

OPINION 6 A NEVER-ENDING CRISIS

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

SPORTS 12 LIGHTNING QUICK

VIJAYAWADA, THURSDAY JANUARY 23, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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## KARNATAKA CRICKET BODY FINED RS 50,000 FOR USING PLASTIC CUPS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Anti-CAA protesters lathicharged by police in UP's Etawah

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# TDP prevails, Capital Bills referred to Select Panel

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an unprecedented development, the ruling YSRCP and the Opposition TDP on Wednesday locked horns in the Legislative Council over the two key Bills - the AP Decentralisation Bill and CRDA Bill, with neither side willing to give an inch.

The stand-off left the Council in the grip with tension with the TDP finally succeeding to have the bill referred to a Select Committee and the YSRCP determined to have its way. The TDP left no stone unturned to get the bill referred to the Select Committee under Rule 143, aware that this would force the government to put on hold its plans for another three months before they are considered by the Council.

Council Chairman MA Sharrif briefly adjourned the House in the evening as pandemonium broke out with the YSRCP members and ministers trooping into the Well and the opposition following suit shortly thereafter. Earlier, noisy



scenes were witnessed in the House as the ruling and the opposition members wrangled over rules and procedural issues and stormed the Chairman's podium over the AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill, 2020 and the connected APCRDA (Repeal) Bill, which have been passed by the state Assembly on Monday. The Decentralisation Bill seeks to pave the way for

establishment of executive capital in Visakhapatnam, legislative in Amaravati and judicial capital in Kurnool, a move strongly opposed by the TDP.

In an unprecedented spectacle, Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly N Chandrababu Naidu and several TDP MLAs came rushing into the Council officers gallery while Rajya Sabha member V Vijaya Sai Reddy, TTD Chairman Y V Subba Reddy

### TDP seeks disqualification of its three MLCs

HYDERABAD: The Telugu Desam Party has formally complained to Legislative Council Chairman Sharief seeking disqualification of three of its MLCs for violating the party whip in the House. Initially 2 TDP MLCs, Pothula Suneetha and Shivanadha Reddy, voted against TDP and supported YSRCP government's Vizag Capital Shifting Bill in the Council. The two MLCs clearly went against the whip. Later, another TDP MLC Satrucharla Vijayarama Raju also violated the party whip.

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and other YSRCP leaders filled the VIP gallery to witness the tension-filled proceedings.

When the YSRCP members objected to the TDP chief's presence, an adamant Naidu retorted saying, "Who are you to say that I cannot come to the Council?"

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# Oppn MLAs create chaos, rush to Speaker's podium

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Assembly was plunged into chaos on Tuesday when the Opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) members rushed to the Speaker's podium and raised slogans against the government. The Opposition members did not spare even Speaker Tammineni Sitaram and shouted slogans against him. After about two hours of commotion, the TDP members staged a walkout.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and other YSRCP members demanded disciplinary action against the TDP members for their unruly behaviour. He said the TDP MLAs, who were just 10 in number, had provoked the YSRCP MLAs. "They had the temerity to run up to the Speaker's podium. It is an insult to democracy," the Chief Minister said.

He further said though there were 151 members in the Treasury benches, they remained calm only to respect the rules of the House and maintain decorum. "It was astonishing to find that the



TDP members had utter disrespect for the institution of the Speaker," he said.

The Speaker said no one had the right to violate the rules of the House. "Do you think this is your House or the Assembly?" the Chief Minister said.

Following the commotion, the Speaker ordered the marshals to take the TDP MLAs away from the podium. With this, the marshals swung into action and removed the TDP members from the Speaker's podium. However, a scuffle ensued between them and the TDP legislators for some time. Later, the TDP members

## Speaker raps 'rude' TDP MLAs, says he is not weak

VIJAYAWADA: Assembly Speaker Tammineni Sitaram lashed out at the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MLAs for creating a ruckus in the House on Wednesday, the third day of the session. Sitaram said that TDP MLAs had violated the House rules by reaching the Speaker's podium. He asked the TDP MLAs to respect the sanctity of the House and said that if they were not controlled, why would resort to physical violence against him. "I give an opportunity to everyone to express their opinion. However, the TDP MLAs did not heed my advice and raised 'Jai Amaravati' slogans," he said.

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staged a walkout in the Assembly. The Speaker referred the issue to the Committee of Ethics.



Tharoor alleges financial irregularities by AAP govt

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## AMARAVATI CASE IN HIGH COURT AP Govt engages Mukul Rohatgi, to pay Rs 5 cr

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The YSR Congress Party government in Andhra Pradesh headed by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has engaged the services of senior counsel and former Attorney General of India Mukul Rohatgi to argue its case in the AP High Court on the capital issue.

What is interesting is that the government would be paying Rs 5 crore as fees to Mukul Rohatgi to argue its case. An amount of Rs 1 crore is being paid to him as an advance to take up the case. A government order (GO Ms No. 1) was issued by the state planning department on Wednesday.

According to the GO, a writ petition has been filed in the High Court relating to the capital issue against the Central and the State Governments seeking a direction to the Governments to continue developmental activities and current plans in the notified capital area of Amaravati.



Advocate-General of the state government S Subrahmanyam suggested to the government to engage Mukul Rohatgi, who is an expert in Constitutional Law as senior counsel to contest the case on behalf of the government.

Accordingly, the government decided to hire the services of Rohatgi to fight the case relating to the capital issue for a remuneration of Rs 5 crore and pay him an amount of Rs 1 crore as advance for his services.

It remains to be seen how Rohatgi would defend the government's stand on Amaravati and also the three capitals issue.

## No stay on CAA, NPR: SC

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Seeking response of the central government in four weeks on a batch of pleas challenging the CAA, the top court also restrained high courts in the country from proceedings with pending petitions on the issue.

"We are not going to pass any ex-parte order without hearing Centre on the aspects of interim relief," a bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde said.

The observation assumes significance as a battery of senior lawyers led by Kapil Sibal and A M Singhvi vehemently sought judicial intervention and demanded that the operation of the CAA and National Population Register (NPR) processes be stopped for a couple of months till apex court decides the petitions.

Taking note of vehement

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



opposition of the Centre, represented by Attorney General K K Venugopal and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, the bench observed "according to the government this relief is akin to granting stay on the Act". The bench, also comprising Justices S Abdul Nazeer and Sanjiv Khanna, said: "The matter is uppermost in everybody's mind. We will form a

five-judge bench and then list the case. Issue notice on all such petitions in which notices were not issued. Attorney General K K Venugopal seeks time to file reply in four weeks."

It said the court would hear some of the petitions in-chambers for deciding the modalities and thereafter a five-judge bench would be constituted after four weeks for day-to-day hearing on a batch of 143 petitions. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for some petitioners challenging the validity of CAA, said the issue be referred to a Constitution bench and the NPR exercise be postponed by a couple of months. He also urged the bench to put on hold the operation of the CAA.

Continued on Page 3

## Council restored by Dad YSR, haunts son Jagan

L VENKAT RAM REDDY ■ HYDERABAD

Late Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy restored Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council after a gap of 22 years in 2007. Now, his son and incumbent Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh YS Jaganmohan Reddy is now making swift moves to abolish the same Legislative Council, when it is set to complete 13 years in March.

The council was abolished by the previous Telugu Desam 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.

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

Incidentally, Jagan is also facing the same problem which NTR had faced in 1985.

When NTR was CM, the Opposition Congress blocked important bills of TDP govern-

- His son Jagan attempts to dissolve the same after 18 years
- NTR dissolved Council in May 1985 to overcome Oppn Congress hurdle
- Jagan faces NTR situation now as Oppn TDP blocking his crucial bills

ment in Legislative Council as it had the majority. NTR had absolute majority in the Assembly.

Now, the opposition TDP, which has a majority in Legislative Council, is blocking the important bills introduced by the YSRCP. Incidentally, YSRCP too enjoys absolute majority in Assembly.

Incidentally, it was Congress government at the Centre under Rajiv Gandhi's stewardship that enacted AP Legislative Council (Abolition) Act, despite stiff opposition from state Congress leaders who argued that the scrapping the council was against the party's interests in the state.

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## TODAY

### ALMANAC

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

### VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Clear with periodic clouds  
Temp: 33/19  
Humidity: 74%  
Sunrise: 06:49  
Sunset: 06:06  
Current Weather Conditions  
Updated January 22, 2020 5:00 PM

## 11,158 Rythu Bharosa centres to be set up: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an initiative that is aimed at helping the farming community, the state government has decided to set up 11,158 'Rythu Bharosa Kendrams' (Farmer assistance centres) in the State by the next Kharif season.

