

**OPINION 6**  
NOW, A GREEN FUND

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

**SPORTS 11**  
MESSI & HAMILTON ARE WORLD'S BEST

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



# the pioneer

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NITHIIN SAYS HE IS LUCKY TO HAVE TRIVIKRAM IN HIS LIFE

Page 12

## 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 Bajagoli 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.



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

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

**5**

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

**8**

**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

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**

**Forecast:** Mostly Sunny  
**Temp:** 35/21  
**Humidity:** 43%  
**Sunrise:** 06:41  
**Sunset:** 06:19  
Current Weather Conditions Updated February 18, 2019 5:00 PM

### EYES ON TARGET

# CM: Cancer curable, no cure for Naidu's acidic attitude

Jagan launches 3rd phase of YSR Kanti Velugu programme at Kurnool

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Promising to usher in a healthy state, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday launched the third phase of the YSR Kanti Velugu project in Kurnool that will benefit over 56,88,420 senior citizens.

Speaking on the occasion, Jagan said that some forms of cancer can be cured, but there is no treatment available for the acidity caused due to jealousy of TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu. "In fact, Arogyasri scheme covers treatment for over 2,000 diseases, but not for the stomachache caused by jealousy. There is treatment for dimmed sight due to eye ailments, but there is no treatment for a defective perspective," the Chief Minister said. He said that some age-related ailments are curable, but there is no cure for those who



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy interacts with senior citizens at the launch of the third phase of the YSR Kanti Velugu in Kurnool on Tuesday.

misuse their brain.

Jagan said that the government will change the contours of all hospitals right from the PHCs in villages to that of a

teaching hospital.

"A sum of Rs 15,335 crore would be spent on Kanti Velugu programme," Jagan said on the occasion.

A total of 56,88,424 people in the 60-plus age group will be covered in this phase of the programme, under which interventions like primary eye screening, prescription of spectacles, supply of essential medicines to needy patients, referral for cataract surgeries and referral for tertiary eye care management will be undertaken.

Screening of eyes of senior citizens will commence in village secretariats in all 175 Assembly constituencies from March 1. There are only 11 teaching hospitals in the state and vowed to bring an additional 16 to the state, Jagan said.

He said that the government has set its sights on development of medical and health, agriculture sectors and also on development of education sector.

# CM confident of Centre's nod for Ravindra, shifts Intel chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Confident that the Centre will clear its request on inter-cadre transfer for Stephen Ravindra, the YSRCP government on Tuesday transferred Intelligence chief Kumar Viswajit and posted him as Principal Secretary, Home.

In a minor reshuffle of IPS officers, the AP Government appointed Sunil Kumar Naik DIG of CID, KRM Kishore Kumar was posted as Chairman, Road Safety Authority, Bala Subrahmanyam appointed Additional Director-General Railway Protection Force and Abhishek Mohanty the Greyhounds Group Commandant.

Vineet Brijlal was given additional responsibility as director of excise department. The government directed Excise director Hari Kumar



Stephen Ravindra

and Kripananda Tripathi to report to the office of the Director-General of Police.

If the Centre, as expected by the AP government, approves the inter-cadre transfer of Stephen Ravindra, an IPS officer of 1990 batch from Telangana cadre, it will pave the way

for his appointment as Intelligence chief of the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had started making attempts to get Stephen Ravindra to AP cadre soon after he assumed charge.

## Fadnavis to face trial in affidavit case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday told former Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to face trial for allegedly failing to furnish details of pending criminal cases in his 2014 poll affidavit, as the judgement on his election matter could have wider ramifications on the candidates in the electoral fray.

Fadnavis insisted to review the verdict in this matter.

A bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra and comprising Justices Deepak Gupta and Aniruddha Bose, after arguments on the matter reserved its verdict on its 2019 judgement asking Fadnavis to face trial.

## 1 killed, 6 hurt as car careens off flyover

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A speeding car hurtled off the Bharath Nagar flyover in the wee hours of Tuesday, killing one person and injuring six others. 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 flyover's railing, before landing on the road below, police said.

Mohd Sohal, a hotel owner, one of the passengers, died on the spot. The other occupants of the car viz. Sunil, Irfan, Ashwak, Ghouse and Sohel 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.

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

## HC reserves order on moving offices

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP High Court on Tuesday reserved its orders on relocation of offices to Kurnool.

Farmers of Amaravati had filed a writ petition in the court against a GO issued by the YSRCP government to relocate the offices of Commissioner of Inquiries and Vigilance Commissioner to Kurnool and sought a stay order.

The government submitted to the court that it relocated the two offices to Kurnool as space was not sufficient in the Secretariat at Amaravati.

## Shariff asks Guv to intervene, resolve select panel imbroglio

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP Legislative Council Chairman MA Shariff on Tuesday called on Governor Biswabushan Harichandan and explained the circumstances leading to the Council Secretary not honouring his orders on the Select Committee and asked the Governor to take suitable disciplinary action against the official.

Shariff called on the Governor at around 7 pm and explained the case in detail.

Later, speaking to media, he said that the secretary returned



Council Chairman MA Shariff

the relevant file on constitution of the Select Committee twice in spite of his ruling. He charged the secretary with

adopting dilly-dallying tactics.

Shariff said that the secretary refused to honour his ruling on setting up a Select Committee on Bills related to Decentralisation of Administration and dissolution of the CRDA. The Bills were stalled in the Council after being passed in the Assembly.

He emphasised that the decision to refer the Bills to the Select Committee was not in violation of the rules. Therefore, he urged the Governor to intervene in the matter.

## 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 com-



**The bank, which has struggled to keep pace with leaner and more focused rivals, is seeking to become more competitive**

petitive as it grapples with slowing growth in its major markets, the coronavirus epidemic, Britain's European Union exit and lower central

bank interest rates. In the latest in a series of overhauls since the 2008 financial crisis, HSBC officials said

the bank would merge its private banking and wealth businesses, axe European stock trading and cut US retail branches as it seeks to remove \$4.5 billion in costs.

"The totality of this program is that our headcount is likely to go from 235,000 to closer to 200,000 over the next three years," Noel Quinn, interim chief executive, told news agency Reuters.

## Police inspector traps woman, suspended

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Guntur range IG Brijlal Vineet has issued orders suspending Nagarampalem model police station inspector K Venkat Reddy from service on charges of coercing a woman to have sexual relations with him.

This is the latest in a list of similar shockers from Guntur. In her complaint to the higher officials of the department, the victim narrated her ordeal and said that the inspector trapped her when

she approached him to sort out her problems.

She said that when she realised that she was being cheated by Venkat Reddy, she approached higher officials and lodged a complaint.

The district superintendent of police Ramakrishna conducted a thorough inquiry into her allegations and found that the victim was trapped and cheated by the circle inspector.

A suspension order was served on the CI on Tuesday.

## Skill to power new industrial policy: Goutham

Govt to attract industries with skilled manpower, rather than subsidies and incentives

SUMIT ONKA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Unlike its predecessor, the new industrial policy of the YSRCP government would focus more on the creating skilled manpower than subsidies and incentives.

When asked about the major change that the new Industrial policy will reflect in comparison to the previous government on the sidelines of an interactive meeting conducted



Goutham Reddy

by United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and DPIIT, AP minister for Industry, Commerce

and IT, Mekapati Goutham Reddy said the government would attract industries with its skilled manpower rather than

subsidies and incentives.

"It is not that we will not provide land, subsidies and incentives to industries in the new policy, but to those units looking for long-term investment in Andhra Pradesh with credible background concrete plan. Our policy will be transparent and promises will be delivered. We will have 28-days window policy to help industries get clearances for their business operation," the minister said.

