

**ANALYSIS 7**  
POWERLESS  
DISCOMS

**MONEY 8**  
CURBS LIKELY ON  
IMPORT OF FURNITURE

**SPORTS 12**  
NADAL SETTLES  
KYRGIOS SCORE

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY JANUARY 28, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



# the pioneer



THERE'S NO COMEDY  
IN ASWATHAMA:  
MEHREEN

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## GOVT TO SELL STAKE IN AIR INDIA, MARCH 17 DEADLINE FOR BIDS

In a revised push, the government on Monday announced plans to sell its entire stake in Air India. The development comes after an initial attempt to sell a majority stake in the airline failed to draw a single bid in 2018. The airline is sitting on a debt pile of around Rs 58,000 crore, besides huge accumulated losses running into thousands of crores. Currently, the Govt of India holds a 100% stake in the airline, and its subsidiary Air India Express. Any bidder would have to agree to assume roughly \$3.26 billion in debt, along with other liabilities, according to the document.



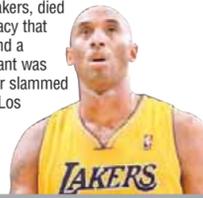
## INDIAN-AMERICANS PROTEST IN 30 US CITIES AGAINST CITIZENSHIP ACT

India's 71st Republic day celebrations in the US on Sunday were marred by protests and marches, albeit peaceful ones, against recent changes in the citizenship law by a large number of Indian-Americans in various cities of the country. Among Indian-Americans, the CAA, however, also had a fair share of its supporters who sought to counter protesters by asserting that 'India cares for Neighbouring Minorities' and 'CAA Won't Impact Indian Citizens.'



## NBA LEGEND KOBE BRYANT, TEENAGE DAUGHTER KILLED IN CHOPPER CRASH

Kobe Bryant, the basketball icon who won five NBA Championships with the Los Angeles Lakers, died in a helicopter crash Sunday, leaving a legacy that spanned 20 years in professional sports and a growing second career as an investor. Bryant was among nine people killed when a helicopter slammed into a hillside in Calabasas, California, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said. He was 41. Also among the victims were his 13-year-old daughter.



## 60-YEAR-OLD AUSTRALIAN WOMAN DIES IN CAKE-EATING CONTEST

A woman died while taking part in a cake-eating competition to celebrate Australia Day, local media reported today. Paramedics were called to a pub in the state of Queensland on Sunday afternoon after a woman was involved in a 'medical incident'. Public broadcaster ABC reported the 60-year-old had a seizure after she 'shovelled a lamington into her mouth'. Lamingtons, a traditional Australian dessert, are cube-shaped sponge cakes dipped in chocolate and covered in grated coconut. The woman was rushed to hospital but later died.



**CBI appeal infructuous in view of new anti-graft law, Raja tells HC**

4



**Railways to go '100% Electric' by 2024: Goyal**

5



**UDAY not failure; new scheme likely in Budget, says RK Singh**

8

**TODAY**  
**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Magha & Shukla Paksha Panchangam  
Tithi: Tritiya: 08:21 am  
Nakshatram: Shalabhisha: 09:23 am  
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)  
Rahukalam: 03:17 pm - 04:41 pm  
Yamagandam: 09:40 am - 11:04 am  
Varjyam: 04:32 pm - 06:20 pm  
Gulika: 12:29 pm - 01:53 pm  
Good Time: (to start any important work)  
Amritkalam: 03:16 am - 05:04 am  
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:06 pm - 12:51 pm  
**VIJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
Forecast: Clear with periodic clouds  
Temp: 33/19  
Humidity: 26%  
Sunrise: 06:49  
Sunset: 06:49  
Current Weather Conditions  
Updated January 27, 2020 5:00 PM

# Assembly votes unanimously to abolish Legislative Council

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Assembly on Monday passed a statutory resolution seeking to abolish the state Legislative Council, days after the YSRCP government failed to get two crucial Bills on its plans to have three capitals cleared by the TDP-dominated Upper House.

All 133 members present in the 175-member House, when the division vote was taken at 6 pm, voted in favour and the resolution under Article 169 (1) of the Constitution was adopted unanimously.

Speaker Tammineni Sitaram announced that the resolution was adopted by a majority as stipulated under Article 169 (1) related to abolition or



creation of Legislative Councils in states. The Speaker asked two ministers - Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose and Mopidevi Venkataramana - who entered

the Cabinet as members of the Legislative Council to sit aside. Later, he adjourned the House sine die.

Continued on Page 3

## It's a question of breathing life into democracy: Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday said that the question before the people of the Andhra Pradesh was not abolition of the Legislative Council but breathing life into democracy.

Participating in the discussion in the Assembly on abolition of the Legislative Council, Jagan said that it was a question of proper functioning of a democratically-elected government.

Continued on Page 3

## Bengal passes anti-CAA resolution

4<sup>TH</sup> STATE TO DO SO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bengal became the fourth state Monday to pass a resolution against the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act, with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dubbing the BJP "Brand Ambassador of Pakistan". Similar resolutions have already been passed by Left-ruled Kerala and Congress-ruled Punjab and Rajasthan. "In Bengal, we will not allow CAA, NRC (National Register of Citizens) and NPR (National Population Register)... Today, people are scared that they may have to leave this country."

# TDP: Only Parliament can abolish Legislative Council

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) on Monday said that the state government or the Assembly does not have the power to abolish the Legislative Council and it was solely a decision to be taken by Parliament.

The TDP, which decided to stay away from the Assembly session, said that the resolution passed in the Cabinet and the Assembly was only a proposal.

"Even if the Assembly passes the resolution, it will only be a proposal. Only Parliament has the right to abolish the Council," TDP leader in the



Council and former minister Yanamala Ramakrishnu told reporters here.

Ramakrishnu termed the move by the YSRCP to abolish the Council as 'most undemocratic' and 'illegal'. He alleged that the government was doing

this only because it lacked a majority in the Upper House and the Chairman referred three capital Bills to a Select Committee.

He said that the process of abolishing the Council will be a lengthy one. "The resolution passed by the State Assembly has to go to the Union Cabinet, and then the Law Ministry will prepare a draft Bill, which has to be passed by Parliament," he said.

The senior leader said that the entire process may take a minimum of two years, but hastened to add that this would depend on the ruling party at the Centre.

Continued on Page 3

# ED finds 'financial links' between PFI and anti-CAA protests in Uttar Pradesh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has found that the recent violent protests in Uttar Pradesh against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) had a "financial link" with the Kerala-based outfit PFI, official sources said on Monday.

The agency, which is probing the Popular Front of India (PFI) under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) since 2018, has found that at least Rs 120



crore were deposited in bank accounts in western Uttar Pradesh after the Act was

passed by Parliament late last year.

Continued on Page 3

## I GOT RS 77 LAKH FROM PFI: SIBAL

NEW DELHI: Hours after senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal said he didn't receive any money from the Popular Front of India (PFI), he made a U-turn and accepted receiving Rs 77 lakh as litigation fee for appearing in the Supreme Court between August 2017 to March 2018 for Hadiya in a case related to her marriage with Shafiqia Jahan.

Continued on Page 3

# Jagan moves Telangana HC challenging CBI court order

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

YSR Congress Party president and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday approached the Telangana High Court against the refusal of the CBI special court to give him exemption from personal appearances in the court in connection with the quid pro quo cases pending against him.

Jagan filed a petition in the High Court challenging the CBI court order. In his petition, the YSRCP president said that the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, he had to discharge his official duties and as such, he would not be in a position to attend the courts personally in the cases pending against him.

He said that since the CBI court was refusing to give him exemption, he was forced to move the High Court. Jagan requested that his co-accused from Jagathi Publications be



**In his petition, Jagan said that as the Chief Minister of AP he had to discharge his official duties and was not in a position to attend the hearings**

filed by Jagan, stating that it was the CBI court that should take a call. Now, Jagan is trying his luck again.

Last Friday, the CBI court expressed anger over Jagan's petitions seeking exemption from personal appearances every week.

It dismissed the petition in connection with hearing on the five charge sheets filed by the ED with regard to alleged money laundering cases.

Continued on Page 3

# CBSE relaxes exam norms for children of military personnel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has decided to extend the relaxation in norms for children of armed forces personnel and those who died fighting terrorism and left-wing extremism for the upcoming board exams for class 10 and 12.

After the Pulwama terror attack, the CBSE had in 2019 decided to extend certain exemptions to wards of martyrs of Armed forces and paramilitary forces,

Controller of Examinations Sanyam Bhardwaj said.

"In 2020, the CBSE has decided to extend relaxations to the wards of armed forces and paramilitary forces who are fighting terrorism and left wing extremism for the country and are martyred in the line of duty during this period," he said.

"Wards appearing for class 12 or 10 examination in 2020 and wish to change their centre of examination in the same city, they would be allowed to do so.

Continued on Page 3

# BJP counters Oppn criticism of Padma Shri to Adnan Sami

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Monday hit out at opposition parties over their criticism of the Modi government's decision to confer Padma Shri on singer Adnan Sami, wondering if they only like those Muslims who are "against" Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India and its institutions.

Addressing a press conference here, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra referred to the Opposition criticism of the government for honouring Sami even though his father served in the Pakistan air force.

# AIMPLB moves SC opposing plea challenging polygamy and 'nikah halala'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) moved the Supreme Court on Monday seeking impleadment in petitions challenging constitutional validity of polygamy and 'nikah halala' practised among Muslims.

The application has been filed to oppose a batch of



petitions on which the apex court had in 2018 issued notices to the Centre and other

stakeholders while referring the matter to a 5-judge Constitution bench.

While polygamy allows a Muslim man to have four wives, 'nikah halala' stipulates that a Muslim woman, who wants to remarry her husband after divorce, has to first marry another man and get divorce from him after consummating the marriage.

# States asked to plug loopholes in criminal justice system

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has directed police heads of the states and union territories to put an end to the abuse of the criminal justice system with respect to the testimonies of 'panchas' (witnesses) in recording a 'panchnama' (testimony document).

In its directive, the ministry has said: "Police officers using the same set of witnesses in 'panchnamas', even after transfer elsewhere, should be identified."

It further said that the police

heads should ensure that "no person becomes witness in 'panchnamas' more than once. This may be ensured by recording the Aadhar number of the witnesses. This should ensure genuine witnesses and remove loopholes in the system."

Under the provisions governing the system, witnesses should be respectable and unbiased members of a particular locality.

'Panchnama' is a record of what the witnesses see at the exact location of the crime.

Continued on Page 3

# Press EVM Button with anger or love? It's Shah vs Prashant

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amit Shah's comment on "pressing the button (voting) with anger" during the Delhi election to make a point against anti-CAA protesters inspired a sharp retort from Prashant Kishor, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s election strategist and the number two leader of BJP's Bihar ally Janata Dal United (JDU).

"EVM buttons will be pressed with just love in Delhi on February 8. It should be a mild current, though, so brotherhood and friendship is not endangered," Prashant Kishor tweeted in Hindi this



morning, in response to the Union Home Minister's widely reported remarks at an election rally in Delhi last evening.

Amit Shah made the comments while lashing out at the Shaheen Bagh protest, where



women and children have been freezing nights for over a month in a peaceful campaign against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA, the new law that gives citizenship to non-Muslim minorities from Muslim-majority

Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan if they escaped religious persecution and arrived in India before 2015. Protesters across the country fear the law will be used to target Muslims.

The Shaheen Bagh protest has come to symbolize nationwide anger against the law. "When you press the button (on the voting machine) on February 8, do so with such anger that its current is felt at Shaheen Bagh," Mr Shah said in his rally.

"Your vote to the BJP candidate will make Delhi and the country safe and prevent thousands of incidents like Shaheen

Bagh," Mr Shah was quoted as saying by news agency PTI while campaigning for the BJP candidate in Babarpur constituency.

Kishor has been routinely criticizing the citizenship law and the National Register for Citizens (NRC) even though it sets him at odds with his party chief Nitish Kumar, the Chief Minister of Bihar.

Another JDU leader who has been a vocal CAA critic like Mr Kishor - Pavan Varma - last week wrote an open letter to Nitish Kumar challenging him on his party's stand on CAA and revealing his private views about ally BJP.

# Kejriwal's days as CM are numbered

Many people, who have earlier hesitated to air the slogan 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and 'Jai Hind', are now displaying patriotism and the members of the 'Tukde Tukde' gang, who advocated the country breaking up, have been displaying patriotism uncharacteristic of them and singing patriotic songs. Protesters against the CAA at Shaheen Bagh in Delhi are no exception.

On the lines of Rahul Gandhi who had claimed during the last Lok Sabha elections that he is a devotee of Lord Shiva and also sports sacred thread, some anarchic forces who display no love for the country, its history and culture and are more loyal to Pakistan than India are claiming to be patriotic. This is purely attributed to time.

Had a great leader like Narendra Modi not appeared on the national political horizon and had the people not held him close to their chest, these demons would not have chanted the Vedas. Because of this, Delhi

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is exercising restraint in his speech on anti-CAA protests. He feels making an issue out of CAA would alienate Hindu voters from AAP and advises party workers to leave CAA alone.

The people of Delhi are well aware of the relations that the AAP has had with the 'Tukde Tukde' gang. The people are also aware of the AAP hand behind the Jamia Milia University campus violence. The Delhi police filed FIR against Deputy CM Manish Sisodia and AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan. The people are not ignorant about AAP government fuelling the protests at Shaheen Bagh.

Vote bank politics savvy Kejriwal is banking on spreading falsehoods to check the BJP in the Delhi polls and also to cover up for his graft. But the people of Delhi have proved that his

**Though there is no BJP government in Delhi, the Centre doled out many benefits to the people. It empowered over 40-lakh poor living in 1,731 unauthorised colonies under the scheme PM Awaas Yojna. Colonies have been provided with drainages, drinking water and community parks.**

political graph is on the decline. 56 per cent of Delhi voters are in favour of the BJP. Anti-incumbency of the Kejriwal government is spreading slowly as an undercurrent because he failed to fulfil his promises to the people.

He promised at the time of last elections to introduce 5,000 new buses fitted with CCTV cameras, but purchased only 50. The promise of over 15 lakh cameras across

Delhi was also not kept. There is no supply of drinking water in more than 650 slums.

Contrary to the claims of extending world class education in Delhi, only 71 per cent of students pass out SSC from state government schools and only 0.84 who cleared 12th secured marks more than 90 per cent.

Smart schools built with 90 per cent of the Central funding are being claimed to



Y SATYA KUMAR  
BJP National Secretary

be the achievement of the Kejriwal government to hoodwink the people.

Hundreds of schools lack basic amenities.

Contrary to claims of AAP on corruption, at least four ministers had to quit the Delhi government for their involvement of sex scandals, receiving kickbacks, fake degree contro-

versy and other corruption scandals.

Kejriwal also holds the Health portfolio, but the health sector in Delhi is in ICU.

As per the Niti-Aayog rankings, health index of Delhi is falling with each passing day. He promised to increase the bed strength in hospitals by at least 30,000 but only increased it by 394. AAP promised to set up 900 PHCs, but failed to set up even one.

Contrary to claims of establishing 130 Mohalla Clinics, the AAP government set up only 50-60 such clinics. The AAP government failed to spend at least 46 per cent of the Central budget on the health sectors. There is a shortage of doctors, specialists, surgeons and administrative staff in government

hospitals. Moreover, the Kejriwal government also failed to implement the Ayushman Bharat scheme of the Modi government.

Pollution is on the rise in Delhi under the AAP and the global standards project Delhi as the worst polluted compared to other cities. Moreover, garbage on the city outskirts is piling up with each passing day and the government is turning a blind eye.

Air pollutions accounts for 3 per cent of deaths in Delhi and people are migrating to other places. Even the Supreme Court found fault with the AAP government on this score.

The Modi government set up smart poles at Connaught Place and other areas to track the air quality and extended a subsidy of Rs 1,156 crore to Punjab and

Haryana governments to acquire machines to prevent farmers there from burning the crop residues. It released Rs 300 crore for waste management and built several cycle tracks and parks in the capital city. In spite of all this, Kejriwal government has failed to fulfill its duty to control pollution.

The Modi government has been providing basic amenities spending lakhs of crores and also implementing many more schemes to benefit the poor, women, farmers, girls and the youth.

The people of Delhi know that the rule of the same party in the state and at the Centre would lead to harmonious functioning of governments. They are witness to rapid development in neighbouring states of UP and Haryana. They are also well aware of the fact that the days of Kejriwal government, which is wasting thousands of crores of public funds and hoodwinking the people, are numbered.

A day is not far off when Ek Bharat Sreshta Bharat slogan becomes a reality.

## CAPSULE

### SCR revenue crosses Rs 10,000 cr-mark

**HYDERABAD:** The South Central Railway crossed the Rs 10,000-crore revenue mark by transporting 28.4 crore passengers and handling 8.10 crore tonnes of cargo during April-December 2019. During the period, the SCR earned Rs 10,270 crore. Furthermore, the South Central Railway has achieved doubling of 119 km length of track and electrified 155 km length of railway track under the programme Mission Electrification. The South Railway has earned the distinction of being the first railway zone in the country as the paperless office with its initiative of e-Office as part of the digital technology initiative.

### AU to conduct APPGECET

**VISAKHAPATNAM:** The Andhra Pradesh State Council of Higher Education (APSCHE) has entrusted the job of conducting APPGECET-2020 (Post Graduate Engineering Entrance) to Prof P Srinivasa Rao, Principal, Andhra University College of Engineering (A), Visakhapatnam, and has been appointed as the convener. While Prof PVGD Prasad Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, Andhra University, inaugurated the office of the convener, APPGECET-2020 on Monday in the examination block of Andhra University College of Engineering (A), Visakhapatnam. Andhra Pradesh Post Graduate Engineering Common Entrance Test (APGECET) is a state-wide common entrance test for admission into all Post Graduate programmes in engineering and pharmacy and all admissions into ME/M Tech/M Pharmacy courses for the year 2020. Examinations will be conducted from May 2 to 4 for all postgraduate courses in engineering and pharmacy disciplines. They are all categorised into 13 different examinations depending on the availability and the qualifying degree. APPGECET-2020 is an online examination.

### VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES

<b>GOLD</b>	
₹ 40,600 (10 gm)	
₹ 470	↑
<b>SILVER</b>	
₹ 47,200 (1kg)	
₹ 1000	↑

### CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg

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

### EGG RATES ₹/100

HYDERABAD	350
VIJAYAWADA	383
VISAKHAPATNAM	410
<b>RETAIL PRICE</b>	<b>₹3.95</b>

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## Volunteers to deliver cash at pensioners doorstep

C PRADEEP ■ VIJAYAWADA

Good news to the pension beneficiaries. And now, they need not wait at the pension centres for hours together from the first of every month. Hitherto, hundreds of senior citizens would wait for their pensions at panchayat and tahsil offices to receive their pensions skipping their breakfast and lunch. Even after going through ordeal, they used to return home empty-handed. Thanks to the government's latest initiative, pensions for senior citizens, widows, single mothers, handloom weavers, toddy tappers, fishermen, tannery workers, AIDS patients and others will receive their pension at their doorsteps on the first of every month.

Beneficiaries would keep their pension books in the queue line at the pension centres and wait for their turn. A few senior citizens, who could not walk even a little distance, were taking pensions once in two or three months. Keeping in view all these problems, the State government, along with the departments concerned, has decided to deliver pension to beneficiaries across the State at their doorstep from February 1.

