

OPINION 6
NOW, A GREEN
FUND

MONEY 8
'INDIA'S SUGAR EXPORT MAY
CROSS 5 MT THIS YEAR'

SPORTS 12
MESSI & HAMILTON
ARE WORLD'S BEST

HYDERABAD, WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2020; PAGES 12 & 3



the pioneer

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NITHIIN SAYS
HE IS LUCKY TO
HAVE TRIVIKRAM
IN HIS LIFE

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RAHUL DRAVID'S SON SAMIT SLAMS SECOND DOUBLE-CENTURY

Rahul Dravid's son Samit Dravid once again showed his prowess with the bat as he slammed a double-hundred in under-14 cricket while representing his school Mallya Aditi International in the BTR Shield Under-14 Group I, Division II Tournament on Saturday. Samit Dravid took just 146 balls and smashed 33 boundaries en route to his second double-century inside two months. Samit's batting blitz helped his side post an imposing total of 377 for three from their allotted 50 overs.



ANOTHER KAMBALA RACER BREAKS SRINIVAS GOWDA'S 100 M RECORD

Another Kambala racer has created a record in 100 metres during a traditional buffalo race in Karnataka covering the distance in 9.51 seconds, improving on the timing of Srinivas Gowda who stirred up a social media frenzy with his recent running exploits. Nishant Shetty from Bajajogi Jogibettu broke 28-year-old Gowda's record at the Venoor Kambala on Sunday, organisers said. Organisers said thus far, four participants have joined the elite club of racers who have completed the 100 metres in less than ten seconds.



AAP MLA BHARDWAJ TO ORGANISE RECITATION OF SUNDERKAND

'Bajrang Bali-Hanuman' was a big issue in the recently concluded Delhi Assembly Election 2020, but the issue has once again been ignited by Aam Aadmi Party MLA Saurabh Bhardwaj, who on Tuesday (February 18) announced that Sunderkand (dedicated to valour Lord Hanuman in Ramcharit Manas) will be recited on the first Tuesday of every month in different areas of his constituency. Earlier on Tuesday, Saurabh Bhardwaj tweeted that the recitation of Sunderkand will be held at 4:30 pm at the ancient Shiva temple, Chirag Delhi.



PM MEETS RICKSHAW PULLER WHO INVITED HIM TO WEDDING OF BETI

During his one-day visit to his Lok Sabha constituency, Varanasi, on February 16, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Mangal Kewat, the rickshaw puller who had sent his daughter's wedding invite to the PM. The Prime Minister enquired about the health and well-being of Mangal Kewat and his family and also commended him on his contribution to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan. Inspired by PM Modi, Mangal Kewat has taken to cleaning the Ganga banks in his village on his own.



BARBS AT BIOASIA 2020

Piyush wants KTR to market India, says political vacuum exists

We heard about Make in India... Discovery in India is equally imp: KTR



I-T raids reveal Jagan's game-plan for Naidu

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NAVEENA GHANATE
HYDERABAD

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday suggested that Telangana Minister for Industries K T Rama Rao should market for India.

He was speaking during the CEO Conclave at BioAsia 2020 on Tuesday. Piyush observed: "We need to have KTR to market India a little more. He is very good at it. But I think he needs to go beyond Hyderabad as we had a little overdose of Hyderabad in the course of the panel discussion".

In response, when KTR wittily asked Piyush if he was suggesting starting a national party, the Union Minister said,

"We would welcome you to come in as national party, right now there is a vacuum out there. Other than Bharatiya Janata Party, I don't see any other party out there."

During the deliberations, KTR and industry leaders expressed the need for restoring weighted average deduction. KTR said, "We heard about 'Make in India' which is important, but 'Discovery in India' is equally important. Research & Development in India is important. But we hear that weighted average deductions, which were at 200 per cent, have been reduced to 150 per cent, and by March it will be 100 per cent."



Union Minister Piyush Goyal and Telangana Minister for Industries K T Rama Rao during the CEO Conclave at BioAsia 2020 on Tuesday.

SLOWDOWN IMPACT

TS Govt staff have to wait longer for pay hike

Govt extends PRC's tenure till Dec 31

L VENKAT RAM REDDY
HYDERABAD

The state government on Tuesday issued orders extending the tenure of the first Pay Revision Commission (PRC) of Telangana State till December 31, 2020.

The orders came as a shocker to about 4.50 lakh state government employees and 1.80 lakh pensioners (retired employees), who now have to wait longer to realize the benefits of the first PRC.

Employees are supposed to get the benefit of pay hike and other incentives of the first PRC from July 2019 itself, since the pay scales under the last PRC appointed in undivided AP in July 2013 and imple-



The first PRC of TS has already been delayed since July 2019 and the latest extension means, it will be further delayed for strategic reasons

mented from 2014 were applicable till July 2019.

The first PRC of TS has already been delayed since July 2019 and the latest extension means, it will be further delayed for strategic reasons.

The last PRC, which was the 10th in line, was appointed in undivided AP in 2013.

Currently, the employees in AP and TS are drawing the

benefits of the 10th PRC post bifurcation.

The new PRCs will be constituted once in five years to revise pay scales.

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had appointed the first PRC of Telangana state headed by retired IAS officer BR Biswal in May 2018.



Which side are you on - Godse or Gandhi?: Kishor to Nitish

5

TRS-BJP political slugfest at railways' inaugural

Piyush Goyal fires salvos against TRS Govt on budgetary allocations to state

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A political slugfest has erupted over the railway budgetary allocations to south India in general and Telangana in particular.

At the satellite railway station inauguration on Tuesday, Union Minister Piyush Goyal countered Telangana Animal Husbandry Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav over his comment that Centre was not supporting Telangana railway projects and ignoring south India.

Talasani had earlier observed on stage, "Whichever state the Railway Minister hails from, those states get more allocations. It would be better if you look at south India, I request you to look at south India."

Piyush said, "Srinivasji, I think you are not aware of the

By defeating Chief Minister's daughter, people have given a befitting reply to the state government conveying them not to differentiate.

I feel sorry that Telangana Cabinet met yesterday and passed resolution to abrogate CAA. For the sake of appeasement, a state government is opposing CAA.



Union Minister Piyush Goyal talking to media persons in Hyderabad on Tuesday

He (KCR) is trying to deviate Muslims by bringing reservation from 4 per cent to 12 per cent which is false reservation.

His son and only important minister of his government, KTR said Centre and state have to work together, even I felt good.

factual situation or you have forgotten that this situation which you were mentioning used to happen in the Congress

government. This is not case with the Narendra Modi government. In Telangana, the railways budget for 2014-15

was Rs 258 crore, sanctioned by the erstwhile government. In the recent budget presented by the Narendra Modi govern-

ment for 2020-21, the railway budget has been increased 10 times to more than Rs 2,602 crore. I came with complete knowledge of what has been allocated to Telangana in the last 5 years and how we increased budget."

After the inaugural, addressing media, Piyush slammed the TRS government for opposing CAA, not implementing EBC reservation and Ayushman Bharat. He said that people taught the TRS government a befitting lesson by defeating CM's daughter. Pointing that BJP was emerging as an alternative in Telangana, he said, "By not implementing the TRS Center's schemes, the TRS government is doing injustice to brothers and sisters of Telangana."

1 killed, 6 hurt as car careens off flyover

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A speeding car hurtled off a flyover killing one person and injuring six others at Bharath Nagar here in the wee hours of Tuesday.

This is the second such incident in the city in less than three months.

The police identified the driver of the car as Sunil. Due to over speeding, Sunil lost control of the vehicle and crashed through the Bharath Nagar flyover's railing, before landing on the road below, police said.

Mohd Sohail, a hotel owner, one of the passengers, died on the spot. The other occupants of the car viz. Sunil, Irfan, Ashwak, Ghouse and Sohail sustained injuries. They are being treated at Gandhi Hospital.

The incident occurred



around 02:15 AM on Tuesday, when the group of friends were heading towards Erragadda from Bharath Nagar. Some persons standing underneath the flyover narrowly missed being hit when the car came crashing down.

The investigating officer, Narasimha Goud, sub-inspector from Sanathnagar Police, said that the car landed on the side where Sohail was sitting, due to which, he suffered multiple injuries and died on the spot.

Power demand peaks to 12,009 MW

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Although summer is yet to set in fully, the demand for power across the state mounted to 12,009 MW on Monday, as against the demand for 11,707 MW power witnessed on May 30, 2018.

On Sunday, the state recorded the peak level demand of 11,783 MW, surpassing the

Crosses previous high of 11,707 witnessed in May 2018
Spike in demand due to Kaleshwaram, Rabi season

2018 record. On Monday the demand increased further by 3,047 MW, taking the total demand to 12,009 MW. Running of pump houses in

Kaleshwaram LI project is stated to be one of the main causes for the increase in the demand. Water is being pumped from Medigedda, Nandimedaram and Lakshampur pump houses.

Moreover, the area under paddy crop during the Rabi season increased manifold -- from 6.83 lakh hectares to 10.81 lakh hectares. Power

usage increased to energise pump sets under 25 lakh agricultural wells and bore wells.

Water is being pumped from lift irrigation projects in the erstwhile Karimnagar district, with the daily power demand reaching 2,130 MW on February 27 this year as against 772 MW recorded on February 17 last year.

Europe's biggest bank HSBC to cut 35,000 jobs

PNS ■ LONDON

HSBC Holdings PLC said on Tuesday it would shed \$100 billion in assets, shrink its investment bank, and revamp its US and European businesses in a drastic overhaul that will mean 35,000 jobs cut over



three years.

The bank, which has struggled to keep pace with leaner

and more focused rivals, is seeking to become more competitive as it grapples with slowing growth in its major markets, the coronavirus epidemic, Britain's European Union exit and lower central bank interest rates.

TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Magha & Krishna Paksha
Panchangam:
Tithi: Ekadashi: 03:01 pm
Nakshatram: Punva, Ashadha: Full Night
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 12:30 pm - 01:56 pm
Yamagandam: 08:10 am - 09:37 am
Varjyam: 04:15 pm - 05:56 pm
Gulika: 11:03 am - 12:30 pm
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritkalam: 02:23 am - 04:05 am
Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL

HYDERABAD WEATHER
Forecast: Mostly Sunny
Temp: 32/16
Humidity: 27%
Sunrise: 06:41
Sunset: 06:19
Current Weather Conditions
Updated February 18, 2019 5:00 PM

Kin deputising for women sarpanches irk Harish

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Finance Minister T Harish Rao was irked on Tuesday when, instead of women sarpanches, he found their kin deputising for them at the Palle Pragathi-Panchayat Raj Sammelan held here.

Besides sarpanches, village panchayat secretaries and MPDOs had been invited to the sammelan.

Relatives of women sarpanches not only took part in the meeting, but some of them also thought it fit to interact with the minister.

A youth present at the meeting told the minister that his



mother was the sarpanch, much to the discomfiture of the minister. The minister then told him, "Your mother should attend the sammelan, but not you".

Deliver or quit: KCR to Mayors and civic chiefs

Build public toilets in three months Ward-wise plans under Pattana Pragathi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao on Tuesday gave a clarion call to people's representatives and administrators that the Pattana Pragathi programme should be conducted successfully all over the State from February 24 to March 4, building on the well-laid foundation of the Palle Pragathi scheme.

Addressing a state-level municipal conference at Pragathi Bhavan here on Tuesday, the Chief Minister suggested that all padayatras,

programmes and rallies to be undertaken by public representatives should begin from Dalit bastis, where most of the poor live. KCR wanted focus on places where SCs, STs and minorities live.

The Chief Minister said that town development action plans should be detailed ward-wise. He wanted the construction of public toilets in all towns and cities to be completed within three months and all power-related issues to be solved within eight months. Otherwise, the Chief Minister warned, the MLAs, Mayors, Chairpersons and



Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and IT Minister KT Rama Rao during state-level municipal conference at Pragathi Bhavan on Tuesday

Commissioners concerned should accept full responsibility and quit their posts.

KCR wanted total discipline in fiscal matters and wanted funds to be spent only as per plans. In the context, he expressed his displeasure that mandal panchayat raj officers had been negligent and did not undertake tour of villages to review Palle Pragathi programme.

He instructed Collectors to camp overnight in villages and conduct padayatras to achieve the targets set under Palle Pragathi.

The recent Income Tax raid on P. Srinivas Rao, former personal secretary of TDP supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu is by all accounts one more attempt by YSRCP chief YS Jaganmohan Reddy to corner his political bête noire.



If one takes stock of the recent developments, it can be assumed that Jagan is doing his best not only to get close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi but also ensure that Naidu is kept at a distance from the BJP.

The reported detection of illegal transactions worth Rs 2,000 crore during the I-T raids has already dented the TDP's, as well as Naidu's reputation. It may be argued that the I-T sleuths found only Rs 2.60 lakh in the residence of Naidu's PS, but the fact remains that the figure of Rs 2,000 crore immediately attracts one's attention and the TDP will find it difficult to convince people otherwise.

I-T raids give a hint of Jagan's game-plan

set off a chain of events that have the possibility of transfixing political observers across the country, especially Delhi.

On the ground however, cadre of both the YSRCP and TDP say that such tactics will put a full-stop to any president of a political party would only be a dream.

The history between Naidu and Jagan has always been bitter and there does not appear to be any possibility of cordiality between the two, at least not in the foreseeable future.

During 2014-19, Naidu held all the political aces and did his best to clip the wings of Jagan with a view to ensure his safe future. He exerted pressure on the Modi government to intensify investigation into the cases being probed by the CBI and get Jagan jailed by cancelling his bail in several DA cases.

Had the Centre acquiesced,

During 2014-19, Naidu held all the political aces and did his best to clip the wings of Jagan with a view to ensure his safe future. He exerted pressure on the Modi government to intensify investigation into the cases being probed by the CBI and get Jagan jailed by cancelling his bail in several DA cases

Jagan would have found himself behind bars by the time the 2019 general elections came. However, Modi didn't yield to Naidu despite their friendship for various reasons, but worked to garner everybody's support irrespective of ideology. Interestingly, there is little to differentiate between Jagan and Naidu when it comes to dealing with the Muslim community.

It may be recalled that Naidu, as Chief Minister of

undivided AP, backtracked on what he preached in the midterm elections for the Lok Sabha in February, 1998. The political approach of Naidu in post-poll scenario was entirely contrary to what he had said during electioneering. He had launched scathing attacks on the BJP, describing it as a party that demolishes mosques. After elections, he joined hands with the BJP justifying the move by saying that it was only to keep Congress from



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

power. Naidu went on to break the backbone of United Front, the third force that was alternative to both the Congress and BJP.

Despite these flip-flops, Naidu never faced an adverse political situation for himself in AP, and was least bothered about aversion among Muslims for his proximity to

the Vajpayee-led NDA regime.

His stand was vindicated by his party's thumping victory in 1999 elections in which the TDP bagged 29 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in undivided AP. Reaping dividends from the alliance, the BJP won seven seats, its best ever performance in AP till date. Congress could only win only five seats, despite being led by a political stalwart like YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Now, Jagan is following Naidu when it comes to the Muslim community. A case in point was the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, which the YSRCP supported despite absence of any formal request by the BJP. This was despite the YSRCP enjoying the support of Muslims in AP because of its secular image it had built by maintaining distance from the BJP in pre-2019 political situation.

According to an internal

survey conducted at the behest of the YSRCP, there will not be any considerable backlash from Muslims if the party favours CAA, as its impact would be negligible in AP.

In other words, Muslims will understand the situation being faced by YSRCP and party will assure the community that it will safeguard their interests.

However, Deputy Chief Minister Amrith Basha's threats that he would resign in the event of the YSRCP joining the NDA has alarmed the party and the Jagan government.

This development stunned the YSRCP, especially since Basha was mum when his party supported CAA in Parliament.

Basha is likely to be pacified by the leadership for the time being, but his dissidence has already made an impact among the minority commu-

nity. Minister Botsa Satyanarayana might not have conveyed the hidden message regarding YSRCP joining the NDA which means sharing power with the BJP. The BJP leadership might be inclined towards the YSRCP as this would boost the NDA strength in the Rajya Sabha.

If indeed the YSRCP joins the NDA government, parallels can be drawn between Naidu and Jagan and their capacity to influence the previous and present NDA governments. Naidu was the lifeline for NDA-1 with his 29-strong force of MPs, while Jagan, despite having 22 MPs, has little to offer the BJP in the Lok Sabha. It is only in the Rajya Sabha that he would be beneficial to the BJP.

By trying to keep the TDP away from the NDA, Jagan has indicated that he does not want to face a TDP-BJP-Jana Sena alliance in 2024.

SPECIAL INVITEE



Endowments Minister Indrakaran Reddy, MLA Chennamaneni Ramesh, EO of Vemulawada temple, priests on Tuesday invite Chief Minister K Chandrababu Naidu to the celebrations of Mahashivaratri festival at Vemulawada temple

T-Hub to lead capacity building programme

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

T-Hub has been chosen to lead a capacity-building programme for incubation managers from 30 select incubation centres across India. T-Hub won the bid organised by Startup India's DPIIT, whose aim is to train business incubation managers and support them through 1:1 mentorship to create a successful startup ecosystem.

T-Hub, in partnership with Wadhvani Foundation, will design and implement the acceleration program to act as a growth hack for these select incubators and help them succeed.

Five applications were shortlisted for this bid, and T-Hub was selected to Design a world-class entrepreneur support program that covers all aspects of incubation, such as sourcing and selection, incubation and startup building, community engagement, monitoring and tracking.

The call for applications for incubators in India is now open. The program will begin in March 2020 by onboarding the incubators.

HYDERABAD BULLION RATES	
GOLD	₹ 41,110 (10 gm)
SILVER	₹ 90
SILVER	₹ 46,400 (1kg)
	₹ 200

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹110
Without Skin	₹125
Broiler at Farm	₹76

EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	365
VIJAYAWADA	398
VISAKHAPATNAM	417
RETAIL PRICE	₹3.65

Minister, Speaker open double bedroom houses

PNS ■ WANAPARTHY

Agriculture Minister S Niranjan Reddy and Assembly Speaker Pocharam Srinivas Reddy on Tuesday toured Wanaparthi constituency and inaugurated the double bedroom houses for the poor in Eerla thana and Karne thana of Ghanapur mandal of the district.

Addressing a gathering on the occasion, Niranjan Reddy said that the houses would be allotted only to the eligible and over 1,400 units are under construction.

Niranjan Reddy alleged that the Opposition filed cases against construction of double bedroom houses by approaching the court. Niranjan Reddy

appealed to the Assembly Speaker to allot 1,000 more houses to the constituency.

The Agriculture Minister said that the houses would be allotted to all the eligible families in serial order and asked them not to be worried over the delay. Irrigation facility would be provided to Karne thana through lift-irrigation, he said.

Pocharam Srinivas Reddy accused the successive rulers for failing to provide irrigation facility to parched Mahabubnagar. "With the support of Chief Minister K Chandrababu Naidu, the Agriculture Minister succeeded in bringing irrigation facility to the district in record time," the Speaker said.



