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VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY JANUARY 24, 2020; PAGES 12 & 3



the pioneer



SAI TEJ BOARDS
SANKRITYAN'S
TIME-TRAVEL
ADVENTURE

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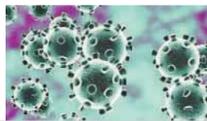
AFTER UDDHAV AND ADITYA, ANOTHER 'SON-RISE' IN THACKERAY CLAN

Setting political circles af flutter, MNS chief Raj Thackeray on Thursday formally launched his 27-year-old son Amit Thackeray into politics at the party's first mega-convention here. Amit Thackeray's name was announced by a senior leader BalaNandgaonkar and greeted with a standing ovation by the 20,000 plus gathering at the NSE Ground, Goregaon. Humbly acknowledging the 'abhishek' honour, Amit Thackeray folded his hands -- and taking a leaf out of his uncle Uddhav Thackeray's book -- stepped forward on the stage, bowed and prostrated, and expressed gratitude to party workers.



NURSE WORKING IN SAUDI 1ST INDIAN INFECTED WITH CORONAVIRUS

A nurse working at a hospital in Saudi Arabia is the first Indian to be infected by the deadly Coronavirus that originated in China and has killed 17 so far. V Muralidharan, the Minister of State for External Affairs, said about 100 Indian nurses, mostly from Kerala have been tested and none except one nurse was found infected by Coronavirus. The minister said the Indian nurses had been quarantined due to the Coronavirus threat. "Affected nurse is being treated at Aseer National Hospital and is recovering well," he tweeted.



SNAKES MAY BE THE SOURCE OF CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK IN CHINA

Snakes may be the original source of the newly discovered novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) that has triggered an outbreak of a deadly infectious respiratory illness in China, according to a new study. The finding, published in the Journal of Medical Virology, provides important insights on the potential origins of the most recent outbreak of viral pneumonia in China, which is now spreading to Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, and Japan. "Results from our analysis suggest for the first time that snake is the most probable wildlife animal reservoir for the 2019-nCoV," said researchers.



PAK CONDUCTS TEST LAUNCH OF BALLISTIC MISSILE GHAZNAVI

Pakistan on Thursday conducted a successful test launch of surface to surface ballistic missile Ghaznavi, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. "Ghaznavi missile is capable of delivering multiple types of warheads up to a range of 290 kilometres," the ISPR said, adding that the training launch was part of a Field Training Exercise of Army Strategic Forces Command aimed at rehearsing operational readiness procedures during day and night. The training launch was witnessed by Lieutenant General Nadeem ZakiManj.



Jagan: Can a poor state like AP afford to have an Upper House?

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday questioned the rationale behind a poor state like Andhra Pradesh having the State Legislative Council.

"Is it necessary for a poor state to have the Legislative Council?" he asked, reminding that the purpose of the Upper House in the past was to accommodate intelligentsia.

"We need to seriously think whether we need to have such a House which appears to be functioning with only political motives. It is not mandatory to have the Council, which is our own creation, and it is only for our convenience. So let us discuss the issue further on Monday and take a decision on whether or not to continue the Council," the Chief Minister told the Assembly on Thursday



YS Jaganmohan Reddy

evening. "These days, there are doctors, doctorates and former civil servants among members of the Legislative Assembly," he said questioning where else would one find

such intelligentsia. "Where is the need for the State Council when the Assembly is studded with several members of intelligentsia?" the Chief

- AP spends Rs 60 crore annually to run the Legislative Council
- The purpose of the Council appears to filibuster the Bills passed by Assembly
- Assembly has many members from intelligentsia. Where is the need for an Upper House for AP?
- Why Naidu sat in visitors' gallery of Upper House is everybody's guess
- CM is the fountainhead of administration and government runs from the place where the CM lives

Minister said. He put the total expenditure being incurred by the state government to run the Council at Rs 60 crore per annum.

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Shariff becomes an instant hero for Amaravati farmers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

For the farmers of Amaravati Capital region, Legislative Council Chairman MA Shariff has become an overnight hero. The whole of Thursday saw farmers rejoicing, and showing their gratitude to Shariff by bathing his portraits with milk. Shariff's decision to use his extraordinary and special powers and send the AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill, 2020 and the APCRDA (Repeal) Bill, passed by the Assembly to a Select Committee are being described as a "heroic act" by the people of the 29 villages in the capital region.

The Council Chairman had quoted the special powers under Rule 154 based on which he referred the Bill to the Select Committee. The previous day, TDP MLCs have used Rule 71 - for the first time in the state's history - and had



Residents of Amaravati Capital region on Thursday wash a portrait of Council Chairman MA Shariff with milk as a sign of adulation.

left the State government with no option but to wait for three more months. On Wednesday, Shariff had ignored protests by ministers Kodali Venkataramaiah and Muttamsetti Srinivas who had climbed the table in front of his seat against his decision.

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'Will invite Cong, NCP to join Thackeray on Ayodhya visit'

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Pavan Varma free to leave JDU when he wants: Nitish

5



Indian economy poised to take off, says Goyal

8

TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Paush & Krishna Paksha Panchangam
Tithi: Amavasya: 03:11 am (Next Day)
Nakshatram: Ulara Ashra: 02:46 am (Next Day)
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 11:04 am - 12:28 pm
Yamagandam: 03:15 pm - 04:39 pm
Varjyam: 09:49 am - 11:30 am
Gulika: 08:16 am - 09:40 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 07:59 pm - 09:41 pm
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:05pm - 12:50pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Clear with periodic clouds
Temp: 30/17
Humidity: 41%
Sunrise: 06:49
Sunset: 06:06
Current Weather Conditions
Updated January 23, 2020 7:00 PM

HC bars govt from shifting HoD offices

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Thursday ordered the State government not to relocate the offices of various head of departments from Amaravati.

Chief Justice JK Maheswari, after hearing the arguments in the Capital cases, initially said that there was no need for look into the Bills that were tabled in the Assembly and the Council.

However, when counsel of the petitioners Ashok Bhan said if there were no court orders, the offices of all heads of departments would be shifted, Chief Justice Maheswari directed the government to maintain status quo until the cases were disposed. If the



government shifted the offices, it would have to take responsibility for the act, he warned.

Chief Justice Maheswari adjourned the case to February 26. Counsel for the petitioners said the High Court had taken the people's concerns into consideration.

Speaking to the media after the hearing, Ashok Bhan said that he had told the court that the High Power Committee report was hidden from the people and urged it to order the government to make it public.

English medium introduced to change lives of poor: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

English medium is being introduced at the primary school level by the government to change the way of life of children, said Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday.

He was speaking during a discussion on the AP Education Act 1/1982 (Amendment Bill) 2019 in the Assembly where he announced that special kits would be provided to all 36.10 lakh primary school children on June 1, just before the commencement of the academic year. This initiative is part of Vidya Kanuka scheme for which Rs 487 crore has been allocated.

Though the Education Bill was passed in the previous



File picture of children learning with the help of illustrated books.

Assembly session, it was sent back by the Legislative Council with some amendments making selection of medium optional by the student or the parent. However, the Assembly rejected the amendments and passed the Bill

unanimously. The Chief Minister said he was unable to understand why the Opposition members were disallowing the Bill that is aimed at providing Right to Education to poor children.

Continued on Page 3

Congress is suffering from mental bankruptcy: Nadda

PNS ■ AGRA (UP)

Newly elected BJP national president J P Nadda on Thursday slammed the Congress for opposing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, saying the leadership of the party was suffering from "mental bankruptcy".

"The Congress has lost all hopes. Its leadership is suffering from 'manasik diwalyapan' (mental bankruptcy). The statements issued by the party in the last eight months will reflect that these are intended to help Pakistan," he said.

Nadda was addressing a public meeting here in support of the amended law three days after taking over the reins from Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

He was elected as BJP's 11th president on Monday



J P Nadda

after he emerged as the only nominee in the fray.

In an apparent reference to the leaders of the BSP and the SP, he said, "These days Dalit leaders are opposing CAA. They and the Congress hardly know anything about the CAA and are only spreading canards to mislead people."

Nadda said the political innings of the two parties was over and they have understood that times have changed under Narendra Modi's leadership.

Commando found dead in Ambani home

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A CRPF commando deployed in the security cover of Mukesh Ambani was found dead at the RIL Chairman's residence with authorities probing if he killed himself or died after his service weapon went off accidentally, officials said.

They said constable Botara D Rambhai was found dead Wednesday night at the 'Antilia' residence of the businessman in south Mumbai.

It is yet to be ascertained if the jawan committed suicide or his weapon went off accidentally, they said. It, however, looks to be a case of suicide, the officials said.

The deceased hailed from Junagadh district of Gujarat and had joined the force in 2014.

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is entrusted with securing Ambani under the top 'Z+' category of VIP security cover.

His wife Nita Ambani is also protected by the force under a similar cover but she has 'Y' cover.

Minorities vote for parties that can defeat BJP, says Pawar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

In a potentially controversial statement, Nationalist Congress Party President Sharad Pawar on Thursday said that the "minorities" decide whom to defeat or elect in the elections.

"In the last (2019) Maharashtra assembly elections, Muslims rejected the Bharatiya Janata Party... In

rural areas, not a single Muslim voted for BJP (candidates)," Pawar said, addressing the NCP Minority Cell meeting here.

During elections, the minorities "decide whom to defeat" and they vote only for those (parties) which can vanquish the BJP and "the change of guard in Maharashtra is because of that," said Pawar amid thunderous applause.

Democracy eroded: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday attacked the Modi government after India slipped 10 ranks on the Democracy Index, saying democracy has been eroded and democratic institutions debilitated under the 'tukde tukde gang' in power, and this should alarm every Indian.

The party said the country has to be vigilant against



"diminishing democracy" and it cannot afford to allow democracy to be diluted.

Senior party leader P Chidambaram said India has slipped 10 places in the index

and "anyone who has closely observed the events of the last two years knows that democracy has been eroded and democratic institutions have been debilitated those who are in power are the real 'tukde tukde' gang".

"The world is alarmed by the direction INDIA is taking. Every patriotic INDIAN should be alarmed too," he said on Twitter.

Continued on Page 3

Women take out huge rally in Vijayawada

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Women took out a huge rally in the city from Singhnagar to Kandrika in Vijayawada on Thursday, welcoming the decision of the Legislative Council Chairman Sharif decision to use his extraordinary and special powers and send the AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill, 2020 and the APCRDA (Repeal) Bill, passed by the Assembly to a Select Committee.

The rally was held under the aegis of the "Save Amaravati JAC". Former minister Deveneni Umamaheshwara Rao said, "A temple should be built for the Council Chairman for his concern towards farmers of Amaravati capital region."

The protesters opposed the YSRCP government's proposal of decentralisation of the administration and condemned the remarks made by the ruling party Legislators against the Council Chairman. "The government should run its administration from Amaravati," they insisted.

After Ram Janmabhoomi, now row over Saibaba birthplace

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

Residents of Pathri in Parbhani district on Thursday decided to approach court to get legal sanctity to their claim that 19th century saint Saibaba was born in their village.

Members of the Sai Janmabhoomi Pathri Sansthan said they will file a petition in the Aurangabad bench of the Bombay High Court with evidence to prove that Saibaba was born in Pathri.

A controversy has erupted over the purported birthplace

Pathri residents to approach court

of the revered saint, 102 years after he took 'samadhi' in Shirdi.

Some residents claimed that Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had retracted his statement on Pathri being Saibaba's birthplace under pressure from the Shirdi temple trust.

MLC and president of the action committee, Babajani Durrani, said Pathri residents will move court on the issue. "Shiv Sena MP Sanjay

Jadhav had met Thackeray to seek his appointment for meeting Pathri residents but it was denied and we were told not to take the controversy any further," Durrani told PTI.

"We have decided to go for legal procedure to resolve this issue and won't be meeting Thackeray. A team of advocates will visit Pathri and we will file a petition in the court next week," he said.

Continued on Page 3



CAPSULE



Andhra team to take on Kerala in Ranji Trophy

VIJAYAWADA: Andhra Cricket Association secretary V Durga Prasad on Thursday declared the names of cricketers, who will represent the Andhra Cricket team to play in Ranji Trophy. He said that the selected team will play against the Kerala team in Ongole from January 27 to 30. Andhra are the selected Andhra cricket team players- Ricky Bhui (Captain), CR Gnaneswar (Vice-Captain), DB Prashant Kumar, N Jyothi Sai Krishna, K Karan Shinde, B Sumanth, M Praneeth, K Nitish Kumar Reddy, S Md Rafi, KV Sasikanth, Ch Stephen, Y Prithvi Raj, UMS Girinath (wicketkeeper), Shoib Md Khan and D Swaroop Kumar. The support staff for the match will be G Jaya Kumar-head coach, MN Vikram Varma-assistant coach, P Madhusudan Reddy-fielding coach, Deep Tomar-physiotherapist, Arjun Basu-S&C coach, Dayananda Garani-massage therapist, K NavaJeevan-video analyst P Dinesh-throwdown coach and N Srinivasa Raju- manager.

Adhyanotsavam from today

VIJAYAWADA: The 24-day Adhyayanotsavam will be performed at Sri Govindaraja Swamy temple from January 24 to February 17. It is an age old practice to perform the unique ritual of Parayanam of Alwar Divya Prabandham in Magha masam. TTD also plans to conduct Chinna Sattumora on February 4, Pranaya Kalahotsavam on February 10 and Pedda Sattumora on February 14.

VIRASAM members demand Kashmir's release

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
Members of Viplava Rachayitula Sangam (VIRASAM) condemned the arrest of VIRASAM poet and Osmania University Prof C Kashmir. In this regard, a round-table was organised at the Press Club demanding the release of Kashmir unconditionally. Writers, poets, cultural activists, artists and others participated in the round-table organised by VIRASAM general secretary Revara. Addressing the gathering, Jana Sahiti leader Divi Kumar alleged that the Telangana State police had picked up Prof Kashmir from his residence under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act after he was elected as the general secretary of VIRASAM on its 50th annual meeting recently. He recalled that many cases were registered on the members baselessly. He recalled incidents of revolutionary poets being targeted and referred incidents at Parvatipuram, Hyderabad, Tirupati, Aurangabad, Koregaon Bhima and in the same way, Prof Kasim was arrested by the police.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES

GOLD	
₹ 40,140 (10 gm)	
₹ 220	↓
SILVER	
₹ 46,100 (1kg)	
₹ 100	↑

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	₹4.07

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Concern over dwindling fish catch

SUMIT ONKA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Over 50 per cent of fishing boats in Vizag stay anchored at the Fishing Harbour in Vizag city for the past one month due to low catch of the fish and prawns. It may be recalled that fishing activities resume pace in the harbour between November and March every year. But, fishermen's hope for a good catch has washed away and activities of the fishing harbour have declined due to the unusual decrease in the catch in the fishing zone in the Bay of Bengal.



President of Dolphin Boat Operators' Welfare Association Ch Satyanarayana Murthy said this fishing season has not much been encouraging due to low catch and loss-making trade. Of the over 700 fishing boats in Vizag, more than 380 boats have been anchored at the jetties of Vizag Fishing Harbour. It seems to be even before the annual fishing ban imposed, over 80 per cent of the boats will stay anchored in Vizag as boat-owners are not in a position to bear the losses, he added. "We have to invest at least Rs 2.5 lakh for each voyage (such as ice, diesel, food grains, labour charges and others for 15 days voyage). However, most of the boat owners incurred losses between Rs 50,000 and Rs 70,000 for each voyage due to low catch of export quality fish and prawns and high input cost," said M Ramu, a boat owner in Vizag. With the low catch, prices of the popular varieties of fish like Seer Fish (in local parlance Konam), Silver Pomfret (Chanduva in local language) and a few other varieties have been increasing in Vizag city said T Sudhakar, a resident of MVP Colony. The most popular Silver Pomfret or White Pomfret, which is a species of Butter Fish cost around Rs 1,200 a kg and the price of Seer (Konam) is Rs 800 and more depending on the size of the fish. The price of Tiger Prawns has increased to Rs 1,200 per kg from Rs 1,000 a kg, he

- President of Dolphin Boat Operators' Welfare Association Ch Satyanarayana Murthy said this fishing season has not much been encouraging due to low catch and loss-making trade
- It seems to be even before the annual fishing ban imposed, over 80 per cent of the boats will stay anchored in Vizag as boat-owners are not in a position to bear the losses, he added
- Hoteliers said that sea food lovers have to ready to shell out more as the prices of fish delicacies will increase in the coming days
- Of the over 700 fishing boats in Vizag, more than 380 boats have been anchored at the jetties of Vizag Fishing Harbour

added. Hoteliers in Vizag city are also struggling to get the required quantity of popular varieties of fish due to low availability in the market. Hoteliers said that sea food lovers have to shell out more as the prices of fish delicacies will increase in the coming days.



Congress working president N Tulasi Reddy and others pay floral tributes to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 123rd birth anniversary at Andhra Ratna Bhavan in Vijayawada on Thursday

Cong leaders pay rich tributes to Netaji

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
Congress leaders paid floral tributes to freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose on his 123rd birth anniversary at Andhra Ratna Bhavan here on Thursday. Congress working president N Tulasi Reddy, general secretary N Narsimha Rao, secretary Nanchariah, women leaders and others were present. Speaking on the occasion, Tulasi Reddy said that Subhash Chandra Bose stands tall in the history as he had fought against the British for independence. He is an inspiration as he had sacrificed his life for the nation, he recalled. Later, commenting on the latest developments in the Assembly, he termed sending the Decentralisation Bill and CRDA cancellation Bill to the Select Committee is a positive sign. He further stated that referring Bills to the Select Committee can be treated as the victory of Opposition against the ruling party. He said the ruling party vented its ire against the Legislative Council Chairman Shariff Mohammed Ahmed for referring Bills to the Select Committee. He said that abolishing the Legislative Council is not in the hands of the YSRCP, it should be decided by the Central Cabinet and now the ball is in the BJP's court. He said that when the Decentralisation Bill is referred to the Select Committee a few departments cannot be relocated to Visakhapatnam. Referring to Bills to the Select Committee was a bold step taken by Legislative Council Chairman, he said.

