party cargo will help the company

achieve its target of handling 60 million tonnes of cargo by March 31, 2020.

Besides Salaya and Vizag, the company has cargo terminals at Hazira and Paradip.

All Essar terminals are focused on bulk and dry bulk cargoes that are primarily used as raw material in core sector industries like steel and power.

"Our business is on a record growth trajectory with all terminals operating in full swing. Significant boost in third-party business and enhanced capacity utilisation of our anchor customers has been the key driver for the growth in volumes," Essar Ports MD and CEO Rajiv Agarwal said.

'Coal will be major source for power generation'

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Coal India Chairman Anil Kumar Jha on Wednesday said renewables are unlikely to surpass coal as the major source for power generation in the near future and asserted that India's energy migration scenario will be different compared to many other countries.

State-owned Coal India accounts for nearly 83 per cent of the country's coal production.

"The question is can renewables take over coal completely in our country? Not in the near future at least. It would not be an exaggeration to state that Coal India Ltd (CIL) is synonymous with

India's energy scenario," Jha told shareholders at the company's 45th annual general meeting here.

His remarks also come against the backdrop of increasing focus on renewable energy sources for generation of power in different parts of the world.

Jha said the energy migration scenario in India would be "different", compared to many other countries which have been switching to renewable sources.

According to him, nine mining projects having a total

capacity of 69.88 million tonnes per year have been sanctioned and the estimated cost is Rs 9,093 crore.

Besides, two rail projects with an outlay of Rs 6,656 crore have been approved.

For the first time, Coal India had breached the 600 million

tonnes-mark in production as well as off-take of coal.

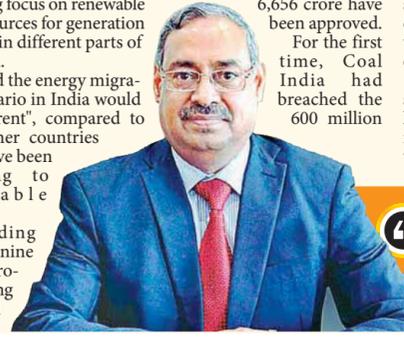
The miner produced 606.89 million tonnes of coal and supplied 608.14 million tonnes of the dry fuel, representing growth of 6.97 per cent and 4.8 per cent, respectively, compared to the previous fiscal.

During the meeting, a shareholder, however, said he was disappointed watching stock price heading towards a lifetime low of Rs

200 a piece, since the initial public offer nine years ago when the price was Rs 235 per scrip.

In late afternoon trade, shares of the company was down nearly three per cent at Rs 189.35 on the BSE.

There was chaos at the venue as security personnel prevented entry of media persons during early part of the meeting and they were later allowed after intervention of a senior official.



"The question is can renewables take over coal completely in our country? Not in the near future at least. It would not be an exaggeration to state that Coal India Ltd (CIL) is synonymous with India's energy scenario"
— ANIL KUMAR JHA, Coal India Chairman

SBI plans to establish 10L YONO Cash Points

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Jaipur, Aug 21 (PTI) State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, is planning to establish nearly 10 lakh YONO Cash Points in the country over 18 months, said its Chairman Rajnish Kumar on Wednesday.

The platform is secure and will eliminate the requirement of using debit cards, Kumar said.

"A customer can make bill payments and can do digital transactions by using the YONO cash feature. We are considering establishing close to 10 lakh YONO Cash Points in 18 months. Nearly 70,000 Cash Points have already been established," he said at a press conference here.

The bank has no plans to discontinue debit cards

but increased use of the digital platform will itself reduce the requirement of the debit cards, he said.

YONO is a digital banking platform of State Bank of India (SBI) and customers can use it on their smartphones to withdraw cash, make transactions and payments.

He added that the bank's new offer about repo rate-linked home loan is getting good response from customers. It is the customers' choice either to go with the new product or with the MCLR-linked home loan, Kumar added. Talking about the slowdown in the automobile sector, he said there are certain trends in the market and they need to be analysed.

"It is an apparent global trend now that people are shifting from vehicle ownership to vehicle rental model due to several reasons like uncertainty of jobs and convenience.

Government may expand scope of 'GeM' portal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is considering to widen the ambit of its procurement portal GeM by permitting government contractors and private bulk buyers to use the platform for buying goods and services, an official said.

Currently, they are not allowed to procure goods and services from the Government e-marketplace (GeM) platform managed by the Commerce and Industry Ministry.

At present, government departments, ministries, public sector units, state governments, and Central Armed Police Forces are allowed to carry out transactions through this portal.

The Commerce Ministry is in the process of preparing a cabinet note for allowing government contractors and private bulk buyers to use the platform, the GeM official said.

Further, there is also a consideration to open the platform for general consumers in the coming years.

The portal was launched in



August 2016 for online purchases of goods and services by all the central government ministries and departments as well as states.

West Bengal-cadre IAS officer Talleen Kumar was recently appointed as the new chief executive officer of GeM.

According to GeM, 2,66,812 sellers and service providers have registered with the portal so far to sell 11,64,243 products and 15,252 services.

The government has made it mandatory for all the departments and ministries to source goods and services from its e-marketplace.

The move is aimed at bring-

ing in more transparency and streamlining government procurement which runs into lakhs of crores of rupees.

The portal provides a wide ranging products from office stationery to vehicles. Automobiles, computers and office furniture are currently the top product categories.

Services, including transportation, logistics, waste management, web casting and analytical, among others, are listed on the portal.

Public procurement worth Rs 50,000 crore is expected to take place through GeM during 2019-20, up from Rs 33,366 crore currently.

63 clauses of MV Act to be implemented from September 1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday said 63 clauses of Motor Vehicle Act, which includes higher penalties for traffic violation, will be implemented from September 1.

"The bill (Motor Vehicles [Amendment] Bill, 2019) was passed (in Parliament). And we have decided to implement 63 clauses (of the act) from September 1," Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari told reporters here.

He was speaking after the launch of the new website of Ministry of Road Transport and Highways Ministry.