Measures are being taken up by the department and a special app was developed to deliver the pension to the beneficiaries at their doorstep through Village Volunteers. Village Volunteers would come to the beneficiary's house and deliver the pension amount on the first of every month and the whole process would be completed on



● Measures are being taken up by the department and a special app was developed to deliver the pension to the beneficiaries at their doorstep through Village Volunteers

● Village Volunteers would come to the beneficiary's house and deliver the pension amount on the first of every month and the whole process would be completed on the same day by noon

● Arrangements are being made to deliver pension at the doorstep commencing from February 1

the same day by noon. Arrangements are being made to deliver pension at the doorstep commencing from February 1.

Speaking to The Pioneer, District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) Project Director M Srinivas Rao said that there were about 4,22,250 pension beneficiaries in the district, who include old-age pensioners, widows, single mothers, handloom weavers, toddy tappers, fishermen, tannery workers, AIDS patients and others. They would receive pension at their doorstep from February 1 through Village

Volunteers. He said till now pension was being given to beneficiaries at the centres from first to fifth of every month. However, from now onwards, measures have been taken by the government to ensure pension at their doorstep on first of every month and every beneficiary will receive their pension without any delay.

He said in urban areas one volunteer will cover 50 families and in rural areas he or she would handle 100 families. In all, there were 20,397 volunteers, including 15,350 in urban areas and 5,047 in rural areas, he disclosed.



Lieutenant General VK Chaturvedi receives a sapling from the organisers of a workshop in Vijayawada on Monday in which he is the chief guest

## Students told to emulate great personalities

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Lieutenant General VK Chaturvedi said the most essential quality of a great leader is his attitude and efforts towards people, situations and life. He differentiated between "being the best" and "being great". He exhorted students to emulate great personalities and touch lives of others significantly instead of just being the best in whichever field they opt to be in. He recalled a few great personalities and asked the students to replicate their achievements. He pointed several key char-

acteristics a management graduate should possess. He was the chief guest at a workshop organised by Gates Institute of Management and Sciences on 'Career Lessons in Leadership' here on Monday.

He asked students to have "Right intentions" in life as they would act as a guiding force to reach better heights in their life. He narrated a practical story from Indo-Pak war of 1971 where Indian soldiers displayed extraordinary efforts to convey a strong message that when intentions are right the results will also be right, he recalled.

## 'Decision to abolish Council a cowardly act'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

CPI State secretary Ramakrishna on Monday said the present political scenario in the State has created confusion among people. Besides, the recent developments over the three-capital proposal have made the people of the State has become a laughing stock in other States. The issue is creating disturbances across the State, he said.

Ramakrishna said abolishing Legislative Council was a foolish decision taken by the YSRCP government. Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy says he is against defection and for the last three days, he was influencing the Council members. He blamed the Chief Minister for saying the Council members are a hurdle for the development of the State.

He alleged that said people gave a clear mandate to the YSRCP to implement bifurcation promises. Special Category Status and others but not to abolish the Council, which is a cowardly act.

## RINL-VSP ventures into retailing

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Sales of Vizag Steel long products to retail customers began at RINL Retail outlet at Pedagantyada here on Monday. PK Rath, CMD, RINL-VSP, inaugurated the sales operations at its new constructed retail outlet building.

Narendra Agencies, Chirala, RINL, rural dealer made the first purchase. PK Rath, CMD, issued the first sales letter to mark the occasion. The retail outlet was constructed at a cost of Rs 4.36 crore in five acres with a storage capacity of 16,000 metric tonnes of steel and also having a 100 MT weigh bridge.

The retail outlet was opened aiming at strengthening the marketing network and facilitates delivery of VSP products



PK Rath, CMD, issuing the first sales letter to Narendra Agencies, Chirala, RINL rural dealer, in Visakhapatnam on Monday

to all types of customers. Retail outlet facilitates delivery of material to low volume individuals/small buyers to order less and multiple products in one vehicle in customised length/ready to use at

site, finished products like cuts, bends and stirrups. RINL retail outlet is an additional distribution channel to sustain sales in alternate market segments and facilitate delivery of material at customers

**The retail outlet was opened aiming at strengthening the marketing network and facilitates delivery of VSP products to all types of customers**

doorsteps. KC Das, Director (Personnel), VV Venugopal Rao, Director (Finance), DK Mohanty, Director (Commercial), KK Ghosh, Director (Projects), AK Saxena, Director (Operations) and senior officials, union leaders were present.



Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan releases 'Bala Sahithi Soochi', a children's bibliography in Telugu, brought out by the Andhra Pradesh Library Association, at Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada on Monday

## Good habits should begin at an early age: Governor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Good habits should begin from an early age and reading is one of them, opined Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan. He released 'Bala Sahithi Soochi', a children's bibliography in Telugu from 1963 to 2019, brought out by the Andhra Pradesh Library Association, at Darbar Hall in Raj Bhavan here on Monday.

Addressing a gathering, the Governor said exposing children to book reading makes them smarter, inquisitive and imaginative adults. He said book reading improves mem-

**The Governor complimented Raavi Sarada and members of Andhra Pradesh Library Association for bringing out 'Bala Sahithi Soochi'**

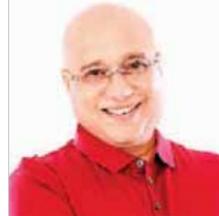
ory power and helps children in academics as well.

He further stated that the history of publication of bibliographies in Telugu can be traced back to 1929 with the first bibliography published

by Sri Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu.

He complimented Dr Raavi Sarada and members of Andhra Pradesh Library Association for bringing out 'Bala Sahithi Soochi' consisting of 6,195 titles of books written by 2,081 authors.

Mandali Buddha Prasad, former minister K Chandrasekhara Kalkura, President, Dr Raavi Sarada, general secretary and office-bearers of Andhra Pradesh Library Association and Mukesh Kumar Meena, Secretary to Governor, were present.



## Lalithaa Jewellery to open outlet in Kakinada today

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Lalithaa Jewellery has carved a niche in gold jewellery market by winning the confidence and appreciation of customers. Overwhelmed with good response from customers, it is inaugurating 25th outlet in Kakinada on Wednesday.

"After witnessing tremendous response to our Vizag, Hyderabad, Tirupati, Vijayawada and Rajamahendravaram showrooms, we decided to create our footprint in Kakinada," said M Kiran Kumar, the CMD of the jewellery retail behemoth.

Deputy Chief Minister Pilli Subhash Chandra Bose, Minister of Agriculture and Cooperation Kurasala Kannababu, Kakinada MP Vanga Geetha, Kakinada city MLA D Chandrasekar Reddy and Kakinada Mayor S Pavan will grace the occasion.

## GOVT TO ABOLISH COUNCIL

# Jagan acting with vengeance: APCC chief

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee president S Shailajanath on Monday alleged that abolition of the Legislative Council reflects the autocratic rule of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy. Addressing the media at Andhra Ratna Bhavan here on Monday, he said the decision of three capitals for the State is the beginning of YSRCP government's downfall.

He alleged the Chief Minister was acting with vengeance as the Bills on three capitals and cancelling of the CRDA were not passed in the Council. Hence, he decided to abolish the Council, which was against democracy.

Shailajanath recalled that former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy had brought Legislative Council as his birthday gift to the people of undivided Andhra Pradesh in 2004, but his son Jagan has

abolished, which is a foolish act. He blamed the YSRCP for stating continuing Council is waste as the government was spending Rs 60 crore on it. Is it necessary to spend Rs 1,400 crore to paint Village Secretariats for a poor and debt-ridden State, he questioned? He also found fault with the government for spending Rs 5 crore for hiring a lawyer to argue against farmers and women in the court.



CAPSULE



**Governor praises Hindi Prachara Sabha**  
VIJAYAWADA: Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan appreciated the organisers of Hindi Prachara Sabha for taking the initiative to spread the national language Hindi across South India. Andhra Pradesh Hindi Prachara Sabha members headed by its secretary S Gaibavali met the Governor at Raj Bhavan on Monday and felicitated him. On the occasion, the Prachara Sabha secretary explained the Governor on various initiatives taken up by them to spread Hindi language in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

**Inter-state robbers arrested**

VIJAYAWADA: Central Crime Station (CCS) sleuths, on a tipoff, arrested four persons and recovered Rs 7.3 lakh cash and gold from their possession. The accused were identified as Mangi Lal, Shail Singh, Ramesh Rabari and Kanai Lal - all hailing from Rajasthan. Acting on the instructions of City Police Commissioner Ch Dwaraka Tirumala Rao, to bring down the crime rate in the city, crime DCP D Koteswara Rao, along with his team, stepped their vigil on suspects and habitual offenders and traced the inter-state gang belonging to Rajasthan. On interrogation, the accused disclosed that they had broken shutters during the late nights and decamped with cash and gold. It may be noted that they were habitual offenders and many theft cases were registered against them and were also imprisoned. After coming out from jail, they came to Vijayawada to meet their friends. During the nights, they used to commit crimes by breaking open the locked shutters and flee with the cash and gold.



# Naidu mortgaged interests of AP for his personal gains: Alla

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Health Alla Nani on Monday held TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu responsible for the bifurcation of the State. Participating in a discussion on the resolution tabled by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy in the Assembly, the Deputy Chief Minister recalled that the TDP government filed cases against those who agitated for the Special Category Status to AP, though it was guaranteed in the AP Reorganisation Act.

"He had even mortgaged the interests of the State for his own personal gains. Though the Sivaramkrishna Committee advised against the construction of the capital city in Amaravati, the previous TDP government went ahead with it. Naidu had constituted a bogus committee with his ministerial colleague P Narayana, which gave the go-ahead for the capital in Amaravati, thereby destroying the future of the State. Naidu was stooping so low that he is fomenting trouble among castes and religions," Nani said.

Claiming that the YSRCP



government had solved the drinking water crisis in West Godavari district within seven months, Alla Nani said he was ready to show the development to anybody who wished to see it.

Alleging that Naidu had taken no steps to provide relief to the kidney patients of Uddanam, Alla Nani said Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had set up a research centre, a dialysis centre and a water grid within three months of the YSRCP coming to power. "The role of the Legislative Council was to give suggestions and not to play politics over the people-friendly steps taken by the Assembly members elected by the people,"

● The TDP chief, along with his party MLAs and MLCs, was creating chaos in the State by creating obstacles to good governance

● They are treating the Amaravati Capital Region as a real estate venture by defending those who had bought lands, said Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Health Alla Nani

The Deputy Chief Minister said, and observed, "It is unfortunate that Naidu had gone to visitors gallery in the Council to influence the Chairman."

He said that the people of the State were watching the political developments, and observed that it was the objective of the Chief Minister and the government to ensure that no region was left out with regard to development. "Decentralisation of governance by establishing the Executive Capital in Visakhapatnam, Legislative Capital in Amaravati and Judicial Capital in Kurnool would ensure development in all the regions of the State," Alla Nani said.

● "Naidu colluded with the Congress and was instrumental in bifurcation of the State," Nani said and observed that because of this Andhra people had lost their right on Hyderabad

Naidu, along with his party MLAs and MLCs, was creating chaos in the State by creating obstacles to good governance. They are treating the Amaravati Capital Region as a real estate venture by defending those who had bought lands, the Deputy Chief Minister said.

He made it clear that the government was not shifting the Capital from Amaravati but was only establishing two more at Visakhapatnam and Kurnool. "Naidu colluded with the Congress and was instrumental in bifurcation of the State," Nani said and observed that because of this Andhra people had lost their right on Hyderabad.

## BJP to work with Jana Sena in TS also

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP State unit president K Lakshman on Monday declared that the State BJP would work, along with Jana Sena in Telangana, too, and would meet Pawan Kalyan on the issue.

He said that the BJP would use Pawan Kalyan's services in all states. The BJP-Jana Sena combine would ring curtains down on the corrupt and dynastic rule of KCR in Telangana, he said exuding confidence. In municipalities where there is no majority for the TRS, the ruling party captured the municipal chairmanship posts through backdoor methods.

The TRS was not content with winning 100 seats and prevented BJP from coming to power in Tukkuguda municipality, he said adding that the BJP would approach courts on the issue.



## TDP chief condemns resolution on dissolution of Council

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday condemned Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy moving the resolution to dissolve the Legislative Council and termed it as unfortunate.

Addressing the media here on Monday, he charged the government with adopting the resolution out of heartburn as the Council Chairman referred the Bill on three State capitals to the Select Committee to re-review the faulty decision of the State government.

Dissolution of the Council set up with lofty ideas was not justified, he said adding that the architects of the Constitution with a lot of foresight provided for bi-cameral legislature.

Chandrababu noted that the Assembly has no right to dissolve the Legislative Council but can only adopt a resolution in this regard.

Calling YSRCP MLAs as gang of criminals, he noted that there were criminal cases registered against 86 MLAs of the YSRCP. He breathed fire on the ruling party for com-



paring criminal gangs with intelligentsia.

Jagan government is ascribing politics to the Legislative Council, he said seeking to know what was the fault of the TDP in its conduct in the Council.

The dissolution resolution has been adopted playing histrionics in the Assembly, he said pointing out that the Speaker first counted 121 who voted in favour of the resolution and later conveniently changed the figure to 133.

Jagan noted that the government spends Rs 60 crore to run the Legislative Council, but spends Rs 30 crore to attend trial in courts, he said.

## Farmers from Karnataka held

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Krishna Lanka police arrested Andhra farmers from Karnataka State at Kanakadurga Varadhi on Monday. The arrested farmers were taken to Krishna Lanka Police Station. Farmers came from border areas of Karnataka like Bellary, Sindhur, Raichur, Mandia and other places to extend their solidarity with Amaravati Parirakshana Samithi (APS) JAC leaders.

The arrested farmers staged a protest in the police station and raised slogans 'Moodu Rajadhanulu Vaddu - Amaravati Muddu'. Speaking on the occasion, they said that the government should have lent a patient hearing to farmers before taking any decision. They found fault with police for highhandedness against farm-

● The arrested farmers staged a protest in Krishna Lanka Police Station and raised slogans against the government

● Farmers came from border areas of Karnataka like Bellary, Sindhur, Raichur, Mandia and other places to extend their solidarity with Amaravati Parirakshana Samithi (APS) JAC leaders

● Opposition leader N Chandrababu Naidu condemned the arrest of Karnataka farmers and said what is wrong if farmers from Karnataka extend their support to the JAC leaders. He said all the farmers should be released unconditionally forthwith

ers and women protesting against three-capitals.

They appealed to people to support the JAC leaders and fight against the government to revoke the decision on three capitals. They said that capital Amaravati is the self esteem of five crore people of the State. Opposition leader N

Chandrababu Naidu condemned the arrest of Karnataka farmers, who were supporting the JAC leaders and said what is wrong if farmers from Karnataka extend their support to the JAC leaders. He said all the farmers should be released unconditionally forthwith.

## TRIBALS PROTEST TENT ACCOMMODATION IN VIZAG AGENCY

# JAC declares two-day bandh on Jan 29-30

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Tribals under the banner of Joint Action Committee of Adivasula Hakkula Parirakshana Samithi (AHPS) staged protests and took out rallies demanding officials of ITDA, Revenue and Tourism departments to remove the tents, which were set up by private players in various parts of Vizag Agency to attract the tourists, citing that the tents have pushed the prostitution and led to ugly behaviour of the visitors.

The JAC also demanded the withdrawal of the cases filed against a teacher and 40 others, who demolished the tents at Kotha Balluguda village under Araku Valley mandal in Vizag Agency due to bad behaviour of the tourists. Police arrested one



tribal teacher Suresh Kumar Vanjula for allegedly supporting villagers, who demolished the tents. Convener of the JAC Rama Rao Dora said that some private players have set up the tents close to the girl's hostel at Kotha Balluguda. Some tourists, who stayed in the tents made obscene gestures at the tribal

girls whenever the girls went up the terrace to dry their clothes. The visitors are consuming liquor in the tents and they are also enquiring about sex workers in the tribals hamlet, Dora said.

"The non-tribals in Vizag Agency set up the tents with the support of some political lead-

ers and officials. We will continue our protest till the government respond to our demand and demolish the tents in various parts in the Agency," Dora added.

Apart from the demolition of the tents, tribals also demanded that the government initiate action against non-tribals, who encroached the tribals lands and set up commercial establishments at Araku Valley, Paderu, Chintapalle and a few other areas in Vizag Agency, which is restricted and protected and no land can be transferred to non-tribals under 1/70 Act.

Demanding the district administration and ITDA officials for strict implementation of the 1/70 Act, the Joint Action Committee has declared a two-day bandh on January 29 and 30.

## ED finds 'financial links' between PFI & anti-CAA...

Continued from Page 1

It is suspected and alleged that these funds were used by PFI affiliates to fuel anti-CAA protests in various parts of UP, sources said, citing the findings of the Enforcement Directorate probe report. They said the ED has shared these findings with the Union home ministry.

The UP police had also recently sought a ban on the Popular Front of India (PFI), days after its complicity was suspected in the statewide violent protests against the amended citizenship law. Nearly 20 people had died during these protests.

The ED, sources said, found the funds deposited in bank were also routed from some foreign shores and were sent in the accounts of certain investment firms. A National Investigation Agency's FIR and chargesheet against the PFI had formed the basis for the ED to file a PMLA case against it. The PFI was formed

## I got Rs 77 lakh from PFI : Sibal

Continued from Page 1

On March 8, 2018, the Supreme Court overruled a Kerala High Court order that had annulled the marriage of 22-year-old Hadiya to Shafiq Jahan, on a petition filed by her father. Hadiya, born a Hindu and named Akhila Asokan, had married Shafiq, a Muslim man, in 2016. Sibal's remarks came after the Enforcement Directorate (ED), here on Monday, said it had identified the PFI and the Rehab Foundation India (RFI) for providing over Rs 120 crore for the protests over the new citizenship law (CAA) and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC).

in 2006 in Kerala as a successor to the National Democratic Front (NDF).

## Jagan moves Telangana HC challenging CBI court order

Continued from Page 1

The judge commented that Jagan cannot continuously seek exemptions from court appearances.

It ruled that Jagan should compulsorily appear before it for the next hearing on January 31 and if he failed to do so, he would be constrained to pass "appropriate orders."

On January 3, the court gave a similar order, dismissing his petition seeking exemption from personal appearances in the court in connection with the CBI cases. As a result, Jagan was forced to attend the court in Hyderabad on January 10.

**The judge commented that Jagan cannot continuously seek exemptions from court appearances**

## Assembly votes unanimously to abolish...

Continued from Page 1

The TDP boycotted the day's proceedings, protesting the government's decision to abolish the Council. It said that it was unconstitutional to have a discussion in the Assembly on the Bills that were in process in the Legislative Council. Earlier, the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet passed a resolution on Monday setting in motion the process for abolishing the state Legislative Council. With just nine members, the ruling YSR Congress is in minority in the 58-member Legislative Council.

The opposition TDP has an upper hand with 28 members and ruling party could get a majority in the House only in 2021 when a number of opposition members will retire at the end of their six-year term.

The move by the AP Cabinet came after the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government last week failed to pass in the Upper House of the state legislature two crucial Bills related to its plan of having three capitals for the state. AP Legislative Council Chairman MA Sharrif on January 22 referred to a Select Committee the two bills — AP Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Bill,

## 'It's a question of breathing life into democracy'

Continued from Page 1

"According to Article 164-2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet headed by the Chief Minister was directly answerable to the Assembly as it was elected by the people," Jagan said. He said that had the Constituent Assembly, which framed the Constitution, felt that the Legislative Council was necessary, it would have made it statutory in all the states to have it. "However, according to Article 169, the Constituent Assembly had left the decision of the abolition of the Council to the Assembly," the Chief Minister said. He said that earlier, when literacy rate was very low, a provision had been made to nominate intellectuals and academicians to the Council. "However, in the present Assembly

there are 38 post-graduates, 13 doctors, 14 engineers and also 68 graduates. Of them, there are three civil surgeons, two Group-I officials, one professor, one journalist, two teachers and also farmers who have been directly elected by the people," Jagan said. He pointed out that Councils are present only in six out of the 28 states in the country. "Councils have been abolished in Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal as their functioning was not up to the mark," the Chief Minister said. Under the circumstances, the question of the continuation of Council arose as all the Bills introduced by the Assembly for the welfare of the people were being stalled in the Council for political considerations, the Chief Minister said.