Announcing this in the Assembly on Wednesday soon after a debate on the subject, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy said all problems related to the farmers would be resolved at the centres that would be set up next to the village secretariats.

The CM said every village with a minimum population of 2,000 would have the 'Rythu Bharosa Kendram'. In all, 5,300



centres would be set up in the State, he said. "These centres will give

advice and suggestions to farmers on issues concerning them," he said.

The CM said the centres would be working in coordination with the village secretariats and they would supply quality seeds, fertilisers and pesticides to the farmers. He said health cards would be issued for animals for the first time in the State. Awareness programmes would be arranged at the centres on crop and cattle insurance.

The centres would also have labs to conduct soil tests and to test the quality of seeds. Paddy procurement would also be taken up at the centres from the next kharif season. "So far 60 per cent of the feeders have been free supply of power for agriculture for nine hours during daytime and by

the next kharif all the feeders would be involved in power supply," the Chief Minister said. The services of agriculture, horticulture, sericulture and veterinary assistants and a veterinary doctor would be made available at the centres. Live workshops and interactive sessions on best agricultural practices would be conducted and a direct call centre would be set up to coordinate with the Rythu Bharosa centres.

Direct video screening with experts from the field would be organised at the centres to suggest best solutions to farmers, the CM said.

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## Jilted lover sets fire to house, 2 dead, 4 injured

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Two minors, a boy and a girl aged 17 and 5 years were burnt alive and other four persons sustained serious burn injuries in the early hours of Wednesday when a youth set fire to the house of a girl who spurned his advances. The incident took place at Dulla village of Kadiyam mandal in East Godavari district.

It is learnt that the jilted lover had an affair with Satyavathi's daughter and the girl's family agreed to their marriage but suddenly went back on their promise. They

The accused had an affair with a girl whose family agreed to their marriage but suddenly went back on their promise.

came to know about the adamant and bad behaviour of the jilted lover. Meanwhile, Satyavathi performed the marriage of her daughter with another man.

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# CS reviews arrangements for Republic Day function

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney on Wednesday directed officials concerned to make all necessary arrangements for the 71st Republic Day celebrations to be held at the Indira Gandhi Municipal Corporation Stadium in Vijayawada.

A review meeting in this regard was held at the Secretariat with officials of various departments.

The Chief Secretary said that elaborate arrangement should be made for the guests. The chief guest at the celebrations will be Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan and the guests of honour would be High Court Chief Justice Jitendra Kumar Maheswari, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, judges, ministers, officials, students and others. All arrangements should be completed by the evening of January 24, Sawhney said.

She instructed the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation officials to ensure proper drinking water facility, seating arrange-



Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney chairs a review meeting on the arrangements for the Republic Day function to be held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Vijayawada.

**Nilam Sawhney instructed the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation officials to ensure proper drinking water facility, seating arrangements, toilet facilities and others for the students**

ments, toilet facilities and others for the students.

She also said that government development welfare schemes, in particular, Navaratnalu should be reflected well in the various tableaux.

DGP Goutam Sawang said the departments concerned should take the initiative to complete the rehearsals by the

evening of January 24. Keeping in view the time and place the tableau should be displayed on time at the Republic Day celebrations, he said.

Principal Secretary to the Government of AP, Praveen Prakash explained minute-to-minute programme at the Republic Day celebration through a PowerPoint presenta-

tion and said that the programme will start by 9 am.

District Collector Md Imtiaz said all arrangements for the function are being made in coordination of the various departments.

Vijayawada Police Commissioner Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao explained about traffic restrictions, parking places, arrangements and others.

Commissioner State Information department T Vijaya Kumar Reddy said that three LED screens would be arranged inside the stadium premises with state-of-the-art audio systems.

# APSCHE plans workshop on NAAC accreditation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education plans to organise a one-day workshop on 'Quality Assurance and Role of IQAC in promoting quality and preparation for NAAC accreditation' in association with Acharya Nagarjuna University.

The APSCHE will organise an interactive session with the stakeholders including students, faculty, parents, institutions and citizens, APSCHE Vice-Chairman Prof K Rama Mohana Rao said in a release on Wednesday.

He said the chief guest of the workshop will be Prof K Hemachandra Reddy, chairman APSCHE and the distinguished guests will be Prof P Rajasekhara Vice-Chancellor Acharya Nagarjuna University and the guests of honour are Prof A Rama Chandra Reddy, retired professor, University of Hyderabad and Former Vice-Chancellor for Yogi Vemana University Prof G Appa Rao IIT Madras, Prof K Rosiah, Registrar, Acharya Nagarjuna University.



Prof Rama Mohana Rao said that APSCHE values the opinions and suggestions of the stakeholders of higher education. In order to have direct interaction with stu-

dent, parents, faculty members, college managements and citizens, the APSCHE is organising the interactive meet to discuss on 'Higher Education Quality Skills and Opportunities'. "APSCHE is organising this kind of a programme for the first time. Two eminent academic personalities are invited to the programme," he said.

# IIT-H to host 3-day ISSC from March 25

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Indian Institute of Technology Hyderabad will be hosting a three-day Indian Structural Steel Conference (ISSC) 2020 from March 25 to 27.

The ISSC is a unique international conference covering various fields of steel structures, PEB buildings, sustainable materials, high strength steel, cold-formed steel structures, natural composites, renewable materials, structural assessment, Composite construction and rehabilitation of structures.

Interested participants can register for this conference at [www.issc2020.com](http://www.issc2020.com). The last date for the registration is March 7.

Highlighting its importance, organising secretary Dr Mahendrakumar Madhavan said, "This conference is focused on creating a forum where researchers and industrial experts having explicit backgrounds but encountering similar challenges on infrastructural development, joining together, to discuss and disseminate the most recent advances in the analysis, behavior, design, and construction of structural steel."

# L&T Infra faces challenges in AP projects, customer revenue dips

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Engineering and construction major Larsen & Toubro on Wednesday announced that infrastructure segment recorded customer revenue of Rs 17,249 crore for the quarter ended December 31, 2019 leading to a y-o-y decline of 5%. The company attributed this decline to Challenges faced in projects in Andhra Pradesh and for a short duration in

Maharashtra and Delhi, coupled with lower fund allocation in some states adversely impacted the execution progress.

However, infrastructure segment of L&T secured orders of Rs 28,115 crore, during the quarter ended December 31, 2019, registering growth of 28% compared to previous year. L&T announced that Developmental Projects Segment

registered customer revenue of Rs 1,238 crore during the quarter ended December 31, 2019, recording 4% growth over the corresponding quarter of the previous year, consequent to progressive commissioning of Hyderabad Metro.

L&T posted a 15.2% year-on-year (YoY) rise in net profit at Rs 2,352 crore for the quarter ended December 2019.



# Multispecialty health camp marks Namrata's birthday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As part of the birthday celebrations of his wife Namrata, superstar G Mahesh Babu, in association with Andhra Hospitals organised a multispecialty health camp at Burrupalem on Wednesday.

The camp covered all specialties, including medicine, surgery, paediatrics, cardiology, dietetics and general medicine. Also, an awareness session was conducted on common health problems which include hand hygiene, respiratory infections, asthma and nutrition.

All specialty consultations and investigations were done and medicine dis-

tributed to patients. Dr PV Rama Rao, Chief of Children's Services and Director, Andhra Hospitals said this was the 28th camp so far in this village and they had been organizing health camps for the past five years.

He said that as many as 334 adult and children benefited from the camp. Dr Rama Rao said that Andhra Hospitals organized this mega camp on this special occasion in association with G Mahesh Babu.

Dr Amar, Dr Mahesh, Dr Veena, Dr Harshith, Dr Swarupa, Dr Ramesh other team members including nurses, lab technicians and pharmacists actively contributed to this camp.



# Bicycle-borne youths Tokyo-bound to cheer Olympians from India

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Three youngsters from Kerala have decided to cheer the Indian contingent taking part in the 2020 Olympics to be held in Tokyo in July in a novel manner. They are planning to reach the capital of Japan by pedalling all way on their bicycles.

