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GROWTH FOR SENSEX IN '20

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KOHLI TO BE
BACK AT NO 3

VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY JANUARY 17, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3

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BUNNY EYES
BOLLYWOOD
FOR PAN-INDIA
APPEAL
Page 11

FINANCE MINISTRY FORMER OFFICIAL QUESTIONS FISCAL DEFICIT NUMBERS

A former top official in Finance Ministry claims the government is understating the fiscal deficit, raising questions about the figures weeks before the annual budget is due to be released. India targeted a budget gap of 3.3 pc of gross domestic product for the year ending March -- one that is widely expected to be missed by as much as 0.5 percentage points as an economic slowdown hurts tax collections. SC Garg, who worked on the current fiscal year's budget targets, sees the real shortfall widening to at least 4.5 pc.



I-T NOTICE FOR RS 3.5 CR PENALTY LEAVES BPO EMPLOYEE 'SHOCKED'

A man from Bhind district in Madhya Pradesh, who currently works in a BPO firm in Punjab, has said that he got the shock of his life when he received an Income Tax Department notice, asking him to pay Rs 3.49 crore penalty for the alleged transactions of Rs 132 crore done in 2011-12. Ravi Gupta, who works as an assistant manager with a Business Process Outsourcing company in Ludhiana, said that in the notice issued last month, the I-T department asked him to explain the transactions of Rs 132 crore made in a bank account opened in Mumbai using his PAN.



MS DHONI DROPPED FROM BCCI'S TOP PLAYERS' ANNUAL CONTRACT

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Thursday announced the new player contracts for India senior men players, with four classifications dividing the players. Notably, former India captain MS Dhoni was dropped from the BCCI's list of centrally contracted players, raising fresh doubts on the future of the veteran wicketkeeper-batsman, who has not played since the World Cup semi-final loss to New Zealand in 2019. Apart from MS Dhoni, Dinesh Karthik, Khaleel Ahmed and recently retired, Ambati Rayudu have been dropped from the central contract.



FOUR GAGANYAAN ASTRONAUTS TO GET 11-MONTH TRAINING IN RUSSIA

The four astronauts shortlisted for the Gaganyaan project, India's first manned space mission, will receive training in Russia for 11 months, Union Minister Jitendra Singh has said. In a statement, the minister of state for atomic energy and space said their training in Russia will start from the third week of January. "After 11 months of training in Russia, the astronauts will receive module-specific training in India. In that, they will be trained in crew and service module designed by ISRO, learn to operate it, work around it and do simulations," the statement read.



BJP: Dhingra report has exposed Cong

4



'Nitish will lead NDA in upcoming Bihar polls'

5



Split roles of investment advisor, distributor: Sebi

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TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Paush & Krishna Paksha Panchangam
Tithi: Saptami: 07:27 am
Astami: 05:32 am (Next Day)
Nakshatram: Chitra: 01:12 am (Next Day)
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 11:02 am - 12:26 pm
Yamagandam: 03:12 pm - 04:35 pm
Varjyam: 10:04 am - 11:35 am
07:00 pm - 08:07 am
Gulika: 08:16 am - 09:39 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritkalam: 07:09 pm - 08:40 pm
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:03 pm - 12:48 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Clear with periodic clouds
Temp: 29/18
Humidity: 74%
Sunrise: 06:49
Sunset: 06:02
Current Weather Conditions
Updated: January 16, 2020 5:00 PM

India plans new law to protect foreign investment

- AP govt decision on renewable energy projects raised questions on contract obligation
- India is entangled in more than 20 overseas arbitration cases - the most against any country
- Institutional investors not preferring India after AP's experience

REUTERS ■ NEW DELHI

India is planning a new law to safeguard foreign investment by speeding up dispute resolution, aiming to attract more capital from overseas to boost stuttering domestic growth, said sources.

In a 40-page initial draft, India's finance ministry has proposed appointing a mediator and setting up fast-track courts to settle disputes between investors and the government, one of the sources said.

"The idea is to attract and promote foreign investment, but a major issue for investors is enforcement of contracts and speedy dispute resolu-



tion," said the official.

The draft proposal is aimed at diffusing investor mistrust around the sanctity of agreements, which has worsened recently after some state gov-

ernments decided to review approved projects, or threatened to cancel contracts.

Both officials declined to be named as the proposal is not public, and is still being

assessed by different ministries and regulators.

Foreign investors have highlighted the enforcement of contracts as one of their biggest concerns, said the second official, adding that improving on this front would also reduce litigation for the government.

While investors can still rely on the existing legal system to settle disputes, it often takes several years for cases to be decided or settled.

Investors previously had an option to take India to international arbitration courts under bilateral investment treaties (BITs) the government had agreed with dozens of nations.

Continued on Page 3

Jana Sena forges alliance with BJP, aims to unseat YSRCP in 2024

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ending the prolonged suspense, the Jana Sena on Thursday announced its alliance with the BJP, after three-hour-long deliberations at a hotel in Vijayawada. The new allies said that they have decided to take the failures of the TDP and the YSRCP to the masses.

On its part, the Jana Sena assured the BJP that its cadre will work with the national party not only in AP but also wherever necessary in the country.

Revealing details of the alliance at a joint media conference later, Jana Sena president Pawan Kalyan and BJP state unit president Kanna Lakshminarayana declared that the parties would fight the 2024 elections together, set up a coordination committee to iron out any differences and work with the primary objective of capturing power in the state by 2024 "by



Jana Sena president Pawan Kalyan announces the alliance in the presence of Nandendla Manohar, Kanna Lakshminarayana and Sunil Deodhar, on Thursday.

The Jana Sena assured the BJP that its cadre will work with the national party not only in AP but also wherever necessary in the country.

fighting against corruption and on public issues."

They said that the alliance has been clinched as the ideologies of the BJP and the Jana Sena are similar and that their

fight was against anti-people's policies of the government.

Earlier in the week, Pawan Kalyan had met top BJP and RSS leaders in New Delhi. The alliance was finalized within two days of his returning to the state.

Pawan Kalyan exuded confidence of the alliance forming the government in 2024. He said that the Jana Sena had decided to sail with the BJP in the interest of the people of the state and for the future of AP.

Continued on Page 3

Sailajanath appointed APCC president

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AICC on Thursday appointed S. Sailajanath as the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president, replacing N. Raghuvendra Reddy. Senior leaders Tulasi Reddy and Shaik Mastanwali were appointed working presidents of the party.

Sailajanath was elected to State Assembly twice - 2004 and 2009 - from Singanamala seat in Anantapur district. He served as a minister for some time.

Earlier, he played an active part in floating Jai Samaikyandhra Party in association with former chief min-



S. Sailajanath

ister N. Kirankumar Reddy. AICC general secretary Venu Gopal said the appointment will come into force with immediate effect.

Continued on Page 3

NIRBHAYA CASE LG for rejection of convict's mercy petition

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Lieutenant Governor of Delhi has recommended the Union Home Ministry to reject the mercy petition of one of the convicts of the Nirbhaya gangrape case, officials said on Thursday.

Mukesh Singh, one of the four convicts, filed the mercy petition a few days ago.

"The Home Ministry has received the mercy petition from the LG recommending its rejection. The petition is being examined and an appropriate decision will be taken soon," a Home Ministry official said.

Deodhar, GVL welcome alliance, say it is a historic day for state

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that January 16 was a historic day in the annals of Andhra Pradesh, BJP state affairs in-charge Sunil Deodhar termed the alliance struck between the BJP and the Jana Sena during Sankranti festival period "a welcome development".

"The alliance would drive away darkness in the state giving way to light," Deodhar said, alleging that the YSRCP government failed in all fronts.

He denied that the BJP has any understanding either with the TDP or with the YSRCP.



Sunil Deodhar



GVL Narasimha Rao

"The alliance has been struck with the Jana Sena on the grounds of ideological similarities," Deodhar said.

Ge said BJP and Jana Sena would work together in ending

dynasty rule and corruption in the State. He said they would bring happiness to the lives of people by driving away darkness.

Continued on Page 3

IUML moves SC for stay on CAA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), the first petitioner to move the Supreme Court against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), filed an application on Thursday seeking stay on the operation of the legislation which came into force on January 10.

In another application, the IUML has sought direction to the Centre to clarify its position on National Register of Citizens (NRC) and National Population Register (NPR).

The Kerala-based political party filed the intervention application in the writ petition against CAA and referred to the decision of Uttar Pradesh government to recommend the names of 40,000 illegal migrants to the Centre who can be granted citizenship under the amended Act.

It sought from the top court stay on the notification dated January 10, bringing the CAA into force "in the interest of justice".

"Pass orders staying the operation of the notification dated January 10, issued by the Union of India directing the coming into force of the provisions of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 from January 10 till the such time the present writ is pending before the court," it said.

I-T sleuths raid Rashmika's house

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Income-Tax department sleuths of Karnataka raided the residence of Kannada beauty Rashmika Mandanna — who is currently basking in the success of *Sarileru Neekevaru* — over suspected tax evasion.

According to reports, the I-T department officers on Thursday morning raided Rashmika Mandanna's residence in Virajpet. Over 10 officers landed at her residence, as per Kannada news channels.

The raids were reportedly made in connection with suspected tax evasion. It is reported that the Income-Tax authorities are investigating whether or not Rashmika Mandanna has paid taxes proportionate to her income.

Rashmika Mandanna is one among the very few actresses to enter Tollywood's Rs 100 crore club in such a short span of time and is one of the most popular and highest paid actresses in Telugu and Kannada cin-

According to reports the Income-Tax authorities are investigating whether or not Rashmika Mandanna has paid taxes proportionate to her known sources of income

ema industry. Rashmika made her acting debut in Kannada movie *Kirik Party* in 2016. In 2017 she starred in two commercially successful films, *Anjani Putra* and *Chamak*.

She made her Tollywood debut with Naga Shaurya starrer *Chalo* and she was later seen in films like *Geetha Govindam* and *Dear Comrade* which brought her much fame. The back-to-back success of films made Rashmika Mandanna one of the most sought after actresses in South Indian film industry. Now she is gearing up to shoot for her next with Allu Arjun. The film is being directed by Sukumar.



Amazon not doing favour by investing a \$1bn: Goyal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the world's richest person Jeff Bezos announced fresh USD 1 billion investment in India, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said his firm Amazon was not doing a favour to the country by the investments and questioned how the online retailing major could incur such "big" losses but for its predatory pricing.

Goyal, who has not yet given Bezos an audience, said e-



Piyush Goyal

commerce companies have to follow Indian rules in letter and spirit and not find loopholes to

Piyush Goyal said e-commerce companies have to follow Indian rules in letter and spirit and not find loopholes to make a back-door entry into multi-brand retail segment

make a back-door entry into multi-brand retail segment. India does not allow foreign

investment beyond 49 per cent in multi-brand retailing and has not yet approved any application of overseas retailers.

"They (Amazon) may have put in a billion dollars but if they make a loss of a billion dollars every year, then jolly well will have to finance that billion dollar. So, it is not as if they are doing a favour to India when they invest a billion dollars," he said at the Raisina Dialogue here.

Continued on Page 3

WHO endorses tech on TB developed by Indians

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has endorsed a technology developed by Indian scientists to detect tuberculosis and multi-drug resistant TB in view of its high diagnostic accuracy, health ministry officials said on Thursday.

The WHO's Global TB Programme has included TrueNat TB test -- a new molecular test that detects tuberculosis as well as resistance to the drug Rifampicin in about 90 minutes -- in its rapid communication document on molecular investigative procedure



in laboratory medicine and pharmacology.

According to Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) Director General Dr Balam Bhargava, the endorsement of the technology by

WHO would enable low and middle-income countries to procure TrueNat for tuberculosis and Rifampicin resistance, thus supporting elimination of the disease in developing countries.

The WHO's Global TB Programme has included TrueNat TB test in its rapid communication document on molecular investigative procedure in laboratory medicine and pharmacology

"The TrueNat assay kit is highly cost-effective compared to GeneXpert and can be used in peripheral centres without an air conditioned laboratory as it runs on battery which can be solar powered.

"The kit works in two steps. In the first step, the DNA is extracted from the sputum and the second stage involves detection of tuberculosis and multi-drug resistant TB," a senior health ministry official said.

Supported by the Department of Health Research (DHR), Ministry of Health and DBT, various indigenous technologies developed by Indian scientists and companies for detection of multi-drug resistant (MDR)/extensively drug-resistant (XDR) TB were reviewed, an ICMR statement said.

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CAPSULE



'Goda parinayam' performed

VIJAYAWADA: Sri Venkateswara Swamy was adorned with sacred garlands brought from Andal Ammavaru located at Sri Govindaraja Swamy temple in Tirupati on Thursday on the occasion of 'Goda parinayam'. Earlier, the procession of garlands commenced from Pedda Jiyar Mutt in Tirumala and proceeded towards temple. Later, priests decorated these garlands to Srivari signifying the celestial wedding.

'Kakabali' conducted

VIJAYAWADA: 'Kakabali', an Agamic ritual, was performed in Tirumala temple on Thursday. 'Kakabali' (food offered to a crow, which is believed to be auspicious) was conducted in the wee hours of Thursday seeking the well being of people. In this, cooked white rice, rice mixed with vermillion and turmeric, all are offered separately to Vimana Venkateswara Swamy at Ananda Nilaya Vimanam. Tirumala Pedda Jiyar Swami, Chinna Jiyar Swami, TTD executive officer Anil Kumar Singhal, temple deputy executive officer Harindranath and others took part in the celestial event.

Bengaluru gets its own 'SHE' team

PNS ■ BENGALURU
Bengaluru police formed an all women police motorcycle brigade 'We for Women' aimed at making the city safer for women and children. "We trained 15 woman sub-inspectors as of now and will continue to grow this team of motorcyclists. We want these women to lead by example and inspire other women as well, while keeping the city safe," said city armed reserve headquarters deputy commissioner of police Divya Sara Thomas in a statement. Women police officers with a passion for riding were identified and trained to improve their riding skills under various conditions. The bullet brigade, set to expand further, will execute patrolling duties and shatter gender stereotype, Thomas said.

Traffic curbs on Beach Road for R-Day parade

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Traffic curbs were imposed from January 17 at the RK Beach Road in the city as the government has decided to conduct the Republic Day parade on January 26.

The decision to organise the official Republic Day function in Visakhapatnam was taken at a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy. Authorities concerned informed Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan in this regard, while the Visakhapatnam district administration has been asked to make necessary arrangements for the event. The district administration was exploring other venues like AP Engineering College Ground and Municipal Stadium.

The decision of conducting the Republic Day parade in Visakhapatnam holds prominence, as efforts of the State government are apparently in full swing to make Vizag as the Executive Capital. It is expected that all the government offices, including the Secretariat, would be shifted to Visakhapatnam and an official announcement could be made this month or on Republic Day, according to sources.

After bifurcation of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in June 2014, the previous government has conducted the



The decision of conducting the Republic Day parade in Visakhapatnam holds prominence, as efforts of the government are apparently in full swing to make Vizag as the Executive Capital

Independence Day and Republic Day in different towns and cities. Vijayawada had remained as the venue for ceremonial events, for the last two years.

Diverted traffic routes

The city traffic police wing will impose traffic restrictions on the Beach Road from Friday in connection with the

Republic Day. The curbs will be in force from 5.30 am to 11.30 am and from 3 pm to 5.30 pm.

Traffic ACP Choudhary Papa Rao in a release here on Thursday said motorists going from Park Hotel Junction to NTR statue should take diversion at Pandurangapuram junction and proceed to All India Radio junction.

Those going to Pandurangapuram from Novotel Hotel should take diversion at NTR statue and All India Radio junction. Walking will not be allowed from NTR statue to Pandurangapuram. Walkers have been advised to walk on the beach instead of using the beach road.

There will be no parking on either side of the Beach Road from NTR statue to Pandurangapuram, All India Radio junction to Pandurangapuram and NTR statue to Pandurangapuram.

The ACP said people living on the RK Beach should contact Three Town Police Station traffic inspector (7382296905) for obtaining passes for free movement during this period.

SWACHH SURVEKSHAN-2020

GVMC seeks denizens feedback on Swachhata

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) is exploring smart ways to draw the attention of people in a bid to ensure that they participate in the Swachh Survekshan-2020 that kicked off from January 4.

With the spirit of competition running high among cities, Vizag is also gearing up to wear the Swachhata crown this time. The performance of cities in Swachh Survekshan League-2020 is crucial to their ranking in Swachh Survekshan-2020 due to the 25% weightage of quarterly assessments to be included in the annual survey that would go on till January 31.

From QR code on dustbins to make the messages on dustbin attractive, flashing messages on the public digital board at prime junctions, sky balloons and many other methods are being introduced to engage the denizens. The reason is Swachh Survekshan-2020 is being conducted from January 4, 2020 and a major thrust of the survey has always been on citizen engagement, be it through citizen feedback or indicators involving citizen participation.

This year, the citizen-centric focus has been enhanced substantially through verification of the progress made by cities on Swachhata through direct responses from citizens. Citizens can share their feed-



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Citizens can share their feedback through the 1969 Swachhata Helpline, Swachhata app, Swachh Survekshan-2020 portal, outbound calls and the Vote-for-your-City app

back through the 1969 Swachhata Helpline, the Swachhata app, Swachh Survekshan-2020 portal, outbound calls and the Vote-for-your-City app from January 4, 2020.

QR-coded Dustbin

GVMC Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr A Hemanth, said: "A monitoring mechanism, regarding the cleaning of dustbins on a daily basis, needed to be introduced. For this purpose, Quick Response (QR) code stickers will be tagged to the public dustbins. When any citizen, who is passing by, notices that the bin needs to be cleaned, they can scan the code on their mobile phone. Within no time, an alarm

will be generated to the civic authorities, and the health inspector, who will take prompt action in addressing the grievance. Once the grievance (cleaning of the garbage bin) is attended to, a satisfactory report will be sent to the complainant. This method will ensure that bins throughout the city are cleaned regularly."

"GVMC employees, too, can make use of this system by scanning the code of the bin they have cleaned. Trials of this system have been implemented on the RK Beach Road. After achieving successful results from the trials, the system will be implemented on the garbage bins across the city within a month or two.

RINL wins All-India Inter-Steel cricket championship

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The RINL emerged has emerged as champions in the All India Inter - Steel (SPSB) Cricket Championship 2019-20 held in Jharkhand. In a well contested final, the RINL defeated hosts Bokaro Steel Limited (BSL) by three wickets to win the championship. The BSL scored 142/10 in 20 overs while the RINL chased the target in 19 overs losing seven wickets.

For RINL KV Kashyap Prakash scored a brilliant 84, while Ch Bheema Rao took three wickets and Jagadeesh took three wickets. The cricket tournament was organised by Bokaro Steel Limited (BSL) at Bokaro Steel City from January 7 to 15.

This is the second time that the RINL won the Inter-Steel Cricket Championship, the earlier occasion being during 2017-18. PK Rath, CMD, RINL, and KC Das, Director



RINL emerges champions in All India Inter-Steel (SPSB) Cricket Championship held in Jharkhand. RINL defeated hosts Bokaro Steel Plant by three wickets in the final. RINL made 143/7 in 19 overs against BSL 142/10 in 20 overs

(Personnel), congratulated the RINL Cricket team and the Sports Department on the achievement.

In all, 12 teams participated in the event. Teams were divid-

ed into four groups. The RINL, along with Salem Steel Plant (SSP) and Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP), was in Group 'C'.

In the semi finals, the JSW scored 163/6 in 20 overs, while

the RINL achieved the target in 19 overs (165/2). For RINL KV Kashyap Prakash hit 56 runs, Ch Jogesh 57 and KP Sai Rahul 24, while Jagadeesh took three wickets.