Agriculture Minister S Niranjan Reddy, Assembly Speaker Pocharam Srinivas Reddy with TRS leaders at Wanaparthi constituency on Tuesday

Clear edge to TRS in DCCB elections

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The TRS is all set to get authority in District Cooperative Central Banks as majority of the Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies chairman posts went to the TRS-supported candidates.

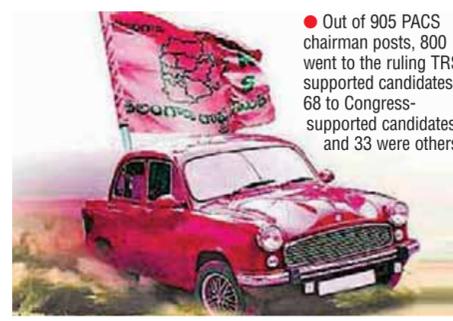
A notification to elect DCCB governing bodies will be released on February 20. The notification was slated to be released on February 17 itself, but was delayed as voters' lists were not ready.

In the DCCB governing body elections, PACS chairmen constitute the electorate.

In all, chairmen of 80 PACS were elected on Monday but their details are awaited, according to department of cooperation.

In 905 PACS chairman posts, 800 went to TRS supported candidates, 68 to Congress-supported candidates and 33 were others.

PACS chairman elect 16 directors for each DCCB and the directors elect their chairman. DCCB are yet to be constituted for newly-formed districts. Since majority of the chairman posts of PACS went to the TRS-supported candidates, there is a keen competition for the DCCB director posts in the party. Lobbying



● Out of 905 PACS chairman posts, 800 went to the ruling TRS supported candidates, 68 to Congress-supported candidates and 33 were others

A notification to elect DCCB governing bodies will be released on February 20. The notification was slated to be released on February 17 itself, but was delayed as voters' lists were not ready

with Ministers and MLAs for DCCB director posts has increased. After the DCCB governing body elections, chairmen of the DCCB in turn will elect Telangana State Apex Cooperative Bank chairman. The DCCB governing body should have representation of weavers, fisheries and sheep cooperative societies and milk producers' societies. There should be at least four directors

on the governing body from these societies.

As elections could not be held to these societies the past chairmen are being continued as in-charge. When general secretary Udaya Mallesam appealed to the cooperative commissioner to put off the governing body elections of the DCCB till elections are held to these four societies, the official expressed his inability.

State transfers 35 municipal commissioners in Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The state government on Tuesday undertook a major revamp of municipal administration by effecting transfer of 35 municipal commissioners across the state at one go.

The move assumed significance in the backdrop of the decision taken by the CM K Chandrababu Naidu. The state has issued an order transferring 35 municipal commissioners on Tuesday. Most of them belong to Grade-III level.

The government appointed Mukund Reddy, Prashanthi, Rajanikanth Reddy and Thrilleshwar as the deputy com-

missioners of GHMC. Nalini Padmavathi has been transferred from the post of GHMC deputy commissioner and appointed as joint director in the office of Director of MA. Venugopal Reddy has been posted as deputy director in the office of Director of MA.

Other officers who have been appointed as new Municipal Commissioners include Md Zakeer Ahmed (Kalwakurthy), Akula Venkatesh (Bellampally), R Triambakeshwar Rao (Luxettipet), Anvesh (Nagarkurnool), K Jayanth Kumar Reddy (Jagityal), N Balakrishna (Nirmal), Sujatha (Ameenpur), P Vemana Reddy (Alia), Venkata Manikaran (Tallapur), Lavanya (Shadnagar), B Sharat Chandra (Sangareddy), K Srinivas Reddy (Tandur), Md Saber Ali (Shamshabad), S Vidyadhar (Narsampet), B Yadagiri (Parakal), Ch Thirupathi (Peddapalle), M Srinivas Reddy (Vemulawada), K Sujatha (Sathupalli), Veerender (Yellandu), Gadde Raju (Mandamari), Maheshwar (Wanaparthi), Spandana (Sadasiavpet), Qamer Ahmed (Yellareddy), B Nagireddy (Huzurnagar), B Gangadhar (Kamareddy), Rajitha (Yadagirigutta), Pallarao (Nandikonda), Prabhakar (Chityal) and Shyamsunder (Amangal).

TRS leaders lobbying for DCCB post

PV KONDAL RAO ■ WARANGAL

Four leaders from the ruling TRS are aspiring for the coveted DCCB chairperson post in Warangal district. As the party high command decides the candidate, the leaders of the TRS have started lobbying for the berth. Dharmasagar society chairperson Gundreddi Rajeshwar Reddy is staking his claim in the limits of Station Ghanpur segment with the support of Rythu Samanvaya Samithi chairperson Palla Rajeshwar Reddy. His candidature was promoted by the leaders of Reddy community and since the Reddy chairpersons are many in number in the erstwhile district, the post was sought by the leaders of that category. Marneni Ravinder Rao of Wardhannapet society is claiming the support of the local legislator Aroori Ramesh and Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao for this coveted post. Dayakar Rao himself was groomed as a leader from the DCCB post and since Marneni is a close aide and a relative to the Minister, his candidature seemed prominent in the list in Warangal district. Apart from these two leaders two more leaders are vying for the post from the Mahabubabad region of the erstwhile district. The district usually allocated the DCCB posts for the surrounding mandals of Warangal urban and the ODCMS posts for the leaders belonging to the Mahabubabad division and Narsampet area till date. But, since the erstwhile Warangal is now divided into six districts the competition among the new regions has become imminent and the leaders are also taking it as a challenge to encourage their supporters as the aspirants. Marneni Ravinder Rao is aspiring for the DCCB berth from Mahabubabad and his candidature is being supported by the local legislator. Challa Linga Reddy of Nekkonda is also trying for the coveted post. He hails from the Guduru area of the erstwhile district and he is being promoted on the lines as the farmer and owner of godowns in the region. Apart from these four leaders several others are also trying to attract the attention of the high command, but since the leaders of the party in Warangal have entrusted the responsibility of choosing the leader from their choice the district Ministers Errabelli Dayakar Rao and Satyavathi Rathod are concentrating seriously on the selection process. However they say that the choice of the high command would be final in this aspect.



GEF adopts Bharosa Centre at Warangal

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Gemini Edibles and Fats India Private Limited as a part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, extend support for setting up of 'Bharosa Support Centre for Women & Children' at Warangal. An MoU was signed by the head of SHE teams Swati Lakra IPS and vice-president of GEF Akshay Chowdhary in the presence of sales and marketing vice-president of GEF India P Chandra Shekhara Reddy on Tuesday.

The Bharosa Centre will be managed by an all-women team. It will be equipped to facilitate immediate, emergency and non-emergency access to a range of services.

Speaking at the occasion Akshay Chowdhry said, "At GEF India, we are always looking at ways to encourage women safety and making them self-reliant. In the past, we have organised freedom self-employment cookery workshops for women to make them independent."

Medaram devotees leave behind 1 cr kg garbage

● Garbage clearance works on war footing ● CRPF jawans, police officials take part in Swachh Medaram

PNS ■ MULUGU

Hundreds of sanitation workers lifted the garbage generated during the Medaram festival by working in three shifts.

The total garbage collected is estimated to be more than 1 crore kilograms, has been deposited in five dumping yards in the vicinity of Medaram with the help of 72 tractors, 20 JCB machines and four dozers. In all, 110 officers and supervisors worked to ensure 80 per cent of garbage has been cleared in 10 days.

The officials estimated that crore devotees had attended the four-day biennial festival, which ended on February 8, at Medaram village. The garbage



problem compounded because of rain during the festival. The garbage became damp and was stinking.

Prior to the festival, officials advised the visitors and traders not to use plastic covers and sachets. It has reduced the bur-

Hundi collections to cross Rs 11 cr

The hundi collections in Medaram are likely to surpass the records of previous years this time. The endowments wing estimated that the collections would cross Rs 11 crore mark by the end of total counting of 494 hundis. The collections after counting the collections in 420 hundis have crossed 10 crore on Tuesday. In the remaining 74 hundis the collections may surpass 11 crore. The counting process will be completed by Wednesday. The last hundi brought from the Jathara venue may not be on par with the filled hundis as they are not filled compared to other hundis, the endowments officials opined.

Medaram. Mulugu Panchayat Officer Venkaiah, who was entrusted to monitor the clearing of garbage, got the meat and bones residue buried instead of taking them to elsewhere. The garbage clearing works were originally scheduled to be completed by February 18. But, the deadline has been extended for two days. However, 80 per cent of the garbage has been cleared till date. CRPF jawans and police officials also took part in Swachh Medaram

CRIME CORNER



Techie hangs self over 'depression'

A 33-year-old man working in a multinational company was found hanging from the ceiling hook in Gachibowli on Tuesday. Police suspect that the man was depressed and resorted to the extreme step. The victim was identified as PNVV Sunny Babu, a native of Sriakulam. Babu was working with Genpact and residing at Sudarshan Nagar in Gachibowli. According to the police, Babu's brother in law, Sampath Kumar had received an email from him at 1 PM on Tuesday. In the email, Babu stated that he was going to commit suicide. Sampath Kumar saw the email around 02:15 PM and rushed to Babu's room. Sampath Kumar then broke open the door only to find the body of Babu hanging from a ceiling hook using a nylon rope.

Three women arrested for false housing promises

Three women were arrested by the Banjara Hills Police of Hyderabad on Tuesday for cheating and collecting money from gullible in the name of the government's double bedroom houses scheme. The accused were identified as Mekala Jyothi, 43, Mandara Anupama, 30, Gopa Lakshmi, 39, and Oggu Jayanthi, 30 said the police, adding that another accused, Mohd. Shayriyari Ali alias Hyder Ali, a GHMC employee, was reportedly absconding. The arrest was done following a complaint from K. Sridevi, a maid servant from Yousufguda who stated that she met Anupama who resides in the same colony and that she offered her a double bedroom house a few months back. The victim was told that Anupama will collect money and offer a double bedroom flat, following which she and her friend Rajitha paid Rs 18,000. After the online application of house sanction from Hyderabad District Collector and after receiving stamp and signatures after some days, she informed that double bedroom room was sanctioned on her name and took Rs 10,000 again at her residence, in the meantime Jyothi was present at her residence stamped with a fake signature on the application. Upon learning the con, the victim approached the Banjara Hills police and lodged a complaint, following which the gang was caught and remanded to judicial custody on Tuesday.

Armed bikers rob youngster

Two bikers threatened a teenager at knife-point and robbed him off Rs 4,000 at Aghapura area in Habeeb Nagar on Monday night. According to the police, the unidentified duo came on a scooter and went into New Ajwa Electrical store at Aghapura around 11 pm on Monday. They threatened a teenager in the shop with a knife and took away Rs 4,000 from the cash counter before fleeing. On information the Habeebnagar police rushed to the spot and took up investigation. Police booked cases under relevant sections of the IPC and formed three teams to identify and nab the robbers.

Piyush: MMTS Phase II will be completed soon

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said that MMTS Phase II will be completed soon and urged the state government to release its share on a priority basis. On Tuesday Piyush along with host of dignitaries laid foundation stone for development of Satellite Terminal at Charlapalli Railway station and Electrification of Yerraguntla - Nandyal section (via Remote video link). He also dedicated double line with electrification of Guntakal - Kalluru section and free high-speed Wi-Fi facility at 427 railway stations in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh to the nation, at a function held at Secunderabad Railway Station.



Minister of Railways Piyush Goyal called on Telangana Governor Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan at Raj Bhavan on Tuesday

Addressing the gathering, Piyush stated that Union government is serving all the regions with responsibility towards 130 crore Indians. He informed that Rs 2,602 crores has been sanctioned towards various developmental projects in Telangana in the current rail budget as against the allocation of Rs 258 crores during the year 2014-15, which is 10 times higher.

Piyush also informed that a record of 158 route kilometers new lines, 48 route kilometers doubling and third line facility and electrification of 303 route kilometers has been done during the last-five-and-a-half-years.

A total of 12 new projects worth of about Rs 10,000 crores have been sanctioned and works are in progress at various stages. Further 22 new

trains have been introduced from Telangana region and services of 42 trains have been extended to facilitate the passengers. He stated that Charlapalli Railway station will be developed with an expenditure of around Rs 250 crores and another terminal station at Lingampalli will be given due priority.

Provision of free high speed Wi-Fi facilities at 427 railway

Provision of free high speed Wi-Fi facilities at 427 railway stations in the states of Telangana and AP will immensely benefit the youth and students

stations in the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh will immensely benefit the youth and students. The Minister also informed that Secunderabad railway station stands in 4th position in Indian Railways in usage of free high speed wi-fi.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of state G Kishan Reddy stated that development of satellite terminal at Charlapalli Railway station is very useful for the residents of Hyderabad east side as well as west side due to its strategic positioning near outer ring road. He urged the railways to expedite the MMTS Phase II and extend it to the popular pilgrim center Yadadri.

Official: AK-47 used by man was stolen from PS

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

The AK-47 rifle used by a man to fire at his neighbour's house recently in neighbouring Siddipet in Telangana was allegedly stolen from a police station nearly three years ago, a senior police official said on Tuesday. During interrogation, the accused told the police that he had stolen the assault weapon and a Carbon rifle from the police station in Siddipet in the early hours of March 13, 2017, Siddipet Police Commissioner N Shweta told reporters.

A detailed report would be sent to higher officials on the 'negligence' of police personnel on duty in the Husnabad station from where the weapons were stolen, she said. After the weapons went missing, personnel of the station had registered a case but it remained unsolved.

Devuni Sadanadam, a labourer in Akkannapet village, had allegedly opened fire from the AK-47 at his neighbour's house over a



petty issue on February 6, but none was injured with the bullets hitting a wall. He had fled the scene then.

Police later arrested him and recovered the AK-47 and one Carbon rifle from his house and registered a case of attempt to murder.

The police official said the accused told them that he used to visit the Husnabad station frequently in connection with a financial dispute he had with a person. According to the in-charge commissioner, he had claimed that on March 13, 2017, the day of Holi festival, when he went to the station around 4 am, no policemen were in sight. He then opened the weapon room and took away the AK-47 and the Carbon rifle.

Watery grave for three teenagers

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Three teenagers, all aged below 14 years, met with a watery grave on Tuesday when they went to Kotta Cheruvu in Annaram village for a swim while enjoying their school holidays.

They were identified as Sandeep, 13, and Mahipal, 14, of Annaram village and Pallav, 13, of Suraram village. They were Class 8 students of Kendriya Vidyalaya-I at Annaram. It was Sandeep who first stepped into the tank. When he was being carried away by strong currents, Mahipal and Pallav also got into the water and tried to save him in vain. They then raised an alarm attracting the attention of people in the vicinity. It was too late by the time the passers-by rushed to the boys' rescue. A pall of gloom descended on the two villages with the death of the trio in the drowning accident.

The Gummadidala police are investigating the case. SI Rajesh Nayak said that a case has been registered.

3-day pensioners' executive meet from February 23

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The state executive of pensioners association will be held in the city from February 23 to February 25 commencing the event with a public meeting at Indira Park on February 23.

Lodging and boarding facilities will be provided at Sundaraiah Vignanan Kendram for the travelers arriving from long distances.

Registration of delegates will take place from 8.30 am on February 24. The delegate fee is fixed as Rs 200 per head.

3 students fined for organising 'Shaheen Bagh night' in HCU

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Hyderabad Central University penalised three students for organising Shaheen Bagh night event against the CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) at the north shopping complex in the University premises on January 31.

They were slapped with a fine of Rs 5,000 each for disciplinary action. The order was passed by the Vice-Chancellor of the University against the students Faseeh Ahmed, PhD Communication, Sahana Pradeep, PhD Translation Studies and AS Adish, MA English.

An incident report was submitted by the security officer to the Vice-Chancellor which said that the three students were involved in organising the Shaheenbagh night event on



A report was submitted by the security officer to the V-C which said that the three students organised the Shaheenbagh night event on January 31 from 9 pm to 2:30 am on February 1

January 31 from 9 pm to 2:30 am on February 1. It also said that they were involved in painting graffiti and defacing the walls at the north shopping complex, despite instructions from the security personnel not to conduct the events as there was no permission to organise

events post 9 pm. Further, the students were warned to be cautious and focus on their studies in future. Recurrence of such incidents or indulge in any acts of indiscipline, would have serious repercussion on their academic career with strong disciplinary action.

Photographer arrested for sexually assaulting minor

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Neredmet Police have arrested a photographer who had sexually assaulted a girl in his photo studio at Neredmet on Tuesday. The situation in the locality turned tense with locals thrashing the man before handing him over to the cops.

The arrested person has been identified as 45-year-old Mohammed Saleem, a resident of Defence colony. Saleem runs RS Digital Photo Studio at Sainikpuri in Neredmet.

According to the police, On Monday evening, the victim, an intermediate student, came to his studio to buy a photo frame. As the girl was alone, Saleem took advantage of the situation, forced himself on her and sexually abused her.

However, the girl escaped from him, ran out of the studio and informed her father of the situation.

The victim's father along with a few locals then caught



Saleem who was trying to escape and thrashed him up before handing over to the police. Saleem, sustained some injuries and was admitted to a hospital where he is recovering.

The Neredmet Police have registered a case under Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act and section 354 A of Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Further investigation is underway, said the police, adding that the crowd was dispersed after assurance of strict action against him.

10k passengers screened for Covid19 at RGIA

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As many as 10,652 passengers were screened at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad since the beginning of corona scare. As on date, none of the Covid suspects were tested positive in Telangana. On Tuesday, 442 passengers were screened at airport. In all, 242 passengers are under home quarantine for 28 days. On Tuesday, 1 passenger was admitted at Gandhi hospital, is under observation in isolation wards.

Till now, 98 samples have been taken from passengers and all found negative. As per the medical bulletin by Telangana Health Department, "The health status of the suspects who are under observation at home and hospitals are stable." State helpline continues to receive calls and got 439 calls received as on Tuesday. Across the world 71,429 cases have been reported while 2,162 were reported on Tuesday alone.

Banner set up by GHMC zonal chief was eco-friendly

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A day after Vigilance and Disaster Management wing of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation fined zonal commissioner of Khairatabad for setting up flexi near Golconda, it issued clarification on Tuesday stating that the banner was eco-friendly and was not violating rules.

The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation EV&DM wing cancels the fine imposed on the Khairatabad zonal commissioner on Tuesday. The zonal commissioner of Khairatabad in a stated that, "As per the report submitted by the deputy director of Urban Biodiversity, instructions were received from the GHMC Head Office that Myspace advertising agency

have been requested for supply of 40 banners and the said agency has supplied 40 cloth banners to Khairatabad Zone." Deputy director of UBD has further informed that the said cloth banners have been erected at the distribution and planting sites in connection with the tree plantation pro-



gramme undertaken by GHMC on Monday.

The statement said, "Banners erected by the UBD section were completely made of fabric cloth with specification 'CT-120, 100% weaved plain cotton cloth' over which the content was printed. These were not in violation of any norms of the government or GHMC and are not flexi banners made up of any material banned by the government."

Three habitual offenders held

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Officials of the West Zone team of the Commissioner's Task Force apprehended three persons involved in bike and cell phone thefts in the limits of Market PS, Begumpet PS, Shahinayathgunj PS and Saifabad PS on Tuesday.

