

ANALYSIS 7
NO COUNTRY
FOR WOMEN

MONEY 8
SENSEX ENDS 153 PTS LOWER;
NIFTY SLIPS BELOW 12,100

SPORTS 12
INDIAN WOMEN
DOMINATE WITH 3 GOLD

VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



ANANYA JOINS
VIJAY, PURI
JAGANNADH
ON SETS
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TAJ MAHAL GETS A MAKEOVER AS AGRA PREPARES FOR TRUMP VISIT

Ahead of US President Donald Trump's two-day India visit next week, a few hours at Agra, the town of the Taj Mahal, has spurred a makeover of sorts. Streets and walls are getting a fresh coat of painted and water is being released into the Yamuna, one of country's major rivers. Fountains inside the Taj Mahal complex were cleaned. Visuals show workers scrubbing away on fountains and pathways. Another photo from inside showed a mud pack being applied to a portion of the monument to clean it.



NIRBHAYA CONVICT BANGS HEAD AGAINST WALL, HAS HEAD INJURY

One of the four Nirbhaya case convicts to be hanged on March 3, Vinay Sharma, was injured after he reportedly banged his head against the wall of his cell at Tihar jail in Delhi. He has approached the court for high level medical treatment for 'grievous head injury, fracture in his right arm, mental illness and schizophrenia.' A jail official said Vinay Sharma had attempted to hurt himself by banging his head against a wall on Sunday afternoon. Security stopped him. He suffered minor injuries. His lawyer claims he has been unable to recognise people, including his mother.



MARK ZUCKERBERG GETS STAFF TO BLOW-DRY HIS ARMPITS

Mark Zuckerberg has his communications staff blow-dry his armpits before big events and speeches, a new book on the Facebook founder and CEO claims. The 35-year-old had become famous for his perspiration during a 2010 televised interview when he became visibly nervous and started sweating profusely. Technology journalist Steven Levy, in his book 'Facebook: The Inside Story', claims that Mark Zuckerberg appears to be 'consumed by his public image' and now has his staff blow-dry his armpits to eliminate any sweat before public appearances.



AVOID 'NATIONALISM' WORD, IT IMPLIES NAZISM, SAYS RSS CHIEF

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat on Thursday said use of the word 'nationalism' should be avoided as it reminds people of Adolf Hitler's Nazism. He made the remarks at an RSS event at the Mukherjee University Morabadi in Ranchi. The RSS chief recalled his conversation with an RSS worker in the United Kingdom where he said: 'Nationalism shabd ka upyog mat kiyye. Nation kahenge chalega, national kahenge chalega, nationality kahenge chalega, nationalism mat kaho. Nationalism ka matlab hota hai Hitler, naziwaad.'



'SC order enabling, will give clarity on moving forward'

4



Nadda calls on Badal for 'strengthening NDA'

5



FAIFA urges govt for 'pragmatic' approach on cigarette taxation

8

TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Magha & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi: Trayodashi 05:20 pm
Nakshatram: Uttara Ashadha: 09:13 am
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 11:03 am - 12:29 pm
Yamagandam: 03:23 pm - 04:49 pm
Varjyam: 01:34 pm - 03:19 pm
Gulika: 08:10 am - 09:36 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 12:01 am - 01:45 am
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:06 pm - 12:52 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Clear
Temp: 34/19
Humidity: 57%
Sunrise: 06:39
Sunset: 06:19
Current Weather Conditions Updated February 20, 2020 5:00 PM

MONEY POWER

Naidu poorest, Devansh richest in Nara family, declares Lokesh

TDP chief's assets grew by 30% but his grandson richer by Rs 15.4cr

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party supremo N Chandrababu Naidu's net assets increased by almost 30 per cent in financial year 2018-19 but his five-year-old grandson Nara Devansh continues to be richer than him by nearly Rs 15.55 crore.

Revealing details of his family's assets, TDP general secretary Nara Lokesh said that Naidu's assets were worth Rs 3.87 crore as on March 31, 2019.

Lokesh made it clear that all the values projected in the declaration were as per purchase value and not market value.

According to the declaration, Devansh possesses assets whose net worth is Rs 19.42 crore, making him richer than his father Lokesh, whose net worth is Rs 19 crore and his mother Nara Brahmani, whose assets are worth Rs 11.51 crore.



Lokesh said that Naidu's assets were worth Rs 9 crore; this includes his posh bungalow at Jubilee Hills in Hyderabad worth Rs 8.01 crore and another residence worth Rs 23.84 lakh in his native village of Naravariapalle in Chittoor district. Naidu still shows a 1983 model Ambassador car as his only own car whose value is Rs 1.52 lakh, National Savings Certificates worth Rs 1,000

and an amount of Rs 74.10 lakh as cash balance in Savings Bank account.

His loans and liabilities to the extent of Rs 5.13 crore, including housing loan from Bank of Baroda, take the net worth of his assets to Rs 3.87 crore.

In 2018, Naidu had projected total assets worth Rs 8.31 crore and liabilities of Rs 5.31 crore, thereby showing his net worth at Rs 2.99 crore. Thus, there is an increase in the value of Naidu's net assets by Rs 88 lakh, an increase of nearly 29.5 per cent.

Nara Bhuvaneshwari has net assets worth Rs 39.58 crore. Her properties in Tamil Nadu and Telangana, shares in Heritage Foods and other companies and gold and silver ornaments are worth around Rs 50.62 crore but since she liabilities worth around Rs 11.04 crore, her total assets are worth Rs 39.58 crore, Lokesh said.

3



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy speaks to officials at the Velugonda project on Thursday.

Jagan wants June 1 deadline for Veligonda project met

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday inspected the Veligonda project works at Kotturu in Pedda Dornala mandal of the district and enquired about its progress from officials. He inspected the first and second tunnel works of the project.

Later, Jagan held a review meeting with officials of the water resources development department and higher author-

ities in the district at the project site. The project's objective is to irrigate 4,47,300 acres in Prakasam, Kadapa and Nellore districts.

The project is being described as a boon for Prakasam district.

The state government is proceeding at a rapid pace to complete the project to get water released from its tunnel No. 1 by June.

The project has been devised to divert the floodwa-

ters of River Krishna from Srisaillam project to provide drinking water and water for irrigation in the three districts.

The project has 3,36,100 acre ayacut in 23 mandals of Prakasam district, 27,200 acres in two mandals of Kadapa district and 84,000 acres under five mandals of Nellore district. The project has been designed to provide drinking water facility to 15.25 lakh people in the three districts.

Blocked by farmers, Roja blames Naidu for 'attack'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tension prevailed at the SRM University on Thursday after a large number of farmers from Amaravati laid siege to the varsity upon learning that APIIC chairperson RK Roja was to attend a summit there. After the police failed to bring the situation under control, the YSRCP MLA had to leave the University premises.

The APIIC chairperson later in the day condemned the incident and said that it was orchestrated by the cronies of TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu.

Speaking to the media, she said Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was committed to the welfare of the farmers in Amaravati region and hence increased the annuity from Rs 2,500 to Rs 5,000 and extended it to 15 years. She said there was no question of neglecting Amaravati as it would be the legislative capital of the state where all the Bills would be framed.



Farmers block the road leading to the SRM University where YSRCP MLA RK Roja was due to attend a summit on Thursday.

"Farmers should question the TDP leaders and former ministers Prattipati Pulla Rao, Narayana and Lokesh for betraying them with false promises. In the five years of TDP rule, Naidu showed graphics to the public and constructed temporary buildings. If the protests continue, no investor will come forward to set up an institution in Amaravati. The public should remain calm and maintain peace," she said.

She further said that Naidu left the state with a debt of about Rs 3 lakh-crore. "It is evident that TDP leaders had grabbed over 4,000 acres of land in Amaravati alone. In the last five years, Naidu built only temporary offices with hundreds of crores and he is confined to 29 villages. Keeping all this in mind, the Chief Minister took up decentralisation to develop all 13 districts equally."

3

SRM varsity working on hydrogen rail engines

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

SRM University AP is working on a flagship project to develop hydrogen-infused railway engines in partnership with the Indian Railways, its Pro-Vice-Chancellor D Narayana Rao said here on Thursday.

Addressing a two-day Industry-Academia Summit organised by the University in association with Confederation of Indian Industry, he said they have also tied up with the Amara Raja Group to establish the SRM-Amara Raja Centre of Excellence to develop energy storage devices.

A MoU was signed between the two organisations in this regard.

The university also plans to open another centre of excellence, the Jal-Janak Rail, a hydrogen-powered fuel cell-based train that would be the flagship project of SRM University AP.

3



The scene on the film set after the accident.

3 die as crane crashes on sets of Kamal film

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Three people were killed and nine injured when a crane came crashing down on the sets of actor Kamal Haasan's upcoming film Indian 2, police said, as the veteran actor mourned the deaths.

An assistant director was among the three killed in the accident on Wednesday night and a case has been registered against the crane operator, who is absconding, under various sections of the IPC, including causing death by

negligence, police said.

Those dead were assistant director Krishna, art assistant Chandran and Madhu, a production assistant, the movie's producer Lyca Productions said in a statement on Thursday.

Haasan, the film's heroine Kajal Aggarwal and others condoled the deaths and hoped that such incidents do not recur.

Haasan also visited the injured at a hospital late Wednesday night.

3

Utter chaos prevails in TS over NPR

L VENKAT RAM REDDY ■ HYDERABAD

Utter chaos prevails in Telangana State over the implementation of National Population Register (NPR) as contrasting stands are being adopted in the government from top to bottom.

Chief Minister K Chandrababu Naidu has publicly declared his opposition to the CAA, NPR and NRC.

Addressing a press conference at Pragathi Bhavan on February 16 after the cabinet meeting, KCR declared that the TS Legislative Assembly will pass a resolution against CAA, on the ground that it is 'discriminatory' in nature.

However, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar issued orders on February 12 in which there was mention about conducting of only 'housing census' in Telangana and there was no mention about conducting NPR.

3

Vidyasagar Rao hints at BJP replacing AP, TS party chiefs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Governor Ch. Vidyasagar Rao on Thursday hinted at the BJP replacing the party's state unit presidents in AP and TS.

Interacting with the media after calling on BJP president JP Nadda, Vidyasagar Rao expressed confidence of the BJP growing as an alternative political force to the ruling TRS in Telangana.

He termed the TRS administration as the 'Naya Nizam rule' and felt that the Opposition parties have been opposing CAA and the NRC only to meet their political exigencies. He demanded the



Government of Telangana officially celebrate September 17 as Liberation Day.

Further, Vidyasagar Rao declared that the BJP would organize a programme in Hyderabad on Feb 21 to highlight the importance of mother tongue. He wanted the authorities to ensure that students would not clash on the grounds of language.

Tharoor backs Dikshit on polls for Cong chief

Time to move on from Gandhis, senior leaders must 'intellectually contribute', says duo

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

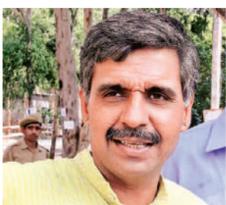
Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Thursday urged the Congress Working Committee (CWC) to hold leadership elections to 'energise workers and inspire voters'.

Tharoor's appeal came in support of his party colleague Sandeep Dikshit's remarks that the biggest challenge the party faces is the "leadership question".

Dikshit has accused senior leaders of failing to find a new president after all these months because they are "scared who will bell the cat". He told a



Shashi Tharoor



Sandeep Dikshit

media house that while Sonia Gandhi is the interim president, Rahul Gandhi doesn't want to be president and the Congress has to respect his position and carry on.

Dikshit named Amarinder Singh, Ashok Gehlot, Kamal Nath, AK Antony, P Chidambaram, Salman Khurshid and Ahmed Patel and said it was time for them to "intel-

lectually contribute" and get into leadership selection.

However, Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said that Dikshit should not have gone public with his views. "If Sandeep is putting it on Twitter, if he puts even a fraction in his work, he will transform Delhi. Instead of giving gyaan (lecture), concentrate on doing good work," Surjewala said.

Reacting to the remarks, Tharoor tweeted, "What Sandeep Dikshit said openly is what dozens of party leaders from across the country are saying privately, including many with responsible posi-

tions in the party. I renew my appeal to CWC to hold leadership elections to energise workers and inspire voters."

He wrote that what he said openly was being said sotto voce by "dozens of party leaders" across the country.

"Some have asked who should vote and for what. I was referring to my earlier call eight months ago for elections among the 10,000 party workers who constitute the 'AICC plus PCC delegates' list. These should be for the elected seats in the CWC as well as for the party presidency," Tharoor said.

3

CCMB to find treatment for glaucoma

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), the premier research organisation, is devising strategies for glaucoma treatment, which causes loss of vision, said Shanthi Swarup Bhatnagar Awardee and CCMB chief scientist Dr Ghanshyam Swarup here on Thursday.

He was in the city to participate in Researchers Day celebrations organised by GITAM Institute of Science on the eve of Shanthi Swarup Bhatnagar birth anniversary.

While addressing a gathering, Dr Ghanshyam Swarup informed that worldwide around 70 million people are suffering from glaucoma. He mentioned that glaucoma is a slowly progressing genetic disease and is more prevalent in the elderly particularly children of Andhra Pradesh.



CCMB chief scientist Ghanshyam Swarup delivers the lecture at GITAM University campus in Visakhapatnam on Thursday

- CCMB chief scientist Ghanshyam Swarup informed that worldwide around 70 million people are suffering from glaucoma

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- Mutations in certain genes are primarily responsible for glaucoma particularly one of the genes causing glaucoma was OPTN, which codes for optineurin protein, he said

Unlike cataract, which is the leading cause for blindness, loss of vision caused by glaucoma cannot be regained by therapeutic intervention, he added. "Mutations in certain genes are primarily responsible for glaucoma particularly one of the genes causing glaucoma was OPTN, which codes for optineurin protein," he said adding that his research work would help in devising a therapeutic strategy to prevent cell death caused by mutation and facilitate to treat

glaucoma to avoid total blindness. Another Bhatnagar Awardee and scientist from Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Prof KR Prasad presented his research work in the area of synthesis of natural products. GITAM Deemed to be

University Vice-Chancellor Prof K Sivaramakrishna felicitated the two Bhatnagar awardees and mentioned that basic science can answer fundamental questions about our world, and lead to wide-ranging applications and tremendous benefits and value.

NATIONAL CAMPUS CRICKET TOURNEY

Raghu College qualifies from Visakhapatnam zone

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Raghu College has qualified from Vizag city and will now represent Vizag and face six other cities in the regional/zonal finals in April. The top two teams from each zone in RBCC will then compete in the national finals, where the teams will play in the knockout rounds of quarter-finals, semi-finals and finals respectively.

From a breath taking season in 2020, the ninth edition of the only global cricket tournament for university students, Red Bull campus cricket kicked off in the country across 32 cities with city qualifiers from February 13 to discover and nurture budding cricketers from college campuses.

The Indian Premier League franchise Rajasthan Royals deepens their association with the energy drink giant Red Bull in India and plans to continue scouting talent from the annual international T20 tournament for college cricket teams - Red Bull campus cricket

Red Bull Campus Cricket-2020 city qualifiers are taking place from February 13 to March 28 across 32 cities, including Chennai, Bengaluru,



Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Kochi, Mysore and Vizag in south.

Raghu College and Gayatri Vidya Parisad College faced each other in the finals of the Vishakhapatnam city qualifiers at the Raghu College ground on February 14 after Gayatri Vidya Parisad beat Andhra University by 10 wickets and Raghu College won against Lendi institute by eight wickets. Raghu College won the final match against Gayatri Vidya Parisad College by nine runs to become the Vizag city champions in the Red Bull Campus Cricket-2020.

Raghu College won the toss and chose to bat first. E Tarun from Raghu College received the Man of the Match award

for picking up three wickets in 2.5 overs. The national winner will then represent India in the Red Bull Campus Cricket-2020 world finals. On the association with Red Bull campus cricket, Jake Lush McCrum, COO of Rajasthan Royals, said, "Rajasthan Royals is delighted to be associated once again with Red Bull campus cricket. It is a fantastic tournament giving a platform to young, talented cricketers across the country and world. This has been a core part of our philosophy since day one. Our coaching team saw immense cricket potential in this tournament last year, in which we were delighted to support in hosting the finals at the SMS Stadium in Jaipur."

CAPSULE



Kapilesvara Swamy cynosure of all eyes

VIJAYAWADA: On the seventh day of ongoing annual Brahmotsavams of Sri Kapilesvara temple, Sri Kapilesvara Swamy took ride on Kalpavruksha Vahanam - the divine wish fulfilling tree on Thursday in Tirupati as a part of the ongoing annual Brahmotsavams in this famous Saivaitic temple. Riding with his caravan of devotees, bhajan mandals, kolatas and chakka bhajans, the Lord was the cynosure of all eyes who gathered along the streets of temple city to witness the procession. Deputy executive officer Subramanyam, superintendent Bhupathi Raju and others were present.

Lord Dhanvantari Shines on Surya Prabha Vahanam

VIJAYAWADA: On the seventh day of annual Brahmotsavams of Sri Kalyana Venkateswara temple at Srinivasa Mangapuram, the Lord glittered on the celestial Surya Prabha Vahanam in 'Dhanvantari' alankaram-the God of Medicine on Thursday. Surya Prabha Vahanam denotes the power of the Lord to grant health and relief from all diseases to His devotees by empowering them with natural healing capabilities. As part of the annual Brahmotsavams, the TTD is organising grand Rathotsavam on Friday at 8.30 am followed by the Aswa Vahanam in the evening with which the vahanam seva of the Lord culminates.



'Step-motherly' treatment by Centre towards AP decried

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

It has been six years, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had accorded Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh at the time of bifurcation, however, the ruling BJP-led-NDA government at the Centre had failed to implement it, said senior Congress leader N Tulasi Reddy.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, Tulasi Reddy recalled that soon after Manmohan Singh announced Special Category Status in the Rajya Sabha, BJP MP Venkaiah Naidu stressed for 10 years SCS and later included in their manifesto.

