

ANALYSIS 7
DISASTROUS
DECADE FOR DATA

MONEY 8
AIR INDIA EMPLOYEES SEEK
RS 50K-CR FOR FLAG CARRIER

SPORTS 11
VIRAT RIGHT GUY TO TAKE INDIAN
CRICKET FORWARD: BOTHAM

VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY MAY 29, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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BALAYYA FURIOUS AT HIS EXCLUSION FROM INDUSTRY MEETINGS

Page 12

Jayalalithaa's niece, nephew legal heirs to all her wealth: HC

The Madras High Court on Wednesday asked the Tamil Nadu government to reconsider its decision to convert late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's residence in Chennai into a memorial and declared her niece and nephew as the legal heirs of her property worth several crores. A division bench of Justices N Kirubakaran and Abdul Quddus also suggested that 'Veda Nilayam', located in the upmarket Poes Garden, be converted into the official residence of CM of the state, while a portion of the property can be a memorial if needed. The bench said, "Deepak and Deepa are second class legal heirs of the late CM, being the son and daughter of her late brother Jayakumar."



Businessman hires 180-seater plane to fly 3 family members, help

A Bhopal-based high net worth individual hired a 180-seater A320 plane of a private carrier to ferry four family members to New Delhi, in a bid to avoid crowd at the airport and in flight amid the COVID-19 outbreak, officials said on Thursday. The person, who is a liquor baron, chartered the aircraft to send to Delhi his daughter, her two children and their maid, who were stuck in Bhopal since the last two months due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown, sources said. The plane arrived here from Delhi on Monday with crew only and flew back with just four passengers for whom it was specially hired, they said.



Locust attack: Delhi issues advisory for spraying pesticides

To deal with the attack of locusts in the national capital, the Delhi government has issued an advisory for spraying pesticides, Cabinet Minister Gopal Rai said on Thursday. Rai said in view of the increasing threat of locusts in north India, the Agriculture Department of the Delhi government will run awareness programmes to make the people and farmers of Delhi aware of this new threat. "Also, the Delhi Government has issued advisory on spraying pesticides and its quantity," Rai tweeted. The circular was issued in order to prevent a probable attack in Delhi by a swarm of locusts, which are reportedly present in the states of UP, MP and Rajasthan.



SEE THE PLIGHT OF MIGRANTS, GIVE THEM RS 7,500: SONIA

Accusing the Narendra Modi government of not listening to the plight of the migrant workers, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Thursday demanded from the government to provide Rs 7,500 to every needy of the country for next six months. Speaking in the Congress 'SpeakUp' campaign to take the voice of poor, migrants, small businesses and the middle class to the central government, Sonia said, "In the last two months the lockdown to combat the spread of novel Covid-19, has created a huge problem of economic crisis." "For the first time, people have seen the pain and plight of the migrant workers. Their pain was heard by the entire nation but not by the government," she said.



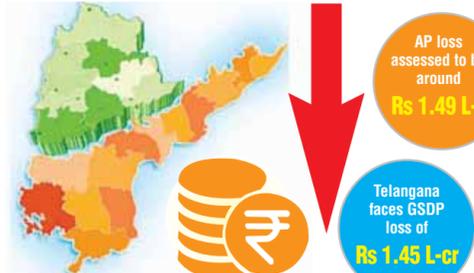
The challenges ahead

3

Telugu states register GSDP loss of Rs 3 lakh-cr

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Coronavirus-induced lockdown has badly hit the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of the two Telugu states, with Andhra Pradesh registering a loss of 1.49 lakh-crore and Telangana accounting for Rs 1.45 lakh-crore in the 2020-21 fiscal, a total of about Rs 3 lakh crore, according to the latest SBI Ecwrap report.



The report estimates state-wise loss at Rs 30.3 lakh-crore. GSDP is the measure, in monetary terms, of the volume of all goods and services produced within the boundaries of the State during a given period of time, accounted without duplication.

The report also estimates district-wise damage with maximum or 50 per cent damage from districts in the red zones. "The combined loss of orange + red zones is around 90 per cent of the total loss.

The loss in green zones is the lowest as 80 per cent of the population in this zone is located in rural areas which is open for almost all activities," says the report. In Telangana, green zones registered no loss

while red zones and orange zones contributed 43.2 per cent and 56.8 per cent loss respectively. The total loss is 14.6 per cent of total GSDP of the state, the report assesses.

Coming to Andhra Pradesh, the share of GDP loss of Andhra from different zones is — 49.4 per cent from red zones, 45.4 per cent from orange zone and 2.1 per cent from green zone.

The states; revenue comes mainly from state taxes and duties, share of Central Taxes, other non-tax revenue (including grants-in-aid) and interests.

The GDP of Andhra Pradesh is mainly driven by its agriculture sector besides industry and services sector.

Vizag on par with Hyderabad, Bengaluru, asserts Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that Visakhapatnam is the only city in the state that can compete with cities like Hyderabad and Bengaluru Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday said that a university would be set up in the city for skill development.

Addressing meeting as part of the 'Mana Palana-Mee Suchana' programme at his Tadepalli camp office here, the Chief Minister said that his focus was on establishment of industries and generating employment opportunities in the state.

Shedding light on the hurdles faced by the state, he said the denial of Special Category Status (SCS) by the Centre deprived AP of the opportunity to extend incentives to industries. "If SCS had been accorded, the Centre would have shared the burden and state would have benefitted from I-T and GST exemptions," he said.

KIA motors to invest additional \$ 54 mn

South Korean automaker KIA Motors India on Thursday announced an additional investment of USD 54 million towards the expansion of the manufacturing facility near Anantapur.



This announcement was made by Kia Motors India CEO Kookhyun Shim, while participating in an Andhra Pradesh government's programme organised at the Chief Minister's Camp Office in Tadepalli. "The investment will be focused on manufacturing SUV vehicles in the state," the government said in a statement. Interacting with the top lawmakers and bureaucrats of the state led by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, a KIA Motors' senior executive said, "Kia is all set to become a model for foreign investors and investments coming to AP." KIA Motors currently employs locals to the tune of 85 per cent, he added. Already, the company has made an investment of USD 1.1 billion in the manufacturing plant at Anantapur, which employs about 10,000 people. The facility in Anantapur, spread across 536 acres, has an annual capacity of three lakh vehicles. The plant can produce hybrid and electric vehicles.



Kookhyun Shim, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of Kia Motors India, with Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy at the CM's Camp Office at Tadepalli on Thursday.

Almost 80% of COVID cases in India asymptomatic: Vardhan

5

YSRCP cannot shake the foundations of TDP: Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The ruling YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh cannot shake the foundations of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) by conspiring and slapping false cases against its workers and leaders, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu said on Thursday.

Naidu, while addressing a political conclave here, also demanded Bharat Ratna for TDP founder NT Rama Rao for his outstanding and multifarious contribution to the poor people, cinema and the socio-political life of the country.

In this regard, a resolution was also passed during the two-day digital conclave, which began on May 27.

"Nobody can shake the foundations of the TDP because it has a strong place in the hearts of poorer sections and backward classes right



"Nobody can shake the foundations of the TDP because it has a strong place in the hearts of poorer sections and backward classes right from the party's inception"

— N CHANDRABABU NAIDU, TDP supremo

from the party's inception," the TDP said in a statement quoting Naidu.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's conspiracies and his YSRCP filing false cases will not "frighten" TDP workers and leaders who are ready to fight back with "self-respect and self-confidence", Naidu, the former chief minister, said.

He said as an opposition party, the TDP is fighting against anti-people policies of the YSRCP-led government but false cases are being filed to harass the TDP cadre.

"Even the media is being threatened with a black order while social media activists are being implicated in false cases," Naidu said.

YSRCP won't complete its full term: Balakrishna

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MLA Nandamuri Balakrishna on Thursday said that the YSRCP government will not last its full term and the TDP will bounce back to power.

Addressing the party's annual conclave, Mahanadu, through videoconference from Hyderabad, Balakrishna made it clear that YSRCP government was headed for disaster in the hands of YS Jaganmohan Reddy.



TTD resolves not to sell its properties

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) board on Thursday passed a resolution not to sell any lands and assets belonging to the trust in the future.

Speaking to media, TTD Trust Board chairman YV Subba Reddy said, "We passed a resolution not to sell any lands of the TTD and decided not to sell any lands or assets belonging to the TTD in the future."

It also passed a resolution asking the state government to initiate a probe into the malicious campaign against TTD. The members conducted the board meeting through videoconference on Thursday.

Along with YV Subba Reddy, Executive officer Anil Kumar Singhal, Additional EO Dharmareddy, Special Inves Karunakar Reddy, Chevireddy Bhasker Reddy and others took part in the meeting.

Church heads want places of worship reopened

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Christian leaders in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana under the banner of Andhra Pradesh Christian Leaders Forum (APCLF) met online and deliberated upon the closure of places of worship in general and churches in particular.

Even as the leaders lauded the efforts of the government to fight against Covid-19, they were against the closure of places of worship.

Need to look at building economy with local skills: Suresh Prabhu

8

Kanna's daughter-in-law found dead



PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AP BJP president Kanna Lakshminarayana's daughter-in-law died soon after collapsing at Madhapur in Hyderabad on Thursday, just two days after celebrating her marriage anniversary.

Nallapureddy Suharika was married to Lakshminarayana's younger son, Kanna Phaneendra. The couple celebrated a decade of their married life on May 26.

According to the police, Suharika went to

meet a friend in Kondapur where she allegedly collapsed in their residence. She was rushed to a private hospital in Gachibowli where the doctors declared her dead.

UN farmers body warns of more locust invasions

PNS ■ NEW DELHI /NAGPUR

Civic workers sprayed gallons of insecticide and farmers beat thalis and played loud music in several areas of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh to drive away swarms of locusts amid their worst invasion in years, reports said.

Authorities in Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka too sounded alerts Thursday to the possibility of locusts entering their territories even as UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) warned that the pests could reach as far



east as Bihar and Odisha in the coming weeks. "We are ready. Seven districts have been put on high alert,"

Sanjeev Kaushal, Additional Chief Secretary at Haryana's Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Department said.

Karnataka set up a committee to examine the threat while saying that the chances of the insects flying into the state are remote.

The swarms entered Rajasthan last month from Pakistan and then spread to areas across the western states, helped by strong winds.

About 90,000 hectares in 20 Rajasthan districts are affected by the locust attack, Om Prakash, Commissioner at the state's Agriculture Department, said Thursday.

Swarms moved from Sri Ganganagar, Nagaur, Jaipur, Dausa, Karauli and Swai Madhopur districts towards

Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, the official said.

He said the department carried out locust control operations over 67,000 hectares in Rajasthan. In Uttar Pradesh, agriculture department workers targeted swarms in Moth and Garutha areas of Jhansi, and in Sonbhadra district overnight, according to Kamal Katiyar Deputy Director, Agriculture.

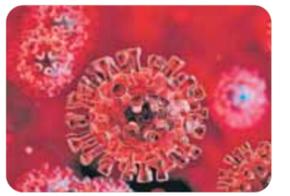
In Sonbhadra, a swarm Wednesday reached Bemauni village in Ghorawal tehsil, where a team from the Agriculture Department sprayed chemicals till late night, killing a large number of insects.

128 new Covid cases take tally to 3,245

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With 128 fresh infections, the total number of Covid-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh rose to 3,245 while one death due to the virus was reported, taking the toll in the state to 59, a bulletin from the government said on Thursday.

