

**OPINION 6**  
 A NEVER-ENDING  
 CRISIS

**MONEY 8**  
 GDP TO GROW BY 5.5 PC IN FY21,  
 BUT RISKS PERSIST

**SPORTS 12**  
 LIGHTNING  
 QUICK

HYDERABAD, THURSDAY JANUARY 23, 2020; PAGES 12-13

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 WORLD OF SCI-FI:  
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## KARNATAKA CRICKET BODY FINED RS 50,000 FOR USING PLASTIC CUPS

City civic body Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) levied a penalty of Rs 50,000 on Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) for using single use plastic cups during the recent India-Australia one day international match. "Despite many awareness meetings, BBMP has found that single use plastic cups were used during yesterday's cricket match and has fined KSCA Rs 50,000 as penalty," tweeted the civic body commissioner B.H. Anil Kumar.

## WIFE, CHILDREN PITCH IN TO ENSURE HAT-TRICK FOR KEJRIWAL

It was in October 2019 that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's daughter Harshita took leave from her job and decided to campaign for her father. Now, wife Sunita and son Pulkit have also hit the streets to campaign for the AAP national convener who is eyeing a hat-trick in elections. Kejriwal is contesting for the third time from the New Delhi Assembly constituency and is aiming to become the Delhi Chief Minister for the third time. The family keeps a low profile and stays away from the limelight. "It was my decision to take leave and campaign for my father," said Harshita.

## CABINET NOD FOR EXTENSION TO OBC SUB-CATEGORISATION PANEL

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved an extension of six months in the tenure of a commission set up to examine the issue of sub-categorisation within Other Backward Classes in the Central List. Now the term of the panel will be till July 31 2020. This is the 8th extension to the commission, whose term would otherwise have expired on January 31. Approval was also granted to adding more ToR to study various entries in the 'Central List of OBCs' and make recommendations.

## AS PART OF GAGANYAAN, FIRST UNMANNED MISSION THIS DECEMBER

Ahead of the launch of India's maiden human spaceflight venture 'Gaganyaan' in December 2021, the Indian Space Research Organisation will undertake two unmanned missions in December 2020 and June 2021, ISRO chairman K Sivan said on Wednesday. Addressing the inaugural session of a symposium on 'Human Spaceflight and Exploration - Present Challenges and Future Trends', Sivan said the Gaganyaan mission not only aims at India's maiden human flight to the space but also setting up a new space station for 'continuous space human presence'.



**TRS misused  
 official  
 machinery, says  
 BJP state unit  
 chief K Laxman**

4



**Tharoor  
 alleges  
 financial  
 irregularities  
 by AAP govt**

5



**China virus  
 outbreak may  
 wallop economy,  
 financial  
 markets**

8

### TODAY

**ALMANAC**  
 Month & Paksham:  
 Paush & Krishna Paksha  
 Panchangam  
 Tithi : Chaturdashi: 02:16 am (Next Day)  
 Nakshatram: Puna Ashadhe: 01:20 am (Next Day)  
 Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start  
 any important work)  
 Rahukalam: 01:51 pm - 03:15 pm  
 Yamagandam: 06:53 am - 08:16 am  
 Varjyam: 10:20 am - 12:00 pm  
 Gulika: 09:40 am - 11:04 am  
 Good Time: (to start any important work)  
 Amritakalam: 08:20 pm - 10:00 pm  
 Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:05 pm - 12:50 pm

**HYDERABAD  
 WEATHER**  
 Forecast: Clear with periodic clouds  
 Temp: 30/17  
 Humidity: 66%  
 Sunrise: 06:49  
 Sunset: 06:06  
 Current Weather Conditions  
 Updated January 22, 2020 5:00 PM

# SC refuses to stay CAA, NPR

● Centre gets 4 weeks to respond; pleas may be referred to larger Constitution bench

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court made it clear on Wednesday that it would not stay the operation of Citizenship (Amendment) Act without hearing the Centre and said that a five-judge Constitution bench would decide its validity.

Seeking response of the central government in four weeks on a batch of pleas challenging the CAA, the top court also restrained high courts in the country from proceedings with pending petitions on the issue. "We are not going to pass any ex-parte order without hearing Centre on the aspects of interim relief," a bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said.

The observation assumes significance as a battery of senior lawyers led by Kapil Sibal and A M Singhvi vehemently sought judicial intervention and demanded that the operation of the CAA and National Population Register (NPR) processes be stopped for a cou-



The Supreme Court would hear some of the petitions in-chambers for deciding the modalities and thereafter a five-judge bench would be constituted after four weeks for day-to-day hearing on a batch of 143 petitions

ple of months till apex court decides the petitions. Taking note of vehement opposition of the Centre, represented by Attorney General K K Venugopal and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, the bench observed "according to the government this relief is akin to

granting stay on the Act". The bench, also comprising Justices S Abdul Nazeer and Sanjiv Khanna, said: "The matter is uppermost in everybody's mind. We will form a five-judge bench and then list the case. Issue notice on all such petitions in which notices were

not issued. Attorney General K K Venugopal seeks time to file reply in four weeks."

It said the court would hear some of the petitions in-chambers for deciding the modalities and thereafter a five-judge bench would be constituted after four weeks for day-to-day hearing on a batch of 143 petitions.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for some petitioners challenging the validity of CAA, said the issue be referred to a Constitution bench and the NPR exercise be postponed by a couple of months. He also urged the bench to put on hold the operation of the CAA. The bench said, "Even we think that the matter should be heard by a Constitution bench." Venugopal said that after the last hearing on December 18, the apex court had issued notice to Centre in 60 matters but thereafter 83 fresh petitions has been filed and copies of many of them were not served upon them.

Continued on Page 2

# KTR clinches deal for Telangana in Davos

● Piramal Group to invest Rs 500 crore in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana delegation headed by Industries Minister KT Ramarao, on the second day of its Davos trip, clinched a major deal with major business conglomerate Piramal Group.

After a series of deliberations at the Telangana Pavilion in Davos, the Piramal Group agreed to investments totalling about Rs 500 crore over the next three years in the state. The proposed investment is expected to increase production capacities with creation of new manufacturing blocks, warehouse expansion, and utility augmentation, among other project facilities.

Minister KTR welcomed the decision of Piramal Pharma to expand their operations in the state and assured that the government would provide support to the group. Piramal Pharma is keen on



Telangana Industries Minister KT Ramarao with Google CEO Sundar Pichai and American attorney and trade expert Karan Krishna Bhatia in Davos

adding capacities through acquisitions in and around Hyderabad, Telangana region with an aim to support API manufacturing, run CSR activities in the areas of primary

healthcare (Piramal Swasthya) & safe drinking water (Piramal Sarvajal) in and around Digwal village.

Continued on Page 3

## MUNICIPAL POLLS

# Above 70 per cent turnout recorded

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The total percentage of votes polled in the municipal elections held on Wednesday is 70.26, according to the State Election Commission. Polling for 120 municipalities and nine municipal corporations across Telangana commenced at 7 am on Wednesday and ended at 5 pm peacefully. About 68.8% men and 69.94% women exercised their franchise. In all, 3.49 lakhs were polled.

The average polling percentage in the municipalities

and municipal corporations at 3.00 PM was 67.46%. At 5-00 pm, the poll percentage was 71.37% in 129 ULBs. At 95.13%, the highest polling was recorded in Pochampally, while the lowest -- 39.65% was recorded in Nizampet. In all, 49 ULBs recorded 80 percent voting and only 3 ULBs within ORR recorded less than 50%.

All corporations except Nizampet recorded over 50 percent polling. By 5 pm, 35.5 lakh votes were cast, out of the total 49.74 lakh voters.

Continued on Page 2



## Cong candidate bites TRS nominee's nose

PNS ■ NIZAMPAT

In a bizarre incident, a Congress contestant in municipal elections on Wednesday bit the nose of rival TRS candidate during a clash between them. According to reports, the fight began with fisticuffs after the candidates blamed each other for impersonation in the 32nd ward in Bodhan municipality. While raining blows on each other, Congress nominee Ilyas bit the nose of TRS candidate Imran, inflicting a deep, bleeding injury.

# Owaisi dares Shah to debate on CAA with 'bearded man'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

After Home Minister Amit Shah threw a challenge to leaders like Rahul Gandhi for a public debate over CAA, AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi joined issue and wanted the former to discuss the law with him instead of others.

Addressing a rally in Karimnagar district on Tuesday night ahead of the municipal polls on January 25, the Hyderabad MP said the Home Minister called for a public debate on CAA with the opposition even as he asked Shah to debate with him on the legislation.

At a rally in Lucknow in



support of the CAA on Tuesday, Shahhad emphatically said the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) will not be withdrawn and those protesting can continue to do so even as he challenged oppo-

sition leaders for a public debate on the amended legislation.

Accusing the opposition of "misleading" people on the amended citizenship law, Shah threw the challenge for the debate to Rahul Gandhi, Mamata Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party) and Mayawati (Bahujan Samaj Party).

Reacting to Shah's challenge, Owaisi said, "I am here.. debate with me.. why (debate) with these people.. 'Daadi wale se karo na' (Debate with a bearded man). We will talk and debate on CAA, NPR and NRC."

Continued on Page 2

# Centre moves SC for 7-day deadline for hanging convicts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government today asked the Supreme Court for "victim-centric" guidelines in death penalty cases and time-limit for convicts using their options. The rules are skewed towards the convicts, the centre says in its petition amid anger over a delay in the Nirbhaya convicts' hanging.

The petition asks for a modification in SC judgment on rights available to death row convicts and says there should be a time limit to file a petition after the SC rejects the petition.

Continued on Page 2

# Vegetable prices ease in city

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The prices of many vegetables, compared to those a month ago, have eased considerably. Tomato is selling now at Rs 10 a kg. Likewise, several less expensive vegetables from all over Telangana are flooding city markets.

The unseasonal rains that

lashed the state two months ago prompted farmers to take up cultivation of vegetable crops like tomato, lady's finger and ridge gourd. Most of the farmers have harvested bumper crops. Like in the case of onions until recently, tomato was sold at exorbitant rates two months ago.

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# India falls to 51st position in ELU's Democracy Index

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India slipped 10 places to 51st position in the 2019 Democracy Index's global ranking, according to The Economist Intelligence Unit, which cited "erosion of civil liberties" in the country as the primary cause for the downturn.

India's overall score fell from 7.23 in 2018 to 6.90 in

the Index that provides a snapshot of the current state of democracy worldwide for 165 independent states and two territories. On India, the report said, the country dropped ten places in the Democracy Index's global ranking to 51st. The primary cause of the democratic regression was an erosion of civil liberties in the country.

Continued on Page 2

# Council restored by dad YSR haunts son Jagan

L VENKAT RAM REDDY ■ HYDERABAD

Late Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy restored the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council in 2007, after a gap of 22 years.

Now, his son and incumbent Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh YS Jaganmohan Reddy is making swift moves to abolish the same Legislative Council, which is set to complete 13 years in March.

The council was abolished by the erstwhile Telugu Desam government on May 31, 1985 since the then chief minister N T Rama Rao felt that it was redundant and a drain on the state exchequer.

However, it became obvious then that the real reason was that NTR found it difficult to push through controversial pieces of legislation and ratify policy decisions in the Upper House, which was at that time dominated by the Congress.

Incidentally, Jagan is facing

- Late CM YSR restored Legislative Council after 22 yrs
- His son Jagan attempts to dissolve the same after 13 yrs
- NTR dissolved Council in May 1985 to overcome oppn Congress hurdle
- Jagan faces similar situation now as oppn TDP is blocking crucial bills



a problem comparable to that which NTR faced in 1985.

When NTR was chief minister, the opposition Congress blocked important bills of TDP government in the Legislative Council, where it had a majority. NTR had absolute majority in the Assembly. Now, the opposition TDP, which has a majority in the Legislative Council, is blocking important bills introduced by the YSRCP. Incidentally, YSRCP too enjoys absolute majority in the Assembly.

Continued on Page 2

# Govt medical professors skip duties for pvt practice

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Authorities of medical colleges have served show-cause notices on at least 30 associate and assistant professors who have been on leave for over a year now without informing the management. The Directorate of Medical Education (DME) has prepared the ground to sack them from service.

The DME has been exploring ways and means of retrenching them from service without inviting legal wrangles.

The decision has created a



lot of sensation among staff in medical colleges. Senior professors with vast experience

have been on leave for well over one year without intimating the college authorities,

- 30 associate and assistant professors went on 'unauthorised leave' for over a year
- Govt issues notices to sack professors

forcing the DME to take disciplinary action against them.

While some professors have responded to the notices and sent their replies, at least 20 professors appear to have chosen not to respond to the notices. So, grounds are being

Continued on Page 2

MEDARAM JATARA

# Jaggery traders jack up prices

PNS ■ WARANGAL

Jaggery traders have formed into a syndicate and allegedly jacked up the prices of the commodity to exploit the devotees, attending the biggest biennial tribal fair Sammakka-Sarakka festival to be held at Medaram from February 5 to 8. They have increased the prices of the commodity by at least Rs 10 a kg. The measure would help traders earn huge profits.

It is a customary practice of devotees to offer jaggery equal to their weight to the deities. At least nine jaggery traders formed into a syndicate claiming to have the support of an excise official. It has created sensation among the business circles in the area.

At least 150-200 lorries of jaggery, each with a capacity of 17 tonnes or 22 tonnes, are sold during the festival period. Traders and officials becoming hand-in-glove with each other had created a controversy. In case of a 17 tonne lorry (10-



**Traditionally, a devotee offers white jaggery, the quantity of which will be equivalent to their own weight, as thulabaram for fulfilling their desires**

while Warangal district, wholesale jaggery traders are equipped with all necessary equipment.

Traditionally, a devotee offers white jaggery, the quantity of which will be equivalent to their own weight, as 'thulabaram' for fulfilling their desires. As lakhs, sometimes crores, of devotees are expected to arrive at Medaram for the Jatar, and most of them will perform thulabaram, the traders are certain there will be a huge demand for jaggery.

tyre lorry), the profit margin of the trader would be at least Rs 1.70 lakh even if the price of jaggery happened to be hiked by Rs 10 a kg. The devotees have been urging the government officials to take steps to ensure that the traders would

not hike the jaggery price by forming into a syndicate.

During the Jatar, devotees will offer white jaggery, popularly known in the Telugu-speaking states as 'Bangaram', to the presiding deities. Therefore, traders are making

beelines to Karnataka and Maharashtra where the produce is cultivated in large quantities.

The traders hope that scores of devotees will arrive this time as well which would help them get high profit. In erst-

# Telangana Pavilion grabs eyeballs at WEF-2020

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana state Pavilion at Davos has become a centre of attraction for political and business leaders and media representatives attending the WEF. The Pavilion is set up on the main road of Davos called Promenade.

Only three States from India - Telangana, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh have set up exclusive pavilions at Davos. Industries, IT and Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao is leading a delegation from Telangana to World Economic Forum, Davos. The delegation comprises of IT & Industries Principal Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, T Hub CEO Ravi Narayan, and Director Digital Media Dileep Konatham, along with a few other officials.

The Telangana Pavilion has a reception area, a waiting lounge, and two meeting lounges, an exclusive state-of-the-art VR lounge, where visitors can watch a Virtual Reality presentation on Telangana state. The Telangana Pavilion also has been stocked with all relevant collaterals like newsletters, industrial and IT Policy booklets and also Annual Reports of IT & Industries departments.

A branded photography area is set up where the delegates can take a photograph. The pavilion walls have nicely designed graphics with interesting tidbits of information about achievements of Hyderabad city and Telangana state. A separate pantry serves snacks, coffee, juices and other refreshments to the visitors. Head honchos of several global corporations are visiting the Telangana Pavilion here in Davos.



# Hectic day for KTR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

IT and Industries Minister KT Rama Rao held a series of bilateral meetings with global industry leaders at the sidelines of World Economic Forum in Davos on Wednesday. Alphabet Inc. and Google CEO Sundar Pichai and Minister KTR met at a business gathering in Davos. Among a host of topics discussed were Google's current operations in Hyderabad and the scope for future expansion.

Rockwell Automation CEO and president Blake D Moret met KTR at the Telangana Pavilion. Rockwell Automation inc is the largest company in the world that is dedicated to industrial automation and information and has a history of over 100 years.

In another meeting, Takeda Pharma Global Vaccine Business Unit President Dr. Rajeev Venkayya met Minister KTR. During the meeting, the Minister informed that Hyderabad is the pharma and

**Google CEO Sundar Pichai and KTR met at a business gathering in Davos. Among a host of topics discussed were Google's current operations in Hyd and scope for future expansion**

life sciences capital of the country. He also gave an overview of Hyderabad Pharma City, the country's largest Pharma manufacturing hub. Takeda Pharma is a Japan-based R&D-driven global biopharmaceutical company that has a history of 230 years. Major industry leaders including Mahindra and Mahindra Limited Managing Director Pawan K Goenka and KPMG Global Chairman and CEO Bill Thomas also called on Minister KTR. Minister also mentioned that the state already has the presence of several global aerospace and defense companies.



# Vemulavada temple hundi nets Rs 1.51 crore in one week

PNS ■ YADADRI/VEMULAVADA

The Vemulavada Rajarajeswara Swamy temple recorded unprecedented hundi earnings of Rs 1.51 crore during the past one week up to Tuesday, when the hundi offerings were counted.

The hundi offerings included 179 grams of gold, 10.5 kg of silver articles, temple EO Krishnaveni said. The record level temple hundi earnings are

attributed to large turnout of devotees at the temple on account of the Medaram festival.

Meanwhile, a temple staff member was caught redhanded while stealing Rs 9,000 of the hundi offerings concealing the money in his lungi. This apart, the Yadadri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple also earned Rs 1.04 crore in 29 days. The temple hundi offerings include cash, 49 grams of gold and 1.9 kg of silver.

# Council restored by Dad YSR...

Continued from Page 1

It was the Congress government at the Centre, under Rajiv Gandhi's stewardship, that enacted AP Legislative Council (Abolition) Act, despite stiff opposition from state Congress leaders who argued that the scrapping the Council was against the party's interests in the state. Later, in 1990, the then Congress government made a vain attempt to revive the council. Subsequently, the Congress again promised revival of the Council in its manifesto for the

2004 Assembly polls. After snatching power from the Telugu Desam, YSR made fresh efforts to revive the Council.

Basing on a resolution passed by then AP State Legislative Assembly, the UPA government enacted the AP Legislative Council Bill in December 2005 for revival of the council. The Bill received the President's assent in January 2006, but it took almost a year for the Election Commission to complete the formalities for constitution of the Council and for conduct of elections to fill the

seats under various categories in the reconstituted Upper House.

Event the dissolution of the AP Legislative Council is expected to take over a year, considering the procedural norms involved in the process.

The MLCs enjoy the same privileges and perks as the members of the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Council will have five special committees of its own relating to privileges, ethics, rules, papers laid and assurances, while the other committees will be common for both the Houses.

# Owaisi dares Shah...

Continued from Page 1

The CAA allows easier citizenship for Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Parsis and Jains who entered India from three neighbouring countries before 2015 after facing religious persecution. Muslim migrants don't figure on this list.