Congress working president N Tulasi Reddy recalls sacrifices made by Netaji to nation

Arrangements for Voters Day reviewed

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Collector Md Mitiaz on Thursday told officials concerned to organise various awareness programmes to mark the Voters Day, which will be observed on January 25. A review meeting was held at the Collector's camp office with officials of various departments in this regard. Speaking on the occasion, the Collector said that Krishna district was in the forefront in organising programmes to sensitise voters in the district in the previous years on voting. He said that on January 25, they will organise State-level programmes at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram at 11.30 am. The occasion will be graced by Governor Biswa Bushan



Collector Md Mitiaz addressing officials in Vijayawada on Thursday in connection with Voters Day, which will be observed on January 25

Harichandan as the chief guest. He told DEO MV Rajyalakshmi and officers concerned to make arrangements to conduct competitions for students at Bishop Azaraiah High School. A free medical camp should be organised for students on the occasion, he

added. Hoteliers in Vizag city are also struggling to get the required quantity of popular varieties of fish due to low availability in the market. Hoteliers said that sea food lovers have to shell out more as the prices of fish delicacies will increase in the coming days.

Muttamsetti offers prayers at Durga temple

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Youth, Sports and Tourism Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao at Durga temple in Vijayawada on Thursday. They offered prayers to Goddess Kanakadurga. Temple officials accorded them a traditional welcome with temple honours. Later, Vedic priests blessed the minister and his kin on the occasion and gave him prasadam.

Jana Sahiti leader Divi Kumar alleged that the Telanagana govt cases are being registered on members of VIRASAM

He demanded that the Telangana government release Kashmir. PDSU leaders Ramakrishna, Rajyalakshmi, A Ravichandra, Poura Hakkula Sangam leader R Sridhar, POW leader K Durga, IFTU leader P Prasad Rao, VIRASAM leader Y Venkat Rao and others were present on the occasion.



Women going around the handloom exhibition in Vijayawada on Thursday

Handloom expo draws good crowds

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA
The National Handloom Exhibition-2020 is drawing good crowds, which commenced on January 20. The expo was being organised by the director of Handloom and Textiles, Government of AP, at Siddhartha Hotel Management College. Manufacturers and weavers from across the country are displaying their products in the expo. As many as 100 shops were set up. Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Deputy Director Textiles B Nageswara Rao said the expo is aimed at providing a platform to the handloom manufacturers to sell their products under one roof. Sarees, dress material, towels, bed sheets and others material are being showcased. The main attraction of the expo is Kalamkari fabrics, Chirala textiles, Gadwal, Ikkat, Dharmavaram, Venkatagari, Uppada sarees besides carpets from Eluru; Mangalgiri handlooms, silk and cotton sarees; dhotis and towels from Tamil Nadu; Pochampalli sarees from

Telangana, Chanderi silk sarees and sarees with zari work from Madhya Pradesh and Bhagalpur silk sarees from Bihar are available for sale. Woollen shawls from Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal also being displayed in the expo, he said. Rao said that cultural programmes such as classical dance, vocal and instrumental music, folk songs, mimicry, magic show and other events will be organised every day during the expo. The visitors can through the expo from 11

Three-day Rufflez exhibition opened

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A three-day Rufflez exhibition-cum-sale was inaugurated at Sesha Sai Kalyana Mandapam here on Thursday. Speaking on the occasion, exhibition organiser Manjulatha said that the expo was aimed at providing designer garments to women for the forthcoming marriage and other occasions at an affordable price. The expo also acts as a one stop shop for people, who are also looking for household articles, she added. As many as 68 stalls were set up at the three-day expo, which includes collections such as designer wear, handloom sarees, designer sarees, silk sarees, fabric material, fashion jewellery, imitation jewellery, jewellery accessories and many more. Designers from Delhi, Rajasthan, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, Jaipur, Lucknow, Hyderabad and Gujarat displaying their garments like Indo-western outfits, along with traditional cotton and silk sarees apart from bridal collection. The expo evoked a good response from denizens when it was conducted a few months ago. Visitors can visit the expo between 10 am and 9 pm till January 25.



Visitors checking imitation jewellery at Rufflez expo in Vijayawada on Thursday

The expo also acts as a one stop shop for people, who are also looking for household articles, said organiser Manjulatha

Death sentence cannot remain open-ended, says SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said the finality of death sentence is extremely important and a convict should not be under the impression, as recent events indicate, that it remains open-ended, which leads to its questioning. "Sentence must be proportionate to the crime," the court held. This observation from the top court is bound to have significance on cases where convicts have been sentenced to death, including the four death row convicts in Nerbhaya gangrape and murder case. It came as the SC heard the review petitions by Shabnam



and Salim, who have been sentenced to death for murdering her father and six other family members, including a 10-month-old infant, for opposing the couple's relationship. The top court had upheld their death sentence in 2015. A bench, headed by Chief Justice S.A. Bobde and comprising Justices S.A. Nazeer

It came as the SC heard the review petitions by Shabnam and Salim, who have been sentenced to death for murdering her father and six other family members, including a 10-month-old infant, for opposing the couple's relationship. The top court had upheld their death sentence in 2015

and Sanjiv Khanna, said it is believed that every criminal is said to have an innocent heart, however, the court has to look into the crime also as they heard the pleas of the convicts' counsel for a relook at the sentence, as they have reformed positively after their conviction. The bench queried senior advocates Anand Grover and Meenakshi Arora whether the courts could consider the good behavior of convicts after the sentencing. The Chief Justice said it is difficult to accept the degree of reform introduced in their behaviour should be considered as a mitigating factor in this case. "This argument will have consequences beyond this case," he said. "We are doing justice on

behalf of the society and the victims. We cannot forgive a convict who has been convicted because there is a law, which deals with a criminal." The court observed that if such an argument -- on taking into consideration the reformation of the convicts after conviction -- is accepted, then no death penalty can be carried out. "The convicts will say we have reformed and we can come out," it said. The Chief Justice also made a strong observation on protecting victims' rights. "We don't want to focus or emphasize only on the rights of accused in a case where seven people including a 10-month-old baby was murdered," he said. "Can a death row convict, once he mends his ways and reforms after conviction be spared the execution of the sentence," said the court reserving the order on the review petition filed by two convicts. On April 15, 2008, Shabnam's entire family was murdered and she pretended that some unidentified assailants had attacked them. The investigation found that Shabnam, in collusion with Salim, made her family members drink milk laced with sedatives before the attack and thereafter, she strangled her ten-month old nephew. A trial court had sentenced them to death and the Allahabad High Court had confirmed the death sentence in 2010.

CAPSULE



30 BAGS OF GUTKA PACKETS SEIZED

VIJAYAWADA: Jaggaiahpet police seized 30 bags of banned gutka packets worth Rs 3 lakh on the Vijayawada-Hyderabad national highway near Jaggaiahpet on Thursday. Police took K Kishore into their custody for transporting the banned material in a Toyota car bearing registration Number AP 39CD 4152, which was also seized. Police informed that the accused Kishore hails from Somavaram village in Nandigama mandal of Krishna district. A case was registered against the accused at Jaggaiahpet police station. CI IV Nagendra Kumar, SI B Raju, constable Rajesh nabbed Kishore.

Srinivasa Kalyanam in Udupi on Jan 28

VIJAYAWADA: Srinivasa Kalyanam project of TTD will be organising Srinivasa Kalyanam at Udupi town in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka on January 28. The venue will be at Girike Mutt in the grounds of Arka Ganapathi temple. OSD of the project RS Gopal is supervising the arrangements.

Shariff becomes an instant hero for Amaravati farmers

Continued from Page 1

Ministers Kanna Babu and Botsa Satyanarayana too came near Shariff's podium and tried to argue with him.

Ministers Buggana Rajendranath and Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose, YSRCP MLCs like Janga Krishnamurthy and others surrounded Shariff and questioned his decision.

They were visibly shocked and disappointed with the unexpected decision of the Chairman at the eleventh hour.

While the Council saw heated arguments throughout the day, the decision brought smiles to the faces of TDP leaders.

It gave a big boost to the farmers in Amaravati who have been protesting relentlessly for the last 36 days against the State government's decision to shift the administration and executive capital to Visakhapatnam.

3-layer intra-city transport in the offing in Vizag city

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A three-layer intra-city transport network for Visakhapatnam is under consideration. Besides metro connectivity, the State government is mulling to start three tram line routes in less congested parts of the city, according to sources at Amaravati Metro Rail Corporation (AMRC).

The tram lines are estimated to cost between Rs 100 crore and Rs 120 crore per km. While the metro rail project is supposed to end by 2024, the tram line project is slated to be completed by 2029. The AMRC official informed that there is a proposal to rename Amravati Metro Rail Corporation as Andhra Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation. The proposed tram routes would connect Pendurthi- NAD Junction, Steel Plant-Anakapalli and Old Post Office-Bheemili. The three tram routes would have at least one crossover with one metro station. The total length of the three tram routes



would be 60 km. These would be battery-operated trams and environment-friendly. A metro rail stretch would come up across NH-16 connecting the steel plant located on the city's outskirts to the proposed Bhogapuram Airport in the northern part.

The first corridor project will cover 30.38 km from Gajuwaka to Kommadi (via NAD Junction, Gurudwara, Maddilapalem and Hanumanthawka along NH-16), while the second corridor 5.25 km covering Gurudwara Junction to Old Post Office

(Via Daba Gardens, Suryabagh, Police Barracks and Poorna Market). The third one will cover 6.91 km covering Thatchitlapalem to China Waltair (via East Point Guest House, Railway Station, RTC Complex, Sampath Vinayaka temple, Siripuram and AU outgate) in the city. The fresh plan is to make metro stretch in Visakhapatnam 80 km long."

The third layer of transport network would comprise buses, auto-rickshaws and different types of cabs. "There are discussions about APSRTC considering procurement of

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eco-friendly electric buses, which will be able to manoeuvre through the narrow city lanes."

4 more fire stations to come up in 'Executive Capital'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

With Vizag city will be turning as Executive Capital, it will get at least four more new fire stations and latest equipment to prevent human loss and property loss in case of fire mishaps.

Vizag, the only coastal city in Andhra Pradesh and the biggest city in-between Kolkata and Chennai corridor has been expanding by leaps and bound and the multi-storey buildings are mushrooming, the fire services department in the city hasn't equipped in terms of number of fire stations, machinery and also man-power.

The city has over 25 lakh population with over seven Assembly constituencies. But, the city has only three major fire stations for decades there is an urgent need to modernise the fire safety system in the city. The fire service personnel said that the city has only one hydraulic sky-lift, which can reach a height up to 54 mts only. The city requires at least two more of 90-metre capacity to tackle fire mishaps in the future.

District Fire Officer N Surendra Anand said that there are requests pending with the government for the establishment of new fire stations in the city. The fire service personnel said that the AP government has decided to procure the latest hydraulic fire fighting equip-



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● The city requires at least two more of 90-metre capacity to tackle fire mishaps in the future

ment with Rs 10 crore in Amaravati. Since Vizag will be the Executive Capital, the government will set up the latest equipment in the city only.

The Fire department has 184 fire stations across the State and it has been facing a dearth of staff (at least 30 per cent staff crisis) in the State. Since, Vizag has

emerged as Health City, IT City and will emerge as Capital City, fire service department may witness various kinds of fire mishaps. The fire service personnel are of the opinion that Vizag will be equipped with the latest equipment to deal with fire mishaps in the coming days.

'English medium introduced to...'

Continued from Page 1

He said children belonging to poor SC, ST, BC, Minorities and middle class-families have been waiting for decades for the introduction of English medium in the government schools as they could not afford to go to private schools which were charging exorbitant fees.

"However, no effort was made to provide them English medium education so far. Hence, the present government has taken this decision to provide it to the children to change their lifestyle," Jagan said.

He pointed out that there are over 45,000 government schools in the state but the number of government primary schools having English medium is less than 35 per cent while it was 98.5 per cent in private schools.

"Hence it can be seen that there has been conspiracy to deny English medium to children belonging to poor families all these years, and the present government has decided to change this trend," said the Chief Minister.

Jagan said that qualitative menu was added to the mid-day meal for schoolchildren which is being called 'Goru Mudda' scheme.

"By the Grace of God and blessings of the parents, we are able to introduce more welfare schemes for the people," he said.

● Refuting allegations levelled by the YSRCP leaders against the TDP at a media conference held here on Thursday, he said that it was high-time the Centre involved in the issue taking into consideration the circumstances prevailed in AP

● The Speaker, Tammineni Sitaram, has been suspending the MLAs without assigning any reasons, he said adding that when asked the reason the Speaker merely says that he is using his discretionary powers

Wondering at the CM's statement that capital did not figure in the Constitution, Yanamala said whether any government across the globe relocated its capital. The only historic character to have accomplished the task was Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq.

Jagan's Mother Vijayalakshmi was defeated as MP of Visakhapatnam as election her would mean destroying the peaceful city, he said.

He alleged that the YSRCP leaders tried to attack the Council Chairman on Wednesday. He questioned the rationale behind having the State Legislative Assembly when the government wants to take unilateral decisions.



He charged the State government with harassing TV channels with CM targeting the channels reporting news for the good of people.

Why should the government apprehensive of the Council referring the Bills to the Select Committee, which is headed by a minister in the government, Yanamala Ramakrishnu wondered.

The State government is in a hurry to relocate the capital to Visakhapatnam by getting the relevant Bills passed willy-nally, he said reading between the lines.

Comparing Jaganmohan Reddy with the mythological character of Duryodhana, Ramakrishnu said Jagan's attitude was similar to that of jealous Duryodhana, who went round the Maya Sabha, an architectural wonder in mythology.

Jealousy and vendetta destroyed Kauravas, but not the Pandavas, he said comparing the TDP with the Pandavas.

Jagan vowed to destroy Amaravati as he felt that it was synonymous with Chandrababu, Yanamala said.

Democracy eroded under Modi: Cong

Continued from Page 1

Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said it is natural that every proud Indian will deeply feel hurt and pained on finding that India has slipped 10 ranks from 41 to 51 on the Democracy Index which is computed by a well-known renowned and a very objectively known entity.

The index for India should be rising as it is one of those few countries who have solid democracy, he said, adding that is the first time since 2006 when it has declined to this figure.

"This is a red-flag which should remind us every minute of our existence that Diminishing Democracy is what we have to be eternally vigilant against. This is our proud heritage, it is our proudest possession. We can't allow it to dilute or diminish even by one millimetre," he told reporters.

Singhvi said democracy has been vibrant, alive and kicking in a big measure only in India, unlike in several other colonial countries.

He said that one parameter was of fear.

"Is there not fear palpable in this country? Whether within the ruling party or outside it, whether it is because of misuse of government's power and agencies or of snooping and surveillance. I don't think we need a thermometer to measure that. We all understand and we all know it. Well, that diminishes democracy. This DD factor is what we are talking about - Diminishing Democracy," he said.

The Congress leader said that besides fear, 'intolerance', increase in instances of vendetta and bringing in uniformity as a right were the factors leading to the fall in India's position on Democracy Index.

Eligible poor to get house sites by Ugadi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Joint Collector K Madhavilatha on Thursday said that all the eligible poor in Krishna district would get house sites by Ugadi. She inspected layout plans at Valluripalem and Totlavalluru villages in Totlavalluru mandal, Srirangapuram, Choragudi villages in Pamidimokkala mandal, along with revenue, housing, DWAMA officials.

The JC inspected layout plans at Valluripalem and Totlavalluru, Srirangapuram and Choragudi villages along with officials

Speaking on the occasion, she said that 4,000 acres was required for the distribution

house sites for the eligible poor by Ugadi. So far 2,600 acres government land was procured for distribution.

She said that there are 2.6 lakh beneficiaries and still 1,400 acres land has to be procured by Ugadi. She further stated that barren government land and private land will be identified across the district by officials. DWAMA PD GV Suryanarayana, Housing PD Dhanunjayudu, tahsildars and others were present.



Joint Collector Dr K Madhavilatha inspecting layout plans in Krishna district on Thursday

Can a poor state like AP afford to have...

Continued from Page 1

Referring to a discussion on the Decentralisation of administration Bills in the Council session held on Wednesday, Jagan said that the reason Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu was present in the visitors' gallery of the Council was common knowledge. "Everybody knows he sat there to transmit certain signals to TDP MLCs," the Chief Minister said.

With the principal opposition Telugu Desam Party members staying away from the Assembly proceedings, the ruling YSR Congress MLAs came down heavily on Council Chairman MA Shariff and Leader of the Opposition in the Council Yanamala Ramakrishnu over the manner in which the proceedings were conducted and the two vital bills referred to a select committee, allegedly in transgression of rules.

"The Chairman's decision was against the rule book and the procedure he adopted was very unfortunate," the Chief Minister pointed out.

He said that the nature of the Legislative Council should be only advisory and lamented that "it has turned out to be the House that blocks Bills passed by Assembly from becoming an Act of Law".

Jagan found fault with the style of functioning of the

Council. "Only six states in the country have the Upper House," he reminded, adding that the people have vested his government with the power to decentralise the administration.. He cited the example of Tamil Nadu which ran its Government from Ooty.

"The government runs from the place where the CM lives. The capital can be located anywhere in the state without any restrictions," Jagan made it clear.

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister held elaborate discussions with his Cabinet ministers and senior MLAs on the Council issue, in the wake of Wednesday's developments and the past experiences where two other Bills were returned, without approval, to the Assembly suggesting certain opposition-sponsored amendments.

The Chief Minister also reportedly discussed the issue with former Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi, who has been appointed by the government to fight its case in the High Court on a batch of petitions, challenging the decision to have three capitals.

The Assembly, which was originally supposed to conclude its extended winter session on Wednesday, has now been extended indefinitely in view of the ongoing stalemate and the government's latest thinking on the Legislative Council.

Huge potential for pharma in north Andhra

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As the pharma industry is poised for an unprecedented growth in the near future especially the north Andhra becoming a major destination for investments in pharma sector, AP Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation led a delegation of its members to Jawaharlal Nehru Pharma City (JNPC) on Thursday, which is the largest Pharma City operated by RAMKY Pharma in Viskhapatnam.

In line with the vision of making Visakhapatnam as a major pharma hub, AP Chambers is in the forefront and always give boost to the industry that has a future of tremendous growth. So, the



AP Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation led a delegation of its members to JNPC, which is the largest Pharma City operated by RAMKY Pharma in Viskhapatnam

Aurobindo Pharma, which are 100 per cent export oriented units with an annual turnover of Rs 25,000 crore on an average and provides employment to over 32,000 people.

"The present scenario is quite encouraging, with several multinational companies evincing interest in investing in bulk drugs and formulations, the region is likely to have a record jump in the bulk drugs

exports in the coming days, said Pydah Krishna Prasad, President Elect of AP Chambers. "The industry is in its vibrant state with efficient processes and cost effective manufacturing pattern in JNPC, it is perfectly staged for better future and the ecosystem prevalent here, will propel growth of the health sector" said G Sambasiva Rao, Past President of AP chambers.

tour is aimed at exploring how the industry can gear up for the next level of growth and serve as a platform to discuss strategies and challenges ahead," said Sudhir Mulagada, Chairman of AP Chambers, Visakhapatnam zone.

