

ANALYSIS 7
CAST THE FOOD
SECURITY NET WIDE

MONEY 8
INDIAN EQUITIES PLUNGE 20
PC IN LESS THAN 45 DAYS

SPORTS 11
ENGLISH FOOTBALL
SHUT DOWN

VIJAYAWADA, SATURDAY MARCH 14, 2020; PAGES 12 & 3



the pioneer



CHARAN, MANOJ
TO STAR IN BILLA
RANGA REMAKE?

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INDIAN-LED TEAM DEVELOPS CAM THAT DOESN'T NEED FOCUSING

WASHINGTON: A team led by an Indian-origin scientist has developed a camera that does not require focusing, by using a single lens about one-thousandth of an inch thick. The advance could enable thinner smartphone cameras, improved and smaller cameras for biomedical imaging such as endoscopy, and more compact cameras for automobiles, the researchers said. The technology, described in the journal Optica, offers considerable benefits over traditional cameras such as the ones in most smartphones, which require multiple lenses to form high-quality, in-focus images.



AUSTRALIAN HOME AFFAIRS MINISTER SAYS HE HAS COVID-19

A senior Australian politician tested positive for the new coronavirus and entered hospital quarantine on Friday, days after returning from a meeting in Washington attended by US Attorney General William Barr. "This morning I woke up with a temperature and sore throat," said Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton, an influential member of the government and a key architect of Australia's controversial immigration laws. "It is the policy of Queensland Health that anyone who tests positive is to be admitted into hospital and I have complied with their advice."



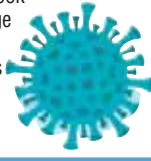
CABINET CLEARS 4% DA HIKE FOR CENTRAL GOVT EMPLOYEES

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved 4 per cent hike in dearness allowance (DA) to 21 per cent for central government employees, costing the exchequer an additional Rs 14,595 crore. Briefing the media I&B Minister Prakash Javadekar said the Cabinet had approved 4 per cent hike in DA to 21 pc for 48 lakh govt employees, 65 lakh pensioners. He further said the government will incur Rs 14,595 crore additional expense on account of this hike.



CHINESE OFFICIAL: US ARMY MAY HAVE BROUGHT VIRUS TO WUHAN

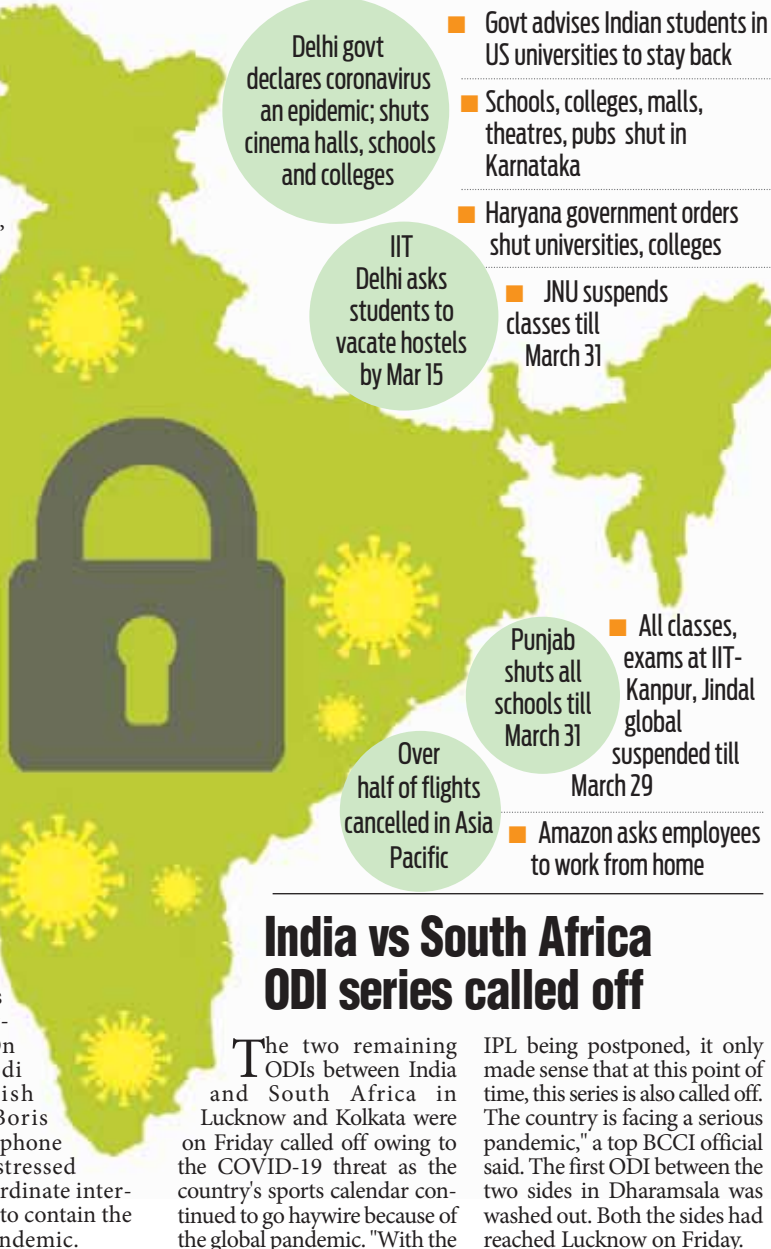
A Chinese government campaign to cast doubt on the origin of the coronavirus pandemic is fuelling a row with the United States, with a Beijing official promoting conspiracy theories and Washington calling it the "Wuhan virus". The spat comes as China tries to deflect blame for the contagion and reframe itself as a country that took decisive steps to buy the world time by placing huge swaths of its population under quarantine. With cases falling in China and soaring abroad, Beijing is now rejecting the widely held assessment that the city of Wuhan is the birthplace of the outbreak.



INDIA SHUTTING DOWN

COUNTRY'S 2ND COVID-19 DEATH CONFIRMED; 68-YR-OLD WOMAN SUCCUMBS TO ILLNESS IN DELHI

With the number of COVID-19 cases in the country rising to 81 and the second death due to the virus reported from Delhi on Friday, at least a dozen states have declared lockdowns, partial or full, raising the spectre of almost a nationwide shutdown in due course. Premier IITs have asked students to vacate hostels by March 15. Educational institutions have been ordered shut in many states including Delhi, Odisha, Punjab, Haryana, J-K, Karnataka and Kerala. In Maharashtra, all malls, gyms, cinema halls and swimming pools located in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, Navi Mumbai and Pimpri-Chinchwad have been shuttered from midnight on Friday. In Karnataka too, all malls, theatres and pubs will remain shut for a week starting Saturday. The Delhi government has decided to stop all sporting events, including IPL, conferences and seminars in the national capital. A total shutdown has been ordered in Kerala, where educational institutions and cinema halls will remain closed till March 31. The idea is to prevent mass gatherings as community transmission of the virus is now the main concern of health authorities.



Coronavirus cases rise to 81 in India: Officials

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The number of novel coronavirus cases on Friday rose to 81, which include 16 Italians and one Canadian, Health Ministry officials said.

Addressing reporters, Health Ministry Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said coronavirus is not a health emergency and that there is no need to panic.

He said seven more coronavirus patients have been cured and they will be discharged soon, while 71 are "clinically stable".

He said so far, India has evacuated 1,031 people, including from Maldives, US, Madagascar and China.

"An exercise will be undertaken on Saturday to bring back Indian passengers stranded in Iran. Air India will also send a flight to Milan on Saturday to bring back stranded Indians. It will land on Sunday morning at Delhi airport," said Ministry of Civil Aviation Joint Secretary Rubina Ali.

A total of 4,000 people who came in contact with 81 positive cases are under vigorous observation across the country, Agarwal said.

Meanwhile, 124 evacuees from Japan, 112 evacuees from China are being discharged from Friday onwards after testing negative for COVID-19, Agarwal said.

The Centre also decided to

Toll crosses 5,000 mark

Total number of deaths due to coronavirus across the world crossed 5,000 mark on Friday. According to worldometers.info, total number of deaths across the globe were recorded to be 5,082 out of 138,275 total cases. Of the total, 3,177 deaths have been recorded in China while 1,016 in Italy. India also reported first death due to coronavirus on March 12. The COVID-19 is affecting 132 countries and territories around the world.

allow international traffic only through 19 border checkpoints out of 37 and decided to continue suspension of Indo-Bangladesh cross border passenger trains and buses till April 15, or earlier, if so decided.

With the World Health Organisation declaring coronavirus a pandemic, Agarwal said 42,000 people across the country are under community surveillance.

The coronavirus outbreak has led to more than 4,000 deaths globally.

The government on Wednesday suspended all visas, barring a few categories like diplomatic and employment, in an attempt to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Modi proposes SAARC strategy to combat COVID-19

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the novel coronavirus pandemic crisis across the globe, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday urged the SAARC nations to chalk out strategy to fight it and set an example to the world.

In a series of tweets, Modi said, "Our planet is battling COVID-19. At various levels, governments and people are trying their best to combat it. South Asia, which is home to

a significant number of the global population, should leave no stone unturned to ensure our people are healthy.

"I would like to propose that the leadership of the SAARC nations chalk out a strong strategy to fight coronavirus. We could discuss, via video conferencing, ways to keep our citizens healthy. Together, we can set an example to the world and contribute to a healthier planet," he said. His remarks came amid

the COVID-19 outbreak, which has hit the health as well as the markets globally. On Thursday, Modi and his British counterpart Boris Johnson in a phone conversation stressed the need to coordinate international efforts to contain the coronavirus pandemic.



President Donald Trump and Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar joke about not shaking hands during a meeting in the Oval Office of the White House, Thursday

NAMASTE IS THE WAY WORLD NOW GREETES

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

"Namaste", the Indian way of greeting people is gaining wide acceptability in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

Be it US President Donald Trump or the French President

Emmanuel Macron or British Royalty Prince Charles, Indian ways of greeting are now being preferred. Even Bollywood star Salman Khan said let it be either 'namaste' or 'salaam' till corona is cured worldwide.

AP to implement Epidemic Diseases Act to contain spread of coronavirus

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday decided to implement the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, as a precautionary measure to curb the possible spread of the novel coronavirus.

The decision follows a directive from the Union Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba to all states to invoke the provisions of the Act.

State Special Chief Secretary (Health) KS Jawahar Reddy told reporters here that action would be taken as per Section 2 of the Act against those who did not follow the safety pre-



KS Jawahar Reddy

The state government has identified two quarantine facilities in Tirupati (500 capacity) and Visakhapatnam (200 capacity) and also two labs for testing Covid-19 cases.

Jawahar Reddy said.

"Also, precautions should be taken by all, particularly in crowded places like cinema halls and malls. If anyone is found violating the guidelines, we will initiate action as per the EDA," he said.

The state government has identified two quarantine facilities in Tirupati (500 capacity) and Visakhapatnam (200 capacity).

Two laboratories for testing Covid-19 cases have been established in Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences, Tirupati, and another in Vijayawada, he said.

CCTV footage reveals bid to frame TDP leader with liquor bottles

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a bizarre incident, some persons were caught placing liquor bottles in the house of TDP leader in Tenali municipal town in the wee hours on Friday. The incident was caught on CCTV footage and has gone viral on social media.

Soon after these persons, suspected to be activists of the ruling party dumped liquor bottles in the house of the TDP



leader, the police entered the scene and filed cases against him.

The police arrested the TDP leader on charges of illegally

storing liquor bottles, according to messages being shared on social media.

Following this, the TDP said that the new law introduced by the YSRCP government, ostensibly to send anybody using liquor to influence voters in local body elections to jail for three years, is being used to target its leaders.

Leader of the Opposition and TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu said that

the new law is being misused to block the nominations of TDP candidates.

He said that the "Tenali incident" clearly shows how the YSRCP, led by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, is hijacking the local body polls.

Naidu alleged that "Jagan's atrocities have reached a peak" and alleged that the Chief Minister is even creating fear psychosis in the state to frighten opposition candidates.

THREE HELD FOR ATTACK ON TDP LEADERS AT MACHERLA

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar on Friday informed that the three accused in the attack on the car of TDP leaders at Macharla have been arrested under Section 307, Section 153 and other relevant Sections of IPC.

Ramesh Kumar reiterated that all district collectors and Superintendents of Police have been given clear instructions to take necessary precautions

and maintain law and order during the elections.

The district collector submitted the report on the incident and the police launched an investigation.

"Based on the information collected, police filed cases under non-bailable Sections against the three accused," Ramesh Kumar said.

Meanwhile, the Macharla court on Friday sent the three accused to 15 days judicial custody.

Naidu trying to find excuse for sure defeat: YSRCP

PNS ■ SRIKAKULAM

Taking strong objection to a TDP delegation meeting Governor Vishwabashan Harichandan and "giving a wrong picture of the state of affairs", the YSRCP on Friday said that such moves by Opposition stem from the fear of defeat and its inability to pick candidates for the local body polls as people are drifting away.

Addressing separate press conferences on Friday, Dharmana Prasad Rao and Jogi Ramesh said that TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu has begun searching for an excuse for his forthcoming defeat and is trying to build a case by submitting representations while the reality is otherwise.

"The Jaganmohan Reddy government is being run in a transparent manner and we are trying to bring in the spirit of democracy in the polls by going for reforms and conducting elections in a free and fair manner without alcohol and money power."

"Giving representation to Governor and seeking the intervention of the Centre has no merit as what is happening in AP is being seen by everyone and the lies of TDP are fully exposed," they said.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Phalguna & Krishna Paksha
Panchangam:
Tithi: Shashthi: 04:24 am (Next Day)
Nakshatram: Vishakha: 12:20 pm
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 09:26 am - 10:56 am
Yamagandam: 01:54 pm - 03:23 pm
Varjyam: 04:10 pm - 05:42 pm
Gulika: 06:28 am - 07:57 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 01:24 am - 02:56 am
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:01 pm - 12:49 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny
Temp: 36/22
Humidity: 44%
Sunrise: 06:24
Sunset: 06:25
Current Weather Conditions Updated March 13, 2020 5:00 PM

CAPSULE



TTD EO presents silk clothes to Bhaktavatsala Perumal

TIRUPATI: As a traditional practice, TTD Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singhal, along with additional executive officer AV Dharma Reddy presented silk clothes on behalf of TTD to Bhaktavatsala Perumal of Tirunindravur in Tamil Nadu on Friday. Later, they offered prayers in this ancient and famous Vaishnavite temple. This temple is considered as one of the 108 Divyadesams dedicated to Lord Vishnu, who is worshipped here as Sri Bhaktavatsala Perumal and His consort Lakshmi is referred to as 'Ennai Petra Thayar'. The temple is believed to have been built by the Pallavas of the late 8th century AD, with later contributions from Medieval Cholas and Vijayanagar kings. Meanwhile, the annual Brahmotsavams are currently going on in the temple. Tirumala Pedda Jiyar Swami, Chinna Jiyar Swami, Seshadri Swami also participated in the religious fete, along with TTD Executive Officer.

517th death anniversary of Annamacharya at Tirumala

TIRUMALA: The TTD is organising the 517th death anniversary of Tallapaka Annamacharya in Tirumala, Tirupati and Tallapaka. As part of the event, Melotsavam will be held at Padala Mandapam at Alipiri. The event will be organised on March 21 at Narayanagiri gardens in Tirumala. Saptagiri Gosti Ganam will be conducted with Unjal Seva. Similarly from March 20-24, Bhakti and dharmic programmes are scheduled at the Mahanti Auditorium and Annamacharya Kalamandiram in Tirupati.

AP, TS govts should reject NPR: HRF

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Human Rights Forum demanded that Andhra Pradesh and Telangana governments pass resolutions in their Assemblies rejecting the National Population Register (NPR) exercise in its totality and not just limit themselves to reverting to the 2010 version of it.

In a release here on Friday, HRF Coordination Committee member VS Krishna said the NPR-NRC-CAA combine are inextricably linked legally. The parent law, the provisions of Citizenship (Amendment) Act-2003 under which NPR operates, explicitly envisions the creation of a National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC). Rule 3 of the Citizenship (Registration of citizens and issue of national identity cards) Rules- 2003 under which the NPR process has been notified, mentions NRIC in the title. Sub-rule 4 of Rule 3 invokes the NPR process, while Sub-rule 5 of Rule 3 clearly states that "The



local register of Indian citizens shall contain details of persons after due verification made from the population register. Therefore, the population register provides the base for preparing a register of Indian citizens and NRC is the legal outcome of the 2003 amendment to the provisions of the Citizenship Act- 1955. The NPR amounts to an initialisation of an NRC.

He said time and again Union Home Minister Amit Shah has made clear, both in Parliament and outside, that the people would do well to 'understand the chronology' of the NPR-NRC-CAA process. In Parliament on Thursday, Amit Shah was lying brazenly when he asserted that the NPR process will not render any person as 'D' or 'Doubtful' in respect of their

HRF Coordination Committee member VS Krishna demanded that the two Telugu States follow the example of Kerala, reject the NPR and pass resolutions in their Assemblies stating in unambiguous terms that they will not implement it in their States

citizenship. Sub-rule 4 of Rule 4 of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and issue of national identity cards) Rules, 2003, which invoked NRIC, clearly states: "During the verification process, particulars of such individuals, whose citizenship is doubtful, shall be entered by the local

registrar with appropriate remark in the population register for further enquiry and in case of doubtful citizenship, the individual or the family shall be informed in a specified proforma immediately after the verification is over."

Krishna said HRF believed that the NPR is a survey exercise that collects data for an NRC. In other words, data from the NPR will be used to identify 'doubtful' citizens and in turn create an NRC. An NRC, which is built on the NPR, will allow the executive to pick and choose whose citizenship it wishes to interrogate. It is evident that the danger that this poses will not be limited to the minorities alone but a whole class of disadvantaged people in the country.

He demanded that the two Telugu States follow the example of Kerala, reject the NPR and pass resolutions in their Assemblies stating in unambiguous terms that they will not implement it in their States.



Eastern Naval Command Chief Vice-Admiral Atul Kumar Jain enters 'Avantika', the administrative complex, after inaugurating it at Nausena Bagh in Visakhapatnam on Friday (inset) 'Avantika'

'Avantika' to enhance administrative support for Navy personnel

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As part of the Indian Navy's initiative to enhance administrative support, a renovated administrative complex was inaugurated at Nausena Bagh by Eastern Naval Command Chief Vice-Admiral Atul Kumar Jain.

The complex called 'Avantika', also has the Deployed Personnel Support Centre and other associated offices for providing administrative support to families of personnel serving onboard ships.

The renovated complex is a result of the Navy's Strategy for Administrative Reforms and Transformation document (START), which was released by the CNS in April 2019 and is aimed at streamlining all aspects of administrative support being provided to its personnel.

