

**ANALYSIS 7**  
ACT, BEFORE IT  
IS TOO LATE

**MONEY 8**  
ZOMATO ACQUIRES UBER  
EATS BUSINESS IN INDIA

**SPORTS 12**  
SHARAPOVA  
HITS ALL-TIME LOW

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY JANUARY 22, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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PINK REMAKE IN  
THE MORNING,  
POLITICS IN THE  
EVENING

Page 11

## BISHNOI TAKES 4 WICKETS FOR NO RUNS AS INDIA BOWL JAPAN OUT FOR 41

Teen spin sensation Ravi Bishnoi displayed a brilliant spell of bowling as India bowled Japan out for just 41 runs in the Under-19 World Cup in South Africa. Seamer Kartik Tyagi did the early damage, removing Japan's opener Marcus Thurgate and No.3 Neel Date in consecutive deliveries in the fifth over of the match. It was then that Bishnoi stepped in. The wily 19-year-old leg-spinner, in his first two overs, took four wickets - including that of Japan's top-scorer Shu Noguchi - without conceding a single run.



## 'INDIA NEEDS INVESTMENT': IMF'S GITA GOPINATH ON SNUB TO BEZOS

India needs a lot of investment and it is important to encourage it, Gita Gopinath, Chief Economist of the International Monetary Fund or IMF told media on Monday, in reference to the government's cold-shoulder to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos during his visit last week. The IMF yesterday slashed India's growth forecast to 4.8 per cent, a cut of 1.3 per cent in just three months, and said the country's sharp slowdown was also a drag on the world economy.



## AP SHIFTS VENUE OF R-DAY CELEBRATIONS TO VIJAYAWADA

The Government of Andhra Pradesh decided to celebrate Republic Day in Vijayawada instead of Visakhapatnam, indicating a change of heart by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy. The CM is reported to have asked the government officials to make arrangements accordingly. The CM is keen to give a strong message to the people of Amaravati region by preferring Vijayawada over Visakhapatnam to celebrate the Republic Day celebrations. The officials are making arrangement to celebrate the event at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium.



## RAJINIKANTH 'WON'T APOLOGISE' FOR 'PERIYAR' RALLY REMARKS

Superstar Rajinikanth today said he would not apologise for his comments on social reformer EV Ramasamy 'Periyar', over which a police complaint has been filed by a political group. Accused of 'defaming' Periyar, Rajinikanth said his comments were based on news reports. Addressing the 50th anniversary event of Tamil magazine 'Thuglak' on January 14, Rajinikanth had said: "In 1971, Periyar took out a rally against superstition in which naked images of Lord Ramachandramoorthy and Sita - with a garland of sandals - were displayed and no news outlet published it."



**Nirav Modi's assets to be auctioned at Saffronart's two upcoming sales**

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**JD(U)'s Pawan Varma speaks of Nitish's 'private apprehensions'**

5



**AI has replaced atom bomb as biggest fear: Huawei CEO**

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### TODAY

**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Paush & Krishna Paksha Panchangam  
Tithi: Trayodashi: 01:48 am (Next Day)  
Nakshatram: Mula: 12:19 am (Next Day)  
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)  
Rahukalam: 12:27 pm - 01:51 pm  
Yamagandam: 08:16 am - 09:40 am  
Varjyam: 07:55 am - 09:33 am, 10:41 pm - 12:19 am  
Gulika: 11:02 am - 12:25 pm  
Good Time: (to start any important work)  
Amritakalam: 05:46 pm - 07:24 pm  
Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL

**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
Forecast: Sunny  
Temp: 32/19  
Humidity: 52%  
Sunrise: 06:49  
Sunset: 06:05  
Current Weather Conditions Updated January 21, 2019 5:00 PM

# TDP invokes Rule 71 to block Decentralisation Bill in Council

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an embarrassing setback to the Jaganmohan Reddy government, the main Opposition party, the TDP, on Tuesday blocked the AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill 2020 in the Legislative Council by invoking Rule 71. The Bill, passed by the State Assembly late on Monday, provides for setting up three Capitals in Amaravati, Visakhapatnam and Kurnool for Legislative, Executive and Judicial activities.

The TDP gave a notice under Rule 71 and moved a motion "disapproving the policy of the government."

Council Chairman Shariff Mohammed Ahmed allowed the TDP's motion much to the dismay of the ruling YSR Congress, which has only nine members in the Council.

Though almost all Cabinet ministers sat in the Council to thwart the TDP attempts to block the Bill, they could not convince the Chairman to take it up the Bill tabled by Finance



Farmers from Amaravati region felicitate Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday, a day after the Decentralisation Bill was passed in the state Assembly.

Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy. Shariff's decision to allow the debate under Rule 71, done for the first time in history, led to heated protests by YSRCP members.

Buggana said taking up the motion under Rule 71 and putting off the Bill would set a bad precedent and have far-

reaching consequences. Earlier, Leader of the Opposition in the Council Yanamala Ramakrishnudu demanded that a debate be initiated on the Bill before it was tabled. He raised a point of order and referred to Rules 139, 140 and 141 of the Council Business. "The Assembly passed the

Bill only last night. You received notice about it this morning. Under Rule 141, two days time can be taken by the Council before the same Bill is moved," Yanamala pointed out.

The TDP has 34 MLCs in the 58-member Council and the BJP has two. **Continued on Page 3**

## Jagan takes steps to abolish Council

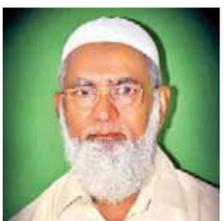
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy called an emergency meeting of the state Cabinet at 10 pm on Tuesday.

In his order, the CM directed all ministers to be available for the meeting to discuss a Bill on abolition of the Legislative Council.

The Bill is likely to be tabled in the Assembly on Wednesday, immediately after the YSRCP leadership meets the Assembly Secretary over the issue.

With the Bills for creating three capitals facing hurdles in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council, the YSR Congress Party government is believed



Shariff Mohammed Ahmed Chairman AP Legislative Council

to have decided to abolish the Upper House of the State Legislature.

As the ruling party is in minority in the Council, the two Bills passed by the State

Assembly Monday faced a roadblock on Tuesday with the TDP insisting on a debate on its notice moved under Rule 71 before taking up the Bills for debate.

As soon as the Council met for the special session, the TDP moved the notice under Rule 71, opposing the government's policies. The discussion under the rule entails voting and since the YSRCP is in minority in 58-member House, it opposed the discussion under the rule.

Following the impasse, the government is said to be considering a proposal to abolish the Council. **Continued on Page 3**

## Dokka quits Council over 3-capital move

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Upset over Amaravati losing the status of Andhra Pradesh's only capital, TDP leader Dokka Manikya Varaprasad Rao on Tuesday resigned from the State Legislative Council.

The former minister sent his resignation to TDP supreme N. Chandrababu Naidu.

Rao wrote that his resignation is in protest against the YSR Congress Party government's move to develop three state capitals.

He said he was pained over Amaravati losing the status of state capital as key functions will be shifted to Visakhapatnam and Kurnool.

His move came on a day when the Council was scheduled to take up two Bills passed by the State Assembly Monday night to create three state capitals.

TDP, which has a majority in the upper House, has issued a whip to all members to be present. However, Rao and another member stayed away, even as the Bill was successfully blocked by the TDP.

The Bills will be sent back to the Assembly. As per rules, the Council can't reject the Bills for a second time.

## Separate panels for SCs and STs historic, asserts Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, while re-introducing the Bills on separate commissions for SCs and STs in the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, objected to TDP stalling them in the previous sessions of Legislative Council and said the government's aim was to ensure the welfare of these communities.

"The Bills are historic", he said and observed that the State government had established three corporations

(Mala, Madiga and Reli communities) for SCs like never before in any other State.

During the TDP reign, Naidu tried to benefit by dividing these communities, Jagan added.

Referring to the SC/ST reservation in Assembly constituencies, the CM said except two seats, all the reserved seats under these categories were won by the YSRCP. "One among those is from the TDP and other candidates from the Jana Sena. **Continued on Page 3**



## Modi to chair Pragati review meeting today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Wednesday review the progress of various projects in the 32nd meeting of 'Pragati', a multi-modal platform for proactive governance and timely implementation. In previous interactions of Pragati, an ICT-based initiative, projects worth over Rs 12 lakh crore have been reviewed by the prime minister, according to an official statement.

In 2019, nine projects worth over Rs 61,000 crore related to 16 states and the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir were taken up for discussion.

Discussions were also held on various topics like grievances of Indian citizens working abroad, national agriculture market, aspirational district programme and infrastructure development programmes and initiatives.

# Protests continue over 3 capitals move in 29 villages

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A day after the Andhra Pradesh Assembly passed two Bills to develop three state capitals, farmers continued their protest for the 35th day on Tuesday, demanding that Amaravati be continued as the only capital.

A shutdown was being observed in all the 29 villages in Amaravati as farmers, who had pooled 33,000 acres of land to build the capital, staged a sit-in and set fire copies of the Bills. With black cloth tied to their mouth, protestors staged silent

Condemning the police's "high-handedness" during Monday's 'chalo Assembly' protest, the farmers decided not to extend any cooperation to the police forces

protests in the villages. Shops and educational institutions remained closed as a mark of protest on a call given by Joint Action Committee. Condemning the police's

"high-handedness" during Monday's 'chalo Assembly' protest, the farmers decided not to extend any cooperation to the police forces deployed in the villages. They did not allow the cops to sit in front of their houses and refused to even give water.

Over 50 people, including six policemen, were reported injured in the police baton charge and the clashes during the opposition sponsored march to the Assembly to protest against the three capitals move. **Continued on Page 3**

## 'Use the stones thrown at you to build your castle'

When Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jaganmohan Reddy revealed his mind for the first time on the capital issue and Opposition leader N Chandrababu Naidu opposed the idea vehemently, I wrote my opinion piece headlined "When Naidu walked straight into the trap of Jagan". Many of my media friends raised objection with that piece and even tried to paint me with the stripes of YSRCP. It was not so. There was nothing in the article against any political party or leader. It was just an observation.

It has been one month since protests began in Amaravati and the state government, taking all of it in its stride, has gone ahead with its plan to shift the executive capital to Visakhapatnam in the guise of decentralization. Obviously, there is no response in favour of Amaravati from people in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, East Godavari, Prakasam, Nellore, Chittoor, Kurnool, Kadapa and Anantapur districts. To prove its point, YSRCP even ventured to hold a massive rally in Vijayawada demanding three capitals. If people of Vijayawada were really worried about the shifting of the capital from their place, would that have been possible for YSRCP leaders? Why could Naidu not garner support from other regions in favour of Amaravati? Not a single leader from TDP had even tried to lead a rally in their place in north coastal Andhra, Rayalaseema against the three-capital proposal.

Naidu, during his five-year tenure, could not strike to be in the headlines rather in the hearts of people. No wonder, TDP is now stalling the latest Bill in the Legislative Council and this effort will prove to be of advantage to Jagan, who can deflect the tide saying Naidu is coming

During the last one month, Jagan has been busy building a castle (read vote bank) with the stones thrown at him by TDP and media houses favourable towards him. As usual, Naidu is busy in ensuring widest possible coverage for his speeches and protests

ensure a third term for him, but it ended in a shocking defeat. Whenever Naidu lost touch with people and found himself surrounded by his 'Bhajan' team, he faced defeat. Whenever he acted smartly, he won hands down. History has repeated in 2019.

### CONTEXT

Ultimately people will determine the winner in a democracy, not media or few vocal sections. With the advent of mobile phone, the days when a few people or spin doctors controlled information are gone. Now information is reaching people in seconds and they are shrewd enough to take side. This single aspect explains the cryptic smile of YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

During the last one month, Jagan has been busy building a castle (read vote bank) with the stones thrown at him by TDP and media houses favourable towards Naidu. As usual, Naidu is busy in ensuring widest possible coverage for his speeches and protests. A politician should not worry about what has been broken, but what can be built anew. Unfortunately, TDP always wants to be in the headlines rather in the hearts of people. No wonder, TDP is now stalling the latest Bill in the Legislative Council and this effort will prove to be of advantage to Jagan, who can deflect the tide saying Naidu is coming

in way of development of north coastal districts and Rayalaseema.

When I asked an auto-rickshaw driver in Tirupati recently, he shared happily that the Jagan government gave him Rs 5,000. When I enquired a poor woman in Kakinada, she was overwhelmed with Rs 15,000 deposited in her account. This year Sankranti was celebrated by most of the poor in AP with Amma Vodi money only! Is anyone observing this? There is a blanket assurance for all poor patients that the government will take care of their medical expenses. There is strong support for farmers in the form of Rythu Bharosa; there is a systematic intervention by the government in the marketing wing resulting in price stabilization for the first time for farmers producing different crops. Is any political party following these things? Instead of observing these important things that would actually influence the people, TDP is busy in an agitation that is not so important to people in other districts.

I too share the economists' concern over precarious financial position of Andhra Pradesh and am really surprised to see how Jagan is able to credit all the promised money in the bank accounts without fail. It is to be observed how the state could bounce back to sound finances under the leadership of Jagan. If it happens, there will be no stopping Jagan for next five years.

—Krishna Prasad

## Pawan to meet BJP brass in Delhi today over capital

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With rapid political developments taking place in the State after the Assembly passed the Decentralisation Bill, Jana Sena Chief Pawan Kalyan will visit New Delhi and meet the BJP top brass. He is strongly advocating continuation of Amaravati as the only permanent Capital of AP.

Interacting with farmers, who met him on Tuesday, Pawan Kalyan said, "The capital will not go anywhere. It



will remain in Amaravati. I am behind you. I'll try and do everything to do justice to you." **Continued on Page 3**

## Stalker slits throat of girl, kills himself

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A 20-year-old man slit the throat of a 17-year-old girl after she spurned his advances and later committed suicide by jumping in front of a train at S Kota in Vizianagaram district late on Monday.

The man was identified as P Koteswara Rao while his 17-year-old girl was undergoing treatment at government hospital at S Kota, where her condition is said to be critical.

The girl was staying with her aunt at Vepada and is studying Intermediate student in a junior college in the village.

Koteswara Rao had been stalking her, ignoring counselling and warnings from the girl's relatives.

When the girl spurned Rao's advances, he decided to eliminate her. On Monday night, Rao intercepted her when she was returning home from college.

He took out a knife from his pocket and slit her throat, and fled. **Continued on Page 3**



**PIN POINT**

While Jana Sena chief Pawan Kalyan's decision to strike an alliance with the BJP may set off a buzz in political circles in AP, a closer look into the pact tells us that there has been a lot of thought behind the decision.

Contrary to the belief of Jana Sena cadre and the general public, the deal that Pawan clinched with the BJP is significant for him; coming as it did in the backdrop of his recent 'dalliance' with the Left parties and his promise of fighting for various people's issues against the governments at the Centre and in the state.

Thus far, Pawan's policy had been maintaining individuality in politics without getting too close with major political forces. However, after observing the outcome of the 2019 elections, and getting a mere 7 per cent of the popular vote, the Jana Sena chief has obviously applied thought on the future course of action.

Pawan realises he can't achieve the results he wants if he takes up the stir of farmers of Amaravati who are on the

# Going behind the scenes of Pawan-BJP pact

warpath in protest against the decentralisation of administration and the government's decision to set up three capitals for executive, judicial, legislative purposes.

Even as the YSRCP government has set in motion the three-capital process by getting the idea approved by the Assembly, and focus shifting to the Legislative Council where the ruling party lacks sufficient numbers, Pawan is powerless to do anything as he has no say in either of these Houses (Jana Sena's lone MLA has already spoken in favour of the three-capital decision).

The thought about how to take on the YSRCP government with his meagre strength and becoming a viable alternative by 2024 when elections are due surely must have crossed Pawan's mind.

Pawan knows that he has to take on Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy who had swept the polls, bagging 86 per cent of the Assembly seats (151 of the 175), if he wants to remain relevant. The result has

**After failing to get power in the last elections, probably due to strategic mistakes on his part, Pawan has realised that he needs to strengthen his own hands with a viable force. This viable force can help him corner the state government on the issue of capital relocation as the Centre had contributed hundreds of crores of rupees so far for the construction of Amaravati.**

forced Pawan to come to a conclusion that he wouldn't be effective against Jagan unless he gets support from a viable force that is capable of controlling the state government over specific issues.

The only such viable force is the Union government.

This was surely the idea behind Pawan going for a pact with the BJP. Pawan had declared his unconditional support for Narendra Modi, the BJP's prime ministerial candidate ahead of the 2014 elec-

tions. Modi also expressed his gratitude at a popular film actor giving his unconditional support and remained silent after Pawan distanced himself from the BJP for some reasons.

Pawan is also looking at ways to impress the Centre and get the rulers in Delhi to issue a direction in this regard. If successful, he can hope to be seen as a strong leader who has the Centre's backing. To achieve this, he has opted for friendly ties with the BJP, a party that he had criticised



M D RATNA KUMAR  
Senior Journalist

hitherto on issues like Special Category Status.

Thus far, the YSRCP government has managed to benefit from the decisions taken by Union government.

For example, the YSRCP took up the issue of appointment of the CBI Joint Director at Hyderabad. It managed to block the appointment of Venkatesh to the post since he is considered close to former JD VV Lakshminarayana, who had investigated a number of DA cases filed by the CBI

against Jagan, leading to the latter's arrest.

YSRCP managed to prevail upon the Centre and successfully blocked Venkatesh's appointment, well aware that the cases investigated by Lakshminarayana are still pending with the CBI.

The Centre accepted Jagan's request and appointed a Gujarat cadre IPS officer to the post.

Pawan naturally considers Jagan his political opponent and his ultimate goal is to unseat Jagan in 2024. To achieve this goal, Pawan decided to tie-up with the BJP which is capable of boosting Pawan's image as a strong leader in AP particularly in his Kapu community that is almost one-third of the state's population.

Hitherto, two major political parties headed by two ruling castes (Kamma and Reddy) have been effectively managing to bag this huge chunk of Kapu votes. If one goes by the numbers, the political party that manages to swing the Kapus towards it would

have the last laugh at the hustings!

Another important matter behind this political pact is to keep Jagan from getting the Centre to dilute the cases he faces. If the BJP has a tie-up with Jagan's rival, he would obviously be able to approach the Centre for help in his personal cases, is the theory.

In fact, Naidu was in a similar position when the TDP was in the NDA, sharing power with the BJP.

Naidu had prevailed upon the Modi-government to frame charges of economic offences against Jagan so that he would be behind bars by the 2019 elections. However, after carefully weighing its options, the Centre didn't act as per Naidu's wishes. The former CM didn't hide his dissatisfaction that his wish of seeing Jagan behind bars during election time was not fulfilled.

Presently, Jagan has the advantage of numbers in Parliament; the Modi government wants overwhelming support from MPs on key issues.

The "Muslim factor" doesn't come into play, since Pawan knows that at one point or the other, both Naidu and Jagan have had supported the BJP.

Pawan remembers well how his elder brother Chiranjeevi, who formed the Praja Rajyam Party, merged it with the Congress despite winning 18 Assembly seats. Pawan realises that the Jana Sena has bagged a lot less number of seats and votes, and he obviously doesn't want to go Praja Rajyam Party way.

To do so, Pawan has managed to convince the brass in Delhi that an electoral alliance works in their favour as he is an "insider" while Jagan is the "outsider" as far as BJP is concerned.

With the alliance, BJP too hopes to gain by tapping into the Kapu vote, with Pawan campaigning for it.

The question is will Pawan succeed in his well-designed plan of creating legal impediments in Jagan's way?

Also a matter of interest is which issue - the disproportionate assets cases against Jagan, or the Chief Minister's policies - will come in handy for Pawan in the next four years to fulfil his goals.

**CAPSULE**

**Srinivasa Chaturveda Havanam from Jan 30 to Feb 3**

**VIJAYAWADA:** Srinivasa Chaturveda Havanam will be organised at Sri Sarada Peetham of Vizag from January 30 to February 3 under the auspices of Hindu Dharma Prachara Parishad and Sri Venkateswara Higher Vedic Studies Institute of TTD. The pontiff of Sarada Peetham Swaroopnanda Swami and his successor Swatmanandendra Saraswathi Swami will supervise the five-day holy event.