The lone death was reported in Kurnool district. Of the fresh cases in the past 24 hours ending 9 am on



Thursday, four were linked to the Koyambedu market in Chennai, the bulletin said.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Jyeshtha & Shukla Paksha Panchangam

Tithi: Saptami: 09:54 pm

Nakshatram: Ashlesha: 06:58 am

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)

Rahukalam: 10:36 am - 12:13 pm

Yamagandam: 03:27 pm - 05:05 pm

Varjyam: 06:30 pm - 08:02 pm

Gulika: 07:22 am - 08:59 am

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 03:44 am - 05:16 am

Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:47 am - 12:39 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 44/30

Humidity: 44%

Sunrise: 05:41 am

Sunset: 06:46 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated May 28, 2020 5:00 PM

TDP demands Bharat Ratna for NTR

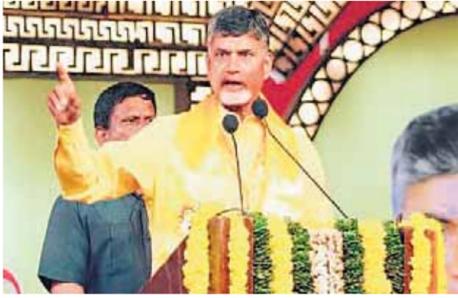
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP on Thursday demanded that Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award of the country, be conferred posthumously on its founder and former Chief Minister NT Rama Rao.

On the second and final day of party's 'Mahanadu', a resolution was passed urging the Centre to confer Bharat Ratna on Rama Rao in recognition of his outstanding and multifarious contributions to the poor, cinema and socio-political life of the country.

The resolution was passed on the birth anniversary of Rama Rao. Popularly known as NTR, the legendary actor had formed the TDP in 1982 and created a record of sorts by leading the party to power within nine months in the then undivided Andhra Pradesh.

TDP President N Chandrababu Naidu began the second day's deliberations after paying tributes to NTR.



● On the second and final day of party's 'Mahanadu', a resolution was passed urging the Centre to confer Bharat Ratna on Rama Rao in recognition of his outstanding and multifarious contributions to the poor, cinema and socio-political life of the country

● Naidu asserted that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's conspiracies and false cases will not be able to frighten the TDP cadre and leaders who will fight back with the self-respect and self-confidence that were given by the party founder

Naidu said the TDP would not relent till NTR was conferred the country's highest civilian award. He pointed out that NTR had played a crucial role in opposing monopoly of the Congress and fought vigorously to form an alternative force at the national level.

Addressing the Mahanadu on the second day, he said that nobody can shake the foundation of TDP as it has a strong place in the hearts of the poor and backward classes right

from its inception. The TDP chief recalled how NTR laid strong foundation for the party by launching popular welfare programmes like Rs 2 kg rice and housing for the poor that became a role model for the rest of the country.

Naidu asserted that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's conspiracies and false cases will not be able to frighten the TDP cadre and leaders who will fight back with the self-respect and self-confi-

dence that were given by the party founder. Alleging that the government is foisting cases, he said TDP cadre will not surrender to the ruling party's intimidatory tactics. Naidu pointed out that in 1989, the TDP met with a crushing defeat with a nine per cent vote share but in 1994, their party came back with a resounding victory with a massive 17.7 per cent votes and Congress could not get opposition party status at that time. When the NTR government was dismissed undemocratically during Indira Gandhi time, Save Democracy agitation was run for 30 days,

which went down as a historic event in the political history of the country as a whole, he recalled.

Referring to manhandling and humiliation meted out to Dalit doctor Sudhakar, Naidu said that the YSRCP was presiding over goondism and rowdism in order to frighten all sections of people and then to plunder the resources of the state.

He said that if the TDP was not strong enough to fight back with self-confidence, the ruling party excesses would have become uncontrollable making the common man's life miserable.

HC orders police to file cases against lockdown violators

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The High Court has directed police to file the cases against those who violated the lockdown norms across the State. The High Court commented that the Central and State governments imposed lockdown under the Disaster Management Act to contain the Coronavirus pandemic in the country.

The High Court on Thursday held hearings on complaints filed over the violations of the lockdown rules. As many eight separate petitions were filed in the High Court alleging that seven MLAs, along with a minister, were involved in violations during the lockdown. Hearing these petitions, the High Court has ordered to register cases against anyone who violated the lockdown.

The High Court has instructed the petitioners to file a complaint with Disaster



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Management against those who committed lockdown violations and asked police to take action against them. Kishore filed a petition in the High Court against eight MLAs for

violation of the lockdown rules. The writ petitions were filed by advocate Para Kishore, Vanga Venaktrami Reddy and advocate Ponaka Janardhana Reddy.

SCR transports essentials to Bangladesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The South Central Railway, even in the prevailing pandemic times due to outbreak of Covid-19, has been continuously operating freight and parcel trains to ensure that the supply chain, particularly of essential commodities, remains intact across the nation.

Now the services of the zone during the current lockdown have crossed the country borders wherein essential commodities are also being transported to the neighbouring country viz., Bangladesh. Four rakes of essential agricultural produce have been successfully loaded and dispatched from different stations of the zone.

Traditionally, transportation of these essential products to Bangladesh was being done regularly by road. During the lockdown period as all the State and international borders have been impacted, transportation by road has been adversely affected. SCR officials under the guidance of Gajanan Mallya, General



● One rake consisting of 42 wagons with 2,477 tonnes of dry chillies has been loaded and dispatched from Tadepalligudem station to Darshan station in Bangladesh, one rake consisting of 42 wagons with 2,472 tonnes of onions has been loaded and dispatched from Nagarsol station to Darshan and two rakes consisting of 42 wagons each with total of 4,928 tonnes of dry chillies, turmeric and ginger have been loaded and dispatched from Reddipalem railway station to Benapole railway station.

Manager, held discussions with consignors for transporting this essential commodity by trains. As a result, the zone has successfully sent the following freight trains in the current month to

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Gajanan Mallya has appreciated the marketing efforts of officers and staff of Guntur, Vijayawada and Nanded Divisions in capturing the new traffic to the new destinations, which is also long lead traffic. He assured the freight customers that the railways will extend support in all aspects to encourage loading of these agricultural produce by rail to Bangladesh. He also opined that transportation of products by trains is not only economically beneficial to consignors but also helps in smooth supply of these essential products to the neighbouring country in a safest and fastest manner.



Govindaraja Swamy Brahminsavams begins

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The annual Brahminsavams of Sri Govindarajaswamy temple kicked off on Thursday with the Dhvajarohanam in the auspicious Mithuna Lagnam 8 am and 9.30 am. Priests installed the flag with the Garuda image on the temple pillar amidst chanting of Vedic mantras and mangala vaidyas and later Srivari Asthanam was performed

within the complex sans devotees in view of Coronavirus restrictions.

Apart from a variety of rituals TTD also organised Snapana Tirumanjanam in the afternoon. In the evening, the Lord was taken out on Pedda Sesa Vahanam within the temple corridors. Pedda Jeeyar Swami, Chinna Jeeyar Swami, special grade deputy executive officer Varalakshmi and temple staff were present.

HC hearing on party colours deferred

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The division bench of the High Court comprising Chief Justice Jitendra Kumar Maheswari and Justice Lalita Kanneganti on Thursday posted the writ petition challenging the party colours to the government buildings to Friday after the Advocate General informed the bench that the Supreme Court would be hearing the case on Thursday.

Chief Secretary Neelam Sawhney, Principal Secretary (Panchayat Raj) Gopalakrishna Dwivedi and Commissioner of Panchayat Raj Girija Sankar attended hearing on Thursday as per the directive of the Division Bench.

It may be recalled that the government has issued GO No 623 after the High Court has instructed the government to remove the party colours to the government buildings and later the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the High Court. Advocate Somayajulu challenged the issuance of the GO No 623 and the High Court directed officials to attend the court to explain why they would not be subjected to contempt of court.



Land e-Auction date extended

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The e-Auction date has been extended for 15 days keeping in view of reaching more buyers, disclosed Pravin Kumar, ex-officio Special Secretary- Revenue Department, Director of Build AP Mission.

In a release on Thursday, he said that it is an open and transparent e-Auction and anybody can participate in bidding. Nine land parcels six in Visakhapatnam and three in Guntur have been identified for sale in the first phase. All these land parcels are at prominent locations, having good potential and are also free from encroachments, litigations and issues.

E-auction of the above nine land parcels will be held on June 11 and the details of land parcels viz location, area, site photographs, e-Auction reserve price, e-Auction terms and conditions are available at www.ap.gov.in & www.nbccindia.com & www.tenderwizard.com/NB CC. Intending individuals/parties may go through above websites for registration and participation in e-Auction.

TTD Chairman condoles ex-EO's death

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

TTD Trust Board Chairman YV Subba Reddy and Executive Officer Anil Kumar Singhal condoled the death of Umapathi Rao, former Executive Officer of TTD, and expressed their condolences to the bereaved family. Late Umapathi Rao had served as third Executive Officer of TTD from 1965 to 1969 and brought about several development activities in TTD during his tenure.

Priest sacrifices man to end Covid pandemic in Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A 70-year-old priest was arrested for allegedly sacrificing a 52-year-old man inside a temple in Odisha's Cuttack district to appease the Goddess and end the Coronavirus pandemic.

Priest Sansari Ojha engaged at Brahmani Dei temple in Bandhahuda area under Narasinghpur police station allegedly beheaded a man inside the shrine on Wednesday night, said police on Thursday. Later, the priest surrendered before the police.

The deceased has been identified as Saroj Pradhan. The priest claimed he was ordered by the Goddess in his dream to sacrifice a human in order to bring an end to the pandemic, the police said.

"The priest claimed that he



saw Goddess in his dream and was asked to sacrifice a human's life to bring to an end to Coronavirus. Hence, to appease the Goddess, he decapitated the man," said Alok Ranjan Ray, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) of Athagarh.

While the body has been

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sent for an autopsy, police seized the murder weapon from the shrine. Police said they were initiating an investigation into the incident as both had shared weed at the temple.

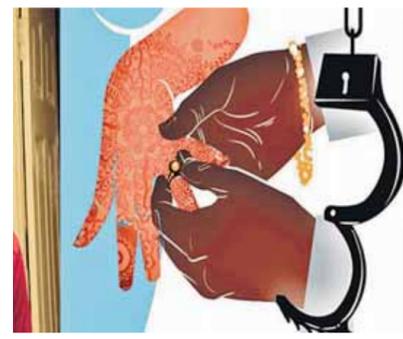
Woman, son held for matrimonial fraud

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A matrimonial scam was unearthed by the Jubilee Hills police on Thursday and arrested a 44-year-old woman and her son, who created a fake profile on a matrimonial site and lured a software engineer and made him transfer Rs 65 lakh.

According to police, the accused were identified as Malavika Devati and her son Venkateshwara Pranav Lalith Gopal Devati, 22, both natives of Ranga Reddy district.

"Malavika's husband Devati Srinivas is absconding. She created a profile on a popular matrimonial site under the fictitious name of Keerthi Madhavaneni and contacted many men who were looking for prospective alliances. The profile introduced Malavika as Keerthi, a doctor living in Jubilee Hills and the owner of several properties. A software engi-



According to police, the accused were identified as Malavika Devati and her son Venkateshwara Pranav Lalith Gopal Devati, 22, both natives of Ranga Reddy district

neer, Varun from California, contacted her after going through the profile," said the police.

During their regular interaction over social media and phone, Malavika alias Keerthi told Varun that her father had died a few years ago and that her mother Mahalakshmi Madhavaneni was torturing her to transfer the property

on her name. She sought his help in fighting a court case to prevent the property being transferred on her mother's name.

"Malavika convinced Varun that once she wins the case, he would also benefit as they would be marrying soon. Believing her, he over a period of time sent Rs 65 lakh as expenses for fight-

ing the case and hiring advocates," added the police.

Upon realising that he was conned, Varun approached the police, who then arrested Malavika and her son. The police said the family was previously involved in similar cases registered in the Nallakunta and Marredpally police stations. Further investigation is on.

Prevalence of 'silent' Covid-19 infections much higher than thought

IANAS ■ SYDNEY

The prevalence of 'silent' symptomless Covid-19 infections may be much higher than thought and as countries progress out of lockdown, a high proportion of asymptomatic individuals may mean a much higher percentage has been infected with the Coronavirus, according to a study of people isolated on a cruise ship during the pandemic.