The JNPC is being developed over an area of 2,400 acres. Out of these 611 acres, which fall under the ambit of Special Economic Zone (SEZ), has attracted major investments from Hospira, Mylan, Eisai, Reddy's Lab and

644 militants of eight groups surrender in Assam

PNS ■ GUWAHATI
In one of the largest surrenders of militants in Assam, a total of 644 cadres of eight insurgent groups formally laid down arms on Thursday.



The members of the insurgent groups — ULFA (I), NDFB, RNLF, KLO, CPI (Maoist), NSLA, ADF and NLFB -- joined the mainstream in front of Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal at a programme here.

Speaking on the occasion, the chief minister said, "People are happy that you have returned to the mainstream for the development of Assam. You have inspired all those who believe in democracy.

"I appeal to people still outside (the mainstream) to come forward and work for making India a strong country. Without peace, progress is

not possible. In all the countries, peace prevails and we have to do the same." The government will carry

The govt will carry out its Constitutional duty for the rehabilitation of the surrendered extremists, who can avail benefits of existing government schemes for their sustenance, said Sonowal

out its Constitutional duty for the rehabilitation of the surrendered extremists, who can avail the benefits of existing government schemes for their sustenance, Sonowal said.

The highest number of 301 militants who surrendered belonged to the National Liberation Front of Bengal (NLFB), followed by 178 from

Adivashi Dragon Fighter (ADF) and 87 from the National Santhal Liberation Army (NSLA). The others who surrendered included 50 cadres of the United Liberation Front of Assam - Independence (ULFA(I)), 8 militants of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), 6 insurgents of the Kamatapur

Liberation Organisation (KLO), 13 members of the Rava National Liberation Front (RNLF) and one Communist Party of India (Maoist) militant. Besides 177 arms, the militants also laid down 58 magazines, 1.93 kg explosives, 52 grenades, 71 bombs, three rocket launchers, 306 detonators, two RT sets and 17 khukris.

"This is an important day for the state and the Assam Police. Altogether 644 cadres and leaders of eight militant groups laid down their arms. This is one of the largest surrenders of militants in recent history," Director General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta told reporters.

Addressing the former militants, Mahanta said, "Many forces keep trying to hamper peace in Assam, but you overcame that. You may have had anguish over different issues, but you realised that by giving life instead of taking away life is more important for the development of the state."

Inspector General of Police (Special Branch) Hiren Chandra Nath said, the surrendered militants came to a unilateral ceasefire between 2015 and 2019. "Today they formally laid down arms in an official function in front of the chief minister. These groups are not related to NDFB(S) militants, who declared ceasefire earlier this month," he said.

SHORT READS



UP: Sonia, Priyanka meet kin of those killed in road accident

AMETHI: Congress president Sonia Gandhi and party national general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday met the families of those who were killed in a road accident near here. Sonia Gandhi, who is on a two day visit to her constituency Rae Bareilly to attend the training camp of party workers, along with Priyanka Gandhi visited Pure Bharetha, Pure Ganesh Lal, Gungwachh and Hathkila villages to extend condolences to the bereaved families. They also stopped for a while at the PWD inspection house here. Six people were killed when a car collided with a fertilizer loaded truck in Baramasi under Amethi Police Station on the Jagdishpur-Gauriganj-Pratapgarh national highway on late Monday night. Till recently, Amethi was represented by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and was considered a stronghold of the party and the Gandhi family.

Sessions Judge hearing Nirbhaya case transferred

NEW DELHI: The sessions judge who recently issued death warrants against the four death row convicts in the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape and murder case has been transferred. Additional Sessions Judge Satish Kumar Arora has been transferred to the Supreme Court as Additional Registrar on deputation basis for one year, a letter sent by Registrar General, Delhi High Court, to the District Judge, Patiala House Courts, said. Before his transfer, Arora was hearing the Nirbhaya Rape case, besides other cases. The case is likely to be assigned to new judge soon. The hanging of all the four convicts was to take place on February 1 at 6 am.



MNS unveils new saffron flag, fuels speculation

Mumbai: Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray on Thursday unveiled his party's new flag which is saffron in colour, setting tongues wagging in political circles about a possible ideological shift. Thackeray unveiled the new flag, which in the centre bears a 'rajmudra' (royal seal used during the times of warrior King Shivaji), at the party's plenary meeting in suburban Goregaon. The party's earlier flag had saffron, blue and green colours. Before unveiling the flag, the MNS chief paid tributes to his uncle and late Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray on the latter's 94th birth anniversary on Thursday. During the inaugural session of the MNS plenary meet, he also paid respects to Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar besides Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, B R Ambedkar and his grandfather Prabhodhankar Thackeray. The MNS was set up in 2006 after Raj Thackeray split from the Shiv Sena. He was in August last year questioned by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case pertaining to alleged irregularities related to Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) loan to Kohinoor CNTL.

'Will invite Cong, NCP to join Thackeray on Ayodhya visit'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday said their allies Congress and NCP are welcome to join Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray when he visits Ayodhya in March to mark the completion of his 100 days in power.

He said offering prayers to Lord Ram has got nothing to do with the common minimum programme, on the basis of which the three ideologically different parties came together to form government in Maharashtra.

It will be the first visit of Sena chief Thackeray to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh since his party severed ties with the BJP over sharing of power after results of the Maharashtra Assembly elections were declared in October last year. "We will invite everybody, including our allies to join. Everyone worships Lord Ram at home. So, they can join us in offering prayers at Ayodhya," Raut said.

He said offering prayers to Lord Ram had nothing to do with the common minimum programme decided by the three parties while forming the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi government. Thackeray earlier



“We will invite everybody, including our allies to join. Everyone worships Lord Ram at home. So, they can join us in offering prayers at Ayodhya”
— SANJAY RAUT, Shiv Sena leader

put off his November 24, 2019 visit to Ayodhya, after the NCP's core committee resolved to form an alternative government in the state.

The Shiv Sena subsequently joined hands with the NCP and Congress to form a coalition government in Maharashtra. Thackeray sworn in as the chief minister on November 28, 2019 and recently completed 50 days in office. "The government is working and will complete

five years with the blessings of Lord Ram. On completion of 100 days in power, Thackeray will visit Ayodhya to seek blessings of Lord Ram and chart out his future course of action," Raut tweeted on Wednesday. Thackeray last visited Ayodhya in June last year and offered prayers at the makeshift Ram Lalla temple along with 18 MPs of his party (who were elected after the Lok Sabha polls held in April-May 2019).

Bedi intimidating, pressuring officers of AFT Mill: Pondy CM

PNS ■ PUDUCHERRY

Chief Minister of Puducherry V Narayanasamy on Thursday accused Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi of intimidating and pressuring officers of the government-owned AFT Mill here and giving directions to them to close the century-old mill.

Addressing a meeting of the ruling Congressmen to celebrate the 123rd birth anniversary of freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the Chief Minister said the cabinet, headed by him, had taken a decision that the AFT Mill should never be closed.

"Workers opting for the voluntary retirement scheme should be given it and at no cost should the mill be closed," he said.

The Lieutenant Governor, however, had allegedly taken a unilateral decision directing the officers to close the mill.

"The Lt Governor is also pressuring and intimidating the officers and the AFT Mill management directing them to close the undertaking of the territorial government," he said. Narayanasamy recalled that he, along with his cabinet colleagues and leaders of the



Chief Minister V Narayanasamy said the cabinet, headed by him, had taken a decision that the AFT Mill should never be closed

allies, had held a dharna in front of the Raj Nivas, the office of the Lt Governor, in February last for six days pressing for as many as 38 demands.

"The first demand in the schedule placed before the Lt Governor during the dharna related to the decision of the government to ensure that the mill continued to operate and the workers intending to go for

self the authority to direct the officers of the mill to go in for its closure," he said.

This is a clear case of Kiran Bedi acting in an utterly unjustified manner inflicting hardship on the workers, he said and added that "there is, therefore, an immediate need for the Centre to recall Kiran Bedi as Lt Governor as she functions in an 'arbitrary manner affecting the welfare of the people and also industrial workers'."

PCC president and PWD Minister A Namassivayam, Revenue and Industries Minister M O H F Shah Jahan and leaders of different wings of the ruling Congress were among those present.

The managing director of AFT Mill had proposed through a notification recently under the provisions of Industrial Disputes Act 1947 that the mill be closed with effect from April 30 and cited the various reasons for the proposal for the closure of the mill.

The mill was set up during the French regime here in a private sector. With the mill facing critical situation in 1980s the territorial government intervened and took it over through a specially floated Textiles Corporation in 1985.

CBI books food exporter for Rs 819 cr banking fraud

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has booked a Delhi-based food exporter in an alleged fraud of Rs 819 crore and carried out searches on a complaint from SBI on behalf of a consortium of banks, officials said on Thursday.

The agency has alleged that Radical Foods Limited, which has its office at Saket, and its directors Siddharth Chaudhary and Anju Chaudhary availed credit facilities to the tune of Rs 732 crore and cheated SBI and other consortium of banks by way of forgery and using forged documents, they said.

The CBI has carried out searches at their premises, the officials said. "An alleged loss of Rs 819.48 crore (approx) as on April 1, 2018, was caused to the banks," an official said.

The consortium comprises State Bank of India (SBI), Indian Overseas Bank, Oriental Bank of Commerce, Exim Bank, Bank of India, IDBI Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, CSB Bank, Vijaya Bank (now Bank of Baroda) and UCO Bank, the official said.

More Shaheen Baghs coming up across country: Nandita Das

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Lauding the efforts of students and common people who have been protesting against the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), actor Nandita Das said on Thursday that more places like Shaheen Bagh are coming up across the country.

Das also exhorted people to speak up against the CAA and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

"They (government) are asking those who have been living here for four generations to prove that they are Indians. This is very sad. I think everyone should speak up," she said on the sidelines of the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF).

The actor said the protests against the CAA and the NRC are "spontaneous" and no political parties are involved in them.

"These are led by students and common people. The youth has created a hope in the country. Every other place is becoming a Shaheen Bagh now, and I think as human beings, we should speak up against these laws," Das said.

She emphasised that with the economic slowdown, growing unemployment rate, and now with the CAA and



the NRC, the country has become a topic of discussion across the world as "people are being divided on the basis of religion."

"We haven't seen this kind of unemployment in possibly 50 years. The economy is going down. International newspapers are writing about what's happening. This is the first time that we are being divided on religious lines."

"Our Constitution has given us the right to equality. You may belong to any caste, gender or religion but you are equal under the Constitution. And if you believe in that equality, you wouldn't want to see any sort of segregation," Das said.

She added it was a great thing that people from the film fraternity have also spoken strongly against the CAA and the NRC.

CBI takes over probe into killing of Indian man in UAE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has taken over the investigation into the killing of a man named Rama Lengaw Natesan in the United Arab Emirates allegedly by a fellow Indian over some dispute in 2008, the officials said.

The case has been taken over after a request from the UAE government under the extradition treaty between both the countries, they said.

Article 5 of the treaty prohibits extradition of own nationals by requested state, subject to the condition that the requested state shall prosecute the accused under its own law, the officials said.

In accordance with the provision, the UAE government had written to India seeking prosecution of Indre Jeet Singh, who is accused of killing Natesan in 2008 in that country, they said.



BJP candidate Kapil likens Delhi polls to India-Pak contest

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP leader Kapil Mishra on Thursday termed the anti-CAA protest sites in the national capital "mini-Pakistan" and said the upcoming assembly elections will be a contest "on Delhi roads between India and Pakistan".

In a series of provocative tweets, the BJP's candidate from Model Town also said Pakistani rioters have taken over the streets of Delhi.

He made no specific mention of the movement against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act but sharply attacked the protest at Shaheen Bagh and other places in the city.

Mishra, who left the Aam Aadmi Party to join the BJP, said, "Pakistan has made its entry in Shaheen Bagh. Many mini Pakistans are being formed in Delhi. Indian law is not being followed in Shaheen Bagh, Chandbagh, Indralok."

"Pakistan rioters have encroached on the roads of Delhi (Pakistan ki entry Shaheen Bagh mein ho chuki hain. Delhi mein chhote chhote Pakistan Banaye ja rahe hain. Shaheen Bagh, Chand Bagh, Indralok mein desk ka kanoon nahi mana jaa raha hain. Pakistani dangayio ka Delhi ki sarko pe kabza)," he tweeted.

For over a month, hundred of people, primarily Muslim



India vs Pakistan 8th February Delhi. There will be a contest on Delhi Roads between India and Pak on February 8. Pak has already entered Shaheen Bagh and small pockets of Pak are being created in Delhi, he said

women, have been staging a protest at the Shaheen Bagh in south Delhi.

"India vs Pakistan 8th February Delhi. There will be a contest on Delhi Roads between India and Pakistan on February 8," Mishra said.

"Pakistan has already entered Shaheen Bagh and small pockets of Pakistan are being created in Delhi," he added.

In another post, Mishra asserted that the BJP will win the February 8 elections and

Kejriwal will resign from his post when votes are counted on February 11. The former AAP leader was removed as minister by Kejriwal in 2017. Last year, he was also disqualified as AAP MLA under the anti-defection law. Mishra, who has often found himself in controversy, faces AAP MLA Akhileshpati Tripathi in the elections. He was criticised for a tweet with communal overtones during Diwali last year.

Senior sub-inspector killed, 2 constables hurt in mishap

PNS ■ BAREILLY (UP)

A senior sub-inspector of police was killed and two constables injured when they were hit by a truck in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly district, police said on Thursday. SSI Randhir Singh (45) was on a routine vehicle checking duty along with the two constables at the Bada bypass crossing on Wednesday night when a truck hit them. They were rushed to a private



hospital where Singh succumbed to injuries, police said, adding that constables Ankur and Kavindra were in a serious condition.

'3 suspects with ISIS links were spreading jihadi ideology'

PNS ■ RAMANATHAPURAM

The three men with suspected links to the ISIS arrested in the district, were allegedly involved in spreading 'jihadi' ideology and plotting to kill those opposed to Islamic beliefs to spread fear among the public, police said.

The trio-B Mohammed Ali, Pura Gani and Amir-was held in the Devipattanam police limits following a tip-off when they tried to flee on Wednesday, police said adding

one man, identified as Sheikh Dawood, however, managed to escape. They allegedly had links to the ISIS and were connected to cases being probed by the NIA, police said.

They were allegedly involved in spreading 'jihadi' ideology in Ramanathapuram district and plotting to kill people opposed to Islamic beliefs to spread fear among the public, police said adding the three also indulged in acts against national integration. Also, they were allegedly involved in efforts to recruit

people to ISIS and raising funds for the banned terror outfit. They were discussing matters including transferring money to Abdul Shamim, one of the accused in the recent killing of Wilson at Kaliakavali in Kanyakumari district near the Kerala border, when the police patrol picked them up.

Police seized books and Islamic propaganda material from the three. They also had in their possession propaganda materials in "audio form" meant to be uploaded on social

networking platforms including WhatsApp. The three were accomplices of Mohammed Riaz and Sheikh Dawood, who have already been booked by the NIA. Police also books from them including one titled 'Democracy is system of Kufr' and Islamic propaganda material. Police said they registered cases against them under various IPC Sections including 153 A and B, Information Technology Act and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.



SHORT READS



Shah pays tributes, says Bal Thackeray never compromised

NEW DELHI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday paid homage to Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray on his birth anniversary and described him as a brilliant intellect of his time who never compromised with his ideals. The Shiv Sena in November broke its decades old alliance with the BJP and formed a government in Maharashtra with the support of the NCP and the Congress. "Remembering Balasaheb Thackeray Ji on his Jayanti. Balasaheb Ji was a brilliant intellect of his time, always mesmerised the masses with his oratory skills. He always stood firm and never compromised with his ideals, Balasaheb Ji's life and his values will continue to inspire us," Shah tweeted. Thackeray was born in 1926 in Pune and passed away in 2012 in Mumbai.

UGC warns varsities against awarding 'unspecified' degrees

NEW DELHI: The University Grants Commission (UGC) has warned universities and educational institutions against awarding "unspecified" degrees. "It has been observed that some universities and institutions are awarding unspecified degrees leading to litigations and different problems for the students conferred with such degrees. The universities should abide by the provisions of the UGC Act and award only those degrees which have been specified by the UGC," the commission said in a letter to vice chancellors of all universities. The UGC has asked universities to stick to the consolidated list provided by it for the approved nomenclature of degrees. "If a university wishes to award a degree other than the ones specified by the UGC, it shall approach the commission for its approval six months prior to starting the degree programme with full justification on the course to be started," the letter said.

Netaji opposed Hindu Mahasabha's divisive politics: Mamata

DARJEELING (WB): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Thursday that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose opposed the Hindu Mahasabha's 'divisive politics' and fought for a secular and united India. Demanding that his birth anniversary be declared a national holiday, Banerjee said Bose through his struggle has sent the message of respecting all faiths and the best tribute to him would be to fight for a united India. "Netaji had opposed the Hindu Mahasabha's divisive politics. He had fought for a secular India. Now efforts are on to oust those who follow secularism," Banerjee said at an event here to celebrate Bose's birth anniversary. She also slammed the Centre for "not being serious" about unravelling the mystery shrouding Bose's disappearance. "They had only declassified a few files and not taken any step to find out what actually happened. It is a matter of shame that even after more than 70 years, we don't know what happened to him," Banerjee said.

Pavan Varma free to leave JDU when he wants: Nitish

PNS ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday took umbrage at his senior party leader Pavan Varma for going public with reservations about the JD(U)'s support to Citizenship (Amendment) Act and tie-up with BJP for Delhi assembly polls, and made it clear that the "scholarly" diplomat-turned-politician was "free to go wherever he likes".

Kumar's blunt remarks came two days after Varma, a former Rajya Sabha member, sent him a two-page letter on the issue and shared screenshots of the same on his official twitter handle and facebook profile despite it containing details of conversations the two were claimed to have had "in private".

Varma, who had sought "ideological clarity" from Kumar the JD(U)'s national president had arrived in the city later in the day on a private visit during which he could not meet the chief minister but demanded from him "a full statement" on CAA-NPR-NRC in view of the country-wide movement against the same.