The AIMIM chief hit out at the BJP over renaming of places, while mentioning about the 'Halwa' ceemony

ahead of the Union budget.

"BJP says it will change names. I want to ask from where did the word halwa originate? It is an Arabic word. It is neither Hindi nor Urdu (word). now remove the Arabic word..They (BJP) say they will (continue to) change names. Inshallah people of the country will change you," the Hyderabad MP said adding "remember I am not halwa.. I am lal mirchi (red chilli)."

# Vegetable prices ease

Continued from Page 1

However, the yield increased by leaps and bounds across the state. Consequently, city markets have been sourcing at least 150-200 lorry loads of tomatoes daily not only from Telangana but also AP, Karnataka and Maharashtra states.

Sourcing of potatoes from Maharashtra as well as capsicum and green chillies from Karnataka is going on in huge quantities, flooding wholesale, retail markets and rythu bazaars.

While tomato is being traded at prices ranging between Rs 10 and Rs 15 a kg, potatoes are being sold at Rs 20 a kg. Ridge gourd and lady's finger are selling at Rs 20 a kg. However, green chillies are selling at rates between Rs 30 and Rs 40 a kg, while capsicum is being sold at Rs 30. Beans and cluster beans are being sold at rates between Rs 25 and Rs 20 a kg.

Inflationary tendencies in vegetable prices have troubled the common man for quite some time. The situation eased following market intervention through imports. Observers say this situation will prevail for about a month, easing prices of some more vegetables.

# Centre moves SC seeking 7-day deadline for hanging...

Continued from Page 1

The four convicts sentenced to death in the 2012 Delhi gang-rape or the 'Nirbhaya' case were initially supposed to hang today, going by a lower court order on January 9.

However, the court declared a new time for execution - 6 am on February 1 - after one of the convicts filed a mercy petition last week.

Under the rules, even after the mercy petition is rejected by

the President, 14 days have to be given to the convict until execution. Last week, the SC also rejected the claim of one of the four Nirbhaya case convicts that he was underage at the time of the incident. The court said an age claim rejected earlier, cannot be raised again.

Pawan Kumar Gupta's plea had been rejected by the Delhi High Court earlier. "How many times will we hear the same things, you have raised it already many times," the court

said, hearing the petition filed on Friday, the day the second date of execution was announced. Nirbhaya's parents are among those who have questioned petitions filed by the convicts at the eleventh hour as a way of delaying the sentence. The young woman who came to be known as Nirbhaya was gang-raped and tortured with an iron rod on a moving bus on December 16, 2012, before being dumped on the road with severe internal injuries.

# Above 70 per cent turnout recorded

Continued from Page 1

Voters turned up in large numbers at polling booths to exercise their franchise. About 55.89% average polling percentage was recorded till 1pm and the turnout was 36.63% till 11 am in 120 municipalities and 9 municipal corporations. The average polling percentage by 9am was 15.40 per cent.

Delay in voting was reported in some polling stations in the erstwhile districts of Nalgonda, Mahabubnagar, Adilabad and in Meerpet Municipality and

Badangpet Corporation. The results will be announced on January 25. The average polling percentage in Dabeerpura by 3pm was 27.31%.

Elections to the Karimnagar Municipal Corporation will be held on January 25 and the results declared two days later.

A total of 12,846 candidates contested from 3,052 municipal wards, including 2,727 wards in 120 municipalities and 325 divisions in nine municipal corporations. About 80 wards reported unanimous win for candidates.

# India falls to 51st position in EIU's Democracy Index

Continued from Page 1

The index is based on five categories -- electoral process and pluralism; the functioning of government; political participation; political culture; and civil liberties.

Based on their total score, the countries are classified as one of four types of regime: "full democracy" (scores greater than 8); flawed democracy -- scores greater than 6 and less than or equal to 8; hybrid regime -- scores greater than 4 and less than or equal to 6; authoritarian regime -- scores less than or equal to 4".

India was included in the

"flawed democracy" category. Meanwhile, China's score fell to 2.26 in the 2019 index, and the country is now ranked 153rd, close to the bottom of the global rankings.

"Over the past year discrimination against minorities, especially in the north-western region of Xinjiang, has intensified. Digital surveillance of the population continued apace in 2019, representing a further constraint on individual freedoms," the report said.

Among other emerging economies, Brazil was ranked 52nd with a score of 6.86, Russia stood at 134th with a score of 3.11.

# Rise in uptake of digital financial services

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana, one of the largest states in India, in terms of the demographics, has lately seen a substantial growth in the uptake of digital financial services. The growth has been recorded through Payworld, an assisted financial services company, which provides a digital platform to semi-urban and rural customers. With close to 2,00,897 retailers registered in their system, Payworld covers 31 districts in Telangana with presence of retailers across major cities in the state.

Payworld data shows that there are over 450 Aadhaar-Enabled Payment (AEPS) transactions per day being undertaken by people in the semi-urban and rural pockets of Telangana.



This number has been on the rise and is increasing constantly close to 70,000 per month. Moreover, money remittance services have been the biggest grosser through Payworld, with an average of 9500 transactions per day with an average ticket size of Rs 2,900.

This clearly indicates that the

rising trend of adopting digital financial services is due to the increase in awareness of these services as well as the simplicity of using them through assisted means. Praveen Dhabhai, COO, Payworld said, "Our entire focus since inception has been to provide complete access of digital financial services to semi-urban

**Payworld data shows that there are over 450 Aadhaar-Enabled Payment transactions per day being undertaken by people in the semi-urban and rural pockets of Telangana**

and rural consumers. We are happy to witness that the efforts have paid off and there is a great uptake of our services in one of the largest States in India, Telangana."

# Govt medical professors skip duties...

Continued from Page 1

According to official information, at least 30 associate and assistant professors have been on leave for over a year without assigning any reason, affecting the academic curriculum of medical colleges and derailing the health services in affiliated hospitals.

This has attracted criticism over the quality of medical education in the state. Some of the students have complained to the DME over professors abstaining from work.

The DME authorities have been speaking to those professors who have not been on long leave.

Director of Medical Education Dr Ramesh directed principals of medical colleges not to entertain leave extension by professors, but reject their applications. He asked the principals not to entertain continuous leave requests. As some of the professors quit the colleges unauthorisedly, the colleges have been encountering problems in replacing them with suitable faculty members. Moreover, their services to medical college hospitals remained inaccessible.

Therefore, the DME decided to sack the professors who have been on leave for over a year.

# No stay on CAA, NPR: SC

Continued from Page 1

"We need to reply to those petitions and six weeks time should be given to us for filing counter affidavits," the AG said. Senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for petitioners challenging the process of grant of citizenship under the CAA to 40 lakhs Bengali Hindus, who had migrated from Bangladesh to Assam and Tripura said that the Act will create a peculiar situation and huge agitations are going on in these states.

He said that the operation of CAA be stayed as it even violated Assam Accord of 1985, which fixes cut of date for grant of citizenship as March 24, 1971.

"Assam is facing a peculiar situation due to the migrants coming from Bangladesh as earlier cut off date for grant of

citizenship was 1950, then cut of date was extended to March 24, 1971. This extension has been challenged before the apex court and the matter is pending," he said.

Venugopal intervened and urged the Court to hear petitions relating to Assam separately from a batch of anti-CAA petitions and assured the court that the exercise of Assam National Register of Citizenship (NRC) will not be complete until the national list is published by the Registrar General of India.

To this, the bench said that the petitions concerning Assam and Tripura as well as the matters related to Uttar Pradesh, which is going ahead with the implementation of CAA without framing any rules, can be dealt with separately.

**GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA**  
O/o Superintendent Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital Humayunagar, Hyderabad

Smt.S. Sharada Devi, Pharmacist Gr II of Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital Hyderabad who is on unauthorized absence and absconding from duties w.e.f.12.09.2016 onwards.

On the basis of enquiry report dated 23.11.2019 and as per CCA rules and in the light of G.O.Ms.No.280 GA (Ser C) Department dated 04.06.2003, Smt.S. Sharada Devi, Pharmacist Gr II of Sarojini Devi Eye Hospital Hyderabad is removed from services. Vide this office orders R.No.835/E/2019 Dated 31.12.19 Sd/-  
**Superintendent**  
DIPR R.O. No. : 1246-DP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT/1/2019-20 Date: 21-01-2020

**GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA**  
**IRRIGATION CIRCLE NIRMAL**  
**TENDER NOTICE**

Tenders were floated vide Tender Notice Nos. 20/2019-20, 21/2019-20, 22/2019-20, 23/2019-20 and 24/2019-20 Dt. 04-01-2020 available from 18-01-2020 to 28-01-2020 and 25/2019-20 Dt. 07-01-2020 available from 20-01-2020 to 03-02-2020 for an amount of Rs. 720.81 Lakhs. For Further details can be seen @ <https://tender.telangana.gov.in>.

Sd/- Superintending Engineer, J&CDD Irrigation Circle, Nirmal  
DIPR No. : 323-PP/CL-Agency/Advt./1/2019-20

**CRIME CORNER**

**Dog menace: Balala Hakkula Sangham approaches NHRC**

Balala Hakkula Sangham has filed a petition to State Human Rights Commission NHRC requesting to direct the GHMC Commissioner to initiate action on veterinary officials who is responsible for the dog menace that took place in Ameerpet on Tuesday. The culprit should also pay compensation to all the victims of dog menace and to take immediate steps to curb it. Around 50 people including children were attacked and injured by stray dogs on Tuesday in Ameerpet. The stray dogs menace has become frequent in the limits of GHMC and Balala Hakkula Sangham has several times demanded them to eradicate stray dogs and save the children but it has been unheard by the corporation.

**Gold ornaments worth Rs 3.5 L stolen from jewellery shop**

Gold ornaments worth Rs 3.5 lakh were stolen from Lalitha Jewellers in Somajiguda. Though the theft is suspected to have taken place a week ago, it came to light on Tuesday during the weekly audit by the staff. According to the police, the offenders diverted the attention of the sales executive and escaped with nine tolas of gold. Two gold chains and a bracelet were stolen by a group of five people. The group of five, consisting of three men and two women, visited the store as customers. They pretended to be interested in another piece of jewellery after the sales executive had shown them a few. After successfully diverting the attention of sales executive, the gang silently stole the gold ornaments. After stealing the ornaments, the gang left without making any purchase, said the Panjagutta Police. Based on a complaint from Lalitha Jewellers representative, K Haribala Sundar, the Panjagutta police and lodged a complaint and began an investigation. The police registered a case under section 380 of IPC and are trying to nab the offenders by verifying CCTV footage.

**Three Class X students missing at Kushaiguda**

Three minor boys, all Class X students of a private school, have been reportedly missing from Kushaiguda on Tuesday. Police said that the trio left their home stating that they were depressed for scoring poor in internal examinations and asked their parents not to search for them in letters left behind by them. The three boys, Hemant, Kiran and Samuel, all aged 15 years, had left their houses on Tuesday to school but gathered at the house of one of them at Tirumala Nagar in Moula Ali. According to the police, the trio went missing from there. As they did not return from school even till night, their parents searched for them, but could not find them, following which they approached the Kushaiguda police, who booked a case of missing and took up investigation. While Hemant took Rs 5,000 from his house, Samuel had taken Rs 6000. The trio also took their Aadhaar cards with them apart from packing their bags with clothes. "A special team was formed and footage from surveillance cameras in the surroundings is being examined," police said. However, the letters, which were found at two of the boys houses, also stated that they would return later on.

**Officials' apathy turns lakes into aquariums**

Irrespective of warnings from High Court and numerous appeals from citizens, the officials concerned are neglecting the plea to protect the lakes in Hyderabad. Their apathy is turning lakes into aquariums. Expressing displeasure over inaction of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation officials in preventing pollution of lakes in the city, a division bench of the Telangana High Court on Monday asked the officials concerned, including the GHMC commissioner, to resign from their posts if they cannot discharge their duties properly. The concern for people's health is better less talked about. An activist Lubna Sarwarth questioned, "All lakes are under the governance of multiple officials in Hyderabad.

**Local search engine Just Dial becomes haven for fraudsters**

DAVE BENNETT SILVERY  
HYDERABAD

Touted as one of the local search engine, Just Dial is slowly becoming a haven for fraudsters looking to make a quick buck by cheating those who use the website. The search engine which claims to help users find relevant providers of products and services is seemingly not being thorough when it comes to verifying the authenticity of the companies it lists.

Police officials also issued an advisory to the proprietors, firms and managements registered with Just Dial, following the increasing number of police complaints.

In a recent case reported at the Cyber Crime Police Station of Cyberabad, a fraudster contacted the complainant, the owner of a beauty parlour and who is registered on Just Dial. The fraudster informed the owner that he is from film industry and wanted to have make up done for 30 females as brides and agreed to pay an amount of Rs 5 lakhs.

Believing the fraudster, the



**ADVISORY**

- Never pay any amount into the caller's account in advance, believing the words of the caller
- Don't believe the caller, unless seen him/her physically.
- Never share bank details to the caller unless confirmed that the caller is genuine.

complainant agreed to visit the house of the caller for the make up. The fraudster then asked for the bank account details of the complainant and informed that he will remit the amount into her account and as such the complainant gave

the bank details. The fraudster said he had deposited the amount in the account but the same is not getting reflected in the bank account of the complainant due to some technical error. Then the fraudster asked the complainant to return his

amount back so that he can send it again. Believing the words of the fraudster, the complainant paid an amount of Rs 2 lakhs into the account of the fraudster.

Similar offences are taking place in Hyderabad on Just Dial. The Cyber fraudsters from various states are collecting the contact details of Hyderabad based firms and agencies who are offering their services or products and have registered with Just Dial for online orders.

After collecting the contact details, the fraudsters are calling the concerned persons and requesting for their services and products in large scale by offering attractive packages. Once the owners of concerned firms talk to the fraudsters, they agree to the attractive business proposals made by the fraudsters by believing them to be genuine customers. Fraudsters then siphon off the funds from the bank account of the owners.

In view of the above, the firms who are registered with Just Dial are advised to follow the following instructions to avoid frauds.

**Cops ensure green channel to transport live heart**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

To facilitate the shifting of a live heart for transplant, the Hyderabad Traffic Police created a green channel between Yashoda Hospital in Secunderabad and Care Hospital in Banjara Hills on Wednesday. On being provided non-stop movement to the ambulance by stopping the traffic en route, the distance of 9.7 kms between Secunderabad and Banjara Hills was covered in 12 minutes.

The medical team carrying the live organ left at 9:31 am from Yashoda Hospital in Secunderabad and reached Care Hospital in Banjara Hills at 9:43 am.

The efforts of Hyderabad Traffic Police in the transportation of live heart were applauded by the management of Care Hospital, Banjara Hills and the public as it would help in saving a life.

■ The traffic en route, the distance of 9.7 kms between Secunderabad and Banjara Hills was covered in 12 minutes



Chilukur chief priest CS Rangarajan and an archaka carry a wooden image of a Dalit Alwar at Chilukur on Wednesday.

**PERIYAR CONTROVERSY**

**Chilukur priest re-enacts 2700-year-old ritual**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chilukur chief priest CS Rangarajan answered the raging Periyar controversy by actions. A wooden image of a Dalit Alwar being carried by an Archaka has been worshipped at Chilukur on Wednesday.

Chief Preist CS Rangarajan said, "Devotees performed Pradakshinams along with the image which reminds us of reenactment of the 2700-year-old ritual conducted by Lokasarangamuni by carrying Tiruppanalagam on his shoulders. This is an answer to Dravidian movements' lies of Periyar. He did not talk about the Alwars at all in his slander against Brahmins and the Gods worshipped by Hindus".

The wooden image carved out of teak wood is done by Balakrishna Chari of Madhavamala village in Chittoor district. These artisans are preserving the tradition of carving out wooden temple images for centuries. He added that Dr Ambedkar had visioned that social reforms of Ramanuja are the need of the hour not through denigration.

**The Munivahana Utsavam is being organised across all Ranganatha Swamy temples in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh states**

To mark the culmination of 1,000 year celebrations of Ramanuja, the 'Munivahana Utsavam' is being organised across different Ranganatha Swamy Temples in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh by carrying the wooden image.

This event happened when Rangarajan carried a Scheduled Caste devotee Aditya Parasi on his shoulders into the temple from outside at Jiyaguda Ranganathaswamy temple on April 16, 2018.

The original event involved TPM Convenor and Chilukur Balaji Temple head priest CS Rangarajan carrying on his shoulders a Dalit devotee from outside the temple up to the Dhvajasthambam.

**KTR clinches deal for Telangana in Davos**

Continued from Page 1

In addition, the Piramal Group plans to shift their plant from other states to a new location in Hyderabad for leveraging initiatives launched in the area of ease of doing business by the Telangana State Government.

This proposed expansion in the healthcare sector in Hyderabad will employ over 500 people, while fetching additional revenues of up to Rs 500 crore. It is designed to be amongst the best facilities globally engaged in manufacturing life saving medicines. The Piramal leadership team plans to visit the new site early next month.

Piramal Pharma presently has a manufacturing facility in Telangana, cGMP API manufacturing facility approved by

various regulatory agencies across the globe including USFDA & EU. It comprises 3 units with multiple production blocks having a total reactor volume exceeding 1,000 KL. It's fully functional Zero Discharge facility meeting all environmental norms manufacturing close to 2000 MT of finished goods, including leading APIs like Isoflurane, Diltiazem, Mebeverine, Ketoconazole with exports to 60+ countries worldwide.

Presently Piramal employs close to 1,400 people, including staff and contract workmen employed at site with plans to add another 600 jobs by FY 23 to support the expansion. In addition, close to 300 indirect manpower engaged with the facility on a regular basis through various service contracts.

**AWARENESS DRIVE**



Telangana Governor and Indian Red Cross Society president Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan appeals to IT and corporate employees to enroll as Red Cross members at Darbar hall in Raj Bhavan on Wednesday.

**Narayana students win big in NSTSE**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Narayana school students have once again came out with flying colors with Top ranks in National Science Talent Search Examination (NSTSE) 2019-20 results by clinching National Rank 1 in Classes II, V and IX. They created history by securing a total of 6 ranks in the top 10 and 104 ranks in top 50 and 221 ranks in top 100.

Narayana students have also clinched a total of 2,276 top ranks in top 500. The exam was conducted by Unified Council for students of classes 1 to 10. The exam was attempted by as many as 15 lakh students.

Dr Sindhura Narayana, managing director of Narayana Group said that she was proud of this victory. She told that the result once again proved that the education system at Narayana is exceptional.

The superior integrated curriculum and superlative academic planning is the reason why Narayana students are coming out in flying colors in all the exams, Dr Sindhura said. Speaking at a press conference arranged to celebrate the stupendous success, Dr Sindhura reminded that Narayana students have topped almost all of the National and International Olympiads announced in 2019-20.



**The trio took their Aadhaar cards with them apart from their clothes**

While Hemant took Rs 5,000 from his house, Samuel had taken Rs 6000. The trio also took their Aadhaar cards with them apart from packing their bags with clothes. "A special team was formed and footage from surveillance cameras in the surroundings is being examined," police said. However, the letters, which were found at two of the boys houses, also stated that they would return later on.