The Andhra Pradesh

Industrial, IT policy, AP Electronic Policy, Innovation and Start-up Policy framed in 2014 will lapse in 2020 and 90 per cent of the final draft of the new policy has been completed.

The government is now collecting feedback before releasing the final draft.

Goutham Reddy added that the TDP was ruining the image of Andhra Pradesh just for political mileage.



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

**T**he 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 bete 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. The I-T raids are likely to 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

**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, 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



M D RATNA KUMAR  
Senior Journalist

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 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 Vaipayee-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 dis-

tance 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 Amthar 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 community. 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 life-line 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.

## CAPSULE



### Lord appears in bewitching Mohini avatar

**VIJAYAWADA:** In his bewitching Mohini avatar Lord Kalyana Venkateswara took out for a celestial ride on the tastefully decked palanquin as Jaganmohini accompanied by Chinni Krishna on Tiruchi on the fifth day of the ongoing annual Brahmotsavams at Srinivasa Mangapuram on Tuesday morning. Devotees thronged the mada streets offering aarti and were blessed as the Lord's ensemble parade comprising drumbeaters of Kerala, chakka bhajans and kolatas all along the procession. Mohini avatar is a mystic presentation of the Lord in His endeavour of protecting the good in the world. Deputy executive officer Yellappa, AEO Dhananjayudu, superintendent Chengalrayudu, main priest Balaji Rangacharyulu, Inspector Anil Kumar participated.

### Somaskanda Murthy takes celestial ride

**VIJAYAWADA:** Sri Somaskanda Murthy took celestial ride on Tiruchi to bless devotees on fifth day of annual Brahmotsavams of Sri Kapileswara temple on Tuesday morning. His grand procession on the streets of Tirupati with its ensemble of bhajans, and mangala vadyams was a spectacle of devotional fervour. Deputy executive officer Subramanyam, superintendent Bupathi Raju, AVSO Surendra and others took part.



**VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES**

GOLD	₹ 41,110 (10 gm)
SILVER	₹ 46,400 (1kg)
	₹ 200

**CHICKEN RATES**

Dressed/With Skin	₹119
Without Skin	₹135
Broiler at Farm	₹82

**EGG RATES**

HYDERABAD	365
VIJAYAWADA	398
VISAKHAPATNAM	417
RETAIL PRICE	₹3.98

## Govt cracks whip against schools violating norms

C PRADEEP  
VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP government has taken several measures to revamp the education sector in the State. The main step is being introduction of English medium in government schools. Though the opposition parties cried foul over the decision stating that the government is neglecting mother tongue Telugu and giving prominence to English, but the government went ahead.

In this regard, the government has taken initiative and decided to impart training to teachers to teach in English medium from Class I to VI from the academic year 2020-21. The other initiative was Mana-Badi Naadu-Nedu, which was launched to improve infrastructure in government schools across the State.

The government was conducting surprise inspections on private schools and colleges to see whether they are following the prescribed norms and guidelines framed by the department.

The government has taken an initiative to conduct surprise inspections on private schools and colleges and they



selected 130 schools and 130 junior colleges in the State. The educational department officials conducted surprise inspection and identified that many schools have been violating the rules and regulations.

As many as 20 officials in each district carried out inspections without prior notice to the managements of institutions. Officials probed into the standards being maintained by institutions and identified many schools and colleges breach the guidelines framed by the education department. Officials identified that many schools and colleges were collecting exorbitant fees

from students. Speaking to The Pioneer, Andhra Pradesh School Education Regulatory Commission chairman Justice R Kantha Rao said that stern action will be taken against the managements of those private schools and colleges for violating the rules and guidelines of the department.

The Commission chairman stated that the department officers inspected institutions on facilities being provided to students like infrastructure, fee, number of students per class, teachers and students' ratio, classrooms, playgrounds, washroom facility,

library, laboratory and others. He said that officials noticed that many institutes failed to provide infrastructure, quality education and collecting high fees, insufficient toilets, no qualified teachers, extra classes for Class III to V.

Notices were served on those schools and colleges, which failed in following the rules, to rectify their defects

He said that officials noticed that many institutes failed to provide infrastructure, quality education and collecting high fees, insufficient toilets, no qualified teachers, extra classes for Class III to V. Notices were served on those schools and colleges, which failed in following the rules, to rectify their defects. He said that action will be taken on CBSE, ICSC schools and colleges, which are not following guidelines of the department, said chairman Kantha Rao.

## Businessmen sensitised on export-import policy

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation in association with the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Visakhapatnam, has organised an awareness programme on export-import policy procedures under Niryat Bandhu scheme at YMCA Hall, Beach Road, here on Tuesday.

The aim of the scheme is helping new exporters and importers by leveraging the knowledge base of officers and providing timely and appropriate support, said BN Ramesh, Joint Director DGFT, Visakhapatnam.

Underscoring the need to develop knowledge on export products and export markets, Ramesh sensitised benefits and incentives given under Niryat Bandhu scheme, an innovative programme launched by the Central government to mentor first generation entrepreneurs as a part of foreign trade policy.

Also, he highlighted the major components of schemes, which are preparation, development and use of New Importer and Exporter Code (IEC) by the holder, monitoring new and potential exporter through counselling



and training. J Sudhakar, branch manager from Export Credit Guarantee Corporation (ECGC), Visakhapatnam, shared the details of the procedure for the traders on how they can avail the opportunities like credit risk insurance, which covers the exporters against loss in export of goods and services.

He also explained the different types of products available for the exporters in detail. ECGC covers the banks and financial institutions, which enable exporters to obtain better facilities from them.

Pydah Krishna Prasad, president elect of AP Chambers, termed the seminar to be very informative and appreciated operations of both the ECGC and DGFT, while Zonal Chairman of AP Chambers Sudhir Mulagada said that the era of controlling authorities have been replaced by exporter friendly regime,

BN Ramesh, Joint Director DGFT, Visakhapatnam, underscored the need to develop knowledge on export products and export markets

He sensitised benefits and incentives given under Niryat Bandhu scheme, an innovative programme launched by the Central government to mentor first generation entrepreneurs as a part of foreign trade policy

which has made international trade easier. The government is promoting the export of services and goods by giving incentives.

## Madiga Finance Corpn chief all praise for Christians

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kommuri Kanaka Rao, chairman of Madiga Finance Corporation, said that it was the Christian community that encouraged the poor and the marginalised sections in the education and employment sectors.

Kanaka Rao was the chief guest at BR Ambedkar and Mahatma Jyotirao Phule Award function held at the Press Club here on Tuesday organised by Christian Literary Academy president M Prabhat Kumar.

Addressing a gathering, Kanaka Rao said the award's recipients have more responsibility and commitment towards the community. They were asked to take on the responsibility of



leading the backward classes in the education, employment and politics. Awards were given to DJ Prabhakar Rao, K Chandrasekhara, P Prabhhu Sai, M Suresh Babu, K Chittibabu, I Ramaiah, S Ranga Rao, P Mallikarjuna Rao and Rajasekhara.

## Syed Shah Bukhari Urs celebrations from March 4

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Endowments Velampalli Srinivas assured that he would try to bring Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy for the Hazrat Syed Shah Bukhari Urs, which will begin at Kondapalli village from March 4 to 6. He released a poster in this regard at his office here on Tuesday. Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that the administration will take an active part in organising celebrations.

Hazrat Syed Shah Bukhari Urs Committee chairman Md Altaf Raza said that they are making arrangements for celebrating the urs on a grand note. He further stated elaborate arrangements will be made



Minister for Endowments Velampalli Srinivas releases a poster on Hazrat Syed Shah Bukhari Urs in Vijayawada on Tuesday

as lakhs of people are likely to participate in celebrations. Muslim leaders GMC Basha, Karimullah, Wajid Khan, Irfan, Rafi, Chandbasha and others were present.