Published in the journal Thorax, the study from Australian researchers revealed that more than eight out of 10 of passengers and crew who tested positive for the infection had no symptoms. The research



was carried out among 128 passengers (mostly from Australia and New Zealand) and 95 crew onboard a ship which set sail from the city of

Ushuaia in Argentina in mid-March for a planned 21-day cruise of the Antarctic after the World Health Organisation (WHO) had declared Covid-19

"As countries progress out of lockdown, a high proportion of infected, but asymptomatic, individuals may mean that a much higher percentage of the population than expected may have been infected with Covid," said Alan Smyth, joint editor in chief of the jour-

nal.

Passengers, who in the previous three weeks, had passed through countries where Covid-19 infection rates were already high, were not allowed to board. And everyone's temperature was taken before embarkation.

Hand sanitising stations were plentiful aboard ship, particularly in the dining room.

According to the study, the first case of fever was reported on day 8, prompting the immediate adoption of infection control measures.

As Argentina had closed its borders, the ship sailed to Montevideo, Uruguay, arriving on day 13. Eight passengers and crew eventually required medical evacuation to the hospital

at this point for respiratory failure.

On day 20 all the remaining 217 passengers and crew were swab tested for Coronavirus. More than half (59 per cent) tested positive. In 10 instances, two passengers sharing the same cabin didn't have the same test result, possibly because the current swab test returns a substantial number of false-negative results, the authors said.

Of those testing positive, 24 (19 per cent) had symptoms, but 108 (81 per cent) didn't. The ship had no contact with other people for 28 days after its departure, so was the equivalent of a hermetically sealed environ-

ment.

The authors concluded that the prevalence of Covid-19 infection on cruise ships is likely to be "significantly underestimated," prompting them to recommend that passengers should be monitored after disembarkation to ward off potential community spread of the virus.

"As countries progress out of lockdown, a high proportion of infected, but asymptomatic, individuals may mean that a much higher percentage of the population than expected may have been infected with Covid," said Alan Smyth, joint editor in chief of the journal in a linked blog.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSR Congress Party rode to power on the back of its supremo YS Jaganmohan Reddy's marathon padayatra and the promise of change.

While Jagan can

proudly express satisfaction at what he has achieved in the past one year, he still has mountains to climb and oceans to cross as he prepares for the next four years of this term.

When Jagan took the reins, residuary Andhra Pradesh was still in its formative stages and the treasury empty.

There were unresolved issues with its neighbouring state, it was still trying to build its capital city "Amaravati", unemployment, lack of industrial development and many more.

Jagan's relationship with the bureaucracy has been tempestuous at best — he is known to relegate anyone that does not find his favour. His handling of State Election Commissioner N Ramesh Kumar is such an example.

The AP government is intolerant of criticism and this was obvious in the handling of Dr Sudhakar Rao and a 66-year-old woman from Guntur who was booked for a critical Facebook post.

The YSRCP came to power on back of Jagan's promise of Navaratnas and also, the issue of Special Category Status to AP. As things stand, there is no mention of Special Category Status and it is just a matter of time the main Opposition party, the TDP, brings up the issue to corner Jagan.

The issue of water sharing between the two Telugu states has once again cropped up, thanks to AP government's deci-

sion to establish a lift irrigation project on Krishna river. When Telangana objected, Jagan went on the offensive by accusing the neighbouring state of constructing projects on Godavari illegally.

Jagan has been accused of selling government lands for implementing his welfare schemes and this has not gone down well with the people. Similarly, the recent controversy over the sale of non-viable TTD lands has left the government in a spot.

With the treasury empty and the government bent upon implementing the three capitals proposal, there are more challenges for the people of AP in years to come.

Jagan's sops have been welcomed by the SC, ST and BC communities while schemes like the Rythu Bharosa have kept the farming community happy.

However, the YSRCP government seems to be struggling on the political front with the Opposition parties — TDP, BJP and Jana Sena — leaving no stone unturned to dent the ruling party's image.

The massive mandate the YSRCP received means naturally means that any brownie points the

Opposition scores are magnified. The YSRCP's failure to counter the Opposition onslaught over certain developments in the State like the recent decision to resume liquor sales even as Coronavirus cases are spiking.

Earlier, the government was caught on the back foot over its decision to trifurcate the capital and the issue landing in court.

The sagging financial health of the state is a huge cause for worry. With little or no development being registered in the State in the past one year on the industrial front, the financial position of the State is going from bad to worse.

Failure by the State government to get the Centre extend financial help to AP is a powerful weapon for the Opposition.

The biggest challenge for the government is its lacklustre policy-making mechanism with almost all of its major decisions getting locked in court cases.

Decisions on issues like Capital construction, introduction of English medium, distribution of lands to the poor, conduct of local body elections, reducing the tenure of SEC and appointment of Justice Kanagaraj to replace N Ramesh Kumar to mention a few have landed in court.

Despite moving quickly to announce and extend an unprecedented ex gratia of Rs 1 crore for the kin of LG Polymers gas leak victims and meeting the survivors, Jagan still faces criticism

from the Opposition as not one plant official was arrested for the mishap.

Inept handling of the media is another challenge before the government. Barring his family-owned

media group no other daily or electronic channel is supportive of the YSRCP government. One has to wait and see how Jagan overcomes these challenges tenure.



The way forward

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Having been hugely successful on the welfare front in the first year of its term, the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government now has the daunting task of assuaging aspirations of the middle classes and the entrepreneurs, thereby setting a perfect platform for development. The lower-income groups are apparently satisfied with the cash incentives they received as part of the government's flagship programme of Navaratnas. Coming as they did in the most crucial time during the Coronavirus crisis, the freebies have to some extent, compensated for the loss of livelihood. Now, as the ongoing nationwide lockdown is all set to be relaxed, the daily wagers are hoping for opening up certain sectors, especially the construction sector. Despite financial crunch, the government has managed to keep the welfare agenda afloat, satisfying the targeted groups and winning accolades from political and economic analysts. Agriculture to was given priority in the bygone year with schemes like the Rythu Bharosa benefiting the farmers in a big way. Aquaculture too has registered much progress with the government lending a helping hand to

farmers. The next four years, in all probability, will witness a flurry of activity on the

"Despite the financial challenges, our government has delivered on its promises and we aim to continue our good work. We are ensuring that the welfare schemes are implemented on ground and the people get benefits. Though Coronavirus has brought new challenges, we will overcome them under the leadership of our dynamic and hardworking CM"

— Vizag MP, MVV Satyanarayana



development while bolstering the revenues to sustain the welfare programmes. Already, there is some sweet news on the eve of the government's completion of one year of formation as South Korean automobile major Kia Motors announcing enhancing its investments and ramping up its capacity to manufacture SUVs spending \$54 million in the State. The government is zealously expected to rev up its efforts to develop industries and complete the irrigation projects. The State government is likely to go aggressive on the improvement of the basic infrastructure to attract global companies to invest in AP in the event of winding up their activities in China in the changing economic scenario. Jagan is already busy taking stock of the progress made in the State in the past one year. All eyes are now on what will be his priorities in the next four years. It's an open secret that he has long-term plans of being in power and he has made his intentions public on several occasions. Therefore, the remaining part of his tenure will be the one that would strike a balance between welfare and development without losing grip on thrust areas of education and healthcare.



Jagan has worked for a fundamentally strong state: Ambati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

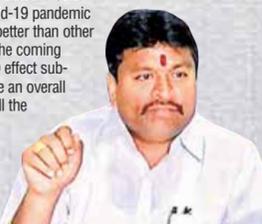
Stating that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has brought radical changes in the state, especially in matters of welfare and development activities, YSRCP official spokesperson Ambati Rambabu said that the YSRCP government has worked to develop the village and agriculture sectors. "If villages are developed, the state will automatically be developed," Rambabu told The Pioneer. He reminded that the YSRCP government, in its first year in power, appointed village volunteers and set up village secretariats, Rythu Barosa centres and Janata Bazaars at the village level and in the days to come, the atmosphere in villages will see a sea change. Rambabu said that the motto of the government is to create financial strength among the villagers and the farmers as agriculture sector is the backbone of the state. "During our first year in power, 90 per cent of the promises mentioned in the YSRCP manifesto have been fulfilled, giving a new definition on the term "framing a manifesto", he said. Rambabu said that the opposition parties are criticising the government without basis, just for their political survival and the fear that the people will forget them altogether. He added that in the coming four years, the Chief Minister will speed up the development of the state and will be implementing welfare programmes in such a way that people will vote the YSRCP to power, again and again.



Jagan's work speaks for itself, says Velampalli

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Expressing satisfaction at the fulfilling of a major part of the promises made to the people in the first year of the YSRCP government, Minister for Endowments Velampalli Srinivas told The Pioneer that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's work has spoken for itself. Srinivas reminded that when Jagan took over the reins of the state, Andhra Pradesh was in neck-deep financial crisis. "However, the YSRCP government has implemented welfare schemes besides strengthening education through Vidya Devena, strengthened the health sector and lent support MSMEs to restart small industries and other sectors. Houses for all the poor in the state is a big initiative from the government," he said. The Minister said that the State Government has tackled the Covid-19 pandemic very effectively, in fact much better than other states in the country. "In the coming days, after the Covid-19 effect subsides, there would be an overall development of all the corners of the state," Srinivas said.



HOUSE SITES yet to be distributed. The process got stalled due to Covid-induced lockdown.

HIGH COURT SCRAPPED A GO that

provisioned 59.85 per cent reservations to SCs, STs and BCs in the local body elections. The court said the government cannot provide 34 per cent reservations to BCs in the local body elections and added that it was against the Constitution to provide reservations over and above 50 per cent.



WE WANT SPECIAL STATUS FOR ANDHRA PRADESH

Getting the Centre to accord **SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS** will undoubtedly go a long way in attracting investors to the State. However, the Centre has refused to play ball so far, and appears not inclined to do so now.



Plans to introduce **ENGLISH AS MEDIUM** of instructions in government schools hit a speed bump in the form of a High Court order; the State government is now mulling moving the Supreme Court.



JAGAN HAD PROMISED TOTAL PROHIBITION IN THE STATE. However, the severe financial crunch faced by the state means that the promise may be difficult to keep

Visakhapatnam farmers on edge mistaking hopper bands for locusts

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Farmers at Achherla village under Kasimkota mandal in Vizag district on Thursday panicked sighting the hopper bands at the cashew orchard as they thought the hopper bands are locusts and which can potentially become a serious problem.

However, the farmers got relief after officials of Horticulture Department said that the hopper bands seen at the cashew orchard at Achherla were not locusts and they said that the hopper bands are Pygomorphidae Hopper (Local Hopper only).

The deputy director of horticulture, Visakhapatnam, K Gopi Kumar, said that they had conducted field observation on Thursday and found that the spotted grasshoppers at the location are not locusts and they are called Pygomorphidae Hopper. The family Pygomorphidae can't be called as a locust family, he added.

Officials said that locusts are grasshoppers belonging to Acrididae (Orthoptera: Caelifera) that meet two criteria. They form at some periods, dense



groups comprising a huge numbers, bands of hoppers, and/or swarms of winged adults that migrate. They are polyphenic in the sense that individuals living separately differ in many characteristics from those living in groups. Locust less likely to reach South India

In its latest report, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of UN has claimed that the locusts are less likely to reach South India.

According to the report, spring-bred immature adult groups of locust and swarms that arrived in Rajasthan from the west continued to move east in

the eastern portion of the state and to the central states of MP and Maharashtra.

Much of these movements were associated with strong westerly winds from Cyclone Amphan in the Bay of Bengal, the FAO said and added the control operations are underway. The FAO warned that "sever-

The deputy director of horticulture, Visakhapatnam, K Gopi Kumar, said that they had conducted field observation on Thursday and found that the spotted grasshoppers at the location are not locusts and they are called Pygomorphidae Hopper. The family Pygomorphidae can't be called as a locust family, he added

al successive waves of invasions can be expected until July in Rajasthan with eastward surges across northern India as far as Bihar and Orissa followed by westward movements and a return to Rajasthan on the changing winds associated with the monsoon."