These three youngsters - two men and a woman - Haseeb (32), Clifin (29) and Dona (29) - who kick-started their grueling pursuit from Kochi (on December 15 2019), reached Vijayawada on Wednesday covering a distance of 1,200 km on their high-end long distance aluminum-gravel bicycles -

Bergamont Grandurance 6. They were warmly welcomed by the members of Club Pedal Zone, a unit which promotes cycling in Vijayawada and they got their bicycles overhauled at pedal zone on MG Road.

"After pedalling through India, we will pass through Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China and enter Japan to reach Tokyo in July 2020 to cheer Indian sportsmen taking part in several sporting events" said Haseeb, a former Amazon employee who is on a sabbatical. Dona is a former TCS employee and Clifin is a part-time teacher.

# Woman ends life in Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A woman committed suicide by hanging herself to the ceiling fan on Wednesday. The deceased was identified as Battula Chinnammai aged about 42 years.

She was casual labourer working at VTPS office.

Ibrahimpatnam police sub-inspector G Ramesh told The Pioneer that his team rushed to the spot after receiving information about the incident.

Ramesh said that the woman might have taken the extreme step due to personal problems. He said a case under Section 174 CRPC was booked and investigation is on.



# Hyundai's new car 'Aura' launched

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Hyundai's new compact sedan, Aura, was launched at Sai Swarna Hyundai showroom by its chairman Stalin Babu at Ramavarappadu here on Wednesday.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that the new Aura comes with 1.2-litre diesel and petrol engines, compliant with BS-VI emission norms.

Hyundai will also offer the vehicle with the new 1-litre turbo petrol engine. Aura

compact sedan will be the second product of the company in the segment after Accent. Aura is the first significant launch of the new decade.

"Aura will be India's only sedan equipped with BS 6 Diesel 1.2 litre Ecotorq engine, offering superior power, performance and fuel efficiency. With class-leading features and superior performance, Aura will be a game-changer product creating new excitement and establish new benchmarks in the automobile industry," he said.



Sai Swarna Hyundai showroom chairman Stalin Babu inaugurates new Aura at Ramavarappadu here on Wednesday

# Workshop held on sex determination tests

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Dr NTR University of Health Science Vice-Chancellor Dr Shyam Prasad on Wednesday said that conducting gender determination tests was illegal.

Medical Termination of Pregnancy after gender determination was a crime and awareness should be brought among the rural and urban people on the law, Dr Prasad said.

In this regard, a workshop was organised jointly by the state Medical and Health department and Women and Child Welfare department here on Wednesday.

The programme was attended by officials of the judicial department, medical and health department, women and child welfare department, panchayat raj and NGOs.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Prasad said pre-conception or pre-natal sex determination is an offence in India under (PC-PNDT) Act 1994. He said that performing MTP after



determination of female is a brutal act and a punishable offence. He said that doctors and others who violate PC-PNDT are liable for three years imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10,000.

Medical and Health department director Dr Aruna Kumari said that the law on PC-PNDT Act should be strengthened and awareness should be created to all the officials on the Act.

She appealed to officials of

the department concerned to implement the Act strictly, and stern action should be taken on people who violate it.

Prosecution director Ramakoteswara Rao said that action is being taken of people who violate this law and were punished as per law and this Act is applicable to doctors, employees of diagnostic centres and others also. The punishment can be three years imprisonment and Rs 10,000 fine, he added.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
<b>GOLD</b>	
₹ 40,360 (10 gm)	
₹ 30	
<b>SILVER</b>	
₹ 46,000 (1kg)	
₹ 700	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹147
Without Skin	₹168
Broiler at Farm	₹102
EGG RATES ₹/100	
HYDERABAD	382
VIJAYAWADA	407
VISAKHAPATNAM	420
RETAIL PRICE (₹/DOZEN)	₹4.07

# Nanak's 550th anniversary, Guj's stepwell among R-Day tableaux

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Walled City of Jaipur and Gujarat's iconic stepwell in Patan, both UNESCO World Heritage, and the 550th anniversary of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev will be thematically showcased among the host of tableaux in the Republic Day Parade this year, officials said on Wednesday.

Jammu & Kashmir will participate in the parade for the first time as a union territory.

Out of the total 22 tableaux, 16 will be of various states and UTs and six of ministries, departments and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF). They were unveiled at an event held at the Delhi Cantonment on Wednesday. Northeastern states will be

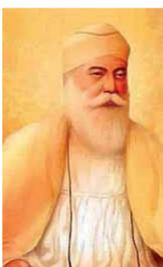
represented by Assam and Meghalaya.

The Walled City of Jaipur, which was accorded the UNESCO World Heritage tag in 2019, will be the overriding theme of the Rajasthan tableau that will depict the Pink City's architectural grandeur and the state's vibrant culture reflected in its folk songs and dances.

The year 2019 was the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev and this will be theme of Punjab's tableau in the parade.

Sikhism's architectural and cultural heritage will be portrayed in its tableau, with messages 'Kirat Karo', 'Naam Japo' and 'Vand Chhako', which form the cornerstone of Sikhism, depicted in panels.

Gujarat's architectural wonder Rani Ki Vav will be the cen-



trepiece of the state's tableau, complemented with folk culture and dances performed by artists.

Rani Ki Vav or Queen's Stepwell initially built by Rani Udayamati as a memorial to her husband King Bhimdev I in the 11th century in Patan dis-

trict of the state was inscribed into the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014.

The majestic architecture of the stepwell will be showcased in the tableau that will be fronted by a statue of a village woman wearing Patola saree of Patan.

The J&K tableau showcases the rich sartorial and cultural heritage of the region with a shawl weaver being depicted in the front. The flora and fauna will be shown in the middle complemented with the Dogra and Kashmiri folk culture. Other states which will take

Sikhism's architectural and cultural heritage will be portrayed in its tableau, with messages 'Kirat Karo', 'Naam Japo' and 'Vand Chhako', which form the cornerstone of Sikhism, depicted in panels

part in the grand parade are Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

The Defence Ministry had received 32 tableau proposals from states and union territo-

ries and 24 from central ministries and departments.

Besides, the three wing of the armed forces -- Army, Air Force and Navy -- will have their own tableaux, officials said.

On West Bengal government's proposal for a tableau being rejected, a senior defence ministry official said, "It was all merit-based and those tableau which were rejected by the committee were after some shortcomings found by the panel".

An Expert Committee had examined it in two rounds of meeting.

The proposals are evaluated by the Expert Committee comprising eminent persons in the fields of art, culture, painting, sculpture, music, architecture, choreography, among others, the ministry had earlier said.

# Resolution to probe insider trading adopted by Assembly

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Tightening the noose on the persons involved in the alleged insider trading in purchase of lands in the Amaravati capital region, the state government on Wednesday passed a resolution in the Assembly to conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the shady deals and ensure stringent action is meted out to the culprits.

Soon after Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy concluded his speech during the discussion on the 'Rythu Bharosa' centres on Wednesday, Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharita tabled the resolution on insider trading.

After TDP member suggested an amendment, the House approved the resolution. Interestingly, contradictory to expectations that the issue



would be referred to the Lokayukta, the resolution did not mention the name of any particular investigating agency.

The resolution mentioned that a Cabinet subcommittee was constituted to study the decisions of the previous gov-

ernment's policy and administrative decisions since the TDP government came to power after bifurcation of the State in 2014.

The subcommittee was formed vide GO No. 1411 on June 26, 2019.

The subcommittee had found that insider trading had taken place in respect of purchase of lands even before Amaravati was declared as the Capital.

The resolution said that the subcommittee had found that the then chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu breached the oath of secrecy and divulged the Capital plans to his close aides, helping them purchase lands in Amaravati.

YSRCP MLA G Srikanth Reddy said on discussion on the subject had already held earlier, only four members from the Treasury benches would speak on the issue.

Chief Whip Kapu Ramachandra Reddy, Agriculture Minister Kurasala Kanna Babu, Srikanth Reddy and another MLA spoke on the issue.

## In one week, Vemulavada temple hundi nets Rs 1.51 cr

PNS ■ YADADRI/VELMULAVADA

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

The hundi offerings included 179 grams of gold, 10.5 kg of silver articles, temple EO Krishnaveni said. The record level temple hundi earnings are attributed to large turnout of devotees at the temple on account of the Medaram festival. Meanwhile, a temple staff member was caught redhanded while stealing Rs 9,000 of the hundi offerings concealing the money in his lungi. This apart, the Yadadri Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple also earned Rs 1.04 crore in 29 days. The temple hundi offerings include cash, 49 grams of gold and 1.9 kg of silver.