## Sucharitha releases results of APP test

IN ALL, 49 HAVE BEEN SELECTED

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharitha released the final results of Assistant Public Prosecutor (APP) posts. Addressing the media here on Tuesday, after releasing the final list here on Tuesday, the Minister stated that the notification to fill the 50 posts of Assistant Public Prosecutors was issued on September 30, 2019.

She informed that of the total 50 posts, 49 were filled in the due process and one post was left out as there is no eligible candidate. As many as 2,488 candidates registered for the examination of which 1981 attended the exam.

She said that in the written test, 496 were qualified, while 97 candidates attended the inter-



view. Finally, 49 were selected and after verification of certificates will undergo training in a few days.

Last time, the recruitment took place in 2013 but the training was imparted in 2017. But this time, training will be imparted within a week. For the first time in history of the State, more than 50 per cent of the posts are filled with women, she said.

## RINL CELEBRATES 38TH FORMATION DAY

# Pradhan exhorts RINL employees to strive, rededicate, increase efficiency

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Union Minister of Petroleum, Natural Gas and Steel Dharmendra Pradhan congratulated RINL on the occasion of its 38th Formation Day and contribution towards nation building.

He exhorted RINL employees to continue their strides rededicating themselves on this day for improving every possible aspect of efficien-

cy in steel making in RINL and banking on professional approach by identifying opportunities to improve the efficiency to produce environmental-friendly steel.

PK Rath, CMD, RINL-VSP, unveiled the Mahatma Gandhi statue in the front lawns of the main administration building to mark the RINL Formation Day, along with Directors. Rath and other dignitaries paid floral tributes to the Mahatma

on the occasion. Gandhi statue sculptured and cast with in-house talent is going to be a main attraction with the backdrop of a 100 feet high mast national flag.

Speaking on the occasion, Rath expressed his gratitude to people, who fought for the establishment of the steel plant here. While praising departments involved in making and erecting the statue, Rath observed that RINL collective proved their

dynamism, innovation and inherent talent in making the statue with in-house talent. The statue weighing around four tonnes is the first of its kind made with cast iron.

To mark the Formation Day celebrations, Rath, CMD and Directors of RINL, participated in a mass plantation drive at Ukkunagaram on Tuesday.

PK Rath, CMD, RINL, presented Jawaharlal Nehru Awards to 83

employees, executives and non-executives for their outstanding performance. Celebrations also marked cultural programmes by schoolchildren of Ukkunagaram. A musical nite by noted playback singer Sonu Mohapatra and party enthralled the audience at the sprawling Trishna Grounds in the township. K Dhanajaya Rao, tollywood playback singer, mesmerised the audience with old and new Telugu songs.



CAPSULE



Scholarships distributed to visually-challenged

**VIJAYAWADA:** Help the Blind Foundation, an NGO from Chennai, has provided scholarships worth Rs 7.35 lakh to 67 visually challenged students from Andhra Loyola College and other colleges in Vijayawada and Guntur. Scholarships were processed through Higher Education for the Persons with Special Needs (HEPSN) wing of Andhra Loyola College. Scholarships were distributed on Tuesday on the ALC premises. Managing trustee of the NGO JV Ramani distributed Rs 25,000 to hostellers and Rs 10,000 to day-scholars. Principal of the college Fr GM Victor Emmanuel, correspondent Fr Sagayaraj, vice-principal (Degree) Fr S Melchior, coordinator of HEPSN Dr G Sahaya Baskaran and volunteers of HEPSN were present.

Former Collector releases poster on VITopia-2020

**VIJAYAWADA:** B Lakshmi Kantham, former Collector of Krishna district and former JEO, TTD, released a poster on VITopia-2020 at the VIT-AP campus here on Tuesday. VITopia is the International Sports and Cultural Festival of VIT-AP celebrated annually. Releasing the poster, the chief guest stated that such cultural festivals promote harmony among educational institutions and creativity among students. He addressed the gathering on 'Society Interest Vs Self Interest'. During his address, he emphasised the importance of culture, which is an integral part of ethics and values. CLV Siva Kumar, Registrar, VIT-AP University, conveners of VITopia-2020 M Kaylan Chakravarthi and others were present.

Fadnavis to face trial in affidavit case

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Fadnavis, contended before the top court this matter has the potential for far reaching consequences on other candidates in the poll fray and the apex court needs to re-examine its October 1, 2019 decision. Rohtagi submitted as per Section 33 A (1) of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951, there was no requirement to furnish information on criminal case unless charges have been framed by a trial court.

INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

# Vizag only city in south India to get UN's support

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam is the only pilot city in South India and among the six in the country selected by the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in a bid to establish inclusive and sustainable industrialisation practices.

The other five cities are Varanasi, Muzaffarpur, Solan, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri. This is exclusively focused on facilitating inclusive and sustainable industrialisation to create comprehensive and integrated models with examples at district-level that can be replicated elsewhere.

On Tuesday, as a part of the flagship UNIDO India Country Program (CP), the DPIIT, in collaboration with Andhra Pradesh's Department of Industries and organised an interactive session with MSME units on 'Inclusive and sustainable industrialisation'.

Mekapati Goutham Reddy, Minister for Industries, IT, Skill Development & Training and Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Youth Advancement, along with Rene Van Berkel, UNIDO representative from UNIDO Regional Office India; JVN Subramanyam, Director of Industries & Commerce, CEO, Andhra Pradesh Economic Development Board, Vinay



Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao, Minister for Tourism, Culture and Youth Advancement lights a lamp to inaugurate an interactive session with MSME units on 'Inclusive and sustainable industrialisation' in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday

Chand, District Collector, Vishakhapatnam, Rajeev Viji, Director, UNIDO International Centre for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development (IC-ISID), and Srinivas Shankar Prasad, CEO, Empower MSME Trust, took up questions and also suggestions from the participants.

This day-long session brought respective ministers, industry bodies, industry representation, government officials, UNIDO representatives under single roof to discuss on strengthening the industrial ecosystem in textiles and garments, food processing, pharmaceutical, general manufacturing of auto components and other sectors.

Entrepreneurs from Auto Nagar in Gajuwaka, especially

depending on the PSUs for their business, put forth their problems in getting bulk orders and need of government help in common manufacturing or testing facilities and preference to the local traders. The manufacturing units are suffering due to unavailability of required manpower, infrastructure in terms of technology upgradation.

The UNIDO CP is particularly aimed at unleashing productive and resilient Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), create solutions for climate, resources and environment; inclusive and responsible value chains and business and strategic policy formulation for industrial transformation.

Industries Minister Goutham Reddy exuded con-

■ The other five cities are Varanasi, Muzaffarpur, Solan, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri

■ This is exclusively focused on facilitating inclusive and sustainable industrialisation to create comprehensive and integrated models with examples at district-level that can be replicated elsewhere

fidence that UNIDO-DPIIT initiative for inclusive and sustainable industrialisation in Visakhapatnam will translate to growth for all and percolates to improve the living standards of all and benefits should be shared equitably.

Rene Van Berkel, UNIDO representative from UNIDO Regional Office, India, said Visakhapatnam should be strengthened to set an example for sectoral efficiency, technical skill equipped and establishing a strong network of small scale manufacturing.

He emphasised that this district-level promotion of strengthening industrial ecosystem is the need of the hour and they are soon to take up base line study to identify sectors and equip capacities of institutes and engineering colleges in industrial skills for the next three years.

# ACB conducts raids on municipal corporations

Rs 80,000 was seized from Guntur Municipal Corporation office

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) sleuths conducted a surprise raid on the Municipal Corporation Office in Guntur and seized

Rs 55,000 from the contract and outsourcing employees and Rs 25,000 from the town planning department.

