

ANALYSIS 7 NEED FOR MULTILATERALISM

MONEY 8 SENSEX ENDS 52 PTS LOWER, NIFTY HOLDS 12K

SPORTS 12 IMPROVED THAKUR BECOMES BETTER T20 BOWLER

HYDERABAD, THURSDAY JANUARY 9, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

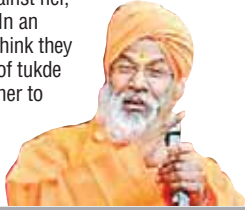
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RAVIPUDI IS JANDHYALA'S 'EKALAVYA SHISYA' Page 11

DEEPIKA PADUKONE PART OF 'TUKDE TUKDE GANG': BJP MP

A day after Bollywood diva Deepika Padukone's sudden visit to ANJU, controversial BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj on Wednesday used unusually strong words against her, calling Padukone part of 'tukde tukde gang'. In an interview to IANS, the Unnao MP alleged, "I think they (people like Deepika Padukone) too are part of tukde tukde gang." The BJP leader went a step further to draw an international conspiracy theory. "Some foreign players are behind them," he alleged.



WHATSAPP ADMINS IN LEH, KARGIL TOLD TO REGISTER WITH POLICE

The police in the newly formed Union Territory of Ladakh have urged admins of WhatsApp groups to register themselves at the police stations in Leh and Kargil. The police released a statement which said: "These days people are using social media as a means of instigating by circulating texts and audio, video clips for their self interest/personal gain, which creates an ambience of hatred and fear amongst the people."



TWEET URGING TWITTER TO SUSPEND TRUMP'S ACCOUNT GOES VIRAL

As tension between the US and Iran mount after Tehran fired over a dozen missiles on two US bases in Iraq, a Twitter user's post, addressed to Twitter to suspend the account of US President Donald Trump — without naming him — to prevent war, has gone viral. Mohamad Safa wrote on @mhdksafa: "Dear Twitter, now would be a great time to suspend his account before he starts World War 3 using your site...Sincerely...The rest of the world. #IranAttacks The post got 855 retweets and 3.5 thousand likes."



INDIA ASKS CITIZENS TO AVOID NON-ESSENTIAL TRAVEL TO IRAQ

The government on Wednesday issued a travel advisory, asking citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Iraq in view of prevailing situation in the Gulf country. In retaliation to killing of its commander General Qassem Soleimani, Iran launched missile strikes on two US military bases in Iraq on Wednesday. "In view of the prevailing situation in Iraq, Indian nationals are advised to avoid all non-essential travel to Iraq until further notification," the advisory by the MEA said.



REBEL TROUBLE FOR TRS IN CIVIC POLLS

● KCR summons party's 103 MLAs to Telangana Bhavan for meeting today to douse the fire

L VENKAT RAM REDDY ■ HYDERABAD

"Operation Akarsh" undertaken by TRS aggressively to weaken opposition parties in Telangana is now taking a heavy toll on the pink party. Ahead of the December 2018 Assembly polls, TRS had admitted thousands of local leaders supporting other parties in municipal corporations and municipalities on the specific promise that they would be given tickets in the municipal polls. Even after winning the Assembly polls with a landslide majority, TRS admitted 12 Congress MLAs and one TDP MLA into its fold. As for the upcoming municipal polls, TRS supremo and Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu had entrusted the responsibility of selecting candidates and ensuring their victory to MLAs of the party. This has now led to tussle between TRS old guard and new entrants in the party who are seen by the former



only as turncoats who do not merit the same attention as old, 'loyal' members of the party. So, TRS is facing 'double trouble' in the allotment of tickets. The first being resistance from long-standing members in municipalities and municipal corporations who are opposing moves to give tickets to new entrants from other parties. The second being the conflict between the TRS MLA candidates who had lost the

elections to 13 rival MLAs from other parties as they have since joined TRS. These rival MLAs, now very much part of TRS, are keen to give tickets to their followers. The defeated TRS MLA candidates are dead against this. TRS had won 88 out of 119 seats in the 2018 Assembly polls. Later, two independent MLAs and 12 Congress MLAs joined TRS. Recently, it wrested the Huzurnagar seat in by-election from Congress, taking

- 'Ticket war' between long-standing members and new entrants among turncoats attracted to pink party fold
- MLAs, despite mandate, express inability to select candidates
- KCR springs into action for setting house in order

its total strength to 103. One TDP MLA, though not yet officially a TRS member, is extending support to TRS. With heavy competition for tickets from the old guard and the newcomers among turncoats, there are now at least five aspirants for each seat on an average. These aspirants are bringing heavy pressure on MLAs to allot them tickets. [Continued on Page 4](#)

New Secretariat in 12 months: Govt

● TS Govt files affidavit in HC

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has filed its counter affidavit in a batch of Public Interest Litigation (PIL) petitions filed against its proposal to demolish the state Secretariat complex and build a new one in its place. The Government has told the High Court that the estimated cost of the proposed new Secretariat complex was about Rs 300 to 400 crore. It also said that it required around 12 months' time to complete the construction of the new complex. The state government also said that the designs of the proposed complex had not been finalized due to pendency of the case before the apex court



of the state. Several social activists, including the Congress party MP A. Revanth Reddy and the vice president of Telangana Jana Samithi (TJS) Prof. PL Visweswar Rao, filed PILs in the issue, and urged the court to issue a stay on the decision of the state government to construct the new Secretariat building.

BJP routed in RSS bastion, Nagpur ZP

PNS ■ NAGPUR

The NCP, Congress Party combine handed a humiliating defeat to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in the elections to the prestigious Nagpur Zilla Parishad — the home turf of Leader of Opposition Devendra Fadnis and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh — officials said here on Wednesday. Of the total 58 seats for which polls were held, the Congress bagged 31, the NCP 10, while the BJP managed only 14 seats. The ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi ally Shiv Sena chose to contest alone and had to be content with just one seat, while two seats were won by Independents in the prestigious local body.

Those opposing CAA will be sent to Pak: Bandi Sanjay

PV KONDAL RAO ■ WARANGAL

Bharatiya Janata Party MP Bandi Sanjay on Wednesday lambasted political parties opposing the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register of Citizens, and labeled critics of the citizenship law as "anti nationals". Addressing a rally held here in support of CAA and NRC, the BJP leader said the historic city of Warangal had been on the forefront from the Nizam period, defeating anti national elements. The BJP leader was critical of CAA opponents for holding a



huge rally here. BJP and national forces had given a fitting reply by holding a saffron rally in the same city where TRS and

MIM parties had "misled" people by opposing CAA and NRC, he reasoned. "Those people who oppose Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) would be sent to Pakistan in buses that don't have brakes," he said. The BJP MP alleged that MIM, "funded by TRS and some Islamic countries", was trying to create ruckus over CAA. There were no protests after the Ayodhya judgment or the abrogation of Article 370; however, CAA was blown out of proportion with the Congress and other opposition parties raising a hue and cry over the issue, Sanjay said. [Continued on Page 3](#)

MUZAFFARPUR SHELTER CASE 'Girls believed dead are alive'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Thirty-five girls suspected to have been killed at a shelter in Bihar's Muzaffarpur are alive, the CBI told the Supreme Court today in a sensational twist in the mass sex assault case that triggered nationwide outrage about two years ago. Last year, the CBI had told the Supreme Court that the politically well-connected Brajesh Thakur, who ran the shelter, and his aides, may have killed 11 girls and it had found a "bundle of bones". Today, the CBI said two skeletons were recovered during their investigation and those were of a man and a woman. No evidence of any minor being murdered had been found. Attorney General K K Venugopal, appearing for the CBI, said the children believed to have been murdered were later tracked down and found



to be alive. The CBI has investigated cases of 17 shelter homes in Bihar and a charge-sheet has been filed in 13 of them. In four cases, the inquiry was closed as no evidence was found, said the agency. The CBI status report was accepted today by a Supreme Court bench headed by Chief Justice SA Bobde. Young girls were forced to dance to vulgar songs, sedated and raped at the government-run shelter in the scandal that exposed the role of influential politicians and bureaucrats. [Continued on Page 4](#)

Naidu taken into custody

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu was taken into custody for defying police restrictions and trying to lead a rally to Auto Nagar after inauguration of the office of the Joint Action Committee of the Save Amaravati cam-



campaign at Benz Circle here on Wednesday. [Continued on Page 4](#)

Owaisi slams cops for tweet on 'Jihadis' in IT firms

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Cyberabad Police is in the soup after its reply to a tweet prompted twitterati to criticize it for "giving legitimacy" to a claim that Muslims are "jihadis" and that those working in American software companies need to be screened in the wake of escalating tension between the US and Iran.

Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar faced sharp criticism from netizens for allegedly legitimising an attempt to spread hate against members of a particular community. All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi slammed the police. [Continued on Page 2](#)

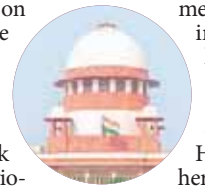


CJI bats for deployment of CISF in some courts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the Centre to look into the possibility of deploying a separate cadre of CISF in certain courts to check unruly incidents of violence. A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde, perhaps referring to the recent Tis

Hazari court complex violence, said "had there been deployment of CISF, the Delhi incident would not have taken place". Lawyers and police personnel had clashed at the Tis Hazari Court complex here in November last year in which a few advocates sustained bullet injuries and several security personnel were injured.



Spot if your saree is real handloom or not with AI

● Telangana State Govt's new initiative to detect genuine handloom saree

NAVEENA GHANATE ■ HYDERABAD

Next time you purchase a handloom saree, Artificial Intelligence can help you distinguish between an authentic handloom product and one that is just an imitation made on a power loom. With power looms invading the handloom territory, the exclusivity of the product is being eaten up by cheap imitations. Power loom products are sometimes sold under the label of handloom products at a premium. Gullible customers end up paying far more than what the product is really worth. Moreover, imitations



from power looms are taking away the dwindling profits of the ailing handloom sector. In order to curb fraudulent practices and to ensure the market has genuine handloom

products, the Telangana government is working on creating an artificial intelligence-based application to help detect handloom and power loom saree. Apparel and Textile Parks of Telangana are building an AI-powered solution, prepared by labelling pixels, to protect weaver and consumer interests. An official in IT Department

said, "We want to bring in technology wherein artificial intelligence will identify if it is handloom or power loom-based on saree patterns. The project has been taken up couple of months ago, in bid to promote our handloom. The work is in progress and it is not yet in final stages to be deployed." The patterns of handloom fabrics will be fed into systems to enable recognition by AI. Thus, when the user uploads the content of the fabric, the machine, using image processing and artificial intelligence, can help determine its genuineness. [Continued on Page 4](#)

Trump offers peace

● 'No Americans harmed in attack by Iran'

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that no Americans were harmed in the attack by Iran on US bases in Iraq as he offered to embrace peace along with the Iranian leadership, in a significant move to de-escalate spiralling tensions in the Middle East. His remarks came hours after Iran launched over a dozen ballistic missiles in a pre-dawn attack on Wednesday targeting at least two bases where US military and coalition forces are stationed in Iraq, which Tehran said was a "slap in the face" of America. "We suffered no



casualties. All of our soldiers are safe and only minimal damage was sustained at our military bases," Trump said in an address to the nation from the White House Grand Foyer. [Continued on Page 4](#)



General strike: Banking services hit 5



Centre to provide Rs 5,559 cr funding for Northeast gas grid 8



'Quiet grace' on JNU stand: Deepika earns praise from all quarters 5



IBM appoints Sandip Patel as India and South Asia MD 8

TODAY

ALMANAC
 Month & Paksham: Paush & Shukla Paksha
 Panchangam
 Tithi: Chaturdashi: 02:33 am (Next Day)
 Nakshatram: Mrigashirsha 03:37 pm
 Time to Avoid: (to start any important work)
 Rahukalam: 01:45 pm - 03:08 pm
 Yamagandam: 06:52 am - 08:14 am
 Varjyam: 11:44 pm - 01:17 am
 Gulika: 09:37 am - 11:00 am
 Good Time: (to start any important work)
 Abhritakalam: 06:54 am - 08:29 am
 Amhrit Muhurtham: 12:00 pm - 12:45 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER
 Forecast: Partly Cloudy
 Temp: 29/19
 Humidity: 82%
 Sunrise: 06:48
 Sunset: 05:57
 Current Weather Conditions
 Updated January 8, 2020 5:00 PM

KCR in a dilemma over NPR

WITH CIVIC POLLS ROUND THE CORNER, TRS PLAYING ITS CARDS CAREFULLY; KCR WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT TO MAKE KNOWN HIS STAND

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As the demand from the Muslim community is growing for a stay on the National Population Register (NPR), Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao appears to be in a dilemma over taking a stand on the NPR and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). With the elections to the urban local bodies scheduled for later this month, the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) is playing its cards carefully with Rao waiting for an appropriate time to declare his stand.



The United Muslim Action Committee leaders have been demanding Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao to halt NPR on the lines of the Kerala government

Minister Mamata Banerjee and lead the protest. However, there was no response from the TRS chief.

A delegation of UMAC leaders led by AIMIM chief and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi had called on KCR with the demand to stay the NPR, scheduled to be undertaken from April. Their contention was that the NPR is the first step of the NRC as already stated by the government in Parliament and made clear in the annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs. They thanked the TRS for voting against the CAA in Parliament and explained to KCR how the NRC could create problems for the people, especially Muslims. The delegation said since the CAA, NPR and NRC were all inter-linked, the state government should not implement the NPR.

After the meeting, Owaisi had told the media that KCR assured the delegation that his party would soon announce its stand. According to the MP, the TRS chief voiced concern over the Hindu-Muslim divide and suggested that the UMAC involve the TRS, Congress and

other parties in its campaign against the CAA. Owaisi claimed that KCR even indicated that he will soon call a meeting of like-minded parties to bring them together on a common platform on the CAA and NRC.

However, KCR is said to be taking a cautious approach in view of the January 22 elections to 120 municipalities and 10 corporations. Political observers say KCR did not immediately take a stand as he believes that if the BJP uses the same to seek votes in the municipal elections, this may boomerang on him. In its best-ever poll performance in Telangana, the BJP had won four Lok Sabha seats, wresting three of them from the TRS. The BJP is expected to give a tough fight in the urban local bodies under these Lok Sabha constituencies.

As the BJP is believed to have some support among the urban voters, KCR does not want to take a chance by announcing his stand before the municipal polls, analysts say. However, the TRS is coming under attack from a section of Muslims for the delay in announcing its stand. Some of the organizers of the 'Million

March' found fault with KCR for delaying a decision and cautioned him that the ambiguity could cost the TRS dearly in the urban local body elections.

Political analyst Telakapalli Ravi believes the TRS opposed the CAA in Parliament because there is a sizeable Muslim population in Telangana. He, however, feels that KCR will not go for a 'head-on collision' with Modi on any issue. "KCR never encouraged any active protest movement on any issue. Even for Telangana he was more for lobbying," Ravi said explaining KCR's silence.

Ravi believes that KCR will act as per the Centre's directions. "No political rebellion is expected from him. If it happens it will be a great wonder." Before the Lok Sabha elections, KCR had tried to form a Federal Front, a grouping of non-BJP and non-Congress parties. He was then seen as a potential national leader, who was expected to play a crucial role in the next government. Some sections see the ongoing row over the CAA and the NRC as an opportunity for KCR to revive his efforts to cobble up a national alliance.

BHARAT BANDH

Banking services severely affected in Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Banking services across Telangana were severely hit by the nationwide strike called by various trade unions protesting the Central government's 'anti-people' policies on Wednesday. However, most of the shops and business establishments were open while transport services remained unaffected. The strike by as many as three lakh employees and workers was underway with the participation of members of various trade unions in the state, senior leader of Telangana CPI, Sudhakar said.

Operations in all public sector banks except SBI were affected. "All public sector banks employees are participating in the strike. There are no counter operations such as cash deposits or withdrawals at banks. Even though officers are participating in the strike, they extended cooperation," All India Bank Employees Association National Secretary B S Rambabu said.

A senior official of SBI said there was no impact of strike on the bank's operations as its officers and award staff associations decided to stay away from Bharat Bandh. The state-owned Singareni Collieries Company said, though some of its employees were on strike, there will not be much impact on coal production. Telangana CPI said there will be gate meetings and dharnas across the state as part of the Bharat Bandh. The central trade unions are protesting against labour reforms, FDI, disinvestment, corporatisation and privatisation policies and pressing for a 12-point common demand charter of the working class relating to minimum wage and social security, among others.



Bandh evokes mixed response in Singareni

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Bharat Bandh call given by national trade unions in protest against anti-people policies of the Union Government went off peacefully in erstwhile Karimnagar district on Wednesday. The nationwide strike evoked mixed response in Singareni coal mines. Coal production in three open cast and nine underground mines was affected as half of the workers stayed away from duties. While the recognised trade union Telangana Boggugani Karmika Sangham, which maintained strategic silence on strike, asked its workers to attend duties, all other trade unions participated in the strike.

On the other hand, activities in banks, post-offices, and other Central government offices came to standstill as the workers boycotted

duties. In Karimnagar, employees working in various Central government offices took out rallies in the town. Members of CITU, AITUC, IFTU, TNUC, INTUC, HMS and others took out rally from Telangana Chowk to Collectorate where they staged protest demonstration.

Left leaders arrested in Andhra Pradesh

Police in Andhra Pradesh arrested leaders of the Left parties and trade unions as they tried to stop state-owned buses and staged road blockade on Wednesday as part of the nation-wide shutdown. Protesters were arrested in Vijayawada, Guntur, Ongole, Visakhapatnam, Kadapa and other towns when they tried to stop buses of the RTC from coming out of the depots.

One killed as 2 buses collide in Nalgonda

PNS ■ NALGONDA

An APSRTC driver was killed while about 50 persons of which 30 Ayyappa devotees belonging to Dindi in Nalgonda district were injured in a road accident involving two buses collided each other that took place at Kasimpentla in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh in the early hours of Wednesday. The injured including 20 passengers of RTC bus and 30 Ayyappa devotees travelling in private bus, were rushed to Ruia Government General Hospital in Tirupati by an ambulance. The deceased APSRTC driver was identified as Ramesh who was killed on the spot.

According to sources, the accident took place when a private bus engaged by Ayyappa devotees, who were returning from Sabarimala, collided with an APSRTC bus, which was coming in the opposite direction, at Kasimpentla on Puthalapattu-Naidupeta main road in Chittoor district.

Man commits suicide

PNS ■ MEDAK

A 36-year-old man committed suicide by jumping in front of a moving train near Manoharabad Railway Station in Medak district on Wednesday. The deceased was identified as Rebba Sathish Kumar, a native of Chegunta, has got down a train at Manoharabad Station on Wednesday morning. Kumar, who was reportedly suffering from seizure disease since childhood, reportedly was in a state of depression.

TAKE CARE!



TRS working president and Minister KT Rama Rao called on Energy Minister Jagadish Reddy at NIMS after the latter was admitted to hospital due to high fever, on Wednesday.

Now, reach Khammam Police through WhatsApp

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

People who belong to Khammam Police Commissionerate areas can now lodge their complaints and grievances through social media platform WhatsApp, informed Commissioner of Police Tafseer Iqbal. He along with senior police officials has launched the WhatsApp number: 7901144600 here on Wednesday for the purpose of receiving complaints from people. He stated that people should post their complaints fearlessly to the police by using the application on their mobile phones.

The majority of the public in today's world have been using social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. Hence it was decided to make use of the advanced technology aiming to make police services more accessible to the public, the CP said. The service was introduced throughout the district to improve police response time and those living in remote places could also use the service. A special wing was set up to continuously monitor complaints received through WhatsApp.