**Police impose traffic curbs**

**VIJAYAWADA:** The city police imposed traffic restrictions in the city in the wake of the ongoing Assembly session. Traffic curbs were imposed at Benz Circle, Dharna Chowk, Prakasam Barrage, Tadepalli, Undavalli and other places. The entry of school and college students was restricted at the Prakasam Barrage. Police diverted vehicles coming from Tadepalli to Vijayawada at the Prakasam barrage and allowed vehicles from Vijayawada to Tadepalli only. Though heavy vehicles are not allowed on the Prakasam barrage, officials permitted RTC buses to ply on the barrage though traffic curbs were in force.

## 45 pc of traffic rule violation challans against two-wheelers

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

Nearly 45 per cent of traffic rules violations have been recorded in Vizag city are found committed by two-wheeler motorists only. Among all the forms of violations committed by two-wheelers, riding without head-gear and jumping the red-signal points are the top violations.

Out of the over 16.6 lakh violations registered in the past four years from 2016 to June 2019 in Vizag city, two-wheeler riders were responsible for most number of cases, totalling to 7.5 lakh and comprising offences such as riding without head-guards, triple riding, over-speeding, jumping the red-signals.

Assistant Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Ch Papa Rao said that Vizag city has over 12 lakh vehicles, including over eight lakh two-wheelers. Two-wheelers have been violating the traffic norms followed by the auto-rickshaw driver in Vizag city. Traffic regulation is a major challenge before the city traffic police with increasing two-wheelers and three-wheelers and poor first mile to last mile



Assistant Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Ch Papa Rao said that Vizag city has over 12 lakh vehicles, including over eight lakh two-wheelers

Two-wheeler riders are the most vulnerable when it comes to fatalities in road accidents in road users' category in the State

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highway's report on the road accidents say that on an average over 8,000 people losing their lives in road accidents

Of the total victims (road users category), over 2,600 were two-wheeler riders, while over 1,400 were pedestrians," said ADCP (Traffic) M Ramesh Kumar

connectivity in the city, he added. Though, they have been imposing fines for not-wearing head-guard, triple riding and other traffic violations, errant riders also don't mind paying Rs 135 as fine (for not wearing head-guard), said a traffic police inspector. Riding without helmet is the most com-

mon violation that they come across any given day at any location, he added.

Unlike helmet violation, seat belt violation cannot be identified without the vehicle being stopped and checked. "We observed that the city traffic police are not intercepting the four-wheelers at many places to

check their violations and the police main target is only two-wheeler riders", said a two-wheeler rider Ganesh Kumar V, who pointed out that the police have soft corner towards four-wheeler riders.

"Two-wheeler riders are the most vulnerable when it comes to fatalities in road accidents in

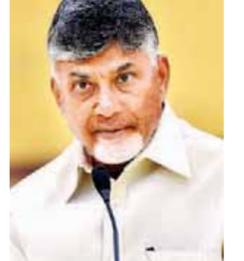
## Tulasi Reddy likens Jagan, Naidu to 'Rahu-Ketu'



**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

Congress working president Tulasi Reddy termed January 20 as a Black Day in the history of the State. He alleged that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's decision of changing the capital from Amaravati was a foolish act. He alleged that Jagan deceived people by promising Special Status if given a chance and changed his stand after coming to power. He said it was unfortunate that people of the State have to bear the brunt of the rivalry among the ruling and the opposition parties.

He blamed the Chief Minister for shifting the cap-



ital from Amaravati on the grounds of decentralisation and development of 13 districts in the State. He likened Jagan and Chandrababu to 'Rahu and Ketu, who are the hurdles for the development of the State.

He alleged that the decisions are taken by Jagan on decentralisation and three capitals was not a correct move and recalled that when Jagan was the opposition leader, he was in favour of Amaravati and changed his stance after coming to power. He challenged if Jagan seeks a fresh mandate by dissolving the Assembly, YSRCP will win 21 seats.

## Mercedes-Benz opens first outlet in Vizag



**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

Mercedes-Benz, the largest luxury carmaker in India, inaugurated their first dealership in Vizag. The inauguration also marked the delivery of record 50 cars, the biggest by any luxury carmaker in the state, according to an official press release.

Located in the heart of the city, the facility will act as one-stop-shop for all the sales and customer service requirements for customers in Vizag and adjoining areas. Martin Schwenk, Managing Director & CEO, Mercedes-Benz, India, and Amith

Reddy Nalla, Founder, Silver Star, inaugurated the facility.

Mercedes-Benz India bucks the auto slowdown trend with the highest Q4 sales of 3,871 units (+3.3%), retains its No. 1 position for the fifth time in a row with the total sales of 13,786 units. The new dealership is fully equipped to provide preventive maintenance and general repair, body and paint repair and sale of accessories. With this facility, Mercedes-Benz India will boast of 96 outlets in 48 cities in the country - highest retail network strength in the luxury car segment.

## Adopt eco-friendly cleaning, TTD EO tells staff

**PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA**

TTD Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singhal directed officials to adopt the usage of eco-friendly organic sanitary reagents for cleaning the rest houses and institutions in Tirupati.

Addressing senior officers at a review meeting at the TTD administrative building, the Executive Officer complimented senior officers and staff for serving lakhs of devotees during Vaikuntha Ekadasi and Dwadasi in Tirumala.

He was all praise for the additional executive officer AV Dharma Reddy for the excellent coordination of all TTD departments in providing quick darshan to devotees on the auspicious days of Vaikuntha Ekadasi and Dwadasi. The Executive Officer directed the Pilgrim Welfare Facilitation Services by Srivari Sevaku to be continued in the Vaikuntam queue complex to coordinate their activities and provide quality service to devotees. He said the fire tendering services at the laddu boon-

di complex should be further strengthened with modern and effective equipments. He also wanted the museum development and garden maintenance works undertaken with partnership of donors should be expedited.

The Executive Officer also suggested for finalisation of launch date for commencement of works of walkers path top slabs with Reliance support and for installation of CCTVs in TTD's local temples. The TTD Executive Officer also directed

officials to compile data of vacant posts up to junior assistants in all TTD departments. He also wanted an annual calendar of events for the TTD organisations like HDPP Annamacharya Project, Dasa Sahitya Project and Alwar Divya Prabandam Project prepared in advance.

Additional executive officer AV Dharma Reddy, JEO P Basant Kumar, CVSO Gopinath Jatti, FA and CAO O Balaji, chief engineer Ramachandra Reddy and others participated.

**VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES**

<b>GOLD</b>	₹ 40,360 (10 gm)
	₹ 130
<b>SILVER</b>	₹ 46,700 (1kg)
	₹ 100

**CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG**

Dressed/With Skin	₹147
Without Skin	₹168
Broiler at Farm	₹102

**EGG RATES ₹/100**

HYDERABAD	382
VIJAYAWADA	420
VISAKHAPATNAM	420
<b>RETAIL PRICE</b>	<b>₹4.20</b>

**RAPE CASE**

## US Justice Dept shuts probe on Uber bribery charges

**SUMIT KUMAR SINGH ■ NEW DELHI**

How did San Francisco-based Uber Technologies Inc obtain the Delhi cab rape victim's confidential medical documents? Who in Delhi police and hospital authorities received bribe money to share case files with Uber? Answers to these questions will remain a mystery for now.

Indian investigative agencies are perturbed by a decision of the United States Department of Justice, which has closed a probe against San Francisco-based Uber Technologies Inc under American bribery laws, sources said on Tuesday.

It was alleged that Uber allegedly bribed top Delhi police



officers as well as hospital authorities to obtain medical and other records of the rape victim. The entire controversy tumbled out in

2017 after which a probe against Uber under Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) was started. It was alleged in India that

It was alleged that Uber allegedly bribed top Delhi police officers as well as hospital authorities to obtain medical and other records of the rape victim. The entire controversy tumbled out in 2017 after which a probe against Uber under FCPA was started

Delhi police officers and hospital authorities received bribes from Uber. After it came to light, Kalanick was forced to step down and Dara Khosrowshahi took the top job in August 2017.

On this, the rape victim sued the company in a San Francisco federal court in 2017 saying that shortly after the incident, a US-based Uber executive 'met with

Delhi police and intentionally obtained her confidential medical records. Uber kept a copy of those records, she had alleged in the lawsuit.

"Uber executives duplicitously and publicly decied the rape, expressing sympathy for plaintiff, and shock and regret at the violent attack, while privately speculating, as outlandish as it is, that

she had colluded with a rival company to harm Uber's business," the lawsuit said.

The rape victim was living in the United States when she filed the lawsuit. This landed Uber into hot water.

Later in December 2017, Uber and the victim agreed to settle a civil lawsuit. Kalanick resigned from its board of directors on December 31, 2019.

The rape case pertains to rape of a 25-year-old woman based in New Delhi on December 5, 2014 by an Uber driver. On December 7, 2014, the Uber driver Shiv Kumar Yadav was arrested from Mathura.

On October 20, 2015, a Delhi court convicted Yadav for rape and sentenced him to life on

October 23, 2015.

It was reported that there is a complaint made by a Delhi court lawyer to Delhi police's vigilance department alleging bribes being taken by a few police officers in the Uber rape case. The complaint was also received by the Office of Commissioner of Police of Delhi police, however, no action was taken against the errant police officers.

A senior CBI officer said, "The matter is related to Delhi police. We can only act when we receive a complaint or else we cannot take up the matter."

Delhi police on contrary said it is the Police Commissioner who has to decide. "He only can look into the matter," said a senior IPS officer with Delhi police.

CAPSULE

Galla held, freed on bail

**AMARAVATI:** Guntur MP and TDP leader Galla Jayadev, who was arrested in the early hours of Tuesday at Thullur, was later released on bail from Guntur District Jail in the evening. Earlier, Jaydev, along with a few farmers, tried to enter the Assembly premises violating the rules. Police registered a case against him under non-bailable Sections 354 and 324 and later released him on bail from the district jail. Galla claimed that he was treated harshly by the police when he was on way to the Assembly. "The police abused, manhandled and tore my shirt," he added.

JAC calls for Guntur district bandh today

**GUNTUR:** The Save Amaravati Joint Action Committee called for Guntur district bandh on Wednesday stepping up their agitation. However, the JAC exempted RTC buses from the bandh's purview. Farmers and opposition parties are breathing fire on the State government for announcing to relocate the executive capital to Visakhapatnam. The JAC appealed to business establishments, educational institutions, cinema halls and government offices to voluntarily observe the bandh by keeping their organisations closed. The JAC appealed to people of all sections to take part in the bandh in large numbers. Meanwhile, police are beefing up security in view of the bandh call given by the JAC and deploying additional forces near the Assembly and other vulnerable areas.

Man charred to death

**PNS/VIJAYAWADA** A visually impaired person was charred to death at Lankapalli village in Gantasala mandal of Krishna district on Monday. The deceased was identified as Hassan Baig (55). He was alone in the house when the incident took place. On Monday night, a fire broke out and Baig was burnt alive as he was fast asleep. On receiving information, police rushed to the spot. Later, police registered a case and took up investigation to ascertain the reason behind the incident.

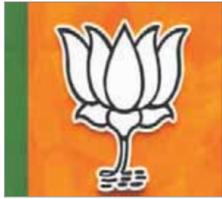
# BJP plans joint stir with Jana Sena on capital issue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BJP Andhra Pradesh unit president Kanna Lakshminarayana on Tuesday condemned the three capitals' formula of the YSRCP government and expressed vented his ire towards the government charging it with implementing the anti-people's policies.

He made it clear that the BJP in association with the political ally Jana Sena would launch struggles against what he called the anti-people's policies of the government.

Addressing a joint media conference in the national capital, along with party MP GVL Narasimha Rao, he condemned that false propaganda that the Centre is behind every eccentric decision that the YSRCP takes. The YSRCP did not put forth



the three capitals' formula prior to the Assembly elections, he said adding that people would not believe the YSRCP's propaganda.

GVL Narasimha Rao said the notion of three capitals was a myth and accused the TDP and YSRCP of according top priority to meet their selfish goals.

Referring to the TDP's demand for the Centre's mediation on the issue, the MP said

that the issue was purely State's issue and ruled out the Centre's involvement on the issue.

Calling the TDP a dummy, he sought to know that it is going to do if the Centre mediates the issue playing the role of a big brother?

The YSRCP is producing evidence on the insider trading that had taken place in the Amaravati Capital Development Region, he said demanding it

■ BJP MP GVL Narasimha Rao said the notion of three capitals was a myth and accused the TDP and YSRCP of according top priority to meet their selfish goals

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who stopped it from taking action against the TDP.

He declared that an action plan on Amaravati would be implemented in consultation with the Jana Sena.

# 'Vidya Kanuka' - YSRCP govt's gift to schoolkids

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy announced in the Assembly on Tuesday that every year on June 1, all the students going to government schools will be receiving an education kit 'Vidya Kanuka' consisting of textbooks, notebooks, school bags, shoes, cloth for uniforms, along with stitching cost, two pairs of socks and a belt. Furthermore, the Chief Minister said that the State government is committed to providing quality education and thus improving the syllabus to meet global standards.

Speaking on the government initiatives - Amma-Vodi, Nadu-Nedu and mid-day meals - the Chief Minister said that over 40 lakh students benefited from Amma Vodi under which over Rs 6,000 crore had been transferred to the accounts of the beneficiaries on a single day. "Not just Amma-Vodi, we are bringing revolutionary changes to offer good education to children across the State. There is a change in the mid-day meals menu, where all the students will have nutritious food



CM YS Jaganmohan Reddy said that the government is committed to providing quality education and thus improving the syllabus to meet global standards

every day without any repetition of the same menu in the week. The mid-day meal programme will be called 'Guru Mudha'.

In order to maintain quality of the mid-day meal, the honorarium to mid-day meal workers has been increased to Rs 3,000 from the existing Rs 1,000. Though with the change of menu, the State government has to bear an additional Rs 344 crore, we are not treating it as a burden because it is for providing nutritious food to children. Parent committees will be monitoring the quality, along with the education welfare assistant in each village and Ward Secretariat."

The Chief Minister further stated that the curriculum for

students will be updated and the government is discussing with world-class universities in six different States to adopt best their practices. "It is very much needed to increase the standards of education and we are moving to compile a syllabus for quality education. There will be activity-based learning, handbooks for teachers and parents and workbooks for students. Teachers training is being provided in a systematic way, wherein every teacher will be undergoing the Cambridge assessment test," he added.

Soon, Vasathi Deevana will also be launched in the State, where the mothers of students studying in hostels will receive Rs 20,000 in two instalments.

## TDP emptied government coffers: Minister

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Minister for Water Resources Anil Kumar Yadav alleged that the erstwhile TDP government has ruined the State economy and completely emptied the treasury during the 2019 elections.

Speaking in the Assembly on Tuesday, Anil Kumar threw an open challenge to TDP MLAs to go for elections in 2024 without any alliance with other parties. He asserted that the YSRCP will compete in 2024 elections without any alliance under the leadership of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

He went aggressive against the Opposition party members for disturbing the Assembly session and going against the SC and ST Bill. "TDP MLAs are deliberately disturbing the sessions and it is pathetic to see them going against the discussion on SC, ST Bill. During elections, the TDP government has emptied the treasuries of every department and corporation funds for Pasupu-Kumkuma.

## AP schemes impress Nobel laureate



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy giving a memento to Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi at his chambers in Amaravati on Tuesday

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi met Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy in the Assembly on Tuesday and discussed various issues concerning the State. Impressed by the welfare programmes being implemented in the State, he extended his support to the government.

Talking to media persons here after meeting the Chief Minister, he said that they had discussed various issues related to children in the State. He

appreciated Jaganmohan Reddy for setting up of Village Secretariats and volunteer system. He said he was impressed by the government's 'Amma Vodi' scheme that provided financial assistance to mothers, who were facing difficulties in sending their children to schools.

"Jaganmohan Reddy's ideas are impressive. I promised all support and cooperation on behalf of the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Organisation to the Andhra Pradesh government to make it a child-friendly State," he said.

## Service awards presented to cops

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Additional DIG (CID) PV Sunil Kumar presented the most outstanding service awards to police personnel working at the Regional Offices here on Tuesday. The CID department was working on a new approach with new advanced technology in crime research under the guidance of Sunil Kumar.

The awards were presented to DSP N Vijayaprasad, inspector R Siva Reddy, head constables T Venkateswara Rao, MRC Reddy and N Vasantha Naidu.

Inspector Manohar Babu, sub-inspector (IB) Ramakoteswara Rao, head constables S Rajababu, G Akkiraju, Ch Mallikarjuna Rao, Ch Ravindra Babu, M Hairiprasad, SD Shammim, Lokesh Babu, constables S Giribabu, R Siva Kumar and T Srinivasa Rao received awards on the occasion from the DIG. In all, 17 police personnel were given the awards for their outstanding performance on the occasion. DIGs CM Trivikram Varma and J Prabhakar and others were present.

## Minister terms govt steps as 'historic'

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Hailing the prestigious welfare programmes Amma Vodi and Nadu-Nedu schemes in the Assembly session here on Tuesday, Agriculture Minister Kurasala Kanna Babu said that the schemes were historic steps taken by the government under Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to transform schools and education sector in the State.

He said the government had allocated Rs 3,600 crore to provide infrastructure in 15,750 schools. He said that the reformed mid-day meals programme included a nutritious food item 'chikki' in the menu that additionally costs Rs 134 crore for the government. Moreover, the existing pay of Rs 1,000 for mid-day

meal workers has been increased to Rs 3,000 and this additionally costs Rs 176 crore. He said 72,77,387 children were registered in 62,518 schools (47,273 government-aided schools and 15,245 private schools) under Amma Vodi scheme. The literacy rate of the State is 67.35 per cent and the woman literacy rate is only 59.96 per cent. Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had introduced the Amma Vodi scheme to eradicate illiteracy in the State.

He said on January 8, about 42,04,955 mothers were identified as the beneficiaries to receive Rs 15,000 financial assistance under Amma Vodi. The scheme has not only benefited the poor children but also middle-class families.

## MLC hails govt for 'Amma Vodi' scheme

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

MLC V Gopal Reddy said that the ruling YSRCP government has brought revolutionary changes in the education system. Speaking at a meeting organised by YSR Teachers Federation at the Press Club here on Tuesday, he said that as Sankranti gift the government has launched Amma Vodi programme, which benefited about 45 lakh mothers across the State by depositing Rs 15,000 directly into the beneficiaries' account.

He said the government has allocated Rs 15,000 crore for education and with the 'Nadu Nedu' programme the government schools would be transformed on par with private and corporate institutions with necessary infrastructure.

## Pawan to meet BJP brass in Delhi today

Continued from Page 1

He said Jana Sena entered into an alliance with BJP only to oppose the 'misrule' of the Jaganmohan Reddy government. He claimed that BJP supports continuation of the Capital in Amaravati.

Consoling the farmers who were injured in police action on Monday, he condemned the YSRCP government for using the police to harass innocent people and observed that the lathi blows on them would spell doom to it. "Are they police personnel or rowdies to use lathis?" he questioned.

The YSRCP government, which brought tears in the eyes of women, would fall soon, Pawan Kalyan said, and added, "I am going to Delhi on Wednesday. I shall talk to the Central leaders and do justice to you."

The YSRCP government had no love for people; it was only using them as pawns in its political game, he said and

observed that the government, which started its reign with demolition, would fall soon.

He promised the farmers that Jana Sena and BJP would stand by them and they would make all efforts to stop the shifting of the Capital. "This is the reason why Jana Sena is walking with BJP," he said.

The Jana Sena chief said though he had been asking the Jaganmohan Reddy government to register cases against those who had resorted to insider trading in purchase of lands in the Capital region, instead of doing that it was focusing on three Capital cities in the State.

"Jaganmohan Reddy may set up three or 30 Capitals, but we are determined to ensure that there is only one Capital at Amaravati. YSRCP government is moving ahead with arrogance. We shall see to it that YSRCP will not win even a single seat. Whether anyone likes it or not, Andhra Pradesh will have only one Capital," Pawan Kalyan said.

## YSR Lifetime Achievement awards to be given on Ugadi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has constituted the YSR Life Time Achievement Awards to honour people from the state who have done distinguished and meritorious public services.

A High Power Screening Committee has been constituted for selection of YSR Life Time Achievement awardees. The committee advised the government that Ugadi being an important Telugu festival, would be the most suitable occasion for the presentation of the awards.