"In these 63 clauses we have increased the penalties. In case of drunken driving, over speeding and overloading among others, the fine has been increased," the minister said. Stating that the all the claus-

"The bill (Motor Vehicles [Amendment] Bill, 2019) was passed (in Parliament). And we have decided to implement 63 clauses (of the act) from September 1"

—NITIN GADKARI
Minister for Road Transport and Highways

es have been sent to the law ministry for vetting, the minister expressed hopes that "they will come to us in two to four days."

Pointing out that road engineering was primarily responsible for road accidents in the country, the minister said that a Rs 14,000 crore project has been prepared by the government to identify accident black spots and plug gaps in highways to reduce casualties.



NCLAT asks Jet lenders if they would cooperate with Dutch court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) on Wednesday asked lenders of Jet Airways whether they would cooperate with the Dutch court administrator who is also pursuing insolvency proceedings against the debt-ridden carrier.

A three-member NCLAT bench headed by Chairman Justice S J Mukhopadhyay asked the Committee of Creditors (CoC) of Jet Airways to file an affidavit within a week in this regard.

The appellate tribunal has also asked the CoC to inform whether they are ready to pay

fees and bear costs incurred by the Dutch administrator.

Jet Airways is facing insolvency proceedings in the Netherlands as well, where it was declared bankrupt after failing to pay two European creditors. Subsequently, a bankruptcy administrator was appointed by the Dutch court.

The NCLAT has asked to list the matter on September 4 for further hearing.

The appellate tribunal's direction came while hearing a petition filed by the Dutch court administrator against the order of the Mumbai bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which had declared overseas bankruptcy



proceedings null and void in the Jet Airways insolvency case. The NCLAT on July 12 had stayed the orders of NCLT on

the plea filed by the Dutch court administrator and agreed to hear it. The appellate tribunal had

Jet Airways is facing insolvency proceedings in the Netherlands as well, where it was declared bankrupt after failing to pay two European creditors. Subsequently, a bankruptcy administrator was appointed by the Dutch court

said that it will clarify the law on action to be taken when there are two insolvency petitions filed against the same company in two different countries.

The Dutch administrator has also agreed before the NCLAT not to sell the confiscated assets of the debt-ridden

Jet Airways. In April, H Esser Finance Company and Wallenborn Transport had filed a petition citing unpaid claims worth around Rs 280 crore.

Following this, a trustee in charge was appointed by the Dutch court and it had approached its Indian coun-

terpart for access to the financials as well as assets of the airline.

One of the Jet Airways aircraft, parked in the Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, has already been seized.

The NCLT Mumbai has also admitted an insolvency plea against Jet Airways by its lender State Bank of India. The airline is grounded since April 18.

The grounded airline owes more than Rs 8,500 crore to lenders. It also has a large debt by way of accumulated losses to the tune of Rs 13,000 crore, vendor dues of over Rs 10,000 crore and salary dues of over Rs 3,000 crore.

ZEE5 Global taking Indian content to 173 countries

PNS ■ DUBAI

ZEE5 Global aims to reach 1.3 billion viewers across 173 countries with its wide catalogue of Indian content that will cut across global boundaries, a top company official said.

Archana Anand, Chief Business Officer at ZEE5 Global, said the digital platform has a collection of over 2,000 films, including many Bollywood blockbusters and exclusive digital world premieres, that are a huge draw for all the fans of the Indian cinema.

"We also have a huge range of Originals across languages, many of which have Bollywood stars like Arjun Rampal, Sunny Leone and Dia Mirza, among others. These have seen great pick-up in the global market," Anand told PTI.

She further said the platform will also feature a bouquet of Malayalam and Tamil content across TV shows, originals, movies etc. as well as Live TV channels ZEE Keralam and ZEE Tamil for the large south Indian population in the Middle East.

"We've also recently added content in five international languages - Thai, Malay, Bahasa, Russian and German, taking our language count to 17 as we've seen a strong demand in these markets, even among mainstream audiences for Indian TV shows and movies," Anand said.

"We want to be the market leaders in providing the best of Indian content to the South Asian diaspora and to be associated with the highest quality storytelling across languages, including in every local market that we are present in," she added.

AIDING THE UNDERPRIVILEGED



Action Aid for Societal Development (AASA), is conducting various activities in Telangana to help underprivileged students, finds V SATEESH REDDY

Readings enables creativity, creativity leads to thinking, and that leads to knowledge that can be powerful and contribute to the development of the nation. Children in rural areas have less exposure and are still not open to many learning opportunities. So, we are trying to do as much as we can for those children by setting up libraries in rural areas, said Sonia Akula, founder of Action Aid for Societal Development (AASA). Through her organisation, Sonia and her team are taking up many activities to help rural students.

Sonia says, "Students from rural areas are not able to cope up when they move to urban areas for higher studies. In rural areas, children don't get proper guidance from parents or tutors. Facilitating the schools in such areas would help students learn basic reading and analytical skills while improving their writing." AASA aims at holistic development of any individual because change begins with a single person and responsible citizens can change

the world into a better place. Started in 2017, Sonia along with Yagnapal Raj, Nagesh, Nitesh, Srujana, Krishna, Ramesh Boya, Jayvarma, Shiva, and Rohit, has been conducting various activities. One of their works is #ProjectHappiness, where they celebrate various festivals (Dussehra, Diwali, Christmas, and Iftar) by helping orphan children engage with people in gated communities. This way, they are also providing an opportunity for the community people to contribute gifts to the children. The project helps the children to be exposed to togetherness and celebration with families.

Through #ProjectPrerna, they organise motivational sessions for the kids with established personalities. This helps them dream high and realise their potential. While #ProjectAidtoEducate deals with the distribution of school kits and installation of libraries in rural areas. #Projectgiving ensures the welfare of the orphans and through it, the organisation arranges clothes, groceries, and shelter homes for them.

Their educational initiative is very recent, and through it, they have been able to achieve so much. "We have distributed school kits to underprivileged children and now, we are setting up libraries in schools in rural areas, where we subscribe to English and Telugu newspapers. This initiative provides students with proper facilities, thus ensuring quality education, as it is a basic need these days and a powerful weapon that can change the world. So, we make sure that education is accessible and affordable to all," Sonia shares.