The arrested persons have been identified as Shaik Aslam, 19, Naser Khan, 19 and Sahil Fardeen Khan, 18. Naser Khan and Sahil Fardeen are childhood friends whereas Shaik Aslam was friends with them from the past four years.

Three of them are habitual offenders and committed robberies and snatched cell phones. They were previously



arrested by Nampally PS, Humayun Nagar PS, Saifabad PS, Kukatpally PS and Rajendra Nagar PS.

After being released from jail, the trio met regularly at Gatala Masjid in Mallepally and consume ganja, cigarettes and

alcohol. As their pocket money was not sufficient, they hatched a plan to commit theft of two wheelers from parking places and theft of cell phones from the buses and autos and others thefts in the area to earn easy and illegal money. The trio used to roam late nights and recce isolated places for committing offences. After completion of recce they will commit the offences. During the past week, the trio stole two cell phones and two motorcycles. On Tuesday, Shaik Aslam and Naser Khan came to the market area of Secunderabad to sell the stolen property when the West Zone Task Force team apprehended them along with stolen property.

India Cements MD urges HC to quash ED case against him

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The MD of The India Cements Limited company N Srinivasan approached the High Court urging it to quash the ED case registered against him.

In his petition he told the HC that the ED had filed a case under Section 3 and 4 of Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002. The counsel for the ED filed its counter affidavit in the case and urged the court to dismiss the petition filed by Srinivasan.

TUNDA CASE
Hyderabad court defers verdict again

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A city court here on Tuesday adjourned the verdict in a case pertaining to terror suspect Syed Abdul Karim alias Tunda to March 3. Nampally Criminal Court posted the case to the next month as the judge was on leave.

The verdict was to be pronounced on February 4 but was adjourned to February 18.

Tunda, a suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba operative and bomb expert, is an accused in 1998

Saleem Junaid module case that was booked by the SIT of the Central Crime Station.

Tunda, 77, was arrested by central agencies in 2013 on the Indo-Nepal border. Currently lodged in Ghaziabad jail, he is facing terror charges in various places in the country.

Tunda allegedly trained youngsters to commit terror activities in India. He along with Junaid, a Pakistani national, allegedly conspired to commit a terror strike during Ganesh festival in 1998.

Bank employee hacked to death

PNS ■ MEDAK

In a gruesome incident that took place in Gajwel town of Siddipet district on Tuesday evening Divya, 25, a bank employee in APGVB was hacked to death by unknown miscreants in her room.

According to police the bank employee came to her room after completing her duties and was preparing her evening food when suspected miscreants entered her room and hacked her to death.

The victim is a native of Yellareddipet village in Siricilla district. The victims marriage is scheduled on 26th of this month.

Charging stations: EESL inks MoU with GHMC

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a joint venture of four National Public Sector Enterprises under the Central Ministry of Power has signed an MoU with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), for the installation of public charging stations to boost e-mobility adoption across India.

Under the partnership, EESL will set up public charging stations in 1,000 BSNL sites in a phased manner on a pan India basis. EESL will make the entire upfront investment on the services pertaining to the MoU, along with the operation and maintenance of the charging infrastructure by using



qualified personnel. BSNL would be responsible for providing the requisite space and power connections to install the charging infrastructure.

Talking about EESL's mission to build a robust EV infrastructure, managing director of EESL Saurabh Kumar said, "Building a strong sup-

EESL has signed MoU with GHMC and development authorities of other states including Noida, Chennai, Jaipur and Kolkata for development of public charging stations

porting EV infrastructure is key to cultivating consumer confidence in electric vehicles and would enhance consumer convenience and reduce the range anxiety as well. EESL is leading the initiatives to promote EV adoption in India under its national e-mobility programme. We are glad to partner with BSNL for synergistic action on setting up public charging infrastructure and services across India." Taking forward the vision of the

National Electric Mobility Programme, EESL has commissioned 300 AC and 170 DC chargers across India.

Meanwhile, in the pursuit of increasing the charging infrastructure penetration, EESL has signed MoU with Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) and development authorities of other states including Noida, Chennai, Jaipur and Kolkata for development of public charging stations in their respective areas.



Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao addresses newly elected mayors, chairpersons, councillors, ward members and corporators at the state-level municipal conference held at Pragathi Bhavan on Tuesday

CM sensitises representatives about duties, responsibilities

● Don't make false promises to people: KCR tells public representatives of ULBs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The onus and responsibility of making towns and cities in Telangana as the ideal towns and cities in the country is on the newly elected mayors, chairpersons, councillors, ward members and corporators, Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao said at the state-level municipal conference held at Pragathi Bhavan on Tuesday.

The Chief Minister educated the public representatives about their duties and responsibilities. Laced with illustrations, he told the gathering on how public representatives should conduct themselves in the public life.

While underlining the need to be steadfast to the work and achieving goals, KCR quoted a

poem from Barthruhari's Subhshita as translated by Yenuku Laxmana Kavi which in Telugu goes like "A r a m b h i m p a r u neechamanavulu...."

"You should emerge victorious while doing your duty. You will come across a variety of experiences in public life. Now, politics has become easy and simple due to the prevailing situation in the state and in the country. During the British colonial regime and later for some time, politics used to be different. Politics then used to mean facing difficulties, doing hard work, suffering jail terms and a great sacrifice, sometimes even sacrificing one's life. After the colonial rule, in independent India, we are indulging in comfortable politics and enjoying them. In those days, it was

sacrifice and giving away one's life but now we are in independent India, and are immersed with the nation building activity," the Chief Minister said.

"Those who understand this will get a good name and fame. Only 140 of you out of 5 crores of people have become mayors and chairmen. This is like a stepping-stone and it all depends on how much do you scale up," he added.

"Don't lose your balance while discharging duties. We got Telangana State with lot of difficulties, sacrifices and hard work. We fought a relentless battle believing that we will be benefitted if we get our own state. Mission Kakatiya and Mission Bhagiratha programmes are implemented in all the villages without any discrimination and without any

scope for politics. To do any work, commitment and dedication is required. Whatever work you want to do, take it up seriously. Many people may not have the required self-confidence. But it should not be the case. Understand with awareness and take up the responsibility, if you really want to do. Then only accept the task and complete it with dedication and you shall succeed. People should have faith and repose confidence in you. If a leader wins faith and confidence of people, he or she will be totally supported by the people" said KCR.

"Public representatives should not indulge in false talk. Don't make false promises to people that you will get all the works done overnight. Prepare a proper planning to undertake

any work or task. Develop towns and cities with people's participation. Have less photo-ops, concentrate and focus more on executing the works," said CM.

"The term Municipality has become a synonym for drainage, dirt and garbage. Baidia (Municipality) became a second name for corruption. It is often referred among the people that Baidia, Khaya, Peeya, Chaldiya (staff came, ate, drank and left). To remove the bad name, transparent policies should be adapted. There should be a non-corrupt system in place. The town's progress should be based on proper planning. It should not be haphazard. It should be in your hands to change the towns and cities as the best ones among others in the country," the CM remarked.

Cong leaders boycott Municipal Sannam, allege its mere 'show'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The leaders of Congress party boycotted the meeting convened by the Chief Minister with newly elected mayors, chairpersons, commissioners and MLAs to formulate programmes on proposed Pattana Pragathi, held at Pragathi Bhavan on Tuesday. The Congress leaders alleged that the municipal elections were held with several illegal activities like distribution of money, liquor and misuse of power. Congress also alleged that the election commission conducted municipal elections with partial attitude.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said that the Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao convened a meeting to boast his 'show', instead the meeting was meant to discuss about the policy decisions including Secretariat shifting, appointment of RTI Commissioners, industrial policy and others.

"How can the Opposition parties attend the meeting held to boast about KCR and TRS?" he said.

Another Congress MLA Komatireddy Rajagopal



How can the Opposition parties attend the meeting held to boast about KCR and TRS? — MALLU BHATTI VIKRAMARKA TS CLP leader

Reddy alleged that KCR has no belief in democracy. There is no need for the Congress MLAs to attend the meetings convened by KCR.

"We would have attended the meet if KCR accepts our suggestions and advices. How can we attend the meet when KCR has no belief in democracy," Rajagopal Reddy said.

KCR is treating Telangana as he is the 'jagirdar' (Landlord) of state, Rajagopal Reddy said.



Cong will not react to cheap comments of MIM: Hussain

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka Sayeed Nasir Hussain has opined that small party like MIM makes statements to remain in the news.

Hussain said that MIM party wants to prove its presence by criticising Congress party. He said that the Congress party will not react to the cheap comments.

It may be recalled here that MIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi criticised Congress party in Karnataka state alleging that the Congress will never come to power again.

Speaking to the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Tuesday, Hussain said that one can understand that the BJP is against Daliths and Minorities while seeing the developments taking place in the nation since 2014.

Komatireddy urges Kiran Rijiju to construct sports complex at Bhongir

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress MP from Bhongir Komatireddy Venkat Reddy has urged the Union Minister of State of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports Kiran Rijiju to construct a multi-purpose sports complex in his Lok Sabha constituency.

Venkat Reddy explained Union Minister that there is a 700-feet height hill in Bhongir where Maloth Purna, who scaled Everest mountain, practiced. Komatireddy said that there are many lakes and tanks in his constituency and urged the minister to encourage water games in his constituency.

The Congress MP said that the future generations would be benefited if constructed sports complex in Bhongir. Several



youth come forward to practice sports if provided these sorts of facilities to the youth.

Later, Komatireddy Venkat Reddy said that the Union Minister responded in positive-

ly assuring that he will sanction the sports complex. Komatireddy said that the State Sports Minister V Srinivas Goud also assured to allocate land in this regard.

TRS-BJP political slugfest at railways...

Continued from Page 1

They have given a fitting reply to the TRS government in the Lok Sabha elections by giving support in a big way. Four MPs have won. By defeating Chief Minister's daughter, people have given a befitting reply to the state government to not differentiate, but implement all of the Centre's schemes."

Speaking on CAA, Piyush termed the state cabinet as 'unfortunate' to revert its decision. He said, "His son and only important minister of his government, KTR at a summit on news channel said the Centre and state have to work together, even I felt good. I want the state government to take back the baseless decision.

The state government, which is trying to bring reservation based on religion, has no right to tell us how to function about dharma."

He alleged that the Government of Telangana had been reduced to acting on the instructions of AIMIM chief Owaisi who was outrightly indulging in religious politics and hoped that wiser counsel would prevail in Telangana.

He said, "I feel sorry that the Telangana Cabinet met yesterday and passed resolution to abrogate CAA. I feel sad that for the sake of appeasement, a state government is opposing central government's law. I urge the Government of Telangana not to politicize the issue on petty political and appeasement grounds.

Kin deputizing for women sarpanches irk Harish

Continued from Page 1

He admonished the youth and asked him not to repeat the mistake.

In another case, the father-in-law of a woman sarpanch attended the sammelan, instead of her, and related the problems in the panchayat to the minister. In fact, 15-20 per cent of the women sarpanches were represented at the meeting by their near and dear.

This also mirrors the fact that in 70-80 per cent of the villages with 'Mahila sarpanches', their kin are exercising real authority, thus misusing the reservation facility.

Jeevan Reddy demands TS to implement loan waiver scheme

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Congress senior leader and MLC T Jeevan Reddy on Tuesday demanded the state government to provide loans to the farmers from cooperative societies.

Questioning the state government to tell as to when it will implement the loan waiver scheme, Jeevan Reddy demanded the state government to allot funds in the upcoming Budget-2020 to the loan waiver scheme.

The TRS government is passing the time blaming the centre, Jeevan Reddy alleged. He asking the state government to provide loans to the farmers by giving 6 per cent subsidy in interest as cooperative societies are collecting interests similar to commercial



banks. Jeevan Reddy said that Congress will celebrate Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao's birthday as 'Farmer's Day' if the latter solves the problems of the farmers. Jeevan Reddy also demanded the state government to provide beneficial price to the turmeric and red gram.

Power demand peaks...

Continued from Page 1

The consumption of power under GHMC limits last year was 1,807 MW, as against 2130 MW recorded on February 17 this year.

As the sun is shining bright far ahead of the start of real summer, the demand for power has increased. Experts suggest that the demand for power might increase to 13,000 MW mark by March this year.

However, power officials said that, despite the increase in demand, there won't be any

necessity to impose power cuts this summer.

According to senior official of TSSPDCL, the power utilities are gearing up to meet any amount of demand in summer and hence there are no plans to impose power cuts for any sector. The official said Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao had assured to help power utilities by sanctioning additional funds to purchase power from the open market to meet the increased demand and directed officials to ensure uninterrupted power supply across the state.

TS Govt staff have to wait...

Continued from Page 1

The committee was asked to submit its recommendations in six months.

However, it did not materialise due to various reasons. The early dissolution of TS Legislative Assembly in September 2018, forcing early Assembly polls in December 2018, followed by elections to gram panchayats, Lok Sabha, zilla/mandal parishads in 2019 and the municipal polls in February, coupled with the enforcement of Model Code of Conduct, are being cited by

government sources as reasons for delay in implementing the first PRC scales all these days.

However, as all elections have been held in Telangana, employees and pensioners were expecting the TRS government to act swiftly at least now on first PRC.

The government order extending the time for first PRC to submit its recommendations till December 31, 2020 comes as a shocker.

Ironically, KCR made a statement on November 10, 2019, when TSRTC employees' indefinite strike was at its

peak, that the PRC report would be obtained within 10 days.

The dwindling revenues of the state government partly due to economic slowdown and cuts in central grants are believed to have forced the government to delay implementing the first PRC scales.

Employees have been demanding a 67 per cent fitment (hike) benefit, but Finance Department officials are saying that due to financial crisis, the government is not in position to meet their demand.

Deliver or quit: KCR to Mayors and civic chiefs

Continued from Page 1

The conference discussed the modalities of the proposed 10-day Pattana Pragathi programme. The CM interacted with Mayors, Chairpersons, Municipal Commissioners, Collectors and Additional Collectors, among other officials. Ministers, Government's Chief Advisor Rajiv Sharma, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar, DGP M Mahender Reddy, Principal Secretary (MA&UD) Arvind Kumar, MLAs, Mayors, Chairpersons, Municipal Commissioners, Collectors and Additional Collectors participated in the conference.

The Chief Minister laid down the guidelines and unveiled a road map for Pattana Pragathi

- Prepare annual, five-year ward-wise plans, taking opinions of people's committees.
- The rule of thumb is: How should a model town and city look like? Remove garbage, clean drainage every day, supply safe drinking water daily, ensure proper street lighting, ensure roads do not have potholes, and nurture greenery.
- Construct public toilets for the use of local residents as well as floating public. Utilize government lands to construct public toilets.
- Create zones in towns and cities for the benefit of street vendors and ensure proper infrastructure there. Till then, do not trouble street vendors.
- Create parking places for autos, taxis, and public transport vehicles. The government will empower Collectors to utilize government places for the purpose.
- Remove twisted or rusting poles and those that are in the midst of roads. Remove transformers on footpaths. Rectify power lines hanging dangerously.
- Civic officials should take responsibility for growing plants in towns and cities. They should ensure 85 per cent survival of the plants.
- Distribute separate dustbins to each household for disposing dry and wet garbage. Arrange adequate number of vehicles to transport garbage from homes. The government has decided to engage 3,100 vehicles all over the State.
- Purchase and employ machines to clean drains.
- For urban local bodies, the government will give Rs 148 crore from the Finance Commission funds per month. There should be financial discipline while spending these funds. Allocate 10 per cent of the funds for greenery. MPs, MLAs and MLCs should spend their constituency development funds.
- Enhance public awareness on the new Municipal Act. The government has brought in a system to ensure easy permissions for the construction of houses and sanction of layouts. Strict action will be taken if someone gives false information or indulges in illegal construction.
- The government will soon be taking up a programme to make Telangana State a totally literate State. Everyone should take up responsibility for turning illiterates into literates.

1 killed, 6 hurt as car...

Continued from Page 1

CCTV footage obtained from a camera right below the crash site showed visuals of the car hurtling down the flyover and crashing on the road. The area underneath the flyover serves as a popular vegetable market, which, because of night fall, had only a few workers when the mishap took place.

According to an auto driver who lives nearby, the workers narrowly escaped being crushed, as they started running the moment they heard a loud crash when the car hit the flyover's railing.

The car, registered in the name of a Gopal Goud L, has unpaid challans from the year

2014 worth Rs 840. The Sanath Nagar Police have registered a case.

The crash site drew a huge number of curious passersby who peeped from the top to catch a glimpse of the crashed car below, causing a traffic jam, with vehicles being stuck as far as two kilometres away.

In the previous incident, a speeding car fell off the newly inaugurated Biodiversity Flyover on November 23 last year, killing a woman and injuring four others underneath.

Although the Raidurgam Police have concrete evidence of over speeding by the driver of the car, the accused, identified as Kalvakuntla Krishna Milan Rao, has not been arrested yet.

SHORT READS



Vice President to attend Shivarathri celebrations at Isha Yoga Centre

COIMBATORE: Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu will participate in the Mahashivarathri celebrations at Isha Yoga Centre near here on February 21. Tight security cover will be made in and around the city during Naidu's visit, police said on Tuesday. Naidu is expected to arrive in the city around noon on Friday and will head to Isha Yoga Centre, some 25 km away, by helicopter as per the initial travel plan. Security will be tightened across the 25-km stretch as Naidu is expected to return to the city by road in the night and stay at Circuit House, police sources said. The Mahashivarathri celebrations will commence at 6 p.m and go on till 6 a.m the next day, in front of 112-feet tall Adiyogi statue where Isha Foundation founder Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev will join thousands of people from all over the world.

Maha: Thane Mayor announces crackdown on hawkers

THANE: Thane mayor Naresh Mhaske announced a crackdown on hawkers in the city and directed the Thane Municipal Corporation to ensure that roads and footpaths are hawker-free. Addressing a meet at the civic body in Maha's Thane city on Monday, he said footpaths and roads were meant for citizens and they should be free at all times. "I want torid footpaths and roads of hawkers for Thane citizens," he said. "Even if hawkers' associations agitate against me, take out a morcha or burn my effigy I don't care. I will ensure that roads and footpaths are free of hawkers," the mayor said. He directed the civic administration to act on the matter immediately.



Kejriwal meets LG Anil Baijal

NEW DELHI: AAP Convener Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday met Lt Governor Anil Baijal, a day after the Delhi chief minister and his cabinet colleagues took charge of their respective offices. An official said the meeting took place at the LG Secretariat. The meeting comes a day before the first cabinet meeting of the new AAP government.

Which side are you on - Godse or Gandhi?: Kishor to Nitish

PNS ■ PATNA

Poll strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor on Tuesday mocked Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for aligning with the BJP in his quest for power, and said the JD(U) leader cannot be wedded to Gandhian ideals and stand with those who support Godse at the same time.

Addressing a crowded press conference here, the first since his expulsion from the JD(U), which Kumar heads, Kishor asserted that the chief minister has been a "father figure" to him even before he formally joined the party and so he wished to speak no ill of him.

Kishor, however, acknowledged that he had differences with Kumar over the contradiction in his avowed commitment to the principles of Gandhi and his tie-up with the BJP, the party the poll strategist sought to identify with the Mahatma's assassin Nathuram Godse.