**Four-year-old boy drowned in water sump**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A 4-year-old boy was drowned in a water sump at his house in Jawahar Colony, Chandanagar on Tuesday. The child was identified as B Vishal. Police said that the boy, who was being played in front of his house slipped and fell into the sump.

According to the police, the child's parents realised that their boy was missing only when there was no response from him to their calls as he did not come inside for a long time. They searched for him in the neighbourhood. They found the body in the sump. He was taken to a nearby hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead. The Chandanagar police have booked a case.

**GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA Revenue (Land Acquisition) Department Office of the District Collector, Siddipet DECLARATION**

Gazette No. 736/2019 Collector Office File No. G3/1523/2016 Date: 20-01-2020 Revenue Divisional Officer Office Date: 20-01-2020 File No. H/460/2018 Date: 11-12-2019

Under directions of Government of Telangana / District Collector, Siddipet, it is hereby decided to acquire land of total admeasuring Ac. 26.22 guntas in the village of Mandapally, Siddipet (Urban) Mandal, Siddipet District for public purpose namely for construction of Manoharabad to Kothapally S.G. Railway line.

Therefore the declaration is made for acquisition of the following land of standard measurement total Ac. 26.22 guntas land in the Mandapally, Siddipet (Urban) Mandal, Siddipet District for construction of Manoharabad to Kothapally S.G. Railway line.

Sl. No.	Survey No.	Nature of Land	Type of land	Area of land	Name of land holder/owner/interested persons	Boundaries	Details					
						East	West	North	South	Structures	Trees	Others
1	09	Patla	Dry	0-21	Dharamaram Chandra Reddy s/o Radda Reddy	Siddipet to Karimnagar Road	Duddolela Bha-gya-gamma	Dharamaram Bha-rathi Devi	Way			
2	96	Patla	Dry	0-02	Duddolela Bha-gya-gamma	Rice Mill	Dharamaram Chandra Reddy s/o Radda Reddy	Bha-rathi Devi	Road			
3	67	Patla	Dry	2-13	Dharamaram Chandra Reddy s/o Radda Reddy	Siddipet to Karimnagar Road	Duddolela Bha-gya-gamma	Dharamaram Bha-rathi Devi	Way			
4	68	Patla	Dry	0-22	Dharamaram Chandra Reddy s/o Radda Reddy	Siddipet to Karimnagar Road	Duddolela Bha-gya-gamma	Dharamaram Bha-rathi Devi	Way			
5	68	Patla	Dry	0-17	Rekha Nagappa s/o Malesam	Dharamaram Chandra Reddy s/o Radda Reddy	Dharamaram Bha-rathi Devi	Dharamaram Bha-rathi Devi	Way			
6	574	Patla	Dry	0-09	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
7	574	Patla	Dry	0-24	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
8	604	Patla	Dry	1-06	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
9	579	Patla	Dry	0-01	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
10	579	Patla	Dry	0-07	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
11	579	Patla	Dry	0-06	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
12	579	Patla	Dry	0-08	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
13	580	Patla	Dry	0-08	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			
14	581	Patla	Dry	0-01	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah	Bandari Narsiah s/o Gattalah			

**Total 26-22**

Under section 15 (Central Act No. 30/2013) the declaration is issued after taking due hearing by contacting interested persons. A Plan of the land to be acquired may be inspected in the office of the Land Acquisition Officer and Revenue Divisional Officer, Siddipet on any working day during office hours.

Date: - 2019  
Sd/- Tahasildar, Siddipet (Urban) Mandal  
Sd/- Revenue Officer, Gajwal  
Sd/- Joint Collector, Siddipet Dist.  
Sd/- Collector, Siddipet Dist.

DIPR No. No.1197/LA/PP/Agency/2019-20



URBAN POLL 22 2020



POLLING PASSES PEACEFULLY ACROSS DISTRICTS

PV KONDAL RAO ■ WARANGAL

The election for the Urban Local Bodies went off peacefully barring a few minor incidents here in Warangal on Wednesday. District wise details indicate that Mahabubabad registered maximum polling, while the industrial belt of Bhupalpally recorded above 65 per cent by the end of the day.

In the 35th ward of Mahabubabad Municipality, a minor scuffle took place when the local MLA Shankar Naik reached the polling station and allegedly tried to persuade and influence the voters for exercising their franchise in their candidate's favour. The women of the Community party, who were present there, confronted the MLA, following which Shankar Naik allegedly scolded them in an abusive language. This led to a clumsy scuffle and the MLA along with his followers were 'chased away' from the place. There was some mild tension in the industrial township of Bhupalpally where a multi-cornered contest could not entail in the brisk polling as voters exercised their franchise on a very low key. The only municipality in Bhupalpally recorded only 62.4 per cent voting. In Warangal rural district, where the municipalities - Wardhannapet, Parakal and Narsampet went to polls, about 65 per cent voters exercised their franchise till the evening. The voters in almost all the areas kept in a silent mode as there was no competition for the coveted posts and ward member posts. In Jangaon municipality, about 68 per cent of voters exercised their franchise and here too there was no serious interest towards the



(Clockwise) MLA Balka Suman and his wife show their inked fingers after casting votes; Voters stand in queue at a polling booth; BJP MP Arvind show his inked finger after casting vote; BJP leader G Vivek casting vote

elections. Mahabubabad is the only district in erstwhile Warangal where the polling was brisk since morning. In Dornakal municipality, about 83.02 per

CANDIDATES CLASH AT POLLING BOOTH IN GADWAL

PNS ■ JOGULAMBA GADWAL

Tension prevailed in Gadwal town as Congress candidate and husband of MIM candidate clashed at the polling station of 15th ward of the municipality on the polling day in the district on Wednesday. The incident took place at Ganjipet polling station in ward number 15 of Gadwal town during the first few hours of polling, when Congress candidate and former vice-chairman of Gadwal municipality Shankar and MIM candidate B Priyanka's husband Sudarshan got into a fight, jostling each other. Police personnel stationed at the polling booth had to use force to control the situation.

cent of voters exercised their franchise. In Maripeda, of the 10,467 voters, 82.88 per cent polling was recorded by the end of polling time.



Scuffles, lathicharge mark polling in Karimnagar

RAMAKRISHNA PERALA ■ KARIMNAGAR

Scuffles between the followers of prime contenders in the 41st ward of Jagtial municipality and in the 46th ward of Ramagundam Municipal Corporation led to a mild tension in the municipal elections of Karimnagar on Wednesday. In Peddapalli district, the Congress,

BJP and Independent candidates alleged that the TRS candidate was indulging in impersonation of votes in the 46th Ward Kakatiya school, polling station. The candidates staged a protest and as the tension mounted, police resorted to lathicharge in the city. The candidates objected to the police action and the CP Satyanarayana pacified the protesters. In Jagtial town, the Puranipet polling station in Siva Veedhi area of 41st Ward witnessed some mild tension and the TRS candidate Kappula



Srikanth was prevented from resorting to influencing the voters by the Congress and BJP

activists. The Congress MLC Jeevan Reddy rushed to the spot and questioned the inspector of Police Jayesh Reddy for being a mute witness to the TRS act. The Congress, BJP activists involved in a verbal spat with the police and it led to lathicharge there too. Meanwhile, in Karimnagar Municipal Corporation, MP Sanjay alleged that his campaign vehicle was pelted with stones. However the CP Kamalhasan Reddy refuted the allegations. Following this, the MP withdrew his additional protection.

Police resort to lathi-charge

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Except for a few stray incidents, polling in 15 civic bodies in Sangareddy, Siddipet and Medak districts went smoothly on Wednesday. The election was conducted for Sangareddy, Sadhasivapet, Tellapur, Ameenpur, IDA Bollaram, Jogipet and Narayankhed municipalities in Sangareddy district, Medak, Ramayampet, Narsapur and Toopran municipalities in Medak

Police resorted to lathi-charge to disperse a mob at a polling station when the TRS and Congress workers had a heated argument over some issue

dispense the crowd from the polling station when the TRS and Congress party workers had a heated argument over some issue. The Congress leaders accused TRS leader Lakshman Nayak of influencing the voters at the polling station.

Similar incident took place at Old Bus station in Sangareddy municipality as an argument erupted between the Congress and TRS leaders. The leaders of a party accused the leaders of the other party of casting vote of a dead person here. The police dispersed the clashing groups away from the polling station.

Voters throng polling stations in Mahabubnagar

AVINASH DEEPAK PULI ■ MAHABUBNAGAR

The 17 municipalities in the erstwhile Mahabubnagar district recorded moderate to brisk polling on Wednesday. Polling was by and large peaceful with no incident of major scuffles reported from any part of the five districts. Four of the 338 wards spread across these municipalities were unanimous and the polling for 334 wards was held and about seventy per cent of the 5,23,428 voters in the seventeen municipalities exercised their franchise on the polling day.

BJP senior leader and former Minister DK Aruna exercised her franchise in Gadwal municipality, while all the leaders representing major political parties cast their vote right in their respective areas. TRS contested from 333 wards and it is expected to record massive victory in many municipalities. In Bhuthoor municipality of Mahabubnagar district, a total of 8,949 voters exercised their franchise and about 86.12 per cent of polling was recorded. The municipality has ten wards. Since morning, the election and polling process was

In four of the 338 wards, the candidates were elected unanimously. Polling was held for 334 wards and about 70% voters exercised their franchise in the district

inspected by the SP of Mahabubnagar Rema Rajeshwari with her team and the additional SP Venkateshwarlu and additional forces accompanied the officials. The police striking force operated the patrolling meticulously and no untoward incident was reported in any part of the five districts Mahabubnagar, Nagarkurnool, Narayanpet, Wanaparthy and Gadwal. There was mild tension in the municipal wards where a keen contest was evident and there the polling too has surpassed 90 per cent. In all, a total of 43 wards spread across these districts recorded 90 plus per cent of polling.



DK Aruna shows her inked finger after casting vote in Gadwal municipality

TRANSPARENCY AND PRIVACY Facial recognition tech raises concerns

NAVEENA GHANATE ■ HYDERABAD

While Telangana boasts about adopting emerging technologies, concerns are being raised about transparency in the system. On Wednesday, during municipal elections, facial recognition technology was used in Kompally municipality. This has raised concerns among privacy activists. Facial recognition software is being used to verify voters in 10 polling stations in the Medchal-Malkajgiri district to "reduce impersonation cases".

Srinivas Kodali, an independent security researcher terming it as "techno dystopia" on Twitter said, "What's happening in Telangana is a shift from e-governance to real-time governance. In this idea of real-time governance, everything will be tracked and everyone has to prove themselves everywhere. Is it like china's social credit registry? We are not yet there but yes. The irony though is there is no consent from the public and no one was told Telangana is issuing these new digital identity systems to people." On Wednesday, the additional polling officer-in-charge took the voter's photos and uploaded them to a server using a Face Recognition App

installed in mobile phones provided to him. He then compared them with the photographs of all the voters of the concerned polling station. The App displays the result of the verification based on a match established with any one of the voters with an appropriate message. Srinivas added on twitter that bonus part is there are no documents anywhere of what this system is. Dystopia's will be built in secret. He said, "Under the name of innovation, IT department has become most secretive. If you intend to develop ethics frameworks for AI, then please start by making all the details related to RTDAI public. There are no documents related to that and Samagra Vedika in public domain." It may be mentioned here that on Monday, AIMIM chief and Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi on Tuesday objected to the facial recognition technology and demanded its withdrawal. "We don't have a privacy law, we don't have a law on surveillance. Yet IT department is pushing Facial Recognition across Hyderabad. IT Department has not published any documents related to these grand IT projects being developed. No transparency is a problem," Srinivas said.



TRS will win any election, says Palla

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

MLC Palla Rajeshwar Reddy said that the results of Municipal elections are endorsements for KCR's welfare agenda and KTR's performance as municipal Minister. In a press meet on Wednesday at Telangana Bhavan, he said, "The first municipal election after the formation of Telangana was held peacefully. There are reports that 80 per cent of the polling was recorded. TRS is going to win the elections. Based on the polling trend, TRS is going to win 90 per cent of seats."



'TRS misused official machinery'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP state unit president Dr K Laxman has accused the TRS of indulging in misuse of power in the polling for municipal elections. He further alleged that the police machinery and poll officials remained mute spectators as the TRS leaders go about inducing voters.

Addressing media at the BJP office here on Wednesday, he alleged that the TRS leaders adopted all possible back-door methods to win the elections acting on the directions from TRS president K Chandrasekhar, who wanted to see the TRS flag flying high on municipalities at any cost.

The election became synonymous with spending money like water. He



—K LAXMAN, BJP state unit president

KTR went on record stating that there would be no threat to the TRS from the BJP, but the TRS left no stone unturned to resist the BJP in the elections and indulged in large-scale irregularities in wards where the BJP has upper hand

charged TRS working president KTR with resorting to poll management methods like resorting to irregularities and high-handedness on the last day deviating from his stand that the development and welfare schemes of the TRS would romp the party home.

Claims of KCR and KTR on development were reflected in unleashing irregularities and high-handedness, he said. KTR went on

names were removed from it, he said adding that the TRS indulged in irregularities on the day of the polling. The police arrested 10 women belonging to other areas in Nizamabad on charges of impersonation, he said adding that it reflects the sorry state of affairs. Moreover, many people from other places were deployed in Tandur to encourage impersonation at the polling booths.

Further, he alleged that TRS candidate Kappula Srikant and his aides entered a polling booth in Jagtial municipality and influenced the voters as the police and poll officials turned a blind eye. In Parakala Municipality, TRS workers clashed with the BJP rivals in 21st ward, he said.

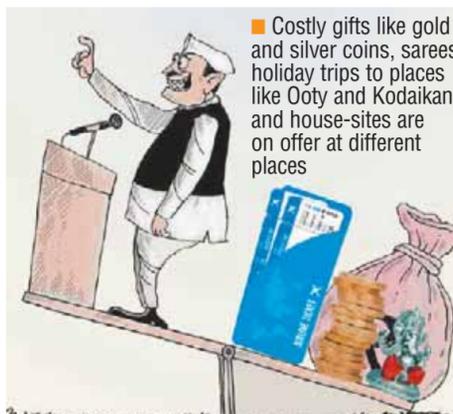
Contestants go the extra mile to woo voters

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

For the first time in the municipal election history of the state, contestants spent anything between Rs 1 crore and Rs 3 crore in each ward/division offering costly gifts to voters to induce them to vote in favour of them.

Gone are the days when liquor and biryani are offered to induce voters. The contestants are now offering costly gifts such as gold, silver coins, sarees, holiday trips to places like Ooty and Kodaikanal and house-sites. In some cases, contestants got NRI reach their native place to exercise their franchise by booking to and from air tickets. The inducement package for the NRIs varies.

At some places, the inducements offered were Rs 2 lakh and a tola of gold to each family. In Suryapet district, there are five votes in a family. The candidates vied with each other to induce the family. The voters in the family refused to



Costly gifts like gold and silver coins, sarees, holiday trips to places like Ooty and Kodaikanal and house-sites are on offer at different places

In some places, voters allegedly refused to take Rs 500 offered as 'inducement' and demanded Rs 1,000 per vote. They demanded and collected the amount from all the candidates who were in the fray

accept Rs 5,000 offered as inducement. The contestant has no other way but offered 10 grams to the family as it became inevitable for him. The incident took place in 27th ward of Huzurnagar municipality.

In Choutuppal municipality, which comes under the limits

of Yadadri Bhongir district, a family of five voters was given Rs 2 lakh by way of inducements at the rate of Rs 33,333 per voter since the contest in the particular ward was very keen. Each member received not less than Rs 50,000 which is inclusive of the inducements offered by other candidates.

Some of the contestants who took winning the election as a matter of prestige, distributed sheep and liquor among caste groups and youth associations during Sankranti. Some of the contestants went one step ahead and celebrated birthdays by buying birthday cakes for voters and also marriage days.

In the 10th ward of Medak municipality, candidate of a mainstream political party distributed poultry birds among the voters, according to a complaint lodged with the police by his rivals. By the time the police arrived on the scene, distribution has been almost completed. When the police seized the rest of the poultry birds, the locals resisted. However, the

police rushed over 40 poultry birds to the police station by a three-wheeler.

In Choutuppal municipality, a candidate booked flight tickets to bring in NRI voters of the ward. In another ward, a candidate spent Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000 to induce each voter. The State Election Commissioner Nagireddy asked RDO of Choutuppal to submit him a report on this as a complaint was lodged with the SEC in this regard.

To woo women voters, some of the candidates distributed sarees, a pair of ear studs made of gold and silver coins. In Boduppal municipal corporation, voters in a house that has five voters in one of the divisions

were given Rs 1 lakh and two gold coins. In Medchal, voters in a ward were given 0.5 gram gold coins. In some other colonies, contestants gave post-dated cheques asking the voters to present the cheque in the bank only on the electoral victory of the contestant.

To woo young voters to their side, contestants in Mahabubnagar district doled out promises to arrange for them picnic in Ooty and Kodaikanal. At some places, voters refused to take Rs 500 offered as inducement and demanded Rs 1,000 per vote. They demanded and collected the amount from all the four candidates that remained in the fray. In some cases, where there is acute contest, each family managed to earn Rs 30,000 to Rs 1,00,000. Not only did the main contestants offered inducements, but also those contesting the polls as independents doled out inducements. If the same trend were to continue, contesting the elections will be out of reach for the common man.

SHORT READS



Maha govt to scrap direct election of village sarpanchs

**MUMBAI:** The Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government is set to overturn the previous Devendra Fadnavis regime's decision of electing sarpanchs (village heads) directly from among the people. State Rural Development Minister and NCP leader Hasan Mushrif on Wednesday said an ordinance will soon be placed before the state Cabinet to pave way for electing sarpanchs from among village panchayat members. The Fadnavis government in 2017 brought an ordinance to ensure the sarpanchs were elected directly from among the people. "People elected sarpanchs directly in the last gram panchayat elections. The MVA has decided that the sarpanch will now be elected from (gram panchayat) members. We will soon bring ordinance before the Cabinet to ensure there is no direct election," Mushrif told reporters here.

4 killed in head-on collision between two trucks in Rajasthan

**JAIPUR:** Four people were killed in a head-on collision between two trucks in Rajasthan's Sikar district on Wednesday, police said. The accident took place near Khudi village on the NH-58 when a truck going to Gujarat from Karnal in Haryana collided with another truck coming from the opposite direction due to poor visibility, they said. The accident led to a traffic jam. Traffic movement resumed after the damaged vehicles were removed from the highway, said Hari Ram, head constable posted at Fatehpur Sadar police station. He said both the driver and helper died on the spot due to the massive collision.



Interpol issues Blue Corner notice against godman Nithyananda

**AHMEDABAD:** The Interpol has issued a Blue Corner Notice to locate self-styled godman Nithyananda, who fled India last year after a rape case was registered against him in Karnataka, Gujarat Police said on Wednesday. The state police revealed the move in a charge sheet filed in a local court in connection with an FIR lodged against Nithyananda in November last year, after two girls went missing from his ashram here. "The Interpol issued the Blue Corner notice against the controversial godman this month," Deputy Superintendent of Police K T Kamariya said. The police said they were working that a Red Corner Notice be issued by the Interpol against him now. Nithyananda was earlier declared wanted by the Gujarat Police. A Blue Corner notice is issued to locate or obtain information about a person in a criminal investigation, while a Red Corner notice is issued to seek arrest of a wanted person.