According to ACB officials, raids were conducted as many complaints were lodged with them against the Town Planning department employees from all corners. The raids were conducted in order to make the State as a corruption-free and provide transparent administration to people.

Raids were conducted on Srikakulam Municipal Corporation, Vizianagram Municipal Corporation, Gajuwaka zone, Madhurawada zone, Kakinada Municipal Corporation, Tadepalligudem Municipality, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation, Guntur Municipal Corporation, Ongole Municipal Corporation, Nellore Municipal Corporation,



Tirupati Municipal Corporation, Proddatur municipality, Yemmiganur municipality and Kadiri municipality.

In Kakinada of East Godavari district, ACB officials conducted raids on municipal corporation office, town planning section and observed that the process of plan approvals was being delayed and identified deviation in construction against the approved plan.

In Greater Visakhapatnam

Municipal Corporation, Gajuwaka zone, five ACB officials conducted a raid on the Town Planning section and verified the records. DSP Shakila Bhanu, CI Lakshman Murthy and others conducted the raids.

ACB officials continued raids on Town Planning section of Vijayawada Municipal Corporation and verified the records. The raid was conducted under the supervision of Additional Superintendent of Police Maheswar Rao.

# Nani urges Paswan to release Rs 4,000 crore arrears from FCI to AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Civil Supplies Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) met Union Minister of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Ram Vilas Paswan on Tuesday and discussed issues related to civil supplies.

Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, Kodali Nani said that he requested the Union Minister to release arrears of Rs 4,000 crore from Food Corporation of India to the State. He said the Union Minister was asked to permit to increase the space in FCI godowns in order to store the more paddy procured from farmers.

The Central government has recognised only 92 lakh rice cards and he urged to recognise 1.3 crore rice cards in the State, he said.

The State government has relaxed the guidelines to issue rice cards to more number of beneficiaries. After issuing fee reimbursement cards and



● The State government has relaxed the guidelines to issue rice cards to more number of beneficiaries, said Minister for Civil Supplies Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani)

● Nearly nine lakh rice card beneficiaries have come forward voluntarily to surrender their rice cards, he said

Aarogyasri health cards, nearly nine lakh rice card beneficiaries have come forward voluntarily to surrender their rice cards, he said.

# 'Students should be agents of change'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Students should be the agents of change to serve society by being the aspirants of IAS, IPS and other posts, which can be achieved through goal setting, choosing the right path, being positive, having confidence, courage, hard work, thinking and dreaming high by improving subject knowledge, communication skills, opined Vani Mohan, Commissioner and the Registrar of Cooperative Societies. She further stated that doing online courses will help a lot to achieve success in life and also in serving the nation, she pointed out.

She was the chief guest at the 13th National Level Management Meet 'SAMANVAY-2020', which was organised under the aegis of the PG Department of Business Administration of Maris Stella College on Tuesday. Guests of honour GV Raghuram, Vice-President, Power Mech Projects Limited, Hannah Anubya, vice-principal, degree section, Malathi, Smitha, Pranavi, Prameela and other faculty and students were present.

# 3 sisters go missing from Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Three sisters reportedly went missing from their home at Dwarakanagar area in Visakhapatnam city. The girls, happens to be siblings, have left home on February 11 evening and did not return.

They were identified as Mindi Anuradha (22), Tulasi (20) and Komali (17). The youngest is studying B Sc in BVK College in the city. The incident came to light after Dwaraka police registered a missing case on Monday late night based on a complaint lodged by the father of the girls Mindi Yerram Naidu, who works as a watchman in an apartment at Dwarakanagar area.

According to Dwaraka police, the girls reportedly left home at 5.30 pm on Monday. As they did not return home till evening, their parents started searching for them frantically.

They also received a mobile text message from their daughter number that they left home intentionally and not to look out for them as they were ending their



● The incident came to light after Dwaraka police registered a missing case on Monday late night based on a complaint lodged by the father of the girls Mindi Yerram Naidu, who works as a watchman in an apartment at Dwarakanagar area

● It was learnt that at around 2 pm on Tuesday, parents received a message from the girls, who said that they were safe and also appealed to take care of their health

● According to sources, parents suspect that the girls are in Chennai

lives. Cell phones of the three girls are switched off.

It was learnt that at around 2 pm on Tuesday, parents received another message from the girls, who said that they were safe and also appealed to take care of their health. According to sources, parents

suspect that the girls are in Chennai.

However, as a part of their search, Dwaraka police formed three teams and checking CCTV footage at various parts of the city, including bus stations, railway station and also enquiring with travel agents.

# Skill to power new industrial policy: Goutham

Continued from Page 1

Skilled manpower, the minister said, will attract industries to the state and hence the state government was planning big to make the students job-ready with a vigorous industry-academic model and establishing Skill Development University. According to him, 25 skill development schools will come up at various places in the state under the ambit of the Skill Development University.

Besides, four Centres of Excellence (CoE) will also be opened to analyze the skills required by the job market and prepare the training module accordingly.

"We will present the final report on the establishment of the varsity within 45 days to the state government," Goutham Reddy said, speaking about the progress made on the proposal. Earlier, AP government has issued a GO, mandating private organisations to reserve 75 per cent of jobs to locals. On Tuesday, representatives from various industrial sectors pointed out the unavailability of local manpower to cater to the demand.

# 1 killed, 6 hurt as car careens off flyover...

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 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.

CCTV visuals obtained after the incident showed the car zipping at 106 kmph at the time of the accident. However, Rao's lawyers blatantly argue that their client was driving within the speed limit, and blamed the mishap on 'faulty design' of the flyover.

# CM: Cancer curable, no cure for Naidu's acidic attitude

Continued from Page 1

Under Phase-1, 66,15,467 students of 60,401 schools were covered. In the preliminary screening, 4,36,979 children were identified with eye problems.

In the second phase, 1,34,252 children with vision defects were identified for distribution of spectacles, but so far only 56,767

were distributed while another 77,485 "are under process", according to information provided by the Chief Minister's Office.

Phase-3 of the programme will be conducted till July 31, 2020 to cover the targeted 56.88 lakh people.

In all, 500 teams from government and private eye hospitals have been identified to conduct the secondary eye screening in the villages.

In fact, 85 per cent of promises made in YSRCP manifesto have been implemented even before the government turning one year in office.

# Indian Navy reviews refit of ships, submarines at ENC

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Indian Navy's Annual Refit Conference (ARC) and Annual Infrastructure Conference (AIC) commenced on Tuesday at the Eastern Naval Command, headquarters, here on Tuesday.

The two-day conference chaired by Vice-Admiral GS Pabby, Chief of Materiel (COM), Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), is being attended by all the stakeholders representing the Naval Headquarters, three Naval Commands, the Tri-Services Andaman & Nicobar Command at Port Blair, Dockyards, Repair Yards and Materiel Organisations of the Navy.

The delegates will deliberate upon refit plans for all ships and submarines of the Indian Navy and formulate plans for infrastructure augmentation to meet the growing requirements of the Indian Navy. Delivering the inaugural address, Vice-Admiral Atul Kumar Jain, Flag Officer



Participants Annual Refit Conference strike a pose at Eastern Naval Command in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday

Commanding-in-Chief, ENC, welcomed the delegates and appreciated the dedicated efforts being put in by one and all in ensuring combat availability of Naval platforms.

Role of the Naval Repair Yards towards the sustained operation of platforms at sea was lauded. The Chief of Materiel (COM), during his address, complimented the forum for ensuring quality refits of ships

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

Continued from Page 1

The restructuring, one of the largest undertaken by a blue chip lender for more than a decade, will be partly managed through natural attrition as people leave the bank, he said.