Complaints regarding crimes, woman harassment, eve-teasing, information on road accidents could be posted on WhatsApp along with photos and videos to help the victims. The complaints would, in turn, be forwarded to the concerned ACPs, CIs and SIs for proper action, the officer said. Additional DCP (Law & Order) D Muralidhar, additional DCP (Admin) I Pooja, ACPs PV Ganesh, Venkata Reddy, Satyanarayana, Venkatesh, Jhangir and SB CI Sampath Kumar were present.



JAC to 'educate' people on CAA

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A joint action committee (JAC) was formed to create awareness on the Citizenship Amendment Act and National Register of Citizenship with over 400 schools as its members. Mohd Maqdoom Ali Khan, convenor of the newly formed Telangana Private Schools JAC said they opposed CAA and NRC in its present form. "We will oppose the government to go ahead with CAA or NRC in Telangana. A massive campaign will be taken up to educate people about the issues related to CAA and NRC," he told mediapersons here. He said the JAC would be a non-political group and support all those who were opposing CAA/NRC/NPA. The JAC appealed to the parents and teachers to participate in the 'Tiranga Rally' scheduled on Friday at Mir Alam Eidgah in the city.

US-IRAN CONFLICT

Security tightened at US consulate in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Security at the Consulate General of the United States of America here has been beefed up in view of the rising tensions between the US and Iran.

The Hyderabad Police have deployed additional police personnel. Barricades have been erected at new spots near the office of the US Consulate General, located in the busy Begumpet area, to prevent any untoward incidents. On Wednesday, police personnel were seen frisking people and checking their identity before allowing them to proceed towards the Consulate in the Chiran Fort Club lane. People working in offices around the Consulate had a tough time in reaching their destinations due to the heightened security. US security personnel have also put in place additional security measures at the Consulate.

The move comes amid growing tension between the US and Iran, following the killing of a top Iranian general by the US in Iraq. Tehran has since threat-



ened to target the US in retaliation and carried out missile attacks on two US bases in Iraq. Hyderabad has Consulates of both the US and Iran. This historic city is also home to a sizeable number of people of Iranian descent. The city, which has a large number of Shia Muslims, witnessed protests against the killing of Iran's top commander Major General Qasem Soleimani. Iranian Consul General in Hyderabad Mohammad Haghbin Ghomi also issued a statement condemning the killing of Soleimani, and alleged that the US was trying to bring back terrorists into the region. The Iranian Consulate also opened a book of condolence on its premises in the Banjara Hills.

Software firm adopts ZPHS school

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Pramati Technologies, a Hyderabad-based software technology company, adopted the Zilla Parishath High School in Pedda Tumbalam village near Kurnool, under the One-School-At-A-Time Mission run by

entrepreneurs and professionals in India and USA, with an aim to rebuild infrastructure and working conditions of rural, underprivileged schools in India.

Pramati has signed an MoU with OSAAT India, a registered non-profit organisation that is helping schools rebuild their

infrastructure and providing basic facilities such as classrooms, and fully functional toilets.

OSAAT has already revamped 29 government schools in rural Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Manipur, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

HYDERABAD BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ 40,940 (10 gm)	
₹ 10	↓
SILVER	
₹ 48,800 (1kg)	
₹ 1300	↑

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹167
Without Skin	₹190
Broiler at Farm	₹115

EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	442
VIJAYAWADA	473
RESAKHAPATNAM	488
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.42

Success in irrigation sector led to reverse migration, says Vinod

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana state planning board vice chairman B Vinod Kumar on Wednesday urged the Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) to undertake a study of marketing paddy in other countries as a bumper harvest is predicted following availability of irrigation facility from Kaleswaram and other irrigation projects.

Success in the irrigation sector led to reverse migration in districts like Mahabubnagar, he said. He pointed out how the farmers have increased the area under



sericulture to 11,000 acres from the previous 3,000 acres responding to the demand. Further, he asked the CESS team to study on crop insurance scheme as it is not giving

the desired results and also the Rythu Bandhu scheme, which is highly successful. He wanted inputs from the CESS to implement the scheme in a more fool-proof manner. He also asked it to study how to implement crop rotation scheme and ways and means of organic cultivation.

Since 230 tmc of water is available in various irrigation projects in the state, including the Kaleswaram project, he wanted the Centre for Economic and Social Studies to prepare plans for production of fish and their export to overseas. Vinod Kumar

also asked the CESS to study and submit report on policies to be adopted to promote food processing units in the state.

Advisor to government GR Reddy asked the CESS to conduct a study on public finance and make suitable recommendations on resource mobilisation. Earlier, Vinod Kumar, GR Reddy and Sudarsan Reddy (director, statistics department), Shaik Meera (director, planning) had a meeting with CESS director Prof Revati, scholars and others at CESS office in Ameerpet here on Wednesday.

Owaisi slams cops for tweet...

Continued from Page 1

The police, however, maintained that it was a usual response and not intended to hurt any community. On Wednesday, Suresh Kochattil, drawing the attention of the Cyberabad police, tweeted: "Many wannabe Jihadis work for American Software companies in Hyderabad? After #Iran threatened to hit US assets, has @hydcitypolice @cyberabadpolice @RachakondaCop done background check/risk assessment of these Peacefuls? Or cops are clueless?" (sic)

In response, the Cyberabad Police, tweeted, "Yes sir... We have specialized

wings for collection of advance intel and our teams are on the job 24x7. Thanks for alerting us. Please keep us updated if you find anything suspicious."

The foregoing response of the police is now seen by a section of netizens as giving legitimacy to blatant 'Islamophobia'. They condemned the response of the police. AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi, wrote: "Sir you say 'yes sir'; please enlighten how many such 'jihadi' are working in soft-

ware companies kindly give a number if not please clarify what you exactly meant. Will you reply to an MP or only to a Bhakti?" In the following tweet, he took a dig at Cyberabad CP V C Sajjanar, who is facing a probe for the killing of four alleged rapists in Hyderabad. The police had claimed that they were forced to shoot them down as they tried to attack the policemen with guns and flee from custody.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
Oto Forest Division Officer, Sathupally.

e-Procurement Tender Notice

CCF/CF & DFO, Section Order No & Date: CCF/CF, S.O.No. 09 to 14/2019-20, Dt: 26.11.2019

No of the works (6) Name of the works: Estimate for extraction of Long Bamboos from BC-I Lokaram to GSD Enkoo of Talieda Range, Estimate for Transportation of Long Bamboos from BC-I Lokaram to GSD Enkoo of Talieda Range and other civil works in undersigned. TOTAL ECY: 97.30 Lakhs. Bid submission start Date & Time: 09.01.2020 @ 10.30 AM. Last date and time for submission of Bid 16.01.2020 upto 4.00 PM. Date of Opening Dt: 16.01.2020 @ 4.30 PM. Further details can be seen at e-Procurement market place at www.eprocurement.gov.in Ph No: 9347777705.

sd/- District Forest Officer, Khammam.
R.O.No.1200-DP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2019-20 Dt.: 08.01.2020

CRIME CORNER

DCM driver gets a year in jail for killing motorist

A local court at Medchal convicted a DCM driver and sentenced him to undergo a year of rigorous imprisonment on Wednesday. The man identified as 36-year-old N Srinivas rao is a driver from Khammam. According to the police, they received a complaint from Mamidi Chandra Shekar, 48, a private employee from Kandlakoya in Medchal. Chandra Shekar said that on August 5, 2016, his son M Santosh Kumar, 20, was going from Bahadurpally to Kompally on his motorcycle when a DCM lorry crashed into his son's bike from behind. Due to the impact of the crash, his son fell down and received injuries. He died on the spot. Based on the complaint, the police registered a case and started investigation. After the course of investigation, a charge sheet was filed in the court at Medchal. During the trial on Wednesday, Srinivas Rao was convicted to undergo rigorous imprisonment for a year and also pay a fine of Rs 5000.

Spurned lover commits suicide in Marredpally

A 21-year-old youngster committed suicide at East Marredpally on Monday after a woman rejected his love proposal. The incident came to light on Tuesday after he was found hanging in his room. The victim was identified as Ravi Chaitanya, who was working in a call centre at Begumpet. The police said that he fell in love with a woman who resides near his home. Chaitanya felt dejected when the woman refused his proposal and was upset over the issue. According to the police, Chaitanya locked himself in his room late on Monday and hung himself from the ceiling fan in his room. After finding the door locked for a long time, Younger sister of Chaitanya kept knocking the door and called Chaitanya multiple times. After several attempts, suspecting something is wrong, Chaitanya's sister called the neighbours, who broke open the door and found Chaitanya hanging. He was shifted to a hospital where the doctors declared him brought dead. Based on the complaint of Murali Krishna, Chaitanya's father, the police registered a case and are probing the incident.

State opens its arms to New Zealand investors

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

New Zealand MP Priyanca Radhakrishnan called on Telangana IT Minister KT Rama Rao at Pragathi Bhavan in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the Minister stated that the State Government is ready to forge ties with the New Zealand-based industries.

The IT Minister extensively discussed the investment opportunities for industries and educational sectors in Telangana. Among a host of issues discussed were possibilities of mutual cooperation in Agritech, startup and innovation sectors.

Talking about the IT sector in the state, KTR stated that Telangana is leading the country in the startup and innovation sector. He highlighted T-Hub and We Hub, which encourage and mentor startups in the state. Minister stated that Telangana will soon house the world's largest startup incubator in the form of T-Hub 2.

Mentioning about the efforts of the State Government in attracting foreign startups, KTR stated that the govern-



New Zealand MP Priyanca Radhakrishnan called on Telangana IT Minister KT Rama Rao at Pragathi Bhavan in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

Priyanca Radhakrishnan invited KTR to New Zealand and also said that she would organise a formal meeting with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

ment has initiated T-Bridge, an initiative that helps local startups to connect with global market opportunities and help bring global startups to Telangana. Minister stated that efforts will be made to work with New Zealand-based startups. KTR stated that the State Government has been giving

top priority to the agricultural and irrigation sector. This has led to an increase in crop production, giving a large scope for the agritech and food processing industry.

In the meeting, KTR praised the works of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and said that the country is fast

progressing under her leadership. New Zealand MP Priyanca Radhakrishnan invited KTR to New Zealand and also said that she would organise a formal meeting with the New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. Priyanca expressed happiness over the meeting and stated that they are working closely with the Telangana NRIs and mentioned that Telangana's state festival Bathukama is celebrated grandly, in New Zealand.

JEE MAIN EXAM

Invigilator refuses to give rough sheet to student, parents protest

CONRAD DIAS ■ HYDERABAD

Student appearing for JEE Main exam had to face problems from the invigilator while writing the test which has resulted in serious outrage among the students as well as the parents on Tuesday.

The incident took place when a student named Bikkumalla Vishnu Sai from Shad Nagar asked for an extra rough sheet from the invigilator, but was denied at his exam centre at Dundigal Aeronautical College on Tuesday.

Concerned students as well as the parents of Vishnu staged a protest outside the JEE Main exam center.

"I have been preparing for JEE exams since last five years. In order to do the rough work properly, I need almost 20 additional rough papers. But the invigilator refused to give me more than 4 sheets. Because of this, I was unable to write the exam properly. I request that I should be given permission to write the exam once again," Vishnu said.

JEE Mains exam is being conducted from January 7 to 9.



Parents of other students also showed their support and started to protest and the situation became tense

There will be a total of 75 questions that the students have to answer in three hours. After this incident, parents of other students also showed their support and started to protest

and the situation became tense. Vishnu's father said, "My son has secured 88 per cent in Class X. Twice, he stood as topper of the Olympiad test. We have been training him for IIT since his Class. We had full hopes that he would get through in the entrance exam. But, due to the invigilator's mistake, now his future has become a question."

An official from the Dundigal Aeronautical College said that the mistake was committed by their staff. He further added that they would send a mail to National Testing Agency and ask them to permit the boy again for the exam.



New Bharosa centre: Gail inks MoU with TS Police

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A Memorandum of Understanding was executed between Gail India Limited and Telangana State Police for constructing a new Bharosa Centre at Medchal-Malkajgiri as a part of CSR.

The agreement has been signed on Wednesday in the presence of DGP M Mahendra Reddy IPS, IG of Women Safety Swati Lakra IPS, Kamareddy SP N Swetha IPS.

Gail India Limited was represented by Rajeev Garg, executive director, Gail and managing director, Bhagyanaagar Gas Ltd, Hyderabad, Sanjay Shende, zonal chief general manager of Gail office in Hyderabad, A Suresh Babu, deputy general manager, VSP, Cheralapally.

As a part of CSR, Gail India Ltd has agreed to financially contribute to construct a Bharosa centre at Medchal and project would cost 70 lakh.

Platform ticket to be dearer for Sankranti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Railway officials have increased the prices of platform tickets at railway stations in view of the congestion during the Sankranti festival. SCR on Wednesday announced that, in view of the ensuing Sankranti festival season, it is anticipated that there will be huge crowd of train travellers as well as accompanying non-travellers at Secunderabad and Kacheguda Railway Stations.

The rate of platform ticket at Secunderabad and Kacheguda Railway Stations will be enhanced from Rs 10 to Rs 20 from January 9 to January 20. In order to regulate the flow of public to enter onto the platforms and to avoid inconvenience to the bona fide passengers during the ensuing festive season, such steps are taken during festival season.

Medical, dental colleges demand 5% hike in fees

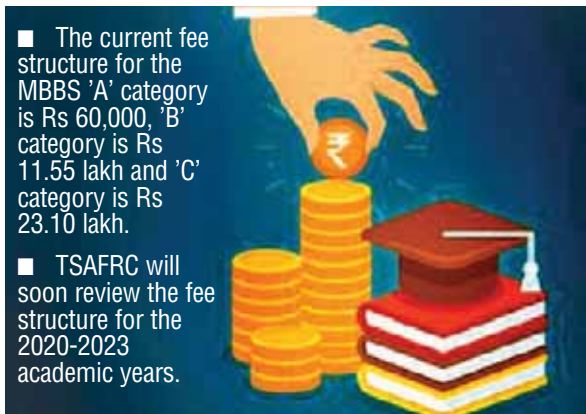
PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Private medical and dental colleges in Telangana have demanded that the fees be hiked by 5 per cent taking into consideration inflation, maintenance of infrastructure and others.

The Telangana State Admission and Fee Regulatory Committee (TSAFRC) will soon review the fee structure for the 2020-2023 academic years.

The current fee structure for the MBBS 'A' category is Rs 60,000, 'B' category is Rs 11.55 lakh and 'C' category is Rs 23.10 lakh.

The private colleges said that the hike is inevitable because of the inflation. They want the TSAFRC to hike the fee by 5 per cent. On the other hand, junior doctors have made an appeal to the TSAFRC to be generous while increasing the fee. They have claimed that the private col-



leges have been increasing fees by 5 per cent every year.

The GO issued had a clause that the colleges could increase their fee by 5 per cent every year looking at the inflation. The Human Resource Development Authority (HRDA) wants the TSAFRC to consider the previous increase and then make a fee revision for the block year of 2020-2023.

The HRDA has appealed to the TSAFRC requesting it to consider the plight of the students and make the fee revision, in accordance with the Telangana High Court's observation.

The HRDA wants the TSAFRC to go by the court's observation on the fee hike, while revising the fee for the 2020-2023 block years.

TS jr colleges to be closed for three days

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Board of Intermediate Education (TSBIE) has announced that all the Junior Colleges and Composite Degree Colleges offering Intermediate courses in Telangana State will have second term holidays for the academic year 2019-20 from January 13 to 15 and no classes should be conducted for the students during this period. The colleges shall re-open on January 16.

The BIE has requested all the principals to adhere to the schedule strictly. Further, all the principals and the managements of private unaided junior colleges in the state are instructed not to conduct any classes during the holidays. Violation of instructions will be viewed seriously and action will be initiated against the erring managements and principals including disaffiliation.

BioAsia to involve 75 healthcare startups

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BioAsia will continue to feature a dedicated platform - startup stage in its 17th edition to be held at Hyderabad from February 17th to 19th. The startup stage at BioAsia 2020 will provide a unique opportunity to the most promising startups across India to interact with global industry leaders.

Startup stage will enable entrepreneurs to showcase their innovative solutions in the pharma, biotech, life sciences, health-tech, and med-tech sectors. As many as 5 startups from these 75 shortlisted startups will get an opportunity to present their solution

to the leaders from over 50 Nations in attendance at BioAsia in addition to the cash prize.

The startups will also get an unmatched opportunity to request exclusive one-to-one meetings with the participating delegates and be a part of the overall deliberations at the event. These opportunities would help them to get insights and guidance on several emerging healthcare challenges and technologies. They will get access to be a part of all the conferences and sessions at BioAsia 2020. State Government and BioAsia have partnered with Tech Mahindra as the lead sponsor for the startup stage.

SPECIAL GUEST



Governor Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan addresses students at Jawaharlal Nehru Architecture and Fine Arts University convocation ceremony at Shilpakala Vedika on Wednesday.

Domestic help sedate family, burgle house

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A couple who were employed as servants at the house of a businessman escaped after looting their house at Kokapet.

According to the Narsingi Police, the couple who were reportedly from Nepal, got employed as domestic help in the house of a businessman at Kokapet. The couple mixed sedatives in the food and served it to the family. After the family members fell unconscious, they stole property including jewellery and cash from the house and fled. Police said that the family was not willing to disclose the amount of property stolen.

The incident came to light when the businessman called his family members over the phone and got anxious when no one was answering calls. He then informed a relative at Gachibowli who rushed to the house and found the family members in an unconscious state. They were immediately shifted to a hospital where they are undergoing treatment. Following a complaint the Narsingi police registered a case and started investigation. Sources said that the police have caught the couple while they were planning to flee to Nepal. However, police denied the claim saying that the case is still under investigation.

UNICEF research grant for scholar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Jharna Brahma, PhD research scholar, University of Hyderabad has been awarded a research grant from the UNICEF/IAMCR communication for development research fund to support her research that will advance understanding of how communication for development contributes to the United Nations sustainable development goals. The grant, worth US \$4,000, is funded by UNICEF and managed by IAMCR.

Jharna will examine forum theatre as a participatory communication tool for mobilising communities in realising SDGs in the context of rural India.

Stone crushers operate illegally

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana State Pollution Control Board (TSPCB) has ignored the stone crushing units which are apparently operating with irregularities.

As per the information obtained by Forum for Good Governance (FGG) from various regional offices of Pollution Control Board, there are 690 stone crushing units operating in the state. The officials of PCB issued notices to 227 units to close them for irregularities.

FGG in a letter to the Chief Secretary seeking cognisance on the issue alleged that barring few exceptions the stone crushing units are working unmindful of closure orders issued by the PCB.



FGG in a letter to the CS seeking cognisance on the issue alleged that barring few exceptions the stone crushing units are working unmindful of closure orders issued by the PCB

them regarding the other units. FGG pointed out that there is lot of variation in figures furnished by the head office and regional offices of TSPCB, which reflects their poor functioning.

In their letter, FGG urged the Chief Secretary to direct the TSPCB to take action as per Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1988 and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1987, on those units which are running with-

out consent and also those units having consent but violating the directions by operating without providing adequate pollution control measures.

FGG suggested the need for regular inspection of the units and electricity may be disconnected as per the rules to instill fear among the owners of the stone crushing units which are operating without consent and not following norms.

NGO instals lift at dialysis centre

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The dialysis unit, which was setup in December 2017, at Government Area Hospital in Malakpet, with five dialysis machines, got a new lease of life after a long pending demand for lift was fulfilled by an NGO.

City-based NGO, Helping Hand Foundation, has come forward to install the lift which costed Rs 7 lakh, for the dialysis patients, after hearing the plight of the patients, through the request made by the hospital authorities. The dialysis patients were finding it extremely challenging to access the facility which is located on the 1st floor of the hospital.