For RINL KV Kashyap Prakash scored a brilliant 84, while Ch Bheema Rao took three wickets and Jagadeesh took three wickets

PK Rath, CMD, RINL, and KC Das, Director (Personnel), congratulated the RINL cricket team

In the first league match, Salem Steel Plant (SSP) scored 112/9 in 20 overs. The RINL scored 113/6 in 17.4 overs. Sai Rahul of RINL took four wickets while Ch Jogesh scored 37 runs. In the second league match, the RINL scored 205/5 in 20 overs and restricted BSP to 148/8 in 20 overs. For RINL, Captain BP Srinivas 69, KV Kashyap Prakash 57, Sai Rahul 51 contributed with the bat while Ch Srinivas took two wickets.

Gut bacteria can protect from, reverse Parkinson's

IAN S ■ LONDON

A common gut bacteria that boosts digestive health could slow and even reverse the build-up of a protein linked to Parkinson's, a new study suggests.

Building on previous research linking brain function to gut bacteria, this study in a Parkinson's model of roundworms, identified a probiotic - so-called good bacteria-which prevents the formation of toxic clumps that starve the brain of dopamine - a key chemical that coordinates movement. The findings, published in the journal Cell Reports, could pave the way for future studies that gauge how supplements such as probiotics impact the condition.

"The results provide an opportunity to investigate how changing the bacteria that make up our gut microbiome affects Parkinson's," said study lead author Maria Doitsidou, from the University of Edinburgh in the UK.

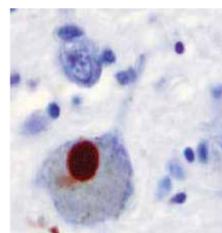
"The next steps are to confirm these results in mice, followed by fast-tracked clinical trials since the probiotic we tested is already commercially available," Doitsidou added.

According to the study, in the brains of people with Parkinson's, alpha-synuclein protein misfolds and builds up, forming toxic clumps.

These clumps are associated with the death of nerve cells responsible for producing dopamine. The loss of these cells causes the motor symptoms associated with Parkinson's, including freezing, tremors and slowness of movement.

For the study, the researchers used roundworms altered to produce the human version of alpha-synuclein that forms clumps. They fed these worms with different types of over-the-counter probiotics to see if bacteria in them could affect the formation of toxic clumps.

Scientists found that a probiotic called Bacillus subtilis had a remarkable protective effect against the build-up of this protein and also



"The results provide an opportunity to investigate how changing the bacteria that make up our gut microbiome affects Parkinson's," said study lead author Maria Doitsidou, from the University of Edinburgh in the UK.

"The next steps are to confirm these results in mice, followed by fast-tracked clinical trials since the probiotic we tested is already commercially available," Doitsidou added

cleared some of the already formed protein clumps.

This improved the movement symptoms in the roundworms. The researchers also found that the bacteria was able to prevent the formation of toxic alpha-synuclein clumps by producing chemicals that change how enzymes in cells process specific fats called sphingolipids. Other studies into mice have found that the gut microbiome has an impact on the motor symptoms.

"The results from this study are exciting as they show a link between bacteria in the gut and the protein at the heart of Parkinson's, alpha synuclein," said study researcher Beckie Port.

"Studies that identify bacteria that are beneficial in Parkinson's have the potential to not only improve symptoms but could even protect people from developing the condition in the first place," Port added.

Mixed crops give good income, farmers told

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

T Vijay Kumar, advisor to the government, in agriculture and cooperative departments suggested to farmers to give up monocrop system and adopt the multi-cropping and mixed cropping pattern for better results and good income. Mixed crop system increases

the fertility of the soil and inversely the income of the farmers also would be increased, he said. On Thursday, he visited Gorada and Santhoshapuram villages of Parvathipuram agency and interacted with farmers and visited the fields.

He spoke to farmers and advised them to practice the

natural farming. Pulses like green gram and black gram should be cultivated frequently to increase nitrogen in the soil and increase the fertility too.

"We should sequester the soil carbon into our land and protect it from fertilizers. We should always cover soil and farms with crops. We should

not allow the sun light to touch soil and evaporate the nutrients and minerals from soil. We should cover the soil always with any crop. Monocrop system is not suggestible as the price of the crop may fall or the yield may be low that year. If we sow many seeds at a time, we can have an assured income from some crops," he added.



Eat 7 meals a week, just dinner: Twitter CEO

IAN S ■ SAN FRANCISCO

In an update to his eccentric food habits, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey has now disclosed that he eats seven meals in a week, just dinner. In an interview to YouTube, Dorsey, who follows Vipassana meditation and intermittent fasting, added to his long list of weird lifestyle that includes ice bath, almost daily.

Dorsey has previously charted out his food chart for dinner that includes fish, chicken or steak, and 'a lot of greens'. "Then, I have mixed berries as a dessert, maybe some dark chocolate," he said in March.

Dorsey said he aims at meditating for two hours daily. He, however, clarified:



"I definitely do not do a sauna and ice bath every day." Jack Dorsey created a storm over social media last year revealing a punishing health regimen that helps

him stay sharper. "During the day, I feel so much more focused. You have this very focused point of mind... I can go to bed and actually knock out in 10 min-

utes, if not sooner than that," Dorsey said. Dorsey walks to office and take 'lots of vitamin C' every day.

According to Dorsey, ice-cold bath in the morning

"Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey created a storm over social media last year revealing a punishing health regimen that helps him stay sharper"

According to Dorsey, ice-cold bath in the morning 'unlocks' his mind and he can take on any challenge while a 15-minute 'sauna' in the evening, followed by another three-minute ice-bath, relaxes him

'unlocks' his mind and he can take on any challenge while a 15-minute 'sauna' in the evening, followed by another three-minute ice-bath, relaxes him.

CAPSULE

Man injured while tying knife to rooster dies

ELURU: In a bizarre incident, a person was killed in Pagadavaram village of West Godavari district during the past 24 hours while he was trying to tie a knife to the legs of a rooster as part of the ongoing cockfights arranged for Sankranti. The deceased was identified as Venkateswara Rao. The rooster swung its legs vigorously while tying the knife inflicting a severe bleeding injury on the thigh region. He bled profusely and collapsed on the spot. He was rushed to local hospital, but doctors declared him dead on arrival.

Gambling dens raided

VISAKHAPATNAM: The City Task Force personnel raided two places under the commissionerate limits and arrested 15 persons, who were allegedly involved in gambling in open places, on Thursday. Police raided an open place of Alakananda layout near Tallavala road of Bhimili Police Station limits and arrested seven persons while they were playing cards by betting. They seized Rs 50,760 and playing cards from their possession and handed them over to station house officer of Bhimili Police Station for further action. In another raid at an open place opposite Kalyana Mandapam, Reddypalli village under Padmanabham Police Station limits, they arrested eight persons and seized Rs 24,880 and playing cards. They were handed over to station house officer of Padmanabham Police Station.



IRREGULARITIES IN COAL SUPPLY CONTRACT

CBI books Adani Enterprises, 2 NCCF ex-officers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered a case of cheating and corruption against Adani Enterprises and a former chairman and an ex-managing director of multi-state cooperative NCCF for alleged irregularities in selecting a company for a tender to ferry coal from ports to power stations in Andhra Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The Andhra Pradesh Power Generation Corporation (APGENCO) had floated a limited tender enquiry for the supply of six lakh MTs of imported coal from sea ports to Narla Tata Rao Thermal Power Plant in Vijayawada and Rayalaseema Thermal Power Plant (RTPP) in Kadapa on June 29, 2010, they said.

The tender enquiry was forwarded to seven PSUs, including National Co-operative Consumer Federation India Ltd (NCCF), a multi-state cooperative under Union Consumer Affairs ministry having 78 per cent government stake, they said.

The CBI booked Adani Enterprises, the then NCCF



chairman Virender Singh, the then managing director of NCCF GP Gupta and its senior advisor SC Singhal under IPC Sections related to alleged criminal conspiracy and cheating and Provisions of Prevention of Corruption Act for allegedly favouring the Ahmedabad-based company in the tender and violation of guidelines.

There was no response to a query sent to Adani Enterprises Limited seeking its

comments. The CBI alleged that acts of 'omission and commission' by the NCCF officers disclose that they acted in 'a manner as unbecoming of public servants' and conspired with the company.

The FIR said the officers "committed irregularities by the way of manipulation in the selection of the bidders, thereby giving undue favour to Adani Enterprises Limited in award of work for supply of imported coal to APGENCO

The CBI booked Adani Enterprises, the then NCCF chairman Virender Singh, the then managing director of NCCF GP Gupta and its senior advisor SC Singhal under IPC Sections related to alleged criminal conspiracy and cheating and Provisions of Prevention of Corruption Act for allegedly favouring the Ahmedabad-based company in the tender and violation of guidelines

despite its disqualification." Giving details of alleged criminal conspiracy and corruption, the CBI alleged that NCCF, Hyderabad unit, which had received the APGENCO tender enquiry on June 29 had forwarded it to its headquarters in Delhi to Singhal, officials said.

The same day the head office selected a single party - Maharishi Brothers Coal Limited (MBCL) - to transport the coal at a margin of 2.25 per cent instead of initiating the process for floating an open tender to call for bids from the competitive bidders citing lack of time as the deadline was July 7, they said.

Six days later on July 7, APGENCO informed NCCF, Hyderabad, that the date of tender has been extended to July 12 following which allocation to MBCL was cancelled and open tender was floated, they said.

"It is pertinent to mention here that before extension of the date of tender they had seven days (July 1, 2010 to July 07.2010) and after extension of date they had five days only (July 8 to July 12, 2010) but now, the management felt that they have sufficient time to call open tender," the CBI FIR has alleged.

The draft tender notice was discussed and approved

by three senior officials of NCCF - Singhal, Gupta, and Singh - who ignored laid down guidelines without consulting head office level committee, it alleged.

Six bidders Adani Enterprises, MBCL, Vyom Trade Links, Swarana Projects Gupta Coal India and Kyori Oremin responded to NCCF tender on July 10, 2010 whose details and bids were tabulated and sent to the headquarters by Hyderabad unit on the same day, it said.

Gupta Coal had quoted 11.3 per cent NCCF margin while MBCL had kept it at 2.25 per cent but remaining companies had not quoted any NCCF margin, it said. Bids of Gupta Coal, Kyori Oremin and Swarana Projects were rejected by NCCF as they did not fulfill tender conditions, the FIR claimed.

The CBI has alleged that senior officers of NCCF did post tender negotiations with Adani Enterprises to give it undue benefits even though the company did not qualify when tender was opened at Hyderabad office of NCCF,

officials said. "Instead of cancelling the bid of Adani Enterprises Ltd. senior management of NCCF conveyed the offer margin of NCCF to the company through one of its representatives Munish Sehgal who was sitting in the NCCF head office on July 10, 2010 in the evening..." the FIR alleged.

It said subsequently Adani Enterprises Limited on the same day informed NCCF that they agree to pay minimum margin charge of 2.25 per cent to NCCF. "It is prima facie evident that when the bids were being processed at NCCF HO, New Delhi representative of Adani Enterprises was informed regarding their imminent rejection due to non submission of NCCF margin and also that MBCL, the eligible bidder had quoted 2.25 per cent margin," the FIR alleged.

The agency has also alleged that Vyom Trade Links was a proxy of Adani Enterprises which had given it an unsecured loan of Rs 16.81 crore and withdrew its offer at last stage on "flimsy grounds".

Pawan Kalyan is unstable, says Ambati

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Describing Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan as a "politically and personally unstable man", YSRCP spokesman and Sattenapalli MLA Ambati Rambabu on Thursday said that there was no need to specifically respond to the alliance finalised between the BJP and the Jana Sena.

Pointing out that Pawan Kalyan's party did not have any impact in the 2019 general elections, Rambabu told reporters here that the Jana Sena chief behaves differently every time he reads a new book.

Reminding that Pawan Kalyan had, in the past, said that the BJP had given the rotten laddus to AP, he wondered if the saffron party had given fresh laddus this time around. "How can Pawan Kalyan's party enter into an alliance



with BJP which has denied AP Special Category Status," Rambabu asked, and reminded that TDP and Jana Sena had sailed together in the 2014 elections.

"In 2019, Pawan had a hidden understanding with TDP and a direct alliance with the Left parties," he added.

The YSRCP leader appealed

to the people to think about Pawan Kalyan's political behaviour as he had displayed instability in forging alliances throughout. He said YSRCP had come to power by driving away a "failed government" headed by TDP.

Stating that not a single corrupt activity had taken place in the last seven months,

Rambabu warned that the YSRCP government would not tolerate if anyone leveled baseless charges.

He said the State government was implementing welfare schemes like no other government in the past. "How can Pawan Kalyan describe the YSRCP government as being a failure?" Rambabu asked.

The YSRCP spokesman said that the party had come to power by going it alone in the last elections and observed that they were not worried about any number of parties coming together.

He said the YSRCP would implement all the promises made in its manifesto and seek votes from the public in the next elections. He also said that efforts were being made to shield Naidu and wondered if the BJP and Jana Sena had come together to help him.

ON THE HORIZON



Families, who thronged a beach in Visakhapatnam, enjoying flying kites on the occasion of Kanuma festival, on the last day of three-day Sankranti festivities, on Thursday

WHO endorses tech developed by Indians for fighting TB

Continued from Page 1

The most promising kits were selected by an expert group and those were subjected to a double-blind validation in comparison to standard tests at four national reference laboratories of the country.

After a stringent review, a series of validation, subsequent feasibility studies and continuous follow-up, the 'TrueNat MTB & Rif' assay was found to be on par with the internationally recognised molecular assay Gene Xpert in terms of sensitivity and specificity and detection of rifampicin resistance.

This was taken up by National TB Elimination Programme after recommendations from ICMR.

As part of WHO's pre-qualification process, ICMR fund-

ed Indian centres of the FIND-coordinated multi-central, prospective field evaluation study in four countries - India, Ethiopia, Peru and Papua-New Guinea. Based on the interim analysis of data, WHO included TrueNat as test to diagnose TB, replacing sputum smear microscopy, and to sequentially detect rifampicin resistance in view of its high diagnostic accuracy. The study has completed enrolment at all sites and a final analysis would be undertaken soon by FIND, Geneva, the statement said.

"It is a matter of pride for ICMR, Department of Health Research, New Delhi, as this was a long journey for promoting Indigenous diagnostic technologies for diagnosis of TB and MDR/XDR TB developed by Indian scientists," it added.

India plans new law to protect foreign investment

Continued from Page 1

But, after suffering setbacks in overseas arbitration matters, India has allowed most of its treaties to lapse, giving investors little to fall back on in case of major disputes.

BITs are agreements between two countries that give foreign investors protections, and among other things, legal recourse via international arbitration in disputes with a government.

India is entangled in more than 20 such overseas arbitration cases - the most against any country - brought by companies including Vodafone, Deutsche Telekom and Nissan Motor Co for disputes over retrospective tax claims and breach of contracts.

If India loses these cases, brought before most of its BITs lapsed, it could end up



paying billions of dollars in damages.

The government's thinking is that India may not need to sign investment treaties with other nations if the new law, which is modelled on a BIT, can give confidence to investors, said the first source. A domestic law, however, cannot be a substitute for a BIT as its scope cannot

allow investors to take their case to international arbitration, the sources said.

Though India's overall ranking in the World Bank's ease of doing business report has improved to 63 from 142 in 2014, it still ranks poorly - 163 out of 190 - when it comes to enforcement of contracts.

The latest example of a con-

tract wrangle is a dispute between the Andhra Pradesh state government in southern India and renewable energy companies. The state has been curtailing power procurement from the companies, citing high prices, and has pushed to renegotiate its supply contracts with them.

Investors including Goldman Sachs, Japan's SoftBank Group, Singapore's GIC Holdings, the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and France's Engie have invested in renewable projects in the state.

The draft proposal for the new law includes a plan to set up an investment tribunal in state high courts that will take up cases as a matter of priority, or will see if the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which also handles insolvency and corporate matters, can handle it.

Deodhar, GVL welcome alliance...

Continued from Page 1

Deodhar expressed the confidence that BJP and Jana Sena would form the government in 2024 elections.

Stating that Andhra Pradesh was in grip of casteism, corruption and dynastic rule, Deodhar said that the BJP-Jana Sena combine would end this trend.

BJP official spokesperson GVL Narasimha Rao called the alliance as historic and described it as a welcome development to cleanse the politics in the state.

Referring to TDP and YSRCP declaring for the past seven months that the Centre favours their rival, he clarified that the BJP has no

political relations whatsoever with the two parties. He contended that the BJP would fight for public issues jointly with the Jana Sena.

Narasimha Rao thanked the Jana Sena for forging an alliance and predicted that the combine would grow as an alternative to the YSRCP and TDP. The BJP captured power in many stages with a margin of mere 2 per cent of votes, Narasimha Rao said, and predicted the same phenomenon would take place in AP too.

The BJP would practice development politics opposing the caste-based politics, politics of vendetta and corrupt politics, he said, exuding confidence that the people would bless the combine.

Goyal: Amazon not doing a favour by investing \$1 bn

Continued from Page 1

The USD 1 billion investment by Amazon.com to help bring small and medium businesses online is on the top of USD 5.5 billion funding it had previously announced.

The minister wondered why an e-commerce market place model, where a firm provides an IT platform for buyers and sellers, incurring huge losses adding that it needs to be looked upon.

"They are investing money over the last few years also in warehousing and certain other activities, which is welcome and good. But if they are bringing in money largely to finance losses and those losses in an e-commerce market place model," Goyal said.

He added that in a fair market place model in a turnover of USD 10 billion dollars, if a company is incurring loss of billion dollars, it "certainly



raises questions, where the loss came from".

Goyal said that how can a marketplace make such a big loss unless they are indulging in "predatory pricing or some unfair trade practices".

"These are real questions which need answers and I am sure the authorities who are looking at it seek those answers and I am sure the e-commerce companies will have their say on that," he said.

Fair trade regulator CCI (Competition Commission of India) has recently ordered a probe against e-commerce majors Flipkart and Amazon

for alleged malpractices, including deep discounting and tie-ups with preferred sellers on their platforms.

The minister added that India allows foreign investments in e-commerce market place model and in this model buyers and sellers are free to trade, but the market place player cannot own the inventory, or they can not determine prices.

There are several established market rules for an e-commerce market place business in India and "I think as long as everybody follows these rules, we very much welcome e-commerce into India," he added.

Further, he said that India has strict rules for FDI in multi-brand retail trading and anybody who tries to use the e-commerce market place model to get into the multi-brand retail space surreptitiously will have to be questioned and investigated.

Jana Sena forges alliance with BJP...

Continued from Page 1

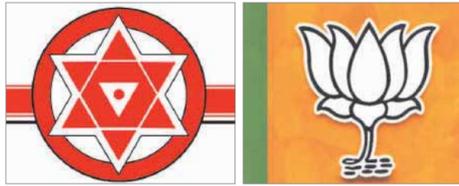
Pawan Kalyan said that he has been holding negotiations with the BJP leaders for the past several months and claimed that differences with the saffron party have been ironed out. "If there are any minor differences, they would be resolved in the future," he said.

He said that the alliance heralded a new era in Andhra Pradesh politics and turned a new leaf in the political history of the state during the Sankranti festival.

Pawan Kalyan said AP was in terrible need of a party like BJP; the BJP leaders contended that the alliance has been struck for the bright future of the state. They said that the state would benefit from a strong government at the Centre.

"There was a communication gap with the BJP, especially after the 2014 elections," Pawan Kalyan admitted.