## BJP-Jana Sena combine to fight for people's issues

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

BJP state unit president Kanna Lakshminarayana on Wednesday issued a statement that the BJP and its political ally Jana Sena will work together hereafter and implement various activities jointly.

Releasing a joint statement by the BJP and Jana Sena, Kanna said that a coordination committee meeting of the alliance would be held in Vijayawada on January 28.

Jana Sena leader Nadendla Manohar said that the BJP-Jana Sena combine took a decision to stand by the farmers of the Amaravati capital region and maintained that a long-march would be held from Tadepalli to Vijayawada on February 2. He vowed that the combine would fight till justice is done to the people of the state.

Earlier, leaders of the combine had a meeting with Union Finance Minister Nirmala

Sitaraman and discussed with her the financial position of the state. Discussion on implementation of development programmes also figured at the meeting.

Rajya Sabha member GVL Narasimha Rao, Kanna Lakshminarayana, Sunil Diyodhara and D Purandeswari represented the BJP, while Pawan Kalyan and Nadendla Manohar represented the Jana Sena at the meeting.

## Medaram Jatara: Jaggery traders jack up prices

PNS ■ WARANGAL

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

It is a customary practice of devotees to offer jaggery equal to their weight to the deities. At



least nine jaggery traders formed into a syndicate claiming to have the support of an excise official. It has created

sensation among the business circles in the area.

At least 150-200 lorries of jaggery, each with a capacity of

17 tonnes or 22 tonnes, are sold during the festival period. Traders and officials becoming hand-in-glove with each other had created a controversy. In case of a 17 tonne lorry (10-tyre lorry), the profit margin of the trader would be at least Rs 1.70 lakh even if the price of jaggery happened to be hiked by Rs 10 a kg. The devotees have been urging the government officials to take steps to ensure that the traders would not hike the jaggery price by forming into a syndicate. During the Jatara, devotees

will offer white jaggery, popularly known in the Telugu-speaking states as 'Bangaram', to the presiding deities. Therefore, traders are making beelines to Karnataka and Maharashtra where the produce is cultivated in large quantities.

The traders hope that scores of devotees will arrive this time as well which would help them get high profit. In erstwhile Warangal district, wholesale jaggery traders are equipped with all necessary equipment.

## 11,158 Rythu bharosa Centres to be set up

Continued from Page 1

Market Intervention Scheme would be introduced for the stabilisation of price of farm produce and to provide remunerative price. The Chief Minister said he was proud to say that though the government had announced earlier that the farmers would be given Rs 12,500 per year for four years, the government has enhanced the amount to Rs 13,550 per year to be given for five years and so far 46 lakh farmers have been covered under the programme in the past six months.

The Chief Minister said that Calamity Relief Fund was set up with a corpus fund of Rs 2,000 crore and an Agriculture Mission was started for the welfare of farmers in which the representatives of Swaminatham Research Foundation and renowned

journalist Sainath are members. Earlier, intervening in the debate on Rythu Bharosa, the Chief Minister said unruly behavior by the TDP members, who created a scene by rushing to the Speaker's podium, was uncalled for and requested the Speaker to take stern action to see that such incidents are not repeated. He said such acts amounted to ridiculing democracy. He asked why members with such unethical values were present in the House.

The Chief Minister said the Opposition members should make constructive criticism or else abstain from the House instead of creating a ruckus. He asked the Speaker to keep marshals ready near the podium and frisk away any member who tries to disturb the House. He said even street-side rowdies were better than these 10 TDP members.

## Telangana Pavilion grabs eyeballs at WEF-2020

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

The Telangana Pavilion has a reception area, a waiting lounge,



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

A branded photography area is set up where the delegates can

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

## Council restored by Dad YSR, haunts son Jagan

Continued from Page 1

Later, in 1990, the then Congress government made an attempt for revival of the council but in vain. Subsequently, the Congress again promised revival of the council in its manifesto for 2004 assembly polls. After snatching power from the Telugu Desam, YSR made fresh efforts to revive the council.

Basing on a resolution passed by the state legislative assembly, the UPA government enacted the AP Legislative Council Bill in December 2005 for revival of the council. The Bill received the President's assent in January 2006 but it took almost a year for the Election Commission to complete the formalities for constitution of the council and for conduct of elections to fill the seats under various categories in the reconstituted Upper House.

Event the dissolution of Legislative Assembly is also expected to take over a year considering the procedural norms, it involves.

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



## Rise in uptake of digital financial services in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

Payworld data shows that there are over 450 Aadhaar-Enabled Payment (AEPs) transactions per day being undertaken by people in the semi-urban and rural pockets of Telangana. This number has been on the rise and is increasing constantly close to 70,000 per month. Moreover, money

remittance services have been the biggest grosser through Payworld, with an average of 9500 transactions per day with an average ticket size of Rs 2,900. This clearly indicates that the rising trend of adopting digital financial services is due to the increase in awareness of these services as well as the simplicity of using them through assisted means.

Praveen Dhabhai, COO, Payworld said, "Our entire focus since inception has been to provide complete access of digital financial services to semi-urban and rural consumers. We are happy to witness that the efforts have paid off and there is a great uptake of our services in one of the largest States in India, Telangana." Overall, the growth and uptake of the digital financial services through Payworld retailers have been on the rise in the state of Telangana with a growth of 46% year on year.

## TDP prevails, Capital Bills referred to Select Panel

Continued from Page 1

Later, he went back to his chambers and watched the Council proceedings three.

Even the media galleries were overcrowded as curious legislature staff, police personnel and several outsiders stormed them to witness the happening in the House, where the TDP is in a majority.

Earlier, the Council, which adjourned on Tuesday without taking up the Bills for consideration, discussed the AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill wherein the TDP strongly opposed the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government's three capitals proposal.

The YSR stuck to its scandal charges against the previous TDP government in relation to the capital and maintained the incumbent government was determined to develop all regions of the state equally.

At the end of the nearly five-hour debate, Leader of the Opposition in the Council Yanamala Ramakrishnu wanted the Bills to be referred to a Select Committee.

Contending that the Bills transgressed Parliamentary laws and legal issues, he said a deeper examination was required by the Select Committee.

"The Bills will have serious

## TDP seeks disqualification of its three MLCs

Continued from Page 1

Satrucharla sat through the Rule 71 debate but he went out of the House just before the voting. Violation of party whip attracts action as per the House rules. This happened despite the TDP's caution to protect its MLCs. Though the TDP successfully blocked 3 Capitals Bill from being tabled in AP Council on Tuesday, three of its MLCs slipped away at the last minute. The TDP got 34 MLCs strength but it could get just 27 votes in its favour.

implications for the state. They will affect the states image as well as investments," Yanamala claimed.

Public opinion should be taken into account before such bills were passed, he said, adding it should hence be referred to a Select Committee.

Legislative Affairs Minister Buggana Rajendranath objected to, citing rules and pro-

cedures.

"Has the TDP moved a motion, seeking reference of the Bill to a Select Committee, before it is taken up for consideration of the House? If not, the question of referring it to a Select Committee does not arise," Buggana contended.

When Council Chairman Sharrif said the TDP motion was indeed moved before the Bills were taken up for consideration, the YSR raised a strong protest saying there was no such record to prove it.

The ministers and YSR MLCs trooped into the Well of the House and picked up an argument with the Chairman.

The Chairman and the Legislature Secretary tried to explain things to the agitated ruling party members but to no avail, even as the TDP legislators too joined the protest.

MLC Nara Lokesh and Municipal Administration Minister Botsa Satyanarayana had an argument right in front of the Chairman's podium.

At one stage, an angry Consumer Affairs Minister Kodali Nani rushed towards the TDP MLCs and the latter shouted at him.

Both TDP and YSRCP leaders raised slogans and counter slogans against each other. With chaos refusing to die down, the Chairman adjourned the Council for 10 minutes.

## Speaker raps 'rude' TDP MLAs, says he is not weak

Continued from Page 1

Sitaram said, "I hail from a community belonging to the weaker sections, but I am not weak."

He further recommended to the Ethics Committee to review the behaviour of TDP MLAs and submit a report with recommended action to be taken.