The dialysis centre at Malakpet caters to 40 CKD patients per week in 4 shifts



daily i.e. 20 patients per day use the facility in 4 shifts of 5 each. Every single patient reportedly had a problem of climbing up the stairs as many of them suffer from shortness of breath.

CS Rangarajan, chief priest of Chilukur Balaji temple inau-

gurated the lift. The priest said the installation of the lift for the kidney patients who were struggling to get smoother access by HHH is a good example of how important humanity and human values are in time.



URBAN POLL 2020



CAPSULE

Jana Sena not to contest civic polls

HYDERABAD: The Jana Sena on Wednesday made it clear that it is not contesting the municipal elections to be held later this month in Telangana. According to party sources, party president Pawan Kalyan permitted the party workers to contest the elections as independents. Meanwhile, Jana Sena political secretary Hari Prasad in a statement said that the party would extend its support to independents contesting the municipal polls.



T-TDP to go it alone says L Ramana

HYDERABAD: T-TDP president L Ramana on Wednesday said that the party will be moving ahead with implementing its plans systematically as far as the municipal polls were concerned. Briefing the media about the T-TDP game plan for the forthcoming municipal polls here, Ramana said that the party has already constituted parliamentary constituency and municipal committees. He said that the party will ensure that the party will assess the strengths and weaknesses of the contestants and finalise the candidates. The T-TDP has decided to go it alone in municipal polls so that it gets the opportunity to rebuild its base and by giving the opportunity to the local leaders to contest, Ramana said, adding that a 15-member election committee has been constituted. A plan has been formulated to ensure participation of the party rank and file in the exercise. A decision on the campaigning would be initiated after filing of the nomination papers. "There is a conspiracy to wipe out the TDP in Telangana," Ramana said, claiming that the people consider every other political party as second to the TDP in implementing welfare and development programmes. The party is held dear by the people as it created basic amenities in towns and villages. Law and order in Hyderabad improved only with the advent of the TDP, a fact that whole Telangana society endorses, Ramana said. He said that the people know that Chandrababu Naidu added Cyberabad to the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. "In spite of economic slowdown, Telangana remains financially stable because of the BJP's Vision-2020 programme," Ramana claimed. The TDP is known for selfless service to the people and giving weightage to the poor and downtrodden sections of society, he said. He appealed to the people of the state to bless the TDP in municipal polls and help it serve them better. Earlier, T-TDP leaders at a meeting held at NTR Trust Bhavan here on Wednesday decided to go it alone and contest all the seats where the party has



considerable strength. If there are any minor adjustments to be made, decision would be taken locally, the party decided. The T-TDP will field strong candidates with the coordination approach of parliamentary constituency and municipal committees, Ramana said.

POLL BATTLE

MUNICIPAL POLL FEVER GRIPS TELANGANA

AVINASH DEEPAK PULI
MAHABUBNAGAR

With the Municipal elections round the corner, the ruling TRS has launched an aggressive campaign and is leaving no stone unturned for a clean sweep in the erstwhile Mahabubnagar district. The party leadership, including legislators and Ministers - Srinivas Goud and Singireddi Niranjan Reddy have been meticulously planning the candidate selection process, campaign process and unification of cadre in the respective districts spread across erstwhile Mahabubnagar.

The party leaders of Gadwal, Wanaparthy, Narayanpet, Nagarkurnool and Mahabubnagar are competing with each other to prove their mettle from the preliminary stage of the election process. The selection of candidates was entrusted to the MLAs representing each segment and they are being guided by the state party leadership.

The ruling party is confident that it would register a clean sweep in the municipal elections. Even in the Councils like Wanaparthy, Minister Niranjan Reddy is leaving no stone unturned and is monitoring the campaigning personally. On the other hand, the Congress, under the leadership of Chinna Reddy is making an all out bid to show its presence at all the important hustings the TRS is exuding that it would win the polls.

The aggression of TRS is evident in the Gadwal district limits as its MLA, Banda Krishna Mohan Reddy is keen on clinching the local bodies amidst stiff challenge from the BJP senior leader and former Congress Minister DK Aruna. Similarly in the district headquarters of Nagarkurnool and Narayanpet, the ruling TRS is ahead in announcing the candidates and aspirants of the urban local bodies.



The ruling TRS has launched an aggressive campaign and is leaving no stone unturned for a clean sweep in the erstwhile Mahabubnagar district

CPI, CPM to jointly contest civic polls

HYDERABAD: The CPI is planning to contest the ensuing municipal elections in alliance with Congress, CPM and other Opposition parties excluding BJP. CPI national secretary K Narayana said there were no differences between the two Left parties - CPI and CPM - as they were both fighting for people in the State. Narayana said that consultations were already held with Congress and efforts are on to make a breakthrough with CPM for a pre-poll alliance. "Our aim is to defeat both TRS and BJP in

municipal elections. We will discuss within the party as well as hold talks with other like-minded political parties before making an announcement in this regard," he said. Further, the CPI national secretary admitted that the Left parties became politically weak but were gearing themselves up to join forces and launch a fight against the "anti-people's policies in the State as well as the nation." "Regional parties have damaged our prospects in some States. But power is not permanent and the Left parties will decide the future of politics in the State. We will continue to fight for people," he declared.



Congress will win municipal polls, says Komatireddy

PNS ■ NALGONDA

Congress MP from Bhongir Komatireddy Venkatreddy on Wednesday asked the party cadre to strive hard for the victory of Congress' candidates in the Municipal elections, to be held later this month.

Addressing the party members at Nivera Hotel at Narkatpalli near here, the Congress MP charged Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao with adopting double standards by singing to Modi tune at the Centre and that of Owaisi in the state.

He exhorted the Muslims to understand KCR's tricks. He charged the TRS government with pushing the state into a debt trap and not implementing at least one welfare scheme in the state. He exuded confidence that the Congress Party's series of electoral successes will begin with the municipal polls. Quoting IT Minister KT Rama Rao, he said that the strength of the Congress cannot be underestimated. He exuded confidence that the Congress would regain power in the state in the next four years.



Make foolproof arrangements: CS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar directed all district Collectors to make necessary arrangements for conducting of municipal elections peacefully and complete the process without any problems as per election schedule given by the State Election Commission. He was speaking during a video conference with District Collectors from BRKR Bhavan here on Wednesday. He said that Collectors should involve fully in election process with utmost care.

"You are aware that it is for the first time highest number of ULB's (Urban Local Bodies) and Corporations are going for elections. Collectors should focus carefully in every aspect like polling staff allotment, printing of ballot papers, procuring of ballot boxes and papers," he said.

The Collectors of Ranga Reddy, Medchal Malkajgiri, Macherali, Sangareddy, Nalgonda having more number of Municipalities, extra care has to be taken and understand each municipality. He also said to concentrate more on new municipalities. He advised to prepare a calendar of activities for each day and be more careful on rejected nominations. He empha-

CS Somesh Kumar advised the officials to prepare a calendar of activities for each day and asked them to be more careful on rejected nominations

sized that Collectors role is critical, crucial and involve fully in the election process. He interacted with Collectors district-wise on their preparedness.

Principal Secretary Arvind Kumar has said that Collectors will have close liaison with Municipal Commissioner stage-wise in election process. He instructed the Collectors to send reports regularly to furnish the State Election Commission and to setup a monitoring system in the districts. No leaves to be sanctioned to the election related officers. Unauthorised absence will not be tolerated. He requested to chalk out timeline for each activity during nominations, polling and counting.

HC to hear Karimnagar civic poll petition tomorrow

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Government on Wednesday sought an urgent hearing of a writ appeal against a late evening order made on Tuesday with regard to certain discrepancies in the voters list for the ensuing Karimnagar Municipal elections. The Bench of Telangana High Court comprising Chief Justice Raghuvendra Singh Chauhan and Justice A Abhishek Reddy said that they



would be handicapped in reviewing the order of a single Judge if the copy of the order was not made available. The Bench will now hear the matter on Friday by which time the order of the single Judge would be available. As reported earlier, one Chada Anand, a resident of Karimnagar, had filed a writ plea complaining that the law relating to delimitation was improperly applied and consequently the constituencies reserved were illegal.

'BJP will make significant impact'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP leader and former MP AP Jithender Reddy participated in 'Citizenship Amendment Act Jan Jagran' (CAA-Outreach) programme on Wednesday in Mahabubnagar. As part of the programme, the former MP met and spoke to several shopkeepers and cleared doubts/rumours allegedly spread by opposition parties regarding the Act.

He assured the public that no Indian citizen, despite of his caste, religion and region, will be affected by CAA. "The Modi government has brought



BJP leader and former MP AP Jithender Reddy interacting with a shopkeeper during the 'Citizenship Amendment Act Jan Jagran' in Mahabubnagar

the Act to help minorities in neighbouring countries as they are persecuted and harassed on

basis of their religion there," he said. He highlighted how lakhs

of Hindus and Sikhs migrated from Pakistan and Bangladesh to India 30-40 years ago and still have no rights. "This Act will guarantee citizenship and land ownership rights to these people," he further said.

On the upcoming municipal elections, he said that BJP will make a significant impact in the elections as the people of Telangana can see the good work done by the Modi government. The former MP was accompanied by senior BJP leaders of Mahabubnagar district during the 'Jan Jagran' campaign.

Rebel trouble for TRS in civic polls

Continued from Page 1

With this, camp offices of MLAs as well as their residences have turned virtually into war zones with skirmishes between followers of old and new members of the party.

Unable to cope with the pressure, many of the MLAs are inaccessible and incommunicado. They are avoiding their residences, camp offices, after having switched off their mobile phones.

The MLAs have conveyed to party leadership that they are unable to pick candidates due to intense competition and undue pressure exerted by ticket aspirants. Many of the anxious aspirants have threatened to contest as rebels, should they be denied tickets. Most of the MLAs could not select candidates, though the nomination process has commenced, with polling date just two weeks away. The party leadership is worried that this 'rebel trouble' may dent the prospects of the pink party in the municipal polls. In this backdrop, KCR has summoned all the 103 MLAs belonging to TRS to Telangana Bhavan on Thursday to resolve the issue. He wants to guide the MLAs with regard to parameters to be considered for allotting party tickets. KCR is also expected to issue a stern warning to rebels that they would lose the opportunity to remain with TRS permanently should they contest as rebels thereby causing damage to party's official candidates.

'Girls believed dead are alive'

Continued from Page 1

The sex abuse case surfaced during a survey by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. A petition was filed by journalist Nivedita Jha before the Supreme Court seeking a court-monitored probe by an independent agency into the allegations.

Today the petitioner's lawyer Shoaib Alam argued in court that the CBI had not responded to statements by inmates who had alleged

murders at the shelter. The petitioner has been asked to file a reply on the CBI's report.

The investigating agency has also asked the Nitish Kumar government in Bihar to act against officials found responsible for lapses in managing shelter homes in the state during its one-and-a-half year-long probe.

Twenty-five Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers are among over 70 officials who could face action.

Naidu taken into custody

Continued from Page 1

Citing that the rally has no permission, the police stopped the protesters leading to a heated argument between Naidu and the cops.

Naidu proceeded to stage a sit-in on the road. Soon, TDP activists, the JAC leaders and leaders of various political outfits started shouting slogans against the government.

Naidu said that permission to take out the bus yatra was obtained but the police did not allow him to reach Auto Nagar to flag it off.

Trump says no Americans harmed...

Continued from Page 1

According to the Iranian state TV, the attacks were in revenge for the killing of the commander of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guards, General Qasem Soleimani, in a US drone strike on Friday, which was ordered by Trump.

The Iranian state television claimed that "at least 80 terrorist US soldiers" were killed in the strikes. Some 5,000 US soldiers are in Iraq as part of the international coalition against the IS terror group.

"No Americans were harmed in last night's attack by the Iranian regime," Trump

said as he described Gen Soleimani as a "ruthless terrorist." "In recent days he was planning new attacks on American targets, but we stopped him," Trump said.

"By removing Soleimani we have sent a powerful message to terrorists. If you value your own life you will not threaten the lives of our people," he said. "Soleimani's hands were drenched in both American and Iranian blood."

Trump called on Iran to "work together" to eliminate the Islamic State, saying the killing of ISIS chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was "good" for Iran. In a direct message to the

Iranian leaders and the people, Trump said the United States is "ready to embrace peace with all who seek it."

"To the people and leaders of Iran, we want you to have a future and a great future, one that you deserve," Trump said. Trump said Iran appears to be standing down, which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world.

"For far too long, all the way back to 1979 to be exact, nations have tolerated Iran's destructive and destabilising behaviour in the Middle East and beyond. Those days are over," he said.

Relax fiscal deficit to boost demand: FICCI

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

With advance GDP estimates projecting FY20 GDP growth at 5 per cent, it is a necessity now for the government to look at measures to infuse capital in the economy in a systematic way.

Dr Sangita Reddy, president, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) said, "The GDP growth estimate for the current financial year of 5% is on expected lines. The growth during the first half of the year has been moderate and we hope to see some momentum in the latter part. In fact, there are nascent signs that point towards an improvement and we need to make sure that these find a more solid footing going ahead".

"FICCI is of the view that the



fiscal deficit target could be relaxed to support infusion of Rs 1.5-2 lakh crore in the economy in the coming year, as such fiscal expansion is much needed at the current juncture

GDP growth estimate for the current financial year of 5% is on expected lines. The growth during the first half of the year has been moderate and we hope to see some momentum in the latter part, said Sangita Reddy

to give a boost to demand and trigger investments," said Dr Reddy. "The nature of the economy is cyclical and when a potential recessionary cycle is foreseen, move to induct more capital into the economy to re-energize it is more important than worrying about fiscal deficit. A time-bound plan must be put in place on the mechanics to

repair fiscal deficit through different measures, including disinvestment in PSUs," added

Dr Reddy. "Union Budget 2020-21 is to be announced soon and we look forward to government continuing taking steps towards bridging the existing gaps and giving out positive signals to boost the sentiment, consumption and investments. Apart from providing cheaper loans, more efforts must be made to increase incomes, especially in the rural areas. This can be achieved through an increase in the quantum of

income support under PM-KISAN and expansion of the Direct Benefit Transfer scheme. Steps are also required to boost construction, infrastructure and exports," said Dr Reddy.

"FICCI is also of the view that a significant focus on the economies of the future technologies like artificial intelligence, along with added stress on science and innovation, are also critical to add a parallel wave of growth," added Dr Reddy. FICCI President said that the government must enable reforms, which will enable ease of doing business, for sustaining growth and demand, and added that a survey is being conducted across industry by the chamber to assess the sentiment of the nation and what it would take for corporate India to re-energise itself.

Spot if your saree is real...

Continued from Page 1

This initiative was announced at the Year of AI event held by the Emerging Technologies wing of IT Department last week. The project, in its initial stages, is being done by the Department of Textile with help from AI partner Aganitha facilitated by IT Department. Handloom fabrics have different thread spacing, uniformity, and cover variation when compared to those of power looms, and it is difficult for the naked eye to detect them. The pilot project has been tested in a closed environment and is reportedly yielding results.

SHORT READS



Those who don't have political existence are calling strikes: Mamata

SAGAR ISLANDS: Hitting out at the Left and the Congress, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Wednesday that those who don't have any political existence in the state are trying to ruin its economy by pursuing "cheap politics" of strikes. Banerjee said she extends her support to the cause of the strike, which has been called against the Centre's economic policies, the Citizenship Amendment Act and the proposed nationwide NRC, but reiterated that her party and government is against any sort of shutdown. "We will not allow any strike in Bengal. Those who don't have any political existence in the state are trying to ruin its economy by pursuing cheap politics such as strikes," she said.

7 newspapers booked for publishing photos of minor rape victim

THANE: Cases have been registered against editors and concerned staff of seven newspapers for allegedly violating provisions of the POCSO Act by publishing photograph and other details of a minor rape and murder victim, police said on Wednesday. Offences under relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act have been registered against editors and concerned staff of the papers with the Bhoiwada police station on Tuesday, police PRO Sukhada Narkar said. The errant publications include 'Pudhari', 'Dopahar Ka Samna', 'Punyanagari', 'Hindi Samachar', 'Navbharat', 'Rajasthan Patrika', and 'Pravasi Sandesh', she added. On December 22, the police had registered a case against a man for allegedly raping and killing a seven-yr-old girl in Bhiwandi town of Maharashtra's Thane district, the official said.



Delhi Police a 'puppet' of Modi gov't: Sitaram Yechury

NEW DELHI: CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury on Wednesday alleged the Delhi Police was a "puppet" of the Modi government and demanded a court-monitored probe in the JNU violence, saying a "pre-judged" police inquiry has no "credibility". A masked mob armed with sticks and rods on Sunday attacked students and teachers and damaged property on the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus, injuring at least 35 people, including JNU Students' Union president Aishe Ghosh. It has been alleged that the Delhi Police personnel were present outside the campus gates when students were being beaten up by the rampaging mob. "The Delhi Police comes directly under (Union Home Minister Amit Shah). Its behaviour, approach and attitude so far is enough evidence of it being a puppet of Modi gov't. A pre-judged police inquiry has no credibility," Yechury tweeted.

ATTACK ON STUDENTS, TEACHERS IN JNU

CAT topper not scared to take part in protests

PNS ■ KOLKATA

JU student Deborshi Chanda, one of the ten candidates to have scored 100 percentile in the Common Admission Test (CAT), said on Wednesday that he will not shy away from taking part in any rally to protest against the attack on women students and teachers of JNU and similar attacks in other higher educational institutions.

Chanda is a student of electrical engineering of Jadavpur University and has presently taken admission in its School of Energy Studies in the 2019-20 session.

"I had participated in the rallies taken out by my fellow students in the varsity campus and outside. I had also joined in shouting slogans denouncing the move to silence free thinking. I have made known my stand on the issue and will do so in future too... I am not



afraid," the young man said. Chanda had scored a perfect 100 percentile in CAT, the results of which were announced few days back and is the only candidate from West Bengal to have achieved the feat.

To a question about JU students taking the lead in the series of protests against the attack on JNU, Jamia Milia students and against Citizenship (Amendment) Act in the past

one month, he said "I am with them. I am proud of my friends in JU and my institution."

"However, it would be wrong to assume that only we (JU students) are in the forefront of protests. Students of other higher educational institutions have also taken out protest rallies and at times we have taken out joint rallies," he said.

Chanda criticised the alleged police lathicharge on agitating

Chanda had scored a perfect 100 percentile in CAT, the results of which were announced few days back and is the only candidate from West Bengal to have achieved the feat

JU students on Monday evening when SFI activists and members of other Left outfits of JU took out a rally near the university against the attack on students in JNU and came face to face with a march taken out by the BJP. "How can police beat up students who are holding a democratic protest?" he wondered.

NITI AAYOG'S DRAFT FOR PRIVATE TRAINS

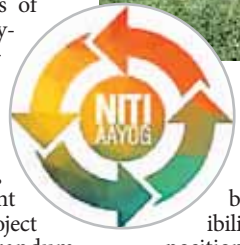
15-min head start, max speed of 160 kmph, own guard, crew

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Private trains running on a particular route will have a head start of 15 minutes on other trains running on the same route, a maximum permissible speed of 160 kmph and also their own guards and crew, says a draft proposal mooted by Niti Ayog as it finalises the contours of bringing in private players for train operations in the country.

A slew of draft documents -- for Request for Qualification (RFQ), Concession Agreement Guiding Principles, Project Information Memorandum (PIM) along with a presentation on the salient features of the project -- for discussion on private participation in passenger trains have been uploaded by Niti Ayog on its website which outline the railways' plans of running 150 trains on 100 routes by private operators, envisaging an investment of Rs 22,500 crore.

The paper, prepared for discussions with stakeholders, has split the 100 routes into 10-12 clusters. As per the paper, the private operator will have



the right to collect market-linked fares and will be provided flexibility of class composition and halts.