## Number crunching

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Who voted for the Chief Minister's statutory resolution on abolition of the Legislative Council? While YSRCP's strength in the House is 151, with the exclusion of the Speaker, the number comes to 150. Out of them, 18 were not present at the time of voting as they were outside the hall when the doors were closed. TDP members, including Gannavaram

MLA Vallabhaneni Vamsi, who is estranged from TDP recently, and has since not embraced any party, and Guntur-West MLA Maddali Girdhar, who donned YSRCP robes a few days ago, were also not present in the Assembly hall.

The lone Jana Sena MLA, who has been cosying up to YSRCP, of late, was present in the hall when the doors were closed, also voted in favour of the resolution.

## TDP: Only Parliament...

Continued from Page 1

"Till the President issues a notification, the Legislative Council will be 'alive'," he said. The TDP leader said Council Chairman Mohammed Ahmed Sharif may go ahead with the process of constituting the Select Committee to look into the two Bills aimed at creating three state capitals. Defending the action of the TDP, which has a majority in the 58-member Council, he said that the party also fought against injustice and it acted to safeguard the state's interests. Accepting the TDP's demand, the Chairman had last week referred the Bills to a Select Committee, drawing strong protests from the ruling

**Accepting the TDP's demand, the Chairman had last week referred the Bills to a Select Committee, drawing strong protests from the ruling party, which alleged that the TDP brought pressure on the Chairman to stall the Bills.**

The Bills aimed at creating Vizag and Kurnool as the state capitals in addition to existing capital Amaravati were passed by the Assembly on January 20,

## States asked to plug loopholes in criminal justice system

Continued from Page 1

The courts rely on the 'panchnama' to check the veracity and authenticity of the action taken by police officers. In criminal cases, it is used to corroborate substantive evidence.

The 'panchnama' lists the articles which are found at a particular place and a particular time and, thus it has corroborative value. There are several kinds of 'panchnamas', such as the spot, memorandum, seizure, inquest and arrest 'panchnamas'.



The panchnama can also be found in cases under the purview of the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act and

**This procedure has been widely misused by several police officers, where the same set of people were made witnesses in multiple cases even though they were not present at the spot**

the Essential Commodities Act. This procedure has been widely misused by several police officers, where the same set of people were made witnesses in multiple cases even though they were not present

at the spot. The misuse has been flagged by several courts and during various meetings between officials of the Law and Home Affairs Ministries. Senior advocate Dhruva Bhagat told IANS that

"as per the statutes of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973, the investigating officer in any case, or FIR, is required to take testimonies of public witnesses during the time of the seizure of any illegal article which is alleged to have been in possession of any accused person."

Bhagat explained that, in general, the investigating officer fails to proceed in this manner, citing, instead, only police officers as recovery witnesses. "If it all any public witnesses were named as witnesses to the recovery made by the invest-

igating officer, the witness would be the same in every case as cited by the investigating officer," said the senior lawyer elaborating on the malpractices. In a bid to curb such misuse, the Centre has now issued directives to the police to provide the proper name and other "details of such witness such as his or her Aadhar Card number, so that the practice of citing the same witness in almost every case for the purpose of recovery is eliminated and a fair and reasonable investigation is carried out by the police officer."

CAPSULE



**CPI (M) man succumbs to burns; anti-CAA flyers found in bag**

**INDORE:** A 72-year-old CPI (M) activist succumbed to the burn injuries on the January 26 evening which he had suffered after setting himself ablaze two days earlier here in Madhya Pradesh, police said on Monday. Though police had not given out the motive behind Rameshchandra Prajapat taking his own life, a CPI (M) leader claimed that he seemed "highly disappointed" because of the "stubborn attitude" of the Central government on the overall CAA-NPR-NRC issue. Police had found pamphlets denouncing Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the proposed National Population Register (NPR) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) from Prajapat's bag at Geeta Bhavan square, the spot of the incident. Rameshchandra Prajapat had set himself on fire last Friday (January 24) by spraying some inflammable substance on himself. He died on Sunday evening during treatment at the MY Hospital, said Tukoganji police station in-charge Nirmal Kumar Shrivastava. When asked about the possible motive behind Prajapat's act, the police officer said they are investigating.



**Guj: Ex-servicemen hold rally, demand martyr compensation**

**AHMEDABAD:** Hundreds of ex-servicemen from Gujarat and their kin held a rally in Gandhinagar in Gujarat on Monday to demand strict implementation of reservations for them in government jobs as well as higher compensation for families of martyrs. The ex-servicemen, who have 14 demands, are on a sit-in protest at Shahid Smarak in Shahibaug area since Sunday and also held a car rally till the state secretariat complex in Gandhinagar on Monday. They said the BJP government in Gujarat should emulate the Aam Aadmi Party government in Delhi and pay Rs 1 crore as compensation to the kin of soldiers who died in the line of duty. "While the AAP government in Delhi is giving Rs 1 crore to kin of martyrs, the Gujarat government provides only Rs 1 lakh. We want the BJP government here to increase the compensation to Rs 1 crore. The kin of martyrs should also be given pension," said Jitendra Nimavat, president of Gujarat Ex Armymen Union. "We also demand strict implementation of the policy of reservations in government jobs for retired army personnel. The Gujarat government has agreed to meet us in the afternoon to find solutions," he added. Nimavat exuded confidence the Vijay Rupani government will accept all 14 of their demands.

# Bars in five-star UP hotels can now stay open till 4 am

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government has decided to allow bars in big cities to remain open up to 2 am and those in five-star hotels till 4 am, an hour later than earlier.

Principal secretary Sanjay Bhoosreddy told PTI that the decision, which will come into effect on April 1, is meant for the convenience of guests, particularly foreigners.

Licensed bars in major UP cities could earlier remain open up to 1 am, or 3 am if they are located in five-star hotels. Unlike before, hotels in small cities can also apply for a liquor licence.

The Uttar Pradesh cabinet last week gave its nod to the 2020-21 excise policy under which the licence fee for selling country-made liquor was increased by 10 per cent. A licence for serving beer is up 15 per cent and for foreign liquor 20 per cent.

"The government has made a simple and transparent excise policy. Renewal of



**Licensed bars in major UP cities could earlier remain open up to 1 am, or 3 am if they are located in five-star hotels. Unlike before, hotels in small cities can also apply for a liquor licence**

licences will be done through e-lottery. Under the new policy, one person will be allowed to have only two shops in the state," Bhoosreddy had said after the cabinet meeting.

Beer shops will now be allowed to sell wine. A licence fee will be charged to serve liquor on luxury trains, which was free earlier. Licences will also be given to airport lounges and hotels located

outside the airport where airline passengers stay.

All liquor bottles will have barcodes so that the consumer can check for spurious liquor.

The annual licence fee to serve liquor in 50-room hotels in the bigger cities will be Rs 10 lakh from April 1. These include Gautam Buddha Nagar or Noida, Ghaziabad, Kanpur, Agra, Allahabad, Lucknow

and Varanasi. The licence fee for category-2 cities has been fixed at Rs 7.50 lakh per year. These include Bareilly, Aligarh, Gorakhpur, Jhansi, Mathura, Meerut, Moradabad, Saharanpur, Ayodhya and Firozabad.

The annual fee for category-3 cities is now Rs 5 lakh and for category-4 town Rs 2.50 lakh, it was announced last week.

## Sukhbir dismisses reports of parting ways with BJP in 2022

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal on Monday indicated that the alliance with the BJP was in place in Punjab, days after its ally decided to contest the Delhi elections alone.

Asked whether the SAD and BJP would fight the 2022 assembly elections separately, Badal told reporters in Amritsar that "these are just in the media and I have been hearing such reports for the last 20 years".

Hitting out at the Congress-led state government for not sticking to its election promise of giving free smartphones on January 26, he said, "I want to tell you that they (Cong-led govt) will not give anything (to people). They are just giving dates. People of Punjab will send them packing after two years".

Education minister Vijay Inder Singha had said on Sunday in Patiala that he was expecting that the free smartphones would be given to the youth before March 31.

Badal alleged that drug and sand mining mafias were "proliferating" under the alleged "patronage" of Congress ministers in Punjab.

"The DGP has no control



over Punjab Police while lower rank officers — DSP and SHOs were working at the behest of Congress leaders. I can give you details of many cases in which Congress leader got drug suppliers released," alleged Badal.

Lashing out at the state government, SAD chief said Congress led government was hiding its "failures" under the excuse of empty coffers.

"We ran government under the leadership of (Parkash Singh) Badal sahib and never gave a statement of empty coffers," said Badal, adding the state saw "unprecedented" development under their regime.

"But Captain sahib is not accessible," he said slamming Chief Minister Amarinder Singh.

## 2G SCAM CASE

# CBI appeal infructuous in view of new anti-graft law, Raja tells HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Union telecom minister A Raja on Monday told the Delhi High Court that the CBI's appeal against his and others' acquittal in the 2G spectrum scam case has become infructuous with the coming of the new anti-corruption law.

Senior advocate Abhishek M Singhvi, appearing for Raja, told the court that the graft charges levelled against him and others in the case have been omitted in the new Prevention of Corruption Act of 2018 and therefore, prosecution in the instant matter cannot go on.

Apart from Raja, his then private secretary R K Chandolia and former telecom secretary Siddharth Behura have also raised the issue in separate applications filed by them.

During the brief hearing before Justice Brijesh Sethi, the CBI contended that the applications were not sustainable as this specific issue had been raised in the replies filed in response to the agency's appeal.

However, the CBI's stand was opposed by Singhvi who said this specific issue, of what happens to older cases in light of the new law, has been referred to the high court by a trial court dealing with a corruption matter and is still pending here.



Besides that, the changes in the new PC Act have also been challenged in the Supreme Court where it is still pending, he said, adding that in the present circumstances, the high court may have to refer the issue to the apex court. Justice Sethi, after hearing the brief arguments, listed the matter for further hearing on January 31.

The CBI and the Enforcement Directorate have challenged the acquittal of all the individuals and companies in the 2G scam corruption and money laundering cases by the trial court. The CBI had also filed an appeal challenging the acquittal of Essar Group promoters Ravi Kant Ruia and Anshuman Ruia and six others

## CORONAVIRUS

# Govt doctors happy over Kochi airport preparedness

PNS ■ KOCHI

A team of doctors deputed by the Union Health Ministry to conduct thermal screening for the novel coronavirus (nCoV) at the Cochin International Airport here on Monday expressed satisfaction over the preparedness of the airport authorities.

"They (doctors) have expressed satisfaction over the arrangement made here. They examined the passenger manifests and details of 178 passengers who were screened by the airport health officers," a statement from the airport said. The central team, comprising doctors including Pushpendra Kumar Verma, Ramesh Chandra Meena and Shoukathali, is also visiting Kalamassery Medical College Hospital where an isolation ward has been set up to observe patients.

While two persons, who returned from China where there was an outbreak of the coronavirus, are under observation in the Kalamassery Medical College Hospital, one



is under observation at a private hospital here, Ernakulam district health officials said.

Their health condition is normal, officials said. The three suspected patients blood samples have been taken and sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune, they added.

On Friday last, 80 people who returned to Kerala from China were kept under surveillance by health officials in the state for possible exposure to the coronavirus that has created

panic across the world, health officials had said.

While seven people, who had shown mild symptoms of fever, cough and sore throat, were being treated at various health facilities in the state, 73 others have been put under home surveillance, officials said.

An update from the airport here had said 24 passengers underwent screening for the virus but no suspicious case was reported.

## Some political parties acting irresponsibly, says Baba Ramdev

PNS ■ GORAKHPUR (UP)

Yoga guru Ramdev has alleged that certain political parties are acting irresponsibly and spreading fear over the amended Citizenship Act and the planned National Register of Citizens (NRC) through rumours and lies.

Interacting with reporters in Deoria on Sunday night he said attempts to disturb communal harmony does not suit a responsible citizen or party.

"CAA, NRC and other issues on which various things taking place in the country presently are based on lies and misunderstandings aimed at instigating people by creating fear in their minds. This is an irresponsible act by some political parties," Ramdev said.

"This country does not belong to any particular party or to (Narendra) Modi ji, Yogi (Adityanath) ji or Amit Shah. It is a country of all Indians."

Those trying to disturb communal harmony or the fabric of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, talking about division of the India and spreading violence are acting against the country and it does not suit a responsible citizen or party, he said.

"I believe that all Muslims



are not involved in it. Crores of Muslims are patriots and they too are unhappy and this is defaming them. All responsible people need to rectify this," the yoga guru said.

Ramdev, who was accompanied by noted singer Kailash Kher for Deoria Mahotsav appreciated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Namami Gange' project and believed that the river will become clean.

"It is a matter of faith. The river is our mother and we worship it. In other parts of the world, rivers are not worshipped but people keep these clean," he said.

Ramdev also visited the Devraha Baba sthan, a place associated with the revered Hindu saint popularly known as "ageless Yogi".

## GAURAV CHANDEL CASE

# Key suspect held in UP's Hapur, main accused yet to be nabbed

PNS ■ HAPUR/NOIDA

A Mirchi gang member allegedly involved in the robbing and murder of Greater Noida resident Gaurav Chandel has been arrested in Hapur district 20 days after the sensational crime, officials said on Monday.

Accused Umesh Singh alias Umesh Pandit was also shot at by the police in his legs when he allegedly tried to flee from



their custody after snatching a policeman's service weapon, the officials said.

**Accused Umesh Singh alias Umesh Pandit was also shot at by the police in his legs when he allegedly tried to flee from their custody after snatching a policeman's service weapon, the officials said**

"Umesh was held late on Sunday night while he was ferrying the wife and a two-

month baby of Mirchi gang leader and main accused Ashu Jaat on a motorcycle. They

were held near Dehra Jhaal along the NTPC road in Dhaulana area following a tip off," the Hapur police said.

The accused has confessed to his involvement in looting Chandel's SUV, a Kia Seltos, on the night of January 6 while he was returning home from work in Gurgaon, the police said.

A firearm and some ammunition were seized from his possession, while Ashu's wife

was also taken into custody, the police said. "After his arrest, Pandit was leading the police to recover Chandel's stolen belongings but midway asked the policemen to get down from the vehicle and started walking. He then suddenly snatched the pistol of a sub-inspector and opened fire in an attempt to flee. He was injured in retaliatory police firing," according to a statement issued by the Hapur police.

## Govt signs pact with NDFB, ABSU to resolve Bodo issue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday signed an accord with the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), one of the dreaded insurgent groups of Assam, providing political and economic bonanza sans a separate state or Union Territory.

The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), which has been spearheading a movement for a Bodoland state since 1972, and another group called United Bodo People's Organisation were also signatories to the accord.

In the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the tripartite agreement was signed by Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, top leadership of the four factions of the NDFB, ABSU, Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry Satyendra Garg and Assam Chief Secretary Kumar Sanjay Krishna.

The home minister described the agreement as "historic" and it will bring permanent solution to the decades old problems of the Bodo people.

"This agreement will facilitate all round development of the Bodo areas, their language and culture will be protected without compromising the territorial integrity of Assam," he said.

# Police raids Sharjeel Imam's Bihar home, fail to find him

PNS ■ JEHANABAD/IMPHAL/TITANAGAR

Police raided the ancestral home of anti-CAA activist Sharjeel Imam in Bihar, hunting for him in sedition cases lodged across several states for his alleged "inflammatory" speeches, but he eluded the dragnet, officials said on Monday.

Police in two northeastern states--Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh--lodged FIRs against the former JNU scholar, over his speech in which he threatened to "cut off" Assam and the northeast from the rest of the country.

Jehanabad Superintendent of Police Manish Kumar said police swooped on Imam's ancestral house in Kako police station area on Sunday night after "help was sought by central agencies".

## Manipur, Arunachal govt lodge cases against him



**Imam was not to be found but two of his relatives and their driver were detained for interrogation and let off thereafter, police said**

He was slapped with a sedition case after his alleged speeches went viral on social media where he was heard speaking about "cutting off" Assam and the northeast from India.

Earlier, he had been booked on similar charges by Aligarh police in Uttar Pradesh for a speech he delivered on the AMU campus.

The cases were lodged after Imam's purported video

emerged where he spoke about cutting off the northeast from India if "five lakh people stand organised". "If five lakh people are organised, we can cut off the northeast and India permanently. If not, at least for a month or half a month. Throw as much 'mawad' (variously described as pus or rubbish) on rail tracks and roads that it takes the Air Force one month to clear it.

"Cutting off Assam (from India) is our responsibility, only then they (the government) will listen to us. We know the condition of Muslims in Assam...they are being put into detention camps," he was shown in the video as saying.

Assam police has already lodged a case against him under the anti-terror law--the Unlawful Activities (prevention) Act.

Imam's father, the late Akbar Imam, was a local JD(U) leader who had unsuccessfully contested an assembly election in his lifetime. Meanwhile, police in Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh have registered FIRs against Imam under IPC sections relating to waging war

against the nation and sedition. If convicted, he could be imprisoned for life.

Taking cognisance of the objectionable video of Mr Sharjeel Imam, in which he threatened to sever Northeast from the rest of country, the

Manipur Police has filed an FIR (No. 16(1)2020 IPS) under sections 121/121-A/124-A/120-B /153 IPC," Rajat Sethi, an adviser to the Manipur chief minister tweeted. Singh retweeted it. The case was filed on Saturday. The crime branch of Arunachal Pradesh police also filed a similar case against Imam on Sunday, Special Investigation Team (SIT) SP Dr Navdeep Singh Brar said.



CAPSULE



**POCSO accused hangs self inside Gwalior Central Jail in MP**

**GWALIOR:** A man charged under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and in prison since January 23 allegedly committed suicide in Gwalior Central Jail in Madhya Pradesh, police said on Monday. Narottam Rawat's body was found hanging from a tree in the premises of a temple within the jail complex after a search was mounted around 7:30pm on Sunday as he had not come back to his barracks post dinner, said Gwalior Central Jail Superintendent Manoj Sahu. "He had eloped with a minor girl on January 4 but was held later, charged under the POCSO Act, and sent to jail on January 23," Sahu said. He said jail wardens Omprakash Suman, Manoj Tyagi and Prem Goyal have been suspended, and probe was underway to ascertain how Rawat managed to make a rope out of clothes, climb atop the tree and commit suicide without on-duty personnel getting alerted.



**West Bengal gov't tables anti-CAA resolution in Assembly**

**KOLKATA:** The West Bengal government on Monday tabled a resolution against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in the Assembly. The resolution appeals to the Union government to repeal the amended citizenship law and revoke plans to implement NRC and update NPR. As per reports, state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Partha Chatterjee introduced the resolution in the House around 2 pm. Three states - Kerala, Rajasthan and Punjab - have already passed resolutions against the new citizenship law. The law has emerged as the latest flashpoint in the state, with the TMC opposing the contentious legislation tooth and nail, and the BJP pressing for its implementation. Incidentally, Kerala, Rajasthan and Punjab have passed resolutions against the new citizenship law. The new citizenship law has emerged as the latest flashpoint in the state, with the TMC opposing the contentious legislation tooth and nail, and the BJP pressing for its implementation.