"Even after repeated orders to calm down, TDP MLAs continued with their unruly behaviour at the Speaker's podium. I clearly said that time will be given to them to speak but they refused to calm down. I called marshals into the Assembly Hall just to get them to sit in their allotted seats. They had come to the session with a pre-meditated intention to create a disturbance," he said.

He said he was pained at the TDP MLAs' most disrespectful comments against him, someone who hailed from a backward class community.

"Such behaviour by TDP MLAs will not be tolerated and it should not be repeated. There are certain rules to be followed in the Assembly and these rules are meant for every member," the Speaker said.

## No stay on CAA, NPR: SC

Continued from Page 1

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

"Assam is facing a peculiar situation due to the migrants coming from Bangladesh as earlier cut off date for grant of citizenship was 1950, then cut of date was extended to March 24, 1971. This extension has been challenged before the apex court and the matter is pending," he said.

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

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

The top court observed that Assam's problem is different from rest of the country as the earlier cut off date for citizenship was March 24, 1971, which under the CAA has been extended to December 31, 2014.

Senior advocate K V



Vishwanathan, appearing for some anti-CAA petitioners said, "The operation of the Act should be postponed as their is apprehension among the minority but their is also anguish among the majority class of the country."

Singhi said that recently 40,000 people have been recommended by the Uttar Pradesh government to the Centre for grant of citizenship. "People are being marked as 'doubtful citizen' in 19 districts of Uttar Pradesh, which is creating panic among the masses that they will be disenfranchised and taken out of the electoral rolls," he said.

Singhi said, "They (UP government) are proceedings ahead even when the rules and regulations under the Act have not been notified. The process needs to be postponed by couple of months and it would not make any difference. Things

which have not happened for 70 years cannot be allowed to start in 20 months".

The CAA seeks to grant citizenship to migrants belonging to the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Jain and Parsi communities who came to the country from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan on or before December 31, 2014.

President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 on December 12, last year turning it into an Act.

Several petitions have been filed challenging the constitutional validity of the CAA. Among those who have filed pleas are the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, RJD leader Manoj Jha, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra and AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi.

## Jilted lover sets fire to house; 2 dead, 4 injured

Continued from Page 1

After learning about the marriage, Srinu attacked Satyavathi on January 17. A complaint regarding the attack was lodged with the Kadiyam police station, however, no action was taken by the police.

On knowing about the incident, Satyavathi's elder daughter G. Durga Bhavani along with her 5-year-old daughter came from Bhimavaram to console her mother. On Tuesday late night, the accused reportedly poured petrol on the house of Satyavathi and set it on fire. In the incident, K Ramu and elder daughter's daughter Vijaya Lakshmi were burnt alive in flames.

Satyavathi and her elder daughter Durga Bhavani sustained severe burn injuries and were rushed to a government hospital at Rajamahendravaram. A case was registered by the Kadiyam police and efforts are on to nab Srinu.



# JNU: All FIRs in line with Jan 3 incidents, no deviation from facts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) on Wednesday said all FIRs and other complaints filed with police are in-line with the incidents that took place on January 3 and do not deviate from facts after an RTI suggested discrepancies in the varsity administration's claims about vandalism in its server room.

The university said its reply to the RTI was related to the specific location and questions sought by the applicant. It also clarified that the servers were damaged by "a group of miscreants" on January 4.

"As per the complaint filed by administration on January 3, 2020 about the incident in Centre for Information System (CIS) Data Centre, JNU has not claimed about damage to servers on that day. The RTI answers are correct and specific to the questions asked," the varsity said.

The RTI response also clearly states that servers are located at CIS Data Centre not in



CIS office, which seems to be "conspicuously ignored while highlighting the matter in the media," it said.

"All FIRs and other complaints filed with police are in-line with the actual incidents that took place on January 3 and do not deviate from actual facts," it said.

The JNU administration reiterates that a group of masked students came to CIS Data Centre premises on January 3 and forcibly evicted

the technical staff, switched off the power supply, locked the premises and squatted in front of the main entrance to the CIS Data Centre without providing any access to the centre, the varsity said.

Before evicting the technical staff out of CIS Data Centre, the masked students forced the technical staff to shutdown the systems, it said.

"This led to the discontinuation of the winter semester registration affecting thou-

**The RTI response also clearly states that servers are located at CIS Data Centre not in CIS office, which seems to be "conspicuously ignored while highlighting the matter in the media", it said**

sands of students of the university. When CIS technical staff got an access to CIS Data Centre on the morning of January 4 with the help of security, it took more than four hours to restore the entire system of CIS," it said.

Damage to the CIS Data Centre server room was caused on January 4 by "a group of miscreants" who broke open one of the door-windows of the CIS premises and entered the server room, it said.

Once inside, they turned off the servers and severely damaged the fibre optic cables, power supplies, broke the biometric systems inside the room, it added.

"The miscreants then started sloganeering and intimidated the technical staff from entering the server room," the varsity said.

Biometric systems and CCTV cameras at the server room were not vandalised in the first week of January, contrary to the claims made by the Jawaharlal Nehru University administration that students had destroyed them on January 3, the varsity has said in a RTI reply.

The reply to the RTI filed by Saurav Das, a member of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), under "life and liberty" clause, said the main server of JNU at the Centre for Information System (CIS) was shut down on January 3 and had gone down the next day "due to power supply disruption".



## Prez confers Bal Shakti Puraskar on 49 braveheart kids

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ishan Sharma who saved a Russian tourist from two robbers, Omkar Singh who holds the world record for the youngest theoretical author and youngest pianist in India Gauri Mishra were among those who were given the Bal Shakti Puraskar 2020 by President Ram Nath Kovind on Wednesday.

Kovind conferred the awards to 49 children in the age group of 5-18 years at a ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan here. The Bal Shakti Puraskar is given to children in the fields of innovation, social service, scholastic,

sports, art and culture and bravery and carries a medal, a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh, a certificate and a citation.

The 49 awardees also included 12-year-old Darsh Malani, who has performed over 50 magic shows worldwide and 11-year-old Manoj Kumar Lohar has been awarded for his mastery in "tabla vadan".

Gauri Mishra, who has the "Youngest pianist of India" record in her name and Korok Biswas, an exceptional dancer despite being diagnosed with down syndrome and 50 per cent intellectual disability are also among the awardees in the Art and Culture category.

### SHORT READS



#### UP: 3 killed, 1 injured as car rams into truck due to dense fog

**SITAPUR (UP):** A car carrying four passengers rams into a truck in the early hours of Wednesday due to dense fog here, killing three people and injuring one, officials said. Vimal Berry (60), Vinodini Gupta (40) and car driver Anshu (80) died on the spot, police said. Hari Prasad Gupta, 60, who sustained head injuries, was admitted to a hospital here. Vimal Berry and his friend Gupta were returning from a marriage in Lucknow when the accident occurred under the Ataria police station. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem, the police added.

#### Tribal woman gangraped in Chhattisgarh; 3 held

**KORBA:** A 23-year-old tribal woman was allegedly raped by three men at a forest in Chhattisgarh's Korba district, a police official said on Wednesday. All the accused have been arrested, he said. The incident took place late Sunday evening when the woman went to relieve herself in a forest area under Balco Nagar police station limits, the official said. The woman, who is separated from her husband, was staying at her parents' home in a village here since the past few days. When she went into the forest, the accused suddenly grabbed her and dragged her near a rivulet where they allegedly took turns to rape her, the official said. They tied the woman's hands with a scarf and also gagged her so that she could not scream for help, he said, adding that when she fell unconscious, the accused fled. After the woman regained consciousness, she somehow managed to reach home and narrated the ordeal to her parents who lodged a police complaint on Monday.

#### Woman injured after neighbours throw acid on her in UP

**SITAPUR (UP):** A 32-year-old woman was injured after her neighbours threw acid on her following an argument here, police said on Wednesday. The acid was from a car battery, they said. Anita, who suffered minor injuries, was sent home after primary medical aid at the district hospital, the police said, adding a case was registered against four people. They said the accused were at large and will be nabbed soon.



## CBI registers four fresh cases against Chhota Rajan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has taken over the probe into an attempt to kill a veteran journalist in 1997 and three other fresh cases allegedly involving jailed gangster Chhota Rajan, officials said on Wednesday.

Baljeet Shersingh Parmar, a noted crime reporter in Mumbai, was severely injured after motorcycle borne shooters of Rajan allegedly attacked him outside a building at Antop Hill on June 12, 1997, they said.