It said the time taken by a private train to complete a path shall be comparable to the fastest train of Indian Railways operating on that path with a variation of plus or minus ten per cent.

"It shall provide a non-discriminatory treatment for the trains operated by the Concessionaire. No similar scheduled regular train will depart in the same origin destination route within 15 minutes of the scheduled operation of the Concessionaires (private

players) train. Each train shall have a minimum of 16 coaches and a maximum not exceeding the longest passenger train operating on the respective path," the draft stated.

The documents have stated that Operation and maintenance of the passenger trains would be governed by standards to be laid down by Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO). The maintenance of the trains shall be the responsibility of the private entity.

Railways will provide berth/space to private entities in the existing maintenance depots/washing lines or a space in proximate area on as is where basis for up-gradation and use of the same by them.

CRPF DIG charged with throwing hot water on jawan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Enraged at having burnt his mouth, a DIG-rank CRPF officer allegedly threw hot water on the face of the jawan who had served it to him, prompting the force to order an inquiry into the incident, officials said on Wednesday.

The purported incident took place on Tuesday at the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) recruit training centre in Bihar's Rajgir district.

An official communication of the force said Deputy Inspector General D K Tripathi, who was staying at the officers' mess of the institute, had ordered hot drinking water when constable Amol Kharat was on duty at the facility.

The officer is said to have burnt his mouth upon drinking the hot water served to him in a thermos flask, following which he summoned Kharat. An altercation took place between the two and the DIG "threw" hot water on the jawan's face and in his winter jersey. The jawan has been admitted to a local hospital. Tripathi did not respond to phone calls and SMS sent to him.

'QUIET GRACE' ON JNU STAND

Deepika earns praise from all quarters

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Leapfrogging from the entertainment section to the front pages of newspapers for showing up at JNU, Bollywood star Deepika Padukone was on Wednesday the cynosure of national attention earning bouquets but also many brickbats on social media and elsewhere.

On Tuesday evening, Deepika made a surprise visit to the Jawaharlal Nehru University to express solidarity with the students who had been attacked.

Her decision to stand in silence with JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh, who received head injuries during the attack on Sunday evening, at a public meeting in the campus prompted many in the indus-



try and outside to praise her for her "quiet grace" and "courage". It also prompted hashtags to boycott her Friday release "Chhapaak", a film based on acid attack survivor Laxmi Agarwal.

Though several people in

Bollywood have voiced their protest against the attack on students and faculty by a masked mob, Deepika is the rare Bollywood A-listers to do so.

Deepika, who faced death threats and social media vitri-

ol for speaking out during the release of her controversial film "Padmaavat", turns producer with "Chhapaak", directed by Meghna Gulzar, making her stake even higher.

"When she was attacked over 'Padmaavat' very few came forward to support her. She knows what it feels to be targeted and she has shown exemplary courage by supporting the JNU students with quiet grace. More power to Deepika Padukone," veteran actor Shabana Azmi tweeted on Wednesday.

Swara Bhasker, who was one of the firsts from the film community to call for action against the perpetrators of Sunday violence, said "Bollywood just got JNU-ised! #LongLiveJNU #JNUProtests."

GENERAL STRIKE

Banking services and normal life hit in Kerala, WB and Assam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Banking services such as cash withdrawal were impacted in some public sector lenders while rail and road traffic was hit in Assam, West Bengal and Left-ruled Kerala as 10 major trade unions went on a day-long strike on Wednesday against the Centre's "anti-people" policies.

While banks were open, some services such as cash withdrawal were impacted in many places in the country as bank employees extended their support to the nationwide strike.

However, work at government departments remained unaffected barring sporadic demonstrations by trade unions. Trade unions have claimed around 25 crore people will participate in the stir.

There were no reports of any impact on essential services from anywhere in the country. Train services were unaffected while electricity generation as well as oil refineries and fuel pumps operated normally.

The strike was near total in Kerala with vehicles, including state-owned KSRTC and private buses, keeping off the roads. In the state capital Thiruvananthapuram, the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) did not operate city and long-distance services. Very few private vehicles and auto-rickshaws were seen plying on roads.

Road and rail blockades were reported from several parts of West Bengal. The strikers also



Transport services unaffected

BHOPAL: Banking services in Madhya Pradesh were affected on Wednesday due to the nationwide strike called by 10 Central trade union to protest against the Central government's "anti-labour" policies. However, transport and other services remained unaffected with markets and petrol pumps remaining open across the state. Several bank employees under the banner of the All India Bank Employees Association (AIBEA) and All India Bank Officers Association among others took out a rally at MP Nagar here. "The strike has affected banking operations in the state and we have received reports that it was also effective in transport, income tax and postal sectors," Madhya Pradesh Bank Employees Association (MPBEA) general secretary, V K Sharma said.

took out rallies in parts of the state and blocked roads and railway tracks in North 24 Parganas district. However, police removed them to ensure movement of vehicles without hitch.

In Kolkata, government buses were plying normally but the number of private buses was lower than usual in the early hours. Metro services were nor-

mal in the city and auto-rickshaws and taxis were also seen on the roads. Heavy police deployment was seen in several areas of the city, including Tollygunge, Behala, Esplanade and Jadavpur. In some areas of north Bengal, the Trinamool Congress took out rallies opposing the strike and urged people to maintain normalcy.

Woman kidnapped, raped at gunpoint

PNS ■ PATNA

A woman was allegedly raped at gunpoint after being kidnapped from the parking lot of a mall here on Monday, police officials said. One person has been arrested out of four persons named in the FIR.

"We have identified the four accused persons who were the (rape) victim's acquaintances. One man raped the girl while others were part of the conspiracy," City Superintendent of Police (Central), Patna, Vinay Tiwary said. Asked whether it is a case of gangrape, Tiwary said, "No, it is not gangrape. It is rape but others were part of the conspiracy." One person has been arrested in connection with the case while raids are being conducted to nab other culprits, the City SP said. The woman is around 20 years of age and is pursuing BBA through correspondence, he added. The victim's medical examination was conducted on Tuesday, police sources



said. While talking to reporters, the rape survivor, who had covered her face with a mask, said she was kidnapped by four men at gunpoint from GV Mall on the busy Boring road intersection around 7:30 pm on Monday while she was coming out of an eatery.

As she stepped out of the eatery, one of the four men, who raped her later, told her at gunpoint to sit in his car in the parking lot of the mall.

The four then allegedly took her to a flat located near P&M Mall in Pataliputra colony where one person raped her while three others stood with a pistol, the rape survivor said.

Three charred to death in Ghaziabad apartment

PNS ■ GHAZIABAD

A Ghaziabad Development Authority (GDA) supervisor, his wife and his brother were charred to death at their apartment in Ghaziabad's Pratap Vihar, fire department officials said on Wednesday. It seems a room heater wire came in contact with the metal bed, triggering the fire, they said.

The deceased has been identified as Bachchoo Singh (48), a native of Banda district in Uttar Pradesh, his wife Rani (45) and his differ-

ently abled brother Narayan (40). Singh had two sons — Gulshan (22) and Pratham (16) — and a daughter Rakhi (17), who were out of station when the fire took place.

"All three members present (in the flat) were charred to death. The entire room had turned to ashes," Chief Fire Officer Sunil Kumar said. City magistrate Shiv Prakash Shukla has been appointed to probe the cause of fire which took place in the ten-storey building of GDA in sector 11 of Pratap Vihar.

175 local trains cancelled due to blockades

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Train services were disrupted in the suburbs and neighbouring districts of the city by supporters of a nationwide general strike called by 10 trade unions on Wednesday, Railway officials said here. At least 175 local trains were cancelled in the Sealdah and Howrah divisions of Eastern Railway (ER) owing to the blockades put up by supporters of the strike, its spokesman said.

In the Howrah-Kharagpur section of South Eastern Railway, there were blockades at some places for durations from 10 minutes to half an hour, but no train was cancelled, its spokesman Sanjoy Ghosh said.

Sealdah division of Eastern Railway was the most affected with cancellation of 128 local trains since morning, ER spokesman Nikhil Chakraborty said. In its Howrah division, 47 more EMU locals were cancelled and 10 mail and express trains were detained enroute, he said. Train services in all the divisions were normalised by 1.00 pm after the blockades were lifted, Chakraborty said.

'No suggestions made to HRD for temporarily shutting JNU'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

JNU Vice Chancellor M Jagadesh Kumar, who met HRD Ministry officials on Wednesday over the recent violence on campus, said the university has not made any suggestions to temporarily shut the varsity.

"We have not made any such suggestions," Kumar told PTI following reports that the varsity administration suggested the Ministry about temporarily shutting the campus following the mob violence on Sunday.

"There is no move to do so. Efforts are on to facilitate conducive environment for students," he added.

Kumar, who has been under fire from students and faculty members for not doing enough when they were brutally attacked by a masked mob on campus, had on Tuesday appealed the students to "put the past behind and return to campus".

US-IRAN ISSUE

Global heritage bodies call upon all parties to respect conventions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Two global heritage bodies have voiced concern over the US threat to target Iranian cultural sites and called upon all parties to respect international agreements, and protect the world's cultural legacy, "regardless of religious beliefs or political intentions". The International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in a joint statement also reminded that Iran is home to 24 UNESCO World Heritage Sites of "great cultural and natural importance – not only to Iranians, but to humanity and its



"ICOM and ICOMOS as representatives of the heritage community in the world, are very much concerned about this evolution and in particular recent developments," the two heritage bodies said in the joint statement issued on Monday

collective memory". In armed conflicts and political upheavals since the turn of the millennium, cultural heritage has been increasingly targeted. It has been looted or deliberately

destroyed, in order to finance warfare or to affect the identity and the confidence of adversaries," the statement said.

Museums as well as cultural sites are affected in many coun-

tries around the world, it said. "ICOM and ICOMOS as representatives of the heritage community in the world, are very much concerned about this evolution and in particular recent developments," the two heritage bodies said in the joint statement issued on Monday.

Tension between the US and Iran has seen dramatic escalation in the last few days in the wake of killing of Maj Gen Qassem Soleimani in a strike by America. Maj Gen Soleimani, 62, the head of Iran's elite al-Quds force and architect of its regional security apparatus, was killed when a US drone fired missiles into a convoy that was

leaving the Baghdad International Airport early on Friday. The strike also killed the deputy chief of Iraq's powerful Hashed al-Shaabi paramilitary force. US President Donald Trump had also tweeted recently to warn Iran that it may target its cultural sites.

"Let this serve as a WARNING that if Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets, we have targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago), some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY

HARD. The USA wants no more threats!" Trump had said.

ICOM and ICOMOS, both France-based, in the statement said, they remind all parties of armed conflicts of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

"There, States Parties agree that 'damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world.' The United States of America ratified the Hague Convention in 2009, Iran in 1959," it said.

Slowing economy

This time Govt data pegs GDP growth at a dismal five per cent. The FM should work out a practical and honest Budget



Gloomy economic forecasts over the last quarter are not new and no matter what the source of research, they haven't been the least bit reassuring. And now the Government's own data has confirmed our worst fears of not just a slowdown but a guttural halt as India's GDP growth has dipped to an 11-year low of five per cent. This has been attributed to a poor showing by the manufacturing and construction sectors. Clearly, the stimulus package announced by Finance

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the form of corporate tax rate cuts and boost to the realty sector has not been good enough. And just when fears fuelled by food and retail inflation are galloping, worryingly, the manufacturing sector growth has been projected to decelerate to two per cent in 2019-20, down from 6.9 per cent in the previous financial year. Likewise, the construction sector growth is estimated at 3.2 per cent as against 8.7 per cent in 2018-19. Consumption and demand are at their lowest and the financial sector stress, which spread from banks to non-banking financial companies, shows that we are yet to tame the effects of reckless lending of the first decade. The non-performing assets (NPAs) of public sector banks are projected to increase by September 2020 and this poses fresh concerns regarding their ability to take prudent lending decisions when liquidity is the need of the hour. For the Government, the rate cuts on corporate taxes and lower GST collections mean that its revenues have already taken a substantial hit.

Observers say while Sitharaman's packages have focussed too much on the supply side, there has hardly been any attempt made to prod demand. Besides, critics fear that the corporate tax cut has not percolated to spur growth in business and infrastructure. In fact, many suspect that most companies might have used the cuts to better their books instead of investing in new projects that could have generated jobs and production. Of course, the stressed Government cannot be ambitious enough about mega projects but at least needs to encourage smaller core sector activities that have a quicker turnaround time. In this respect, MSMEs still remain transformative. It needs to further boost liquidity in rural India and create demand. Clearly the Government can no longer live in denial that we are badly stuck in the trough of the "U" and need desperate measures to climb out of it. It has already delayed interventions, which were made in late August, and the full results are only expected to manifest themselves a few months down the line. Also, though the Government has been speeding up privatisation of state-run firms to boost investment and foster growth, the takers for debt-ridden enterprises are few and far between and as in the case of Air India, there are no suitors. India's problem is that no matter what its corrective push to attract investment, the global slowdown means that there isn't enough big-ticket interest. With a squeeze on domestic credit and weak corporate profits, leave alone recovery, signs of a pick-up look bleak. Our GDP needs to grow at around eight per cent annually to create jobs for the millions of our young people who join the labour force each year. Or else, we could become the worst victim of a demographic drag. The preparations for the Union Budget are on and Sitharaman would do well to present a realistic, honest estimate than give in to the politics of manoeuvring. Some talk is going around about the need to cut personal income tax rates to put more money in the hands of consumers but that, too, is a short-term solution. A practical and scalable reform process needs to get rolling. Remember, we do not know what kind of oil shocks we have to bear given the US-Iran tensions in the Middle East. That could throw all calculations awry.

Finally, a closure

The verdict in the Nirbhaya case is out but unless judicial processes are time-bound, rape survivors are not safe



When a paramedical student was brutalised and gangraped on a bus in New Delhi on a cold December night in 2012, the savagery of it brought out the nation's guilt at not treating rape as the most heinous of all crimes. It brought about furious debates and discussions, even drove changes in the criminal justice system, led to the death penalty and a consciousness about the public safety of women. But rapes have not stopped in

India, giving us the dubious distinction of being the most dangerous country for women anywhere in the world. And Nirbhaya's family had to suffer for seven long years before they got justice despite a systemic overhaul, new laws and her case being classified as the "rarest of rare." All her violators will now be hung to death. Yes, justice has been delayed inordinately. But the only satisfaction is that there will be closure after following due processes of law.

The Nirbhaya case will forever be our conscience call and hopefully the delayed verdict will now fast-track judicial processes and build in deterrence in our societal systems. Post Nirbhaya, the conviction rate of rapists has risen, though still at 32 per cent. There has also been an increase in reportage of crimes against women. But when the proportion of rape crimes is pitted against the suspects being convicted, the entire idea of progress comes under question. Also, the death penalty for heinous cases has emboldened predators on the prowl in public spaces, the recent rape and burning of a 26-year-old veterinarian in Hyderabad being a prime example. Only 20 per cent of the ₹3,200 crore Nirbhaya Fund, which was meant to strengthen safety of women in public spaces, ensure on-site rapid responses and quick rescues, has been utilised. Laws and funds alone cannot make a difference. One of the reasons why the Hyderabad police encounter of rapists got massive support was because the masses are fed up with the way our judicial processes work. In fact, for the criminal, there is no deterrent. But once he knows he can be hunted and chased to the corner of the earth, he will at least think twice. Or slow down. For that to happen, we need to fast-track procedures and at the same time ensure swift justice. This calls for certain institutional as well as behavioural reforms in society. At present, fast-track courts are no different from the usual courts in terms of case pile-ups and vacancies, taking up to eight months to settle complaints. The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) says rape trials should be completed in 60 days but that never happens. A quick and unbiased judicial set-up with requisite number of judges is a sine qua non. The inquiry process should factor in sensitivities of rape survivors while families and communities should be counselled to rise above stigmas. And the criminal concerned should not, under any circumstance, get bail pending full inquiry, lest he intimidate the survivor. At the time of writing, a rape survivor in Uttar Pradesh committed suicide as she was being bullied into withdrawing her complaint. Only a continuously responsive system can serve as an effective deterrent and inspire confidence in the community to pursue justice. The Hyderabad encounter case had itself led to the Andhra Pradesh Government introducing the Disha Bill, which mandates that cases involving crimes against women must be settled in 21 days through special courts. Let's talk less, implement more.

Dangers of a digital world

With the number of active web users growing every day, piracy remains a big threat and needs to be addressed through multiple strategies targeting different areas



AISHWARYA GIRIDHAR

The previous decade was noteworthy for a number of reasons, not least of which was the sharp rise in the number of Internet users — more than a billion people from across the world joined the new Internet bandwagon in the last six years alone. This has had massive cultural implications, requiring the revision of legal, economic and technological frameworks. Intellectual Property (IP) frameworks have received much importance in this era, especially because they can impact areas beyond IP. For instance, copyright laws can have implications beyond the digital content ecosystem and can extend to an array of areas such as free speech, the flow and availability of information and the manner in which cultural products such as art, music, film and the like are produced and exchanged.

Such cultural products in the creative industry play an important role in a country's economy. For instance, the Indian creative industry (largely comprising the media and entertainment industry) is poised to be worth \$31 billion by 2020 and is expected to create over a million jobs by 2022. However, this industry has repeatedly highlighted copyright piracy as a major issue that eats into its profits significantly. While this is an issue that has practically been around since the beginning of the copyright framework, technological advancements have meant that it is now possible to make perfect replicas at a scale almost instantaneously and with much easier access.

One of the first steps to tackle piracy is to understand its underpinnings and to assess the factors that contribute to it. A few studies in this regard have been there in India and they indicate that piracy is influenced by several factors — ranging from personality-based to social and cultural. However, the overall lack of information about various aspects of this issue is a problem. There is no recent academic literature on the drivers of piracy and more importantly, there is a lack of reliable data on the total size of the cultural economy in our country.

This lack of information complicates policy and law-making in this area. While the standard legislative response has been to use stringent penalties for copyright infringement without accounting for differences in the kinds of infringement and infringers, this approach has had limited success. Then there are also other challenges that relate to tackling digital piracy. We have an overburdened judicial system, disparate enforcement mechanisms, a fragmented supply chain and more generally, the absence of a widespread understanding of "copyright." Additionally, since "law and order" is a State subject under the Constitution, enforcement relies on respective police forces, making it difficult to implement centralised and uniform enforcement strategies.

Other measures that have been effective in controlling piracy include a reduction in



the "windowing period" between releases abroad and in India. This means lesser the time taken for a new release to be made accessible through legal platforms, the more likely is it that users will consume such content through legal means.

This can be effective when such content is easily available on various over-the-top (OTT) platforms for content that is highly anticipated. Another development that has been instrumental in reducing piracy rates has been the introduction of online streaming services, making legal content easily available at a reasonable price. However, the effect of the stark increase in the number of streaming services, all with their own catalogues and separate pricing plans, is yet to be seen.

Nevertheless, other technological measures can be useful in this regard. For instance, various forms of water-marking techniques have been used to identify the source of pirated content, fingerprinting and related technologies have been used by platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, which host user-generated content, to combat infringement by helping to identify and block the illegal use of copyrighted content.

More recently, blockchain technology is also beginning to be explored as a means to combat infringement, both as a way to establish a chain of contact for content and to expose piracy through the use of Bitcoin rewards to incentivise



WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT IN FRAMING RESPONSES TO PIRACY THAT ARE EFFECTIVE AND TIME-SENSITIVE, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO ALSO HAVE IN PLACE JUDICIAL SAFEGUARDS TO ENSURE THAT ALL INTERVENTIONS ARE NARROWLY TAILORED AND AIMED ONLY AT ADDRESSING PIRACY



the detection of pirated content. While these methods have varying rates of success in combating infringement, upgrades and innovations in technology, especially those that combine various existing methods, can be expected to make them more viable in the future.