These movements will cease as swarms begin to breed and become less mobile, it said. "Swarms are less likely to reach south India" and also to Nepal and Bangladesh.

Guv to complete medical colleges construction by 2023

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The government will complete the construction of newly sanctioned medical colleges by 2023, according to Minister for Medical and Health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas (Nani). He said that all government district hospitals and area government hospitals in the State would be developed as teaching hospitals in every parliamentary constituency.

The minister inspected proposed sites for medical colleges in Jammulapalem road of Bapatla and Kamepalli of Piduguralla in Guntur district on Thursday.

He said that the government will recruit 9,700 doctors and medical staff by issuing notification. He said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was giving preference for the establishment of Village Clinics to help the public to get medical facilities.

The health minister said that the government is planning to start nursing colleges, along with medical colleges, in the State. He said that



the government would pay the medical expenses worth Rs 1,000 for treatment through Aarogyasri and Arogyasri will be applicable wherever the patient undergoes treatment.

He further stated that the government would start Vasati Deevana for the welfare of the children in June and July.

The minister with APLA deputy speaker Kona Raghupathi, Collector I Samuel Anand Kumar, joint collector AS Dinesh Kumar, Narasaraopet MP Lavu Srikrishnadevarayalu, Gurajala MLA K Mahesh Reddy and others visited sites proposed medical college sites in Guntur district.

Medical and Health Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas inspected proposed sites for medical colleges in Jammulapalem road of Bapatla and Kamepalli of Piduguralla in Guntur district

The government will recruit 9,700 doctors and medical staff by issuing notification

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was giving preference for the establishment of Village Clinics to help the public to get medical facilities

Vizag on par with Hyderabad, Bengaluru, says Jagan

Continued from Page 1

Jagan said that unfortunately, even when the State was ruled by Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in alliance with the BJP for five years post-bifurcation, it could not get Special Category Status.

Assuring industrialists and investors in the state, Jagan said, "The only guarantee we give to industrialists is that we will stand by our words. The government will be proactive in this regard and the state is ready to give land and water for industries. We have to create an industry-friendly environment for industrial development in the state."

He said that the government has introduced judicial purview and reverse tendering unlike any other state in the country.

"About 75 per cent of jobs in the industry will be given to locals. We are planning more job-oriented courses at higher education level," he said.

In a bid to strengthen the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Andhra Pradesh to help them cope with the Covid-19 lockdown impact, the YSRCP government had extended industrial incentives worth Rs 968 crore to MSMEs to revive their business and the remaining Rs 500 crore will be

released soon," he said. The Chief Minister pointed out that a fixed amount of power charges was waived off and the total package of incentives came to ₹1,200 crore.

Jagan added that eight new fishing harbours will be established in the state at a cost of Rs 2,400 crore.

While announcing a new steel plant would be set up in Kadapa at a cost of Rs 15,000 crore, Jagan said, "We will tie up with private companies for the development of steel plant if they come forward." He also announced that three greenfield ports will be set up at Bavanapadu, Ramayapatnam and Machilipatnam in the state.

Kanna's daughter-in-law found dead

Continued from Page 1

"The doctors declared her dead and we suspect that she might have had a heart stroke. However, the doctors at the hospital did not confirm this. The reason behind the death can only be confirmed once the autopsy report comes out" said N Shyam Prasad Rao, ACP, Madhapur, adding that the body was sent for post mortem.

The Raidurgam Police registered a case of suspicious death and began an investigation. The police said that despite the family ruling out foul play, the investigation would continue to ascertain the events that led to her death.

YSRCP won't complete full term: Balakrishna

Continued from Page 1

"I have come to this conclusion after witnessing the lack of governance in the state. Many times, I am confused if there is a government in this state or not," the MLA said.

Heaping praises on TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu's leadership of the party despite severe odds, Balakrishna said he was realising the dreams of the party founder and his father NT Rama Rao.

Asserting that for TDP its cadre is its strength, the MLA said that the party does not belong only to the family members of NTR, but all those who are struggling hard for the strengthening of the party,

even during tough times. Strongly condemning attacks against TDP workers at various places by ruling party members, Balakrishna said party cadre need not fear anybody. He alleged that the government was foisting false cases against TDP leaders at all levels.

Balakrishna assured TDP cadre that he was available for them at all times and shares their agonies. He deplored that the YSRCP was misusing its popular mandate and after coming to power it has been adopting anti-people measures and resorting to politics of vendetta.

He lamented that even after AP High Court has slapped the government decisions on numerous counts, the government failing to learn lessons and correct itself.

YSRCP cannot shake foundations of TDP: Naidu

Continued from Page 1

"False cases are being filed and attacks are being continued, but the TDP cadre will not surrender to the ruling party's intimidatory tactics," he added.

Naidu recalled that in 1989, the TDP had met with a crushing defeat with a nine per cent vote margin but in 1994, the party came back with a resounding victory with a massive 17.7 per cent vote margin, and the Congress could not get even the opposition party status at that time.

When the NT Rama Rao government was dismissed undemocratically during late prime minister Indira Gandhi's time, a Save Democracy agitation was run for 30 days which went down as a historic event in the political history of the country as a whole, he said.

Expressing concern about ill-treatment and humiliation meted to a Dalit doctor, Naidu said accused the YSRCP for "presiding over goondaism and rowdiness in order to frighten all sections of people and then to plunder the resources of the state." Naidu said Jagan's "rule of atrocities" cannot continue for long considering the strong democratic foundations of India.

Senior IAS officer Ramamani passes away

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh IAS Officer Association general secretary Praveen Kumar in a release on Thursday condoled untimely demise of senior IAS officer TK Ramamani (56) of 2010 batch. She discharged her duties in various capacities in different departments.

Ramamani husband Murali Mohan was retired from service recently and she is survived by two sons. As an IAS officer, she was the joint collector in Anantapur and the

Commissioner of Commercial Tax Department. She visited her relative's house in Guntur on Wednesday evening and reported some health problem. Immediately, she was rushed to a hospital and she breathed her last while undergoing treatment.

Praveen Kumar, Sunitha, Praveen Prakash, Guntur Collector Samuel Anand Kumar, joint collector Prashanti, Dinesh Kumar, Pradhunma and others met her family members and consoled them.

128 new Covid cases take tally to 3,245

Continued from Page 1

Samples of 9,858 people were tested and 68, including those from other states, have been discharged from various hospitals after treatment, taking the cumulative recoveries to 2,125, including 167 people

from other states. The number of active patients is now at 1,061 — 824 from AP, 126 and 111 from other states and foreign returnees respectively.

Cumulative positive cases from other states stood at 293, it said.

CCMB cultures Corona with potential for vaccine

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) on Thursday announced that it has established a stable culture of Coronavirus, which will enable the premier research centre to work towards vaccine development and testing potential drugs to fight Covid-19.

Over the last month and a half, the CCMB established stable cultures of Covid-19 causing coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, from patients' samples.

A team of researchers led by CCMB virologist, Dr Krishnan H Harshan have isolated infectious viruses from several isolates. The ability to culture the virus in the lab enables the CCMB to work towards vaccine development and testing potential drugs to fight Covid-19. It also makes them a potential donor of the culture to other authorised centres that can continue growing the virus for their own use.

Church heads want places of worship reopened

Continued from Page 1

The meeting of heads of churches across AP unanimously adopted the appeal of the President of the United States Donald Trump which read "...Some governors have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential, but have left out churches and other houses of worship. It's not right. So I'm correcting this injustice and calling houses of worship essential. Millions of Americans embrace worship as an essential part of life. The governors need to do the right thing and allow these very important essential places of faith to open right now..."

Chairman of APCLF, Oliver Rayi said that they strongly believed that India has a rich tradition of worship and is home to many deities of various faiths and at times such as this it is the faith of the people that gives them solace and peace.

The meeting also took cognisance of the statements made by the Chief Ministers of a few states who too expressed their willingness to reopen places of worship.

The meeting of the Church



heads also adopted stringed guidelines (SOPs) for the reopening of Churches formulated by APCLF and resolved to seek the government to adopt the same.

Oliver Rayi said that the SOPs are in line with the guidelines of WHO and also incorporate SOPs for Holy Communion Service and other church related activities. They requested the Governments,

both at the Centre and in the State, to reopen places of worship immediately so that masses can seek divine intervention towards the fight against Covid-19.

They said that Government and scientists both need God's Mercy and the prayers of the masses at this time.

The online meeting was hosted by Oliver Rayi and was attended among others by Vice

Chairman Rev Joseph Moses; Most. Rev. Dr. Govada Divya sirdadam, Former Moderator & Bishop Emeritus, Krishna Godavari Diocese, Church of South India; Rev. G Bhagavandas, President, Indian Pentecostal Churches, AP; Bishop Pratap Sinha, President AP State Pastors Fellowship; Rev. G Joseph Raju Secretary CBCNC; Rev. Juhani Hallonen, AP State President, AICC and others.

Tollywood personality Shyam K Naidu arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The SR Nagar Police arrested Tollywood cinematographer Shyam K Naidu on charges of rape and cheating on Thursday night. Police registered a case based on a complaint lodged by a Telugu film artiste in which the victim alleged that Naidu sexually exploited her promising marriage.

According to the complainant, the victim and Naidu, the accused, were in a relationship for the last few years as he had promised to marry her. However, when the victim prodded him about their nuptials, Naidu evaded the topic and kept ignoring her.

The SR Nagar police has booked Naidu under Section 376 (rape) and 420 (cheating) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and arrested him. Police said they would produce him before a court for judicial remand on Friday.

Telugu states register GSDP loss of Rs 3 lakh-cr

Continued from Page 1

Agriculture accounts for around 34 per cent, industry 24 per cent and other services 43 per cent. The estimated GDP of the state for 2019-20 was Rs 10.81 lakh-crore and AP has been registering a growth of close to 15 per cent in the last five years given the SGDP data of states.

The GSDP of Telangana in 2020-21 was estimated Rs 11.05 crore. Service sector is the largest contributor to the Telangana's economy with a share of about 65 per cent in the year 2018-19. Growth in services has largely been fuelled by IT services with the State holding leading position in IT & ITes in the country in terms of production and exports.

UN farmers body warns of more locust invasions

Continued from Page 1

There was little damage as there are no standing crops right now, District Agriculture Officer Piyush Rai said.

Several other UP districts remain on alert.

Swarms crossed into Madhya Pradesh's Balaghat district from eastern Maharashtra on Thursday afternoon, an official said.

The pests were sighted over Sondya village in Tumsar tehsil of Maharashtra's Bhandara district around 1 pm, Ravi Bhosle, Divisional Joint Director at the state's Agriculture Department said.

The locusts then crossed the Bawanthadi river, reaching Balaghat.

"Our staff in the border area is keeping a watch on the locust movement in case they re-enter Maharashtra," he said.

A Maharashtra agriculture department team had rushed to Temani village in Bhandara district in the early hours of Thursday and sprayed pesticides from two fire tenders on trees over a one-kilometre radius. Pesticides were sprayed and by morning, a large number of them had fallen off the trees and died," Bhosle said.

"Mango trees were affected the most. They devoured leaves but not the fruit. Also, no damage was seen in paddy fields," he said.

Palghar district authorities too have asked farmers to be on alert.

The FAO, meanwhile, warned that the invasion could continue for weeks.

"Several successive waves of invasions can be expected until July in Rajasthan with eastward surges across northern India as far as Bihar and Orissa, followed by westward movements and a return to Rajasthan on the changing winds associated with the monsoon," it said.

In the past few days, there have been movements of adult groups of locusts in India, Oman, the UAE, and Uganda, it said.

Swarms are forming in the spring breeding areas and migrating east to the Indo-Pakistan border ahead of the monsoon rains.

FAO Director General Qu

Dongyu had on May 22 warned that efforts to control desert locusts will take time.

"Our gains have been significant, but the battle is long and is spreading to new areas. It is clear that we cannot declare victory yet. Upsurges of this magnitude are rarely defeated in a few months," he said.