Kumar made the comment when mediapersons approached him at the historic Gandhi Maidan here, where he had come to attend a function



'WILL DECIDE NEXT COURSE OF ACTION DEPENDING ON NITISH KUMAR'S REPLY'

New Delhi: JD(U) general secretary Pavan Varma on Thursday said he will decide his next course of action depending on the reply from party president Nitish Kumar to his letter and asserted that he will continue to speak "what he believes is for the good of the country and the party". Varma's comments came after Kumar, who is the chief minister of Bihar, snubbed him saying he is free to go wherever he wants and slammed him for raising his concerns over the party's stand on a host of citizenship measures of the Modi government. "I have not received a reply. Depending on the reply or its absence I will decide on my course of action. I will continue to speak what I believe is right, what is for the good of the country and the party," the former Rajya Sabha member said. The former diplomat has drifted from the JD(U) over its support to CAA and NRC.

organized on the occasion of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's birth anniversary. "He (Varma) is a scholarly person for whom I have enormous, personal respect. But the types of state-

But if he had any reservations, he could have expressed the same in a party forum. And the reference to conversations made in private! Would I ever go public with what he has said to me in private

— NITISH KUMAR
Bihar Chief Minister

ments he has been giving.. it has left me flabbergasted," he said.

"There should be no confusion on the stand taken by the Janata Dal (United) on issues. Our stand is always very clear.

"But if he had any reservations, he could have expressed the same in a party forum. And the reference to conversations made in private! Would I ever go public with what he has said to me in private", Kumar said with obvious displeasure.

"Nonetheless, I have lots of respect for him. He can go wherever he likes", Kumar said with smile on his lips, concealing the bitterness caused by the recent development.

This is the first time that Kumar has chosen to speak about voices of dissent emerging from his party in the wake of the JD(U)'s decision to support the CAB in Parliament.

Rly commissions govt's first waste-to-energy plant

● To turn e waste, plastic into light diesel oil

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The East Coast Railway has commissioned the government's first waste-to-energy plant which will turn e waste and plastic into light diesel oil in 24 hours, officials said on Thursday.

A patented technology called "Polycrack" will be used in this waste-to-energy plant, which is first of its kind in Indian Railways and only the fourth in India.

"It is the world's first patented heterogenous catalytic process which converts multiple feed stocks into hydrocarbon liquid fuels, gas, carbon and water. Earlier, lots of non-ferrous scrap generated from the Carriage Repair Workshop had no efficient method of disposal. As a result, these elements were being disposed by landfills, which had environmentally hazardous impact," said East Coast Railway spokesperson JP Mishra.

He said in this process, pre-segregation of waste is not required to reform the waste which can be directly fed into the machine to be converted into diesel.

"It has high tolerance to moisture hence drying of waste is not required. Waste is processed and reformed with-



The plant is the world's first patented heterogenous catalytic process which converts multiple feed stocks into hydrocarbon liquid fuels, gas, carbon and water

in 24 hours. It is an enclosed unit hence the working environment is dust free. Biological decomposition is not allowed as the waste is treated as it is received, the officer said.

The foot print of the plant is small hence the area required for installing it is less when compared with conventional method of processing. All constituents are converted into valuable energy thereby making it zero discharge process," he explained. Gas generated in the process is re-used to pro-

vide energy to the system thereby making it self reliant of its energy requirement and also bring down the operating cost, the officer said.

He also said that there is no atmospheric emission during the process unlike other conventional methods except for combustion gases which have pollutants less than prescribed norms the world over.

The plant operates at around 450 degrees, making it a low-temperature process when compared with other options.

Dalit man set ablaze in MP dies, Cong, BJP engage in war of words

PNS ■ BHOPAL

A 24-year old Dalit man, who was set on fire in Madhya Pradesh's Sagar city last week, died at a hospital in New Delhi on Thursday morning, police said.

The ruling Congress and the opposition BJP hit out at each other following the incident.

While the BJP said police did not act upon the victim's complaints made before the incident because of the state government's "appeasement policy", the Congress accused the saffron party of trying to vitiate the atmosphere by speaking "lies".

Dhanprasad Ahirwar, a resident of Motinagar area in Sagar, was set ablaze on January 14 by four of his neighbours who were forcing him to take back a police complaint that he filed after a dispute with them, police said. Ahirwar, who sustained around 70 per cent burns, was initially treated in Sagar and then shifted to a hospital in the state capital Bhopal.

He was later taken in an air ambulance to a hospital in Delhi where he died on Thursday, police said.



Dhanprasad Ahirwar, a resident of Motinagar area in Sagar, was set ablaze on January 14 by four of his neighbours who were forcing him to take back a police complaint that he filed after a dispute with them

All the accused, Chhuttu, Aju Pathan, Kallu and Irfan, have been arrested, Sagar's Superintendent of Police Amit Sanghi said.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Kamal Nath expressed grief over the death of Ahirwar and assured all assistance to his family.

"Received the news of demise of Dhanprasad Ahirwar, a resident of Sagar,

during treatment in Delhi. My condolences to the family.... Instructions have been issued for all possible help to the family," Nath tweeted.

However, Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly Gopal Bhargava accused the Sagar district administration of negligence and said Ahirwar could have been saved if police had acted "in time".

Karnataka notifies anti-superstition law

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Over two years after it was passed by the Karnataka legislature, the B S Yediyurappa-led BJP government has finally notified the much-hyped anti-superstition law that aims to prevent and eradicate "inhuman evil practices".

Interestingly, the BJP, which was then in the opposition, had expressed strong reservations about the bill, piloted by the Siddaramaiah led Congress government and passed by the state legislature in November 16 2017.

The Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Act RPT Act, 2017, that intends to protect the common people against "evil" and "sinister" practices, shall come into force with effect from January 4 2020, the government notification issued earlier this month said.

The Act seeks to combat and eradicate other such inhuman practices propagated and performed in the name of "black magic" by common with the sinister motive of exploiting the common people, thereby destroying the social fabric in society.

Further, it aims to bring social awakening and aware-



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ness in the society and create healthy and safe social environment.

Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Siddaramaiah congratulated BJP for enforcing the Act by rectifying its mistake of "condemning, hounding and maligning" his government when they tried to implement the Act with an intention to stop it.

He also hoped that things which are beliefs now "don't turn into superstition under pressure."

Considered similar to the one in Maharashtra, the Act has 'savings' and 'schedule' categories, which classify practices that could be tolerated and those that need to be controlled or prohibited.

The notification said noth-

ing in the act shall apply with respect to the forms of worship mentioned under the heading 'savings'

These include practices like 'pradakshina', yatras, 'parikramas' performed at religious places, among other normal practices.

It also includes the advice with regard to 'Vastushastra', advice by 'jyotishya' and other astrologers

Practices included under the 'schedule' for prohibition are -- performing any inhuman, evil act and black magic in search of precious things, bounty and hidden treasures.

Other practices listed under 16 points for prohibition are facilitating any person to roll over leaves of leftover food by other people in public or religious places or similar practices that violate human dignity; subjecting women to inhuman and humiliating practices like parading them naked in the name of worship or otherwise, such as "bethale seve".

Also, forcing any person to carry out evil practices such as killing of an animal by biting its neck and coercing any person or persons to perform 'fire walk' at the time of 'jatra's (temple/village fest) and religious festivals have also been included, it added.

Gun used to kill TN police officer recovered from drain

PNS ■ KOCHI

A gun allegedly used to kill a Tamil Nadu police officer early this month was recovered from a drainage near the KSRTC bus stand here by the 'Q' branch team probing the case, police said here on Thursday.

The gun, reportedly made in Italy, was recovered in the presence of the arrested suspects — Abdul Shameem and Taufeeq--while they were brought here as part of gathering evidence in connection with the case, they said.

Police suspect that the gun allegedly used by the assailants was meant only for Army supply.

Personnel of the Tamil Nadu 'Q' branch, which handles matters related to extremists and involving national security, had taken the duo into custody last week.

Two unidentified men had shot Special Sub Inspector Wilson with a pistol and stabbed him when he was on duty at Kaliyakavilai check-point in Kanyakumari on the border with Kerala around 9.30 PM on January 8.

Hemant Soren to expand Jharkhand Cabinet today

PNS ■ RANCHI

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren will expand his four-member cabinet on Friday. Earlier on Thursday, Soren called on Governor Droupadi Murmu at the Raj Bhavan. "The cabinet will be expanded tomorrow at 1 pm at Birsa Mandap in the Raj Bhavan," an official said.

JMM general secretary Suprio Bhattacharya confirmed the cabinet expansion. As per the constitutional



provision, Jharkhand can have a maximum of 12 ministers,

including the chief minister. The previous Raghubar Das government had left one berth vacant throughout its term.

Soren took oath as the 11th chief minister of Jharkhand on December 29 at the Morabadi ground with a galaxy of leaders, including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, in attendance.

Along with Soren, three ministers — two from the Congress and one from the RJD — also took oath that day.



Reciting preamble every Saturday mandatory in MP government schools

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Students in government-run schools in Madhya Pradesh will have to compulsorily read out the Preamble to the Constitution during their assemblies on every Saturday starting this week, an official said on Thursday.

Earlier this week, the Maharashtra government also made it compulsory for students in schools across the state to read out the Preamble to the Constitution during their morning assemblies everyday from January 26.

A Public Relations Department official in Madhya Pradesh said, "Preamble to the Constitution will be recited by students in every government school every Saturday." The state School Education

Department on Wednesday issued an order to this effect, the official said, adding that it will be implemented immediately.

"As per the order, students will recite the Preamble to the Constitution every Saturday under the guidance of the school headmaster or teacher after the prayers in primary and middle schools," the official said.

"Similarly, students of high schools and higher secondary schools will recite the preamble under the guidance of the principal during the 'bal sabha', which is held every Saturday," he said.

The move to make students read out the Preamble comes at a time when large-scale protests are being held against the CAA and NRC.

R-Day parade dress rehearsal leads to traffic snarls in Delhi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Thousands of commuters faced difficulties in reaching their destinations as several roads were closed in view of full dress rehearsal of the Republic Day parade, leading to traffic snarls in the Lutyens' Delhi on Thursday. There was heavy traffic congestion at Dhaula Kuan, Bhikaji Cama Place, ITO and Pragati Maidan.

The rehearsal parade began at 9.50 am from Vijay Chowk and proceeded towards the Red Fort via Rajpath, C-Hexagon, Tilak Marg, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg and Netaji Subhash Marg, according to the Delhi Police. Traffic on Rajpath - from



Vijay Chowk to India Gate - was restricted during the rehearsal on Thursday, the police said.

Metro services were available for commuters but entry and exit gates at Udyog Bhawan and Central Secretariat stations were

closed. No heavy transport vehicles were allowed to enter the national capital from borders from 10 pm on Wednesday till the rehearsal concluded in the afternoon on Thursday. They were allowed to ply between

In this year's parade, the Walled City of Jaipur and Gujarat's iconic stepwell in Patan, both UNESCO world heritage, and the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev will be thematically showcased in the tableaux.

ISBT Sarai Kale Khan and ISBT Kashmiri Gate on Ring Road from 7.30 am to 1.30 pm on Thursday. Traffic on Tilak Marg, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg and Subhash Marg was restricted on both directions.

For the Republic Day too, no traffic will be allowed on Rajpath from Vijay Chowk to

India Gate from 6 pm on Saturday till the parade gets over on Sunday.

No cross traffic on Rajpath from 11 pm on Saturday at Rafi Marg, Janpath, Man Singh Road till the parade gets over.

C-Hexagon-India Gate will be closed for traffic from 2 am on Sunday till the parade cross-

es Tilak Marg, a traffic advisory said.

From 5 am on Sunday, the traffic on Tilak Marg, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg and Subhash Marg will not be allowed on both directions. Cross traffic will only be allowed depending upon the movement of the parade.

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.

PAPER WITH PASSION

A really bad year

India slips on the global democracy index from 2018 even as Thailand goes up. We are losing the war of perception



As the world's largest democracy, no matter how grudging an admission this might be by assessors of the Western world, we should at least be held up as tolerable and accommodative if not the best. So India dropping by 10 places to 51st on *The Economist's* Democracy Index 2019, is a cause for worry rather than an easy example of Western bias. Simply because the publication has earned global respect and acceptability as least biased and careful about facts. And as a member of the Fourth Estate, it fulfils its

responsibility of upholding what global regimes are flawed at, in political, economic and social liberalism. So it is considered credible enough. Also, it has never rated India so harshly or lowly ever since it began the index 12 years ago. So what is alarming? India's decline in its overall score from 7.23 in 2018 to 6.9 last year and its classification as a "flawed democracy," just two steps away from being called an authoritarian regime. Given our much-claimed vibrancy, we should have scored at least eight or thereabouts on all counts. The index termed the erosion of civil liberties as the primary cause of our democratic regression. Which means that even by the Modi regime's own standing since 2014, the last six months have severely damaged perception. Except for pluralism and electoral processes, where we scored 8.67, there has been a drastic slide in the perception of governance, political culture and civil liberties. In short, it is the functionality and leadership of the Government that has clearly been put under the scanner. Before we dismiss these observations as part of a worldwide conspiracy hatched by a minuscule group of "urban Naxals", "funded academics" or give in to the compulsive urge to generate counter-propaganda, we must stop to think that the idea of democracy suffering in India has never been a talking point. This is simply because it has always been seen as a descendant of its civilisational moorings, its liberal ethos and, therefore, incapable of forced human constructs of oppression and supremacy. This is the reason why the world supported the abrogation of Article 370 only because the Government argued it as an issue within our constitutional space and never thought that it would be followed by authoritarian clampdowns or adventurism. That acceptance was followed by a significant review of citizenship laws and a renewed impetus on re-establishing majoritarian Hindu pride through the Ram temple. Considering their upending tectonics and the monolithic aggression that went against our grain of consensus politics, dissent was but natural. But the Government, instead of sizing up its destructive potential and neutralising it through a process of dialogue, went about hammering it with mindless brutality. Contentious politics cannot be force-fed in a democracy and for a Government that rests on a valid people's verdict, undermining it would only backfire on its true intentions.

The countrywide internet shutdowns on dissenting voices and protests have given us the dubious distinction of authorising over 67 per cent of the world's internet shutdowns. Holding up the information highway has become the latest tool for authoritarian governments around the world to control the political narrative on their terms and carpet-bomb any opinion or emotion against it. We are guilty of it while claiming to be a democracy. The otherisation and ghettoisation of politics, perpetuated through citizenship laws and a census based on profiling, are clearly divisive in intent and end up playing a nation's people against each other. The crackdown on students and civil society protests have been the proverbial last straw. The restrictive and biased media has relegated itself to being the Government's official propagandist than a conscience-keeper. The discourse in the country has been polarised to such an extent that we fail to realise that every argument is justified on its axis and needs to be heard, judged and then decided on its merit or demerit. That is the democratic process, which is now being dumped as a liability than an asset. And if free speech is under threat, then obviously the estimation of India as a democracy will be called into question. Going by the study, almost one-half (48.4 per cent) of the world's population lives in a democracy of some sort although only 5.7 per cent reside in a "full democracy." As the world's largest democracy, imagine the diplomatic sweep India can harness for the future. Critics might draw some solace from the fact that the US had also been demoted from a "full democracy" to a "flawed democracy" in 2016. But then the number of "full democracies" increased to 22 in 2019, with Chile, France and Portugal joining the top-ranked countries. Even Thailand, for long considered running a faux model, had the biggest improvement in score. Should we still be defending ourselves?

An astronaut's friend

ISRO is using a half-humanoid robot to smoothen out creases for Gaganyaan, our manned mission



So what if we have to wait awhile to send an Indian woman into space, we have a half-humanoid robot in the shape of one doing so. And she will test-pilot drills for our first manned mission as part of the Gaganyaan project. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will be sending Vyommitra to mimic humanistic functions in the spacecraft, even converse with intended astronauts and respond to their queries. This preparatory drill is being done to ensure that Indian astronauts can complete their historic manoeuvre without a glitch. India though is not the first nation to send a robot into space to ensure safety of manned flights. NASA had sent Robonaut 2 to the International Space Station (ISS) in 2011 and Japan's Kirobo had landed there in 2014. Advanced versions are being developed to do a recon for human settlements. Post the failed lunar mission last year, ISRO seems to have learnt its lessons well and is proceeding with extreme caution with AI-aided dry runs.

While the nation would rather not talk about Chandrayaan 2 simply because its rover failed to land on the dark side of the moon, it has had its own success. Forget the lost rover, at the end of the day, it is indigenously developed and manufactured and is testimony to not only R&D and innovation but the ability of home-grown companies to expand capabilities. The Gaganyaan is a logical follow-through of this mission. India has already set a benchmark in PSLV and GSLV launches. It recently launched the high-power communication satellite GSAT-30. This is expected to provide improved coverage and will enable Indian broadcasters to air content in the Middle East, Australia and other parts of Asia, widening the arc of our soft diplomacy. The commercial satellite launch market is estimated to be \$30 billion by 2025 and ISRO is certain to be a top player in it. With Vyommitra, ISRO hopes to expand its ability to analyse data and ensure trajectory and payload optimisation for bigger missions. NASA is using AI for its next rover mission to Mars, too. But then a word of caution here. Robots aren't heroes. As much they promise a new era in space exploration, they must ascend the curve with utmost care.

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Illogic and the showman

The US under the Trump administration typifies the reckless decision-making of military imperatives without prior experience, counsel or professional advice



BHOPINDER SINGH

Traditionally, the US administration has benefitted from the military experience that resides in the "White House." Prior to their political ascendancy, around 29 of the 45 US Presidents have held military experience. However, the incumbent President Donald Trump has been an exception. He has had a controversial past of medical deferment that purportedly kept him out of military enrollment during the Vietnam War. Post the World War II, in the midst of the cold war era, nine successive US Presidents were former combatants till the tenures of Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and now Trump. Even the US Congress and Senate have had a substantial presence of veterans (they represented more than half of Congress for much of the late 20th century), who have debated and drafted security policies in pursuance of national objectives.

Given that the post World War II period entailed bloody American military involvement in places like Korea, Vietnam, the Middle East, Somalia and Afghanistan as well as other covert wars and operations, the reassuring presence and understanding of the accompanying security sensitivities added the necessary nuance, steel and perspective on governance. But the last 12 years have seen a gradual reduction in the representation of veterans (till very recently) in both Houses. Trump though has displayed himself with misplaced enthusiasm for military trappings, bravado and parades to posit his own surrogate muscularity in pursuit of politics.

Most of his interventions, allusions and invocation with military imperatives have been high on instinctive showmanship and theatrics but have been low on efficacy. He started his tenure by appointing the iconic Marine Corps General James Mattis as the Secretary of Defence. The latter was found to be too rational, grounded and a well-read professional for Trump's boorish and fickle preferences. The US President authorised the usage of the "mother of all bombs" (GBU-43/B Massive Ordnance Air Blast, the most powerful non-nuclear explosive) in Afghanistan. Today, he is negotiating "peace talks" with the Taliban, which has already accounted for well over 2,000 US casualties. He got the US military to rashly rain 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles (each costing approximately a million and a half dollars) on a dilapidated airbase and then another hundred on an industrial site in Syria, among other military commitments. Today, most Syrian lands have been lost to his *bête noire*, Bashar al-Assad's Syrian Government.