The document lays down the milestones and associated timelines for bringing about enhancements in medical support, priority assistance to families of personnel serving afloat, improved quality of services and station facilities, increase in transit accommodation and allied services.

A number of other projects and support initiatives are also being progressed. The endeavour of the ENC is to continue to focus on the men at sea and meet all the objectives and goals of the strategy for enhanced administrative support.

- Renovated administrative complex inaugurated at Nausena Bagh
- The renovated complex is a result of the Navy's Strategy for Administrative Reforms and Transformation document (START), which was released by the CNS in April 2019 and is aimed at streamlining all aspects of administrative support being provided to its personnel
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of the strategy for enhanced administrative support.

Post-inauguration of the complex, the C-in-C addressed Flag Officers, Commanding Officers, personnel and families from fleet ships and highlighted the purpose of the administrative strategy. The C-in-C emphasised the importance of all personnel providing assistance to the fleet ships to ensure timely support. He also urged all agencies concerned to put in concerted efforts in ensuring the timely achievement of established objectives and goals towards improving administrative support.

ADMISSION TIME

CBSE urges parents to check affiliation of schools

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Alerting parents against unregistered schools, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has asked them to check the affiliation status of a school before seeking admission to their children.

The National Board under the aegis of Ministry of Human Resource Development grants affiliation to schools on fulfilment of mandatory conditions as laid down in its bye-laws. In case of non-fulfilment of conditions, the application of schools stand rejected.

Such schools are not allowed to enrol their students for Board's examinations. It has come to the notice of the Board that some of the non-affiliated schools are misleading the parents by displaying various boards at schools.

Some of the schools show messages such as "to-be affiliated to CBSE", "CBSE Pattern", "Likely to be affiliated with CBSE" or "Running under the aegis of CBSE". The Board does not allow non-affiliated schools to present the candidates to the Board Examination.

"Indeed, the application of such schools is either under process or rejected by the Board. Some of them may not apply for affiliation at all," CBSE Secretary Anurag Tripathi said in a statement.

So, the parents, who wish to admit their children in CBSE-affiliated schools, are requested to check the affiliation status (including up to what class the affiliation is given by the board) of a school. They may go through CBSE affiliation website to find the list of affiliated schools.

'Follow guidelines for peaceful conduct of polls'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

District Collector Md Imtiaz released the guidelines, which should be followed by the presiding officers while discharging their duties, here on Friday. He said that the presiding officer has complete powers to control the operations in the polling centre.

The Collector said that it is the basic responsibility and the duty of the presiding officer to see that the polling is done impartially and with complete freedom. The presiding officer should have clear information about the guidelines prescribed by the Election Commissioner to conduct the election to carry out peaceful and impartial elections.

He said that the presiding officer will discharge his



Krishna District Collector Md Imtiaz

duties, as per the guidelines of the returning officer. The training will be imparted for one day prior to elections and training for polling officers will be held one day before the poll under the supervision of the returning officer.

Howrah-Yesvantpur Duranto to run with LHB rake

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

With a view to providing secure and comfortable journey to commuters, it has been decided by railways to run all three rakes of 12245/12246 Howrah-Yesvantpur-Howrah Duranto Express with modern LHB (Linke Hofmann Busch) coaches instead of existing conventional coaches from March 13.

With the introduction of LHB coaches, passengers would get improved amenities with more comfort during their journey. The revised composition of Howrah-Yesvantpur-Howrah Duranto Express is one First Class AC, one Second Class AC, five Third Class AC and 11 sleeper class coaches.

The features of new LHB coaches are: Fire extinguisher in all coaches, fire detection and suppression system in all AC coaches, modular wash basin outside and inside the toilet with



automatic bib cock, which will save water, air suspension system in coaches for riding comfort in place of coil spring.

Besides, the rakes will have modern equipment for application of automatic brake in case of failure in air suspension brake system and improvised bio-toilet with water pressure system. In addition to it, accommodation will increase substantially. There will be an increase of 72 berths in AC 3

Tier and 22 berths in sleeper class coaches.

The train No 20805/20806 Visakhapatnam-New Delhi Visakhapatnam AP Express will be augmented with one more sleeper coach to AP Express. The additional sleeper class coach will be available to 20805 Visakhapatnam-New Delhi AP Express from March 16 and to 20806 New Delhi-Visakhapatnam AP Express from March 18.

Coronavirus paralyzes life across globe

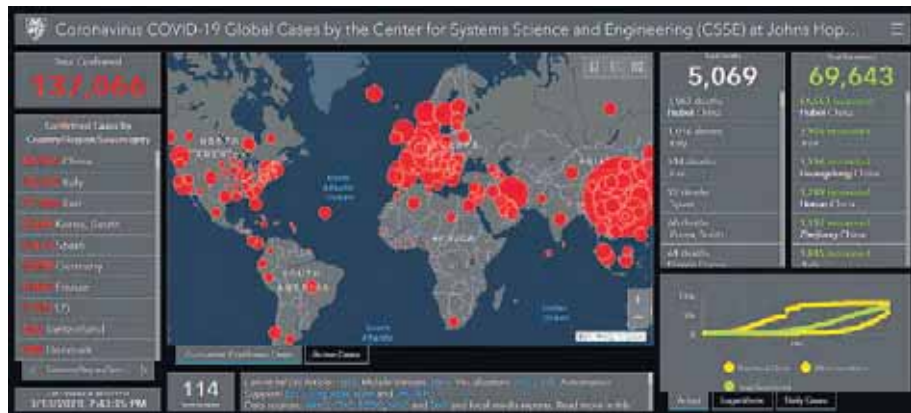
PNS ■ SEOUL

The coronavirus pandemic has taken over daily lives around the globe, overwhelming hospitals, shuttering schools and offices, halting the US presidential campaign rallies and world sports while increasing fears about the financial toll.

The intensifying spread of COVID-19 beyond Asia has dashed hopes about a quick containment, even with travel and social events curbed drastically. And political leaders were among those infected or quarantined due to potential exposure.

Asian markets were sinking further on Friday, after the US stocks had their greatest losses since the Black Monday crash of 1987 and bad European results. Benchmarks in Japan, Thailand and India sank as much as 10 per cent. Losses in mainland China, where the virus is subsiding, were less severe.

In the United States, the Congress neared a deal with the Trump administration on a



sweeping aid package with sick pay, free testing and other resources to help reassure anxious Americans and calm markets, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said.

People fretted over the health risks to elderly, threatened jobs and dwindling savings while caring for children staying home from shuttered schools. While Washington scrambled to shape an economic rescue package, the

EU pushed back against President Donald Trump's sharp restrictions on travel from Europe to the US, slamming Trump's 'unilateral' decision and declaring the virus a 'global crisis', not limited to any continent, and it requires cooperation.

The spread of the virus in Europe, North America and the Middle East has drawn contrast with waning epidemics in

the hardest-hit nations in Asia. China, where the outbreak emerged late last year, still accounts for more than 60% of global infections.

The pandemic's new epicentre is Europe. Italy's death toll topped 1,000 on Thursday with more than 15,000 confirmed cases. France, Spain and Germany all exceeded 2,000 cases each. In Italy's hardest-hit Lombardy region, hospitals were

Asian markets were sinking further on Friday, after the US stocks had their greatest losses since the Black Monday crash of 1987 and bad European results. Benchmarks in Japan, Thailand and India sank as much as 10 per cent. Losses in mainland China, where the virus is subsiding, were less severe

overwhelmed with both the sick and the dead. The country's restaurants, cafes and retail shops closed in a lockdown on personal movement, though grocery stores, pharmacies and markets were allowed to operate.

Scientists detail first person-to-person transmission of Covid-19 in US

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Scientists have detailed the first known locally-transmitted case in the US of the novel coronavirus infection, COVID-19, tracing it to a man, who contracted the disease from his wife travelling from Wuhan, China.

According to researchers, person-to-person transmission of the deadly coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, occurred between the two people with prolonged, unprotected exposure while the first patient showed symptoms.

They said despite active monitoring and testing of 372 contacts of both cases, no further transmission was detected. The study, published in the journal The Lancet, noted that on January 23, 2020, Illinois reported the US state Chicago's

first laboratory-confirmed case, or index case, of COVID-19 in a woman in her 60s returning from Wuhan, China in mid-January 2020.

Subsequently, scientists said the first evidence of secondary transmission in the US was reported on January 30 when her husband, who had not travelled outside the US, but had frequent, close contact with his wife since her return, tested positive.

Following this, public health authorities conducted an intensive epidemiologic investigation of the two confirmed cases, the researchers noted in the study.

In the research, scientists report the clinical and laboratory features of both patients and the assessment and monitoring of several hundred individuals with potential exposure



to SARS-CoV-2. In total, they identified 372 individuals as potential contacts with 347 of them actively monitored after confirmation of exposure to the woman or her husband on or after the day of symptom onset. This included 152 communi-

ty contacts, and 195 healthcare professionals, the study mentioned. There were 25 people that had insufficient contact information to complete active monitoring, the scientists said.

They said they also tested a convenience sample of 32 asymptomatic healthcare per-

Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 might be likely to occur through unprotected, prolonged exposure to an individual with symptomatic COVID-19", said Jennifer Layden, Chief Medical Officer of the Chicago Dept of Public Health

sonnel contacts. According to the study, these 347 contacts

underwent active symptom monitoring for 14 days following their last exposure.

Of these, 43 people developed fever, cough, or shortness of breath were isolated and tested for SARS-CoV-2, as well as asymptomatic healthcare professionals. Scientists noted that all 75 individuals tested negative for SARS-CoV-2. Assessing the data, researchers observed that on December 25, 2019, the female patient travelled to Wuhan where she visited a hospitalised relative and other family members with undiagnosed respiratory illness. On her return to the US on January 13, 2020, the study noted that she experienced six days of mild fever, fatigue, and cough before being hospitalised with pneumonia and testing positive for SARS-CoV-2. Prior to hos-

pitalisation, she was living with her husband, who has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and chronic cough, it said.

These conditions, the researchers said, made it difficult to determine the timing of his symptom onset related to COVID-19. Eight days after his wife was admitted to a hospital, the husband was also hospitalised with worsening shortness of breath and coughing up blood, and also tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, according to the study.

The scientists said both patients recovered, and were discharged to home isolation, which was lifted 33 days after the woman returned from Wuhan, following two negative tests for SARS-CoV-2 taken 24 hours apart.

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CAPSULE



Endowments Minister launches campaign in Vijayawada division

VIJAYAWADA: Minister for Endowments Velampalli Srinivas, along with 23rd division YSRCP candidate Atmakuri Subba Rao, launched the campaign in Governorpet here on Friday. Candidates launched the campaign on the last day for filing of nominations for the 64 municipal divisions in the city. Velampalli appealed to voters to vote for the YSRCP as Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has allocated Rs 100 crore for the development of three Assembly constituencies in the city. Subba Rao said that he would strive for the development of the municipal division if he is elected.

Satish Reddy is Chairman of CII Southern Region

VIJAYAWADA: Satish Reddy, Chairman, Dr Reddy's Laboratories Limited, Hyderabad, has been elected the Chairman of CII Southern Region for the year 2020-21. Reddy has been closely associated with the CII and was the Deputy Chairman of CII Southern Region in 2019-20 and is a Member of CII National Council from 2014-2020. He has also held positions as Past Chairman of CII National Pharma Committee and Past Chairman of CII Andhra Pradesh State Council during 2003-04. He joined the company in 1993 and since then he held many positions. He oversaw the expansion and establishment of a strong footprint for Dr Reddy's finished dosage products in Russia, CIS countries and other emerging markets. CK Ranganathan, Chairman & Managing Director, CavinKare Private Limited, Chennai, has been elected the Deputy Chairman of CII Southern Region for the year 2020-21. Ranganathan is an active member of CII.

LOCAL BODY POLLS

TDP defeat imminent: Peddireddy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP is confident of a huge victory in the local body elections, as the government is on a fast track in implementing the welfare schemes, said Minister for Panchayat Raj Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy. While the opposition TDP is finding it difficult in fielding candidates in the elections, he said.

Speaking to the media here on Friday, he refuted the allegations of TDP leader N Chandrababu Naidu against the YSRCP.

"This is only to cover up the imminent defeat in the local body elections. But in reality, this is for the first time in the State's history that elections are being conducted peacefully with stray incidents, which is



TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu is unnecessarily creating a ruckus over law and order due to fear of losing the elections, alleged Minister for Panchayat Raj Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy

a common factor during elections. Naidu is unnecessarily creating a ruckus over the issue due to fear of losing the elections," he added. Even the TDP leaders are worried to go and support their candidates in the elec-

tions, as they are aware that people want YS Jaganmohan Reddy to remain as the Chief Minister for many years. TDP senior leaders Pothula Sunitha, Dokka Manikya Vara Prasad, Rehman and others left the party, as they have lost faith in

section of the media is trying to create hype that all is well within his party, while the reality is otherwise," he said. "People realised Naidu's true colours when he tried to stall various Bills like introduction of English medium in government schools, reservation for BCs and separate commissions for SCs and STs. Naidu, who claims to have 40 years of experience in politics, is behaving like a novice and uttering unparliamentary words against the Chief Minister," he said. "The election process is being conducted transparently with no scope for any irregularities. Naidu is trying to search for reasons to mislead people as he realised that the defeat of TDP is imminent. Therefore, he is levelling baseless allegations," he said.

128 booked for drunken driving



Police conduct counselling for those who were caught for drunken driving in Vijayawada on Friday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The city traffic police launched a drive against drunken driving across the city for two days on March 11 and 12 and nabbed 128 for drunken driving.

The drive was carried out under the supervision of DCP (traffic) TV Nagaraju, traffic circle inspectors, sub-inspectors, assistant sub-inspectors and others. In spite of campaign launched by the city police to check the drunken driving cases, many are reportedly driving in a drunken state.

Counselling was conducted at the traffic headquarters located at AS Vyas Complex near the Indira Gandhi Municipal Stadium. Traffic

police explained the ill effects of drunken driving and asked them to shun the practice.

They said not only auto drivers but their families, passengers and their families will be badly affected in case of accidents caused by drunken driving.

Traffic police have been collecting hefty penalties for the past few years from the drivers for violation of traffic rules like triple riding, helmetless driving, passing in the wrong route, over speed, rash driving and overload of passengers. In spite of raids, many cases of drunken driving are noticed by the traffic police in the city. Police caught drivers of tractors, trucks, cars and other vehicles during the drive.

Anti-CAA caravan arrives in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Samajwadi Samaj led Lok Jana Jagaran Yatra arrived at the Vizag Shaheen Bagh agitation camp at GVMC Gandhi statue area on Friday and expressed its solidarity with the striking members.

Addressing a gathering, the leader of Yatra and former MLA Dr Sunilam said the Yatra began from Gandhi Smriti in New Delhi on January 30 and addressed over 140 meetings covering 10 States. They also addressed 45 Shaheen Bagh agitation camps on the way. The Yatra will end in Hyderabad on March 23.

"All along the route, the Yatra received overwhelming response from people and nowhere we faced any resistance," he added. He alleged that the CAA, NPR and NRC were draconian and destroy the democratic fabric of the



country.

"Due to the NDA policies, the country is facing economic crisis and so far 3.2 crore unemployed persons are looking for jobs. In addition to the economic crisis, the Modi government has passed these laws to destroy the country," Sunilam said.

Due to the regressive policies, Bangladesh has opposed the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and some

more countries would be following the same. "It is shame for the country, if a Prime Minister is not welcome by neighbouring countries," Sunilam said.

Samajwadi Samajam general secretary and Yatra convenor Arun Kumar Srivatsava, senior advocate and activist IM Ahmed, M Lakshmi from POW and VS Krishna of HRF addressed the gathering.

Privilege darshan for elderly, challenged

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

With an objective to provide comfortable darshan to elderly, physically challenged and parents of infants of five years, the TTD will provide special darshan for them on any two lean days in a month.

As part of it, the TTD is allotting 4,000 tokens for elderly and physically challenged on March 17 in three slots (1,000 tokens at 10 am, 2,000 tokens at 2 pm and 1,000 tokens at 3 pm slots). The TTD appealed to senior citizens and challenged persons should utilise this opportunity instead of their visits on crowded season. Already, the TTD provided



similar darshan to this category of pilgrims on March 10.

Similarly on March 18, the TTD organising special darshan for parents with five-year-old infants from morning 9 am to 1.30 pm through the Supatham entry gate. Similar darshan was provided earlier on March 11.

Three held for attack on TDP leaders at Macherla

Continued from Page 1

The three accused, identified as Turaka Kishore, Battula Nagaraju and Mallela Gopi, have been lodged in Gurazala sub-jail.

The special teams of police are searching for the remaining accused who attacked the vehicles carrying the TDP leaders. They are investigating the case based on the CCTV footage available.

Additional police force was deployed in Palnadu region to prevent any untoward incidents and to conduct elections peacefully.

The YSRCP leaders said that Naidu speaking of BC welfare and SC uplift sounds odd as he had never given a single seat to weaker sections for the Upper House.

"Jagan on the other hand has given priority to the weaker sections and women in his Cabinet and also in the composition of the Cabinet," they said. As weaker sections are convinced that YSRCP government is standing for their cause, they are giving overwhelming support to the government while TDP has ignored the weaker sections and cheated them on many counts, the YSRCP leaders said, adding that this was the very reason why TDP is not getting candidates for the elections and some are not taking the B forms with fear of defeat.

"Naidu is making false allegations against the government on creating hurdles for TDP members in filing nominations. First and foremost there are no candidates with TDP to contest in the elections and secondly, people are least bothered to look up at TDP members as they lost trust in the party members. In fact, TDP leaders themselves lost faith in Chandrababu Naidu over his incapable decisions and joined YSRCP," they said. All those who were given Rajya Sabha seats by TDP are the close aides of Naidu from upper castes. Chandrababu Naidu has nominated Varla Ramaiah with evil intentions as there is no scope of victory. "But our Chief Minister has given two seats to BC leaders out of the four Rajya Sabha seats. In the last five years, Naidu ruined every system of democracy, constitution, and governance. That is why people rejected him in the elections. Unlike Naidu, Jagan fulfilled 90 per cent of the election promises within nine months of forming the government. People of all castes and creeds are welcoming his governance," they said.

Naidu trying to find excuse for sure defeat: YSRCP

Continued from Page 1

Namaste is the way world now greets

Continued from Page 1

Namaste, does not require touching another and only involves joining your own two palms together -- thereby turning out to be the safest way to greet people in COVID-19 times.

Coronavirus, as per the experts is highly contagious and is spread by physical contact, one of which is the handshake. So, be it a common man or the president or prime minister, it is the same for everyone.

The fact today is that Namaste is being looked upon as a clean way to meet and greet.