In the coming months, desert locusts will continue breeding in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. New swarms will form in June and migrate to Sudan through South Sudan and pose a risk to the Sahel in West Africa.

"The locusts, combined with the impacts of COVID-19, could have catastrophic consequences on livelihoods and food security," the FAO head said.

TTD resolves not to sell its properties

Continued from Page 1

"We also passed a resolution rejecting the decision taken by the previous TTD trust board to sell the lands. No guesthouses have been allocated since we came to power. The allocation of the guesthouse is done in a completely transparent manner. Guidelines will be framed in this regard and also a resolution taken to build a children's hospital under TTD trust," Subba Reddy said.

"All arrangements are put in place for resuming darshan following the norms such as maintaining physical distance and wearing face masks. We will take a call after the Central government's decision on resumption of darshans in temples," he said.

Dr Sudhakar moves HC seeking justice

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Dr K Sudhakar Rao, who was admitted to a mental healthcare hospital for alleged acute stress psychosis, has approached the High Court seeking justice.

A petition was filed in the High Court on his behalf and the four-page letter he had written to the superintendent of the mental healthcare hospital at Visakhapatnam attached as proof of his healthy state of mind and clarity of thought. Counsel for the doctor exuded confidence that the petition would be listed on Friday.

In a letter to the medical superintendent of the mental healthcare hospital at Visakhapatnam, Dr Sudhakar Rao, suspended as the civil

assistant surgeon (anaesthesia) narrated the series of incidents that took place since April 8 when he demanded N95 masks for doctors. He said that earlier, he asked for the N95 mask for proper protection when he was attending a Caesarian case on April 6. Later on April 8, he demanded that every doctor be given N95 masks, which resulted in his suspension.

After suspension, he received a number of calls on his mobile abusing him. He alleged in the letter that the police placed liquor bottles and took away Rs 10 lakh cash from his car.

In the four-page letter, Dr Sudhakar Rao elaborately discussed the events that led to the police manhandling him and foisting false cases against him.

SHORT READS



Odisha CM wishes speedy recovery of corona warriors

BHUBANESWAR: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday wished speedy recovery of a sarpanch, and some ASHA and Anganwadi workers who have tested positive for COVID-19. While speaking to them over telephone, the chief minister praised their courage and dedication in providing outstanding service to society, an official said. "These corona warriors will be an inspiration to others," the official quoted the chief minister as saying. At least one sarpanch (village head) and some accredited social health activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers have been infected with the deadly virus in the state so far, the official said.

Lockdown has to end: Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw

BENGALURU: With the exodus of migrant labour back to their home states, there is no case for extending the COVID-19-induced lockdown any longer, according to biotechnology veteran Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, who said the focus now should be to bring any outbreak under control quickly. The Executive Chairperson of Bengaluru-headquartered biotech major Biocon Ltd said on Thursday their return without controls would cause infections and the states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan should be prepared to meet the possible surge. "The Lockdown has to end. What we really need now is prepare for tracking any outbreak and quickly bringing it under control. That has to be our strategy going forward. You cannot go on increasing the lockdown," Mazumdar-Shaw said.

HC says NIA acted in haste in taking Navlakha to Mumbai

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court has pulled up the NIA for hastily removing activist Gautam Navlakha, accused in Bihma Koregaon violence case, from the national capital to Mumbai even when his interim bail plea was pending here. Justice Anup J Bhamhani, said the National Investigation Agency acted in "unseemly haste" in taking Navlakha, who was lodged in Tihar jail here, to Mumbai where the investigation is pending. While the order was passed on Wednesday, it was made available on the court's website on Thursday. Navlakha was taken to Mumbai by train on May 26. The court had on May 22, sought the NIA response on a plea by 67-year-old Navlakha, who said he was lodged in Tihar jail at a time when the entire nation was gripped by the threat of contracting the highly contagious and deadly Covid-19 virus.

Modi's letters to his mother will be released next month

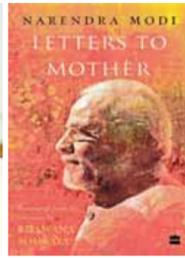
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's book 'Letters to Mother', translated by film critic Bhawana Somaaya, will be released by HarperCollins Publishers as e-book and hardback in June this year.

As a young man, Modi had got into the habit of writing a letter every night to 'Mother Goddess', whom he addressed as 'Jagat Janani'.

However, after every few months, Modi would tear up the pages and consign them to a bonfire. But the pages of one diary, dating back to 1986, survived.

"This is not an attempt at literary writing; the passages featured in this book are reflections of my observations and sometimes unprocessed thoughts, expressed without



HarperCollins to publish Modi's book

NEW DELHI: Many letters that Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a young man wrote to mother goddess, whom he addressed as 'Jagat Janani', every night on varied topics will be published in a book form in English next month. HarperCollins India said "Letters to Mother", translated from Gujarati by renowned film critic Bhawana Somaaya, will be released as ebook and hardback. These letters have been taken from Modi's diary, dating back to 1986. "This is not an attempt at literary writing; the passages featured in this book are reflections of my observations and sometimes unprocessed thoughts, expressed without filter..." a HarperCollins India statement quoted Modi as saying.

filter... I am not a writer, most of us are not; but everybody seeks expression, and when the urge to unload becomes overpowering, there is no option but to take pen and paper, not necessarily to write but to introspect and unravel what is happening within the heart and the head and why," Modi said about the book.

Bhawana Somaaya, recipient of the Padma Shri award in 2017 and author of several books on cinema, said, "In my opinion, Narendra Modi's strength as a writer is his emotional quotient. There is a raw intensity, a simmering restlessness which he does not disguise and that is his attraction."

Almost 80% of COVID cases in India asymptomatic: Vardhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on Thursday said almost 80 per cent of the COVID-19 cases in India are asymptomatic or at best with very mild symptoms.

In an exclusive interview to IANS, the Health Minister said, "Even today, in almost 80 per cent of the cases of COVID-19, which are being reported in India, the patients tend to exhibit either nil or mild symptoms. These patients are mostly contacts of confirmed cases. Interestingly, had it not been for our contact tracing efforts, and if left to their own in isolation, these patients may not have even remembered or reported their infection."

Harsh Vardhan, who has recently been elected the chief of WHO's Executive Board, was answering a query on whether asymptomatic



patients who are potential virus carriers and who can take the virus deeper into rural India are causing worry to the government.

He said, "I am aware about WHO's mention of some laboratory-confirmed cases that are truly asymptomatic. It is equally true, that as on date, there has been no documented asymptomatic transmission."

However, he added that

recently, more symptoms like headache, muscle pain, pink eye, loss of smell, or loss of taste, intense chills, rigors and sore throat have been included in the list of COVID-19 symptoms by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States. "It will require more studies before these symptoms are finally included in our list in India," he quipped.

'Centre, state govts have no concern for migrants'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

BSP president Mayawati on Thursday said the plight of migrant workers and reports of their deaths while trying to return to their homes reflected lack of concern on the part of the Centre and state governments.

However, courts have started taking cognisance of the plight of migrants, she noted.

"The manner in which the bitter truth of the sorry state of migrant labourers forced to return home and their deaths on the way are coming before the country and the world through the media, re-establish that the central and state governments have no concern for them, this is very sad," she said in a tweet.

Nine migrants have been found dead in Shramik trains since Monday.

"On the 65th day of lockdown today, this news gives some relief that the hon'ble



courts have started questioning the central and state governments about the malfunctioning in government hospitals in testing and treatment of coronavirus, neglect of private hospitals, plight of migrant labourers and deaths," she added.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday took suo-motu (on its own) cognisance of miseries faced by migrants, who are stranded across the country and asked the Centre and the states to take measures to provide relief to workers as there have been inadequacies and certain lapses.

Heavy rain, winds disrupt restoration work in Bengal

Kolkata, May 28 (PTI) An overnight downpour, coupled with gusty winds, claimed at least two lives and dealt a fresh blow to the city and other south Bengal districts on Thursday, a week after Cyclone Amphan battered the state, leaving behind a trail of destruction.

In North 24 Parganas, a 40-year-old man was killed and five others were injured after a brick wall collapsed on them, police said.

One person died in a lightning strike at Durgapur in West Burdwan district, a disaster management department official said. Sources in the Kolkata Traffic Police said the squall, which started on Wednesday evening, left parts of Central Avenue, MG Road, Bidhan Sarani and Ultadanga heavily waterlogged for at least a few hours, inconveniencing workers undertaking relief work in



the wake of the May 20 cyclone. In Howrah, several areas including Panchananatala Road, Shibpur, and Mandirtala remained inundated, with just a few shops lifting shutters during the day.

Official sources said the heavy rain, preceded by the Nor'wester, has also disrupted life in Nadia, Hooghly, North and South 24 Parganas, East and West Midnapore districts, which are already under severe strain for the past eight days

due to the cyclone.

Protests that had been raging on in the Amphan-hit city seeking resumption of power and water supply, were missing on Thursday, with private power utility CESC claiming that electricity has largely been restored in the metropolis.

In Roy Bahadur Road area of Behala, however, residents claimed they were still reeling under water crisis, and uprooted trees blocking major roads were yet to be cleared.

Complaint against B'deshi singer for humiliating Modi

PNS ■ AGARTALA

Tripura Police has registered a complaint against Bangladeshi singer Mainul Ahsan Nobel, who earned fame in the music reality show 'Sa Re Ga Ma Pa' in Kolkata, for allegedly humiliating Prime Minister Narendra Modi over social media.

The complaint was filed by a resident of Belonia town in South Tripura district who is a student of Pandit Deen Dayal Petroleum University at Gandhinagar in Gujarat.

The complaint was filed on May 25, the person who is called Suman Paul said.

Nobel is not yet a popular singer in Bangladesh and has always been rejected by the audience of that country. He participated in the TV music reality show called Sa Re Ga Ma Pa in Kolkata, earned money, gained fame and returned to Bangladesh. If the person insults our prime minister it cannot be accepted. So I filed the FIR, Paul told reporters.



Belonia superintendent of police Jal Singh Meena confirmed that the complaint was registered and forwarded to Tripura Polices cyber crime cell.

The complaint was registered the same day it was filed at Belonia police station under Indian Penal code sections 500 (punishment for defamation), 504 (intentional insult), 505 (public mischief) and the IT Act.

We have registered the complaint and forwarded it to the cyber crime cell because it is not in the Indian cyber space. We have started investigation into the issue, the SP said.

SC asks searching questions to Centre over migrant crisis

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Thursday asked some searching questions from the Centre on the plight of migrant workers ranging from as to how long they will have to wait before going to their native places to who will pay for their travel and provide them food and shelter.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan, S K Kaul and M R Shah asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, about the confusion over the payment of travel fare of stranded migrant workers and said that they should not made to pay for their journey back home.

"What is the normal time? If a migrant is identified, there must be some certainty that he will be shifted out within one



week or ten days at most? What is that time? There had been instances where one state sends migrants but at the border another State says we are not accepting the migrants. We need a policy on this," the bench told Mehta.

The bench, questioning him over the travel-fare for the migrants, said: "In our country, the middlemen will always be there. But we don't want middlemen to interfere when it comes to payment of fares. There has to be a clear policy

as to who will pay for their travel."

At the outset, Mehta submitted a preliminary report and said that between May 1-27 total of 3,700 special trains have been run for carrying migrant labourers and many have been shifted by road to bordering states. He said 91 lakh migrant workers have been shifted to their native places till Wednesday.

Millions of migrant workers were stranded across the country without food, shelter and transportation after the nationwide lockdown was announced from March 25 at 4-hour notice to combat the spread of global pandemic, Covid-19.

They then started walking hundreds of miles to reach their homes, leading to miserable plight.

Entire country heard cries of migrants but not govt: Sonia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress President Sonia Gandhi on Thursday said the entire country has heard the cries of pain of migrants "except the government" and urged the Centre to unlock its coffers to help those affected by the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

In a video message posted as part of the Congress 'Speak Up India' campaign launched on Thursday, she demanded that the government provide Rs 7,500 to each needy family for the next six months.