Further, the Screening Committee asked for some more time to receive nominations and to sift through the nominations received so far.



## Jagan takes steps to abolish Council

Continued from Page 1

An emergency meeting of the state cabinet is likely to be held and send the proposal to the Centre for its approval. The YSRCP, which came to power in May last year, has only nine members in the Council. TDP is in majority with 34 members.

The Council was abolished by the TDP government on May 31, 1985 since the then Chief Minister N. T. Rama Rao felt that it was redundant and caused a drain on the state exchequer.

It was in 2007 that the Legislative Council in the undivided Andhra Pradesh was revived after a gap of 22 years.

However, the real reason was that Rama Rao found it difficult to push through controversial legislations and policy decisions in the Upper House which was at that time dominated by the Congress.

The Assembly on Monday night passed Andhra Pradesh Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill and Capital Region Development Authority Repeal

Bill, paving the way for development of three capitals - Amaravati, Visakhapatnam and Kurnool. As the YSRCP has overwhelming majority in 175-member Assembly, the Bills were passed without any problem.

Council Chairman Mohammed Ahmed Shariff agreed to the TDP demand, triggering strong protest from the YSRCP. Minister for Legislative Affairs B. Rajendranath Reddy urged him to reconsider the decision saying this would set a wrong precedent. He wanted the chair to first take up the two Bills for debate before allowing discussion on the TDP notice under Rule 71.

Amid the pandemonium, the chairman adjourned the House for 10 minutes. When it re-assembled, the chairman asked TDP member Y. Rajendraprasad to speak, evoking strong protest from the ruling party. Some ministers rushed to the chairman's podium to lodge their protest. The ruckus forced him to once again adjourn the House.

## Separate panels for SCs & STs historic, says CM

Continued from Page 1

After witnessing our (government) welfare programmes, JSP MLA is supporting us. TDP is trying to do politics by using the lone SC MLA on the issue." He said like never before the present government had six ministers belonging to SC/ST communities and two of them are Deputy Chief Ministers. "This is a historic decision which is why I request everyone to support the Bill," he said.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Tribal Welfare Pamula Pushpa Srivani said the importance given by Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy to Scheduled Castes and Tribes could be gauged by the fact that he had introduced the SC, ST Bill. She said it was unfortunate that the TDP members were creating havoc during the debate on the Bill which shows how much the TDP members were bothered about the welfare of the SC and STs.

## VAKAPALLE GANG RAPE CASE

# Duty roster missing, cop tells court

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Reserve inspector of Armed Reserve Police told Visakhapatnam SC ST (POA) Act Special Court here on Tuesday that they were unable to trace the duty roster.

It may be recalled that the Special Public Prosecutor S Rajendra Prasad had sought registers from the Paderu Police Station and the Armed Reserve Police office for information about the deployment of the special police party in August 2007, the month in which the Greyhound police personnel allegedly raped the tribal women at Vakapalle in the Visakhapatnam agency.

Judge OV Nageswar Rao of the Special Court asked the Reserve Inspector why he has not produced these registers, which should be mandatorily maintained in each and every police station, including the Armed Reserve. The judge added that if the registers

Special Public Prosecutor had sought registers from the Paderu Police Station for information about the deployment of the special police party in August 2007

ters are destroyed, they should at least produce the destruction of register.

The Special Public Prosecutor concluded that if the police do not make their stand clear, he would be constrained to ask the court to initiate criminal proceedings under S 349 CrPc against the witnesses for not obeying the court's summons to produce the documents. The judge posted the case to February 4 as a last chance for the production of registers.

## Stalker slits girl's throat, kills himself

Continued from Page 1

The injured girl was rushed to the government hospital at S Kota.

A couple of hours after the attack, Rao committed suicide by jumping in front of a goods train.

Inspector Srinivasa Rao registered a case and took up investigation.

The police said that they have shifted the body for autopsy. Vizianagaram Police chief B Raja Kumari appealed to students to approach the police if they face harassment in the name of "love".

## Oppn TDP blocks passage of decentralisation bill in council

Continued from Page 1

When TDP MLC Rajendra Prasad started the debate on Rule No. 71, the YSRCP members opposed it saying that the Bills tabled by the government should be discussed first. They said it was against established convention.

YSRCP members, including ministers, went to the podium and demanded that the discussion be held on the Bills.

Municipal Administration Minister Botsa Satyanarayana alleged that the Council chairman was biased in favour of TDP. "Where is the need for the

rule book, when no one follows rules?" he asked.

The Ministers also raised slogans from the Well as the stalemate continued till the evening with no breakthrough.

"I am giving two hours time for a discussion under Rule 71. We can take up the Bill after that," the Chairman said but the ministers insisted that government business be taken up first.

At one time, the ministers spoke in a pleading tone and requested that the Chairman reconsider his decision on the Rule 71 motion.

Botsa Satyanarayana asked

the Chairman not to use the Council for "political business."

"Don't use your discretionary powers for political gains. Go by the rule book. Don't do politics. Don't get involved in politics. It will be a blot on you," Satyanarayana told the Council Chairman.

Deputy Chief Minister Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose said, "We are pleading with you to reconsider the decision. This is not government policy, but a Bill."

The Opposition leaders countered it saying the government brought its policy in the form of a Bill.

## Protests continue over 3 capital move...

Continued from Page 1

Hundreds of protestors had tried to march towards the Assembly to lodge their protest against the shifting of key capital functions out of Amaravati.

Meanwhile, opposition Telugu Desam Party leader and Guntur MP Galla Jayadev, who was arrested during the protest on Monday, was released on bail on Tuesday.

The MP said they were conducting peaceful protest but the police turned violent and attacked them. Jayadev sustained baton blows.

The TDP leader said for 15 hours the police carried him from one place to the other and did not inform him whether he



was being detained or arrested. "If the police can do this to an MP, what happens to the common man," he asked.

Dramatic scenes were witnessed late Monday night when the police detained former Chief Minister and TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu

and his party MLAs when they were trying to visit Mandadam village to call on the injured protestors.

TDP MP from Vijayawada, Kesineni Nani and TDP's Andhra Pradesh unit President Kala Venkata Rao said the police acted in high-handed

manner at the behest of political bosses. They asked the police if they had obtained permission from the Lok Sabha Speaker to arrest Galla Jayadev. The TDP said it would take up the issue with the Centre.

The Assembly on Monday night passed Andhra Pradesh Decentralization and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill Aand Capital Region Development Authority Repeal Bill, paving the way for development of three capitals - Amaravati, Visakhapatnam and Kurnool. Meanwhile, several farmers from Amaravati called on Jana Sena leader and actor Pawan Kalyan at his party office. They alleged that police carried out brutal baton charge.

# India plans own TOEFL for foreign students

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is likely to frame its own English language test, on the lines of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), for foreign students to improve its ranking among the most preferred countries for education in the world.

At a press conference here on Tuesday, Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) President Dr Vinay Sahasrabudhe said that after several brainstorming sessions with the UGC, Niti Aayog and other related institutions, the government has identified several issues that held back India from being in top ten or 15 countries for education.

"As per the data, India is 26th most favorite destination for education, globally. We are trying to make efforts to move up the ladder, and get into

at least top 15 list," Sahasrabudhe said.

One of the reasons for not being in the top ten list, he said, was that students from non-English speaking foreign countries, once admitted in Indian institutions, found it difficult to cope up with English medium education. The government, he said, is also looking at building hostels and providing accommodation to couples since a considerable number of foreign students are married.

According to the ICCR, there are around 50,000 foreign students, mostly from Asian and African countries, studying in various degree programmes in India. However, other ministries claim that there are around 100,000 foreign students. There is no definitive official data on foreign students nor has been there any survey on the most



**The ICCR, the cultural arm of the Ministry of External Affairs, has been promoting India's soft power for over 60 years, through cultural and education exchange programmes. The council is the largest governmental body to offer scholarships to foreign students. At present, around 4,000 foreign students are recipients of the ICCR scholarships**

preferred graduate programmes among foreign students.

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India's soft power for over 60 years, through cultural and education exchange programmes. The council is the largest governmental body to offer scholarships to foreign

students. At present, around 4,000 foreign students are recipients of the ICCR scholarships.

Sahasrabudhe also said that the number of foreign stu-

dents would go up if people who visit India for studying and training in Indian classical music, dance, ayurveda, yoga, culinary under tourist visa are added. "We are yet to

devise a mechanism which will give us an exact idea about the total number of foreign students in India," he said. With a mission to make India a preferred hub for education, the ICCR in collaboration with Symbiosis International and Savitribai Phule Pune University, he said, is organising a national conference 'Destination India' in Pune on January 28 and 29. "This is the first time that all the institutions involved in hosting foreign students will come together to prepare a roadmap to bring two lakh foreign students to India by 2022."

The ICCR will also honor four distinguished foreigners who studied in Indian universities and rose to high positions in their respective countries. The annual award was set up by then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj in 2015.

## SHORT READS



### 25 kg heroin worth Rs 105 crore seized in Kolkata

**KOLKATA:** In one of the biggest drug seizures in the East in recent history, the Kolkata Police on Tuesday arrested two persons with 25 kilogram of heroin worth more than Rs 105 crore in the international market, a senior officer said. Acting on a tip-off, the Special Task Force of the Kolkata Police raided a house in Paikpara area in the northern part of the city in the early hours of Tuesday and nabbed Uttar Pradesh-based drug dealer Juber and his accomplice from Manipur, Moulana Fayazuddin, the officer said. "We have seized heroin weighing 25.255 kg. This is one of the biggest seizures of heroin not only in Kolkata but also in West Bengal and the Northeast," he said. Preliminary investigation revealed that while Juber was working as a hawker in the city, Fayazuddin was an agricultural labourer. Both the accused were drug carriers for dealers based in Uttar Pradesh and the Northeast. Juber possessed 20 kg heroin and Fayazuddin 5.255, the officer said.

the area," officials said. Earlier in the day, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) asked authorities to identify and arrange counselling for children seen at protests against the CAA at Shaheen Bagh. According to the CAA, members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities who have come from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan till December 31, 2014 to escape religious persecution there will not be treated as illegal immigrants but given Indian citizenship.

### Woman Maoist surrenders in Odisha

**MALKANGIRI (ODISHA):** A woman Maoist, carrying a reward of Rs 2 lakh on her head, gave up arms here, expressing her desire to return to social mainstream, police sources said. Adme Madkani (22), who had joined the outlawed CPI (Maoist) around five years ago, surrendered before Malkangiri Superintendent of Police Rishikesh D Khilari, they said. Once an active member of the outfit's Darva Division, Madkani was wanted by the police in at least six cases in the district, including three involving civilian murder. According to the SP, Madkani claimed to have realized the futility of violence, and wanted to quit the banned organisation. She was also disappointed with the treatment meted out to the women cadres by the Maoist leaders.

### Three killed, 11 injured as bus hits truck in MP

**JABALPUR:** Three persons were killed and 11 others injured after a bus hit a stationary truck in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district in the wee hours of Tuesday, police said. The mishap took place near Mangala village around 3 am when the private bus was going from Banda in Uttar Pradesh to Nagpur in Maharashtra. It collided with a truck parked on a roadside near Mangala village, located about 20 km from here, Bargi police station in-charge R D Dwivedi said. The deceased included two bus passengers - Mansi Tiwari (18) and an unidentified man - and a resident of Mangala village, Narayan Rajput (20), who was standing near the stationary truck. The 11 injured bus passengers were admitted to a government hospital here, he said. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath took to Twitter to express grief over the deaths in the mishap, and said directives have been issued to ensure proper treatment of the injured persons.

### Police officer killed, Army jawan injured in encounter in Pulwama

**SRINAGAR:** A special police officer was killed and a soldier injured on Tuesday in an encounter with militants in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district, police said. The encounter broke out in the district's Khrew area when the security forces had launched a cordon and search operation, a police official said. Special Police Officer Shahbaz Ahmad was killed while an Army jawan injured in the exchange of fire, the official said. He said the operation was on till last reports came in.



### Meghalaya minister's PSO shoots himself

PNS ■ SHILLONG

In a freak accident, the personal security officer of Meghalaya Minister A L Hek accidentally shot himself in his thigh on Tuesday while the official statehood day programme, in which Chief Minister Conrad Sangma was present, was under way here.

The personal security officer accidentally fired his 9mm service pistol while cleaning it seated inside Hek's vehicle and injured himself, police said. The incident took place when the 48th Statehood day celebration was going on in the afternoon where Hek and Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma was attending the function along with other dignitaries.

## India needs \$2.64 tln investment to meet SDGs by 2030: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India needs a whopping USD 2.64 trillion investment to meet the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs), offering the private sector an investment opportunity of over USD 1.12 trillion by 2030, according to a report.

According to the Standard Chartered SDG Investment Map, the total investment that the country needs to make by 2030 is a whopping USD 2,633.9 billion. Of the total, USD 1,558.8 billion is for clean energy, USD 505.5 billion for transport infrastructure, USD 377.4 billion for digital access; and USD 192.2 billion for clean water and sanitation.

Of the total USD 2.64 trillion of investment needed, the potential investment opportunity for the private sector is a whopping USD 1.12 trillion with USD 701.5 billion



going into clean energy, USD 226.5 billion for digital access, USD 176.9 billion in transport infrastructure, and USD 19.2 billion for clean water and sanitation, said the report.

For the emerging markets as a whole, the opportunity for the private sector is around USD 10 trillion, said the report adding that "India represents USD 1.124 trillion of SDG opportunity, or more than 10 per cent of the USD 9.668 trillion opportunity for private sector investors across all emerging markets to help achieve the UN goals."

### Nails of tiger killed in Goa forest found inside temple

PNS ■ PANAJI

The Goa Forest Department on Tuesday recovered missing nails of one of the four tigers, who was killed in Mahadai Wildlife Sanctuary earlier this month, an official said.

A team from the forest department, which was investigating the case, recovered the nails from Kelbai Temple at Golavali village inside the sanctuary, state's chief wildlife warden Santosh Kumar said.

A tigress and her three cubs were found dead inside Mahadai Wildlife Sanctuary earlier this month, following which five locals were arrested.



## LG meets Shaheen Bagh protesters, seeks end to stir

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor Anil Bajal on Tuesday met a delegation of protesters from Shaheen Bagh and appealed to them to call off their agitation as it has been causing inconvenience to schoolchildren, patients and general public.

The eight-member delegation submitted a memorandum of their demands, including withdrawal of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, to the LG, an official said.

Thousands of people, including women and children, have been protesting for over a month at Shaheen Bagh and nearby Jamia Millia Islamia against the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC). "Met the delegation of protesters from Shaheen Bagh. Assured them to convey their concerns to appropriate authorities. Appealed to call off their agitation in view of continued inconvenience to school children, patients, daily commuters,



local residents, etc due to blockade of road," Bajal tweeted. In another tweet, the LG said, "I once again request all to maintain peace and order."

Joint Commissioner of Police (Southern Range) Devesh Srivastava and DCP (South-east) Chinnoy Biswal were present in the meeting. According to the LG office, the delegation assured Bajal that they would convey his message to other protesters at Shaheen Bagh.

"The LG also directed the police officers concerned to take all steps as per law to ensure peace and harmony in

the area," officials said.

Earlier in the day, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) asked authorities to identify and arrange counselling for children seen at protests against the CAA at Shaheen Bagh.

According to the CAA, members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities who have come from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan till December 31, 2014 to escape religious persecution there will not be treated as illegal immigrants but given Indian citizenship.

## Restrictions on cash withdrawal from PMC Bank based on ability to pay depositors: RBI to Delhi HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Restrictions on cash withdrawals from the scam-hit Punjab and Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank Ltd were based on the bank's liquidity position and ability to pay its depositors, RBI told the Delhi High Court on Tuesday. Justifying its action on putting cap on withdrawals, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said restrictions were placed due to liquidity and solvency issues but that does not "extinguish the liability" of the bank towards the depositors.

"The steps taken by RBI are not arbitrary in nature. Directions under Section 35A of the Banking Regulation Act 1949 (AACs) were issued in view of the large scale irregularities and wrong doings committed by the bank to prevent further deterioration of the bank's financials and also aim at protecting the interest of depositors," RBI said. The submissions were made in response to a PIL seeking removal of restrictions on cash withdrawals from the PMC Bank. The central bank further said that the move to restrict payment of deposits was based on available liquidity to prevent any discretionary and discriminatory payment to the small body of depositors. Seeking dismissal of the plea,



**The RBI said it has not violated any fundamental rights of the petitioners and directions for invoking Article 226 of the Constitution against RBI and the petition was not maintainable.**

RBI and the petition was not maintainable.

The PMC Bank has been put under restrictions by the RBI, following the unearthing of a Rs 4,355-crore scam. Cash withdrawals have been capped by the RBI at Rs 40,000 for a six-month period, causing panic and distress among the bank's customers, petitioner Bejon Kumar Misra had said in his plea.

In the petition, Misra had sought quashing of the RBI notifications by which the restrictions were placed on cash withdrawals from the bank.

He has also said a full insurance coverage of the depositors' money was the need of the hour, "considering the reoccurrence of financial scams in co-operative and nationalised banks".

The plea was first moved by Misra in the Supreme Court, which refused to entertain it last month and asked him to approach the high court.

Subsequently, he filed the petition in the Delhi High Court. The petition has sought directions to the Centre and the RBI for constituting a high-powered committee to look into the working and operations of all cooperative banks "in order to have a robust and transparent mechanism, which can inspire confidence of the public in cooperative banks".

## Birth certificates say two UP kids aged over 100-yr

PNS ■ BAREILLY (UP)

Two-year-old Sanket may not look it but he is 102-year-old, according to his birth certificate. Shubb (4) is 104.

A Bareilly court recently ordered police to lodge a case against a village development officer and a village head who allegedly issued wrong documents after the children's family refused to give them a bribe.

Pawan Kumar of Bela village under the Khutar police station of Shahjahanpur had moved court alleging that birth certificates of his nephews Shubb (4) and Sanket (2) were issued with wrong years of birth, SHO Tejpal Singh said.

Pawan had alleged that Village Development Officer Sushil Chand Agnihotri and



head Pravin Misra had demanded Rs 500 for each birth certificate for which he had applied online two months ago, the SHO said. When he refused to give bribe, the year of birth was mentioned in the certificate as June 13, 1916 and Jan 6 2018 instead of June 13, 2016 and Jan 6, 1918, Pawan had stated in the court.

A copy of the order issued on January 17 has been received and we are taking required action, the SHO said.

## DABHOLKAR MURDER CASE:

### Court denies bail to accused Bhawe

PNS ■ PUNE

A special court here on Tuesday rejected the bail application of Sanatan Sanstha member Vikram Bhawe, who is one of the accused in the 2013 murder of nationalist Narendra Dabholkar.

Additional Sessions Judge S R Navandar said that bail cannot be granted to Bhawe given his conviction in the 2008 Thane bomb blasts case and in view of his alleged role in Dabholkar's murder.

According to the CBI, Bhawe (34) had played a key role in the conspiracy to kill Dabholkar by facilitating reconnaissance of the spot in Pune where he was shot dead on August 20, 2013 and also the escape route for the shooters. Bhawe was convicted for his alleged involvement in the blasts at theatres and auditoriums in Thane district in 2008.

## CBI books Frost International, directors for Rs 3,592-cr fraud

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked Mumbai-based Frost International, its directors Uday Desai and Sujay Desai besides 11 other individuals and companies for allegedly cheating in a consortium of 14 banks to the tune of over Rs 3,592 crore, officials said.

The action has been taken on the complaint of Kanpur Zonal office of Bank of India, which alleged that the directors had worked in the guise of undertaking merchanting trade with-out genuine business, they said. It is alleged that they had defaulted in meeting payment obligation towards the lending

banks of the consortium led by Bank of India, the officials said.

The company and its directors, guarantors and unidentified others submitted forged documents, diverted and siphoned off the bank's funds, they said.

The action of the company and its directors cheated the banks to the tune of over Rs 3,592.48 crore, they added. The banks had already secured Look out Circular against Uday Desai and 10 others on January 18, 2019. It was preceded by another LOC against Desai and 13 others on the request of Indian Overseas Bank, they said.

## Nirav Modi's assets to be auctioned at Saffronart's two upcoming sales

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fugitive businessman Nirav Modi's seized assets including artworks, luxury watches, handbags and cars will go under the hammer at Saffronart's two upcoming auctions.