Units of the US Special Forces, in conjunction with allies — Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — conducted operations along with supporting militias in the Yemen theatre. As a result, a ragtag Army of Iran-supported Houthi rebels have been coking a snook at the much larger, affluent and better armed forces of the US and



its allies. While he did get to "take out" a past his prime Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and more recently the Iranian Commander of Quds Force, Major General Qassem Soleimani, the essential American foothold in the Middle East remains shaky and is desperately in need of a "pull-out" to limit further damage.

Taking militaristic decisions is inevitable for a superpower that is mired in protecting its hegemonic interests across the globe. However, recent decisions and the fate of the Trump-led US military's involvement across the globe warrant serious introspection. It's not that "team" Trump did not have competency but his impatience with reason and restraint has ensured that the likes of Mattis have left, got fired, joined his "echo chamber" or, as mentioned in the famously anonymous Op-ed in *The New York Times*, are part of the silent "resistance working within the Trump administration." The Op-ed, authored by a senior person in the Trump administration, evocatively noted his leadership style to be "impetuous, adversarial, petty and ineffective." Further, it went to express the conundrum of the hapless staff, who would "privately admit their daily disbelief at the commander-in-chief's comments and actions."

A thoroughbred professional, Mattis became a typical suf-

ferer of Trump's foolhardiness when he refused to carry out killing orders of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad, to make war plans to attack Iranian facilities and opposed the decision of the US' troop withdrawal from Syria. On Mattis' resignation, the former combatant was hailed as the "last adult" in the Trump administration. Questions now abound if Soleimani would have been "taken out" today if Mattis was still around.

The decision to up the ante with Iran did have the backing of some veterans like four-star general Jack Keane and former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency David Petraeus among others. But as Congressman Adam Smith said, "Trump has no idea what he's doing but isn't afraid to do it." This unheeding trait has led to multiple forms of military adventurism with little to show on the ground at a time when Trump is in the last leg of his first tenure.

The usual phenomenon of spectacular military actions, resulting in a bipartisan "rallying around the flag" and, thereby, bumping up the crucial presidential approval ratings, is an old hat (in all democracies). After the Gulf War, former US President George HW Bush's approval ratings went up from 58 per cent to 89 per cent. His son, George W Bush's invasion of Iraq got a similar spike from

58 per cent to 71 per cent. Barack Obama's elimination of Osama bin Laden took his ratings from 44 per cent to 51 per cent. But Trump's Soleimani action did not result in any noticeable jump. He continues to languish in the mid-40 approval percentages. Clearly, Trump has politically abused the "military card" too often and it no longer resonates. On the contrary, his embarrassing description of "beautiful weapons" in the serious business of deploying the "last resort" responsibly diminishes the statesmanship and restraint required of his position.

What deliberately polarising politicians like Trump also achieve is that they dangerously "divide" perceptions within the veteran community, which is usually bipartisan on security matters and goes by military "facts." This sort of brazen politics has alienated the likes of Trump's fellow Republican and former combatant Senator John McCain, whose professional integrity as a soldier was affronted by usurpers like him.

Matters of military need to be spared from political appropriations. Else, the required institutional ethos and perceptions are weakened. Following this, the overall national security preparedness, too, would stand diminished.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands)

SOUNDBITE

The Congress leadership is suffering from *manasik diwaliyapan* (mental bankruptcy). Statements issued by it in the past months reflect that these are intended to help Pakistan.

BJP chief —JP Nadda



They (Government) are asking those who have been living here for four generations to prove that they are Indians. This is sad. I think everyone should speak up.

Actor —Nandita Das



When I was playing cricket, India was seven times our size but we regularly quashed them. In hockey and so many other games also. We were great.

Pakistan Prime Minister —Imran Khan



Netaji had opposed the Hindu Mahasabha's divisive politics. He had fought for a secular India. Now efforts are on to oust those who follow secularism.

West Bengal CM —Mamata Banerjee



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Change of guard

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "BJP's new chief" (January 21). With the advent of JP Nadda as the BJP president, the party may see a change from the diktat-style of the earlier dispensation to one of consultation, if not consensus.

Voices of the BJP cadre from the State as well as district levels may yet get a chance to be heard. And that should prove useful after a string of recent poll reverses, equally attributable to a failing economy, consolidation of the Opposition, protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and amorphous ideologies clouding local issues.

That said, the policy approach that ran the party till now is getting transplanted to Home Affairs in the national canvas. Federalism is losing currency and an unfamiliar brand of nationalism is being sought to be implemented. As unease of the States and the common man gets palpable by the day, the future does not augur well. Nadda will have an important role in deciding what the party must focus on next.

R Narayanan Navi Mumbai

CAA: Flawed on several counts

Nobody expected the Supreme Court to stay the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). And it did not, on the presumption that the law passed by Parliament is constitutionally valid until it hears both the petitioners challenging its constitutionality and the Central Government — "presumption" being the operative word. Hence, there is no cause for the Government to celebrate prematurely. Before going ahead with the implementation of the CAA, the Government will do well to remember the apex court's observation that "nothing is irreversible." When the Sabarimala case was referred to a larger Constitution Bench, the original ruling, allowing entry of women of all ages into the temple, was held in abeyance or at least its implementation was not favoured by the BJP even in the absence of any stay on the ruling. Similarly, the Government can put on hold the implementation of the CAA till the top court's final ruling.

Home Minister Amit Shah has refused to make a gesture towards the opinion of the anti-CAA protesters



and ruled out a repeal of the law. Critics of CAA plead the case for the inclusion of Muslims as the seventh religious group to make the law "religion-neutral." Secular India cannot and should not discriminate between a Hindu from Pakistan, a Rohingya Muslim from Myanmar and a Sri Lanka refugee of any faith on granting citizenship.

G David Milton Maruthancode

Silent killer

Sir — In a shocking tragedy, eight Indian tourists from Kerala, including four children, died this week due to a possible gas leak from a room heater at a resort in Daman in Makwanpur district of Nepal. They were part of a 17-member tourist group who had checked into Everest Panorama

resort at Daman, a popular tourist destination in Nepal.

According to the SP of District Police Office, Makwanpur, the tourists turned on the gas heater in the room and later suffocated due to some defect in the device, leading to carbon monoxide leak resulting in death.

The group — travelling to Pokhara from Kerala — were returning home. On the way,

they had stopped at Everest Panorama Resort in Daman. Gas heaters that are not installed correctly or have become faulty over time can cause a carbon monoxide leak. As carbon monoxide is a colourless, odourless and tasteless gas, it becomes difficult to detect it. To prevent such hazards, hotels should inspect and rectify such appliances regularly. The tourism Ministry in Nepal, too,

should have mechanisms to avoid such mishaps. Also, tourists staying in hotels in cold places should be aware of such silent dangers.

M Pradyu Kannur

No, thank you

Sir — At a time when he is embroiled in impeachment proceedings, US President Donald Trump has once again expressed his desire to "help" India and Pakistan resolve their dispute. With elections round the corner, it is all but common for politicians to intensively work towards improving their image.

However, New Delhi must be complimented for beating off another unwanted diplomatic advance by making it clear that there is no scope for mediation by anybody. Now, the ruling Government must refrain from gaining unwanted attention on the Kashmir issue. It must strike a conversation with all stakeholders and leaders in the Valley.

Aditi Via email

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Aim for green industrial growth

Centre, States must create a sustainable business environment and impactful economy while integrating with global benchmarks and practices



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The world is moving towards sustainable businesses to tackle the challenges of climate change, empowerment of communities, health, education and other social causes to ensure the survival of life on the planet. From Davos, where the world's most powerful people gather, to a humble policy document emerging from a bureaucrat's desk, the theme is sustainability. In the midst of the clamour for making the blue planet a safer, healthier zone, lies the underlining theme of slowing the world order and tightening cross-border flows of goods, services and people. India, with its goal of a \$5 trillion economy by 2024 in the middle of ominous forecasts of slow GDP growth, is facing a double challenge of sustainable growth vs a steroid shot of booster measures to put the economy on the fast track. While the full Union Budget 2020 will deliver parts of the promise and create hopes for more, the door is ajar for two important policies under consideration by the Government — the industrial policy and the e-commerce policy.

The proposed industrial policy (third after 1956 and 1991) ought to be a North Star for making India a global innovation, R&D and manufacturing hub, thereby achieving the \$5-10 trillion target in the next decade. However, it must be kept in mind by lawmakers that this policy is coming at a time when the world has shifted towards Industry 4.0 and the global economy determinants are increasingly sinking into computing prowess of latest chips and bots while facing tremendous ecological challenges. This policy has a stated objective to develop and sustain global competitiveness for India; increase technology depth of the industry; increase employment avenues; increase share in global merchandise exports and reduce the environmental footprint. The stated vision is a one trillion gross value addition in manufacturing by 2025, (even though with right policy measures this target can be moved up.) The Government at this stage is in focussed stakeholder consultations to devise the right strategy for pushing India up in the world economic order.

The key questions being asked under the stated targets are how to bring the cost of capital expenditure in large-scale manufacturing in value terms for land, electricity and money at par with the globe benchmarks? How to reduce regulations and promote ease of doing business? How to develop India as a research, design and innovation hub by removing hurdles which are fully-integrated with the new asks from a connected digital economy? How to promote skills and workforce education as well as upskilling of the existing workforce to be able to function in the new industrial arena? How to focus on quality checks, testing and standards practices while recognising that we need to align with global benchmarks? Also, how to increase India's global share in exports with a focus on our policy? Assist and put all industries on technology-aided platforms to enjoy the true benefits of a connected global economy? Achieve a stable, predictable, industry, consumer and economy-friendly policy framework to foster higher growth? Increase foreign direct investments? Promote sustainability as the core objective of all businesses in the country?

All these are commendable strategy directions which ask the right questions for an increasingly coagulating global order where technology innovations are diminishing physical barriers in fractions of seconds while protective Governments are putting iron fences around their economies and reducing global agreements to pieces of paper.

It is in this context that the new industrial policy seeks to achieve significance, as it comes at a time when every citizen is feeling the impact of the crumbling economy, job losses and more important, climate change. From extreme weather conditions being reported around the globe, to rising costs of providing basics to humans, not to forget, extinction of species, are a real danger today.

India needs to walk the tightrope of creating a sustainable business environment and impactful economy while getting more integrated with global benchmarks and practices. The new industrial policy needs a series of deliberations and clause by clause analysis of the vision, objectives before being drafted.

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has formulated a working group to finalise the policy which includes a couple of key State Governments. Nobody can deny the role States are likely to play in shaping the next economic growth for India. State Governments in the past have organised successful roadshows or "invest inwards" summits, promising big ticket businesses free land, cheap electricity and fast Government clearances for new projects. However, now they need to align with the Central Government and put in their key demands, challenges and proposed solutions towards developing their States which are sustainable, long-term and more importantly can survive changing regimes. It is a long shot but in the spirit of federalism, States need to get their records straight on power subsidies, clamp down on existing businesses using local administration and similar regulatory challenges. The deliberations so far have been behind closed doors. For a global "outward"-looking industrial policy, there should be an open consultation process, especially at the State Government level.

(The writer is Country Manager, India, ITC Council)

I'M HERE TO TELL ALL OF YOU. MAMATA BANERJEE, RAHUL GANDHI, COME AND DEBATE CAA WITH ME. I HAD PILOTED THE BILL IN THE PARLIAMENT.

—UNION HOME MINISTER

AMIT SHAH

POINT COUNTERPOINT



YOU SHOULD DEBATE WITH ME. WHY DEBATE WITH THEM? THE DEBATE SHOULD BE WITH A BEARDED MAN. I CAN DEBATE WITH BJP ON CAA, NPR AND NRC.

—AIMIM CHIEF
ASADUDDIN OWAIISI

List of expectations

As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman gears up to present the Union Budget on February 1, India Inc shares its hopes and concerns

MSMEs need more incentives



RACHIT CHAWLA

At a time when the economy of India is experiencing a slowdown, the country is still hoping for a balanced Union Budget by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1. The middle-class is anticipating relief in income tax and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are looking for incentives. It is also crucial for the FM to formulate policies which ascertain 6.5 per cent real GDP growth for the fiscal year 2020-21.

Time to revamp MSMEs: While the economy is still facing a liquidity issue and MSMEs are bearing the brunt of the deceleration, achieving 6.5 per cent growth is a challenge but not impossible. If the Government could save Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) and MSMEs, the scenario would turn favourable within a few months. Recently, the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) requested the Government to change the definition of MSMEs in response to alterations in the economic environment of the country in the last couple of years. MSMEs are the backbone of the Indian economy and the country cannot compromise with their health. Hence, a changed definition will help the sector enhance its contribution to employment-generation, poverty-alleviation and resource improvisation. A large number of MSMEs are struggling with financial challenges and without subsidies their sustenance is difficult. It is shocking that out of the 6.33 crore MSMEs in the country, only 0.05 lakh are medium enterprises. They are usually deprived of the Public Procurement Policy which mandates 25 per cent procurement from the micro and small enterprises. They are also barred from availing delayed payment reliefs through facilitation councils.

Need for sector-specific measures: Besides considering the problems of MSMEs, Sitharaman must also address the issues of under-performing sectors such as real estate, energy and telecom. There is an urgent need to reinforce sectors which strengthen the infrastructure of the country but are reeling under the impact of the downturn. Last year, Sitharaman relieved large businesses by cutting corporate tax to 22 per cent, but businesses cannot flourish until MSMEs become secure and stable. The Government should also lower the tax burden on MSMEs by slashing the Goods and Services Tax in key sectors. The real estate sector, which is one of the growth propellers of the economy, has been struggling for almost a decade. To infuse life into this sector, the Government must consider its long-pending demands such as getting industry status, a single-window clearance mechanism, dropping the circle rate section from the Income Tax Act, elimination of taxes on vacant property, reduced land acquisition cost and tax rationalisation on Real Estate Investment Trusts.

Telecom, yet another crucial sector is hopeful that the Government will take measures to resolve the burgeoning debt issues in the Budget. Telecom companies are also demanding reduction in licence fee, Spectrum Usage Charges and relief in levies.

No compromise with liquidity: The next big challenge before Sitharaman is increasing liquidity in the market because it is directly proportional to the growth of MSMEs, especially start-ups. The IL&FS and DHFL fiascos had drastic repercussions on the financial markets, and one of the main reasons for the huge impact is the lack of availability of alternative options to bank funding. Now, Public Sector Banks have decided to cut their Marginal Cost of Funds-based Lending Rates (MCLR) which will be beneficial for the economy as it will improve liquidity in the market. Lower MCLR will mean that NBFCs can borrow from banks at lower rates and the NBFCs that operate in SME lending and housing will benefit the most. It will strengthen the capitalisation structures of HFCs and help revive the real estate sector. Also, to bring back positive sentiments in the market and to counter the decelerating growth, better liquidity is needed and a lower MCLR would help meet this to a great extent. Industry pundits believe that stability in the sector will be regained by the first quarter of 2020. They are optimistic about increased demand for credit because urbanisation is taking place at a fast pace. Plus, there is a thriving start-up culture in the country and retail and e-commerce sectors have high penetration even in semi-urban areas. The Government should also keep inflation under control and it must not go beyond six per cent for at least three quarters. If all these issues are addressed, making India a \$5 trillion economy will be a realistic goal.

(The writer is founder, CEO, of an investment management firm)

Give IT sops to boost EV sales



PANKAJ MUNJAL

The Union Budget announced in 2019 was in many ways a landmark one for pushing e-mobility. Not only was the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on electric vehicles slashed to five per cent, the Budget also offered major incentives for buyers of electric vehicles (EVs) in the form of income tax rebates on loan. These measures were designed to push the sale of EVs, which have been on the top of the Government's priority list in recent years. These incentives were additional to the major commitment announced under the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME-II) scheme to boost EV infrastructure. However, the sale of EVs remained lukewarm with an analysis suggesting that just 1,309 units of e-cars were sold between April and November 2019. With the economic slowdown and falling demand hitting the auto sector hard, the industry needs a slew of measures that will address concerns on both the demand and supply sides. With the Union Budget round the corner, there are hopes that the Finance Minister (FM) will announce measures to revive consumption, put more disposable income into the hands of the people as well as more sops for EVs. Importantly, the FM must give a policy push to e-bicycles which have the potential to be at the forefront of an e-mobility revolution.

Revive demand: In its annual review, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that the declining consumption and investment, accompanied by falling tax revenue have arrested India's GDP growth. The IMF also called for "urgent" policy actions to reverse this slowdown. Falling demand has been at the centre of the current slowdown and the country needs measures that can put more incomes into the hands of people and revive consumption. Cutting income tax rates and readjusting income tax slabs might be a tough call at a time when the Government's revenues are shrinking but it might also be the bitter pill the economy needs. An income tax exemption on income up to ₹5 lakh can positively impact salaried taxpayers and boost consumption. It can also spur buying among people who have deferred automobile purchases in view of the deceleration. However, just monetary measures will not be sufficient. The economy also needs a major fiscal policy push to increase employment and income. The Government must announce broad measures to infuse expenditure in strategic sectors like manufacturing and infrastructure and create income-generating avenues in the rural economy. This also includes revisions in GST slabs to create a low tax economy.

Institute a supportive scrapping policy: Earlier this year, the FM announced a scrap page policy aimed at shunting out old vehicles and increasing production. The policy is aimed at serving the twin objectives of reducing emissions and boosting consumer demand. The Government must ensure a quick rollout of the scrap page policy to encourage the replacement of older vehicles and must also lay down positive incentives for customers to push the disposal of older vehicles. The incentives may include exemption on road taxes for consumers and low interest loan schemes for purchase of new commercial vehicles. According to the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), the commercial vehicle industry suffered a decline of 22 per cent in sales between April and November 2019. We hope a supportive scrapping policy can help revive some of this lost demand.

Extend FAME II benefits to E-bicycles: E-bicycles have recently been categorised under EVs to get tax benefits. However, they do not get the benefits designated under the FAME-II scheme. We hope the Government recognises the need to promote e-bicycles as much as the need to promote e-cars. While e-cars address the concern of pollution, they do not solve the problem of traffic congestion. E-bicycles are both eco-friendly, space-friendly and also offer a viable solution to the anxiety that comes with lack of charging infrastructure as they can be easily pedalled back in case of battery loss.

Policy measures to reduce viability gap of EVs: More measures might be needed to reduce the viability gap of EVs. The Government must support the sector in different ways to make EVs more affordable and viable. These measures can include exemption on road tax, lower power tariffs for charging EVs, exemption of parking fees for EV users and exemption of permit costs among other measures.