Gandhi lamented that even though the country is passing through a serious economic crisis with loss of livelihood, the central government has not



helped those affected.

"It is for the first time since Independence that such a spectre of pain and anguish has been witnessed, where lakhs of famished and thirsty labourers have been forced to walk hundreds of thousands of kilometres back home barefoot and

without any access to medicines or transport," she said.

"Everyone across the country except the government heard their cries of pain and trauma," she said in her video message on the party's social media handles.

Gandhi said instead of loans, the government should provide financial relief to small and medium industry so that crores of jobs are saved and the country progresses.

Noting that crores of livelihoods have been lost, lakhs of businesses and factories shut and farmers are running from pillar to post to self their produce, she said, "The entire country endured this pain but probably the government did not."

Ensure food, water provided separately at quarantine: HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has directed the AAP government to ensure that food and water are provided separately to persons who have tested positive for COVID-19 at the quarantine facilities in the national capital.

The direction by Justice Navin Chawla came on a plea by some of the persons who were quarantined in flats at Sultanpuri here after their return from Indonesia.

They had claimed they were tested negative but were being supplied with food and water along with the persons who have tested positive for COVID-19.

The Delhi government told the high court that food and water was being provided separately to those in quarantine who have tested positive for coronavirus. The petitioners, however, claimed that this was done after the instant petition was filed.

Taking note of the submis-



The Delhi government told the high court that food and water was being provided separately to those in quarantine who have tested positive for coronavirus

sions, the high court said the government has assured that food, water and other facilities are being separately provided and shall be separately provided to the persons in

the quarantine who have tested positive for COVID-19.

"The respondent (Delhi government) is bound to this statement," the court said and disposed of the petition.

As luxuries slip in list of priorities, fashion industry ponders bleak future post lockdown

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Walking the runway to success till just a few months ago, the Indian fashion industry is now reevaluating its future with insiders saying the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have set the clock back at least a decade.

As the lockdown continues and incomes shrivel, elaborate trousseaus, designer gowns and bespoke suits running into several lakhs of rupees have plunged in the list of priorities of the industry's trend-conscious clients.

It is difficult to predict consumer behaviour even after the restrictions are lifted but many designers believe the focus will be on simpler aesthetics and on maintaining the artisans and craftspeople who are the backbone of their business.

"The fashion industry has never been affected in such a definitive way around the world. We've had times when there has been a recession in different countries at different times but the whole world shutting down together is



unprecedented," veteran couturier Ritu Kumar said.

While it's too early to visualise what the future holds, she believes the pandemic will "set back the clock by one or two decades in the way we think about clothing and fashion."

"It'll put a crunch on turnovers and cash across the fashion industry. It's difficult to predict what will happen after the lockdown is lifted... will customers immediately buy because they've been deprived of shopping for so

long, or will customer behaviour change since the scare of the virus will prevail for some time," she added.

She said luxury goods are likely to be the last to really get back into the flow of things. "As for the heavy craftsmanship, two things may happen - one is that maybe people will start appreciating the craftsman's work and try and buy more of handloom and handcrafted designs, which are more classical and not fast fashion..."

It is difficult to predict consumer behaviour even after the restrictions are lifted but many designers believe the focus will be on simpler aesthetics and on maintaining the artisans and craftspeople who are the backbone of their business

"On the other hand, the bridal market in itself will always be there, but I think it is going to scale down to a large extent... the craftsmanship will still be there but at a smaller level," she added.

Fashion designers said they are utilising lockdown days to plan the way forward for secure business continuity in the second half of 2020 while taking care of the well-being of their employees and artisans, who have been without work with production

and export shutdowns.

While there are no separate figures for the fashion industry, the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) estimates that the textile and clothing industry in India employs over 105 million people and also earn around \$40 billion forex, apart from substantial revenue under GST and other taxes.

Rahul Mehta, president of the Clothing Manufacturers Association of India (CMAI), added that India's apparel market is estimated to be around Rs 6.5 lakh crore. This includes all sectors starting from high-end fashion labels to moderately priced ready-to-wear brands.

Designers are facing a double whammy and looking at huge monetary losses, said Sunil Sethi, chairperson of the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI). "They have to bear losses like most other industries and also need to take care of the mental, physical and financial well-being of the people involved in the process of converting their designs into a garment."

Labour woes

While States are redistributing returnee workers, in the long run we need a national database and a pan-India social security net



The reverse exodus of migrants, which according to the Government's admission in the Supreme Court has seen 91 lakh daily wagers and service personnel move out of cities to their home States, may change the labour market forever. Shunted out overnight by contractors and factories following the lockdown and with no savings, quarters or interim relief coming from either their employers or the Government, they trudged back home, risking their lives in the process, exposing themselves to the disease and starvation. And though they may return to the subsistence economy that they once escaped, they are not coming back soon. Rejected by the big

cities that they helped build and mistreated like intruders by the Governments they voted for, they would much rather find work in their home States under MGNREGA and infrastructure projects. The vacuum in big cities is already being felt as daily needs servicemen like drivers, cleaners, electricians, handymen, carpenters, plumbers, house helps, gardeners and bricklayers have all fled. And now with several States compiling a data base of returnees with their skill sets, these people are most likely to be rehabilitated in services vacated by migrants from elsewhere. In other words, local sourcing, something that political parties have promised in their manifestoes for a while, may soon become the new rule of engagement in the labour market. Except that the traditional labour-exporting States may be flooded with returnees seeking newer pastures and fall short of accommodating them. Sensing the new labour map, the first off the mark has been Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. With the State having already received 23 lakh migrants by the end of last week, he has fast-tracked moves to absorb returnee workers according to their skill sets and allocate them work zones. Fifteen lakh are already on the database and industrial units have sought contracts for five lakh among them. He has further drawn up a migrant commission to list all workers in the State, provide jobs and issue them a card that would ensure their social security during a crisis. An insurance scheme to secure their lives, too, is on the cards. And though he is reconsidering it, his controversial suggestion that other States hiring labourers from UP would have to go *via* his Government points to a new trading tool that may just take off unofficially as everybody tries to leverage strengths in a pandemic-hit economy. Such a move is downright unconstitutional as every citizen has a right to migrate to any part of the country in the quest for better prospects. But new regional labour cartels could emerge, peddling a skilled pool of workers and quoting higher prices now in labour-starved zones. Rajasthan has started collecting data of both skilled and unskilled workers from all 33 districts and will release them to factory owners in 18 industrial clusters soon. It has already collected details of 1.2 million unemployed people and will soon launch a portal that will help devise programmes for the labourers, generate quick employment and also meet the demand-supply gap. It will also help design training programmes for workers as per their qualifications and requirements of industries. Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh has restarted the Sambal Yojana, which will now cover returnee migrants and provide social security to their family members, including school fees of children and insurance. A workers' database is almost ready. Bihar and Jharkhand are also working on an internal reorganisation map. Punjab and Haryana, States without too much of local labour, were among the first to set up migrant portals to rehire and redirect displaced labour to their various work sites.

While the "vocal for local" mantra has taken a new meaning in the labour market, this could well be short-term. For wages and capacities are lower in States. For example, even if Uttar Pradesh manages to provide jobs to its returning migrants, its per capita income is a little over ₹70,000. Comparatively, it is over ₹2 lakh in Maharashtra and ₹4 lakh in Delhi. So the osmosis will happen once the threat of the pandemic weakens. Besides what do you do with States like Uttarakhand, which do not have enough opportunities to absorb highly-skilled labour? So far over 1.54 lakh migrants have returned to the State and under the Mukhyamantri Swarojgar Yojana, they will get heavily subsidised loans to set up small businesses or shops. Many returnees are from the IT, hospitality and BPO sectors with a particular skill set and experience of working in big cities and are not keen on the entrepreneurial mode. They wouldn't want to erode their revenue-earning ability for the safety of a home that they won't have to pay for. Labour is needed across industries and communities and perhaps a national database and a pan-India social security net should be set up to streamline our demographic edge than pass this on to States as their responsibility. Besides, this protection based on geography will never substitute competence.

The cost of care

SC asks Govt to identify private hospitals which benefitted from past largesse and, therefore, should treat COVID patients free



As Coronavirus cases continue to rise across the country and the Government healthcare infrastructure begins to burst at the seams, the Supreme Court has asked the Centre to identify private hospitals which can treat COVID-19 patients for free or at a minimum cost as many of them have been given land either free or at nominal rates. However, the hospitals are off the hook for now as being a policy issue, the Government would need to take a call on it first. At the moment, patients are being treated for free/minimum cost at Government hospitals across the country. However, those who opt for private healthcare facilities end up paying hefty sums as the cost of treatment in general wards is around ₹0.8 lakh in Tier-III towns; ₹1.5 lakh in Tier-II State capitals and ₹2.5 lakh in metro cities. Co-morbidities push up care costs further.

What complicates the matter is the fact that the Government cannot put a cap on treatment costs like it did for the Corona tests as that will depend on many factors like the place where the patient is being treated; his/her age; whether the person has any co-morbidities; what stage the virus is in, whether it is in the initial stage or has the infection aggravated. Will the s/he go to the ICU or be on oxygen support or will s/he also need a ventilator? Predictably private hospitals are not very keen to shoulder the COVID burden with the Government because they say their bottomlines have already been hit by a decline in patient footfall, limited OPD operations and suspension of the lucrative medical tourism business. Plus the overheads have shot up as they are spending more on disinfection, sterilisation, infection control, isolation wards, staff rotations and quarantines, responsible waste disposal and comprehensive disinfection. Free treatment won't work even if the hospitals had benefitted from largesse at inception. So while the apex court and the Centre mull how to rope private hospitals in, patients continue to suffer because even having an insurance does not mean that there will be no major out-of-pocket expense. Insurance firms are not paying patients for the PPE, face shields and so on that constitute at least 50 per cent of the total treatment cost for a Corona patient. But what is irking is that while crying about the cost of the PPEs pushing up their expenses, hospitals are glibly glossing over the fact that they are charging all patients for these kits even though one doctor tends to multiple patients wearing one kit. Asking hospitals to lower treatment costs is reasonable but seeking to make it all free will be counter-productive. The larger question right now is how to increase capacities as both public and private facilities are saturated.

Strategic stalemate

The Chinese behaviour along the LAC points to a familiar pattern *vis-a-vis* India. However, it's time for New Delhi to turn a new page in dealing with Beijing



VIVEK MISHRA

After some intense physical showdown between the Indian and Chinese soldiers at the Line of Control (LAC), attempts are now being made by Beijing to dial down the conflict. A Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said recently that the situation at the border with India is "overall stable and controllable" and that both countries have "proper mechanisms and communication channels" to resolve the issues through "dialogue" and "consultation." China's apparent attempt to de-escalate tensions at the border is as quintessential a leaf from its strategic playbook as its attempt to escalate it in the first place. A few familiar patterns apropos earlier such endeavours cannot be missed.

The timing of the flare-up is, perhaps, the most predictable one. A pandemic-stricken world has been brought down to its knees and India has surpassed China's Coronavirus tally. It has now climbed into the top 10 countries worst-hit by the pandemic. To recall, in 2014, when Chinese troops intruded deep into the Indian territory even as Premier Xi Jinping was on a State visit to India, it baffled many. Why would Beijing do that? If anything, it only harmed the purpose of the ongoing bilateral talks. By now, China's strategic charade of mixing wrong signals with publicly-perceptible good intentions is all too known. Physical assertion with an intention to send a political message that points south, deliberate obfuscation to prevent perception build-up, international grandstanding and the choice of an opportune time — all of this collectively constitute the Middle Kingdom's new approach to heighten tensions. But there is a marked similarity that runs across modern China's strategic behaviour.