Perhaps this was what prompted US President Donald Trump to say after he met the Ireland Prime Minister Leo Varadkar in the Oval office at the White House on Thursday, "We didn't shake hands today and we looked at each other and said what are we going to do? Sort of a weird feeling. We did this (joined hands). I just got back from India and I didn't shake any hands there. It was easy."

While Trump's trip to Ahmedabad (India) on February 24, 2020, where he



attended a rally named Namaste Trump put 'Namaste' on the world spotlight, he himself is being seen to be making a case for Namaste in these days of coronavirus spread, and even hailed the Indian way of greeting as: "They (India and Japan) were ahead of the curve."

Last week Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu too advocated for Namaste way of greeting. He asked his fellow countrymen to greet each other by folding hands and saying Namaste as opposed to shaking hands as fears over the coronavirus outbreak grow.

During a press conference, he said that small steps such as adopting the Indian Namaste could help in controlling the spread of the virus, among others steps.

"President Macron also decided to greet all his counterparts with a namaste, a graceful gesture that he has retained from his India visit in 2018," a tweet from the official Twitter account of the Ambassador of France to India Emmanuel Lenain said on March 11.

A video of Prince Charles greeting with namaste went viral on the Internet. He was seen greeting people with a Namaste at the annual Prince's Trust Awards on March 11 at the London Palladium.

As the world grapples with the deadly coronavirus outbreak, people are searching for ways and means to safeguard themselves and Namaste is being increasingly accepted as a simple way of lifestyle.

Namaste is originally a Sanskrit phrase formed from 'Namah,' meaning 'bow, obeisance, adoration,' and the enclitic pronoun 'te', meaning 'to you'. It differs from the Namaskar in the sense that Namaskar means bow to the energy in you and Namaste is bowing to you. Whatever the meaning, but the Indian way of greeting is now becoming the world's favourite.

TTD takes steps to curb corona impact at Tirumala

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The TTD has rolled out effective measures to check the impact of coronavirus, said TTD Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singhal.

On Friday, he inaugurated the coronavirus awareness and counselling centre at Alipiri Check Point, along with additional executive officer AV Dharma Reddy and CVSO Gopinath Jatti. Speaking on the occasion, he said as a part of State and Central governments initiatives against spread of corona, the TTD has scaled up steps to arrest its impact in Tirumala as the Hill Town is visited by scores of pilgrims everyday from across the country.

The Executive Officer said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and health secretary of reviewed and made several suggestions to TTD. Accordingly corona virus prevention camps have been set up with thermal scanning testing at Alipiri check point near Padala Mandapam at Alipiri footpath route and also at Srivari Mettu



TTD Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singha, along with additional executive officer AV Dharma Reddy and CVSO Gopinath Jatti, interact with health department officials at Tirumala on Friday (right) A stall was set up to provide medicare to corona suspects

footpath route. "If any symptoms are identified, pilgrims will be stopped from entering Tirumala and diverted to isolation wards at Ruia Hospital for medication," he added.

Similarly, coronavirus awareness programmes are being organised since one week under the guidance of additional executive officer AV Dharma Reddy in Tirumala, he said.

The Executive Officer said special focus has been laid on

sanitation and cleaning is taken up at an interval of every two hours in Tirumala where pilgrim congregation is more, including PACs, Anna Prasadam Complex, Vaikuntam queue complex and Kalyanakattas.

The TTD has provided option of change of dates or refund on cancellation for devotees holding Arjitha Seva, Rs 300 darshan and accommodation that are booked in advance till May 31.

In view of Government of India not issuing visas to foreign-

ers till April 15, the TTD has also appealed to both NRIs and foreigners to postpone their pilgrimage to Tirumala for 28 days from the day they stepped in India.

The EO said on the appeal of Health Secretary, the Padmayati Nilayam at Tiruchanoor has been allowed to be utilised as an isolation ward in view of coronavirus threat. If needed the TTD choultries near Tirupati Railway Station will also be allotted for the same purpose

upon the request of District Collector.

The TTD EO said one lakh hand bills were distributed every day and non-stop broadcast of precautionary steps are being arranged throughout the day in Tirumala for the awareness of the pilgrims.

He said the crowd rush to Tirumala has reduced and devotees with time slots could have easy darshan without waiting in the Vaikuntam queue lines. As a precautionary measure in

In view of Government of India not issuing visas to foreigners till April 15, the TTD has also appealed to both NRIs and foreigners to postpone their pilgrimage to Tirumala for 28 days from the day they stepped in India

view of corona, it has been instructed to allow only 250 devotees in each compartment of Vaikuntham queue complex as against the usual figure of 450 to 500 to avoid spread of corona. Special precautionary measures for devotees are being telecasted through SVBC channel in waiting compartments and other platforms and health and medical departments of TTD are fully equipped with all emergency material, he noted.

AP to implement Epidemic Diseases Act to contain spread...

Continued from Page 1

The Medical and Health Department has taken up a cluster containment strategy and is implementing it in the Nellore district. Upon identifying a Covid-19 positive case, as many as 20,000 households in the radius of 1 km have been screened for the presence of the virus and there were no positive symptoms, Jawahar Reddy revealed.

Across the State, as many 564 people who have returned from outside the country have been isolated. While 331 of them are still under observation, 12 of them are in hospitals, he said. "All foreign returnees are advised home isolation for 14 days and to contact a helpline for medical advice prior to

visiting a hospital," Jawahar Reddy said.

He said that the State is well equipped to treat coronavirus cases. "With the approval of ICMR, screening and confirmatory tests are being done at SVIMS Tirupati and screening test alone in Vijayawada. Proposals were also laid for Kakinada hospital for processing screening tests. As on date, 56 hospitals have been identified with isolation wards and district level rapid response teams were also formed along with taskforce teams. The public is advised not to panic and take necessary precautions by maintaining hygiene. People who are experiencing symptoms like cough, fever, breathlessness are advised to contact 104 helpline or call center 0866-2410978," the top bureaucrat said.



APCC President Sailajanath and others submit a memorandum to Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan at the Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada on Friday

Congress leaders meet Governor, accuse YSRCP of violence

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

APCC President S Sailajanath, along with Congress leaders, met Governor Biswa Bushan Harichandan at the Raj Bhavan here on Friday and apprised him of poll violence in local body elections. He further stated that the ruling YSRCP was creating a panic among the contestants by resorting to violence.

He recalled that they met the State Election Commissioner on Thursday and complained against the ruling party, as they are creating hurdles to their candidates while filing nominations.

He alleged that the ruling YSRCP leaders and activists are resorting to attacks and creating panic among the Opposition leaders across the State. In a few places, officers are acting in favour of YSRCP activists.

He found fault with the Election Commission for not taking action against complaints on the ruling party for indulging in attacks. He said

APCC President S Sailajanath alleged that the ruling YSRCP leaders and activists are resorting to attacks and creating a panic among the Opposition leaders across the State

In a few places, officers are acting in favour of YSRCP activists

that in a few places nominations are being cancelled in the name of verifications.

Though a few incidents of attack and threatening candidates were brought to the notice of the Election Commission no action was taken till now, he said. He further stated that in Sullurpeta, police were telling the candidate not to file nominations against the YSRCP. "In this backdrop, the Congress leaders urged the Governor to save democracy and postpone the local body elections," he said.

After 7 months in detention, Farooq Abdullah released

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

After being in home detention for over seven months, Farooq Abdullah was released on Friday with the government revoking the draconian Public Safety Act (PSA) against the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister.

The 82-year-old National Conference (NC) leader was initially taken into preventive detention on August 5 last, the day the Centre abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution that granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and later slapped with the PSA.

Walking out of his Gupkar road residence in Srinagar where he was kept under detention, Abdullah demanded that his son and former chief minister Omar and PDP's Mehbooba Mufti, also a former CM, and other politicians lodged in various prisons in the union territory and outside should be released at the earliest to allow political activities.

"Today, I am free but this freedom is not complete. It will be complete when other leaders like Omar, Mehbooba Mufti and others in outside jails are released, a frail looking

OPPN LEADERS SAY 'LONG OVERDUE'



Abdullah said, appearing before reporters at the lawns of his home after spending 220 days in detention.

According to an order issued by the Union Territory's home secretary Shaleen Kabra, the PSA ordered by the district magistrate of Srinagar on September 15 and subsequently extended for three months each on December 13 and March 11 this year, stands revoked.

Abdullah was booked under 'public order' of the PSA, a provision that allows authorities to detain a person for three months without trial. This can be extended up to two years.

Officials said District

Magistrate Shahid Iqbal Choudhary visited the residence of Abdullah and handed over the release order to him.

Abdullah, a Lok Sabha MP from Srinagar, was the first chief minister to have been booked under the PSA.

"I would also like to express gratitude to every individual who prayed for us... I will not speak on any political matter till others are released," Abdullah said.

The NC leader, who was flanked by his family members including his wife Mollie Abdullah, daughter Safia and grandson Adeem, did not take any questions from the media.

Abdullah, who underwent an eye surgery earlier this week, expressed the hope that he would be able to attend Parliament so that he can raise the voice of the people there.

Immediately after his release, the NC issued a statement welcoming the decision and also urged the Union Territory administration to release other political leaders including Omar Abdullah, who is party vice president. The NC said the release of its patron from detention was the right step towards restoration of a genuine political process in Jammu and Kashmir.

It said the process would receive further fillip when Omar Abdullah and other political detainees are set free. "We urge the government to do so at the earliest," it said.

"As the pre-eminent political party of Jammu and Kashmir, the National Conference has played a key role in strengthening the voice of the people through democracy and will continue to do so," the statement added.

Omar as well as Mehbooba Mufti were slapped with the PSA on February 6, the day when their six-month term of preventive detention was to end.

Future to be decided after all leaders are released: Farooq

SRINAGAR: Former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and NC patron Farooq Abdullah on Friday thanked parliamentarians who "fought for my freedom" from detention and said he will be able to take a decision on future only after other leaders are released. "I am free... Hope others political leaders would be released soon. Thank all parliamentarians who fought for my freedom. Will be able to take decision on future only after other leaders are released," he said. Abdullah was under detention since August 5 last year when the Centre abrogated the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcated it into two union territories. He was the first chief minister against whom the Public Safety Act was invoked. The stringent Act was slapped against him on September 15, hours before the Supreme Court was to hear a petition by MDMK leader Vaiko who claimed that Abdullah was illegally detained.



Himachal govt mulls raising income criteria for pension

PNS ■ SHIMLA

The Himachal Pradesh government will consider hiking income criteria of Rs 35,000 per year for women and differently abled persons to avail social security pension, Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur said in the state assembly on Friday.

Terming Congress legislator Sukhvinder Sukhu's suggestion in this regard as a good one, the chief minister told the assembly during the Budget session that the government would definitely consider hiking income criteria for women and differently abled people for social security pension.

Earlier replying to Sri

Renukaji MLA Vinay Kumar and Kangra MLA Pawan Kajal's questions, Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Rajiv Saizal said, "There is no proposal to increase existing income criteria of Rs 35,000 to Rs 60,000 per annum for social security pension of Rs 1,000 per month.

At the same time, the minister said that there are more than 5.34 lakh pensioners in the state and there is no income criteria for persons who have reached the age of 70, persons with 70 per cent or more disabilities, persons with more than 40 per cent intellectual disability and lepers.

SHORT READS



Bird flu outbreak in Malappuram: Culling to begin on Saturday

MALAPPURAM: Ten specially-trained squads will from Saturday begin culling and disinfecting operations around one-km radius of Palathingal from where the outbreak of bird flu was detected. The Animal Husbandry Officer (AHO) of Malappuram Rani Oommen said training for the squad members was underway at the Parappangadi municipal office. "Each team would have six or seven members. The culling of birds and pets in around one-km aerial radius of Palathingal, where the outbreak of bird flu has been detected, would begin on Saturday," the AHO said. As ordered by the district collector, trade of eggs, chicken and pets around 10-km of the epicentre has been prohibited, the official said. Malappuram district collector Jaffer Malik had on Thursday confirmed the outbreak of bird flu in Palathingal and imposed a ban on trade of chickens, pets and other birds in and around 10-km radius of the site. Last Saturday, the bird flu outbreak was detected in two poultry farms in Vengeri and West Kodyathoor in Kozhikode district.

Eight nominations filed for seven RS seats from Maharashtra

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Eight nominations have been filed for seven seats of the Rajya Sabha from Maharashtra as of Friday, the last day of filing papers, an official said here.

Those in the fray include sitting Rajya Sabha members

NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Union minister and NDA ally Ramdas Athawale.

Returning officer Vilas Athavale said an eighth nomination did not have mandatory affidavit or proposer and the person did not even pay the security deposit. The decision on its validity will be taken

during the scrutiny of papers on Monday, he said, refusing to divulge the candidate's name.

Congress general secretary Rajiv Satav, Shiv Sena deputy leader Priyanka Chaturvedi, former NCP minister Fauzia Khan and BJP's Bhagwat Karad on Friday filed their nomination papers.

Pawar, Harivansh, Scindia in fray for RS polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh, NCP supremo Sharad Pawar, BJP's newest recruit Jyotiraditya Scindia and Congress veteran Digvijay Singh are among those in the fray for elections to 55 Rajya Sabha seats to be held on March 26 with a number of the contestants set to get elected unopposed.

Friday was the last date of filing of nominations for the biennial polls. Fifty-one of these 55 seats from 17 states are falling vacant on different dates in April due to retirement of sitting members, while four other seats are already vacant due to resignation of members.

Bypoll will also be held to a Rajya Sabha seat from Haryana vacated by former Union minister Birender Singh.

Counting will be held on the evening of March 26, an hour after the conclusion of polls.

A keen battle is on the cards in Madhya Pradesh, where the Kamal Nath government faces



Harivansh Narayan Singh, Sharad Pawar, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Digvijay Singh

a grim future following rebellion by at least 22 MLAs, as both the BJP and Congress have announced two candidates each for the state's three seats.

Scindia and Digvijay Singh are expected to comfortably win in the polls. The BJP's Sumer Singh Solanki and Phool Singh Baraiya of the Congress are likely to slug it out for the third seat.

The two parties are comfortably placed to ensure the win of one of their candidates, and while the Congress appeared to have an edge for the third seat but the decision of its 22 MLAs to resign from the state

Assembly has upended the numbers game.

Most of these MLAs are supporters of Scindia, who joined the BJP on Wednesday. The official tally of the Congress in the 228-member assembly is 114 and the party also enjoys the support of four Independents, two BSP and one SP MLA.

If the resignations of the 22 MLAs, who are camping in Bengaluru, are accepted or they abstain from voting in the Rajya Sabha polls, then the actual strength of the assembly will fall to 206. The Congress, on its own, will then have 92 mem-

bers and the BJP 107 seats.

Two other candidates — BJP's Ranjana Baghel and Ram Das Dahiwal, an independent — have also filed their nominations in Madhya Pradesh.

Apart from Madhya Pradesh, there are seven vacancies from Maharashtra, six from Tamil Nadu, followed by five from West Bengal and Bihar, four each from Odisha, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh, three each from Assam and Rajasthan, two each from Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Jharkhand, and one each from Himachal Pradesh, Manipur and Meghalaya.

Vistara imposes travel ban on Kunal Kamra

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Full service carrier Vistara on Friday barred stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra from taking its flights till April 27, an airline official said. The decision has been taken after Kamra was found "guilty" for alleged misbehaviour by an internal committee of IndiGo. The ban on Kamra comes into effect immediately, the official said. On January 28, Kamra was banned by IndiGo from flying with the airline for six months for allegedly heckling a private TV news anchor. The ban period was later reduced to three months. As per norms, any allegation of misbehaviour mid-air by passengers has to be investigated by an internal committee set up by the carrier concerned. Soon after IndiGo's ban, others carriers such Air India, GoAir and SpiceJet too announced travel restrictions on Kamra. At that time, Vistara had not banned him from travelling in its flight.



'Rann Utsav' sees drop in tourist income in 2019

PNS ■ GANDHINAGAR

The Gujarat government on Friday informed the legislative Assembly that over 78,000 less tourists visited the much-acclaimed 'Rann Utsav' in Kutch district in 2019 as compared to 2018.

While 5.16 lakh national as well as international tourists visited the famed destination in 2018, 4.38 lakh travellers attended the festival in 2019, a drop of 78,000, said Tourism

Minister Jwaha Chavda in his written reply.

He was responding to a query by Shailesh Parmar (Congress) Rann Utsav, a music and dance carnival celebrated during winter months.

Responding to a sub-question regarding international tourists, Chavda said as against 8,186 international tourists in 2018, nearly half - that is 4,457 - came last year to enjoy the white sands of Rann of Kutch, indicating a drop of 3,729.

Pehlu Khan lynching case: 2 teenagers sentenced to 3 yrs in special home

PNS ■ JAIPUR

In the first punishment awarded in the notorious Pehlu Khan lynching case of 2017, Alwar's Juvenile Justice Board sentenced two teenagers to three years in a special or safe home on Friday. "The board sentenced both of them to three years in a 'vishesh' or 'surakshit ghar' (special or safe home) in Jaipur," case officer sub-inspector Ram Kishore said.

He added that the two were minors when the crime was committed but were in the age group of 18-21 years now.

They were part of the mob that lynched Khan, a 55-year-old dairy farmer, in 2017, and were convicted last week.

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections under which they were held guilty are 302, 147, 323 and 341, according to Inspector General of Police, Jaipur, S Sengathir.

Meghalaya cops seize arms, top ULFA (I) commander escapes

PNS ■ TURA (MEGHALAYA)

A top ULFA (Independent) militant managed to escape during an encounter with the Meghalaya Police in South Garo Hills district, police sources said on Friday.

Self-proclaimed deputy commander-in-chief of ULFA(I) Drishti Rajkhowa alias Manoj Rabha was among the militants who escaped during the exchange of fire at Bolbokgre village in the evening of March 11, they said.

A huge cache of arms and ammunition were left behind by the ULFA(I) militants, a senior police officer said.

Three rifles, three pistols, walkie talkie sets, camping gears and a large number of bullets, besides "demand pads" of the banned Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA) outfit used in extorting money were seized, he said.



Acting on a tip-off about the presence of a group of militants near Bolbokgre, a police team was sent to nab them, district Superintendent of Police Priyangshu Pandey said.

"Seeing the police team, the militants fired indiscriminately leading to retaliatory action by the personnel. However, they were able to escape, leaving behind a huge cache of arms and ammunition. A

search operation has been launched to nab them," Pandey said. The SP said that investigation is on to find out the reason behind the presence of ULFA(I) militants in the area. He said that since the death of GNLA leader Sohan D Shira, ULFA(I) militants have mostly fled to Bangladesh but they keep frequenting the bordering areas in India.