Tulasi Reddy said that on February 20, 2014, Manmohan



Singh made six announcements in Parliament like according Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh, tax exemption, Bundelkhand package to north Andhra, subsidies to AP and compensating the revenue deficit for the year 2014-15, which was un-

animously approved in the House. On March 1, the Union Cabinet had voted in favour and on March 5 election notification was announced.

Parakamani activities reviewed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TTD additional executive officer AV Dharma Reddy reviewed activities and issues related to Parakamani at Gokulam Conference Hall in Tirumala on Thursday.

Deputy executive officer Venkataiah presented activities and issues related to Parakamani through a PowerPoint presentation.

Later the additional executive officer discussed with bankers about status of lifting of coins, currency notes and also reviewed on foreign currency and soiled notes. He also instructed the engineering wing to replace the old Parakamani machinery with new one.

Officials told to expedite Durga flyover works

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

District Collector Md Imtiaz instructed officials of National Highway and Soma Constructions to expedite the construction work of Durga flyover.

He inspected the construction works at Krishnaveni Ghat, along with engineers and construction company representatives on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, he said that 85 per cent of the flyover construction was completed and additional workers have been deployed to complete the remaining work at a brisk pace.

He told officers concerned and construction company engineers to complete the approach road works near Kanakadurga temple. Furthermore, Soma Company project manager Anantharamulu said that the main flyover construction will be completed by March-end and trial run on one side of the flyover will be ready. He said that by April month-end, the flyover construction works will be completed and in May-end, the flyover will be ready for use.

Kapilesvara Swamy temple decked up for Shivaratri

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TTD has made elaborate arrangements at Sri Kapilesvara Swamy temple for Maha Shivaratri celebrations on Friday. Keeping in view the anticipated huge turnout of devotees, the TTD has organised special queue lines, barricades, shamanas and parking lots around the temple. Rituals begin on Friday at 2.30 am with Mahanyasaka Ekadasha Rudrabhishekam followed by Rathotsavam (Bhogi Ratham) and the most important Nandi Vahanam in the evening. Devotees will be given darshan from 5.30 am till midnight. On Saturday, Lingodbhava Kaala Abhishekam will be performed from midnight of Friday to 4 am in which the TTD appealed to devotees to participate in big numbers and beget blessings.

The TTD has deployed nearly 250 Srivari Sevaks, 150 Scouts, 100 Vigilance personnel for the mega religious event. Annaprashadam and water arrangements have also been made by the TTD. Later in the evening, there will be devotional cultural events like bhajans, harikatha and bhakti sangeetam. Meanwhile, the



The TTD has deployed about 250 Srivari Sevaks, 150 scouts and 100 Vigilance personnel for the mega religious event. Annaprashadam and water arrangements have also been made by the TTD

TTD is organising grand Maha Shivaratri celebrations at the Sri Seshachala Lingeswara temple at Kandulavaripalli village of Chandragiri mandal from February 20-22.

Celebrations began with Kalasasthapanam and Ekadasha Rudra Avahanam in the early hours on February 20. On Friday, abhishekam will be performed to Sri Vigneswara, Sri Subramanya, Sri Anjaneya and Sri Umamaheswara deities. Later, on Ekadasha Rudra

Abhishekam for Seshachala Lingeswara and Nandikeswara Swamy will be performed in the evening. Dharmic programmes, including Harikatha and Bhakti Sangeet will be arranged.

On February 22, midnight Mahanyasaka Rudrabhishekam and Kalyanotsavam will be performed. Interested couple could participate in the Kalyanotsavam by buying Rs 300 ticket. Later, the TTD is organising Gramotsavam in the evening.

All India Football tourney in Vizag from February 24

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

State Bank of India is conducting All India Football Tournament for its employees across 17 of its circles. This mega event is being hosted by Visakhapatnam module of Amaravati Circle in Visakhapatnam.

The tournament will begin from February 24 to 28 at railway ground and Police Barracks ground. To conduct these games, the SBI Administrative Office, Visakhapatnam, has made elaborate arrangements for the smooth conduct of the event.

It is learnt that international football players, who are working in the bank like Durjay Kumar Brahma, Debasika, Ranjanadh Dhut and national football players like Dhanal Kumar and Stephen David, are playing in the tournament.

Last time, the similar event was held at Guwahati where Kerala circle team has bagged the first prize and North-East stood as second in the football tournament. Bank is focusing on many curricular activities

The tournament will begin from February 24 to 28 at railway ground and Police Barracks ground. To conduct these games, the SBI Administrative Office, Vizag, has made elaborate arrangements for the smooth conduct of the event

and employees are being encouraged to participate in camps like yoga and physical education. Accordingly, sports and games, awareness programmes are being undertaken. To reduce work pressure and stress to its employees, SBI is conducting tournaments every year. All the employees of the bank across its 17 circles will be coming to the City of Destiny.

Module DGM Y Sathanarayana Prasad participated in the draw for teams on Thursday. Addressing the staff, he said that each employee should start his/her day with walking and some physical exercise so as to protect their health.

'99% farmers registered under e-Karshak'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The government is committed to supporting farmers, said Krishna District Collector Md Imtiaz. He further stated that 98 per cent of farmers have been registered under e-Karshak and registered their crop details under e-Crop

The Collector, along with Nandigama MLA M Jagannathan Rao, handed over the letter granting Rs 7 lakh to the wife of K Ashok Kumar, a farmer, who committed suicide.

The Collector said that Ashok Kumar committed suicide in July, 2019, and as per the directive of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, Rs 7 lakh was given to his kin and the amount would be directly transferred to her account.

MLA M Jagannathan Rao said that Andhra Pradesh was providing highest MSP to farmers. He recalled that farmers in the State would get Rs 13,500 per year under Rythu Barosa scheme.

In all, 2.16 lakh beneficiaries would get house sites in the district on Ugadi, he said.



TTD EO urges students to aim for stress-free education

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Apart from the Govinda Namas and Siva Namas, the Temple City of Tirupati reverberated with the rhythmic recitation of Saraswathi Maha Mantra on the bright sunny day on Thursday.

The pilgrim centre echoed to chorus chanting of 'Om Sreem Hrim Kleem Maha Saraswatyai-Mahyam Medham Pragyam Pracha' with the tens of thousands of voices chanting the Maha Mantra during the spectacular Maha Saraswathi Yagam organised jointly by Hindu Dharma Prachara Parishad wing and Education Department of TTD in the spacious Geeta Jayanthi grounds. Speaking on the occasion, TTD Executive Officer Anil



Priests perform Maha Sarswathi yagam in Tirupati on Thursday in which local MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy, TTD Executive Officer and others take part (right) A massive gathering of students witness the yagam.

Kumar Singhal said that the TTD has launched skill development training in collaboration with the AP Skill Development Corporation for students of TTD educational institutions for enhancing their

job opportunities after the completion of their studies. He advised students to develop 'Stress free' education to have a happy, healthy and prosperous career. He appreciated students for



participating in the massive programme with devotion, dedication and discipline. "The unique feature about students studying in TTD institutions is that your passion for Hindu sanatana dharma makes you

special from other students. I am confident that this Maha Yagam will help you to excel in your exams. But at the same time, I advise you all to aim at stress-free education, which we used to have during our

- Education is an ocean without any end, says TTD Trust Board Special Invitee and Tirupati MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy
- Continuous studies will reduce exam phobia: TTD CEO
- Nearly 10,000 students took part in Maha Sarswathi yagam

times. We enjoyed our studies without feeling stress. This could be possible only when you study every day not just before exams," he opined.

The TTD Executive Officer said even Prime Minister

Narendra Modi had recently focused on the state of mind of students preparing for examinations in his 'Mann ki Baat' programme. He wished that the worship of Goddess Saraswati would reduce stress and prepare students to face any challenges in the examinations with courage. TTD Trust Board Special Invitee and Tirupati MLA Bhumana Karunakar Reddy said the blessings of Goddess Saraswati will enhance the mental stamina, peace and develop concentration among students. "Education is the only property, which cannot be looted by anyone, or any force. Education is like an ocean without any end. It enhances ethical values and makes us to become responsible citizens of society."

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CAPSULE



Governor arrives in Tirupati

VIJAYAWADA: Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan accompanied by wife arrived in Tirupati on Thursday. On his arrival at Padmavathi Rest House, Tirupati, TTD Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singhal and CVSO Gopinath Jetty accorded him a warm welcome. Superintendent of Police Ramesh Reddy and others were present.

Durga temple to have non-hereditary Trust Board

VIJAYAWADA: The government has constituted a Non-hereditary Trust Board to Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, according to a press release issued by V Usha Rani, Secretary to Government (endowments) on Thursday. The new trustees shall hold the office for a period of two years with effect from the date of taking the oath of office and secrecy. Commissioner of Endowments M Padma will take necessary steps to administer the oath of office and secrecy to members appointed as trustees and also for the election of the Chairman to the above Trust Board as per the provisions of the Andhra Pradesh Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments Act.

Cops foil suicide bid by woman

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A woman tried to commit suicide by jumping into the River Krishna from the Prakasam Barrage on Thursday. On noticing the woman jumping into the river, the NDRF staff swung into action and rescued the woman. According to NDRF staff, the woman hails from Tadepalli village in Guntur district and came to the barrage with her two-year-old son. Later, she left the boy, and suddenly jumped into the river to commit suicide, which was captured in the CCTV on the barrage. Police took her to the government hospital for treatment and doctors said that she was out of danger. On receiving the information, the family members of the woman came to the government hospital and took her home. Police said that she might have taken the extreme step due to family disputes.

JAGAN'S VISION HAILED

Disha Bill historic, will copy it: Maha Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Disha Bill introduced by the Andhra Pradesh government is winning praise not only from people across the State but also from other States in the country.

Home Minister of Maharashtra Anil Deshmukh heaped praise on Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharitha for introducing the Disha Bill. He was in the State to seek details about the Bill.

He met Minister for Home Mekathoti Sucharitha, Minister for Women and Child Welfare Taneti Vanitha, along with officials, including Chief Secretary Neelam Sawhney, DGP Gautam Sawang and Home Secretary Kumar Vishwajit.

Maharashtra DGP Subodhaya Kumar Jaiswal and Maharashtra Additional Chief Secretary Sanjay Kumar accompanied the minister. Speaking on the occasion, Deshmukh said that they will take measures to bring a similar Bill in Maharashtra and added that it is commendable to launch the Disha Police Station within two months of introduction of the Bill. He also said that measures will be taken to introduce the Disha Bill in the Maharashtra Assembly with the direction of Andhra



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy gives a bouquet to Home Minister of Maharashtra Anil Deshmukh in Amaravati on Thursday. Minister for Home Mekathoti Sucharitha, Minister for Women and Child Welfare Taneti Vanitha and officials belonging to Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra are also seen

● Home Minister of Maharashtra Anil Deshmukh said that they will take measures to bring a similar Bill in Maharashtra

● He said that it is commendable to launch the Disha Police Station within two months of introduction of the Disha Bill and added that measures will be taken to introduce the Bill in the Maharashtra Assembly

Pradesh. Home Minister Makati Sucharitha said: "We introduced the Bill for prevention of crimes against women and girls, which is the first of its kind in the country."

She further stated: "Rs 87 crore has already been allocated and we are setting up 13

Special Courts, Special Police Stations and also appointing Public Prosecutors. Separate Control Room and One-Stop Centre have been set up."

The government has distributed Disha Crime Detection Kits to Disha Police Stations and will make each police sta-

tion women-friendly," she added.

Addressing a gathering, Minister for Women and Child Welfare Taneti Vanitha said that the Disha Bill, which is aimed at protecting women and girls, is a historic Bill.

Chief Secretary Neelam Sawhney said that as part of the implementation of the Bill, the government is taking steps to create large scale infrastructure. She informed that two women officers have been appointed as special officers for the implementation of Disha Bill. Disha Special Officers Kritika Shukla and others were present.

BJP-Jana Sena will tie up for local body polls: Kanna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The BJP will win majority seats in the ensuing local body elections by tying up with the Jana Sena, disclosed State president Kanna Lakshminarayana

Continuing his tirade against Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, Kanna Lakshminarayana alleged that the YSRCP government was filing false cases against BJP activists. Addressing a meeting here on Thursday, he said that even after meeting the DGP, false cases are being registered against BJP activists and blamed the ruling party for supporting the culprits attacking temples.

He pointed out that the ruling YSRCP was boasting of implementing welfare schemes for the poor but it is increasing the prices of essential commodities.

Similarly, the government has increased RTC charges, fuel prices, electricity charges, liquor prices but states that their government is striving for the welfare of people.

He pointed out that Rs 10,000 was given to auto drivers on one hand and on the other hand, taxes are being imposed on

● Govt foisting case against BJP workers, alleged BJP State president Kanna Lakshminarayana

● MP GVL Narsimha Rao said that the State received better allocations in the budget compared to the previous year for the Polavaram project, Kotipalli railway line, National Highways, Central Universities,

houses for the poor under PM Awas Yojana, drinking water to remote villages

them and challans are being issued leaving them in the lurch. MP GVL Narsimha Rao created awareness among the gathering on allocations in the Union Budget to the State.

He said that the State received better allocations in the budget compared to the previous year for the Polavaram project, Kotipalli railway line, National Highways, Central Universities, houses for the poor under PM Awas Yojana, drinking water to remote villages and others.

City cops crack burglary case within 24 hrs

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The city police on Thursday solved a burglary case within 24 hours of the crime and nabbed the offender. The arrested have been identified as Matha Nani (19), a resident of Sriharipuram area in Vizag city.

Police said that Nani broke into the house of one Molleti Nagamani when she was away for a brief period on Wednesday afternoon.

Since, Nagamani's mother, who is in the house and she doesn't have good vision and also lost hearing, Nani took advantage and gained entry into the house. Nani broke open the almirah and decamped with gold ornaments worth Rs 1.31 lakh.

Based on a complaint lodged by Nagamani, the Malkapuram police led by Sub-Inspector D Suribabu kept tabs on all jewellery shops in the vicinity and they nabbed Nani when he approached a shop at Sriharipuram to sell the jewellery. Police recovered the stolen jewellery from the accused.

He said that the State received better allocations in the budget compared to the previous year for the Polavaram project, Kotipalli railway line, National Highways, Central Universities, houses for the poor under PM Awas Yojana, drinking water to remote villages and others.



3 die as crane crashes on sets of Kamal Haasan's film

Continued from Page 1

The accident took place at suburban Nazrathpet when the crane employed to erect the sets crashed, police said.

The shoot was underway at a private cinema studio, they added.

On Thursday, Haasan and Lyca Productions condole the death of the three professionals.

The 65-year-old actor said though he had "met with and crossed" many accidents, this was "very horrific."

Condoling the death of three "most hardworking" technicians, Lyca Productions said "we are extremely saddened" over the accident.

Expressing his condolences, Haasan tweeted, "Though (I) have met with and crossed many accidents, today's mishap is very horrific. I have lost three of my colleagues."

"More than my pain, the grief of the family who lost them will be manifold. I take part in their grief as one of them," he said.

Lyca Productions said "no



words could ease what we truly feel" and expressed condolences to the bereaved families.

Many other film actors including Dhanush mourned the deaths.

In a tweet, the actor-producer said the loss at the sets of Indian 2 was "irreparable."

"Such incidents should not recur," he said and wished speedy recovery of the injured.

Kajal Aggarwal expressed anguish over the death of her colleagues.

"Words cannot describe the

heartache I feel at the unexpected, untimely loss of my colleagues from last night. Krishna, Chandran and Madhu—sending love, strength and my deepest condolences to your families. May God give strength in this moment of desolation," she tweeted.

"In so much shock, denial, trauma from the monstrous crane accident last night. All it took was a fraction of a second to stay alive and type this tweet..." she added.

Lyricist Vairamuthu also expressed grief.

GVMC to do away with parking fees

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

An announcement from the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) has really brought smiles on the faces of Vizagites. The Corporation has announced that parking fees could not be collected from the shoppers and cinemagoers visiting malls and multiplexes in the city.

However, the respite has come up with some terms and conditions. GVMC Commissioner G Srijana said no parking fee shall be charged for the first half-an-hour, which could be extended to one hour if the owner of the vehicle produces an invoice from the mall or multiplex.

She said in case, the bike or car has been parked for more than an hour and the vehicle owner produces a bill or movie ticket, which costs from Rs 20 to Rs 50, then the parking fee will be waived off.

"Illegal parking near commercial establishments and cinema theatres often leads to traffic congestion. So, we have decided to provide free parking facility at the com-



● The Corporation has announced that parking fees could not be collected from the shoppers and cinemagoers visiting malls and multiplexes in the city

● "Illegal parking near commercial establishments and cinema theatres often leads to traffic congestion. So, we have decided to provide free parking facility at the commercial establishments to overcome traffic congestion", Commissioner said

● GVMC Commissioner G Srijana said no parking fee shall be charged for the first half-an-hour, which could be extended to one hour, if the owner of the vehicle produces an invoice from the mall or multiplex

mercial establishments to overcome traffic congestion", she said.

Social activists welcomed the move. G Srinivas, a social activist, said GVMC has taken a good decision as there were complaints that people are being fleeced in the name of the parking fee at commercial

establishments in Vizag city. However, doubts remain whether the commercial establishments will follow the rules since they are infamous for ignoring the instructions. The surveys conducted by CRO - Consumer Rights Organisation had found that almost all shop

ping malls and theatres are collecting parking fees from consumers, which is 'Unfair Trade Practice & Deficiency in Service'.

Tharoor backs Dikshit on polls for...

Continued from Page 1

Tharoor had said the way forward for the party could be opening up all key posts, including the CWC membership, to fresh elections which would help legitimise the incoming set of leaders.

The rout in the Delhi polls has brought out the fissures within the party with several

leaders openly sparring over the reasons for the party's dismal performance.

After the party was routed in the Delhi polls, a section of Congress leaders openly congratulated the Aam Aadmi Party for defeating the BJP, while others criticised their own leaders for praising a political rival that has edged out the Congress in Delhi.