# Unmanned Gaganyaan to carry ISRO's 'lady' robot 'Vyomamitra'

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Even before orbiting astronauts on India's first manned mission to the space in December 2021, the Indian Space Research Organisation will send 'Vyomamitra', a 'lady robot', in unmanned Gaganyaan spacecraft.

The robot was the centre of attraction at the inaugural session of the "Human Spaceflight and Exploration - Present Challenges and Future Trends" here on Wednesday.

Vyomamitra, a combination of two Sanskrit words Vyoma (Space) and Mitra (Friend), took everyone by surprise when she introduced herself to the audience gathered there.

"Hello everyone. I am Vyomamitra, the prototype of the half-humanoid, been made for the first unmanned Gaganyaan mission," the robot



**Vyomamitra, a combination of two Sanskrit words Vyoma (Space) and Mitra (Friend), took everyone by surprise when she introduced herself to the audience**

said. Explaining about the role in the mission, she said, "I can monitor though module parameters, alert you and perform life support operations. I can perform activities like switch panel operations..."

The robot said she can also be a companion and converse with the astronauts, recognise them and can also respond to

their queries. ISRO chairman K Sivan told reporters the humanoid will simulate human functions in space and also interact with the environment control life support system.

"It will be simulating exactly the human functions there (in space). It will check whether the system is right. This will be very useful to

simulate, as if a human is flying," said Sivan. Earlier, addressing the inaugural function, Sivan said ahead of the launch of India's maiden human spaceflight venture 'Gaganyaan' in December 2021, ISRO will undertake two unmanned missions in December 2020 and June 2021.

## Japan aiding NE states in management of forest, sewerage

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Japan has huge investment in infrastructure projects in the Northeast and is collaborating with several states in the region in areas like forest, sewerage and disaster management, the Centre said on Wednesday.

The issue was discussed threadbare when a delegation led by Japanese Ambassador Satoshi Suzuki called on Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jitendra Singh here on Wednesday, an official statement said. During the meeting, various issues related to mutual collaboration and cooperation between the two countries were discussed. "There is huge Japanese investment in infrastructure projects in the North Eastern region of the country," the DoNER Ministry statement said.

In the area of forest management, Japan has been collaborating with the governments of Tripura, Sikkim and Nagaland and soon it will tie up with Meghalaya. Mutual collaboration in the areas of bamboo, disaster management, road infrastructure and Guwahati Sewerage Project were some of the issues that came up for dis-



**In the area of forest management, Japan has been collaborating with the governments of Tripura, Sikkim and Nagaland and soon it will tie up with Meghalaya**

ussion at the meeting, it said. The upgradation of Aizwal-Tuipang Section of NH-54 with a length of 372 km is being done with the assistance of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) at a cost of Rs

6,168 crore. The road would provide seamless connectivity to Sittwe port in Myanmar as part of the government's 'Act East Policy'. Singh said India shares traditional relations with Japan and under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, new areas of mutual collaboration are being added to it. The minister mentioned about the bullet train project in this regard. Singh said during the last five years, Japanese engagement in India's infrastructure projects has increased. Recently 12 nursing caregivers from Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh have been taken up for jobs in Japan through initiative of private agencies, the minister said.

## Revised cost estimate for campuses of NITs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the Revised Cost Estimates (RCE) of over Rs 4371 crore for establishment of permanent campuses of new National Institutes of Technology (NITs) till 2022. "Cabinet has approved the Revised Cost Estimates (RCE) for establishment of permanent campuses of new NITs at a total cost of Rs 4371.90 crore for the period till 2021-22," Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said at a press conference.

"NITs were established in the year 2009 and started functioning from academic year 2010-2011 in their respective temporary campus with very limited space and infrastructure. These NITs will be fully functional from their respective permanent campuses by March 31, 2022," he added.



## DELHI POLLS

# Tharoor alleges financial irregularities by AAP govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Wednesday raised questions over the construction of classrooms and purchase of anti-pollution masks in Delhi by the AAP government and demanded answers for alleged financial irregularities.

Another Congress leader Sharmistha Mukherjee alleged that Delhi had become the "rape capital" under the Modi and Kejriwal governments.

"The Aam Aadmi Party started off claiming to combat corruption. Would they care to explain where this money went?" Tharoor asked on Twitter. He said the Delhi government undertook a construction of 12,782 classrooms for a total expenditure of Rs 2,892 crore and sought to know how much did a

**Tharoor said the Delhi government undertook a construction of 12,782 classrooms for a total expenditure of Rs 2,892 crore and sought to know how much did a classroom cost**



classroom cost. "Our people have estimated that all of this could have been done comfortably for a maximum spending of Rs 800 crore, whereas Rs 2,892 crore have

been spent. Do we have a Rs 2,000-crore scam on our hands here?" he asked in a video posted on Twitter.

Tharoor also alleged financial irregularities in the AAP's procurement of anti-pollution masks for school children. "Did they charge the taxpayer all that they spent? Did they charge the taxpayer more than they should have spent?" he asked. "Did they give the children anti-pollution masks that could actually protect the children? These financial irregularities must be addressed forthwith."

## Speeding car mows down five women workers

PNS ■ ROURKELA

At least five women labourers were killed and six others injured after a speeding car mowed them down in Odisha's Sundargarh district on Wednesday, police said.

The accident took place when, at a sharp turn in Ramabahal, the car jumped the road divider and ran over a group of women engaged in some work before ramming into an SUV.

While two women died on the spot, doctors declared three others dead on arrival when all the injured were taken to Rourkela

Government Hospital, its Chief Medical Officer S Kabi Satpathy said.

The car, which was going towards Rourkela from Sundargarh, and the SUV were carrying three occupants each.

These six injured persons were sent to a hospital at Rajgangpur, Satpathy said. Both the vehicles were badly damaged.

Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Rajgangpur, BK Nanda said a board informing people about the ongoing work on the road had been put up at the spot where the accident occurred.

# Mumbai to remain open 24x7 from Jan 27: Aaditya Thackeray

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra Cabinet on Wednesday approved its 'Mumbai 24 hours policy' allowing malls, multiplexes and shops to remain open round-the-clock in the city from January 27.

Noting that London's 'night economy' was five billion pounds, state Tourism Minister Aaditya Thackeray told reporters here after the Cabinet meeting that the government's decision could help generate more revenue and jobs, in addition to the existing five lakh people working in the service sector.

He also said keeping shops,



malls and eateries open in the night was not mandatory. "Only those who feel they can do good business can keep their establishments open

throughout the night," he said. In the first phase, shops, eateries and theatres in malls and mill compounds situated in non-residential areas will be

Only those who feel they can do good business can keep their establishments open throughout the night  
— AADITYA THACKERAY  
Maharashtra Tourism Minister

allowed to remain open. "In the Bandra-Kurla Complex and Nariman Point near NCPA, a lane will be opened for food trucks. Food inspectors will keep a watch on them. If rules on solid waste management, decibel limits and law and order are violated, there is provision of lifetime ban," the Shiv Sena

leader said. He said the police force will not be under stress because after 1.30 am, their job till now was to check if shops and establishments were shut down. "But, now they will be able to focus on law and order only," said the minister, who is son of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

He also said that while taking the decision, Excise rules have not been touched and pubs and bars will close as usual at 1.30am.

"People can eat food, shop and watch movies even during the night," he said. He said Mumbai is a "24x7 functional city". "There are people who work in night shifts.

There are tourists, too, in transit. Where do they go if they are hungry after 10 pm?" he asked.

Thackeray also said there are provisions for security and CCTVs in malls and mill compounds and they have all the licenses. If these establishments need additional police security, they will have to pay for it, he added.

Asked about criticism from the BJP over this move, the minister said the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government was working to fulfil people's aspirations.

"The BJP is against the youth, seeing the way they are handling students," he said, referring to the recent violence in Delhi's JNU and Jamia Millia Islamia.

## Centre designates Daman as HQs of 2 merged UTs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday designated Daman as the headquarters of the merged Union Territories of Daman & Diu, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli. The Central government has also approved amendments or extension or repeal in the legislations and regulations dealing with Goods and Services Tax (GST), Value Added Tax (VAT) and State Excise. The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an official statement said.

These amendments will lead to 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' by way of having common taxation authorities, better delivery of services to the citizens by reducing duplication of work and improving administrative efficiency, it said. These will help in bringing more uniformity in laws relating to GST, VAT and State Excise and it will also help to avoid any legal complications in the levy and collection of GST Tax, VAT, State Excise, including recovery of arrears, it said. Moreover, the said amendments not only bring uniformity in taxation laws but also strengthen the system of laws, it said.

The statement said Daman has been designated as the Headquarters of UT of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu in view of the merger of the two UTs on January 26, 2020.



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## CENTRAL ARMED POLICE FORCES

# Govt allocates Rs 232 crore for infra development

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has approved Rs 232 crore for the development of infrastructure for jawans of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) like the CRPF and BSF, officials said.

The CAPFs, which are the backbone of internal security, are pressed into service in anti-naxal, anti-terror and anti-insurgency operations across the country in addition to law and order duties in states and work in difficult circumstances away from their families.

A total of Rs 216.46 crore has been sanctioned by the Union Home ministry recently for the development of infrastructure of the CAPFs and Rs 16.03 crore has been sanctioned for acquisition of land, a Home ministry official said on Wednesday.



Apart from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Border Security Force (BSF), the other CAPFs include the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), National Security Guard (NSG) and the Assam Rifles. The fund will be spent main-

ly for construction of residential quarters, barracks, office buildings among others, the official said. In the Union budget for 2019-20, a total of Rs 5,117 crore has been allocated for development of police infrastructure, including constructions of barracks, residential quarters, purchase of vehicles and arms and ammunition.

PAPER WITH PASSION

## Miffed allies

Slighted by the BJP over seats, the Akali Dal and Dushyant Chautala refuse to contest Delhi polls



The allies are proving to be an itch again for the BJP in the run-up to the Delhi Assembly elections and though it may not be betting big on them, the mutual differences are worsening its arrogant and abrasive image. The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), its long-time ally, which was hoping to contest six seats, has now decided to withdraw from the race altogether, citing irreconcilable differences on several issues, primary among them being the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). The SAD is dead against the religion-based conditionality in the new law and wants all minority communities (some Ahmadiyyas are in Punjab) to be included. Besides, the BJP was pushing it to contest under the lotus symbol, clearly intended to subsume federal parties under its umbrella than that of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Ever since the Akali leadership has passed into the hands of Sukhbir Singh Badal and the SAD has been pushed down the ladder of political dominance in Punjab, it has slowly and steadily been asserting its independence. By choosing to end the alliance in Delhi, it hopes to douse the fire of criticism in Punjab that it is now being guided by the Hindutva ideology and supporting contentious issues like the abrogation of Article 370 and CAA without looking at the bigger picture. Its core constituency feels these issues serve a predominantly Hindu voterbase and do not find much resonance among Sikhs, who have been shortchanged. This has become more pronounced after the Akal Takht jathedar, Giani Harpreet Singh, publicly lambasted Hindutva, going so far out as to seeking a ban on the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS).

Already Congress Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, by passing an Assembly resolution against the CAA, has pushed the Akalis into a corner. As for Delhi, there are around 10 lakh Sikh voters, who could potentially affect the results in about 10 of the 70 Assembly seats. Question is whether this slippage would impact the BJP vote share. Rifts between the Akali Dal and the BJP have been widening ever since the seat-sharing fiasco in the Haryana Assembly elections, with the latter attempting to poach some of its candidates. While all of these moves may seem hurtful to the coalition dharma, fact is the emaciated SAD needs the BJP's majoritarian weight to have a stake in both Central and State politics. The BJP, post the mammoth Lok Sabha verdict of last year, is not looking to be overtly dependent on the Punjabi vote in the city. In fact, it doesn't see too much of a community drift, arguing that the presence of the Akalis could have led to an ideology-based split. It claims the neutral Sikh vote would come its way and is, in fact, hoping to divide the Sikhs as those with Panthic loyalties and those that are non-aligned. In that sense, it is trying to undercut the Akalis. Besides, the Delhi BJP, which once thrived on the anti-Sikh riots sentiment to draw the Sikh vote towards it from the Congress and had the Punjabi Hindu vote with negotiators like Madan Lal Khurana, is now much more dependent on other community votes like the Purvanchalis while consolidating its hold among Banias. The shift in the power axis is apparent from the fact that the BJP has accommodated both the Janata Dal (United) and the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), allocating three seats between them, clearly with an eye to the Bihar elections. However, both these allies are not with their fair share of troubles. JD(U) senior leader Pavan K Varma has sought "ideological clarity" over the seat-sharing with BJP in Delhi while colleague Prashant Kishor continues asking questions on CAA. Other than the SAD, the Jannayak Janata Party (JJP), the BJP's newest ally in Haryana, will also not be contesting the Delhi elections. Led by the fiery young descendant of the Chautala clan, Dushyant Chautala, it claims it didn't get the electoral symbols of its choice and is, therefore, withdrawing from the race. But there were murmurs of the party wanting to contest at least 12 seats. There is a sizeable Jat population that can swing the results in Najafgarh, Mundka, Mahipalpur, Mehrauli, Nangloi, Badarpur, Devli and Chhattarpur. And while Dushyant may not openly challenge the CAA, fact is he is finding it hard to justify a relationship of convenience politically. The BJP may not need the allies numerically now because it has stepped out of the pretend politics of Modi 1.0 and is gung-ho about its solo majority status. But it cannot consolidate its India map without its federal partners given its recent drubbing at the State polls. And with its oldest ideologically-friendly ally, Shiv Sena, walking out, it certainly could do without more friends turning foes and eroding popular trust in the process.

## Another deadly virus

With complex strains emerging in China, we should ask why this is happening at all when dealing with public health risks



It looks like every second year, a new deadly contagion emerges in China. First, it was SARS, then Avian Flu, which was followed by Swine Flu and now, a new coronavirus has taken over the Chinese city of Wuhan. This new virus is estimated to have infected over 400 people, nine of whom have died. Thanks in no small part to the boom in international air travel within and outside China, which connects even secondary cities such as Wuhan, cases have spread in several countries now, including across the Pacific in the US. Earlier viruses

like Avian Flu or Bird Flu were thought to have originated in illegal poultry farms where animals were kept in unhygienic conditions. In the case of Swine Flu, too, the emergence of the virus was in pig farms. Avian Flu led to the killing of millions of birds at poultry farms as they were culled. With the emergence of Swine Flu, where the virus was thought to have passed from domesticated pigs to humans, thousands of pigs were eliminated as well. And now, this latest virus, which does not have a moniker as yet, appears to have emerged from the illegal trade in marine wildlife in that Chinese city.

All of this does raise questions about hygiene standards and food quality issues that many towns and villages in China face behind the new glass and concrete skyscrapers. In this part of the world, illegal trading of animals and bird farms is common, often next to human dwellings. It should not be a surprise then that when pathogens do the dreaded inter-species skip, such an environment becomes an enabler. It is, therefore, contingent upon the Chinese authorities to get to the bottom as to why these new pathogens are emerging. This should be done on an urgent basis because the next outbreak may not be as contained or worse but more virulent and deadlier. Public health officials have been warning about the potential of a next global pandemic to rival the Spanish Influenza of exactly a century ago when an estimated 50-100 million people died, including around 17 million people in India. This is one reason why Indian authorities must be vigilant. During the Avian Flu crisis, authorities pre-emptively culled millions of chickens in poultry farms across the country. It is good to know that passengers arriving from China are being scanned at Indian airports. However, we have to stay on our toes and urge the Chinese to clean up their act.

# opinion

## A never-ending crisis

As more details about the Boeing 737 MAX emerge, it is becoming clearer that a fair dose of arrogance pushed the American plane-maker



KUSHAN MITRA

Boeing's internal documents, which revealed that executives mocked aviation regulators and airlines across the world, including India's Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), were hugely damaging for the American planemaker and marked a torrid start to 2020 after a horrific 2019. The year began in the aftermath of the Lion Air 737 MAX crash in Indonesia. Using "friendly" media sources, Boeing executives said that poor pilot training (and the lack of it) was the primary cause of the crash. While there may have been an element of truth to that, the second 737 MAX crash of an Ethiopian Airlines jet, seconds after takeoff from Addis Ababa, dealt the final blow.

As a result, Boeing's 737 MAX fleet was grounded worldwide, some regulators doing it sooner than others, but the aircraft manufacturer kept on producing planes, even though they could not fly. Planes kept coming off the production line at over 20 a month, leading to over 200 aircraft being parked at Boeing's plant in Renton, Washington. However, with little space to keep so many airplanes — Boeing was also forced to park planes in employee car parking lots — the American manufacturer decided to suspend production a few weeks ago.

It is extremely fortuitous that the grounding of the Boeing 737 MAX has not collapsed the global aviation industry. It is noteworthy here that the MAX was still a new aircraft and had not been fully integrated with fleets across the world. The grounding is now beginning to impact growth opportunities for airlines. With large American carriers like American Airlines and Southwest Airlines, which are the largest operators of MAX, now delaying the re-introduction of the plane all the way till the middle of this year, this crisis is not going to end anytime soon. Boeing's nose has been grounded to the tarmac, its reputation ruined.

In most other industries, such a crisis might have been fatal for a company but the global airliner manufacturers' duopoly between the American Boeing and the European Airbus, where the latter has smartly and carefully not uttered a word or even celebrated the former's woes, makes the Coke-Pepsi duel look like a violent conflict in comparison. While the Chinese and the Russians are trying to up their game in the civilian airliner market — some could even argue that Boeing's fall has given them an opportunity — they are far from being an effective contender. It takes several billions of dollars and an army of engineers to develop a new aircraft. Right now nothing can beat the entrenched players.

But at the end of the day, the entire MAX crisis that has engulfed Boeing comes down to the fact that the manufacturer did not want to spend a huge sum of money on developing a new plane. The Boeing 737 is a design



that dates back to the early 1960s, the airworthiness certificate given to the aircraft is one that was issued almost seven decades ago. The Boeing 737 has been an immensely successful plane. During 2018, Boeing delivered its 10,000th 737 with a backlog of close to 5,000 aircraft remaining in its books. It has been off the competition over the years as well. The McDonnell Douglas DC-9 and Douglas MD80 family could not keep up with the success of the Boeing and eventually Boeing acquired McDonnell-Douglas.

However, the Airbus A320 family, developed by the European planemaker in the early 1980s, was a different kettle of fish. With its highly advanced wing and computerised fly-by-wire technology, Boeing had to develop new technology to keep the 737 competitive. So when Airbus decided to refresh the A320 with modern new high-bypass ratio engines, which would reduce fuel consumption, it got a lot of interest from airlines. While Airbus has had its share of problems over the years, particularly around the A380 super-jumbo, the A320 has been a money-spinner. With modifications in new engines — the New Engine Option (Neo) — it would become even more attractive.