The Mumbai-based auction house has been selected to host the sales on behalf of the Enforcement Directorate, Government of India. While the first sale, a live auction, will be held on February 27 in Mumbai, the second will be an online sale on March 3-4.

Highlights of the auction include 15 artworks by significant modern and contemporary Indian artists like a 1935 masterpiece by Amrita Sher-Gil which has never previously been auctioned and is estimated at Rs 12-18 crore, a significant oil on canvas by M F Husain from his

**Important watches going on sale include a Jaeger Lecoultré Men's "Reverso Gyrotourbillon 2" Limited Edition wristwatch, and a Gerrard Perregaux Men's "Opera One" wristwatch**



sale include a Jaeger Lecoultré Men's "Reverso Gyrotourbillon 2" Limited Edition wristwatch, and a Gerrard Perregaux Men's "Opera One" wristwatch.

Of more than 80 branded handbags included in the auction, several are from the Birkin and Kelly lines by luxury retailer Hermès.

"Saffronart is extremely honoured to inaugurate its 20th year by lending our services

and expertise to the Enforcement Directorate, Government of India. We are diligently working with the ED to assess and evaluate each item and put together the catalogue for both the sales, which includes a distinguished lineup of artworks by the likes of Amrita Sher-Gil, M F Husain and V S Gaitonde.

"The auctions also feature luxury collectibles - such as watches by Jaeger Lecoultré, and Birkin and Kelly handbags from Hermès - which are among the most popular luxury items internationally and witness great demand from celebrities and collectors," said Dinesh Vazirani, Saffronart CEO and Co-Founder. Select lots from the upcoming auctions will be exhibited at the Saffronart gallery in The Oberoi, New Delhi during the India Art Fair later this month.

SHORT READS

**Kerala CM seeks assistance of External Affairs ministry**

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has sought the intervention of External Affairs minister S Jaishankar to render all assistance to the families of the eight keralite tourists who died at a resort in Nepal. In a letter to the minister, Vijayan said "we have heard the shocking news of the death of eight persons from Kerala who were on a visit to Nepal. I request your Ministry to kindly intervene for rendering all possible assistance to the families and friends of the victims".

**Two J-K youths among National Bravery awardees**

**NEW DELHI:** Two youths from Jammu & Kashmir and a Karnataka boy, who guided an ambulance during floods in the state, are among those who have been chosen for the National Bravery Award this year, officials said on Tuesday. The names of awardees — 10 girls and 12 boys — were announced by the Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) on Tuesday. Sixteen-year-old Muhammed Muhsin from Kozhikode in Kerala, who drowned while saving three of his friends in the rough sea in April last year, has been chosen for the ICCW Abhimanyu Award posthumously, the officials said. Kupwara native Sartaj Mohidin Mugal, 16, and Mudasir Ashraf, 19, from Budgam are among the awardees for performing acts of valour in Kashmir in 2019. Venkatesh, 11, from Karnataka, who guided an ambulance carrying a body and relatives of the deceased, during the floods last August will also receive the award, officials said.

**ISRO provides consultation to Qualcomm on NavIC**

**BENGALURU:** The Indian Space Research Organisation on Tuesday said it has provided "consultation" to San Diego-based chipmaker Qualcomm towards enabling NavIC capability in their Snapdragon mobile chipset platforms. The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), also called NavIC—Navigation with Indian Constellation—is reportedly on par with US-based GPS, Russia's Glonass and Galileo developed by Europe. "These chipsets are being released by Qualcomm Technologies, Inc., and the release will help accelerate the adoption of NavIC by smartphone OEMs," ISRO said on its website.

**Pondy CM warns Centre on hydrocarbon project**

PNS ■ PUDUCHERRY

Puducherry Chief Minister V Narayanasamy on Tuesday cautioned the Centre against going ahead with the proposed hydrocarbon project in the delta district of Karaikal and Bahoor block here and warned of "big protests" if it was not dropped once and for all.

Addressing a hurriedly convened press conference here, the Chief Minister said the Centre was acting in an "autocratic and unconcerned" manner by letting the Vedanta group take up drilling operations both offshore and onshore in Puducherry and Karaikal regions for the hydrocarbon.

He said he had received a letter a couple of days ago from the Centre stating that the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification 2006 has been amended exempting hydrocarbon project proposed in the Cauvery delta region from public consultations.

He also said the Union Petroleum Ministry had informed the Puducherry government that the Vedanta group of company had been



sanctioned permission to take up drilling operations in the Union Territory in addition to Villupuram and Nagapattinam in neighbouring Tamil Nadu.

While 39 sq km in Karaikal would be taken up for drilling, an extent of two sq km land would be brought under exploration on shore in Bahoor in Puducherry.

Narayanasamy said he had written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Dharmendra Pradhan registering his government's strong protest

against the Centre's "autocratic and unconcerned" approach in letting a private firm to take up the drilling operations.

He said he had also taken strong exception to the recent amendment to the EIA notification.

"I have very strongly opposed the Centre's stand that no prior permission or clearance is necessary for the drilling operations from the concerned State government."

If the Central government went ahead with its decision to let the private firm to take up drilling operations in the

**He alleged that the Centre was acting with utmost grudge and rancour against the Puducherry government and has been planning to disturb the fragile environmental zone in Puducherry and Karaikal districts through the hydrocarbon project**

Union Territory despite the objection by the territorial administration, the Chief Minister said, "we would stage a big protest and this would include an agitation to protect fishermen and farmers."

Narayanasamy called upon the Centre to drop the proposal for the project in the Union Territory as it was an "injurious threat to farmers and fishermen."

He alleged that the Centre was acting with utmost grudge and rancour against the Puducherry government and has been planning to disturb the fragile environmental zone in Puducherry and Karaikal districts through the hydrocarbon project.

**NGT summons CGWA CEO over water extraction**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has directed the CEO of Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) to appear in person after noting several deficiencies in compliance of conditions while granting NOC for ground water extraction to real estate developers in Ghaziabad and Noida.

The order came after the a bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel was informed that although the proponent has been granted NOC for ground water extraction, it has not complied with the conditions.

"We find that though there are several deficiencies in compliance of conditions imposed by the CGWB while granting NOC for ground water extraction, the CGWB has failed to take necessary action even after the deficiencies have come to their notice," it bench said.

"Since such situation is happening in number of cases, it is necessary to require presence of the CEO of the CGWA to ensure that there is effective monitoring mechanism to



**The order came after the a bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel was informed that although the proponent has been granted NOC for ground water extraction, it has not complied with the conditions**

remedy such violations without which the regulatory functions entrusted to the CGWA will have no meaning," it said in a recent order.

The tribunal was hearing a plea filed by UP resident Mahakar Singh alleging illegal

cutting of trees, extraction of ground water and construction without environmental clearance for the project of Wave City at Ghaziabad and High Tech City at Noida by real estate developers.

The UP pollution control board (UPPCB) told the tribunal that presently, 40-50 families are residing in Wave City township in area which has been developed in phase 1 of the project.

"Unit has installed eight compact Sewage Treatment Plants presently for treatment of sewage generated from domestic processes. STP's were not found in operation. No sewage was found at inlet of STP," UPPCB said.

**'No encroachment can be allowed on forest land'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The NGT has directed the Delhi government to remove illegal constructions in south Delhi's Jaunapur and Dera Mandi forest areas, saying no encroachment can be allowed on forest land.

A bench headed by National Green Tribunal (NGT) Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel said the monitoring has to be at a higher level so that the encroachments are removed and the land is restored to its original condition.

It also directed the Delhi government to file a status report before the next date by email. "Let further steps in the matter be taken expeditiously," the bench said.

The tribunal was hearing a plea by south Delhi resident Amarjit Singh Nalwa and others seeking execution of a 2015 NGT order directing the Delhi government to remove encroachments.

The plea stated that unauthorised constructions are going on in the said area and the authorities are not taking any steps to stop them.

**JD(U)'s Pawan Varma speaks of Nitish's 'private apprehensions'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

JD(U) leader Pawan Varma on Tuesday sought ideological clarity from party president Nitish Kumar over aligning with the BJP in the Delhi elections, referring to the Bihar chief minister's "private apprehensions" on how the saffron party is leading the country. In remarks that may embarrass Kumar, Varma claimed in a letter to him that despite his alliance with the BJP in 2017, his "private apprehensions" regarding the party and how it was leading India into a "dangerous space" did not change. "I remember your confessing to me in private how the current leadership in the BJP party has humiliated you. You maintained, on more than one occasion, that the BJP is leading India into a dangerous space,"

the former RS member and JD(U) general secretary wrote. In the letter, which he shared on social media, Varma said, "It was your personal view, as conveyed to me, that the BJP is destroying institutions, and that there is a need for democratic and socialist forces within the country to regroup, a task for



Nitish Kumar

which you actually assigned a senior party official."

The JD(U) or its president have not reacted to Varma's claims and swipe at Kumar, who has been a frequent critic of the Modi government's policies and had asked his party to stand against its citizenship measures.

The JD(U)'s decision to broaden its alliance outside and join hands with the BJP for the Delhi polls has left him "deeply perplexed", Varma said, adding that he looked to Kumar for ideological clarity.

"On more than one occasion, you have expressed your grave apprehensions about the BJP-RSS combine, he said in his let-

**The JD(U) or its president have not reacted to Varma's claims and swipe at Kumar, who has been a frequent critic of the Modi government's policies and had asked his party to stand against its citizenship measures**

ter to the Bihar chief minister. "If these are your real views, I fail to understand how the JD(U) is now extending its alliance with the BJP beyond Bihar, when even long standing allies of the BJP, like the Akali Dal, have refused to do so. This is especially so at a time when the BJP, through the CAA-NPR-NRC combine, has embarked on a massive socially divisive agenda..." he said.

Varma said there is an urgent need for the JD(U) to harmonise what the party's constitution says, what the leader of the party feels in private, and what actions the party takes in public.

**'Cong joined Maha govt as Muslims insisted'**

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

A video of Maharashtra minister and senior Congress leader Ashok Chavan purportedly saying that his party joined the Shiv Sena-led government on "insistence" of the "Muslim community" to stop the BJP from returning to power has gone viral on social media.

The remarks were purportedly made by the PWD Minister while addressing an anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) rally in Nanded in Maharashtra region of the state recently.

Chavan said on Tuesday that he didn't specifically mention Muslims in his speech.

"We have a (coalition) government in place in the state. The Congress decided to join the government to avoid the (repeat of) losses the state had suffered in the last five years (when the BJP was in power). Our Muslim brothers also insisted that we join the government to keep the biggest enemy, the BJP, away from power," Chavan said in Hindi.

The senior Congress leader, who had served as a chief minister of Maharashtra during December 2008 to November 2010, also said the new citizenship law will not be implemented in the state as long as the present dispensation in at the helm.

The Congress is a part of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government comprising the Shiv Sena and the NCP.

Calling for extensive debate on the CAA, Chavan said nobody's Constitutional rights should be allowed to be violated.



Ashok Chavan

**Chavan said on Tuesday that he didn't specifically mention Muslims in his speech Calling for extensive debate on the CAA, Chavan said nobody's Constitutional rights should be allowed to be violated**

**BJP MLA calls Mamata 'cruel-hearted' woman**

PNS ■ BALLIA (UP)

In provocative remarks, Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA Surendra Singh has called West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee a "cruel-hearted" woman and also said if illegal Muslim migrants are allowed to stay in India, there will be Kashmir-like stone-pelters everywhere.

The Baira MLA who last week compared Banerjee with "a demon", accusing her of protecting those "who killed thousands of Hindus", on Monday told newspapers, "She is not with the people of West Bengal but is standing alongside the 'shaitans' (devils) of Bangladesh."

"She is a cruel-hearted woman who will be removed from power in the coming assembly polls," Singh claimed. Referring to Muslim immigrants from neighbouring countries, the BJP MLA said, "If the Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims are allowed to stay, every street in the country will have stone-pelters like in Jammu and Kashmir."

To a question, he said he stands by his earlier statement that Hindus should give birth to five children.

**Proposed cut in duty-free liquor, cigarettes decried**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Indian airports are likely to incur a revenue loss of Rs 650 crore per annum if the reported recommendations of the Commerce Ministry on duty-free sales are put in place, private airports operators body APAO said on Tuesday.

Vehemently opposing the proposed move to reduce liquor allowance from two litres to one litre and to do away with import of cigarettes presently one carton of 100 sticks, the Association of Private Airport Operators (APAO) in a statement said the move will have "disastrous"



effect on the domestic aviation industry.

The Commerce Ministry, as part of its proposals to the

finance ministry ahead of the budget, has recommended restricting purchase of tax-free alcohol to one bottle at

duty-free shops as part of steps to reduce import of non-essential goods, sources had said earlier. The ministry, as per the sources, has also recommended to the Finance Ministry that purchase of cigarette cartons at duty-free shops should be prohibited.

"Such a move will have disastrous effects on the Indian aviation industry across all stakeholders including airports, airlines, passengers and duty-free operators," APAO said.

According to the Association, the proposed restrictions will lead to increase in passenger charges, hurt air-

port industry and may "encourage smuggling," besides a revenue loss of about Rs 650 crore per annum at all airports.

Liquor imports for duty-free sale stands at around USD 97 million as against country's total import bill of USD 460 billion, according to the APAO. The revenue loss at airports will impact the operators' financial ratings and consequently hamper expansion plans, it said.

The proposal, if accepted will increase in aeronautical charges of around Rs 200 crore per annum, which in turn, will lead to higher air ticket prices, it added.

PNS ■ MANGALURU

The investigation to trace the suspect who placed the Improvised Explosive Device (IED) at Mangaluru International Airport on Monday has revealed that the man detected in the CCTV footage was carrying another bag which he left behind at a shop before going to the airport.

The suspect, before going to the airport, had two bags with him when got on to a bus from the bus stop near State Bank of India here and alighted at Kenjar airport stop.



He went to a nearby salon and asked the staff to keep his bag there for some time, which they allowed and told him to keep it outside the salon, police sources said.

He then hired an auto rickshaw with the other bag with

the IED to reach the airport.

After leaving the bag in the airport premises, he went back and collected the bag from the salon. He left by the same auto rickshaw towards Kavoore, they said.

It is yet to be ascertained to which place he went from there and what he did with the other bag.

It is also not clear whether he had really wanted to detonate the explosive planted at the airport as the wires of the IED had not been properly connected and the timer was not in the 'on' position, the sources said.

**UPSRTC signs pact with transport firm**

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh State Road Corporation (UPSRTC) has signed an agreement with a private transport firm in Nepal for running buses on the Ayodhya-Lucknow-Janakpur Dham route, officials said on Tuesday.

The pact was signed between UPSRTC and M/s Shree Matarani Yatayat Samiti in Janakpur Dham in Nepal.

"The memorandum was signed in Lucknow on Monday," Rajsheshkar, MD, UPSRTC said on Tuesday.

Under Indo-Nepal Cross border transport facilitation agreement 2014, a new route

from Janakpur Dham to Ayodhya was created.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Nepalese counterpart KP Sharma Oli had jointly inaugurated the bus service in May 2018. UPSRTC has already started its bus services on this route from Lucknow.

As no Nepalese bus operator was selected by the Nepal government, the return service could not start.

The proposed bus service will be AC Janath whose fare will be Rs 1,350 from Lucknow to Janakpur Dham (Nepal) and Rs 950 from Ayodhya to Janakpur Dham, Rajsheshkar said.

**'Bright future awaits J-K after abrogation of Article 370'**

PNS ■ JAMMU

Stating that Article 370 was the "biggest obstacle" in the development of Jammu and Kashmir, Union minister Kiren Rijiju on Tuesday said the future of the Union Territory is bright and its youth can now have a dream to "touch the sky".

Rijiju was the part of the latest batch of nearly a dozen Union ministers who reached Jammu on Tuesday on the fourth day of the massive outreach campaign launched by the Centre to disseminate information about the implementation of its policies and programmes for the overall development of Jammu and Kashmir. "We are here to act like wings for the youth to fulfil their



dream and the central government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is determined to take the region to the new heights of development and progress," the minister of state for youth services and

sports said. Addressing a gathering after dedicating the upgraded indoor stadium to the people here, Rijiju said the momentum of the developmental activities witnessed "three to four times increase" after the

**The future of Jammu and Kashmir is bright and the younger generation is lucky and can have a dream to touch the sky**

nullification of Article 370. "The future of Jammu and Kashmir is bright and the younger generation is lucky and can have a dream to touch the sky," he said. The Centre had on August 5 last year abrogated Article 370 provisions of the Constitution, which guaranteed special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and bifurcated the state into Union territories.

Rijiju said Article 370 was the "biggest obstacle and was stand-

ing like a wall" in the way of development of Jammu and Kashmir.

"After its abrogation, the speed of development increased by three to four times. If the development continues like this, I believe that Jammu and Kashmir will be the most developed region of the country in the near future," he said.

Rijiju said he is on a two-day tour of the UT and "will look at how my ministry will con-

tribute in the developmental progress". He assured more indoors stadiums for the region and said "we will provide the local sports persons all facilities and support to make them champions". The minister said had successive governments carried forward "such type of development" as it is happening today", Jammu and Kashmir would have touched great heights. "Better late than never...Article 370 is gone and the prime minister's development plan for the UT will set an example not only for the country, but the entire world to see," he said. Rijiju said when he was in the home ministry, the erstwhile state received the "highest funds" under the leadership of PM Modi.

## Capital gain or loss?

Jagan Mohan Reddy may want to develop Andhra uniformly with 3 capitals but the human cost might impact his politics



**A**ndhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy should remember his father YSR Reddy's overarching nature of politics, one that was about social welfare and uplifting backwards and one that gave him a bankable legacy. So he should stop over-obsessing about setting up three capitals in a now truncated State, focus on its cash-strapped economy and optimise its resources rather than engaging in a competitive one-upmanship with his predecessor and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief Chandrababu Naidu.

True, the latter had built his persona by creating futuristic cities as a measure of good governance, be it by redeveloping Hyderabad and giving it a new moniker called Cyberabad or, after losing that to Telangana, attempting a Singapore-style new capital at Amaravati. But considering that much work had progressed on the new capital and was largely acceptable to the gentry for whom it wasn't too far out of Hyderabad, Reddy might have to pay a political price for stalling the project. For there is a constituency he cannot ignore, that of farmers. The Naidu Government had cracked a land deal with them, whereby they pooled 34,000 acres of farmland in return for stakeholderhood of developed land. Now with global investors out of the city, its status reduced to just a legislative capital and unfinished towers turning it into a ghost town, the human cost would bear heavy on Reddy. As it is the crashing prices have meant that farmers have lost out on the land value. They can't reclaim their old land which has become fallow ever since they were acquired in 2016. Promised doles like annuity for crop loss, they feel cheated although the Reddy Government has increased the pension amount from the existing ₹2,500 to ₹5,000. With protesters at his doorstep and his intransigence, Reddy has a man-made crisis that he can ill-afford. His plan of devolving power across the State by developing Amaravati as the legislative, Visakhapatnam as the executive and Kurnool as the judicial capitals may be well-intentioned and help him assuage all his constituencies, particularly catapulting the cosmopolitan Visakhapatnam as a top-tier city, but is ridden with challenges. With the functions of the executive, legislature and judiciary being interconnected, requiring swift approvals and quick transfer of files, governance is bound to suffer a time lag while efficiencies will be compromised. The exchequer, too, will be under additional fiscal stress owing to logistical expenses. The infrastructural costs of building new spaces will make a further dent in the State Budget, though Reddy insists that firming up Amaravati would have been much more expensive. Most importantly, the movement of staff for allied or overlapping issues could end up disturbing the bureaucracy. Then there is the larger issue of a loss of face among investors, both global and domestic. Allegations of malpractices that the Reddy regime has been levelling against Naidu's contracts have scared prospective investors. The repudiation of past contracts has raised doubts about their sanctity in the State, which would henceforth be dependent on regime change and new governance priorities. This has already spooked most business houses. At the moment, Andhra Pradesh has topped the official ease of doing business index, relegating Telangana to the second spot. But given the decentralisation move, it may not be able to hold on to this advantage for long.