**Hold dialogue with anti-CAA protesters: Digvijay to PM, Shah**

**PNS ■ SEHORE (MP)**

Senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh on Monday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to hold a dialogue with protesters opposing the CAA-NRC-NPR regime, to prevent "further deterioration" of the current situation. Singh also said the "movement" against the new citizenship law and the two other proposed exercises has now gone out of the hands of politicians, as it has turned into an "emotional issue". "The movement against the CAA, NPR and NRC has gone out of the hands of politicians and political parties and has become an emotional issue, which should not

**Railways to go '100% Electric' by 2024: Goyal**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

India has set 2024 as the target for 100 per cent electrification of railways, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said today, adding that "we are very very conscious of our responsibility to the environment". By 2030, India plans to make the entire railway network a "net-zero emission network", he further said. "We are embarking on rapid

**By 2030, we plan to make the entire railway network a net-zero emission network. We will have no emission from the railways.... it will run on clean energy and clean power, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said**

electrification of the rail network by 2024. We expect the entire network to be electrified

by then," Mr Goyal told reporters at the India-Brazil Business Forum.



"By 2030, we plan to make the entire railway network a net-zero emission network. We will have no emission from the railways.... it will run on clean energy and clean power," he said. India would be the first country in the world to run a railway network "of this scale and size" on electricity, he further said. The central minister also spoke of scope of partnership with Brazil for developing

rail infrastructure. Indian Railways has been working to reduce the carbon emission amid global concern over climate change. As per the NITI Aayog data, carbon dioxide emission from the Indian Railways was around 6.84 million tons in 2014. Last year, Mr Goyal, while announcing the electrification goal, had said that that the centre is phasing out the old coal plants, which is going to help

reduce environmental pollution. "It will also create the demand for new plants and spur the investment cycle," he had said. India has the fourth largest network in the world after US, Russia and China. Spread across 67,368 km with about 7,300 stations, the rail network runs close to 13,000 passenger trains that carry over 23 million passengers daily, according to government data.

**India map sans PoK, Aksai Chin on KMC's Facebook page; mayor says profile hacked**

**PNS ■ KOLKATA**

Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) Mayor Firhad Hakim has alleged "deep-rooted conspiracy" behind the posting of a distorted map of India, sans Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Aksai Chin, on the civic body's Facebook page on Republic Day. The West Bengal BJP has demanded Hakim's resignation from the mayor post and a statement from Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the incident.

Alleging that the civic body's profile was "hacked by people with vested interests to malign the KMC", Hakim said a probe will be initiated into the incident. The KMC landed in an embarrassing situation after



the map of India, without PoK and Aksai Chin, was seen on its page on Republic Day.

Along with the distorted map, the mayor's Republic Day message was on display. As the image went viral, the

**Alleging that the Kolkata Municipal Corporation's Facebook profile was "hacked by people with vested interests to malign the KMC", mayor Hakim said a probe will be initiated into the incident.**

mayor was trolled, following which the KMC deleted the map. The BJP lashed out at Hakim over the incident.

"We demand the immediate resignation of Hakim as the KMC mayor. Isn't the civic body endorsing Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's claims on Kashmir?" state BJP general secretary Sayantan Basu said on Monday. Basu also demanded a statement from Banerjee

on the incident as Hakim also holds important ministerial portfolios and is a senior TMC leader. "We also want to know whether the Bengal CM also believes that PoK is not part of India," Basu said.

A KMC official said a complaint has been lodged with the cyber cell of the Kolkata Police and New Market police station on January 26 over the incident.

**Centre to release report card of 'smart cities' in June**

**PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

The central government will release a report card of 100 selected smart cities in three categories — ease of living, municipal performance index and climate -- in June as the Smart Cities Mission completes its five years.

According to the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, it will help cities in better planning and moving towards data-driven governance that will eventually improve their liveability.

Smart Cities Mission Director Kunal Kumar said that in June the ministry will come out with ranking of smart cities in Ease of living index, performance of municipalities and climate.

"We are using data to change lives. The government is ranking cities on economy, sustainability and other. We have converted citizens' aspirations into our outcome," Kumar said.

He said in the category of climate, cities will be ranked based on their works in promoting matters related to the environment. The Smart Cities Mission, a flagship programme of the Narendra Modi government, was launched in June, 2015. The country's urban



population was 37.7 crore (31 per cent) in 2011 census and it is projected to increase to 60 crore (40 per cent) by 2030, an official said.

According to the official, the ease of living assessment will be done on three parameters - quality of life, economic ability and sustainability. It will also include education, health, housing, mobility, safety, development, economic opportunities.

Thirty-five per cent weightage will be given to 'quality of life', 30 per cent to citizen participation, 20 per cent to sustainability and 20 per cent to economic viability, the official said. Municipal performance

assessment will help urban local bodies in reducing the complex realities of governance into a few understandable dimensions that can be measured and quantified. The verticals that are covered in the index include services (30 per cent weightage), finance (20 per cent) technology (15 per cent), planning (15), governance (20 per cent). The ministry said that the value of tendered smart city projects so far is over Rs 1,62,000 crore. The value of work orders issued so far is around Rs 1,20,000 crore and the value of all completed projects is more than Rs 25,000 crores.

**Stalin says he's 'troubled' to see Omar Abdullah's picture**

**PNS ■ CHENNAI**

DMK President M K Stalin on Monday said he was deeply troubled to see a photograph of National Conference leader Omar Abdullah in which he sports an overgrown beard and demanded the Centre immediately release all leaders in detention in Jammu and Kashmir.

The top Dravidian party leader took to Twitter to demand his release and said "Deeply troubled to see this picture of @OmarAbdullah and tagged three images of the Kashmiri leader.

While the first showed Omar Abdullah clean shaven, the next featured him with a medium beard and in the final one an overgrown beard was striking.

"Equally concerned about Farooq Abdullah, @MehboobaMufti & other Kashmiri leaders who are incarcerated without trial or due process. Union Govt must immediately release all political prisoners and restore normalcy in Valley," he said.



**Omar is among the three former CMs of the erstwhile state who continue to be in custody since August 5 when the Centre abrogated Article 370**

The DMK has all along been demanding the release of all leaders in detention in Kashmir following the scrapping of Article 370.

A photograph of Omar Abdullah surfaced on Twitter on January 25 in which he seemed almost unrecognisable sporting a salt and pepper beard, triggering reactions of awe and anger from netizens, including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. Omar is among the three former chief ministers of the erstwhile state who continue to be in custody since August 5 when the Centre abrogated the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and divided it in two Union Territories.



**BJP doesn't want to open Shaheen Bagh route: Kejriwal**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday alleged that the BJP does not want to open the Shaheen Bagh stretch of the Kalindi Kunj road where anti-CAA protests are going on for over a month as the saffron party is doing "dirty politics" over it. He said law and order in the national capital entirely lies with the Centre and "if they are saying that they need permission from me, I am giving them permission, open the road in one hour". "I can give you this in writing, BJP does not want to open the route in Shaheen Bagh. The Shaheen Bagh route will remain closed till February 8 (election day) and it will open February 9," Kejriwal told reporters. He further alleged that the BJP just knows how to do "dirty politics over everything".

**9,000 GPs oppose Maha gov't move to cancel direct elections**

**PNS ■ MUMBAI**

Several thousand gram panchayats in Maharashtra have opposed the Uddhav Thackeray government's decision to cancel direct elections for the post of sarpanch.

The new rule states that those elected to the gram panchayat will elect a sarpanch (village headman) from among themselves.

"As many as 9,000 gram panchayats have passed a resolution opposing the state government's decision to allow members to elect a sarpanch from among themselves," said Maharashtra State Sarpanch Parishad chairperson Dutta Kakade on Monday. The rule for direction election of sarpanch was brought in by the previous BJP-led Devendra Fadnavis dispensation.

The Fadnavis cabinet had, on July 3, 2017, decided to



amend the respective clauses of Maharashtra Gram Panchayat Act of 1958 to facilitate election of sarpanchs (gram panchayat heads) directly from among the people of the village.

Incidentally, Thackeray, whose Sena was part of the ruling alliance at the time, had disapproved of this move.

Thackeray had, in July, 2017, said that going by this logic (of direct election of sarpanch) a demand for election of state chief minister in a similar way can be raised by people.



**From politics to frogs, Goa RD tableau has netizens hopping**

**PNS ■ PANAJI**

A day after Goa's colourful Republic Day tableau dominated by a large green frog strumming a guitar rolled by Rajpath on Sunday, social media is abuzz with the amphibian motif.

While the motif of a frog is aimed at creating awareness about the Goa government's "Save the Frog" campaign designed to prevent poaching of the amphibian in Goa, the popular 'interpretation' of the motif according to a string of social media posts indicates something more tragi-comic.

With 15 out of 40 MLAs in the Goa legislative assembly having hopped parties since the state assembly elections in 2017, social media posts seem to sarcastically suggest that the frog is more representative of legislators "hopping" political parties.

"The #republicday tableau of #Goa, portraying the #political reality image of Goa to the #world dignitaries and #Indian citizens. #frogs #bebbo," says Alison Morenas from Margao. Bebo is the Konkani word for the frog.

"This Republic Day, Goa's Mascot 'The Frog', truly signifies our politics & our politicians, who have become experts in jumping from one political party to another.

The rest of our country is not very different either! The Emperor of Frogs strums on his guitar, while our nation burns!" says Candolim-based businessman Ricardo Rebelo.

A youth BJP leader Pranav Sanvordekar also took a dig at the float. "Frog on the tableau at #RepublicDay parade was successful in portraying the state of political affairs in #Goa..." he said.

Fifteen MLAs have quit the Congress and the Maharashtra Gomantak Party since the 2017 state assembly elections, to join the BJP.

**SC notice to Maharashtra on Arun Gawli's plea challenging life term**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The Supreme Court on Monday sought response from the Maharashtra government on a plea by gangster-turned-politician Arun Gawli challenging the life term awarded to him in the 2008 murder of Shiv Sena corporator Kamlakar Jamsandekar. A bench of Justices R Banumathi and A S Bopanna issued a notice to the state on Gawli's appeal challenging the December 9 last year verdict of the Bombay High Court which had upheld the life term awarded to him by a trial court. According to the prosecution, Jamsandekar was murdered at the behest of Gawli (64), a former Maha MLA.

the National Register of Citizens (NRC) across the country. "Amit Shah had said that CAA bill will be followed by the NPR and then the NRC in a chronological order. Now, if they want to handle the situation properly then PM Modi and Shah should hold a dialogue with those staging protests. "They should clear all doubts from the mind of protesters otherwise the situation will further worsen in the country," Singh added.

Answering a question on Shah's appeal to the people of Delhi where assembly polls will be held on February 8, Singh said, "As they (BJP leaders) have no issues to raise, they are setting the country on fire (by making such statements)".

**BJP will not win in Delhi: Sachin Pilot**

**PNS ■ JAIPUR**

Affirming his faith in the wisdom of the voter, Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister and Congress leader Sachin Pilot says people of India will do the right thing when the time comes and the BJP will lose the Delhi elections next month.

Addressing a gathering at the ongoing Jaipur Literature Festival on Sunday, Pilot also lamented the government's "lack of inclination" to engage with those protesting against



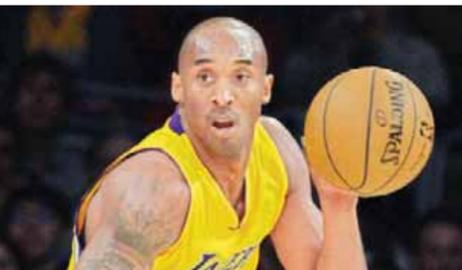
the CAA. "There's absolutely no inclination, and there is nobody forcing the hand of those who run the country that they should at least reach out and engage with people. You can talk to your worst enemies but you can't talk to people who are your citizens, your workers, who have supported you," he said at the session titled "The Democracy Index". The government, Pilot said, is morally, constitutionally and socially bound to speak and reach out to people who feel alienated. "It's not about religion, caste, or language. When you say I am the democratically elected government.

**From Kohli to Warne, cricket fraternity mourns Kobe Bryant's death**

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The cricket community joined the rest of the world in mourning NBA legend Kobe Bryant's tragic death with batting legend Sachin Tendulkar, India captain Virat Kohli and West Indies great Vivian Richards offering their condolences.

Bryant, along with one of his daughters, 13-year-old Gianna and seven others died in a helicopter crash on Sunday morn-



ing. He was 41-years-old and regarded as one of the greatest hoopsters in the game's history. "Saddened to hear about the tragic demise of Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gianna & others on-board the helicopter. My condolences to his family, friends and fans across the world. #KobeBryant," Tendulkar tweeted. Kohli and India coach Ravi Shastri were devastated with the news. "Absolutely devastated to hear

this news today. So many childhood memories of waking up early and watching this magician doing things on the court that I would be mesmerized by. Life is so unpredictable and fickle. His daughter Gianna passed away too in the crash. I am absolutely Heartbroken. Rest in peace. Strength and condolences to the family," Kohli wrote on his Instagram page.

"Absolutely devastated by the tragic news of Kobe Bryant and his daughter. My heartfelt condolences to his family, friends and fans across the globe #KobeBryantRIP #KobeForever #Kobe," Shastri wrote on his Twitter page.

Richards on his part said: "A true legend of the sporting world! Rest In Peace dear Kobe and his daughter. May the family have immense strength to overcome this sad time."

Australian spin great Shane Warne was "stunned" by the

tragedy. "Like everyone, I'm stunned, shocked and saddened to hear the horrific news about Kobe Bryant and his 13 year old daughter who died in a helicopter crash. Thoughts are with his family and loved ones at this extremely sad time!"

# Selling the jewel

The Govt has invited expressions of interest for Air India again. Will it succeed this time in selling off the airline?



What's next for Air India? Even with Ministers in the Government trying to talk up the sale — Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said he would have bought the airline if he weren't a Minister — the fact is that this sell-off is difficult. This time it will not be — thanks to the quality or the lack of it — the asset on sale alone. In a revised push, the Government has made it clear that it plans to sell its entire stake in the carrier. But the sell-off process by the Modi Government during both its terms has been sporadic and questionable. Take its failure to sell off Can Fin Homes, the housing finance arm of Canara Bank. Without any reason to put it on sale, it has been more damaging to the investor community than any of the protests at Shaheen Bagh or resolutions by the European Parliament. Foreign investors are genuinely worried whether India is open to doing business at all. The Government's negativity has been on display, including that of Goyal's recent statement against Amazon's billion-dollar investment/bailout to its Indian operations. Air India is no ordinary public sector unit (PSU); it is the national airline after all. Talk of its disinvestment have flamed passionate arguments on both sides. On the one hand, some feel that it remains a vital national asset and that the Government must plough in more taxpayers' funds to keep it afloat. On the other, there are those who feel that it is a five-tonne deadweight attached to India's leg and must be divested immediately or better still, shut shop. Air India may be tottering at the edge of the precipice but it still has strengths that can be advantageous in the long run. Whoever rescues it stands to gain for it has some of the prized international slots in profitable routes, a decent fleet and has a well-developed domestic and international footprint. It has some leftover glow from being a superbrand at one time and has skilled and experienced staff, particularly on operations and engineering sides, who are also being sought by most private operators.

With the disinvestment process in a limbo and the Government failing to even make what one could best describe as "easy sells", the question about selling Air India should be put on hold. Simply because selling the national carrier is extremely complex and involves a layered process with terms and conditions. At the same time, despite Jet Airways' collapse actually providing a slight fillip to the rest of the industry, the Indian aviation industry has been hurt due to a multitude of reasons, many not of its own making. IndiGo, India's largest airline, is suffering due to engine issues. SpiceJet, owned by Government-linked entrepreneur Ajay Singh, is faced with a cash crunch, which is not being helped by several of its Boeing 737 Max aircraft grounded. So, the question about who has the money as well as the expertise to buy Air India is open, one that does not have easy answers. The same issues that arose when Jet Airways was going down in flames have re-emerged now. It would be easier and cheaper to establish a new airline than sink hundreds of millions of dollars into Air India unless one really values the slots. At the same time, during the weekend, it emerged that Dubai-based Emirates carried over 50 million Indians to Dubai and beyond, a classic case of how Indian passengers have fuelled the growth of global airlines. There is no doubt that India offers rich pickings for global airlines and could one day become a key driver of the aviation economy. We are poised to be the third largest player in this sector by 2025.

# A censure too far

India has rightly ignored the EU resolutions on CAA, argued the law is an internal matter but we must dispel doubts



It is perhaps a little hypocritical of the European Union (EU) to go so far as to pass resolutions against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) when it has traversed a spectrum of genocidal politics and refugees born of racial hatred itself. That's patronising. India is capable enough to conduct its own democratic scrutiny. Yes, all is not right with the new law that makes religion a criterion for naturalisation. And the civil society dissent against it has indeed become a pan-Indian movement to act as a counter-pressure to the Government. Both the law, which was duly passed by Parliament, and the mass protests thereafter, are within democratic convention. Though the Government clampdown on discourse is reprehensible, the recent protests have shown how masses of people can effectively turn the tide while being leaderless and without political endorsement. To that extent, the pro and anti-CAA battle will be settled within the spirit and territoriality defined by the Constitution and may actually set us on the self-corrective course of democratic renewal. We certainly won't need any third-party intervention to make that call, India's citizens are enough to do it. Domestic matters, no matter how contentious, will have to be solved domestically. Fellow democracies indeed need to respect that.

Also, such resolutions mean nothing unless they are a precursor to some sort of practical curbs in EU's engagement with India (some EU members have suggested that as well) but that's an extreme option, considering there are nations with worst rights violations. Unless of course, this is being done to negotiate a stronger position when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Brussels for an Indo-EU summit. Having said that, the international narrative does shape global perceptions and attitudes in engaging with India. And the resolutions embody unanimity of opinion from the extreme Right to extreme Left groups, coming from 625 of 752 EU members. Sifting through them, certain key issues do come up on which the Government has to ready its explainers and demonstrate that it is receptive as a vibrant democracy and not combative like an authoritarian regime. It has to engage with counterpoints than scare them away. The key concerns are clearly about the marginalisation of a community implicit in the CAA, its link with the profiling nature of census in the National Population Register (NPR)-National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the clampdowns on dissent, including those in Kashmir following its changed status as a Union Territory. The resolution, which falls under the category of "resolutions on topical subjects," says that India has "created the legal grounds to strip millions of Muslims of the fundamental right of equal access to citizenship" and has linked the rights situation in Kashmir. The US, too, despite the guided tour of the Valley, has been critical of the detention of mainstream political leaders, who have so far worked within India's democratic template and even been allies of New Delhi, without formal charges. The viral images of an emaciated, bearded and unkempt National Conference leader Omar Abdullah have only intensified the sense of victimhood at the hands of an oppressive regime. Till date, the Government's lobbying and efforts to push its own point of view have not been too convincing. It has not made any reconciliatory moves either except by countering criticism with an obstinate aggression that is sharpening polarities. We must realise that intransigence is not always an asset even as we attempt to reset the template of diplomacy from passive to aggressive.

# A Constitutional mandate

Those individuals/leaders, who stand opposed to the CAA, must show respect to the Constitution, which empowers Parliament to make laws regarding citizenship



A SURYA PRAKASH

Continued opposition to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which was passed by Parliament last month, and to the preparation of the National Population Register (NPR) by several State Governments, who stand opposed to the ruling dispensation, and their threatening postures towards the Union Government do not augur well either for the Republic or our Constitutional well-being.