Submarine repair another feather to HSL's cap

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Hindustan Shipyard Limited (HSL) achieved another milestone in submarine repair capability by completing extensive repairs, upgrade, system integration and trials of INS Sindhuvir ahead of the contractual delivery period. The refit completion ceremony was conducted at the shipyard on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, Rear Admiral LV Sarat Babu, Chairman and Managing Director, HSL, said timely com-



pletion of the refit was possible due to the involvement of Naval Dockyard, Visakhapatnam, and support of the Eastern Naval Command.

Apart from the strong vendor base of about 70 MSMEs developed during the refit has cumulatively generated sizeable local revenue, employment and

enhancement of skill, the CMD added. The chairman said the HSL is on a strong pedestal for undertaking future submarine projects like P75I construction, Major Refit and Life Certification (MRLC) of Sindhughosh and other submarine refits by harnessing the potential of Indian companies thus fostering Make in India intent. The CMD also added that India is now no need to depend on other countries, including Russia, for the refit works and construction of submarines.

BLOCKED BY FARMERS, ROJA BLAMES NAIDU FOR 'ATTACK'

Continued from Page 1

Accusing Naidu of being the 'president of drunkards association', Roja said, "It is unfortunate that Naidu is supporting drunkards. While Jagan Mohan Reddy is striving to provide a better quality of life to women, it is sad that Naidu is favouring drunkards."

On the I-T raids, the MLA said, "I'm not at all surprised that Chandrababu Naidu and Lokesh are silent about it. They know that they would go to jail one day and in order to avoid this, they launched the Praja Chaitanya Yatra just to divert the attention of the public. It is not Praja Chaitanya Yatra, but it is Picchodi Yatra."

Naidu poorest, Devansh richest in Nara family...

Continued from Page 1

Last year, Bhuvanewari's net worth was Rs 31 crore, including total assets worth Rs 53.3 crore and the remaining liabilities. Lokesh said that he himself has net assets worth Rs 24.70 crore, including a share in his father's Jubilee Hills bungalow, a farmhouse along with five acres of agricultural land in Ranga Reddy district in Telangana and investments in Heritage.

Lokesh has two bullet proof Toyota Fortuner cars and a Ford Fiesta car. He has liabilities to the tune Rs 5.70 crore. In 2018, he had declared assets worth Rs 21.4 crore, with total assets of Rs 27.29 crore and liabilities of Rs 5.88 crore.



Lokesh's wife Nara Brahmani holds net assets worth Rs 11.51 crore, with total assets being Rs 15.68 crore and liabilities of Rs 4.17 crore. She also has properties in Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy

Lokesh has two bullet proof Toyota Fortuner cars and a Ford Fiesta car. He has liabilities to the tune Rs 5.70 crore. In 2018, he had declared assets worth Rs 21.4 crore, with total assets of Rs 27.29 crore and liabilities of Rs 5.88 crore

and Chennai, besides investments in Heritage and other companies. In March 2018, she had shown Rs 7.72 crore as net assets and Rs 13.38 crore as total assets. Lokesh's son Nara Devansh, has total assets worth Rs 19.42 crore, compared to Rs 18.71 crore the previous year. His assets include an open plot worth Rs 16.17 crore in Jubilee Hills, fixed deposits and shares in Heritage Foods.

He has no liabilities. Lokesh said that in the previous year, the turnover of Heritage Foods was Rs 2,500 crore and had given employment to about 3,000 people.

He alleged that mud was being slung on the TDP in spite of it running business and doing politics with sincerity and discipline. "The amount found by I-officials during their raid on former PA of

Chandrababu Naidu was just Rs 2.68 lakh. The I-T officials returned the amount," Lokesh said. Heritage Foods was established in such a way that it had no link with the TDP or politics. Heritage Foods is spread in about 15 states selling milk and milk products and it owns properties in as many as nine states. Lokesh clarified that Heritage Foods does not have assets in the capital region of Amaravati and that land purchased for the group in 2014 was 30 km from Amaravati.

Take a jibe at YSRCP president YS Jaganmohan Reddy, Lokesh said that his assets should be announced not by the CBI or ED but the Chief Minister himself should declare

the properties owned by him. He alleged that Jagan owned assets worth Rs 42,000 crore while his wealth was calculated to be in lakhs in 2009. Lokesh said that his family did not float any benami companies or build homes or bought cars with the help of benami companies. He claimed that the Nara family has been declaring its assets for the past nine years. However, he emphasised that the assets declared were not according to the market value. "Whenever we demand that he reveals his assets, they maintain silence," Lokesh alleged, and said that if anyone proves that he or his family has and disproportionate assets, he would hand them over to the treasury.

Utter chaos prevails in TS over NPR

Continued from Page 1

The different stands taken by CM and CS led to utter confusion whether NPR will be implemented or not in Telangana. Complicating the things further, the Director of Census Operations, Telangana, K Ilambarathi, IAS, has written to officials and staff to be involved in Census operations on February 13, to get ready for collecting data for NPR from

In his letter, he stated that housing census and NPR will be taken up in Telangana from April 1 to September-end. He even cited the GO 235 issued by Telangana government on November 9, 2019, appointing officers for monitoring Census operations. He said it's

the responsibility of principal census officers to monitor the implementation of housing census and NPR updation.

Ilambarathi, in his letter, disclosed plans of imparting training to officials and staff for taking up Census, NPR in all the district headquarters from February last week to March first week. Adding further confusion to NPR, the state education department issued a Memo No.990 on the same day on February 13, terming it 'urgent'.

In the said memo, the department directed education officials not to schedule any major exams between January 1, 2021 to March 15, 2021 as most of the staff will be busy collecting data at ground-level for Census and NPR updation.

India's third coronavirus patient discharged

PNS ■ THRISSUR

A woman medico, who was India's first novel coronavirus patient being treated at the Government Medical College hospital here was discharged on Thursday, official sources said.

The decision to discharge her from the hospital was taken by the Medical Board, which met and examined the results of the woman's samples that had tested negative for the second time, they said.

The discharge of the student marked the recovery of all three cases of infection in India reported from Kerala.

Two other students -- one from Alappuzha and another Kasaragod -- had been discharged recently after they too tested negative for the virus in fresh tests days after being infected by it.

The woman, India's first coronavirus patient had been undergoing treatment in the isolation ward of the Medical



The woman, India's first coronavirus patient had been undergoing treatment in the isolation ward of the Medical College Hospital here since her return from Wuhan in China last month

College Hospital here since her return from Wuhan in China last month.

All the three Keralites had earlier tested positive for the coronavirus on their return from Wuhan, the epicentre of the deadly outbreak that has left over 2,000 people dead in China, triggering a scare in the state.

The health condition of the third patient at Thirissur Medical College Hospital is satisfactory. The

second consecutive test result of the blood sample of the student, sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune, has returned negative," Health Minister K K Shailaja had said in a release on Wednesday.

The health department has said a total of 2,242 people are under observation across the state, out of which, eight are in isolation wards of various hospitals and other under home quarantine.

The student admitted to the isolation ward of Alappuzha Medical College was discharged on February 6 while the patient from Kasargod sent home five days later.

Earlier, after the three students tested positive, the government had declared the coronavirus as a state calamity, but withdrew it after effective quarantine and no fresh cases being reported.

GRANTING PERMANENT COMMISSION TO WOMEN OFFICERS

'SC order enabling, will give clarity on moving forward'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General M M Naravane on Thursday said the force has been championing gender equality and the Supreme Court order granting permanent commission to women officers will give it a lot of clarity moving forward.

The Supreme Court on Monday had directed that women officers in the Army be granted permanent commission and command postings.

"Indian Army does not discriminate any soldier based on religion, caste, creed, or even gender. The outlook of the Indian Army has been throughout like this and that is why we started inducting women officers as early as in 1993," Gen Naravane told reporters. Indian Army has taken the initiative to induct women in rank and file, and the first batch of 100 women soldiers is undergoing training at Corps of Military Police Centre and School, he said.

"The Supreme Court's decision is a welcome one as it brings out a sense of clarity and purpose to gainfully employ officers for better efficiency of the organisation. I must assure that everybody in the Indian Army including women officers will be given equal opportunity to contribute to the nation as also progress in their careers," he said hailing the verdict as enabling.



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— M M NARAVANE ON, Army Chief General

Letters are being sent to women officers asking whether they will prefer permanent commissioning, the Army chief said. Speaking on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, Gen Naravane said terror incidents have seen a downturn and the Army is maintaining pressure on terror groups.

There is an external dimension to the decrease in cross-border terrorism, he said, in oblique reference to the ongoing Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary. Pakistan may have to

rethink strategy as even China realised they cannot back their all-weather friend all the time, the Army chief said on the FATF plenary.

A sub-group of the global terror financing watchdog FATF on Tuesday recommended continuation of Pakistan in the 'Grey List' for its failure to check terror funding.

When asked on the health condition of hardline Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the army chief only said security forces are geared up to take care of any situation.



Six pilgrims from Nepal killed in TN road accident

PNS ■ SALEM/CHENNAI

Six pilgrims from Nepal, including two women, were killed and 24 others injured in a road accident near Salem on Thursday, police said.

The accident happened on the Salem-Bengaluru highway after a bus rammed the minibuses the pilgrims were travelling in when its driver tried to swerve to the right near Omalur in the district, police said. Chief Minister K Palaniswami condoled the death of the six pilgrims and said the accident happened in the early hours of Thursday when they were proceeding to Rajasthan from Kaniyakumari.

Speaking in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, he said that the accident happened around 1 AM.

"Six Nepalis including two women travelling in the bus were killed," he said and expressed his condolences.

The injured have been admitted to hospital, he said, adding he has directed the Salem Collector to ensure they received the best medical treatment.

SHORT READS



Law student raped by lawyer, accomplice in UP's Bareilly

BAREILLY (UP): A law student was allegedly raped by a lawyer and his accomplice inside his chamber in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly district last week, police said on Thursday. The incident happened on February 15 in Bahedi area of the district, Bahedi SHO Pankaj Pant said. The woman, said to be around 21, had gone to the chamber where the lawyer and his accomplice raped her, the SHO added. An FIR has been registered on Wednesday following a complaint by the victim's mother, he further said. A manhunt is on for the accused men who are absconding, Pant said.

Civil rights groups demand restoration of Art 370

NEW DELHI: Scores of people from different organisations, including AISA and AIDWA, gathered at Janitri Manitar here on Thursday demanding restoration of Article 370 of the Constitution. They expressed solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir and demanded that the government restore the provision that gave full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir. The programme was held by organisations AIDWA, AISA, ANHAD, DASAM, DSG, DTF, IPTA, Khudi Khidmatgar, NAPM, NFIW, OBR India, PIPFPD, RYA, Sangwari, SFI, Youth Alliance for Peace.



SC stays Karnataka HC order in DGP case

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed the Karnataka High Court order issuing non-bailable warrant (NBW) against the state Director General of Police (DGP) in a case. A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde took up the appeal of the Karnataka government after finishing matters listed for hearing today and stayed the operation of the high court order. Earlier in the day, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Karnataka government, had sought urgent hearing on its plea saying that quite an "unusual" order has been passed by the high court issuing NBW to the state police chief to be executed through the home secretary. The Karnataka High Court has issued the NBW against the state police chief in a case. Further details are awaited.

AIRCEL-MAXIS

Delhi court grants time till May 4 to CBI, ED to finish probe

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday granted time till May 4 to the CBI and ED to complete probe in the Aircel-Maxis matter against former Union Minister P Chidambaram and his son Karti. The Enforcement Directorate told Special Judge Ajay Kumar Kumar that Letters Rogatory (LRs) had been sent to four countries and their response were awaited in connection with the case.

LR is issued by courts on the request of an investigation agency when it wants information from another country.

The ED had on February 14 filed status reports of investigation in the cases and said active investigation into the matter was going on, while the CBI had stated that LR has been sent to Malaysia and the response is awaited.

The CBI status report had stated that LR had been sent to Malaysia and there were developments in the case.

The court had on January 28 "revived" the Aircel-Maxis cases filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Enforcement Directorate against Chidambaram and his son that were earlier



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adjourned 'sine die'. The case was adjourned 'sine die' — without fixing any date for hearing — on September 5 last year with the court noting that the two probe agencies were seeking "adjournment after adjournment".

The trial court took up the matter on its own on January 28 and sought the status report from the CBI and the ED. They, however, sought more time and the court granted them

two weeks. The court had also granted anticipatory bail to the father-son duo. It has been challenged in the Delhi High Court, which will hear the matter on March 4. The probe agencies were investigating how Karti Chidambaram received clearance from the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) for the Aircel-Maxis deal in 2006 when his father was the Union finance minister.

Man held for 'offensive' FB post on Yogi

PNS ■ NOIDA (UP)

A trader has been arrested in Greater Noida for allegedly sharing a Facebook post deemed "offensive" against Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, officials said on Thursday.

The accused, identified as Chand Quraishi, is a resident of Jewar town and was arrested on Wednesday evening, they said.

When contacted, Quraishi said he shared the post by "mistake".

A police official said,

"Quraishi had shared a post on Facebook which was deemed offensive against the chief minister. A complaint was filed at Jewar police station by a local resident after which the accused, a trader, was arrested." Quraishi has been booked under the Indian Penal Code section 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace), among others, the police said.

In June 2019, two persons were arrested in UP's Gorakhpur district for allegedly making objectionable comments on social media against the chief minister.

Raj Nivas to be thrown open to tourists

PNS ■ PUDUCHERRY

Raj Nivas, the official residence of the Puducherry Lt Governor would be thrown open to tourists during mornings also. Kiran Bedi made the announcement on Thursday, while addressing a team of French tourists visiting the 18th century building housing office cum residence of the Lt Governor.

Bedi told the tourists after registering their views on the Union Territory that in addition to the time allotted for them to visit the imposing and palatial premises during mid day now the building maintained as a heritage structure would be open to visitors in the mornings also.

NIRBHAYA

Court seeks Tihar jail authorities' reply on convict Vinay's plea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court Thursday sought response from Tihar jail authorities on a plea by one of the four death row convicts in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, seeking better treatment for his claimed mental illness, schizophrenia and head and arm injuries.

Additional Session Judge Dharmender Rana directed the prison authorities to file its reply on the plea by Vinay Kumar Sharma on Saturday.

According to prison officials, Sharma injured himself by banging his head on his cell wall in Tihar Jail.

The incident happened in



jail number 3 on Sunday afternoon, they said, adding that he got some minor injuries and was treated inside the prison premises.

During the hearing, the prosecution opposed the plea saying it was not maintainable. Counsel for Sharma told

the court that he was refusing to recognise people, including his mother.

The plea claimed that when Sharma's counsel visited him in the prison on the request of his family members, he found that he had sustained grievous head injury, fracture in his right arm with plaster and was suffering from "insanity", "mental illness" and "schizophrenia".

Sharma could not identify his counsel and his mother in jail, it said.

The petition further claimed that he was having "decreased sleep" for a long time and was referred to senior psychiatrist in view of drug dependence.

HC seeks Delhi govt's reply on plea by Jessica Lal murder

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court asked the AAP government on Thursday to reply to a plea by Jessica Lal murder convict Manu Sharma, serving life imprisonment, seeking premature release.

Justice Brijesh Sethi asked the Delhi government to file a status report in the matter along with the relevant records of Sentence Review Board (SRB). The court listed the matter for further hearing on March 30. Sharma has sought direction to set aside the September 19, 2019 order of the competent authority which



had accepted the July 19 last year recommendations of SRB rejecting his early release plea.

The petition, filed through advocate Amit Sahni, sought Sharma's release saying the

The petition, filed through advocate Amit Sahni, sought Sharma's release saying the authorities rejected his plea in an unfair, arbitrary and whimsical manner

authorities rejected his plea in an unfair, arbitrary and whimsical manner. It contended that Sharma was being victimised by the State and despite having undergone 23 years (with remission) in jail, his case was rejected four times. It claimed that he has been rewarded appreciations for his efforts through his NGO "Siddhartha Vashishtha

Charitable Trust". "The petitioner (Sharma) has had an unblemished record throughout incarceration and there has been nothing adverse against him. His reformative actions and efforts for helping children of jail inmates has been appreciated by the Lt. Governor of Delhi as well as the Division Bench of High Court of Delhi," the plea said.

Sharma, son of former Union minister Venod Sharma, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by the high court in December, 2006 for killing Jessica Lal in 1999. The trial court had acquitted him, but the Delhi High Court had reversed the order and the Supreme Court had upheld his life sentence in April, 2010.

Lal was shot dead by Sharma after she had refused to serve him liquor at Tamarind Court restaurant owned by socialite Bina Ramani at Qutub Colonnade in south Delhi's Mehrauli area on the night of April 30, 1999.



Maha: Govt employee arrested for extortion

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A 47-year-old Central government employee was arrested for allegedly trying to extort Rs 7 lakh from a liquor shop owner, police said on Thursday.

The Marine Drive police on Tuesday arrested Rajendra Waghmare for allegedly trying to extort Rs 7 lakh per month from Ashok Patel who owns a liquor shop in south Mumbai, an official said.

Waghmare was employed as a labourer with the Ministry of Defence and worked at Mazgaon Dock, senior inspector Mrityunjay Hiremath of Marine Drive police station said. The accused visited the liquor shop and allegedly told Patel that the shop's license was not proper and he will have to shell out Rs 7 lakh per month to keep the establishment running, the official said. Patel then lodged a complaint with the police and later trapped the accused when he visited the shop on Tuesday, he added.

SHORT READS



Affidavit case: Fadnavis appears before court, gets bail

NAGPUR: Former Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis appeared before a Nagpur court on Thursday in connection with a complaint seeking criminal proceedings against him for alleged non-disclosure of criminal cases in his election affidavit in 2014. The senior BJP leader was given the last chance by Chief Metropolitan Magistrate P S Ingle to appear before the court on Thursday. Taking note of Fadnavis' appearance before the court, the magistrate granted him bail on a personal bond of Rs 15,000. The court was hearing an application filed by advocate Satish Uke, seeking criminal proceedings to be initiated against Fadnavis for alleged non-disclosure of criminal cases registered against him in his election affidavit in 2014.