The AASA team is planning to set up 100 libraries in rural locations. This Friday, they are setting up libraries at Eklaspur, Manthani of Peddhapalli, and two more at Koyyuru of Khammam with the help of a few kind-hearted sponsors.

Sonia adds, "We are planning to request corporate companies to take this up and help us in this great cause. We also went all the way to Kerala during last year's floods and rehabilitated a tribal village and its almost 200 families."

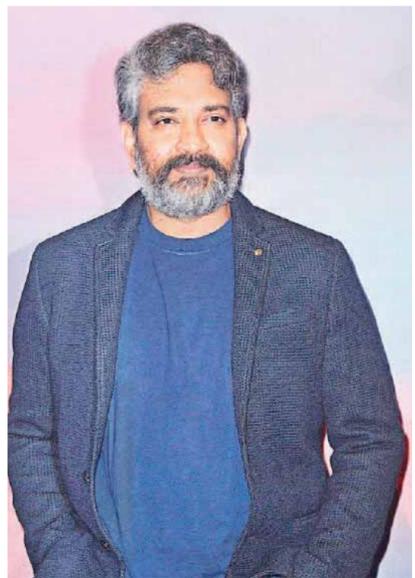
On a concluding note, she says that they are looking forward to expand their activities to more homes and schools in rural areas, helping them with education, sports, and career. "As we aim at a holistic development, we are trying to take up activities that aid in overall well-being — physical, mental, social and economic well-being of children, youth, women and farmers."



“As we aim at holistic development, we are trying to take up activities that aid in overall well-being — physical, mental, social and economic well-being of children, youth, women and farmers”
SONIA AKULA

RAJAMOULI CASTS A BRITISH ACTRESS

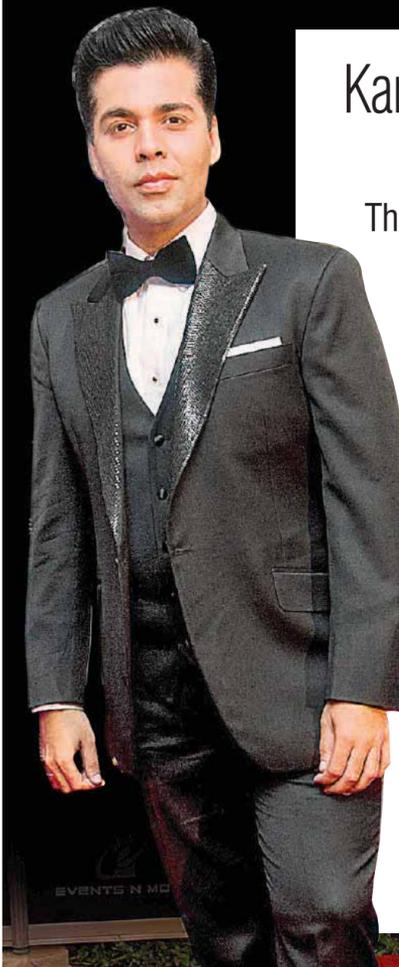
The director has told his team not to reveal the name, as he wants to announce it with a bang, finds NAGARAJ GOUD



After original choice Daisy-Edgar Jones left the project citing personal issues, filmmaker S.S. Rajamouli had a tough time finding a replacement for his period drama RRR. Although some regional names including a familiar Hollywood name were bandied about, turns out the director has finally got the actress of his choice. We hear he has signed a British actress for the part but has told his team to withhold from revealing her name at this juncture. It is understood that he wants to announce it with a bang. She will be joining the sets in October. As per the story, she will be cast alongside Jr NTR, who will be seen as young Komaram Bheem, while Alia Bhatt is cast opposite Ram Charan, who will be seen as young Alluri Seetharama Raju.

Meanwhile, the unit will be heading to Bulgaria this month-end to film some portions. We hear that only Tarak's portions will be shot during this leg of filming.

Being made on a budget of ₹400 crore, RRR, set in the early 1920s, is a fictional story based on two real-life heroes and freedom fighters — Alluri Seetharama Raju and Komaram Bheem. The likes of Ajay Devgn and P Samuthirakani will also be seen in significant roles in the film, a DVV Danayya production.



Karan Johar: I won't apologise for films I have made

The filmmaker mentions that just because his characters are rich and lead a luxurious lives, doesn't mean that they don't have their share of problems

Karan Johar is often criticised for only focussing on beautiful, high-class people with perfect lives in his works, but the filmmaker has said that he won't apologise for films that he has made, although he is willing to change his cinematic syntax with changing times.

"I made that kind of films because I was raised in a certain atmosphere and there was also an aspiration that was attached to my way of thinking. I always thought that cinema was meant to be larger-than-life and therefore, I created aspirational characters," said Karan, who added, "However, somewhere down the line, cinema's syntax changed and I have to kind of adapt to that. I have to make sure that my characters are more rooted and real so that they don't seem so flashy anymore. I am accused of affluenza but, having said that, I won't apologise for the films that I have

made, although I think I have to tweak the level affluenza in future." He was interacting with the media at author Shunali Khullar Shroff's book launch, *Love In The Time Of Affluenza*, in Mumbai.

Affluenza means first world problems. It is vastly believed that the privileged class doesn't have problems and that their biggest concerns in life are emptiness, feeling disenchanted with life and pursuing money to be happy with it.

In most Karan Johar films, the characters are beautiful, drive luxury cars and live in posh houses, thereby betraying symptoms of affluenza. Asked if he agrees that affluenza is a reality, Karan said, "When you talk about my films and affluenza, then that's been (done by way of) criticism. Everyone says I make films about first world problems. It is said that if Ranbir Kapoor flies a private plane in a film, then his

heart shouldn't be broken at all. Apparently, if you are wealthy you are not allowed to feel pain."