Despite the problems that India's low-cost carrier IndiGo has suffered with Neo aircraft, nearly a thousand such planes are in service currently. Boeing had to do something to keep up with the rising competition. Neo's efficiency gains over the existing generation 737 were massive.

But Boeing had a problem. When it started developing the 737 in the 1960s, it did not have to face much in terms of ground clearance and kept riding low to the ground. This made it easier for planes to service at smaller and less prepared airports, which were all but common in the 1960s and the 1970s. In fact, it was this very ability, coupled with its having lower engines, that made it attractive to the airlines. Even when the 737 was improved, few changes were made to this end. The problem with high-bypass ratio turbofan engines today is that to gain a perfect ratio, the front fan has to be massive. The 737's basic architecture made fitting such a new engine nearly impossible. And while Boeing should have ideally developed a new aircraft altogether, market realities made that an impossibility. It took it over a decade to develop the 787 Dreamliner with an overly optimistic entry into

service schedules. The subsequent delays left the company with a bloody nose.

The 787 is an immensely successful aircraft today, hundreds of them forming the backbone of airline fleets across the world. But Boeing did not have the time and its management thought of developing a new aircraft. A better option, no matter what the physics, would have been to re-engine the current airframe with minor modifications. Well, the modifications were not simple. In order to fit a larger fan, Boeing engineers had to move the engine further forward and above the wing. This caused some major problems to the aerodynamic properties of the 737 but these could be solved. Pilots could be trained to deal with the changes. Then came another problem. One major selling point for airlines is to calculate the number of additional training pilots needed when they move to a new type of aircraft. Pilots trained on the regular Airbus A320 could fly the new A320 Neo with just a couple of hours of orientation. Boeing promised pretty much the same even though it was obvious — something that the stash of internal emails revealed — that pilots should have taken many more hours of training for

the MAX, even some hours inside the simulator.

The issue, as many people know now, is that Boeing decided to integrate much more software into the MAX to augment flying characteristics. One of those pieces of software was the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS), which in low-speed conditions, usually after take-off, would keep the plane from stalling. With the engines of the 737 MAX being shifted so much further forward, the centre of gravity of the plane, too, being far forward, only software could resolve it. As we know now, the MCAS system depended on good data from the sensors outside the aircraft. Sensors can fail and usually those failures should be notified, as on cars, to cite an example. But Boeing just made an alert system for a sensor data mismatch, an optional extra on the 737 MAX, even though it was but a software switch. The MCAS system made some sudden changes to the planes flightpath and without proper training to recognise the software intervention, pilots onboard had no clue how to deal with the issue. With little altitude, the pilots of the Lion Air and Ethiopian Airlines aircraft slammed to the ground.

At the end of the day, a company, once known to be extremely fastidious on the engineering front, made a stupid mistake. A firm that almost bankrupted itself while developing the Boeing 707 and then almost did so again with the Boeing 747 — which has proven that it can redefine the market even in contemporary times with the Boeing 777 and Boeing 787 — has ruined its reputation, thanks to the unnecessary shortcuts it took. As is being made clear in the emails for the public to see, sheer arrogance of its executives made matters worse.

It is being made apparent that the Boeing 737 MAX will not make it back into the service before mid-year. A freshly empowered Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the civil aviation regulator in the US, will not be in the pocket of Boeing as it was once. It is unlikely that a company so vital to America's trading interests and its defence industry will be allowed to collapse. But the arrogance on display at the company was little different from that displayed by the bankers before the financial industry collapse of 2008. Boeing has to do a lot to repair its reputation and salvage the image of Boeing 737. Being humble shall make for a very good start.

(The writer is Managing Editor, The Pioneer)

## SOUNDBITE

With no development on its agenda, the ruling party is making a complete exposition of its agenda to create a Hindu *rashtra*.

**Congress MP**  
—Shashi Tharoor



Growing up in a country like India, you see wealth and poverty live together in such a symbiotic way...seeing that you become desensitised to it.

**Actor**  
—Priyanka Chopra



What's going on between Pakistan and India... if we can help, we certainly will be willing to. We have been watching it very closely.

**US President**  
—Donald Trump



Normalcy acrobatics is in full swing even as Kashmir continues to reel under a crippling internet shutdown and leaders remain detained.

**PDP president**  
—Mehbooba Mufti



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Righting the wrong

Sir — A peaceful protest by Kashmiri Pandits to mark the 30th anniversary of their mass exodus from the Kashmir Valley grabbed some attention. Through it, they appealed to the Government to take plausible and sincere steps to rehabilitate them in the Valley. Successive Governments have only paraded their cause. Largely, they have either ignored the Pandits or used them for their selfish end. Left liberals, rights activists and secularists, too, have turned a blind eye to their rightful grievances though they have been campaigning for the rights of minority communities in general. Are Kashmir Pandits not a minority in the Valley? After the nullification of Article 370 and the revocation of special status to the former State of Jammu & Kashmir, it is the responsibility of the Union Government to restore normalcy in the Valley and rehabilitate the displaced Pandits willing to return. Even after the Supreme Court's directive, little action has been taken.

**Nimai Charan Swain**  
Bhubaneswar

### Crash barriers will make roads safer

This refers to the report, "Crash barriers planned to slash NH fatalities" (January 22). The Centre's plan to install crash barriers along its existing National Highways (NH) and make them mandatory for all future highway projects is welcome. This step is bound to bring down the number of crashes and fatalities. Coming closely on the heels of the enactment of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, that calls for stricter punishments for traffic violators, the installation of crash barriers will require a big push from the powers that be to make it a reality.

Crash barriers are designed to withstand the impact of even high speed vehicles and are expected to slide and roll the vehicles back on the road while keeping the level of damage to them as well as the barriers within acceptable limits. As per statistics, less than five per cent of the total network of about 1.50 lakh km of highways have installed crash barriers. India accounts for the highest number of road deaths in the world. The total number of accident-related deaths in 2018 stood at

### Growth trouble

Sir — Once again, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has slashed India's growth estimate to 4.8 per cent for this fiscal year and 5.8 per cent for 2020-21. Observers attribute such grim forecasts to an economic slowdown.

In the Indian context, the current growth projection follows a downward trend from 7.5 per cent last year to 6.1 per cent in October. It is disheartening that while growth projections have continued to decline in the recent past, the Government has taken little cohesive action for revival and has instead been demanding rate cuts from the

Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Yet India is projected to be the second-fastest growing major economy in the world after China. There are miles to go for that to happen. The Government has to come up with a big bang strategy to revive growth.

**Srishti Mathur**  
Ujjain

### The clock is ticking

Sir — At a time when the country is faced with severe economic slowdown and given the seriousness of the problem of unemployment with agrarian crisis, too, at its peak, the common man is expecting relief and progressive measures in the Budget that is to be presented on February 1.

However, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is busy attending various forums and meetings to defend the Government's decision to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). With just a few days left for the Budget, one would have expected the Finance Minister to be giving finishing touches to it. Despite the fact that Sitharaman has taken several measures to revive the economy, the situation isn't showing any signs of improving. The Budget must focus on reviving demand, investment and growth. All of this must be done in a transparent manner.

**Anna Mary Yvonne**  
Chennai

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

**FIRST COLUMN**

# The tech-savvy road to health

Technology has not been a disruptive force in senior healthcare but that story is set to change over the next six years, says **Sushant Reddy**

We have just celebrated our entry into a new decade. The defining theme of the first two decades of this century was the rise of technology start-ups and their transformative change in our lives. Just 10 years ago, none of us could have imagined the lifestyle changes created by internet-enabled platforms and aggregators like Uber, Amazon, Swiggy, Zomato, Hotstar or Netflix. However, there are some sectors where technology hasn't had such a transformative effect, yet. One such is healthcare and more specifically, healthcare for senior citizens. What is senior healthcare? This in itself is a very generic term; in fact, the term is so generic that everything, from an Out Patient Department to in-hospital care to the pharmacy can be grouped into this category.

Broadly speaking, senior healthcare can be classified into four areas: Hospital care, preventive care, home care and healthy living.

**Hospital care:** This is what everyone easily relates to as traditional healthcare. Episodic events such as emergencies, illness, injury treatments at a hospital come under hospital care.

**Preventive care:** All aspects of healthcare that are preventive in nature such as diagnostic tests, pharmacy, doctor consultations, disease management (diabetes, hypertension), health insurance and so on fall in the category of preventive care.

**Home care:** Healthcare services delivered at home such as nursing, physiotherapy, home Intensive Care Unit (ICU), dialysis and chemotherapy services, medical devices and so on come under this.

**Healthy living:** Services that enable a healthy lifestyle for seniors such as custom-designed senior homes, smart tracking devices, companionship services and so on come under this tag.

The fact remains that senior healthcare is a massive challenge. India is in the middle of a rapid demographic and cultural transition — senior citizens above 60 years are over a 100 million today and constitute eight per cent of the total population. This figure is expected to grow to 350 million, an estimated 20 per cent of the total population by 2050, a dramatic rise in the older population, both in size and proportion.

Another massive factor driving this transition is a mass migration, both domestic and international, of educated, urban youth that happened during the 80s, 90s and the first decade of the 21st century. The country recorded over 30 million international migrants and 139 million domestic migrants as of 2017.

These challenges have increased India's senior healthcare burden exponentially and the problem is compounded by the fact that despite massive technological advances in this century, it has not yet created a disruptive impact in the senior healthcare industry. This is because of three main reasons, fragmented and localised service providers, low tech savviness of seniors and language barriers.

**Fragmented and localised service providers:** Traditionally senior healthcare services have been very human-intensive. The role of care provider was and still remains extremely critical and everything else was not a deal breaker.

**Low tech savviness of seniors:** All things equal, technology adoption of millennials is much higher than that of senior citizens. While seniors are comfortable with popular apps like WhatsApp and YouTube, adoption of other technology in general has been less than spectacular.

**Language barriers:** English is not a preferred conversational medium for most senior citizens and as most technology platforms are designed for urban, English-speaking customers, this becomes a major mental obstacle not only for senior citizens but also for care providers.

So, the big question is, how can technology transform senior healthcare? There are multiple areas where technology can become a real force-multiplier.

**Smart medical alert system:** India does not have a reliable 911 emergency service that can be accessed by senior citizens. Having smart medical alert systems that can provide emergency support at the push of a button will be a great value addition for seniors.

**Doctor-on-call services:** Senior citizens usually avoid visiting a doctor for minor health issues because of mobility and logistic issues. A "doctor-on-call" service where general physicians and specialist doctors can talk over a voice/video call will be a great value proposition for senior citizens.

**Internet of Things devices and smart tracking:** Senior citizens have a higher risk of falls, rapid heart rate, breathlessness, low blood pressure and so on. Smart Internet of Things (IoT) devices that can track regular health vitals, detect abnormal patterns and alert care providers is another major opportunity in this space.

**Smart senior living homes:** The concept of senior living was a social taboo until recently. With reality developers revisiting the concept of "senior living", a lot of Indians are taking a fresh look at this concept.

**Intelligent voice platforms:** Voice is a major breakthrough when it comes to senior citizens. Easy, intelligent voice-based platforms to order medicines, schedule doctor appointments or health check-ups will be a major opportunity in future.

Technology has not been a disruptive force in senior healthcare but that story is set to change over the next five-six years. With rapid advances in voice-enabled platforms, artificial intelligence and IoT devices, start-ups are burning the midnight oil to come up with smart, easy-to-use technological solutions that create an impact in the senior healthcare industry. It is not a question of "if" anymore, it's just the "when" that needs to be answered.

(The writer is CEO and founder of a leading insurance aggregating platform)

**POINTCOUNTERPOINT**

THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS DIALOGUE (IN KASHMIR) IS TO GO CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE, LISTEN TO THEIR PROBLEMS AND FIND SOLUTIONS TO THEM.

—UNION MINISTER  
**MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI**



THE VISIT OF MINISTERS' BRIGADE IS TO HIGHLIGHT THE AGENDA OF THE BJP AT THE EXPENSE OF PUBLIC EXCHEQUER BY USE OF ENTIRE OFFICIAL MACHINERY.

— J&K CONGRESS COMMITTEE CHIEF  
**RAVINDER SHARMA**

# The changemakers

Young innovators Manav and Swati Subodh are empowering entrepreneurs to undertake social experiments, job creation and meaningful development in their communities



**MOÏN QAZI**

One of the dispiriting features of the modern development model is that despite oceans of research and studies, there has not been a substantive transformative impact on marginalised communities. Much of the outcomes have been purely academic and we need more dedicated, courageous and purpose-driven champions who can creatively apply their core competencies and new knowledge to enhance people's well-being. Similarly, we need to design tools and techniques that can help translate these insights into effective public policies and professional practices that can sustainably deliver quality outcomes on an exponential scale.

There is now a tribe of passionate entrepreneurs who are collaborating with like-minded allies and with those with different perspectives, to build a co-leadership of expertise to address pressing human challenges and accelerate the transition of the underprivileged from subsistence to sustainability in emerging economies. Some of them are bright people working to uncover and scale breakthrough disruptive solutions for leapfrogging meaningful social change. They have the vision to see the world the way it should be and create what is missing. They are combining business acumen with their conscience to solve problems in the community and foster a fairer society in an efficient and sustainable way.

A brother-sister duo, Manav Subodh and Swati Subodh, with diverse backgrounds and with careers on the cusp of steady and promising trajectories, decided to change track and pursue something that had relevance and meaning to the wider world, and in particular to the underserved communities. Manav was Global Manager, Marketing, Entrepreneurship and Corporate Affairs at Intel but found the canvas dimming his social horizon. Swati obtained her post-graduate in biotechnology and did her doctoral research in genomics at AIIMS. It was here that she had her moment of epiphany. Her laboratory was opposite the outpatients department where the daily sight of struggling patients stirred her and fired the imagination to furrow a path of concrete action. Manav and Swati realised that their path was never going to lead to the right level of fulfillment, because they were not doing something that exactly fitted the values they had cultivated over time.

Since it wasn't possible to change their values, they knew they needed to switch their careers. Manav was the first to take the plunge when he conceptualised the 1M1B (1 Million for 1 Billion) Foundation, an initiative to inspire a million young leaders, educators and entrepreneurs to generate jobs that will create better lives for a million people in the underserved communities. The idea was to empower entrepreneurs who would undertake social innovations, job creation and meaningful development in their communities so that each in turn would create jobs and more stable economic lives for a thousand more.

With Swati's expertise in healthcare and Manav's expertise in entrepreneurship education and ecosystems, a social entrepreneurship model was conceptualised. They visualised that a million entrepreneurs — spanning different geographies and sectors — can come up with the right solutions that can impact one billion people. Everyone, according to them, is a natural entrepreneur and can play a vital role in promoting resilience in their communities. They believe that with relatively simple and inexpensive tools we can put the needle on tough problems but interventions fail to reach the right person at the right time. Sharing them equitably across the world to maximise the impact is a big challenge. Addressing these and other burning social problems requires understanding and reframing them with a fresh view. It is here that entrepreneurs like Manav and Swati

IT TAKES LOCAL ENTREPRENEURS, EMPOWERED TO ADAPT EASILY TO THE NUANCES OF LOCAL CULTURE, TO CREATE AND DRIVE CHANGE SUSTAINABLY ON THE GROUND. THE 1M1B FOUNDATION IS SERVING AS A MICRO-ACCELERATOR FOR GRASSROOTS ENTREPRENEURS BY GIVING THEM SKILL TRAINING, ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGIES, FINANCE AND THEN HELPING THEM LAUNCH THEIR OWN MICRO-ENTERPRISE



are stepping in and filling the vacuum. With a team of like-minded people who share this passion 1M1B started taking shape.

Manav and Swati understand that interventions for rural regeneration cannot be played out in the same way that society perceives the poor: Desperate citizens who need to be rescued by the elite. "We have to understand the local challenges to improve their composite livelihoods. You can't solve the problems of the last mile from the headquarters," explains Manav. According to him, it takes local entrepreneurs, empowered to adapt easily to the nuances of local culture, to create and drive change sustainably on the ground. The 1M1B Foundation is serving as a micro-accelerator for grassroots entrepreneurs by giving them skill training, access to technologies, finance and then helping them launch their own micro-enterprise. "We scan the local environment to get better assessment of needs of the area and prospective interventional aspects and partner with these entities to provide our know-how and execution pipeline to enable last mile access to maximise impact", he adds.

There are several interventions being promoted by 1M1B across segments. The Skills Accelerator programme helps individuals develop relevant skills to ensure that they are in line with the market needs. Fifty per cent of the participants get formal jobs and 15 per cent of them land up starting their own business. 1M1B is honing the leadership skills of micro-entrepreneurs along with building rural co-innovation labs. It helps accelerate the access of indigenous technologies to rural markets by pairing these entrepreneurs with mentors who help them in developing their ideas. It also connects global start-ups to rural markets. This access and exposure allows them to test their solution on the specific populations through other village-level players. The programme provides training in computer skills, communication, accounting,

finance, access to technologies and hands-on growth support to help them launch their own micro-enterprises. 1M1B believes that communities of artisans, particularly women, deserve economic opportunities and aims to keep alive the rich tradition of their craftsmanship. The foundation is working with *Kalamkari* weavers to provide a more robust economic base to the weaver community. It is also an implementation partner on providing training in Artificial Intelligence (AI) to 5,000 schoolchildren in New Delhi, Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Students are encouraged to come up with project ideas on how AI can be applied for societal good. Those selected are given access to the AI Youth Lab to advance their projects and create prototypes.

The Future Leaders programme is dedicated to identifying and nurturing the next generation of leaders committed to positive change. The target group comprises high school students and undergraduates who have the potential to have a meaningful influence on topics of relevance. During the course of the programme, they are imparted high-impact leadership development skills to develop the knowledge, resources and network needed to become an inclusive and socially-minded changemaker. These skills include thinking critically and from multiple perspectives, collaborating inclusively, communicating effectively and becoming empathetic leaders. The coaching also exposes them to an array of educational experiences that broaden their world view.

The latest batch participated in the fifth annual 1M1B Activate Impact Summit at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. The summit provided them the opportunity to learn about leadership through the lens of the experiences of leaders of civil society, government, industry, non-government bodies, private entities, venture funds, entrepreneurs and influencers.

The foundation is a UN-accredited

non-profit organisation with special consultative status to the UN Economic and Social Council and associated with the UN Department of Global Communications.

The foundation has a very innovative business development programme, called *Business Raja* (king). An AI-enabled chatbot, it is guiding aspiring entrepreneurs in rural India to grow their nascent ideas, raise funds and run their businesses successfully. It is simple in design. For the user, it is just another contact on WhatsApp they talk to about their ideas in three languages — Telugu, Hindi, and Kannada — as of now.

The chatbot asks a user about their ideas, how they came up with it, measures the person's personality and attains a complete profile. It also assesses their responses to tough questions — a sort of psychometric test.

An aspiring entrepreneur needs to follow a three-step process: First, share a business idea. The chatbot will provide reference resources that need to be completed. Then, the candidate will have to design a financial plan such as product pricing. Finally, if the idea works well, the chatbot will help in raising funds. A final score of investment readiness is then sent to the lending institution.

"The idea of *Business Raja* emerged while our team was working with grassroots innovators and helping them navigate the challenging entrepreneurial landscape. The AI chatbot and the resources associated with it help to do this, at scale so we can enable more entrepreneurs faster", explains Swati.