The UK-based bank, whose huge Asian operations are headquartered in Hong Kong, said the coronavirus epidemic had significantly impacted staff and customers. In the long run it

could reduce revenue and cause bad loans to rise as supply chains are disrupted, Quinn said. The virus has killed almost 1,900 people, overwhelmingly in mainland China, and infected more than 70,000, while its economic impact is spreading across the globe.

HSBC veteran Mr Quinn is auditioning for the permanent role of CEO, which the bank said in August would be announced within six to 12 months.

# HC reserves order on shifting

Continued from Page 1

The court asked the government why it was relocating the two offices to Kurnool instead of shifting them to another building in Amaravati. The three-member Bench asked the government to submit an affidavit. As per court directions, the government submitted an affidavit to court on Tuesday.

The affidavit attributed the relocation to inadequate space in Secretariat. The affidavit also highlighted a proposal to relocate some of the offices not connected to the Secretariat. There are plans to relocate at least 10 government offices, including the offices of Commissioner of Inquiries and Vigilance Commissioner, to Kurnool as District Collector of Kurnool submitted a report to government indicating availability of suitable buildings there and hence the relocation.

# Covid19 outbreak hits industries dependent on parts from China

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

The coronavirus outbreak has hit industries in Maharashtra's Aurangabad district, a prominent manufacturing hub, with companies finding it difficult to procure substitutes for Chinese parts. Companies have started sourcing products from other countries to continue their manufacturing without interruptions.

"Aurangabad has more than 4,000 companies and some of them source parts from China. The coronavirus outbreak in China has disturbed the supply chain of materials," former chairman of Chamber of Marathwada Industries and Agriculture (CMIA) Prasad Kokil said.

The gap in the supply of raw materials can create problems, he said, adding that this is a chance to look for substitutes and decrease the dependency on Chinese parts.

The micro, small and medium enterprises can grab this opportunity, Kokil said. Companies working in solar and energy sector have to import parts from China, solar and energy equipment manufacturer M P Sharma said.

"The production of solar items has been impacted, as the



**The gap in the supply of raw materials can create problems, he said, adding that this is a chance to look for substitutes and decrease the dependency on Chinese parts**

supply of raw materials from China has been disrupted. We have found new alternatives in Vietnam and Taiwan," he said. "Imported parts make 60 per cent of our products. We need to buy them even if they are 13 to 15 per cent costlier than Chinese imports," he added.

One of the manufacturers who has invested Rs 3.5 crore in Chinese machines is unable to get his consignment, as he can't send anyone to transport the equipment from there,

industrialist Sunil Kirdak said.

When asked if local MSMEs can profit from this development, Confederation of Indian Industry's zonal chairman Mukund Kulkarni said it would be highly unlikely as the parts will have to be delivered in a short span of time. "We can make quality parts, but we may not be able to meet the demands in a short span of time. Hence, imports will continue, only the countries we import from will change," he said.

## NGOV SCARE:

### Med teams to screen visitors to WB for Urs

PNS ■ MIDNAPORE

A special medical team has been deployed to screen pilgrims arriving in this West Bengal town from countries such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan to take part in the annual Urs festival, amid the scare of novel coronavirus, officials said on Tuesday.

Lakhs of Bengali-speaking Muslims from across India and several countries in the region have been coming to the Midnapore town in West Midnapore district to offer flowers, chaddar and sit to the shrine of saint Syed Shah Mehr Ali Alquadr Al Baghdadi on the occasion for over a hundred years.

This year marks the 119th anniversary of the Urs. A train carrying 2,321 pilgrims from Dhaka in Bangladesh arrived here on Monday. Among the passengers, 994



were female and 106 children.

A district official said adequate police arrangements have been made for the Urs festival and to facilitate the pilgrims.

Medical teams have also been deployed to screen people arriving here from foreign countries amid the scare of novel coronavirus, he said.

The teams have been deputed at the Midnapore railway station to screen the pilgrims for symptoms of the disease and only after that they are being allowed to enter the town, the official said. The Urs, which began on Monday, will continue till Wednesday.

# Centre renames defence institute after Parrikar



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The central government has renamed Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), a government think tank, as Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in order to "honour the commitment and legacy" of the late defence minister.

Parrikar, who was defence minister from November 9, 2014 to March 14, 2017, died on March 17 last year in Panaji at Goa due to pancreatic cancer.

He steered the Defence Ministry "through the tough challenges of attacks like Pathankot and Uri and responded to these with exemplary boldness", said a government statement on Tuesday.

"An epitome of integrity and dedication in public life, throughout his career, late Manohar Parrikar showed a tremendous fighting spirit, taking on the odds with fearlessness," the statement noted.

**He steered the Defence Ministry "through the tough challenges of attacks like Pathankot and Uri and responded to these with exemplary boldness"**

defence minister, India witnessed a series of decisions that "enhanced its security capacities, boosted indigenous defence production and bettered the lives of ex-servicemen", it said.

His "biggest" contribution was towards the implementation of long-standing One Rank One Pension (OROP) demand for the armed forces, the statement said.

The renaming of the IDSA "will align the vision and aspiration of the premier defence institute with the contribution of the former Raksha Mantri and Padma Bhushan awardee", said the statement.

## SHORT READS



### Case against TN man for derogatory tweet against Chidambaram

**SIVANGANGA (TN):** A case was registered against a resident of Karaikudi in this district for an alleged 'derogatory and threatening' tweet against former union minister P Chidambaram and his son, police said on Tuesday. The Karaikudi police registered the case against the man hailing from the town for tweeting against Chidambaram and his son Karthi Chidambaram. While Chidambaram is a Rajya Sabha MP, his son represents Sivaganga constituency in the Lok Sabha. The FIR was registered based on a complaint by A Palaniappan, a local Congress functionary.

### Maha: Matka den busted in Jalna, six arrested

**JALNA:** Six persons were arrested and valuables worth Rs 60 lakh were seized from an alleged 'matka' (gambling) den in a residential building at Double Jee in Maharashtra's Jalna city, an official said on Tuesday. The police received a complaint about the matka den and raided the apartment of Machindra Uttaram Athawale (63) on Monday, inspector Devidas Shelke said. While six people were caught red-handed, valuables worth Rs 60 lakh including 12 smart phones, computers, printers and cash were seized from the premises, he added. On interrogation, the arrested accused revealed that the racket was being run by Shilving Chagga Appa Veer, a resident Khabadi Mohalla of Jalna, the official said. The police are on the look out for the main accused in the case, he added.

### MP: 13 Barasinghas translocated to Satpura tiger reserve

**BHOPAL:** As part of conservation process, Madhya Pradesh forest department has shifted 13 endangered Barasinghas (swamp deer) from the Kanha Tiger Reserve to the Satpura Tiger Reserve, a forest official said on Tuesday. With the latest translocation on Monday, the total number of swamp deer in the Satpura special enclosure has gone up from 23 to 36, the official said. "Barasingha"—the state animal of Madhya Pradesh—is categorised as "extinct". It is found only in the Kanha Tiger Reserve. In order to raise their population they were shifted successfully to Bhopal's National Van Vihar and Satpura Tiger Reserve (STR), where their numbers are increasing, the official said. Earlier, 33 swamp deer were translocated to Satpura as part of the conservation programme. Following their increasing numbers, some 20-25 Barasinghas were released in the wild, he added.

## UP BUDGET

# Infrastructure push for Ayodhya

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With an aim to develop Ayodhya as a tourist attraction, the Uttar Pradesh government in its budget for 2020-21 has made a special provision of Rs 500 crore for an airport in the city. Apart from it, the state government will spend Rs 85 crore on the development of a high-class infrastructure in the pilgrim city.