Lakshminarayana said that Pawan offered to work under leadership of Narendra Modi out of his "large-heartedness"



and termed the alliance as historic.

"The alliance would expose YSRCP and TDP failures and jointly fight for people's issues," the BJP leader said, exuding confidence of forming the government in the state in 2024.

Pawan Kalyan said development of the state took a backseat under TDP and YSRCP rule because both the parties have ignored people's welfare and also because of dynastic and caste-based politics. He accused the two parties of promoting graft and anarchy.

"The people are vexed with the rule of Palegars (YSRCP) while the previous regime was full of corruption and irregularities. Therefore, the people long

for a third and viable alternative," Pawan Kalyan said.

He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP national president Amit Shah for their support to the alliance.

On relocation of capital from Amaravati, he said that the capital was decided after ascertaining views of all. He said that he had opposed pooling such large area - 33,000 acres - for the capital as it was not feasible.

As predicted, the capital is being relocated driving farmers onto streets, the Jana Sena chief said.

If the state capital is relocated, the BJP-Jana Sena combine would take to the streets to oppose it, and drag the matter to courts if necessary, he

warned. "If Amaravati is to be shifted to elsewhere, BJP-Jana Sena combine would not keep mum as the party has a bold leadership," he warned.

The idea of three state capitals is mooted to dupe the public. By merely establishing the High Court in a city, the city cannot be called the state capital, he said.

On special status for AP, he held the TDP accountable. "Had the TDP refused the special package it would have been a lot better," Pawan Kalyan opined.

Currently, the special status issue is in the court of YSRCP, which has had 22 MPs in Lok Sabha, he said.

On Citizenship Amendment Act, Pawan Kalyan said that there was no threat to Muslims of the country as the Act protects minorities in Pakistan and Bangladesh living in India as refugees.

However, some vested interests are spreading rumours that the citizenship of Muslims would be annulled, he said, describing it as "totally false".

Sailajanath appointed APCC president

Continued from Page 1

The AICC appointed a Dalit this time as the PCC chief in place of a BC leader (Raghuvendra Reddy).

Raghuvendra Reddy led the party unsuccessfully in 2014 and 2019 elections; the Congress failing to capture even a single Assembly seat under his leadership.

Following these successive debacles, party senior leaders, including Raghuvendra Reddy, submitted their resignation. However, the AICC did not accept Raghuvendra Reddy's resignation. Since then, he had not been taking an active part in politics and had been maintaining a low profile.

The AICC made the appointments to revive the party in the state at least by 2024. Accordingly, posts have been given to Dalits, Reddy and Muslim communities who once formed the strong base for the party.

Frosty Indo-Pak ties impacted us tremendously: Hamid Karzai

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the frosty India-Pakistan relationship has impacted Afghanistan tremendously, former Afghan president Hamid Karzai on Thursday said maintaining a balance in ties with the two neighbours has been difficult for his country.

Pakistan's impact on Afghanistan is a "lot greater" than any other country and Kabul must convey to Islamabad that close ties with New Delhi will not impact their relationship, Karzai said at a session at the Raisina Dialogue here.

"India is the greatest friend of Afghanistan. India has been a tremendous contributor to Afghanistan, but the impact that Pakistan can make in Afghanistan, is a lot greater than any other country," the former Afghan president asserted.

He said the "unfortunate state of relationship" between India and Pakistan has impacted Afghanistan tremendously.



"India is the greatest friend of Afghanistan. India has been a tremendous contributor to Afghanistan, but the impact that Pakistan can make in Afghanistan, is a lot greater than any other country," the former Afghan president asserted

"We want to be the best friends with India and Afghans have proven to be the best friends with India, but we will tell Pakistan that our friendship with India is not going to stop us from being the best brothers and friends with Pakistan. How to convey this is a very difficult task, but we have to manage it," he said.

"We have two sentiments toward Pakistan -- when we became refugees in Pakistan after the Soviet invasion of Pakistan, Pakistani people received us with open arms...On the other hand we have serious complaints against the Pakistani government and their military institutions for their interference in

Afghanistan, promotion to extremism, and all of that," Karzai said.

Talking about the peace process in his war-torn country, he said there is no other way for Afghanistan. It needs the peace process to be successful, he added.

Breeding loan by zoos helps conserve Himalayan serow

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

A "breeding loan" arrangement between Assam State Zoo and Nagaland Zoo has helped in the conservation of the Himalayan serow, an endangered wildlife species.

A Himalayan serow calf was born in the Assam state zoo here on Wednesday, officials said.

The Assam State Zoo which is the coordinating zoo for conservation breeding of serow had only two female serow and the Nagaland Zoo had only one male.

Both the Zoo discussed the matter and Nagaland Zoo sent the male to Assam State Zoo for breeding, for a certain period of time with the approval of the Central Zoo Authority (CZA) as there was no point for the endangered species to remain unpaired, the official added.

The Himalayan serow is a goat-antelope native to the Eastern Himalayas and Eastern and Southeastern Bangladesh



and is listed in the IUCN Red List as its population is dwindling due to habitat loss and hunting for its meat.

At the Assam State Zoo, the male and female serow were carefully paired and within ten months of the arrival of the male and pairing with a female, the first serow calf was born on Wednesday.

This is the first time that ani-

mals have been exchanged on breeding loan and the breeding has been successful.

"This is a very special occasion for both Zoos and for the conservation of serow", Assam Environment and Forest Minister Parimal Suklabaidya said. He wished for the well-being of the newborn serow and congratulated both the zoos for taking this unique initiative.

SHORT READS



Himachal Speaker resigns, may be made state BJP president

SHIMLA: Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Rajeev Bindal resigned on Thursday amid reports that he will be the new chief of the BJP's state unit. Bindal submitted his resignation to Deputy Speaker Hans Raj, a day ahead of the filing of nominations for election to the Himachal BJP president's post. A state BJP leader, who did not want to be quoted, said Bindal's appointment will be announced on Saturday. Bindal is considered close to BJP's working president J P Nadda, party leaders said. They said there is unanimity in the state unit on Bindal's appointment. BJP state vice president Ram Swaroop Sharma said nominations for the president's post can be filed within a 24-hour period. Union Human Resource Development Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and BJP's national secretary Sunil Deodhar will come to the state as observers for the election, he added.

SSI killing suspects linked to IS activists

PNS ■ KANYAKUMARI (TN)

Two suspects in the murder of a policeman at a check post in the district, were brought here for interrogation on Thursday, amid tight security.

The duo was medically examined at the Thalalai police station and interrogated in connection with the murder of Special Sub Inspector Wilson, police said.

The two men had shot at Wilson using a pistol and stabbed him when he was on duty at the Kaliyakavilai checkpoint on the border with Kerala on January 8.

They were picked up from Udipi Railway station in Karnataka on January 14. The suspects have been identified as Abdul Shameem (29) and Taufeeq (27), both hailing from Thiruvithancode near Nagercoil.



According to police sources, the duo has confessed to having links with some IS activists from Kerala's Mallapuram and Kozhikode districts.

They were said to be helping them recruit members for the terror outfit. The police said they were trying to ascertain whether the duo conspired to carry out any attacks in Tamil Nadu.

'Justice Clock' to be set up at Calcutta High Court

PNS ■ KOLKATA

A 'Justice Clock' is set to be introduced at the Calcutta High Court soon, displaying the status of cases before it and in subordinate courts of West Bengal, an official said here.

The electronic LED display board to be installed will also show the ranking of the high courts and district and subordinate courts, based on their performance in disposing of highest number of cases.

There are at least 22.81 lakh cases pending before different courts in the state, of which 17.7 lakh are criminal cases, according to the National Judicial Data Grid.

The 'Justice Clock' will be installed in the high court premises first and then in subordinate courts and people will be able to view status and pendency of cases before any



court in the state, the official said. The date of the installation of the clock is likely to be announced on Friday, the official said.

Of the total pending cases in the state, including civil and criminal, 3,16,902 cases are pending before different courts for more than 10 years, as per the grid.

BJP: Dhingra report has exposed Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday cited an SIT report to accuse the Congress of protecting those involved in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, saying it never showed interest in providing justice to the victims and its leaders even "justified" the violence against the community. BJP leader and Union minister Prakash Javadekar said the Special Investigation Team (SIT) headed by retired Delhi High Court judge Justice S N Dhingra has brought to fore the truth and said what happened in 1984 was not just riots but the "worst kind of genocide" against Sikhs.

Javadekar said Congress leaders like the then prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and more recently, Sam Pitroda "justified" the violence with their comments.

The report shows that the hands of the Congress are with "murders", he said.



Prakash Javadekar cited the Dhingra report and said that what happened in 1984 was not just riots but the "worst kind of genocide" against Sikhs.

Anti-CAA protesters detained at Turkman Gate

NEW DELHI: Some demonstrators were detained while protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and National Register of Citizens in Central Delhi's Turkman Gate on Thursday.

Lalu appears before CBI court in the fifth fodder scam case

RANCHI: Jailed RJD president Lalu Prasad appeared before a special CBI court here on Thursday in connection with a case pertaining to fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 139.35 crore from Doranda Treasury when he was the Bihar chief minister in the 1990s. This is the fifth and last fodder scam case against Prasad in Ranchi. There is a sixth case against him in Bhagalpur in connection with the animal husbandry scam, popularly known as the fodder scam. A total 34 questions were asked to Prasad during the trial by the special CBI judge (AHD) Sudhanshu Kumar Shashi in about three hours on Thursday, a CBI advocate told reporters. He has been convicted in the previous four fodder scam cases and has been ordered prison sentences ranging between three and a half years and 14 years by different special CBI courts. The Doranda Treasury case RC/47 has 575 witnesses and 111 accused, a CBI official said adding the investigating agency has filed charge sheets against 170 people. Prasad, who has been in jail since December 2017, is undergoing treatment for his illnesses at the Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences here.

Bad weather disrupts flight operations at Srinagar airport, 15 flights cancelled

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

Low visibility and accumulation of snow at the Srinagar airport led to cancellation of 15 flights on Thursday morning, officials said.

Most parts of the valley received snowfall overnight. "The air traffic remained affected on Thursday as well as no flight operations took place in the morning," an official of the airport here said.

He said 15 morning flights of various airlines to and from Srinagar were cancelled.

"The flights were cancelled due to accumulation of snow on the runway and low visibility," the official said.



He, however, said the other flights for the day were kept on standby as there was possibility of flight operations taking place later in the day if the weather improved.

Flight operations have been affected at the airport for the past few days. All flights were cancelled on January 12 and 13, but few operated on January 14. However, flight operations

did not take place on Wednesday as well due to continued snowfall.

Most plain areas in the valley received moderate to heavy snowfall on Wednesday which continued during the night, a MET official said.

He said the higher reaches of the valley, Jammu region and Ladakh Union Territory received heavy snowfall.

He said there are chances of light snowfall at isolated scattered places of J-K over the next 24 hours.

"No major snowfall is expected for the next five days. Another spell of lesser intensity is likely from January 21 to 24, he added.

Bansidhar Bhagat elected Uttarakhand BJP president

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Bansidhar Bhagat, an MLA from Kaladhungi, was elected unopposed on Thursday as the new president of Uttarakhand BJP.

The 65-year-old Bhagat takes over from Nainital MP Ajay Bhatt who had been given one-year extension after completing his three-year-term as the state BJP chief in 2018.

Bhagat, a former minister, has been elected unopposed to the post, the party's central observer and Union Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal announced at a press conference.

Soon after Bhagat's election to the post, HRD Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank said the



Terming the 2022 Uttarakhand elections his top priority, Bhagat said that he will boost the morale of party worker and ensure the BJP's victory

party will benefit hugely from Bhagat's long political experience.

Terming the 2022 Uttarakhand assembly elections his top priority, Bhagat said that he will boost the morale of each and every party

worker so as to ensure the BJP's victory in the polls. Bhatt whom Bhagat succeeds had become the Uttarakhand BJP president in December 2015 and completed his tenure in 2018, but got an extension for a year in 2019.

St Xavier's a temple of edu: WB Governor

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Describing St Xavier's College as the perfect example of a temple of education, West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday said, the institution not only imparts quality education but also ensures that those who are recipient contribute to societal causes.

Dhankhar, who was delivering the address as the chief guest of the convocation of St Xavier's College, said these are places "where you are allowed to fully explore your talent in a seamless environment without interruption."

He said a convocation is an occasion that must persuade one to think about the relevance of education within odds.

Talking about the right to education as a fundamental right, the governor said, "it is heartening to note this right has been exemplified by St Xavier's College and all institutions connected with that name by providing education with quality."

Indian Coast Guard eyes 200 ships, 100 aircraft inventory by 2025

PNS ■ CHENNAI

The Indian Coast Guard has planned to acquire 16 advanced light helicopters apart from 50 vessels to its fleet as part of its vision to have 200 ships and 100 aircraft inventory by 2025.

Speaking to reporters on Thursday, Coast Guard Director General Krishnaswamy Natarajan said, "Today we have 50 ships under construction in various Indian shipyards and apart from that we have 16 advanced light helicopter MKIII under production with HAL, Bengaluru."

The first of the twin engine helicopter was expected to be inducted by March 2020, he said after the 19th edition of Indo-Japan joint exercise 'Sahyog-Kaijin', about 50 nautical miles off Chennai coast.

Natarajan noted that the Coast Guard has recorded significant progress and the present inventory was at 145 ships and 62 aircraft.

"The budget (of Coast Guard)



which was about Rs 1,000 crore has now grown to more than Rs 5,000 crore in terms of both revenue and capital," he said.

"We are also in the process of acquiring 14 twin engine heavy helicopters and 6 multi-mission maritime aircraft which will have a capability of maintaining surveillance in our exclusive economic zone," he said.

The Indian Coast Guard, fourth largest coastal security agency in the world, has installed 36 Coastal Surveillance Radar Network on the mainland

and 10 on islands that can track suspicious vessels.

"We also plan to install 38 more Radar Stations apart from integrating the radar stations with Vessel Traffic Management System of the Ports. Our vision is to reach 200 ships and 100 aircraft by 2025," he said.

On the joint exercise, he said this year it was the turn of Japanese Coast Guard to visit India, further strengthening ties between the two nations.

Natarajan said the Japanese Coast Guard has extended sup-

port to Indian Coast Guard by capacity building in the form of training.

"You all should know Japan Coast Guard is the second largest Coast Guard of the world, after the US. I can also proudly say Indian Coast Guard has acclaimed the stature of 4th largest with 145 ships in its inventory and 62 aircraft," he said.

In 2019, the Coast Guard has apprehended Rs 2,000 crore worth of drugs with most of them from the Western Coast.

Referring to the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) signed with his Japanese counterpart, the official said Coast Guard has signed similar agreements with South Korea, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Oman, Vietnam and Pakistan.

On the MoC, Japan Coast Guard commandant admiral Takahiro Okushima said the relationships between the two coast guards was getting stronger every year.

HC tells AIIMS to treat minor suffering from rare disease

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Thursday asked AIIMS to treat a minor who is suffering from severe aplastic anaemia and requires bone marrow transplant, and said the cost will be borne by the Centre.

Justice Navin Chawla asked the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) to provide the necessary treatment to the 11-year-old boy, a resident of Bihar, and directed the Ministry of Health and Family Services to reimburse the cost of treatment.

The court listed the matter for further hearing on July 24. It had earlier asked the ministry and AIIMS to respond to the minor's petition who requires bone marrow transplant which is the only life saving treatment for the disease.

The court was hearing a plea claiming lacunae in two major health related schemes -- Rashtriya Aarogya Nidhi and Ayushman Bharat -- due to



which patients suffering from life threatening diseases are being deprived of monetary benefits to avail treatment.

In the petition filed through his mother, the minor has sought the court's direction to the AIIMS to treat him with bone marrow transplantation which would cost around Rs 12 lakh.

Advocate Gaurav Kumar Bansal, appearing for the minor, has also sought direction to the Health Ministry to remove the lacunae which debars persons like the petitioner, suffering from deadly

diseases involving transplant treatment, to avail benefits as provided under the Rashtriya Aarogya Nidhi (RAN) scheme.

The plea said that as per the rules, those who are covered under Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna cannot avail the benefits of RAN scheme.

Neither bone marrow transplant is covered under Ayushman Bharat scheme nor rules allow the petitioner to avail benefits of RAN scheme, due to which the child has been left with no option except to die, it alleged.

CAPSULE



Kejriwal Centre keep politics away from budget

NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday urged the Centre to keep politics away from the budget that is "good" for the national capital. Kejriwal said he would write to the Centre and request special allocation for tackling pollution and ensuring cleanliness in the Union budget. "The Centre should keep politics away from the budget and I want to request the Centre to present a good budget," he said.



Pondy CM dares Bedi to prove land-grab charges

PUDUCHERRY: Puducherry Chief Minister V Narayanasamy on Thursday challenged Lt Governor Kiran Bedi to prove the land-grabbing allegations made by a rebel Congress legislator against him. Hitting out at Bedi for making public the allegations against him and his son by Congress MLA N Dhanavelou, the Chief Minister told reporters here it was "shocking" that she came out with a press statement on the issue without ascertaining their veracity. "It is really shocking that the Lt Governor had come out with a press statement highlighting the charges the rebel legislator Dhanavelou had made during his meeting with her recently," Narayanasamy said. "Bedi should have ascertained the facts and genuineness of the complaints Dhanavelou had made orally that my son and I had indulged in land-grab crimes," Narayanasamy said and challenged Bedi to prove the allegations. He also said if charges of land-grabbing were proved he would quit office. "If charges of land-grabbing made out against me and my son by the disgruntled MIA are proved I will quit office," Narayanasamy said adding "if on the other hand the Lt Governor did not prove them she should go out of public life once and for all."

SHAH SEEKS PEOPLE'S SUPPORT TO CAA

'NITISH WILL LEAD NDA IN UPCOMING BIHAR POLLS'

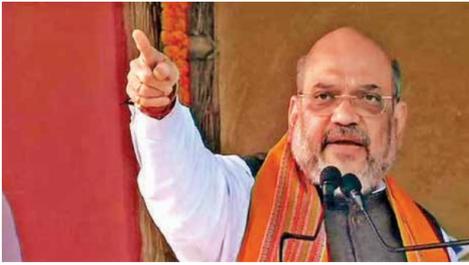
PNS ■ VAISHALI (BIHAR)

BJP president Amit Shah on Thursday made an impassioned plea for the support of people of Bihar to measures taken by Narendra Modi government like the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

He also sought to dispel "rumours" of discord within the NDA in the state, asserting that assembly polls in Bihar will be contested under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

Addressing a pro-CAA rally of the saffron party in this north Bihar district, Shah slammed the opposition for misleading minorities about the Act and engineering violence that had erupted in the aftermath.

Underscoring that the law provided for granting citizen-



ship and not snatching it away from anybody, he said the party was organizing rallies across the country with a view to busting the misinformation campaign.

Shah sought support to the Modi governments measures like CAA as also abrogation of Article 370 and construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

"I want to dispel all rumours

about our coalition (with Kumar JD(U). The elections will be contested under Nitish Kumar leadership, he declared.

"Lalu Prasad (RJD supremo), who is in jail in corruption cases, may go on dreaming that our coalition will come apart. But he should know that the NDA has led Bihar out of his lantern age (an

allusion to RJDs poll symbol) to the LED era.

"The country and the state shall progress under the leadership of Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar respectively", the BJP chief said.

Shah had earlier stated in a couple of TV interviews that the chief minister (Nitish Kumar) will lead the NDA charge in the assembly polls this year.

This was, however, the first occasion for him to make a pronouncement to the effect on the soil of Bihar.