It doesn't require a flash of genius or invention of any radical idea to change the story line. What is ultimately needed is practical compassion. Most revolutionary solutions have been evolved by people like Manav and Swati who looked at the familiar landscape with fresh eyes. They saw promise where others saw hopelessness.

(The writer is Member, NITI Aayog's National Committee on Financial Literacy and Inclusion for Women)

# Vote for the environment

The spectre of climate change is looming large and pollution cannot be stopped by turning a blind eye to it. In the February 8 Assembly polls, Delhiites need to elect a Government that makes environmental policies its priority



**SRIRAJ KOTA**

Delhi is heading for polls on February 8 to elect 70 members to the Legislative Assembly and needless to say, campaigning by political parties across the national Capital is expected to reach a fever pitch soon. Like always, this election, too, will witness a plethora of populist issues being made a poll plank by the candidates and their star campaigners as they do the rounds of the city. Populism has become an integral aspect of elections mainly due to the fact that the people of one of the world's largest democra-

cies have become used to being wooed with sops and benefits. Whether it is regularisation of illegal colonies and structures or subsidised electricity and so on, we just lap it up.

However, do we ever stop to think what the cost of these sops is and who is footing the bill? The answer is that we the people or the electorate are eventually going to pay for the sops, collectively. The sole beneficiary in this will be the political party we elect, who will be laughing all the way to the seat of power, for the next five years.

We, as voters, must critically evaluate the promises being made by the Government in power and all the other contending parties and see what their commitment is for pressing issues such as climate change and the environment. And, we also need to look at the environmental cost of an election. This also needs to be audited and made public in order to ensure that the people realise the environmental costs of



this democratic exercise and which parties have had the smallest carbon footprint. This will usher in a positive change in the thinking of the voter which will in turn compel the parties to shun anti-environmental activities in the form of excess use of fuel, plastic and paper during campaigning. The people of Delhi need to question the Government and ask it what it has done to safeguard the environment and

also assess what the environment-related promises and assurances other contesting parties are bringing to the table. The subject of pollution in Delhi has been a hotly debated matter, with the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) claiming tremendous success in reining in the same with the help of the vehicle rationing initiative the Odd-Even Scheme. However, as is the norm in politics, these initiatives have been

heavily criticised by the Central Government.

Both the Centre and the Delhi Government have been trading charges over this key issue and blaming each other for the sad state of affairs in the Capital.

As the common man continued to suffer the impact of the pollution shrouding the city in a pall of smog, the judiciary took it upon itself to express reservations on the efficacy of the scheme in controlling the spiraling pollution levels in Delhi-NCR and pulled up the Centre, the Delhi Government and even the neighbouring States of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh on the environmental crisis caused by crop residue burning by farmers.

The Supreme Court also directed the Central Government to assess the feasibility of the use of hydrogen-based fuel technology in the Capital to mitigate air pollution.

However, the fact remains that

things should not have come to such a pass. We need clear, tangible and more-importantly quantifiable results against efforts undertaken to protect the environment by all stakeholders. The city is what we will leave to the future generations and it cannot be inhospitable due to pollution that has reached unmanageable levels and turned it into a "gas chamber", choking and killing the people that reside in it.

The spectre of climate change is looming large and pollution cannot be stopped by turning a blind eye to it. Combatting pollution and climate change need a concentrated and sincere effort by the Government in power that has the resolve and the firm mandate of the people behind it. So this time let us elect the environment. A Government that makes environmental policies its priority will then automatically get elected.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)



**BE ALERT, NOT AFRAID**

Sounding the alarm unnecessarily has dangers of its own. People may fail to pay heed next time, or may overreact this time. Equally, muting discussions can backfire, especially in a world where information, or unfounded rumours, can be shared so quickly. It is essential that Chinese authorities at all levels are open about the coronavirus outbreak, as well as assiduous in tackling it. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



Trump calls Boeing a 'big, big disappointment'

**NEW DELHI:** President Donald Trump on Wednesday criticized Boeing as a 'very disappointing company' because of the aerospace giant's recent problems, which he said had a knock-on effect for the US economy. "This is one of the great companies of the world, let's say as of a year ago, and then all of a sudden things happen," Trump said in an interview on CNBC from the Davos economic forum in Switzerland. This "had a tremendous impact. You know, when you talk about growth, it's so big that some people say it's more than a half a point of GDP. So Boeing -- big, big disappointment to me," he said.



We will do well only if others with us do well: Pichai

**NEW DELHI:** Google CEO Sundar Pichai on Wednesday said the company will do well only if others alongside it do well as he dismissed any risks from the tech giant becoming too powerful. "With our scale rightly comes scrutiny. Yes, we've bought start-ups, but we also invest every year in hundreds of start-ups through our venture arms," he said at the WEF 2020 in a conversation with World Economic Forum Founder and Executive Chairman Klaus Schwab. Schwab asked him whether there is a risk that Google may become too powerful. "We will do well only if others do well alongside us," Pichai answered.



SBI Life Q3 profit up 47 pc at Rs 390 cr

**NEW DELHI:** SBI Life Insurance on Wednesday reported a 47.4 per cent growth in profit after tax (PAT) at Rs 389.44 crore for the third quarter ended December 2019. The private insurer's PAT stood at Rs 264.28 crore during the October-December period last year, the insurer said in a regulatory filing. Assets under management (AUM) increased to Rs 1,64,190 crore as compared to Rs 1,34,150 crore at the end December 31, 2018. Established in 2001, SBI Life Insurance is a joint venture between the State Bank of India and BNP Paribas Cardif SA, and is one of the leading life insurance companies in India. During the period ended December 31, 2019, the company classified its investment in Dewan Housing Finance Ltd (DHFL) bonds as NPA on account of default in interest and principal repayment of non-convertible debenture (NCDs) held in Unit Linked Funds, it said.

# NTT to invest \$ 1.5 bn in data centres in India

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Japanese tech major NTT on Wednesday said a significant part of its USD 7 billion global commitment for data centres business would be spent in India over the next four years.

The company also feels that there will be margin compression issues for the data centres business in India as capacity supply goes up along with an increase in competition, NTT's country chief executive for global data centres and cloud infrastructure, Sharad Sanghi, told PTI.

In the last few months, a string of corporates, including the Adani Group, Hiranandani and Reliance Industries have announced investments in data centres, on the back of regulatory moves like data sovereignty which makes it incumbent upon financial institutions to house their data locally.

"India is the fastest growing region for NTT and a substantial amount of the USD 7



**The Adanis have committed Rs 70,000 crore for data centres in Andhra Pradesh, Hiranandanis have committed Rs 14,000 crore and RIL has announced a partnership with Microsoft for the same**

billion commitment will be invested here," Sanghi said.

When asked if the money will be equally split between the four regions the company operates in, Sanghi said the overall investments are bound to be shared proportionately, hinting that over USD 1.5 bil-

lion or nearly Rs 11,000 crore will come into India.

The company, whose revenues have been growing at 30 per cent every year, is targeting to more than double its capacity in the next three years through the investments, Sanghi said.

Its overall capacity, which stands at 1.2 million sq ft at present spread across Mumbai, Noida, Chennai and Bengaluru, will go up by 1.5 million sq ft, he said.

The company is looking at going to newer locations as well and also adding to its land bank to house the facilities, he said.

Demand is coming from global hyperscalers like the cloud service providers, data localisation requirements and as a greater number of enterprises move to the cloud, Sanghi said.

The Adanis have committed Rs 70,000 crore for data centres in Andhra Pradesh, Hiranandani have committed Rs 14,000 crore and RIL has announced a partnership with Microsoft for the same.

Sanghi said the high quantum of investments in the business will change the characteristic of the market, which has so far been dictated by suppliers, from 2021 onward once the capacities come on board.

# GDP to grow by 5.5 pc in FY21, but risks persists

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

India's growth rate is expected to be marginally higher at 5.5 per cent in 2020-21 against the estimated 5 per cent for the current fiscal on the back of strong policy push coupled with revival in demand, a report said.

Citing an NSO report, India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) said the slowdown is a combination of several factors including an abrupt and significant fall in lending by non-banking financial companies close on the heels of a slowdown in bank lending and reduced income growth of households coupled with a fall in savings and higher leverage. Although some improvement in FY2020-21 is expected, these risks are going to persist, India Ratings and Research principal economist Sunil Sinha said.

As a result, the Indian economy is stuck in a phase of low consumption as well as low investment demand, it said.

"A strong policy push coupled with some heavy lifting (even if this requires using the escape clause as suggested by the FRBM Review Committee headed by N K Singh) by the government is required to revive the domestic demand cycle and catapult the economy back into a high growth phase," it said.

The government has announced a slew of measures recently to prop-up the economy, but Ind-Ra believes they will come to aid only in the medium term.

The shortfall in the tax plus non-tax revenue to result in the



**The government announced a slew of measures recently to prop-up the economy, but Ind-Ra believes they will come to aid only in the medium term**

fiscal deficit slipping to 3.6 per cent of GDP (budgeted 3.3 per cent) in FY2020, even after accounting for the surplus transferred by the RBI, it said.

"A continuation of low GDP growth even in FY21 means subdued tax revenue and limited room for stepping-up expenditure. Ind-Ra believes the government will have to construct the FY21 budget in a way that

expenditure is rationalised and prioritised and all avenues of revenue generation are tapped," it said.

While rationalising, the focus of expenditure has to be on creating direct employment and putting more money in the pockets of the people at the bottom of the pyramid, it said, adding since their marginal propensity to consume is close to one, they are likely to spend what they receive.

"This will support the consumption demand. Therefore, budgetary allocation to heads such as rural infrastructure, road construction, affordable housing and MNRGA must be prioritised and allocation for non-merit subsidy/expenditure less critical for growth be rationalised," it said.

Also, gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) has become government dependent, as incremental private capex has been down and out, it said, adding, despite the fiscal constraints, the government has not shied away from infrastructure spending in the past and even resorted to fund them through extra budgetary resources.

# 'AFT Mill in Puducherry will never be closed'

PNS ■ PUDUCHERRY

Revenue and Industries Minister M O H F Shah Jahan on Wednesday said the century-old Anglo-French Textile Mill, a government of Puducherry undertaking, would never be closed at any cost. He told PTI in the wake of a proposal issued on January 21 by the managing director of the Pondicherry Textiles Corporation P Priyatarshny running the AFT Mill, popularly known as Rodier Mill, since it was taken over in 1985 from the private sector.

The proposal was that 'the government is totally in favour of implementing VRS (voluntary retirement scheme) and does not want to close the now-defunct mill, he said.

The cabinet headed by Chief Minister V Narayanasamy decided recently that the mill should make VRS facility available for the workers opting for the scheme, Shah Jahan said. "We never intended to close the mill," he said and added that the cabinet decision was sent to the Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi for approval.

The Minister said the Lt



Normally, when differences arise between the government and the Lt Governor the issue concerned should be sent to the Centre for its decision as is envisaged in the Business Rules of Puducherry government

—SHAH JAHAN

Revenue and Industries Minister M O H F

Governor had, however, disapproved of the cabinet decision.

"The Lieutenant Governor took the stand that the mill should be closed on the ground that the mill is in the red," the Minister said. With the difference of opinion between the cabinet and the Lt Governor on the future of the mill the issue was referred to the Central government.

"Normally, when differences arise between the government and the Lt Governor the issue concerned should be sent to the Centre for its decision as is envisaged in the Business Rules of Puducherry government", he said.

The issue relating to the AFT Mill was thus now pend-

ing clearance from the Centre and hence no decision had been taken by the cabinet to close the mill, Shah Jahan said.

Shah Jahan said he would again write to Bedi informing her of the stand of the government that the VRS scheme alone should be introduced and any decision to close the mill should be scrapped.

Earlier, the opposition AIADMK legislature wing leader A Anbalagan released at a press conference a copy of the notice issued on January 21 by the managing director of the mill P Priyatarshny under the Industrial Disputes Act 1947 proposing the closure of the mill with effect from April 30.

# Alembic Pharma Q3 net profit up 38% to Rs 234.19 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Alembic Pharmaceuticals on Wednesday reported a 37.89 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 234.19 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2019 mainly on account of robust growth in international markets.

The company had posted a net of Rs 169.83 crore for the corresponding period of the previous fiscal, Alembic Pharmaceuticals said in a BSE filing.

Consolidated revenue from operations of the company rose to Rs 1,209.13 crore for the quarter under consideration as against Rs 1,018.15 crore for the same period year ago.

"It was a good quarter for the company led by strong growth in the International markets. We launched 7 products in the US market during the quarter," Alembic Pharmaceuticals MD Pranav Amin said.

International formulations grew by 48 per cent to Rs 664 crore in the December ended quarter, the company said.

# PayTm looks to double its growth rate in TN, Kerala

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Digital payments firm Paytm, promoted by One97 Communications Ltd, has set a target to achieve more than double its business growth in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, an official said here on Wednesday.

The move by the company follows the launch of all-in-one QR Code facility enabling merchants to accept unlimited payments through the company's wallet, Rupay Cards and UPI (unified payments interface).

The company has set a target to achieve more than double business growth in Tamil



Nadu and Kerala within a year, company senior vice-president Saurabh Sharma said.

"Tamil Nadu and Kerala have witnessed a 50 per cent business growth in last year and we expect significant growth in digital adoption from this region in 2020", he told reporters.

# Adani Group aims for world's largest solar power player tag

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Gautam Adani on Wednesday said his group is aiming to become the world's largest solar power company by 2025 and the biggest renewable energy firm by 2030.

In a LinkedIn post, the Adani Group chairman said the age of renewable energy has dawned upon the world faster than most could have anticipated.

"Our vision is to become the world's largest solar power company by 2025 and the largest renewable power company by 2030," he wrote.

In 2019, the Adani Group was ranked as the sixth largest solar player globally and as a part of this journey, "we are well within reach to be India's largest renewable energy company by 2020 and one of the top three global solar energy companies by 2021."



# Sensex sheds 208 pts; ONGC tanks 5 per cent

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmark Sensex surrendered early gains to end 208 points lower on Wednesday as energy, power, auto and financial stocks came under selling pressure.

After plunging 473 points from the day's high in a choppy session, the 30-share BSE index settled 208.43 points, or 0.50 per cent, lower at 41,115.38. It hit an intra-day high of 41,532.29 and a low of 41,059.04.

Likewise, the broader NSE Nifty closed 62.95 points, or 0.52 per cent, down at 12,106.90.

ONGC was the top loser in the Sensex pack, tumbling 5.13 per cent, followed by



NTPC, Maruti, Kotak Bank, HDFC, Asian Paints, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank.

On the other hand, Nestle India, TCS, Infosys, HCL Tech, SBI and Bharti Airtel ended with gains of up to 1.86 per cent.

According to experts, major stocks are in the process of correcting to their support levels ahead of the Union Budget.

# Indian cities to add 100 new malls by 2022

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Despite low consumer spending in recent times, mall developers remain bullish on the growth potential of organised retail as 100 new malls spanning over 49 mn sq.ft. are scheduled to come up across the country by 2022-end, property consultant Anarock said.

Of the total new mall supply, the top seven cities alone will see 69 new malls spread over 35.5 mn sq.ft. area.

The remaining 31 malls over 13.5 mn sq.ft. will come up in tier 2 & 3 cities such as Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Indore, Surat and Nagpur, it said in a statement. Region-wise, west and south Indian cities will see almost equal new supply.

West India will get 36 new malls over 17.5 mn sq. ft. area,



followed closely by South India with 35 new malls over nearly 17 mn sq. ft.

The north region will see a supply of 22 new malls spanning over 11 mn sq. ft. area.

East India will see a much more modest supply of seven new malls spread over approx-

imately 3.5 mn sq. ft.

"2019 was defined by significantly lower retail leasing, so this generous new upcoming mall supply over the next three years testifies to the confidence of private equity investors in Indian retail's pent-up potential," MD & CEO

of Anarock Retail, Anuj Kejriwal said. "The retail sector drew over USD 2.8 bn PE inflows from 2015-2019-end, 59 per cent by foreign investors alone.

Despite overall weak consumer spends, F&B, family entertainment centres, cinemas and beauty/wellness service outlets continue to flourish and demand new retail spaces.



# ICICI Lombard gets Irdai nod to pilot 5 projects

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ICICI Lombard on Wednesday said it has received Irdai's approval to pilot five innovative applications and programs in its health and motor portfolio under the Sandbox Project.

Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India's (Irdai) Regulatory Sandbox Project has provided the insurance industry with the flexibility to explore new products and services that suit today's technology and data driven world.

"This is the highest number given to any company under the Irdai-introduced project. ICICI Lombard is to pilot the five proposals from February 1, 2020 to July 31, 2020," ICICI Lombard said in a statement.

# China virus outbreak may wallop economy, financial markets

AP ■ BANGKOK

News that a new virus that has afflicted hundreds of people in central China can spread between humans has rattled financial markets and raised concern it might wallop the economy just as it might be regaining momentum.

Health authorities across Asia have been stepping up surveillance and other precautions to prevent a repeat of the disruptions and deaths during the 2003 SARS crisis, which caused \$40 billion-\$50 billion in losses from reduced travel and spending.

The first cases of what has been identified as a novel coronavirus were linked to a seafood market in Wuhan, suggesting



animal-to-human transmission, but it now is also thought to be spread between people. As of Wednesday, some 440 people

were confirmed infected and nine had died from the illness, which can cause pneumonia and other severe respiratory

**Health authorities across Asia have been stepping up surveillance and other precautions to prevent a repeat of the disruptions and deaths during the 2003 SARS crisis, which caused \$40 billion-\$50 billion in losses from reduced travel and spending.**

symptoms. A retreat in financial markets on Tuesday was followed by a rebound on Wednesday, as investors snapped up bargains. Share benchmarks were mostly higher, with Hong Kong's Hang Seng gaining 1.1% and the Shanghai Composite index advancing 0.4%. Japan's

Nikkei 225 jumped 0.7%.

While the new virus appears much less dangerous than SARS, "the most significant Asia risk could lie ahead as the regional peak travel season takes hold, which could multiply the disease diffusion," said Stephen Innes, chief Asian

strategist for AxiCorp.

"So, while the risk is returning to the market, the lights might not turn green until we move through the Lunar New Year travel season to better gauge the coronavirus dispersion." The 2003 outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in China, along with cases of a deadly form of bird flu, resulted in widespread quarantine measures in many Chinese cities and in Hong Kong. More than 8,000 people fell sick and just under 800 people died, a mortality rate of under 10%.

While the ordinary flu kills hundreds of thousands of people each year, such new diseases raise alarm due to the uncertainties over how deadly they

might be and how they might spread. That's especially true during the annual mass travel of the Lunar New Year festival, which begins this week.

"The cost to the global economy can be quite staggering in negative GDP terms if this outbreak reaches epidemic proportions as until this week, the market was underestimating the potential of the flu spreading," Innes said in a report.

In China, health officials stepped up screening for fevers. "We ask the public to avoid crowds and minimize the public gatherings to reduce the possibility of cross infection," Li Bin, deputy director of the National Health Commission, said Wednesday.