Sengar gets 10-yr jail for death of Unnao rape victim's father

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Disqualified BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar was on Friday handed down 10 years rigorous imprisonment, besides imposition of a fine of Rs 10 lakh, by a Delhi court for the death of Unnao rape victim's father in custody, saying "no leniency" can be shown for killing a family's "sole bread earner".

Sengar, who has already been sentenced to the "remainder of his natural biological life" for raping the minor Unnao girl, was stripped of his membership on February 25 of the UP Assembly following his conviction in the rape case.

Pronouncing the sentence in a packed courtroom, District Judge Dharmesh Sharma also awarded 10 years jail term to Sengar's brother Atul Singh Sengar and five others for their role in the custodial killing of the father of the rape victim.

The court, which did not hold the accused guilty of murder under the IPC, awarded maximum sentence for the offence of culpable homicide



The court, which sentenced all the convicts to maximum punishment under IPC Section 304, said that the children of the deceased has lost the protective cover of their father

not amounting to murder of convicts under section 304 of the IPC after holding that there was no intention to kill.

Sengar and his brother will have to pay Rs 10 lakh each as fine within three months to legal heirs of the deceased, including the rape victim, as compensation.

"Considering the minor children (of the deceased) losing their father who was sole bread winner of the family and keeping in mind the fact that the victim's family has been uprooted from their native place, all the convicts in the case are being sentenced to maximum punishment," the

court said in its order. The court said Sengar and the co-convicts, two police officials, being public servants were supposed to uphold the law but there was no denying the fact that they broke the rule of law. "The way crime has been committed, the victim's father was beaten up and paraded, no leniency can be given to the convicts and therefore, I am sentencing all the convicts to the maximum punishment," the judge said.

MP Cong MLA's father seeks police help to meet him

PNS ■ BENGALURU

A day after a Minister in the crisis-stricken Kamal Nath government was allegedly stopped by police from entering a resort near here where 19 of the 22 rebel Congress MLAs from Madhya Pradesh were believed to be holed up, Karnataka Congress President-designate D K Shivakumar along with him approached the ADGP, seeking help.

Shivakumar, accompanied by Madhya Pradesh Ministers Jitu Patwari and Balaram Choudhary, along with Narayan Choudhary, who is



father of one of the MLAs Manoj Choudhary, met ADGP Amar Kumar Pandey at the DGP office here.

Narayan Choudhary requested police to give him an opportunity to meet his son and submitted a memorandum in this regard.

Alleging that his son Manoj was forcibly brought here by "some people" and kept in the resort, Narayan Choudhary said, "Though my son wanted to meet us, he was not allowed by some local people said to be BJP members threatened us and took us to the local police station without any reason."

"As all of us have come from Madhya Pradesh to see my son, who is in the custody of the local people, I request

One killed, 9 hurt as vehicle falls into gorge in Udhampur

JAMMU: One person died and nine others sustained injuries when a vehicle skidded off the road and rolled down into a gorge in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district on Friday, officials said. A tempo traveller carrying passengers from Patnitop to Jammu skidded off the Patnitop-Kud road at Kassar Morh and rolled down into a deep gorge, they said. In the incident, Rajul Pran of Maharashtra was killed and nine others, mostly from Maharashtra were injured, they said adding that the injured have been hospitalised.

Illegal arms making unit busted in UP's Muzaffarnagar

MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP): An illegal arms manufacturing unit was busted with several weapons seized from the unit at Mirapur Road in Khatauli town here on Friday, a senior police officer said. Five rifles, two guns, seven country-made pistols and a large quantity of arms in process of being manufactured were recovered from the place, Muzaffarnagar Senior Superintendent of Police Abhishek Yadav said. Acting on a tip-off, the place was raided and the illegal arms were seized, the SSP said. Rajbir, an accused, was arrested after a case was registered, he added.

Shah to attend AIIMS Rishikesh convocation tomorrow

RISHIKESH: Union Home Minister Amit Shah will attend the second convocation of AIIMS Rishikesh on Saturday, the institute's director said. Those attending the convocation would have to go through a thermal screening in view of the coronavirus threat, AIIMS Rishikesh Director Ravikant told reporters here on Friday. Shah will be the chief guest of the convocation which will be presided over by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Harsh Vardhan, while Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivedra Singh Rawat will be the special guest, he said.

SHORT READS



Survey of India team 'detained' in Bengal village over NRC

Burdwan: A Survey of India team was detained by villagers in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district on suspicion that they were collecting data for the National Register of Citizens (NRC), officials said on Friday. The incident happened in Bahirghanya village in Galsi 2 block on Thursday when the five-member team went there for fieldwork, they said. Locals said that members of the team were taking photographs of places of worship, raising suspicion that they were in the village for the NRC exercise. The surveyors told the locals that they were in the village to update the map of the area but it failed to convince them, officials said. When the locals sought to see their identity cards, they refused, following which they were detained, officials said, adding that members of the team were then taken to the BDO's office. Block Development Officer (BDO) Shankhya Bandyopadhyay said members of the team clicked photographs of temples and mosques in the village. Since there is a panic over the NRC, the sudden visit by the team led to tension in the village, he added. "They showed me an order relating to the survey exercise, but there was no prior information about it," Bandyopadhyay added. The officer said that a meeting was held with the locals and they were told that the survey was not related to the NRC.

Annual health check-ups for govt officials suspended till June 30

New Delhi: The government has suspended till June 30 the mandatory annual health checkup of all its officials in the wake of coronavirus outbreak to avoid unnecessary strain on hospitals and ward off chances of them getting infected in health facilities, officials said Friday. Annual health checkup is a mandatory requirement for the appraisal of all central government officials above the age of 40 years and it is to be done by March 31 every year, they said. In the wake of coronavirus outbreak in the country, the process has been suspended till June 30, they said.

Nirbhaya convict moves HC on lapse in mercy plea rejection

New Delhi: One of the four death row convicts in the 2012 Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case, Vinay Sharma, on Friday approached the Delhi High Court claiming there were procedural lapses and "constitutional irregularities" in the rejection of his mercy plea by President Ram Nath Kovind. The petition on behalf of Sharma was moved by his lawyer, A P Singh, who said the matter has been filed in the high court registry. The plea claims the recommendation sent to the President to reject the mercy plea did not contain the signature of Delhi Home Minister Satyendar Jain.

CENTRE: FENCING AROUND FOREST AREAS PERMITTED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Friday said it has permitted fencing around forest areas to ensure safety of people living in adjacent villages from attacks by wild animals.

Responding to a question raised in the Lok Sabha, Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said the government is providing financial and technical assistance to state governments for activities like erection of physical barriers around forest areas to avoid man-animal conflict.

"The Central government supplements the efforts of state governments by providing financial and technical assistance to the state/UT governments under various centrally sponsored schemes for management of wildlife," said

the minister in his written reply to a question asked by BSP MP Malook Nagar. "Activities such as construction/erection of physical barriers, such as barbed wire fence, solar powered electric fence, bio-fencing etc. are permitted under the schemes for ensuring safety of people living near forest areas," he added.



"Activities such as construction/ erection of physical barriers, such as barbed wire fence, solar powered electric fence, bio-fencing etc. are permitted under the schemes for ensuring safety of people living near forest areas," he added.

The environment minister also said that as per state forest department of Uttar Pradesh, six persons have lost their lives in man-leopard conflict in Bijnour District alone in the year 2019-2020.

Replying to another question on ensuring safety of wild animals and adequate food for them to prevent them from entering residential areas, the minister said the Centre has taken a number of steps regarding the same. "A network of Protected Areas (PAs)

namely, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, conservation reserves and community reserves covering important wildlife habitat have been created all over the country by the respective states/UTs under the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 to conserve wild animals and their habitats," he said.

"The ministry has issued guidelines in context of human-wildlife conflict to the chief wildlife wardens of all the states/UT administrations," Javadekar said.

Centre's 'erratic' decisions caused economic slowdown: Desai

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra industries minister Subhash Desai on Friday alleged that some "erratic" decisions by the Centre may have caused economic slowdown in the country. The minister was discussing issues related to slump in industrial investment in Maharashtra in the Legislative Council.

"The Centre has made some erratic decisions, which could have slowed down investment here," he said.

The Centre has created a



"trust deficit" among the potential foreign investors, the minister alleged. Instances like

cancellation of a global tender for constructing a new Assembly block at Amravati in Andhra Pradesh may have created a negative image of the country, he said.

The industries minister also cited disputes between some companies and the Union government.

"There have been instances such as Vodafone case, where several old tax dues are now being recovered. The company has openly expressed its disappointment over the decision," he claimed.



Cabinet okays recast scheme for Yes Bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved reconstruction scheme for Yes Bank under which SBI will acquire 49 per cent stake in the crisis-ridden private sector bank.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the Union Cabinet has approved the reconstruction scheme for Yes Bank as suggested by the Reserve Bank.

On March 5, the RBI imposed a moratorium on Yes Bank, restricting withdrawals to Rs 50,000 per depositor till April 3.

The RBI also superseded the board and placed it under an administrator, Prashant Kumar, former deputy managing director and CFO of SBI.

Giving details about the scheme, Sitharaman said SBI

On March 5, the RBI imposed a moratorium on Yes Bank, restricting withdrawals to Rs 50,000 per depositor till April 3.

will invest for 49 per cent equity in Yes Bank and other investors are also being invited. There will be a three year lock-in period for all the investors, she said. However, the lock-in period for SBI would be only for the 26 per cent of the shareholding.

The authorised capital of the lender has been increased to Rs 6,200 crore from Rs 1,100 crore, the finance minister said.

300 firms found violating pollution control norms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over 300 out of 700 industries inspected by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) have been found violating environmental norms and causing pollution in the last four years, the ministry of environment told the Lok Sabha on Friday.

Replying to a question in the lower house of Parliament, Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar said the CPCB carried out inspection of 700 industries for verification of compliance to environmental norms between April 2016 and March 2020.

"CPCB has reported that out of the 700 industries inspected, 342 industries were found non-complying," he said.

Under provisions of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, show-cause notices/technical directions to 159 units and closure directions to 181 units were issued for non-compliance, the minister said.

Other than these, one direction each to Assam and Maharashtra State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) was issued under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

AI cancels flights to seven countries till April 30

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Air India has decided to cancel flights to Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Israel, South Korea and Sri Lanka till April 30, an airline official said on Friday, amid mounting concerns over coronavirus epidemic.

The move comes a day after the national carrier announced suspension of services to Kuwait till April 30. Earlier, the airline curtailed services on most European routes, including Italy and France.

"It has been decided to temporarily suspend services to Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Israel, South Korea and Sri Lanka due to the coronavirus outbreak," the official said on Friday. On Wednesday, the government decided to suspend all visas, except a few categories such as diplomatic and employment, from March 13 to April 15.

Most of 19 MP Cong MLAs headed for Bhopal

PNS ■ BHOPAL

Most of the 19 rebel Congress MLAs from Madhya Pradesh, including six ministers, who have been camping in Bengaluru, are expected to reach Bhopal on Friday evening, party sources said.

After former Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia quit the Congress, 22 party MLAs, including six ministers - most of them said to be his supporters - resigned from the assembly earlier this week, pushing the Nath government in major crisis.

Of the 22 rebel MLAs, 19 lawmakers, including half a dozen ministers, had e-mailed their resignation letters to Governor Lalji Tandon.

"Most of the 19 MLAs have left Bengaluru where they were staying. They will travel by air and are expected to reach here," a Scindia loyalist told PTI.



Pvt agents no longer needed for booking train tickets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union government is considering barring private vendors and agents from booking train tickets for passengers, Railway Minister Piyush Goyal told Lok Sabha on Friday.

Replying to a discussion on the demand for grants of the Railway Ministry, he spoke about his ministry's crackdown on touts, including arrests, and asserted that private agents are no longer

Those who need help can go to "common service centres" which are run by government, he said

needed when most people can book tickets on mobiles. Those who need help can go to "common service centres" which are run by government, he said.

C'garh: Tulsi, Netam file nominations for RS polls

PNS ■ RAIPUR

Congress nominees K T S Tulsi and Phulo Devi Netam on Friday filed their nomination papers for two Rajya Sabha seats from Chhattisgarh for the upcoming biennial elections.

Tulsi and Netam filed their nominations in the Assembly complex in the presence of Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, AICC's Chhattisgarh in-charge P L Punia, state Congress president Mohan Markam and state ministers.

Netam (48), the state Congress women's wing president, is a prominent tribal leader from the Bastar region.

She was the MLA from Keshkal (1998-2003) in the Bastar division and had unsuccessfully contested the 2014 Lok Sabha election from Kanker.

A noted Supreme Court lawyer, Tulsi was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 2014 when the Congress-led UPA was in



The nominations papers of both candidates will be scrutinised on March 16 and last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 18, an official said.

power at the Centre. He was appointed as Additional Solicitor General of India in 1990.

The nominations papers of both candidates will be scrutinised on March 16 and last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 18, an official said.

Though the polling is scheduled for March 26, the two

Congress candidates will be elected unopposed as no other party has fielded nominees.

The results will be formally announced on March 18 as no polling will be required, the official said. The opposition BJP did not field its candidate in view of its low strength in the Assembly, whose members vote in Rajya Sabha elections.

Meghalaya closely monitoring disputed border area: Governor

PNS ■ SHILLONG

Meghalaya Governor Tathagata Roy on Friday said that a disputed area along the Assam-Meghalaya border is being monitored continuously and neighbouring Assam has been requested to maintain status quo.

Following recent reports that senior Assam officials had visited Umwali village on February 19 to carry out a survey for construction of a police outpost, villagers gathered at the spot and opposed the attempt to set up the structure, Roy said.

The area is a bone of contention between the two north-eastern states. Meghalaya claims it to be part of West Khasi Hills district, while Assam asserts that it falls under its Kamrup (Rural) district.

Following the incident, the deputy commissioner of West Khasi Hills district had taken up

the matter with the deputy commissioner, Kamrup (Rural) district, requesting him to maintain status quo and ensure peace and tranquility in the border area.

The governor was addressing the Assembly on the first day of the budget session. After a chief secretary level meeting on June 20, 2019, the state government had requested Assam to have a chief ministerial level meet on the border issue after the budget session in April, the governor said.

Roy also said the state government is committed to ensure the security of its citizens, irrespective of the community they belong to.

The governor's assurance came in view of

The area is a bone of contention between the two north-eastern states. Meghalaya claims it to be part of West Khasi Hills district, while Assam asserts that it falls under its Kamrup (Rural) district.

the recent violence arising out of a clash between two groups at Ichamati and its fallout in Shillong city.

"Protection of life and liberty is a fundamental right in our Constitution... The government has taken all necessary steps...to provide adequate security to all citizens, irrespective of the community they belong to," Roy said.

He said the state has witnessed agitation and protests by various groups against the

Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) and the demand for implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in the state.

Mentioning that "overall" agitations against the CAA and demand for ILP were effectively handled by the state police, Roy, however, said in an unfortunate incident that took place on February 28 in Ichamati, Lurshai Hynniewta, a Khasi Student's Union member, succumbed to his injuries following the clashes.

The clashes broke out during an anti-CAA and pro-ILP meeting organized by the KSU in East Khasi Hills district close to the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Political leaders welcome revocation of PSA against Farooq

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Political leaders on Friday welcomed the revocation of the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA) imposed on National Conference patron and former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir Farooq Abdullah.

While Abdullah's party, the National Conference (NC), termed his release a "step in the right direction towards restoring genuine political process in Jammu and Kashmir", former Union minister and senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said he welcomed Abdullah's "belated release".

"I hope he will soon resume his rightful place on the front bench of the Lok Sabha, where he can address with his usual compelling vigour the issues facing his state and the state of the nation. His detention was a disgrace," Tharoor said in a

"Time to release all detainees including thousands of young men languishing in jails outside J&K. This has gone on for far too long & must end now," Iltija tweeted.

tweet. Iltija Mufti, daughter of incarcerated PDP president and former J and K chief minister Mehbooba Mufti demanded the release of all those detained following revocation of the special status of the erstwhile state under Article 370 of the Constitution. "Time to release all detainees including thousands of young men languishing in jails outside J&K. This has gone on for far too long & must end now," Iltija tweeted.

Senior CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury said Abdullah's release was long overdue. "The imposition of PSA on and detention of Dr

Farooq Abdullah was illegal, undemocratic and unconstitutional. We have all been concerned about his health and well being. His release was long overdue."

The CPI(M) in Jammu and Kashmir described Abdullah's release as a "step to correct one wrong among many wrongs".

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee said she prayed for the long life of Abdullah and hoped that the other two former chief ministers - Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti - will soon be released and "allowed to join the democratic process immediately."

RS POLLS Congress, BJP candidates file papers in Rajasthan

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Congress and BJP candidates filed their nomination papers on Friday for the Rajya Sabha elections in the Rajasthan Assembly.

The Congress had named All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary K C Venugopal and Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) general secretary Neeraj Dangi, whereas the BJP had named Rajendra Gehlot as its candidate.

Bharatiya Janata Party's senior leader Omkar Singh Lakhawat surprisingly also filed his nomination paper on one seat, saying he filed it following the directions from the party.

The biennial elections for Rajya Sabha will be held on three seats in the state. The Congress has fielded



Scrutiny of nominations will be held on March 16 and nominations can be withdrawn by March 18. If necessitated, polling will take place on March 26, from 9 am to 4 pm.

BJP's Gehlot blamed the Congress government in the state for its failure on all fronts.

"I will strongly raise the issues related to development of the state in the Rajya Sabha," he said.

The Rajya Sabha seats, presently held by Ram Narain Dudi, Vijay Goel and Narayan Lal Panchariya, all from the BJP, are going to be vacated next month after completion of their term.

Scrutiny of nominations will be held on March 16 and nominations can be withdrawn by March 18. If neces-

sitated, polling will take place on March 26, from 9 am to 4 pm.

Rajasthan has a total of 10 Rajya Sabha seats and nine from those seats, including three whose tenure is going to complete next month, are from the BJP.

The Congress's only Rajya Sabha MP from Rajasthan is Manmohan Singh, who was elected unopposed in the Rajya Sabha bypolls held last year after the seat fell vacant following the demise of BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Madan Lal Saini, who was also the party's state president.