A few days back, Shirromani Akali Dal MLA Manjinder Singh Sirsa had alleged that A-list Bollywood celebrities including Deepika Padukone, Vicky Kaushal, Varun Dhawan, Ranbir Kapoor, Shahid Kapoor, and Malaika Arora among others were in a drugged state at a recent party in Karan Johar's home. The filmmaker had shared a video from the party on his Instagram account and Sirsa claimed the video was proof that drugs were consumed in the party.

After the incident, Karan Johar and the other celebrities present at the party faced severe backlash from all quarters, especially on social media.

"I feel social media has its pluses and minuses. It's a boon and a curse. It's a boon when you have to reach out to millions, connect with the world and to know whatever is happening around. It's a curse when it is misused, misunderstood, and unnecessarily used to add negativity for no reason. That is the reality of our existence. We have to envelop it and hopefully, some of the negatives eventually get subsided by the positivity that the world must have," said KJo.

On the work front, Karan Johar will be directing the period drama *Takht*, starring Anil Kapoor, Kareena Kapoor Khan, Ranveer Singh, Alia Bhatt, Vicky Kaushal, Bhumi Pednekar and Jahnvi Kapoor.

Jennifer Aniston reveals her unusual WELLNESS RITUAL

Hollywood star Jennifer Aniston has revealed an unusual "wellness ritual" that she undertakes with her Friends co-star Courteney Cox. The 50-year-old actress opened up about her "self-care," and said she has a passion for joining Courteney in infrared saunas, reports mirror.co.uk.

Speaking to *Shape* magazine, Aniston said she was a "major fan" of this "one can't miss wellness ritual." Cox and she were so into these saunas that the 55-year-old star, who played Monica Geller in the much-loved sitcom, has even bought a portable one so she could enjoy at any time with Aniston.

Singers Selena Gomez and Lady Gaga are also reportedly fans of the treatment, which involves sitting in an enclosed sauna and letting infrared light hit the body. It reportedly helps augment skin radiance, and *Vogue* magazine said it helps "release of endorphins, increased circulation and relaxed mind and muscles which leads to better sleep".

"My friend Courteney Cox — you may know her — had a portable infrared sauna that you go into. It kind of looks like a little igloo," said Aniston, adding, "It's such a game changer in terms of your skin detoxification and cell rejuvenation. So that I do a couple times a week right after I do the gym. I've noticed a real change in my energy, and my sleep, and my skin," she added.

She also said that she likes to end the week with a "little mini facial," and said it is "important" to get into a "wellness routine".

“My friend Courteney Cox — you may know her — had a portable infrared sauna that you go into. It kind of looks like a little igloo. It's such a game changer in terms of your skin detoxification and cell rejuvenation.”

JENNIFER ANISTON



How Tom Holland escapes getting trapped in Spider-Man avatar

Actor Tom Holland doesn't feel trapped in his Spider-Man avatar, and says it is all about creating a balance in professional life. "It is a balance of doing other movies while doing these big movies. I did one with Alfonso Gomez-Rejon (*The Current War*), did *The Devil All the Time*, which I shot in Alabama. It is a dark film. I am also doing a film with Russo Brothers later this year called *Cherry*," Holland said while discussing how he ensures he doesn't get trapped in his onscreen superhero avatar.

"It is about kind of fitting into schedule these new indie projects which are very character focused, and about balance," he added.

For Holland, the path towards showbiz began getting carved when he was a child. The son of English comedian Dominic Holland studied dance when he was in school, and went on to do *Billy Elliot The Musical*.

He featured in films like *The Impossible*, *How I Live Now*, *In The Heart of the Sea* and *The Lost City of Z*. However, his big ticket to Hollywood came with role as the iconic web-slinger.

Holland was introduced as Spider-Man in *Captain America: Civil War* in 2016. He got his first solo movie with *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, which took the superhero back to school. He was back as the superhero with his second solo movie *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, which was released in India by Sony Pictures Entertainment India.

While growing up, the London native says he wasn't a fan of the comic books but of the characters. "I watched the cartoons and the films. When I started auditioning, I started reading all the comics. I was angry with my parents that they didn't introduce it to me as a kid because I loved reading them. I think if I had grown up reading comics, I would be more inclined to read more. Comic books are such good ways to come up with great creative ideas for films," he added. — IANS



DABANGG 3 TO RELEASE IN TELUGU ALSO

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's upcoming film *Dabangg 3* will release in four languages — Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu — on December 20. Salman on Wednesday morning took to Instagram to share a picture with his *Dabangg 3* director Prabhudeva, to announce the details.

"Chulbul Pandey coming to you on December 20 in Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu," the 53-year-old superstar tweeted. Salman and Prabhudeva have reunited on this project after *Wanted* in 2009.

Dabangg 3 will launch a new face — Saiee — the daughter of actor-filmmaker Mahesh Manjrekar. The budding actress will play the love interest of superstar Salman Khan's character, Chulbul Pandey.

DABANGG 3 WILL LAUNCH A NEW FACE — SAIEE — THE DAUGHTER OF ACTOR-FILMMAKER MAHESH MANJREKAR



HRITHIK helps SAMEERA REDDY overcome stammering

Actress Sameera Reddy has revealed that she had a stammering problem and actor Hrithik Roshan who helped her overcome it. On a chat show, Sameera spoke of her struggles with stammering, adding that Hrithik, who had also faced speech disorder in his life, had helped her deal with the issue. "Due to my stammering problem, I would hesitate to speak in front of others, and (would hesitate) going for auditions thinking that people would judge me. Hrithik, being the sweet and caring person he is, noticed this, and gave me a book that changed my life. It helped me overcome my fear. Gradually, I started noticing changes in my speech. I also went to a speech therapist and started working on my speech. I cannot thank Hrithik enough for that book and I still have it with me," the actress said, who recently gave birth to her second child.



Marvel's involvement in SPIDER-MAN movies may be in doubt

With great success comes great re-negotiation. In the wake of the announcement that *Spider-Man: Far From Home* is now the highest-grossing film ever in Sony Pictures' history, reports surfaced that Marvel Studios may be stepping away from the cross-studio partnership.