The use of soft-law approaches along with public-private partnerships have also been effective in targeting piracy, especially where they target revenue models of those indulging in large-scale piracy. For instance, infringing website lists, which identify websites that host pirated content, have been used to reduce advertising, thereby disrupting revenues. Such lists are usually prepared by law enforcement or other arms of the Government in partnership with the private sector. For instance, the UK's Police Intellectual Property Crime Unit partners with experts, companies and law enforcement agencies in other countries to counter crime on an international scale. It compiled an IWL as part of its "Operation Creative" initiative, which helped reduce advertising on illegal websites.

More localised and country-specific lists are also being used to target the revenue of websites hosting pirated content. In India, the Maharashtra Cyber Digital Crime Unit, which is a part of the State's cyber police force, works on a model that relies on collaboration with the private sector. It has taken down hundreds of websites that host pirat-

ed content and has sent notices to different brands and networks advertising on such websites.

Piracy is, therefore, a complex issue with numerous drivers and needs to be addressed through multiple strategies targeting different areas of the ecosystem. In this context, a report by the Esya Centre titled, *Trends in Copyright Infringement and Enforcement in India*, explores the issue of copyright piracy and the challenges in effectively countering it. It examines legislative, judicial, policy and technological best practices both from India and internationally to inform next steps in this regard.

What is clear is that in framing responses to piracy that are effective and time-sensitive, it is essential to have in place judicial safeguards to ensure that all interventions are narrowly tailored and aimed only at addressing piracy. This because of the impact that these laws can have on issues of free speech and access and because it is important to also account for fair dealing exceptions provided for under copyright law. Ultimately, copyright forms a part of larger goals of increasing innovation, promoting research, progress in the arts and sciences and providing fair wages to creators of various kinds, among others. It is essential to situate copyright in that larger context and tailor remedies for infringement within those bounds.

(The writer is a junior fellow at the Esya Centre)

SOUNDBITE

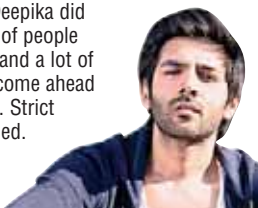
It (consideration for citizenship) has to be independent of religion but take cognisance of the sufferings and other issues into account.

Nobel laureate — Amartya Sen



I respect what Deepika did and I hope a lot of people would stand up and a lot of citizens should come ahead and talk about it. Strict actions are needed.

Actor — Kartik Aaryan



India usually plays a very good role in (maintaining) peace in the world. We welcome all initiatives, especially from India, to not allow escalation (of tensions).

Iran's Ambassador to India — Ali Chegeni



Those who don't have political existence in the State are trying to ruin its economy by pursuing cheap politics such as strikes. We will not let them impose a strike.

West Bengal CM — Mamata Banerjee



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Killing a General

Sir — Qassem Soleimani was reportedly Iran's second-most important man after Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and a larger motive behind his killing cannot be ruled out. It is an election year for US President Donald Trump and there are reports that he may have ordered the strike to boost his prospects. The Osama bin Laden operation by former US President Barack Obama could have been uppermost in his mind.

But Laden was a non-State actor, a terrorist, while Soleimani was a key ally in America's fight against the Islamic State (IS). The attack is also being called a diversionary ploy by Trump to drive the attention away from more pressing domestic issues like his impeachment. Global crude oil prices have already soared as a result of the ongoing turbulence in the region. The impact will be felt worldwide, including in India. Additionally, New Delhi has the bothersome task of adopting a "please all" attitude not only towards the US and Iran but also other key players.

Ganapathi Bhat Akola

Stage is set for triangular contest in Delhi

This refers to the editorial, "All eyes on Delhi durbar" (January 8). A fresh Assembly election in Delhi is scheduled for February and outgoing Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is well-placed to win another five-year term. A combination of factors makes the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader a front-runner. Three political parties — the BJP, Congress and AAP — are in the fray and are gearing up for a fierce battle to prove their loyalty to the public. In the winter of 2015, the AAP faced twin problems in the run-up to the Assembly polls. The BJP was gearing up to capitalise on the 2014 Modi wave to return to power in the national capital after a long exile, which in this case had run for 14 years and more. To add to AAP's woes, Kejriwal's "common man" image was under constant attack by the Opposition. Mufflerman's smog-induced cough just wouldn't go and BJP leaders would daily mock AAP, asking how someone, who couldn't cure himself of common cold in three months, would administer Delhi.

Five years later, Kejriwal cannot claim to be the underdog and outsider. He needs a new narrative and a retaining wall to seek another term in office. He under-



stands that the biggest chink in the BJP's armour remains a leadership vacuum in the Delhi unit. The BJP retains its 30-plus per cent base but due to the complete collapse of the Congress, is in a direct contest against the street-smart AAP. It is at a disadvantage. Because the Assembly elections are fought on local issues, Modi, despite trying, does not always compensate for the shortcomings of the local party units, Jharkhand being the latest case in point.

J Akshay Bengaluru

Reaching a new low

Sir — The Government has brought the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth to its slowest in 11 years. This is a result of its fixated politics and prescriptive economics. The Modi Government came to

power by building up suspicion over its predecessor's sphere of governance. Its demonisation exercise was met with disapproval and in the process, it knocked down the cornerstone of our cash-centric economy. More than a flagging economy, it is the feckless efforts at its

repair that is of greater concern. The Government's apathy towards economists and disregard of the autonomy of pivotal planning and oversight institutions made things worse. Frenetic activities have been there but little progress was seen. Unsettled socio-political

environs, induced by energetic propagation of inconsequential themes, seem to have been the final nail in the coffin.

R Narayanan Navi Mumbai

University politics

Sir — The imbroglia at the JNU is not merely a "law and order" problem. It is a pitched political and ideological battle. With claims and counter-claims flying thick and fast, every video accusing the ABVP is being countered with those incriminating Leftist opponents. But now reports say that one of the attackers claimed to be a Leftist goon actually belonged to the ABVP. The joint secretary of ABVP has admitted that two persons, seen with rods and sticks, belonged to it. The tit-for-tat response by the masked warriors has done the Modi-Shah duo no good. Meanwhile, we can only hope university campuses can remain places of learning.

KS Padmanabhan Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A tale of three theocracies

More empathy and an outreach by those in power towards those who fear the introduction of the CAA are imperative



ISHAN JOSHI

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is a well-drafted, welcome piece of legislation. It passes with flying colours the triple test of Aristotelian logic, the Indian Nyaya school and Confucian principles.

CAA seeks to provide both the physical and epistemological comforts of home in a land of refuge, India, to religiously persecuted minority communities of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh. All three of these states are theocracies with Islam enshrined in their respective Constitutions as the state religion. I shall refer to them "Group I states" for the purpose of this article.

Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Nepal, also in the neighbourhood, are non-theocratic states with no state religion. These may be termed the "Group II states."

It follows, therefore, that what in legalese is termed "reasonable differentia" is clearly established in that distinction between these two groups of South Asian nation states. Which is also why the CAA cannot be extended to include minority communities claiming religious persecution in Group II states such as the Rohingya in Myanmar, Tamils in Sri Lanka and Ahmadiyya/Isma'is/Shias in Pakistan.

Unless, that is, any of the Group II states decides in the years ahead to adopt a state religion and convert itself into a theocracy. And a political party in India included such a demand in its election manifesto, got democratically elected and followed through on bringing its promise to fruition with legislation to that effect.

Were this to come to pass, support for fast-tracking Indian citizenship eligibility for minority communities living in future theocracies within Group II states in the Indian sub-continent would be entirely valid. But only then, not before.

As for Group I states, their Muslim citizens are excluded from the ambit of the CAA because they cannot, by definition, be religiously persecuted in a theocratic country where the state religion is Islam.

This is not to say members of the majority community in Group I states are not persecuted; far from it.

Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggests our Muslim neighbours who have chosen to found and live in theocratic states in South Asia are discriminated against on a plethora of grounds including political, sectarian, factional, regional, economic, gender et al. by oppressive state apparatuses.

But, and without intending to make this sound like Philosophy 101, it is one thing to say all citizens of Group I states regardless of faith have a disability; it is quite another to assert that they all suffer from the same disability.

It stands to reason, thus, that the palliative for specific disabilities will differ depending on the particular disability one is aiming to ameliorate.

The CAA's architecture is designed to deal with a specific disability; that of the disappearance of minority communities from Group I states which were, till 1947, either directly or indirectly part of Britain's Indian empire. The Act does so in a humane, practicable and ethical manner. Some may disagree. But that's for lawyers to scrap over in court.

If the Supreme Court of India, which has admitted a bunch of petitions challenging the Constitutional validity of the Act, holds the amended citizenship law to be kosher, excellent. If it doesn't, then it will not be the law of the land.

Either way, as law-abiding citizens of the republic, it would behoove each one of us to accept with grace the verdict once appears if any are disposed of or, if required, bring in a fresh law.

In any event, there can be no justification for anti-CAA protesters inciting anarchy via arson, destruction of public property, wanton violence and mindless lumpy behaviour.

Governments, for their part, both at the Centre and in the States, must ensure the might of the law is brought to bear upon rioters including punitive measures such as those initiated by the Uttar Pradesh (UP) Government in issuing notices under the law to confiscate the immovable assets of those charged with destroying public property as compensation.

Simultaneously, administrations must adopt a policy of zero-tolerance for the use of disproportionate force by police without neutering them or hampering their effectiveness.

It's tough, in Indian conditions, but that's Raj Dharma. Making incendiary remarks targeting co-citizens, especially among the Indian Muslim community, is unacceptable. Doubly so if they come from those in positions of responsibility. Whatever the provocation.

More empathy and an outreach by those in power towards those who fear the introduction of the CAA, however unjustified their apprehensions may be, are also a categorical imperative.

What is puzzling beyond all measure, though, is what the rationale behind opposing the CAA is by those who term themselves "secular." Is their collective self-loathing so acute?

Surely, they cannot stand in favour of oppressive theocracies and swear by secularism in the same breath.

On second thoughts, the history of the 20th century teaches us that perhaps they can — taking a line from their support for the Khilafat movement to the overturning of the Shah Bano verdict and opposition to a Uniform Civil Code for India.

The conviction grows that they are here to bury secularism, not to praise it. And when erstwhile mainstream political parties become its pall bearers, it is time to worry.

I do not propose to blame it all on Nehru & Co.

On the contrary, as a proud secularist albeit from an Indic tradition I am grateful that the founders of the Republic did not enshrine Sanatan Dharma as the national faith. It would not only have been oxymoronic but undermined the whole notion of an Indic exceptionalism.

But choosing to be Constitutionally faith-neutral if very different from trying to force Indic faiths into an Abrahamic mould and normalising the characterisation of Hinduism as a "religion." Approximations just don't cut it.

These fine distinctions, however, would surely have gladly been forfeited by the ethnically-cleansed minority communities of Group I states if they had not been murdered, raped, humiliated, delegitimised and dehumanised for 72 years because of religious persecution. The CAA, read as it is, aims to redeem secular India's solemn pledge at the time of Partition.

If not wholly, then at least very substantially.

(The writer is a senior editor with Asia News Network. The views expressed are personal)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

IT'S A SLAP IN THE FACE FOR THE US. BUT MILITARY ACTION IS NOT ALL. WHAT IS VITAL IS ENDING THE CORRUPTING PRESENCE OF USA IN THE REGION.
 —IRANIAN SUPREME LEADER
 AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI



ALL IS WELL! MISSILES LAUNCHED FROM IRAN AT TWO MILITARY BASES LOCATED IN IRAQ. ASSESSMENT OF CASUALTIES & DAMAGES TAKING PLACE NOW.
 —US PRESIDENT
 DONALD TRUMP

Need for multilateralism

The Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean in particular have become the epicentre of geopolitics and India has emerged as a key player



VIKAS KALYANI

In recent days, Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne announced efforts to strengthen Australia's involvement in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the importance of working with India in defence and other activities. Speaking at the 2019, Raisina Dialogue in Delhi — a geopolitical conference co-hosted by the India — Payne said: "Our respective futures are intertwined and heavily dependent on how well we cooperate on the challenges and opportunities in the Indian Ocean in the decades ahead."

In terms of global political significance, the Atlantic Ocean can be viewed as the ocean of our grandparents and parents; the Pacific Ocean as our ocean and that of our children; and the Indian Ocean as the ocean of our children and grandchildren. There is an obvious sense in which the region is the future. The average age of people in the region's countries is under 30, compared to 38 in the US and 46 in Japan. The countries bordering the Indian Ocean are home to 2.5 billion people, which is one-third of the world's population.

Having heard the Australian Minister and read a few expert comments from Australian scholars of international affairs, it becomes clear that Indo-Pacific in general and the Indian Ocean in particular is being viewed as the epicentre of geopolitics and India as the key player in this region. The need of economic partnership among the littorals is of utmost importance while having a collaborated approach to address geopolitical risks. India, being the largest country, has a logical role to play as a leader bringing the nations of IOR on multilateral platforms.

Multi-nation platforms: There are multi-nation platforms existing, which have mutual growth as their aim but their effectiveness is questionable when compared to other oceanic platforms. For example, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was established by nations bordering the Bay of Bengal in 1997. In more than two decades, it is still gaining momentum but cannot be compared with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

Australia, along with 21 other border states, is a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) which seeks to promote sustainable economic growth, trade liberalisation and security. Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper seeks to support IORA in areas such as maritime security and international law. It also aims at strengthening its ties in the region such as with India and Indonesia — and also build new connections, particularly in Africa.

It brings out the Australian perspective which is outreach and focusses on multilateral cooperation with the stakeholders. The Indian perspective becomes clear from the Foreign Secretary's words: "The challenges we all face today, and all of us know this, whether they be the traditional security issues such as nuclear proliferation, armed conflict and so on, or newer non-traditional issues such as terrorism, migration and refugee flows and environmental degradation — all of these, in our view, require more, and not less, multilateralism. India's vision of engagement in the Indo-Pacific region

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 SECURITY AND GROWTH FOR ALL THROUGH MULTILATERALISM IS THE ONLY VIABLE SOLUTION AGAINST PROBLEMS ARISING IN TODAY'S GEOSTRATEGIC SCENARIO BECAUSE OF UNILATERALISM AND TRADE WARS. INDIA'S ACTIVE AND FREQUENT FRIENDLY ENGAGEMENTS WITH IOR COUNTRIES' ARMED FORCES WILL BOOST THE CONFIDENCE OF ALL THE PARTICIPANTS AS WELL AS THE LITTORAL COUNTRIES AND WILL GIVE STABILITY TO THE MARITIME SECURITY OF THE IOR. THE IAF THUS CAN PROVE ITSELF TO BE AN IMPORTANT TOOL IN FURTHERING THE VISION OF SAGAR



will be based on the values of peace, stability and prosperity on a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific with the ASEAN regional bloc central to the concept, which serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large. Our Prime Minister's articulation of the vision of SAGAR — 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' will continue to provide the basis for our maritime engagement."

Cooperation is key to maritime security: Maritime security is a major challenge for the poorer coastal and island countries of the IOR. In particular those that have large zones of maritime jurisdiction. There are 48 independent countries in the region, including hinterland and landlocked states of East Africa and South Asia. There are 18 in Africa, 11 in the Middle East, seven in South Asia, six in Southeast Asia, five island states and Australia. Managing maritime security is a challenging endeavour. It requires cooperation between regional countries and between those with a stake in regional security. Maritime security is no longer the sole prerogative of navies with more non-military agencies now involved.

Maritime security is a priority for the IORA, currently the main regional organisation for economic and security cooperation. It recently committed its members to working on increasing cooperation among navies and other maritime security forces in the region. The plan is to do this collaboratively with the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), a voluntary initiative by India to address shared maritime security challenges and threats.

However IONS' main focus has been on naval cooperation and it has

been successful in terms of bringing navies and coastal security forces together in the form of joint exercises. There is some scepticism about the symposium's ability to make a broader contribution to maritime security.

Defence cooperation: The Foreign Minister of Australia also pointed to increasing defence activities in the Indian Ocean, noting that in 2014, Australia and India had conducted 11 defence activities together, with the figure reaching 38 in 2018. This shows the positive approach from Australian counterparts to build a strong security-oriented partnership with India.

In 2018, the Indian Air Force (IAF), for the first time, participated with fighter aircraft in Exercise Pitch Black that was conducted in Australia. During the transit to Australia, the IAF contingent also had constructive engagement with Indonesian and Malaysian air forces. In recent times the IAF has shown its capabilities of reaching anywhere within the IOR at an unimaginable short notice and also has undertaken exercises across the bays around, so as to make itself familiar with the region. In its pan-India exercise Gagan Shakti-2018, special attention was given to maritime air operations. The operation was the largest-ever series of air exercises conducted by the IAF. It crucially demonstrated an operational range with the help of air-to-air refuelling by the IL-78 Flight Refuelling Aircraft (FRA). The Su-30s, airborne from a base on the eastern coast, engaged multiple targets towards the western seaboard of India at distances beyond 2,500 km and landed at a southern base, thus covering a total distance of 4,000 km in a single mission, which is less than average distance between India and many IOR countries.

Among other defence cooperations, the air forces of two nations can work together by using the respective island territories as regular refuelling halts during ferries or conduct joint exercises with navies of friendly countries around. For example the Cocos Keeling Island and Christmas Island (Australian external territory) have 8,000 and 7,000 feet runways respectively which are fit for operations by all kind of aircraft.

They are located south of Indonesia and almost midway between India and Australia. The distance between Port Blair and these islands is 2,675 km and 2,833 km respectively. Similarly, Andaman and Nicobar Islands can be used by the Australian Air Force for the same purpose. With these kinds of practices of using island runways and conducting joint exercises, the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations in actual contingencies will be conducted more efficiently when time is a critical factor and decision-making delays cannot be afforded. The same is applicable for any other contingency which imposes challenge to safety and security of IOR countries.

Security and growth for all through multilateralism is the only viable solution against problems arising in today's geostategic scenario because of unilateralism and trade wars. India's active and frequent friendly engagements with IOR countries' armed forces will boost the confidence of all the participants as well as the littoral countries and will give stability to the maritime security of the IOR. The IAF thus can prove itself to be an important tool in furthering the vision of SAGAR.

(The writer is a senior research fellow at the India Foundation)

Global forests and ecology in peril

As the going gets tough for the world's 'green assets', it is being predicted that the Amazon rain forests are now the most threatened with a projected loss of 48 million hectares by 2030



KOTA SRIRAJ

The ongoing bush and forest fires in Australia are presenting a daunting challenge to the authorities and are proving to be a painful and tragic end for the wildlife affected by the blaze. This country-wide catastrophe, mainly caused by drought and extreme heat, has so far claimed 24 lives, destroyed 18 million acres of forest and bushland and has also consumed 1,200 homes.

The spectre of climate change in the form of global warming is transforming the definition of natural disasters as rising temperatures, droughts and strong winds become a lethal combination of fanning even the smallest of a bush fire into a country-wide inferno.

This is evident in Australia's case as well because this year saw the mid-December temperatures going as high as 42 degree Celsius in the midst of winds that were recording speeds of 120 kmph.

Yet another aspect, which precipitated this disaster in Australia was the fact that the country witnessed its driest spring season in the last 120 years and this rendered the bushland, forests and grasslands dry and fit for a blaze.

The 2019 Amazon forest fires, too, were an unfortunate occurrence as they saw over 906,000 hectares of prime forest land — that was rich in ecology and wildlife — being burnt to cinder.

Here, too, the role of man cannot be ruled out, as every year, the countries bordering the forest areas of the

Amazon rain forest illegally slash and burn the woodland to clear land for agriculture and habitation. These countries are unable to take strict action to stop this practice and as a result, sometimes this clearing process gets out of hand and unfortunately results in mega-disaster events.