Those who shouted anti-India slogans at JNU a few years ago were sent to jail by Prime Minister Narendra Modi but (Arvind) Kejriwal has refused to initiate prosecution, Shah said taking a swipe at the Delhi Chief Minister.

Japanese, Indian Coast Guards hold exercise off Chennai coast

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Coast Guards of India and Japan took part in a joint exercise 'Sahyog-Kaijin' off the Chennai coast on Thursday as part of strengthening the bond of the two countries.

One ship of the Japanese Coast Guard and four ships and an aircraft of the Indian Coast Guard took part in the exercise.

Led by Commanding Officer Captain Kiyoshi Harada, the 'Ehigo PLH08' and the four ships and a Dornier aircraft of Indian Coast Guard participated in the drill in the Bay of Bengal around 50 nautical miles off Chennai.

The highlight of the drill was the scenario of the interception of a hijacked ship and subsequent rescue of crew in a joint operation led by both the Coast Guards, a press release said.

The exercise marked demonstrations of search and rescue, external fire-fighting and sharing of best practices, the release said.

According to an official, the apprehension of a pirate vessel MV Alondra Rainbow by the Coast Guard in November 1999 off the west coast of India marked the beginning of regular interaction between the Coast Guards of India and



The highlight of the drill was the scenario of the interception of a hijacked ship and subsequent rescue of crew in a joint operation led by both the Coast Guards

Japan.

The apprehension of the vessel brought out the significance of a coordinated operation thereby encouraging the policy-makers to have a series of conferences and meetings to discuss issues of various crimes at sea.

The Japanese ship 'Ehigo' undertook a goodwill visit to Chennai Port following the signing of a memorandum of cooperation between the two Coast Guards in 2006.

The joint exercise, in its 19th edition, was witnessed by the Japanese Coast Guard

Commandant Takahiro Okushima, Indian Coast Guard Director General Krishnaswamy Natarajan.

A vessel from National Institute of Ocean Technology also participated in the exercise.

The visit of Japanese ship, which arrived here on January 13, focuses on further strengthening ties, mutual understanding between the two Coast Guards, enhancing interoperability in communication, search and rescue procedures and sharing of best practices.

After row, Raut withdraws remark about ex-PM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

After criticism from ally Congress, Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday withdrew his controversial remarks wherein he claimed that former prime minister Indira Gandhi met gangster Karim Lala in Mumbai.

However, before taking back his comments, Raut said his words were "twisted" by those unaware of Mumbai's history as he meant that Gandhi met Karim Lala in his capacity as representative of the Pathan community.

Later, after Congress leaders Milind Deora and Sanjay Nirupam hit out at Raut over his "ill-informed" remarks, the Sena leader withdrew it.

"If someone feels my statement hurt Indira Gandhi's image, or someone's feelings, I take it back," said Raut, whose party is part of the ruling alliance with the Congress and NCP in Maharashtra.

"In the past, I have taken her (Gandhi's) side and argued with people who tried to malign her image. In such cases, some Congress leaders had remained silent," the Rajya Sabha member said.

During an interview to the Lokmat media group at its award function in Pune on



During an interview to the Lokmat media group at its award function in Pune on Wednesday, Raut claimed, "When (underworld don) Haji Mastan came to Mantralaya, the entire secretariat would come down to see him. Indira Gandhi used to meet Karim Lala in Pydhonie (in south Mumbai)"

Wednesday, Raut claimed, "When (underworld don) Haji Mastan came to Mantralaya, the entire secretariat would come down to see him. Indira Gandhi used to meet Karim Lala in Pydhonie (in south Mumbai)."

He also said that "they (underworld) used to decide who will be Mumbai's police commissioner and who will sit in Mantralaya".

Karim Lala was one of the three top underworld dons of Mumbai for over two decades,

from the sixties to early eighties, the other two being Mastan Mirza alias Haji Mastan and Varadarajan Mudaliar.

Taking strong note of the remark, former Union minister Deora and Nirupam asked Raut to withdraw it.

Deora said politicians should refrain from "distorting" legacies of prime ministers who are no more.

Former Mumbai Congress chief Nirupam said Raut will "repent" if he continues a "false campaign" against Gandhi.

Man confesses to murder on live TV programme

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A man wanted for killing a woman friend on New Year's eve at a hotel here was arrested from a television studio after he confessed to the crime while on air, police said on Thursday.

The accused, Maninder Singh, was wanted by the police for allegedly killing Sarabjit Kaur (27), a nurse at a private hospital in Mohali on New Year's eve.

Singh on Tuesday appeared at the office of a regional television and confessed his involvement in killing Kaur following which the police rushed to the studio and arrested him when the programme was being telecast live, police said.

Out on bail, 31-year-old Singh is already convicted in a 2010 murder in Haryana's Karnal, police said. During the interview, Singh



confessed that he had killed Kaur as well as another woman in 2010.

The TV management informed police, who barged into the studio and arrested the accused.

Singh wanted to marry Kaur but his family was against their inter-caste marriage so they decided to go for court marriage, the police said.

Singh claimed Kaur was ready to marry him, but later he came to know that she was in touch with another man.

Police said Singh had strangled Kaur and later slit her throat with a knife in the hotel room.

Raut remark on ex-PM Cong 'disappointed', speaks to Thackeray

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Terming Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut's comment about Indira Gandhi meeting gangster Karim Lala as "wrong", Maharashtra Congress chief Balasaheb Thorat on Thursday said such remarks will not be tolerated, and conveyed their disappointment to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

The state revenue minister cautioned all leaders, including Raut, against making remarks criticising great leaders.

"It, indeed, was a wrong statement and we will not tolerate such a statement. Nobody should make such a statement. Raut should also not make such a statement which criticises great men," Thorat told reporters here.

"We are disappointed with the statement. We have spoken to the chief minister on the issue," he added.

'I am not a rubber stamp': Kerala Guv

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, who has been at loggerheads with the Left government over various issues since the past few days, on Thursday made it clear he was not a "rubber stamp."

The remarks were made by Khan a day after a section of the media reported he had allegedly refused to sign the ordinance on the Local Self Government ward re-organisation, which had recently received the cabinet nod.

"I have to apply my mind. I have to take my time. The file is with me. I will take some time to make up my mind on what to do about it," he told reporters at the airport.

Khan had not signed the ordinance with respect to the amendments to Kerala Panchayat Raj Act 1994 to increase the number of constituencies in Local Self Governments.

The Governor said on Thursday that he had only raised certain queries (with regard to the ordinance) and the Constitution expects him to apply his mind to ensure that the process of ordinance was not used for some extraneous purposes...So I



Arif Mohammed Khan

The Governor said he had also raised certain questions about the desirability of having an ordinance when the Assembly was going to meet in a few days time

have to take take my time. "The Constitution expects me to apply my mind. And to ensure that the process of ordinance is not used for some extraneous purposes," Khan said.

The Governor said he had also raised certain questions about the desirability of having an ordinance when the Assembly was going to meet in a few days time.

"Recently, a senior leader said, he appointed someone because of their ethnicity. The very oath which is prescribed by the Constitution asking to do good to all manner of people without ill-will and affection," he said.

Express views in dignified manner: LS Speaker Om Birla tells lawmakers

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday asked lawmakers to express their views in the House strongly and emotionally but also in a disciplined and dignified manner to "successfully stand the test" as a public representative.

In his inaugural address at the Seventh Commonwealth Parliamentary Association India Region Conference at the UP Legislative Assembly, Birla said the faith of people in democracy has gone up, as the polling percentage in elections after Independence has risen, and so has the responsibility of lawmakers.

"Therefore, the members should put forth their views strongly, emotionally, but in a



Om Birla

disciplined and restrained manner while adhering to the traditions of Parliament and in a dignified manner," he said in an apparent reference to the repeated unruly behaviour of lawmakers inside legislatures.

"Our faith in democracy is very deep-rooted. Democracy is the soul of our nation. As far as faith in democracy is concerned, India is leading the world," Birla said

In a democracy, elected representatives act as a bridge between the government and the people and thus "it becomes our moral responsibility" to successfully stand the test as a public representative, he emphasised.

"Our faith in democracy in

very deep-rooted. Democracy is the soul of our nation. As far as faith in democracy is concerned, India is leading the world," Birla said.

"India is a country where different religions, castes, languages, dialects exist. Unity in diversity has been the symbol of our country. Hence, our parliamentary traditions have always remained 'jeevant' (alive) and active," he said.

He also praised Lucknow's culture and heritage and paid tributes to former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. He also lauded the role of Uttar Pradesh for its contribution in freedom struggle, strengthening the parliamentary democracy, and for giving the maximum prime ministers to the country.

Postal Dept honours Chuni Goswami

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Legendary Indian footballer Chuni Goswami, who led the Indian gold medal winning team in the 1962 Asian Games, has been honoured with a postal stamp issued on his 82nd birthday by the Indian Postal Department.

Goswami, who turned 82 on Wednesday, became only the third Indian footballer after Gostho Paul (1998) and Talimeren Ao (2018) on whose name a commemorative stamp has been issued by the largest postal network in the world.

"It was a completely unexpected gesture. I'm really humbled with this honour shown to me. It will further inspire me to live a longer life,"



Chuni Goswami

Goswami said after the commemorative stamp was issued in his residence in Kolkata on Wednesday.

"Over the years, I have received many laurels during my sporting career. But this one at the fag-end of my life will surely be right up there," he added.

Rajnath flags off 51st K-9 Vajra at L&T complex

PNS ■ HAZIRA (GUJ)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday flagged off the 51st K-9 Vajra-T gun at the Larsen and Toubro Armoured Systems Complex at Hazira, Surat.

The L&T officials showed the minister the different manoeuvres of the K-9 Vajra-T. A tracked self-propelled howitzer. Singh sat in the vehicle on which the gun was mounted and was driven around the Hazira complex.

The gun weighs 50 tonnes and can fire 47kg bombs at 43-kilometre distant targets. It can also turn around at zero

The K9 Vajra contract involves delivery of 100 such systems in 42 months, which is the largest contract awarded to a private company by the Ministry of Defence

radius.

L&T had in 2017 won the Rs 4,500-crore contract from the Ministry of Defence to supply 100 units of K9 Vajra-T 155 mm/52 calibre tracked self-propelled gun systems to the Indian Army under the Centre's 'Make in India' initiative.

The K9 Vajra contract

involves delivery of 100 such systems in 42 months, which is the largest contract awarded to a private company by the Ministry of Defence.

The Defence Minister also put 'tilak' and drew the auspicious 'swastik' symbol with kumkum on the new artillery. During the puja, he also offered flowers to the gun and broke a

coconut. Singh said in his speech that he salutes the commitment and hardwork of employees of L&T as the company's Hazira complex is a sign of "new thinking of new India".

"I see this complex has a new and astonishing achievement... There were many sectors in India where private sector's participation was almost nil. Defence sector was one such example," he said.

Under the 'Make in India' scheme, the government has taken many steps that will make the country a net exporter of arms in future, he said.



Death of justice

As the hanging of Nirbhaya's rapists gets stalled, we must ask if we can get real about women's safety or just float a bogey



All concerns and campaigns for women's safety sound vacuous and patronising when the commitment to it, by virtue of honouring and implementing the law, falters. We lose faith in a system that is exploited routinely and remains imprisoned in a maze of technicalities to deny closure. Even if it is as gruesome and indelible a case as that of the rape of Nirbhaya, which has taken seven long years to be taken to its logical end and is still stopping short of answering to our national conscience. Worse, the system is oblivious

and impervious to what this travesty means to women in general and to Nirbhaya's family and friends in particular. Now, the hanging of the four rapists, convicted for one of the most heinous of crimes in India, has been stalled due to procedural drags, simply because all the convicts need to be given time to file mercy pleas and each of them would have to be heard following due processes. This should have been initiated earlier given the Supreme Court's ruling and clarity on the death sentence in a case considered "rarest of rare." So a case which ushered in special laws, a fast-track mechanism and well-intended course correction is now being denied the same privileges. Yes, due processes of law have been followed but the undue stress caused by delays in punishing the offenders is the reason that people talk about overriding the system with vigilantism. In the end, women lose confidence in society at large, whose mindset is set by precedents and examples, and predators are emboldened simply because they think they can get by. Considered a cut-and-dry case, the Nirbhaya verdict should not have been long in coming but it took four-and-a-half years for the trial court, the High Court and the Supreme Court to pass their judgments, with the lawyers of the convicts using every trick in the book to delay the inevitable. As per the law, once the apex court handed out the death sentence on May 5, 2017, the four convicts should have filed a review petition within 30 days, but the men exploited a legal provision for condonation of the delay if the convict gives a convincing reason. Hence all four filed their review petitions at different times after long, deliberate delays, in their bid to thwart the justice system. Under prison rules, if death sentence has been handed out to more than one person in a case and if even one of them moves a mercy plea, the execution of the others, too, has to be postponed till the plea is decided. Hence, as one of the four convicts, Mukesh Kumar, has a mercy petition pending before the President, all cannot be hanged. What is appalling is that these oversights have been made by responsible arms of the administration, in this case the Delhi Government and prison authorities. The Delhi High Court, therefore, slammed the Delhi Government for sitting on the case for a year and not issuing a notice on the mercy plea to convicts. The court also castigated the Delhi prison authorities for not informing the convicts that they could move mercy pleas before the President. This is not the first time that the convicts have exploited loopholes to thwart justice. Right from false alibis, to buying time by getting pages and pages of trial court proceedings translated from English to Hindi, they have done it all.

No wonder then that in a country where the conviction rates for rapes are as low as 32.2 per cent, despite laws dealing with sexual assault being made stringent in the aftermath of the incident, crimes against women have been on the rise. They have spiralled from 329,243 cases in 2015 to 338,954 in 2016 and 359,849 in 2017. From 2013 onwards, over 30,000 women/girls have been raped. That there is no seriousness about building in deterrence is revealed by a dismal 11 per cent utilisation of the Nirbhaya Fund allocated to States/Union Territories for ensuring the safety and security of women/girls. Any reform — police, judicial, infrastructural — will have no meaning till we reform the attitude towards law enforcement, implement it instead of negating it. Of course, there is the monster of politicisation even in tragedy. The BJP promptly blamed the AAP Government for delaying notices to convicts considering the Supreme Court rejected the appeal against their death sentence in 2017. AAP claimed that while the Delhi Government's recommendation was swift, the Centre had been in hibernation mode. While the point-scoring over who pushed Nirbhaya's rights rages on, what both forget is that each had agency and powers to do what could have been done in days, not years. Both, as representatives of people, look emaciated by the criminals who help them keep their talk points rolling. After all, there is no political capital to be made out of Nirbhaya's deathly silence.

Putin's Russia

The resignation of the Russian Cabinet has paved the way for his plans to stay on in power beyond 2024



Vladimir Putin has now become the longest serving Russian leader since Joseph Stalin. No matter what opinion one may have of the current Russian leader with regard to the way he has ridden roughshod over any and all opposition, *prima facie* he is a lot nicer than Stalin, a man revered by the Communists in India, who was also one of the greatest mass murderers in history. Unlike Stalin, Putin also has to worry about a small thing called a Constitution. But after a shock decision by the Russian Cabinet to resign on Wednesday, it is clear that Putin will remain in charge well beyond 2024 when his second eight-year stint as Russian President will come to a close. And to do so, he will need to reform the Constitution. It's worth noting that his Cabinet resigned not in a manner of protest but to make his life easier. After all, his long-time aide, former President and newly-resigned Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, was not expected to do anything but that. How Putin will structure his continued reign remains to be seen. Will he become the head of the State Council or amend the Constitution to ensure he remains President indefinitely?

However, unlike Chinese President Xi Jinping, who, too, made a power grab and changed the rules in the People's Republic of China, Putin's task is far tougher. First, unlike China, Russia is at least a quasi-democracy. The past three years have seen constant protests against Putin as Western sanctions against Russia have begun to bite. His claims that he is hearing the clamour for reforms within the country and that is what is prompting these "reforms" is, therefore, debatable. But more Putin also means that he will remain a major figure on the global stage. His intervention in Syria and Iran are of grave concern to the US and other Western nations. At the same time, he has made it very clear that he wants to see a revival of Russia's international power, wants it to be a nation with the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons in the world and one that continues to develop new weapons technology. Russia punches well above its economic weight in the world. With Putin in charge, it possibly punches a weight category even higher. While many in Washington DC, London and other Western capitals would be glad to see the back of the man, these new reforms mean that he is not going away anytime soon unless the Russians want him to.

A new air quality agenda

An efficient traffic signal management can not only help maintain the flow of traffic but also drastically reduce air pollution levels and save fuel



KK PAUL

Air pollution in our country, particularly in some of the urban centres, has become a major public health issue. Depending on the region and climatic conditions, there are several contributory factors that add to the pollution levels but vehicular emissions in metropolitan cities have emerged as a major source. According to official estimates, the number of vehicles in the national capital surged to over 1.20 crore, including over 80 lakh two-wheelers. The number of vehicles per thousand population, too, increased considerably — from 317 in 2006 to over 550 in 2016 — leading to visible congestion on the roads.

That vehicular emissions contain carcinogenic material needs no emphasis. But what has now come to light is that the inhalation of toxic airborne particles emitted by diesel and petrol vehicles can weaken bones and speed up the ageing process. This finding, based on a fairly large sample size taken from the vicinity of Hyderabad, quantifies on the basis of X-Rays and other studies and determines the extent of osteoporosis, the weakening of bones, in all age groups.

Besides, the World Health Organisation (WHO), too, concluded that each year, thousands of children succumb to acute infections in their lower respiratory system caused by polluted air. Health hazards from air pollution due to vehicular emissions are, thus, manifold. Traffic police personnel and professional drivers, who face maximum air and noise pollution exposure on the roads, have to bear the brunt of this situation.

Last autumn saw Delhi's Air Quality Index (AQI) shooting beyond 1000, making it one of the most polluted cities in the world. Stubble burning by farmers in some of the States adjoining Delhi, combined with vehicular emissions, were major contributors to the deteriorating quality of air. In the following months, the situation somewhat improved but with people becoming used to witnessing "hazardous" levels of air pollution, even the current "severe" category appears to be taken in stride without much hue and cry.

With the capital witnessing hazardous air quality, schemes like Odd-Even were introduced to limit the number of four-wheelers on the roads. This scheme did show a dip in pollution levels, however small it might have been. Despite it being known that emissions from two-wheelers, which include benzene, are far more hazardous, the Odd-Even scheme could not be made applicable for some reason or the other. As a result, a more significant dent in pollution levels could not be achieved. After April 1, when the Bharat-VI norms come into play, the level of auto emissions is bound to show a downward trend.

But the geometry of roads in Delhi has mostly evolved as a result of unplanned



organic growth and the lack of norms surrounding urban planning. This has resulted in a very large number of intersections where vehicles have to necessarily give way and accommodate other traffic streams. This has led to a situation where the number of signalised intersections is quite high and drivers have to stop their vehicles every now and then. Waiting time at a traffic signal depends on the timing of the microprocessor, which should ideally be determined after a careful study of traffic load and pattern on a particular arm of the road on an hourly basis. However, this is always not the case.

As vehicles have to often wait at signalised intersections in an idle running mode, they emit very large amounts of pollutants. It is well-known that an idle engine is far more polluting than when a vehicle is in motion. Similarly, slower moving vehicles on the streets, largely two-wheelers, are more polluting than those at a higher speed.