The Hollywood trade *Deadline* reported that there was a disagreement over the profit-sharing structure. According to a person close to the deal who



THE HOLLYWOOD TRADE DEADLINE REPORTED THAT THERE WAS A DISAGREEMENT OVER THE PROFIT-SHARING STRUCTURE

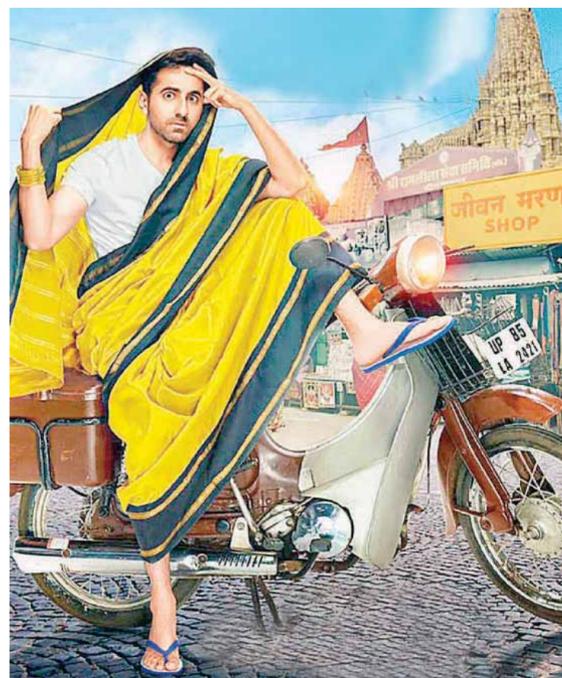
was unauthorised to speak publicly, negotiations are not yet final. However, the suggestion that Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige may not produce future live-action Spider-Man movies and that the character itself might not appear in any more Marvel Cinematic Universe films quickly turned into a trending topic.

Sony has held the rights to the Marvel character since 1985, but in 2015, announced a partnership with Disney and Marvel that would allow Spider-Man to be used in MCU films like *Avengers: Endgame*. It also allowed Feige to serve as a producer on stand-alone Spider-Man movies like *Far From Home*.

The crossovers have been well received by audiences and critics. Moreover, the teenage web-slinger has been made into a central component in the MCU with a close relationship to Tony Stark that drove the storylines in both *Endgame* and *Far From Home*. However, as Marvel enters its Phase 4, Spider-Man also has no official MCU appearances planned.

Two standalone Spider-Man movies are, however, reportedly in the works from Sony, which would bring back director Jon Watts and star Tom Holland. Sony has also created its web of Spider-Man spinoffs, including the Oscar-winning animated feature *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, and *Venom*.

Representatives from the two studios did not respond to requests for comment. — AP



Jonita Gandhi lends voice for Ayushmann Khurrana

Actor Ayushmann Khurrana will soon be seen lip-syncing to the song *Bajta Ring Ring* in his *Dream Girl* avatar. Jonita Gandhi, the singer behind the song, says she had had fun while working on it and hopes everyone enjoys the track. Gandhi has worked on the song along with Meet Bros.

"When I found out I was going to be the voice behind Ayushmann Khurrana, I was confused. Once Manmeet (Meet Bros) explained, I remember laughing. I can't wait to see him act out my lines," Jonita said in a statement.

"It's definitely a first for me and I'm excited! Recording this song with the Meet Bros was so much fun. The song is full of drama and the singing style is slightly retro. We experimented in studio with various textures and delivery styles and I think we ended up with something super catchy! I hope everyone has as much fun listening to and watching this song as we had recording it," she added.

In *Dream Girl*, National Award-winning actor Ayushmann essays a man who can talk in a female voice and his actions lead to hilarious consequences. Directed by Raaj Shaandilyaa, the film also stars Nushrat Bharucha, Manjot Singh and Abhishek Banerjee. The film is slated to open in theatres on September 13.

SATYADEV and RAHUL VIJAY come together for a romantic drama

The two young and happening actors had no issues coming together as they belong to a generation that puts story above everything else, finds NAGARAJ GOUD



Ever since superstars Venkatesh and Mahesh Babu shared screen space for *Seethamma Vakitlo Sirimalle Chettu* (SVSC) back in 2013, multi-starrers in Telugu have been on the ascent. *Masala, Samantakamani, Devadas, F2* — *Fun and Frustration* are some releases after SVSC, while films like *RRR*, starring Jr NTR and Ram Charan, and *V*, featuring Nani and Sudheer Babu, are in the making. Continuing in the path of their seniors, two young and happening actors, Satyadev and Rahul Vijay, are coming together for a love story, *The Pioneer* has exclusively learnt. The film will mark the directorial debut of Krishna Kishore who previously assisted Puri Jagannadh.

A source close to the development says, "The film is about Rahul and Satyadev's love stories and how one particular character in the film shares it to the other. The narrative has been designed in an interesting way. It has a poetic feel to it and is set in a contemporary atmosphere. Both the actors had no issues coming together as they belong to a generation that puts story above everything else." The source adds that the film will most

likely flag-off in a month. "A major part of the film will be shot in Hyderabad while some portions require the unit to travel to a rural set-up. The script has been locked. '96 composer Govinda Vasantha has been roped in to render tunes and music sessions between him and the director are underway in Chennai."

Meanwhile, Rahul Vijay — except for a song — has completed shooting for *College Kumar*, his next after *Suryakantham*. A remake of Kannada hit of the same name, the film is simultaneously being made in Telugu and Tamil. The song will be shot in Chikmagalur once rainfall ceases over there. Satyadev, on the other hand, is filming for a couple of web series, with directors Anish Kuruvilla and Shekhar Suri.

"A major part of the film will be shot in Hyderabad while some portions require the unit to travel to a rural set-up. The script has been locked. '96 composer Govinda Vasantha will render tunes

SOURCE



Sai Tej picks up pace

The actor is in talks with Veeru Potla for a possible collaboration, as he has already given his consent to the director to develop the story further

With *Chitralahari* ending his dry spell at the box-office, Sai Dharam Tej has decided to up his game. Close on the heels of agreeing to spearhead BVSN Prasad's next production with debutant Subbu, who assisted Virinchi Varma in the past, the actor, this newspaper has reliably learnt, is in talks with Veeru Potla for a possible collaboration.