"Nitish ji has always said that he cannot leave the ideals of Gandhi, JP and Lohia... At the same time, how can he be with the people who support the ideology of Godse? Both cannot go together. If you want to stay with the BJP, I don't have any problem with it but you cannot be on both sides," Kishor said.

"There has been a lot of dis-



cussion between me and Nitish ji on this. He has his thought process and I have mine. There have been differences between him and me that the ideologies of Godse and Gandhi cannot stand together. As the leader of the party you have to say which side you are on," he added.

He also said that unlike the JD(U) rank and file for whom he cannot leave the ideals of Gandhi, JP and Lohia... At the same time, how can he be with the people who support the ideology of Godse? Both cannot go together. If you want to stay with the BJP, I don't have any problem with it but you cannot be on both sides," Kishor said.

"There has been a lot of dis-

fame was his handling of Narendra Modi's prime ministerial campaign of 2014, seemed to be still smarting under Kumar's statement that he was inducted into the JD(U) on the recommendation of Amit Shah.

"My association with various political parties as a strategist is well known. I have never kept it a secret. But I had not joined the JD(U) as an agent of some other party. If speaking a lie makes things easier for Nitish Kumar, then I grant this to a man who is like a father figure to me," he said.

Kishor said that in 2014, when Kumar had fought the Lok Sabha polls alone after having parted ways with the BJP and was drubbed, return-

ing with only two seats, "he was still the pride of Bihar." "Compare that with the situation today when a Gujarati leader from another party (an allusion to Shah) has to give the assurance that Kumar will be the NDA leader in the assembly polls as if he was not the leader of the people of the state but a manager of a firm," Kishor said.

— PRASHANT KISHOR
Poll strategist-turned-politician

INX MEDIA CASE

Court directs CBI to hand over certain documents to PC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court directed the CBI on Tuesday to hand over to P Chidambaram and his son Karti certain documents filed along with the charge sheet in the INX Media corruption case. Special Judge Ajay Kumar Kuhar issued the direction to the CBI during the hearing in the INX Media corruption case. The court was also hearing the money laundering case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate.

The Chidambarams were present in the court.

Chidambaram was taken into custody on August 21 when he was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in INX Media corruption case.

On October 16, the ED arrested him in the separate money-laundering case.

Six days later, on October 22, the apex court had granted him bail in the case lodged by the CBI.

On December 4, after 105



Special Judge Ajay Kumar Kuhar issued the direction to the CBI during the hearing in the INX Media corruption case. The court was also hearing the money laundering case lodged by the Enforcement Directorate

days of custody, Chidambaram was granted bail by the Supreme Court in the money laundering case lodged by the ED.

Karti is also currently out on bail in both cases.

CBI had registered its case on May 15, 2017, alleging

irregularities in a Foreign Investment Promotion Board clearance granted to INX Media group for receiving overseas funds of Rs 305 crore in 2007 during Chidambaram's tenure as finance minister. Thereafter, ED had lodged the money laundering case.

Delhi court sends Sharjeel to judicial custody till March 3

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court Tuesday sent Sharjeel Imam, named as an "instigator" by Delhi Police in its charge sheet on violent protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) at New Friends Colony here last year, to judicial custody till March 3.

Imam was arrested on sedition charges last month in a separate case.

The police has filed the charge sheet before Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gurmohina Kaur, naming Imam as an instigator of the violence.

It said it has attached CCTV footage, call detail records and statements of over 100 witnesses as evidence in the charge sheet.

The court had on Monday sent Imam to one-day custody of Delhi Police in the case as it wanted to quiz him because an accused - Furkan - in the December 15, 2019 violence case has alleged in his disclosure statement that he was provoked by Imam's speeches.

The police had earlier told the court that Furkan was arrested on the basis of a CCTV footage which showed him carrying a container allegedly containing petrol.

Four people were arrested in the case on December 16 and sent to judicial custody. Furkan was arrested later.



The police has filed the charge sheet before Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gurmohina Kaur, naming Imam as an instigator of the violence

Imam, who came into the limelight during the ongoing protests at Shaheen Bagh here against the CAA and the National Register of Citizens, was arrested from Bihar's Jehanabad on January 28 in a separate case for allegedly making inflammatory speeches at the Jamia Millia Islamia University here and in Aligarh.

A case had been registered against him on sedition and other charges on January 26.

Guj: Satellite phone found on island

PNS ■ BHUJ

A local fisherman allegedly recovered a satellite phone on an island near Kandla port in Gujarat's Kutch district, an official said on Tuesday.

The police has launched a probe into the recovery of the Inmarsat satellite phone, which was found on Papparva island, superintendent of police (Kutch-East) Parikshita Rathod said.

The fisherman on Monday approached the police with the satellite phone, which he mistook for a mobile phone, when he found it on the island near jetty number 10 of the Kandla port on February 3, she said.

"While the island is uninhabited, local fishermen go there to dry their catch," Rathod said.

He took the phone to a local mobile shop to buy a SIM card on Monday and was informed that it wasn't a regular cellphone, the official said. As per preliminary investigation, the satellite phone is not active and call record details will be extracted soon based on the IMEI number, she added.

Fadnavis govt misused police in Elgar Parishad case: Pawar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Tuesday claimed that the previous Devendra Fadnavis-led government in Maharashtra had misused police machinery in the Elgar Parishad case.

The former Union minister also said the Elgar Parishad case and the case of violence at Koregaon-Bhima in Pune district on January 1, 2018, were two completely different cases.

Talking to reporters here, Pawar said the Fadnavis-led BJP government and the Pune police "misused" their power in Elgar Parishad case. He demanded that an SIT be appointed to probe the conduct of Pune police and the misuse of power by the Fadnavis-led government.

The Centre transferred the case from the state to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) fearing that the truth would be out, Pawar said.

The activists in the Elgar Parishad case could be termed as aggressive but not anti-nationals, he said.



The former Union minister also said the Elgar Parishad case and the case of violence at Koregaon-Bhima in Pune district on January 1, 2018, were two completely different cases

The violence at Koregaon-Bhima was the result of a "different atmosphere" created by Hindutva activists Milind Ekbote and Sambhaji Bhide, he said. Cases were also registered by Pune police against those who were neither involved with Elgar Parishad nor the Koregaon-Bhima violence, he said.

The matter relates to alleged inflammatory speeches delivered at the Elgar Parishad conclave, held at Shaniwarwada in Pune on December 31, 2017, which the police claimed, triggered violence near the Koregaon-Bhima war memorial in the

district the next day. The Pune Police have claimed the conclave was backed by Maoists.

During the probe, the Pune police arrested Left-leaning activists Sudhir Dhawale, Rona Wilson, Surendra Gadling, Mahesh Raut, Shoma Sen, Arun Ferreira, Vernon Gonsalves, Sudha Bharadwaj and Varavara Rao for alleged Maoist links. They have been booked under relevant sections of the IPC and anti-terror law UAPA.

The Pune court hearing the Elgar Parishad case has transferred it to the special NIA court in Mumbai.



BJP appoints observer to select leader of Legislative party

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP has appointed its national general secretary Saroj Pandey as observer for selecting the leader of its Legislative party in the Delhi Assembly, a party statement said on Tuesday.

It also appointed its national general secretary P Muralidhar Rao as an observer for selecting the leader of its Legislative party in the Jharkhand Assembly.

The appointments were made with the approval of the party President JP Nadda, the statement said.

The AAP bagged 62 of the 70 assembly seats in the just concluded polls in Delhi.

Won't hand over Koregaon-Bhima probe to Centre: Uddhav

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday said his government will not hand over

the probe in the Koregaon-Bhima violence case to the Centre. The violence was a result of the alleged inflammatory speeches delivered at the Elgar Parishad conclave at Shaniwarwada in Pune on December 31, 2017. The Maharashtra government

had recently okayed the handing over of investigation into the Elgar Parishad case to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

"Elgar and Koregaon-Bhima are two separate topics. The issue facing my Dalit brothers is about Koregaon-Bhima and I will not give it to the Centre. I want to make it clear that there will be no injustice to Dalit brothers," Thackeray tweeted.



Kamal Nath denies being angry with Scindia

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Tuesday denied being angry with Congress general secretary Jyotiraditya Scindia, who last week threatened to hit the streets against the state government over non-fulfillment of promises made in the poll manifesto.

"When I have never been angry with (former chief minister and BJP national vice president) Shivraj Singh Chouhan, how come I can be with Scindia," Nath told

reporters here on the sidelines of a programme, when asked about his party colleague.

While mentioning Chouhan, he was apparently referring to the frequent criticism of the state Congress government by the senior BJP leader.

At a public rally in Tikamgarh last Thursday, Scindia threatened that he would hit the streets if promises made in the



Congress' manifesto before the 2018 Madhya Pradesh polls and demands of guest teachers in the state are not fulfilled.

Responding to it, Nath on Saturday said, "Toh woh tu jaaye (let him do so)."

Later on Sunday, Scindia reiterated he is a public servant and will hit the streets if promises made in the poll mani-

festos are not fulfilled, but also

said there is a need to be patient with the Kamal Nath government as it has completed only a year.

Scindia was one of the front-runners for the post of Madhya Pradesh chief minister after the Congress defeated the BJP in the Assembly polls held in December 2018.

The Congress, however, decided to go with senior leader Kamal Nath, leaving several in the Scindia camp unhappy.

Scindia later lost the Lok Sabha polls last year from home turf Guna.

Maria claims top cops knew Sheena Bora case accused socially

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Former Mumbai police commissioner Rakesh Maria has claimed his successor Ahmad Javed knew Sheena Bora murder case accused Indrani and Peter Mukerjea socially, and that Peter also knew the then Joint Commissioner of Police (law and order) Deven Bharti on "first name terms".

Maria, who investigated some high-profile cases like the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts and also headed probe in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, made the revelation in his memoir 'Let Me Say It Now' released on Monday.

Bharti, now Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS)



According to excerpts from the memoir, during interrogation in the murder case, Peter Mukerjea told Maria that he had approached Deven Bharti in 2012 to complain about Sheena Bora going missing

chief, rejected the claim, saying it appears to be a marketing strategy for the book which attempts to grab more eyeballs rather than place facts. Peter Mukerjea was arrested

on November 19, 2015 in the Sheena Bora murder case, in which his former wife Indrani Mukerjea is the main accused. Sheena Bora, 24, was Indrani Mukerjea's daughter from an

earlier relationship. The killing came to light in 2015 when Indrani Mukerjea's driver Shyamwar Rai, who had helped them dispose of the body, was arrested in another case.

Rai later turned an approver in the case. As per Maria's book, Peter Mukerjea knew Deven Bharti "on first name terms". Maria has also written that Javed also knew the Mukerjeas socially, adding they

were invitees to the latter's Eid party. According to excerpts from the memoir, during interrogation in the murder case, Peter Mukerjea told Maria that he had approached Deven Bharti in 2012 to complain about Sheena Bora going missing. The book mentions that when Maria asked Peter Mukerjea about "doing nothing" when he found out about Sheena's sudden disappearance,

he replied, "Sir, I had told Deven!"

Recalling Mukerjea's interrogation, Maria said, "That night I couldn't sleep a wink. The thought uppermost in my mind was to find out the exact meaning of what Peter had told me in the evening."

"It meant that Peter Mukerjea knew Deven Bharti on first name terms. And I had not known this all these days. Morever, Deven Bharti had not thought it fit to tell me even once that the Mukerjeas were close to him," he says in the book. Maria claimed that whenever he would discuss with Bharti the mystery of non-registration of missing complaint or accidental death report, he would keep silent.

TN CM accuses DMK of deceiving people over CAA

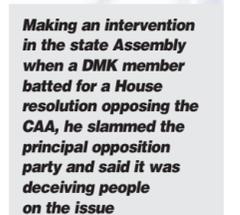
PNS ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K Palaniswami on Tuesday accused the DMK of deceiving the people over the CAA and dared it to explain "which minority" community has been affected by the law in the state. Making an intervention in the state assembly when a DMK member batted for a House resolution opposing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, he slammed the principal opposition party and said it was deceiving the people on the issue.

The assembly, debating the 2020-21 budget, witnessed exchanges over the controversial law even as protests by Muslims against it continued for the fifth day at Old Washermanpet here.

Speaking on the budget, DMK MLA T Mano

Thangaraj favoured an anti-CAA resolution in the House. Intervening, Palaniswami, who had been maintaining that the government will not allow anything that may affect the minorities, sought to turn the tables on the DMK and asked it to give details about those affected by the citizenship act. "Which minority is affected in Tamil Nadu? We are not acting (deceiving) like



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you (DMK)," he said. When Thangaraj, defended his position and pointed to resolutions against the CAA in some states, the Chief Minister said the law related to Citizenship came under the domain of the Central government and not the state. IUML member KAM Muhammed Abubacker too spoke and pointed to apprehensions vis-a-vis the CAA.

Message of Shaheen Bagh

SC appoints mediators for shifting women-led protests on the CAA. Should the Govt not have done this instead?



In the end, the executive abdicated its responsibility and left it to the judiciary to tackle civil unrest in the country that has risen in opposition to its new profile-linked citizenship law. And the highest court of the land, the Supreme Court, had to intervene to settle the issue of moving protesters at Shaheen Bagh, the epicentre of a relentless people's struggle against a law that violates the Constitutional spirit of equality of all religions. Addressing a clutch of petitions against the protesters that were pushed in a surrogate manner, the court

did not denounce their stance and upheld what it has before, that citizens have a democratic right to disagree and be heard. But considering the sit-in on a public road had stretched to over two months and was obstructing traffic and public convenience, the court said that the protest site should be relocated to avert a crisis. Yet it did not pare the protesters down with dictated choices of sites but sent in mediators to work out a deal. The Shaheen Bagh women, who have never refused a dialogue, had gone public with their desire to meet the Home Minister and Prime Minister, but it was the Government which did not honour the rules of civil engagement and instead demonised them as enemies of the State. Had it indeed mastered statecraft, it could have made a virtue of the negotiations, used them for explanatory propaganda on the new law and avoided a conflagration that ultimately burnt it badly. Now as many Shaheen Baghs and dissent movements have erupted across the country, will the Government squander away its political mandate as an administrator or create new binaries for electoral politics? Will it be a reconciler of diversity or just the interpreter of societal maladies?

There is nothing wrong with the BJP Government justifying its ideological pitch but when in governance, it cannot be seen as abetting a civil war. Particularly when the women-led protest at Shaheen Bagh swiftly turned into civil society's spontaneous combustion and powered the Opposition. Primarily because the women of Shaheen Bagh had taken a high moral ground when they started out, reading the Preamble and positing themselves as citizens who shouldn't be defined by exclusion as opposed to the establishment's determination to brand them anti-Hindu. As all religions made common cause with them, the BJP turned them into a test case of nationalism, lionising them with its intolerance. So what began as an anti-establishment forum was needlessly elevated to a referendum on whether minority intrusion can disrupt a majority lives — in this case, blockade-hit Delhiites — on whether there was a mini-Pakistan that needs to be surgically cut out from the heart of the city. Clearly, the BJP is solely responsible for terming every democratic disagreement as a treacherous feat, even making its core voter deeply uncomfortable. Yes, the women blocked traffic because that's the only way they could make people sit up but it was the BJP which gave shelf life to the sit-in, prolonging it for intended political gains, adamant in rejecting overtures and scoring a self-goal by weaponising it for the Delhi Assembly elections. Even the women pointed out that their protest was not a civic issue but a national one and, therefore, were unconcerned about the buzz around them. The Delhi voter, in the end, chose a "doing" Government rather than a "blaming" one. Had the BJP been smart, it could have attempted reconciliation talks. Considering the city-state's law and order is a Central subject, it could have worked around the traffic mess. By engaging with the women, it would have not only demonstrated seriousness of intent, it could have been seen as an expert negotiator, one who attempted to clear misconceptions around the CAA. Clearly, the Government's mishandling of Shaheen Bagh has blown up in its face and compelled it to eat humble pie. The Prime Minister had to clarify that CAA "does not affect Indian Muslims" and that there was no talk of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) yet. Home Minister Amit Shah had to simmer down on NRC after declaring in Parliament that every infiltrator would be thrown out and even admit that aggressive and polarising rhetoric had cost the BJP the Delhi election. It's a different matter though that the National Population Register (NPR) can be used to harvest profile-based data still, something that the civil protest movements are now questioning, too. This has forced the Government to concede that respondents wouldn't be needed to show any papers. It is in this sense that the Shaheen Bagh protests have been successful compared to other protests before; they have forced a systemic reaction. And with mini protests acquiring gale force, the Modi Government can no longer afford to be in a victim or petitioner mode. It cannot be a denier anymore, it has to seize the discourse. Or be horribly out of sync with what India wants.

Too little to charge

Let's not get excited by the discovery of lithium reserves. They are not enough to fuel India's electric ambitions



The discovery of an estimated reserve of 14,000 tonnes of lithium ore in Mandya, 100 km from Bengaluru, has gotten several people excited. Rightly so, because this metal is one of the key components for Lithium-ion batteries and is a crucial building block for electric vehicles, which many believe, will be the future of India, indeed for global mobility. But there's no need to get overly excited about this. In terms of reserves, it is less than half a per cent of the total deposits found in Chile, which along with Bolivia, holds some of the world's largest stocks of this key material. By some estimates, India will need over a million tonnes of lithium ore in the next two decades to ensure half its vehicle fleet is able to drive on electric vehicle battery. So, 14,000 tonnes of lithium ore cannot even power the electric vehicles that will be needed in Bengaluru and its suburbs alone. This discovery should, however, be used as an opportunity to further mineral exploration. Low on reserves, we have to import minerals and metals worth billions of dollars — crude oil to gold — from nations across the world. We have to become more pro-active in tapping deposits and maximising their potential. This small finding should spur Indian companies and the Government to look for other key resources for the future like rare-earth metals — a sector where China commands a near-global monopoly.

India should also carefully evaluate technologies that can be used to power the future. In mobility, this could involve discussions around hydrogen-based fuel-cell technologies that are less dependent on lithium resources. While hydrogen extraction technologies are currently expensive and energy negative, the dramatic lowering of unit costs of solar and wind energy can allow for sufficient hydrogen generation, which can also use the existing fuel-retail system. India should not become beholden to another set of resource-rich countries. Policy-makers have to be extremely careful about which path the country will take. They must not give in to half-baked ideas by motivated parties. Our bureaucrats and politicians must be very careful and make serious considerations about India's future because their decisions will decide which path the country will take and the impact it will have in the next five or six decades. We cannot afford to lose more decades as we have already wasted the first two this millennium.

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Now, a green fund

The Finance Commission must be lauded for including forest cover in the mix for allocation of tax resources. States must respect this and do their bit in conserving it



VK BAHUGUNA

One of the keys to improving Centre-State relations and ensuring development is even-handed and judicious distribution of tax revenue and other forms of earning between the federal and State Governments. The Finance Commission of India is a unique constitutional body that is periodically set up under Article 280 of the Constitution to define financial relations between the Central and State Governments. It lays down a set of principles that determines the method and formula for the distribution of tax proceeds between both Governments.