In its strategic playbook, it avoids "strength" and attacks "weakness." As the world reels under the Corona pandemic, China seems to have controlled the spread of the virus and has now resorted to practising aggressive behaviour, thus rattling other countries. It has waged conflicts on multiple fronts. Border tension with India along the LAC has escalated; two new municipal districts to control the disputed Parcel and Spratly islands has been declared; military confrontation with Malaysia and Vietnam in the South China Sea, too, has been launched. Besides, China has approved a controversial legislation in Hong Kong to undermine its autonomy. This, in clear violation of the initial terms of agreement between Britain and China that the former's autonomy shall be pre-



served until at least 50 years. Furthermore, there's an obvious cold war 2.0 on with the US. Wolf warrior diplomacy has been launched world over as a pre-emptive effort to counter criticism and questions of accountability. It is also resisting a global call for an unbiased probe into the origin of the Coronavirus. Above all, Xi has called upon the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to "prepare for war." All such instances have come to test China's strategic transition into a "great power." As countries look inward to deal with their economic, political and strategic problems arising due to the spread of the virus, China considers this as its moment to test the limits of "power transition hypothesis." But in many ways, how China acts during the pandemic will define its future course as a "great power."

In the ongoing standoff with India, too, traits clearly point to the aforementioned test-of-its-power transition. China has opened multiple fronts of conflict along the LAC; at least one of them is a hitherto uncontested region, the Naku La Pass in north Sikkim. There are a few other peculiarities that set the ongoing border flare-up apart from earlier skirmishes. The number of PLA troops camped near the LAC is estimated to be somewhere in between 5,000 and 10,000.

Although India has matched Chinese encampments and numbers, this is perhaps a new high of troop build-up by the latter in the absence of any unilat-

eral aggression by the former. The military build-up and China's refusal to recede is geared towards "political signalling" than to "protect" an apparent incursion into India. This subtle packaging comes at a time when India is scrambling to improve border infrastructure and connectivity in border areas. In the current context, the strategic importance of the Darbuk-Shyok-DBO road, that brings India within an eight kilometre range of the strategically important Karakoram Pass, cannot be overstated.

Steps from either side point to a long-drawn confrontation. While the two sides match in troop numbers that mirror each other, certain factors suggest that neither side will be too quick to withdraw from strategic positions. Chinese troops remain entrenched in bunkers along with a fleet of heavy vehicles and monitoring equipment. Helicopter movement close to the LAC has also been monitored by the Indian side. India, too, scrambled two fighter jets along the LAC in Ladakh. Besides, Army Chief MM Naravane paid a visit to Leh, the headquarters of 14 Corps in Ladakh, for a security review of the sensitive sector amid tensions. Perhaps this suggests that the best way to resolve the present standoff is through established mechanism at the military and government level, howsoever ineffective these mechanisms may be.

Chinese behaviour along the LAC points to a familiar pattern *vis-a-vis* India. Just like its

traditional medical practice acupuncture, it is pressing certain points. Its assertions may often be intended to solve a deeper or a different issue. In the present case, unprovoked assertions along the LAC can be linked to a few decisions taken by India in recent times, which may have perturbed China. Among them is the Indian Government's decision to implement three important recommendations relating to border infrastructure that was made by the Shekatkar Committee in 2016. Specifically, the work on the Sela tunnel (connecting Tezpur in Assam to Tawang) is in full swing. Once completed, it will provide all-weather connectivity to an important frontier with China in the Kameng sector. Such projects are also on to connect Zaskar Valley and Ladakh. The Nimu-Padam-Darcha road being constructed across the Sinkunla Pass could have been points of concern for China, too.

Other factors that could have perturbed Beijing include New Delhi's decision to change FDI norms for countries sharing land border with India. This could potentially impact how China invests in India. The virtual presence of two BJP MPs at the swearing-in ceremony of the Taiwanese leader has also irked Beijing. Lastly, India's support to the global call for a WHO-led probe into the origin of the Coronavirus is a cause, too.

From India's point of view, the transgressions, including ones at previously uncontested patrol areas, like the Naku La

Pass, point towards a wider conflicting arc. To that end, Chinese strategy along the LAC has preferred horizontal to vertical escalation, where scaling up of conflict at the local level has been the preferred strategy.

India's options in the current standoff are limited. First, and perhaps the most likely way to resolve the tension, is by repeating the Doklam strategy. It should resolutely wait until both sides decide to de-escalate. However, under no circumstances should India negotiate on settled areas like the Naku La Pass. This will not only increase the possibility for China to horizontally escalate against India but would also dilute India's sacrosanct nature of "sovereignty" apropos a modern state. This is precisely what makes the current standoff different and more fraught than previous ones. Since both sides have laid claim to a new area as their "sovereign part", possibilities of de-escalation are high. India can press other weak points of China to compel desired State behaviour if LAC is too sensitive a matter. Adopting the Indo-Pacific strategy to chart a future strategy in Asia as an emerging global power is a low-hanging fruit. Among other steps, raising a global pitch on China's other interests or decisions that run counter to Indian interests can be considered. It is, perhaps, time to turn a new page in dealing with China.

(The writer is deputy director, KIIPS, Bhubaneswar, and research fellow, ICWA, New Delhi)

SOUNDBITE

Unka darr, unki siski, unki peeda desh main sabne suni, par shayad sarkar ne nahi (Everyone saw their pain, heard their cries but may be the Government has not).



Congress leader —Sonia Gandhi

The best thing I've learned from Saif is being comfortable with myself and not always being running after money, success or fame. He's taught me to love the greater things in life.



Actor —Kareena Kapoor

The Indian Government, with its arrogant expansionist policies akin to Nazi's Lebensraum (living space), is becoming a threat to its neighbours.



Pakistan Prime Minister —Imran Khan

MS (Dhoni) is an incredible cricketer. Intelligence, calmness, power, athleticism, speed and a match-winner. This puts him among the greatest sportsmen in the modern era.



Former India coach —Gary Kirsten

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Another threat

Sir — Swarms of locusts have been destroying crops across western and central India. This is the worst such attack in three decades. With a speed of 150 km per day, these creatures have been rampaging farms across Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat and other States. Concerns about them harming farm output have been raised. The solace is that with the harvest season over, rabi crops have not been affected and most monsoon-fed crops are yet to be sowed. But this does not mean that they are harmless.

Cotton, summer pulses and vegetables have already suffered in some regions. With agriculture fields remaining bare right now, the insects have made their way to urban areas. This poses another set of problems. The Government is using specialised spraying machines and plans are on to deploy 60 specialised insecticide sprayers to kill the swarms. But what is needed is for us to shift to sustainable policies for an equitable future.

Shikha
Via email

Amid crisis, people must act responsibly

With the fourth phase of the lockdown coming to an end and having registered more than 1.5 lakh cases, one feels that the curfew should have been implemented much earlier than in the last week of March. Also, the migrants should have been given at least a week's window to return to their home States. Necessary medical infrastructure, arrangements for poor labourers, who have been rendered jobless due to the spread of the pandemic, too, should have been put in place. There's no disputing the fact that the lockdown was essential, at least to reduce the rate of spread of the infection. At the same time, it cannot continue endlessly, especially for a country like us. If not from the virus, people would die of hunger.

A phased relaxation of the lockdown is inevitable now. However, it is amusing to see how the public has been flouting all lockdown norms. Even days before the lockdown was announced, the ever-busy and overcrowded streets of Kolkata wore a "ghostly" look. Getting into the railway coach seemed like a relaxed stroll in a park. In Central Kolkata, shops were almost devoid of customers. And when the lockdown was imposed, non-market areas remained almost desolate. At milk booths and grocery stores, people meticulously stood in queues, maintaining safe distance from each

Kajal Chatterjee
Kolkata



other and wearing masks religiously. The third phase of the lockdown saw a slew of relaxations for non-hotspot areas. But many people took advantage of the situation and came out of their homes on some pretext or the other. With the Government easing norms, it was obvious that human activities would increase. But how can people act so irresponsibly? It's high time people get accustomed to the new-normal and inculcate behavioural changes and habits. Else India must get ready to brace for alarming days.

Hasty decision

Sir — This refers to the editorial, "Up in the sky" (May 27). The Uddhav Thackeray-led Maharashtra Government has

said that the Centre "arbitrarily" took the decision to allow domestic flight operations and that "no consultation" was made with the State. Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Ministry has said

that Maharashtra, like all other States, agreed to allow domestic civil aviation operations.

In an email response to the Centre, the Maharashtra Government has said that

restrictions on the movement of people and transport are in place in important cities such as Mumbai and Pune. Political blame games aside, such a big decision should have not been taken by the Centre before consulting the States.

MN Musaeed Jogeshwari
Mumbai

Setting examples

Sir — Bollywood actor Sonu Sood deserves all the praise for arranging buses for the migrant workers so that they reach their home States safely. His team has even set up a toll-free number. In personal capacity, he has been doing what the Government — both Central and States — had promised to do. To see a member of the film fraternity take such decisive steps during the outbreak of a deadly virus is unusual. It is to be seen if his colleagues, many of whom hold immense wealth, follow his example?

Babu Tanda Rampur
Uttar Pradesh

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Saving lives and livelihoods

The question of livelihood is getting desperate. The cure today is proving more expensive than the pandemic



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

A housing society with nearly 3,000 families in Greater Noida was sealed this week due to a family being found Covid-positive. These families, most of them first-time flat owners, self-employed or working for private enterprises in the National Capital Region (NCR), are a relatively new bunch of inhabitants to this area. The sealing exercise ensured most of them are imprisoned within the society complex while their employers threatened them with salary cuts if not layoffs. For the first time perhaps since the lockdown began in March-end, angry employees from the housing society took to an organised demonstration to save their livelihoods.

A few dozen special trains meant to transport migrant labourers to their States allegedly got diverted on extended routes and ended up terminating at wrong destinations across the country. Many flights, too, got cancelled within the first two days of resuming operations in the country.

A high-intensity super cyclone whipped its way into mainland West Bengal leaving a trail of unprecedented destruction. It took nearly four days to restore electricity in the capital city of Kolkata even as rural and semi-urban areas are yet to be reached and assessed, for providing basic amenities like clean drinking water.

The above examples are just a fragment of the apologetic tale of mismanagement and lack of coordination between different arms of the same Government in a particular geography. If we start adding layers of Central, State, district, city and neighborhood governance to this, an almost incomprehensible cobweb of India's ongoing pandemic-redressal system emerges.

It takes courage and a Himalayan leap of faith to impose a lockdown this stringent for more than two months on almost one-fifth of humanity, for a Prime Minister. We understand Narendra Modi took a call to save lives while bartering away over 400 million livelihoods, of people who had just about begun to start having a semi-global existence with most basic amenities like electricity, clean drinking water, gas connections and a monthly income of nearly \$150. In just two months, the harsh realities of still being a poor nation have started hitting hordes if not headlines.

Consider snapshots like the "Biggest recession for India", "Millions of faceless, traceless stranded nowhere", "Lockdown exit strategy missing." The real issue is beginning to stare most of us in the face and we are slowly realising that there is no lockdown exit strategy at all.

This reminds me of another great warrior. In the Mahabharata, Abhimanyu, the son of the brave Arjun, was a child prodigy who mastered the key skill sets of warfare in his mother's womb. However, Abhimanyu didn't know how to get out of the *Chakravyuha* (a multi-tier defensive formation used in warfare), even if he did know what it took to get into one and win a day in a battle. We all know what it takes to prepare and get into a war. But how many know how to safely get out of one with least collateral damage to human life or limb, especially if the war is not at the borders?

That's a crucial point, to drive at this stage and here are some near-safe assumptions: COVID-19 spreads fastest with human-to-human contact. Misinformation or mistrust is a greater virus than COVID and is here to stay longer. A vaccine, if at all, is at least a year away from the developed world and much longer for a poor yet aspirational nation like ours.

The developing world can only wish for more heat and home-made remedies. The surprise element is that some of that ancient common sense does work in dealing with a deadly virus.

There is no statistical data to prove any of the above claims, but most of them have great significance. Indians can at this stage wish for a common-sense guided approach to the pandemic.

India has had a good recovery rate till now and low fatality as compared to the rest of the world, based on public information. And there is no reason to doubt this information since in a nation with nearly 1.5 billion phones the truth can't be suppressed for too long. Somebody or the other will definitely capture an anomaly and let the information flow. Let us also accept and be cautious that India has managed to hold up so far and lives as envisaged by our Prime Minister are more saved than lost.