Five of family killed as car hits truck on highway

JAMMU: Five members of a family were killed on Thursday when their car rammed into a stationary truck on the Jammu-Pathankot Highway in Samba district of Jammu and Kashmir, police said. The accident took place at Swanda Morh in Ghagwal area when the car driver lost control and hit the truck parked on the roadside around 5:30 am, a police official said. All the five occupants of the car were rushed to a nearby hospital where they were declared brought dead, he said. The official identified the deceased as Darshan Singh (70), his wife Darshan Kour (65), brother Arjun Singh (75), nephew Manjeet Singh (56) and Manjeet's son Sahib Singh (20), all residents of Jammu. The family was returning from Punjab where they had gone to attend a pre-wedding ceremony, the official said.



Thrashing of Dalits: Rahul asks govt to book culprits

NEW DELHI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday termed the torture of two young Dalits in Rajasthan's Nagaur as "horrific and sickening" and asked his party government in the state to take immediate action to bring the perpetrators to book. The video of the two Dalit men being thrashed has become viral on social media. "The recent video of two young Dalit men being brutally tortured in Nagaur, Rajasthan is horrific and sickening. I urge the state Government to take immediate action to bring the perpetrators of this shocking crime to justice," he said on Twitter. The two Dalits who were allegedly caught stealing money from a two-wheeler agency were beaten up by the showroom staffers in Nagaur district, police said on Wednesday. Five persons have been detained in connection with the case.

NADDA CALLS ON BADAL FOR 'STRENGTHENING NDA'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP president J P Nadda on Thursday called on Akali Dal patriarch Parkash Singh Badal at his home in Punjab's Badal village and deliberated on strengthening the NDA in the state, sources in the parties said. The visit to Badal's native village came days after the former Punjab chief minister said minorities "should be taken along" to run a government.



The closed-door meeting, which lasted about an hour, assumes significance following the brief strain between the BJP and its oldest ally Shiromani Akali Dal that had announced it would not contest the Delhi assembly elections following differences with the saffron party on the Citizenship Amendment Act. It later backed BJP candi-

To avoid 'office of profit' row, no perks for Waikar, Sawant?

PNS ■ MUMBAI

In a bid to avoid any controversy over the appointment of Shiv Sena MLA Ravindra Waikar and party MP Arvind Sawant to key posts with Cabinet rank, the Uddhav Thackeray-led government may issue a notification as per which they may not get perks and allowances for the posts. The state government had appointed Waikar as the chief coordinator in the chief minister's office (CMO) and Sawant as the head of the state Parliamentary Coordination Committee.

"A notification or a revised Government Resolution (GR) will be issued as per which they may not get perks and allowances for the posts. This is to avoid any allegations of office of profit," an official said on Thursday



MLA Ravindra



MP Arvind Sawant

"A notification or a revised Government Resolution (GR) will be issued as per which they may not get perks and allowances for the posts. This is to avoid any allegations of office of profit," an official said on Thursday.

Waikar, who is an MLA from Jogeshwari constituency in suburban Mumbai, was appointed chief coordinator in CMO and also allotted the rank of Cabinet minister. His responsibility is to coordinate with public representatives and the chief minister on fast-tracking projects and fund allocations.

Sawant, an MP from South Mumbai, was last week appointed as the chairman of a state-level parliamentary committee set up to follow up pending proposals related to Maharashtra

with the central government. He was also given the rank of a Cabinet minister.

However, the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government thinks that the opposition BJP may try to corner it during the upcoming Budget session of the state legislature over these appointments citing the office of profit.

Talking to PTI, Sawant said the office of profit issue will not arise if he and Waikar do not avail allowances and perks that come with the post.

When contacted, Waikar said, "How can the govern-

ment give us perks and allowances as elected representatives and in our new posts together? We have not yet taken charge. A rectification to the GR will be done."

Waikar was Minister of State for Housing in the previous Devendra Fadnavis-led government, while Sawant was Minister for Heavy Industries in the Modi government.

He was not inducted by Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray into his cabinet, while Sawant quit as Union minister when the Sena and BJP fell out over power sharing in Maharashtra.

No intention to scrap Art 371: Shah assures Northeast

PNS ■ ITANAGAR

Reaffirming the government's commitment to protecting the unique culture of the Northeast, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Thursday misinformation was spread after abrogation of Article 370 that identical fate awaited Article 371 in the region.

Most of the states that have special provisions under Article 371 are in the Northeast. These provisions are aimed at preserving their cultural heritage and customary laws.

Addressing a gathering to mark the 34th foundation day of Arunachal Pradesh, Shah said the Northeast was only geographically united with the rest of India before 2014 when Narendra Modi assumed office of the prime minister.

"The real emotional integration of the region with the rest of the country happened only under the Modi government," he said.

Shah said, "Misinformation was spread after abrogation of Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, that Article 371 will also be scrapped. It will never happen. Nobody has any such intention."

HISTORICAL GASTRONOMICA

Natl Museum drops non-veg dishes from menu of food event

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Non-vegetarian food has been dropped from the menu of the National Museum's week-long exhibition-cum-event on India's culinary history, Historical Gastronomica, due to an "unwritten policy" based on "sentiments", a senior official of the museum said on Thursday.



The organisers came under fire after the event's menu comprising non-vegetarian dishes was put up on the museum's website. Shortly afterwards, it was decided that only vegetarian food would be served at the exhibition which will be on till February 25.

The food event is being organised jointly by the National Museum, the Ministry of Culture and One Station Million Stories (OSMS), a private firm.

The additional director general of the museum Subrata Nath told PTI that OSMS did not discuss in detail the non-vegetarian part of the menu with the museum officials. "They (OSMS) got our

approval but the non-vegetarian part of the menu was not discussed with us. We assumed that they would know that we do not serve non-veg food here given the policy of the institution. Just 10 days back we had a Guru Nanak festival and we never had this controversy," Nath said.

"It (non-veg food items) was on the site for a day and we withdrew it as soon as we realised the issue," Nath added. Nath, however, said that the "policy" of not serving non-vegetarian dishes was not a written one, but a "sentimental one".

"The museum is full of idols of several gods and goddesses, we have to respect the senti-

ments of the people who visit us. We cannot serve non-vegetarian food here. It is an unwritten policy based on sentiments which we thought they (OSMS) knew," said Nath.

When asked if this was straying from the culinary history of ancient India where non-vegetarian dishes were common, Nath said that visitors will just not be served the food, but will be briefed on them.

"We are not serving the non-vegetarian food, but we will brief visitors on the historical dietary practices of ancient India, so it is wrong to say that we are not giving a true picture of the food in ancient times," he said.

Private school manager held for giving 'cheating tips'



PNS ■ MAU (UP)

A private school manager was arrested here on Thursday for allegedly giving "cheating tips" to students appearing in the UP Board examinations and advising them to slide in a Rs 100 note along with answer sheets to get a good score, police said.

A two-minute long video of Praveen Mall, manager of Harivansh Memorial Inter College, went viral on social media in which he is seen giving the "tips" to students to get high marks in the UP Board of

Secondary Education examinations.

In the video, he purportedly assures students that "none of them will fail" if they follow his instructions.

The video clip was secretly filmed by one of the students and sent to the Chief Minister's Office, officials said. "All of you should maintain discipline. If a chit is found with you and even if you are slapped, fold your hand and be ready for one more (slap). Don't argue and stand straight as the teacher can damage your future," Mall is heard saying in the video.

CWC must hold leadership elections

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Thursday urged the Congress Working Committee (CWC) to hold leadership elections to "energise workers and inspire voters".

Tharoor's appeal came in support of his party colleague and former MP Sandeep Dikshit's remarks that the biggest challenge the party faces is the "leadership question".

Dikshit has accused senior leaders of failing to find a new president after all these months because they are "scared who will bell the cat".

Reacting to the remarks, Tharoor tweeted, "What Sandeep Dikshit said openly is what dozens of party leaders from across the country are saying privately, including many with responsible positions in the party. I renew my appeal to CWC to hold leadership elections to energise workers and inspire voters."

Darapuri, Jafar to legally challenge UP govt's recovery notices

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Social activists S R Darapuri and Sadaf Jafar said Thursday they intend to move court against the Uttar Pradesh government's recovery notices on them for damage to public property during anti-CAA protests here last year.

They stated they have not yet received any official communication seeking recovery, but a senior government official said the notices have been issued to 28 people including them.

Darapuri told PTI on Thursday, "I am hearing news that I've been issued recovery notices by the district administration, though I have not received any such notice till now. I will challenge it in the



S R Darapuri and Sadaf Jafar



High Court if I get any."

Social activist Jafar, who is also a Congress leader, said if she receives any recovery

notice she too will move court.

"The state government is sending recovery notices unconstitutionally to people.

There is no proof against me of inciting violence but instead of arresting antisocial elements, they arrested and tortured me," she said.

She was arrested on December 19 in connection with the violence.

Lucknow Additional District Magistrate (East) KP Singh had on Monday issued recovery notices to 28 people stating that they have to deposit Rs 63 lakh by March 20, otherwise action will be taken against them.

Besides Darapuri and Sadaf, the notice also names Mohammad Shoib of Rihai Manch, and social activists Robin Verma, Deepak Kabir, Pawan Rao Ambedkar, among others.

Use of Indian languages can make governance people-centric: Naidu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

At least 40 percent of the population globally does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu said on Thursday asserting usage of Indian languages can make governance in the country more people-centric.

"Globally 40 percent of the population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand. Indian languages can bring administration closer to people. It can make governance more people-centric," Naidu said at an event here to mark the "International Mother Language Day".



Vice President Venkaiah Naidu

"Language shape the cultural life of a nation and lay the foundation for its progress. Language is the vital, unseen thread that links the past with the present. I have always emphasized the importance of protecting and conserving our unique and rich linguistic heritage," he added.

The Vice President said celebration of languages should not be limited to a day.

"It is important that our celebration of Matrihashas does not end with the conclusion of Matrihasha Diwas. In fact everyday should be celebrated as Matrihasha Diwas.

"I hope that more and more people will start using their native languages at home, in the community, in meetings and in administration. We must accord a sense of dignity and pride to those who speak, write and communicate in these language," he said.

At the event, Naidu was welcomed in 22 Indian languages by students dressed in traditional Indian attire.

Dhankhar addresses function over loudspeakers; TMC cries foul

PNS ■ HOWRAH

Use of loudspeakers at a function addressed by Jagdeep Dhankhar sparked a row, with the Trinamool Congress alleging that the West Bengal governor violated the restrictions put in place due to the ongoing state board examinations.



Jagdeep Dhankhar

Dhankhar inaugurated a 10-day-long fair at Anantapur Mill grounds in rural Howrah's Shyampur police station area on Wednesday evening.

Addressing the gathering, the governor said if a man gets educated, it only helps him but when a woman gets educated,

tration officials were tight-lipped over the incident. The Raj Bhavan also refused to comment.

The organisers said they took permission from the police for the fair.

Bholanath Mondal, the chief of the organising committee, said that only the loudspeakers near the stage were used during the governor's address and those outside the ground were switched off.

"The Kali puja in Anantapur and the fair around it is a very old tradition. We don't have any option but to use the loudspeakers," he said.

Cong wants 10 turncoat MLAs to seek fresh mandate

PNS ■ PANAJI

The Goa Congress has said it will challenge its 10 former MLAs, who joined the BJP last year, to resign and seek fresh mandate on the saffron party's ticket.

State Congress spokesman Urfan Mulla told PTI on Thursday that his party leaders will visit homes of the 10 MLAs and challenge them to re-contest the election.

After the 2017 Goa polls, a hung Assembly had emerged. But, the BJP outsmarted the Congress by cobbling together a coalition quickly.

In July last year, 10 Congress MLAs switched over to the BJP. "The Congress will chal-



enge them to resign as MLAs and then re-contest on BJP's ticket from their respective Assembly constituencies. If they think they can get re-elected on BJP's ticket, they should try their luck," Mulla said. These MLAs got elected in

MLAs later this week, Mulla said.

"St Cruz MLA Antonio Fernandes, who is among these 10 lawmakers, will be the first one to be given a letter challenging him to resign," he said.

Mulla also said that the Congress is planning to hold a 'mashal rally' (with fire torches), similar to the protest held by former chief minister Manohar Parrikar before the 2012 state polls, against the presence of off-shore casinos in the Mandovi river in Panaji.

Locals have been opposing the presence of these vessels in the river.

Before the 2012 elections, Parrikar led a 'mashal rally' in

Panaji, urging the then Digambar Kamat-led state government to shift the casinos out of the river.

The Congress is miffed with the recent statement of state Ports Minister Michael Lobo, who said the off-shore casinos should not be shifted out of the Mandovi river, and suggested that more such vessels be introduced in other rivers of the state.

"We have planned a strategy. We will hold exactly the same kind of agitation that was held by Parrikar. We want to remind the BJP of its assurance on the off-shore casinos," Mulla said, adding that the exact date for the rally would be announced soon.

Priyanka for RS?

The Cong is hoping that the gambit of putting her in a Central role will hold out some hope of reviving the party



There may be a host of recommendations for the Congress to revive itself and capitalise on its pan-India matrix as a cohesive Opposition force. But there's nobody to accept them. There may be umpteen calls to restore inner-party democracy by holding organisational elections and choosing capable leaders and its president based on cadre choices. But there's nobody to "bell the cat" as one of its own self-deprecating leaders said. There may be articulate and activist young leaders, who have sought to shine their light

for a 2.0 recast but have been fobbed off by old hawks who fear their irrelevance, even if that applies to holding on to the crumbs of a fast disintegrating party. There may be seasoned leaders with wise words of wisdom that run in different directions, justifying them as inner party democratic dialogues although the world sees them as terrible infighting. There's the old matriarch, who is still keeping it together, the Gandhi tag the party's brand adhesive that's as scapegoating for party leaders in failure as grandstanding in success. But Sonia Gandhi doesn't know how to pass it on to her offspring. Reconciling some issues and the generational divide, infusing fresh breath energy with his band of followers was son Rahul, reluctant yet stubborn, a cocktail that's more impulsive than explosive. Then there is Priyanka Gandhi, the more willing and capable scion with some strike capabilities, who could have been the galvaniser had not her *brahmastra* potential been wasted by benching her. So the Congress is tempted to play its last family card to mend the party by assigning her a Central role now rather than waiting for the next round of parliamentary elections. As 51 Rajya Sabha seats will be falling vacant in April, of which eight are from the three party-ruled States, there's a growing clamour to elect her to the Rajya Sabha.

Can this reset the Congress' narrative indeed? On the face of it, she has not been able to sway the Lok Sabha verdict even though she was made party general-secretary in charge of eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP). In fact, the Gandhis lost the home bastion of Amethi, too. Beyond some crowd-pleasing speeches, dramatic optics with the boatmen of Varanasi and campaign colour, Priyanka was compromised by an organisational matrix that had been floundering in the face of the BJP's phalanx. She herself admitted as much. And although she is probably the only politician other than Modi who can produce a mass resonance, she has two handicaps — the people's rejection of the politics of entitlement and a disconnect with the grassroots. Which is why one must credit her with not abandoning UP even after the Lok Sabha debacle while her brother chose exile. She worked the ground unlike her brother, who chose to be a disembodied conscience. She has been taking up the cudgels on behalf of the dispossessed tribals in Sonbhadra, praying with Dalits and has been visiting the anti-citizenship law protesters at the receiving end of police brutality. She has also been articulating her positions on national issues rather vociferously on social media. There is a rooted realism to her brother's exalted escapism, one that is now translating into huge crowd turnouts at her roadshow to the utter discomfort of caste-based parties, Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Not only has she lived down her tag, her political sensibilities are primed and she has based herself in Lucknow with diligence of purpose. But the real problem is how she negotiates the tricky territory between her and Rahul camp followers and obviates criticism that by getting elected to the Rajya Sabha, the Gandhis would ensure family representation in each House and were just living out their timelines as legislators. But Priyanka could make herself heard that much more nationally as a parliamentarian and counter the BJP's oratory and propaganda. Comparisons are being drawn about how her grandmother Indra Gandhi became Prime Minister in 1966 as a Rajya Sabha member. However, the context was different as Indira had the Congress as the dominant political party ruling in most States and at the Centre. That position has been wrested by the BJP today, leaving Priyanka with virtually no enablers. She has a classic glass cliff situation; she could emerge in her own right if she manages to bring the Congress out of the ventilator or she could be condemned for inefficiencies if she fails. Besides, she has a better connect with and a sensibility to deal with both senior and junior leaders, who are claiming fiefdoms of importance and fighting each other, be it Milind Deora, Ajay Maken, Pawan Khera, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Kamal Nath or Jyotiraditya Scindia. She could still be the balancer and end the confusion at least. But how would she avoid her Achilles' heel, businessman-husband Robert Vadra, who is entangled in vigilance probes? If she manages the political dissociation from personal, perhaps she could still get the party back on keel.

Tesla's second coming

The company announces it is working on improved EV batteries to reduce 'range anxiety' among drivers



South Africa-born entrepreneur Elon Musk is a polarising figure. His late night tweets are analysed by venture capitalists and tech journalists as much as that of US President Donald Trump's morning tweets, which are examined by diplomats and political journalists alike. It would not thus be incorrect to argue that Musk has become one of the most important human beings in the world alongside Trump. That's because his automotive venture, Tesla Motors, which makes Electric Vehicles (EVs), is now valued at \$100 billion, more than the entirety of India's automotive sector combined and even more than that of Volkswagen AG, the German automotive colossus. Only Japanese carmaker Toyota is worth more by quite a bit. But Tesla Motors, named after the famed Serbian inventor Nikola Tesla, who promoted the alternating current system, is now miles ahead of the rest of the global automotive industry as it pivots towards an electric future. It is not only taking a lead with its readily available products but dominates the software world, too, with its autonomous driving system.