Decentralising capitals, though new to India, has been experimented in 15 countries across the world. In South Africa, for example, Pretoria is the administrative capital, Cape Town is the legislative capital and Bloemfontein is the judicial capital. In Sri Lanka, too, while Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte is its official capital and seat of national legislature, Colombo is the de facto seat of national executive and judicial bodies. Moreover, India, too, is not alien to having twin capitals because of seasonal reasons in Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh and the former State of Jammu & Kashmir. The constitutionality of having diversity of governance within the States through just distribution of powers, thus, stands the test. So long as it is kept within the realm of pragmatism than political sabre-rattling. Reddy's test will now be in the Upper House where his party does not have absolute majority and where the TDP is a thorn in the flesh. All the more reason for him to act in a prudent manner, so that his moniker of Bhramaravati (illusionary city) for Amaravati doesn't end up being used against him. The BJP with Pawan Kalyan, is waiting for him to make a mistake.

## Inequality rules

The way to grasp the current political climate is by understanding how inequity has grown over the decades



**T**he British charity Oxfam has come out with another annual report at a time when the World Economic Forum (WEF) held at the Swiss resort town of Davos is under way. The report gains eyeballs, loaded as it is with some stunning statistics to highlight "inequality" across the world. This year's report has some stunning numbers — the top one per cent of India's billionaires owns four times as much wealth as the poorest 70 per cent. On the global front, the top 22 richest men in the

world have more wealth than all the women in Africa. The details are quite shocking. While the calculations of the report have been questioned in the past, make no mistakes about the message it sends out: The world is a deeply iniquitous place. The extremely rich are the ones who are exponentially richer than those at the bottom of the human pyramid. With or without a report, evidence is there that the world is becoming more unequal, the rich are getting richer and the poor, well, poorer.

And when someone needs to decipher why there has been such a rise in a nativist Right-wing polity across the world, particularly in democracies, it would be wise to understand that people feel like they have been left behind by globalisation. But they blame other social constructs, too, multi-culturalism for example. Ergo, the leaders they vote for are the ones "who say it like it is." Of course, many of these elected men, and they are almost always men, do not have the necessary talent to do much about it. They, thus, blame previous administrations and on that front, their point must be accepted. For years, peace dividend allowed sycophancy, nepotism and corruption to bloom and far from making the world a better place, inequality accelerated. The technology revolution has propped up many billionaires but it has also started treating human beings as mere data points — their information being bought and sold without their knowledge. But what can be done about this? The breakdown in trust is massive but other than motivated philanthropy schemes, it would be prudent for the very rich to actually start contributing more to society. Governments have to realise that unmitigated development is not always a good thing, even if some people can become very rich. The poor will be hurt due to the impacts of climate change much more; they will suffer from societal breakdowns far more. While clinking their champagne glasses at Davos later this week, leaders need to realise that they might soon lose control of the narrative.

# Preventable reality

The comprehensive listing of threats that can emerge this year, published by the Astana Club, is specific to Eurasian countries but has lessons for the entire world



RK PACHAURI

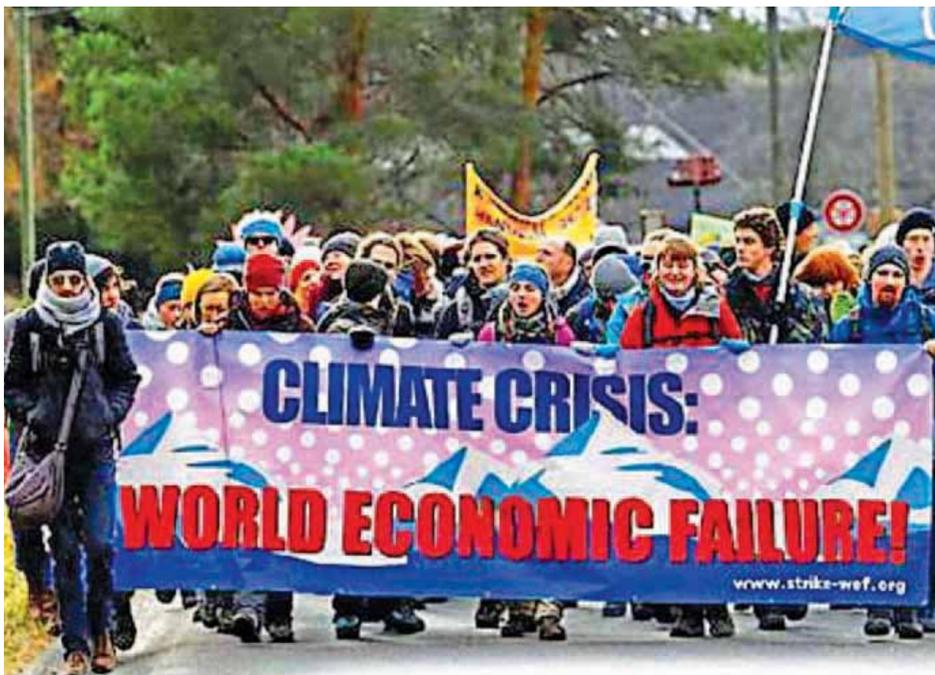
**T**he Astana Club based in Kazakhstan has brought out a useful document which assesses the top 10 risks for Eurasia in 2020. There are contributions from researchers and thinkers from all over the world, which have been incorporated while carrying out this assessment. Although the risks identified are specific to Eurasia, in effect, one could identify these as being applicable to almost any other part of the world.

The foreword of this document identifies China emerging as a new potential superpower. It also draws attention to China's economic strength as signified through the Belt and Road mega initiative. Eurasia being in the vicinity of China sees the changes in the balance of power that are now developing. It also expresses the fact that Russia has finally recovered from the chaos and devastation of the 1990s despite several sanctions and restrictions. As a result of this phase of recovery, it is expanding its influence far beyond post-Soviet borders. Concurrently, leaders such as India, Japan, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been identified as showing bold intentions to influence the international order. The document observes that no geo-political game can now play out without the participation of these new players.

The first of the 10 risks, which is identified, deals with the aftershock of the US presidential campaign. It looks at developments within the US and the efforts of the current administration to move in the direction of nationalism with possible isolation from global affairs and developments. The prediction made is that in the coming year, there will be more apparent manifestations of the unilateral approach to foreign policy, which obviously will have erratic consequences in a negative sense. In effect, the assessment of this first risk can be seen as not entirely related to aftershocks of the US presidential campaign but possibly more in terms of leading up to the presidential election, which implies several risks during the campaign itself.

It is obvious that the current process of impeachment, which the US Senate will be pursuing, will have major implications for the presidential election in November, 2020, as well as some risks for candidates running for the US Senate. It is also obvious that global developments initiated by the White House would be targeted, keeping in view the 2020 elections. While this Astana Club assessment was produced before the killing of Iranian Major General Soleimani, it can be concluded that to some extent, this attack on a very popular and respected general in Iran was clearly a "macho" act, which was perhaps designed to blunt the impacts of the current impeachment process against US President Donald Trump.

This document also highlights the fact



that as far as Iran is concerned, Trump will increase sanctions and the pressure that would be imposed on Tehran. On the other hand, the likelihood of a US-Iran military conflict, which posed certain danger in the summer of 2019, will decline this year. The opinion is also expressed that Trump is unlikely to initiate a military campaign against Iran, which could have uncontrollable consequences. There are other possible developments related to the Middle East, which could also constitute a risk politically to Eurasia. But, of course, there will be serious implications for other parts of the world, particularly for South Asia, with its proximity to both Eurasia and the countries of the Middle East.

The other risks identified in the study include the effects of global economic recession, escalation of the US-China confrontation, a new stage of the nuclear missile race, exacerbation of the battle for technological dominance, military escalation of the conflict around Iran, nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, a new wave of terrorism, aggressive nationalism and populism as well as large-scale climate change problems.

The prospect of a global economic recession is very real and this, combined with an inward looking policy of nationalism such as in the case of the US, could cause economic complications worldwide.

**“**  
**WHILE THE BACKBONE OF THE ISLAMIC STATE (IS) HAS GENERALLY BEEN DECIMATED, IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT RE-GROUPING BY THIS TERRORIST ORGANISATION COULD LEAD TO SEVERAL DANGERS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD. INDIA IS CONFRONTED BY STATE-SPONSORED TERRORISM IN OUR VICINITY AND THIS IS A SUBJECT THAT THE ENTIRE GLOBAL COMMUNITY AND INDIA WOULD NEED TO DEAL WITH**  
**”**

Also, in the case of the US, there is the real prospect of a further division between the Democrats and the Republicans, those who are supporters of Trump and those who are strongly opposed to his continuation as President. In the case of the Middle East, it seems unfortunate that Iran and the US have been at loggerheads for over 40 years now, which is affecting all developments in the wake of the Iranian revolution. Developments in 2020 will continue to be affected by an obvious bias on the part of the US openly favouring some Middle Eastern nations.

The issue of terrorism is also alive. While the backbone of the Islamic State (IS) has generally been decimated, it is entirely possible that re-grouping by this terrorist organisation could lead to several dangers in different parts of the world. India is confronted by State-sponsored terrorism in its vicinity and this is a subject that the entire global community and it would need to deal with. The extent of this threat is likely to increase as a result of frustration within a country which is our neighbour. We have to be alive to this as well as other terrorist threats across the globe.

With respect to climate change, we need to come up with scenarios on how we may be able to bring about a transition from fossil fuels to low carbon sources of energy. Far

more immediate is the issue of impacts of climate change, which would pose increasing risks across the globe. Projections of extreme events, which the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had clearly brought out 11 years ago, is the increase in intensity and frequency of disasters and extreme events. A typical but unfortunate example of this is provided by the raging forest fires, which recently affected several parts of Australia, followed immediately by extreme precipitation events which led to flooding and excessive damage.

All in all, it is important that the Astana Club has come up with a comprehensive listing of threats, which can emerge during 2020 and, therefore, extending into this decade as a whole.

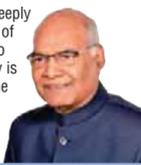
Kazakhstan and several Eurasian countries may lie beyond the Himalayan range but in terms of proximity, they are in some cases very close to us in terms of geographical distance. India should, perhaps, engage far more closely with countries of the region and exercise its soft power, including the flow of knowledge, education and research on issues that have a bearing on the region. The threats for Eurasia apply equally to India as well.

(The writer is former chairman, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2002-15)

## SOUNDBITE

A democracy like ours deeply relies on the uncovering of facts and a willingness to debate them. Democracy is meaningful only when the citizen is well informed.

President — Ram Nath Kovind



There's right and there's wrong, and there's common sense and there's abuse of power and as a citizen I have every right to voice my opinion.

Hollywood veteran — Robert De Niro



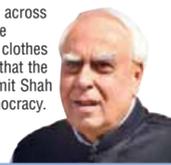
People are more generally aware now. The climate and the environment is a hot topic. But from another perspective, pretty much nothing has been done.

Climate campaigner — Greta Thunberg



Protests of people across India (who can't be recognised by the clothes they wear) reflect that the duo Modi/J and Amit Shah are a drag on democracy.

Congress leader — Kapil Sibal



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Technological feat

**Sir** — An Australian developer has produced an app that allows people to upload a photo of someone else and match it with other photos of people and their location. Police in America have already tested and successfully used it to arrest one person. The introduction of cameras on mobile phones has led to millions of photos being taken and far too many being put online for us to ignore. The Instagrammers and influencers may not realise that by default, the location is embedded in their photos. The technology that allows facial recognition is under attack from privacy advocates, but why? If you have done nothing wrong, then you have nothing to hide. Although the reality is that some people err in their life choices. The concern of people being recognised in photos has gone too far with google maps and street view blurring number plates on cars and people's faces. People should be happy to be known and seen although not obsessively. Live a good life and be seen doing it.  
**Dennis Fitzgerald**  
 Melbourne

### Indian foreign policy takes a beating

**N**one will dispute the fact that the foreign policy as is pursued by the ruling dispensation has dented the good relationship India has been maintaining with other nations, particularly immediate neighbours. Maintaining cordial relations with other nations, even after effectively recording dissent on matters affecting us, requires a lot of suave diplomacy, which is lacking in present-day leaders. Though he is a career diplomat and has also served as the Foreign Secretary, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is found to be undiplomatic in his deliveries. He has also been more aggressive, muscular in his thoughts, words and deeds, particularly after sporting the BJP party cap.

At a time when the BJP Government is hell-bent on implementing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), National Population Register (NPR) and National Register of Citizens (NRC), it has become inevitable on the part of the External Affairs Minister to play second fiddle and hand sell the schemes despite the damage such accusations of persecution of minorities are going to cause to our relationship with



Bangladesh and Afghanistan. It appears that Indian diplomacy has gone for a toss and has suffered an irreparable damage. Jaishankar has failed to handle the sensitive issue with utmost care. This is also evident from the strong statements made by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and former Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai against the CAA.

Tharcius S Fernando  
 Chennai

### Recognising Nadkarni

**Sir** — Bapu Nadkarni, who passed away recently, leaves behind an incredible legacy in bowling. In 1964, he bowled 131 consecutive balls without conceding any runs during a Test innings against England. He had similar

economical bowling averages in earlier matches against Pakistan in Kanpur and Delhi in the 1960-61 series. His economy rate across his first-class career was less than two.

He was one of the finest all-rounders of the time. His maiden over tally is difficult to match. It is unfortunate that the present

cricketers, who play at a time of immense money and fame in the sport, are honoured frequently while players of yesteryear are forgotten. It would be even better if a series of postage stamps of older cricketers with notable contributions could be issued.

SC Agrawal  
 Delhi

### Challenges ahead

**Sir** — This refers to the editorial, "BJP's new chief" (January 21). Both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah wanted someone to take charge of the party who would be a non-challenger to them and JP Nadda was best suited for this. What, however, must be complimented is that Nadda is one leader who grew from the grassroot level to make his way to the top.

Nadda has taken charge amid protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). More importantly, will he be able to stop the reverses the party has seen in States? Surely, the BJP is on a weaker footing and the winning the forthcoming elections in Delhi and West Bengal will be challenging. One thing that will come handy for him is that he has been part of the Modi Government and knows both the organisation and the Government well. Can be a good catalyst between the two?  
**Bal Govind**  
 Noida

Send your feedback to:  
 letterstopioneer@gmail.com

**FIRST COLUMN**

## The enigma named Putin

What the Russian Premier needs is a position that gives him the final say when big changes loom but lets him abjure from daily exercise of power



**GWYNNE DYER**

Five years ago somebody posted photographs on the internet showing a man who looked a lot like Vladimir Putin in photographs from 1920 and 1941. In both shots he was in military uniform, defending the interests of the Russian people then as he still does today. But how can this be? He wasn't even born until 1952. So the wave of faux speculation starts that Putin is an immortal hero who returns at intervals to save Russia. Or maybe just that he's an immortal vampire. At any rate, he'll be around forever. It was nonsense then and it's nonsense now.

Last week the Russian President announced a wave of constitutional reforms and the vast majority of foreign observers, especially in the West, immediately jumped to the conclusion that Putin is changing the system so that he can stay in power forever. Twenty-five years in power (his current term as President expires in 2024) is not enough for Putin, the foreign pundits insist. He can't risk leaving power, they explain, or Russians would start asking where his vast illicit wealth came from. And then the pundits spin off into lengthy tirades about how he is Evil Incarnate, even comparing him to Joseph Stalin, who ruled the old Soviet Union from 1924 until his death in 1953. Stalin was a mass murderer without a conscience. Nobody was safe from his paranoia: He even killed most of the other heroes of the Bolshevik Revolution. He was probably responsible for the deaths of ten million Russians.

And Vladimir Putin? Here's the opinion of Simon Tisdall, columnist and former foreign editor of *The Guardian*: "Like Stalin, (Putin) has made many enemies and caused untold misery...cronyism and corruption on a vast scale...military aggression and disruption abroad....Again like Stalin, retirement is not a safe option for the ex-KGB spy who normalised assassination as a modern-day tool of state policy."

Where to start? Perhaps with the obvious point that Stalin killed tens of thousands for every death that can be attributed to Putin. Moreover, corruption in Putin's Russia is far less than it was in the 1990s under the first post-Communist President, the Western-backed Boris Yeltsin, a drunken puppet who made ordinary Russians cringe.

"Military aggression and disruption abroad?" Guilty as charged, in the illegal restoration of Crimea to Russian control (though most people in Crimea welcomed it) and in backing anti-Government rebels in two provinces of eastern Ukraine. But there is a litany of Western invasions and military interventions (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Serbia, Syria, Yemen) that didn't meet the highest legal standards either and had equally messy outcomes. Nor do Western Governments lag behind on the assassination front.

More importantly, Russia's western border is a 1,000 km east of where it was in 1914. It is a minimum of 300 km east of where it was as recently as 1991. Putin has not challenged that new frontier once (with the partial exception of Ukraine) in 21 years in office. You could have a much more frightening and disruptive person than Putin in the Kremlin.

The old KGB was a ruthless organisation but also a rational and realistic one. Putin is a man steeped in that tradition, not an adventurer or a fantasist, and we should probably be grateful for that. So what are the odds that he will still be running things after 2024? He will be 72 years old in 2024. Definitely time to start thinking about what happens after he's gone. And I'm going to make a bold assumption here: That he is a Russian patriot. Being Russian means that he fears disorder above all else: Russians sometimes call themselves "Italians of the North" and they don't mean it in a good way. So he wants a strong state, run with a firm hand, even after he has retired, which means that a clear and orderly succession is very important. However, living on under somebody else's firm hand is not an attractive prospect for Putin. He may or may not have fabulous sums of stolen money tucked away — the evidence for that is unclear — but you make a lot of enemies in a quarter-century in power and they could hurt you badly after you have relinquished it. So what Putin needs is a position that gives him the final constitutional say when big changes loom but lets him withdraw from the daily exercise of power. Something like the chairmanship of a strengthened State Council that can overrule both President and Prime Minister when necessary (but does so very rarely). And lo! That appears to be exactly what he has in mind. The details of his proposed reforms are not yet clear but a weaker President, a stronger Prime Minister and a State Council presiding serenely from afar are all part of the package. I'm not saying that's what will actually happen, but I think it's what he'd like to happen.

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

**POINTCOUNTERPOINT**

**THEY HAVE GONE TO THE SUPREME COURT (OVER THE CAA) WITHOUT INFORMING ME. THAT IS AN UNLAWFUL ACT. NOT LEGALLY CORRECT.**

—KERALA GOVERNOR  
**ARIF MOHAMMAD KHAN**



**THE CHIEF MINISTER WAS NOT DUTY-BOUND TO HAVE INFORMED THE GOVERNOR BEFORE MOVING THE SUPREME COURT ON THE CAA.**

—FORMER KERALA GOVERNOR  
**P SATHASIVAM**

# Act, before it is too late

Taking a 'fair' and 'realistic' view of all receipts and expenditure of the Govt, its fiscal deficit is turning out to be almost double the three per cent target sought by the NK Singh panel



**UTTAM GUPTA**

Having achieved the fiscal deficit (FD) target for three years in a row, the Narendra Modi Government missed it in 2017-18 and 2018-19. During 2017-18, the actual FD expressed as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 3.5 per cent against the target of 3.2 per cent. For 2018-19, the then Finance Minister, Arun Jaitley had set a target of 3.3 per cent as against three per cent sought by a committee under NK Singh, former Expenditure Secretary and current Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission.

The committee was set up in 2016 to review the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003, with a mandate to revamp it and recommend a path for the next six years. It advocated a FD target of 2.5 per cent, revenue deficit 0.8 per cent, combined Centre-State debt ceiling of 60 per cent and a Central debt ceiling of 40 per cent for 2022-23. It recommended three per cent FD for 2018-19. It also allowed the Government to breach the target in case of "far-reaching structural reforms with unanticipated fiscal implications."

Vide the Finance Bill, 2018-19 the Government amended the FRBM Act to allow it to achieve three per cent FD by 2020-21 instead of 2018-19 recommended by the committee. Further, it sought the debt limit of 40 per cent by the Centre (60 per cent for Centre and States) to be reached by 2024-25 instead of 2022-23 mandated by the committee.

During 2018-19, the Government posted 3.4 per cent (against the target of 3.3 per cent), that too by taking recourse to what is termed as "financial engineering." It paid ₹60,000 crore less to the Food Corporation of India (FCI) towards food subsidy as reimbursement of the excess of the cost of procurement, handling and distribution over the sale price to the beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). It paid ₹32,000 crore less to State-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) viz. Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and so on, for selling LPG and kerosene at subsidised prices. Likewise, short payments to manufacturers for fertiliser subsidy were about ₹40,000 crore.