Wall of shame

A poster war over civil protesters in Lucknow, despite court orders, shows the UP Govt's stubbornness and arrogance



The first record of bounty-hunting or putting the price on the head of a thief came from a graffiti in Pompeii in 79 AD. Since then bounties and rogues' galleries have been used to crack down on criminals, demonise native Americans in the civil war, segregate immigrants and outcasts, tame rebels and break rival chieftains and warlords in a feudatory dispensation of justice across the world. Except that these medieval practices are well past their time; clanish societies have evolved into modern nation-states that address conflict and dissent within a defined socio-political architecture. Nowadays, the most wanted list is usually issued by Interpol. As for shaming the most hated social deviants, even petty criminals have the privilege of covering their faces when they are being taken to and from courts. Yet the Yogi Adityanath Government in Uttar Pradesh overrode all democratic convention and decided to name and shame citizens who may not be guilty of any crime. As he refuses to pull down hoardings with pictures of anti-citizenship law protesters — some of them notables and proven civil rights activists — despite a High Court order on dismantling them, he has thrown us back to medieval times and worse. For by putting out their names, details and addresses, he has placed the judgement call on a dangerous entity called the people's court, which can be easily swamped by the tide of majoritarian sentiment. Although he insists that exposing protesters is required simply because they fuelled riots and are, therefore, responsible for destruction of public property, no credible case for conviction has been made out against them yet. Besides, while the shaming walls claim that the cost of repairing damaged infrastructure should be recovered from them, there have been news reports of spot recoveries by the State police and musclemen claiming endorsement of the regime, which have been nothing but a sanctioned loot. The Lucknow administration has even served property attachment notices to several individuals. And should the courts limit it further, the State Government passed an ordinance on recovery of damage to public and private properties during political processions. So even the democratic right to dissent via sit-ins comes with caveats. Let us not even hazard a guess about the life threats we are exposing these people to officially, leave aside the incivility of an invasion of their privacy.

Much of the recent actions of the UP Government, be it against citizenship protesters or lynch mobs, would have us believe that it is a law unto itself. What prompts it to ignore the Allahabad High Court order to take the shame posters down as they "reflect colourable exercise of powers?" What compels it to be bull-headed about challenging the order in the Supreme Court despite the latter's declaration that there is no law to back such action? The intransigence of the Adityanath Government indicates that the "baying for blood" emotion is seen as legitimate redress by a society, which has completely bought into the finger-pointing propaganda of the times. By putting out personal details of protesters and dissenters, who are as much nationalist as any of us, there is an implied punishment of the educated and informed mind, a demonisation of it as anti-Hindu and classist. Suddenly, they are more dangerous than the criminals facing serious allegations, including murder, in Uttar Pradesh. There is a message and licence to the mob here, to do whatever they deem fit with the protesters, much like the anti-semitic posters exposed Jews as the enemy in Hitler's Germany. It is also a warning to and intimidation of potential dissenters that the establishment will go after them regardless of institutional checks and balances. Furthermore, it is consciously identifying and humiliating people for not being "Indian." By encouraging a mob hitback against the "guilty", the Adityanath Government could easily absolve itself of responsibility saying that matters went out of hand in a volatile scenario, just like it did in Delhi. Even if extremist elements of the Sangh Parivar get involved, they become faceless in a mob. There is, after all, a precedent of such perpetrators going unpunished. Posters and shaming walls, something that were so long confined to social media trolls, are now being made mainstream. The Samajwadi Party (SP), although belatedly, has launched a political counterpoint, putting up hoardings of accused ex-Union Minister Chinmayanand and jailed Unnao rape convict Kuldeep Singh Sengar, both former BJP leaders, lambasting the party's sexual offender list. Of course, they were just as promptly pulled down. Protest graffiti by civil groups are an expression of their angst because the law is often an utter failure. But when an elected Government resorts to such agitprops, it appears not a protector but a destabiliser of citizenry. And it sits smug, particularly when political gains are to be made in the end.

Together, we can

It must not be forgotten that the responsibility to protect fellow humans from any outbreak rests upon every nation



One of the defining characteristics of the Indian State has been the humanitarian operations it has carried overseas to bring back stranded Indians whenever and wherever they may have been. The China rescue mission in the wake of the spread of Coronavirus was one that silenced naysayers. With minimal support from the virus-stricken country and much bickering, direct diplomacy helped us secure all our citizens back on home soil. The Government is now bracing up for the challenge to bring back its citizens from Italy and Iran, the second and third most COVID-19 affected countries after China. While the Wuhan rescue operations were at the very initial stages, when the deadly disease didn't assume such alarming proportions confined as it was within the country, the current mission is being undertaken when COVID-19 has been declared a pandemic. Like in China, poignant stories abound of stranded Indians making desperate pleas, asking the Government some uneasy questions like where they are supposed to go and why they are being treated as smugglers. Panic-stricken students, fishermen and pilgrims in Italy are still not aware that they have to furnish a "Coronavirus negative" certificate before boarding a rescue aircraft. With the Italian health networks bursting at the seams, we are now flying out teams of doctors and virologists to test stranded Indians before bringing them back. This is a cumbersome process and in these stressed and stretched times, our embassies need to be proactive than protocol-bound in calming anxieties. Many Indians claim that their calls to emergency numbers, too, went unanswered. This suffering could have been avoided had the Indian embassy and by extension the Government ensured that the information about the requirement of the certificate from Indians returning from new Coronavirus hotspots had been disseminated properly. The embassy should have put up notifications on its website. A day-to-day interactivity should be immediately built in our response systems overseas and we should not be relying on SOS on social media, which is prone to fear-mongering than actual information.

Until the late Sushma Swaraj became the External Affairs Minister, India did not have a very good track record of looking after its expatriates/tourists/students stranded in foreign countries. Embassies were at best indifferent to their plight. She made a huge difference and changed the narrative. Let us maintain that efficiency and sensitivity. Remember, COVID-19 requires coordinated efforts.

Let's think afresh

Given a rise in gig economy, the time is ripe to ensure that the next revolution in the labour force is one that is allowed to grow and prosper, ethically and responsibly



AJOY KUMAR

It is well known that Jews faced severe exploitation, insult, discrimination and abuse in Nazi-ruled Germany. They were unable to hold any relevant job, other than menial ones that were assigned to them by the State. The fact that they were Jews deprived them of any chance of getting employed. German employers (most of them) would not hire them due to the existing systematic bias and propaganda that was fed to them by the State and its media channels.

Yet, a number of them, who were discriminated against, found a voice through other means — some through academics, others through literature — and ended up being pioneers in their respective fields. However, a large number of them were ultimately relegated to jobs in concentration camps, under the will of their oppressive rulers, or were left to die hungry. The success of the Jewish community brings to focus an issue that should require no debate: No one is inherently or genetically good or bad at most jobs. This episode highlights the manner in which a country views its minorities — be it on the basis of religion, caste or gender. The effects are limited not just in the way they face discrimination, through hate speech for example, but in more significant ways like a chance to earn a livelihood or to own a house.

This is where the "gig economy," which has seen massive expansion over the past few years, provides a ray of hope if we are willing to grab it. This can broadly be defined as an area of work where short-term jobs are assigned to individuals through online platforms. These positions range from hiring people directly for the customers for everyday jobs, like a driver or a maid or a plumber, to businesses hiring people on a freelance basis to help enterprises.

There is an argument that these jobs actually erode human resource or take advantage of the workers since there is no obligation to pay for their provident fund or to provide them with health cover, among other things. This does shed light on a valid concern. However, I think the gig economy has the opportunity to ensure that people, especially those who are discriminated against, find a way to earn a living and play a constructive role in society. The discrimination at workplace against minorities has been proved statistically. A 2010 study by Thorat and Attewell observed that in the case of equally qualified Scheduled Caste (SCs) and upper caste (about 4,800 each) applicants, SCs had 67 per cent less chance of receiving calls for an interview. What is more disturbing is that a higher percentage of less qualified high castes (undergraduate) received calls compared with the more qualified SCs



(post-graduates). The numbers are indeed shocking. In the case of other communities, who, too face discrimination, enough statistical and anecdotal proof exists that employers are reluctant to hire people from minority communities (assuming all things being equal). This is why even as the Muslims constitute roughly 14 per cent of India's population, they only make up three per cent of India Inc. With workplace gender discrimination remaining an issue of much debate, there's hardly any impact on the ground. In fact, things are getting worse for the women. According to a Deloitte report, female labour force participation in India fell to 26 per cent in 2018 from 36.7 per cent in 2005.

These are worrying trends and this is where the gig economy has the potential to alter the situation. This is evident from the number of minority communities that are registered on various online platforms as participants of the gig economy workforce. What may have started as a compulsion, on being excluded from the regular work force, may present women, SCs, STs and Muslims an opportunity to thrive in the labour workforce.

BOTH PRIVATE ENTITIES AND THE GOVERNMENT MUST COME TOGETHER TO PLUG SOME GAPING LOOPHOLES. A CLEAR MESSAGE MUST BE SENT OUT THAT THE ECOSYSTEM WILL NOT TOLERATE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ANY PARTICULAR COMMUNITY

Of course, this dream has some caveats. There have been instances in the past where we have seen discrimination on these platforms too. Last year, an Indian customer took to social media to lodge a complaint with an online food aggregator, Zomato, that he had refused to take the order because the driver appeared to be of Muslim heritage. Zomato responded with a witty tweet saying, "Food doesn't have a religion. It is a religion." This is just a microcosm of the discrimination that gig workers can face. Such attitude or approach towards our fellow Indians is something that I am sure, we all agree, cannot be tolerated, accepted or be allowed to fester.

This is where we need both, private bodies as also the Government, to help plug some gaping loopholes in the gig economy. To cite an example, private companies can refuse to display the name/gender of the person who's delivering the service as has been requested. Further, gig workers must be given the liberty to report any kind of discrimination by any user. Such conduct must be taken into account by online platforms prior to assigning work to any serviceman.

Further, creators of the gig economy must send a clear message that the ecosystem will not tolerate discrimination against any particular community. On its part, the Government can issue guidelines, listing out the details such companies must implement. Moreover, it is important to come up with a legal framework that protects the legal rights of such workers. In France, for example, labour law now allows for social security coverage against accidents at work to platform workers, which allows them a right to collective action. The European Parliament, too, has passed new rules that protect gig workers by legislating against discriminatory clauses and allowing for more security for such gig workers. Given India's large labour force and the number of participants in the gig economy, both as consumers and suppliers, the time is ripe to ensure that the next revolution in the labour force is one that is allowed to grow and prosper, ethically and responsibly. If we manage to do so, it will truly be a win-win for all Indians. (The writer is a former IPS officer, a former MP and currently a member of the AAP)

SOUNDBITE

I don't agree with the perception that there's going to be brain drain in the party. Young leaders will be attended to and given responsible positions going forward.

Congress spokesperson
—Randeep Surjewala

The decision to produce 'NH10' was instinctive. I was 25, I had no knowledge of producing films and I didn't know what I was getting into but I knew that I had to do it.

Actor
—Anushka Sharma

Certain controls may be justified but general travel bans are not seen as being the most effective. What we can do and what we should do is to carry out health screening measures.

EU Commission chief
—Ursula von der Leyen

I am grateful to the people of J&K and all leaders across the country who spoke for our freedom. But this freedom will be complete when all leaders are released.

Former Chief Minister
—Farooq Abdullah

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Curbs on visa valid

Sir — In the wake of the spread of the COVID-19, nations across the world have taken difficult and complex decisions to prevent the spread of the virus. Ireland has shut down schools, nurseries and colleges and urged all who can to work from home. Denmark has sent home all non-critical public sector employees. In the light of this, India, too, has suspended visas for all foreigners for a month with a few exemptions such as for diplomats, official or employment purposes. Though this decision has received much criticism, it must be kept in mind that prevention is better than cure and, hence, this is a good step taken by the Government keeping in mind the safety of its citizens. By preventing any foreign visitors into the country, further cases of Coronavirus can be prevented and the sole focus will be on treating the existing patients. It is clear by now that the main carriers of this virus are people travelling via flights. In fact, this decision should have been taken much earlier.

Padmimi Raghavendra
Secunderabad

Travelling a risky path

We feel a deep sense of vulnerability in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic. The prognosis is for more people to be affected by the affliction in the coming days. The steep economic downturn and concomitant loss of jobs and incomes, economic distress and lowering quality of life due to the pandemic has deepened the all-round gloom. Whether COVID-19 poses an existential threat to the human race or not, it has certainly become a serious global health crisis. It is spreading rapidly, assuming alarming proportions and causing psychological anxiety. Wide-ranging measures, from the closure of borders, schools and colleges and cinema halls, to denial of visas, cancellation/postponement of sporting fixtures and cultural and religious events, suspension of tourism and ban on air travel among others have been taken to cut the transmission chain and contain the pandemic. But what is important is to educate the masses, to help them separate fact from fiction. It is a novel experience to watch matches being played in empty stadiums without spectators or behind closed doors. The chance of "external survival" of the virus in the hot climate is said to be slim but it is yet to be proved conclusively. However, it is reassuring to hear from China that the pandemic will be "over by June" if countries take concerted action. Meanwhile, scientists

Leadership crisis

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Just another Scindia" (March 12). Jyotiraditya Scindia's exit from the Congress is fast losing its political vision and resources, allowing the BJP to gain strength. Without realising the importance of its leaders and taking radical decisions, it will soon find itself in the clutches of a bigger crisis.

Yash Bhatia
Ujjain

Loss for Congress

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Just another Scindia" (March 12). Jyotiraditya Scindia's exit from the Congress wasn't surprising but a major setback for the party. The adamant attitude of the Congress high command has seen many leaders quit, expressing dissatisfaction over the workings of the party. In Scindia, the Congress has lost one of its best leaders, who enjoys immense goodwill of the people of Madhya Pradesh. As a newly nominated MP in the Rajya Sabha, the BJP will benefit from having a people-centric personality like Scindia in its party.

Varun Dambal
Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A measure of their worth

India's first Land Records and Services Index is a way to gauge States' relative performance and help improve services on the ground



PRERNA PRABHAKAR

The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) recently released India's first Land Records and Services Index (N-LRSI), 2020, based on data collected over 2019-20 on two aspects of the supply of records — the extent of digitisation of land records and its quality. The first component, which aims to assess whether a State has made all its records digitally available to citizens, looks at three dimensions — the text (also called the record of rights), the official map associated with a land record (also called cadastral maps) and the property registration process. The second component of the index aims to assess if the data is comprehensive and reliable. Whether ownership details are updated as soon as a sale occurs; the extent of joint ownership; type of land use; size of the plot on the record and on the map and if encumbrances are being recorded (other claims on the property such as mortgages and court cases). All these elements are closely connected to property disputes and to the ease with which transactions can be completed, legally recorded and accessed. Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu are the five best-performing States on the index.

One of the unique features of the N-LRSI, 2020 is its ability to assess the relative performance of States on various components and sub-components of the index. There is no State/UT that emerges victorious on all the parameters of the index as they are at different stages of progress with regard to the extent of digitisation of records and the registration process. For improved land record management, laggard States should extract lessons from the better-performing ones on various parameters, which can possibly drive change in State-level policies. While for textual record digitisation, Dadra Nagar Haveli, Chhattisgarh and Goa appeared to be leading, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh topped the list for spatial record digitisation. For the registration component, Maharashtra emerged as the leader, while Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh were front runners due to quality records.

The findings will enable States to make efforts in the direction of creating more comprehensive and accurate records, by adopting the initiatives that successful States have made. In addition, the index brings out certain areas where no State/UT has taken any initiative. Effective integration across departments is one such area. The N-LRSI analysis has brought out the poor synergy across land record departments — revenue department as the custodian of textual records, the survey and settlement department managing the spatial records and the registration department. The N-LRSI design entails a sub-component of updating of ownership (within Quality of Records component), which gauges the extent of integration between registration and textual records — swiftness of the process of updating ownership as the result of registration of a transaction, the phenomenon which is commonly known as mutation. The information obtained from all the State/UT sources in this regard revealed that no State/UT has the provision for mutation on the same day as the registration. Moreover, there are only seven States/UTs that have the second-best alternative wherein a note indicating the registration appears in the textual record copy. The study also brought out the weak linkage that exists between the revenue department and survey and settlement department. This creates a huge divergence between the land area reported by the textual and spatial record, enhancing the chances of legal disputes over the definition of boundaries and extent of a land plot. With such poor inter-departmental synergy, aspiring for updated and accurate records will always be a distant goal and States/UTs should strive to undertake necessary actions to have the appropriate systems in place.

With varied recommendations for land record management, the N-LRSI, 2020 holds immense significance for a number of related factors. It is likely to be a helpful tool to assess the quality of key Government services like PM-Kisan, that are dependent on land record details. The efforts by States to improve land record digitisation and quality are expected to increase the chances of accurate identification of PM-Kisan beneficiaries and enhance the scheme's effectiveness.

The index can be a signalling factor for investors, as a clear title is one of the prerequisites for land acquisition that a firm envisions for setting up an industrial unit. An improved quality of land records, with accurate information that mirrors the ground reality, is expected to provide the necessary push to the underdeveloped mortgage market in India. As per the Committee on Household Finance, 2017 mortgages account for only 23 per cent of total liabilities in India. One of the primary reasons for this dismal situation is the inferior quality of land records, which are often not updated, indicating a high possibility of disputes. Without clear titles, it is not possible for banks to give out loans against the land/property. For instance, if the record does not get updated to reflect the subdivision of property, it cannot be used by the on-ground owner to request for a bank loan. With serious challenges of availability and use of data and information confronting the land policy and governance, the index promises to offer a pivotal solution to improve the existing situation.

(The writer is Associate Fellow, NCAER)

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THE CONGRESS PARTY IS NOT OPEN TO FRESH IDEAS AND REMAINS STRUCK IN INERTIA. IT IS CUT OFF FROM REALITY.

—BJP LEADER
JYOITRADIYA SCINDIA



HE FORGOT HIS IDEOLOGY AS HE WAS APPREHENSIVE ABOUT HIS POLITICAL FUTURE. SCINDIA WILL NEITHER GET RESPECT IN BJP, NOR WILL HE FEEL SATISFIED.

—CONGRESS LEADER
RAHUL GANDHI

Patching up lives

Quilting has not only become a powerful way to advocate change around the world, it has provided a healing touch to marginalised sections of society as well



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

In 2014, four years before the Supreme Court of India decriminalised homosexuality by declaring Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code unconstitutional in respect of consensual homosexual sex between adults, a group of people belonging to the LGBTQI community in Chhotaudepur, decided to step out of the shadows. Instead of using street protests to voice their opinions, the Gujarat-based group adopted a unique way to advocate their rights. With many of them being henna artists, the group used their artistic skills to design and stitch a patchwork quilt. Christened the "Henna Pride" advocacy quilt, their labour of love has since been taken around the world for creating awareness about the lives, trials and tribulations of its makers and for raising the issue regarding liberty for all communities, irrespective of their gender and sexual orientation.

Exhibited at the 2019 summit of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+25) in Nairobi, the quilt drew attention to the challenges members of the LGBTQI community face in advancing their sexual health and reproductive rights, despite gains like the Supreme Court's landmark judgment.

Quilting has not only become a powerful way to advocate for change, it has provided a healing touch as well. Making the "Henna Pride" quilt was particularly liberating for the team from Vadodara-based Vikalp, a not-for-profit organisation that works with tribal and transwomen, as homosexuality was considered a crime in India at the time.