The CAA, which has now become the law of the land, has amended the Citizenship Act of 1955 to provide succour to Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians, who because of religious persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, crossed over to India before December 31, 2014, and are living here without any legal status. These nations are Islamic States, meaning Islam is the State religion over there.

Thus, automatically, unlike in India, adherents of all religions other than Islam are second or third-class citizens. Therefore, all non-Muslims are Constitutionally inferior and this has conditioned the majority to ill-treat the religious minorities in these nations. Ever since Partition, the Hindus and other minorities have been subjected to all forms of harassment and cruelty in these nations, forcing them to either convert to Islam or flee.

As a result, the population of Hindus in undivided Pakistan, which was around 24 per cent in the mid-1940s, has crashed to just 1.70 per cent. Similarly, in Bangladesh, which was earlier East Pakistan, the Hindu population has crashed from 30 per cent to about seven per cent. This should also answer the question as to why Muslims have been left out of the list of persecuted minorities under the CAA. First, they are not "minorities" and second, it is laughable to say that Muslims are "persecuted" by an Islamic State. The CAA seeks to offer some help to these subjugated minorities and to only those who entered India before the cut off date. In other words, this is not an open-ended scheme to allow for future migrants from these nations. Nor does it have anything to do with the citizens of India, whether Hindu or Muslim.

Given this reality, the attempt made by the Communists, the Congress and other parties opposed to the BJP, to spread the word that the CAA is against the Muslim citizens of India is blatantly false. This Act seeks to provide succour to persecuted religious minorities in Islamic States and it is also in line with the *Bharatiya* dharma and Constitutional dharma as well, to reach out to them. Those opposing this are abetting the non-secular, non-democratic behaviour of the citizens of Islamic nations across India's border and will thereby lose the moral right to talk about these values in the country. The Communists and the Congress are also spreading canards about the NPR, the compilation of which is critical for policy formulation. Both parties were roundly rejected in



the last parliamentary election in May 2019. In fact, although the Communists hog 30 to 40 per cent of the airtime on television debates, public support for such parties has fallen dramatically. In the 2004 Lok Sabha election, the two main Communist parties had a combined vote share of 7.07 per cent. In 2014, this was down to 4.07 per cent and in 2019, it crashed to 2.36 per cent.

So, it appears that the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) is their last bastion and with the support of the Congress, the two parties seek to avenge the electoral humiliation they suffered by whipping up passions against the Government that received overwhelming public support.

Meanwhile, in a resolution, the Kerala Assembly has said that the CAA passed by Parliament has created apprehensions in various sections of society. This was followed by the Punjab Assembly, which in its resolution stated that the CAA had caused widespread anguish and social unrest in the country. It further said that "the ideology behind the CAA is inherently discriminatory and is as far away as it can be from being a humanitarian measure." The Rajasthan Assembly is the latest one to demand repeal of the CAA. These resolutions are not unconstitutional but unprecedented and are certain to pose a threat to the federal structure.

Even more worrying is that the Punjab Assembly's resolu-

“ THE ATTEMPT MADE BY THE COMMUNISTS, THE CONGRESS AND OTHER PARTIES OPPOSED TO THE BJP TO SPREAD THE WORD THAT THE CAA IS AGAINST THE MUSLIM CITIZENS OF INDIA IS BLATANTLY FALSE. THIS ACT SEEKS TO PROVIDE SUCCOUR TO PERSECUTED RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN ISLAMIC STATES ”

tion refers to "apprehensions" that the NPR is a prelude to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and that it is "designed to deprive a section of people from citizenship of India." It goes on to say that because of these apprehensions, the Union Government should amend the forms and documentation associated with the NPR.

However, Assemblies in Kerala, Punjab or Rajasthan never shed tears for persecuted religious minorities in theocratic States such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Further, all lectures on secularism are to be directed towards the secular, democratic citizens of India and the Government elected by them.

Three other developments in recent weeks are extremely worrying. One, several Chief Ministers have declared that they will not implement the CAA in their States. Two, the disgraceful decision to bring kids to protest sites and to get them to raise foul, abusive slogans against a duly elected Prime Minister. And three, telling the Muslims not to respond to queries from enumerators who are tasked to prepare the NPR.

Every Chief Minister and politician in the country, who has declared that CAA will not be implemented in his/her State, must immediately withdraw their statement because it will amount to challenging the supremacy of the Constitution. Parliament is

empowered to make laws regarding citizenship, naturalisation of aliens under item 17 in the Union List and no State or individual has the right to say that the law made by it will not be implemented. If Chief Ministers persist with this line, it will lead to a Constitutional breakdown and the consequences will be terrible because the overwhelming majority in this country swears by the Constitution and will not allow a few malcontents in politics to disturb its rhythm and balance.

Second, the decision by protesters to bring infants to protest sites and to get them to hurl abuses at the Prime Minister is another act of brinkmanship which no reasonable person will support. Last, asking the Muslims to boycott the NPR is equally risky because any attempt to stymie the working of a duly elected Government at the federal level will have its own implications.

Those, who are encouraging such tendencies, are treading a dangerous path. It is indeed unfortunate that one has to make such a gloomy prognosis about what lies ahead around the time when the nation just celebrated its 71st Republic Day. Everybody has to be alert to ensure that the Constitution and the democratic way of life remain undisturbed.

(The writer is an author specialising in democracy studies. Views expressed are personal.)

## SOUNDBITE

The Opposition, the CPI(M) and the Congress must put aside narrow political differences and fight together against the fascist BJP Government at the Centre.

West Bengal CM —Mamata Banerjee



For me fitness is a way of life. It is my daily routine. I cannot operate without exercising regularly or doing something for my fitness. I do yoga, running, sprinting, weights.

Actor —Anil Kapoor



The Government with a 56-inch chest will have to shed its arrogance on the new citizenship law and bend before the people who have been protesting against the law.

Former Union Minister —Yashwant Sinha



I would not say Jinnah has completely won but he is winning. There's still a choice available to the nation between Jinnah's idea and Gandhi's idea of a country.

Senior Congress leader —Shashi Tharoor



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Imbibing Indian ethos

Sir — As India celebrated its 71st Republic Day, we need to pause and introspect on the larger picture than debate on transient aberrations — social, political and economic — to which we have become so accustomed to. Yes, as a State, we have not slipped as have other contemporary nations who have attained independence. This, we owe to the legacy bequeathed in our philosophy and culture, the tenets of which run through our genes. The *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* had delineated a vibrant ethos for public and private good. Time and tide have posed questions and we have chosen the right path many times. What is satisfying is that we strive to make amends to the wrongs. Each era is defined by a mix of thinkers and leaders they offer. That at any given time we seem to misplace their right proportion remains an enigma. And no nation is an exception to this. Let us nevertheless celebrate an envious legacy we have inherited and pass it on to future generations. R Narayanan Narayanan

### Blunders that require quick remedy

In its report, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had confirmed that the Indian economy would grow at a rate lower than five per cent in 2019-20 rather than 7.2 per cent as predicted by it in April last year. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s periodic survey of the economy, too, gave a lucid account. Noting that the economy was bottoming out and growth had slowed from a rapid pace, it said recovery had been hurt as non-banking financial companies — which contribute a large share to its financing, weighing on job creation, income and consumption — are under stress. And now, the *Reuters* has forecast that India's corporate and income tax collection is likely to fall below what was collected in 2018-19, a fall for the first time in two decades. It is here that it is difficult to fathom the philosophy behind some of the decisions taken by the ruling Government. The subjugation of Kashmir and its people and the passage of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have all made prospective investors wary of parking funds here. A new facet of Indian politics now is a flurry of saffron foot soldiers who remain alert all the time to counter every critic of the Government. Recently, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella had to face the wrath for his tweet on CAA. He said, "I think what is happening is sad...It's just bad." During his visit to India, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos pledged



to invest \$1 billion. His proposal didn't earn approval from the Government. A few days ago, George Soros, the billionaire investor and philanthropist, made a candid observation during his speech at the World Economic Forum, "A democratically elected Narendra Modi is creating a Hindu nationalist State" in India, alluding to the CAA. He, too, wasn't spared. These are men who command respect and wield considerable clout among the business fraternity across the world. For a country, which banks heavily on foreign investment to revive its economy, attacks on well-meaning critics will only be self-defeating. Haridasan Rajan Kozhikode

### Stop creating walls

Sir — The Chinese have always had a fascination with walls culminating in the "Great Wall of

China" to keep the invaders out. Soon, they realised that the walls do not stop things from coming in. Now, they have put up another set of walls across a number of cities, initially Wuhan, to prevent

the spread of coronavirus. But again, the walls failed. Coronavirus has already claimed 80 lives in China and the country is making desperate attempts to stop its spread. But

emphasis must be on curing rather than just containing it. The modern world moves too fast for walls to work.

The real dilemma is to find a cure to it using scientific research, including vaccinations. There's a dire need to raise funds for medical research. Let's hope there is a solution and that it is found soon. Dennis Fitzgerald Melbourne

### Learn from Kerala

Sir — The coronavirus threat in China has put millions of people in lockdown at a time when they should be celebrating the Lunar New Year. Given the way this disease has been spreading, many fear that it may become pandemic. Early reports suggest that the disease may have originated in bats. China must learn from Kerala's experience, which successfully contained the Nipah virus outbreak in 2018 due to adequate planning and infrastructure. Sravana Ramachandran Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

**FIRST COLUMN**

# Leaders must get their act together

China seems to be a prime source of viruses. The doctors will do their duty as always but it would be nice if Chinese politicians act fast



GWYNNE DYER

In an emergency, the good thing about dictatorship is that it can respond very fast. The bad thing is that it won't respond at all until the dictator-in-chief says that it should. All little dictators, who flourish in this sort of system, won't risk their positions by passing bad news up the line until the risk of being blamed for delay outweighs the risk of being blamed for the emergency in the first place. You can see how this works if you consider China's response to the emergence of nCov-2019 (novel coronavirus 2019), a new viral threat potentially as serious as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus of 2003. Some things it has done well but others it did very badly and the odds that the virus will spread globally are now probably even or worse.

The local health authorities in Wuhan, the 11-million-strong city in central China where the virus first appeared, spotted it on December 31, 2019, when only a few dozen cases had come to their attention. That's as fast as you could ask for. And they promptly shut down the seafood and wild game market where the victims caught the disease. Score: Nine out of 10.

China's national health authorities also acted fast. On January 9, they announced that they had a brand new coronavirus on their hands and just one day later they released its full genetic sequence online so that medical researchers worldwide could start working on it. Elapsed time: Just 11 days. Known deaths at that point: One. Score: 10 out of 10.

But these are medical professionals doing their duty according to internationally-agreed protocols. We don't know what they recommended to China's political authorities at that point but they must have called for widespread testing and probably also for travel restrictions to control the spread of the virus. But nobody dared to rock the boat: Nothing was done.

A pause here to recall how countries control the spread of a new infectious disease for which there is no vaccine nor any effective cure. Isolate the victims as soon as they are identified and give them medical support: Some will die but most will usually survive. And if you do that soon enough and thoroughly enough, the global pandemic never gets going.

There are often complicating factors. The spread will be far faster if the virus can pass from one person to another in the air. It will be much harder to isolate the people carrying the virus if they become infectious before they develop visible symptoms. But the methods available to slow or stop the spread are still the same: Identify the carriers and isolate them.

Now, back to what happened in China. The medical people did their job; the political people did not. It was two more weeks before the city of Wuhan was cut off from the rest of the country and the world. I live in London, 15 hours' flying time away and during those two weeks 2,000 people arrived from Wuhan at London's airports.

Lunar New Year, the biggest holiday in China's calendar, was coming up fast but nothing was done although half the population goes home for a visit at this time every year. Wuhan and a dozen other Hubei cities are now in lockdown but it's too late: Wuhan's mayor, Zhou Xianwang, admits that five million people have already left the city for the New Year celebrations. Score: Two out of 10.

We now have two pieces of bad news that would have made it even more urgent to seal Wuhan off had we known them at the time. The new virus does propagate through the air and people carrying it do become infectious before they display any symptoms.

Zhou didn't dare advocate isolating the city and neither did anybody else, until the Great Panjandrum Himself had spoken. President Xi Jinping finally spoke on January 25, saying that China faces a "grave situation" and now the system is racing to do what it should have been done two weeks ago.

Too bad but this pandemic (if that is what it becomes) will probably be on the same scale as the SARS virus and that is not really horrific: Deaths in the high hundreds or a few thousands worldwide. The mortality rate among those who catch it appears to be about two per cent, compared to one per cent for ordinary seasonal influenza. And ordinary flu kills about 400,000 (mostly elderly) people every year.

But one of these days something like the 1918 virus that caused the Spanish influenza will emerge again. That killed around 50 million people worldwide, out of a global population only a quarter of what it is now. Since Chinese food markets now seem to be a prime source of dangerous new flu-related viruses, the Chinese Government has a particular responsibility to contain them early. The Chinese doctors will do their duty, as always, but it would be nice if China had its political act a bit more together before then.

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

ON FEBRUARY 8 MORNING, PRESS THE BUTTON WITH LOTUS SYMBOL SO HARD THAT ITS CURRENT FORCES SHAHEEN BAGH PROTESTERS TO LEAVE BY EVENING.  
 —UNION HOME MINISTER  
 AMIT SHAH

**POINT COUNTERPOINT**



EVM BUTTONS WILL BE PRESSED WITH LOVE IN DELHI. IT SHOULD BE A MILD CURRENT SO THAT FRIENDSHIP AND BROTHERHOOD ARE NOT ENDANGERED.  
 —JD(U) NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT  
 PRASHANT KISHOR

# Powerless discoms

The house must be set in order, else this will have catastrophic consequences for power producers, banks, States and Modi's plans to supply electricity to every household



UTTAM GUPTA

Even as there are incessant promises from the ruling establishment of electrifying all villages in the country and making power available to each and every household for maximum duration in a day, the most crucial wheel required for making this happen has got stuck. And the irony is that the political brass is only paying lip service to the urgent need for extricating it. The reference here is to the power distribution companies (discoms) — mostly owned and controlled by State Governments which procure electricity from the independent power producers (IPPs), Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) like the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) and so on, besides their own undertakings such as Rajasthan Rajya Vidyut Utpadan Nigam (RVUN) and sell to consumers. There are some discoms in the private sector as well but they, too, can't ignore the diktats of the state.

Ever since the dawn of the present century, the discoms have been incurring losses primarily due to three factors. First, being their sole owner and controller, the ruling establishment runs discoms as an extension of the state machinery, ordering them to sell electricity to a certain category of consumers viz. poor households and farmers either at a fraction of the cost of purchase and distribution or even free. On the units sold to this class, the discoms incur heavy under-recovery. At the same time, they are told to sell to industries and businesses at a price much above the cost to enable them to offset under-recovery on sale to preferred customers. But, even after offset, losses remain.

Second, in the course of transmission and distribution of electricity, there are so called "technical and commercial" (T&C) losses. Most of it is plain theft which is facilitated by faulty transformers, meters and other equipment. There being no revenue from stolen power, this further exacerbates the losses.

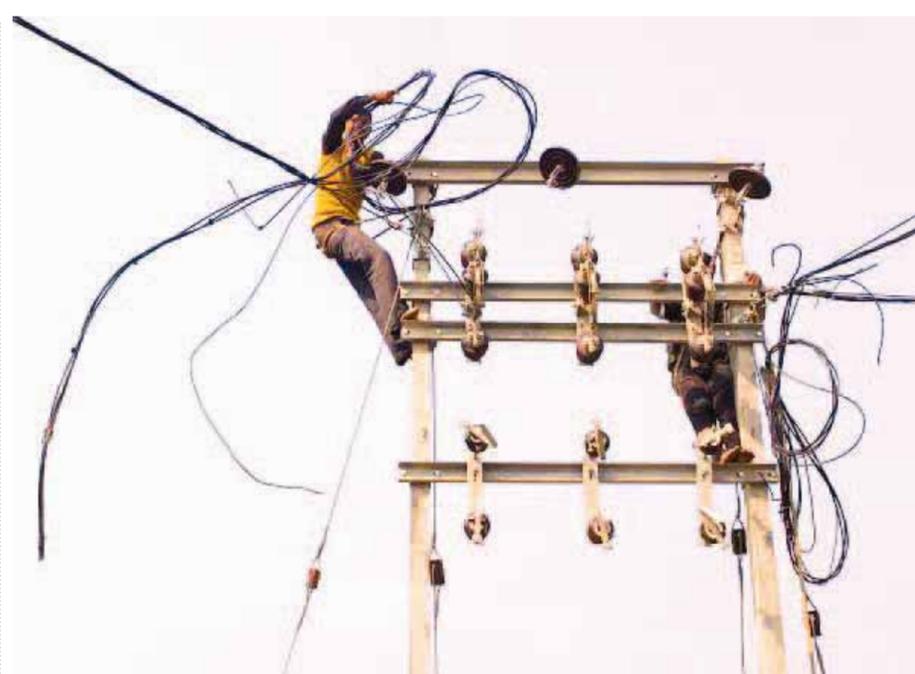
Third, under the power purchase agreements (PPAs) signed by discoms, States allow inflated tariff to generators taking recourse to "gold plating" (euphemism for claiming higher investment than actual), excessive overheads and over-invoicing of fuel bills and so on.

The above three factors make a deadly combination leading to shortfall in the realisation from sale, vis-à-vis the cost of supplying electricity which gets manifest in their loss. Funded by borrowings, this leads to accumulation of debt to unsustainable level. To ensure that they are able to sustain operations and the spillover effect on the rest of the economy is arrested/avoided, the Government had come out with three bail-out packages since 2000 — the latest being in 2015.

In 2015, under a financial restructuring package (FRP) orchestrated by the Union Government, over 75 per cent of the outstanding debt, about ₹400,000 crore of discoms were taken over by State Governments whereas for the balance 25 per cent, they were allowed to issue bonds — backed by sovereign guarantee — to raise funds at concessional interest rate. The FRP was intended to enable discoms to wipe the slate clean, reduce losses and eventually eliminate them.

During 2016-17 and 2017-18, they did show significant reduction with losses declining from

“A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION CAN EMERGE ONLY BY TACKLING THE FUNDAMENTAL CAUSES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO LOSSES OF DISCOMS. THE CENTRE AND STATES SHOULD PUT THEIR HEADS TOGETHER TO DO AWAY WITH SOPS TO FARMERS AND HOUSEHOLDS, ELIMINATE THEFT AND REIN IN INFLATED TARIFF UNDER PPAS”



₹52,000 crore during 2015-16 to ₹32,000 crore during 2016-17 and ₹17,000 crore during 2017-18. During 2018-19, this trend was reversed with losses increasing to ₹28,000 crore. The trend continues during the current year. A collateral damage has been by way of increase in pending payment to power generators. Thus, the amount due for more than 60 days increased from about ₹23,000 crore as of March 2018 to ₹71,000 crore as of November 2019. All dues including those pending for less than 60 days — as on this date — were even higher at about ₹81,000 crore.

This has a debilitating effect on the ability of generators to service loans taken from banks and financial institutions (FIs). A good chunk of those loans have already become non-performing assets (NPAs). Moreover, given their precarious finances, discoms are forced to reduce off-take which affects capacity utilisation. It leads to an anomalous situation whereby despite ample capacity, electricity generation declines affecting supplies.

There is an urgent need to set the house of discoms in order, or else this will have catastrophic consequences for all stakeholders, viz. power producers, banks/FIs, finances of States and jeopardise Prime Minister Narendra Modi's grandiose plans to supply electricity to every household. So, what is the Government doing to set things right? From August 1, 2019, it made mandatory for discoms to open letters of credit (LOC) for getting supply from generators (genscos). Under the LOC arrangement, the bank guarantees that a buyer's payment to a seller will be received on time and for the correct amount; in the event that the buyer is unable to pay, the bank will be required to cover the full or remaining amount which in turn, it will recover from the

buyer using all available legal means.