Amazon forests, considered the world's largest terrestrial carbon sink, are now at peril, too, thanks to climate change and anthropogenic activities.

According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Global Land Outlook report, 70 per cent of the global forests are at peril thanks to deforestation and man-made disasters such as forest fires. The report states that tropical jungles are at the highest risk and to illustrate the point the report presents a staggering fact that nearly 5.5 million hectares of rich forestland disappeared annually between 2010-2015.

As the going gets tough for the world's 'green assets', it is being further predicted that the Amazon rain forests are now the most threatened with a projected loss of 48 million hectares by 2030. The inability of

mankind to take care of nature and safeguard the precious natural resources is very unsettling.

India, too, has good forest wealth but, some years ago, that also came under threat as hundreds of acres of valuable forests in Uttarakhand's Himalayan foothills became a casualty of tremendous fires.

The callous selfishness of human actions is leading to spiralling temperatures, which in turn are making the flora and fauna's survival difficult. Add to these woes are the afforestation efforts which are progressing at snail's pace. All this means that we are compromising those very carbon sinks that can have a major role in climate change mitigation.

In the wake of these global forest fire episodes, the world environmental community must introspect to find a lasting solution to safeguard nature's assets from these recurrent disasters.

In this regard, it becomes clear that the global community lost a great opportunity at the recently-concluded UN Climate Change Conference COP 25, to put in place systems and checks that can play a pivotal role in

preserving the global green canopy.

The forests are the last remaining barriers between mankind and the consequences of climate change. They need to be treated as a national priority and be accorded sufficient protection. The strict and non-negotiable segregation of habited areas and forests is probably the first step towards forest conservation.

In addition to this, the forest protection laws that are currently lax and implemented even more poorly need to be overhauled so that woodland protection becomes a serious matter.

In India, too, the forest department is woefully understaffed and ill-trained to protect these precious resources. All these aspects must change if India and the world want to keep whatever forests are still left.

This must be done expeditiously before it is too late to undo the damage, else man will have to pay a heavy price for this indiscriminate and mindless pillage of natural wealth and future generations will pay for our crimes against nature.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)

CAPSULE



Cabinet gives in-principle nod for strategic sale of Neelachal Ispat

NEW DELHI: The government on Wednesday in-principle approved strategic sale of Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd (NINL) by allowing six PSU shareholders to sell their stake in the steel company. A decision in this regard was taken in the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar told reporters. NINL is a joint venture company, in which four central PSUs -- MMTC, National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC), Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) and MECON -- and two Odisha government companies IPICOL and Odisha Mining Corporation (OMC) are shareholders. MMTC holds 49.78 per cent share in NINL, followed by OMC (20.47 per cent), IPICOL (12 per cent), NMDC (10.10 per cent), while MECON and BHEL hold 0.68 per cent each. The strategic buyer for NINL will be identified through a two-stage auction procedure, said an official statement.



Govt approves Ordinance to amend law to ease auction of coal mines

NEW DELHI: The government on Wednesday approved an Ordinance to amend a law in order to ease rules for auctioning of coal mines and opening it for steel and power sectors. The decision taken by the Cabinet Chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi will also do away with end-use restrictions of the mining blocks, Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi said. "The Cabinet has approved promulgation of Mineral Laws (Amendment) Ordinance 2020," the minister said, addressing media after the Cabinet meeting. The Ordinance will ease rules for auctioning coal mines to open up to all sectors. The Ordinance to allow auction of 46 iron ore and other mines before March 31, 2020.

Centre to provide Rs 5,559 cr funding for North east gas grid

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In only the second instance of the government directly funding a gas pipeline, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on Wednesday approved a Rs 5,559 crore viability gap funding for the proposed North-East gas grid, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said.

The 1,656-km North-East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid will connect Guwahati in Assam to major cities in the region such as Itanagar, Dimapur, Kohima, Imphal, Aizwal, Agartala, Shillong, Silchar, Gangtok, and Numaligarh. The pipeline will enable the supply of piped cooking gas to households and CNG to automobiles, besides fuel to industry.

However, in the absence of anchor customers, the Rs 9,265 crore pipeline is not economically viable.

The CCEA headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved "a viability gap funding of 60 per cent of the project cost," Pradhan said at a post-Cabinet press briefing here.

The North-East pipeline grid



The CCEA headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved "a viability gap funding of 60 per cent of the project cost," Pradhan said at a post-Cabinet press briefing here

is to be implemented by Indradhanush Gas Grid, a joint venture of state-owned GAIL India, Indian Oil Corp (IOC), Oil and Natural Gas Corp (ONGC), Oil India Ltd (OIL) and Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL). The consortium had pitched

for a 60 per cent funding support from the government and would raise the rest via equity and debt. Without government support, the pipeline will not be viable.

This is the second time that a gas pipeline project in the

Indradhanush grid.

All other pipelines in the country have been funded by public or private sector companies.

Pradhan said the project is critical towards implementing the government's Hydrocarbon Vision 2030 for the North-East.

The vision envisages the development of the region by leveraging its hydrocarbon potential, enhancing access to clean fuel and accelerating the growth.

"About 20 per cent of India's natural gas production comes from the North-East. Out of about 75 million standard cubic meters per day of gas output, 15 mmscmd come from North East," Pradhan said. "Currently Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura have established gas production potential while there are possibilities for the same in Nagaland and Manipur."

The funding support to the gas grid is a part of a broader goal of the government to raise the share of natural gas in the country's energy mix to 15 per cent by 2030 from current 6.2 per cent.

IBM appoints Sandip Patel as India and South Asia MD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

IBM on Wednesday said it has appointed Sandip Patel as managing director of its India and South Asia (ISA) operations.

He succeeds Karan Bajwa, who is quitting the company to pursue opportunities outside of IBM, the company said in a statement.

In his role, Patel will be responsible for all strategic and operational matters related to IBM's sales, marketing, services and delivery operations in the region, including Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

"Additionally, he will play a critical role in enabling India's capabilities across IBM's global missions, global centres of excellence, research and innovation labs," the company said.

Most recently, Patel was based in Boston, Massachusetts, where he was IBM's global general manager for the Insurance industry and was responsible for the company's business across all brands in this market segment. His extensive expertise in



key industries, including financial services, insurance and healthcare, coupled with his global leadership experience will bring great value to IBM's clients and business in the region, it added.

"IBM has been a key player in India's technology journey and continues to provide the innovation necessary to power India's digital transformation across key industries and government," Harriet Green, Chairman and CEO of IBM Asia Pacific, said.

Patel's deep industry expertise and global understanding of clients across different markets will bring real value to our clients as they embark on their transformation journey, he added.

Sensex ends 52 pts lower, Nifty holds 12k amid US-Iran flare-up

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BSE benchmark Sensex ended 52 points lower on Wednesday as the US-Iran clash kept global investors on the edge.

After plunging nearly 400 points during the session, the 30-share BSE index pared some losses to settle 51.73 points, or 0.13 per cent, down at 40,817.74.

Similarly, the broader Nifty fell 27.60 points, or 0.23 per cent, to finish at 12,025.35.

Among Sensex stocks, L&T was the top loser, shedding 2.19 per cent, followed by ONGC, Titan, Sun



Pharma, Hero MotoCorp and Infosys.

On the other hand, Bharti Airtel, TCS, Ultratech Cement, Bajaj Finance and ICICI Bank spurred up to 2.74 per cent.

According to analysts, domestic stocks followed global equities that plunged on

Among Sensex stocks, L&T was the top loser, shedding 2.19%, followed by ONGC, Titan, Sun Pharma, Hero MotoCorp and Infosys

increasing tensions in the Middle East after Iran launched missiles targeting US military bases in Iraq in retaliation for the killing of Iran's top general Qasem Soleimani.

Brent crude oil futures rose nearly 0.62 per cent to USD 68.67 per barrel.

GENERAL STRIKE

HMSI Manesar plant, units of component makers at Manesar-Bawal belt affected

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Production at Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India's (HMSI) Manesar plant in Haryana and factories of various auto component manufacturers in Manesar-Bawal industrial belt was hit on Wednesday by the day-long strike called by 10 major trade unions against the Centre's "anti-people" policies.

The strike, however, had no impact on production of auto majors Maruti Suzuki India, Hero MotoCorp and Honda Cars India at their plants in various parts of the country.

"Workers in all three shifts at the Manesar plant are not working today in support of the trade union strike," HMSI Employee Union President Suresh Gaur told PTI.

He said HMSI Manesar plant workers along with counterparts from factories of auto component makers Shivam Autotech, Emkay Automobile Industries, Munjal Showa, Napino Auto & Electronics



and Talbro, among others have joined in for a day-long protest.

"Workers at factories in the Manesar-Bawal industrial are supporting the strike and productions have been affected," Gaur claimed.

When contacted, HMSI officials declined to comment.

Workers and officials at Maruti Suzuki, Hero MotoCorp, Honda Cars India confirmed that production was on normally at their

respective plants and the strike has had no impact.

10 central trade unions have claimed around 25 crore people will participate in the nationwide strike called to protest against the union government's labour reforms, FDI, disinvestment, corporatisation and privatisation policies.

They are pressing for a 12-point charter of demands of the working class relating to minimum wage and social security, among others.



Sebi directs HBJ Capital Services to refund clients

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has asked HBJ Capital Services Pvt Ltd to refund within three months the fees collected from clients while acting as an unregistered investment adviser, and also restrained its directors from accessing securities market.

Directors of the firm -- Kumar Harendra, Amrita Singh, Abhishek Kumar Singh and Jitendra -- are required to ensure that the directions are complied with and in case of failure to repay the investors, the directors shall "jointly and severally, refund the money collected by HBJ as fee, during their respective period of directorship, to the investors within a further period of two months," Sebi said in an order on Tuesday.

HBJ LLP, which was carrying out alternative investment fund activities without obtaining requisite registration, has also been directed to refund the money collected from the investors or partners along with promised return.

In the event of failure, Kumar Harendra and Amrita Singh shall refund the moneys collected by HBJ LLP jointly and severally, during their tenure as designated partners, Sebi added.

Additionally, HBJ Capital, HBJ LLP and the officials have been barred from the securities market till the direc-

HBJ Capital, HBJ LLP and the officials have been barred from the securities market till the directions for refund and repayment are complied with

tions for refund and repayment are complied with.

From the date of completion of refund, they shall further be restrained from the securities market for a period of two years, Sebi said.

They have also been restrained from holding positions as directors or key managerial personnel of any listed entity for a period equal to the period of their debarment.

The directions come after the regulator "concluded that HBJ was carrying out investor advisory activity without obtaining certificate of registration from Sebi."

Sebi had noted that fees were collected on behalf of the company in breach of legal provisions as it can be collected only after the legal requirement of certificate of registration is complied with by the company.

HDFC to invest Rs 250 cr in stressed assets fund for realty sector: Mistry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest pure-play mortgage financier HDFC has made a commitment to invest Rs 250 crore in the government-led special fund to revive stalled real estate projects, a top company official said on Wednesday.

HDFC CEO Keki Mistry said that the realty sector's revival hinges a lot on banks, which are reluctant to lend to stalled projects due to regulatory issues. As part of its measures to

boost growth, the government had in November last year announced a Rs 25,000 crore package for the real estate sector, including a corpus to help stalled projects.

SBI Caps, which is managing the fund, had last month announced the first close of the fund with Rs 10,530 crore commitments from investors, including HDFC.

"We are participating in the fund (with a contribution of)

Rs 250 crore," Mistry told reporters on the sidelines of an event by industry lobby CII here.

Mistry said apart from the fund, support in the form of bank lending is essential for reviving the sector's prospects and flagged concerns on reluctance among bankers to lend.

"The problem is that no one wants to do it because when you lend to a project which is NPA in someone's books, you have to straight away classify (it) as NPA from day one, in which case there is a lot of reluctance of banks to participate," he explained.



Iran crisis sparks fear over Middle East oil supplies

PNS ■ LONDON

The burgeoning Iran crisis has sparked oil supply worries over the Strait of Hormuz -- a vital shipping lane for a fifth of global crude -- and also over Iraq's output, analysts say.

Oil prices had surged last Friday after US President Donald Trump ordered the drone assassination of Iran's top general Qasem Soleimani, but the market stabilised on Monday and Tuesday with Middle East crude supplies unaffected.

However on Wednesday, the oil market shifted higher once more after Tehran launched revenge attacks to target US forces in Iraq, making good on its pledge to hit back over the killing.



Iran fired missiles overnight at Iraqi bases housing the US and British military, officials in Washington and Tehran said.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab voiced concern over "reports of casualties".

But Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif insisted that the country does "not seek escalation or war".

Traders remain fearful nevertheless that Tehran could seek to block the Hormuz

On Wednesday, the oil market shifted higher once more after Tehran launched revenge attacks to target US forces in Iraq, making good on its pledge to hit back over the killing

waterway -- a key artery for crude that stretches between Oman and Iran.

Hormuz, one of the world's most congested transit points, links up the region's oil producers with markets in Asia, Europe and North America.

"Supply disruptions were put at the forefront of the agenda for investors," said Mihir Kapadia, CEO of Sun Global Investments.

"These concerns have been

fuelled by Friday's killing of Soleimani and it is likely Iran will try and disrupt oil exports that travel through the Straits of Hormuz.

"However...it remains unclear as to what the next developments will be."

The US government's Energy Information Administration describes Hormuz as "the world's most important oil transit chokepoint" through which 21 million barrels of

crude per day passed in 2018.

The strait had already been rocked last year by a string of attacks that Washington and its allies blamed on Iran, accusations Tehran firmly denied.

Its Western foes have also accused Iran of being behind a major attack on Saudi oil installations and Iran has in recent months also repeatedly seized tankers operating in the Gulf.

Traders remain less fearful over the loss of Iranian oil because the Islamic republic remains under punishing US sanctions that were re-imposed by Trump in 2018.

Energy Aspects analyst Christopher Haines noted traders were instead worried about oil output from Iraq -- particularly if US troops are pulled out.

America's military strategy in Iraq was thrown into confusion Monday as the Pentagon admitted a letter from a general informing the Iraqi government of an imminent US troop pullout was sent by mistake.

"There is a potential risk of disruption on Iraq, whose crude exports represent (about) 3.5 million barrels per day," Haines told AFP.

"If US troops leave, it will leave the area less secure," he added.

Iraq is currently the second biggest player in oil cartel OPEC after kingpin Saudi Arabia. SEB analyst Bjarne Schieldrop agreed that Iraqi production could be impacted by the current crisis -- but so far no oil supplies have been affected.

Ramco Systems' stock up 4 pc on securing deal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Ramco Systems on Wednesday rose by 4 per cent after the company said it has secured a multi-million-dollar global payroll and workforce management deal from a leading Australian university.

The scrip jumped 3.68 per cent to close at Rs 171.80 on the BSE.

During the day, it climbed as much as 8.29 per cent to Rs 179.45. On the NSE, it advanced 4 per cent to close at Rs 171.70. With this win, Ramco will expand its foothold in the higher education vertical which is witnessing good demand for HR and payroll transformation, the company said in a BSE filing.

Online streaming paves way for **A NEW WAVE**

Within a decade, there has been an immense rise in the number of content-driven films and their demand. **SIDDHESH SUMAN** speaks to writer-director Ashwin Sarvanan about the reason behind the beginning of a new wave in Indian cinema

Ashwin Sarvanan, writer-director of the multilingual Taapsee Pannu-starrer *Game Over* in 2019, speaking to *The Pioneer* about the advent of a new wave in cinema, says, "A lot of young artistes are entering the industry and are redefining what has been traditionally termed mainstream cinema. The big stars are also working with these young filmmakers showing that they are willing to take risks with narratives and characters. This is a big deal as earlier we used to make only the 'risk-free' films that allowed no experimentation because of the big budget involved."

"But now, the present generation of filmmakers are combining the experimental narratives with

mainstream appeal to find commercial success while breaking barriers and conventions at the same time," he added. This is apparent from even mainstream Bollywood finally moving away from the old repetitive stories and making experimental films like *Andhadhun* (2018) by Sriram Raghavan and *Mard Ko Dard Nahi Hota* (2019) by Vasan Bala.

The rise in popularity of online streaming services that thrive on original content, made mostly by young talent, is also a good sign of progress.

Talking about the shift in audience's interests from commercial films to content-driven or experimental films, Ashwin says, "This is because of their exposure to content that has radically changed. After the arrival of

Amazon Prime, Netflix and other streaming platforms, people can stream any international or art house film sitting at home. Their expectations have changed accordingly and they expect the same from Indian cinema too. Audiences want to be surprised by something that is fresh. Plus the box office shows that films that were previously considered art house are now making good money. This paradigm shift happening in the Indian cinema industry is a good sign."

A major part of this change is seen in the South Indian film industry especially in Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam. Several South Indian films are winning national and international awards and are being screened at international film festivals.

group of serial killers who enter her home. This film was widely appreciated and was released in Telugu, Tamil and Hindi.

SUPER DELUXE

Written & directed by Thiagarajan Kumararaja, this film is a story about three different people and their journey towards fighting their inner demons. This story is so well crafted and the characters are written in such detail that the film manages to keep you on the edge of your seats throughout. Vijay Sethupathi won the best actor award for this film in Indian Film Festival of Melbourne. And the film was also nominated for best Asian feature at AACTA Awards.

EE NAGARANIKI EMAINDI

A 2018 buddy film written and directed by Tharun Bhascker Dhaassyam, is based on four childhood friends with a passion for filmmaking but abandon their dreams as they grow up. They reunite years later to make a short film just to realise that this is what they are destined to do. The film was praised for its take on friendship and films.

the search for a buffalo that escaped from a slaughterhouse to wreak chaos over a village. An unusual concept that is amazingly written and shot. The film was screened at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and even received praise from Hollywood directors such as Ari Aster who made mind-bending horror films like *Hereditary* and *Midsommar*.

VIKRAM VEDA

Written and directed by Pushkar and Gayatri, this film is a modern take on the classic saga of Vikram and Betaal. Vikram played by R. Madhavan is a pragmatic police officer bend on capturing Vedha, an underworld don played by Vijay Sethupathi. As the film progresses it blurs the lines between good and evil. An regional take on the neo-noir action thriller, the film was screened at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

GAME OVER

This film takes the horror and thriller genre to a whole new mind-bending level. A game designer who suffers from PTSD locks herself away from the world. But the story takes a wrong turn for her when she has to face a

Here are a few films from the past couple years that are signs of the better times to come in cinema.

TO LET

Released in 2019, *To Let* is written, directed and shot by Chezhiyan. This film, which reminds of the body of work by Satyajit Ray, portrays the hardships of a modern working-class family and their struggle in finding a home. The film won the National award for Best Tamil Feature, Special Jury Award at the International Film Festival of India in 2018 and was a nominee for a Golden Peacock.

AGENT SAI SRINIVASA ATHREYA

The movie is directed by R.S.J. Swaroop and co-written by Naveen Polishetty, who also starred as the fumbling detective, Agent Sai Srinivasa Athreya, in the film. This film is a perfect mix of fun and drama and a quirky take on the thriller-comedy genre.

JALLIKATTU

A Malayalam action film directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery and written by S. Hareesh and R. Jayakuma, the story revolves around the mayhem that ensues during



“ Audiences want to be surprised by something that is fresh. Plus the box office shows that films that were considered art house previously are now making good money. This paradigm shift in the Indian cinema industry is a good sign.

— ASHWIN SARVANAN



Unhappy with *Chhapaak* makers: Dr Sunitha Krishnan

Social media has been divided over Deepika visiting JNU in the aftermath of the attack on its students and teachers. **K RAMYA SREE** writes about Twitteratis reaction to the actor's visit



Bollywood superstar Deepika Padukone who was in Delhi to promote her upcoming film, *Chhapaak*, joined the students of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) who are protesting against the attack on students and teachers. This move by the actress has raised eyebrows of many who called it a publicity stunt while many others, including Bollywood celebrities, taking to Twitter to support the actress with #isupportDeepika. Her visit led to polarising social media trends, including people demanding ban on her upcoming film.