A majority of the taxes such as Customs duty, income tax, service tax and Central excise are collected by the Centre. States were given the mandate to provide economic and social services to the people. They are empowered to levy income tax on agricultural earnings, professional tax, value added tax (VAT), State excise duty, land revenue and stamp duty. Hence, the Finance Commission was created to address issues of vertical and horizontal imbalances of federal finances in India.

The 15th Finance Commission, which was established to decide on the devolution of taxes and other receipts to the Centre and States for the next five years beginning April 2020, submitted its recommendations before the Central Government last December. The Commission used the population data of 2011 while making its recommendations and for the first time, in addition to income distance, population and area and forest cover, it used two additional factors — demographic performance and tax effort — to determine the tax pool of States.

The Commission's usage of the 2011 population figures gave rise to considerable controversies. While the 14th Finance Commission had taken the 1971 census as the base with a weightage of 17.5 per cent and assigned a weightage of 10 per cent to the 2011 population figures, the present one has kept the weightage of 2011 population at 15 per cent and has given additional 12.5 per cent to demographic performance. The use of 2011 data has benefitted some States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar while others have been disadvantaged.

Most States in southern India, except Tamil Nadu, feel that they are suffering because of their policy of population control. They believe they will get a smaller share of the pie if the population dispensation is applied. However, according to the Economic Survey, 2016, inter-State labour mobility averaged 5-6.5 million people between 2001 and 2011, yielding an inter-State migrant population of about 60 million and an inter-district migration as high as 80 million. Apart from the southern States, Assam, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha, Punjab and West Bengal, too, saw



a dip in population compared to the 1971 census. The 15th Finance Commission was critical of the Union and State Governments' tendency to finance spending through off-budget borrowings, too. On this front, it called upon both to phase out off-budget liabilities.

Irrespective of the surrounding controversies, the Commission made it clear that it wants to play a key role in fostering sustainable development. It must be noted that the 14th Commission had accepted it as a criterion to determine the share of taxes to various States. This is why "forest cover" was assigned 7.5 per cent weightage. The 15th Finance Commission sought to raise the area cover to 10 per cent in order to reward States that have "provided ecological services" to the country.

However, it is distressing that none of the States has been liberal in granting funds to the forest department commensurate to the contribution the forests have made in getting funds. The enhancement of funds to States — from 7.5 per cent to 10 per cent — if implemented, can go a long way in protecting the country's ecological frontiers. This can also lead

to the economic well-being of the people and the country and help consolidate forest resources as well.

The importance of the maintenance of forest-like buildings and roads was first recognised by the 13th Finance Commission, which earmarked ₹1,000 crore and called upon the States to manage ecology, environment and climate change, consistent with sustainable development. This fund was kept at the disposal of the Government of India and was released to States on a project basis. This helped a great deal in maintaining forests across the country.

However, the actual spending on forests by States, after the 14th Finance Commission grants, has not been very encouraging when compared to the intention of the criterion to strengthen forest cover base. The *State of Forest Report 2019* released by the Forest Survey of India recorded a marginal increase of 5,188 sq km in total forest and tree cover in the country. However, it gave a dismal picture in tribal areas (where the forest cover has gone down by 741 sq km). With regard to the disappearance of higher girth class trees in

forests due to poor regeneration and protection, the report, if examined critically, indicates the urgent need to spend money on natural forests. Yet another important issue that needs to be dealt with is to address the concern of States, which have less forest cover. We need to step up efforts to cover more areas through agroforestry, farm forestry, block plantations, urban and peri-urban forestry among other efforts.

Efficient fiscal management goals of the Commission cannot be achieved unless we have an effective monitoring system in place. The 15th Finance Commission should follow the pattern of the 13th Finance Commission, which recommend *inter alia* that a portion of the divisible pool of tax within the forest criterion should be retained with the Government of India to be sanctioned by the Ministry of Finance and Environment, Forest and Climate Change, for the maintenance of forests.

It would be appropriate to ensure third-party monitoring of the use of the grant to States so that misuse or arbitrary or unauthorised use of the funds can be checked. Further, for monitoring and

evaluation of the works undertaken through the Finance Commission Awards, States should opt for certification of forests. This can help promote sustainable forest management and at the same time provide space for international markets for procurement of forest products.

Further, the Commission should put a complete ban on the freebie culture of politicians, who are more interested in votebank politics. If need be, it must ask the Government to amend the Constitution. The Prime Minister must think about curbing the freebie culture sooner than later. At the same time, the Election Commission must ensure political consensus on this. A group of retired forest officers had sought time from the Chairman of the Finance Commission to submit a memorandum on these issues so that the Commission's own recommendations lead to desired effects on the country's economy and on conservation of forests, water and bio-diversity. A forest governance policy must pay attention to the multiple ways in which our green cover is valuable.

(The writer is a retired civil servant)

SOUNDBITE

Nitishji has always said that he cannot leave the ideals of Gandhi, JP and Lohia... At the same time, how can he be with the people who support the ideology of Godse?



Political strategist — Prashant Kishor

I was also a newcomer at one point of time, I'm only four years old here. I am no veteran. Every film is a new film. I am as new as the director for that film and story.



Actor — Vicky Kaushal

Using funds of peacekeeping operations for other requirements, while payments for peacekeeping remain, is not only bad accounting practice but also tends to be interpreted as bad faith.



Indian Envoy — Syed Akbaruddin

If NRC is implemented, it will affect not only Hindus or Muslims but also Adivasis. NPR is a census, and I don't find anyone will be affected as it happens every 10 years.



Maharashtra CM — Udhav Thackeray

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Together, we can

Sir — The forthcoming visit of Donald Trump to India is unique not only because this will be his first since he became the US President but also because it comes soon after his acquittal in the impeachment trial by the US Senate. Besides, he is also one of the frontrunners for the US elections later this year and enjoys record-high popularity back home.

Relations between the US and India have seen an upswing in recent years. The US considers India a key player in the Indo-Pacific region. Bilateral trade, both goods and services, touched \$142 billion in 2018. But there's a lot that is left to be desired and worked on.

Importantly, Trump considers India to be among those nations taking trade advantage of the US. Since long, America has been averse to India's intellectual policy legal framework and some investment restrictions. India, on the other hand, believes that under Trump's presidency, the US has taken a more rigid stance; new tariffs have been introduced for new products. But both nations have a com-

Wall to hide misdeeds and guilt

The construction of a wall in front of a slum along the road connecting Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport to the Indira Bridge in Ahmedabad ahead of US President Donald Trump's state visit has rightly drawn a lot of flak. This illustrates that BJP-led Governments at the Centre and in Gujarat refuse to accept the nation as it is. This act is clearly at odds with their claims of "patriotism" and "commitment" towards the impoverished sections of the country. The Government is clearly not above conjuring a false narrative to provide an impression of "national glory." It seems that the wall is being constructed to prevent Trump's convoy from viewing the slums, which the American visitors would presumably consider "eyesores." But they should remember that slum dwellers are victims of an unjust and inequitable social order. Apart from the deprivation they already have to live with, it is inhuman to render them "invisible" in this humiliating manner.

It would be reasonable to ask why money was spent on a "beautification drive" rather than on improving the living conditions of the slum dwellers. The veneer of prosperity created to impress a world-



leader dehumanises millions of poverty-stricken Indians, who are unlikely to be represented at the "Namaste, President Trump" event in Ahmedabad. One is reminded of Rabindranath Tagore's words, "Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before the insolent might." Those in power would do well to live by them.

G David Milton Maruthancode

mon agenda too: To challenge a rising and aggressive China and create a new rules-based order in East Asia. Challenges faced by both are entirely different in nature and it's difficult to find common ground. Yet, both nations must unite and plan the

way forward strategically. A "mini trade" deal may not help iron out differences but is of utmost importance for India, given its economy is in the midst of a slowdown at the moment.

Ganapathi Bhat Akola

Better late than never

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Lead from the front" (February 18). The Supreme Court's ruling, asking the Government to ensure that all women officers are given

permanent commission besides making them eligible for command posting at par with male officers, is historic.

It's shocking that despite the Army facing shortage of officers in support services, it let go of trained women officers. Time and again women have proved their mettle in all spheres. They are not in any way inferior to male counterparts. It's about time that we realise and acknowledge their contribution wholeheartedly and give them their due respect.

Bal Govind Noida

Shameful incident

Sir — It is shameful that more than 60 girl students were forced to strip in an administrative check about whether they were menstruating or not at a college in Gujarat's Bhuj. The Government needs to keep a check on the norms laid down and take action against them. There should be uniformity in policy and rules.

Shashi Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

What lies ahead for social sector

As India will be home to the largest working population in the world by 2030, health and education are key areas it must focus on



URVASHI PRASAD



SARAH IYPE

At the start of the new decade, the much-awaited Budget 2020-21 set the tone for the year ahead. With the core themes of "Aspirational India", "Economic Development" and "Caring Society", health and education feature as cross-cutting elements, critical for driving inclusive growth. As a prelude to the New Education Policy, the Budget had some key announcements on higher education, in particular. First, leveraging the triple helix model of innovation and ensuring greater university-Government-industry linkage, 150 institutes will initiate apprenticeship-embedded courses by next year. As India stands at the threshold of the fourth Industrial Revolution, this move will facilitate the generation of a skilled workforce, ready to be absorbed by the industry.

Second, in a novel step to promote greater access, the Budget also announced that the top 100 institutes in the National Institute Ranking Framework will launch exclusive online education programmes. Third, diversifying the options for further study, it proposes the establishment of a National Forensic University, offering courses on niche aspects such as cyber-forensics. While these are steps in the right direction, we must be cognisant of the sheer scale of the education ecosystem. India has around 25 crore children in over 15 lakh schools, while at the higher education level there are about 3.7 crore students in 41,000 institutes. To ensure the delivery of quality education across this landscape, an emphasis on early childhood education and foundational learning is critical. Beyond the Budget, we need a nationwide call to action for a sustained effort on knowledge enhancement to enable foundational learning for all. Further, while the financial allocation to education has increased by 4.7 per cent, it falls short of the recommended level of investment at six per cent of the GDP. Opening up the sector to External Commercial Borrowings and Foreign Direct Investment may serve as an avenue for increased spending in it. Any enhancement in expenditure, of course, must be targeted at driving improvements in quality education, in sync with the need to shift the policy focus away from input and access metrics.

On health, the Budget provides an additional ₹69,000 crore. However, there is still some way to go before the 2017 National Health Policy's (NHP's) goal of raising public health spending to 2.5 per cent of the GDP by 2024-25, is achieved. Of course States, too, need to ramp up spending on health as they account for 64.4 per cent of the total Government health expenditure.

A key Budget announcement was setting up of hospitals in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode to boost the supply of health services under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, through a viability gap funding mechanism. The scheme has been fairly successful since its launch in September 2018, reaching out to over 80 lakh patients across more than 20,000 hospitals. Although the budgetary allocation for Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs), the second pillar of Ayushman Bharat, has not been enhanced, it is crucial that these Centres are operationalised in a timely manner, providing screening for non-communicable diseases in addition to reproductive, maternal and child health interventions.

Focussing on human resources is critical, not just for the health sector but also for the broader economy, given the sector's significant job-creation potential. Recognising the shortfall of medical personnel, the Budget emphasises the need for attaching medical colleges to district hospitals in PPP mode.

Furthermore, a push was made on integrating Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) with Ayushman Bharat. AI can offer an unbiased second opinion on diagnosis, treatment modalities, potential risks and predicted outcomes as well as enable health personnel to identify dormant signs of diseases. The announcement of a national-level scheme to map India's genetic landscape is another crucial move given that the answer to many diseases and their treatment, at least partly, lies in our genes. On social determinants of health, the Budget increased the allocation for nutrition-related programmes by 25 per cent and also committed to implementing the necessary steps for sustaining behaviour change in sanitation and focussing on waste management.

Overall, Budget 2020-21 included some noteworthy announcements for social sectors. However, there is much more that needs to be done if India is to truly harness the potential of its human capital for boosting economic growth. As India will be home to the largest working population in the world by 2030, health and education are key for reaping the benefits of the much talked about demographic dividend. Of course, the Union Budget is only one instrument for achieving this and much of the action, in terms of increased spending on social sectors as well as quality implementation at scale, lies in States, thus necessitating ongoing coordination between the Centre and States.

(Prasad is a public policy specialist and Iype is an education specialist. Both are with the NITI Aayog and the views expressed are personal)

THE CONGRESS PARTY ALWAYS CHOOSES TO STAND WITH THOSE WHO ARE INIMICAL TO THE COUNTRY AND RILE UP SECURITY FORCES.
 —BJP SPOKESPERSON
 GVL NARASIMHA RAO

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



WHEN POLICEMEN HIDE THE TRUTH, THERE'S NO DIALOGUE WITH THE YOUTH AND GOVT BECOMES A SLEUTH, DEMOCRACY WILL WEAKEN AT ITS ROOTS.
 —CONGRESS LEADER
 KAPIL SIBAL

Use AI to fight pandemics

The Coronavirus outbreak has called into question the ability of governments in predicting, containing and even preventing epidemics. AI and big data can be the answer



ABHINAV VERMA



YUKTI SHARMA

In 2019, the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board said that the world was not prepared for the next big pandemic, which could potentially spread between continents in 36 hours and kill up to 80 million people. It pointed out that the climate crisis, global migration and humanitarian conflicts were all breeding grounds for newer outbreaks. The Coronavirus took us by surprise, simultaneously pointing out that systems of the past decade might not be effective in tackling challenges that are taking novel shapes and forms. With one of the largest populations and widening socio-economic divides, India is vulnerable to contagions. Experts claim that this susceptibility hasn't changed much in the last 100 years, when India was one of the countries worst hit by the Spanish Influenza in 1918. We have been struggling to contain influenza and encephalitis outbreaks for the last four decades. There is a pressing need to overhaul how we respond to outbreaks, both globally and in India, keeping technology at the centre. Coronavirus' example itself shows that it was two Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled enterprises, BlueDot and Metabiota, that provided the key and life-saving insights into the containment of this viral eruption. By using Natural Language Processing (NLP), BlueDot sifts through and analyses over 10,000 articles in 65 languages, including foreign news reports, plants and animal disease networks and official proclamations, to issue warnings. It was able to catch and warn about the impending outbreak days before the official announcement was made. Similarly, Metabiota applied AI to the used travel itineraries and flight patterns to determine the likely spread of the disease. It was accurate insofar as it predicted that South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Thailand had the highest risk of the viral outbreak.

AI for comprehensive disease surveillance: As epidemics spread in phases from introduction to amplification and finally contained transmission, the response and sequence of interventions flow accordingly. Even before diseases erupt, a public health system attempts to anticipate new and re-emerging disease through early detection. Thereafter, the response strategy changes to containment, control and mitigation, followed by re-focus on eradication. Creating a technology-based intervention into pandemic management also needs to consider the response strategies commensurate with the stage of epidemical evolution.

However, technologies have a critical and more successful role to play in some phases of the response cycle as opposed to others. One such is prediction and early warnings, for which integrated disease surveillance programmes exist both in the public and private sectors. These surveillance strategies include Event-Based Surveillance (EBS) and Risk Modelling. EBS systems use unstructured data from multiple sources like internet, official reports, social media and so on, to detect and trace the evidence of an emerging threat and overlay it with traditional surveillance systems to issue public health warnings and formulate mitigation strategies. The Global Public Health Intelligence Network (GPHIN), and HealthMap, an automated electronic information system, are EBS tools that use NLP, text processing algorithms and Machine Learning (ML). These can increase the speed of identifying signs, filtering information, enhance capacity for consuming information and increase accuracy manifold.

The Program for Monitoring Emerging Diseases (ProMED), Medical Information System (MedISys) and Pattern-based Understanding and Learning System (PULS) are similar EBS tools. These systems are proving absolutely essential in disseminating information at breakneck speed, characterising transmissibility patterns, contagiousness, illnesses and

“ IN THE FIGHT AGAINST OUTBREAKS — ONE THAT THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY IS NOT WINNING — CHANNELISING THE POWER OF DATA THROUGH AI CAN BE THE PERFECT WEAPON. CORONAVIRUS AND THE SWIFTESS THAT AI-ENABLED SOLUTIONS SHOWED HERE WERE NECESSARY PROOF OF THE CONCEPT TO INCENTIVISE GREATER RESOURCES AND COLLABORATIONS IN AI-ASSISTED OUTBREAK MANAGEMENT. NOW IT IS UPON GOVERNMENTS AND MULTILATERALS TO LEAD THE WAY IN MOBILISING AI AGAINST THE NEXT VIRUS ”



deaths caused by the pathogen, aiding quicker emergency response. Risk modelling uses statistical tools to characterise and identify factors in populations or individuals that enhance their vulnerabilities to contracting a particular disease. Overlaying this data with open source internet data and climate data accounting for presence, distribution and movement of pathogens can help identify correlations that were invisible to us before. For example, in China, the cases of hand, foot and mouth disease in children were best predicted by AI models that utilised data on weekly temperature and precipitation as well as data on disease-related queries from the Chinese Baidu search engine.

Compared to these, India's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) uses manual surveillance, where data on some 24 epidemic-prone diseases is collected on a weekly basis at the primary health centre level and reported upwards. Whenever there is a rising trend of illnesses in any area, it is investigated by the Rapid Response Teams (RRT) to diagnose and control the outbreak. This system is slow and doesn't use any risk modelling for predictions. A study by the Indian Institute of Public Health, Hyderabad in 2016 pointed out that this procedure suffered a time lag from anything between three to 64 days.

The Media Scanning and Verification Cell of the IDSP was established in 2008 for early warning signals through media reports. However, this activity is limited to manually scanning newspapers/electronic media. Some technologically-adept States use Google alerts to automate the process. Needless to say, State media verification cells are unable to exhaustively scan all media sources with the swiftness that's needed to respond to outbreaks. The Health Ministry is piloting an Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) that can enable near real-time data reporting and hopes to apply modelling and GIS tools to enhance the IDSP. There exists immense scope for integrating emerging technologies within the IHIP platform. But

at present these discussions are nascent. **Focussing on holistic pandemic management:** While most technology applications in pandemic response are limited to surveillance, there is a dire need to identify intervention areas in overall pandemic management. AI can not only help us predict where the disease might be travelling to, but it can also offer insights into how people take up health services during emergencies. Accounting for health-seeking behaviours in designing response strategies can substantially boost effectiveness and success of responses.

Learning from behavioural data, ML models can identify less obvious patterns in human behaviour and disease transmission, which could enable a targeted response. This is called infodemiology, where you can integrate internet data into public health informatics to examine individual health-seeking patterns during emergencies. Google Trends Data as well as more-specific Google Dengue Trends have also been used by researchers to develop a holistic understanding of behavioural aspects of citizen response to pandemics. Such insights can be used to determine where health services are imperative to be delivered in times of shortages that mandate trade-offs. In a more mature system, one would also be able to determine if an individual or a group of people is likely to change its location, go out and seek formal assistance, or if they will adhere to treatment routines — all insights that can help authorities make better decisions.