Musk and Tesla are also leading the charge when it comes to battery technology. The company is now developing batteries that can ensure an electric car can travel almost 600 km on a single charge. It will make for the longest journeys possible on a single charge, diluting "range anxiety" that is still the single-most quoted reason for people not to buy electric vehicles at this time. Yet, while Tesla solves problems for the first world, India is still miles away from adopting an electric future, with infrastructure and manufacturing far behind the curve. That said, the few electric cars that have been launched in our country right now are promising and have decent enough range for daily commuting, if not long-distance travel. With Musk bemoaning high Customs duties for imported cars, Tesla Motors is yet to come to India. It would be wise for the Government to keep a lower degree at least initially on electric cars to promote their usage going forward.

The war on rationality

Shutting down N-power plants only to replace them with coal burning is the height of illogic. Nobody is as crazy as the Germans and the Japanese



GWYNNE DYER

Germany and Japan are finally winning a war together. Unfortunately, it is the "war on rationality." Coal, as everybody knows, is by far the most damaging source of energy we use, in terms of both the harm to human beings and the impact on the climate. It's twice as bad as natural gas and dozens of times worse than solar or nuclear or wind power. Yet both Germany and Japan have been building a lot of new coal-fired power stations. But why are they still betting on coal?

Would it upset you if I said it's because they are, despite their apparent sophistication, superstitious peasants at heart? Well, go ahead and get upset. Germany still gets more than a third of its energy from burning coal and most of it is ultra-polluting lignite or "brown" coal. Solar, wind, geo-thermal and hydropower generation provide just 17 per cent of the country's electricity needs. If most of Germany's 17 nuclear powers had not been shut down after 2012 (the last are scheduled to close within two years), then at least half the coal would not have been needed.

There had been an active anti-nuclear power movement in Germany for some time but what triggered the 2012 decision to shut the entire sector down was the Fukushima disaster of the previous year. I am deliberately avoiding the words "calamity", "disaster" and "catastrophe" because while the Fukushima tsunami killed 19,000 people, the subsequent problem with the four nuclear reactors on the coast killed nobody. Yet, the German people, or at least a large number of German anti-nuclear activists, insisted that any nuclear reactor anywhere was a mortal danger and the Government agreed to shut all nuclear plants down. The country pulled a 180 and decided to embark on ending its use of nuclear power entirely.

The same thing happened in Japan. The Japanese planners were foolish to put four reactors on the coast in a region where earthquakes and consequent tsunamis were to be expected from time to time. What needs to be condemned is the decision of the planners and not nuclear power. Nevertheless, all 50 Japanese nuclear reactors, which accounted for 30 per cent of the country's electrical power, were immediately shut down.

The Japanese are not as blindly dogmatic as the Germans: Two of those nuclear plants reopened in 2015 and seven more resurfaced recently. A further 17 are in the lengthy process of restart approval. So by 2030, the Japanese Government hopes to be getting 20 per cent of its electricity from nuclear power again. But that's only half the amount of



nuclear power that Japan originally planned to make available by 2030. The gap between 20 per cent and the planned 40 per cent of the country's energy needs will be made up by burning coal.

Japan recently announced that it plans to build 22 new coal-burning power plants in the next five years. Its Government has argued that these coal plants use ultra-supercritical boilers that are vastly more energy-efficient and pollute less per unit of energy. But these plants still emit greenhouse gases and are a non-starter for activists who want the world to zero out carbon emissions.

This is deeply irresponsible behaviour and the worst thing is that the decision-makers know it. They are just deferring to public opinion, which in this instance is entirely wrong. The "superstitious peasants" should really be frightened of global warming, for which coal-burning is a major driver, not of relatively harmless nuclear power.

That's not to say that nuclear power is the solution to all our problems, or even most of them. It is generally

OTHER COUNTRIES CAN BE IDIOTIC, TOO. DUE TO AN ADMINISTRATIVE GLITCH, CHINESE PROVINCES ARE CURRENTLY BUILDING HUNDREDS OF UNNECESSARY COAL-FIRED POWER STATIONS THAT MAY NEVER BE USED SINCE THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EXPECTS THE COUNTRY'S COAL USE TO PEAK THIS YEAR

the most expensive option because it costs so much to build the reactors and the associated controls and safety devices. Indeed, nuclear is no longer cost-competitive with other "clean" sources of power like wind and solar.

So there is a case for not building any more nuclear power stations, at least in regions and countries that have ample resources in terms of sun and wind. But there is no case for shutting down existing nuclear stations and burning more coal to make up the difference. That is so stupid, it verges on the criminal.

Other countries can be idiotic, too. Due to an administrative glitch, Chinese provinces are currently building hundreds of unnecessary coal-fired power stations that may never be used, since the Central Government expects the country's coal use to peak this year — and most existing Chinese coal plants already sit idle more than half of the time.

China is using coal power financing as a key element of its Belt and Road Initiative to expand its economic and political influence throughout Asia and Africa. Both Japan

and China are now racing to secure lucrative construction contracts in developing countries to expand their strategic reach.

At least China is also building nuclear plants as fast as it can. Last year, it accounted for more than half the world's output of solar panels. (On the other hand, it is providing work for the Chinese construction industry by building a planned 300 coal-fired power stations in other countries, presumably on the unspoken assumption that carbon dioxide emissions elsewhere won't affect China's climate.)

But nobody is as crazy as the Germans and the Japanese, who have been shutting down nuclear plants and replacing them with coal-fired plants. France will close its last coal-fired station in 2022 and Britain will do the same in 2025. But Germany says 2038 and Japan just says "eventually." That's far too late: By then the die will be cast and the world will be committed to more than 2°C of warming.

(Gwynne Dyer's new book is "Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work".)

SOUNDBITE

Problems of radicalism, environment and the belief that one is right while the rest are wrong are the basic issues disturbing the peace in the world.

RSS chief
—Mohan Bhagwat

It is hypocritical that only female actors are accused of going under the knife or getting botox when male actors do the same. Why point fingers at women?

Actor
—Raveena Tandon

In all fairness, the Chinese have slowed down. It is India that is an even bigger problem but it is an enormous problem. Nobody is doing anything about it.

US presidential aspirant
—Michael Bloomberg

China has realised that it cannot back its all-weather friend all the time. If FATF comes down heavily on them (Pakistan), it may have to do a rethink on rhetoric and activities.

Army Chief
—General MM Naravane

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Threat of extinction

Sir — The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) operates with four levels of language endangerment between "safe" (not endangered) and "extinct" (no living speakers), based on inter-generational transfer. At a time when nations are talking about the decline of languages, India still ranks one among those countries that have the largest number of living languages. But it is depressing that our country has also earned the dubious distinction of being one with the most number of endangered languages in the world. India has reportedly lost one-fifth of its languages in the past five decades.

It's not surprising that those languages that are at risk are the ones spoken by marginal tribes. Mother tongue languages, too, rank at the bottom. When there's no education in the mother tongue, children drop out when they go to high school. The best way to conserve a language is to create livelihood opportunities for those who speak it.

Dimpy Bhatia
New Delhi

Speak up to save languages

The mother tongue forms the very basis of "identity" of an individual or a community. Every effort must be made to build strong foundations at the formative stage to preserve languages. To stress the importance of mother tongue in one's life, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) declared February 21 as the International Mother Language Day to celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. However, it's disturbing that India is not doing enough to preserve its rich native languages. In the 1961 census report, a total of 1,652 mother tongues were mentioned. The 1971 census mentioned only 108 languages. Further, a 2017 study, carried out by the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre, titled *People's Linguistic Survey of India*, arrived at the conclusion that the country had lost at least 300 languages since Independence. It predicted that at least 400 Indian languages were at the risk of dying over the next 50 years. The extinction of hundreds of languages indicates the loss of culture, too.

The importance of languages must be realised. They permeate every facet of our lives and form the very basis of our civilisation. They play a significant role in creating and strengthening bonds among people. Preserving

Welcome move

Sir — It wasn't surprising that a special court pulled up the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for not conducting a lie

detector or psychological test on its former Special Director, Rakesh Asthana, in an alleged bribery case. But it was happy that Special CBI Judge Sanjeev Aggarwal has asked the probe agency to submit the case diary

for examination. It also enquired about the previous investigating officer, Ajay Kumar Bassi, who was taken off the case and had been transferred to Port Blair after the then agency Chief, Alok Kumar Verma, was shunt-



and protecting our cultural heritage is the constitutional duty of the citizens. Social scientists and concerned authorities, too, must rise to the occasion and rescue dying languages and cultures to keep heterogeneity and spirit of "equality of all languages" alive. The protection and promotion of languages is the responsibility of both the citizens and the Government. The best way is to constantly use them. A start can be made at schools by making mother tongue the medium of instruction for children.

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata

ed out. People are fully aware that Asthana is the blue-eyed boy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. How can one forget that in 2002, the then Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani had introduced Asthana to the then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi?

Back then, he was heading the probe on the Godhra train burning case and had sent the State into an unprecedented carnage and helped Modi to get clean chit from the Supreme Court appointed-SIT, headed by R Raghavan.

To clear the matter, Special Judge Aggarwal has directed the initial investigating officer in the case, Ajay Kumar Bassi, to appear before it on February 28. Hope the case diary clears the role of Asthana and Prime Minister Modi's much hyped *na khaunga, na khane dunga* mantra and simultaneously, the skeleton of the country's highest probe agency's alleged wrongdoing.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee
Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

We must come up Trumps

Leaders of both nations have to look at meaningful and time-bound solutions to address each other's concerns on emerging trade issues



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

In the run up to President Donald Trump's maiden visit to India, a bunch of eye-catching, US Secret Service men have started fanning out in locations which the leader is expected to visit. Make no mistake, that's not the only spectacle India will witness for the next week or so. "Namaste Trump" formerly "Kemcho Trump", promises to be a grander display of abundance and strategic friendship than "Howdy Modi" in Houston. Trump has already made statements on being "Number one" on Facebook, ahead of Modi, and expressed elation over the millions and millions of people who are expected to greet him in India.

Meanwhile, thousands of eyes would be scanning for inches or miles moved in the crucial Indo-US strategic partnership corridor. Trump is keen for India to open up its markets further for US goods and services and act as a key balancing partner in the region that is facing threats of dominance from China. Pushing his "America first" policy, Trump has been chipping away at any preferential treatment to India, specially in the field of trade. A few days ago, he declared India with a national average income of \$2,000 and, therefore, an approximate \$3 trillion economy as "developed" at par with China. He thereby justified taking India off any list of a preferential trade policy. Perhaps in the same breath a US-based think tank *World Population Review* has ranked India as the fifth-largest economy, overtaking the UK and France. While it may have led to celebrations in some quarters, many look at this development under the bleak prospect of a meaningful trade deal.

India's key ask from the US at this stage is a reinstatement of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSPs) programme which will allow it to export nearly \$6 billion worth of goods to the US under nearly zero tariffs. While it may be less than 10 per cent of India's overall exports to the US, it is a sticking point. Several trade watchers and policy analysts have indicated that the US is pushing for an increase of nearly \$5-\$6 billion in additional trade value of goods. Hopeful of a deal, nearly \$3.5 billion defence agreements between India and the US are ready to be signed when Trump visits India. These include nearly 30 armed helicopters mostly meant for naval operations, a key tool in the strategic Indian Ocean where China has been seen flexing its maritime muscles. Whether a sale of weapons and military copters will be seen within the broad contours of Indo-US trade, will be a complex question to answer.

That leaves — fraught with screaming lobbies on both sides — high attention agricultural produce and medical equipment sectors. In the run-up to the visit, reports have surfaced of India's willingness to allow low tariff import of some frozen meat products, along with berries and nuts. Conditional import of dairy products with strict compliance to the vegetarian nature of the produce, could also be made. Limited concessions on medical devices' price caps imposed in the post-GSP era, can also be brought to the table.

However, right now chances of a restricted or "mini" trade deal are also looking like a distant possibility. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, who was supposed to be in India at least a week before Trump to give final contours to the deal, has given it a pass, substituting it with hectic video conference calls with his Indian counterpart Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal. It is unclear if the duo would be able to strike a lightning deal in under a week to come up with crackling billion figure hopes.

Many point at previous last-minute dashes for making major announcements, sometimes literally minutes ahead of crucial leadership meetings. Take the example of US support to India's permanent seat at the UN Security Council, a decision which was taken "15 minutes" ahead of then President Barack Obama's address to the Indian Parliament. This gives rise to hopes of a fig leaf trade deal pending since the "Howdy Modi" event in Houston last year being accomplished during the "Namaste Trump" extravaganza.

This deal or no deal, from what we gather, still leaves an impactful chunk of digital trade between India and the US. Trade in services between the two nations — large portions of it digitally-aided — remains a key area of negotiation. US companies have raised concerns with Indian counterparts and the Government on the restrictive nature of tariffs and non-tariff barriers which limit the access of US tech firms to India. For instance, the upcoming Data Protection Bill has text additions which suggest compulsory data localisation and sharing of non-personal data with the Government. These are seen as growth and innovation barriers in a connected, seamless, shared digital economy of two great democracies. Technology collaboration by removing tariff and non-tariff barriers, specifically in the technology segment, could be great lever of strategic and public policy partnership for both countries. One clear area to work together is looking at developing protocols beyond fifth generation or 5G followed by communications. India and the US can be natural partners in the new digital trade world. Rhetoric and spectacle aside, leaders of both nations have to look at meaningful and time-bound solutions to address each other's concerns on emerging trade issues while ensuring prosperity for local markets.

(The writer is Country Manager, India, ITC Council)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

ALL WHO WORK AS BRAND AMBASSADORS ARE AT A RISK OF BEING FRAMED BY THIS (MODI) GOVT. TAPAS WAS THE THIRD VICTIM OF THIS VENDETTA POLITICS.

—BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER
 MAMATA BANERJEE



MAMATA, TOO, FOLLOWED A SIMILAR VENDETTA POLITICS IN BENGAL AND PUT HUNDREDS OF OPPOSITION WORKERS IN JAIL.

—CONGRESS LEADER
 ADHIR CHOWDHURY

No country for women

Govt apathy and hopelessness have led many farm widows to take their lives. Just how many more suicides will it take for the State to take action?



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

Mudapu Yadamma, 38, is from Mallareddipalli village in Nalgonda district, Telangana. Two years ago, her husband, a farmer, committed suicide by consuming pesticide and left her with a debt of ₹3.5 lakh. Kamatham Lakshmi Devi, 31, is from Danduvaripalli village in Ananthapur district of Andhra Pradesh. She, too, was left with a debt of ₹8 lakh after her husband, also a farmer, killed himself two years ago.

Vidya More, 38, is from Maharashtra. When her husband ended his life in 2012, his suicide was declared not eligible (as a farm suicide) thereby denying her the right to ex-gratia compensation. They may live in different States but the fate of farm widows across the country is worryingly similar. Not only do farm widows suddenly become invisible to the State, they are ostracised by their families and are left to fend for themselves, especially when they are hounded to repay the debts taken by their farmer husbands. Latest statistics released by the Government show that 11,379 farmers killed themselves in India in 2016. In other words, there were 948 suicides every month or 31 growers committed suicide daily. One big reason for this was mounting debts. While the inability to pay back loans can be attributed to several reasons, including failed crops, the agrarian crisis and the unavailability of alternative opportunities for earning a livelihood, the burden of repaying the debts has fallen on their widows.

At present, there is no programme or policy that frees these farm widows from debts incurred by their husbands. The harrying by banks or moneylenders begins almost immediately after the husband's death, leaving hardly any time for the widow to mourn her spouse.

The need to survive and look after her children pushes her to earn a living. But studies have shown that the woman farmer often adopts the same kind of farming as the deceased husband. She also resorts to the same practice of chemical-intensive and external-input-driven farming requiring investments and borrowing. But with women farmers not seen as credit-worthy and access to Government schemes and credit being limited, the situation can be so hopeless and dire that women farmers are often forced to take the same path as their husbands and end their lives. Women accounted for 8.6 per cent of farmer suicides in the country.

A prime cause has been the inadequate efforts by the Government to prevent farmer suicides coupled with insufficient and lopsided support to families affected by them, according to the Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM), an informal forum comprising 120 organisations of women farmers and civil society groups in 24 States working to secure rights of women growers.

Recent consultations on the "Status of Women Farmers in Farm Suicide Families" held by MAKAAM and UN Women also revealed that the lack of recognition by the Government of the deaths as farm suicides in many cases further exacerbated the conditions of the marginalised widows as the State refused to extend any support to them.

Korra Shanthi is one such victim of State apathy. A resident of Nalgonda district, Telangana, Shanthi and her husband were engaged in culti-

“ LACK OF RECOGNITION IS A MAJOR HURDLE IN THE RELIEF AND REHABILITATION OF WIDOWS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THIS IS ACCORDING TO A MAKAAM STUDY ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN FARM SUICIDE-AFFECTED FAMILIES IN THE SIX STATES OF MAHARASHTRA, KARNATAKA, TELANGANA, ANDHRA PRADESH, TAMIL NADU AND PUNJAB ”



vation on leased land. When her husband ended his life in 2018, Shanthi was left with a debt of ₹6 lakh. Although she applied for ex-gratia payment with the help of local activists, she has not received any money yet. Shanthi has been told that she is unlikely to receive it because her husband did not own any land in his name, making her ineligible for ex-gratia payment.

Since several State Government rules specify that only land owners and land title holders are considered as farmers while extending support to the suicide-affected family, those toiling on leased land fall through the cracks. With land ownership being the main criteria, tenant farmers and women farmers, especially farm widows who do not have land in their names, are not recognised as real farmers. Further, farmers who have borrowed from moneylenders also don't get counted as eligible or genuine cases and their widows and families are denied compensation. "This is one of the biggest problems in Punjab," contends 40-year-old Veerpal Kaur. A resident of Mansa district, Punjab, Kaur has witnessed the despair that led to her husband, father and father-in-law ending their lives. But their families were not considered eligible although the suicides were due to farm distress.

Lack of recognition is a major hurdle in the relief and rehabilitation of widows and their families. This is according to a MAKAAM study on the status of women in farm suicide-affected families in six States of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Punjab. One of the important findings was that in Maharashtra, Punjab and Karnataka,

only those farmers who had institutional debt were considered as genuine and eligible for support, not those who ended their lives due to pressure from moneylenders.