In the fourth budget of the Yogi government in the state, Rs 10 crore has been kept for the renovation of Tulsi Smarak Bhawan in Ayodhya.

The budget also earmarked Rs 180 crore for setting up a cul-



tural centre in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's constituency Varanasi and Rs 200 crore for the expansion and beautification of the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

The government also earmarked Rs 18 crore for the construction of a 'vedic vigyan

kendra" under Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya.

The budget also provides for Rs 8 crore subsidy for the Kailash Mansarovar yatra and Rs 10 lakh for Sindhu Darshan.

The budget proposed Rs 50 crore to promote tourism units under the Uttar Pradesh Tourism Policy-2018.

Development of Garhmukteshwar in Hapur district to conserve cultural and ancient heritage, development of water sports in Ramgarh Taal in Gorakhpur, construction of heliports at important tourist centres and the implementation of 46 tourism schemes have also been proposed in the budget.

# Not mulling prohibition: Rajasthan minister

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan's Parliamentary Affairs minister Shanti Dhariwal on Tuesday said the government is not contemplating a liquor ban in the state.

Replying to a query by Rashtriya Loktantrik Party MLA Indira Devi during Question hour in the state Assembly, Dhariwal said the government has announced an excise policy which emphasises temperance.

The minister said a committee, headed by the then additional chief secretary CS Rajan, was formed on March 26, 2013 to discuss proposals on liquor ban.

The committee submitted its report on September 10, 2013. The committee's view was that



liquor ban was not a practical policy and temperance was the only solution in Rajasthan, the minister said.

The government at present is not considering a liquor ban in the state. The government has

announced an excise policy which emphasises temperance, Dhariwal said.

Some of the important directions in the policy include strict compliance of timing for opening and closure of liquor shops,

action on advertisements encouraging liquor consumption, awareness on the side effects of liquor, ban on advertisements in liquor shops, penalty on consuming liquor at public places and ban on illegal liquor, he said.

Earlier, the opposition BJP staged a walk out from the House over the reply of Agriculture minister Lal Chand Kataria on a question related to PM Crop Insurance Scheme.

The minister informed the House that the state government will deposit premium amount of Rs 685.85 crore for Rabi crop for 2019-20 for which the process has been initiated. He also said farmers have deposited a premium of Rs 384.51 crore to insurance companies.

## UP earmarks Rs 783 crore for education

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has earmarked Rs 783 crore in its 2020-21 budget for improvement of education and basic infrastructure facilities under the 'Pradhanmantri Jan Vikas Karyakram' in minority-dominated areas.

"The budget has a provision of Rs 783 crore for improvement of education, sanitation, health, drinking water and basic infrastructure facilities under PM Jan Vikas Karyakram in minority-dominated areas," Finance Minister Suresh Khanna said in his budget speech.

# Festival to celebrate Indian heritage

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An upcoming festival will celebrate India's cultural heritage and ethos through a series of panel discussions, classical dance and music performances, plays, 'mushaira', and sufi music.

"Jashn-e-Hind", organised by Delhi-based NGO Sakshi, will be held at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) from February 21.

Aimed at reviving the India's "cultural legacy", the three-day event will feature 'ghazal', 'gurbani', 'qawwali', 'bhajan', and folk music performances to highlight the 'Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb'.

"The festival will address contemporary issues of social relevance by raising aware-



ness in the community. It is aimed at reviving our rich composite, cultural legacy.

"The choice of programs will bear in mind that the ethos should be in consonance with values of the 'Ganga Jamni tehzeeb', that is, living in amity,

harmony and with respect for life and environment," Mridula Tandon, president, Sakshi, said.

She added that the event will also "bring to the fore and celebrate the contribution" of the armed forces including the paramilitary.

The multi-cultural event will host leading names in the field of poetry including Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, Laxmi Shankar Bajpai, Kunwar Bechain, Moien Shadab, and Mahesh Garg 'Bedhadak'.

It will also witness participation by classical dancers like Birju Maharaj, Shovana Narain, Yamini and Bhavna Reddy, Priti Patel, and Geeta Chandran's troupe, as well as musical stalwarts like qawwali-singer Sabri brothers, flautist Ajay Prasanna, Rajasthani vocalist Sudesh Sharma among others.

Other participating speakers include, lyricist Piyush Mishra, literary critic Shamim Hanfi, psychiatrist Nimesh Desai, and paralympian Ranveer Saini.

The festival will come to an end on February 23.

# Buddhist monks on way to Pak stopped in Raj

PNS ■ BARMER

Thirteen Buddhist monks on a global peace mission from Thailand to France had to return from Barmer after they were not allowed to undertake further journey to neighbouring Pakistan through Rajasthan's Munabao border. According to a police official, they were stopped from entering the area restricted for foreigners in Barmer, over 100 kilometres away from the Indo-Pakistan border.

Now, they will go to the Attari-Wagah border crossing for their further journey into Pakistan, a police official said.

The monks have a valid visa for India and Pakistan. Their leader said they were



carrying the message of global peace and will be covering nearly 9,000 km from Thailand to France in this mission.

"A group of monks is on a peace journey and will go to Pakistan from India. There was no clarity over their route. Since they cannot cross the border from here, they were asked to go to the Wagah border," Barmer Circle Officer Vijay Singh said.

## SUPERSTITIOUS REMARKS

# Preacher Indurikar Maharaj apologises

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

Marathi 'kirtankar' (preacher) Nivrutti Maharaj Indurikar on Tuesday tendered an apology over his remarks on the timing of intercourse and gender of child, seeking to end a controversy on the issue. His apology came after state minister Bachchu Kadu said Maharashtra government will not file a case against him over the remarks.

During his kirtan (sermon) at a hamlet in Ahmednagar district recently, the preacher reportedly said intercourse by a couple on an even date would beget a male child, while on an odd date would result in the birth of a girl.

The Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmulan Samiti, a voluntary organisation working to eradicate superstitious beliefs, had sought a police case against Indurikar Maharaj, alleging



that his comments violated provisions of the PCPNDT Act.

In a statement, Indurikar Maharaj said he was tendering an apology if anyone's sentiments were hurt by his remarks. "In the last 26 years of my delivering kirtans, I had stressed on fighting superstition and other social ills... If my remarks hurt anyone's sentiments, I apologise for it," he said.



## Aligarh SP leader's son shot dead in 'road rage'

PNS ■ ALIGARH (UP)

A Samajwadi Party leader's son was shot dead during a violent clash that broke out here after a "road rage" incident involving them and a local BJP politician's son, police said on Tuesday. They said 20-year-old Sachin, son of a district-level SP leader Puranmal Prajapati, was killed Monday night in Palasahibabad locality in Sarni Gate area as the argument following the collision between two motorcycles led to stone-pelting and firing. At least six people, including the deceased's younger brother and a policeman, were injured in the clash, the police said.

# Actor, ex-MP Tapas Paul dead

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

Veteran Bengali actor and former Trinamool Congress MP Tapas Paul died of a cardiac arrest in a Mumbai hospital early Tuesday, his wife said. He was 61.

Paul, who had a long history of heart problems, was admitted to a private hospital in Mumbai, where he had gone to meet his daughter in January.

The two-term former MP from Krishnanagar, who moved away from both cinema and active politics after the CBI arrested him in the Rose Valley chit-fund scam in December 2016, is survived by his daughter Sohini and wife Nandini.

According to Nandini Paul, the actor was rushed to hospital on February 1 after he fell ill at the Mumbai airport on his way to the United States for treatment.

The actor-politician, known for films such as "Saheb" and "Amar Bandhan", was on the ventilator till February 6.