Although Deepika did not speak at the gathering, #boycottChhapaak has been trending on social media. Many have tweeted screenshots of the tickets of the film that they cancelled in the wake of her visit. However, such tweets left the twitter divided, by many calling it fake and that this is being

done by the 'bhakts' of the country. This isn't the first time that the actions of the 34-year-old actress have come under scrutiny. Two of her films *Padmaavat* and *Happy New Year* too received flak for hurting sentiments of a community. "Lol. Sharing screenshots of the same ticket cancelled by multiple people.. Whom are they fooling? (sic)" said one user.

"Haryana, Kerala, Delhi and other states bhakts also had cancelled same tickets, same seats no's and same theatre (sic)," said another user. Meanwhile, Dr Sunitha Krishnan, social activist and chief functionary and co-founder of Prajwala, said that she was unhappy with the makers of *Chhapaak*. "I am unhappy with the makers of #Chhapaak for not acknowledging Adv Aparna Bhat in their credit titles even after they extensively used her for their research, I will still urge everyone to watch #Chhapaak for its story on hope &

courage in situations most of us cannot fathom (sic)," she tweeted. *Chhapaak* is the story of a young woman who tries to rebuild her life after a man throws acid on her. The film is scheduled to hit screens on January 10 across the country.

It is said that Deepika reportedly told the JNUSU president Aishe Ghosh that she was proud of her. She was also present when former JNUSU president Kanhaiya Kumar, who contested the 2019 Lok Sabha polls on a CPI ticket, gave his speech. It can be mentioned here that many female actors of Bollywood including Shabana Azmi, Sonam Kapoor Ahuja, Taapsee Pannu, Swara Bhasker, Twinkle Khanna have been tweeting about the attack, while very few male actors have unequivocally condemned the attack.

That being said, a few people, rather none from Bollywood have voiced their opinion about the attack.

Every medium has its own audience

Speaking to **V SATEESH REDDY**, television actor Siddharth Varma shares about his unexpected entry into movies, love for serials, the boy next door fame and more

Actor Siddharth Varma entered the film industry with the movie *3G Love* in 2013. He also acted in a lead role in *Dagudumutha Dandakor* and *Nenu Naa Friends*. Later, he began acting for the television and is well known for his role as Aditya in *Rakta Sambhandam* in Zee Telugu. Siddharth also did serials like *Matti Gajulu*, *Kunkuma Puvvu*, and *Swati Chinukulu*.

CINEMA DEBUT

Siddharth says his entry was unexpected. "After my graduation, I started preparing for the Integrated Common Entrance Test (ICET) exam. At that time, one of my friends advised me to attend a movie audition. Till then I have never acted in a single short film but tried my hand at the audition nevertheless. It ended up

going well for me as, among the 700 people who turned up for the audition, I was selected for the lead role in *3G Love*. Later, I did movies like *Dagudumutha Dandakor* and *Nenu Naa Friends*. Director Krish sir, who produced the movie *Dagudumutha Dandakor*, encouraged me a lot in movies."

TELEVISION ENTRY

Even though he made his acting debut with movies, Siddharth has always been interested in serials. He shares, "I love serials more than cinema. Anuradha madam of Zee Telugu encouraged me to work in serials. The family drama *Rakta Sambhandam*, where I play the role of Aditya, has already completed 500 episodes. Aditya, in the beginning of the series, is energetic but becomes more composed after he falls in love. Hence the show portrays different shades in acting."

BOY NEXT DOOR

Siddharth said that he is getting movie offers but he is not interested as he is busy getting more out of the television. He says, "I'm very happy to be a part of the television broadcast industry. I am being offered movie roles but if I go back to movies then it might affect my schedule regarding my work in

serials. For now, I'm only focussed on acting in serials and I might move to movies in the future. Many know me as the boy next door due to my roles in serials and I'm loving it. Where ever I go people recognise me and appreciate my work. I am very happy with this."

CELEBRITY STATUS

About finding stardom, Siddharth says, "I never take the celebrity status I have for granted and I am always myself no matter where I go. Whenever I go out with my wife, Vishnupriya — who is an actress in serials such as *Iddaru Ammayilu*, *Kunkuma Puvvu* and *Nuvve Kavali* — people come up and ask for selfies and we are more than happy to oblige."

When asked about his dream role in serials or movies, Siddharth says that he doesn't aim for a particular kind of role but whatever role he plays he wants to do it with utmost dedication. He says that he loves to watch Prabhas act. He recollected the time when he used to watch the superstar's movies during his college days in Bheemavaram with his friends.

AUDIENCE FOR EVERY MEDIUM

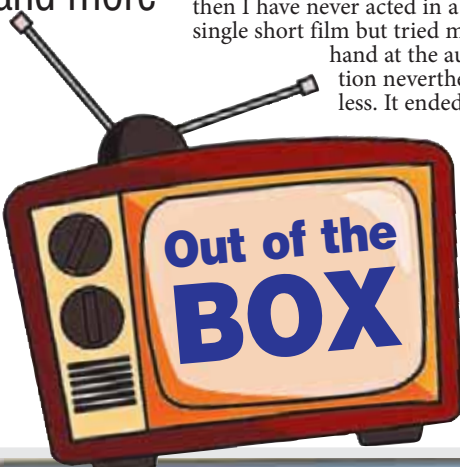
Siddharth says that every

broadcast platform be it cinema, television, OTT has its own fan base. He shares, "In my opinion, every streaming platform has its own audience. Nowadays the content in serials is great and doesn't lag. All serials are shot and edited mimicking movies and that has created enthusiasm among audience to watch the next episode too. I believe the competition among serials has become more when compared to movies fighting over box-office collections."

CRAZY COUPLES

In his free time, Siddharth spends time having fun with his gang. He shares, "Whenever we get time from shooting, Vishnupriya and me, along with our friends from work, spend time together by going out and doing fun activities. We have four pairs in the gang and we named it the Crazy Couples."

Siddharth says that along with other TV actors like Meghana, he does his share of charity regularly by helping NGOs with needy things. Advising budding actors, he says, "For every actor it's a do or die situation when one enters the industry. I suggest budding actors not to take anything light and give 100 per cent in every chance you get."



what's brewing?

PARTY



● Sushma ● Kushboo



● Nidhi Agerwal



● Simran



● Sravani



● Kritva



● Gopi Krishna, Murali Krishna and Vaibhav



● Sunayana



● Nazya Khan

ORNATE AFFAIR

Manepally Jewellers, on Tuesday, launched its fourth branch at Dilukhnagar where it showcased an impressive array of creative traditional designer jewellery. Actress Nidhi Agerwal inaugurated the showroom along with directors of Manepally Jewellers, Murali Krishna and Gopi Krishna.

Photos by SV Chary

CITY GUIDE

COMEDY



OH HELLO!

● Crowd favourite Rahul Dua starts his country tour again, this time travelling solo with his brand new stand up special 'Oh Hello!' He will be touring through multiple venues in the city between January 12 and January 25.

PICHLI IKKIS SAAL

● Presented by Udaan Performing Arts, 'Pichle Ikki Saal', is a drama that revolves around several topics that are crucial to the youth. Several issues such as insecurities, pollution, unemployment, addiction to technology, drugs, relationships problems, ethics and morals, parental and peer pressure, need for freedom, perils of capitalism, education, and much more. The play will be performed at Lamakaan on January 11 at 7.30 pm.



DISCOURSE ON MARGINALISED

● A discussion on 'Sex, gender and intersectionality: a discourse on the marginalised' will be held on January 11 at Phoenix Arena from 4 pm.



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



EK DURACHARI RAJA

● Shudrka Hyderabad is staging a play Ek Durachari Raja on January 19 at Lamakaan from 7:30 pm. Ek Durachari Raja, has drawn from Camus' 'Caligula' the concept of deification of emperors which was common to the pagan world, the Greek and Macedonian kings.



SPLENDOR OF MASTERS

● Banyan Tree's Splendor of Masters aims at showcasing a bouquet of maestros from the world of Indian music in combinations that are not only rare but also aesthetic and enriching. Every year this festival has received an overwhelming response from the music lovers from various cities. The event will be organised at Shipkala Veda on January 25 at 6 pm.



HOME

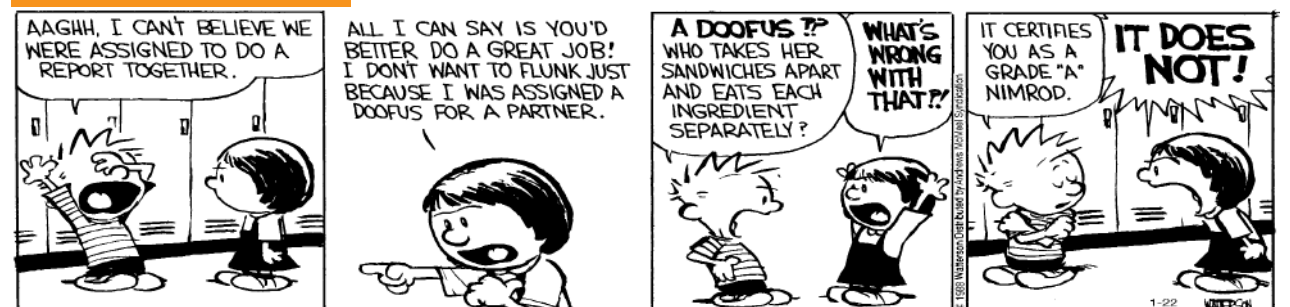
● Home is a 2009 French documentary film by Yann Arthus-Bertrand. The film is almost entirely composed of aerial shots of various places on Earth. It shows the diversity of life on Earth and how humanity is threatening the ecological balance of the planet. It will be featured at Lamakaan on January 15 at 7 pm.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



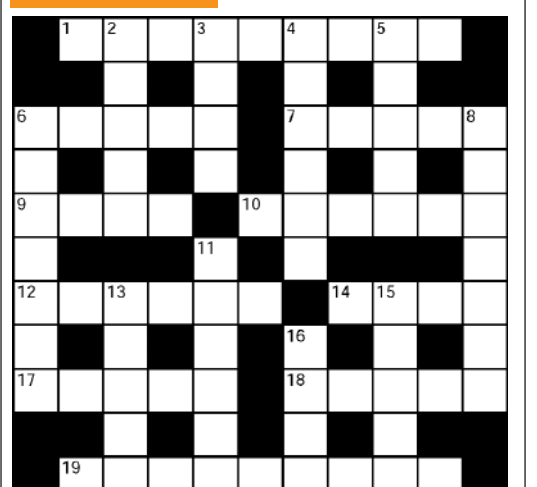
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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

- Not remembered
- A brass musical instrument blown in the army
- Time of darkness
- Very small
- This is made from cream
- A symbol on playing cards
- Wear this on a foot
- Lift up
- A word of greeting
- Allowed
- Seller of meat
- A kind of long bomb fired under the sea to sink ships
- A small river
- Similar
- Cut exactly into two pieces
- Injured by a gun

DOWN

- A keyboard instrument
- Leaves
- Poke this out at someone you don't like
- Two times six minus four

SOLUTION

M	T	R	O	A	S
A	N	G	R	I	E
G	A	R	D	E	N
R	A	C	E	B	A
J	A	S	S	I	I
N	O	R	T	H	E
C	O	M	P	O	S

RAVIPUDI IS JANDHYALA'S 'EKALAVYA SHISYA'



Anil Ravipudi speaks to NAGARAJ GOUD about how he came up with the story of *Sarileru Neekevvaru*, his rapport with Mahesh Babu, take on critics and more

After wrapping up the Jodhpur leg filming of *Supreme*, his second directorial, Anil Ravipudi was heading back to Hyderabad in train when he met a soldier whose jovial nature inspired him to come up with the idea of *Sarileru Neekevvaru*. "I found him to be peculiar. Generally, soldiers come across as tough individuals but here was a guy who was cracking jokes in Godavari accent. I've understood from him that soldiers are tough when the situation demands it, but otherwise are quite laid back and jovial. I've taken that element and used it to pen the characterisation of Mahesh Babu in *Sarileru Neekevvaru*," says Ravipudi in an exclusive with *The Pioneer*. The journey helped him to come up with 35 minutes of the story, which he narrated to Mahesh Babu during the making of *F2* itself. "He gave his in-principle nod to the story in 2018 itself but it wasn't until last February when he told me that he is ready to do the film, even though he hadn't heard the complete story yet. I spent the next three-and-half months finishing the script. Around 20 days before the shoot, Mahesh heard the whole story. What attracted him to the story is how the behaviour of an Army man changes when he goes back to his civilian life. His part strikes a balance between being emotional in one minute and turning funny in the next," the director shares.

Once criticised for being a one-dimensional actor, Mahesh shed that tag with films like *Khaleja* and *Dookudu*, where his comic timing received much praise. However, Ravipudi's brand of comedy is different and it took the actor a couple of days to get adjusted to the director's style of writing. "But once he got a hang of it, it was a cakewalk for him," he says, adding that one of the best qualities that Mahesh has is the freedom he gives to his director. "Also, he never made me feel like I was working with a superstar. He treated me like his younger brother and would often crack jokes. As an actor, he is ready to give multiple takes as long as the director is content. He has immense respect for a director."

The actor at the pre-release event said that shooting for the film was the most fun he ever had on sets and that he has never seen a more positive director than Anil. Commenting on it, the director says, he believes in being positive and his sets reflect the same. "Even if someone admonishes me, I wouldn't get back at him in a similar tone. I would rather request them to tell me clearly what they think I did wrong. Generally, if someone gets angry, they yell. However, if I get angry, I eat. Seeing my eating habits, Mahesh *garu* once playfully mocked me saying, 'You eat too much. See your paunch?' In fact, for dubbing when I went at 3 pm to his house — where he constructed a state-of-the-art dubbing facility — he would first jokingly offer me snacks first. Then around 5.30 pm, he would be the first one to cheekily call for a snacks break."

The film marks veteran actress Vijaya Shanti's comeback to films after 13 years. Ravipudi first approached her to play Ravi Teja's mother in *Raja-The Great*. Although she didn't sign it, the meeting helped him know that the actor-turned-politician was willing to do a film if she comes across a nice story. Yet it "was difficult" for him to get her on board for *Sarileru Neekevvaru*. She was busy with politics and was not in a mood to even entertain the thought of settling down for a story narration. However, he



had his way at the end of the day. "I've told her to listen to the story once and then decide. I was confident that if she listens to it, she would not say no. She heard it, liked her character arc and the whole story as well," he recalls.

His films have been criticised for being over the top and lacking a strong story. While he admits to take criticism in a positive way, he doesn't agree that his films have no stories and his sequences are an extension of *Jabardasth* comedy skits. "If films have no story in the first place, nobody would watch them that too by paying Rs 150 for a ticket. The films I've done with Kalyanram, Sai Dharam Tej and Ravi Teja have turned out to be their career best. If some believe that scenes from my films are an extension of *Jabardasth* skits, they would rather watch *Jabardasth* at home, right? We can't make films that please 100 people. I have 70 of them liking my films and I make films for them. Now if I experiment tomorrow, people would criticise me anyway, saying that I should've stuck to my strong points."

All his previous films have been money spinners and Ravipudi is sure that one day,

he might taste failure. But he wants to delay it as long as he can; may be sometime before he retires. "If you make the same films again and again, audience will feel bored. Which is why I ensure that my lead characterisations vary from film to film despite the fact that I've made commercial films," he reveals his *mantra*, adding that he is a fan of veteran writer-director Jandhyala. "He was associated with dishing out healthy comedy films. He was the pioneer to have introduced unique mannerisms to characters. I'm his *Ekalavya Shisya*."

He hasn't committed to his next yet. He admits to be in talks for *F3* and adds that Dil Raju has even asked him to consider remaking *F2* in Hindi. However, he wants to see the result of *Sarileru Neekevvaru* and decide his next course of action. Megastar Chiranjeevi praised him to the sky at the pre-release event of *Sarileru*, making many wonder if there's a combination on the cards. While no meeting to this end prevailed, he is ready to jump at the opportunity to direct the megastar. Does he have a story? "I can prepare one in three to four months' time," he signs off.

If films have no story in the first place, nobody would watch them that too by paying Rs 150 for a ticket. The films I've done with Kalyanram, Sai Dharam Tej and Ravi Teja have turned out to be their career best. If some believe that scenes from my films are an extension of *Jabardasth* skits, they would rather watch *Jabardasth* at home, right? We can't make films that please 100 people. I have 70 of them liking my films and I make films for them. Now if I experiment tomorrow, people would criticise me anyway, saying that I should've stuck to my strong points

Vamsi gifts Maruthi a Range Rover



Filmmaker Maruthi, who is basking in the success of *Prathiroju Pandage*, has been presented with a Range Rover Velar by the film's producer Vamsi. Although it didn't receive favourable reviews from the critics, *Prathiroju Pandage*, released on December 20, was a box-office smash, collecting a share of Rs 30 crores in the first two weeks. Its theatricals were valued at Rs 18 crore and it is still drawing decent footfall. Reacting to Vamsi's gesture, Maruthi tweeted, "Everyday is a festival if one has a friend like you." In fact,

Vamsi along with Pramod and Bunny Vas gifted the director a Jaguar car after the phenomenal success of *Bhale Bhale Magadivoy* in 2015. Meanwhile, the director, we hear, has decided to go big for his next. Although he was in talks with D.V.V. Danayya to launch his son Kalyan next, source say he told the producer that he can't take up the offer now. His next too will be a joint production venture between GA2 Pictures and UV Creations and might feature an A-listener in the lead. Mahesh Babu's sister Manjula and Dil Raju have also given advances to Maruthi long back.



Thammareddy is proud of PALASA 1978

After premier production houses Geetha Arts and UV Creations have come forward to distribute *Palasa 1978*, buzz around it has shot up. At a promotional event of the film in Hyderabad on Wednesday, film's presenter Thammareddy Bharadwaj said that he, except for giving the unit moral support, didn't do much more than that. "Director Karuna Kumar steered the ship from start to finish. I was narrated the story by him before he took the film to floors but he shot it better. He deserves high praise for directing it as a pure emotional drama. I'm extremely happy to be a part of the film and I can proudly vouch to audience that we will visit theatres with a good film," Thammareddy said.

Singer-musician Kaala Bhairava, who is riding high on success of *Mathu Vadalara*, is the film's music composer.

I had complete details about the project, I ensured that Karuna Kumar gets signed on by GA2 and UV. Seeing him, I was reminded of myself during the *Ee Rojullo* days. *Palasa 1978* was a tough subject to deal but he made a great film out of it. It will be Tollywood's *Asuran*. Immediately afterwards I made Allu Aravind *garu* watch it. He liked it immensely and later came on board to distribute it," Maruthi said.

Palasa 1978 is a crime period drama which tells the story of two singers and dancers who take to rowdiness. Set in the backdrop of cashew plantation and industry — which is famous in Palasa — their rise and fall is narrated in a gritty way. The story spans from 1978 to 2018. Shot completely in a start-to-finish schedule of 40 days, including songs and action sequences, the film features Rakshith, Thiruveer, Nakshatra (Rajdooth fame), Praveen, Raghu Kunche, Vijaya Ramaraju and Mirchi Madhavi in key roles.

A colourful launch

Announced last December, *Colour Photo*, featuring Sunil, Chandini Chowdary and Suhas in the lead roles, was launched in Hyderabad on Wednesday. For the traditional *muhurat* shot, *Care of Kancharapalem* director Venkatesh Maha switched on the camera,

while *Agent Sai Srinivasa Athreya* helmer Swaroop sounded the clapper. The script was handed over to film's debutant director Masala Sundeeb by Sunil. Sai Dharam Tej, Panja Vaishnav Tej, Gopi Mohan and Pavan Sadineni too were spotted at the event and extended their wishes to the film's team.