Moreover, there was a wide variation in the relief and rehabilitation package given by these six States. The study showed that the criteria used to determine "farm suicides" were different across States and even within the relevant agencies like the police, agriculture and revenue departments.

According to MAKAAM's Seema Kulkarni, even in the States where compensation was being paid, it was not uniform. "While Andhra Pradesh provides a compensation of ₹7 lakh for each family, in Maharashtra, which has the largest number of farm suicides in the country, this is only ₹2 lakh. In the case of Telangana, although its policy states a compensation of ₹6 lakh, hardly any payment had been made since subsuming farm suicide cases into the Farmer Insurance scheme called Rythu Beema Padhakam," says Kulkarni.

Of all the States, only Andhra Pradesh had a one-time settlement mechanism, (used in certain cases), to settle all outstanding institutional as well as private loans within ₹1 lakh to liberate woman from never-ending debt. However, its use was limited.

The study also found that only Karnataka had a policy to support education of children from farm suicide families, including reimbursement of fee of those studying in private institutions. "However, even here, the implementation was poor and lacked coordination between different agencies, states", Ashalatha Satyam of Rythu Swaraja

Vedika, a MAKAAM partner.

She points out that such a policy does not exist in other States. This is why many widows in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh had to pull out their children from schools. Although the Maharashtra Government had announced a support package related to education fee, nothing has been finalised so far.

In cases where land is in the name of the husband, wives have the opportunity to eke out a living once they are able to get it transferred in their name. But even here it is usually a long and uphill battle as relatives don't want to give her the rightful share in the property. Lack of land ownership has forced most of the women to either become labourers or seek other means of employment, often at the cost of their safety. So, Mudapu Yadamma is dependent on wage labour to keep her three children in school since her in-laws are not prepared to give her a share in the family land. Kamatham Lakshmi Devi, too, was denied her share in the family land cultivated by her husband and does any work that helps her earn a living. Vidya More has taken up sewing and wage labour to make ends meet. But all this isn't enough to repay the huge debts incurred by their husbands.

They are not the only ones struggling for survival and their rights. Hundreds of farm widows have fallen off the Government's radar. Government apathy and hopelessness have led many to take their lives. This is not unknown to the political masters. Then what is the Government waiting for? Just how many more suicides will it take for it to take action?

(The writer is a senior journalist)

Strive to preserve your identity

Maintaining and retaining the languages of ethnic and cultural groups is critical for the preservation of cultural heritage and identity. Using one's mother tongue at home is part of this exercise



MJ WARSII

To promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and bolster social and multilingual identity, the International Mother Tongue Day is celebrated every year on this day (February 21).

Mother tongue refers to a person's native language, that is, a language learned from birth. The first International Mother Tongue Day was observed in 1990 after the declaration by the United Nations (UN) to recognise the sacrifices of people who lost their lives for the sake of their mother tongue in Bangladesh.

Language is one of the most precious gifts that we have and each tongue represents a unique and distinct cultural heritage. Language is a

means of communicating values, beliefs and customs and has an important social function as it fosters feelings of group identity and solidarity. It is the means by which culture, traditions and shared values may be conveyed and preserved.

About 50 per cent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the medium of instruction is different from the language used at home. This is perhaps one of the most astounding facts about second language education. Schools have tried to tackle the problem by going to the families of these children for assistance in helping students gain confidence in the use of the second language. They ask the parents to use the second language at home so that the students become more comfortable with it and are able to cope with it in school. This does more harm than good for reasons other than that of a second language being much harder to learn regardless of copious levels of effort put in to achieve fluency.

In developing areas, usually there aren't resources enough to prepare

students at this level, so the efforts made by the parents and the students are futile in that sense.

This second language education also causes a rift between families and their native languages in a wholly unnecessary way. Families feel alienated from their mother tongue simply because the school gives the impression that they should feel this way. By propagating this attitude, these education systems are essentially destroying diverse cultures and backgrounds that make our species so great.

The different languages and dialects spoken throughout the globe reflect how history and culture have shaped the way in which people speak, think and reflect. Our mother tongue helps to link new generations to the past, which is part of our cultural and plurilingual heritage. It is a well-known fact that everyone had a language that they grew up speaking and a good proportion of the world spoke more than one tongue. However, the idea that someone would regularly have to be taught in a language that wasn't

native to them had never occurred previously. "This was, undoubtedly, exacerbated by the fact that I never made significant strides towards becoming fluent in another language. The closest I had ever come was a working proficiency in Spanish during my junior year of high school. When I think back on my perspective on this subject in the context of my parents, their accents never bothered me because I had just always been so used to them," says a 21-year-old former student Tej, who is pursuing higher studies at Washington University in St Louis, USA.

Leanne Hinton, a Professor of linguistics at the University of California in Berkeley, says in *Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education*, "More broadly, the loss of language is part of the loss of whole cultures and knowledge systems, including philosophical systems, oral literary and musical traditions, environmental knowledge systems, medical knowledge and important cultural practices and artistic skills. The world stands to lose an impor-

tant part of the sum of human knowledge whenever a language stops being used. Just as the human species is putting itself in danger through the destruction of species diversity, so might we be in danger from the destruction of the diversity of knowledge systems".

These problems are hard to fix. If one were to approach educators and tell them to fix the issue, they would undoubtedly point to a lack of resources. Nevertheless, an effort must be made by educators to have respect for the mother tongue of their students, even if it is different from their own.

The beauty of academic education is that the majority of it comes from books that can be more easily produced in areas with greater resources. It is for the educators in these parts of the world — who are multilingual — to produce orthographical and instructional materials for use in developing areas. Given the resource crisis in the developing world, this is likely to be one of the most practical solutions. Children in developing areas have the

thirst for knowledge, we must do what we can to satiate it.

Language is the essence and identity of culture and is a major tool of communication and for exchange of ideas and emotions. To know your language is the simplest and most important way to keep and preserve your culture. In recent times, the idea of linguistic and cultural awareness has increased; thus allowing the mother tongue to be more culturally accepted.

It is clear, that we must strive to reform the systems that educate the youth, in order to further the quality of learning in the first language or mother tongue and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

Maintaining and retaining the languages of ethnic and cultural groups is critical for the preservation of cultural heritage and identity. Using one's mother tongue at home will make it easier for speakers to be more comfortable with their own linguistic and cultural identity.

(The writer is Chairperson, Department of Linguistics, AMU)



GENERATING JOBS NEED OF THE HOUR

Is there any sign that Boris Johnson understands that monetary policy has failed and there needs to be fiscal intervention to bolster demand for jobs? Not much. Just increasing the fiscal deficit won't help. However, most of the cash flows via tax cuts to the richest, who do not spend it. Johnson promises infrastructure spending in Labour areas that voted Tory. The economic returns from this won't materialise for a decade — not in time to impress anyone who voted for the Tories. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



Tata Realty appoints Ritesh Sachdev as senior VP, head for commercial leasing

NEW DELHI: Tata Realty and Infrastructure Ltd (TRIL), a subsidiary of Tata Sons, on Thursday announced the appointment of Ritesh Sachdev as senior vice-president and head (commercial leasing and asset management). Prior to this, Sachdev was associated with Colliers International as the head of occupier services (India) and Managing Director (South India). He has over 20 years of experience in the real estate sector. "The commercial real estate sector in India is on the path of unprecedented growth. We, at TRIL, have already aligned our business strategy towards these developments in the commercial real estate sector."



Museum showcasing legacy of L&T group set up in Chennai office

NEW DELHI: Technology, engineering, construction major Larsen and Toubro has set up a museum at its facility here with a display of milestones achieved by the company. Larsen and Toubro opened the state-of-the-art digitally transformed corporate museum christened HHL Centre after Larsen and Toubro's founder Henning Holck-Larsen. "The revamped museum is the best example of immersive storytelling using latest digital technology and platforms," a company statement said on Thursday. Commenting on the corporate museum, Larsen and Toubro CEO and managing director SN Subrahmanyan said, "The museum is a manifestation of all the key milestones the company has achieved. "We trust that this will go into the annals of the corporate history of India and will become an inspirational landmark for Chennai," he said.



'Vodafone Idea pays Rs 1,000 cr to telecom dept towards dues'

NEW DELHI: Vodafone Idea on Thursday paid Rs 1,000 crore more to the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) towards its statutory dues, a senior official said. The company had paid Rs 2,500 crore to the government towards adjusted gross revenue (AGR) dues on Monday. In all, it owes Rs 53,000 crore to the telecom department. The DoT source said that notices will also be sent to Tata Teleservices for recovery of full dues in a day or two. The company had paid Rs 2,197 crore to the government on Monday, while DoT's calculations peg the outstanding amount at over Rs 14,000 crore.

FAIFA urges govt for 'pragmatic' approach on cigarette taxation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tobacco farmers' body FAIFA on Thursday said the hike in taxes on cigarettes announced in the Budget 2020-21 will only increase the smuggled cigarette trade which, in turn, will affect livelihoods of millions of tobacco growers and farm workers.

The Federation of All India Farmer Associations (FAIFA) said it had also appealed to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to have a "pragmatic approach" on cigarette taxation at a meeting on Wednesday evening.

The hike in national calamity contingent duty (NCCD) on cigarettes proposed in the Budget is a major setback to the FCV tobacco farmers who have been fighting torrential and unseasonal rainfall this year in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, FAIFA said in a statement.

"Indiscriminate increase of excise duty on cigarettes will result in reduction in legal



cigarette production and this will reduce the tobacco purchases of domestic manufacturers, impacting market prices for farmers thereby putting more pressure on farmer's earnings and causing further stress," it said. Commenting on the hike in NCCD on cigarettes, FAIFA President Javare Gowda said, "This tax increase will provide a further boost to the smuggled cigarette trade and (lead to) decline in domestic demand, resulting in weak

demand in the ensuing auctions." He further said the hike in NCCD was unexpected as several representations were made to the government to make it aware of the current situation of tobacco farmers and the ground-level realities of the struggles and losses that are being faced by them due to crop damage and also smuggled and illegal cigarette markets. In the Budget, Sitharaman had announced increasing NCCD on cigarettes, ranging

In the Budget, Sitharaman had announced increasing NCCD on cigarettes, ranging from Rs 200-Rs 735 per thousand sticks, depending upon length of cigarette and on filter and non-filter basis

from Rs 200-Rs 735 per thousand sticks, depending upon length of cigarette and on filter and non-filter basis.

It was increased to 60 per cent from 45 per cent on smoking mixtures for pipes and cigarettes, while on other forms of smoking tobacco (other than smoking mixtures for pipes and cigarettes) and forms of chewing tobacco, it was increased to 25 per cent from 10 per cent.

Gowda claimed that due to higher taxation, smuggled, illicit and contraband cigarettes along with WHO regulations, FCV production has come down to 210 million kg in 2019-20 from 325 million kg in

2013-14. It has resulted in "loss of more than Rs 5,000 crore (cumulative) to the FCV Tobacco Farming community", he added.

In contrast, he said the market for illicit cigarettes is rising and has doubled from a level of 12.5 billion sticks in 2005 to 26.5 billion sticks in 2018 making India the fourth-largest and fastest-growing illegal cigarette market in the world.

"Based on the current tax rates on cigarettes, it is estimated that the government loses Rs 13,000 crore in tax revenues per annum on account of illegal cigarette trade," Gowda claimed.



Sensex ends 153 pts lower; Nifty slips below 12,100

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmark Sensex dropped 153 points on Thursday, dragged by losses in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, TCS, HDFC Bank and HUL amid tepid global cues and rising crude oil prices.

The 30-share BSE gauge settled 152.88 points, or 0.37 per cent, lower at 41,170.12. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty slipped 45.05 points, or 0.37 per cent, to 12,080.85.

Asian Paints, HUL, TCS, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, UltraTech Cement were among the top laggards in the Sensex pack.

On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, Tata Steel, SBI, PowerGrid and ONGC were among the gainers.

According to traders, concerns over the economic impact of the coronavirus epidemic on world economy kept investors on edge.

Coronavirus death toll climbed to 2,118 in China with the death of 114 more people. However, new confirmed cases declined to 394, registering the biggest drop since December when the first case was reported in Wuhan city.

The 30-share BSE gauge settled 152.88 points, or 0.37 per cent, lower at 41,170.12. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty slipped 45.05 points, or 0.37 per cent, to 12,080.85

Meanwhile, bourses in Shanghai rallied after China's central bank cut interest rates to help ease credit for companies stricken by the virus outbreak.

Benchmarks in Tokyo ended with gains, while those in Hong Kong and Seoul closed in the red. Stock exchanges in Europe also fell in opening trade.

Further, continued rise in crude oil prices too weighed on investor sentiment, traders said. Brent crude oil futures rose 0.14 per cent to USD 59.20 per barrel.

On the currency front, the Indian rupee depreciated 9 paise to 71.63 per US dollar (intra-day).



Passenger vehicle retail sales fall 5 pc in January: FADA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile dealers' body FADA on Thursday said passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales in January declined 4.61 per cent to 2,90,879 units as compared to same month last year, hit by tepid response by end customers.

According to Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA), which collected vehicle registration data from 1,223 out of the 1,432 regional transport offices (RTOs), PV sales stood at 3,04,929 units in January 2019.

Two-wheeler sales declined 8.82 per cent to 12,67,366 units last month as compared with 13,89,951 units in January 2019.

Commercial vehicle sales declined 6.89 per cent to 82,187 units as compared to 88,271 units in January 2019.

Three-wheeler sales, however, rose 9.17 per cent to 63,514 units last month as compared

Two-wheeler sales declined 8.82 per cent to 12,67,366 units last month as compared with 13,89,951 units in January 2019

with 58,178 units in January 2019.

Total sales across categories declined 7.17 per cent to 17,50,116 units last month as against 18,85,253 units in the year-ago month.

"Auto sales continue to be in the negative territory in the month of January, except for three wheelers, with many consumers still not concluding on their decisions. Ongoing transition of BS-IV to BS-VI is also a factor in delayed purchase decision," FADA President Ashish Harsharaj Kale said in a statement.

Gold prices rise Rs 111 on weak rupee, silver falls Rs 67

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices on Thursday rose by Rs 111 to Rs 42,492 per 10 gram in the national capital on weak rupee, according to HDFC Securities.

The yellow metal had closed at Rs 42,381 per 10 gram in the previous trading session.

However, silver prices fell Rs 67 to Rs 48,599 per kg from Rs 48,666 per kg on Wednesday. "Spot gold for 24 karat in



Delhi continued upside, gaining Rs 111 on weaker rupee catching overnight gains in dollar index. The spot rupee was trading around 5 paise

weaker against the dollar after falling 23 paise in the opening trade," HDFC Securities Senior Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel said.

Besides, strong demand due to wedding season pushed gold spot prices higher, he added.

In the international market, both gold and silver were trading lower at USD 1,609.60 per ounce and USD 18.26 per ounce, respectively.

Panasonic India eyes 10% AC marketshare next fiscal: Official

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Consumer electronics major Panasonic India is looking to increase its marketshare in air-conditioners segment to 10 per cent in the next fiscal from six per cent last year, a senior company official said on Thursday. Panasonic India announced the launch of its new range of connected air-conditioners here.

"We are expecting aggressive growth. Catering to the growing preference for connected ACs, with this launch, we aim to take our marketshare to 10 per cent and 25 per cent-30 per cent growth in the air-conditioner segment in FY 2020-21, Business Head Air Conditioning Group, Panasonic India, Gaurav Sah told reporters.

Coronavirus may impact GDP if containment is delayed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The cascading effect of coronavirus epidemic might cause a drag of about a percentage point on global GDP growth, if the containment is delayed beyond June, a report said in Thursday.

According to the report by Dun & Bradstreet, the outbreak of coronavirus is already having a considerable impact on the Chinese economy, and its implications will increase for global businesses with operations or suppliers in the region.

On January 30, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global health emergency.

Typically, there is a slowdown in the Chinese business activity during late-January on account of the Lunar New Year holidays. This is generally factored into the inventory planning by global businesses, hence, the impact on them has so far been muted, the report said. "However, the extent of impact on global businesses will depend on how soon the virus is contained," the report said adding that the role of China in the global economy has increased manifolds.

The Dun & Bradstreet data shows that 22 million businesses, or close to 90 per cent of all active businesses in China, are located in the most-impacted



China cuts loan rate as it battles coronavirus impact

BEIJING: China on Thursday announced it would cut interest rates in a bid to boost the economy, as it battles the economic fallout of the new coronavirus outbreak. The reduction in the loan prime rate (LPR) -- one of the preferential rates commercial banks give to their best customers and which serves as a reference for other lending rates -- is the latest measure to help companies struggling through the epidemic. The one-year LPR was lowered to 4.05 per cent from 4.15 per cent, the People's Bank of China (PBoC) said in a statement. The five-year LPR -- on which many lenders base their mortgage rates -- was also lowered to 4.75 per cent from 4.8 per cent. The LPR, released on the 20th of every month, is based on rates of the central bank's open market operations, especially medium-term lending facility rates.

regions. "With the impact of the outbreak on the Chinese economy, the cascading effect might cause a drag of approximately one percentage point on global GDP growth if containment is delayed beyond the summer of 2020 (June)," the report noted. The data shows that at least

220 Indian firms have legal linkages with around 350 companies in China. Of these 220 Indian companies, 58 per cent are in the manufacturing sector, 40 per cent are in the services sector and the remaining 2 per cent are in the construction sector.



MG Motor India's SUV Hector bookings cross 50,000 units

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

MG Motor India on Thursday said bookings for its SUV Hector have crossed 50,000 units in just eight months since its launch, and plans to launch six-seater version of the model later this year.

The model has already sold nearly 20,000 units since its entry into India last year.

MG Motor India Chief Commercial Officer Gaurav Gupta said, "The Hector continues its strong momentum in the Indian market crossing the 50,000-mark in terms of bookings received in just eight months since its launch."