The accumulated traffic at intersections awaiting a green signal is a major source of pollution. This can be handled through appropriate signal management. It is known that traffic signals contribute

ROAD-BY-ROAD CLEARANCES NOT ONLY ENHANCE THE WAITING TIME AT INTERSECTIONS BUT ALSO LEAD TO MORE EMISSIONS AS A LARGE NUMBER OF VEHICLES AT ANY GIVEN TIME HAVE TO WAIT FOR THEIR TURN. THE DELAY IN JOURNEY TIME IS BUILT IN AND IS CURRENTLY BEING EXPERIENCED BY ALL ROAD USERS

towards orderly and well regulated movement of traffic, besides increasing the traffic handling capacity of the intersection. Under favourable conditions, they can be coordinated to provide for continuous or near continuous movement of traffic at a given speed. Such coordinated signals lead to reduced fuel consumption and bring down emissions by minimising stops and consequent delays. They can bring down the journey time, too.

In this context, it can be observed that in Delhi there are quite a large number of busy intersections where the pattern of signals has undergone a change over the last few years. The flow pattern at these intersections allows the traffic to move forward only from one carriageway, while all others are static. Such road-by-road clearances not only enhance the waiting time at intersections but also lead to more emissions as at any given time, a large number of vehicles have to wait for their turn to make the move. The delay in journey time is built in and is currently being experienced by all road users.

On the other hand, the flow pattern, which enables a straight-straight movement and

which is simultaneously followed by right-right, can definitely reduce the waiting period at intersections and may even reduce the journey time. It can also impact air pollution in a positive manner. Most Delhiites would recall that such a system was indeed being followed until a few years ago.

It has also been observed that on account of a perception-reaction time loss, some time at the beginning of each green period remains under-utilised, leading to building up of congestion over a period of time. The use of reverse timers at all points can help overcome this and ensure maximum flow of traffic with complete utilisation of the green phase. This would mean a reduction in journey time as well as air pollution levels.

Given the severity of the air pollution problem in Delhi, measures that can lead to a reduction in the levels of pollution must be attempted. An appropriate scheme to manage traffic signals can make a significant contribution not only to the flow of traffic but also bring down the levels of pollution.

(The writer is a retired Delhi Police Commissioner and former Uttarakhand Governor)

SOUNDBITE

As long as there are States which sponsor terrorism, we will have to live with the menace. We need to take the bull by its horns and strike at the root cause.



Chief of Defence Staff —Gen Bipin Rawat

I feel that only when you're successful, then only people have an agenda against you, otherwise nobody bothers about you.



Actor —Kangana Ranaut

India has been a tremendous contributor to Afghanistan, but the impact that Pakistan can make in Afghanistan is a lot greater than any other country.



Former Afghan President —Hamid Karzai

In a world that is seeking to break free from mindless hate, violence, conflict and terrorism, the Indian way of life offers a ray of hope.



Prime Minister —Narendra Modi

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Focus on the economy

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "SC to the rescue" (January 16). Protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have continued for over a month now and there appears to be no end in sight to the confrontation. While the Union Government refuses to budge, various segments of the country are not willing to give up. To top it all, now Chief Ministers of various States are knocking the doors of the Supreme Court to oppose the Government's move.

The time for the Union Government to act is now. If confrontations reach magnanimous proportions, it may be too late for it to make any meaningful contribution towards its resolution. As it is, much damage to the country's image has already been done. Of much larger concern for the Government should be the state of the economy. Demand has evaporated from almost all sectors of the economy, unemployment figures continue to break multi-year lows and the banking sector refuses to show any sign of revival. More than the CAA, the Government's focus

When movements are politicised

Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has called for unity among Opposition parties to support the ongoing protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and force the Government to roll back the law. Though most Opposition parties did not attend the meeting called by the Congress to discuss the political situation in the country in the wake of violence in the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) campus and protests over the CAA, the fact is that only a united front can provide the organisational backbone to the movement and make a difference.

Protests against the CAA must be complemented by a strong political pushback through a combined and strong Opposition. The refrain by the media that "a people's movement" has been hijacked by certain political parties and leaders is but an attempt to delegitimise the protests led by the students, civil society activists and women. Congress leaders like Shashi Tharoor, Mani Shankar Aiyar and student leader Kanhaiya Kumar must not be criticised for being on the "protest stage" simply because they stand opposed to the Hindutva brigade. They are not piggybacking on the protest but just extending their support to the protesting students. May be it is a dictate of "patri-



tism" that BJP leaders can organise and take part in pro-CAA campaign and rallies and Opposition leaders must not take part in anti-CAA protests. Aiyar's rhetorical flourish, "Let us see who is powerful — we or the kaatil" was blown out of proportion to see if this can help arrest the declining in the BJP's support base. With protests continuing for over a month now, what is clear is that no sacrifice is too great to win the "political" battle for a liberal, secular India.

G David Milton Maruthancode

Better late than never

must be on the Union Budget, which must be used to re-invigorate the Indian economy and provide the much-needed stimulus.

Harminder Singh Gumbhir Uttar Pradesh

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "SC's conscience call" (January 11). Once again, it was the Supreme Court which had to

come to the rescue of democracy. Though delayed, it is laudable that the top court came down heavily on the Union Government. It minced no words in stressing that "Internet free-

dom is part of the freedom of expression and cannot be curbed."

Rightly so, freedom of information is an extension of freedom of speech and, thus, a fundamental human right. The top court's order has raised question marks over the validity of the curbs imposed by the Government in Jammu & Kashmir since August last year. Although the Government's decision to abrogate Article 370 and 35(A) were landmark, the curbs on internet access and landline services appeared to be too strident.

Devendra Khurana Bhopal

Flagging issues

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "SC to the rescue" (January 16). The Delhi High Court has given a strong and factual statement, rebuking the police for its failure in handling protests and presenting the required evidence. This calls for a re-look at the way public services departments work.

Shubham Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A crippled campaign

Accessible India intended to take measures to secure the right to an accessible environment for people with disabilities. But it failed



ARMAN ALI

The enactment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 has ensured the domestic transition of the social model adopted under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2006 and ratified by the Government in 2007. The principles stated to be implemented for empowerment of persons with disabilities (PWD) are respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, including the freedom to make one's own choices and independence of persons. The Act lays stress on non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between men and women, respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities. The principle reflects a paradigm shift in thinking about disability from a social welfare concern to a human rights issue. However, the rights-based vision of the Act has not been translated into reality as yet. This is because of the lack of the Government's efforts to ensure that measures are taken for which it has been made responsible under the Act. Accessible India has been one of the most visible campaigns of the Narendra Modi Government which intends to take measures securing the right to an accessible environment for PWDs in the country. Launched before the enactment of the 2016 Act, it seeks to ensure a Built Environment Accessibility, Transportation System Accessibility and Information and Communication Eco-System Accessibility in India, the three of its basic components. It is a matter of great misfortune that India's biggest campaign has failed miserably in its effort. The failure can be basically attributed to the ingenuity shown in its vision, as ambiguous and over-ambitious targets were made without any measure of accountability. The campaign thus serves more in rhetoric than in action.

Ambiguous and over-ambitious targets: The campaign under Built Environment Accessibility targeted 50 most important buildings in Tier-1 cities and 25 most important Government buildings in Tier-2 cities, to be made fully accessible within a period of six months by July 2016. The revised guidelines have extended the deadline to March 2020. The numbers and time period were too ambitious for the reach of the Department of Persons with Disability. The deadlines were missed and extended consecutively and targets under it are yet not achieved even as three years have passed since the campaign was launched. Moreover, there was no study done on the number of Government websites or the quantum of public documents, which makes it impossible to assess the Government on the targets it envisaged as they were mostly made in percentage terms i.e. to make 50 per cent of all Government websites and public documents accessible by March 2018. Such ambiguous targets make it easier to extend the deadline as it becomes impossible to measure the true progress of the work done.

Lack of accountability framework: The department has only released partial information in terms of the total number of buildings and websites that were made accessible but greater details about these buildings have not been provided. This information is not only necessary for awareness but also necessary for accountability purposes. No verification study has been conducted or is currently under process by technically qualified Government or non-government agencies to assess the progress made in built environment or information and communications technology in terms of accessibility. With respect to public buildings under the State Government, the department issues utilisation funds under the campaign. Data can be easily found on the huge amount of funds disbursed under the scheme. However, no accountability is ensued on the State Government as no post-verification study is done to check the proper use of funds. No training or workshop has been conducted to train engineers in the task of retrofitting. Untrained professionals are unable to understand the reports provided to them post accessibility audits.

Social audit: The campaign did include a component of "social audit" to ensure implementation in the form of a website, a mobile-based application where one could report inaccessible buildings and action could be taken on it. However, the objective completely failed because of sluggish implementation of this measure as both the website and the application have been unmanned and thereby lying defunct since 2016.

The failure of the campaign to properly formulate its target and include accountability in its practice has reduced it to a utopian status without any real ground-level impact. This failure is for the lack of technical experts on the subject of accessibility involved in the formulation process. There is a sincere need for the Department for Persons with Disability to diverge from this erring process and hire a permanent officer trained in universal design and accessibility so that proper measures can be taken to address the issues of PWDs.

(The writer is Executive Director, National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People)

IN THE BJP-LED CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, POVERTY, ANARCHY, VIOLENCE AND TENSION HAVE EXCEEDED THAT DURING THE CONGRESS REGIME.

—BSP CHIEF MAYAWATI



MISUSE OF POWER HAS BEEN DONE BY THE BSP, AND THE BSP-SUPPORTED CONGRESS GOVERNMENT, WHICH WAS AT THE CENTRE.
 —BJP LEADER AND UTTAR PRADESH MINISTER SHRIKANT SHARMA

Budget a litmus test

Sitharaman would be presenting her second Budget at a time when the middle class and the industry's expectations from it would be high given the economic turmoil in the country



ABHISHEK RAJA

The economic turmoil that India is currently going through is unprecedented. The performance of Modi 2.0 has been below par on various fiscal indicators. Rising unemployment, industry-specific pangs, reduced demand, falling industrial output, higher inflation and lower-than-expected tax collections are a few areas of concern. As Finance Minister (FM) Nirmala Sitharaman gears up to present the Union Budget 2020 on February 1, it is expected that she would try her best to accelerate the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth which is estimated at five per cent for 2019-20, the lowest of the decade. Sitharaman would be presenting her second Union Budget at a time when the industry's expectations from it would be somewhat high considering the slowdown in various sectors, though the Government took necessary steps last year to shore up the economy through stimulus packages, including the slashing of the corporate tax. However, the Government's move to slash corporate tax has raised the hopes and expectations of the salaried class for a similar relief in income tax. While the middle class wants the Modi Government to provide income tax relief, the FM has very little fiscal room to dole out such largesse and this makes the Union Budget 2020 very interesting. The general expectations for the Union Budget 2020 are as follows.

Reduction in individual income tax rates: In the Interim Budget, presented in February 2019, income tax relief was provided that primarily benefited individuals with an annual income below ₹5 lakh. In another sop for the salaried class, the standard deduction of ₹40,000, which was introduced in the Union Budget 2018, was raised by ₹10,000 to ₹50,000 per year. But last year we had the economic slowdown brought on by the weakness in demand. Therefore, to create demand the Government may reduce income tax rates and may create some more sub-slabs in the current slabs. For example, the current tax rate is 20 per cent for a slab of ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh. This could be reduced to 10 per cent and a further new slab, say for example ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh, could be created with a 20 per cent tax rate.

Increase in deduction under Section 80C: At present, the deduction under Section 80C is available up to ₹1,50,000 and eligible investments include life insurance policies, Public Provident Fund (PPF), National Savings Certificate (NSC), five-year notified tax-saving bank deposits, three-year Equity Linked Saving Schemes (ELSS) mutual funds, repayment of housing loan, tuition fee and many more. One can put the entire ₹1,50,000 in one investment or in more than one instrument. Practically, the overall limit of ₹1,50,000 does not offer any major benefit in real terms, as various investments are clubbed under one single provision. With an increase in the inflation rate, there is a need for an increase in the threshold limit of the Section 80C deduction, too. It is recommended that this deduction should be increased to a minimum of ₹2 lakh or even ₹2.5 lakh. Thus, if the threshold limit of Section 80C is increased by the FM in the Budget, this will not only boost investments, but also provide a majority of taxpayers the much-needed relief.

Infrastructure Bonds: The Government is tight on funds and needs money to finance the country's infrastructure, so it may consider rein-

“ THE GOVERNMENT'S MOVE TO SLASH CORPORATE TAX HAS RAISED THE HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE SALARIED CLASS FOR A SIMILAR RELIEF IN INCOME TAX. WHILE THE MIDDLE CLASS WANTS THE MODI GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE INCOME TAX RELIEF, THE FM HAS VERY LITTLE FISCAL ROOM TO DOLE OUT SUCH LARGESSE AND THIS MAKES THE UNION BUDGET 2020 VERY INTERESTING ”



roduction of Infrastructure Bonds. These bonds were good for people who need a fixed income. This investment was over and above the investment limit under Section 80C. They offered a decent rate of interest and tax benefits. The maturity of these bonds is often between 10 to 15 years with an option to buy back after a lock-in of five years.

Debt-linked saving schemes: The Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI) had last year requested for introduction of debt-linked tax saving schemes or DLSS similar to Equity Linked Savings Schemes (ELSS). The basic argument for introduction of DLSS is that many conservative people do not invest in ELSS to claim tax deductions under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act because they are scared of putting money in stocks. The industry believes that these people would happily invest in a debt scheme like DLSS to save taxes under Section 80C. The mandatory lock-in period in these schemes can be five years like tax saving bank deposits.

Direct Tax Amnesty Scheme: The Government, which is hard-pressed for revenue, may come up with a Direct Tax Amnesty Scheme (DTAS) in this Budget. Last year they announced Sabka Vishwas (Legacy Dispute Resolution) Scheme, 2019 for Indirect Taxes through which the Government collected more than ₹35,000 crore. Direct tax collection is facing a severe shortfall in the current fiscal year. After refunds, it saw a growth rate of 0.7 per cent till December 15, 2019 against the Budget target of 17.3 per cent. Advance tax collection after the third instalment stood at ₹2.51 trillion, compared with ₹2.47 trillion in the corresponding period last year, posing a 1.6 per cent growth.

DTAS may allow assesseees to declare

the additional income of the previous five-six years without penalty or prosecution. The proposal, being examined, will allow assesseees to revise declared income with no fear of past cases being opened up, or prosecution. It will help improve compliance, besides raking in revenues for the Government. People who want to declare more income from the previous year do not do so because the moment they do, they are taken up for scrutiny, investigation and prosecution and penalties are imposed upon them. This scheme will also help in prevention of litigation. In August last year, the Government increased thresholds for tax litigation, below which the I-T Department was directed not to file appeals and withdraw cases that related to the ones under those. The limits were revised from ₹20 lakh to ₹50 lakh for appeals before the tribunal, from ₹50 lakh to ₹1 crore for appeals before High Courts and from ₹1 crore to ₹2 crore for appeals before the Supreme Court. A large number of pending appeals have been withdrawn/dismissed following the order.

Setting up of a Development Finance Institution: The Government may announce the setting up of a Development Finance Institution (DFI) in this Budget. This could be created to cater to core sector project financing. India is going through the rarest of rare economic conditions where economists — who often call for fiscal prudence over anything else during the Budget season — have become more realistic, conceding that there is a need to breach the fiscal deficit target. The DFI could be one of the triggers where the FM would take a decision, even breaching the fiscal deficit target. To improve sentiments and growth, India is in dire need of infra-

structure spending. But for the Government, which is in the process of generating revenues through disinvestment of various PSUs including Air India, BPCL, CONCOR, the SCI and so on, any commitment to such projects would be considered to be an audacious act.

Infrastructure push: The Government may announce a massive push for all forms of physical connectivity through the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, industrial corridors, dedicated freight corridors, Jal Marg Vikas and UDAN schemes. Major commitment for ambitious projects like Bharatmala and Sagarmala is also expected. The Bharatmala project would help develop national road corridors and highways, while Sagarmala would enhance port connectivity, modernisation and port-linked industrialisation.

Micro irrigation funds: In 2017, then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced a dedicated Micro Irrigation Fund with NABARD under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana. The objective of the fund was to achieve the goal of "per drop more crop". A whopping ₹5,000 crore was sanctioned for this in 2018. Considering climate change, which has led to drought in some areas and floods in others, a new corpus would be allocated to this scheme in the forthcoming Budget.

This year's Union Budget comes with more expectations than ever because of socio-economic conditions. For the first time the FM has the leeway to breach fiscal deficits and come up with real reforms, both for taxation and the economy, but the challenge is whether the Government is ready for such action.

(The writer is an author and GST and economics specialist)

The joys and perils of the gig economy

The nature and quality of jobs generated for women in the freelance workforce need to be examined so that appropriate policy suggestions can be put forward for policymakers to make informed decisions

BALWANT MEHTA SIMI MEHTA ARJUN KUMAR

The participation of women in the workforce in India is one of the lowest in the world at around 21 per cent compared to the global average of 48 per cent. And it has been declining steadily over the last two decades mostly on account of the agricultural sector. Some of the key reasons for low work participation of women in the country are a disproportionate burden of care-giving and domestic duties, rising income of households, absence of suitable jobs, patriarchal social norms and poor working conditions. In fact, women's participation in care-giving and domestic duties in the country is highest among all the nations across the world.

The labour force participation rate (LFPR) of women declined more in rural areas, while it was almost stable or marginally up in urban areas in the last few years. Over the years, the rural and urban gap in the LFPR of women narrowed and then converged in 2018. Agriculture distress, low payment in unorganised sector jobs and rising participation of women in

higher education are leading to increasing migration to urban areas in pursuit of better jobs and opportunities. These trends could have significant implications in the Indian context as women in urban areas are increasingly participating in new-age jobs, particularly those that are technology-based such as flexible work on information technology and other digital platforms called the gig economy.

This is helping women maintain a work-life balance and accommodate disproportionate care activities by reducing reliance on physical space and presence and giving them the option to choose their own working hours and tasks.

This phenomenon has been brought about by technological innovation. The ownership and access to computers, tablets with internet and smartphones — some of the prerequisites for active participation of people in the gig economy — has increased manifold in India in recent years. This has encouraged more women to participate in the gig economy, particularly from urban and peri-urban areas.

According to the *Employment Outlook Report*, by staffing platform TeamLease, women gig workers accounted for about 68,000 jobs in the country in 2019 and the

gig economy is expected to generate more jobs in the future. It is estimated that it will comprise half of the urban workforce by 2025 and as much as 80 per cent by 2030.

The increasing participation of women in the gig economy will not only empower them financially but also steer the economic growth of the country. As reported by the McKinsey Global Institute, if India increased the workforce participation rate of women by ten percentage points by 2025, its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could rise by as much as 16 per cent as compared to the business-as-usual scenario. A recent report on the *Future of Work Anywhere-Gig Worker* by Noble House revealed that men and women have almost a 50:50 participation in the gig economy against the traditional workforce where the ratio is about 70:30.

About 86 per cent of women gig workers in India believe that this kind of arrangement gives them an opportunity to earn equal to their male counterparts. The *2019 Employment Outlook Report* reflected that the new-age internet companies were seeing more women in frontline roles. It is easy to see why, given the lower attrition rates, better ratings for delivery women and improved productivity at

warehouses. This has led to greater demand for women at delivery hubs and fulfilment centres.

Another study done by BetterPlace (2019) reveals that the number of women entering the gig economy is rising. Online companies such as Amazon and Flipkart that have begun to hire women in delivery roles have also seen better acceptability by customers. Besides, food-delivery apps such as Swiggy and Zomato have also employed several thousand women employees in cities like Kochi, Jaipur, Pune and other Tier 2 cities.

However, the much-debated issue in the gig economy is the growing concern regarding availability of decent work and violation of fundamental rights of workers. Under the gig economy, the demand for workers and supply of opportunities are matched online or via mobile applications. Though the gig economy provides good job opportunities and allows for flexible working schedules for women, it can also pave the way for severe commoditisation of work that forces people to choose transient work in the absence of better options. They are also vulnerable to attacks and exploitation.