The above three so-called "deferred payments" add up to ₹1,32,000 crore. In addition, public undertakings like the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO), National Housing Bank (NHB), Rural Electrification Corporation (REC), Power Finance Corporation (PFC), National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) borrowed on behalf of the Government to fund welfare schemes such as rural and urban affordable housing, sanitation and irrigation projects, rural electrification schemes (including free electricity connections to households) highways and railway projects. Termed Extra-Budgetary Resources (EBRs), these totalled ₹280,000 crore.

All put together, the money, a whopping ₹412,000 crore, should have been paid by the Government from its Budget. But it decided to make other entities pay for it or borrow on its behalf. This translates to about 2.3 per cent of the GDP.

**“**  
 IN THE BACKDROP OF THE SLOWDOWN IN GROWTH, EVEN AS COMMENTATORS ARE ADVOCATING SOME LENIENCY IN THE FISCAL CONSOLIDATION DRIVE, THE REALITY IS THAT ALREADY, THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL RELAXATION THROUGH IT IS GOING UNRECOGNISED. UNDER THE 'BUSINESS AS USUAL' SCENARIO, THE ECONOMY MAY FACE CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD RECOGNISE THAT THE PROBLEM EXISTS AND STOP FUDDING ITS ACCOUNTS. BUT THIS BY ITSELF WON'T HELP  
**”**



Including this, the FD for 2018-19 would have been 5.7 per cent instead of 3.4 per cent reported in the Budget. During 2017-18 also, according to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), the FD was suppressed by 2.4 per cent, courtesy EBRs.

The current year for which the FD target is kept at 3.3 per cent (same as the target for 2018-19), will also end up with a repeat of the scenario in the previous two years.

Let us look at how slippage from the target is likely to pan out. First, at the time of the Budget presentation, the FD projection at 3.3 per cent or about ₹700,000 crore in value term was based on a nominal GDP growth of 12 per cent — from ₹188,00,000 crore during 2018-19 to ₹211,00,000 crore during 2019-20. Against this, the actual growth is estimated to be 7.5 per cent implying a GDP of about ₹202,00,000 crore during 2019-20. Even if the deficit were to be kept at ₹700,000 crore, as percentage of the lower than initially projected GDP or ₹202,00,000 crore (or "denominator" effect), this will be 3.46 per cent.

That apart, even in absolute terms, the deficit is expected to be much higher than ₹700,000 crore. First, given the slow pace of tax collection so far till November 2019 — both direct and indirect — and little prospect of any major recovery in the remaining four months, the collection during the year is expected to fall short of the Budget estimate by about ₹200,000 crore. Second, the proceeds of disinvestment are expected to miss the target by a whopping ₹80,000 crore (the Budget estimate of ₹1,05,00,000 crore was based largely on strategic sale of BPCL, Air India and so on which is unlikely to materialise before March 31, 2020).

So, the total shortfall in collection — on both these counts — adds up to ₹2,80,000 crore. Add to this, fertiliser subsidy arrears of about ₹60,000 crore (according to the industry body Fertiliser Association of India); unpaid food sub-

sidy bills of the FCI at ₹60,000 crore and about ₹30,000 crore as unpaid fuel subsidy bills to OMCs. That takes the grand total to ₹430,000 crore. This will push the actual deficit to ₹1,130,000 crore which translates to 5.6 per cent. This does not capture the EBRs used to fund the Government's welfare schemes. If that is included then, the deficit would be even higher.

Taking a "fair" and "realistic" view of all receipts and expenditure of the Union Government, its fiscal deficit is thus turning out to be almost double the three per cent target handed out by the NK Singh Committee. Though, in the balance sheet, it may still show a figure close to the target and brandish that it is sticking to the fiscal consolidation glide path, that is made possible through an act of skulduggery. But, this is not a sustainable situation.

Apart from the spillover effect on PSUs, other agencies of the Government such as the FCI and others, through whom subsidy is administered (e.g. fertiliser manufacturers) who are made to bear the brunt by way of liquidity problems, interest cost, recurring losses and so on, the most serious damage is done due to the "complacency" this breeds with regard to fiscal management. When, the target is achieved without actually bringing about reduction in expenditure or boosting revenue or a combination of both, why would our planners and policymakers take credible measures in that direction?

For instance, a major reason for the ballooning subsidy on urea is its ridiculously low MRP (the current price is just 10 per cent higher than it was in 2002). This is despite the recommendation of the Expenditure Reforms Commission (ERC) in 2000 to increase steps to eliminate the gap between the cost and price over five years. No action on this front implies increasing subsidy in the face of ever-increasing cost. But, by rolling over payments year-after-year and showing less in the Budget, the man-

darins in the Finance Ministry skirt the real issue.

Likewise, by not releasing food subsidy dues to FCI and showing less expenditure in the Budget, they run away from dealing with the real factors viz. ridiculously low selling price of food grain, high inefficiency in handling operations by agencies and giving millions of non-deserving access to the food security system.

The same holds for oil subsidy (mainly LPG and kerosene).

In the backdrop of the slowdown in growth, even as commentators are advocating some leniency in the fiscal consolidation drive, the reality is that already, there is substantial relaxation though it is going unrecognised. Under the "business as usual" scenario, the economy may face catastrophic consequences. The Government should act before it is too late. For that, it should recognise that the problem exists and stop fudging its accounts. But, this by itself won't help.

This has to be followed up by some hardcore reforms such as removal of controls in key areas such as fertilisers, food, fuel and power, giving subsidy through direct benefit transfer (DBT), substantial pruning of the number of beneficiaries under welfare schemes and removing inefficiencies at various levels in the supply chain. This will require shedding populism and cracking down on vested interest (especially corrupt politicians and bureaucrats who are gaining a lot from the existing dispensation) with alacrity.

Modi should show the gumption to crack the whip. Having an absolute majority in the Parliament and four-and-a-half years to go, he can afford to do. Even so, time and again, he has reiterated his commitment to do things in the overall national interest even if it leads to a political backlash. Hence, he should go ahead.

(The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst)

# Unlock the Capital's economic potential

Regularising unauthorised colonies is a long-standing issue that needs to be resolved soon because not only will it benefit the people living in these areas but will also add to the Government's coffers and provide an entry point for residents into the formal financial markets



**PRERNA PRABHAKAR**

Delhi's urban planning policies have been characterised by the inability of the agencies concerned to facilitate adequate supply of affordable, formal housing stock for its residents. As a result, informal housing has crept up across large parts of the national Capital. Unauthorised Colonies (UACs) are one form of such informal housing categories and have grown at an unprecedented rate — from 110 in 1961, to nearly 1,800 colonies today. These UACs cater largely to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and Low Income Groups (LIG) that reside in the city.

While numerous efforts have been made to regularise these colonies to

address problems emanating from their informality, the situation has barely improved. This has been a result of institutional multiplicity coupled with the political motives of elected representatives at various levels.

Political establishments target the UAC population for garnering votes and make promises about regularisation and development. However, once elected, they fail to deliver on them.

In 2008, just before the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, the then Central Government issued a notification to regularise UACs and invited applications from these colonies. However, the process went nowhere post applications.

This time, the Narendra Modi-led BJP Government at the Centre, close to the Delhi Assembly elections in February 8, has passed a Bill in the Parliament to confer ownership rights on 40 lakh people living in unauthorised colonies. In this regard, Prime Minister Modi addressed a rally in New Delhi and said, "We took the initiative to do the work which many previous Governments did not do."

As per the Bill, these rights will be conferred for built-up plots as well as

vacant plots on payment of nominal charges.

Subsequently, any owner of a 100 sq mt residential plot in an unauthorised colony will have to pay at least ₹19,980 (depending on the zone in which the colony falls) to acquire the ownership certificate. This addresses the affordability concern in case of the UAC population while attempting to recover the land cost from the residents of these colonies.

This measure can have positive benefits for the city's economy. Implementing this notification can provide an entry point for the residents into the formal financial markets. This affirmed ownership can enable property owners to seek collateral against their houses. Such a move is expected to add around 800,000 potential customers to the housing loans market, providing the necessary push to the national Capital's economy.

With the registration of UAC households, the decision is likely to boost further formal transactions, hence adding to the Government's stamp duty revenue.

However, the Bill does not offer any clarity on the status of transaction of a plot/house/property in the existing colony.

This clarity is important to solve the issue of creating a formal and affordable housing market in these colonies. In the absence of clear information, it may be assumed that with the conferment of the ownership rights to a UAC plot owner, the subsequent registration of sale deed will take place at the conventional circle rates of the colony.

In this case, the resident living in an UAC household acquires the ownership rights of a 100 sq mt plot for at least ₹19,980; however he/she would be selling the same property for ₹1.6 crore, based on conventional circle rates.

This begs the question — do properties in these localities really merit this price, given the inadequate infrastructure? In this regard, to maintain a balanced buyer-seller dynamics, policymakers should reconsider the transaction prices for these households. Without this necessary revision, it is possible that these prices create an excess supply condition and consequently distort the market.

Another route through which this Bill is likely to inflate the Government's revenue is through Property Tax obligation for the registered UAC households.

Although the notification is silent on the issue of Property Tax collection from these colonies, the forthcoming Bill is likely to offer clarity in this regard. With legal ownership, the UAC residents will be obliged to pay the annual property tax, which will be a significant contributor to its maintenance services.

To reap these possible economic gains from the Bill, it is vital that the implementation of the entire process is not complex. From the perspective of the applicants, the suggested process involves certain tools and techniques that are likely to be beyond their understanding, given their socio-economic profile. Thus, training and awareness would be required to make the programme successful and the Delhi Government must take the lead on it by substantiating the need for institutional coordination.

Discussions with a few residents of UACs in Delhi have brought out that given their past experience, residents are still apprehensive about the actual implementation of the Bill and have not gone ahead with the application process on the online portal. In some cases, people are not even aware of the procedural require-

ment.

This is reflected by the fact that there are only a handful of applications on the DDA's portal — 166 out of around 800,000 households in the city. Against this pessimistic situation, it is imperative that for the desired success rate of this policy, volunteers are appointed to assist the UAC residents in the process. As of now, there are only 25 help desks and they are very unlikely to serve the purpose of efficiently facilitating the process.

Effective implementation of this proposed policy can unlock the substantial economic potential of the city's land and housing markets.

The issue of UACs in Delhi has gone on for far too long and it is high time that it gets resolved for better economic outcomes. Whether the vicious circle around policy implementation for unauthorised colonies — with vote bank politics being the central point — will be broken this time around is likely to get clear after the Delhi Assembly elections.

(The writer is an Associate Fellow at the National Council of Applied Economic Research. The views expressed in this article are personal)

CAPSULE



**Atanu Das is MD and chief executive Bank of India**

**MUMBAI:** State-run Bank of India (BoI) on Tuesday said Atanu Kumar Das has been appointed as its managing director and chief executive officer for a period of three years. Das was serving as an executive director at the bank since February 2017. His appointment was announced by the personnel ministry on Monday. In his 26 years of banking experience, Das has been involved at both policy and operational levels. In BoI, he assumed the charge as Delhi regional head in January 2015. Prior to BoI, he was heading Vijaya Bank's Lucknow Region for more than three years. At Vijaya Bank's he has handled key departments as planning and development and also was posted as executive secretary to chairman and managing director for more than two years.



**RS Singh government director on SJVNL board**

**NEW DELHI:** State-owned power firm SJVNL on Tuesday said Himachal Pradesh's Additional Chief Secretary Ram Subhag Singh has been appointed as its part time government director. "Ministry of Power on 20th January, 2020 has appointed Ram Subhag Singh, Additional Chief Secretary (MPP & Power), Government of Himachal Pradesh as part time Government Director on the Board of the Company with immediate effect," the firm said in a BSE filing. He is appointed as nominee director of Himachal Pradesh on the Board of SJVNL Ltd (SJVNL) from January 20, 2020, the statement said. Singh is a 1987 batch Indian Administrative Services Officer of Himachal cadre. He is a doctorate in social sciences and also holds, post graduate diplomas in Human Resource Management and Public Administration.

**Sensex ends 205 pts lower; Nifty slips below 12,200**

**Mumbai:** Market benchmark Sensex dropped 205 points on Tuesday, led by losses in auto, banking, metal and FMCG stocks amid a sharp fall in other Asian markets on concerns over a deadly virus in China. After trading on a volatile note, the 30-share BSE index settled 205.10 points, or 0.49 per cent, lower at 41,323.81. Likewise, the broader NSE Nifty fell 54.70 points, or 0.45 per cent, to 12,169.85. Tata Steel was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 3.01 per cent, followed by M&M, Maruti, Asian Paints, PowerGrid, ITC and Axis Bank. On the other hand, Ultratech Cement, HDFC, Kotak Bank, ONGC and TCS ended with gains.

**AI HAS REPLACED ATOM BOMB AS BIGGEST FEAR: HUAWEI CEO**

PNS ■ DAVOS

Tech giant Huawei's founder and CEO Ren Zhengfei on Tuesday said atom bombs were the biggest fear once, but now there is fear over artificial intelligence, but people must realise that the development of technology is for good.



Speaking at a session on 'A Future Shaped by a Technology Arms Race' here at the WEF Annual Meeting, Zhengfei said AI is not as damaging as atom bombs. Speaking during the same session, historian Yuval Noah Harari, however, said the danger is not so obvious in AI as compared to atom bombs and there are benefits for some actors. "You can win the race and dominate the world. It's a conversation in Beijing and San Francisco - in Washington they don't really understand what's happening," he said. Harari said there is state surveillance in China, and surveillance capitalism in the US, with no serious third player in the arms race. "On the most shallow level it could be a repeat of the nineteenth century industrial revolution, when the leaders had the chance to dominate the world economically and politically... I understand the current arms race as an imperial arms race... You don't need to send the soldiers in if you have all the data on a country," Harari said. "To hack human beings, you need a lot of biological knowledge, enough computer power, enough data about me. You can hack my body, my brain, my life, you can reach a point where you know me better than I know myself," he said. Zhengfei is for good. Development of technology is for good, not for bad. Over the last thousands of years, technological advancement was very much in synch with people's evolution and people's fears over innovations like steam ships and the mechanical age were gradually overcome, said. "I believe in the face of new technologies humanity will be able to use them to benefit us. Most people aspire a good life, not a miserable life," the Huawei CEO said. "Atom bombs were the biggest fear when he was a boy. Today, we're seeing fear over AI but it's not as damaging as atom bombs," he said. "At Huawei, our research is so-called 'weak AI', where there are clear boundaries in terms of where AI can be applied," he said. On the US fears of China, Zhengfei said, "if you look at the education system in China, it's designed for the industrial age, so AI can't grow rapidly in China... The US is over-concerned. The US has got used to being the world number one." "Huawei used to be an admirer of the US, we learned a lot from them. We hired dozens of American consulting firms to learn how to manage our business. The US should feel proud of it, they have the US management system exported and implemented. They should not be overly concerned about Huawei and our position in the world."

**44** You can win the race and dominate the world. It's a conversation in Beijing and San Francisco - in Washington they don't really understand what's happening

— REN ZHENGFEI  
Huawei's founder and CEO

**Zomato acquires Uber Eats business in India**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Zomato on Tuesday said it has acquired the Indian business of Uber Eats in an all-stock deal that will give Uber 9.99 per cent stake in the Indian food delivery and restaurant discovery platform.



Uber Eats app in India will discontinue operations and direct restaurants, delivery partners, and users of the Uber Eats apps to the Zomato platform, effective Tuesday, Zomato said in a statement.

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The deal marks possible consolidation in the highly competitive and price-sensitive online food delivery market where most players are in the red.

In a regulatory filing to the BSE, Info Edge (India) - a shareholder in Zomato - said its shareholding in Zomato will stand reduced to about 22.71 per cent on fully converted and diluted basis upon closing of the transaction. The deal comes days after Zomato had raised USD 150 million in funding from existing investor Ant Financial, an Alibaba affiliate, at a USD 3 billion valuation.

Post money valuation of Zomato is USD 3.55 billion, sources in know of the matter said, adding that this transaction will add to a total of over 50 million orders per month on its platform, giving it around 55 per cent market share.

"We are proud to have pioneered restaurant discovery and to have created a leading food delivery business across more than 500 cities in India. This acquisition significantly strengthens our position in the category," Zomato Founder and CEO Deepinder Goyal said.

Uber Eats, which entered India in 2017, has about 26,000 restaurants listed on its platform from 41 cities. On accessing Uber Eats app, users were shown a message saying they can still use Uber Eats if they are travelling outside India. Discussions between Zomato and Uber have been on for months. Facing stiff competition from Zomato and Swiggy, Uber Eats had been making losses.

**GAIL ferries LNG in trucks over 1,700 km to push gas**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a first, state-owned gas utility GAIL India Ltd is ferrying imported LNG in trucks from Gujarat coast to Bhubaneswar in Odisha as part of a government push for a gas-based economy to reduce emission and carbon footprint.

**Gas so supplied is cheaper than alternate fuels such as diesel. LNG can also be used as a fuel directly in trucks and buses but there are only a handful of vehicles currently operating in the country using such fuel**



With gas pipelines yet to reach most parts of eastern India, GAIL has hired specialised cryogenic bullet trucks to transport imported liquefied natural gas from Dahej in Gujarat to Bhubaneswar, where it is used as CNG to fuel automobiles and piped gas as cooking fuel in kitchens, company Chairman and Managing Director Ashutosh Karnatak said.

LNG is environment-friendly natural gas turned into liquid at minus 160-degree Celsius for ease of transportation in ships and trucks.

"We started transporting LNG through trucks from Dahej to Bhubaneswar and have broken-even on the business," he told PTI here.

It takes about a week for the LNG truck to move from west coast to the east and on reaching Bhubaneswar LNG is regasified or converted back into its gaseous state at

an LNG Satellite Station, which was set up at a cost of Rs 10 crore. Following regasification, gas is moved in cascades to CNG dispensing stations and piped natural gas fuelling points.

Gas so supplied is cheaper than alternate fuels such as diesel. LNG can also be used as a fuel directly in trucks and buses but there are only a handful of vehicles currently operating in the country using such fuel.

"Gas is a happy fuel. It not just cuts vehicular emissions (caused by use of liquid fuels such as diesel) but also is an environment-friendly

replacement for coal," he said.

The government is targeting raising the share of natural gas in India's energy basket to 15 per cent by 2030 from the current 6.2 per cent.

Karnatak said the use of natural gas for generating power and producing fertilizers as well as fuel in steel and aluminum plants, besides city gas operations such as CNG to automobiles and piped cooking gas to households can help achieve the target.

Globally, natural gas constitutes 24 per cent of primary energy consumption. In Gujarat, the share of natural gas in its energy basket is 25-26 per cent because of a network of pipelines that takes the fuel from import or production source to consumption points.

Gas pipelines in India are presently concentrated in west and north, and GAIL is now laying new lines to the east, north-east, and south.



**Mutual funds add 68 lakh folios in 2019**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mutual fund industry added 68 lakh folios in 2019 taking the total tally to 8.7 crore, which suggests investors' understanding about market risks associated with such schemes. However, the pace of growth in folio numbers dropped in 2019 as compared to preceding three years. Industry experts attributed the trend to decline in investors account in debt oriented schemes as they were spooked by credit events in fixed income market.

Folios are numbers designated to individual investor accounts. An investor can have multiple folios.

According to the data available with markets regulator Sebi, the number of folios with 44 fund houses rose to 8.71 crore at the end of December 2019 from 8.03 crore at the end of December 2018, registering a gain of 68 lakh folios. In comparison, over 1.38 crore investor accounts were added in 2018, more than 1.36 crore in 2017, nearly 70 lakh in 2016 and close to 56 lakh in 2015, the data showed.

**Mercedes to launch AMG GT 63 S**

● Showcase A-Class limousine at Auto Expo

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz India on Tuesday said it will launch AMG GT 63 S 4MATIC 4 door Coupe in the Auto Expo next month.



Besides, the company will unveil all-new A-Class limousine, showcase the new GLA and EQC Edition 1886 during the biennial show.

"Participation in Auto Expo reflects our unwavering commitment to our customers who want to associate with a winning and fundamentally strong brand," Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO Martin Schwenk said in a statement.