"He was taken off the ven-



**The actor-politician, known for films such as "Saheb" and "Amar Bandhan", was on the ventilator till February 6**

tilator and was recovering, but suddenly his condition worsened and he died of cardiac arrest around 3.30 am on Tuesday," Nandini Paul told.

Paul had been suffering from heart ailments and been in and out of hospitals for treatment during the past two years.

He was born in Chandannagar in Hooghly district and graduated from Hooghly Mohsin College in bioscience.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said in her condolence message that Paul's death had left a deep void in films and politics.

Paul. He was a superstar of Bengali cinema who was a member of the Trinamool family. Tapas served the people as a two-term MP and MLA. We will miss him dearly. My condolences to his wife Nandini, daughter Sohini and his many fans," Banerjee tweeted.

A romantic hero, having endeared himself to the Bengali audience since his debut film "Dadar Kirti" in 1980, Paul became a household name with his leading roles in "Parabat Priya" (1984), "Bhalobasa Bhalobasa" (1985), "Anurager Choyan" and "Amar Bandhan" (1986). He made his Bollywood debut in Hiren Nag's "Abodh" (1984) opposite Madhuri Dixit Nene.

# 'British MP's visa revoked for her anti-India activities'



British lawmaker Debbie Abrahams' e-Business visa was revoked as she was involved in anti-India activities and the cancellation was conveyed to her on February 14, government sources said on Tuesday.

Asserting that the grant, rejection or revocation of a visa or electronic travel authorisation is the sovereign right of a country, the sources said Abrahams was issued an e-Business visa on October 7 last year which was valid till October 5, 2020 for attending

business meetings. "Her e-Business visa was revoked on February 14, 2020 on account of her indulging in activities which went against India's national interest. The rejection of the e-Business visa was intimated to her on February 14," a source said. Abrahams, who chairs a British parliamentary group on Kashmir, was denied entry into India upon her arrival at the New Delhi airport on Monday. Government officials had said on Monday also that she was informed in advance that her e-visa had been cancelled.

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.

"Bihar cannot bear to see its leader becoming a 'pichhlaggu' (piggybacking). Nitish Kumar, who had once famously thwarted Narendra Modi from campaigning for the BJP in Bihar, cut a sorry figure recently when he spoke at rallies in Delhi assembly polls like a mere sidekick while Shah and J P Nadda were running the show," he lamented.

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 can I 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

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**

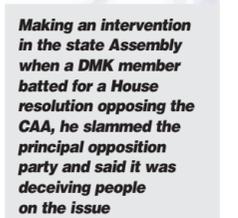
PNS ■ CHENNAI

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



Making an intervention in the state Assembly when a DMK member batted for a House resolution opposing the CAA, he slammed the principal opposition party and said it was deceiving people on the issue

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.

# 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 densification 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

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](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

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

**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 UPAs 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.

**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

*Sasireka Parinayam* was Meghana's debut serial in Telugu. She said, "I gave my audition for *Sasireka Parinayam* in Hyderabad in 2013. At that time, I didn't know a single word of Telugu. However, I was selected and the *Sasireka 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."

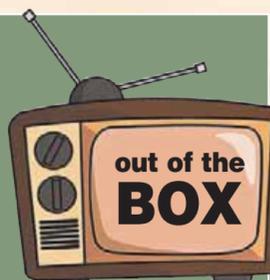
### NO DREAM ROLE AS SUCH

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

# I owe my career to debutant directors: VICKY KAUSHAL

Successive hits and a National Award later, actor Vicky Kaushal vividly remembers his time as a newcomer four years ago and says he owes his career to first-time directors.

The actor, who was first noticed in the then debutant director Neeraj Ghaywan's 2015 social drama *Masaan*, said every film is a new project for both the actor and the filmmaker.

He later collaborated with a string of new directing talent like Moze Singh for *Zubaan*, Anand Tiwari for *Love Per Square Foot*, and Aditya Dhar for *Uri: The Surgical Strike*, for which the actor earned the best actor National Award.

"I owe my career to debutant directors, so I'm quite used to working with first timers. I just read the script and if I am sold on that, I meet the director to understand his vision. If I sense clarity and vision there, that's what I am sold to."

"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 direc-

tor for that film and story. We have to work with that spirit. I tried to bring out the same fire in every film that I had in my first film," Vicky told *PTI* in an interview here.

But the 31-year-old actor is more excited about working with a new director as they bring a "scared energy" to the film sets.

With his upcoming horror film *Bhoot: The Haunted Ship* too, Vicky is joining hands with debutant director Bhanu Pratap Singh, who served as assistant director on *Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania* (2014).

"There is a different sort of enthusiasm which comes on board. That energy is not an energy which takes things for granted. It's a scared energy and that brings out something special," he said.

The actor has always maintained he is no horror buff but it was the story, based on a true incident of a stranded cargo ship at Juhu Beach, that found him.

He said unlike *Sanju* where he needed to learn a dialect for the character or *Uri* which demanded physical transformation, essaying the role of Prithvi was a pretty much a

straight line.

"It was more about adapting to the new grammar. It was something I was not so prepared for. I had underestimated the horror genre before doing this film quite a lot. In horror, timing has to be correct, everything has to fall in the right place at the right time, all departments work in sync to make that one shot," he added.

Vicky said the team has attempted to present the horror genre in its truest form — with jump scares and atmospherics.

"*Bhoot* is not just about jump scares but it is also about the mood that keeps you on your toes when you watch it. We have tried to stay true to the genre. There are no unnecessary subplots."

"We have not tried to lure the audience with making a nice musical album where people are like 'let's go to watch the songs' or turning into a romantic horror or horror comedy. They have been made over the years."

Asked his first memory of a horror film, Vicky remembered how scared he was after watching Ram Gopal Varma's *Raat*.



## Taapsee, Tahir Raj Bhasin in desi version of *Run Lola Run*

Actors Taapsee Pannu and Tahir Raj Bhasin will be teaming up for the Hindi adaptation of German film *Run Lola Run*.

The 1998 Tom Tykwer directorial was about two star-crossed lovers who find themselves left with a few minutes to change their lives forever.

The Hindi version titled *Loopo Lapeta* will be helmed by Aakash Bhatia, who will make his directorial debut with the movie.

It will be produced by Sony Pictures Films India,

Ellipsis Entertainment and Aayush Maheshwari.

"*Loopo Lapeta* is a shining addition to our slate of clutter-breaking and compelling motion pictures. We love the amazing cast which has come on board to breathe life into this cutting-edge script. It will always be the studio's constant endeavour to work with new directors and actors, and Aakash Bhatia is one amazing find for the studio," said Vivek Krishnani, Managing Director, Sony Pictures Entertainment India.

The principal photogra-

phy will begin in April. Tanuj Garg and Atul Kasbekar, Managing Partners, Ellipsis Entertainment, said, "We are emotional about this film, as it was the first to get green-lit at Ellipsis after our company was formed. When Aayush Maheshwari approached us with the rights, we agreed immediately and invested the better part of three years in working on various versions and drafts to adapt the German film to suit an Indian context.

The film will release on January 29, 2021.



## KJo to launch Suhana Khan, Asim Riaz in *Student Of The Year 3?*

News of Shah Rukh Khan's daughter Suhana Khan and popular *Bigg Boss 13* contestant Asim Riaz's Bollywood debut is doing the

rounds on the Internet.

According to the latest reports, filmmaker Karan Johar, who is known to launch new actors in his films has taken up the task to introduce Suhana. Reportedly, he

will be launching Suhana and Asim in the third installment of the *Student Of The Year* franchise.

Karan has previously launched Alia Bhatt, Varun Dhawan, Sidharth Malhotra, Ananya Pandey and

Tara Sutaria with the *Student Of The Year* franchise.

The filmmaker currently awaits the release of *Bhoot Part One: The Haunted Ship* scheduled for February 21.