He further said the company continues to accelerate the momentum by opening new brand outlets closer to prospective customers in tier-I and tier-II cities.

"With plans to launch the Hector Plus 6-seater family version in Q3 2020 (third quarter of 2020), we aim to further strengthen the Hector brand in India," Gupta said.

MG Motor India said it has already expanded its operational footprint to over 200 centres across India and aims to expand the number to 250 by March-end.

Connect2India, IRClass join hands

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Global trade information provider Connect2India on Thursday said it has partnered with IRClass to provide verification, credibility and conformance check for MSMEs.

Indian Register of Shipping (IRClass) is an international ship classification society providing ship classification and certification as well as technical inspection services.



Connect2India Founder Pawan Gupta said that the vision is to enable MSMEs to mitigate any regulatory and policy non-compliance coupled with business continuity and risk management.

"This will not only help Indian MSMEs find global

customers easily and arrange export/import orders at a much faster pace, but also help overseas SMEs build the confidence in their Indian trade counterpart with required technical certification and inspection in place as result of this collaboration," he said in a statement.

A constant worry has been to address the concerns regarding quality, conformance and responsible manufacturing.

Co-living student housing can generate 7-11% rental yield

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Co-living, co-working and student housing, which are emerging segments in the Indian real estate sector, have the potential to generate rental yield of 7-11 per cent, according to a report by CII and Anarock.

The report, titled 'Emerging Asset Classes: The Future Looks Promising', was released at the 2nd CII Real Estate Confluence here on Thursday. It delves into these highly promising new Indian real estate asset classes and explores their growth drivers as well as the underlying opportunities for investors and other real estate stakeholders.

"Co-living, student housing and co-working have rental



yields of anywhere between 7 per cent and 11 per cent -- a significant step-up from the 3 per cent national average rental yield of traditional housing formats," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said.

Co-living, student housing and senior living are the next evolutionary step in the residential real estate domain, while co-working has evolved from traditional office real estate, he said.

It delves into these highly promising new Indian real estate asset classes as well as the underlying opportunities for investors and other real estate stakeholders

"The drivers behind this evolution are changing social dynamics, a highly enabled start-up environment, rising interest in higher education by migratory student population, and the need for quality housing solutions for senior citizens," Puri said. According to the report, top-6 co-living players currently have 1.18 lakh beds priced between Rs 6,000 and Rs 30,000 per month. As

many as 13 prominent student housing brands now have 1.5 lakh beds across India.

Senior housing growth is primarily in top cities' outskirts and tier-II and III cities like Bhiwadi (NCR), Neral (Mumbai), Talegaon (Pune), Devanahalli (Bengaluru), Mysuru and Coimbatore.

"Co-living, student housing and senior living are fundamentally innovative and spe-

cialised residential assets, but with varied business models," Puri said.

While co-working as a segment has flourished in India, there are interesting differences in how local and global players address it. Domestic co-working operators have restricted their presence to tier-I cities, while global players are also penetrating into tier-II and III cities.

The report also highlighted that data centres, with potential of 10-14 per cent rental yield, is drawing high investor interest. The recent Budget's proposal to roll out a new policy for building data centre parks underscores the importance and relevance of this promising asset class.

HDFC Bank SME book doubles to Rs 1.48L cr

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Private sector lender HDFC Bank doubled its SME book to over Rs 1.48 lakh crore by December 2019 from Rs 74,000 crore in March 2017, cornering over 9 per cent of the around Rs 16 lakh crore market, at a time when credit flow to the segment has been tepid.

According to the RBI data, the system-wide SME loan book stood at Rs 15.7 lakh crore as of June 2019, up 10 per cent over the 12 months' period.

With a loan book of over Rs 1.48 lakh crore, HDFC Bank is the clear No. 2 in the SME

lending space after the industry leader SBI which leads the segment with around Rs 2.7 lakh crore loan book and around 14 per cent market share.

During this period -- March 2017-December 2019, the bank added more than 3 lakh customer accounts -- from 30.74 lakh customer accounts to nearly 34 lakh accounts.

While system-wide lending to the SME sector has been tepid, HDFC Bank has clocked 19 per cent incremental growth in the disbursal in the December 2019 quarter, serving close to 3.4 million SMEs/MSMEs accounts, says a senior bank official.

A WOMAN of courage

Hyderabad-based Sathvika Gupta is the only brown woman from Asia to do Level 7 in fire safety and fire safety management from Cambridge University and she was appreciated recently by the Telangana government for keeping Numaish safe from untoward incidents, reports V SATEESH REDDY

Hyderabad-based Sathvika Gupta is the only brown woman from Asia to do Level 7 in fire safety and fire safety management from Cambridge University. She was recently felicitated for her services and keeping the Numaish exhibition free from fire accidents this year.

Last year, a massive fire broke out at the exhibition causing losses worth crores and had even halted the prestigious exhibition for a week.

This time, the Telangana State government appointed Sathvika Gupta to make sure there were no fire accidents.

Sathvika, along with her team, did a good job and was appreciated for her efforts.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Sathvika Gupta, director for Sathvika Fire Services, says that, "My father started the services 25 years ago and I've been working here for the past 16 years. I used to see my father work hard and helped him since it was a small company but I realised that his work saves lives. So, I also joined him."

She has conducted more than 500 safety training sessions in India and across the UK. She says

that, "India, with a population of 1.25 billion, has a strong workforce of 465 million. About 48,000 workers die in India due to occupational accidents every year and around 38 fatal accidents take place every day in the construction sector. Overall, workplace deaths in India are 20 times higher than in the UK. We aim to address these issues and create not just awareness but also contribute and develop the necessary systems."

She is the only brown woman in the world from Asia to achieve level 7 in safety.

When asked about it, she shares, "Not many people opt for fire services, particularly women. Even in India, in private, public, and government sectors, there is no one in the safety field because it's a tough job to be on site and take care of life and property. I know about 200 different kinds of safety, like nuclear, radiation, food, construction, and chemical, but fire safety was mainstream. When I was studying in London at the Cambridge University, I was the only woman from Asia in a class of 32 at the fire safety and management class. I feel proud I took this step with my father's support."

About keeping Numaish safe from fire hazards for more than 45 days, Sathvika explains, "Numaish is India's biggest exhibition and lakhs of people visits every day. Last year, the fire happened just because of lack of awareness. People are not aware of what to do and what not to do in case of emergencies. This year, the Telangana State government chose us to maintain safety all throughout and we did it. After the exhibition, ministers appreciated our work and it was a proud moment for us."

When asked about how they were able to keep the exhibition safe from fire mishaps, Sathvika shares, "For the exhibition, we did

auditing, risk assessments and trained 1,500 stall owners on operating fire extinguishers. We asked everyone to have one extinguisher at their stall. Every day 100 stalls were covered from 4 pm to 8 pm for training. We did four live mock drills and evacuation procedures and calculated everyday risks. We made sure there is a proper hydrant system with two pump houses with a 1.5 lakh-liter water capacity."

"We used 78 hydrant valves and fire buckets, 40 fire fighting volunteers, 60 exhibition society volunteers, two mobile fire extinguisher bike riders and a team from disaster management from the government. With the support of all these teams, we were able to keep Numaish safe for everyone this year," she added.

She is also doing a campaign, Safe Zone Telangana, to make the state safe from fire accidents.

She adds that, "Our team have also designed a special programme, according to layman psychology, to make sure that educated and uneducated people from all age groups are made aware of safety. The campaign will cover the entire state of Telangana. It helps provide training in all the 31 districts of Telangana on first aid, evacuation procedure, fire safety, and more."

About her opinion on having an education board on safety in India, she says that, "With the world's largest population and a large youth base, we should have one to protect ourselves and to create awareness. There are many big brands covering up fire accidents and not letting them out. We need a separate board to tackle these issues."

Sathvika said that it was important to include safety in curriculum for students and added that it would help youngsters pursue this field.



Not many people opt for fire services, particularly women. Even in India, in private, public, and government sectors, there is no one in the safety field because it's a tough job to be on site and take care of life and property. I know about 200 types of safety measures

SATHVIKA GUPTA, SAFETY EXPERT

'Lack of consistent funding of NGOs brings India down'

Philanthropist Natasha Poonawalla has been announced the chair of the British Asian Trust's Children's Protection Fund for India, by His Royal Highness Prince Charles of Wales in an event, held this year in the heart of London.

Held by the British Asian Trust's India Advisory Council, the Children's Protection Fund for India will work with Sir Chris Hohn and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), to develop South Asia's largest anti-trafficking fund.

Founded in 2007 by Prince Charles in collaboration with eminent Brit-Asian business leaders, the British Asian Trust Fund has been instrumental in combating child-trafficking, improving livelihood, and education across the South Asian diaspora. The British Asian Trust has aided in yielding astonishing results for 4.8 million children working in forced labour in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

In a conversation with *IANSLife*, Poonawalla tells us more about her role with the organization, major concerns when it comes to child protection in India, and more. Excerpts:

Q You have been announced as the Chair of the British Asian Trust's Children's Protection Fund for India. Tell us more about it?

Poonawalla: The foundation has continually laid focus on saving and enhancing the quality of life. In that sense, our primary objective has always been to strengthen the healthcare system, through our vaccination and immunization programs we have strived to save lives across the world. We have done extensive work on women's and children's

safety through various programmes initiated in collaboration with certain NGOs. However, ever since the Nirbhaya case occurred, I was perplexed and extremely disturbed. And, as time passed, more cases were being reported with repeated instances of sexual abuse and assault on children as young as three years old.

The shocking case of Asifa pushed us towards recognizing the appalling fact of the number of dangerous criminals that roam our streets freely. We took a decision to address the dire concern by conducting research that further showed us frightful insights on the existing scenario. We

NATASHA SAYS ONE OF THE MAJOR CONCERNS OF TODAY'S WORLD IS PROTECTING KIDS FROM LIFE THREATENING DISEASES AND ABUSE

realised that more than often, children who have been trafficked and abused seem to be the perpetrators of child abuse later in their lives. Owing to the lack of rehabilitation through mental health programs and adequate sex-education as such topics seem to be a taboo

in our society and even school teachers seem to be uncomfortable discussing this.

Q What importance does the title hold for you?

Poonawalla: It's not as much about the title but the impending impact that you can leave on the next generation by creating awareness and finding implementable solutions for the cause.

Q What will be your key roles?

Poonawalla: My key role in the position would be leading the way in implementing actionable solutions that address the root cause through all necessary means. Strategising with the India Child

Protection Fund team and leveraging influence in the government on framing impactful policy reforms that include making education compulsory and incorporating mental health programs and sex education with a strong emphasis on the importance of inculcating consent and individual choice in our education programmes at schools of every level.

I think one of the initial efforts have been for awareness the appointment of our ambassador Katy Perry by His Royal Highness Prince Charles of Wales on my introduction. The decision certainly aided in bringing in a significant amount of attention to the cause and our aim.

Q What are the major concerns according to you when it comes to child protection in India?

Poonawalla: One of the major concerns according to me is protecting children from life threatening diseases and sexual abuse, on which we are working with a set of NGOs. Also, I think child labour is a result of poverty and illiteracy that compels parents to hand their children over to devious child traffickers in hope for a better future.

Q What do you think our country lacks when it comes to fighting such crimes?

Poonawalla: I don't think there is a lack of initiatives around these societal menaces. However, what brings us down is the lack of consistency in the funding of our local NGOs, due to which they are unable to scale up their activities on a regular, year-on-year basis.

In comparison to foreign countries, there is a generous influx of funding on charities. Our country doesn't see a constant collaboration between the public and private sectors and NGOs. — IANSLife



Ayushmann meets his LGBT fans

Actor Ayushmann Khurrana, who will next be seen in the gay rom-com *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, interacted with LGBT fans during his visit to the Capital.

To spend some time with the star, the fans had to participate in a contest, wherein they had to complete the catchy phrase, "I want to meet Ayushmann because..."

The meet-and-greet session was organised by Blued, a gay social app.

"Blued is the largest gay social app in India. While we have done out of the box campaigns in India, which focusses on strengthening the LGBTQI+ community with *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, being associated as

exclusive dating partner, we aim at registering our presence as a brand which will always stand for the community rights and position our brand strongly to help the LGBTQI+ community in India," Sanyam Sharma, marketing director, Blued India, said.

Speaking of *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, the film launches digital sensation Jitender Kumar as Ayushmann's on-screen love interest. The film also reunites the *Badhai Ho* couple Gajraj Rao and Neena Gupta, and features Manurishi Chaddha and Maanvi Gargroo in important roles. Bhumii Pednekar plays a cameo in the film, written and directed by Hitesh Kewalya. The film is scheduled to release on February 21.



STEP UP 2 star Robert Hoffman launches desi music video

Step Up 2 fame Hollywood actor-dancer-choreographer Robert Hoffman arrived in India on Wednesday and was accorded an Indian welcome with tika and garland. Hoffman along with writer-filmmaker Arsal Qureshi and actress-model-blogger Jas Sagu hosted a press interaction to launch their collaboration, a music video titled *Aag Ka Gola LA* on Wednesday in Mumbai.

Asked which was his real passion, acting or dancing, Hoffman replied: "My passion lies with neither dancing nor acting. My passion lies with reverence and my passion lies in art that gives you the feeling or sensation or experience that is greater than life, something god-like."

He added that he wants to create magic. "You cannot do justice to music. I don't think music has justice done to it in any sort of human context. For me, music and the feelings it inspires are beyond human context. So, when I dance, I am attempting to create something larger than life. When I act, I am hoping to create something that defies the simplicity of the ego to do greater things. So my draw was never to be an actor or dancer, it was to create magic. I know it sounds a little cheesy but that is my inspiration," the actor said.

The music video *Aag Ka Gola LA* features Robert Hoffman and Jas Sagu, the song is crooned by Saurabh Shetye while Saurabh Durgesh is the composer. The music video is directed by Arsal Qureshi of Blow Media.

"For the music video, I trusted Arsal and took her lead. We did perform a dance routine but all the artistic decisions came from Arsal," revealed Hoffman.

He added that his visit to India seems like the right thing to do as his focus is shifting in life.



Ben Affleck quit *The Batman* fearing alcohol relapse

Hollywood star Ben Affleck has revealed why he walked out of the upcoming DC superhero biggie, *The Batman*, despite having played the caped crusader in films like *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*, *Suicide Squad* and *Justice League*.

In a new interview, Affleck said his decision was driven by the fear that playing out the role would mess up his commitment to staying sober after several rehab stints for his battle with alcoholism, reports *aceshowbiz.com*.

"I showed somebody *The Batman* script. They said, 'I think the script is good. I also think you'll drink yourself to death if you go through what you just went through again,'" said Affleck.

At one point, there were reports that the actor would not only act in the upcoming *Batman* film, but also write and direct it, reports the *New York Times*.

Affleck gave up the idea of scripting and directing the project in 2017, and Matt Reeves took over the reins.

Subsequently, Robert Pattinson was cast as *Batman* and his alter ego Bruce Wayne.

During the interview with the *New York Times*, Affleck, opening up on his long battle with alcoholism, credits fellow Hollywood stars Bradley Cooper and Robert Downey Jr. for helping him overcome alcoholism.

"One of the things about recovery that I think people sometimes overlook is the fact that it inculcates certain values. Be honest. Be accountable. Help other people. Apologise when you're wrong," he said.



Udit Narayan, Alka Yagnik, Kumar Sanu set for new musical innings

Bollywood's Udit Narayan, Alka Yagnik and Kumar Sanu are coming together to bring back the nostalgia of the sounds and rhythms from the 1990s musical era through an upcoming reality TV show.

The singers, known for ever-green romantic songs, will soon be seen in the role of mentors in the show *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Li' Champs*.

The show was launched

here on Wednesday with some music and lots of nostalgia. Host Manish Paul introduced the mentors at the musical evening, who then have a glimpse into the show.

"It's a very happy thing for me to work with my close friends Alka and Kumar Sanu. In the past, we worked together a lot...Getting the three of us together is iconic," said Udit, who then took the audience back to the 1990s with his performance on

popular songs like *Papa kehte hain* and *Main nikla gaddi leke*.

The mentors also showed a glimpse into their camaraderie through their witty banter.

"There are many memories and incidents that we will be opening on the show. It will be very interesting," Kumar Sanu said.

Kumar Sanu and Alka also performed live on songs like *Dheere dheere se meri zindagi mein aana* and

Kuch kuch hota hai respectively. The trio left the audience asking for more when they sang *Dil ne yeh kaha hain tumse*.

The musical press meet presented a teaser of the show with some contestants performing live.

"It's getting more difficult for us to select the best. Everyone is so talented," Yagnik said while talking about the contestants.

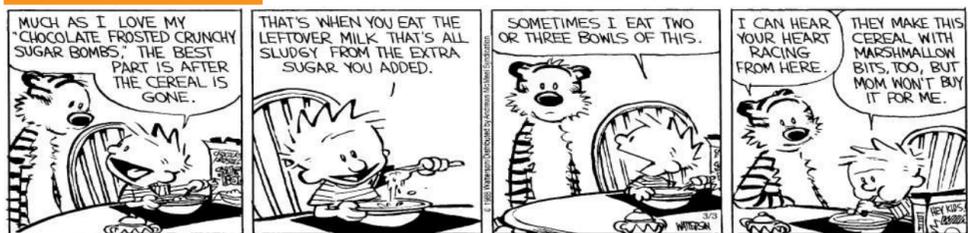
The show will air on Zee TV from February 29.

FUN

ARCHIE



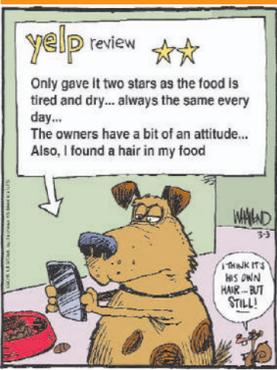
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



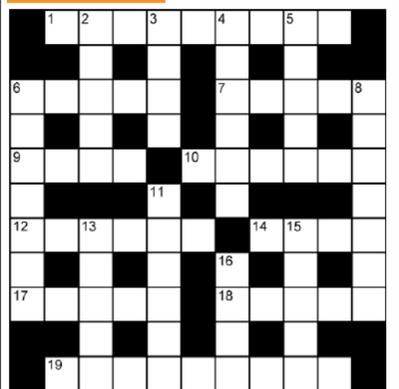
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution

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

- 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.