"The whole process of coming together to make the quilt was empowering," says Maya Sharma, co-founder of Vikalp. "They didn't have a voice and finding that voice was important. The quilts gave them a sense of purpose and represented the change that happened within, just by coming together. Just the process of sharing their experiences helped transform their lives. Each of them developed their potential," explains Sharma.

Life for Payal, a 30-year-old transwoman took a turn for the better after the quilting project began. A male by birth, Payal prefers to be called that and not Mukesh, the name given by his family. He joined Vikalp to be with like-minded people and was chosen to contribute to the "Henna Pride" quilt because of his talent as a henna artist. Although Payal is one of the few educated, young tribals in his village, he had not been able to garner enough support to effectively combat stigma and discrimination. But joining hands with others like him boosted his confidence and self-belief. Today, he is the leader of a group and helps young people in tribal areas around his village live a dignified life. Now, there is greater freedom to dress and feel like a woman and to dance and celebrate without facing any backlash.

Payal's colleague, Dakshaben, who joined Vikalp nearly 15 years ago, has become a journalist in a small newspaper. Dakshaben, a survivor of domestic violence, initially worked at women's courts in Tilakwada to arbitrate cases of women like her, who were exploited and battered by their husbands. She brought a gender perspective to the quilting process, having been an outreach worker and possessing deep knowledge of her tribal community.

For Anika, a sex worker, quilting gave her the chance to overcome stigma and understand that

“MAKING THE 'HENNA PRIDE' QUILT WAS PARTICULARLY LIBERATING FOR THE TEAM FROM VADODARA-BASED VIKALP, A NOT-FOR-PROFIT ORGANISATION THAT WORKS WITH TRIBAL AND TRANSWOMEN, AS HOMOSEXUALITY WAS CONSIDERED A CRIME IN INDIA AT THE TIME



she, too, had human rights. Today, she is much more aware of her constitutional rights and has begun to take her own decisions.

Much of this transformation was made possible because of the efforts of the Advocacy Project (AP), a global not-for-profit organisation that helps marginalised groups tell their stories and become agents of change. AP collaborated with Vikalp to use the quilt-making process to help the group.

"The Advocacy Project uses embroidery and quilting as a tool for therapy, rights awareness and advocacy. Funded by the United National Population Fund to train women, AP connects the artists with professional quilters to produce stunning advocacy quilts. Then they are exhibited to a larger global audience to push for social change," says Karen Delaney, Deputy Director, AP.

Interestingly, the process of quilting has also brought change in the lives of professional quilters like Bobbi Fitzsimmons. Little did Fitzsimmons realise that her life would change when she engaged with the project some years ago. Fitzsimmons, who was present at the Nairobi Summit where AP presented 18 quilts from 14 countries, narrated how the project helped her gain confidence to move on in life.

While working in Nepal to create two quilts with women who lost family members during the civil war in the

country, Fitzsimmons was able to overcome the trauma of her own loss. "The quilts are both memorials to those who disappeared and dramatic reminders to the Government that each block represents people whose lives were torn apart by their loss," she says.

Fitzsimmons was also involved in helping to make the Kenya Cow quilt presented by Children Peace Initiative Kenya (CPIK). This quilt showcased how cows and children played a role in bringing peace between warring tribes in north-west parts of the country.

Salaiton Lenguris and Joyce Leiririo, mothers of some of the quilters from Kenya present at the summit, pointed out how freedom from conflict had given them a chance to become economically independent. Lenguris stated that the quilts portrayed how drought forced pastoralists to take their cattle into the grazing grounds of other tribes, triggering a conflict. It also showed how children became the torchbearers of peace.

The Children Peace Building Programme came about after the CPIK decided to use them as the primary actors in the peacemaking process. "The idea is that children are not just victims of conflict; rather, they are the bridges of peace in their families and communities that can combat and resolve inter-ethnic conflicts," contends Samson, programme officer, CPIK.

Under this programme the CPIK brought children of the warring Samburu and Pokot tribes together and engaged them in a series of activities that enabled them to become friends. Once the children became friends, their families ended hostilities. Various activities over the past three years, including a five-day peace camp for the children, helped them become agents for reconciliation between their tribes. This peace was sealed by gifting two families one heifer. Once the heifer gave birth the calves were distributed among them, thus ending the perennial conflict over livestock.

Lenguris and Leiririo were among the first from the Samburu tribe to become friends with mothers and children of the Pokot tribe. No fighting has been reported between the two tribes for some years now.

Now that there is peace, the mothers have been able to make use of their quilting training to make more quilts and the sale of their products has given them economic freedom as well.

"Besides getting the opportunity to come together, we gained skills that can be used to generate income for the rest of our lives. So, for the first time, we have the resources to look after the health of our children and families. This is why these quilts have become so important for us," says a contented Lenguris.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

Cast the food security net wide

The Government, the private sector, civil society organisations and agencies like the UNWFP can together achieve zero hunger and improved nutrition, leaving no one behind



BISHOW PARAJULI

With remarkable progress in foodgrain production, India has made a successful transition from being a food-deficit nation to a food surplus one. However, efforts to address malnutrition have not maintained the same pace. According to the latest *Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey*, 34.7 per cent of children under five years of age are stunted, 17.3 per cent suffer from wasting and 33 per cent are underweight. There is also a high prevalence of anaemia and micronutrient deficiency disorders. This is the result of a multitude of underlying factors, including lack of access to health

and nutrition services caused by social, economic and geographical barriers, and inhibiting social norms and structures. Climate change further exacerbates the existing threats to food security. With one decade left to achieve the ambitious goals of Agenda 2030, which include an end to hunger and all forms of malnutrition, bold action by a variety of actors — including the Government, civil society and UN agencies — is needed.

The strong policies and programmes put in place by the Government, including the implementation of the National Food Security Act, 2013, the launch of the National Nutrition Strategy, 2017 and the flagship initiative of POSHAN Abhiyaan to improve nutrition in children, adolescents, pregnant and nursing women, are leading the way. Local action at the State level, with remarkable progress made by the 117 aspirational districts, is accelerating the process. Several States across India are in the process of

implementing reforms and policies to address food insecurity and malnutrition. If maximised, these have the potential to transform the current state of malnutrition in the country. The use of technology to improve efficiency of food safety nets is one example of this. While, at the Central level, the Government is implementing the One Nation, One Ration Card scheme, which allows migrants to access their public distribution rations anywhere in the country, States like Odisha have deployed mechanisms that ensure proper targeting of food even in case of authentication failures. Similarly, Uttar Pradesh has pioneered the use of an interactive voice response system that not only allows beneficiaries to register their complaints but also provides accurate and updated information to them.

Fortification of Government-approved commodities within the social safety net programmes can improve nutritional outcomes. This has

been initiated with the introduction of the Central scheme on rice fortification and is being implemented across the aspirational districts in several States where the foodgrain is fortified with essential vitamins and minerals to address anaemia caused by micronutrient deficiency, especially among adolescent girls. Going forward, fortification has the potential to have better results if implemented on a mandatory basis.

The mid-day meal programme provides daily meals to 120 million schoolchildren aged between six and 14, with an objective to improve school enrollment, retention and attendance. It also aims to reduce classroom hunger to enable better learning. These meals have been further enhanced in some cases with the diversification of menus to include locally-sourced green vegetables as well as milk, eggs and fortified foods, and the promotion of kitchen gardens. Nutrition during the first 1,000 days of life has a profound

impact on children's ability to grow, learn and thrive. Adequate nutritional intake through improved infant and young child practices, enhanced nutritive value of food for expecting and nursing mothers and complementary food for children can prevent malnutrition. The Government of Kerala is working to enhance the nutritional value of food provided to children at Anganwadis by making take-home rations for children between six months and three years of age safe and more nutritious, and fortifying rice used to serve hot cooked meals to children aged three to six years. But more can be done. Identifying food consumption patterns and mapping locally-available nutritious food commodities such as millets, green vegetables and fruits, could lead to the diversification of food baskets under existing food security nets, which would further improve the dietary intake of vulnerable families and promote farming of indigenous climate-resilient crops.

In order to improve consumption patterns, diversify diets and enhance nutritional outcomes, it is crucial to focus on knowledge sharing. Behaviour change communication strategies to promote healthy eating habits can leverage the cultural and social aspiration of communities to encourage them to choose nutritious and appropriate diets. Eradicating malnutrition is an ambitious target, which individual entities cannot achieve alone. The private sector can bring in efficiencies and innovative solutions, civil society organisations have a key role to connect communities to the initiatives being designed and implemented for the most vulnerable and agencies like WFP can provide technical support and share international experience and best practices. Together, we can reach the goal of achieving zero hunger and improved nutrition, leaving no one behind.

(The writer is Representative and Country Director, UN World Food Programme in India)



FAKE DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA

Fear of waning legitimacy lies behind the latest constitutional wheeze by Russian President Vladimir Putin. However, Putin is confident enough of his position to put the changes to a referendum in April. That will be another simulation of democracy, although the pretence gives Russian liberals hope that the real thing is still possible. (The Guardian editorial)

CAPSULE



PayPal unveils ElderCare@PayPal initiative

CHENNAI: Digital payments player PayPal on Friday said it has unveiled an "ElderCare@PayPal" initiative offering holistic wellness for parents of its employees. The company said the initiative was part of its efforts to provide employees with a supportive environment and covers parental health including physical and financial conditions. In a statement, the company said the programme would also cover tier II and III cities besides major cities and towns. "At PayPal, inclusion as our core value is not only about including employees in every aspect of their work life, but about practising inclusion of their families as well," PayPal India, Head-HR, Jayanthi Vaidyanathan said. "Our new ElderCare initiative is another step over and above our suite of programmes around child and partner care."



Govt approves Rs 7,660 cr green highway project

NEW DELHI: The government on Friday approved a proposal for the construction of 780 km of green highways at a cost of Rs 7,660 crore. "The Cabinet has approved building 780-km 'green' National Highway project at a cost of Rs 7,660 crore," Union Minister Prakash Javadekar told reporters after the meeting. The project pertains to rehabilitation and upgradation of various National Highways covering a total length of over 780 km in four states -- Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.



IOC declares Rs 4.25/share interim dividend

NEW DELHI: State-owned Indian Oil Corp (IOC) on Friday declared an interim dividend of Rs 4.25 per share, which will give the government Rs 2,060 crore. "The Board of Directors of the company at its meeting held today (Friday) has declared an interim dividend of 42.50 per cent i.e. Rs 4.25 per equity share of face value of Rs 10 each for the financial year 2019-2020," the company said in a regulatory filing. The government, which holds 51.50 per cent stake in IOC, will get over Rs 2,060 crore plus taxes. "The dividend will be credited to the account of the shareholders or the dividend warrant in respect thereof will be dispatched on or before March 31, 2020," it added. The company's board fixed March 25 as the 'record date' for the purpose of ascertaining the eligibility of shareholders for payment of interim dividend at the aforesaid meeting. Shares of IOC traded 4.50 per cent higher at Rs 91.70 on the BSE on Friday.

CORONAVIRUS CONCERNS

INDIAN EQUITIES PLUNGE 20 PC IN LESS THAN 45 DAYS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian stocks have slumped nearly 20 per cent in less than 45 days as concerns over coronavirus pandemic dampened investor sentiments worldwide, including in major European markets and the US.

Data compiled by Sebi showed that China's Shanghai Composite declined just 1.78 per cent while the decline in other key Asian markets was in the range of 7-15 per cent.

The figures are based on comparison between closing levels on January 31 and March 12 -- the period during which coronavirus infections became more pronounced across geographies, including India.

Over the last few days, the Indian stock market has been moving in tandem with other global markets owing to concerns relating to coronavirus pandemic, resultant fear of economic slowdown and fall in international crude prices.

However, Sebi said that fall in the Indian indices has been significantly lower than the stock market in other countries.

Indian equity benchmark Sensex plunged by 19.51 per cent and the broader Nifty sank 19.83 per cent, much lower than France's CAC, which plummeted 36.35 per cent, Russia's RTS (36.3 per cent),



Brazil's Bovespa (36.2 per cent) and Germany's DAX (29.43 per cent).

Further, the FTSE 100 index of the UK dived by over 28 per cent, US Dow Jones declined 25 per cent and Nasdaq over 21 per cent. Interestingly, drop in Asian markets has been lower than European and the US.

Chinese market has slipped just 1.78 per cent even as epicentre of the outbreak was the central Chinese city of Wuhan. Among other Asian markets, Hong Kong's Hang Seng tumbled 7.61 per cent, Taiwan's Taixex (9.33 per cent), South Korea's Kospi (13.43 per cent) and Singapore's Strait Times (15.06 per cent).

Meanwhile, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) also said that the regulator and stock exchanges are prepared to "take any action" as required to deal with market volatility, hours after trading was halted for 45 minutes.

Meanwhile, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) also said that the regulator and stock exchanges are prepared to "take any action" as required to deal with market volatility, hours after trading was halted for 45 minutes

'RBI closely' monitoring global situation

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday said it is closely monitoring the current global situation and assured that it will take all steps to keep markets adequately liquid and stable.

The statement comes at a day when trading on the Indian stock exchanges hit a "circuit breaker" -- first time since 2008 -- as soon as markets opened on Friday.

"The RBI is closely and continuously monitoring the rapidly evolving global situation and will take all necessary measures to ensure that money, debt and forex markets remain adequately liquid and stable, and continue to function normally,"



the RBI said in a statement.

Both Sensex and Nifty plunged over 10 per cent in the opening session, hitting their lower circuit levels, as new coronavirus-led recession fears triggered panic selling in the market.

Stock exchanges had halted trading for 45 minutes within 15 minutes of market opening. Normal trading resumed around 1030 hours.

BYD Company opens largest plant to make masks

PNS ■ CHENNAI

China-headquartered BYD Company on Friday said it has unveiled the largest face masks plant aimed at serving the demand in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

BYD is proud to announce that it has created the world's largest mass produced face mask plant. The plant is now running at full capacity and is able to produce 50 lakh masks and three lakh bottles of disinfectants per day, a company said in a statement here.

The company said the plant would allow the firm to alleviate severe shortage that has affected hospitals and agencies across China in the wake of COVID-19 outbreak.

A special task force was appointed by BYD chairman and president Wang Chuanfu consisting of leaders from various divisions and more than 3,000 engineers were involved in research and development, design among others.



Goyal pitches for pvt sector investment, skills in railways

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Railway Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday made a strong pitch for private investment in railways, saying it will help the Centre realise the goal of Rs 50 lakh crore investment in the sector over the next 12 years.

If it is only left to the government to raise all the money, then welfare schemes will be hit and it may be forced to boost revenue by raising taxes and fare, Goyal told Lok Sabha in his reply to a discussion on demands for grants of his ministry.

He favoured using skills of private sector and facilities it may bring at less cost, saying it will strengthen the railways and help its expansion.

There is a need for Rs 50 lakh crore investment in the railways in the next 12 years, Goyal said. During the discussion,

He favoured using skills of private sector and facilities it may bring at less cost, saying it will strengthen the railways and help its expansion

members of opposition parties like the Congress, TMC and the Left had spoken against any move to privatise the railways.

In his reply, Goyal gave a detailed reply to criticisms of his ministry by opposition parties as he defended the move to merge all eight services into a single service of Indian Railway Management Service and cited several figures to assert that the railways has improved on parameters like safety, punctuality, cleanliness and expansion.

Three PIOs barred from acting as company directors in UK

PNS ■ LONDON

Three Indian-origin businessmen, two based in Mumbai and one in London, have been banned from acting as directors of any company without the permission of the UK court for their mismanagement of a health supplements firm operating out of India.

Melvine D'Silva, 44, from west London, and fellow directors Soriyano DSouza, 35, and Ramakant Lal, 37, from Mumbai have each signed seven-year disqualification undertakings, which bans them from directly or indirectly becoming involved, without the permission of the court, in the promotion, formation or management of a company.

The three bosses were directors of Vivid Lifestyle Limited, a health supplements company incorporated in July 2013. The company, however, was wound-up in the courts five years later in August 2018 following confidential enquiries after the UK's Insolvency Service received complaints



about Vivid Lifestyle's activities.

"As directors, it was entirely down to Ramakant Lal, Melvine Elias D'Silva and Soriyano Dsouza to supervise the activities of the call centre they had contracted to sell their products," said Martin Gitner, Deputy Head of Investigations for the Insolvency Service.

"Without that proper oversight, sales agents were left to their own devices and carried out aggressive and reckless sales tactics, often against vul-

Yes Bank shares gain 2 pc after SBI fund infusion

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Yes Bank on Friday rose by 2 per cent after State Bank of India (SBI) said it will infuse Rs 7,250 crore into the crippled private sector lender.

The stock surged 9.98 per cent to Rs 27.55 on BSE in day trade before closing at Rs 25.55, showing gains of 2 per cent. In opening trade, the stock touched lower circuit at Rs 22.55 on BSE.

On the NSE, the stock jumped 10.57 per cent to Rs 27.70. It settled the day at Rs 25.50, up by 1.80 per cent.

In terms of volume, more than 27 crore shares were traded on the NSE and over 2.6 crore units were exchanged on BSE.

State Bank of India on Thursday announced a Rs 7,250-crore fund infusion into the crippled Yes Bank under which it will pick up to 49 per cent equity in the fourth largest private sector lender.

Brokerages advise stock investors against taking short bets

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Brokerage houses on Friday cautioned investors against making an entry even as benchmark stock indices recovered after hitting the lower circuit of 10 per cent, saying the impact of coronavirus pandemic is still lingering. If someone is buying stocks, they should do so only with a medium to long term investment horizon and not to make a quick buck, they advised investors.

Immediately after opening, trading had to be halted on both the BSE and NSE on Friday as the indices hit the lower circuit after a fall of over 10 per cent. However, after opening in 45 minutes, they



zoomed to be in the green as against the previous day's close.

The selling was in line with global peers and possibly also a reaction to the first Indian death due to the virus pandemic.

"Investors should avoid taking any knee-jerk reaction to the current sell-off," asset manager Axis Mutual Fund said in

The selling was in line with global peers and possibly also a reaction to the first Indian death due to the virus pandemic

a note, advising that fresh investments should be spread over 3-6 months time.

Foreign brokerage Bank of America Securities made it clear that it is "not yet" the time to buy, reasoning that the Covid-19 sentiment is still driving the markets and major global markets will first have to contain the pandemic.

Govt to bring National Fisheries Policy for holistic development of sector: Giriraj

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government plans to bring out a National Fisheries Policy for holistic development of the sector which is growing at an annual rate of 8 per cent, Union Minister Giriraj Singh said in Rajya Sabha.

The government will take care of the interest of traditional fishermen while framing the policy, Singh, the Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairy, said while replying to supplement-



ary questions during Question Hour.