The agency has taken over the Mumbai police FIR in the case filed under IPC sections related to attempt to murder, they said.

The agency has registered two more cases of extortion by alleged gang members of Rajan and one case related to issuing threats to life, the officials said.

The agency has booked Rajan and his henchmen Guru Satam and Suresh for allegedly demanding Rs 20 lakh as extortion money from businessman Devang Bipin Parikh



in 1995, they said.

The other case pertains to alleged demand of Rs 25 lakh in 1998 from a man named Ghisulal Jain by Hemant, who is believed to be a member of Rajan gang, they said.

The Mumbai police had filed charge sheets in both the cases but Rajan remained absconding, they said.

The last case is related to threats issued to the life of builder Shabbir N Patel and his son in 1996, they said.

In November last year, the CBI had taken over 10 cases, including those of extortion and murder, in which Rajan

was allegedly involved. These cases were registered in a 14-year period since 1992, they said.

These cases include killing of trade union leader Datta Samant in 1997 in Mumbai in which Rajan's role is suspected, they said.

Rajan was arrested at Bali airport in Indonesia on October 25, 2015, and deported to India. He is an accused in around 70 cases in Maharashtra, including the J Dey murder case in 2011.

The Maharashtra government has handed over all these cases to CBI.

## Delhi court seeks report on Jamia violence by police

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court Wednesday directed the police to file an action taken report on the plea of Jamia Millia Islamia University seeking registration of FIR against police action on students at the varsity last month.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rajat Goyal sought report from Delhi police by March 16. JMIU students and locals had protested at Jamia Nagar in Delhi on December 15, 2019 against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. Protesters torched four buses and two police vehicles as they clashed with the police in New Friends Colony. Police baton charged the protesters and used tear gas shells to disperse the mob before entering the varsity campus, detaining several persons allegedly involved in the violence.



## Militant killed in encounter in J&K's Pulwama district

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

A militant was killed in an encounter with security forces in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir as the operation to flush out ultras in Khrew area entered the second day on Wednesday, police said. An Army jawan and a special police officer (SPO) were killed in a gunbattle in the area of Tuesday.

The gunbattle had started after cordon and search operation were launched by security forces in the district on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day Director General of Police (DGP) Dilbag Singh had told reporters that there were reports of presence of two militants in the area.

"The Khrew operation resumed this (Wednesday) morning after being suspended on Tuesday night. So far, there is no confirmation of any militant being killed there... We have reports of presence of two militants there and the search is on," Singh had said on the sidelines of a wreath-laying ceremony of the slain SPO Shabbaz Ahmad. The DGP said operations against militants in the val-



ley have been intensified.

"Counter-terrorist operations in the valley have been intensified, which has created a stir in south Kashmir. There have been half-a-dozen successful operations and they will continue in the same manner. We will work harder for the people and for establishing peace in Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

Asked about preparations for the Republic Day functions in the Kashmir Valley, Singh said all arrangements are in place.

"We have done all preparations on the ground. Preparations have been done in all districts of the valley. All security arrangements have been put in place in Srinagar as

well. I think all other arrangements have also been done for the January 26 function and this function will take place smoothly," the DGP said.

On a question about the police using drones for surveillance in Srinagar city, Singh said they are technical aids that help police. "Drones are a normal technical aid which every police force uses in this age. Jammu and Kashmir Police also uses them to cover law and order situations. I think this is a very good help and drones show us what happens in lanes and bylanes which otherwise is not possible. They tell us about any mischievous activity taking place there," he said.

## Anti-CAA protesters lathicharged by police in UP's Etawah



PNS ■ ETAWAH (UP)

People protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act were allegedly lathicharged by police in a Muslim-dominated area in Uttar Pradesh's Etawah district.

A video of the incident, where policemen can be seen using batons and chasing away protesters in the area on

late Tuesday night, has also gone viral on social media.

Violence broke out when police tried to disperse the protesters who were on a sit-in since Tuesday morning in Pachraha area, defying prohibitory orders imposed there.

"The police indulged in force against us while we were holding a peaceful protest. Our brothers and

cousins were beaten up and we were abused. We were physically tortured. We have a right to protest," one of the women protesters said.

Responding to the allegations, police said the protesters had staged dharna defying prohibitory order imposed in the area and were pelting stones. Police said they had to use mild force to chase the protesters

away. In the video, policemen can be seen entering houses and shops.

The sit-in was organised in solidarity with women protesting at Shaheen Bagh in Delhi against the new legislation. "Police are citing prohibitory orders to end out protest. What about the large public meetings being held by ministers," another protester said.

## NGT asks CPCB to give report on railway engine emissions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal asked the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on Wednesday to submit compliance report on its order on guidelines enumerating locomotive standards for Railways.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel directed the apex pollution monitoring body to submit report in a month.

"This tribunal on consideration of pollution by operation of locomotive engines by the Railways, directed that the guidelines, containing locomotive standards, be put up on the website of CPCB and expeditious efforts be made by all the stakeholders including MoEF, CPCB to approve the final parameters for locomotive engines, after completing the study and then to notify the same.

"Let the CPCB file a report about the compliance of the above directions within one month by e-mail," the bench said.



Railways" aims to fix standards and protocols for the sector to achieve the targets submitted by India under the Paris climate change agreement.

The Railways contributed 9.7 per cent of this figure (24.7 million tonne). Globally, however, only 3.5 per cent of the emissions from the transport sector are attributed to the rail sector, the report said.

The directions came while hearing a petition filed by Dwarka resident S K Goyal about harmful emissions from diesel locomotives.



## Special needs kids can use calculators during exams: CBSE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Children with special needs appearing for the Central Board of Secondary Examination (CBSE) in class 10 or 12 will be able to use basic calculators from this year, officials said. "The board has decided to facilitate students under Children with Special Needs (CSWN) category by permitting use of simple basic calculator during Class X and Class XII board examination," CBSE Controller for Examination Sanyam Bhardwaj

said in a letter sent to schools.

"Calculator will only be allowed to those students who have already been registered under CWSN category for the 2020 examination," he added.

To avail the facility, the students have to give a request to the schools by January 28 and principals will have to forward it to concerned regional office of CBSE. "Candidates who will request without appropriate certificate will not be allowed to use calculator during examinations," Bhardwaj said.

## Groom's dad and bride's mom elope; family calls off marriage

PNS ■ SURAT

Old longing for each other seems to have prevailed over societal norms for Gujarat residents Himmat Patel and Shobhna Raval when they apparently decided to rekindle their young love and 'eloped', shattering the marriage plans of their respective son and daughter.

While Patel is a resident of Katargam area of Surat, Raval hails from Vejalpore in Navsari district.

Patel (43) and Raval (42) have been "missing" since January 10 and a police complaint has been lodged to trace them, a family relative has said.

The relative claimed that both Patel and Raval knew each other since their childhood.

Both of them used to live in the same society in Katargam earlier before Raval shifted to Navsari after her marriage.

"Since they knew each other, it is possible that they might have decided to rekindle their



old love and eventually eloped together. They came into contact once again after Patel sought the hand of Raval's daughter for his son. When both the families were busy in the preparations for the marriage, which was scheduled for the second week of February, both of them eloped on January 10," he claimed.

Raval's husband said the family was put in an embarrassing situation due to her act.

"The wedding, which was supposed to be held in the second week of February, has

been called off now," he said. Both the families have informed local police stations about the disappearance.

"Since Navsari police is also investigating the case, we are also kept in the loop. Both of them are yet to be traced," said police inspector, Katargam, B D Gohil.

Gohil said the investigation revealed that the duo had visited Mahakaleswar temple in Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday.

"We are trying to talk to them," he added.

SHORT READS



**Maha govt to scrap direct election of village sarpanchs**

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

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

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



**Interpol issues Blue Corner notice against godman Nithyananda**

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

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

PNS ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

**Revised cost estimate for campuses of NITs**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



DELHI POLLS

**Tharoor alleges financial irregularities by AAP govt**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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**Centre designates Daman as HQs of 2 merged UTs**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

CENTRAL ARMED POLICE FORCES

**Govt allocates Rs 232 crore for infra development**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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



**'Kanyashree' to raise breast cancer awareness**

PNS ■ BALURGHAT (WB)

Beneficiaries of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's UN award-winning pet project 'Kanyashree' will make people aware about breast cancer and work towards early detection of the disease in South Dinajpur district, officials said on Wednesday.

District Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH), Dr Sukumar Dey said that 180 students of classes 11 and 12 — who have benefitted from the conditional cash transfer scheme — from various blocks will spread awareness on the disease under the 'Pragya' project.

The district administration will soon conduct a workshop to train the volunteers for

early detection of breast cancer. "Only 10 per cent of breast cancer cases are detected in the early stages. We hope to increase the percentage to 30 per cent after the drive. The Kanyashree girls had earlier played an effective role in creating awareness on dengue," he said. Mahadyuti Adhikary, nodal officer of 'Kanyashree' in the district, said that 'Pragya project' is being implemented only in South Dinajpur. "Rural women will open up more to the health workers when they are accompanied by young local volunteers," he said.

Kanyashree scheme, which is aimed at reducing drop-out rates of girls and delaying their marriage till they attain adulthood, has been awarded by the United Nations.

**43 flights, over 9K passengers screened for coronavirus**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 43 flights and 9,156 passengers were screened for novel coronavirus till Tuesday at the seven identified airports including Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, Union Health Secretary Preeti Sudan said on Wednesday.

Till now, no cases have been detected through these screening efforts, she said. Sudan further said the Indian Embassy in China has been regularly providing the health ministry with updates on the status of the infected cases in that country.

The Embassy has informed that a total of 440 cases of pneumonia with novel coronavirus were confirmed in China and nine people have died till Wednesday.

"Cases have been reported in 14 provinces (including Taiwan) and municipalities as well," the health secretary said.



**Speeding car mows down five women workers**

PNS ■ ROURKELA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

He also said keeping shops,



malls and eateries open in the night was not mandatory.

"Only those who feel they can do good business can keep their establishments open

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

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

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

He also said that while taking the decision, Excise rules have not been touched and pubs and bars will close as usual at 1.30am. "People can eat food, shop and watch movies even during the night," he said. He said Mumbai is a "24x7 functional city." "There are people who work in night shifts.

There are tourists, too, in transit. Where do they go if they are hungry after 10 pm?" he asked. Thackeray also said there are provisions for security and CCTVs in malls and mill compounds and they have all the licenses. If these establishments need additional police security, they will have to pay for it, he added.

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

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

the answers of the asked questions. The RTI has a set of different questions pertaining to the different branches of the university," the varsity said.

The RTI question was related to the varsity's admission, evaluation and CIS branch. "Different branches of the university keep their data in different formats. The Central Public Information Office directly sends the data available in their respective branch to the applicant," the varsity said.

Asked about criticism from the BJP over this move, the minister said the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government was working to fulfil people's aspirations. "The BJP is against the youth, seeing the way they are handling students," he said, referring to the recent violence in Delhi's JNU and Jamia Millia Islamia.

PAPER WITH PASSION  
**Miffed allies**

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



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

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

**Another deadly virus**

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



It looks like every second year, a new deadly contagion emerges in China. First, it was SARS, then Avian Flu, which was followed by Swine Flu and now, a new coronavirus has taken over the Chinese city of Wuhan. This new virus is estimated to have infected over 400 people, nine of whom have died. Thanks in no small part to the boom in international air travel within and outside China, which connects even secondary cities such as Wuhan, cases have spread in several countries now, including across the Pacific in the US. Earlier viruses like Avian Flu or Bird Flu were thought to have originated in illegal poultry farms where animals were kept in unhygienic conditions. In the case of Swine Flu, too, the emergence of the virus was in pig farms. Avian Flu led to the killing of millions of birds at poultry farms as they were culled. With the emergence of Swine Flu, where the virus was thought to have passed from domesticated pigs to humans, thousands of pigs were eliminated as well. And now, this latest virus, which does not have a moniker as yet, appears to have emerged from the illegal trade in marine wildlife in that Chinese city.

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

**A never-ending crisis**

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



KUSHAN MITRA

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

The 787 is an immensely successful aircraft today, hundreds of them forming the backbone of airline fleets across the world. But Boeing did not have the time and its management thought of developing a new aircraft. A better option, no matter what the physics, would have been to re-engine the current airframe with minor modifications.

Well, the modifications were not simple. In order to fit a larger fan, Boeing engineers had to move the engine further forward and above the wing. This caused some major problems to the aerodynamic properties of the 737 but these could be solved. Pilots could be trained to deal with the changes. Then came another problem. One major selling point for airlines is to calculate the number of additional training pilots needed when they move to a new type of aircraft. Pilots trained on the regular Airbus A320 could fly the new A320 Neo with just a couple of hours of orientation. Boeing promised pretty much the same even though it was obvious — something that the stash of internal emails revealed — that pilots should have taken many more hours of training for

the MAX, even some hours inside the simulator.

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

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

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

(The writer is Managing Editor, The Pioneer)

**SOUNDBITE**

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

Congress MP —Shashi Tharoor



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

Actor —Priyanka Chopra



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

US President —Donald Trump



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

PDP president —Mehbooba Mufti



**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

**Righting the wrong**

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

Nimai Charan Swain  
Bhubaneswar

**Crash barriers will make roads safer**

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

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



1,51,417, indicating an increase of 2.3 per cent over 2017 figures. About 85 per cent of accident-related deaths happen in the most productive age group of 18-60. Cost effective solutions for crash barriers are available worldwide. All we need are implementation and adoption.

Shubham  
Via email

**Growth trouble**

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

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

Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

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

Srishti Mathur  
Ujjain

**The clock is ticking**

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

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

Anna Mary Yvonne  
Chennai

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

**FIRST COLUMN**

## The tech-savvy road to health

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Language barriers:** English is not a preferred conversational medium for most senior citizens and as most technology platforms are designed for urban, English-speaking customers, this becomes a major mental obstacle not only for senior citizens but also for care providers. So, the big question is, how can technology transform senior healthcare? There are multiple areas where technology can become a real force-multiplier.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—UNION MINISTER  
**MUKHTAR ABBAS NAQVI**

**POINT COUNTERPOINT**



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

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

# The changemakers

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



**MOIN QAZI**

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

The foundation is a UN-accredited

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Vote for the environment

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



**SRIRAJ KOTA**

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

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

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

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



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

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

heavily criticised by the Central Government.

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

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

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

However, the fact remains that

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

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

(The writer is an environmental journalist)

**FOREIGN EYE**



**BE ALERT, NOT AFRAID**

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

CAPSULE



Trump calls Boeing a 'big, big disappointment'

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



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

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



SBI Life Q3 profit up 47 pc at Rs 390 cr

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

India's overall score fell from 7.23 in 2018 to 6.90 in the Index that provides a snapshot of the current state of democracy worldwide for 165 independent states and two territories.

On India, the report said, the country dropped ten places in the Democracy Index's global ranking to 51st. The primary cause of the democratic regression was an erosion of civil liberties in the country.

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

Based on their total score, the countries are classified as



**Pakistan was ranked 108th on the overall list with a score of 4.25, while Sri Lanka was at 69th place with a score of 6.27, Bangladesh (at 80th with 5.88 score).**

one of four types of regime: "full democracy" (scores greater than 8); flawed democracy -- scores greater than 6 and less than or equal to 8; hybrid regime -- scores greater than 4 and less than or equal to 6; authoritarian regime --

scores less than or equal to 4". India was included in the "flawed democracy" category. Meanwhile, China's score fell to 2.26 in the 2019 index, and the country is now ranked 153rd, close to the bottom of the global rankings.

## 'AFT Mill in Puducherry will never be closed'

PNS ■ PUDUCHERRY

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

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

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

The Minister said the Lt



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

—SHAH JAHAN  
Revenue and Industries Minister M O H F

Governor had, however, disapproved of the cabinet decision.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, Pakistan was ranked 108th on the overall list with a score of 4.25, while Sri Lanka was at 69th place with a score of 6.27, Bangladesh (at 80th with 5.88 score).

The overall list was topped by Norway, followed by Iceland and Sweden. Other countries in the top 10 include New Zealand at the fourth place, Finland (5th), Ireland (6th), Denmark (7th), Canada (8th), Australia (9th) and Switzerland (10th).

North Korea was at the bottom of the global ranking at 167th place.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

Citing an NSO report, India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) said the slowdown is a combination of several factors including an abrupt and significant fall in lending by non-banking financial companies close on the heels of a slowdown in bank lending and reduced income growth of households coupled with a fall in savings and higher leverage.