Flexible work and the possibility of

combining paid and unpaid work could provide opportunities to women involved in care-giving activities but could also lead to the deterioration of their working conditions and increase in working hours, given the requirement of constant availability to both duties of care-giving and paid work.

While more women are joining the gig economy, they are paid less than men for the same jobs. As much as 60 per cent of the jobs are in food technology, 30 per cent in e-commerce and courier services and 10 per cent in hyper-local delivery. Another study done by BetterPlace (2019) reveals that challenges remain when hiring them for frontline roles, especially with regard to their safety.

The Fairwork Project Initiative shows that app-based service companies such as Ola, Uber, Uber Eats and Zomato have some of the worst working conditions among Indian start-ups. These companies were ranked on five principles of fairness and score only two-four out of 10. The only positive is that they paid at least a local minimum wage including employment costs incurred by the workers. It is also argued that the new work culture within the gig economy is not activity regulated

and women face the possibility of being disadvantaged all over again.

The nature and quality of jobs generated for women under the gig economy need to be examined so that appropriate policy suggestions can be put forward for policymakers to make informed decisions. It would further provide an improved understanding of the realities of flexible work arrangements in both crowd work (digital marketing, online tuitions, content writers, translators, graphic designers, freelance recruiters, software development, accounting, data analytics, legal work, medical transcription, health workers and social work) and on-demand service work (such as personal transport services offered by Uber, Ola, food delivery services provided by Zomato, Swiggy and e-commerce services of Amazon, Naukri.com that require a direct interface between workers and those requesting for gig services) to fill the critical knowledge gap.

(Balwant Mehta is a Fellow at the Institute for Human Development and a Visiting Fellow at the Impact and Policy Research Institute (IMPRI), while Simi Mehta is CEO and Editorial Director and Balwant Kumar is Director at IMPRI)

CAPSULE



Zinier raises \$ 90 mn in funding from ICONIQ Capital, Tiger Global, others

NEW DELHI: Zinier, a field service automation solutions provider, on Thursday said it has raised USD 90 million (around Rs 638 crore) in funding from ICONIQ Capital, Tiger Global Management and five other investors. The series C round of funding also saw participation from existing investors Accel, Founders Fund, Nokia-backed NGP Capital, France-based Newfund Capital and Qualcomm Ventures LLC. The funding will support global customer adoption and expansion of Zinier's AI-driven field service automation platform -- ISAC, a statement said. In the past year, more than USD 100 million was invested in Zinier to transform the way field service work gets done, it added.



Yes Bank acquires 10.25 pc stake in Sical Logistics

NEW DELHI: Private sector lender Yes Bank has acquired 10.25 per cent stake in Sical Logistics, a Coffee Day Group company, by invoking pledged shares. "Yes Bank Ltd has, pursuant to invocation of pledge of shares, acquired 60,00,000 equity shares having nominal value of Rs 10 per share, constituting around 10.25 per cent of the post-issue paid-up share capital of a listed company, namely, Sical Logistics Ltd," the lender said in a regulatory filing. The shares have been acquired pursuant to invocation of pledge of shares of Sical Logistics Limited subsequent to default/breach of terms of credit facilities sanctioned by Yes Bank to Sical Connect Ltd, the filing added.



HDFC ERGO Health to merge with HDFC ERGO through share swap

NEW DELHI: HDFC ERGO Health erstwhile Apollo Munich Health Insurance will merge with HDFC ERGO through a share swap deal. The board of director of HDFC ERGO and HDFC ERGO Health at its meeting on January 15, approved a scheme of arrangement and amalgamation between the two entities, HDFC Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Mortgage lender HDFC Ltd is promoter of general insurance firm HDFC ERGO. The scheme envisages amalgamation and will lead to dissolution of HDFC ERGO Health without winding up, it said.

INVESTMENT ADVISERS

Split roles of investment advisor, distributor: Sebi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets watchdog Sebi has proposed a new set of norms for investment advisers, under which they will have to segregate their advisory and product distribution activities, as part of its effort to strengthen the regulatory framework.

Besides, the regulator has suggested that Investment Advisers (IA) should not come out with any investment advice suggesting assured returns to clients in the investment advisory document.

Also, Sebi has suggested mechanisms for charging fees from clients and proposed to raise the net worth requirement for IAs.

Further, it has proposed that IA should clearly declare to the client that it will not seek any power of attorney from its clients for auto implementation of investment advice.

The new set of proposals are intended to strengthen the regulatory framework for investment advisers as well as empower them to effectively discharge their responsibilities towards the investors who are their clients, the regulator said in a draft proposal.

Sebi said it has been receiving numerous investor complaints against investment advisers and most of the complaints were related to assured returns being offered by IAs, charging of exorbitant fees from client with a false promise



Further, it has proposed that IA should clearly declare to the client that it will not seek any power of attorney from its clients for auto implementation of investment advice

of handsome returns, mis-selling without adhering to the risk profile of the client, non-disclosure of complete service fees and charges and extracting money in the name of various charges.

To further strengthen and make the IA Regulations robust, the regulator has come out with fresh proposals in this regard and sought public comments on the proposals till January 30. The final regulation will be put in place after taking into consideration, views of all stakeholders.

"There should be clear segregation between the two services provided to the client i.e.

investment advice and distribution of the investment products," the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in the draft proposal.

IAs should provide a document to the client detailing the terms and conditions of the investment advisory services offered to the client. They should ensure that neither any investment advice is rendered nor any fee is charged until consent is received from the client on the terms and conditions.

The document must clearly indicate that IA should not, in the course of performing its services to the client, hold out any investment advice imply-

ing any assured returns or any other nomenclature that gives the impression that the investment advice is risk-free or not susceptible to market risks.

Further, the document must mention about scope of services, functions of IA, investment objective and guidelines, risk factors, validity of advisory services, terms of fees, conflict of interest and liability of IA among others.

Besides, it has been suggested that IA should clearly declare to the client that it will not seek any power of attorney or authorisations from its clients for auto implementation of investment advice and it does not derive any direct or indirect benefit out of the client's securities or investment products.

Further, the regulator has proposed two mechanism under which an investment adviser can charge fees -- Assets under advice (AUA) mechanism of fees and fixed fees.

Under the AUA mechanism, the maximum fees that can be charged will be 2.5 per cent of AUA per annum per family across all schemes or products and the upper limit of Rs 75,000 annually per family has been proposed under fixed fee model.

"If agreed by the client, Investment Adviser can charge fees in advance. However, such advance cannot exceed fees for two quarter," as per the proposal.

India's palm oils import dips over 8 pc in Dec 2019: SEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's import of palm oils declined by 8.64 per cent to 7,41,490 tonnes in December 2019, Industry body Solvent Extractors Association (SEA) said on Thursday.

India, the world's leading vegetable oil buyer, had imported 8,11,700 tonne palm oils in December 2018. The country's total vegetable oil imports declined to 11.28 lakh tonne in December 2019, compared to 12.11 lakh tonne in the year-ago period.

The share of palm oil is more than 60 per cent of the country's total vegetable oil imports.

According to SEA, import of palm oils have declined, while that of soft oils have risen due to reduction in the duty difference between the two oils.

Among palm oil products, import of crude palm oil (CPO) declined to 6,31,824 tonne in December 2019, from 6,70,244 tonne in the year-ago period, as per the SEA data.

The shipment of RBD palmolein dropped to 94,816 tonne, from 1,30,459 tonne, while that of crude palm kernel oil (CPKO) rose to 14,850 tonne from 10,997 tonne in the said period.

Among soft oils, import of sunflower oil declined to 1,97,842 tonne in December 2019 from 2,35,824 tonne in the year-ago period.

However, the shipment of soyabean oil rose sharply to 1,68,048 tonne from 85,404 tonne in the said period.



BNP Paribas sees 9pc growth for Sensex in '20

PNS ■ MUMBAI

French brokerage BNP Paribas on Thursday said it expects a 9 per cent rise in the Indian equity benchmark Sensex amid concerns on the broader economy.

It expects the 30-share BSE Sensex to be 44,500 points by the end of the year.

Manishi Raychaudhuri, its Singapore-based head of Asia Pacific Equity, said he has not seen such a sharp correction in growth momentum like in the case of India, and termed the same as "scary".

He said with the fall in private investments, this was bound to happen, adding that concerns are both cyclical and structural, and made it clear that there is no magic wand to correct things up.

Making it clear that he holds "bearish" views on the economy, there are a few things which can cheer investors, and pointed out to careful stock selection as a key.

It expects the 30-share BSE Sensex to be 44,500 points by the end of the year

Stating that the house is "overweight" on India, its head of India equity research Abhiram Eleswarapu said, "market is not about the economy, but only about the top 50 companies."

He, however, said that there are risks to its market expectations, including stagflation, the government's budget moves and if the US Federal does not cut interest rates twice.

Raychaudhuri said the government should not look at the fiscal deficit number and cut down expenditure to achieve the target, warning that such a move can ensure that the current growth slowdown continues.

'IOC to decide on bidding for BPCL after govt lays out rules'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Oil Corp (IOC), the country's biggest oil firm, will decide on bidding to buy Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) after the government lists out rules for the stake sale, its Chairman Sanjiv Singh said Thursday.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had on November 21, 2019 decided to sell government's entire 53.29 per cent stake in country's second-largest state refiner BPCL, but a tender for sale hasn't yet been issued.

"The expression of interest (EoI) (for BPCL stake sale) hasn't been issued yet. We don't know the conditions. We have no information whether PSUs are allowed to bid or not," Singh told reporters here. "I cannot comment if IOC will bid or not unless we see the conditions set out in the EoI."

He said a decision on the issue can only be taken once there is clarity on the bidding process the government intends to follow.

Soon after the Cabinet decision, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had hinted that PSUs will be kept out of BPCL privatisation.

"Since 2014, we have a clear vision that the government has no business to be in business," Pradhan had said on November 22, 2019. "We have examples of 2-3 sectors such as telecom and aviation where ushering in private participation has led to customers benefiting from price cuts, effi-



The expression of interest (EoI) for BPCL stake sale hasn't been issued yet. We don't know the conditions. We have no information whether PSUs are allowed to bid or not

-SANJIV SINGH IOC Chairman

ciency, and better service."

Asked if the company has been told that PSUs will be kept out, Singh said there is no information on whether state-owned firms can bid or not.

BPCL will give the buyer ready access to 14 per cent of India's oil refining capacity and about one-fourth of the fuel marketing infrastructure in the world's fastest-growing energy market.

It, however, will be sold after carving out Numaligarh Refinery from its portfolio and given to a public sector unit. Numaligarh Refinery Ltd is also to be sold out to a PSU, possibly through a bidding process.

Maruti to hone skills of 800 drivers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Thursday said it has undertaken an initiative to train 800 drivers in the current fiscal as part of a joint programme with the Haryana government.

The country's largest car maker has initiated driver training programme under Haryana Skill Development Mission (HSDM).

Training will be conducted at company's operated Institute of Driving & Traffic Research (IDTR) at Bahadurgarh and at Rohtak, MSI said in a statement.

The company's association with HSDM is targeted to create a pool of better vehicle drivers and make the roads safer in the state, it added.

The institutes at Bahadurgarh and Rohtak are a joint venture between MSI and Haryana Transport Department.

IDBI seeks to exit PCA framework, management to meet RBI this week

PNS ■ MUMBAI

LIC-owned IDBI Bank, currently under prompt corrective action since May 2017, is expected to hold meeting with the RBI this week to seek removal of operational restrictions, according to sources.

The lender will make a presentation to the Reserve Bank of India on its improved financial position, the sources said, adding the management is hopeful of coming out of the PCA framework by the end of this month.

The RBI had placed IDBI Bank in May 2017, after it had breached the thresholds for capital adequacy, asset quality (net NPAs were over 13 per cent in March 2017), return on assets and the leverage ratio.

Since coming under the PAC, more than a third of its entire book became dud loans in Q2 of FY18, with the gross NPA ratio touching 32 per cent and the net NPAs at 17.30 per cent.



"The presentation to the RBI will be on the key financial numbers. On the capital front and in terms of net NPAs, we have been able to make progress," the sources told PTI.

A query sent to the bank did not elicit any response. The PCA norms trigger if a bank's net NPA crosses 6 per cent or if CRAR (capital to risk weighted assets) is below the regulatory requirement of

10.88 per cent as of March 2019.

In the quarter to September 2019, its net NPA stood at 5.97 per cent and tier-1 capital and CRAR improved to 9.52 per cent and 11.98 per cent, respectively.

Capital infusion through recap bonds by the government in Q2, and also from LIC, and recovery from stressed accounts have also helped the

Since coming under the PAC, more than a third of its entire book became dud loans in Q2 of FY18, with the gross NPA ratio touching 32 per cent and the net NPAs at 17.30 per cent

bank in shoring up its capital position, another person familiar with the matter said.

In the second quarter of FY20, the bank received Rs 4,743 crore from LIC, which holds 51 per cent stake, and Rs 4,557 crore from the government which still owns 47.11 per cent.

Wipro Ventures sets up \$ 150 mn Fund II to invest in enterprise software firms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Wipro Ventures, the strategic investment arm of Wipro Limited, on Thursday said it has closed USD 150 million (about Rs 1,063 crore) Fund II that will invest in enterprise software companies.

"Buoyed by the success of its first USD 100 million fund launched in 2015, Wipro

Ventures will continue to invest in early to mid-stage companies building innovative enterprise software solutions across key areas, including cybersecurity, application development, analytics, cloud infrastructure, test automation, and artificial intelligence," Wipro said in a regulatory fil-

ing. Wipro Ventures, managed by Biplab Adhya and Venu Pemmaraju, has invested in 16 early to mid-stage start-ups so far, including 11 in the US, 4 in Israel and 1 in India.

In addition to making direct equity investments, Wipro Ventures has also invested in five early-stage enterprise focused venture funds in Israel, New York and Los Angeles.



Wockhardt gets DCGI approval for two new antibiotics

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Wockhardt on Thursday said it has received approval from the Indian drug regulator for its two new antibiotics indicated for the treatment of acute bacterial skin and skin structure infections.

The approval by the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) is for novel antibiotics discovered and manufactured in India by an Indian company, Wockhardt MD Murtaza Khorakiwala said in a media conference call today.

The approval for the two novel antibiotics by the DCGI paves way for a Rs 100 crore opportunity for the company in the country over 18 to 24 months on an annual basis, he added.

The size of Indian antibiotic market is around Rs 16,000 crore, growing at 7 per cent and is one of the largest therapeutic segment, with around 12 per cent market share of the Indian pharmaceutical market, Khorakiwala said.

The company will also launch these antibiotics in emerging markets primarily through partnerships, he added.

"DCGI has approved



Wockhardt's 2 new antibiotics, EMROK (IV) and EMROK O (Oral), for acute bacterial skin and skin structure infections including diabetic foot infections and concurrent bacteraemia based on the phase 3 study involving 500 patients in 40 centres across India," Wockhardt said in a statement.

The new drug will target superbug like Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), which is a leading cause of rising antimicrobial resistance (AMR), it added.

The size of Indian antibiotic market is around Rs 16,000 crore, growing at 7 per cent and is one of the largest therapeutic segment, with a 12 per cent market share of the Indian pharmaceutical market, he said.

Higher customs duty likely on toys, paper and footwear

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government may increase customs duty on several products like paper, footwear, rubber items and toys in the forthcoming Budget with a view to promote 'Make in India' and boost manufacturing growth, sources said.

The Commerce and Industry Ministry in its Budget recommendations to the Finance Ministry has proposed rationalisation of basic customs or import duty on over 300 items from different sectors, including furniture, chemicals, rubber, coated paper and paper boards, they said.

For new pneumatic tyres of rubber, it has proposed to hike customs duty to 40 per cent from the current 10-15 per cent.



For new pneumatic tyres of rubber, it has proposed to hike customs duty to 40 per cent from the current 10-15 per cent. Similarly on footwear and related products, the ministry has suggested increase in duty to 35 per cent from the current 25 per cent

Hike in the duty will help address the issue of price competition. Majority of imports are coming from ASEAN countries, with which India has a free trade agreement. It is also suspected that China is re-routing large quantities of footwear through these countries," the sources said.

The ministry has proposed to increase import duty on

wooden furniture to 30 per cent from the current 20 per cent.

For coated paper, paper boards and hand made papers, it has suggested doubling the duty to 20 per cent.

However, it has asked for removal of import duty on waste paper and wood pulp, which is currently at 10 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively.

The paper industry has expressed concerns about cheap imports and surge in inbound shipments.

"This has significant negative impact on coated paper manufacturing industry. Increase in duty will help domestic industry to compete with global players. It would also protect local manufacturers and ensure sustained growth of domestic paper industry," one of the sources said.

For wood, metal and plastic toys, the ministry has suggested increase in import duty to up to 100 per cent from the current 20 per cent.

Import of these toys increased to USD 304 million in 2018-19 from USD 281.82 million in 2017-18 from China and Hong Kong.



Laying path for self-sufficiency

Hyderabad-based NGO Sahara is training adolescent girls and homemakers to become self-employed, writes V SATEESH REDDY

Not every girl gets a chance to pursue higher studies because of financial constraints.

Many are forced to stay at home or worse work as daily labourers to make sure they earn enough for themselves and their families. To help girls from such impoverished families earn a better life, a Hyderabad-based NGO, Sahara, has set up skill development training for adolescent girls and women. For more than a decade, the organisation has been helping thousands of girls and homemakers gain independence by giving training in courses such as tailoring, styling and make up, applying mehendi, computer education, English proficiency, office management, making and selling artificial ornaments and more.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Ramagiri Narsing Rao, Founder and Secretary of Sahara, says, "Through our NGO, we have been helping the underprivileged across Telugu states for more than three decades now. In our journey, we have observed that many young women and homemakers are being restricted to their homes or working in back breaking daily labour because of financial constraints. Hence, our NGO helps them learn various courses so they can turn to self-employment."

When asked about how it is different from the Prime Minister Skill Development programme, Narsing Rao shares, "The Prime Minister Skill Development programme doesn't offer proper facilities. Many women who got trained under that programme are now coming to us for a second round of training. We don't have restrictions on the number of women joining out team of trainees and one can join at any time. We have one-month short-term courses and long-term courses that last

SAHARA HAS BEEN HELPING THOUSANDS OF GIRLS AND HOMEMAKERS GAIN INDEPENDENCE BY GIVING TRAINING IN COURSES SUCH AS TAILORING, STYLING AND MAKE UP, APPLYING MEHENDI, COMPUTER EDUCATION, ENGLISH PROFICIENCY, OFFICE MANAGEMENT, MAKING AND SELLING ARTIFICIAL ORNAMENTS AND MORE



“We strive to bring an overall sustainable development in communities. We understood that only by integration of different activities involving various age groups development is possible. We are base projects on the children, the women, the youth and the elderly in fields of environment, health, life, employment and skill development.”

RAMAGIRI NARSING RAO
FOUNDER AND SECRETARY,
SAHARA ORGANISATION

three to six months. Our focus is to help the people getting trained grow as an individual and also learn to be a part of a group.”

Speaking about how the organisation started, Narsing Rao says, "I started the organisation three decades ago in rural areas like Adilabad by starting various social activities. We strive to bring an overall sustainable development in communities. Through years of service we noticed that only by integration of different activities involving various age groups development is possible. We develop our projects for the children, the women, the youth and the elderly in fields of environment, health, life, employment and skill development."

He said that more than a 1,000 women have benefitted through their programme till date.