"Government of India envisages to bring out a

The policy would focus on bringing new technology and ways to deal with threat from cyclones as part of the overall objective to improve income of fishermen, Singh said

National Fisheries Policy for holistic development of the fisheries sector," the minister said, adding that the sector is growing at a rate of 8 per cent annually.

The policy would focus on bringing new technology and

ways to deal with threat from cyclones as part of the overall objective to improve income of fishermen, Singh said.

The proposed policy would incorporate the provisions of the existing National Policy on Marine Fisheries 2017.

Exports of 1,945 products to US grow by 5pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Exports of 1,945 Indian products, which were availing duty incentives under the GSP scheme of the US, has recorded a growth of 5 per cent to USD 5.47 billion during June-December 2019 period, Parliament was informed on Friday.

Benefits under Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) were rolled back by the US in June last year.

Under the GSP programme,

1,945 products including auto components and textile materials used to get duty-concessions in the American markets.

"India's exports to the US, which were under the GSP lines have shown an increase of 5 per cent in the period of June-December 2019 as compared to the corresponding period of previous year i.e., from June-December 2018 (USD 5.2 billion), when GSP benefits were there," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said in

a written reply to the Rajya Sabha.

He also said that the average duty benefits accrued to exporters and importers on account of US GSP benefits were 3.8 per cent, which varied across the products.

On February 10 this year, the US has also removed India from the list of developing countries for the purpose of countervailing investigations under the WTO's Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures.

Pentagon to reconsider award of JEDI contract

PNS ■ SAN FRANCISCO

The US Department of Defense said Thursday it wants to reconsider its decision to award a multi-billion-dollar military cloud computing contract to Microsoft in a bidding process Amazon claims was tainted by politics.

A judge last month issued an order at Amazon's request temporarily blocking the US military from starting work on the Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure contract, or JEDI.

In a filing late Thursday in a federal court, government attorneys asked for the matter



to be "remanded," or sent back, to the Pentagon "for 120 days to reconsider certain aspects of the challenged agency decision." It is up to the court whether the case is remanded or proceeds.

The DoD attorneys said the

The DoD attorneys said the motion came in response to the judge stalling the awarding of the JEDI contract on the grounds Amazon Web Services (AWS) would "likely be able to show" that the department erred in evaluating its proposal

"We are pleased that the DoD has acknowledged 'substantial and legitimate' issues that affected the JEDI award decision, and that corrective action is necessary," an AWS spokesperson said in a statement.

"We look forward to complete, fair, and effective correc-

tive action that fully insulates the re-evaluation from political influence and corrects the many issues affecting the initial flawed award." Amazon argues it was shut out of the deal because of President Donald Trump's vendetta against the company and its chief executive Jeff Bezos.

COLOURS THAT LAST



Fashion designer Nida Mahmood plays with the ajrak printing from Gujarat and a 160-year-old analogue photography technique in her latest sustainable fashion line. By PNS

“AJRAK PRINTING HAS ALWAYS FASCINATED ME, ESPECIALLY THE INDIGO COLOUR THAT IT USES WIDELY. IT'S AN ART FORM THAT NEEDS LABOUR OF LOVE. MY WORK HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT CELEBRATING INDIA. I ALSO FEEL THAT THIS CRAFT HAS NOW BEEN DECLINING DUE TO THE ADVENT OF MORE MODERN AND QUICKER METHODS OF PRINTING”

Our design stories begin with a piece of cloth and we, the designers, romance it, says Nida Mahmood. For her, fabrics are the most integral part of her design process as they have evolved to be accepted and recognised as an art form. So it is that she resolves her creative challenges through fabrics. It's the reason that she has launched a sustainable line through a sub-brand called Madam Marigold. It revolves around Indian traditions with a contemporary touch that aims to revive age-old art forms and techniques that do not exhaust natural resources and are long-lasting. It comprises tunics, pants, saris, jackets, overlays and dresses. The marigold flower has acted as Nida's muse as it stands for "everything that is Indian," be it a wedding or a ritual or a new shop. "It epitomises India in several beautiful ways and celebrates its true essence," says she. The collection brings Indian simplicity back in the limelight by reviving age-old craftsmanship. In her maiden collection, she has explored the ajrak printing from Gujarat and also worked on a 160-year-old analogue photography technique to expose designs on the garments and prints on textiles and paper. Ajrak, a block-printed cloth with deep, crimson red and indigo blue background, bears symmetrical patterns with interspersed unprinted sparkling-white motifs. The term is derived from Azrak in Arabic which implies 'blue' as it is one of the principal colours in it. The colour is the major reason why the designer chose the technique. It's her "favourite" and she believes that there couldn't have been a better way to add her personal touch to the collection. She says, "Ajrak printing has always fascinated me, especially the indigo colour that it uses widely. It's an art form that needs labour of love. As a designer, my work has always been about celebrating India and it's beautiful culture. Ajrak, hailing from as old as the Indus valley civilisation, allows me to do so. I also feel that this craft has now been declining due to the advent of more modern and quicker methods of printing. Brighter chemical dyes are replacing the natural, muted colours and this slow and

careful process of printing this traditional textile is getting lost." In Ajrak, the process of dyeing and printing the fabric is repeated again and again with different kind of dyes to achieve the perfect design. How challenging is it to deal with such a slow and time-consuming process and yet balance it with the deadlines? "Yes, it is an extremely tedious technique and requires a lot of attention and care. We coat the fabric with a photosensitive material so that the design and the colours are exposed. The entire process can even take around two weeks to finally come to end. But once it takes shape, every design differs from each other in various aspects. That is the beauty of it," says Nida. Eco-sensitivity forms the core of her collection as the techniques used for dyeing, printing and other surface ornamentation are sustainable. Even the process of Ajrak printing is long-lasting as it uses colours from natural elements like turmeric, pomegranate, onion peels, tea leaves, beetroot, hibiscus, marigold, natural indigo and many others. "It is very important to consider the impact of the fashion industry on the land that we are living. This is an eco-friendly brand. We focus on circularity in fashion which promotes minimum waste and an optimum use of all resources. We make sure to constantly minimise the negative impact of any resources on environment," says she. While the designer is known for introducing new trends in fashion, what has been her creative process? "I believe in following my heart as a creative person and the only rule is to not have rules. When one doesn't box oneself in the rules set by society or any industry, one is able to create work that is fresh and has an independent and fresh perspective," says she. As the fashion trends keep evolving with every season, a designer needs to constantly update his/her designs. What keeps Nida going? She says, "The love for what I do keeps the light glowing. This is my bread and butter and as an entrepreneur it is imperative for me to work towards achieving mid-term and long terms business goals. Though we need to be on the toes all the time but there is no pressure. I guess one just slides into the role that I need to play as it is such a transient industry."

Jack of all trades and master to many

Vijayawada-based Immanial Pokalkar, who won national-level competitions in Mime, Modelling and Rangoli is helping underprivileged kids to learn and hone various skills through his organisation, finds V SATEESH REDDY

At a time when youngsters are hooked to social media apps to kill time, a 20-year-old from Vijayawada is making the most of his time and talents. Meet Immanial Pokalkar, who is busy pursuing his hobbies of Mime, clay art, Rangoli and modelling, with absolute seriousness to make it to the top. Speaking to *The Pioneer*, Pokalkar says he was interested in various crafts right from his childhood, but since his family wasn't economically sound, he had no means to hone them. "That is when I decided to not be bogged down by circumstances and began teaching myself all these crafts," he says. Pokalkar, who learnt mime by observing people's emotions, hopes to act for the Telugu television industry one day. He won his first modelling competition while he was still in college. He credits his professors who recognised his talent and encouraged him to participate in a university-level modelling competition, where he emerged a winner. "This event boosted my confidence to participate in

several other competitions, in one of which, I was crowned Mr Vijayawada," an elated Pokalkar tells us. He won several other Rangoli and Mime competitions. Talking about the stereotype of Rangoli being a woman's craft, he says most of the participants are



POKALKAR, WHO LEARNT MIME BY OBSERVING PEOPLE'S EMOTIONS, HOPES TO ACT FOR THE TELUGU TELEVISION INDUSTRY ONE DAY

these crafts myself. I don't want another talent to suffer the same. This is why I started 'Imaginary Creations' which will provide a platform for budding talent in various fields. Every kid has a dream of his own and I will strive to do my best in guiding them to achieve that," he signs off.

Tiny tot's drawing turns into a real toy

A Hyderabad boy won a chance to have the drawing of his dream-toy turn into a real toy for IKEA. Eight-year-old Ayaan is one among the six children across the globe to have won the Swedish home furnishing retailer's Annual Global Soft Toy Drawing Competition. In its sixth such edition, the home furnishing retailer encouraged children aged up to 12 to draw their dream toy on paper and have a chance for it to be turned into a real toy. The winning drawings will eventually become a part of the global limited edition — the SAGOSKATT collection — a range of soft toys designed

by kids, for kids. This year, 71,000 children submitted their drawings for the competition. Fifteen entries were selected from each country, with six international drawings adjudged winners. Ayaan's Eggplant Monster Car was one of them. IKEA was pleased to have a winner from Hyderabad. "Ayaan's drawing of an Eggplant Monster Car will be turned into a real soft toy and sold in IKEA stores across the globe," Aurelie Raimon, Store Manager at IKEA Hyderabad said. The competition aims not only at having children share their dreams and imagination, but also contributing to children's right to play and develop. — PNS



Armaan Malik set to launch first English single



who truly believes in me, this project and also shares the same vision as me about global music. We have been working on this for about a year now and I can't control my excitement to share this new side of me with the world," said Armaan.

To this, David Massey, president and CEO, Arista, added: "We are excited to have Armaan join the Arista family. He is an international superstar and we look forward to introducing him to the US and broadening his fan base here."

The 23-year-old playback singer gained popularity with many super hit songs like *Tu Hawa, Naina, Main Hoon Hero Tera, Hua Hain Aaj Pehli Baar, Sau Aasmaan, Dil Mein Tum Ho* among many others.

Singer-songwriter Armaan Malik will launch his first English-language single *Control* on March 20.

The singer has signed with Arista Records. Under the deal, Armaan will release his first English language single,

and release English music has been my dream for as long as I can remember and I couldn't have found a better family than Arista Records to be starting this new journey with. There's no better feeling than to know that I'm in such good hands with an executive like David Massey,

COVID 19 effect: Release date of SIR postponed

The release date of Rohena Gera's feature film *Is Love Enough? SIR* has been postponed owing to the coronavirus outbreak.

The film was initially scheduled to release on March 20.

"Bearing in mind public health concerns and the advisory from the Health Ministry, we have decided to postpone the release of *SIR*. We look forward to sharing our film with our home audience in India and will announce an updated release date as soon

as possible. Meanwhile, we urge everyone to stay safe and take all necessary health precautions," a statement from the makers said, announcing the change in the release date of the film, read.

The decision comes one day after the Delhi government officially announced the shutdown of all cinema halls in the capital until March 31 due to the outbreak of coronavirus.

Is Love Enough? SIR features Tillotama Shome, Vivek Gomber and Marathi actress Geetanjali Kulkarni.



Fast And Furious 9 release date rescheduled to April 2021

The release of the ninth instalment of the *Fast and Furious* franchise has been rescheduled in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The much-anticipated film was set to release on May 22, but officials at Paramount took to Facebook on Thursday, March 12 to announce the film's release would be delayed by 11 months, reports *aceshowbiz.com*.

"We feel all the love and the anticipation you have for the next chapter in our saga. That's why it's especially tough to let you know that we have to move the

release date of the film. It's become clear that it won't be possible for all of our fans around the world to see the film this May," the statement reads.

The statement added: "While we know there is disappointment in having to wait a little while longer, this move is made with the safety of everyone as our foremost consideration."

The production, which stars Vin Diesel, is the latest

release to be halted as the virus becomes an official global pandemic. *A Quiet Place: Part II*, the latest James Bond film *No Time to Die*, *The Lovebirds* and the *Peter Rabbit* sequel have also been rescheduled.



Jack Antonoff: I only work with friends



in the industry, reports *femalefirst.co.uk*.

"Basically, I only work with my friends. Also, they're kind of my only friends at this point. I mean, I have my childhood friends. But your friends are who you spend your life with. I spend my life in the studio, with these people," he said.

Jack also opened up about his collaboration with Taylor Swift.

"Taylor's the first person who let me produce a song. Before Taylor, everyone said: 'You're not a producer.' It took Taylor Swift to say: 'I like the way this sounds...'" he added.

Singer Jack Antonoff loves working with friends. In an inter-

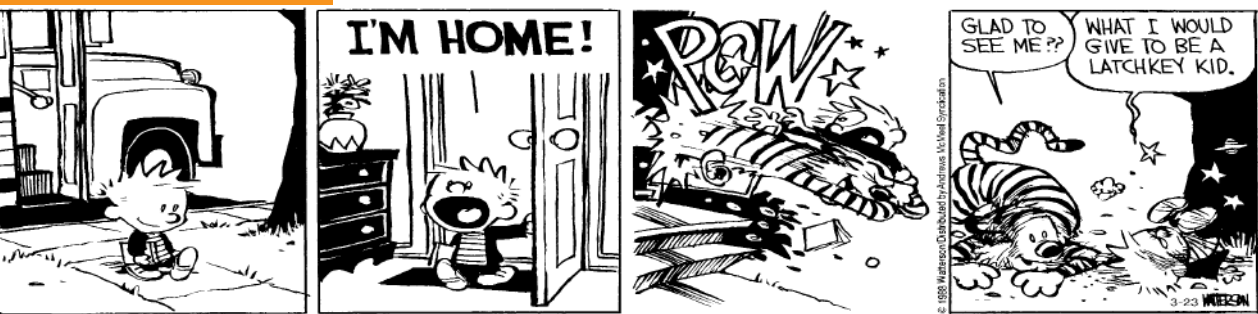
view with the *New York Times* newspaper, Jack spoke about his working procedure and the comfort he gets while working with his friends

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



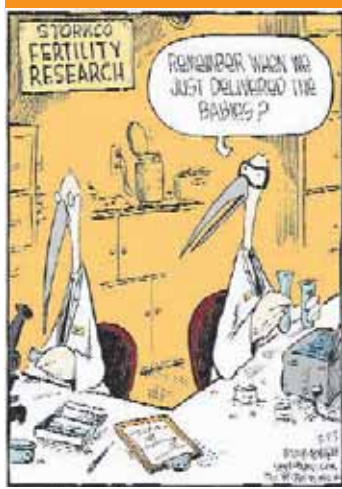
GARFIELD



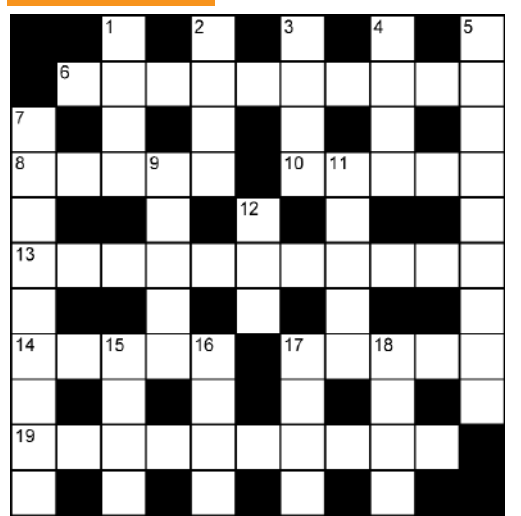
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

ACROSS

- Boast
- Leave out
- Small mark
- This covers a sheep
- Find these on a beach
- A light metal
- Raised land smaller than mountains

DOWN

- Not asleep
- Say "yes" with your head
- A flat squarish thing used like a boat
- Wicked
- Mix red and white to make this colour
- Story

SOLUTION

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

AFP ■ LONDON

The English Premier League suspended all fixtures until April 4 on Friday after Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta and Chelsea winger Callum Hudson-Odoi tested positive for coronavirus.

Matches in the English Football League, Women's Super League, all football in Scotland and international friendlies for England and Wales have also been suspended.

Following a meeting of shareholders today, it was unanimously decided to suspend the Premier League with the intention of returning on 4 April, subject to medical advice and conditions at the time," the Premier League said in a statement.

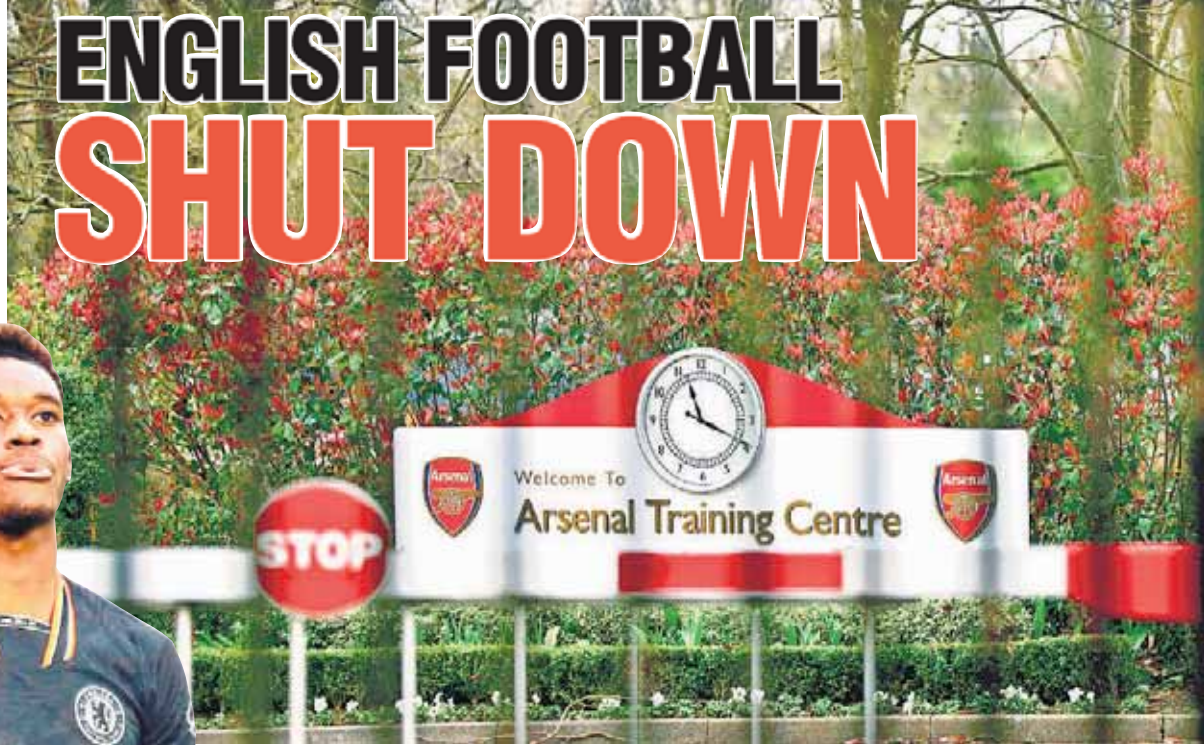
Everton also announced a player is in self-isolation for seven days after reporting a high temperature.