Although some improvement in FY2020-21 is expected, these risks are going to persist, India Ratings and Research principal economist Sunil Sinha said.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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



Nadu and Kerala within a year, company senior vice-president Saurabh Sharma said. "Tamil Nadu and Kerala have witnessed a 50 per cent business growth in last year and we expect significant growth in digital adoption from this region in 2020", he told reporters.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"Our vision is to become the world's largest solar power company by 2025 and the largest renewable power company by 2030," he wrote. In 2019, the Adani Group was ranked as the sixth largest solar player globally and as a part of this journey, "we are well within reach to be India's largest renewable energy company by 2020 and one of the top three global solar energy companies by 2021."



## Sensex sheds 208 pts; ONGC tanks 5 per cent

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

## Indian cities to add 100 new malls by 2022

PNS ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

imately 3.5 mn sq. ft.

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

**The remaining 31 malls over 13.5 mn sq. ft. will come up in tier 2 & 3 cities such as Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Indore, Surat and Nagpur, it said in a statement**

of Anarock Retail, Anuj Kejrival said.

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

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

# China virus outbreak may wallop economy, financial markets

AP ■ BANGKOK

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Nikkei 225 jumped 0.7%.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Raising the standards of EDUCATION

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

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

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

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

Till date, more than 6,000 students in Telangana benefited through these programme by 100 Smiles, says Manoj Kumar.

Apart from digital classrooms, they have provided computer and science labs to 24 government schools in eight districts of Telangana including Warangal, Mahbubabad, Mahbubnagar, Sangareddy, Rangareddy, Medak, Nalgonda and Adilabad.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MANOJ KUMAR CHITTIMALLA  
FOUNDER, 100 SMILES



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

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

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

## ‘OTT services have no impact on TV serials’

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

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

### In the limelight

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

### Tough times

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

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

### Unpredictable role

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

### Learning Telugu

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

### Where is your Taylor?

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

grateful to my audience for the tremendous reception."

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

### Change perception

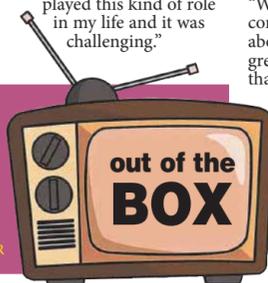
He said the serial actors are not given the same respect as cinema stars. He shares, "In Kannada, serial actors get the same name and fame as cinema artistes. But, in Telugu it is different. I don't know the reason for it but people perception has to change about serial actors. Whatever the field is,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

### OTT impact

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

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

AKARSH BYRAMUDI, ACTOR





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

“

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

VI ANAND  
DIRECTOR



## ASURAN remake rolls in Uravakonda

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

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

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

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

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



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

**T**he makers of Superstar Mahesh Babu-starrer *Sarileru Neekevarru*, which set the box-office on fire, will be adding a couple of new scenes to the film's prints starting from this weekend. Announcing this at a press meet in Hyderabad on Wednesday, the film's director Anil Ravipudi said one particular comedy scene between Mahesh Babu and Rao Ramesh running into the length of one-and-half minutes will be added from the

weekend. He also clarified they are not removing any scenes as reported by some media outlets recently. Film's producer Anil Sunkara said that the film is best grosser in Mahesh's career and that the distributors and exhibitors got more than what they wished for from the film's collections. "One particular distributor told me it's the best Sankranti of the Telugu industry," Sunkara added. Meanwhile, Mahesh is celebrating the film's success in the US with his family.

## JAANU BOOKS ITS RELEASE DATE

**V**alentine's Day will arrive a little early for Telugu movie buffs. The much anticipated *Jaanu* — official Telugu remake of Tamil super hit '96 — will release on February 7, production house Sri Venkateswara Creations announced on Wednesday. Although the Prem Kumar-directed film, spearheaded by Sharwanand and Samantha, was wrapped up long back, producer Raju was waiting for a right release date. He had considered releasing the movie on February 21 but he advanced it now. A heart-touching love story, *Jaanu* revolves around two childhood sweethearts who meet 20 years later in a school reunion. The original was raved for its representation of love and its music by Govind Vasantha, who has been retained for the remake as well. The film's first single was released on Tuesday and Raju is planning to amp up the promotional activity from next week. *Jaanu* will be followed by another romantic drama, *World Famous Lover*, on February 14.



## Nikhil basketball player in Konda's next

**A**fter Aditya Music forayed into production recently with *Entha Manchi Vaadavuraa*, another south music company Lahari Music has decided to follow suit. The reputed music label will be producing Kannada actor Nikhil Kumar's next flick with Telugu director Vijay Kumar

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

A Kannada-Telugu bilingual, the film, we hear, will be a love story which revolves around basketball. Nikhil will be playing a basketball player in the film and he has been prepping for his role in Bengaluru. "The shoot will begin towards the month-end in Bengaluru and it will be shot later in Mysore, Hyderabad and in the

US as well. The makers are extremely happy with the response the first look poster has garnered. The leading lady and other supporting artistes will predominantly be from Kannada," said a source. Kannada's top music director Arjun Janya is on board to compose tunes, while Konda has handed over the editing job to Prawin Pudi.



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

# LIGHTNING QUICK

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

British Rana played the "best knock" of his first-class career as Delhi shocked defending champions Vidarbha by six wickets in an incredible final day run chase in the Ranji Trophy here on Wednesday.

With this memorable run chase on day four, Delhi handed Vidarbha their first outright defeat in a first class game after three years.

Chasing 347, Rana, who has made a name with his big-hitting exploits in the IPL, smashed an unbeaten 105 off only 68 balls as Delhi reached the target in 73 overs, leaving Vidarbha gutted.

Delhi now have 16 points and stay in hunt for a quarterfinal berth while Vidarbha stay put on 17 points.

The chase was set up by openers Kunal Chandel (75 off 146) and Hiten Dalal (82 off 146) with a steady stand of 163 in under 49 overs.

The left-handed Rana then took charge and sent the Vidarbha bowlers including fancied Umesh Yadav (0/85 in 19 overs) on a leather hunt with eight fours and seven sixes.

"I had promised our coach (KP) Bhaskar sir that if its 75 overs and around 320 runs, we will win. This is the best first class knock that I have played. I haven't forgotten the 2017 final in Indore, which Vidarbha won without playing outstanding cricket.

"I knew I can hit their spinners out of the ground," Rana told reporters having ripped opposition off-spinner Akshay Wakhare (64 off 9 overs) with slog sweeps, cuts and drives.

Vidarbha coach Chandrakant Pandit took a gamble with a sporting declaration but it backfired as a side with its back to the wall produced the best performance of the season.

Openers Kunal and Hiten played confidently without taking pressure on an eased out track.

Once Rana came in, Vidarbha sensing danger, deployed a negative field '7-2' (seven on the off side) field.

Their pacers Rajneesh



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

Gurbani (0/64 in 12 overs) started bowling on an imaginary seventh off stump line.

The umpires started calling no ball and then Delhi started

attacking as they were forced to change the line.

"I knew they would bowl negative line but what I didn't like was time wasting tactic. Once



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

## HIGHEST SUCCESSFUL CHASES IN RANJI

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

FAISEL FEATURES

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

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

### MAIDEN TRIPLE HUNDRED

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

Uttar Pradesh had posted a humongous 625/8 declared in

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

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

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

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

to bat and did the job for his team.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sanju Samson in a file picture PTI

## Shaw, Samson celebrate senior team call up

PTI ■ LINCOLN

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

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

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

Chasing 231 after opting to field, India completed the task with more than 20 overs to spare at the Bert Sutcliffe Oval.

With the ball, Mohammed Siraj was the most successful bowler for India A, picking up three wickets for 33 runs in 6.3 overs, while there were two wickets apiece for Khaleel Ahmed and Axar Patel.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Smriti Mandhana in a file picture

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Southee 'looking forward' to India series

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Angelo Mathews celebrates after double hundred AP

## Mathews 200\* hurt Zimbabwe

AFP ■ HARARE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IANS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## SINGLES

### TOP FIELD FOR B'LRUR ATP CHALLENGER

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

### NIKHAT, SHIVA ENTER STRANDJA QUARTERS

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

### MEXICAN STRIKER HERNANDEZ JOINS GALAXY

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

### AUSTRALIA TO HOST INDOOR CRICKET WC

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

### GIBSON IS B'DESH NEW PACE BOWLING COACH

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

### IRAN TEAMS AFC CL MATCHES MOVED TO UAE

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