A romantic comedy set in the backdrop of an engineering college in 1995, *Colour Photo* is a joint production venture between Sai Rajesh, Shravan Konka and Benny Muppaneni.

Singer-musician Kaala Bhairava, who is riding high on success of *Mathu Vadalara*, is the film's music composer.



Salman gifts Sudeep a luxury car

Bollywood superstar Salman Khan gifted his *Dabangg 3* co-star Kichcha Sudeep a luxury car, that costs over Rs 1 crore, after the success of the film. According to reports, Salman gifted a Rs 1.54-crore BMW car to actor Sudeep who played the villain in the third installment of the *Dabangg* franchise. Sudeep took to Instagram and shared photographs of the new car along with Salman and said it was an honour to work with the

Bharat star. He captioned the image: "Good always happens when you do good. @beingsalmankhan sir made me believe this line further when this surprise landed at home along with him. BMW M5... A sweetest gesture. Thank you for the love you have showered on me and my family sir. It was an honour to have worked with you and to have had you visit us." The film also stars Sonakshi Sinha and Saiee Manjrekar. — IANS



Improved Thakur becomes better T20 bowler

PTI ■ INDORE

Having worked considerably on his skill-sets, speedster Shardul Thakur feels that he has become a "better T20 bowler" compared to what he was a couple of years back.

Thakur featured in his first T20I in 22 months. The figures of 3/23 showed that there has been a marked improvement in his death bowling since the 2018 Nidahas T20 Trophy in Sri Lanka where he was a batsman's delight.

"I feel T20 is such a short format, there are always going to be ups and downs. The more you play, the more experienced you get and you keep learning. Whereas first-class and Test cricket are formats where you have time to think about your game but in T20 you don't have that time," Thakur said following India's seven-wicket win against Sri Lanka.

Playing IPL regularly over the past couple of seasons has been one of the reasons for his success, feels Thakur.

"So whenever you practice, you need to add to your strengths and keep bettering your skills. Over a period of time, while practising I have been developing my skills and brushing it up. Playing last two-three years in the IPL, and domestic cricket, I have gotten better," Thakur said.

Like all the young pacers, Thakur also spoke about the contribution from Indian team's bowling coach Bharat Arun as it's difficult to manage sessions with a personal coach in a heavy duty cricket calendar.

"At this point, it is very difficult to work with a particular coach because I am in and out of the Indian team. Sometimes I play for Mumbai, then Chennai Super Kings. Now I am again with the Indian team. But recently, our bowling coach (India) Bharat Arun has been really helpful," said Thakur.

He picked all his wickets against Sri Lanka in the penultimate (19th) over and his plan was to keep things simple.

"I just had to bowl as many dot balls (that) I could. Luckily, I got three wickets there. It is satisfying. I have been working hard for it. When it pays off in an international game, it makes me really happy," said the Mumbai pacer.

Sri Lanka could only manage 142 for nine, which India chased down comfortably. Thakur said it was a below-par total considering the conditions.

"The pitch was very good. It was about 170-180 wicket. I don't think it was difficult to score runs on that pitch. There was no dew also today."

He also praised fellow fast bowler Navdeep Saini, who too impressed on Tuesday.

"He was really good in this game. The way he uses his bouncers and yorkers is creditable. He was also bowling with some gas," added Thakur.



Indian pacer Shardul Thakur prepares to bowl during India's nets session

Indian Cricket Team/Instagram

'Prasidh can be 'surprise package' in T20 WCup'

PTI ■ INDORE

Indian captain Virat Kohli on Tuesday hinted that Karnataka pacer Prasidh Krishna, who turns out for Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL, could be a "surprise package" going into the T20 World Cup.

On a day when his lead pacer Jasprit Bumrah returned from a long injury layoff, Kohli spoke about the options at his disposal as India geared up for the mega event, to be held in Australia later this year.

"I think there'll be one player who will be a surprise package. Prasidh Krishna is someone who has bowled really well in domestic cricket," Kohli said after India's seven-wicket win.

Given that the skipper has mentioned his name, the 23-year-old could be part of the team for the upcoming New Zealand tour.

For the uninitiated, besides his exploits at the domestic circuit, Krishna showed composure while



Karnataka pacer Prasidh Krishna PK/Instagram

bowling the Super Over in a high-stakes IPL game against Delhi Capitals last year.

Udana virtually out of 3rd T20

PTI ■ INDORE

Sri Lanka head coach Mickey Arthur has indicated that left-arm pacer Isuru Udana is unlikely to feature in the third and final T20 against India in Pune tomorrow after sustaining a back injury during a warm-up session.

Sri Lanka missed Udana's services while defending a meagre 143 against India on Tuesday after the bowler injured his back just before Sri Lanka

went out to bowl.

"Look, I'm no doctor. He is in a hell of a lot of pain in the dressing room. What the diagnosis is I honestly don't know. I just hope we can get him back for the West Indies series," Sri Lanka coach Mickey Arthur said.

With Sri Lanka having a packed calendar, Arthur doesn't want to risk Udana, who has been one of Sri Lanka's best T20 bowlers in recent times.

"We've got so much

cricket... the middle of February. I even think that could be a push. So, yeah, I just hope the best for him. It's something in the back," added the South Africa.

Sri Lanka did not pick the experienced Angelo Mathews for the second game in a row. Mathews has made a T20 comeback after 16 months. Asked if he could play the final game in Pune, Arthur said: "After the batting performance, everybody has a chance of playing."

KL knows how to build innings

PTI ■ INDORE

India opener KL Rahul feels he has got "a lot better" at reading the game and building his innings, the secret to his consistent performance in the white ball formats.

Rahul is enjoying a good run in limited overs cricket having hit two hundreds and three half centuries in the ODIs and to top it up, three more fifty plus scores in T20s in

2019. "I've just been getting runs and the reading of the game has gotten a lot better and knowing how to build my innings again," Rahul said after India's victory.

"I felt that was lacking and I always knew I had the game to get the runs and it was just a matter of spending time in the middle. Really happy to carry on the same way," Rahul added.

Rahul can put Dhawan under pressure: Gambhir

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India opener Gautam Gambhir reckons that Shikhar Dhawan would be under pressure to keep his place as opener in the Indian team since KL Rahul is doing extremely well.

Dhawan, making a comeback to the team after two months due to a knee injury, scratched his way to a 30-ball-32 while Rahul struck a 32-ball 45 as India chased down a modest target of 143 in the second T20 against Sri Lanka.



"Rahul is in unbelievable form. It amazes me every time I see Rahul bat, that, why didn't he play the same way in Test cricket. With the kind of quality he possesses, he is someone who

can get you a 50-ball 100 in Test cricket as well. The kind of shots he has is superb," Gambhir said during a post-match show for host broadcasters Star Sports.

Gambhir indirectly suggested that Rahul is better suited to partner Rohit.

"Shikhar Dhawan looked rusty but it's a good thing that he got some runs under his belt. It will help him when he walks out to bat in the next game. Had he got out early, the pressure would have been more," Gambhir said.

Career best rank for Labuschagne

PTI ■ DUBAI

India skipper Virat Kohli retained his top spot among batsmen while Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane slipped in the latest ICC Test rankings issued on Wednesday.

With 928 points, Kohli is way ahead of second-placed Australian maestro Steve Smith (911).

Pujara was placed sixth, down one rung, with 791 points, while Rahane occupied the ninth spot after slipping a couple of positions with 759 points.

In bowling, India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, returning from an injury layoff, remained static at sixth position with 794 points, while spinner Ravichandran Ashwin (772 points) and seamer Mohammed Shami (771) were ninth and 10th respectively.

Australia's Marnus Labuschagne



Marnus Labuschagne celebrates after century AP

grabbed a career-best third place. The 25-year-old moved up one slot after scores of 215 and 59 in the final Test against New Zealand.

He was the highest scorer in the recently-concluded series with 549 runs, while his five previous Tests that include two at home against Pakistan, have seen him amass 896 runs.

Australian speedster Pat Cummins was at the top of the standings with 904 points ahead of Neil Wagner (852) and West Indies' Jason Holder (830).

Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc equalled a career-best fifth position that he previously achieved in March 2018.

He finished with 15 wickets in the series that included four in Sydney. Spinner Nathan Lyon's 10-wicket haul has helped him advance five places to joint-14th.

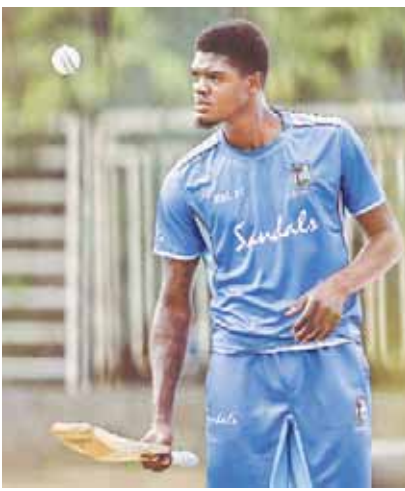
For New Zealand, all-rounder

Colin de Grandhomme was a notable gainer. He moved from 47th to 39th among batsmen and from 36th to 34th among bowlers. Matt Henry has moved up three places to 66th among bowlers.

England all-rounder Ben Stokes has made it into the top 10 for batsmen for the second time in his career after scores of 47 and 72. He moved from 15th to 10th, while his best was ninth, achieved in November last year.

Dom Sibley's maiden Test century has lifted him 87 places to 80th while fast bowler James Anderson's record 28th five-wicket haul in the first innings sees him back in the top 10 for bowlers.

Opener Dean Elgar (up three places to 19th) and Aiden Markram (up one place to 22nd) among batsmen and Anrich Nortje (up 34 places to 62nd) are the notable gainers for South Africa.



Lewis, Joseph script WI win

BRIDGETOWN: Opening batsman Evin Lewis fell agonisingly short of a century as his undefeated 99 helped West Indies to cruise to a five-wicket win over Ireland in the first one-day international at Kensington Oval on Tuesday.

The 28-year-old left-hander made his runs off 99 balls with 13 boundaries and two sixes.

After dismissing Ireland for just 180, the West Indies reached their target with 100 balls to spare.

For Lewis, it was his eighth ODI half-century but he made a gallant attempt to go to what would have been a third century.

With the scores level, he launched Barry McCarthy over extra cover but his hopes of a six to end the game in style fell just inches short.

Earlier, West Indies fast bowler Alzarri Joseph picked up four wickets as Ireland stumbled to 180 all out in the 47th over.

"For me, it's a really good start to the year," said man-of-the-match Joseph.

"It's about putting in the hard work in training and doing the yards.

"I kind of had an idea of how I wanted to bowl today, and I just kept it simple and bowled to my plans."

Wicketkeeper Lorcan Tucker was Ireland's top scorer with 31 as the tourists collapsed following a solid start at Kensington Oval.

The three-match ODI series continues at the same venue today and concludes in Grenada on January 12.

Boult, Latham doubtful for India series

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

New Zealand pace spearhead Trent Boult and wicket-keeper batsman Tom Latham are doubtful starters for the home series against India after the duo suffered fractures in the recently-concluded Test series against Australia.

Boult was ruled out of the final Test after fracturing his right hand and coach Gary Stead said the pacer was "touch-and-go to be available" for the Twenty20 series against India.

"Boult has been resting his broken right-hand and will return to bowling later this week," Stead said in a statement on Wednesday.

"He'll be touch-and-go to be available for the Indian T20 series later this month and we'll continue to monitor him closely over the next few weeks," he added.

The 27-year-old Latham broke his right little finger while claiming the catch of Marnus Labuschagne on day four of the third Test against

Australia in Sydney, ruling him out for days.

"An X-ray has confirmed a fractured finger for Tom Latham. He will require approximately four weeks of rehabilitation after the fracture to his right pinky finger," New Zealand Cricket said in a statement.

The Blackcaps are set to host Men in Blue for a five-match T20 series starting in Auckland on January 24 followed by three ODIs and two Tests.



Saina, Sindhu start with win

KUALA LUMPUR: H S Prannoy stunned world number 10 Kanta Tsuneyama while ace Indian women shuttlers PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal also sailed into the second round of the Malaysia Masters, here on Wednesday.

Prannoy, ranked 26th in the world, took 34 minutes to send Tsuneyama packing with a 21-9, 21-17 win in the first round match.

Prannoy, however, runs into world number one and top seed Japanese Kento Momota, who has been in red-hot form, in the second round today.

Momota defeated another Indian Parupalli Kashyap 21-17, 21-16 in a 43-minute first round match.

World Championships Bronze-medallist B Sai Praneeth and the seasoned Kidambi Srikanth, though, bowed out of the men's sin-



Saina Nehwal celebrates after win in singles events.

Reigning world champion Sindhu, seeded sixth, took just 35 minutes to beat Evgeniya Kosetskaya of Russia 21-15, 21-13 in the

women's singles first round that lasted 35 minutes.

World number six Sindhu will face Aya Oshiro of Japan in the second round.

The other Indian in the fray, London Olympics Bronze medallist Saina needed just 36 minutes to get the better of Belgium's Lianne Tan.

The unseeded Saina brushed aside Tan 21-15, 21-17 in their first meeting against each other.

Both Sindhu and Saina have struggled recently, making a series of early exits with the former failing to defend the World Tour Finals crown last month.

Earlier, Praneeth made a first round exit after going down tamely to Denmark's Rasmus Gemke 11-21, 15-21 while Srikanth lost to Chinese Taipei's Chou Tien Chen 17-21, 5-21 in only 30 minutes. PTI

SINGLES

BOPANNA-KOOLHOF PAIR IN DOHA SEMIS

DOHA: India's Rohan Bopanna and his Dutch partner Wesley Koolhof reached the semifinals of the Qatar Open with a straight set win. The third seed Indo-Dutch team knocked out the Swiss-American duo of Stan Wawrinka and Frances Tiafoe 6-3 6-4. The winners next take on second seeds Henri Kontinen and Franko Skugor, who ousted the American team of Ken and Neal Skupski 6-7(2) 6-4 13-11 in a tough quarterfinal. India's Divij Sharan and his Kiwi partner Artem Sitak had lost the first round 6-7(4) 2-6 to French pair of Jeremy Chardy and Fabrice Martin.

ASHWIN, DK RETURNS IN TN RANJI TEAM

CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu on Wednesday named a strong team comprising ace off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and the experienced Dinesh Karthik and Abhinav Mukund for the next two Ranji Trophy games against Mumbai and Railways. The team led by Vijay Shankar will take on Mumbai at the M A Chidambaram stadium from January 11 while it meets Railways here from January 19. Test discard Murali Vijay, however, is not part of the squad, having missed out since the season-opener against Karnataka at Dindigul.

RAUF, RASHID TAKE HAT-TRICKS IN BBL

MELBOURNE: Rising Pakistan pacer Haris Rauf on Wednesday made it two hat-tricks in the Big Bash League after Rashid Khan, as he snared a treble for his side Melbourne Stars against Sydney Thunder. Haris produced three excellent deliveries in the last over of Thunder's innings to pick up the wickets of Matthew Gilkes, Callum Ferguson and Daniel Sams to end on a high with figures of 3/23 in four overs. Earlier in the day, Afghanistan leggie Rashid once again proved why he is one of the best in the business as he registered his third career T20 hat-trick against Sydney Sixers.

NEW DELHI TO HOST ITTF EC MEETING

NEW DELHI: The national capital will host the Executive Committee meeting of the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) on Friday and Saturday. This will be second time the country will be hosting such a meeting. The previous EC meeting of the ITTF was held in New Delhi way back in 1987 when Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) played host to the World Championships. The EC meeting, to be chaired by ITTF president Thomas Weikert, will discuss the development of table tennis in India, among other issues, a TTFI release said.

ANIL IN LIST OF UMPIRES FOR U-19 WC

DUBAI: Anil Chaudhary is the lone Indian named in the list of 19 match officials, including 16 umpires, for the upcoming ICC U-19 World Cup starting in South Africa from January 17. The 54-year-old Chaudhary has so far officiated in 20 ODIs and 27 T20Is. He previously has been part of multiple U-19 World Cups. The ICC named three match referees for the tournament, with former Sri Lanka seamer Graeme Labrooy to officiate alongside South Africa's Shaib Wadvalia and England's Phil Whitticase. Rashid Riaz Waqar will be the TV umpire for the first of 48 games in the tournament.

ZIMBABWE TO HOST SL IN TWO-TEST SERIES

HARARE: Zimbabwe will host Sri Lanka for a two-Test series later in January. The first match of the series will begin from January 19 and the second from January 27. Both the matches will be played at the Harare Sports Club. On Tuesday, Zimbabwe Cricket announced Sean Williams as their Test captain while Chamu Chibhabha was picked to lead the national team in ODIs and T20Is on an "interim" basis.

SHANGHAI TO HOST 2021 CLUB WC FINAL

SHANGHAI: Shanghai will host the opening ceremony and final of the expanded 2021 Club World Cup in China, state media said. Eight Chinese cities will stage matches for the FIFA-organised tournament, which will for the first time involve 24 teams rather than the current seven. Chinese sports authorities officially launched preparations on Tuesday for the Club World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian Cup. The other cities staging matches in June and July 2021 are Tianjin, Guangzhou, Wuhan, Shenyang, Jinan, Hangzhou and Dalian.

BREWSTER JOINS SWANSEA ON LOAN

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool forward Rhian Brewster has joined Championship side Swansea on loan for the remainder of the season. The 19-year-old, who shot to fame as the top scorer when England won the under-17 World Cup in 2017, is highly rated at Anfield but has found first-team opportunities hard to come by. He will now link up once again with Swansea boss Steve Cooper, who was manager of the England Under-17 World Cup-winning side. He will be available for Sunday's derby clash with rivals Cardiff as he looks to help guide the club back into the Premier League.

LEAVE TEST CRICKET ALONE, SAYS BOTHAM

CAPE TOWN: Legendary all-rounder Ian Botham has urged the ICC to leave Test cricket "alone" after England's thrilling win against South Africa in the final hour of the fifth day. He is the latest among the illustrious bandwagon of cricketers who have spoken against the proposed change for the 2023-2031 cycle. "Well played England...Such a good idea to end 5day test cricket...Full house watching cricket at its best!! Leave the flag ship of cricket alone it's a real test of character, skill, guts, stamina & ability...It's real cricket for real players!!! Leave it Alone!!!!!!," Botham tweeted. AGENCIES

AICF appoints retired HC Chief Justice to look into Bengal Chess controversy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Chess Federation on Wednesday appointed former Kolkata High Court Chief Justice Jyotirmoy Bhattacharya to probe the corruption allegations against Bengal Chess Association (BCA) officials.

Grandmaster Dibyendu Barua had accused BCA Secretary Atanu Lahiri of engaging in corruption and diverting funds meant for chess promotion to his company Global Chess.

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) had also found that the fund Utilization certificate furnished by Bengal Chess for the national sub-junior chess championship 2018 was forged.

The AICF has also filed an FIR in the case as per the decision taken in GB meeting and has also requested

SAI to do a forensic check by a government agency on the alleged fund Utilization certificate.

"AICF's move came following its General Body meeting (GBM) held in Bhopal on December 28," a release said.

"The AICF general body had taken a strong note of especially the second finding and a motion for a thorough probe in the matter was passed," the release added.

Barua had also accused Lahiri of banning several top players for criticising his handling of the chess affairs.

AICF Secretary Bharat Singh Chauhan welcomed the appointment of the retired Kolkata High Court Chief Justice to conduct the inquiry.

"I welcome the development. It is going to be a fair inquiry," Chauhan said.