The brand showcase planned by the company will not only fascinate its customers and enthusiasts, it will also send a strong message of excitement and positive sentiment, he added.

"As leaders in the luxury car industry, our investments at the Auto Expo firmly reiterate Mercedes-Benz's confidence in the long-term prospect of the luxury car market and the bullishness of its customers; it also underline our responsibility to drive the industry and provide a positive stimulus to the market," Schwenk noted. The 15th edition of India's

**44** Participation in Auto Expo reflects our unwavering commitment to our customers who want to associate with a winning and fundamentally strong brand

— MARTIN SCHWENK  
Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director and CEO

biennial flagship automobile show, Auto Expo, will be held from February 5-12 with many Chinese companies set to make their debut.

While the likes of Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors will continue to make their presence felt, notable absentees from the expo will be Honda, BMW and Ford, among others. Audi, Lexus, Volvo and Jaguar Land Rover are also reportedly not participating in the Auto Expo 2020.



**Apollo Hospitals, Bajaj Finserv unveils Health EMI Card**

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Healthcare major Apollo Hospitals on Tuesday unveiled co-branded health EMI card in association with Bajaj Finance Ltd to ensure patients undergo hassle-free payment during hospitalisation. "Users of this co-branded healthcare card will be able to convert their medical expenditure into no cost EMIs that can be repaid over a period of 12 months", officials said here.

The Apollo Hospitals-Bajaj Finserv Health EMI (Easy Monthly Instalment) card offers financing and quick loan processing with minimal paperwork avoiding documentation.

Apollo Hospitals Group and Bajaj Finserv had previously joined hands to offer 100 per cent finance on all healthcare and diagnostic services.

Tuesday's launch would help people facing medical emergency, as well as those who are not able to bear the cost upfront.

**Embassy Group forms new firm Olive to enter co-living**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leading realty firm Embassy Group on Tuesday announced an investment of up to Rs 1,000 crore to develop six greenfield co-living properties across major cities to meet the growing need of shared rental homes for students and co-living professionals.

Bengaluru-based Embassy Group, which last year launched India's first real estate investment trust (REIT) and runs co-working business WeWork India, will operate co-living business under a separate firm 'Olive by Embassy'.

"We are launching a new firm and brand 'Olive' for our co-living business which is

● To invest Rs 1k crore to build 6 centres



now emerging as a separate asset class. The objective is to disrupt the PG (accommodation) market which is unorganised and poorly managed,"

Embassy group Chief Operating Officer Aditya Virwani said. The company has identified two land parcels to develop co-living centres in

Bengaluru and Chennai, said Virwani, who is also co-founder of Olive. "We are targeting to start development of 5-6 greenfield co-living properties this year with capacity of 5,000-10,000 beds," he said, adding that the company would operate in a price range of Rs 10,000-20,000 per bed. The first centre is expected to be operational by middle of the next year. Asked about investment, Virwani said the total project cost could be around Rs 800-1,000 crore, including land cost. Embassy group would invest fund in the co-living

business. "We will go to the market to raise funds after establishing the brand," he said. The company plans to expand co-living business in cities like Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune and Delhi NCR. The first phase will see the launch of 20,000 beds — Bengaluru 15,000, Chennai 2,500 and Pune 2,500. It is also open to tie up with land owners to develop co-living centres.

Virwani said the yield in co-living business is almost similar to commercial properties of 7-8 per cent.

"The shared economy concept has percolated all aspects of society, creating unprecedented disruptions as well as opportunities.

"The shared economy concept has percolated all aspects of society, creating unprecedented disruptions as well as opportunities.

**Reliance answer to trio of Exxon, AT&T, Amazon**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries is India's answer to US giants Exxon, AT&T and Amazon - all rolled into one, Bernstein Research said on Tuesday.

"Reliance has disrupted the energy and telecoms industry in India and is on the cusp of doing the same to retail, fintech, and media," it said in a report adding the company has an enviable track record of innovation and execution.

For the oil-to-telecom conglomerate, energy remains core business and is expected to further expand as India is forecast to be the fastest-growing market for fuel and chemical products over the next decade, it said adding the company's partnership with BP of the UK and Saudi Aramco will support this. Reliance owns the world's largest single-site oil refining complex and has multiple petrochemical plants. Three years back it forayed into telecom business and has reached 34 per cent share of market revenue.

"Based on the current net add run-rates it will likely reach 44 per cent share by the end of the next financial year," Bernstein said.

On its retail foray, it said Reliance is the offline leader



with USD 18.5 billion of revenues coming from 11,000-plus stores. "The company is best positioned in New Commerce - digitizing the neighbourhood stores and in e-commerce (grocery/fashion categories)."

Also, fintech is another area in which Reliance is well positioned, it said identifying digitizing the kirana stores to accept digital payments and distributing mutual funds through Fio Money (payment app) as business opportunities.

Stating that media offers unique opportunities and synergies with telco, the analyst said Reliance has the dominant OTT platforms in India with content partnerships with Disney and Viacom.

"With activities spanning oil and gas, telecoms, retail media and fintech, Reliance is one of the most diversified conglomerates in India if not the world. There is simply no other company like it," Bernstein said.

**'Staff spend over 3 hrs a day on easily automatable tasks'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Office workers are ready to welcome automation of repetitive digital tasks, as on an average employees spend more than three hours a day on mundane computer tasks which are not part of their primary job and are ripe for human error, a survey said on Tuesday.

According to a global study commissioned by Automation Anywhere, in India, out of 1,000 participants surveyed, 88 per cent believe humans should not be carrying out repetitive administrative tasks if they can be automated.



The research by the robotic process automation player noted that nearly half of workers surveyed found digital administration boring and a poor use of their skills, while

majority of respondents said it gets in the way of doing their main job and reduces their overall productivity.

With an 8-hour workday being the global norm, accord-

**With an 8-hour workday being the global norm, according to the survey, the average employee loses 60 hours per month to easily automatable tasks**

ing to the survey, the average employee loses 60 hours per month to easily automatable tasks.

By deploying a digital workforce and automating these repetitive tasks, employees could be given back a quarter of their annual work time (4.5 months) to focus on more

meaningful work, boosting productivity and overall business value.

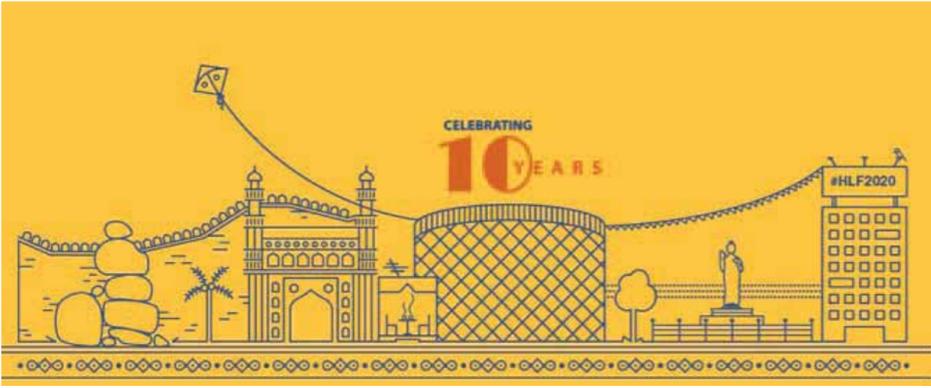
At the very top of the "hated task" heap is general data entry - manually inputting data into a computer or other devices, followed closely by managing e-mail traffic and filing digital documents - such as docu-

ments, spreadsheets, images or PDFs - into the correct digital folder.

Compiling reports from IT and software systems and invoice management round out the top five most hated tasks, the survey noted.

"Close to 80 per cent of the participants in India believe that admin work is an obstacle for them to do their main job," said Milan Sheth, Executive Vice President India, Middle East & Africa, Automation Anywhere.

Sheth further said "workers can focus on higher value tasks if the mundane repetitive tasks can be automated".



The 10th edition of the three-day Hyderabad Literary Festival will be held this Friday at Vidyaranya School. V SATEESH REDDY writes about the highlights of HLF this year that include a variety of literary programmes scheduled and the other attractions bound to draw in a large crowd



## Literary bug ready to BITE HYDERABADIS



All is set for the tenth edition of the Hyderabad Literary Festival which is scheduled to be held from January 24 to 26 at Vidyaranya School, Hyderabad.

The festival, that began 10 years ago, remained as a platform for literary lovers across the country. The HLF is organised by the Hyderabad Literary Trust in association with the Government of Telangana and with the support of several academic, literary, cultural organisations and publishing houses from across the country.

Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Amita Desai, one of the festival directors of HLF said, "This year, the festival has begun ten weeks early. We have been conducting events on Festival Fridays across various locations in Hyderabad. We have completed nine of these events till date and the tenth one begins with the inauguration of the tenth edition of HLF this Friday. During these past Fridays we have conducted various literary events such as musical evenings at venues where people gather like Lamakaan, Goethe Zentrum, Phoenix Arena and more."

For this edition, the guest nation is Australia and the language in focus is Malayalam. Around 30 per cent of speakers at the festival are said to be from various countries. Amita Desai informed that the events at the festival include literary sessions, Kaavya Dhaara, stage talks, storytelling, interludes, cultural events, workshops, exhibitions, moving images talks, film screenings, Youngistaan Nukkad, Nanha Nukkad, and more.

About Youngistaan Nukkad, Amita shares, "The fourth edition of Youngistaan Nukkad at the Hyderabad Literary Festival 2020 focuses on celebrating the aspirations of youth. It will be an amalgamation of how creative art forms is performed in an exclusive corner dedicated to the youth at the most happening festival of the city. This edition of Youngistaan Nukkad will see new elements in the form of featured acts, street gallery, and open mic ensuring an entertaining variety. It will be a corner for glorifying art, dreams, passions and fun."

She informed that filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan will be the keynote speaker this year. She adds, "Many important interludes such as Girish Karnad: In Memoriam, will be a part of the festival. Another highlight is the play, Framed as a Terrorist by Vijit Singh. The story is a theatrical adaptation of a real-life incident about a student who travels to Karachi to meet his sister. He gets framed as a

terrorist and the play is about his time in jail and his struggle against the false case with an unwavering spirit." On a concluding note, Amita shares, "The HLF is a festival by the citizens and for the citizens; free for all. Last year around 12,000 people participated and this year we are expecting more than 15,000. We are also requesting people to carry their own water bottles to reduce plastic wastage."

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## TICKLING THE FUNNY BONES

Glendale Academy International celebrated theatre over the weekend by staging its annual play *Charley's Aunt* at its campus. Written by Brandon Thomas, the original play holds a record of 1,466 shows and has been adapted and performed by many till date. Directed by Abhimanyu Acharya, the three-act play is a hilarious drama revolving around love stories, mistaken identities, impersonation and endless confusions. There is never a dull moment in the

play. Even the emotional sequences can't keep you from cracking up. To bring the best on stage and do the justice to a well-crafted script, the student artists of Glendale invested their two months in rehearsals. With a total of 15 crew members, including 10 on stage artistes and five technicians, everything was well managed by students and faculties. The ensemble gave its 100 per cent to make the performance look magical on stage. Not only the students but also the parents, the theatre-goers and others con-

tributed to the cause. It was a houseful show with nearly 500 showing up to witness the performance. Writer and director Jagadeesh Daneti was the chief guest of the event. The writer-director who has collaborated with many in the West is now ready to add one more feather to his cap by collaborating with Johnny Martin next. After the performance, a male and a female artist were awarded as best actors in the memory of late Bashiruddin Khan, founder of Glendale Academy International. — PNS

## Bringing back smiles

Eleven students of renowned Mohiniyattam dancer Anita Peter, founder of Lasya Drutha and disciple of Sreedevi Unni, performed for the elderly over the weekend. Anita says, "Dancing is an art where one adorns the jewels of humility, respect and wisdom through their learning and experience and this is the greatest blessing that my students and I will carry through the years for being able to express through dance."

Dancers Sharanya Kedarnath, Rukmini Kedarnath, Pooja Nair, Prabha Satiraju, Dr Sandhya, Vyapti Nair, Meera Eashwaran, Anita Biju, Kruti Nair, Aadya Kurup and Amritha danced along with their Anita Peter. Little Aadya began the evening by performing Ananda Ganapathy in Ragam Puraneer, Jathiswararam in Ragam Chenchurutti, Padam Krishna Nee Begane Baro in Ragam Kalyani, Shiva Stotram in Ragamalika, Navarasanjali in Ragamalika, Ashtapadi in Ragam Revagupti. The dances were followed by the ballet

*Mohaname Gandhi* with the lyrics in Telugu. The ballet is based on the Father of our Nation, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and portrays his life and how he continues to inspire millions of people. "I have heard the story of Lord Vishnu transforming into Mohini for the distribution of Amrut during the churning of the ocean for eternal life. Today I have seen so many Mohinis in front of my eyes and we have all been given the Amrut through their beautiful performance," said the eldest resident who himself is a Carnatic music and Telugu scholar. — PNS





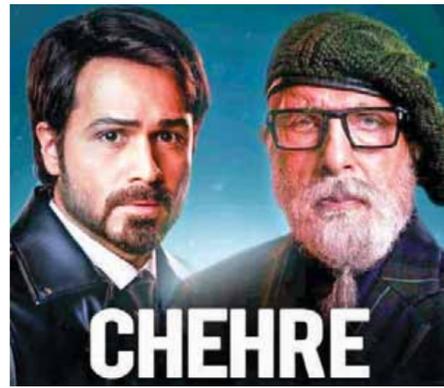
## AMITABH BACHCHAN'S CHEHRE GETS NEW RELEASE DATE

**A**mitabh Bachchan and Emraan Hashmi's mystery thriller *Chehre*, which was scheduled to release on April 24, will now open on July 17.

The thriller has been helmed by Rummy Jafry and produced by Anand Pandit. *Chehre* has been moved from its earlier April release date, on a special request

from Shoojit Sircar and Producer Ronnie Lahiri — the makers of *Gulabo Sitabo*. Talking about the new release date, Pandit said: "Yes we have moved *Chehre* to July 17, upon a special request from the makers of *Gulabo Sitabo*. We have always had a fantastic association with Shoojit Sircar and Ronnie Lahiri, and seeing as it was mutually beneficial to not only all of us

to give a good release window to these exciting movies, but also to Mr Bachchan's fans, we decided to now release *Chehre* on July 17." To this, Producer Ronnie Lahiri of Rising Sun Films, added: "Our film was ready and we were keen to release it in April. We share a great rapport with Anand Pandit and as the *Chehre* shoot was going on, we humbly request-



## Saif's 'concept of India' draws social media ire

**A**ctor Saif Ali Khan is being massively trolled for his comment on Indian history. "I don't think this is history," Saif said, talking about his latest release, the historical drama *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*, adding: "I don't think there was a concept of India till the British gave it one."

Saif's comment came in an interview when he was asked to comment on the political subtext of the film, reports *news18.com*. "For some reason I didn't take a stand. Maybe next time I would. I was very excited to play the role because it's a delicious role. But when people say this is history, I don't think this is history. I am quite aware of what the history was. I don't think there was a concept of India till perhaps the British gave it one. I don't think there is really any constructive point in arguing about loudly, provided you yourself know why you're doing it," Saif said.

## Kangana wants Deepika to say sorry for TikTok challenge on Chhapaak 'look', says sister Rangoli was hurt

**A**ctor Kangana Ranaut has called for Deepika Padukone to apologise for appearing in a promotional video for the film *Chhapaak*, which has been criticised for being insensitive. In an interview to *India Today*, Kangana said, invoking her sister's plight, "Rangoli is an acid attack survivor and she was very hurt seeing the video. Sometimes, marketing teams tend to go overboard with their promotions, and I am sure Deepika must be having some explanation for this."

In the controversial video where *Chhapaak* is being promoted, Deepika set about a challenge for a TikTok makeup artist to recreate three of her 'looks' from her films, including that of Malti in *Chhapaak*. Deepika



right, but if I were given the choice I would never stand behind the *Tukde Tukde gang*. Rangoli had earlier mocked Deepika for celebrating the success of her organisation, the Live Laugh Love foundation. The organisation aims to create awareness and provide support for those suf-

fering from mental illness. "What is happening here? Is this depression? These are the people who raise issues against the word 'mental' but are dancing like guests at a wedding on videos about depression. What a disgusting way to rake publicity in the name of depression," Rangoli had written in a tweet. — PTI



### FUN

#### ARCHIE

YOU'RE LATE, ARCHIE! YOUR FRIENDS HAVE ALREADY LEFT!

STORY OF MY LIFE!

THEY WAITED AN EXTRA HOUR BECAUSE THEY HEARD YOU GOT POTION FOR BEING LATE TO SCHOOL!

POP'S

YEAH! BUT THEN...

I GOT ANOTHER DETENTION FOR BEING LATE TO DETENTION!

#### CALVIN AND HOBBS

BOY, YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN THE SPARKS FLY WHEN I GAVE MY HALF OF THE REPORT.

I'VE NEVER SEEN SUSIE SO MAD. SHE ACCUSED ME OF NOT DOING ANY RESEARCH AND CLAIMED I MADE UP THE WHOLE THING.

DID YOU?

HECK, NO. I JUST TOOK A FEW CREATIVE LIBERTIES.

AND THEY CALLED YOUR MOM OVER A FEW CREATIVE LIBERTIES?

GEEZ, YOU THINK SUSIE WAS MAD...

#### GARFIELD

HAVE YOU TRIED DOING SIT-UPS?

#### REALITY CHECK

LOOK AT HIM-- DOES HE HONESTLY THINK WE DON'T KNOW HE'S WEARING A RUBBER GLOVE?

THAT'S A COCK-A-POPPLE-PANT!

#### SPEED BUMP

THE THINKER

THE NEVER-SHUTS-UP-GUY

#### CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	
5				6
7		8		
9			10	
			11	
12	13		14	15
		16		
17				18
19				

#### NANCY

Pockets full of nickels, Pockets full of dimes

BUSHMILLER HILL

Pockets full of quarters might weigh me down.

But it would be nice some-times

#### SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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

- Replied
- Tool for boring holes
- Part of a poem or song
- Required
- Closed
- Iranians live here
- A horse's fastest pace
- By yourself
- Liked very much
- Someone who writes news for a newspaper

#### DOWN

- Similar
- Worked out the solution to
- Jealousy
- One of the planets
- Exactly the same
- A small creature with many legs
- Carry your money in this
- Higher than
- A body organ
- The number nothing

SOLUTION

F	L	A	T	T	E	N	S		Z
R	U	B	E	T	A	P	O	T	
T	U	S	E	M					
N	A	M	E	S	Z	E	B	R	A
L	I	V	E	S					D
G	I	V	E	S	B	E	A	T	S
H	L	T	B	L	O	T			
T	O	M	A	T	S	O			
W	S	Y							U
L	H	O	S	P	I	T	A	L	

# DEVGN'S SOUTH INNINGS BEGIN



Rajamouli's *RRR* team gets a boost of inspiration with Bollywood Superstar Ajay Devgn joining the sets, reports NAGARAJ GOUD

**M**ore than 10 months after S.S. Rajamouli announced that he would be casting Bollywood superstar Ajay Devgn in a pivotal role in *RRR*, the actor joined the sets in Hyderabad on Tuesday. The actor, who is basking in the afterglow of his recent box-office smash *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*, landed in Hyderabad on Monday and drove straight to Rajamouli's house.

A source close to the development says, "Devgn had a detailed discussion about his part and what Rajamouli is expecting of him. He also wanted to know how he will go about his Telugu lines as this is his first time doing a South Indian film. Rajamouli had sorted out everything. On day-one, it was business as usual for the acclaimed actor. He had a great first day and was extremely pleased with the hospitality shown by cast and crew."

The source further informs that producer Danayya and Rajamouli are extremely thankful to Devgn for making it to the sets, especially with *Tanhaji* still drawing crowds to the theatres. The film has minted more than Rs 175 crore and is counting. "He could've stayed with promoting his Hindi film but he chose to honour his commitment for *RRR* and the team is extremely grateful for his presence," adds the source. The actor will be seen in the flashback portions of *RRR* and has allotted 25 days in total.