AI-assisted genomics research is slowly emerging to be a game changer in the rapid development of treatments and vaccines for contemporary infections. Baidu has developed an algorithm that can significantly speed up RNA structure prediction and subsequently unlock the key to the virus. Developing models that can match patterns embedded in the viral genomes to their animal host and vectors that carry the virus can be a breakthrough in narrowing the search for diseases. This can lead to early interventions in controlling disease upsurge or preventing their

emergence altogether. **Building blocks for AI in pandemic response:** Building a comprehensive and accurate surveillance system requires massive amounts of quality data from different sources. Meteorological data, for instance, needs to be overlaid with vector-movements and population mobility data to accurately identify hotspots for outbreaks. This requires Government departments coming together in mission-mode and pooling their data into one consolidated programme. It also requires AI-enabled technologies to be integrated into existing workflows for pandemic management and creation of new protocols with adequate capacity-building, so its benefits can flow to all levels.

As pandemics are not constrained by national boundaries, a global surveillance system is imperative, something where multilaterals like the WHO and international foundations can play a catalytic role. Nations need to be propelled to make disease information public and if possible move towards interoperable surveillance networks that can communicate with their global counterparts.

Can AI fight the next Coronavirus is a question up for debate. But it can bolster our capacity to respond substantially, especially in disease pre-emption, design of accurate interventions and in some cases with more research investment, even prevention of outbreaks.

Therefore, in a fight against outbreaks — one that the global community is not winning — channelising the power of data through AI can be the perfect weapon. Coronavirus and the swiftness that AI-enabled solutions showed here were necessary proof of the concept to incentivise greater resources and collaborations in AI-assisted outbreak management. Now it is upon governments and multilaterals to lead the way in mobilising AI against the next virus.

(Verma is a lawyer and public policy consultant and Sharma is a software engineer. Both work with the International Innovation Corps, University of Chicago.)

Don't write the Congress off yet

It was an umbrella party at one time giving space to all shades of opinions and ideologies — the Right, Left and the Centre — and despite many splits it has survived so far. So there is no reason why it cannot do so in the future



KALYANI SHANKAR

Many people are writing off the 135-year-old Congress Party after its dismal performance in the just-concluded Delhi Assembly elections. This is because the grand old party has suffered one setback after the other since 2014, though there were some good patches in between. Now, critical questions are being raised over its survival that need to be answered by Congressmen. This is not the first time that the party is facing such a crisis. In its long history, the

Congress has been written off many times by its opponents. However, every time it rose like a phoenix from the ashes and came back to power.

The slide began in 1967 when the party lost many States. After the 1969 split, Indira Gandhi emerged successful in the 1971 mid-term poll. However, after the defeat of Indira in 1977, the party was written off. But it rallied again in 1980 and continued to rule till 1989. After VP Singh challenged Rajiv Gandhi in 1989, there were apprehensions about the Congress' survival but in 1991 the party came back to power at the head of a coalition, though it could not retain power for long.

In 1998, Sonia Gandhi took over the Congress amid panic in the party that it would perish. When no one expected the Sonia-led Congress to succeed, she formed the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and cap-

tured power in 2004. After 10 years of the UPA's rule, the party faced its worst-ever humiliation when it got just 44 seats in 2014 and 52 seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Now, once again, the Congress is being written off. No doubt the party is going through one of its worst existential and leadership crises right now. Thankfully, the Congress has always performed well in States where regional strongmen were given the job of handling the elections. The Maharashtra and Haryana polls proved this fact in recent times. That said, is that enough for the party to remain relevant? From ruling the Centre and a majority of States in the '60s and '70s, the Congress has now been pushed into a corner with its governments in a measly five States. When the Narendra Modi Government stormed to power in 2014, many thought that the Congress would eventually recov-

er but it has only declined further as it had failed to gauge the mood of the public and turn it into electoral success. Last year's electoral victories in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh apart, the Congress has witnessed gradual decay in its State units in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Delhi. Today, the Congress is ruthlessly criticised and mocked because of its determination to cling to the Nehru-Gandhi family.

The BJP has vowed to create a "Congress-mukt Bharat" but an Opposition is not bad, even for the ruling party in a democracy, as the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee used to say. One party rule is not what our founding fathers visualised. Some analysts argue that the collapse of the Congress as a national alternative to the BJP creates a political vacuum. It is not as if there

is no base for the Congress despite the slide, as it is the only party, apart from the BJP, with a national presence. Even in its worst defeat the Congress managed to get 19.6 per cent of the national vote; about 117 million people voted for it in 2019. It must build on this base.

The decline of the Congress is of its own making. Its dependence on one family, its high command and coterie culture, loss of connect with grassroots workers, lack of an organisational structure, poor communication skills, disconnect with the aspirations of voters and living in its past glory, have all led to its downfall. Moreover, the BJP has emerged as an alternative to the Congress at the national level, while in some States the regional satraps have usurped the Congress' space. Since the party refuses to move out from under the shadow of the Gandhis, it is for the family to fill the leadership vacuum

and fight to get back its political space. They must find the right formula to do this, fast.

It is too soon to write an obituary of the Congress. The grand old party is like an ancient banyan tree. Its roots are deep and in many States. All that the Congress needs is a charismatic leader and a vote catcher who could reinvent and revive the party. Did not the then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair reinvent the Labour party and called it the New Labour?

It is time the Congress wakes up, defines its ideology, strengthens State units, faces the challenge of regionalism and reclaims its lost space. It was an umbrella party at one time giving space to all shades of opinions and ideologies — the Right, Left and the Centre — and despite many splits it has survived so far. So there is no reason why it cannot do so in the future. (The writer is a senior journalist)

FOREIGN EYE



INVEST IN POOR NATIONS

It is no accident that the most worrying recent pandemics to afflict the planet have emerged from Asia and Africa, in poor countries that have inadequate health services. Hospitals, laboratories and research centres there need bolstering rapidly and should be the focus of major investment by the West. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



EESL, BSNL to set up 1,000 EV charging stations

NEW DELHI: State-owned Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) on Tuesday said it has signed an initial pact with BSNL for installing charging stations for electric vehicles. As per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), EESL will set up public EV charging stations at 1,000 BSNL sites in a phased manner across the country, an EESL statement said. EESL will make the entire upfront investment on the services pertaining to the MoU, along with the operation and maintenance of the charging infrastructure by using qualified personnel. Telecom PSU BSNL would be responsible for providing the requisite space and power connections for installing the charging infrastructure. Taking forward the vision of National Electric Mobility Programme, EESL has commissioned 300 AC and 170 DC chargers across India.



Birla meets Telecom Secy amid AGR issues

NEW DELHI: Amid talks of the government encashing its bank guarantee over default in payment of dues, Vodafone Idea Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla met Telecom Secretary Anshu Prakash on Tuesday as he looked for options to keep the company afloat. After the meeting, Birla said he "cannot say anything at the moment." Vodafone Idea on Monday paid Rs 2,500 crore to the Department of Telecom (DoT) and promised to pay another Rs 1,000 crore before the end of the week. But the amount paid for now is less than 5 per cent of the dues that the DoT estimates the company owes to the government following a Supreme Court ruling that asked for including non-telecom revenues of telcos in computing statutory payments such as licence fee and spectrum charges.



Gold rises Rs 239 on global cues, rupee depreciation

NEW DELHI: Gold prices on Tuesday rose by Rs 239 to Rs 41,865 per 10 gram in the national capital on positive global cues and rupee depreciation, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had closed at Rs 41,626 per 10 gram in the previous session. Silver prices also jumped Rs 296 to Rs 47,584 per kg from Rs 47,288 per kg on Monday. "Spot gold for 24 karat in Delhi traded higher by Rs 239 with strong international prices and rupee depreciation. The spot rupee was trading around 23 paise weaker against the dollar for the day," HDFC Securities Senior Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel said.

Das says no reason to doubt, govt will meet fiscal deficit targets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Throwing his weight behind Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's budget numbers, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das has said that there is no reason to doubt that the government will be able to cut fiscal deficit to 3.5 per cent of the GDP in the fiscal beginning April 1.

In an interview with PTI, Das said the government has remained within the limits set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Committee for the budget deficit.

Sitharaman missed deficit target for the third year in a row, pushing shortfall to 3.8 per cent of the GDP in the current fiscal as compared to 3.3 per cent previously planned. The fiscal deficit target for the coming fiscal year starting April 1, has been fixed at 3.5 per cent.

The fiscal deficit is the shortfall in a government's income compared with its spending. It essentially means that the government is spending beyond its means.



The FRBM committee headed by N K Singh had recommended fiscal deficit to be cut to 2.8 per cent in 2020-21 fiscal and to 2.5 per cent by FY2023

"With regard to the fiscal management of the government, the government has remained within the recommendations FRBM committee," Das said. "So, therefore, the excess fiscal deficit has been restricted to 0.5 per cent. The government has adhered to that and a large part of the financing of fiscal deficit next year will come from small savings."

The FRBM committee headed by N K Singh had recommended fiscal deficit to be cut to 2.8 per cent in 2020-21 fiscal and to 2.5 per cent by FY2023.

The panel had suggested an "escape clause" in case of over-

riding consideration of national security, acts of war, calamities of national proportion and collapse of agriculture severely affecting farm output and incomes. Under this, a deviation from the stipulated fiscal deficit target can be taken but not in excess of 0.5 percentage points in a year.

Das said there is no reason to doubt that the fiscal deficit for the next year would be met.

"There is no reason for anyone to doubt that number. The Budget has been presented just about a fortnight ago. There is no reason to disbelieve that number," he said.

The fiscal slippage

announced in the government's new FY2021 budget is modest relative to its previous targets.

The RBI governor said the Budget for 2020-21 had announced that certain bonds will be opened up for non-resident investment without any limit.

"Besides, an announcement has been made in Budget for raising limits for corporate bonds from 9 per cent to 15 per cent," he said. "So, therefore, there are a lot of foreign resources which are going to come into India. Indian corporates are also accessing a lot of money from foreign sources today through ECB."

Private equity, VC investments hit record high of \$ 48 bn in 2019

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Private equity and venture capital investments in the country touched an all-time high of USD 48 billion in 2019, according to an EY report.

The report titled 'PE/VC Agenda: India Trend Book 2020' said that this is the third consecutive year that the private equity and venture capital sector has outperformed.

"In terms of value, PE/VC investments increased by 28 per cent as compared to 2018, while the deal volume increased by 35 per cent."

"The growth was primarily driven by a significant increase in investments in infrastructure sector, which grew over three times compared to 2018," it said.

The report was released on Monday at the Indian Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (IVCA) conclave 2020.

According to a report, while growth in traditional PE/VC investments dipped marginally in 2019, the growth in overall



"The growth was primarily driven by a significant increase in investments in infrastructure sector, which grew over three times compared to 2018," it said

PE/VC investments was driven by investments in the infrastructure asset class.

"Investments in infrastructure sector accounted for 30 per cent of PE/VC investments by value compared to 12 per cent in 2018," it said.

The report pointed out that

largest deals in 2019 were also in the infrastructure sector including Brookfield's USD 3.7 billion buyout of Reliance Jio's tower assets and USD 1.9 billion investment in Reliance Industries East-West pipeline.

The largest deal in traditional PE/VC asset class was Alibaba and Softbank's USD 1 billion investment in Paytm, it said.

The EY report said largest fund raise during the year saw government sponsor a USD 1.5 billion fund for providing last-mile funding to real estate developers for completion of stalled housing projects followed by Edelweiss Alternative Asset Advisors and Kotak Special Situations Fund raising USD 1.3 billion and USD 1 billion respectively to invest in stressed assets.

As per the report, PE/VC investments in infrastructure space were at USD 14.5 billion in 2019, which were higher than the cumulative PE/VC infrastructure investments received in the previous seven years.

Tea Board push for quality check of Nepal brew

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Amid concerns that CTC variety from Nepal was being sold as Darjeeling tea to the consumers, Tea Board has asked the commissioner of customs, Kolkata (land), to check the quality of brew arriving from the country at FSSAI-accredited laboratories. According to a Tea Board official, brew from the neighbouring country cannot be banned as the treaty signed between the two countries has provisions for its import. As per the treaty, India imports tea from Nepal at zero duty, the official said.

"As the plucking season in Darjeeling has arrived, we have asked the customs department to check if the quality of tea from Nepal conforms to FSSAI parameters," he told PTI on Tuesday. Arun Kr Ray, the deputy chairman of Tea Board, said the agency has sought help from a laboratory in Mumbai, which can differentiate between Darjeeling and Nepal tea.

'India's sugar export may cross 5 MT this year'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's sugar export may cross 5 million tonne in the marketing year ending September on higher demand from overseas amid global deficit of 8-9 million tonne, industry body ISMA said on Tuesday.

For the current year, the government has allowed export of 6 million tonne of sugar under Maximum Admissible Export Quota (MAEQ) to help deal with the surplus sugar.

India had exported 3.8 million tonne during 2018-19 marketing year (October-September) against the mandatory quota of 5 million tonne.

The country's sugar production has reached 16.98 million tonne till February 15 of the current marketing year, which is much lower than 21.96 million tonne output till the same period a year ago, it said.

According to the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), global sugar prices for raw and white sugar are 20-25 per cent higher than the prices which prevailed three months ago when India started its



exports against 6 million tonne under MAEQ.

"Accordingly, Indian sugar exports may get accelerated in the coming months, and could achieve more than 5 million tonne of MAEQ in the whole season," it said in a statement.

As per market reports, about 1.6 million tonne of sugar has been exported from India and about 3.2 million tonne of contracts have been signed for exports, it said.

As per reports available, few sugar mills are not planning to export sugar against their allocated export quotas. A few of

them have surrendered a part of their MAEQ to the government, it added.

ISMA said the government has decided to withdraw and reallocate export quota of mills which were not able to undertake shipments.

"20 per cent of export quotas of mills which have not contracted for 25 per cent of their MAEQ by end of January 2020, will be withdrawn and reallocated among the others who have exported most of the MAEQ and are willing to export beyond their original MAEQ," it said.

HCL Tech bags IT deal from NZ

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IT services major HCL Technologies on Tuesday said it has bagged a new large contract with New Zealand dairy co-operative, Fonterra to modernise and manage its entire technology infrastructure.

The multi-year partnership with HCL Technologies will consolidate Fonterra's technology suppliers and bring together the co-operative's IT infrastructure services under one umbrella, HCL Technologies said in a statement.

It, however, did not disclose the financial terms of the deal.

"This partnership will also extend HCL's New Zealand presence to three offices within the country and will bring around 60 new jobs to the Waikato region as the local support services for Fonterra employees will be based at its Hamilton Delivery centre," the statement said.

The partnership will reinforce HCL's focus in support-



ing the local New Zealand IT ecosystem by investing in local skills and partnering with regional companies and tertiary education groups to develop the local expertise to fill these roles over the coming years.

"We have been supporting Fonterra for over a decade by managing its IT application support and maintenance portfolio including SAP. We are delighted to expand our partnership with Fonterra to modernise and manage the entire technology infrastructure," HCL Technologies Executive Vice President and Country Manager, (Australia and New Zealand) Michael Horton said.

Ravi Viswanathan to join TVS Supply Chain

PNS ■ CHENNAI

TVS Supply Chain Solutions, part of the USD 8.5 billion TVS Group on Tuesday said Ravi Viswanathan has been appointed as the CEO and the joint managing director with effect from April 1.

The city-based leading end-to-end supply chain management services company in a statement said Viswanathan would report to Managing Director, R Dinesh.

Prior taking up the new role, he had served IT major Tata Consultancy Services as its Global chief marketing officer.

An alumni of NIT Tiruchirappalli, Viswanathan has built and led multiple business units in TCS during his over 30-year career.

Viswanathan will take on the role of CEO and joint managing director of the company from April 1, 2020.

SOLAR ENERGY

India's 18K sq km reservoir surface area has potential to generate 280 GW

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reservoirs with cumulative (surface) area of 18,000 square kilometers in India have the potential to generate 280 GW of solar energy through floating solar photovoltaic, a report has said. The report 'Floating Solar Photovoltaic (FSPV): A Third Pillar to Solar PV Sector?' has been produced by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) as part of Energy Transmission Commission (ETC) India.

A new report by TERI has found that India's reservoirs have 18,000 sq km of area with the potential to generate 280 GW of solar power through floating solar photovoltaic (PV) plants, TERI said in a statement. ETC India is a



research platform based in TERI, New Delhi. It is the Indian chapter of the global Energy Transitions Commission. The findings of the report, which was released during the recently held World Sustainable Development Summit 2020,

have the potential to help in planning out strategies for achieving overall capacity addition in solar energy in India.

The report has calculated the potential for floating solar photovoltaics (FSPVs), or 'floatovoltaics', on the basis of 30 per cent of the water surface

The report has calculated the potential for floating solar photovoltaics (FSPVs), or 'floatovoltaics', on the basis of 30 per cent of the water surface area of the country's medium and large reservoirs

area of the country's medium and large reservoirs.

The report provides state-wise details of floating solar potential in the form of a web-based interactive tool called India Floating Solar PV-Tool, which has also been developed under this study.

Barbeque Nation files IPO papers to raise Rs 1,000-1,200 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Casual dining chain Barbeque Nation Hospitality has filed fresh papers with markets regulator Sebi to raise an estimated Rs 1,000-1,200 crore through an initial public offering.

The IPO comprises a fresh issue of shares worth Rs 275 crore and an offer-for-sale of up to 98,22,947 equity shares, according to the draft papers filed with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi).

The company may consider a pre-IPO placement to the tune of Rs 150 crore.

Proceeds of the issue will be utilised to repay an outstanding borrowing of Rs 205 crore in part or full and for general corporate purposes.

The company is promoted by Sayaji Hotels, Sayaji Housekeeping Services, Kayum Dhanani, Raof Dhanani and Suchitra Dhanani



The issue is being managed by IIFL Securities, Axis Capital, Ambit Capital and SBI Capital Markets

and is backed by private equity firm CX Partners, which made its first investment in 2013 and again in 2015.

The promoters hold 60.24 per cent, CX Partners owns 33.79 per cent and renowned stock market investor Rakesh Jhunjhunwala's investment firm Alchemy Capital holds 2.05 per cent in the company.

According to market sources, the IPO size will approximately be between Rs 1,000-1,200 crore.

The issue is being managed by IIFL Securities, Axis Capital, Ambit Capital and SBI Capital Markets.

In 2017, the company had filed IPO papers with Sebi seeking to raise Rs 700 crore. However, the regulator kept the processing of the company's proposed IPO in abeyance "pending regulatory action for past violations" and finally approved the IPO plan in January 2018.

Although, the company could not launch the initial share-sale due to adverse market conditions.

Barbeque Nation Hospitality owns and operates Barbeque Nation Restaurants, currently operating at 138 outlets across India and 7 outlets in the UAE, Oman and Malaysia.

Housing sales bookings of top 9 listed realty firms up 2%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales bookings of top 9 listed real estate developers rose 2 per cent to nearly Rs 5,800 crore during the third quarter of this fiscal year, according to property consultant Anarock.

Sales bookings of DLF, Sobha, Puravankara, Prestige Estates, Brigade Enterprises, Mahindra Lifespace Developers, Godrej Properties, Oberoi Realty and Kolte Patil have been taken into account. "Housing sales revenue of the top 9 stock exchange-list-



2 per cent in a year," Anarock said.