Relying on the above, in September, 2019, the Union Power Minister, RK Singh even exuded confidence that this would prevent creation of fresh dues. But this has not happened as may be seen from arrears continuing to be on an upward trajectory from about ₹49,000 crore in February, 2019 to over ₹71,000 crore as of November 2019. Clearly, the mechanism has not worked even as generators are forced to maintain supplies despite not receiving payment.

Singh was also optimistic that by incorporating a provision for penalty (or surcharge) for delayed payment at commercial rate of interest of 18 per cent in the New Tariff Policy (NTP), it should be possible to eliminate all pending dues. This may work while dealing with private entities (in fact, in those cases, the problem may not even arise in the first place) but not when it comes to dealing with state entities. So, it is unlikely that the legacy dues would be cleared.

Under the NTP (this is yet to be approved by the Union Cabinet), the Government has also proposed capping of tariff hike to 15 per cent of the under-recovered power supply cost. Further, they won't be eligible for grant or loan if they don't make efforts to reduce losses. These, too, are unlikely to work in improving their financial position and ability to clear the arrears and make timely payments in future.

Let us not forget that at present, even after increasing tariff — mostly directed at industries and businesses (a big chunk of households and farmers are never touched) — discoms incur loss. If a hike is restricted to just 15 per cent then their loss would be even bigger. Far from any help in reducing, such a stipulation will only end up increasing loss

as they lose the flexibility to hike tariff. Similarly, the pressure by way of denying grant or loan won't be of much help.

The Government is also contemplating a Special Loans Plan (SLP) under which banks will be asked to give loans to discoms to enable them to clear their dues to genscos. This will have serious implications for the banks. Considering that discoms won't be able to pay back (given their precarious finances and no effort being made to address the fundamental factors behind their losses), these loans will be NPAs from day one. For banks struggling to come out of the crisis they got into (courtesy, legacy NPAs), this will compound their woes.

True, payment by discoms to genscos (enabled by SLP) will enable the latter service loans they had taken from banks thereby preventing those loans from becoming NPAs. However, for banks, this is no consolation as one set of NPAs would have been substituted by another. Besides, the genscos will continue to remain vulnerable to payment default as long as the discoms remain financially unviable. The SLP may solve today's problem but after some time, dues will pile up requiring Centre's intervention yet again.

Let it be understood in no ambiguous terms that whether it is the FRP (granted thrice over earlier) or SLP under consideration now, these are merely "band aids." These don't offer sustainable solution even as the problem keeps on festering beneath.

A sustainable solution can emerge only by tackling the fundamental causes which contribute to losses of discoms. The Centre and States should put their heads together to do away with sops to farmers and households, eliminate theft and rein in inflated tariff under PPAs. (The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst)

# India is not there yet

The NITI Aayog's index of UN's Sustainable Development Goals reveals that Kerala is on top of the chart in the country while in the north, Himachal Pradesh is a leading performer and Haryana and Punjab are laggards



PINKI RAMAUL

On December 30, 2019, the NITI Aayog released the second edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index, 2019, which is more robust than the first edition, SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018, on account of a wider coverage of goals, targets and indicators and has greater alignment with the National Indicator Framework (NIF). A composite score was computed in the range of zero to 100 for each State and Union Territory (UT). If a State/UT gets a score of 100, it signifies that it has achieved the 2030 national SDG targets. The higher the score, the closer the State/UT gets towards achieving the objectives.

For North India, the report revealed contrasting performances by States, with Himachal Pradesh (HP) fortifying its position as the lead performer and securing the second rank with a composite SDG index of 69. Punjab was placed 12th with a score of 62 and Haryana ranked much lower at 18th place with a score of 57, which was even lower than the country's average of 60. Overall, Kerala achieved the first rank with a tab of 70, while Bihar was the worst performing State with a tally of 50.

The SDGs consist of a set of 17 broad-based global goals adopted by 193 countries at the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Summit at UN Headquarters in New York in September 2015. The objectives were intended to be achieved by 2030 as a part of the resolution, "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." These SDGs for 2030 evolved from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2015. India is committed to achieve the 17 SDGs, the 169 associated tar-

gets and 232 SDG indicators, which comprehensively cover the social, economic and environmental dimensions of development.

The present analysis of the three North Indian States covers only 15 SDGs since the SDG 14 (life below water) is excluded as it applies only to nine coastal States and the SDG 17 (Partnership for the goals) is only qualitatively analysed in the report.

Out of the 15 SDG indices, HP is the best performer among these three States on 11 SDG indices while Punjab is the best performer on three goals viz. SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) and Haryana is the best performer on only one of the goals viz. SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure).

However, appreciably, at an all-India level, Haryana is among the top three States in respect of SDG 9. However, Punjab has not found mention among the top three States at the all-India level on any of the 17 indices used for evaluating States and

UTs on parameters of development. Significantly, on the other hand, at the all-India level, goal-wise HP has been the top State in three SDGs viz. Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 5 (gender equality) and Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities).

Besides applauding the achievements of the States, the report also highlights several challenges before them, which need to be comprehensively addressed by Governments. Some of the critical issues highlighted reveal that at the all-India level, Haryana ranks second-highest in urban income inequality. Punjab and Haryana have less than 10 per cent of their geographical area under forest and tree cover. Both Haryana and Punjab have surpassed the maximum limit of annual groundwater withdrawal, which is 70 per cent, so that the ground water is replenished at a normal rate. These States have to improve this ratio.

Unfortunately, in terms of sexual crimes against the girl child as well as total crimes against children, HP is the worst. Moreover, it does badly

in terms of SDG 2 (zero hunger), which reflects poorly on the performance of the State Government on ending starvation, thus requiring a more focussed approach on nutrition.

Among the positive aspects, Punjab has the highest agricultural productivity at 4,169.67 kg/Ha and is nearing the targeted productivity of 5,033.34 kg/Ha. Similarly, Punjab with Gross Value Added (GVA) in agriculture at ₹2.4 lakh, has the second-highest GVA after Goad at ₹3.7 lakh, which is already above the target of ₹1.3 lakh.

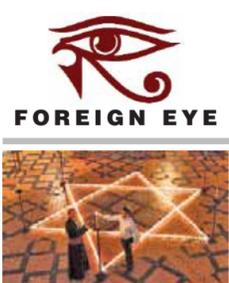
Cellular density is over 100 per cent in both HP and Punjab and with a HIV incidence per 1,000 uninfected population at 0.01, HP is closest to achieving the UN target of zero HIV-incidence. In terms of the average annual drop-out rate at the secondary level, HP is the best performing State with a 7.03 per cent rate as compared to 19.89 per cent in India. It leads the States in the Female Labor Force Participation Rate at 39.70 per cent as compared to the all-India rate

of 17.7 per cent.

In terms of the share of renewable power as a proportion of the total electricity generated, HP leads the country with 94 per cent of the total electricity generated in the State coming from renewable sources. The above analysis emphasises that the SDG India Index Report 2019 would spur the States towards necessary course-correction wherever required and encourage them to ensure timely achievement of the goals.

At the global level, it is widely agreed that India will play a leading role in determining the relative success or failure of the SDGs, as it is the second-most populous country, accounting for one-sixth of the world's population. In this context, it is worthwhile to quote Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, "The coming years will be a vital period to save the planet and to achieve sustainable, inclusive human development."

(The writer is an author and editor)



**FOREIGN EYE**  
**LEST WE FORGET OUR DARK PAST**

This Holocaust Memorial Day, and the ceremony that will take place in Poland, carry a special poignancy because of the diminishing number of survivors and the landmark nature of the date. In the last 75 years, survivors have talked about it out of a sense to duty to the dead and the living. Philosopher Santayana said of the Holocaust: "He who does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it." That lesson must never cease to be taught. (The Guardian, editorial)

CAPSULE



**JPVL appoints R K Porwal as Chief Financial Officer**

**NEW DELHI:** Jaiprakash Power Ventures (JPVL) on Monday said it has appointed R K Porwal as Chief Financial Officer of the company. Porwal is a chartered accountant besides holding masters' degree in commerce and LLB. He has over 32 years of post-qualification experience in finance, accounts, taxation, auditing, contract management. The board has approved the appointment of R K Porwal as Chief Financial Officer... with effect from January 27, 2020, based on the assessment of the nomination and remuneration committee and recommendation and approval of the audit committee of the company," a BSE filing said.



**Maruti launches BS VI compliant CNG version of Alto**

**NEW DELHI:** Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Monday said it has launched BS VI compliant CNG version of its hatchback Alto with price starting at Rs 4.32 lakh (ex showroom, Delhi). The Alto S-CNG offers a mileage of 31.59 km/kg, MSI said in a statement. "With the introduction of Alto BS6 S-CNG, we reinforce our efforts towards sustainable green mobility," MSI Executive Director (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava said. The launch of company's S-CNG vehicle range is aligned to government's vision of reducing oil import and enhancing the share of natural gas in the energy basket of the country from 6.2 per cent now to 15 per cent by 2030, MSI said. The auto major has already sold over 1 lakh BSVI Alto units in the country, it added.



**India asks Qatar to lower LNG price to reflect market**

**NEW DELHI:** India on Monday pressed its largest LNG supplier Qatar to lower price of gas "supplied under long-term contract to reflect falling rates of the spot or current market, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said. Qatar supplies 8.5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas annually to India at a price linked Brent crude oil. Landed price comes to USD 9-10 per million British thermal unit, while the same gas is available in spot market at half the rate. After talks with visiting Qatari Energy Minister Saad Sherida Al-Kaabi, Pradhan said, "LNG contracts should reflect current market reality".

**Raman Rao to join Hilleman Labs as CEO**

**NEW DELHI:** Hilleman Laboratories, a joint venture between pharma company MSD and Wellcome Trust, on Monday said Raman Rao will assume the role of its chief executive officer on February 1, 2020. He will replace Davinder Gill who will leave as CEO of the company on January 31, 2020. Hilleman Laboratories said in a statement. Rao has more than 22 years' experience in research and development, manufacturing and commercialisation of vaccines for infectious diseases, and is joining from Takeda Vaccines where he was Vice President of Global Product Operations, it added. Established in 2009, Hilleman Laboratories is a research and development joint venture with a not-for-profit mission to develop affordable vaccines for diseases that commonly affect low-income countries.

**Govt issues bid document; to sell 100 pc stake in Air India**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday announced sale of 100 per cent stake in debt-laden Air India as it issued the preliminary bid document for the strategic disinvestment and has set March 17, as the deadline for submitting expression of interest.

As part of the strategic disinvestment, Air India would also sell 100 per cent stake in low-cost airline Air India Express and 50 per cent shareholding in joint venture AISATS, as per bid document issued on Monday.

Management control of the airline would also be transferred to the successful bidder. This is the second time in less than two years that the government has come out with proposal for selling stake in Air India, which has been in the red for long.

The government has set March 17, as the deadline for



submitting the expression of interest (Eoi).

AISATS is an equal joint venture between Air India and Singapore Airlines. It offers ground handling services.

Air India also has interests in Air India Engineering Services, Air India Air Transport Services, Airline Allied Services and Hotel Corporation of India.

These entities are in the process of being transferred to a separate company -- Air India Assets Holding Ltd (AIAHL) -- and would not be a part of the proposed transaction, the document said.

According to the document, debt of Rs 23,286.5 crore would remain with Air India and Air India Express at the time of closing of the disinvestment.

The remaining debt would be allocated to AIAHL.

A person in the know of PIM details said staff would be given shares on discount under Employee Stock Option Programme (ESOP).

Air India staff will be offered three per cent of the airline's total shares in the government's disinvestment process.

About 98 crore shares would be set aside under the ESOP, the person said.

As on November 1, 2019, Air India and Air India Express had 16,077 employees on their rolls, including permanent people.

Meanwhile, Air India Chairman and Managing Director Ashwani Lohani said Air India does not have "excess staff" and the retiring employees' medical benefits issue is being sorted out.

On the Air India stake sale, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, said the proposed Air India disinvestment is structured on "very sound principles".

EY is the transaction adviser for Air India disinvestment process. In 2018, the government proposed to offload 76 per cent equity share capital of the national carrier as well as transfer the management control to private players. However, there were no bidders.

**UDAY not failure; new scheme likely in Budget, says RK Singh**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the UDAY scheme was not a failure, Power Minister R K Singh on Monday said an improved version of the programme, meant for revival for discoms and to ensure 24x7 power, may be announced in the Union Budget later this week.

"We asked for a new (UDAY) scheme. We had discussions with the Finance Ministry... I am optimistic that the new scheme will find a place in budget," Singh said at the sidelines of the listing ceremony of the USD 750-million international bond of Power Finance Corporation (PFC) at NSE. The minister also said, it would be great if the scheme finds a place in budget because it will address the requirements of the distribution companies... for ensuring 24x7 power supply."

The government in November 2015 had launched the Ujwal Discom Assurance



R K Singh

**The minister informed that under the new scheme, the Centre will provide for assistance for reduction of losses**

Yojana (UDAY) to bring about operational and financial turnaround of debt-laden power distribution companies. He also indicated that unlike

the earlier practice of having multiple schemes, the centre would channelise all efforts through one scheme, and states would have to reduce the losses of discoms to get all the benefits. The centre is contemplating to combine the features of UDAY scheme, Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) and Integrated Power Development Scheme (IPDS) under an umbrella programme.

Divulging details, the minister informed that under the new scheme the Centre will provide for assistance for reduction of losses. "That assistance will be in terms of technology and modern equipment to reduce the losses."

However, this scheme includes elements of all previous schemes. "Now, there will be only one scheme for ministry of power," he said.

He also told that the scheme has a conditionality that discoms must work out their trajectory for loss reduction.

**DCM Shriram Q3 net profit falls 22 pc to Rs 175 cr; income up**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

DCM Shriram Ltd, which is mainly into chemical, sugar and fertiliser businesses, on Monday reported a 22 per cent fall in its consolidated net profit to Rs 175.43 crore for the December 2019 quarter, on higher expenses and provision for losses in sale of foreign subsidiaries.

The company's net profit stood at Rs 225.65 crore in the year-ago quarter, the company said in a regulatory filing.

Total income, however, rose to Rs 2,229.49 crore during the third quarter of this fiscal year from Rs 2,135.2 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.

DCM Shriram said the board has "approved the proposed sale of entire equity capital and the underlying business including all assets and liabilities thereof on a going



concern and 'as is where is' basis of the step-down subsidiaries in Indonesia and Vietnam by Bioseed Holdings PTE Ltd, a subsidiary of the company in Singapore."

The agreements to sell have been entered into with the buyer and, pursuant to that, an amount of USD 5,20,000 out of the total net consideration of USD 9,50,000 has been received as earnest money.

The balance amount will be received at the time of entering into share purchase agreement which is expected to be completed by March 2020, it added. The buyer is Prasad Seeds Global PTE Ltd.

**Air India, AI Express great assets: Puri**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Civil aviation minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday said Air India along with Air India Express is a "great asset", as the government came out with preliminary bid document for disinvestment of the national carrier. The Minister of State for Civil Aviation said the successful bidder would continue to use Air India brand.

The government on Monday announced sale of 100 per cent stake in debt-laden Air India as it issued the preliminary bid document for the strategic disinvestment and has set March 17, as the deadline for submitting expression of interest.

As part of the strategic disinvestment, Air India would also sell 100 per cent stake in low-cost airline Air India Express and 50 per cent shareholding in joint venture AISATS, as per bid document issued on Monday.

**Nissan revises India strategy, plans 1 new model every year; compact SUV on anvil**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Japanese automaker Nissan plans to launch one new product every year, starting with a compact SUV, as part of its revised strategy for a turnaround in the Indian market, a top company official said on Monday.

The company, which has so far failed to make an impact in the market, now plans to focus primarily on the Nissan brand in the country and introduce multiple products with different body styles, including SUVs and sedans, going ahead instead of depending only on its SUV lineage as part of an



**Nissan now plans to focus primarily on the brand and introduce multiple products with different body styles**

earlier plan announced in 2018. It will also continue with Datsun brand, with focus on providing value proposition to the customers.

"We plan to launch at least one new product every year going forward. The first prod-

uct is going to be an all-new compact SUV which would be rolled out in the first quarter of the next financial year," Nissan Motor India Managing Director Rakesh Srivastava told reporters here.

The company would launch

multiple products in order to build a profitable and sustainable business in the country, he added.

Currently, Nissan sells six models in India under both Nissan and Datsun brands.

Commenting on the new product, Srivastava said the model has been designed in Japan keeping in mind requirements of the Indian market.

"Globally, we have a range of SUV products. We are now looking to enhance our commitment to the market by coming out with a new offering in the B-SUV space (sub four metre compact SUV)," he noted.

**Curbs likely on import of furniture**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government is likely to impose restrictions on imports of furniture with a view to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce inbound shipments of non-essential items, an official said. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade has suggested to its commerce counterpart to put the restrictions.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade is expected to soon come out with a notification regarding this, the official said.

Putting a product in restricted category means an importer will require licence or permission for the inbound shipment.

**Prestige Estates Q3 profit jumps over two-fold to Rs 162 crore**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Prestige Estates Projects Ltd has reported over two-fold jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 161.8 crore for December quarter and raised Rs 437 crore through preferential allotment of shares to Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC.

Its net profit stood at Rs 58.1 crore in the year-ago period.

Total income from operations also rose sharply to Rs 2,696.3 crore during October-December of 2019-20 from Rs 1,079 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year, Bengaluru-based developer said in a regulatory filing.

The board of directors has allotted 1,34,41,654 equity shares of Rs 10 each to an



**Total income from operations rose to Rs 2,696.3 cr during October-December of 2019-20 from Rs 1,079 cr in the corresponding period of the previous year**

investor, on a preferential allotment basis, at a price of Rs 325 per equity share.

Last month, the board had approved "issue and allotment of 1,34,41,654 equity shares at a price not less than floor price of Rs 323.22" on preferential basis to GAMNAT Pte Ltd, which is an affiliate of GIC.

Prestige group announced development of 250 projects across India with completion of seven projects, including three housing and four commercial, across Bengaluru. The company last week launched a new township project Prestige Finsbury Park.

**Goyal pitches for activation of India-Brazil biz leaders forum**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce and industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday suggested the Brazilian side to reconstitute and activate India-Brazil Business Leaders Forum to boost economic ties between the two countries.

The minister said that he would be happy to hear from Brazilian side on the suggestion.

"I have a suggestion for consideration of the Honourable President (of Brazil Jair Bolsonaro) and business leaders of both the sides. Some years ago, we had started India Brazil Business Leaders Forum, which some how for various reasons has not yet taken off," Goyal said.

He was speaking at the luncheon meeting of business leaders of both the sides in the presence of the Brazilian President.

Goyal said that both the countries can use this oppor-



**Goyal said that both the countries can use the opportunity provided by the presence of business leaders to activate the forum**

tourism, agriculture, clan energy and startups.

The minister said that both the countries have set up a target to take the bilateral trade to USD 15 billion by 2022 from the current USD 8.3 billion.

Speaking at the function, Bolsonaro said that huge potential is there for Indian businesses in Brazil.

"Brazil's potential is unmatched," he said, adding for both the countries, "opportunities are right before us".

Brazilian Foreign Minister Ernesto Fraga Araujo said both the countries can increase cooperation in attracting investments.

tunity, where business leaders of both the countries have gathered, "to activate" that forum and "we will re-constitute it to make it more relevant and contemporary to businesses which are working with Brazil".