The rest of their first-team squad and coaching staff have been told to stay away from all of the Merseyside club's sites.

Leicester City had three players go into self-isolation on Thursday and Bournemouth said goalkeeper Artur Boruc and four staff members were taking the same precaution.

West Ham staff are also self-isolating as

ENGLISH FOOTBALL SHUT DOWN



Closed gates at Arsenal's London Colney training ground on Friday. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has tested positive for the coronavirus. It has forced the club to close its training complex, put the entire first-team in self isolation

they faced Arteta's Arsenal six days ago at the Emirates.

"Above all, we wish Mikel Arteta and Callum Hudson-Odoi speedy recover-

ies, and everyone else affected by COVID-19," said Premier League Chief Executive Richard Masters.

"In this unprecedented situation, we are working closely with our clubs, Government, The FA and EFL and can reassure everyone the health and welfare of players, staff and supporters are our priority."

The English Football League, which

heads up the three divisions below the Premier League, and Women's Super League will be suspended until April 3 at the earliest.

England's two friendly matches at home to Italy and Denmark later this month have been postponed as has Wales' clashes with Austria and the US.

However, the authorities still hope to be able to resume and complete the sea-

son at a later date.

"Despite the challenges, it is the Premier League's aim to reschedule the displaced fixtures, including those played by Academy sides, when it is safe to do so," added the Premier League statement.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Thursday the government was considering the question of banning major public events such as sporting fixtures, but was not ready to do so yet.

However, the news of Arteta and Hudson-Odoi's positive tests in the last 24 hours forced the English football authorities to act.

Hudson-Odoi said he had already "recovered" from the virus but will continue to self-isolate.

"As you may be aware I had the virus for the last couple of days, which I've recovered from," the England international posted in a video on social media.

"I'm following the health guidelines and self-isolated myself from everybody for the week. I hope to be back on the pitch very soon."

All matches in Scotland, including Sunday's Old Firm derby between Rangers and Celtic, have also been indefinitely suspended.

"Today's announcement is made in the interests of public health but, equally, the health and safety of players, match officials, and staff across the game," said Ian Maxwell, Scottish FA Chief Executive.

"It is also why the Scottish FA is compelled to ensure that the suspension is cascaded through the non-professional and grassroots games until further notice."



UEFA Europa & Champions League trophy

UEFA postpone all CL & Europa matches

AFP ■ PARIS

All UEFA Champions League and Europa League matches scheduled to be played next week have been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic, European football's governing body said on Friday.

The move comes after two of next week's four scheduled Champions League last 16, second legs — between Manchester City and Real Madrid, and between Juventus and Lyon — had already been called off on Thursday.

Two other matches scheduled for next Wednesday, between Barcelona and Napoli and between Bayern Munich and Chelsea, were initially due to go ahead behind closed doors.

"In the light of developments due to the spread of COVID-19 in Europe and related decisions made by different governments, all UEFA club competitions matches scheduled next week are postponed," UEFA said in a statement.

"Further decisions on when these matches take place will be communicated in due course."

The postponements also affect all the second legs of the Europa League last-16 round.

Six of the eight first-leg matches were played on Thursday, four behind closed doors.

The other two matches, between Inter Milan and Getafe and between Sevilla and Roma, were called off.

UEFA also confirmed that the draws for the Champions League and Europa League quarter-finals, which were supposed to be held next Friday, March 20, were postponed as a consequence.

The body will hold a crisis meeting next Tuesday to work out a way forward for their club competitions and for Euro 2020, which could now be postponed by a year due to the pandemic.

Man Utd thrash LASK

AFP ■ MELBOURNE



Daniel James (21) celebrates with Man Utd teammate Odion Ighalo after scoring

AFP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester United put one foot in the Europa League quarter-finals on Thursday with a 5-0 win at LASK Linz in one of four last 16 first leg matches played behind closed doors.

Odion Ighalo slammed home the opener via the underside of the bar from 20 yards just before the half-hour, and Daniel James added a second with a sharp run and finish just before the hour mark.

Juan Mata bagged a third eight minutes from the end and Mason Greenwood and Andreas Pereira struck in injury time, as United extended their unbeaten run to 11 matches, with nine clean sheets in that time.

"I think the quality in our play was good. We were well prepared for them and they did fantastic," United boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer told BT Sport.

"There was some high-class finishing in the goals... It should have been more goals before half-time, but we got the goals we needed."

Ibrox was one of the two grounds where fans were allowed to attend, but the presence of Rangers' home support couldn't stop them losing 3-1 to Bayer Leverkusen.

Bundesliga outfit Bayer are now favourites to progress

should the second leg matches take place thanks to Kai Havertz's penalty eight minutes before the break and two lovely second half strikes from Charles Aranguiz and Leon Bailey.

George Edmundson had briefly given Rangers hope in the 75th minute when he pulled the scores back to 2-1 with a well-placed header, but Steven Gerrard's side could not capitalise.

Istanbul Basaksehir won 1-0 at home to FC Copenhagen in Turkey courtesy of a late Edin Visca penalty, in the other game allowed to take place before a crowd.

Basel secured a surprise 3-0 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt with Samuele Campo, Kevin Bua and Fabian Frei all on target for the visitors.

Wolverhampton Wanderers gave themselves a good chance of continuing their first European run in nearly four decades with a 1-1 draw at Olympiakos' empty Georgios Karaiskakis Stadium.

Shaktar Donetsk saw off Wolfsburg 2-1 in an entertaining encounter in Germany, with goals from Junior Moraes and Marcos Antonio enough for the Ukrainians, who also missed a penalty through Victor Kovalenko.

He said Prime Minister Shinzo

Formula One's season was thrown into turmoil Friday with the Australian Grand Prix cancelled just hours before cars were due to hit the track amid fears that more races will be called off as the coronavirus pandemic takes its toll.

The decision follows April's Chinese Grand Prix being postponed and with the second race of the year in Bahrain, Vietnam also scrapped, leaving huge question marks over the rest of the calendar.

"We will in the coming days be looking at races that are more imminent like Bahrain and Vietnam," F1 chief Chase Carey said in Melbourne.

"And we will have further announcements and

Australian GP cancelled



Workers pack up in pit lane after the cancellation of the Australian F1 GP

decisions on how we navigate the short-term elements of our schedule. We know there are issues there."

The future of the Australian race, the first of the season, was also in

doubt on Thursday when McLaren pulled out after one of its team members tested positive for the virus.

McLaren revealed on Friday that 14 other staff were now in a mandatory two week quarantine after being in close contact with the man, casting doubts on whether it will be able to compete in Bahrain even if the race goes ahead.

The McLaren employee was among eight Formula One personnel who went into isolation after showing flu-like symptoms typical of the disease this week.

The other seven — including four from the Haas team — all returned negative results.

The fast-moving developments sparked a crisis meeting between the race organisers, the FIA, teams and Formula One promoters late Thursday to discuss whether Sunday's race should go ahead.

"Those discussions concluded with a majority view of the teams that the race should not go ahead," they said in a joint statement just hours before the first official practice session and with fans queuing to get in.

It added while fans would be disappointed, "the safety of all members of the Formula 1 family and the wider community, as well as the fairness of the competition take priority."

ATK, Chennaiyin to vie for hat-trick

I-League matches in empty stadiums

PTI ■ MARGAO

ATK and Chennaiyin FC will seek a hat-trick of ISL titles here today when they meet in the 6th edition's final, which will be played without spectators owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Though for a different reason, this is the second time that an ISL match will be played in an empty stadium after the league stage game between NorthEast United FC and Bengaluru FC was held behind closed doors in Guwahati in the wake of the protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act in Assam.

The season has been a landmark one in many ways. While it has produced high quality football, the sport's governing body AIFFF has granted ISL the top-tier domestic competition status.

The league phase winners of the ISL, FC Goa will become the first Indian side to directly play in the group stage of the AFC Champions League, the top club league of Asia.

ATK (2014 and 2016) and Chennaiyin (2015 and 2017-18) have both won the ISL twice already and are looking to become the first side to win it three times.

But, in an anti-climax of sort, there will be no spectators to witness the historic moment as the final will be played in front of an empty stadium.

The two teams were brilliant in the play-offs with Chennaiyin getting the better of FC Goa in a thrilling two-legged tie



ATK and Chennaiyin skipper and coach pose with the ISL trophy on the eve of season 6 final

that finished 6-5 on aggregates, while ATK produced a second leg turnaround to send defending champions Bengaluru FC packing with a 3-2 win on aggregate.

This is the first time that these two clubs are meeting each other in the final. Interestingly, neither club has lost an ISL final — a run that will end for one of them today.

The two sides are also on equal footing this season. In the league stages, ATK defeated Chennaiyin in Chennai before

the team from the south returned the favour in Kolkata.

While ATK have been one of the most consistent sides this season, Chennaiyin were left to produce a miracle to reach this stage after Owen Coyle took charge of them at the start of last December.

In the six matches before his arrival, Chennaiyin had won only once and scored just four goals. Since he took charge, Chennaiyin went on to win eight matches, a tally bettered only by FC Goa. Now Coyle is a win away from completing a miracle.

NEW DELHI: All the remaining 28 matches of the I-League, including Sunday's marquee Kolkata derby between champions Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, will be played in empty stadiums, the All India Football Federation said on Friday.

The decision was taken after the AIFFF and I-League officials had a Skype meeting with club representatives.

"Adhering to the advisories issued by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, AIFFF has decided to complete the remaining matches of the 2019-20 edition of the Hero I-League behind closed doors," the AIFFF said in a statement.

"Besides team officials and players; match officials (referees), medical staff, TV Crew, accredited media, and required security staff — none would be allowed to be in the premises of the stadium on match day, and during official practice the preceding day," it said.

This will be the first time in the country that so many competitive football matches under the aegis of the AIFFF will be played closed doors.

The first match to be played behind closed doors will be the



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee felicitates Mohun Bagan players

one between Real Kashmir FC and TRAU FC at TRC ground in Srinagar today. The enthusiastic Real Kashmir supporters who have been turning out to pack the venue most of the time

will be robbed of the opportunity to cheer their team.

But the match which will be hit the most as far as football-mad spectators are concerned is Sunday's Kolkata derby between champions Mohun Bagan and East Bengal at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata.

This will be the last Kolkata derby of the I-League era as a merged side of Mohun Bagan and ATK will play in the ISL from next season.

No plans for Olympics without spectators: Japan

TOKYO: Japanese government officials insisted on Friday they have no plans to alter the Olympics, including holding it without spectators, after US President Donald Trump proposed a delay over the coronavirus.

The fate of the 2020 Games, scheduled to open in Tokyo on July 24, has been thrown into doubt by the outbreak of the virus, now dubbed a pandemic.

But organisers, Japanese government officials and the International Olympic Committee have insisted preparation for the Games is on track, with no expectations of a postponement or cancellation.

"There is no change in the government policy in that we closely cooperate with the IOC, the organising committee, and the Tokyo metropolitan government to steadily prepare for holding the Games as scheduled," government spokesman



A man with a mask walks past countdown clock for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics

Yoshihide Suga told reporters.

He said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Trump had held a phone call to discuss the outbreak as well as the

Olympics. "In the telephone talks with President Trump, the prime minister mentioned our efforts toward holding the Games, and the president said

Trump praises preparations

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump late on Thursday praised Tokyo's Olympic preparations and their "magnificent" venue just hours after he suggested delaying the Summer Games for up to a year due to the coronavirus.

Trump's apparent change of heart came after a phone call with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo

he highly values Japan's efforts on transparency," Suga said.

Asked about the possibility of scaling back the number of spectators, Hashimoto said: "We are not thinking about that at all."

Suga also said the government "doesn't envisage" either a Games without spectators or the prospect of

athletes withdrawing from the event.

IOC chief Thomas Bach told German television ARD on Thursday that the body would follow recommendations by the World Health Organization, but for now continues to work for a "successful" Games.

Oly torch relay scrap because of crowds

AFP ■ OLYMPIA

Greece's Olympic Committee on Friday said it was cancelling the rest of the torch relay for the Tokyo 2020 Games on Greek soil as large crowds had turned out despite coronavirus warnings.

"The rest of the torch relay on Greek soil has been cancelled," the committee said, adding that the Olympic flame would be handed over to Tokyo organisers on March 19 as scheduled, but without spectators.

It noted that crowds had

ignored "repeated warnings" not to gather in force at stopovers in the torch relay.

Greece has so far declared 117 cases of the coronavirus, one of whom died on Thursday after 10 days in hospital.

The move was announced after a large crowd mobbed Hollywood actor Gerard Butler as he lit a cauldron in the city of Sparta.

Butler had starred as the ancient Spartan King Leonidas in the 2007 epic 300, and repeated his famous line from the movie — "This is Sparta" — for gathered media.



Madha: GREAT ATTEMPT BUT LACKS LUSTRE

While Tollywood is not new to films that expose scams, the director of *Madha*, debutant Srividya Basava, aims to bring to light scams of the pharmaceutical industry. The film that won 26 awards at film festivals around the world such as the Berlin Flash Film Festival and London International Motion Picture Awards among others, was a let-down.

The film revolves around Nisha (Trishna Mukherjee), a proofreader who falls in love with Arjun (Venkat Rahul), a director of photography, whose cruel intentions bring ruin to her life. Following several incidents, Nisha is diagnosed to be psychologically ill and ends up in a mental asylum. Nisha witnesses atrocities inside the asylum. Why was she framed to be mentally ill and how she tries to expose these scams, if she will, forms the crux of the story.

The film has three subplots running parallel to each other: A psychiatrist who explains the capabilities of the human mind and

how it is a big weapon; a team of doctors working on genes that can fight any disease; and the story of Nisha. While the attempt was great, the result seemed to have confused the audience that tried connecting them, all through the film.

The film loses points for its slow-paced introduction and subsequent narration. Unlike regular thrillers, the film makes almost no revelations until the very end, most of which are unimpressive. The film makes one recall sequences from another critically acclaimed psychological thriller *Awe* that made little to no revelations until the climax. The director's attempt to give all clichés relating to this genre a miss is laudable.

Naresh Kumar's background set the tone and makes up for the slow, redundant scenes in the film. The cinematography and lighting too, beautifully add to the theme and mood of the film.

Actress Trishna Mukherjee is an absolute delight to watch. Her portrayal of a psychologically-ill patient and a

troubled woman is brilliant and definitely a talent to look out for. Venkat Rahul does a good job at playing Rahul and Anish Kuruvilla too does a decent job playing the

CAST: TRISHNA MUKHERJEE, VENKAT RAHUL, ANISH KURUVILLA

RATING: 2/5

antagonist.

While *Madha* doesn't classify as a commercial hit, it definitely is worth a watch for its cast, gripping storyline, cinematography and its young director's brave attempt at a psychological thriller.



Anup's tunes for Kalyaan Dhev

Music composer Anup Rubens will be rendering tunes for writer Sreedhar Seepana's directorial venture with Megastar Chiranjeevi's son-in-law Kalyaan Dhev. It was on Seepana's insistence that production houses GA2 Pictures, People Media Factory and Abhishek Agarwal Arts, who are jointly producing the film, tapped Anup, who has to his credit albums like *Ishq*, *Manam*, *Gundejaari Gallanthayinde* and *Temper* among others. While his recent form has been questionable, the director believed that with his script, Anup can create magic.

"Anup has already started music sessions with the director. A teasing song has been recorded and Seepana is highly impressed with it. Both are planning to record a couple of more songs if not three

WHILE ANUP'S RECENT FORM HAS BEEN QUESTIONABLE, THE DIRECTOR BELIEVED THAT WITH HIS SCRIPT, ANUP CAN CREATE MAGIC

before the shoot rolls in April first week in Visakhapatnam. The tunesmith is gung-ho about the script and he is keen to offer an album which will be a smorgasbord of different musical styles," said a source.

The untitled film sees Avika Gor as Kalyaan Dhev's love interest, while Annapurna, Pridhvi Raj, Vennela Kishore, Posani Krishna Murali, Aadukulam Nariyan, Shatru and Vidyullekha Raman round off the supporting cast.

— NG

Charan, Manoj to star in *Billa Ranga* remake?

Mega Power Star Ram Charan, who is currently shooting for the SS Rajamouli's upcoming big-budget and multilingual drama *RRR*, has his fans guessing his next move. With the film likely to wrap shooting by May this year, rumours are rife that Charan is looking to star in a remake of a classic.

According to the latest buzz, Charan has shown keen interest in acting in the remake of his father and Mega Star Chiranjeevi's film *Billa Ranga* which created quite a sensation the 1980s. Actors Chiranjeevi and Mohan Babu delivered a hit by playing dual roles as father and son in *Billa Ranga*, which was helmed by KSR Das. And it is being heard through the grapevine that Mohan Babu's son Manchu Manoj too, is likely to reprise his father's role in the remake of the classic.



Alia Bhatt to join *RRR* in Pune

The team of director SS Rajamouli's mega-budget *RRR*, which has been shooting in and around Hyderabad, will soon move to Pune to begin its next schedule of shooting after a brief break. Key scenes of both the lead actors — NTR and Ram Charan — will be shot during this schedule. The schedule is likely to begin this month-end and will have Bollywood star Alia Bhatt join the cast.

Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn recently finished shooting for his scenes in the film. At least 80 per cent of the shoot is said to have completed. With the release date being postponed to January 8, 2021 from July this year, Rajamouli now has ample time to shoot at his pace. The shooting is likely to be wrapped by the end of May and post-production will begin soon after. *RRR* is a multi-starrer being produced by DVV Danayya and will release in 10 languages across the country.

Balayya wraps up shooting first schedule with Boyapati

In some good news for actor Balakrishna's fans, the actor finished shooting for the first schedule of his upcoming film tentatively called *NBK 106*. The announcement was made by director Boyapati Srinu on social

media. An elated Srinu took to twitter to say, "Done with the first schedule successfully with an emotional sequence, gearing up for the next.

#BalayyaBoyapati3." This is the third film that has the two working together. They had previously worked together for *Simha* and *Legend*.

The first leg of the film was shot in Varanasi. The second schedule in Hyderabad will begin soon. Balayya is paired with actress Anjali, who was also seen with the actor in *Dictator*.

Produced by Miryala Ravinder Reddy, the film is touted to be a commercial action entertainer. S Thaman will be composing music for the film.

Balakrishna's last film *Ruler* co-starring Sonal Chauhan and Vedhika and directed by KS Ravi Kumar failed to impress the audience. The actor's fans hope he will deliver a hit this time and are all geared up to ensure the film earns good bucks.