The first three quarters of fiscal 2020 indicate that the overall sales bookings of the top 9 developers was close to Rs 16,500 crore as against Rs 15,730 crore during the corresponding period of the previous year.

Godrej Properties, Prestige Estates and Sobha were the top three players with maximum sales revenue during the first nine months of fiscal 2020. Together, they accounted for a 55 per cent share of the total sales revenue of Rs 16,500 crore.

India Inc to dole out average 9.1 pc salary hike

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Companies in India are projected to dole out an average salary hike of 9.1 per cent this year, the highest level in the Asia Pacific region, as they look for key talent and niche skills, says a report.

However, the quantum is lower than 9.3 per cent increase seen in 2019 and also the lowest in a decade.

Leading HR consultancy Aon's annual salary survey released on Tuesday also showed that around 39 per cent of the companies surveyed are expected to give as much as 10 per cent increase in pay.

The results are based on responses from over 1,000



organisations spread across more than 20 industries.

In the Asia-Pacific region, India is expected to dole out the highest salary hike at 9.1 per cent, followed by China at 6.3 per cent this year.

For India, the previous lowest quantum of hike was 6.6 per cent in 2009, as per Aon.

As per the survey, Philippines is anticipated to see a salary rise of 5.8 per cent, followed by Malaysia (5.3 per

A big reason for India's higher salary increase, as compared to other growing economies, is the high inflation rate and the war for key talent and niche skills, Fernandes noted

cent), Singapore (3.8 per cent) and Australia (3.1 per cent) in 2020.

"Despite economic challenges in 2019, organisations in India are taking a positive

view. Pay increases in India continue to be the highest in the region," Tzeitel Fernandes, Partner (Rewards Solutions) at Aon told reporters here.

A big reason for India's higher salary increase, as compared to other growing economies, is the high inflation rate and the war for key talent and niche skills, Fernandes noted. In 2019, companies in India gave an average pay increase of 9.3 per cent, reflecting a slowdown in the economy compared to 2018, the survey said. According to the survey, 39 per cent firms are expected to raise the salary over 10 per cent while 42 per cent would go for an increase between 8-10 per cent.

A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE

Progressive Theatre Group, started by HCU's PhD scholar in Theatre Arts, John Basheer, has been spreading awareness on social issues through street plays, finds V SATEESH REDDY

Youngsters are the future of the country and they need to have the right information about contemporary issues to understand them.

Hyderabad-based PhD scholar in Theatre Arts John Basheer started his theatre group in 2013 and has been staging street plays since then about issues like women empowerment, unemployment, GDP, latest row over the CAA and the NRC and more.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, John Basheer says, "I'm doing my PhD from SN School of Fine Arts at the University of Hyderabad. I was inspired to create this group by Jananatyia manch's founder Safdar Hashmi and his plays."

They also did a play called

March On about the October Revolution. He says, "It is a travelling street theatre performance as part of the centenary celebrations of the October Revolution. The street theatre performance, while presenting the social realities of our times, took us back to the conditions that led to revolution in 1917. It put forward the need for the revolt of the peasants, workers and students to fight against imperial, communal, fascist conditions existing in our times and to march on towards socialism."

Usually, they stage every play at three venues in the university including the North Shopping Complex, the South Shopping Complex and the Ladies Hostel Canteen. The performers are not only from theatre arts and also from other departments. More than 200 students attend each play of the

group. He says, "We are getting a positive response for our street plays in the campus. Many students are gaining knowledge after watching our plays. We also started staging our plays outside the campus and recently staged one at the Ravindra Bharati. We are staging our next in Anantapur district of AP on February 29."

Speaking about how the play is created, John says, "Before staging a play, we post it on social media and invite people to join us. We ask interested candidates to do research about a topic. After the research, we create the script. For us, everyone is a script writer. After the script, we conduct a theatre workshop and practice rehearsals. Finally, we stage plays at the three venues."

About their recent play on the Citizens Amendment Act (CAA), John adds, "Recently,



we did a play about the Citizens Amendment Act and its impact on Indians. During the play, we explained what is the Act is about and how it's affecting citizens. We are not against anyone. We are just showcasing facts about a particular issue. We have seen huge protests about the CAA in Assam recently. To find outsiders in the country, it is not fair to force laws on the rest of the citizens."

John said that most of their team members are women and added that they are very happy to be a part of

this good cause.

He added that they did various plays on women issues to create awareness among women fraternity in the campus.

The team also staged a play about late Rohit Vemula in the campus.

John said that they explained the problems Dalit students face in the universities by narrating it on lines of the story of Ekalavya.

"Not just dialogues, we also narrate plays in the form of folk songs," he says. The group says they don't give any solution for the problems

because they are not policy makers and only explain what was happening in the country about various issues of the nation.

He adds, "The Central government spoke about giving autonomous status to some universities recently. But on the other hand they are encouraging private universities like Jio and neglecting government universities. To explain this issue, we staged a play about how government is neglecting universities. We staged the play about how universities are suffering from the lack of funds."



'Gave up on dream job for acting'



Speaking to V SATEESH REDDY, television actress Meghana Lokesh shares her journey to acting, giving up on her dream of becoming a chemistry lecturer, childhood and more

Kannada-based actor Meghana Lokesh entered the Telugu television industry with *Shashirekha Parinayam* and through her acting skills she garnered a name for herself. She is now a part of popular serials such as *Rakta Sambhandham* and *Kalyana Vaibhogam* in Zee Telugu. Meghana has also acted in two Tollywood films — *Idi Maa Prema Katha* and *Ameerpet to America*.

THEATRE OPENED ROADS

Meghana said she wanted to be part of a theatre group since she was eight years old. "I don't have any family background in acting. I was born and brought up in Mysore. My father and brother are engineers and my mother is a lecturer. During my school days, I was part of Natana Theatre Group headed by my guru Mandya Ramesh

sir. I performed in more than 200 plays across Karnataka. Theatre opened roads for me to learn and practice acting for a living," she said.

ENTRY INTO SERIALS

Meghana forayed into acting at the age of 18 with a Kannada serial. She said, "I played a supporting role in my first serial *Devi*. I bagged my first lead role in *Pavitra Bandhana*. Later, I worked in *Purushottama*, which got me fame and I became a familiar name in the Kannada television fraternity."

CHEMISTRY LECTURER

If not for acting, Meghana would have become a chemistry lecturer. "I wanted to become a chemistry lecturer. It feels good to wear an apron and work in a lab. Because of my acting schedules, I had to give up on my dream of becoming a lecturer. It became difficult to balance both careers so I chose acting," she explained.

TELEGU ENTRY

Sashirekha Parinayam was Meghana's debut serial in Telugu. She said, "I gave my audition for *Sashirekha Parinayam* in Hyderabad in 2013. At that time, I didn't know a single word of Telugu. However, I was selected and the *Sashirekha Parinayam* team helped me learn the language. That serial established me in the Telugu industry."

DUAL ROLES

We have seen actors perform dual roles in movies. Meghana also plays a dual role in the daily serial *Kalyana Vaibhogam* as Manga and Nithya. Speaking of the same she said, "In *Kalyana Vaibhogam*, I have to play a positive Manga and a negative Nithya. I need to portray two opposite characters and I took it as a challenge. I'm getting positive response from the audience for my roles in the serial."

"I am also a part of the *Rakta Sambhandham* serial as Tulasi. It is an

optimistic character who believes in herself. I loved her," she added.

ACTING IN CINEMA

Meghana didn't just confine herself to small screen. She has also done two movies in Telugu — *Idi Maa Prema Katha* and *Ameerpet to America* and was part of two short films — *Emotion* and *Beautiful Life*. About her stint into movies and short films, Meghana said, "Movies happened to me due to serials. My first film was *Idi Maa Prema Katha* alongside anchor Ravi. It is a love story. My second film was *Ameerpet to America*. I also did two short films — *Emotion* and *Beautiful Life*."

SERIALS TRAVEL WITH YOU

When asked about the difference between acting for television and staging a theatre, Meghana said, "The pattern and style of acting are different whether it's theatre, serial or cinema. Theatre is a live performance and we have no second chance to correct it. I love to do message-oriented short films. The life-cycle of a movie is just a couple of months in people's

memory but serials take years and travel with the audience. I would like to work in more movies but right now I'm busy with serials."

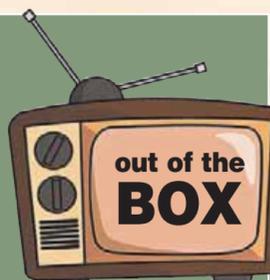
NO DREAM ROLE AS SUCH

She says that she doesn't have any dream role to look forward to but wants to give her best with every role she gets. She said, "I will give my 100 per cent to whatever role I get and have no dream roles. I want to engage audience with my acting. Whenever I go out, people interact with me about my role and appreciate it. It gives me a lot of energy to do more and more serials."

NO IMPACT

She says that every medium, whether it's TV, web series or cinema don't affect one another. "Every medium has its own audience and there is no impact of one medium on the other. Web series and cinema quickly end their run, but television serials become intrinsic to the viewer's family," she said.

"The pattern and style of acting are different in each medium. Theatre is a live performance and we have no second chance to correct it. The life cycle of a movie is just a couple of months in people's memory but serials take years and travel with the audience. I would like to work in many movies but right now I'm busy with serials



MEGHANA LOKESH
TV ACTRESS



With her husband Swaroop Bharadwaj

PARTY



● Janaki Rajagopal Lagadapati



● Ateeq Siddiqui, Hasnain Sabari and Jabir Patel

TOGETHER FOREVER

Political leaders, bureaucrats, actors and well-wishers attended the wedding reception of Nadia Naser Khan, daughter of Gulam Naser Khan with Mohammed Omer Fazalullah, son of Mohammed Fazalullah, retired civil engineer, UAE recently in the city and blessed the newly-weds. The guests had a splendid evening relishing the widespread menu and interacting with each other.



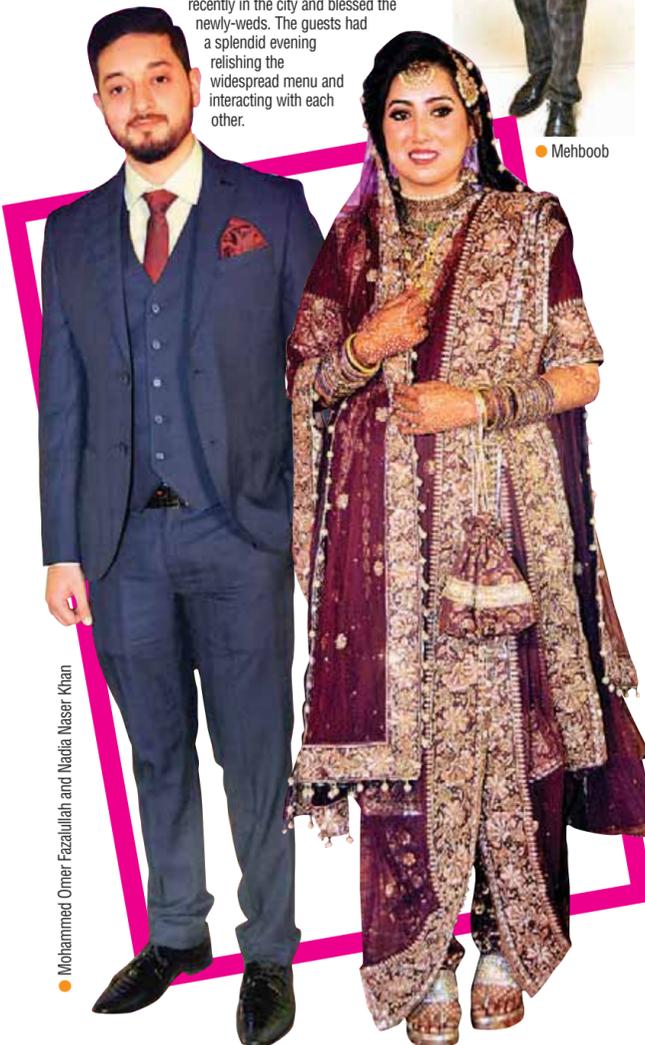
● Mehboob



● Suman



● AK Khan



● Mohammed Omer Fazalullah and Nadia Naser Khan



● Farooq Hussain



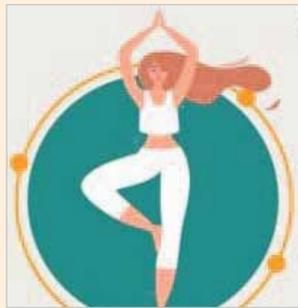
● Nayani Narasimha Reddy



● Kubra Photos by SV Chary

CITY GUIDE

EVENTS



YOGA WORKSHOP

● Fab Cafe, Gachibowli is conducting a Yoga workshop at its premises on February 23 between 9 am and 11 am.

MOVIE SCREENING

● Cinephiles Film Club is screening a film *Armour* today at Lamakaan from 7 pm. Octogenarian couple George and Anne's happy life comes to a halt, when Anne suffers from a stroke and George must do everything possible to help her recover.



CHILDREN'S ART EXHIBITION

● Children's Art Exhibition will be held on February 22 at Lamakaan from 12 pm. Children would be trained in various art skills during the exhibition.

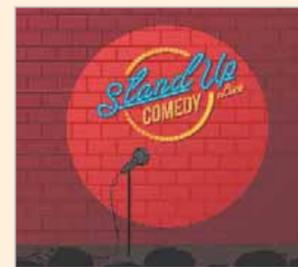


AN INSPECTOR CALLS

● *An Inspector Calls*, is the Telugu adaptation of the original English play by the same name by J B Priestly written in the year. The play revolves around the alleged suicide of a young woman named Shwetha and an unsuspecting family which is visited by a mysterious Inspector. The play will be staged at Phoenix Arena on February 28 at 8 pm.

COMEDY NIGHTS

● Comedy Nights with Abhijeet Deshpande and Rupal Tyagi will be held on February 22 at Phoenix Arena from 7.30 pm.



DIMSUM FESTIVAL

● Radisson Hyderabad, Kondapur is organising Dimsum food festival from February 20 to 28 between 7.30 pm and 11 pm.

GET YOUR EVENT LISTED: To get your events listed, send your details along with a poster and contact number to pioneer.features@gmail.com

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



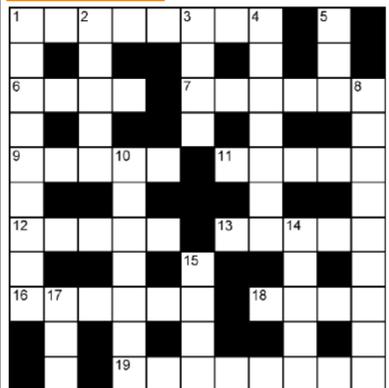
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



CROSSWORD

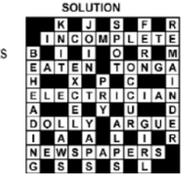


ACROSS

- Illnesses
- A tool you eat with
- The most destructive type of exploding bomb
- The River Nile flows through this country
- Not as many
- Sooner than expected
- The opposite of fresh
- A keyboard worker
- A clenched hand
- Someone who grows plants

- Glide over snow with long things on your feet
- A worker in wood
- Tugging
- A visitor from another planet
- Mix up with a spoon
- A word of agreement

SOLUTION



DOWN

- Not the same
- An apology word
- The mark of an old injury
- Opposite of quickest

SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

7	9	1	4	2	6	8	3	5
8	2	4	5	3	7	9	6	1
3	5	6	9	1	8	4	2	7
5	7	8	3	4	9	2	1	6
1	6	2	8	7	5	3	4	9
9	4	3	1	6	2	5	7	8
6	8	7	2	9	3	1	5	4
4	3	5	7	8	1	6	9	2
2	1	9	6	5	4	7	8	3

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.



RAVI TEJA gives his nod to Prasanna and Trinadh Rao

Ravi Teja endorsed a period drama which has elements like friendship, romance and revenge woven into it. The actor feels period drama is an uncharted territory for him, finds NAGARAJ GOUD

Having come close to teaming up a couple of times in the past, the combination of Ravi Teja and writer Prasanna Kumar Bezawada, who has penned the story and dialogues of successful films like *Nenu Local* and *Hello Guru Premakosame* in the past, will be a reality soon.

A fan of Prasanna's brand of writing, the actor endorsed a period drama which has elements like friendship, romance and revenge woven into it, *The Pioneer* has exclusively

learnt. Trinadh Rao Nakkina, who so far has directed Prasanna's most scripts, will be sitting in the director's saddle.

A highly-placed source close to the development tells us, "Ravi has been discussing multiple storylines with Prasanna for past couple of years. Although he liked a majority of them, he felt the period drama is an uncharted territory for him, while simultaneously possessing elements that one expects from his films. From his mannerisms to looks to dialect, the film will be a complete changeover for him. Also, he is playing a role that he has hitherto

played in his career and he is extremely pumped about it. Major portions of the film will be set in the Godavari belt. Except for the dialogues, the story is in place."

The source further adds that People Media Factory will be pooling in resources for the project, whose official announcement will be out mostly during Ugadi.

"The story has scope for another two A-listers to join the cast and Prasanna is on the job. The film will roll mostly in May. Chances of Devi Sri Prasad composing music are high," the source concludes.

PEOPLE MEDIA FACTORY WILL BE POOLING IN RESOURCES FOR THE PROJECT, WHOSE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE OUT MOSTLY DURING UGADI



Raju and Vamsi bet big on Sai Tej

Leading production houses SVC and UV Creations snatched the Telugu states rights of Sai Tej-starrer *Solo Brathuke So Better* (SBSB), which is more than halfway into filming.

With Sai's last film, *Prathiroju Pandage*, landing distributors in huge profits, Raju and U.V. Vamsi decided to bet big on SBSB. The reception to the recent teaser was another factor, we hear. Film's producer B.V.S.N. Prasad is extreme-

ly happy with what he got with SVC and UV. He is also expecting high prices for US and Karnataka rights.

In the fun-filled entertainer, which is slated for the May Day release, Sai plays a student who is averse to the idea of being in a relationship, leading him to form a club called SVSB. Nabha Natesh, on the other hand, plays a spunky girl who challenges Sai's steely resolve to stay single. The film, which is a Thaman musical, marks the directorial debut of Subbu.

SP backs College Kumar

The prestigious Suresh Productions will be distributing *College Kumar*, featuring Rahul Vijay, Rajendra Prasad, Madhu and Priya Vadlamani.

An agreement to this end has been sealed between Suresh Babu and *College Kumar* producer Padmanabha. Suresh is planning to release the film on March 6. While the film's promotions have been low-key, the cast is hopeful that full-scale promotions will

begin this month-end as they believe that they have a good product in hand. The film is a remake of 2018 Kannada hit of the same name. Directed by Santhu, who also helmed the remake, the film told the coming-of-age story of a happy-go lucky chap who has to fulfil his father's dreams. The pressure starts getting to him, leading him to rebel against his dad. For the Telugu version, the makers have taken the core point of the original, while giving it a new spin.



I want to turn director one day, says DIGANGANA

Digangana Suryavanshi was sure of not doing another love story after her debut film in Telugu, *Hippi*. Her turn in the last year release received good acclaim, with many praising she stood out from the rest of the cast for maintaining a consistent graph all throughout. It is the reason why she chose a suspense thriller, *Valayam*, where she has scope for performance.