After his last directorial *Edu Gold Ehe* in 2016, Potla, who wrote blockbusters like *Varsham* and *Nuvvostanante Nenoddantana*, has been lying low. His discussions with Sai have started something back and they are both trying to come together for a commercial potboiler set in a realistic space. "It's peppered with humour as well. Sai liked his character sketch and story in total, giving Potla the consent to go ahead with developing the story further. After a film with Deva Katta, Sai felt that a film with Potla would be the right move on the career front," said a source.

The actor is presently shooting for Maruthi's *Prathi Roju Pandage*, which he will be wrapping up in November. He will later dive headlong into the sets of Katta's next. He will take a call on whom among Potla or Subbu will take preference towards the year-end or early next year.



IN-BETWEEN THE NEW AND OLD



Still of actor Sathyaraj's residence from director Maruthi's *Prathi Roju Pandage*, starring Sai Dharam Tej and Raashi Khanna. Art director Ravindra gave a house at Nanakramguda Studios a complete makeover after the team failed to get what Maruthi wanted — a house that looks in between ultra-modern and old. Major portions of the romantic family entertainer will be shot in the house, which, in the film, will be shown as a home from Godavari districts.



Yesudas, Balu and Chitra under one roof in Hyd

The whole event will be supervised by Balu's son, Charan

For Telugu music lovers, here is a great piece of news for you. For the first time, evergreen voices of KJ Yesudas, SP Balasubrahmanyam and KS Chitra that have mesmerised millions of fans all over the world will be under one roof for the musical concert Legends. Scheduled to take place on November 30 at Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad, event management firm Eleven Point Two is making the event transpire. Balu's son Charan will be supervising the whole show.

Balu said at an event in Hyderabad recently, "The concert is a first of a kind in Telugu. We have sung in concerts abroad but it's for the first time we will be singing in Hyderabad. We will only be singing Telugu songs and the show will kick off with Anna Yesudas' song. Musicians from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu will act as a band for the concert while AR Rahman's right-hand man Srinivas Murthy will be the music conductor."

Deverakonda lauds KS Ramarao's passion for cinema

Vijay Deverakonda, who attended the pre-release event of Aishwarya Rajesh-starrer *Kousalya Krishnamurthy...Cricketer* on Tuesday evening compared the film's producer KS Ramarao to a 'daddy figure'. The senior producer is also shepherding the actor's on-sets untitled film with Kranthi Madhav under his reputed Creative Commercials. "He is on sets every day meeting our needs. There were days where he was unwell, yet he would come to sets. When we asked him why can't he simply chill at home, he said, 'I only know cinema. If I can't make movies, what will I do?' He likes the cinema atmosphere and loves hanging around sets. When I asked him why he is not into other investments, he replied that he doesn't like other businesses and would only invest in films, irrespective of whether they make him money or not. I love you Ramarao garu," Vijay said and extended his best wishes to the unit of *Kousalya Krishnamurthy...Cricketer*. "I hope it will be a success upon release this Friday."



VIJAY COMPARED THE FILM'S PRODUCER KS RAMARAO TO A 'DADDY FIGURE' AS HE IS ON SETS EVERYDAY TAKING CARE OF ALL NEEDS



Ran away to get some help, says Raj Tarun

After his car careened and crashed into a divided near Outer Ring Road at Alkapur, Narsingi in the wee hours of Tuesday, Raj Tarun remained unavailable for a comment for a large part of Tuesday, prompting some reports to state that he has gone into hiding. However, on Wednesday, the actor, taking to Twitter, issued a statement, saying that he did run away from the incident, but it was to get some help.

"Thank you so much everyone for the concern. So blessed to get calls to know I am safe or not. I came out from home via Narsing circle, which is a regular accident spot from the past three months. It was a sudden right. In that quick decision, lost control and the car hit the wall beside the road. With that sound, all my ears blocked and vision was unclear. Sudden heartbeat made me clueless. The seatbelt is there. I checked myself and took a quick run to go back home and get some help. This is all that happened around that incident. Was on rest to come out. Starting my work again in a few days. Thank you for the love (sic)," he wrote on Twitter.

He also emphasised that wearing seat belt saved him and advised others to wear one. He further said that he was alone in the car when the accident took place and that he was taking care of all formalities (police) after such a mishap.

On the work front, he will be next seen in Sri Venkateswara Creations *Iddari Lokam Okate*, a remake of 2011 Turkish hit *Love Likes Coincidences*. After finishing this film, he will join the sets of Vijay Kumar Kondra's next from September.

HE ALSO EMPHASISED THAT WEARING SEAT BELT SAVED HIM AND ADVISED OTHERS TO WEAR ONE



Red ball challenge

India gear up for Test Championship opener against Windies on tricky track

West Indies vs India
Live from 7:00pm IST
SONY TEN 1 & 3 NETWORK

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND

A perfect combination and a winning start will be foremost on skipper Virat Kohli's mind when India take on West Indies in their inaugural World Test Championship opener here on Thursday. A win in the opening Test will be the 27th for Kohli as skipper and will put him on even keel with his predecessor Mahendra Singh Dhoni. A century in the game (19th as captain) will place him on par with Ricky Ponting.

On paper, a batting line-up that has Kohli, Cheteshwar Pujara, KL Rahul, Rohit Sharma and Rishabh Pant in the ranks should be termed clear favourites but this West Indies team, led by Jason Holder, is no pushover.

England found that out the hard way at the start of the year when they lost a Test series 1-2 in some of the most lively pitches on the Caribbean islands in recent times.

One such pacer-friendly wicket was at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua where Kohli and his men will be facing the Windies first up.

The last Test played here saw England scoring 187 and 132 but that was a different time of the year.

Nevertheless, Kohli and head coach Ravi Shastri, who recently got a fresh contract, will be wary of the challenge that can be posed by the new ball pair of Kemar Roach and Shannon Gabriel along with Jason Holder bowling his steady seam-up spells.