Manoj Kumar Chittimalla from the city provides digital education for government students in rural areas of the state through his NGO, 100 Smiles, writes V SATEESH REDDY

## Raising the standards of EDUCATION

tion in government schools and bring it on par with private schools. This will make sure every child can fulfil their potential, irrespective of his or her circumstances and background.

He shares, "It all started with a monthly donation of Rs 100 from each person in our organisation. Soon hundreds joined us. With these funds, we set up digital classrooms that give wider exposure to children in various fields. We have connected the schools to the world with the support of digital classroom and converted all school subjects into digital format that can be displayed to children through audio-video equipment."

"Soon, we observed that the number of students increased and the results also improved. With digital classrooms, we taught students not just academics but also other things like technology, history, yoga, human values and many more. Soon, we

applied this other schools and witnessed improvement there as well. We did all these activities in the rural areas of Telangana."

Till date, more than 6,000 students in Telangana benefited through these programme by 100 Smiles, says Manoj Kumar. Apart from digital classrooms, they have provided computer and science labs to 24 government schools in eight districts of Telangana including Warangal, Mahbubabad, Mahbubnagar, Sangareddy, Rangareddy, Medak, Nalgonda and Adilabad.

He shares, "We have done research on the current state of government schools in the state and prepared our plan to help them out. We targeted award-winning teachers in a particular district, who can voluntarily help us in the betterment of our cause. We motivate children and help them know the importance of education and create a

passion for learning through modern learning facilities like virtual classrooms."

Manoj said that they conduct counselling for parents about the importance of education for their children. He added that Loksatta founder J.P. Narayan is the chief advisor for their NGO.

He added, "We decided to target a single school at a time, adopt it for a certain period (for six months or more based on the support that is needed) and focus all our energy and resources on that one school. After all the promises are fulfilled, we will run a sustainable maintenance model and move onto the next school."

Apart from these activities and programmes, Manoj and his team also organise other activities such as the Swachh Bharat campaign, workshops on the importance of taking care of health and hygiene, rebuilding school infrastructure, providing sports materials and more.

"It started with a monthly donation of Rs 100 from each person in our group. Soon hundreds joined. With these funds, we set up digital classrooms that give wider exposure to children in various fields."

MANOJ KUMAR CHITTIMALLA  
FOUNDER, 100 SMILES



Digital education gives students a better understanding of subjects when compared to plain reading of textbooks. Many private schools have already started using digital education. At the same time, students in government schools find it tough to get a standard learning experience and basic facilities. Through our 100 Smiles Foundation, we provide digital education for the government school students. We also provide the hardware for computer labs and set up libraries for schools in rural areas of Telangana," said Manoj Kumar Chittimalla, founder of 100 Smiles.

Manoj Kumar comes from an agricultural background and did his schooling in government schools. Hence, Manoj knows the difficulties that students face in these schools. He shares, "I have always wanted to bring change in the quality of education in government schools and contribute towards making quality education accessible to rural areas in the country. I completed my graduation to become an engineer and made it into a private firm. I started the 100 Smiles charity foundation with the support of like-minded people in 2016."

Manoj said that the main objective of 100 Smiles is to improve the quality of educa-

## 'OTT services have no impact on TV serials'

Speaking to V SATEESH REDDY, television actor Akarsh Byramudi opens up about struggles he faced as an actor, seeking different roles, learning Telugu, people's perception about TV actors, and more

Bengaluru-based television actor Akarsh Byramudi has become familiar with Telugu audience for his role in *Attarintlo Akka Chellellu*. He made his acting debut with Kannada serial *Laxmi Baramma* in 2015. Later he entered the Telugu television industry with the serial *Punnaga* in 2016.

### In the limelight

Akarsh said that his friends, relatives and well-wishers have always told him that he is good looking and encouraged him to get into modelling. He said that, "I was always told that I was born for the limelight. After my B.Com, my sister's friend advised me to attend auditions for TV serials. I got selected for the Kannada serial *Laxmi Baramma* in 2015."

### Tough times

He said that his debut into the television industry got him into trouble. Once he found himself in a predicament where he had to replace a well-established character in a serial. He explained, "In the *Laxmi Baramma* serial, I had to fill the shoes of a role which was played by a well-established actor up until then. But my acting skills were not at par then and the role didn't work out for me. Disappointed with the experience, I shifted my attention to completing my MBA. Later, I got a call from Annapurna Studios in Hyderabad and they asked me to attend an audition. Even the experience of working on my first serial left a bad taste for me, I agreed to star in my first Telugu serial, *Punnaga*."

He added, "Once you get into acting then it is not possible to get rid of it. With the *Punnaga*, I created my own name in the Telugu TV industry. I worked hard and learned acting skills from my co-stars."

### Unpredictable role

After *Punnaga*, Akarsh got into *Attarintlo Akka Chellellu* serial on *Zee Telugu*. About his role in the serial, Akarsh says, "In the serial, I play a high-spirited youth called Aditya who doesn't have control over his emotions. When he was young, he was bullied a lot due to which he was traumatised. He gets angry or happy for no reason and is very unpredictable. I have never played this kind of role in my life and it was challenging."

### Learning Telugu

Even though he comes from a Kannada speaking family, he can speak Telugu very well. When asked about the difficulties he faced in learning a new language, Akarsh adds, "When I came here, I didn't know anything about the Telugu language. I learned the language within three months. Many people said that learning Telugu would not be an easy but I did it with ease. Mainly because most of the words in Kannada and Telugu are similar in script and in meaning."

### Where is your Taylor?

About the response for his roles and stardom that followed, Akarsh informs, "When I go out, people come up to me to talk about my role and it feels great to be recognised like that. In the serial, I call the lead actress Taylor and when I go out people ask me 'where is your Taylor?'. At the same time, she calls me *Saaruu* in the serial and people tease her by asking her 'where is your *Saaruu*? I am

grateful to my audience for the tremendous reception."

He informed that he doesn't have any dream roles and added that he wants to give his best to every role he gets. He also informed that he loves the acting of Mahesh Babu and Samantha.

### Change perception

He said the serial actors are not given the same respect as cinema stars. He shares, "In Kannada, serial actors get the same name and fame as cinema artists. But, in Telugu it is different. I don't know the reason for it but people perception has to change about serial actors. Whatever the field is, every actor deserves respect."

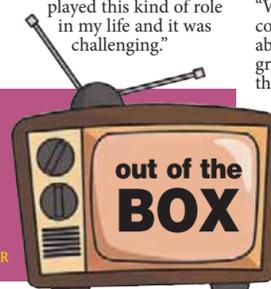
### OTT impact

Speaking about the OTT (over-the-top) platforms, Akarsh said, "Every field has its own audience and I believe that the OTT services don't have any impact on serials. Digital serials won't last long and don't reach every village. Whereas through TV, we reach out to every family and audience gets to be a part of the journey."

"

When I came here (Hyderabad), I didn't know anything about the Telugu language. I learned the language within three months. Many people said that learning Telugu would not be an easy but I did it with ease. Mainly because most of the words in Kannada and Telugu are similar in script and in meaning.

AKARSH BYRAMUDI, ACTOR



**PARTY**

## TRADITIONAL AESTHETICS

After the successful completion of the first phase of its domestic marketing campaign, Kerala Tourism kicked-off the second phase of the National Partnership Meet in Hyderabad recently. In its latest event, Kerala Tourism showcased a combination of the state's traditional art forms and products much to the delight of the attendees.



● Nehra

● Jijith

● Anand

● Krishna Das

● Satarupa Datta

● Mureedharan

**CITY GUIDE**

» **COMEDY**



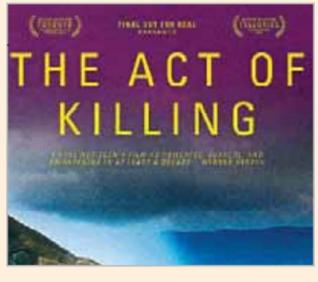
**OH HELLO!**  
● Crowd favourite Rahul Dua starts his country tour again, this time travelling solo with his brand new stand up special 'Oh Hello!' He will be touring multiple venues in the city till January 25.



**DRAUPADI - A DANCE DRAMA**  
● Draupadi is a dance drama in Kuchipudi format, with Sravya Manasa playing the lead role as Draupadi. It deals with the less familiar phases of Draupadi's life along with her inclination towards Karna. The play shall be held at Phoenix Arena on February 1 at 7 pm.

**THE ACT OF KILLING**

● Cinephiles Film Club is screening a film The Act of Killing on January 29 at Lamakaan from 7.30 pm. Filmmakers expose horrifying mass executions of accused communists in Indonesia and those who are celebrated in their country for perpetrating the crime.



**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 music lovers in various cities. The event will be organised at Shilpakala Vedika on January 25 at 6 pm.

**PALM LEAF CRAFT**

● For all craft lovers Lamakaan Cultural space brings you Palm Leaf Craft, which is the third in a series of workshops named Leela Ten Months, Ten Crafts. This is an initiative to sustain traditional crafts that are on the verge of extinction. The workshop will be held at January 26 at 11 am.



**SPEAK UP**  
● "SPEAK UP" is an intensive weekend workshop on effective Communication and Public Speaking skills. With theatre-based exercises, group activities and stage time, this program helps you break out with confidence and discover your own voice. The focus here is on verbal, non-verbal and written communication. The workshop will be conducted on January 25 from 11am to 5pm.

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

**FUN**

**ARCHIE**

JUGHEAD! WHAT ARE YOU THINKING PLAYING HULA-HOOP IN THE HALL?  
I'M NOT PLAYING!  
ACHOO!  
I'M JUST TRYING TO AVOID CATCHING ANYONE'S COLD!  
SNIFF!  
DO NOT CRESS!

**CALVIN AND HOBBS**

DON'T YOU HATE IT WHEN YOUR BOOGERS FREEZE?

**GARFIELD**

DO YOU THINK OF ME OFTEN, GARFIELD?  
OH, SURE!  
ASSUMING THAT THINKING OF YOU THINKING OF ME COUNTS?

**NANCY**

Days can fly, and nights can crawl...  
and whole years can disappear.  
But, if you can find a Peace-filled place...  
Then, your life can float right there.

**GINGER MEGGS**

KISSING BOOTH  
CAN I CLAIM THIS ON TAX?  
YOU'LL HAVE TO FORGIVE ME...  
...I'M FRESH OUT OF RECEIPT BOOKS.

**REALITY CHECK**

WE HAVE A REALLY SMALL BUDGET FOR THIS PROJECT, BUT IT WILL GIVE YOU LOTS OF EXPOSURE!  
BUT- YOU CAN DIE FROM EXPOSURE!

**SPEED BUMP**

I DON'T KNOW IF I'M MORE IMPRESSED BY HIS DEXTERITY, HIS GRIPPING ON THE SIZE OF HIS BALDOPR.

**CROSSWORD**

1	2	3	4	5
6			7	8
9			10	
12	13		14	15
17			16	
			18	
19				

**SUDOKU**

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

**Yesterday's solution**

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

**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**

- A pain in your mouth
- Smash
- A huge person
- One quarter of thirty-six
- Boil water in this
- Scared
- Lost blood
- Cut into two equal parts
- Sooner than expected
- Completely tired out

**DOWN**

- Sea
- Carry away
- Quarrelled
- This beats rhythmically inside your chest
- Under
- A weekday
- Film theatre
- Rest from work and take it easy
- Big
- Tame animals kept at home

**SOLUTION**

A	N	S	I	E	R	E	D		
I	L	L	O	N	A	C	E		
D	R	I	L	L	V	E	R	S	E
E	K	V	Y	T	H				
N	E	E	D	E	E	D	S	H	T
I	R	A	N	G	A	L	L		
T	R	A	N	G	A	L	L		
C	B	Z	L	I	E				
A	L	O	N	E	L	O	V	E	
L	V	R	E	E					
R	E	P	O	R	T	E	R		

# I like the world of sci-fi: VI ANAND

Making sci-fi movies is not everyone's cup of tea. Vi Anand speaks about his dive into fantasy world with the much anticipated *Disco Raja*, writes NAGARAJ GOUD

Filmmaker Vi Anand followed *Ekkadiki Pothavu Chinnavada*, which braved demonetisation and went to register impressive numbers, with *Okka Kshanam*, starring Allu Sirish. Although it opened to positive reviews, it failed to light up the box-office. Anand says he still doesn't understand what went wrong. "I've made my mark with the film and I was content with the overall product. However, I don't know why it didn't perform well. Post the release, the team was of the opinion that the release date (December 28) wasn't the right one and I too felt the same," he shrugs.

Despite *Okka Kshanam's* failure, Anand got Ravi Teja on board for his next, *Disco Raja*. The film is a scientific-thriller which oscillates between the past and the present, and is set to open in cinemas this Friday. It is Anand's third sci-fi drama after his maiden Tamil film *Appuchi Gramam* and *Okka Kshanam*. He is secretive about the film's plotline but admits to have a thing for sci-fi stories. "It's my favourite genre. From *Extra Terrestrial* and *Abyss* to Christopher Nolan's films, I like the world of sci-fi. I had a thin storyline of *Disco Raja*

ten years ago and I've worked on it whenever I got time. But I needed more research material for a comprehensive screenplay. This is when I came across a news, one-and-half years ago, about an experiment gone wrong in a biochemical lab. *Disco Raja* is about what if that experiment had been successful," he explains.

The film's storyline itself has paved way for humour, twists and turns within its offbeat screenplay, making it a packaged commercial entertainer with a new concept, he informs. "I've written it keeping Ravi Teja in mind. He will be seen as a music-loving gangster who has heroic elevations. He is sarcastic and full of swag. He took the film to the next level with his performance. In fact, at times he even came up with one-liners for the film that were not on paper. He was fully immersed with his role. I've approached him with the story when he was on the lookout for a concept-driven film," he shares.

quick to mention that the actor didn't force him to add humor, which is usually a given in Teja's movies, to the story. "If the entertainment comes organically with the story, let be it. Else, no point adding it," he had told me. He was sure not to disturb the flow of the story. *Disco Raja* will be one of his top five characters of his career. The film will have all the elements that one usually expects from his film but they will be presented in a different manner," he states.

The architect-turned-director, who has a gold medal from the Madras University, has filmed an action sequence in Iceland last September with the help of the stuntmen from *Fast and Furious 7*. Terming it as the film's most challenging schedule, he adds, "The temperature at the location would vary drastically from morning to evening. It would be freezing in the morning but when the temperature rose to 0 °C, the ice would melt. We had special cars to navigate through



crevices filled with water while returning to hotel. It was risky but at the same time, it was the film's most important sequence. We shot at the same place

where Christopher Nolan shot *Interstellar* and that made us a happy bunch. The sequence will last for 10 to 12 minutes but is important for the narrative."

At the film's pre-release event recently in Hyderabad, Ravi Teja had dropped hints at the film's sequel. Anand admits that he has shared the sequel storyline to his actor who is "very interested in it." "But he is a practical man and told me that it will depend upon how well *Disco Raja* fares at the box-office," the director maintains.

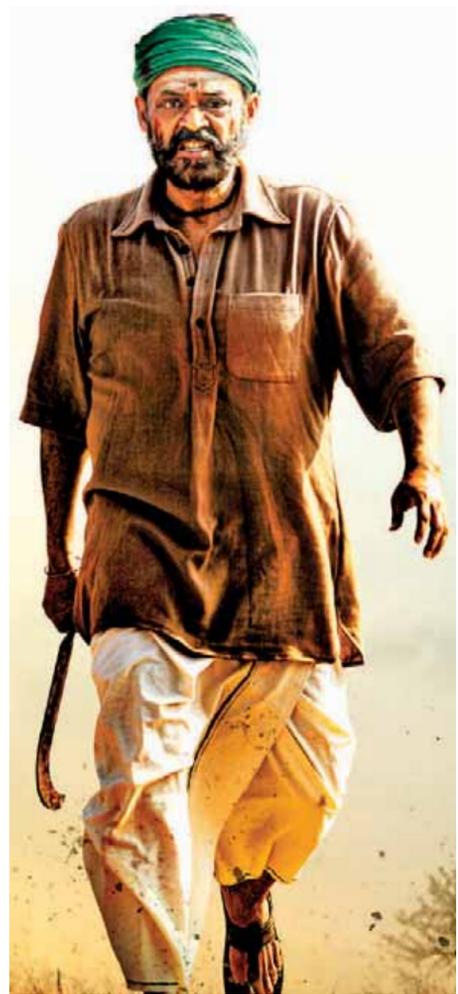
He is open to helm web series but believes that watching a film in a theatre is irreplaceable.

"Watching web shows is a personal activity, while watching film is a community activity. Yes, digital is the way forward but watching it in a theatre cannot be replaced," Anand, who will direct Nikhil next for Geetha Arts, signs off.

“

I've written it (*Disco Raja*) keeping Ravi Teja in mind. He will be seen as a music-loving gangster who has heroic elevations. He is sarcastic and full of swag. He took the film to the next level with his performance. In fact, at times during shooting he even came up with one-liners for the film that were not on paper.

VI ANAND DIRECTOR



## ASURAN remake rolls in Uravakonda

Suresh Productions on Tuesday evening announced the title of Victory Venkatesh's next, which is a remake of Tamil super hit *Asuran*, as Naarappa.

The famed production house originally planned to unveil the posters and title as the clock rung 12 am on Wednesday but with sudden leaks releasing the title on Tuesday evening itself, they've changed their plans. The posters, however, received a thumbs-up from cinephiles and celebs.

The film's principal shoot began on Wednesday at Paalturu Village,

Uravakonda in Anantapur. The first schedule will be shot mostly in Rayalaseema post which the unit will film some scenes at Ramanaidu cine village, Nanakramguda. Director Sreekanth Addala got a strong technical team in place for the project, which will narrate the tale of a farmer Narappa and his fight to save his land and son from the most affluent family in the village.

He has roped in Mani Sharma for the music, while Sam K. Naidu will be cinematographer. Peter Heins will choreograph stunts.

Speaking about his decision to remake *Asuran* last month, Venkatesh had said, "The film's emotions make it a hardcore commercial film. I was following it up when it was under production as its producer Kalaiipuli Thanu made Gharshana earlier with me. I took the decision of remaking it 30 minutes into watching the film. It will be a challenge for me. We are making it on a tight budget and we will wrap it up in four months for a summer release."



## New scenes to be added to *Sarileru...*

The makers of Superstar Mahesh Babu-starrer *Sarileru Neekevarru*, which set the box-office on fire, will be adding a couple of new scenes to the film's prints starting from this weekend. Announcing this at a press meet in Hyderabad on Wednesday, the film's director Anil Ravipudi said one particular comedy scene between Mahesh Babu and Rao Ramesh running into the length of one-and-half minutes will be added from the

weekend. He also clarified they are not removing any scenes as reported by some media outlets recently.

Film's producer Anil Sunkara said that the film is best grosser in Mahesh's career and that the distributors and exhibitors got more than what they wished for from the film's collections. "One particular distributor told me it's the best Sankranti of the Telugu industry," Sunkara added.

Meanwhile, Mahesh is celebrating the film's success in the US with his family.