— IANS

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



#### NANCY



#### GINGER MEGGS



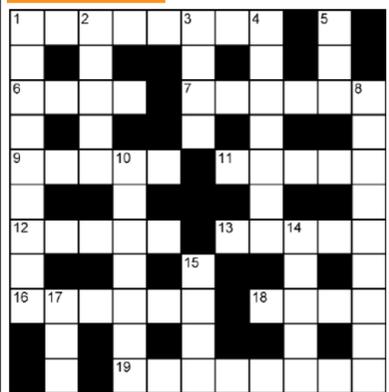
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### 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

#### DOWN

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

#### SOLUTION



#### SUDOKU

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

#### 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.

# 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.

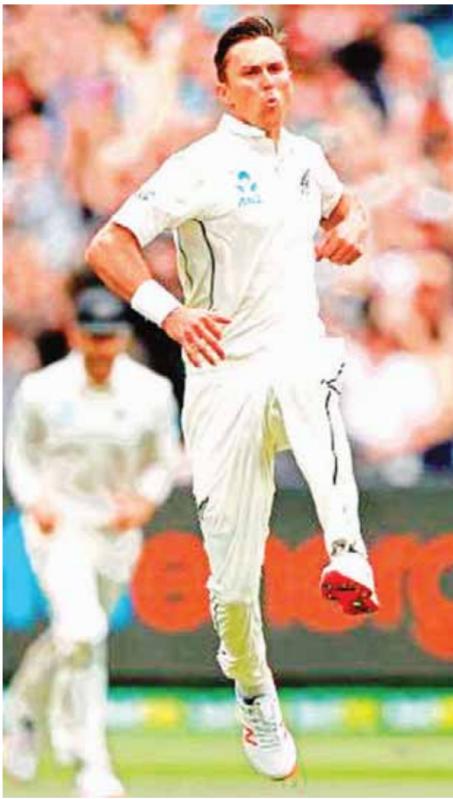
Boult was out of action for the past six weeks due to a fracture on his right hand sustained during the Boxing Day Test against Australia and missed out on the limited-overs leg of the India series.

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.



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 Reserve 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."

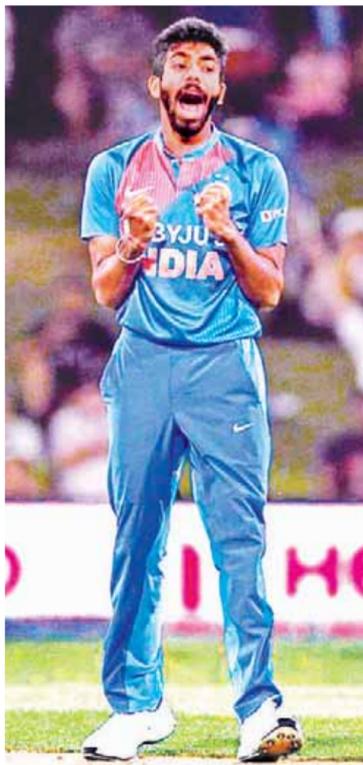
But Bond felt Bumrah's bowling wasn't all that bad during the series, which India lost 0-3.

"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 it," 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.



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.

## 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.

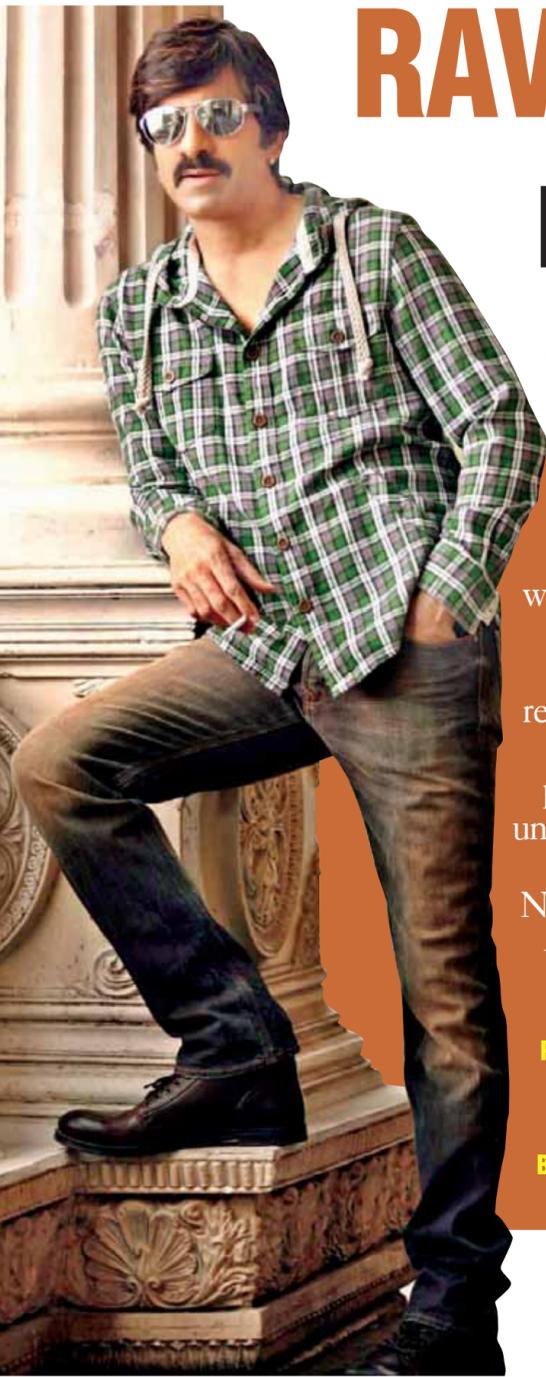
However, the quarterfinals starting on Thursday will not see the use of DRS.

"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.



# 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 hither-

to 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.

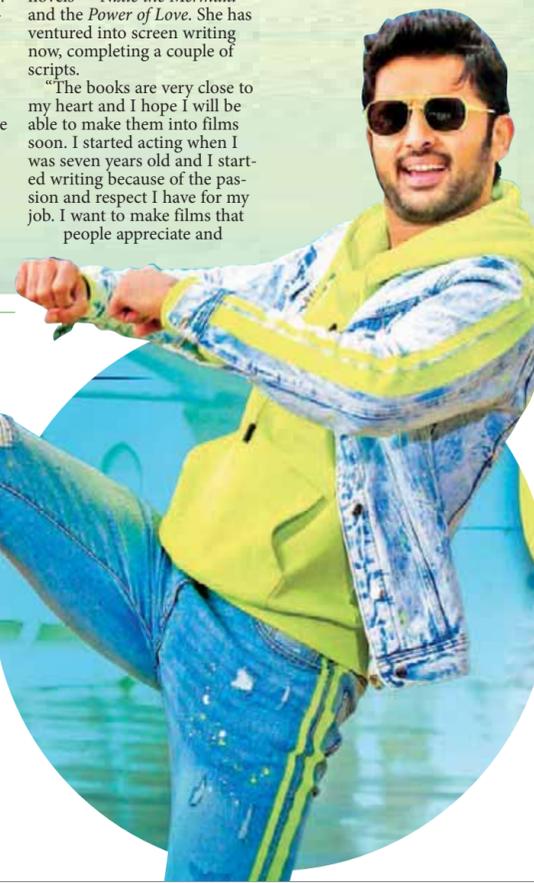
Known for featuring in Hindi TV shows like *Ek Veer Ki Ardaas...Veera* and *Bigg Boss*, Digangana is passionate about writing as well. Her first book of English lyrics titled *Waves the Endless Emotions* was released at the age of 15 and was followed by her two novels — *Nixie the Mermaid* and *the Power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