(The writer is Chairman and MD of a leading motor company)

Formulate retail policy soon



RAVINDER SINGH

India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and the drivers of this growth can be credited to the burgeoning millennial population, growing middle-income households and an increasing representation of women in the workforce. All these factors contribute to economic growth by boosting retail consumption, thereby providing a highly positive outlook for businesses in the country. Meanwhile, as far as the market potential is concerned, the retail industry provides a robust platform for multiple stakeholders, including the consumers, distributors, manufacturers and additional sectors like transportation, logistics and so on. In fact, according to the Retailers Association of India (RAI), around 43 million people in the country are employed in the retail sector and the industries that support those businesses. In fact, the sector is generating employment at a fast pace, taking the second position after agriculture in terms of creating direct as well as indirect employment opportunities.

Despite the retail industry's positive contribution towards the country's economy, 2019 witnessed many players struggling to sustain the growth chart. Even though they are expecting growth to rebound in 2020, it will all depend on factors like the recovery in the manufacturing and other sectors, availability of finances in the hands of consumers to make easy retail consumption decisions and of course, the forthcoming Union Budget 2020 that will be presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1. This will be her second Union Budget and the retailers have many expectations from the Modi Government in its second term.

Accelerating the process of national retail policy: It is a harsh reality that India to date has been unable to develop a robust manufacturing sector despite two decades of economic and trade liberalisation. Structural issues like scarcity of resources in the form of raw materials and trained labour force, lack of capital and credit facilities and inadequate infrastructure are causing major hindrances in the operations of small retail traders. This is also affecting the export-competitiveness of a large number of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). So, in this year's Union Budget, these players want the Government to speed up the formulation and implementation of the National Retail Policy, as this would provide a significant boost to the development of 65 million small traders in the country's retail sector and expedite/promote the ease of doing business in the country.

Promotion of digital and modern retail: The Indian retail industry is currently dominated by e-commerce and it is expected to grow to \$200 billion by 2026 driven by rising smartphone penetration, the launch of 4G networks and increasing disposable incomes. That said, the competition is only increasing day by day. Bearing in mind the new-age consumers' speedy adoption of technology, offline retail players must also modify their strategies to keep their brands relevant, the brand experience even and their products and services accessible across multiple channels. They are expecting the Government to modernise its retail by upgrading the use of Point of Sale Machines that would help retailers to access the customers' information and efficiently manage their inventory, thereby improving their revenue-generation and profitability.

Boosting the consumption story: Due to the deceleration in the economy, retailers both small and premium ones, are bearing the brunt of a consumer class that has become careful in its purchasing decisions. This slowdown in consumption has dampened the demand in the retail segment. Retail players are hoping that the Union Budget will be pro-consumption and will come out with a slew of measures that will make small-ticket credit and additional cash accessible in the hands of the middle class. This will positively impact the retail industry by increasing demand and also provide a much-needed boost to the economy.

GST on clothes: Clothes are subject to five per cent GST if the taxable value of the goods is less than ₹1,000 per piece, whereas, the sale value of clothing that exceeds ₹1,000 is subject to 12 per cent GST. Retailers expect the Budget to focus on increasing the threshold for the five per cent slab to ₹2,000 from the ₹1,000 that is levied at present to give a fillip to the sector.

(The writer is Founding Director of a chain of value retail stores)

Derivatives are a double-edged sword

Used both for hedging and speculation, the derivatives markets worldwide have grown to a humongous level, reaching about \$1.2 quadrillion. However, their use has also brought giant corporations to their knees, hence investors must exercise caution



HIMA BINDU KOTA

The term "financial weapons of mass destruction", coined by billionaire Warren Buffett for derivatives, is not without reason. They can be used both for hedging and speculation and their markets worldwide have grown to a humongous level, reaching about \$1.2 quadrillion, almost 10 times that of the world GDP.

However, the use of derivatives has also brought giant corporations to their knees during past global financial meltdowns. One cannot forget the bankruptcy of corporations like Enron and Barings Banks due to wrong speculative moves involving

derivatives. Since they are a double-edged sword, one has to be extra cautious while using them.

What are derivatives anyway? These are instruments that derive their value from any underlying asset, which could be either a stock or a commodity.

Any investor or corporation can put money in any one of the popular derivatives for hedging or speculative purposes. Corporations use them for hedging if they want to reduce an existing risk or protect themselves from any volatility in the price of an underlying asset by taking an offsetting position, whereas speculation is trying to make profit due to any price changes.

Several analysts believe that the Indian stock markets are set to rise further in 2020 and may end higher by at least 13 per cent. It is being predicted that Nifty might end above the 13,000 mark. Similarly, the expectation for the BSE Sensex is that it will go above the 46,000 level. So, if we consider a bullish market for this year, what are the derivative strategies that

an investor can use in this type of market where the prices of underlying assets are set to rise? Although the general belief is that stock markets will be bullish, there will certainly be variations as is natural.

In case the markets are extremely bullish, investors should go ahead with a long-call strategy. This is one of the simplest approaches and can be used by beginners in the derivatives market. There is only one transaction involved, i.e., buying call options. It helps investors use the power of leverage and make potentially unlimited profits and at the same time cap their losses. In the worst case scenario, when the markets do not behave as anticipated, loss is limited to the price of buying the call options.

A reverse call ratio spread is also an extremely bullish strategy where an investor can sell an option at a lower price, usually in-the-money or at-the-money and buy more options at the higher strike price, which is out-of-the-money, of the same underlying asset. So if an investor sells one

option and buys two options with a higher strike price, a reverse call option strategy is created.

When the market outlook is moderately bullish and the investor is expecting some upward movement in the underlying asset, a long-call ladder strategy could be initiated. This strategy has the potential of earning from time decay if it expires in the range of the strike price. This strategy is created by buying one in-the-money call, selling one at-the-money call and selling one out-of-the-money call of the same underlying asset with the same expiry. Experiments can also be made with different strike prices.

Another income-generating strategy that can be initiated in a moderately bullish market is a covered call option which can be created by using a stock and an option. This strategy is created by purchasing a stock and simultaneously selling a call option, which is out-of-the-money, usually on the higher side.

When the markets are becoming more neutral, buying a long-call

would not be the best strategy to use. In a moderately bullish market, investors could take a short put option strategy, wherein they go short on a put position, i.e., they are obliged to buy the underlying asset in future at a predetermined price if the buyer wishes to exercise his option. This strategy will be helpful for investors if the price of the underlying asset increases moderately or even remains at the same level. In a flat market, this strategy will be beneficial as it gives investors a chance to earn some upfront money in the form of premium which can be adjusted against some margins.

Another strategy for a more neutral or flat market with a bullish view is bull put spread option, which involves two put options, both short and long. It is created by one short put with a higher strike price and one long put with a lower strike price. But here the expiration date remains the same. This strategy has a higher potential of being profitable as it is beneficial in situations when the prices are steady or are rising.

In case an investor has suffered any losses due to price fall, a stock repair strategy is there and can help the investor recover their losses even if the prices of the underlying asset show slight improvement.

This strategy is created by buying one at-the-money call and at the same time selling two out-of-the-money call, of the same underlying asset with the same expiration. The trick here, though, is that the strike price of the sale should be very close to the buying price.

As one can see, there are different derivative strategies for different market outlooks. However, taking a bet with derivatives can be very dangerous as by paying a small premium, investors can end up initiating very large transactions and if the markets do not move the way the investors anticipated, the losses can be huge. These transactions should only be undertaken by an expert with knowledge about stock markets and in particular, derivatives.

(The writer is Associate Professor, Amity University, Noida)



FOREIGN EYE



WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

The world turned a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's behaviour because it suited it. Now the costs are clearer as an investigation found billionaire Jeff Bezos had his mobile phone hacked after receiving a WhatsApp message apparently sent from the account of the Saudi crown prince. A year after journalist Khashoggi's death, many of those who had pulled out of the 2018 investment summit were present. Yet many of them are doubtless in urgent talks with their digital security consultants.

(The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



Canara Bank's net profit rises 3.8 pc to Rs 330 cr in Q3

MUMBAI: State-owned Canara Bank on Thursday reported a 3.8 per cent rise in its net profit to Rs 329.62 crore in the third quarter of the current financial year, mainly due to a decline in proportion of bad loans. The bank's profit was Rs 317.52 crore during the December 2018 quarter. Its total income stood at Rs 14,001.63 crore during the quarter ended December 2019, up from Rs 13,513.35 crore in the year-ago period, Canara Bank said in a stock exchange filing. The net non-performing assets (NPAs) as a percentage of total assets stood at 5.05 per cent, down from 6.37 per cent a year ago. Similarly, the percentage of gross NPAs also narrowed to 8.36 per cent from 10.25 per cent. In absolute terms, the net NPAs stood at Rs 21,337.74 crore, down from 26,591.07 crore.



Power ministry appoints Ashish as govt nominee

NEW DELHI: State-owned power giant NTPC on Thursday said the power ministry has appointed Ashish Upadhyaya as a government nominee director on its board. The ministry has appointed Upadhyaya, additional secretary and financial advisor in the ministry, as a government nominee director on the board of NTPC till the date of superannuation or till further orders, whichever is earlier, according to a BSE filing. Upadhyaya joined as a part-time official director on the board of NTPC on Wednesday. He is a 1989-batch IAS officer of Madhya Pradesh cadre. Upadhyaya has been working as additional secretary and financial advisor in the power ministry since November 14, 2019.



OBC Q3 profit jumps 39.11 pc to Rs 201.66 cr

MUMBAI: State-owned Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC) on Thursday reported a 39.11 per cent jump in net profit at Rs 201.66 crore for the quarter ended December 2019, mainly due to reduction in bad loans. The bank, which is going to be merged with another state-run lender Punjab National Bank, had reported a profit of Rs 144.96 crore in October-December quarter a year ago. The bank's total income during December quarter stood at Rs 5,642.61 crore as compared with Rs 5,127.98 crore a year ago, it said in a regulatory filing. Income from interest stood at Rs 4,659.93 crore as against Rs 4,561.12 crore during October-December quarter of previous fiscal.

DB Corp posts 7.9 pc rise in Q3 profit at Rs 81.63 cr

NEW DELHI: Media house DB Corp on Thursday reported 7.9 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 81.63 crore in the third quarter ended December 2019. The company had posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 75.63 crore in the same quarter a year ago, DB Corp said in a regulatory filing. Revenue from operations during the quarter under consideration stood at Rs 598.75 crore as against Rs 659.7 crore in the same quarter previous fiscal, it added. The company said its board of directors at its meeting held on Thursday declared second interim dividend of Rs 3.5 per equity share of face value Rs 10 each.

Sebi bars Equicom Financial, directors from providing investment advisory

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has barred Equicom Financial Research and its two directors from acting as an investment advisors for luring innocent investors by making assured profit commitment and presenting misleading information to clients.

Besides, they have been barred from capital markets, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in an order.

After receiving several investors' complaints, Sebi conducted an examination in relation to the affairs of Equicom.

This is registered as an Investment Adviser (IA) with effect from April 25, 2014 and, Amit Kukda and Akhilesh Raghuvanshi are the two directors of Equicom through whom the company functions.

The probe found that Equicom was involved in luring the innocent investors by making assured profit commitments; extracted more and more money from the clients by offering more and more services; presented misleading information to clients to influence their decision to invest, took advance payments for services and made false commitment of profits to their client for extracting more payments from the clients among others.

"The adoption of such practices are nothing but contrivance/device/deceit for manipulatively forcing the clients to deal with the IA. Thus, Equicom has prima facie violated ...the PFUTP (Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices) Regulations," the regulator said in an order passed on Tuesday.

Besides, Sebi noted that Equicom has failed to abide by the code of conduct while carrying out its activities as an investment adviser and therefore violated Investment Advisers Regulations.

The regulator said Kukda and Raghuvanshi being the directors of Equicom are prima facie responsible for the violations committed by the company.

Consequently, Sebi has directed Equicom and its two directors to "cease and desist" from acting as an investment advisor including the activity of acting and representing through any media (physical or digital) as an investment advisor, directly or indirectly until further orders.

In addition, they have asked "not to access the securities market and buy, sell or otherwise deal in securities in any manner whatsoever, directly or indirectly, until further orders". Further, they have been restrained from diverting any funds raised from investors.

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In addition, they have asked "not to access the securities market and buy, sell or otherwise deal in securities in any manner whatsoever, directly or indirectly, until further orders". Further, they have been restrained from diverting any funds raised from investors.

After receiving several investors' complaints, Sebi conducted an examination in relation to the affairs of Equicom.

This is registered as an Investment Adviser (IA) with effect from April 25, 2014 and, Amit Kukda and Akhilesh Raghuvanshi are the two directors of Equicom through whom the company functions.

The probe found that Equicom was involved in luring the innocent investors by making assured profit commitments; extracted more and more money from the clients by offering more and more services; presented misleading information to clients to influence their decision to invest, took advance payments for services and made false commitment of profits to their client for extracting more payments from the clients among others.

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Indian economy poised to take off, says Goyal

PNS ■ DAVOS

Asserting that the Indian economy is well-poised to take off, Union minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said there is a lot of enthusiasm for making investments in the country.

Speaking at a session at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual summit here, the Commerce and Industry Minister also said the government will hold discussions with Britain and European Union on free trade agreements.

Britain is set to leave the European Union by end of January. "... things have once again started showing an upturn... economy is well poised to take off from here," Goyal said.

According to him, the enthusiasm to make investments in India is infectious.

At least four or five companies have said that more than 50 per cent of their total workforce would operate out of India in the coming years.

Sensex rises 271 pts on value buying

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmark Sensex rose by 271 points on Thursday on the back of gains in index heavyweights Infosys, L&T, ICICI Bank and SBI, despite massive a selloff in global equities.

After gyrating over 300 points in a volatile session, the 30-share BSE index settled 271.02 points, or 0.66 per cent, higher at 41,386.40. It hit an intra-day high of 41,413.96 and a low of 41,098.91.

Likewise, the broader NSE Nifty closed 73.45 points, or 0.61 per cent, down at 12,180.35.

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rising by 2.98 per cent, after the company reported a 15 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit at Rs 2,560.32 crore for quarter to December 2019.

Other gainers included M&M, SBI, Titan, Infosys, Bharti Airtel and Ultratech Cement.

Power Min seeks Brazilian investment in energy sector

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Power Minister R K Singh on Thursday urged Brazilian investors to invest in the Indian energy sector, saying it is the fastest growing energy market and its consumption will treble in coming days.

Singh also assured investors that India will provide stable policy and regulatory regime to facilitate them.

"Meeting our aspirations require us to go on higher energy consumption pedestal... with our low base (per capita) energy consumption, our energy consumption is going to double or treble in short while."

"We want more and more companies to come here and invest here. We can promise of stable policy regime. We can promise a regulatory regime which is fair and decides and



Piyush Goyal

According to him, the enthusiasm to make investments in India is infectious

Some of them are big names, he noted.

On RCEP, Goyal said it was an "unbalanced trade agreement, which was really not fulfilling the guiding principles on which RCEP started about eight years ago, therefore India chose not to participate in it".

'If I were not a Minister today, I would be bidding'

PNS ■ DAVOS

As the government works on divesting debt-laden Air India, Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said if he was not a minister, he would be bidding for the airline.

Air India has been in the red for long and the government is now in the process of finalising the contours for its disinvestment.

Responding to a query about proposed disinvestment of Air India, BPCL and other companies, Goyal said in the first term, the government had inherited an economy which was in pretty terrible shape.

Steps were taken to put the economy back in shape and if the government had looked at

HCL, Citi chiefs join US-IBC board

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

HCL CEO C Vijayakumar and Citi India CEO Ashu Khullar have joined the Global Board of Directors of US-India Business Council, the top advocacy group said on Thursday.

Other high-powered additions to the board include Procter & Gamble President, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa Mageswaran Suranjan; TransUnion President for International David Neenan; and Bharat Forge Deputy MD Amit Kalyani.

India's largest realty firm DLF on Thursday announced an investment of Rs 5,000 crore to develop large commercial project here as part of its strategy to expand portfolio of rent yielding properties.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Thiru Edappadi Palaniswami laid the foundation stone of 'DLF Downtown' at Taramani in Chennai.

The 27 acre project will be developed by DLF's joint venture firm with GIC named DLF Cyber City Developers Ltd



divesting these jewels, it would not have got a great value.

He was talking at a session on 'Strategic Outlook: India' at the WEF 2020 here.

"If I weren't a minister today, I would be bidding for Air India. It has some of the best bilaterals the world over... a well managed and efficient Air India with lot more good aircraft put in using these bilaterals is nothing short of a gold mine to my mind," Goyal said.

Bilaterals refers to an agreement between two countries that allows each other's airlines to operate services with a specific number of seats.

Goyal holds the portfolios of Railways as well as Commerce and Industry.

"India today is a land where you have equal opportunity, you can work with integrity..." the minister said, adding that he thinks a good job has been done in cleaning up the banks and strengthening them.

GE T&D India bags Rs 173-cr order from JKPDD

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

GE T&D India Ltd on Thursday said it has bagged a Rs 173-crore order from Jammu & Kashmir Power Development Department (JKPDD).

GE T&D India Ltd was awarded a supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) and advanced distribution management solution (ADMS) project by JKPDD for the distribution operations in Jammu and Srinagar, according to a statement by the company.

The order worth about Rs 173 crore, won through a competitive bidding process, includes a five-year maintenance services contract and the

supply and integration of a host of solutions in the overall distribution network in the two cities, said the statement.

Pitambar Shivnani, chief executive officer of GE T&D India Ltd, said, "The commitment towards the implementation of this technology is a major step towards realising the vision of 24x7 power supply to all consumers in the

cities of Jammu and Srinagar." The technology solution being executed for this project is used mainly for 24x7 power supply, reduction of power losses and real-time data monitoring and control of distribution network from a centralised place.

This will determine the setting up of reliable and "no manual touch" systems for system control or data collection and adoption of information technology in energy accounting.

The SCADA technology reduces aggregate technical and commercial losses and enables real-time monitoring and control of the electric distribution network, handling of loads during load shedding and restoration and plugging of pilferage points.



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SPOTTING MARKET MANIPULATION

Sebi to tap AI, ML and Big Data

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sebi is acquiring capabilities to monitor and analyse social media posts to keep a tab on possible market manipulations, its Chairman Ajay Tyagi said on Thursday.

He said the capabilities will involve use of artificial intelligence, machine learning, big data analytics and natural language processing tools to spot market manipulation.

The new plan involves creating a "data lake" project to augment analytical capabilities, he said while speaking at the Speaking at the National Institute of Securities Markets at Patalganga near here.