## JAANU BOOKS ITS RELEASE DATE

Valentine's Day will arrive a little early for Telugu movie buffs. The much anticipated *Jaanu* — official Telugu remake of Tamil super hit '96 — will release on February 7, production house Sri Venkateswara Creations announced on Wednesday. Although the Prem Kumar-directed film, spearheaded by Sharwanand and Samantha, was wrapped up long back, producer Raju was waiting for a right release date. He had considered releasing the movie on February 21 but he advanced it now. A heart-touching love story, *Jaanu* revolves around two childhood sweethearts who meet 20 years later in a school reunion. The original was raved for its representation of love and its music by Govind Vasantha, who has been retained for the remake as well.

The film's first single was released on Tuesday and Raju is planning to amp up the promotional activity from next week. *Jaanu* will be followed by another romantic drama, *World Famous Lover*, on February 14.



## Nikhil basketball player in Konda's next

After Aditya Music forayed into production recently with *Entha Manchi Vaadavuraa*, another south music company Lahari Music has decided to follow suit.

The reputed music label will be producing Kannada actor Nikhil Kumar's next flick with Telugu director Vijay Kumar

Konda. Although the duo was supposed to team up in 2018, the actor's sudden foray into politics meant that Konda had to get back to Telugu and do a film *Orey Bujji* with Raj Tarun. The director has wrapped up the shooting of *Orey Bujji* last month and is now in Bengaluru to monitor the pre-production activities of his yet-to-be-titled next film.

A Kannada-Telugu bilingual, the film, we hear, will be a love story which revolves around basketball.

Nikhil will be playing a basketball player in the film and he has been prepping for his role in Bengaluru.

"The shoot will begin towards the month-end in Bengaluru and it will be shot later in Mysore, Hyderabad and in the

US as well. The makers are extremely happy with the response the first look poster has garnered. The leading lady and other supporting artistes will predominantly be from Kannada," said a source.

Kannada's top music director Arjun Janya is on board to compose tunes, while Konda has handed over the editing job to Prawin Pudi.



SINGLES

TOP FIELD FOR B'URU ATP CHALLENGER

**BENGALURU:** The third edition of the Bengaluru Open from February 10 to 16 will see one of the best fields in the ATP Challenger Tour event with four players from the top-100 world rankings taking part in it. Lithuanian Ricardas Berankis, ranked 69th in the ATP rankings, followed by 74th ranked Stefano Travaglia will lead the top field. Japanese journeyman Yuichi Sugita (91) and Australian James Duckworth (94) are the other players in the top-100 who will be vying for honours in the biggest ATP Challenge Tour event in Asia which offers a total prize purse of \$ 162,000. Defending champion Prajesh Gunneswaran, currently the highest ranked Indian at 123, will lead the home challenge in company of 2017 winner Sumit Nagal (131).

NIKHAT, SHIVA ENTER STRANDJA QUARTERS

**NEW DELHI:** Four-time Asian medallist Shiva Thapa (63kg) and defending champion Nikhat Zareen (51kg) on Wednesday sailed into the quarterfinals of the Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament with resounding victories in their second-round bouts in Sofia. Also making the quarters was national medallist Duryodhan Singh Negi (69kg) after a comprehensive 5-0 triumph over Ireland's Kieran Molloy. Zareen was declared the winner after local favourite Sevda Asenova forfeited during the opening round of the contest. Former world Bronze-medallist Thapa defeated Poland's Pavel Polakovic 5-0 in his last 16 stage clash.

MEXICAN STRIKER HERNANDEZ JOINS GALAXY

**LOS ANGELES:** Javier Hernandez completed his long-awaited transfer to the Los Angeles Galaxy on Tuesday, saying the lure of playing regular football had prompted his move to Major League Soccer. The Mexican international striker, who will reportedly become the highest paid player in MLS, with *Sports Illustrated* saying he will earn \$6 million (5.41 million euros) a year, joins the Galaxy after a frustrating spell at Spanish side Sevilla. The Mexican star heads to the MLS after a successful career in European club football which included stints with Manchester United, Real Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen and West Ham, as well as Sevilla. Hernandez has scored more than 200 goals for club and country throughout his career.

AUSTRALIA TO HOST INDOOR CRICKET WC

**MELBOURNE:** Australia is set to host the 11th edition of the Indoor Cricket World Cup from October 10 to 17. The tournament will be held at the state-of-the-art indoor cricket venues in Melbourne — Casey Stadium & CitiPower Centre. Last held in 2017, Australia are the reigning men's and women's champions and the host will be seeking to continue the run of never losing a World Cup in either division in the 25-year history of the tournament. Cricketers from up to 10 countries will compete in the tournament in four divisions: under-21 men and women and open men and women.

GIBSON IS B'DESH NEW PACE BOWLING COACH

**DHAKA:** Bangladesh have appointed Otis Gibson as their new pace bowling coach, replacing South African Charl Langeveldt who resigned in December. The 50-year old former West Indies fast bowler signed a two-year agreement. Gibson, who has enjoyed two successful stints as bowling coach with England and has served as head coach of the West Indies and South Africa, will join the squad for the Pakistan tour which begins in Lahore on Friday.

IRAN TEAMS AFC CL MATCHES MOVED TO UAE

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Two Iranian football clubs' AFC Champions League preliminary round matches have been moved to a neutral country because of security fears. The Asian Football Confederation said the ties — Shah Khodro FC of Iran v Riffa of Bahrain and Iran's Esteghlal FC v Kuwait SC will now be played in the United Arab Emirates on Jan 25. Both the matches were scheduled to be played in Iran on Tuesday but were postponed and "moved to neutral venues because of ongoing security concerns and the decision of several governments to issue travel warnings to the Islamic Republic of Iran," said an AFC statement. **AGENCIES**

# LIGHTNING QUICK

## Rana's unbeaten 68-ball 105 helps Delhi beat Vidarbha by 6 wickets in 347 run chase



Sarfraz Khan celebrates after completing his maiden triple hundred during Ranji Trophy game against Uttar Pradesh at Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday **PTI**



Maharashtra players pose after win against Assam during Ranji Trophy game **PTI**

Score	Team	Opponent	Venue	Season
372-4	Saurashtra	Uttar Pradesh	Lucknow	2018-19
371-4	Assam	Services	Delhi	2008-09
360-4	Rajasthan	Vidarbha	Jaipur	1989-90
357-5	Rajasthan	Services	Jaipur	2018-19
348-4	Delhi	Vidarbha	Delhi	2019-20
344-4	Punjab	Bengal	Ludhiana	1992-93

FAISEL FEATURES

they started bowling within the stumps. I knew I will blast them if it's in my arc," said KKR's dependable middle-order batsman.

"This is my natural game and I don't like advise if people come and tell me to change my mindset. I only welcome advise when I need them," he said.

MAIDEN TRIPLE HUNDRED

**MUMBAI:** Staying true to his words, young Sarfraz Khan stuck his maiden triple hundred to single-handedly give Mumbai the crucial first-innings lead and grab three points on the last day of their Elite Group B match against Uttar Pradesh.

Uttar Pradesh had posted a humongous 625/8 declared in

their first-essay courtesy wicket-keeper Upendra Yadav's unbeaten maiden double-ton.

But Sarfraz's (301 not out off 391 balls; 30x4; 8x6) herculean task overshadowed Yadav's double-ton on a flat track, which had absolutely nothing for the bowlers even on the final day.

Right-handed Sarfraz was the cynosure of all eyes at the Wankhede Stadium, as he batted for as long as 633 minutes and hammered 30 fours and eight sixes.

What is more special about his knock is that the pint-sized batsman was suffering from fever two nights ago, but he came out

to bat and did the job for his team.

Sarfraz, who had played for Uttar Pradesh and returned to Mumbai, had all shots in the book.

But more importantly, contrary to his style, he showed restraint and respected the good balls.

Sarfraz, in the process, became the seventh Mumbai batsman to score a triple ton in first-class cricket and joined the illustrious list comprising Wasim Jaffer (301 and 314 not out), Rohit Sharma (309 not out), Ajit Wadekar (323), Sunil Gavaskar (340), Vijay Merchant (359 not out) and Sanjay Manjrekar (377).

The hosts resumed the final day on overnight score of 353/5 needing 273 more runs to overhaul Uttar Pradesh's first innings total, with 22-year-old Sarfraz unbeaten on 132 in company of his skipper Aditya Tare, who was unbeaten on 9.

Sarfraz first got able support from Tare (97 off 144 balls, 14x4) and then Shams Mulani (65 off 82 balls; 5x3; 1x6), as they took the game away from Uttar Pradesh.

While Sarfraz and Tare added 179 runs for the sixth wicket, he and Mulani added 150 runs for the seventh wicket and it was their partnership that ensured Mumbai crossed Uttar Pradesh's first-innings total.

Sarfraz, who had completed his individual 250, took a single, as Mumbai surpassed Uttar Pradesh's mammoth total and celebrated like the team had won the match.

Then Mumbai allowed Sarfraz to complete a well-deserved 300.

He completed his triple ton with a six over wide long on, after which the match was called off.

## Tri-series before WC will help in team composition: Smriti

**MUMBAI:** Playing in a tri-nation tournament before the Women's World T20 will help in strategising and team composition, senior India player Smriti Mandhana said on Wednesday.

The marquee event will start in Australia next month but before that, the country is hosting India and England in a tri-series. "Most of them have played in Australia, I think India A touring Australia last month is also going to be a big help (as) four-



Smriti Mandhana in a file picture

five players were part of that team as well," Mandhana told reporters.

She added, "The tri-series is going to be a really important tournament, thinking about the team composition or what is needed or what target we need to aim at on Australian wickets."

The left-handed batswoman said the tri-series matches could tell them a lot about what will be a safe target during the World Cup. "How can our bowlers plan better, all those things we are

going to understand once we land in Australia and play the tri-series.

"Specially the targets, tri-series will define the targets, like what the scoreline will be for the World Cup.

"England, Australia and India is always going (to be challenging). We are going to aim at good targets so I think that (tri-series) is an important tournament leading up to the World Cup," the 23-year-old said.

According to Mandhana, the team has been thinking about the World T20 for the past one year.

"Last one year, whatever we were doing during the matches, we were thinking about the World Cup, so finally we are leaving for the World Cup, it is quite exciting.

"I'm looking forward to playing this World Cup with this team as it is a new team with a mixture of experienced and new players," she said. **PTI**

## Jemi working on increasing bat speed to hit big shots



DUBAI (PTI): To make up for "lack of strength", India opener Jemimah Rodrigues is working on increasing her bat speed, which, she hopes, will aid in hitting big shots in the upcoming Women's T20 World Cup.

The lively 19-year-old is also striving to hone her backfoot skills ahead of the marquee event, starting in Australia next month.

"I'm working more on my back foot, developing my back foot more and trying to increase my bat speed. Because looking at my size, you can

make out I don't have that much strength to hit the sixes... But I've been working on that for quite some time," said Jemimah in a *Road To The T20 World Cup* podcast.

Since making her international debut in 2018, she has consistently put in commendable performances to established herself as a key member of the team.

India take on defending champions Australia in the opening game of the tournament in Sydney on February 21, and the youngster believes her side will have to be mentally strong against the hosts.

"I think when it comes to Australia, you got to be the best or you can't play. That's the kind of team they are. My favourite team to play against is also Australia. It's more of a mind game than just skills (when you play them on the field)," Jemimah said.

Jemimah, who will be playing her first World Cup, is looking forward to play in the final of the tournament, which will mark an important milestone in her life.

"I can't put it in words, how important it will be for me to be a part of the Indian team that plays in a World Cup final. It's quite exciting. I'm really looking forward to it," she said.

## Southee 'looking forward' to India series

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

New Zealand's veteran seamer Tim Southee is "looking forward" to the India challenge, leaving behind the disappointment of being dropped for the final Test of Australia series earlier this month.

"It's about making that adjustment. What's gone is gone and it was very disappointing, the guys would have learnt

from it, and now we've got to look forward to the Indian series," Southee was quoted as saying by *stuff.co.nz*.

Then, coach Gary Stead had said it was felt Henry would offer more pace than Southee.

But the 31-year-old is expected to lead the New Zealand attack when the five-match Twenty20 series against India starts at Eden Park on Friday.

He admitted he was disappointed not to have played in Sydney but said he has moved on.

"It's disappointing. You're gutted every time you're left out. It's an absolute dream to play for NZ and every time you do miss out it hurts, but you've got to respect the decisions and try to help out and give back to the team, even when you're not playing."



Angelo Mathews celebrates after double hundred **AP**

## Mathews 200\* hurt Zimbabwe

AFP ■ HARARE

Angelo Mathews struck his highest Test score with an unbeaten double century on Wednesday as Sri Lanka left Zimbabwe battling to save the series opener going into the final day at Harare.

Former skipper Mathews eclipsed his previous Test best of 160 and finished 200 not out after a marathon knock spanning 468 balls, as Sri Lanka declared their first innings on 515 for nine.

Zimbabwe, playing their first Test since November 2018, ended the fourth day on 30 without loss and trailing by 127 runs after Brian Mudzinganyama was drafted in as a concussion substitute for opener Kevin Kasuza.

Debutant Kasuza, who made 63 in the first innings, suffered a delayed concussion after he took a blow to the helmet while fielding at short leg on Tuesday.

Mudzinganyama became the fourth Zimbabwean to make his Test debut in this match. He was unbeaten on 14 with Prince Masvaure 15 not out at stumps.

The 32-year-old Mathews brought up his 10th Test century, his first since December 2018, in the morning session and steadily added to his total with considerable support from Dhananjaya de Silva and Niroshan Dickwella.

De Silva and Dickwella both scored 63 but two quick wickets for Sikandar Raza, who finished with three for 62, hastened the declaration as Mathews reached 200 with a sweep to the square leg boundary.

With one day remaining, the visitors appear the only team capable of victory although the pitch looks likely to have the final say.

## I see 'incredible' Kohli breaking more records: Smith

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

It's the year of the World T20 and it isn't just Virat Kohli and the Indian boys who are looking to take every opportunity to prepare for the show-piece event slated to be held later in the year. Run-machine Steve Smith is already excited at the prospect of playing another ICC event at home after the 2015 World Cup. In fact, he believes that his stint in the IPL with Rajasthan Royals will have a major role to play in the build-up to the mega event Down Under.

Speaking to IANS, Smith spoke about the much-debated proposal to have four-day Tests, India skipper Kohli's gesture to ask fans to support him during the 2019 World Cup, the Indian Premier League and how Tim Paine has done a brilliant job leading Australia in Test cricket.

For a man who has dominated batting charts in the last few years, Smith's numbers in the shortest format of the game definitely has room for improvement. But the former Australia skipper wants to keep playing and improving on the go rather than changing his style of training going into the World T20.

"No real specific training, but just playing a lot more T20 cricket and just getting the right tempo I guess for the game is the most important thing for me. I would love to be a part of the World Cup, it's obviously at home in Australia. I was involved in the ODI World Cup here in 2015 and had the most amazing six-weeks of my cricketing career and loved every minute of it. So yeah would love to be

involved in another World Cup at home for sure!" he smiled.

Asked if he was looking at his time with Rajasthan Royals to try some new stuff as it will be the perfect training ground for the World T20, Smith doesn't sound the sort who likes to tinker much with his training ritual. But he does have it on his mind to give his leg-spin skills a thought.

"Ah, don't want to try too much different. I don't really know, maybe a bit more bowling perhaps, but then that takes time away from my batting. So yeah, it's a difficult one but we'll wait and see," he reveals.

A chat with Smith can never move forward without discussing Kohli. It looks like these two will go ahead and share all the records between them when they hang their boots. The greatness of Smith though is in his humility. The moment the talks move towards the comparison, he decides to highlight how brilliant Kohli has been both as batsman and leader.

"Yeah, he is terrific. His batting numbers just speak for themselves. I think he's an incredible player in all three formats and I think we will see him break many records. He's already broken plenty of them and I see him breaking many more over the years. He has got the hunger for runs and doesn't stop getting them. Hopefully he can stop getting them against Australia, that'll be nice.

"As a captain he's already made India the number one side in the world in Test cricket. From what I have seen he sets really good standards for

them. He is a lot about fitness and is health conscious and things like that. He's got the Indian side into a really good place and leads them exceptionally well," the 30-year-old pointed.

Asked about Kohli's gesture to ask fans to show him support during the 2019 World Cup, Smith feels it was really nice of the India skipper. "In the World Cup it was really nice of Virat to do what he did. He did not have to do that and yeah it was a lovely gesture and really appreciated that," he smiled.

Kohli, in fact, won the 'Spirit of Cricket' award for his gesture in England.

There have been talks that Smith is a natural leader and that the national captaincy could well return to him in the near future. But for the batsman, Paine is the captain and someone who is doing a good job with the boys.

"Yeah, Tim's done a terrific job. He has led the troops really well. Obviously retaining the Ashes in England in twenty-odd years was an exceptional effort and yeah he has led the team exceptionally well," he said.

From the Ashes to the ICC's proposal to have four-day Test matches on a regular basis from 2023, Smith is a traditionalist in the matter and wants the format to stay as it is.

"I am comfortable with five days. I like the challenge of a five-day Test match. Obviously, there has been a lot of talk of the four-day Tests, but my personal opinion is I like five days. I don't make the decisions obviously of how it all works out but my opinion is five-days Tests is what it is all about," he signed off.



Sanju Samson in a file picture **PTI**

## Shaw, Samson celebrate senior team call up

PTI ■ LINCOLN

The in-form Prithvi Shaw flourished yet again as India A notched up a convincing five-wicket victory over New Zealand A in the first unofficial ODI here on Wednesday.

A day after being picked as the injured Shikhar Dhawan's replacement in India's ODI squad for the assignment against New Zealand's senior team, the 20-year-old Shaw smashed 48 off 35 balls to lay the foundation for the visiting team's chase.

Wicketkeeper Sanju Samson, who replaced Dhawan in India's T20 squad, blazed away to a 21-ball 39, while Suryakumar Yadav hammered 35 off a mere 19 deliveries.

Chasing 231 after opting to field, India completed the task with more than 20 overs to spare at the Bert Sutcliffe Oval. With the ball, Mohammed Siraj was the most successful bowler for India A, picking up three wickets for 33 runs in 6.3 overs, while there were two wickets apiece for Khaleel Ahmed and Axar Patel.

Their efforts helped India A bowl out New Zealand A for 230 with nine balls to spare in the 50-over match.

Quite a few home team players got off the blocks easily but could not go on to make substantial contributions. Rachin Ravindra top-scored with 49 off 58 balls and skipper Tom Bruce made 47 off 55.

India A got their chase off to a brisk start with Shaw and his opening partner Mayank Agarwal (29) picking the gaps at will.

The visitors had raced to 79 in 9.1 overs when Shaw fell to James Neesham. The 20-year-old Shaw, who came into the match after a 100-ball 150 in a practice game, hit five fours and three sixes.

Captain Shubman Gill (30) got out after getting his eye in and after that, Samson showed his prowess, smoking two maximums and three boundaries.

Mumbai big-hitter Suryakumar, who can also use the big handle to good effect, struck three fours and two sixes to take his team close to victory.

Vijay Shankar (20) and Krunal Pandya (13) then got the job done as India A took lead in the three-match series.