Releasing stills of Devgn and Rajamouli, production house DVV Entertainment, which is investing close to Rs 500 crore on the film, tweeted, "All of us are super charged and ecstatic to kickstart our schedule with @AjayDevgn ji today... Welcome Sir! (sic)." Set in early 1920s, *RRR* is a fictional story based on two real-life heroes and freedom fighters — Alluri Seetharama Raju and Komaram Bheem. Tarak is playing the younger Bheem, with English actress Olivia Morris paired alongside him, while Charan will be seen as younger Ramaraju, with Alia Bhatt as his love interest. In all likelihood, the film, which has Keeravani's music, will open in 10 languages simultaneously this October.

# tollywood

## Miss India for Women's Day

**T**here has been no significant development about Keerthy Suresh-starrer *Miss India* after the film's impressive first teaser released online last August. Initially planned for a release last year itself, the film's makers are now considering releasing it on March 6 in honour of International Women's Day (March 8). The film's theme-an underdog who

becomes a leading restaurateur-celebrates a women and her achievements, which is why Mahesh has decided to pitch it in March first week. He believes it will be a perfect Women's Day viewing, a source told us. "Every woman comes across situations that Keerthy faces in the film, a factor which will help them connect to her story more."

Mahesh had said at the film's launch last year. Newcomer Narendra Nath, who is a gold medalist from the Satyajit Ray Film Institute, is the director, while S.S. Thaman is the composer. The supporting cast is stacked up with the likes of Rajendra Prasad, Naresh, Nadiya, Naveen Chandra, Kamal Kamaraju and Poojita Ponnada.



## PINK REMAKE IN THE MORNING, POLITICS IN THE EVENING



**P**awan Kalyan, who was expected to begin shooting for the Telugu remake of the Hindi film *Pink* next month, sprung a surprise by joining the sets of the film on the first day itself. Usually, it has been a practice for him to join his films after it's shot for some days. The actor has filmed for the untitled film at old Bowenpally, Secunderabad briefly on Monday. With the shoot happening at a public place, the actor's look got leaked. He left the shoot venue in the noon, catching a special flight to Amaravati at the Begumpet airport. He participated in multiple activities of his party Jana Sena in the evening. He didn't shoot for the film on day-two though, restricting himself to the current political scene in AP.

Meanwhile, buzz doing the rounds indicate that Pawan's next with *Krish* will be launched on January 27. It remains to be seen whether the actor will grace the muhurat ceremony or not. For the untitled period drama, massive sets are being erected at different studios across the city. Work on this film as well is kept under wraps. A.M. Ratnam is the producer.

**BUZZ DOING THE ROUNDS INDICATE THAT PAWAN'S NEXT WITH KRISH WILL BE LAUNCHED ON JANUARY 27**

## Filmmaking is a tedious process: NIVETHA

**D**arbar might have not lived up to the expectations but Nivetha Thomas has walked away with rich accolades for her turn as Rajinikanth's daughter in the action-drama. Recalling an interesting anecdote from the film, she said that a particular sequence that she had shot for a whole day lasted just two seconds in the final cut. She took two flights to reach the location for the said shot. "A shot lasting two seconds in the film took a journey of two flights, a day's shoot and a night's stay to work. Filmmaking is a tedious process. Cheer the feeling it creates! Be kind :) Every word you say spreads & it definitely matters. This particular setup was from #Darbar (sic)," she posted on Twitter on Tuesday along with a still from the film.

Nivetha, whose next release in Telugu would be Nani-starrer *V*, also has *Pink* remake and Sudheer Varma's next — which is a remake of 2017 South Korean action comedy *Midnight Runners* — in her kitty.



## Bobby likes 'negative space' more



**B**obby Simha has done a handful of Telugu films like *Ram, Size Zero*, *Edaina Jaragochu* but hadn't tasted success similar to that of his Tamil career. He is right now looking forward to the release of Ravi Teja-starrer *Disco Raja* where he is playing a full-length supporting role Burma Sethu. The film's success determines his future here. "Disco Raja title sounds commercial but director Vi Anand packed it with a lot of content. I've done close to 45 films till now and I rate him as one of the best. His approach to filmmaking is different and he carries a cool head. Another great trait about him is that he is a good listener. When you tell him that you want to approach a scene in a certain way, he would politely tell he had conceived it in a different way. The discussions are often healthy," Bobby tells.

**“Edaina Jaragochu was a small film but I've done it because I liked the content. I don't even know whether it did good or bad in the cinemas. I'm getting good number of roles in Telugu but I just don't want to associate with run-of-the-mill stuff**

BOBBY SIMHA ACTOR

For someone who is selective with his work, it's *Disco Raja*'s story and his character that drove him to sign it. "I had two variations in my role — a young guy and a middle-age man. It was a nice challenge. The other reason was the retro episode in the film where most of the film's characters go back to 1980s and don't wear bottom pants. Like Ravi Teja *garu*, even I was excited to shoot for those episodes. There's a lot of content in it," he informs, adding that he likes to explore negative space as he believes a bad character has no limitations unlike a positive character.

However, he is quick to mention that Disco Raja will help him shed his antagonist image as it's a complete role which has both positive and negative shades. He admits to have rejected many Telugu offers in the past for lack of a good story and characterisation, saying that he doesn't differentiate between small films and big films as long as he finds content interesting. "Edaina Jaragochu was a small film but I've done it because I liked the content. I don't even know whether it did good or bad in the cinemas. I'm getting good number of roles in Telugu but I just don't want to associate with run-of-the-mill stuff," he asserts.

Having rubbed shoulders with his inspiration superstar Rajinikanth in *Petta*, Bobby has now shared screen space with another Tamil stalwart

Kamal Haasan in Shankar's *Indian 2*. He states it's a big learning curve for him to have watched Kamal go about his job.

"He knows everything about every craft of filmmaking and acts according to the lenses the cameraman uses. For his knowledge on cinema, he needs a bigger word than universal to describe him. To see him acting and learn from it is a gift to me," he raves, clearly in awe of the celebrated actor.

The Hyderabad-born Telugu guy who settled in Chennai started his career as a junior artiste to reach where he is right now. He believes with the advent of social media, the struggles of aspiring actors to bag that one elusive opportunity and prove their talent has become less painstaking as they can now send their acting skills through videos or short films. "In fact, when an assistant director of a big director asked me to send my pictures back then, I've given him a short film and asked his director to check out my acting skills. I felt proud that day," he signs off.

— NG

# SHARAPOVA HITS ALL-TIME LOW

Maria fails to overcome first round hurdle in third consecutive Slam; Nadal launches record bid with easy win

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Top seed Rafael Nadal turned on the style as he launched his bid for a record-equalling 20th Major title at the Australian Open on Tuesday, but falling star Maria Sharapova hit a career low. Australia's Nick Kyrgios also cantered into the second round, but fourth seed Daniil Medvedev had to fight his way past American Frances Tiafoe in four sets. Nadal, one shy of Roger Federer's Grand Slam mark, dropped only five games as he swatted aside Bolivia's Hugo Dellien 6-2, 6-3, 6-0 in just over two hours at a sunny Rod Laver Arena. "It was a positive start," said the reigning Roland Garros and US Open champion, wearing a bright pink singlet and matching trainers. "What you want in the first round is just to win, and it's better if it's in straight sets." He joins Federer and defending champion Novak Djokovic in



Spain's Rafael Nadal makes a backhand return to Bolivia's Hugo Dellien during their first round singles match at the Australian Open

round two as the Big Three look to tighten a stranglehold that has brought them all but one of the last 14 Australian Open titles. Nadal, the first player to be world number one in three different decades, is still thriving at 33 but it's a different story for five-time Grand Slam winner Sharapova. The 32-year-old, playing on a wildcard as she wrestles with a shoulder injury, lost 6-3, 6-4 to Croatian 19th seed Donna Vekic, making her an opening-round loser at three straight Grand Slams for the first time. The future looks uncertain for the former world number one, who won Wimbledon when she was just

17 but has not reached a Grand Slam final since she lifted the 2014 French Open trophy. "I can speak about my struggles and the things that I've gone through with my shoulder, but it's not really in my character to," Sharapova said. "I was there, I put myself out there (playing). As tough as it was,

I finished the match — it wasn't the way that I wanted." Britain's Johanna Konta, a two-time Slam semi-finalist, also fell at the first hurdle as she battles to overcome a knee problem, losing 4-6, 2-6 to unseeded Tunisian Ons Jabeur. **STORMY FOGNINI**

On a bumper day of 88 first-



Maria Sharapova makes a forehand return to Croatia's Donna Vekic

round matches, after rain wiped out half of Monday's schedule, former US Open champion Marin Cilic and Milos Raonic both moved safely through. Italy's Fabio Fognini, two sets down against America's Reilly Opelka when their match was suspended on Monday, returned to win it in five after a stormy encounter when both players argued furiously with the umpire. A new star emerged in 18-year-old Italian Jannik Sinner, last year's NextGen champion, who earned his first Grand Slam victory against Australia's Max Purcell. Australia's Kyrgios, who has spearheaded fundraising efforts for the country's deadly bushfire disaster, kept his notorious temper in check despite being taken to two tie-breaks in a 6-2, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7-1) win over Lorenzo Sonego of Italy. "I feel super-comfortable, you guys are the best. I feel the support.... I am ready to go again,"

Kyrgios told the crowd. Medvedev, the narrow loser to Nadal in September's US Open final, dropped the second set against Tiafoe before recovering to win 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2. Austria's Dominic Thiem, who has reached the last two French Open finals, went through in straight sets against Adrian Mannarino, while 2014 champion Stan Wawrinka needed four to get past Damir Dzumhur. Seventh seed Alexander Zverev beat Marco Cecchinato in straight sets but there was disappointment for France's Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, the 2008 finalist, who retired with a back injury against Australia's Alexei Popyrin. Elsewhere, women's fourth seed Simona Halep survived some painful-looking falls to beat America's Jennifer Brady, and 2016 champion Angelique Kerber dropped only four games against Elisabetta Cocciaretto of Italy.

## Ankle tear rules Ishant out of NZ Test series



Samson replaces Dhawan for T20s; Shaw in ODIs

PTI ■ DELHI

Wicketkeeper-batsman Sanju Samson and talented opener Prithvi Shaw replaced injured India opener Shikhar Dhawan for the upcoming T20 and ODI series against New Zealand respectively.

Dhawan dislocated his shoulder while fielding in the third ODI against Australia in Bengaluru on Sunday.

Shaw returns to the senior team after a gap of one year following an ankle injury and an eight-month doping ban. Samson, who played in the T20 series against Sri Lanka earlier this month, was back as a reserve opener cum keeper.

India's T20I squad: Virat Kohli (C), Rohit Sharma (VC), Sanju Samson, KL Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant (WK), Shivam Dube, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Washington Sundar, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini, Ravindra Jadeja, Shardul Thakur.

India's ODI squad: Virat Kohli (C), Rohit Sharma (VC), Prithvi Shaw, KL Rahul, Shreyas Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rishabh Pant (WK), Shivam Dube, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Ravindra Jadeja, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Navdeep Saini, Shardul Thakur, Kedar Jadhav.

However, the Indian cricket board is yet to issue a statement on Ishant's injury.

"It's a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in BCCI as we will again do his MRI to ascertain degree of tear and decide on his rehabilitation," a BCCI source said.

Fellow Delhi pacer Navdeep Saini is likely to



Akash Singh in a file Photo Twitter

India outplay Japan by 10 wickets in mismatch

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

Defending champions India outclassed debutants Japan by 10 wickets in their second match to all but secure a spot in the quarterfinals of the ICC U-19 World Cup here on Tuesday.

Opting to field first, four-time champions India bowled out a hapless Japan for 41 runs in 22.5 overs with leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi taking four wickets. It was the joint second lowest total by a team in the Under-19 World Cup and joint third lowest in the under-19 cricket history.

Pacers Kartik Tyagi and Akash Singh shared five wickets among themselves as none of the Japanese batsmen entered double digits.

India needed just 4.5 overs to complete the formalities with Yashasvi Jaiswal and Kumar Kushagra remaining unbeaten on 29 and 13 respectively.

India captain Priyam Garg, however, said his fast bowlers could have done a better job.

"Very happy with the performance. The spinners were good, but the lines and lengths could have been better from the pacers. There's no pressure as such. We want to do well, we take every game as it comes," said Garg.

## 'NZ need to win 2 out of 3 formats to get pass marks'

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

New Zealand are up against a "powerhouse" in the visiting Indian cricket team, says former all-rounder Craig McMillan who feels the Black Caps will have to win in two out of three formats to be eligible for at least the "pass marks".

New Zealand will host India for five Twenty20s, three ODIs and two Tests beginning here on January 24 and the hosts will be desperate to bounce back from the recent 0-3 Test drubbing at the hands of Australia.

"It's big. This whole Indian tour is big after what happened in Australia," McMillan was quoted as saying by *Radio Sport Breakfast*.

"This Indian side are a powerhouse. Doesn't matter if it's Tests, ODIs, T20s, they are the real deal so it's going to be a really intriguing tour. For New Zealand to get a pass mark for this tour they need to win two of the three series."

The series against India will start with the T20 rubber on Friday and McMillan feels with the ICC T20 World Cup scheduled to be held later this



Ross Taylor poses for a photo Black Caps/Twitter

year, it is imperative for New Zealand to win this assignment.

"Five Twenty20s to start and I know it's not everyone's favourite format of the game but we've got a T20 World Cup

later in the year in October in Australia so straight away these five matches become important. Because of the performance in Australia we need to start winning again and get that support

## De Kock replaces Faf as ODI skipper

AFP ■ JOHANNESBURG

Quinton de Kock was on Tuesday named as South Africa's one-day international captain as part of a long term transition plan.

His first assignment will be to lead the team in a three-match series against World Cup champions England, starting in Cape Town on February 4.

Test and Twenty20 captain Faf du Plessis was not in a 15-man squad named by Cricket South Africa on Tuesday despite committing himself to the organisation until the World Cup T20 in October and November.

Independent selector Linda Zondi said Du Plessis' omission did not signal the end of his ODI career.

"We decided to rest Faf and Kagiso Rabada for this series because they have both played

a lot of cricket," said Zondi. "A different squad will be picked for a T20 series against England after the one-day games and after that there are still T20s and ODIs against Australia."

Zondi said the appointment of De Kock was part of succession planning leading up to the 2023 Cricket World Cup.

In his press conference after the third Test against England on Monday, Du Plessis said there was an opportunity to relieve some of the pressure on his captaincy.

quad includes new ODI caps in batsmen Janneman Malan and Kyle Verreynne, all-rounder Jon-Jon Smuts, fast bowlers Lutho Sipamla and Sisanda Magala and left-arm spinner Bjorn Fortuin. Of these Magala and Verreynne have yet to play at any international level.

and there's an opportunity for some young guys who performed in that to be given a chance," McMillan added.

## Character of pitches in NZ has changed: Tendulkar



Indian team celebrates after winning the match Twitter

The pitches in New Zealand have become a lot more batting-friendly over the years, says iconic former batsman Sachin Tendulkar, insisting that India have the "ammunition" to trouble the sprightly hosts during the upcoming series.

Tendulkar, who has been on a record five New Zealand tours since 1990, feels that from seaming tracks during his early trips years, the tracks became high-scoring hard ones during his last tour back in 2009.

"Of late, the Tests in New Zealand have been high scoring and surfaces have changed," Tendulkar told PTI during an exclusive interview.

From 2002, when India played

ODIs and Tests on green tops, to 2009, when India won only their second Test series in 32 years, Tendulkar has seen it all in New Zealand.

"I remember when we played in 2009, the Hamilton pitch was different compared to other pitches. Other pitches got harder (Wellington and Napier) but not Hamilton. It remained soft."

"But Napier became hard with passage of time (where Gautam Gambhir scored an epic match-saving 12-hour hundred in 2009). So, from my first tour (in 1990 till 2009), I realised pitches got harder with passage of time," Tendulkar said.

Tendulkar is confident that the

Indian bowling attack, spearheaded by Jasprit Bumrah, has the ammunition to put New Zealand in trouble.

"We have a good bowling attack with quality fast bowlers as well as spinners. I believe we have the ammunition to compete in New Zealand."

However, in Wellington, Tendulkar wants the team to be well-prepared to counter the breeze factor.

"Wellington, I have played and it makes a huge difference if you are bowling with the wind or against the wind. The batsman needs to be judicious in the choice of which end he wants to attack, it is very important," he said.

## Sarfراز hits unbeaten ton as Mumbai fight back against UP

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Young Sarfraz Khan hit an unbeaten century as Mumbai fought back on the third day of their Ranji Trophy Elite Group B game against Uttar Pradesh here on Tuesday.

UP had posted a mammoth 625/8 declared in their first essay, courtesy Upendra Yadav's unbeaten double hundred (203 not out).

Mumbai resumed the day on their overnight score of 20/2 and had a mountain to climb.

Thanks to Herculean effort by 'crisis man' Siddhesh Lad (98 off 174 balls; 10x4x1x6), who lived up to his billing and 22-year-old Sarfraz (132 not out off 160 balls; 14x4; 4x6), the duo gave Mumbai the confidence that UP's first-inning score could be overhauled.

Overnight batsmen Bhupen Lalwani (43 off 80 balls; 5x4) and Hardik Tamore (51 off 94 balls; 10x4) had an uphill task on hand of surviving the morning session against the experienced Ankit Rajpoot and Yash

Dayal. They negated the challenge well and stitched a crucial 75-run stand for the third wicket.

Pacer Wajid Ali gave the visitors the much needed break-through after he trapped Lalwani in front of the wicket as Mumbai lost their third wicket at 91.

Tamore then notched up his maiden first-class fifty by driving Ali through the covers for a four, but could not convert it into a big score.

### BENGAL ROUT HYDERABAD IN 3 DAYS

Kalyani (WB): Rookie spin all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed shone with a first-innings hat-trick in a six-wicket match haul as Bengal thrashed a sloppy Hyderabad by an innings and 303 runs for their first win of the ongoing Ranji Trophy season, here on Tuesday.

The 25-year-old, who was bought by Royal Challengers Bangalore for the 2020 edition of the IPL, claimed the feat in his seventh Ranji appearance.



Sarfraz Khan reacts during the third day of Ranji Trophy Match against Uttar Pradesh PTI

Shahbaz (4/26) ran through the Hyderabad lower order to help his side bundle out the visitors for 171 in their first innings. Following on, Hyderabad were all out for 161 with Shahbaz (2/51) accounting for two batsmen.

Shahbaz became the seventh player from Bengal, and first since India pacer Mohammed Shami, to claim a Ranji Trophy hat-trick. Shami had achieved the milestone against Madhya Pradesh in 2012-13.

Rookie pacer Akash Deep (4/38) was the star in Hyderabad's second essay as Hyderabad were bundled out in 46.2 overs.

Bengal had scored 635 for seven declared in their first innings after electing to bat.

### J&K POSTS WIN OVER ODISHA

Cuttack: Jammu & Kashmir bounced back superbly after conceding first innings lead to pull off a four-wicket win over Odisha on the third day of the Ranji Trophy Group C match here on Tuesday.

### BCCI says 'no' to Saha's Ranji test

PTI ■ KALYANI (WB)

Indian wicketkeeper batsman Wriddhiman Saha, who is recovering from a finger surgery, has been asked to skip Bengal's next Ranji clash against Delhi to keep himself ready for the upcoming Test series in New Zealand.

The 35-year-old sustained a fracture on the ring finger of his right hand during the historic

Day/Night Test Test against Bangladesh in Kolkata in November and consequently underwent a surgery in Mumbai.

"Wriddhi will not be available for Delhi match (at Eden Gardens from Sunday). I think the Board (BCCI) has said no to him," Bengal coach Arun Lal said after they scripted an innings and 303 win over Hyderabad to brighten their qualifying hopes.

Resuming its second innings at 136 for seven, Odisha could add only 30 runs as Umar Nazir picked up the last three wickets—Rajesh Mohanty, Suryakant Pradhan and Rajesh Dhuper.

Chasing 204 for a win, J&K opener Suryansh Raina (69) and Shubam Pundir (45) added 79 runs for the third wicket to lay the platform for an easy win. Abdul Samad with a knock of 30

not out and the first-innings bowling hero Aquib Nabi (26 not out) too the side over the finish line. For the home team, Basant Mohanty bowled his heart out and picked up four wickets in the second innings but could not prevent J&K from romping home.

In Delhi, Services pulled off an exciting one-wicket win over Haryana despite being shot out for 97 in the first innings.