He requested the Indian industry to give fresh nominations of people who are looking for engaging with the South American country.

Talking about business opportunities in both the countries, he said that businesses of both the sides can look at potential in areas like railways, infrastructure,

**BLR airport investing Rs 13,000 cr on expansion**

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru (KIAB or BLR Airport) welcomed 33.65 million passengers during the calendar year 2019, registering a 4.1 per cent growth, compared to previous years 32.33 million.

While international passenger traffic witnessed double-digit growth of 14.0 per cent,



an upswing from 4.27 million in CY 2018 to 4.87 million in CY 2019, domestic traffic grew by 2.6 per cent, from 28.05 mil-

lion to 28.78 million.

The year 2019 has been a turbulent year for Indian aviation, mostly impacted by the closure of a large airline and supply-side challenges caused by the grounding of some aircraft types, according to a BLR airport statement.

These factors had a ripple effect as the ATMs at BLR Airport were down by 0.1 per cent as against the double-digit

CAGR witnessed in the previous five years (CY14 to CY18).

The total ATMs during 2019 was 235,058 as compared 235,190 in CY 2018. Notably, international movements remained on the upswing, growing by 13.0 per cent with a total of 30,556 ATMs as compared to 26,966 ATMs in CY 2018, owing to the launch of new routes and new flights during Winter 2018.

**Government pegs 7 pc rise in onion output this yr; sees production fall in major fruits**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday projected the country's overall onion production to increase by seven per cent to 24.45 million tonnes in the current 2019-20 crop year, which may bring relief to consumers from high prices seen in the last few months.

Releasing its first forecast, the Agriculture Ministry said onion crops has been grown in 12.93 lakh hectare in the 2019-20 crop year (July-June), slightly higher than 12.20 lakh hectare achieved during the previous year.

Consequently, production



of onion -- the key kitchen staple -- is estimated to increase to 24.45 million tonne this year from 22.81 million tonnes in the 2018-19 crop year.

Onion is grown during both kharif (summer) and rabi (winter) season. The ministry had recently said there was around 22 per cent damage in kharif

the said period. The ministry has projected marginal drop in production of beans, parwal, pumpkin and tapioca this year.

However, overall production of vegetables is estimated to be higher at 188 million tonne in 2019-20 crop year from 183 million tonne in the previous year.

Among major fruits, production of apple is expected to be higher at 2.73 million tonne this year compared with the final output of 2.31 million tonne last year, but there is likely to be a fall in output of mango, banana, grapes, and pomegranate.

**SIAM seeks incentive-based scrappage policy, GST rate cut**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Auto industry body SIAM on Monday urged the government to announce an incentive based scrappage policy ahead of the Budget, while also seeking a reduction in GST on BS-VI vehicles to 18 per cent.

Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) also suggested Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to increase budget allocation for internal combustion engine (ICE) bus procurement by state transport undertakings.

"As SIAM, we have urged the Finance Ministry to consider announcing an incentive based scrappage policy and also increase Budget allocation



for ICE bus procurement by State transport undertakings," SIAM President Rajan Wadhwa said in a statement.

He further said increased cost of BS-VI vehicles may effect demand. "Hence, we have also requested government to reduce GST rates for BS-VI vehicles effective April 1 from 28 per cent to 18 per cent," Wadhwa added.

## Hyderabad's OWN GULLY BOY



To all youth who are passionate about rap just remember to exploit, excavate, experience, elaborate and, most importantly, stay eccentric. Authenticity and originality is everything when it comes to rapping. Don't listen to anyone who has anything bad to say about your passion

ASAHEL SHAMIR JANNU RAPPER

Rap is all about rhythm and poetry. Asahel Shamir Jannu aka The Mutant speaks to SIDDHESH SUMAN about his journey into rap so far. While many people struggle due to many issues in this field, life started out tough for Asahel as he was born with spina bifida. But this did not let his spirits down and he is here to tell the world a good story

Rap is a medium of expression using poetry and music. One of the ideas behind the origins of rap is to make people aware of the vices in society such as rape, murder and discrimination. It soon became a medium for the youth to make their voices heard. *Desi* hip hop has grown a lot in recent years. Bollywood portrays rap as rich people wearing huge gold chains, fur coats, driving expensive sports car and singing about alcohol and women. But Indian rap music is much more deeper than that. The underground scene started shaping in our country since the beginning of this century with groups like 2 ShadeZ, Machas with Attitude, Bombay Bassment, Gully Gang and so on pioneering the Indian rap music scene.

The Mutant is a Hyderabad-based rapper and musician and was born with spina bifida — a birth defect

where a baby's spinal cord fails to develop properly. He has however not let that come in the way and is breaking barriers and creating ripples in the underground hip hop scene.

In an interview with *The Pioneer*, Asahel said, "I started off as a poet at the age of 12. Rap was more of a hobby back then, but once I turned 14, I turned professional and there has been no looking back. My stage name explains my story. Mutant is someone who is an outcast and according to Marvel's *X-Men* comics, it means a superhero. My physical condition has never been a hurdle for me. The only time it's been a



problem is when I travel. Otherwise the way I am, makes me who I am." "Rap has been a way of expressing myself. It gives me meaning and my music defines who I

am. Rap is what I live for," he added. Talking about the image rappers have in mainstream culture, he said, "The mainstream image of rappers that films have created is not good. No one can explain

lifestyle in an hour or two. What an actual artist goes through is a lot more." Speaking of the problems he faced in becoming a rapper, he said, "The major problem I feel is that organisations, clubs and other bodies don't pay artists well and

that has to change as soon as possible." Asahel said that the rap culture in the city is mixed as half of the people who take part in this culture are clueless about rap itself. "But that is changing now. People are getting more aware about it and I feel that's perfect. I love

the audience of Hyderabad as they support every artiste. Hip hop has grown so much in the past decade. People from our city are lovely." Asahel won many competitions in the city such as the rap battle at the Infocus Film Festival and the Patsav's Ultimate Rap battle this year. He also judged various rap battles held by colleges around the city. He is currently working on a new album which will be released

soon. "To all youth who are passionate about rap just remember to exploit, excavate, experience, elaborate and, most importantly, stay eccentric. Authenticity and originality is everything when it comes to rapping. Don't listen to anyone who has anything bad to say about your passion. Collaborate with other artistes around the city and keep the unity in the community. Hustling can do miracles for you," he said on a concluding note.

What are the barriers that art can cross? Anand Vishwanadha, a poet, shares with ANUSHKA PRADEEP about how he managed to overcome his disability to make it big

## In tune with nature

Anand Vishwanadha, despite being faced with a hearing disability, is in tune with nature, be it through poetry or photography. "I am fascinated by nature and I find newer narratives with greater depths in every intimate encounter with nature. I am someone who writes about those experiences, demystifies those riddles for my readers," he said.

His time amidst nature led him to publish three books of English poetry namely *Moving On*, *Ink Dries* and *Stray Birds*. His photographs of birds have been exhibited at several places in the city including the Goethe Zentrum and Thalam and the Indian Photo Festival (IPF) 2005.

In an interview with *The Pioneer*, Anand talks about his tryst with poetry in his life. "I never doubted the fact that I wanted to be a poet. Whenever I met published poets and authors at events, I would show them what I had written and ask for an honest review. They would read my work and encourage me to continue writing."

On being asked about pursuing writing as a career, Anand said, "I don't think writing is a viable mainstream career option in India. Content writing is my main source of revenue. It may take a person an entire lifetime to be an established poet whose books sell well. If you list out 10 famous poets you'd see that eight of them would have passed away even before their work saw the light of day. Art is indeed something that outlives the artist. But more realistically, writing professionally can be considered an option if you are good at writing fast, coming up with several books a year."

"I think it's important to have a career aside from your passion because following a passion is easier as long as there is a source to fuel the passion. That is my advice to those who want to pursue their passion. Thanks to networking over social media nowadays, the support artists get is growing," he added.

Apart from being a professional copywriter in the corporate sector, Anand has also founded Chitrak Eco Ventures where he works as the chief sustainability officer. It is a wilderness camp in the Jawai Bandh region of Rajasthan which is famed for leopards, raptors and other wildlife.

Upon being asked about how his disability has affected his work, he says, "I do face a certain amount of discrimination because of my disability. I get my books self-published but many publishers are not willing to commit to publishing. So I have to market my books and being hearing impaired is an impediment. Speech and hearing are intricately linked. Inability to hear properly affects the ability to speak."

However, he said that being a poet helped him retain his voice thanks to his yearning to voice out his thought or opinion.

"Writing is a very lonely activity. I believe it is important to have one's family as a support system in order to sustain life as a writer," he concluded.



Anand Vishwanadha



## Mirroring the past in style

Actor Priyanka Chopra's white Ralph and Russo gown at the 2020 Grammy Awards red carpet was stunning for many reasons, the main one being its plunging neckline. Comparisons were inevitably made between her dress and the now-iconic green Versace dress worn by singer Jennifer Lopez exactly 20 years ago. Expected for the similar plunging neckline that JLo's dress had there are no other similarities: JLo's dress was made of sheer

tropical print fabric and Priyanka's pure white outfit was embellished with tassels and diamante. But the inevitable comparisons were made and it only looked like an attempt to top something that has been seared into fashion-pop culture the way it has. This emulation of Jennifer Lopez, deliberate or otherwise, did not escape Twitter, where others poked fun while others extended support. Priyanka Chopra was her husband Nick Jonas' plus one at the Grammys. Jonas Brothers were nominated for the Best Pop Duo/Group Performance

for their song *Sucker*, losing to Lil Nas X and Billy Ray Cyrus' *Old Town Road*. While they didn't take an award home, a good time was had by the Jonas Brothers and the 'J-Sisters' as Priyanka, Sophie Turner and Danielle Jonas (married to Joe and Kevin respectively). "So proud of this fam (sic)," Priyanka captioned a Jonas-special post that had Jonas brother and their wives. The Grammys were held on Sunday evening. It was a big night for Billie Eilish, who won Record, Album and Song of the Year. — PNS

## Michelle Obama wins a Grammy

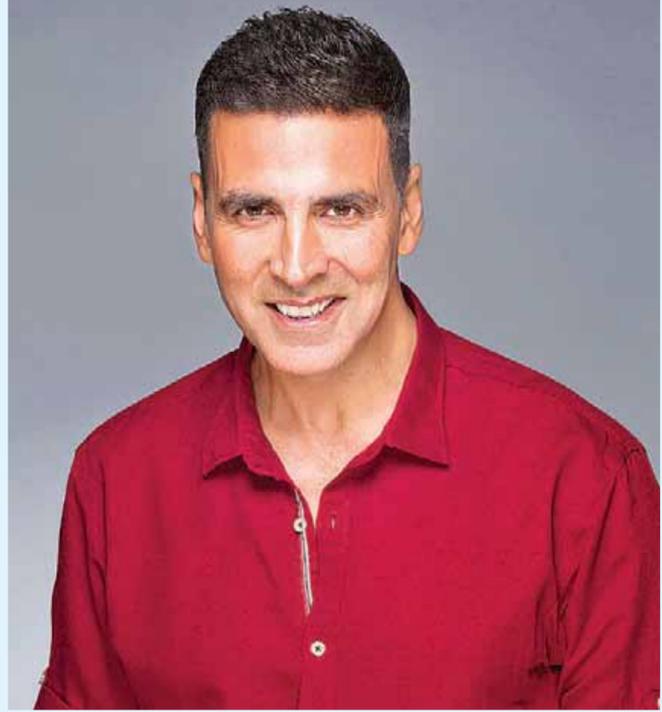


**F**ormer US first lady Michelle Obama won a Grammy for the best spoken word album for *Becoming*, her best-selling memoir, during the awards ceremony's pre-show.

*Becoming* was read by Obama in the audiobook. She was nominated alongside artists including Michael Diamond and Adam Horowitz, reports *Hollywood Reporter*.

It was Obama's first Grammy win. She was previously nominated for *American Grown: The Story of the White House Kitchen Garden and Gardens Across America* in 2013.

Obama has joined a list of political winners in the Grammy category including Hillary Clinton, a fellow former first lady, as well as three US Presidents — Jimmy Carter (who won the award three times), Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, along with spoken recordings of John F Kennedy and Franklin D Roosevelt.



## Akshay Kumar postpones Bachchan Pandey release for Lal Singh Chaddha

**S**uperstar Aamir Khan's *Lal Singh Chaddha* has secured a solo release this Christmas, and



all credit goes to none other than Akshay Kumar.

Earlier, Aamir's official Hindi adaptation of Hollywood film *Forrest Gump* was scheduled to hit the big screen along with Akshay's *Bachchan Pandey* on December 25, but now producer Sajid Nadiadwala and Akshay have moved the release date of their movie on Aamir's request.

"Sometimes all it takes is one conversation. Thank you to my friends @akshaykumar & Sajid Nadiadwala for their warm gesture of moving the release date of their film *Bachchan Pandey* at my request. I wish them the very best for their

film. Looking forward to it, (sic)" Aamir tweeted on Monday.

Responding to Aamir's post, Akshay wrote: "Anytime Aamir, we're all friends here."

Not only this, Akshay, while announcing the new release date of *Bachchan Pandey*, shared his new

look from the movie too.

In the new poster, Akshay is seen wearing a chunk of gold chains.

Farhad Samji directorial *Bachchan Pandey* will now release on January 22, 2021.

In the movie, Akshay will be seen starring along with Kriti Sanon.

## Ayushmann locks lips with Jitendra Kumar in Gabru song



**A**yushmann Khurrana's lip-lock with co-star Jitendra Kumar is the highlight moment of *Gabru*, the first-launched track of the upcoming comedy *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*.

The film's song, released on Monday, is a recreated version of the Yo Yo Honey Singh hit of the same name. Ayushmann and Jitendra play on-screen lovers in the film, which aims at being a quirky comedy centred on homosexuality and the societal taboos around it.

Overall, the video makes for a fun watch, with Ayushmann breaking into the Nagin Dance at one point, with co-star Gajraj Rao.

The recreated *Gabru* credits Tanishk Bagchi as composer. The number has been sung by Romy. A Twitter user wrote: "Officially

one of my favourites -- @ayushmannk... Love his candor and guts. (sic)"

Another commented: "The way Ayushmann is expressing his love... omg... so brave!"

The film's director Hitesh Kewalya said, "The song is a peppy dance number, which is full of energy and fun. More so, it's been made as a family dance number, which will connect with more people. It's hilarious, foot-tapping and at the same time important to the story. Everyone had so much fun while shooting for the song and it reflects in the song's energy. The track was already famous, but with our film, *Gabru* will also be remembered for its entertainment quotient."

*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* also stars Neena Gupta and Maanvi Gargoo. The film is slated to release on February 21.

### FUN

#### ARCHIE



#### CALVIN AND HOBBS



#### GARFIELD



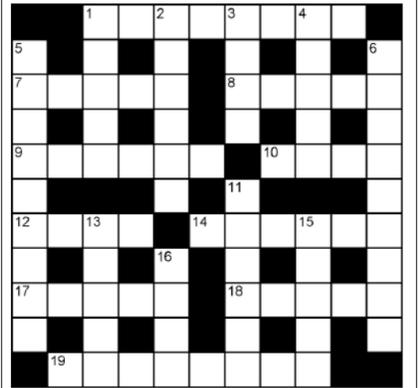
#### REALITY CHECK



#### SPEED BUMP



#### CROSSWORD



#### NANCY



#### SUDOKU

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

**Yesterday's solution**

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

**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**

- Speaks very quietly
- A builder follows these when building a house
- The backbone
- Athens is the capital city of this country
- Fewer
- You see with these
- The large country just north of the USA
- Weary
- Near
- Young people
- Lift up
- Food that looks like lots of worms
- A daily publication
- A small dish under a cup
- Garden soil
- A nut from an oak tree
- A worshipped statue

**DOWN**

- A huge sea mammal
- A six-legged creature
- Shove

**SOLUTION**

A	Q	A	R	I	U	M	E
M	S	T	E	W			
B	L	A	C	E	A	S	E
U	A	H	S	I			
L	I	L	A	C	Q	U	E
A	N	E	R	O			
N	I	E	C	E	D	S	K
C	I	A	W	A			
E	N	I	D	R			
N	T	E	A	C	H	E	R

#### GINGER MEGGS



# SREEKARAM JOINS THE SUMMER RACE



Directed by B. Kishore, a hit short film maker, the film will see Sharwanand essaying the role of a farmer, writes NAGARAJ GOUD

**T**he first look of Sharwanand-starrer *Sreekaram* was unveiled by the film's makers on Monday. Dressed in casuals, the actor, who is essaying the role of a farmer for the first time, is seen taking a stroll through paddy fields. Directed by B. Kishore, *Sreekaram* is being considered for a release in April by Achanta brothers. The director had earlier made hit short films like *Idedho Bagundhe* and *Shatamanam Bhavathi*. News is that films like *Red* (starring Ram), *Love Story* (Naga Chaitanya and Sai Pallavi), *Solo Brathuke So Better* (Sai Tej) and *Uppena* (Vaishnav Tej) are likely to release in the same month as well. Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Kishore said that *Sreekaram* is almost 70 to 80 per cent through with its shooting. "Major sequences have already been shot till now.

We are planning another Tirupati outing for 15 days from February 10, with which all talkie portions will be wrapped up, leaving us with a couple of songs to shoot. The film has rich scope for background score and composer Mickey J. Meyer asked me to give close to 40 days for it," he said. Besides Sharwa who has always been a safe bet, Kishore is happy that Rao Ramesh took the film to another level. Initially, another senior actor was in talks for the part but later the makers had a change of heart and felt that the role should be played by Rao Ramesh. "The producers and I've shared the same feeling but neither of us was willing to come forward and propose Rao Ramesh garu's name. Later I mustered the courage and said that I'm looking at Rao Ramesh to play Sharwa's father Keshavula. The producers happily obliged. When Sharwa anna was mentioned about it, he too expressed his consent by stating, 'I haven't worked with him after *Gamyam*, let

him get on board! Their scenes will be a major asset to the film." Although Sharwa will be seen as a farmer, Kishore is quick to clarify that the film will not address pressing issues of farmers. "In fact, the farmland episodes will be nothing short of hilarious, as Naresh garu and Satya will bring the roof down with their antics," Kishore said, with a smile. Clearly in awe of Sharwanand who he equates to gold, Kishore added, "He is a proven actor and I need not add anything to him. What his role required him was to strike a fine balance between being extremely active and underplaying the emotions. He aceed it. His dialogue modulation will be different from what he has done in the past. I've had a great time till now working with him. We shot at a farmland in Tirupati where lord Venkateswara Swamy insignia would be overlooking us. So happy with the scenery around that every day after pack-up, he would stay at the spot and happily discuss next day sequences with us till late into the evening."