If there is pace and bounce, Kohli is likely to go with four specialist bowlers in which Ravichandran Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav will be fighting for the lone spinner's slot.

The three pacers, in all likelihood, will be Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami.

However, it is the batting combination that will be the skipper's primary worry and if he can get it right, that will be considered as a tactical victory.

In an ideal situation, if Hardik Pandya was available, Kohli would have been tempt-



Rohit Sharma defends during India's warm-up game against West Indies A at Antigua. BCCI/Twitter

ed to drop one among Rohit Sharma and Ajinkya Rahane but given the recent record of West Indies in Tests, he might go in with an extra batsman which means both will feature in the playing XI. If a green-top is provided and Kohli still goes with five bowlers which includes Ravindra Jadeja as an all-rounder, it could well be a toss-up between the two

Mumbaikars. The other issue will be at the top of the order as to who will open with Mayank Agarwal.

The common logic says KL Rahul, who is a specialist opener, but Hanuma Vihari was sent to do the fire-fighting in Australia and it would be unfair to not give him another opportunity against a relatively easier pace

Australia rule out bouncer battle

England vs Australia
Live from 3:30pm IST
SONY SIX NETWORK

AFP ■ LEEDS

Australia coach Justin Langer has told his side to avoid being drawn into a bouncer battle after Steve Smith was ruled out of the third Ashes Test against England.

Star batsman Smith suffered delayed concussion symptoms after being hit on his neck by a 92 mph bouncer from England fast bowler Jofra Archer during the drawn second Test at Lord's.

His absence from the third Test at Headingley starting today leaves Australia with a huge hole to fill.

Smith marked his return to Test cricket after a 12-month ball-tampering ban with innings of 144 and 142 during Australia's 251-run win in the first Test at Edgbaston.

He also made 92, having retired hurt after being hit when on 80, at Lord's where Marnus Labuschagne, Test cricket's first concussion substitute, made a brave fifty in the second innings after being hit flush on the grille of his helmet by Archer.

World Cup-winning fast bowler Archer struck several telling blows on a Test debut that yielded five wickets.

Australia also have plenty of fast-bowling firepower at their disposal in Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc. But Langer insisted his side would not be sidetracked from their goal of becoming the first Australia side in 18 years to win an Ashes series in England.

"We know what our plans are to beat England," Langer told reporters at Headingley, where the third Test starts on today.

"It's not an ego game," the former Australia opening batsman insisted.

"We're here to win the Test match, not to see how many bruises we can give.

"I'm sure the bouncer will still be part of every bowler's armoury, if it helps us get batsmen out then we'll use it, otherwise we'll keep sticking to the plan."

England are still without James Anderson after their all-time leading wicket-taker broke down with a calf injury after bowling just four overs at Edgbaston.

Smith and England opener Rory



Burns apart, both top-orders have struggled in the face of some quality fast bowling.

But England have stuck by Jason Roy, even though the World Cup-winning opener averages just 10 in four innings this series.

Roy, however, has mainly been a middle-order batsman in first-class cricket with Surrey. England coach Trevor Bayliss hinted at a reshuffle in the batting line-up, if not in personnel.

"We think we've got the best seven batters available to us at the moment in England... Whether we can change it round and make that (order) any better, I'm not sure, but we'll certainly have a discussion about it," he said.

"There's one or two batting spots in the wrong positions but we're trying to do the right thing by the team," England's Australian coach added.

Now the question is can England, who had Australia 122-8 in their first innings at Edgbaston only for Smith to steer his side to 284, take advantage of his absence?

England will look for more heroics from Archer and hope that, with Ben Stokes fresh from an unbeaten century at Lord's, someone can give their attack enough runs to play with.



Kane Williamson, facing camera, chats with teammate Ross Taylor & coach Gary Stead as they inspect the pitch during practice session AP

NZ look to exploit Lanka's weakness

AFP ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka vs New Zealand
Live from 10:00am IST
SONY ESPN NETWORK

New Zealand will be hoping to add to Sri Lanka's poor record at their own Oval ground and level the series in the second and final Test starting today.

Unlike the spinner's paradise at Galle and the batting heaven that is the SSC, the Oval — the only ground in Asia where Don Bradman played — favours seam bowlers.

Sri Lanka have been often exposed here by quality seam bowlers and one up in the two-match series, they will have New Zealand's Trent Boult and Tim Southee — and possibly Neil Wagner — to contend with.

In the last 10 years, Sri Lanka have played seven games at The Oval and lost five, including once to New Zealand. In that game seven years ago, Southee claimed eight wickets while Boult finished with seven.

"We have some fond memories from last time, and we managed to win that," New Zealand wicketkeeper BJ Watling said at a pre-match media briefing on Wednesday.

Left-arm quick Wagner claimed nine wickets in New Zealand's last Test match and was unlucky to miss out in Galle as conditions heavily favoured spin. He is expected to make a return because at the expense of Mitchell Santner.

The opening Test was a lot closer than the six-wicket margin suggests and the New Zealanders know that fielding lapses cost them dearly after setting Sri Lanka a daunting task of 268 runs.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, will leave out off-spinner Akila Dananjaya, whose action was reported to be suspect for a second time by match officials after the Galle Test.

Dananjaya, who claimed a five-wicket haul in the opening game, was forced to remodel his action after it was first reported in November last year.

Technically he is allowed to play the second Test, but he is likely to travel to India instead to test his action. Dilruwan Perera has been drafted into the squad and is expected to play.

Sri Lanka will move up to the number five of the official ICC rankings if they win the second Test and the series.

More importantly, it will give them a strong start in the World Test Championship.

Kumble can be selector in future: Sehwaag

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Test captain Anil Kumble's ability to boost confidence of the players makes him an ideal candidate for the role of chairman of selectors, said Virender Sehwaag, who also advocated a hike in remuneration for the job.

Never to mince his words, former opener Sehwaag said BCCI needs to pay more for heading the selectors' committee.

The current selection panel, led by MSK Prasad, has faced a lot of flak for it being a lightweight with a cumulative experience of 13 Tests.