He adds, "We have been setting up various centres across Hyderabad. We move from one

location to the next after each training. After the courses, we refer the trainees to beauty parlours and other service sectors for employment."

When asked if they take any fee for these courses, Rao said that they charge Rs 500 as a registration fee in order to make the people take the programme seriously.

About their other social activities, Rao adds, "We sponsor poor girl children to pursue their education, form children clubs and promote child rights. We take care of the elderly living in a community and help them by providing food and other necessities for their survival. We conduct medical camps and also spread awareness about the environment."



Content plays key role

Speaking to V SATEESH REDDY, *Number 1 Kodalu* fame Jai Dhanush shares about his entry into movies and television, the impact of OTT platforms and more

Jai Dhanush has become a household name among the Telugu audience for his role in *Number 1 Kodalu* serial. In the daily, he plays Rahul who is ambitious and aims to be the best in all that he does. He is a person who has his mind set on becoming successful but eventually gets married to an illiterate woman. The story is about how he deals with it.

Began with movies

Jai Dhanush began his acting career in movies and his first movie in a lead role was in *Pote Poni* in 2006. He says, "I was interested in acting since my childhood. I learned it under Satyanand master at his acting institute. Later, I tried my luck in the industry and got small roles in movies like *Vijayendra Varma*, *Mee Shreyobhilashi* and more. Later I got lead roles in movies like *Pote Poni* and *Manorama*."

Cinema to serials

After donning lead roles in movies, Jai entered television. Speaking about his entry into television, Jai says, "Entertainment is my passion.

After acting some movies, I got a chance to enter the television industry. I believe that in order to rise to the top in movie one needs constant support and back up. But through serials the opportunities are more and audience base is more diverse. I believe serials are a reflection of our daily lives and they connect well with all age groups. Hence I worked in serials in all regional languages. I did serials like *Alliyambal* in Malayalam, *Chandralekha* in Tamil and got a great feedback for my efforts."

Marriage to a co-star

Jai did serials like *Aadapilla*, *Thurpu Padamara*, *Konchem Istam Konchem Kastam* and more. He married to his co-star

Keerthi. He shares, "Whenever Keerthi and I go to a public place, people recognise us and talk to us about our work in serials. They refer to us with our names in the serials and that feels good. I met Keerthi in *Thurpu Padamara* serial and we worked together in *Alliyambal* in Malayalam. We both act in serials in several languages and this is a great learning experience for us. As we both are from the same industry, we understand each other very well."

Versatile actor

Jai said that actor Vikram is his role model and want to don versatile roles like him. He shares, "I have no specific role that I aim to act as in movies. Whatever role I get, I want to give it my best and connect with all age groups. My favourite serial is *Number 1 Kodalu*. Zee TV Anuradha madam helped me set high goals for myself in the TV industry."

Content is key

He said that the OTT (over-the-top) services will have no effect on the viewership of television serials. He adds, "I believe that content plays a key role in every medium. Introduction of various platforms is a healthy competition. Nowadays, serials have a good story and are giving a tough competition to movies too. More platforms means budding actors would get more chances to prove their talent."

Speaking about women playing the villain in many serials, Jai said that it is all done for entertainment and one shouldn't care if the negative character is a man or a woman. He says that women donning such role doesn't affect how woman are seen in society.

Social activities

Speaking about his experience in providing social work, the actor says that, "I think it is important for everyone to take part in social work. My fans have an association in Kerala and I take part in social activities with them. In the city too, when I get free time I take part in social work."

As a message to aspiring artistes in the film and television industry, he says that focus and dedication regarding work are important for any budding actor, whether man or woman, and everyone must have a goal in life and work hard to achieve it.

“I believe that content plays a key role in every medium. Introduction of various platforms is a healthy competition. More platforms means budding actors would get more chances to prove their talent”

JAI DHANUSH



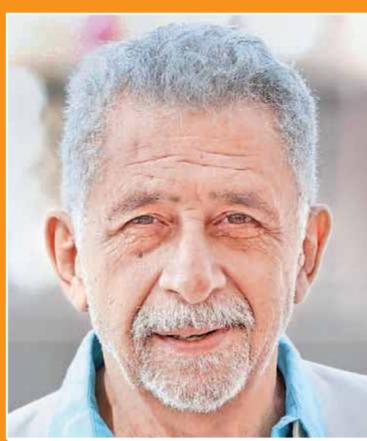
Game of Thrones spin-off likely in 2022

Game of Thrones straight-to-series spin-off titled *House of Dragon* is likely to premiere in 2022. HBO programming chief Casey Bloys told this to *variety.com* during the Television Critics Assn. tour on Wednesday, calling it his "best guess". He was not able to narrow down a more precise premiere date at this stage, though. No production dates have been deter-

mined yet. Co-created by George RR Martin and Ryan Condal, *House of Dragon* is based on *Fire & Blood* and set 300 years before the events of 'Thrones', telling the story of House Targaryen. Bloys said: "They are in the room breaking story right now. My guess is we'll see it on the air in '22."

As for the untitled *Game of Thrones* prequel pilot starring Naomi Watts, which HBO ultimately passed on, the cancellation was characterised as no singular thing. "Pilots — sometimes they come together, sometimes they don't. And I would say that was very much the case here. There's nothing I would point to and say 'Oh, this was the problem,'" Bloys said. He added that Jane Goldman, who co-created the project with Martin, took on the challenge of

world-building "beautifully". "That (prequel) was 8,000 years before the current show, so it required a lot more invention. One of the benefits of *House of Dragon* is there was a text from George and there was a little bit more of a roadmap. "(Goldman's prequel) did have more challenges in terms of establishing a world, but I think she handled that beautifully... there wasn't one glaring thing."



Naseeruddin Shah, Manisha Koirala in Netflix film *Freedom*

Netflix on Thursday announced the cast of the movie *Freedom*, directed by Dibakar Banerjee, which includes Naseeruddin Shah, Manisha Koirala, Huma Qureshi and Kalki Koechlin.

According to a press release from the streamer, actors Divya Dutta, Zoya Husain, Shashank Arora, and Neeraj Kabi are also part of the film.

Starting 25 years into the future, *Freedom* traces the history of a family in three stories that are intricately interwoven with the personal and ideological histories of India.

Dibakar said the new project is the story of the regular middle-class folks. "With family ties, parents, grandparents, children, loves, lies and secrets lost and suppressed over generations. It's about food, ambition, sex, and betrayal. It's about what we hide and what we wear on our sleeves, and about a past and a future that we call India."

"As a filmmaker, I want to move away from cinematic stereotypes, and working on *Lust Stories* and *Ghost Stories* with Netflix gave me renewed hope about creative expression in India. *Freedom* is the next step forward," the director said in a statement.

The film is slated to start streaming on Netflix in 2020.

SANDERS supports CARDI B's bid to enter politics

Rapper Cardi B's bid to make it as a politician has received backing from the US Senator Bernie Sanders.

Cardi took to Twitter on January 12 to inform her followers about her latest interest: "I think I want to be a politician. I really love government even though I don't agree with (our) Government (sic).

"Like I was watching war documentaries. No matter how many weapons a country have you need people! How are you trying to go against a country and possibly start a war when this country lacks patriotism? I barely see people claiming they love being American."

Sanders believes the *Bodak Yellow* hitmaker would be a fantastic member of Congress.

He has told *tmz.com*: "Cardi B is deeply concerned about what's happening in the country. She knows what it's like to live in poverty and struggle, and it would be great for her to bring that experience to politics."



JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE GOES FOR CRYOTHERAPY

Singer-actor Justin Timberlake was spotted walking in solo to a cryotherapy appointment here. Justin's recourse to the therapy follows his

hand-holding scandal with Alisha Wainwright in November. The two will soon be seen together in the upcoming film, *Palmer*. For his cryotherapy session, Justin was dressed in a long wool coat and jeans, teamed with a navy beanie, reports *mirror.co.uk*.

Cryotherapy exposes the body to extremely cold temperatures for several minutes for the purpose of relieving muscle pain and reducing migraine symptoms.

This comes after he was seen on a night out getting cosy with his *Palmer* co-star in New Orleans on November 21.

The gossip vineyard buzzed when Justin and Alisha were spotted getting too intimate during the night out. She was seen stroking his thigh even as he held her hand during the boozy outing.

CRYOTHERAPY EXPOSES THE BODY TO EXTREMELY COLD TEMPERATURES FOR SEVERAL MINUTES FOR THE PURPOSE OF RELIEVING MUSCLE PAIN AND REDUCING MIGRAINE SYMPTOMS

Justin has been married to actress Jessica Biel since 2012.

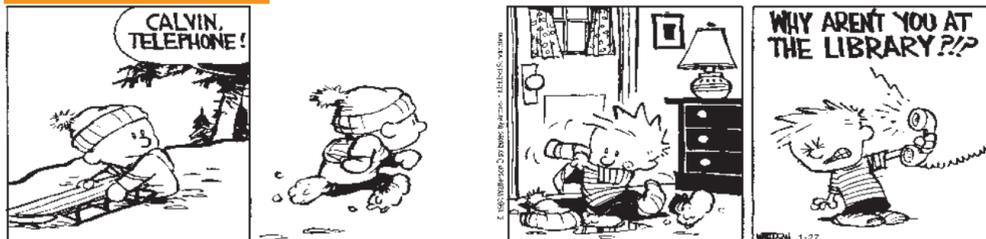


FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



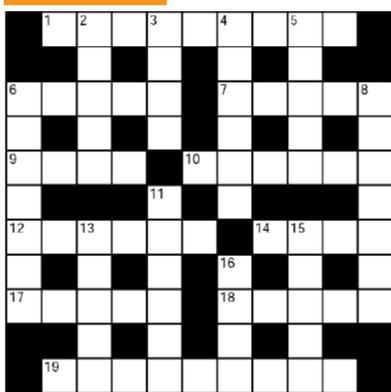
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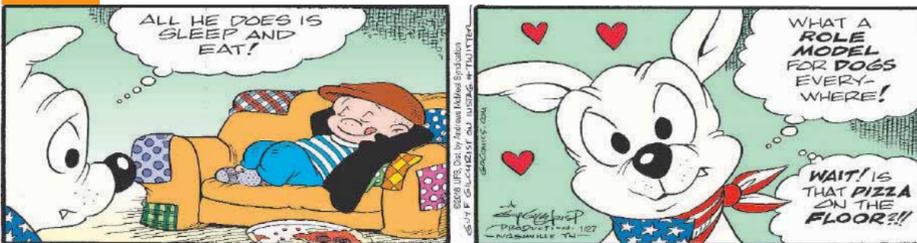
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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 curved wooden thing thrown by an Australian Aborigine
- The steps on a ladder
- Inexpensive
- Manufactured
- Say again
- Ripped
- The skin on top of the head
- Fortunate
- Family members who lived long ago

DOWN

- A female relation
- Comments
- Things made of kiln-baked clay
- Humans
- You remember and think with this body organ
- Happen
- Apartment

SOLUTION

P	R	A	O	L	B
A	P	R	I	E	T
R	O	A	E	O	A
A	F	R	I	C	A
H	E	L	P	B	O
U	A	A	U	A	A
T	A	S	T	S	M
E	S	A	E	R	K
C	O	N	F	I	S



BUNNY EYES

Bollywood for pan-India appeal

Many Tollywood stars have made foray into Bollywood and Allu Arjun is also keen on joining the bandwagon. K RAMYA SREE writes about the expectations the Stylish Star has about going national

Stylish Star Allu Arjun has a huge fan following but he wants to have a 'pan-India appeal'. For this he has evinced interest in doing a Bollywood film. He has said that he wants to have a Hindi film in his filmography, though he is yet to choose the right project and director from the ones that were offered to him so far. The actor is currently enjoying the success of *Ala Vaikunthapurramulo*.

Speaking with an English publication, *Mid Day*, in an interview, Allu Arjun said, "I want to have pan-India appeal, for which I need to do a Bollywood film. It's a huge prospect for my growth as an actor. Having a Hindi movie

in my filmography is important. Thanks to social media, people can now watch and appreciate movies irrespective of the language."

He said that he has been offered Bollywood films. "It is about finding the right project and the right director. I don't want to rush into things."

Speaking about *Ala Vaikunthapurramulo*, Bunny said that, "In mass entertainers, we tend to go over-the-top. But this time, I decided to keep my performance more authentic. We have known each other (Pooja Hegde) for many years. But to [witness] her talent on set was sheer pleasure."

The film has been receiving rave reviews since its release. Even Pawan Kalyan wrote an appreciation note for Allu Arjun. The latter posted a picture of the flowers and the note and tweeted, "Soo overwhelmed to see this coming from PSPK garu himself. Very touched by the graceful gesture... Thank you very @PawanKalyan garu. (sic)"

Directed by Sekhar Kammula, the film marks the maiden collaboration of Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi. However, Kammula and Sai Pallavi are joining hands for the second time. The latter made her Telugu debut with *Fidaa*. Talking about the project, Kammula had said, "It's a love story of a boy and girl who move to the city from their village to pursue their dreams." He went on to reveal that the film will see Chaitanya speak in Telangana dialect.

ALLU ARJUN SAID THAT HE WANTS TO HAVE A HINDI FILM IN HIS FILMOGRAPHY, THOUGH HE IS YET TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT PROJECT AND THE RIGHT DIRECTOR FROM THE ONES THAT WERE OFFERED TO HIM SO FAR.



Love Story first look poster out

Extending their Sankranti greeting, the makers of Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi-starrer, *Love Story*, released the first look on Wednesday. The poster was unveiled on the occasion of Sankranti.

Directed by Sekhar Kammula, the film marks the maiden collaboration of Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi. However, Kammula and Sai Pallavi are joining hands for the second time. The latter made her Telugu debut with *Fidaa*. Talking about the project, Kammula had said, "It's a love story of a boy and girl who move to the city from their village to pursue their dreams." He went on to reveal that the film will see Chaitanya speak in Telangana dialect.

The role with great interest to pull off his part. Also, Sai Pallavi could spring a surprise for the audience. I believe the lead pair's performances will stand out," Kammula said.

The film, being produced by Ram Mohan Rao, will be wrapped up in three schedules. The project went on the floors last September and is currently on the verge of being completed. If everything goes as planned, the film will hit the screens this summer.

If reports are to be believed, Chay will next team up with director Parasuram for a romantic comedy. An official announcement regarding the project is yet to be made.

Sai Pallavi, on the other hand, has begun shooting for Rana Daggubati's *Virata Parvam*, in which she plays a naxalite. Last seen in Suriya's *NGK*, Pallavi has an interesting slate of projects in her kitty currently.

VARUN in Maruthi's next?

Maruthi Dasari is considered one of the pioneers of the new Tollywood era and one of the most popular directors in the industry.

His direction has always been revolutionary in terms of his style, making small budget films. He never failed to deliver his best and made his mark in Tollywood.

Industry grapevine is that the filmmaker wants to test his luck with a mega hero and is planning to work with *Mega Prince* Varun Tej.

Maruthi earlier worked with Nani and Sharwanand and wanted to work with Allu Arjun too. But he failed to convince the actor. Now sources said that Varun Tej, who is enjoying the success of *Gaddalakonda Ganesh*, has agreed to helm the movie.

With Maruthi's recent directorial venture *Pratiroju Pandage* starring Sai Dharam Tej and Raashi Khanna, performing well at the box office, it is believed that Varun Tej will give his nod to the director. Recently Maruthi Dasari is said to have narrated a story to Varun Tej and though the actor is impressed with the narration, he asked the director to come back with the full script.



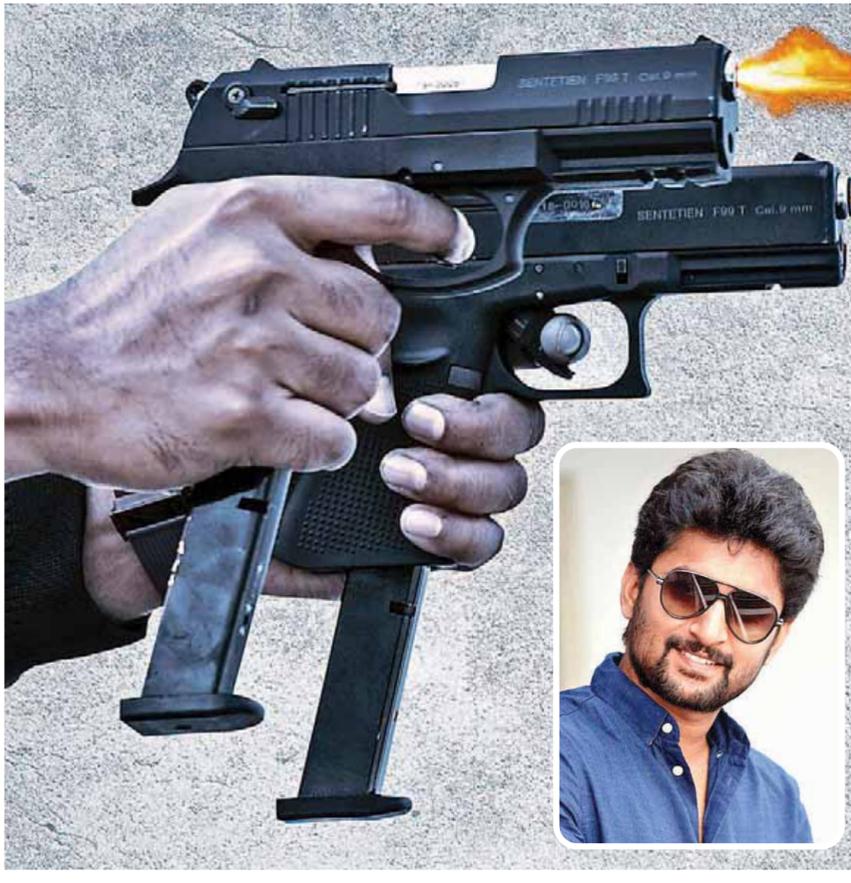
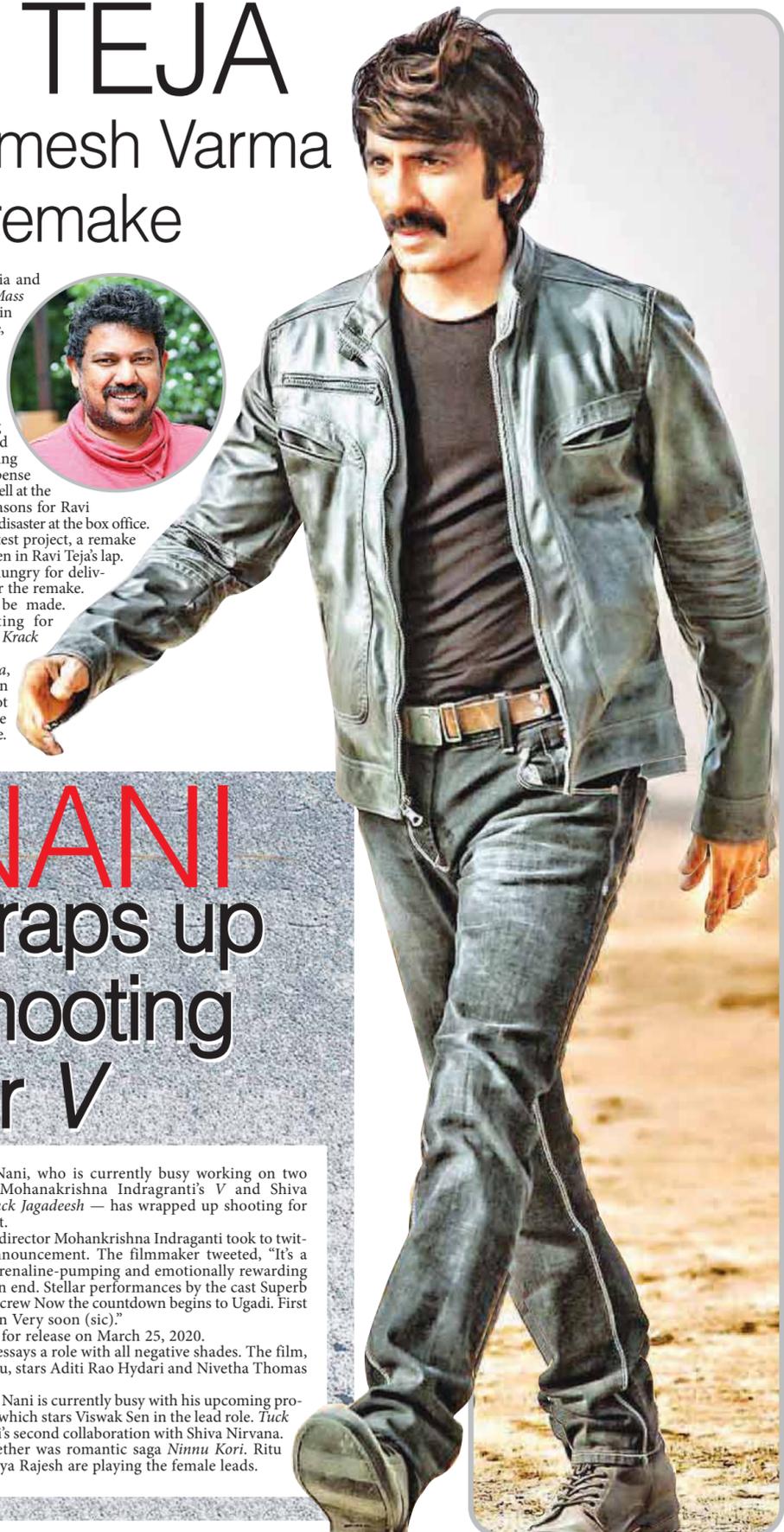
RAVI TEJA to join Ramesh Varma for Tamil remake

If the ongoing buzz in the media and film industry is to be believed, *Mass Maharaja* Ravi Teja will be seen in a Telugu remake of a Tamil movie, helmed by Ramesh Varma. Ravi Teja will be collaborating with Ramesh Varma for the second time with the first one being for *Veera*.