Major sequences have already been shot. We are planning another Tirupati outing for 15 days, with which all talkie portions will be wrapped up. The film has rich scope for background score and composer Mickey J. Meyer asked me to give 40 days for it



B. KISHORE DIRECTOR



## Srikanth's dual avatar

**A**ctor Srikanth, whose solo career has been on a downward spiral in the last decade or so, has agreed to headline a new film, *Maranamrudangam*, *muhurat* of which was held in Hyderabad on Monday. Successful director Anil Ravipudi sounded the clapperboard for the first shot, as veteran director Kodandarami Reddy switched on the camera and later directed the honorary first shot. To be directed by Venkatesh Redba and produced by Madhu Redba and Vabbilishetty Chiranjeevi, the film is a revenge-drama set in mafia backdrop. Speaking after the launch, Srikanth said the title is apt for the story. "I like the title a lot. I've watched Chiranjeevi garu's *Maranamrudangam* multiple times. Our film has no relation to the old film. I liked the story and I've signed it after listening to multiple narrations. I will be seen in dual roles. The pre-production has been meticulous and we will wrap up the film on time," he said. Expressing his happiness on directing Srikanth, director Venkatesh said he has grown up watching the actor's films and he never expected to direct him this early in his career. He added the film, written by Thulasi Das, will go to sets mostly after February 15. Anand, who has composed music for Charmme Kaur last decade, is on board to render tunes. — NG

## A whistling Gopi



**A**ctor Gopichand's next with Sampath Nandi has got a title. Film's producer Srinivasaa Chitturi on Monday announced it as *Seetimaarr*. A sports-based drama, the film will see the macho actor as the coach of the AP female Kabaddi team and so the title. His leading lady in the film, Tamannaah, has donned the coach hat for Telangana female Kabaddi team. Speaking about the film's progress, the producer said, after wrapping up schedules in Hyderabad and Rajamahendravaram until now, the new outing kicked off at Ramoji Film City on Monday. "We will shoot it non-stop from here on and will ensure that the film is readied for a summer release," the producer said, adding, budget-wise, the film will be Gopi's biggest till date. Digangana Suryavanshi, who made her Telugu debut with *Hippi* last year, is playing a supporting role in the film, while Tarun Arora will be seen as the antagonist. The likes of Bhoomika, Rao Ramesh, Posani Murali, Pragathi and Annapuramma are essaying supporting roles, said sources. It's a Mani Sharma musical.

## FIRST LOOK

**H**ere is the first look of actor Sudheer Babu from Indraganati Mohana Krishna's much anticipated *V*, which is headlined by Nani. The actor plays an IPS officer in the action-thriller, which is scheduled to release on March 25. A joint production between Dil Raju, Sirish and Harshith, the film is a cat and mouse game between Nani and Sudheer. Nivetha Thomas and Aditi Rao Hydari are the leading ladies.



## ALI GOES HOLLYWOOD

**J**agadeesh Daneti, who made the damp squib *Tippu* sometime back, is going Hollywood. He has roped in Telugu actor Ali for his possible Hollywood projects and together they've recently met, Prakash Javdekar, Information and Broadcasting Minister in New Delhi, to discuss films and seek permissions for shooting at some critical locations in India. The minister appreciated Jagadeesh's efforts towards Indo-American film collaborations. Congratulating Ali, he assured that he will forward the matter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Jagadeesh mentioned that Hollywood elite are scheduled to visit India next month or in March and will announce the projects. Furthermore, he said Ali's experience and expertise will drive certain subjects through execution and he is privileged to be launching him in Hollywood. With Ali on board, it seems many star heroes, actors and technicians are passing their names to enter the west through the director. Johnny Martin of Martini Films, Pink Jaguars Entertainment and other reputed Hollywood Production houses from USA will be partnering Jagadeesh for the projects.

## There's no comedy in Aswathama: MEHREEN

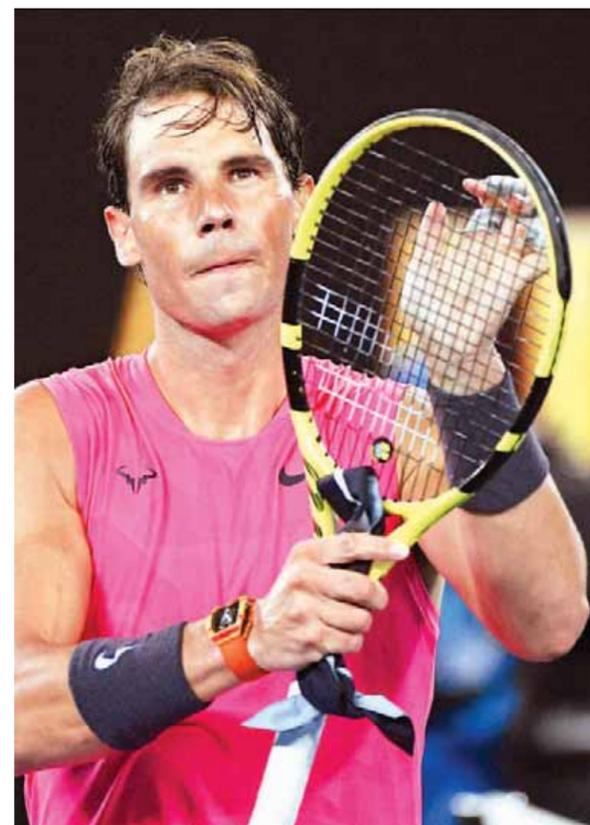
**T**he month has been a mixed bag for Mehreen Pirzada. While her Tamil film, *Pattas* with Dhanush has set the box-office on fire, her other release, *Entha Manchi Vaadavuraa* (EMV), with Kalyanram fizzled out in no time after its first day release. "Yes, it was disappointing that EMV didn't do well but everybody who worked on it gave their 200 per cent. I'm happy and satisfied with both the films," she says. The actress is now looking forward to the release of *Aswathama*, in which she is cast opposite Naga Shaurya. More than her role, it was the film's

theme on women safety that led her to sign it. "There are certain films that you feel the need to be a part of and this is one such film. There's no humour in the film. I play a role which helps Shaurya to achieve his mission. The only lighter moment in the film is my introduction with him. It's an emotional action-thriller told in a gripping way," she adds. It is for the first time the actress has paired opposite Shaurya and talking about her experience with him, she says, "He would be the first one to arrive on sets. Off screen he is shy and reserved but once the camera rolls, he is a different person altogether," she informs. — NG



# Nadal settles Kyrgios score

World No 1 beats home favourite in four-set classic to step closer for 20th Slam



Rafael Nadal celebrates after defeating Nick Kyrgios in their fourth round singles match AP

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Rafael Nadal won a grudge match with Nick Kyrgios to reach the Australian Open quarter-finals and keep the heat on Roger Federer's record for Grand Slam titles on Monday.

The world number one, labelled "super salty" by Kyrgios after he criticised the Australian's behaviour last year, fought off a furious challenge to go through 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/4).

As the tennis world mourned the death of Kobe Bryant, Kyrgios arrived at Rod Laver Arena wearing an LA Lakers shirt, and 15-year-old Coco Gauff had tributes to the basketball great scrawled on her trainers during the doubles.

Nadal and Kyrgios had been feuding after some bad-tempered matches but the Spaniard said he was impressed by what he'd seen from the often-temperamental Australian at this tournament.

Kyrgios fought back to challenge Nadal in a high-octane clash played in good spirit, with a polite handshake afterwards — a far cry from some of their previous exchanges.

"When he is playing like today with this positive



Simona Halep serves to Elise Mertens during their fourth round singles match AP

Australian Open  
Live from 5:30am IST  
SONY SIX & TEN 2 NETWORK

Elsewhere, powerful Swiss Stan Wawrinka beat fifth seed Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 2-6, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 to set up a quarter-final with Germany's Alexander Zverev, who overcame close friend Andrey Rublev 6-4, 6-4, 6-4.

And Simona Halep rose to number two in the world with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over Elise Mertens, taking a big step forward in a rapidly clearing women's draw.

The Wimbledon champion from Romania, who avoided an exodus of top

seeds in the previous round, will next play Estonia's Anett Kontaveit, a 6-7 (4/7), 7-5, 7-5 winner against Iga Swiatek of Poland.

"She's strong. I'm here just to face any challenge I have. So I'm not thinking negative," Halep said of Kontaveit. "I just want to go there and to give my best."

Angelique Kerber, the 2016 champion, was the latest big name to fall as she went down to Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-2.

Pavlyuchenkova's quarter-final will be against Garbine Muguruza, the two-time Grand Slam

champion who is resurgent since reuniting with coach Conchita Martinez, beating Kiki Bertens 6-3, 6-3.

"It's like couples, we all want Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston to get back together, right?" joked Martinez, the 1994 Wimbledon champion.

Earlier, Martina Navratilova and John McEnroe were among the big names to criticise Court, the 24-time Major-winner whose 1970 sweep of the Grand Slam titles was marked with a short ceremony at Rod Laver Arena.

Navratilova said the devout Christian's deeply conservative views were "actually hurting people," while fellow American legend McEnroe called Court a "crazy aunt".

In today's quarter-finals, six-time champion Roger Federer will play America's Tennyson Sandgren and title-holder Novak Djokovic, going for his eighth title, is against big-serving Canadian Milos Raonic.

Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty plays two-time Wimbledon winner Petra Kvitova, and Tunisia's Ons Jabeur, the top-ranked player from Africa, takes on America's Sofia Kenin.

India beat New Zealand by seven wickets in the second T20 International in Auckland on Sunday to grab a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

Bumrah returned with figures of 1-21 from his four overs as Indian skipper Virat Kohli changed his bowling plans from the first game.

"Even in the first game, Bumrah bowled slower balls that were going wider. Normally, death bowlers get into straighter lines, plus yorkers and mix it with chest height. He kind of changes things a lot and is tougher to play," Seifert said.

"...The ball was holding a lot more which made it tougher. So sometimes as a batsman you have to move away from the stumps and see if they bowl straight. I was backing myself to do something different instead of just standing there at the wicket," said the stumper, who remained unbeaten on 33 off 26 balls.

"It was tricky and the ball was holding a little bit. When Kane (Williamson) got out in the over against Yuzvendra Chahal, we knew it was the over to push because they had Bumrah coming back," he added.

He said New Zealand batsmen need to take a cue from their Indian counterparts on how to adapt to different conditions quickly.

## Tough to hit Bumrah: Tom

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

In awe of Jasprit Bumrah, New Zealand wicketkeeper Tim Seifert says the Indian speedster's subtle variations have been difficult to pick in the ongoing T20 series and his side needs to learn a thing or two about adapting from the visitors.

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He said New Zealand batsmen need to take a cue from their Indian counterparts on how to adapt to different conditions quickly.

"...Indian batsmen showed how to get under the ball and time it. They showed it a couple of times that and on the slower wickets you just have to keep it like that. Once you lose your shape, you are not in position," he said.

"Try to get them (bowlers) off line or off balance, try to get into that position to hit good balls. That's T20 cricket as well. Sometimes it's going 100 per cent but some times you have to take a breath and re-assess. Indian batters did that well."

Seifert believes New Zealand bowlers did reasonably well in the two games but they have been outplayed by the Indian batsmen.

"To be honest, in the first game they were 110-1 and they had wickets in hand. We didn't bowl too badly in that first game. In the second game, we only got 130 and it is tough to bowl at Eden Park (with that total)," he said.

"170 was the target in mind but once you get 130 on the board, that was going to be very hard at Eden Park against a team that is very strong and playing really well. But our spinners were outstanding. Good balls have gone to boundary."

He said coming into the T20 series on the back of a lost Test rubber in Australia also didn't help New Zealand's cause in the first two games.

"Boys are coming off a Test series (in Australia) and a lot of them haven't played T20 cricket for a while," he said.

"But for some like me, I have had the Super Smash for the last two months, so I have played a lot of T20 cricket. They have two games under their belt now so hopefully they will have a better understanding."

Asked if New Zealand would want to play on India's strength of chasing, Seifert replied, "Even in ODI cricket, India have chased down big totals but I think on that wicket it was going to get slower and slower."

## PSG go 10 points clear

AFP ■ LILLE

Neymar dedicated his second goal in Paris Saint-Germain's 2-0 win at Lille to basketball legend Kobe Bryant, whose death in a helicopter crash earlier on Sunday shocked the world, as his double shot the French champions 10 points clear at the top of Ligue 1.

The world's most expensive player slotted home the 52nd-minute penalty and went over to television cameras by the side of the Stade Pierre Mauroy pitch to make the number 24 with his fingers in honour of Bryant's shirt number.

"It's deeply saddening for the world of sport and



Neymar celebrates after scoring AP

for all of us," said Neymar to Canal+ after the win, which put PSG 10 points clear at the top of the league.

"Not just for basketball fans, but for everything he did for sport."

He had already put his side ahead with a fine strike in the first half before putting the game out of reach and increasing the gap between them and second-placed Marseille.

His 12th league goal of the season tipped the balance in the Parisians' favour after a positive start for the home side, who were unbeaten at home ahead of the match.

"We deserved to win, I think we played well," said PSG coach Thomas Tuchel.

"We controlled the match and counter-attacks and this is not easy to do against a good team like Lille."

Lille stay seventh after the defeat, two points away from the European places.

## Struggling Napoli beat leaders Juve to spoil Sarri San Paolo return

AFP ■ NAPLES

Piotr Zielinski and Lorenzo Insigne scored in the second half as struggling Napoli shocked champions Juventus 2-1 to spoil coach Maurizio Sarri's return to the Stadio San Paolo on Sunday.

Sarri had not been back to Naples since being sacked in May 2018 after three successful campaigns, and before moving to Chelsea.

This season he has taken over eight-time reigning champions Juve, a move seen as a betrayal by his former team, the two-time Serie A runners-up.

Juve missed the chance to open up a six-point lead on Inter Milan at the top of the table, after Antonio Conte's side were held for

## Past haunts the present



Lorenzo Insigne, center, celebrates with teammates after Napoli beat Juventus AP

their third consecutive draw.

Inter are three points behind Juve with Lazio a further two points adrift in third after city rivals Roma ended Simone Inzaghi's side's 11-match winning streak.

"It is pleasant and exciting to go back," said Sarri despite the

whistles and insulting banners of his former fans, reserving his criticism for his "under-par, mentally bland" team.

"We lost a match against an opponent who had done the minimum to win," he added. "We were passive throughout

the game, always halfway between pressure and waiting, we made mistakes."

In Naples, Zielinski broke the deadlock after 63 minutes finishing off a rebound after Insigne was denied by Juve goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny.

Insigne volleyed in a second after 86 minutes to an explosion of joy among the crowd.

Cristiano Ronaldo pulled a goal back as the game headed into injury time for his 13th goal in nine consecutive games in all competitions.

The visitors pushed for the equaliser but Alex Meret smothered Gonzalo Higuain's goal-bound effort, as Juve crashed to just their second defeat of the season.

Napoli move up to tenth place, 12 points off the Champions League places after ending a run of three consecutive defeats.

## Warriors look to bounce back against Rockets



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Awadhe Warriors will look to capitalise on home advantage and bounce back to form when they take on the Mumbai Rockets on the final day of their home leg at the Premier Badminton League here today.

With both coming off a loss in their last tie, it will be a stern test of nerves for the two teams.

The Awadhe Warriors suffered a 1-2 loss at the hands of Hyderabad Hunters while the Rockets went down 2-5 to the Pune 7 Aces in their previous outings.

Having begun their campaign on a high with a gritty 4-3 victory over the North Eastern Warriors, the Awadhe Warriors were aiming to continue their winning streak but the Hunters proved to be too strong.

Despite the outcome not going their way, they had a few positives coming out of the match.

Ko Sung Hyun and Shin Baek Cheol's partnership is growing stronger day by day. The pair, who won three BWF titles last year, has taken their confidence into the league and remains unbeaten so far.

Former world No 10 Wong Wing Ki Vincent gave an effortless display in front of the roaring home fans while Subhankar Dey's stamina and tenacity impressed one and all.

The Warriors also have world No 14 Beiwenzhang in their ranks.

"Our last match did not go our way but that hasn't dampened our spirit. The crowd support here has been fantastic. We are looking forward to finishing our home leg with a win," said Zhang.

Meanwhile, Mumbai Rockets will be gunning for their first victory of the season after a disappointing start for the former runners-up that saw them lose to the high-flying Chennai Superstarz and the Pune 7 Aces.

## All senior players, Klopp to miss FA Cup replay

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp confirmed he will not take charge of the Reds' FA Cup replay against Shrewsbury, nor will any senior players from the European champions take part.

Klopp made 11 changes as the League One side, 59 places below Liverpool in the English football pyramid, came from 2-0 down to secure a replay at Anfield on Sunday.

However, the German did still include a handful of experienced players such as Adrian, Joel Matip,



Dejan Lovren, Fabinho and Divock Origi.

Even they are set to miss the replay as it falls a few days into Liverpool's two-week winter break from Premier League action.

Klopp said he has already promised that week off to first-team players and that under-23s coach Neil Critchley will take charge of team.

Liverpool went out of the League Cup in December when a team fielding five debutants and an average age of 19 was beaten 5-0 by Aston Villa.

Critchley was also in charge for that game with Klopp and the first team away in Qatar for the Club World Cup.

AFP



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AFP

## Third Pak-B'desh T20 rained off

PTI ■ LAHORE

The third Twenty20 international between Pakistan and Bangladesh was abandoned without a ball being bowled Monday because of bad weather in Lahore, giving the home side a 2-0 series victory.

Murky conditions and drizzle delayed the scheduled 13:00 pm (0830 GMT) toss at the Gaddafi stadium pitch, but play was called off three hours later. Pakistan won the first match by

five wickets on Friday and the second by nine wickets the next day.

The series win helped Pakistan hang on to their number one ranking in Twenty20 internationals with 270 points, leading Australia by just one point.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam said the series win will help the team's confidence.

"Our bowling was outstanding in both the games... helped us keep them down to low totals," said Babar who lost 2-0 in Australia last year in his first series as skipper.

## Real go top with win

AFP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid moved top of La Liga for the first time since October on Sunday after grinding out a 1-0 win away at Real Valladolid to make Barcelona pay for their surprise defeat to Valencia.

It is 16 weeks since Madrid last finished a round top of the pile and it looked like a scrappy contest at the Jose Zorrilla would end goalless until Nacho Hernandez headed in the winner with 12 minutes remaining.

Victory means Zinedine Zidane's side pull three points ahead of Barca, whose 2-0 loss away at the Mestalla on



Nacho embraces Real's coach Zinedine Zidane after scoring AP

Saturday under new coach Quique Setien could prove a turning point in a nip-and-tuck title race.

"Nothing changes, we are happy with the win,"

said Zidane. "There are 16 games left and we will have to fight until the end if we want something. Nothing changes."

Madrid now have the luxury of hosting their struggling city rivals Atletico Madrid, who are 10 points back after a goalless home draw with Leganes, with a cushion next weekend, not to mention on the back of a 19-game unbeaten run.

"We are top of the table again after being there a long time ago," said captain Sergio Ramos. "We have to keep going."

"Defensively what we are doing we are doing very well, it is our strength," said Zidane.

## Indian women's lose 1-2 to NZ



PTI ■ AUCKLAND

The Indian women's hockey team lost 1-2 to New Zealand in its second match of the ongoing tour here on Monday.

The Indians had earlier defeated New Zealand Development squad 4-0 in the opening match of the tour.

New Zealand started the game on an attacking note and earned a penalty corner early in the first quarter and the chance was brilliantly converted by Megan Hull in the third minute of the match.

India drew parity when young Salima Tete converted a penalty corner in the dying minutes of the first quarter.

The visitors matched New Zealand in the second and third quarters but a defensive error in the final 15 minutes cost India dearly as they concede a penalty stroke, and Megan

Hull made no mistake from the spot.

India's chief coach Sjoerd Marijne was disappointed with the result. "We created enough scoring opportunities but we were not productive enough. New Zealand were very successful in the little changes they got. They executed them well," he said.

"It is not about how many opportunities you create but how effective you are. New Zealand were stronger today and in the beginning we were struggling with that. But after the first quarter, we played much better."

"We created eight shots on goal and four penalty corners. We are definitely working on being more effective in the coming matches," he added.

India will again take on New Zealand in the third match of the tour on Wednesday.