In efforts to curb possible manipulations in the securities market, Sebi has been keeping a watch on social media and there have been cases where social media posts have helped in acting against manipulative activities.

"Catching malpractices in the market using the standard tools that analyse only structured data of price and volume is increasingly getting difficult," Tyagi said.

"We want to acquire technology and unstructure data analysis because the structured data analysis is not helping much, manipulators use all sort of things," he noted.

A tender has also been floated for acquiring the technology.

Even in the absence of such a focused tool, Tyagi said Sebi already has capabilities, where in it screens social media posts after corporate announcements and the changes in price and volumes of a scrip.

The Sebi chief said application of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and ML (Machine Learning) tools has the potential to bring a para-

digim shift in the securities market landscape, adding that blockchain can be used in clearing and settlement activities.

AI/ML tools are being increasingly deployed in fund management, trading, supervision and surveillance functions in the capital markets, he added.

Further, Tyagi said there is a need for the technologists to invest time in research in these tools for applications in the capital markets.

Systemic risks are becoming important objectives for financial regulators, Tyagi said, explaining that this requires identification and monitoring of important financial institutions, leverage, interconnectedness, risk concentrations and market sentiment.

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Making a way through EMERGENCIES

Karimnagar-based Vishwaja Reddy built disposable sanitary pad vending machines to make sure that no girl or woman would have to worry about not having a pad when needed, finds V SATEESH REDDY



Vishwaja Reddy, a student of the University of Hyderabad studying MBA, says, "In the midst of my external lab examination, while I was studying engineering, I got my periods. I couldn't go out and bring a pad. I somehow managed to get one with help from my junior. Then it struck me that something must be done so that pads can be made available during emergencies like these."

"During research on this topic, I came to know about sanitary napkin vending machines and incinerators. Being a mechanical engineer it was easy for me to understand how the machine works. The prototype I made was with cardboard and also tied up with a fabric company to procure the pad material," she adds.

This led Vishwaja Reddy to the creation of sanitary pad vending and disposable machine.

When asked about how the machine works, Vishwaja

shares, "The manual sanitary napkin vending machine gives out pads in exchange for coins. All one needs to do is drop a Rs 5 coin and pull the lever to get the pad. We upgraded it to an automatic metal machine that runs on power. Recently, we have modified the machine to scan an RFI code, similar to the ones used at Metro stations. The code can be incorporated into ID cards of students and employees so it can be easily scanned."

About incinerators, she adds, "A safer, quicker and hygienic method for disposal of napkins is the incinerator. The used pads are burned at

a relatively low temperature so as to have the least amount of emissions. There is an external thermal protection that automatically cuts power when required. An incinerator can burn up to 200 pads a day depending on its capacity. Burning 10 pads produces only one tablespoon of ash."

She said that these machines are very useful to every girl who is menstruating and can easily obtain a pad and it is not just for girls but also for women/sweepers (men) who clean washrooms. She says, "Generally, every female face such crises but they don't know what to do

and sometimes even if they have any plan they may not come forward to discuss it with anyone. If you face problems express it out loud. Even if you may not get a solution right away, you may find a way to get out of it eventually."

Vishwaja was awarded the Intinta Innovation award 2019 by the IT department of Telangana. IT Minister K.T. Rama Rao also lauded her for her efforts.

Vishwaja says that they had installed the machines in 23 schools and colleges in Hyderabad and are planning to set up the same in rural areas of Telangana.

"It took a year for me to make the machine. Each machine costs Rs 10,000 to Rs 18,000. Being a student, I had to collect the funds by going from school to college to convince them to buy the sanitary pad vending machine. That is how I managed to make these machines," shares Vishwaja.

On a concluding note, she says, "We are working on to get a patent for the machine. We want to make more and distribute them throughout the state so that no girl or woman would have to face the worry of not having a pad when needed."



Generally, every female face these problems but they don't know what to do and sometimes even if they have any plan they may not come forward to discuss it. If you face problems, express it. Even if you may not get a solution, you may find a way to get out of it

VISHWAJA REDDY, INNOVATOR

Animal Planet comes to city zoo

Why do dogs wag their tails? How do cats always land on their feet? What makes some people magnets for mosquitoes? Do elephants really never forget? How do electric eels not electrocute themselves? Why don't penguins' feet freeze on ice? Animals are extraordinary, and they do seemingly impossible things that leave humans in absolute awe. Children especially are full of curiosity and want to know more about the wild animals not found in urban areas.

These questions and other mysteries will be explored as the channel Animal Planet presents the natural world up close, with rare footage of animals captured in new and surprising ways with a special preview of *How do Animals Do That* as a part of special

tie-up with Nehru Zoological Park Biological Park. As a part of the tie-up, Animal Planet will screen hugely popular series *How Do Animals Do That* in the auditorium of Hyderabad Zoo starting January 23, 2020.

The entry to the theatre will be free. The zoo will host

show according to visitor's interest. The tie-up with Hyderabad Zoo is in line with Animal Planet's mission to keep the childhood joy and wonder of animals alive by bringing people up close in every way, said, Megha Tata, Managing Director, South Asia, Discovery.

"We are delighted to part-

ner Animal Planet in this novel initiative. I am confident that children will enjoy and learn a lot from this entertaining series. We will continue in our endeavor to offer world class content to discerning visitors to our zoo," said N. Kshitija, I.F.S Curator Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad.



Chance for influencers, Instagrammers to shine



Content creators and influencers in the Telugu states now have an opportunity to showcase their talent. Instagram launched the 'Born on Instagram' programme in Hyderabad, to discover, showcase and grow the most creative content creators in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The programme aims to give creators the knowledge to best leverage Instagram and hone their storytelling capabilities.

The programme will have the creators participate in a series of 15 events, including one in Hyderabad, and subsequently provide a bouquet of benefits over the rest of the year including one-on-one partner management, sessions on best practices of the platform, video storytelling techniques, mentorship by celebrated creators, create-

together opportunities and other useful resources.

"Born on Instagram" is a programme that recognises the creativity in content that we're witnessing all across India — in big and small cities. Hyderabad is a great example because it represents the myriad passions that are pursued on our platform — food, fashion and technology. While we build on our strength of visual storytelling and launch innovative features for enhancing safe self-expression, programmes like these will help us in further identifying and mentoring the next big digital content creators of India," said Manish Chopra, Head of Partnerships, Facebook India.

A highlight of the event was Mahathalli aka Jahnvi Dasetty, a popular creator with 648k followers, who shared her insights on leveraging the platform. She said, "I love entertaining con-

tent and that's the genre I focus on. While I play different characters in different sketch videos I make, Instagram allows me to show my real and authentic self. It's a place where you see all my passions, which include fashion, travel and entertainment. I'm hoping this new programme discovers and develops more talented Instagrammers from Hyderabad, and I'm happy to play a part in it."

— PNS

A HIGHLIGHT OF THE EVENT WAS MAHATHALLI AKA JAHNAVI DASETTY, A POPULAR CREATOR WITH 648K FOLLOWERS, WHO SHARED HER INSIGHTS ON LEVERAGING THE PLATFORM.

MATT DAMON to play detective in NYPD thriller



Matt Damon is reuniting with his *Ford v. Ferrari* director James Mangold for a film titled *The Force* in which the Hollywood actor will be essaying the role of a detective.

Mangold has been developing the Don Winslow bestseller since 2017. *The Force* centers on corrupt NYPD officers with Damon set to play detective Denny Malone, who runs an elite crime fighting squad but becomes ensnared in a corruption scandal, reports variety.com.

Fox bought movie rights to *The Force* in 2016 and set it up with Ridley Scott to produce through his Fox-based Scott Free company.

The Story Factory's Shane Salerno and Kevin Walsh are also producing. David Mamet wrote the first script and Scott Frank has been working on the most recent version.

Damon recently wrapped up the drama *Stillwater*, directed by Tom McCarthy. He is starring with Jodie Comer, Adam Driver and Ben Affleck in *The Last Duel*, with Ridley Scott serving as a director.



CAPTAIN MARVEL sequel in works

A follow-up to *Captain Marvel*, featuring Oscar winner Brie Larson in the title role, is finally taking shape at Disney.

According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, the studio is in final negotiations with Megan McDonnell, a staff writer on its Disney Plus series *WandaVision* on the project.

Sources said Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, who co-wrote and directed the 2019 hit, will not return to helm the sequel. However, they are in talks to remain in the Marvel Universe and direct a possible Disney Plus series. Marvel is hoping to find a female filmmaker for *Captain Marvel 2* and is eyeing a potential 2022 release.

Plot details are under wraps but the new story will move the setting from the 1990s of the original film to the present day. *Captain Marvel*, which was Marvel's first female-centric movie, followed Larson as US Airforce pilot Carol Danvers, who becomes one of the universe's most powerful heroes.

Also starring Samuel L Jackson, Ben Mendelsohn and Gemma Chan, the film grossed USD 1.13 billion worldwide. Larson's *Captain Marvel* also appeared in 2019's *Avengers: Endgame*.

We'll walk in underwear if we win Grammy: CAMILA CABELLO

Senorita fame singers Camila Cabello and Shawn Mendes seem to be huge fans of Grammy winning musical duo Twenty One Pilots.

In an interview to radio.com, Cabello, who has been nominated for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance at the 2020 Grammys along with Mendes, joked about how she and Mendes will accept the award in underwear if they win, reports etc.canada.com.

Three years ago, Tyler Joseph and Josh Dun of Twenty One Pilots had collected the Grammy award in their underwear.

"If Shawn and I win the Grammy, we will walk on stage in our underwear like *Twenty One Pilots* did. That's a promise. Just kidding. It's not. I gotta work out before I do that," Cabello said.

Cabello also spoke about how special it would be to share such an honour with Mendes.

"It feels really special to get to share that kind of experience with someone that is first and foremost my friend that I've known for such a long time. He (Mendes) was actually the first person, I think, that I wrote a song with," she added. The 2020 Grammys take place on January 26.



Jackie Shroff to team up with son Tiger in *Baaghi 3*

Actor Tiger Shroff is set to share the screen with his father and veteran actor Jackie Shroff for the first time in *Baaghi 3*, the makers announced on Thursday.

In the third installment of action-drama, directed by Ahmed Khan, Jackie will play the on-screen father of Tiger and his co-star Riteish Deshmukh's characters.

In a cameo appearance, the 62-year-old actor will essay the role of a police inspector in *Baaghi 3*, producer Sajid Nadiadwala said.

"Everyone has been waiting to see Tiger team up with his *Hero* father Jackie

since we launched him. There have been plenty of speculations and no one has been able to bring them together in the last six years as the duo was categorical they would only share the screen when a film and role merited their presence.

"Ahmed and I feel the story line required Jackie to be a part of them film and I believe our visions matched to understand how it's a pivotal role in the film," Nadiadwala said in a statement.

The producer said having Jackie on board will add to the film's expectations. "... I am confident no one will be disappointed by this double dose of Shroffs and will stand as a strong USP," Nadiadwala



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



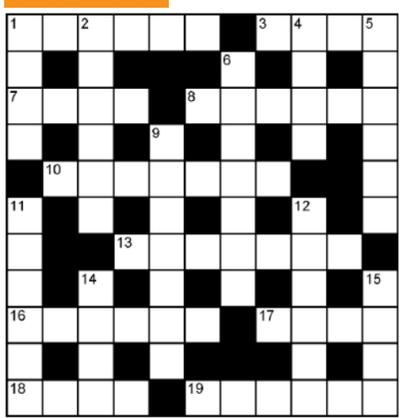
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



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Yesterday's solution

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

- Rules**
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- One of the continents
- Opposite of false
- A short letter
- Repairing
- Went red in the face
- A game with bat and ball
- A king's son
- Come to an halt
- Sprinkle this on food
- A bird that can be trained to race
- Four times twenty
- You need this to be allowed to drive a car
- The world's largest bird
- Wine is made from these
- Middle
- Young woman
- Twirl

DOWN

- A female relation
- A baby's toy
- Water from the sky



SAI TEJ boards SANKRITYAN'S time-travel adventure

Sci-fi bug is catching on. Now director Rahul Sankrityan has lined up a time travel movie for Sai Tej who is riding a high after the success of *Pandaga Chesko*, writes NAGARAJ GOUD

Even before he takes his third film with Nani to sets, director Rahul Sankrityan has lined up another project. *The Pioneer* has exclusively learnt that he got an in-principle nod from Sai Tej for a time-travel adventure drama. The actor is riding a high, post the success of *Pandaga Chesko*. The project will be a joint production venture between GA2 Pictures and UV Creations, which produced Rahul's second film *Taxiwaala*, and will roll after he wraps up Nani's film.

A highly-placed source close to the development tells us, "Geetha Arts got a wind of Rahul's time-travel story last year and immediately asked him to narrate it to Bunny Vas, chief of GA2 Pictures. He endorsed it and later asked Rahul to narrate it to Sai Tej. The actor liked it straightaway. He was bowled over by the content and style especially. Vas was instrumental in making Vamsi of UV Creations listen to the story, and got his nod too. Vamsi too felt that the whacky nature of the content will be a refreshing change

for audience from regular commercial cinema. Business-wise as well the film will be a hot commodity in the market as it marks the combination of Sai Tej teaming up with GA2 Pictures and UV Creations after the box-office smash *Pandaga Chesko*. Time-travel concept aside, the film's story is layered which will be its definitive style."

The source adds that the film will be a mounted on a

budget of Rs 20 crore to Rs 25 crore and will boast of a good number of computer graphics shots.

Right now, Rahul is busy polishing the script of his next with Nani, while Sai Tej is shooting for *Solo Brathuke So Better* in Visakhapatnam. In all likelihood, the duo's coming together will transpire next year.

EVEN BUSINESS-WISE THE FILM WILL BE A HOT COMMODITY IN THE MARKET AS IT MARKS SAI TEJ TEAMING UP WITH GA2 PICTURES AND UV CREATIONS AFTER THE BOX-OFFICE SMASH PANDAGA CHESKO. THE FILM'S STORY IS LAYERED WHICH WILL BE ITS DEFINITIVE STYLE



SREE VISHNU, SUDHEER support *Savaari*

The trailer of *Savaari*, featuring Nandu and newbie Priyanka in the lead, was launched in Hyderabad on Wednesday evening. Carrying a good deal of buzz around it, the film marks the directorial debut of Saahith Mothkuri whose 2017 short film *Bandham Regad* received widespread critical acclaim. Actors Sudheer Babu and Sree Vishnu graced the trailer launch as guests and were thoroughly impressed by the trailer.

Vishnu said he came to the event uninvited after falling in love with the film's song *Nee Kannulu Naa Dillulu*. "I've heard the song on a loop for 10 to 15 days continuously. The other songs are equally good and they will help generate buzz around the film. The trailer is different and the film's team looks gen-

uine. I hope from here on Nandu will not associate with films for money and attempts to create a different path of cinema. I will be watching *Savaari* on its first day (February 7)," he said.

Sudheer said he understood Nandu's range as an actor after working with him in *Sammohanam*. "The great quality about him is that he never relents. His passion for cinema hasn't diminished a bit from the day he started his career. He deserves stardom and a good fan base," Sudheer said. On Saahith he said, "I was impressed with his *Bandham Regad* and later I've heard this story from him. I liked it but I was looking at some other genre at that time. For someone who listens to a story a day, I am still able to recall Saahith's story with clarity and that tells how much of an impact it had on me. And now after watching *Savaari*'s promotional material, I can say that he will be one of the big directors in the future."

FIRST LOOK

Revealing a new still, the makers of *Uppena*, which marks the acting debut of Megastar Chiranjeevi's nephew Vaishnav Tej, on Thursday announced that the film, a rustic love story, will be opening in cinemas on April 2. Directed by debutant Buchi Babu Sana, the film, a Devi Sri Prasad musical, is a joint production venture between Mythri Movie Makers and Sukumar Writings. Vijay Sethupathi, Krithi Shetty, Sai Chand and Brahmaji will be seen in pivotal roles.



NAG to present Telugu version of '83

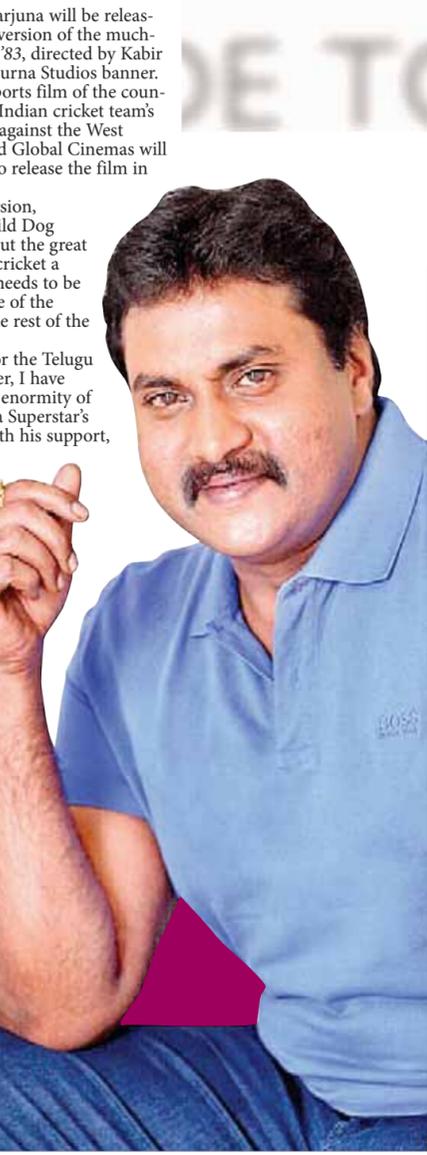


Superstar Akkineni Nagarjuna will be releasing the Telugu dubbed version of the much-anticipated Hindi film, '83, directed by Kabir Khan, under his Annapurna Studios banner. Touted as the biggest sports film of the country, the film chronicles Indian cricket team's historic 1983 World Cup triumph against the West Indies. Reliance Entertainment and Global Cinemas will partner with Annapurna Studios to release the film in Telugu on April 10.

Happy to present the Telugu version, Nagarjuna, who is shooting for *Wild Dog* presently, said, "The film is all about the great iconic win in 1983 that has made cricket a religion in India. It is a story that needs to be told and I am proud to present one of the most awaited films in India and the rest of the cricketing world."

Excited to have Nag on board for the Telugu version, Kabir said, "As a filmmaker, I have always admired Nagarjuna for the enormity of greatness he has and having such a Superstar's association is a sheer privilege. With his support, the Telugu version of '83 is surely going to be a hit with the local audience."