"I think Anil Kumble could be the right candidate for the chairman of selectors post. He is someone who has interacted with Sachin (Tendulkar), Sourav (Ganguly) and Rahul (Dravid) as a player and with youngsters as a coach," Sehwaag told reporters during launch of a new app 'The Selector'.

"When I made a comeback (Australia series 2007-08), he (Kumble) came to my room and said you will not be dropped for the next two series. That's the kind of confidence a player needs," said Sehwaag.

However, Sehwaag also said that he doesn't think that Kumble will agree to do the job right now since the chairman gets ₹1 crore per annum. "BCCI needs to raise bar as far as pay is concerned. Then a lot of players will be interested," said Sehwaag.

Asked if he would also be interested in this post, Sehwaag said that he doesn't like too many restrictions.

"I write columns, appear on TV and being selector will mean a lot of restrictions. I don't know whether I would like so many

restrictions," the former Indian opener said.

Sehwaag, who had lost the race to be India's coach in 2017 to Ravi Shastri, said that he did not apply this time.

"In 2017, the BCCI secretary and (late) Dr MV Sridhar (GM Cricket Operations) asked me to apply so I applied. This time no one asked me, so I didn't apply," said Sehwaag when asked if he was amused in the manner Shastri was re-appointed the coach.

As the talk veered towards playing XI for the first Test against West Indies, Sehwaag's vote went to Ajinkya Rahane if India played five bowlers.

"Ajinkya Rahane has been batting at No 4 (No 5) so if it is a case of five bowlers then he should play. Rohit Sharma comes in only if you go with four bowlers," Sehwaag reasoned.

He also felt that "Mahendra Singh Dhoni should have batted at number five" in the World Cup semi-final against New Zealand.

"Players like Hardik Pandya, who can play big shots should have come in at number seven towards the end," said the former India captain.

He also expressed his happiness at S Sreesanth's life ban being reduced to seven years.

"I am very happy for him. He now needs to play domestic cricket," he said.

Sehwaag was asked about suggestions on wearing neck guards in the wake of Steve Smith recent injury.

"Why do you need to show your neck to the bowler? You have a bat and you are wearing a helmet. In my entire career, I never used chest pads," Sehwaag said.

BFI should do away with selection trials: Mary Kom

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Celebrated Indian boxer M C Mary Kom on Wednesday said proven performers should not be made to undergo selection trials and asserted that she did no wrong by seeking an exemption from the ones for the world championships.

A controversy broke out over Mary's selection for the women's World Boxing Championships in Russia after her competitor in the 51kg category, Nikhat Zareen, was refused a trial bout. Zareen, in a letter to the Boxing Federation of India (BFI), alleged that she was stopped from competing despite having a scheduled trial bout.

Mary Kom, a six-time world champion and an Olympic Bronze-medallist, was chosen by the BFI selection panel based on her Gold medal-winning performances at the India Open and a subsequent tournament in Indonesia.

"Maybe, the BFI can change the programme altogether, no trial for boxers who are performing well, they can directly get the quota for any championship or tournament," Mary said on the sidelines of an event arranged by the All India Gaming Federation.

The world championship is sched-



Mary Kom, a six-time world champion and an Olympic Bronze-medallist, was chosen by the BFI selection panel based on her Gold medal-winning performances at the India Open and a subsequent tournament in Indonesia.

uled to be held in Russia in September-October.

"You look at other games like badminton, who gives trials? Did Saina Nehwal and P V Sindhu give any trial?" she added.

Mary defeated Zareen in the semi-final of the India Open in Guwahati ear-

lier this year. When quizzed on her decision to approach the BFI with a request for exemption, Mary Kom said she merely left it on the federation and did not pressurise it to rule in her favour.

"I felt weird about my decision but I had told BFI clearly you decide who is doing better. If I have to give a trial or not is not in my hands. The BFI decides all these things, it's upto them" she said.

Soon after this furore, Mary Kom was caught in the eye of the storm on being picked in the selection panel for this year's national sports awards. The point of contention was her personal coach Chhote Lal Yadav's application for the Dronacharya award.

Mary Kom recused herself from the selection committee's proceedings after a media storm on conflict of interest. Yadav was eventually not among the nominees finalised this year.

"This was my second time in the committee. I have recommended many coaches and at that time there was no controversy. This time I don't know what happened, the media created a controversy, so I recused myself," she said.

Mary Kom was part of the awards selection committee for Dronacharya in 2016 as well but her coach was not in fray at that time.

Puneri beat Bengaluru Bulls 31-23

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Puneri Paltan registered a 31-23 win against defending champions Bengaluru Bulls in a Pro-Kabaddi League match at Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium here on Wednesday.

A heavily bandaged Surjeet Singh at the centre was the leader (6 tackle points) in the defensive unit for Puneri Paltan, never allowing the league's best raider, Pawan Sehrawat, to weave his magic.

Sagar Krishna came in for a struggling Girish Ernak as coach Anup Kumar made the changes to a faltering Pune side while the Bengaluru Bulls went in with an extra defender in the line-up buoyed by the performances of their two raiders in Pawan Sehrawat and Rohit Kumar.

It was the Pune team which started off well, consistently tackling Bengaluru Bulls raiders, with Sagar Krishna justifying his inclusion with an incredible body block on Rohit Kumar six minutes into the match.



The defensive units matched each other tackle for tackle, as the raiders, including Punes Nitin Tomar struggled to impress.

A low-scoring, heavy tackling first half, which also saw Sehrawat reach 100 points for the season, ended with scores even at 10-10.

Bengaluru decision to play just two raiders backfired

as Paltans improved defence thwarted any raider who ventured into their territory.

Pune inflicted the game's only All-Out on Bengaluru Bulls in the sixth minute of the second half to open up an 8-point gap.

Manjeets clever raids in do-or-die situations were also vital for Pune as they raced to a two-digit lead.

The defence held firm, as Surjeet Singh completed a personal milestone of 250 points in Pro Kabaddi League, and secured a very important victory that pushed his team up to 10th in the league standings.

Bengaluru's loss meant they lost out on an opportunity to go to the top of the points table.