ACROSS

- Large printed words on a newspaper's front page
- One of the five senses
- Brush hard to clean
- Catch fish with these
- Opposite of youngest
- A cricket referee
- Clean with water
- The sound a horse makes
- A smell
- These are carried in rain
- What you get if you stay out in the sun too long
- Someone who sells meat
- A shooter of arrows
- A piece of glass that can make a rainbow
- A greeting in Hawaii
- This covers a sheep

DOWN

- The fourth even number
- A fruit on a palm tree
- A very rude remark
- Weird or uncanny



'TRIVIKRAM GARU IS MY LUCKY CHARM'



Director Venky speaks to the media about working with Nithiin, the reason behind re-casting actress Rashmika, taking inspiration from Trivikram and more, reports
K RAMYA SREE

Director Venky Kudumula and actor Nithiin who are eagerly waiting to taste success with their next film have pinned all hopes on *Bheeshma* that is set to hit screens today across Telugu states. Speaking earlier this week, actor Nithiin had said that this film will give him the kind of box-office success

he got with *Sye and Dil. Bheeshma*, a romantic love story, revolves around the most eligible bachelor whose *Singles' Anthem* is already trending. Speaking to the media, director Venky Kudumula said, "When I pitched the script one-and-a-half-years back, Nithiin's marriage was not fixed and people would call him the most eligible bachelor. That was the reason I penned the script accordingly. We see love in any genre. Although I chose organic farming in this film, it is dealt in a light and comic way." For Venky, who is an agricultural graduate and whose father is a farmer himself, the adulteration of food has become a major cause of concern for the last couple of years and inspired him to pen this script. He feels this film will have a hard-hitting message. After *Chalo*, Venky almost



took more than a year to prepare for his next. He was worried about the film being delayed but it was Nithiin who gave him the confidence that it is okay to take time to pen a fully bounded script. He was also all praise for

Trivikram Srinivas. "Trivikram *garu* is one of the best writers in the Telugu industry. Me, and many others, take inspiration from him. I believe he is my lucky charm and he also came for my previous film *Chalo's* pre-release event. He was the one who asked me to tell the gist of the story in the trailer so that people will know what they are getting into. That is why I mentioned organic farming in the trailer," he said. Speaking of Rashmika, Venky said that he has decid-

ed to re-cast his heroine after he worked with her on his first film *Chalo*. The actress' dedication towards cinema is what made him approach her again. "Rashmika has become a superstar by the time I pitched this script and I was worried if she will accept the film. Thankfully, she gave her nod after the first session itself." He goes on to say, "Despite not knowing a word in Telugu, she managed to dub for herself from the very first film and I was very impressed by it."

“When I pitched the script one-and-a-half-years back, Nithiin's marriage was not fixed and people would call him the most eligible bachelor. That was the reason I penned the script accordingly. We see love in any genre. Although I chose organic farming in this film, it is dealt in a light and comic way.”
VENKY KUDUMULA, DIRECTOR

Kamal, Kajal had a narrow escape, says costume designer



After the ghastly accident on the sets of Kamal Haasan's *Indian 2* on Wednesday that left three dead and nine injured, new details have emerged from the accident sight. As per costume designer, Amritha Ram, who was present on location, it was providential escape for Kamal Haasan, Kajal Aggarwal and herself, who were seconds away from being crushed.



Kajal and I who were right under are safe. (sic) She shared a picture of their crushed canopy under the crane. The accident occurred when a crane with heavy-duty light came crashing down. As per a statement

released by the makers of the movie Lyca Productions, the deceased were identified as assistant director Krishna (rumoured to be close to Shankar), art assistant Chandran and production assistant Madhu. *Indian 2*, which is being bankrolled by Lyca, also stars Siddharth, Rakul Preet Singh, Bobby Simha and Priya Bhavani Shankar in key roles. The team recently completed the second schedule after canning an action sequence worth Rs 40 crore in Bhopal. National award-winning stunt choreographer Peter Heins was roped in to oversee this action episode.



Mahesh Babu unveils statue of veteran Telugu actor VIJAYA NIRMALA

Telugu superstar Mahesh Babu, along with his father, veteran actor Krishna, unveiled the statue of his stepmother and well-known actor-filmmaker Vijaya Nirmala on Thursday here. The grand unveiling coincided with Vijaya Nirmala's 74th birth anniversary. Vijaya Nirmala, who had starred in over 200 films and had directed 44 in her illustrious career of over three decades, passed away in June 2019. She made her acting debut at the age of five in the 1950 Tamil film *Machcha Rekkai*, and at 11 she made her Telugu debut with the film *Panduranga Mahatyam*.

She rose to stardom opposite Prem Nazir in the 1964 Malayalam film *Bhargavi Nilayam*, and went on to work with him again in *Udhayogastha*. As a leading lady, she made her Telugu debut with *Rangula Ratnam* alongside Vanisri and Anjali Devi. In 1967, she starred in Telugu film *Sakshi* and it's on the sets of this film she met actor Krishna with whom she worked in 47 films and eventually ended up marrying. However, it was her second marriage. Vijay Nirmala was one of the very few female filmmakers to really make a mark as a director. In 1971, she made her directorial debut via the Telugu film *Meena*, which

was based on the eponymous popular novel written by Eddanapudi Sulochana Rani. Two years later, she directed her first Malayalam film *Kavitha*. She was the only female director to work with major stars like Sivaji Ganesan and Rajinikanth. She directed the latter in the Telugu remake of *Amar Akbar Anthony*, which also starred her husband Krishna. Her other popular directorial projects include *Rowdy Rangaamma*, *Sirmalle Navvindi*, *Bezawada Bebbuli* and *Collector Vijaya* among others. With 44 films as director to her credit, she holds a Guinness Record for most number of films directed by a female filmmaker.



Ananya joins Vijay, Puri Jagannadh on sets

Vijay Deverakonda's first ever pan-India film being directed by Puri Jagannadh has moved to Mumbai where the film unit is canning crucial scenes on the lead cast. It is learnt that actress Ananya Pandey, has bankrolled the project and she joined the shoot on Thursday. She will be seen alongside Vijay in female lead role. The shoot is currently taking place in a massive set erected by art director Jonny. Ananya took to social media to announce her association with Vijay Deverakonda and Puri Jagannadh while a sharing a couple of pictures with them. The actress wrote, "Happy, blessed and excited to be associated for a Pan-

India film with our director @purijagannadh Producers @karanjohar @charmmekaur @apoorva1972 @DharmaMovies @PuriConnects @PCfilm. Welcoming Mr. Deverakonda @TheDeverakonda to Bollywood. #AnanyaPandeyVijayDeverakonda." Two pictures show Ananya and Vijay enjoying script-reading sessions while sitting on a window, other pictures show them having a good laugh with Puri and Charmme. In association with Puri Jagannadh Touring Talkies and Puri Connects, the film billed to an actioner is being produced jointly by Puri Jagannadh, Charmme Kaur, Karan Johar and Apoorva Mehta. The film will also see Ramya Krishnan, Ronit Roy, Vishu Reddy, Ali, in key roles. — KRS

'Banjara Baahubali' comes to Telugu

At a recent press event at Rama Naidu Studios, makers of the movie in Banjara language, *Gor Jeevan*, released the poster and the trailer of the movie which has also been made into Telugu. The event was attended by actress and singer Mangli, filmmaker Raju Nayak and music director Bhole. The makers said that the purpose of the movie is spread awareness about the restrictions women face in society. They also thanked the audience for the wide reception the songs have received. The movie gathered a following in the Banjara community even before its release last year. The Telugu version will be released on February 28. Producer Raju Nayak said, "Gor Jeevan was Banjara's *Baahubali*. We had a lot of fun shooting it and I am sure everybody will enjoy the Telugu version too." Suresh Kondetti, producer and director of *Santosham* said, "I was surprised to see the collections that *Gor Jeevan* made. The film started off with 35 theatres and later grew to 100 theatres over the weekend. That's quite an achievement."

Indian women dominate with 3 Gold

Divya, Pinki and Sarita bag yellow metal in freestyle event of Asian C'ship

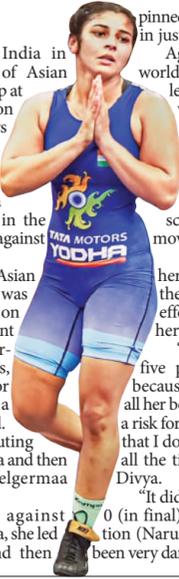
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

On a fruitful day for India in women's competition of Asian Wrestling Championship at Indira Gandhi stadium here on Thursday, three female wrestlers — Pinki Rani (55 kg), Sarita Mor (59 kg) and Divya Kakran (68 kg) won Gold medals in the freestyle event. While Nirmala Devi (50kg) settles for Silver in the 50kg category after losing final against Japan's Migo Igarashi.

2018 Commonwealth and Asian Games Bronze medallist Divya was the star performer for the hosts on the opening day of freestyle event as she produced a strong performance by winning all her bouts, including against reigning junior world champion Naruha Matsuyuki in the fourth round.

She started the day by routing Kazakhstan's Albina Kaingelinova and then knocked out Mongolia's Delgermaa Enkkhaikhan.

In the third round, against Uzbekistan's Azoda Esbergenova, she led 4-0 with consecutive rolls and then



pinned her opponent to finish it off in just 27 seconds.

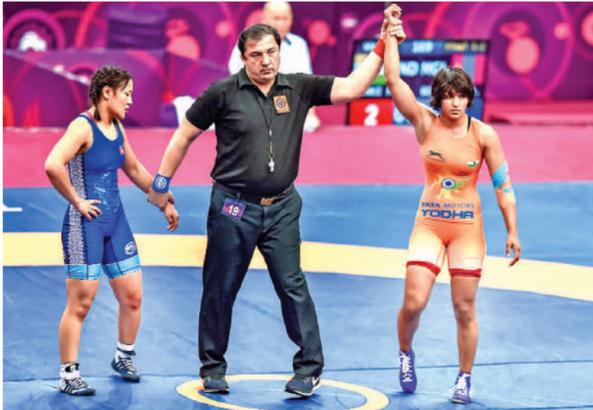
Against the Japanese junior world champion, with her strong left-leg attacks, Divya led 4-0 with a takedown and an expose move.

The Japanese made a solid start in the second period as she attacked the Indian's left leg initially but scored points with a right leg move to make it 4-4.

The Japanese almost pinned her but Divya wriggled out of the difficult position. She soon effected a move which led to her victory by fall.

"I had to win by fall to get five points from all my bouts because the Japanese was winning all her bouts by big margins, so I took a risk for big wins. My coach had said that I don't have to go for big throws all the time, but I went for it," said Divya.

"It did become tricky after I led 4-0 (in final). I was not in a great position (Naruha's lock) and it could have been very dangerous. But I took a risk and



Referee raises the hand of wrestler Pinky after winning her bout against Mongolian Dulguun Bolormaa PTI

it paid off by God's grace."

Asked if the absence of Chinese wrestler helped, she replied in the affirmative.

"Yes, it did benefit. But if you have a five-wrestler group it becomes even

tougher, you have to fight everyone and win big. I won 4 bouts within 2 hours. It was tough on the body but the good thing is I have improved on my range, I made all kinds of attacks, Irani, Kheme, single-lead, double leg attacks."

Sarita, competing in her first Asian event since winning a Silver in 2017 in 58kg, won her first two bouts by technical superiority against Madina Bakbergenova (Kazakhstan) and Nazira MarsbekKyzy (Kyrgyzstan) before winning 10-3 against Japan's Yuumi Kon.

She edged out Mongolia's Battseteg Atlantsseteg 3-2 in the final. Sarita managed a push-out point to win her first Gold at this event after the scores were tied.

Pinki, competing at senior Asian for the first time, began by beating Uzbekistan's Shokida Akhmedova by fall but lost the next bout to Japan's Kana Higashikawa.

She won her semifinal against Marina Zuyeva 6-0 and beat Mongolia's Dulguun Bolormaa 2-1 to grab the Gold. All the points scored in the final were on passivity.

"I was a bit careful because I had injured my elbow. I did not want to aggravate since important events are lined up," said Pinki.

Nirmala beat Mongolia's Munkhnar Byambasuren 6-4 and Uzbekistan's Dauletbike Yakhshimuratova by technical superiority but lost the final 2-3 to Japan's Miho Igarashi.

SINGLES

LFC WORLD HEADS TO DELHI
NEW DELHI: Liverpool FC has confirmed Delhi as the next stop for its interactive roadshow, LFC World. The unique fan experience will arrive at the Select Citywalk Mall on March 7. Liverpool legends Emile Heskey and Jason McAteer will be in town. Reds in Delhi can also have their photograph with UEFA Champions League trophy and various iconic recreations of Anfield such as the Shankly Gates, This Is Anfield sign and the players' dressing room. Following a day of free LFC-themed activities, fans can be part of a BOSSnights gig featuring Jamie Webster — creator of the Reds famous "Allez allez allez" song — and share the match-day atmosphere at a viewing party as the team takes on Bournemouth in the Premier League back at Anfield.

FEDERER WILL MISS FRENCH OPEN
BASEL: Roger Federer has had surgery on his right knee and will miss the French Open and several other tournaments. Writing on his Facebook page on Thursday, the 20-time Grand Slam champion said his knee "has been bothering me for a little while" so he "decided to have arthroscopic surgery in Switzerland yesterday (Wednesday)." Doctors "are very confident of a full recovery," Federer said, before ending his post by telling his fans "see you on the grass!" as he targets a return for Wimbledon. Federer will skip tournaments in Dubai, Indian Wells, Bogota and Miami prior to the French Open, which starts on May 24.

SHARATH ENTER MEN'S & MIXED DOUBLES Q/F
BUDAPEST: Indian table tennis legend Aachanta Sharath Kamal on Thursday entered the quarterfinals of both men's doubles and mixed doubles at the ITTF World Tour Hungarian Open. The former Commonwealth Games Gold medallist showed tremendous grit and resolve as he partnered Manika Batra to a marathon 11-8, 9-11, 6-11, 11-9, 11-7 victory over home hope Adam Szudi and Szandra Pergel. Later, Sharath Kamal paired up with Gnanasekaran Sathiyar to register yet another hard-fought 11-6, 11-8, 8-11, 9-11, 11-9 win against Japan's rising stars, Shunsuke Togami and Yukiya Uda in men's doubles.

MUGURUZA SHOCKED BY QUALIFIER IN DUBAI
CHENNAI: Qualifier Jennifer Brady claimed a second seeded victim on Thursday, defeating Garbine Muguruza 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 to reach the Dubai C'ships semi-finals. The American who ranks just outside the Top 50 followed up on her first-round defeat of third seed and two-time champion Elena Svitolina at the Aviation Club. "I was able to find a way, I wasn't feeling my best," Brady said after seeing off the ninth-seeded Spaniard. "Maybe I didn't play my best tennis, but I stayed in there, competed and came out on top."

BARCA SIGNS DANISH FORWARD BRAITHWAITE
BARCELONA: Barcelona signed Denmark forward Martin Braithwaite to help fill its injury-depleted attack on Thursday. Barcelona agreed to pay the 18 million euros (\$19.4 million) buyout clause in Braithwaite's contract with Spanish league rival Leganes. Barcelona was granted permission to sign a Spanish league player after it was left without Luis Suarez and Ousmane Dembele for long periods due to injuries to both attacking players. Braithwaite will sign for the rest of this season plus four more, the club said. AGENCIES

Atalanta's night to 'remember forever' No bright side for Spurs

AFP ■ MILAN

Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini hailed a performance his club will "remember forever" after the Italian side crushed Valencia 4-1 on Wednesday to take a giant step closer to reaching the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time.

Dutch wing-back Hans Hateboer scored twice on 16 and 62 minutes, sandwiching goals from Josip Ilicic and Remo Freuler.

"This is an evening that we'll remember forever," said Gasperini. "It's an amazing result, full of emotion."

It was an extraordinary night for the side from Bergamo who travelled to the San Siro



Atalanta players celebrate after UEFA Champions League R16 first leg victory AP

with over 40,000 of their fans as their home stadium 55km away does not meet UEFA regulations. Denis Cheryshev pulled one back for Valencia in the first leg of the last-16 tie at the San Siro, the same stadium where the Spanish side lost the 2001 final to Bayern Munich on penalties. Valencia, seventh in La Liga, had finished top of their group after away wins over Ajax and Chelsea but were missing several key players through injury and suspension.

"It certainly complicates things a bit, it's a pretty overwhelming result, this 4-1," said Valencia coach Albert Celades. "In the end it doesn't reflect much what we saw on the pitch."

Atalanta's run comes despite losing their opening three Champions League group games, before finishing second behind Manchester City.

"Three goals ahead is a nice reward," added Gasperini. "But there were a lot of dangerous situations, these are things we'll need to improve in Valencia."

"We are satisfied with this victory and above all with this advantage."

AFP ■ LONDON

Jose Mourinho fears his side's season is running out of gas after an injury-hit Spurs slumped to a 1-0 defeat at home to RB Leipzig in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie.

Spurs could be without the talismanic duo of Harry Kane and Son Heung-min for the rest of the season through injury and looked toothless against the Bundesliga contenders.

"We are in a very difficult situation," said Mourinho. "What worries me is this is going to be the situation until the end of the season."

Tottenham captain Hugo Lloris kept his side in the tie with a string of important saves, but he could not prevent Timo Werner from the penalty spot as the German international's 26th goal of the season gave Leipzig a lead to defend on home soil on March 10.

"Over the 90 minutes we deserved



Timo Werner celebrates after he scores RB Leipzig opening goal against Tottenham AP

the win and could have won by more," said Leipzig boss Julian Nagelsmann.

"It's only the first game today. You have to perform at the same level in both games."

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