Ranveer Singh has stepped into the shoes of Kapil Dev for the film, which also features Tahir Raj Bhasin, Jiiva, Saqib Saleem, Jatin Sarna, Chirag Patil, Dinker Sharma, Nishant Dahiya, Harry Sandhu, Sahil Khattar, Ammy Virk, Addinath Kothare, Dhairya Karwa, R. Badree and Pankaj Tripathi. Deepika Padukone will be seen playing Romi, Kapil Dev's wife.



Saiee Manjrekar, Niddhi Agerwal in casting race

More than three months after its launch, Varun Tej's as-yet-untitled boxing drama with debutant director Kiran Korrapati will finally go in front of the cameras from February 15 in Visakhapatnam. A little birdie tells us that Varun is in the process of creating a certain look for the film. "He is preparing for his part in Mumbai. The makers have hired the services of national-level boxer Neeraj Goyat, who is the first Indian boxer to have made it to WBC world rankings (ranked 20), to train him in boxing as well as in attaining the boxer's look," informs the source.

The source further exclusively confirms that except for the lead actress casting, other cast members are in place. The makers have approached Saiee Manjrekar, daughter of filmmaker-actor

Mahesh Manjrekar, to be the lead heroine. She has made her Bollywood debut alongside Salman Khan in *Dabangg 3* last year. "Niddhi Agerwal is also on the director's wish list. In another two to



source. The first schedule in Visakhapatnam will be followed by outings in Hyderabad and in surrounding areas of New Delhi, calling it a wrap. On the supporting front, the source informed that Nadiya and Jagapathi Babu will be seen in pivotal roles, while the likes of Vennela Kishore and Satya will take care of comedy. A joint production venture between Sidhu Mudda and Allu Venkatesh, the film will be shot by cinematographer George C. Williams, while S.S. Thaman is the tune-smith. — NG



Sunil down with infection

Actor Sunil, who was recently seen in a comedy role in Trivikram's *Ala Vaikunthapuramlo*, has been admitted to a private hospital in Hyderabad, after he complained of uneasiness on Wednesday evening. According to reports, the actor has been on antibiotics for the past week. The side effects from the antibiotics took a toll on him leading to throat infection and

sinus. He was not in a position to speak properly till Thursday noon and his situation improved as the day progressed. Doctors treating him told his family that there's nothing to worry about.

The sudden hospitalisation means that Sunil won't be able to promote his Friday release, *Disco Raja*.

He has projects like *Colour Photo* and Anand Deverakonda's next with Damodar Attada in his kitty.

Black & Blue

Upbeat India take on injury-struck Kiwis as build-up to T20 World Cup continues

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Preparations for the World Cup on top of their agenda, India will take on an injury-hit New Zealand in a rare five-match T20 International series starting today during which seam-friendly wickets would be a major challenge for the visitors.

Unlike most overseas tours, this will be a quick start for the Indian team. The team arrived in Auckland on Tuesday and Thursday was when they hit the nets ahead of the tour-opening game.

On the plus side, this hectic schedule helps the team management maintain consistency in team selection as they continue experimenting across the available squad in a World Cup year.

Despite injury issues to key white-ball personnel like Shikhar Dhawan, Hardik Pandya, Deepak Chahar and Bhuvneshwar Kumar this past home season, the bench strength has come across adequate and raring to go for challenges ahead.

It begins at the top where KL Rahul has stepped up as a key part of India's white-ball plans.

Skipper Virat Kohli dropped hints that Rahul's newfound confidence in his dual role as batsman-keeper has given vital options to the team.

According to Kohli, Rahul will continue to keep wickets in both ODIs and T20s, but will open in the shortest format while returning to the middle-order in the 50-over format.

It could mean that Prithvi Shaw is being primed for an ODI debut and a potential pairing with Rohit when the three-match series begins on February 5.

The skipper also indicated a change in middle order plans. With Rahul keep-



Indian captain Virat Kohli and New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson pose with the T20 trophy on the eve of 1st game at Eden Park in Auckland. Black Caps/Twitter

ing wickets, the fit-again Rishabh Pant could lose his spot in the playing eleven.

Manish Pandey is expected to play as the fifth specialist batsman and Shreyas Iyer will regain his spot at number four.

Pandey, Iyer and Pant batted together in the nets on Thursday, while Sanju Samson hung around, only to pad up later on. The Kerala batsman didn't seem to be in contention for the first T20I.

Pant and Pandey could both fit into the playing eleven should India opt for five bowlers and leave out the sixth option in Shivam Dube. Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja are the other two all-round options.

The Yuzvendra Chahal-Kuldeep Yadav combination is yet to play a game together since the 2019 ODI World Cup, and it remains to be seen if things will change in this aspect.

In the pace department, Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah are assured

starters, while the toss-up will be between Shardul Thakur and Navdeep Saini.

New Zealand had beaten India 2-1 in the T20I series last year. The Black Caps also won 2-1 in the T20I series during their Sri Lanka tour, and then drew 2-2 at home against England in a five-match series.

Despite the recent good record in the shortest format, there is a downbeat mood in the hosts' dressing room thanks to the 3-0 shellacking received in Australia over the past month.

It hasn't helped matters that the disappointing loss to their trans-Tasman rivals has raised questions about Kane Williamson's future as captain.

For the moment, New Zealand's leading batsman is happy to lead the side across all formats, but his position is up for review after the shattering defeat to Australia.

As always, they have a dearth of all-rounders to choose from but need to balance with pickings in the pace department,

which is missing the services of Trent Boult, Matt Henry and Lockie Ferguson owing to injuries.

It remains to be seen if the Black Caps opt for two spinners in Ish Sodhi and Mitchell Santner given the really short boundaries at Eden Park, venue for the first two T20Is.

TEAMS

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

New Zealand: Kane Williamson (capt), Martin Guptill, Ross Taylor, Scott Kuggeleijn, Colin Munro, Colin de Grandhomme, Tom Bruce, Daryl Mitchell, Mitchell Santner, Tim Seifert (wk), Hamish Bennett, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Blair Tuckner.

India vs NZ (1st T20)
Live from 11:30am IST
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

No revenge in mind against 'nice guys'



Virat Kohli during India's nets session. PTI

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

The loss still rankles him but Virat Kohli on Thursday said he can't really bring himself to think of revenge when India take on New Zealand for the first time after the Kiwis sent his side packing from the ODI World Cup last year.

The Black Caps defeated pre-tournament favourites India by 18 runs in the semifinals of the showpiece in England and today's tour-opening T20I is the first clash between the two sides since then. Kohli has spoken repeatedly about how devastating the loss was for him personally.

"Even if you want to think of revenge, these guys are so nice you cannot get into that zone," said Kohli at the pre-match press conference.

"We get along really well with these guys and it's all about being competitive on the field. As I said in England, they are probably one side that has set the example for teams to play international cricket," he reasoned.

Williamson and his men had drawn effusive praise for their grace in the aftermath of a heartbreaking World Cup final loss to England, a game that was decided on boundary count after scores were tied.

"It is not about any kind of revenge — it is two quality sides playing good cricket. It is a challenge to beat New Zealand here and we are totally up for it," Kohli said.



Indian U-19 players celebrate after win. CWC/Twitter

India U-19 side look for hat-trick

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

India vs NZ (U-19 WC)
Live from 1:15pm IST
STAR SPORTS 2 NETWORK



Already through to the quarterfinals after two resounding wins on the trot, defending champions India will be keen to maintain their unbeaten run when they face New Zealand in the final Group A tie of the ICC U-19 World Cup here today.

India, who are atop their group with four points, had cruised to a 90-run victory over Sri Lanka in their opening encounter before outclassing debutants Japan by 10 wickets with disciplined bowling effort. The Priyam Garg-led side will start as favourites against New Zealand.

New Zealand, on the other hand, were unlucky to share a point with Japan after their match was washed out in Potchefstroom last week. However, they managed to clinch a late winner against Sri Lanka and book a place in the last eight.

New Zealand, who had finished eighth on home soil in 2018, will be looking to follow a similar trajectory as their senior counterparts, who reached the finals of the men's World Cup last year, in this edition of the U-19 showpiece.

Having won the warm up matches against Zimbabwe and Afghanistan and the quadrangular series, the Indian team would not want to lose the rhythm at any cost.

In their previous outing, India leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi (4/5) took four wickets while pacers Kartik Tyagi (3/10) and Akash Singh (2/11) shared five scalps among themselves to help the four-time champions bundle out Japan for 41.

Also on the batting front, Jaiswal (59), Garg (56) and wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel (52 not out) impressed with half centuries against Sri Lanka while Tilak Varma (46) and Siddhesh Veer (44 not out) also provided useful contributions.

However, the Indian team is yet to be tested against a strong opposition.

SINGLES

BFI OFFERED TO HOST OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

NEW DELHI: The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) has offered to host next month's Olympic Qualifying Tournament, which has been cancelled in the Chinese city of Wuhan following the outbreak of coronavirus. The qualifiers are scheduled from February 3 to 15 but the schedule has now become uncertain following the health crisis in Wuhan, which has so far claimed 17 lives and infected over 550 people. "...Due to any reason, if the event is to be shifted to a different country, BFI would be willing to host this Asian and Oceania Qualification Event 2020," BFI President stated in a letter to the Chairman of the IOC's Task Force (Boxing).

SHIVA, SONIA LATHER ENTER STRANDJA S/F

NEW DELHI: Former world medalists Shiva Thapa (63kg) and Sonia Lather (57kg) assured themselves of medals at the 71st Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament by advancing to the semifinals. Joining them was Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg). He outpunched Ireland's Kurt Walker 5-0 to make the medal rounds. Former world Silver-winner Lather (57kg) clinched a 3-2 triumph over Michaela Walsh in a hard-fought contest to enter the last-four stage. Thapa got the better of George Bates in his quarterfinal clash.

WORLD ARCHERY LIFTS SUSPENSION ON INDIA

KOLKATA: In a big boost to Indian archers' preparations for the Tokyo Olympics, the world body on Thursday conditionally lifted the suspension on India, less than a week after the embattled national federation held its elections. While lifting the ban, World Archery instructed AAI to make changes in its constitution regarding athlete membership, resolve governance issues and develop a strategic plan. It also asked AAI to furnish a quarterly progress report on these issues. After lifting of the ban, the Indian archers are now free to compete under the Indian flag. India currently has three men's and one women's quota place at 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

RFI LIFTS BHOKANAL'S BAN

NEW DELHI: Rower Dattu Bhokanal's two-year suspension on charges of tanking a race during the 2018 Asian Games was lifted by the national federation (RFI) after the intervention of the IOA Narinder Batra. Bhokanal was a member of the Indian quartet that won a Gold in the men's quadruple sculls event in the Asian Games but later left the single sculls race midway. He was banned by the RFI in March last year. In his explanation, Bhokanal had said that he fell off the boat as it overturned and he was also not well on that day. But after Batra asked the RFI to review its decision, they informed Bhokanal's suspension has been lifted.

CASSELL JOINS RR AS FAST BOWLING COACH

MUMBAI: Rajasthan Royals on Thursday appointed former Australian first class cricketer Rob Cassell as their new fast bowling coach for the upcoming Indian Premier League. Cassell has had success of working with, and developing fast bowlers during his previous coaching and development roles at South Australia and Ireland men's cricket team. The Australian represented his country at the 2002 U-19 World Cup in New Zealand but never played for the senior team.

STAFANIE TAYLOR TO LEAD WEST INDIES WOMEN

BARBADOS: Stafanie Taylor will lead West Indies women in the upcoming T20 World Cup slated to be played in Australia from February 21- March 8. The team, led by Taylor, sees the return of Deandra Dottin to international cricket after eight months out of the squad following corrective surgery and rehabilitation. "The World Cup squad continues to show a blend of experience and young emerging players. It is boosted by the return of captain Stafanie Taylor, who was out of the T20 series against India through injury," chief selector Ann Browne-John said. AGENCIES



India ODI skipper Mithali Raj along side NZ players. ICC

Christchurch will host 2021 WWC final

AUCKLAND: Christchurch's Hagley Oval will host the summit clash of next year's Women's Cricket ODI World Cup, it was announced on Thursday.

The 50-over tournament which will run from February 6 to March 7 will be played across six cities.

Auckland will host a bumper opening weekend at Eden Park, before the focus shifts to matches in Wellington, Hamilton, Tauranga, Dunedin and Christchurch.

The tournament, featuring 31 matches between February 6 and March 7, will be capped by a final in Christchurch under lights at the Hagley Oval, one of New Zealand's main Test venues.

Handling pressure will be key in T20 WC: Harmanpreet

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Indian women's cricket captain Harmanpreet Kaur in her pre-departure press conference for T20 World Cup on Thursday said handling pressure would be crucial in the upcoming ICC Women's tournament in Australia, something that her side couldn't do in the last two global showpieces.

India made a semi-final exit from the last T20 World Cup and in the previous ODI World Cup, they had finished as runners-up.

"We were quite close in the last two World Cups, the only thing is we have to keep in mind how to handle pressure in the tournaments, last two World Cups we lacked in handling pressure," Harmanpreet said.

"This time we want to enjoy rather than taking more pressure on ourselves, thinking that it is a big tournament. We have to avoid thinking like that and focus on giving our best," she added.



India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur and coach WV Raman answer to media queries. PTI

The 30-year-old batswoman, who has played 104 T20s, said the team needs focus on enhancing skills instead of thinking about the pressure of being at a big stage.

"Last few World Cups, we put ourselves under too much pressure of playing in a big tournament. This time

rather thinking that we are going for a big tournament, we just want to focus on our skills, how we should play and how to make the team win," she said.

"That will be very important for us and when we focus on these things, we (will) produce better results," she added. She counted spin bowling as one of

the strengths of her team.

"...They always give us breakthroughs. So I am looking forward to how our spinners perform there (in Australia) and see what they do for the team," said the skipper.

India will, in all likelihood, open with the experienced Smriti Mandhana and young Shafali Verma and according to Harmanpreet, the duo will have a crucial role to play.

"They both (Smriti and Shafali) are very important for the team and they always give their best...The first six overs are going to be important for us.

"Good start is important for the team and whenever they get a good start, we never look back. They both have very big role to play," she said.

Asked what her message for new players like Shafali and the 16-year-old Richa Ghosh, Harmanpreet said they would be encouraged to play their natural game.

"...Don't take any pressure because if we play freely without any pressure you will give your 100 per cent," she said.

Root facing 'good selection headache'



Joe Root in action during third Test. AP

JOHANNESBURG: England captain Joe Root on Thursday was looking forward to the prospect of two of the world's fastest bowlers operating on a pace-friendly pitch in the fourth and final Test against South Africa, starting at the Wanderers today.

Root said Jofra Archer had bowled with "good pace" in practice on Wednesday after recovering from an elbow injury which kept him out of the second and third Tests — both of which England won.

He said that if Archer had no lingering signs of injury or soreness, England would have a "really good

selection headache".

Mark Wood startled several of the South African batsmen in the third Test in Port Elizabeth, bowling bouncers at around 150kmh.

Archer is also among the world's small club of 150kmh bowlers.

"It would be nice to see how they go together," said Root. "I think they would be a relentless barrage of pace which is exciting, especially on a surface such as you typically get here at the Wanderers."

He also said that it would be "a very big achievement" if England could complete a series win.

Meanwhile, South African skipper Faf du Plessis said his side needed to dig deep to salvage a series draw.

"How strong are we mentally in this last hurdle? We know where we have been a little bit poor in our game plans," he said.

Du Plessis said Temba Bavuma would replace Zubayr Hamza in the XI, but there would also be a change in the batting order, with Rassie van der Dussen moving up to number three, the position filled by Hamza in the first three Tests.

He is also hoping that Vernon Philander, who will retire from international cricket after the match, would finish his Test career "with the storybook ending he deserves" on a pitch where he has done well in the past. AFP

Pak need Malik & Hafeez's experience

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's T20 skipper Babar Azam has defended the decision to recall veterans Shoaib Malik and Mohammad Hafeez, saying the experienced duo's presence will help the team in its pursuit of retaining the number one spot in the shortest format.

Desperate to hold on to its numero uno status in T20 rankings, Pakistan has recalled Malik and Hafeez in the team for the three-match series against Bangladesh.

"I felt that we needed these two (Malik, Hafeez) seniors. They were part of the number one team last year," he said.



Shoaib Malik in practice session. AP

"I gave my opinion to the selectors and they heard me. Their presence will help me and the team. I will learn from them on captaincy as well," Babar added.

The 25-year-old bats-

man also said Pakistan is under no pressure in the series against Bangladesh, especially after the thrashing in last T20 series against Sri Lanka at home.

"No there is no pressure for us because what is done is done but we will not try to repeat the same mistakes we did against the Lankans," Babar said.

He made it clear that they were not taking Bangladesh lightly.

"Bangladesh have a good combination of youngsters and seniors and it will be a good competitive series. Their players have the advantage of having come here fresh out of the BPL (Bangladesh Premier League)," he said.

Lakmal sets up Sri Lanka win

HARARE: Suranga Lakmal took four for 27 to set up Sri Lanka for a 10-wicket win over Zimbabwe in the first Test on Thursday.

Resuming on 30 without loss and needing 157 to make Sri Lanka bat again, Zimbabwe recovered from the loss of three early wickets to Lakmal to reach lunch at 120 for three.

The tall pace bowler struck again immediately after, removing Brendan Taylor for 38, and Zimbabwe slumped to 170 all out, losing their last seven wickets for 50.

Sri Lanka needed just 14 to win and the openers Oshada Fernando and Dimuth



Karunaratne knocked off the runs in three overs. Angelo Mathews was named man of the match for his 200 not out in Sri Lanka's first innings of 515 for nine declared. AFP

Sivaramakrishnan in fray for National selector's post

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India leg-spinner Laxman Sivaramakrishnan has applied for a position in the national selection panel along with former off-spinner Rajesh Chauhan and left-handed batsman Amay Khurasiya.

All the three former India internationals have confirmed that they are offering their candidature for a place in the selection committee. The last date for applying is today, January 24.

The other two confirmed applicants are former junior selector Pritam Gandhe and current junior selection committee member Gyanendra Pandey but both have completed their four-year tenure in one committee and are unlikely to be considered as per Lodha norms.

It is understood that among applicants, the "senior most Test cap" will become the chairman and if Sivaramakrishnan gets the nod, he will be the senior-most having made his Test debut in 1983 (vs West Indies in Antigua) as a 17-year-old.

The BCCI will be replacing MSK Prasad (South Zone) and Gagan Khoda (Central Zone) from the current committee.

Former junior chairman of selectors Venkatesh Prasad and former India batting coach Sanjay Bangar could also throw their hat in the ring, which will make it an interesting three-way battle for the chairman's position. It is learnt that both players are undecided. Also there is no clarity whether former India speedster Ajit Agarkar will apply or not.