Ramesh Varma made his directorial debut with *Oka Oorilo* in 2005 starring actor Tarun, followed by *Ride*, *Veera* and *Abbayitho Ammayi*. His previous offering with Bellamkonda Srinivas was the suspense thriller, *Rakshasudu*, which performed well at the box office. This could be one of the reasons for Ravi Teja to give his nod although *Veera* was a disaster at the box office.

Sources said that Ramesh Varma's latest project, a remake of a super hit Tamil movie, has now fallen in Ravi Teja's lap. *Mass Maharaja* Ravi Teja who is also hungry for delivering a hit movie, has given the nod for the remake. An official announcement is yet to be made. Currently, Ravi Teja is busy shooting for Gopichand Malineni's directorial venture *Krack* alongside Shruti Hassan.

Meanwhile, Ravi Teja's *Disco Raja*, directed by V.I. Anand, will hit screens on January 25. After wrapping up the shoot of *Krack*, the *Mass Maharaja* will join the sets of Ramesh Varma's directorial venture.



NANI wraps up shooting for V

Natural star Nani, who is currently busy working on two movies — Mohanakrishna Indraganti's *V* and Shiva Nirvana's *Tuck Jagadeesh* — has wrapped up shooting for *V*, it is learnt.

The film's director Mohanakrishna Indraganti took to twitter to make this announcement. The filmmaker tweeted, "It's a WRAP for *V* An adrenaline-pumping and emotionally rewarding shoot has come to an end. Stellar performances by the cast Super contributions by the crew Now the countdown begins to Ugadi. First look will be out soon Very soon (sic)."

The film is slated for release on March 25, 2020. In the film, Nani essays a role with all negative shades. The film, produced by Dil Raju, stars Aditi Rao Hydari and Nivetha Thomas as female leads.

On the other side, Nani is currently busy with his upcoming production venture *Hit* which stars Viswak Sen in the lead role. *Tuck Jagadeesh* marks Nani's second collaboration with Shiva Nirvana. Their first film together was romantic saga *Ninnu Kori*. Ritu Varma and Aishwarya Rajesh are playing the female leads.



KOHLI TO BE BACK AT NO 3

In current situation, you should be ready to bat anywhere: Iyer

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Skipper Virat Kohli is set to be back at his regular number three position after the strategy of coming two-down boomeranged in the lung-opener as India take on a resolute Australia in the must-win second ODI here on Friday.

India go into the game 0-1 down after Australia registered a 10-wicket win in the lung-opener at Mumbai, courtesy David Warner and Aaron Finch, who hit unbeaten hundreds.

In a bid to field all three in-form players — Rohit Sharma, Shikhar Dhawan and KL Rahul —, Kohli dropped himself down the order but the plan backfired spectacularly as he was unable to convert his start.

Opener Dhawan later said he was ready to bat at number three if asked to by the team management, but since Kohli has been successful at that position, the skipper would be more than willing to walk in one-down.

Kohli batting at three also provides stability to the middle-order. With a concussed Rishabh Pant out of the second game, Rahul is a certainty as he will keep wickets.

So, like in the last game, Rohit and Dhawan, who made a dogged 74 off 91 balls in Wankhede, could open, and there could be a toss-up between Rahul and young Shreyas Iyer at number four. Iyer had a rare failure on Tuesday.

Pant's absence could pave the way for the inclusion of Karnataka batsman Manish Pandey, who made optimum use of the opportunity that he got in the third T20 against Sri Lanka in Pune.

It would also be interesting to see which among the experienced Kedar



India's captain Virat Kohli bats during a practice session

has not been as effective as earlier and he would like to change the perception.

It would be interesting to see whether India play Delhi speedster Navdeep Saini or persist with Shardul Thakur, who gave away 43 runs in Mumbai.

Ravindra Jadeja looks a certainty and so the choice would be between chinaman Kuldeep Yadav, who conceded 55 runs in the first ODI and Yuzvendra Chahal as the lead spinner.

On the other hand, a high on confidence Australia will be looking to seal the issue to register back to back series wins in India, a rare feat for any visiting team. The Finch-Warner combination will look forward to carry the momentum.

Their middle-order comprising the experienced Steve Smith, in-form Marnus Labuschagne, Ashton Turner and Alex Carey looks more or less settled.

If all of them fire in unison, along with the openers, then it will hard for the opposition bowlers.

However, it will be quite a test of their middle-order at the Saurashtra Cricket Association stadium.

Australian bowlers also showed at the Wankhede, why they are considered among the best.

Led by pace spearhead Mitchell Starc, they bundled out India for a sub-par 255 and Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins would be raring to go once again.

Spinners Adam Zampa and Ashton Agar, not only contained the runs, but provided crucial breakthroughs and are expected to play a similar role again in the middle overs.

The track here is expected to be

Bhuvneshwar undergoes sports hernia surgery in London, rehab in NCA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Injury-plagued Indian pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar has undergone a sports hernia surgery in London and will begin his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) after returning to the country, the BCCI said on Thursday.

The Board did not specify any timeline for his recovery but it is learnt that he will return to action during the Indian Premier League (IPL), which is scheduled to start on March 29. Bhuvneshwar plays for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the T20 event.

"Fast bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar travelled to London on 9th January and underwent a successful sports hernia surgery on 11th January. He was assisted by Team India physiotherapist Yogesh Parmar," read a statement from Board Secretary Jay Shah.

"Bhuvneshwar will now return to India and commence his rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bengaluru," it added.

He was not named in the T20 squad for the upcoming tour of New Zealand due to the injury.

a belter and India can draw confidence from the home series against New Zealand in 2017, when they won 2-1 after losing the opener, co-incidentally in Mumbai.



Shreyas Iyer celebrates with Virat Kohli

BCCI/Twitter

(considering) the competition which we have now right now," 25-year-old Iyer told reporters ahead of the second ODI here.

The stylish batsman also said that the team is looking forward to more experimentation.

"We can't give any reasons of batting at any particular number. Yes it is really important for us to be focused and not to cry about why we haven't been batting at a similar position. Experimentation is something we are looking forward to. Hopefully, we will get a good number for each batsman.

"This is the time we should try and experiment things and hopefully it will work-out in the future," said the Mumbaier.

A middle-order collapse in Mumbai exposed India's weakest link but Iyer said that it was part and parcel of the game.

"Well it happens sometimes and you are not prepared. The country was not prepared to see us collapsing in such situations but it is a part and parcel of the game," said Iyer on the collapse.

"You have to take it in your stride and move forward. As a team we have been doing really well throughout the season and it was just one of the matches where you completely collapsed...There is lot of learning from there," said Iyer.

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Shreyas Iyer on Thursday said the current competition in the Indian team demands one to bat at any number after he did not get to play at his usual number four spot in the first ODI against Australia.

Iyer returned to India's limited overs set-up following the 2019 World Cup and has done well at number four.

"In this situation, you should be ready to bat at any number because it is really important to play in the team,

Need to have a strong character to get better of Kohli: Zampa

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Australian leg-spinner Adam Zampa on Thursday said one needs to have a "strong character" to get the better of a class act like India captain Virat Kohli, who he has dismissed six times in limited overs cricket so far.

Zampa said despite enjoying an upturn in the Indian captain in limited-overs, Kohli is a hard nut to crack.

"It's going to be an attacking approach. I think if you're on the back-foot and have a defensive mindset then that's when he (Kohli) can get on top of you. The most important

thing playing in places like India against these guys is to have a little bit of character," said Zampa ahead of Friday's second ODI here.

Zampa has dismissed Kohli four times in ODIs and twice in T20s.

"You probably know you're going to get hit for boundaries but it can really get worse if you make that affect you. I have got him a few times now but I don't think there is anything in it. He still scores at over 100 (strike rate) against me," the 27-year-old spinner said.

"He is a very hard guy to bowl to. He's one of the toughest guys I've ever had to bowl



Adam Zampa kicks a ball during a practice session

to. After game one (first ODI), he will be even more switched on. It will be a big challenge," said Zampa, who has 66 ODIs wickets from 49 games.

Steve Waugh had said in the past that Kohli has not shown enough respect to Zampa, but the leggie disagreed with the former Australia skipper.

"I don't think he (Kohli) doesn't respect me. I don't think that's correct (referring to Waugh's statement)."

Zampa said Australia has managed to find out Kohli's weak point.

"We basically just found that Virat finds leg-spinners

hard to line up early in his innings. He's such a great starter, even the other day he was 16 off 14. How much energy he brought to the crease, his running between the wickets, some of the cover drives he played off the quicks," he said.

"I think it's important to try and have a game plan against him. So we figured out before the last game that it would be good to start with leg-spin to him."

"I've got him out four times in the last year or so it's nice to have that confidence to bowl to him at the start of his innings," said Zampa, who is on his third tour to India.

PTI ■ RAJKOT

Australia captain Aaron Finch has no doubts that India will "fight back" in the second ODI here Friday after being battered in the series-opener in Mumbai.

Australia gave the hosts a reality check with a crushing 10-wicket win in the lung-opener on Tuesday, riding on David Warner and Finch's unbeaten hundreds.

But Finch said it would be silly to take India lightly as they boast of world-class players.

"That was a pretty good performance. I think our fielding was a little bit sloppy but all in all we are really happy with



Aaron Finch bats during a practice session

AP

how the boys went," he was quoted as saying by Cricket.Com.Au.

"They (India) will fight back no doubt. They are a great side, got some world-class players," Finch said talking about what to expect from Friday's match.

Asked about his opening partner's batting display, the Australia skipper said: "He (Warner) is playing unbelievably well I think. It's so hard to bowl to him once he gets in. He hits the ball all around the ground, so stopping him from scoring is so hard."

"He is so clear with how he is going to bat, his footwork is pretty good. His mental state is unbelievable when he is out in the middle. He is so clear with his thoughts and his game. He is in top shape."



Ireland stun WI by four runs

AFP ■ ST. GEORGE'S

Ireland rode a career-best 95 from opener Paul Stirling before keeping their nerve in a nail-biting final over to pull off a four-run win over world champions West Indies in the first of a three-match Twenty20 series on Wednesday.

The burly Stirling steered Ireland to 208-7 in their 20 overs.

However, the home side appeared comfortably on course for victory — bringing up their hundred inside 10 overs with just two wickets down — until the game was decided in the last over.

Needing 15 to win, all-rounder Josh Little (3-29) got rid of the dangerous Dwayne Bravo, one of two wickets to fall in the last over.

With five needed off the last ball and seven wickets down, Hayden Walsh could only wave his bat into thin air in a desperate attempt to win the game.

It was only Ireland's second victory in T20 cricket over the West Indies who went into the game having swept the ODI series 3-0.

"Everyone is ecstatic, we came so close in that second ODI (lost by one wicket) and it maybe affected us in that third ODI, so to show the bottle and come out against one of the top teams in T20 cricket and get a win was great for the vibe of the team," said Ireland skipper Andrew Balbirnie.



Dhoni dropped from BCCI's central contracts list

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mahendra Singh Dhoni was on Thursday dropped from the BCCI's list of centrally contracted players, raising fresh doubts on the future of the former India captain who has not played since the World Cup semifinal loss to New Zealand last year.

The BCCI announced the central contracts for the period of October 2019 to September 2020. The 38-year-old Dhoni was in the A category, which fetches a player Rs 5 crore as annual retainerhip, until last year.

Skipper Virat Kohli, his white-ball deputy Rohit Sharma and top pacer Jasprit Bumrah were retained in the highest A+ bracket of Rs 7 crore.

Dhoni's contract not being renewed is not exactly a surprise as he has not played a competitive game since that World Cup semifinal on July 9. He has been on an sabbatical and has refused to divulge his future plans.

Head coach Ravi Shastri had recently said that Dhoni may soon end his ODI career but could be in contention for a spot in the T20 World Cup squad provided he does well in the IPL.

Among others, batsman K L Rahul has been promoted from B grade to A. Having lost his place in the Test side



MS Dhoni in a file photo

PTI

Mahi starts training with Jharkhand Ranji squad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The 38-year-old showed up at his home team's net practice in Ranchi, indicating that he is gearing himself for the upcoming Indian Premier League. This was on a day when BCCI axed him from the list of centrally contracted players.

"Even we did not know that he was going to come and train with

us. It was a pleasant surprise. He batted for a while and did the usual training routine," a source close to the Jharkhand team management told PTI.

"We are expecting him to train with the team regularly from now on. His presence can only help the players," the source added.

In fact, Dhoni has bought a brand new bowling machine for his training. While the

Jharkhand team will have their red-ball routines, Dhoni will primarily practice against the white ball.

Jharkhand's next match is against Uttarakhand, starting Sunday in Ranchi. The team has returned home after an eight wicket loss against Maharashtra in Nagthane. Out of five games, Jharkhand have won two, lost two and drawn one.

19, has been included in the Grade B category, which also features Hardik Pandya and Yuzvendra Chahal along with two others.

Pacer Navdeep Saini and T20 specialist Washington Sundar are new entrants in Grade C alongside Shreyas Iyer, Deepak Chahar and Shardul Thakur. Though he has not played Tests, Saini has emerged as an option in all three formats.

Iyer, who made a limited-overs comeback following India's World

Cup campaign, has cemented his place in the middle order and seems to be a stable number four that the team has been looking for.

Pacer Thakur too has made an impact in the limited opportunities he has got while the injured Chahal has become a strong contender for a spot in the T20 World Cup with a string of impressive performances, including a six-wicket haul against Bangladesh in November. It is the best ever in the shortest format till date.

Runaway favourites Ind ready for High Five

PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

A few precocious talents, hardworking teenagers and a chunky lot which might fall by the wayside in times to come will form an eclectic 16-team mix in the melting pot called ICC Under-19 World Cup starting on Friday.

Defending champions India will be overwhelming favourites to win the junior global meet for the fifth time with at least six players, including skipper Priyam Garg having played senior cricket (first-class, List A or T20).

Not to forget four players — Yashasvi Jaiswal, Garg, Ravi Bishnoi, Kartik Tyagi—who have already landed fat contracts in the IPL.

India have been the team to beat on the junior cricket circuit since Virat Kohli's team dominated the proceedings in the 2008 edition.

While there will be future stars in Pakistan, Australia, England and New Zealand teams, the presence of Japan and Nigeria will certainly have its own curiosity value.

In fact Japan are clubbed with India, New Zealand and Sri Lanka in group D. The Japanese team mostly

has South Asian expats with names like Tushar Chaturvedi, Yugandhar Retharekar, Ishan Fartyal, Debashish Sahoo helping out the likes of Kazumasa Takahashi, Masato Morita and Shu Noguchi.

The Nigerian team, which is clubbed in a difficult group comprising Australia, West Indies and England, has more local flavour in the presence of Sylvester Okpe, Oche Boniface, Ifeanyichukwu Uboh and Olayinka Olaleye.

The tournament starts with hosts South Africa taking on Afghanistan in the 'Diamond City' of Kimberley on Friday, followed by Australia's big-ticket game against West Indies on the very next day.

Australia like India have a number of players, who have already played senior level cricket with one prominent name being former death over specialist Ian Harvey's nephew McKenzie Harvey, who has played 2 List A and 13 T20 games.

Similarly England have Ben Charlesworth with an experience of 11 first-class games to his credit while a few of his teammates have also played for their respective counties.

AFP ■ PORT ELIZABETH

World cricketer of the year Ben Stokes survived three reviews by South Africa as he and Ollie Pope regained the initiative for England on the first day of the third Test at St George's Park on Thursday.

England were 224 for four at the end of an attritional day during which South Africa had briefly claimed the advantage.

England were 148 for four when Stokes and Pope came together, in danger of failing to capitalise on batting first on a placid pitch on a hot, sunny day.

But the pair added 76 without being parted and were able to lift a slow scoring rate after 117 for two in 58 overs before tea. Stokes was unbeaten on 38 at the close while Pope made 39 not out.

Stokes came into the match

Pope, Stokes revive England

a day after being named player of the year by the International Cricket Council and on the back of a man-of-the-match performance when England levelled the four-match series by winning the second Test in Cape Town by 189 runs.

Stokes made a shaky start, surviving a leg before wicket review on umpire's call against left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj and an appeal for a catch at slip off what South Africa thought was an inside edge off the pad.

South Africa Stokes their last review when Stokes played no shot against Vernon Philander with the second new ball but the ball was well outside the off stump.



Ben Stokes in action

Kagiso Rabada took two wickets for South Africa but the home team's most impressive bowler was Maharaj who took one for 55 in 32 overs. He bowled an unbroken spell of 30 overs which enabled captain Faf du Plessis to rotate his fast bowlers as England struggled to assert themselves.

OPENERS FALL INTO TRAP

Zak Crawley and Dom Sibley gave England a solid start, putting on 70 for the first wicket but both fell to catches at backward square leg.

Joe Denly was leg before to Maharaj when South Africa successfully sought a review which showed a ball headed for the stumps had hit pad before

bat, while Root was beaten and bowled by a fast delivery from Rabada which hit the top of his off stump.

With the four-match series tied at 1-1, batting first appeared to be a considerable advantage on a pitch which had a fair covering of grass but which offered no help to the bowlers.

It was the sixth successive Test toss lost by Du Plessis. South Africa picked new cap Dane Paterson as a specialist fast bowler in place of all-rounder Dwaine Pretorius. Paterson surprisingly shared the new ball with Philander, with the quicker Rabada and Anrich Nortje having to wait for their turn.