"I was on the lookout for a docile role and I got that with *Valayam*. I play Disha, who is homely, innocent and marries as per her parents wish. She shares a great bond with her husband (played by Laksh) but after sometime, she disappears. Is she kidnapped or murdered? Or is she having an extramarital affair? Such questions pop up as the male lead gets stuck in a complex web. Which is why the title *Valayam*," she says.

She goes on to say that, "The film has a simple and straight narrative. However, the way it is told and the way it engages the viewers with its thrills will keep them hooked to their seats."

As much as she loves com-

mercial cinema, the actress wants to strike a fine balance between commercial cinema and cinema that unleashes the actor in her. "My next is *Seetimaar* with Gopichand. It falls in the commercial bracket. I will be seen as his love interest in the film. It was a conscious decision to sign a commercial film after *Valayam*," adds the actress who is playing a quirky and energetic news channel anchor in the sports-drama.

Known for featuring in Hindi TV shows like *Ek Veer Ki Ardaas...Veera* and *Bigg Boss*, Digangana is passionate about writing as well. Her first book of English lyrics titled *Waves the Endless Emotions* was released at the age of 15 and was followed by her two novels — *Nixie the Mermaid* and *the Power of Love*. She has ventured into screen writing now, completing a couple of scripts.

"The books are very close to my heart and I hope I will be able to make them into films soon. I started acting when I was seven years old and I started writing because of the passion and respect I have for my job. I want to make films that people appreciate and

remember for a long time. My first script is about life, family, romance and there's a psychology angle as well. The second traces the journey of a person who stops doing what he is doing and takes up what he is passionate about."

Does she intend to direct them as well? "Direction is very a big job. I will have experienced guys who understand the technical side of filmmaking because it's not just about emotions but how sound the film is technically. I have shared the scripts with a few people who share my thought-process. But I haven't given the execution part enough attention as of now," she says, admitting that she has the *kheeda* to switch to direction but not anytime soon.

— NG



Nithiin says he is lucky to have Trivikram in his life

With the month already witnessing two flops — *Jaanu* and *World Famous Lover* — expectations are high on the Nithiin-starrer *Bheeshma*, a popcorn entertainer, to salvage the box-office from bleeding further. The film, directed by Chalo fame Venky Kudumula, will open in cinemas later this Friday and the makers conducted a pre-release event in Hyderabad on Monday evening, with Trivikram Sreenivas gracing it as the guest.

Speaking at the event, Nithiin recalled that he didn't want to start *Bheeshma* until he gets a bound script in hand, a reason why the film took time. "Before

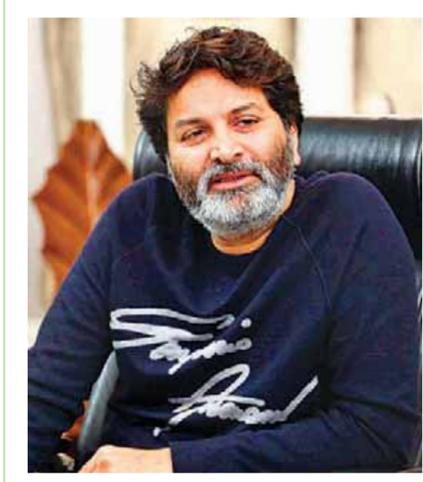
beginning it, Venky told me he is my fan, assuring that the film will be 'what if a fan directs his favourite actor?' Staying true to his words, he has presented me in a complete commercial avatar after a long time. My fans have been asking me to do a hardcore dance number since a long time and this film facilitated me with that opportunity. I toiled hard for *whattay beauty* song, Jaani master squeezed all my energy. I was shocked with the way Rashmika Mandanna danced for it. If she maintains similar work ethics, she will reach a big position in her career."

The actor further said after his parents, sister and his lady love Shalini, Pawan Kalyan and

Trivikram are the most important people in his career.

"These people matter to me a lot. I consider myself lucky to have a person like Trivikram in my life," he said.

Trivikram, who watched the film, said it's very good and promised viewers that they will have a great time watching it in theatres. "I specifically liked a fight sequence in the second half. From the way it was conceived to the way it was shot by action master Venkat, I enjoyed it immensely. Mahati Sagar did a great job with its background score," he said.



MESSI & HAMILTON ARE WORLD'S BEST

PTI ■ BERLIN

British F1 ace Lewis Hamilton and Lionel Messi, arguably the world's greatest footballer, were on Monday declared the joint winners of the prestigious Laureus World Sportsman of the year award.

They received the same number of votes, a first in the 20-year history of the awards with the jury unable to split Hamilton and Messi.

Messi, the six-time FIFA World Player of the year, is the first team-player to bag the award. He though was not present to receive the award and sent a video message.

They pipped golfing great Tiger Woods, Kenyan marathoner Eliud Kipchoge, tennis legend Rafael Nadal and MotoGP champion Marc Marquez.

American gymnast Simone Biles who won five gold medals at the 2019 World Championships, grabbed the World Sportswoman of the year award, her third in four years after winning it in 2017 and in 2019.

She beat a strong challenge from Jamaican sprinting great Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who

missed out on the honour for the fifth time. She was nominated 2010, 2013, 2014 and 2016 also but did not win it.

The most decorated gymnast also beat competition from American footballer Megan Rapinoe, Japanese tennis sensation Naomi Osaka, American track and field athlete Allyson Felix and skier Mikaela Shiffrin.

Snowboarding sensation Chloe Kim won the World Action Sports person honour, her second straight in the same category.

In the Sports person of the year with a disability category, Oksana Masters, born with limb impairments caused by radiation from Chernobyl and adopted by an American single parent, was recognised for an outstanding year in 2019.

She won five Gold medals and a Silver at the World Para Nordic Skiing Championships.

South Bronx United (SBU), a football programme based in New York, was honoured with the Sport for Good Award. The programme uses football to achieve educational outcomes for young people from underserved communities.

The 2019 Rugby World Cup



British reigning F1 drivers champion Lewis Hamilton poses with Worlds best sportsman of year Award during the 2020 Laureus World Sports Awards
Lewis Hamilton/Twitter

winners South Africa won their second Laureus World Team of the Year Award, beating Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool and the US Women's Football Team, among others.

For the 2020 Laureus World Comeback of the Year, Germany's gritty F3 driver Sophia Florschütz was the winner.

Travelling at 276km per hour, she had lost control of her car at the Macau circuit, crashing through safety barriers and leaving her with a spinal fracture which required an 11-hour surgery and months of rehabilitation.

In November 2019, a year on from her accident, the 18-year-old Sophia was back in the cockpit, racing once again in the Macau Grand Prix.

Egan Bernal, who became the youngest rider to win the Tour de France at 22, grabbed the World Breakthrough of the Year award.

German basketball great Dirk Nowitzki was recognised at the Ceremony with the Laureus Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to the sport of basketball.

Spanish Basketball Federation got the Exceptional Achievement Award.

Tendulkar wins best sporting moment award

PTI ■ BERLIN

Batting great Sachin Tendulkar being carried on the shoulders of his teammates after India's World Cup triumph at home in 2011 was voted the Laureus best sporting moment in the last 20 years.

With the backing of Indian cricket fans, Tendulkar got the maximum number of votes to emerge winner on Monday.

The charged-up Indian cricketers rushed to the ground at the Wankhede Stadium and soon they lifted Tendulkar on their shoulders and made a lap of honour, a moment etched in the minds of the fans.

Former Australian skipper Steve Waugh handed the trophy to Tendulkar after tennis legend Boris Becker announced the winner at a glittering ceremony.

"It's incredible. The feeling of winning the world cup was beyond what words can express. How



many times you get an event happening where there are no mixed opinions. Very rarely the entire country celebrates," Tendulkar said after receiving the trophy.

"And this is a reminder of how powerful a sport is and what magic it does to our lives. Even now when I watch that it has stayed with me."

Won't rule out playing 2023 WC: Taylor

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

Veteran New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor doesn't rule out playing the 2023 ODI World Cup but says his form, fitness and motivation level at the end of next year will decide whether he actually manages a place in the squad.

The 35-year-old will become the first cricketer in the world to complete 100 games across three international formats when he steps out for the first Test against India at Basin Reserve on February 21.

"I haven't ruled it (2023 World Cup) out but I still think it's a long way away. First and foremost I want to get to next year - the Twenty20 World Cup and then the home summer - and then I'll have a good idea on how I'm placed at the end of next summer," Taylor was quoted as saying by 'stuff.Co.Nz'.

"Whether there is still a drive, whether I'm good enough, whether I'm fit enough, and whether I deserve my spot in the side. If I can tick all those, then definitely 2023

is an option."

The big-hitting batsman said despite his desire to continue, he won't out himself under too much pressure.

"You always want to do well and first and foremost the game is more important. At the same time you can put extra pressure on yourself. You've just got to go out and enjoy it and take it as another game. Hopefully I can contribute in any way I can," he said.



Can't wait to get Virat out: Boult

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

There are no half measures for fit-again New Zealand pace spearhead Trent Boult who is ready to challenge India captain Virat Kohli on his return to international cricket during the two-Test series starting here on Friday.

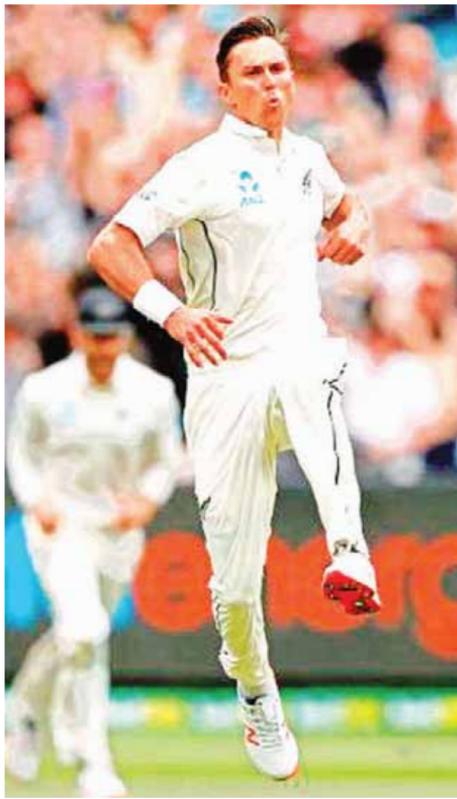
Boult was out of action for the past six weeks due to a fracture on his right hand sustained during the Boxing Day Test against Australia and missed out on the limited-overs leg of the India series.

Back for the traditional format, the left-arm fast bowler made his priorities clear ahead of the first Test.

"That's personally why I play the game, to get guys like that (Kohli) out and test myself against them, so I can't wait to get stuck in. But he's an exceptional player. Everyone knows how great he is," Boult said, sending out a warning after landing in the capital city for the opening Test.

The Basin Reserve track will have a lot for the seamers and in conditions conducive to seam bowling, a wily customer like Boult might prove to be a handful.

"I'm preparing for a solid wicket. It generally is very good here and goes the full distance (five days). I do enjoy playing here, the history that's involved, and it's going to be an exciting week building up. I can't wait to get out there," said the 30-year-old who has taken 256 wickets from 65 Tests.



New Zealand seamer Trent Boult celebrates after taking wicket
ICC/Twitter

"That's personally why I play the game, to get guys like that (Kohli) out and test myself against them, so I can't wait to get stuck in. But he's an exceptional player. Everyone knows how great he is,"

who warmed up by playing a club game at the picturesque Taupo ground.

"I was pushing in off the long run. I think a couple of the clubbies from Taupo really enjoyed that. It was a good afternoon," added the pacer, who sent down eight overs in a friendly game for his club Cadets.

Professionally, Boult had to lie low due to injury, but it was also a good break as he and wife Lana welcomed their second child.

"Having some time away from the game and having my second son a couple of weeks ago came at quite a good time," said Boult.

Fighting fit, all he wants now is to get hold of a red kookaburra and get a few to tail into Kohli and company.

"I am hungry to be here and can't wait to get back in the white and get the red ball moving around," he said.



Indian wvs team celebrates after winning the warm-up match against West Indies BCCI

Poonam's three wickets help Ind edge out WI

PTI ■ BRISBANE

Spinner Poonam Yadav claimed three wickets as India geared up for the ICC women's T20 World Cup with a thrilling two-run win over the West Indies in a low-scoring warm-up match here on Tuesday.

Electing to bat, India posted a lowly 107 for eight in their stipulated 20 overs before returning to restrict West Indies to 105 for seven.

Chasing 108 to win, West Indies were comfortably placed at 57 for one in 13 overs when Deepti Sharma struck, cleaning up opener Lee-Ann Kirby (42) to trigger a collapse.

Soon skipper Stafanie Taylor (16), Chedean Nation (0) and Deandra Dottin (1) were back in the hut as West Indies slumped to 67 for five in the 17th over.

Hayley Matthews (25) and Chinelle Henry (17) blasted three fours and a six in the 19th over to leave them with 11 to get off the last six balls.

Henry blasted Poonam for a four but the Indian dismissed

Matthews in the fourth ball. West Indies needed three runs off the last ball but Henry was caught by Veda Krishnamurthy.

Earlier, India's top-three failed to fire as they were reduced to 17 for three in 3.1 overs. Opener Smriti Mandhana (4) lasted just six balls, while Jemimah Rodrigues (0) failed to open her account. Young Shafali Verma blasted a couple of fours before being caught by Britney Cooper off Shamila Connell (2/20).

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (11), too, didn't stay long, while Krishnamurthy was cleaned up by Afy Fletcher (1/26), as India slumped to 52 for five in 11.2 overs.

Deepti Sharma made a 32-ball 21 before becoming a victim of Anisa Mohammad (2/16), while Pooja Vastrakar (13) was removed by Aaliyah Alleyne (1/9). Stafanie Taylor then got rid of Taniya Bhatia for 10.

Shikha Pandey finally smashed a 16-ball 24 to give some respectability to the total.



Kyle Jamieson after dismissing Prithvi Shaw
Black Caps/Twitter

Jamieson credits shift to Auckland for making him better cricketer

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

Towering New Zealand pacer Kyle Jamieson has revealed that moving from Canterbury to Auckland helped him get rid of a detrimental aggressive streak and become a cricketer worthy of national duty.

The 6'8" tall pacer, who made his ODI debut against India in the recent series, was handed a place in the Test squad for the upcoming two-match rubber beginning at Basin Reserves here on February 21.

"I'm a pretty fiery character on the field. On the field I'm pretty aggressive. I think it came out in ways I necessarily didn't like. I would sort of do it and then post-game be like, 'What did I do that for?'" he was quoted as saying by 'stuff.Co.Nz'.

Jamieson shifted to Auckland, where he was born, prior to this season after making his T20 debut for Canterbury in 2016 in the Super Smash.

He said there was a lot of

negativity around him in Canterbury, where he grew up, and it affected his behaviour.

"There was a bit of negativity surrounding myself and that environment and that was coming out in my behaviour on the field," he said.

The 25-year-old said returning to Auckland made a massive difference to his game.

"I'm really enjoying my cricket, which is probably something I couldn't say a couple of years ago," said Jamieson, who scored 25 and took 2 for 42 on debut during the second ODI against India at Eden Park.

"I was going through a bit of stuff off the field. Just the chance to come in with this group and turn up and learn everyday - try and better myself as a cricketer - was something that was too hard to turn down, so look, it's been massive for my game.

"...It was just a shift that I needed to make. Most importantly, I needed to be happy and I needed to enjoy my cricket. Wherever that may take me, then it will," he added.

'NZ's conservative approach against Bumrah will soon be adopted by others'

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand's conservative approach against Jasprit Bumrah could become a template for other teams as they look to tackle the Indian pace ace who recently endured a rare wicket-less outing in an ODI series, reckons former fast bowler Shane Bond.

The premier bowler copped criticism for his lean run during the three ODIs against New Zealand and Bond put that down to expectations.

"That's the nature of expectations when you get a bowler of Jasprit's quality," Bond, the fastest New Zealand bowler during his time, told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"I thought New Zealand played him well and identified him as a risk. They have played him conservatively and obviously there was some inexperience around (Navdeep Saini and Shardul Thakur)," he said.

"All teams will now identify him as a risk and attack others. So that's where the bowling group and what they do (as a group) is massive. It is not an easy place to bowl as wickets are flat."

But Bond felt Bumrah's bowling wasn't all that bad during the series, which India lost 0-3.

"At the end of the day, all you can do is try and bowl well. He bowled reasonably well but sometimes you don't get wickets," Bond said.

Bond, who has spent considerable amount of time with Bumrah as the Mumbai Indians bowling coach in the IPL, nonetheless expects India's premier strike bowler to have a "massive impact" on the two-Test series starting Friday.

"When you come back from a lay-off, it's always hard to get into the groove. Just that he hadn't had a lot of game before the series and conditions are a bit foreign," said Bond.

"Although New Zealand played him well in limited overs, Jasprit will have a massive impact on the Test series. I have no doubt about that,"



'Hope Pandya gets to play some cricket before IPL'

PTI ■ WELLINGTON

Mumbai Indians bowling coach Shane Bond wants all-rounder Hardik Pandya, who is recovering from a back surgery, to play a few matches before the Indian Premier League, beginning March 29.

"I only hope he gets to play some cricket before the IPL and always believe it's better to spend a little bit longer for coming back rather than rushing in," Bond said.

"There's no doubt he can come back. I am just pleased that they are taking an orthodox approach with Hardik's rehabilitation and T20s, especially IPL will be nice for him to comeback as he will not be over-bowled."

Pandya underwent a productive net session at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru recently.

He was seen facing throwdown in the nets and mainly played with a straight bat. It is not yet clear if he will make a comeback in the South Africa ODIs next month or the IPL.

Earlier this month, Pandya was ruled out of the Test series against New Zealand after failing to regain full match fitness.

added the bowler, whose promising career was cut short by numerous injuries.

"It always takes time to get back to top form because there is no substitute of game time. So it's good for Jasprit that he is leading into Test matches with some short form cricket," said Bond, who played 18 Tests, 82 ODIs and 20 T20 Internationals.

Limited DRS use was always planned for Ranji semifinals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The limited use of Decision Review System was always planned for the Ranji Trophy semifinals and not from the knockout stages, clarified BCCI's general manager of cricket Saba Karim on Tuesday.

The move to introduce limited DRS comes after the umpires committed some howlers in some knockout games of the previous season.

However, the quarterfinals starting on Thursday will not see the use of DRS.

"We are introducing from the semifinals. This the first time we have initiated this program, we wanted to bring in semifinals and we have done that. It was never meant for the quarterfinals," Karim, also a former India wicketkeeper, told PTI.

"The whole idea is that we wanted to bring in the DRS wherein we can have uniformity for both the games and that will be in the semifinals. All the four teams have been pitted equally and that would not have been possible before (in quarters)," he said.

The restricted technology for Ranji semis will not have Hawk Eye and Ultra Edge, two key components of the DRS used in international games.

"We will be using the technology which is available to us. We are looking at a very limited use of the DRS. We don't have snickometer and ball tracking. We have red zone and we have spin vision and we will try and give whatever is available to umpires for them to decide," added Karim.