However, the question of livelihood is getting desperate, the cure today is proving more expensive than the cause. Every life saved today may be lost to malnutrition, hunger, preventable disease or disaster in the near future. Keepers of the law on the ground aren't safe from the pandemic or viral flow of misinformation and one-size-fits-all can't be the approach.

Going extremely micro-local and an empowered approach to tackle the pandemic can be a solution for the long-term fight against the virus. However, remember that with great power comes great responsibility. Therefore, frontline lawmakers, right from the senior-most to those guarding the neighborhoods to prevent the outflow of the virus, have to ensure livelihoods and social distancing at the same time.

(The writer is a senior policy analyst)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

REPUBLICANS FEEL THAT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS SILENCE CONSERVATIVES. WE WILL REGULATE OR CLOSE THEM DOWN BEFORE WE LET THIS HAPPEN.
 —US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP



WE WILL CONTINUE TO POINT OUT INCORRECT OR DISPUTED INFORMATION ABOUT POLLS GLOBALLY. WE WILL ADMIT TO AND OWN ANY MISTAKES WE MAKE.
 —TWITTER CEO JACK DORSEY

Disastrous decade for data

The challenges for data posed by the pandemic, CAA-NPR-NRC and the reluctance of the Government to release official figures need to be tackled urgently



ARJUN KUMAR



PC MOHANAN

Owing to the lockdown necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre has deferred the National Population Register (NPR) updation exercise and the first phase of Census 2021, both of which were scheduled to start in April. Census operations in India had hitherto been conducted in an unbroken chain since 1881. The only exceptions were in Assam in 1981 due to Statewide protests against illegal immigration from Bangladesh and in Jammu and Kashmir in 1991 due to law and order problems.

India's census, comprising house listing operations, where all the houses, irrespective of use, are identified and population enumeration, is one of the largest administrative exercises undertaken anywhere in the world. In the present context, given how the virus is spreading its tentacles, it is impractical to send census enumerators to households to collect and validate any information.

The census-NPR debate: Before the pandemic struck, the emphasis on conducting a joint census and NPR updation exercise, riding on the house listing operations, had faced considerable debate and criticism owing to the recently-enacted Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) intertwined with the Government's open commitment to the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Linking of the census and NPR raises technical and operational questions. In 2011, the NPR tagged to the house-listing schedule had serious coverage issues, with about 60 million people missing. The fact that the NPR data is certainly not required for targeting purposes, the question that arises then relates to its utility since it is collected at enormous physical and financial costs when Aadhaar-based biometric identification numbers with higher coverage are already available. Moreover, since the Government has not revealed the existing NPR to public scrutiny, all insistence on its accuracy is merely a conjecture, validating apprehensions over the NPR being the base for the NRC. The census-NPR debate has become intertwined with other controversies over official Government data. This has portrayed the present decade as disastrous for public data in India and warrants an urgent response to uphold the integrity and credibility of our statistical institutions.

The political economy of official data and harnessing ICT: Experiences from recent years suggest that the Government itself shied away from accepting various official statistics on employment, consumption, sanitation, and so on, owing to the inability of the Government, NITI Aayog and other departments to produce credible reports on account of method and comparability, adhering to the consistent macro picture. Apart from concealment and postponement of Government reports, if and when these are released, they are done so with multiple disclaimers.

As a result, the entire process makes the reports virtually unusable. This is further amplified by blatant withholding of administrative data often managed by big private consultants. For several years, not much has been done to fix this lacuna.

To reform the Indian statistical system, the present Government prepared the Draft National Statistical Commission (NSC) Bill, 2019. This Bill is aimed at empowering the NSC to effectively formulate policies, priorities and standards on statistical matters. Further, a Five-year Vision 2019-2024 for the National Statistical System has been published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). The NITI Aayog on its

“THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PANDEMIC HAS TAUGHT US THE REAL IMPORTANCE OF DATA AND STATISTICAL SYSTEMS WITH A ROBUST ECOSYSTEM FOR INNOVATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY. EMPOWERMENT OF THE SEVERELY-UNDERFUNDED AND UNDERSTAFFED INDIAN STATISTICAL SYSTEM REQUIRES URGENT AND LARGE INVESTMENTS IN TECHNICAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES”



part has proposed a National Data and Analytics Platform (NDAP). These efforts demonstrate a growing acknowledgement of the need for the use of digital technology, which would democratise access to holistic and coherent public Government data on a real-time basis.

Thus, going forward, it appears that the era of Industry 4.0, Artificial Intelligence (AI), blockchain and gig economy would require extensive utilisation of ICT. This would enable quick and smooth harnessing of new sources of data, including payroll data, GIS data and big data generated using mobile communications, social media interactions and digitally-enabled transactions.

A departure from the past census exercise for census 2021 is that these operations will be carried out with handheld devices for prompt scrutiny and transfer of data to secure centralised servers. While this is certainly a progressive move, India must further take a cue from the experience of many countries in their responses to COVID-19 to tackle data-related exigencies concerning citizens registries.

In the US, the ongoing census 2020 (https://2020census.gov/) operations have been made fully online, ensuring accountability and credibility. Importantly, this has made the exercise open, inclusive and incorporate of citizens in these challenging times. No wonder, the census exercise in the US appears more as a celebration on social media, where its citizens are proudly enrolling and actively participating, whereas, in India, the whole exercise displays apprehensions and policy vacuum.

There is no time to lose. The existing initiatives by the Government on harnessing ICT, such as Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI), Digital India and JAM Trinity, need to be leveraged to carry out and continue the historic census exercise of 2021, as well as

to restore the credibility of our statistical institutions.

COVID-19, data and the State: There is no denying that the pandemic can only be fought with real-time information and aggregated data collected using cutting-edge technology and with the use of the internet, phones, ICT, location data and so on. This will help in the mandatory surveillance of each citizen in the extended lockdown period to enforce the necessary social distancing, isolation, tracing, delivery of essential services and welfare, the functioning of the economy and society and, more importantly in ensuring health and medical facilities.

This calls for a full-fledged citizen digital literacy programme under Digital India, utilising the lockdown time to handhold each citizen. In other words, the time for ensuring universal digital literacy, learning and application is now or never. During the pandemic, the amount of constructive and willing enrolment and support from each citizen, community, private sector and civil society, which will provide for such universal enumeration and registry by the Government, will be enormous and worth attempting. For now, the fallout of non-withdrawal of the State's power over data and surveillance remains a valid yet distant worry.

The way forward: The fight against the pandemic has taught us the real importance of data and statistical systems with a robust ecosystem for innovation and accountability. Empowerment of the severely underfunded and understaffed Indian statistical system requires urgent and large investments in technical and human resources.

Also, a real-time and dynamic database of unemployed, migrant and informal sector workers would immensely help in aiding the most vulnerable and marginalised sections that are excluded from any support from the Government in the absence of their up-to-date registry. This

would, in future, help to avoid situations like the current plight of internal migrants trekking along the highways to reach their home villages and small towns, in the face of the transportation and economic lockdown.

The census provides migration data at the district and town level, so holding it every five years instead of the present decadal system should be considered. Organising an intercensal survey, as done in many countries, can also mitigate this deficiency in the Indian data system to a large extent.

Improving the credibility of official statistics would take a broad consensus and effective leadership. Disentangling the overlapping functions of statistical bodies like the NSC and MoSPI and creating coherence and cohesiveness in their duties and responsibilities is required.

To enable evidence-based policymaking, planning and implementation, adapting ICT at par with global standards is required by the system of official statistics in India. A universal digital India push now can lay the foundation of real-time data and modern architecture. This will go a long way in realising the vision of 'New India' and a \$5 trillion economy. Further, postponement of NPR and only doing the first phase of the 2021 census work will be a logical step to ensure that the timeline for the population count in March 2021 is not altered. The challenges for data, posed by the pandemic, CAA-NPR-NRC and the reluctance of the Government to release official data, needs to be tackled urgently. Besides this, the NSC should be made an independent and dynamic body led by professionals to ensure availability of credible, accessible and legible statistics to empower policymakers with quality data to make India the world guru.

(Kumar is Director, IMPRI and Mohanan is former acting Chairperson of the NSC and mentor, IMPRI.)

A pandemic of domestic abuse

Lockdowns have trapped women and girls with abusive partners. They are isolated and cut off from support networks and resources



SHRUTI KAPOOR

Every morning I wake up to a few messages on Saify's social media pages. Usually, these are requests for help and read like, "I know a girl who is facing domestic violence (DV), please can you help?" One person asks, "Hey, do you help in the lockdown too? I have been going through domestic violence for four years and it's been horrible." My team and I get busy supporting victims of domestic violence, getting them the help they need.

More than 90 countries are under lockdown with four billion people con-

finned to their homes. However, little do most people realise that for millions of women, "home" is not a safe place during a lockdown. As the world scrambled to flatten the Coronavirus curve, the DV curve surged across the globe. In France, DV cases increased by 30 per cent while in Argentina, emergency calls regarding DV increased by 25 per cent. Cyprus and Singapore helplines registered an increase in calls of 30-33 per cent. The UK, US, Spain, India and other countries, have all witnessed a rise in violence at home.

Lockdowns have trapped women and girls with abusive partners. They are isolated and cut off from support networks and resources. Victims are no longer able to pick up the phone and call for help because they are being watched by the abuser constantly. They are unable to step out of that door and seek support.

The truth is that DV has persisted in our homes for generations. A fact most of us choose to ignore. DV, like

all forms of abuse, is about power. And during this pandemic, men are using violence to control women's minds, bodies, economic capacities and mobility. It is a deliberate action carried out against the victim with a sense of entitlement over their bodies. And nothing can or should justify violence against women/girls.

So, what have countries done so far to address DV during this pandemic?

France is offering hotel rooms for victims of abuse. The Government will pay for 20,000 hotel nights for victims and put in place approximately 20 counselling centres at stores across the country in order for women to be able to seek help when they run errands.

In Germany, the Green Party's parliamentary leader, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, said she feared for the lives of thousands of women trapped with violent partners and called on the Government to free up money for safe houses.

In Greece, officials said they were stepping up a campaign to help women cope with problems clearly emerging from the issue of confinement.

A prosecutor in Trento, Italy, has ruled that in cases of DV the abuser must leave the family home and not the victim.

In India the National Commission for Women has launched a WhatsApp number (+91 7217735372) to facilitate quick and increased reporting, taking cognisance of the increase in violence.

So, the big question is, what can a citizen do as a bystander?

Now more than ever, bystander intervention is vital. Each one of us, even under a lockdown, can actively intervene online or in the offline space if we see someone experiencing harassment or violence. Here are five ways that can help citizens speak out, identify, engage or respond to a situation of domestic abuse.

Delegate: Which means get help

from someone else. For example, in India, you can dial 100 for the police or 181 to connect to the women's helpline number after checking with the person facing harassment or abuse.

Delay: Wait for the incident to be over and then check in with the person harassed or abused. You can call the person, message them or use another creative way to check on them like through a chat feature on an online game and so on.

Direct: Is to use an indirect approach to de-escalate the situation and divert the attention of the abuser away from the violence to give the victim a break. A common way to do this, if the incident is happening in your neighbourhood, is to ring the bell and ask to borrow something, like a cup of milk. The famous #RingTheBell campaign by Breakthrough is a classic example of how to distract an abuser.

Document: You can document the violence using your phone or a camera. Remember, while document-

ing the incident, try to film undercover and give the videos and photos to the person facing the violence. Consent is important. Let them decide what to do with it.

Direct: Speak up when you see a incident of DV. You can do so by naming the behaviour. You can say, "Domestic violence is a crime." Name what you see. "It looks like she is physically hurt and very scared." Ask the abuser a question, "Why are you beating her?"

A word of caution: When intervening, please ensure your own safety first. If you don't feel safe intervening, get help. Be vigilant. DV, most of the time, is occurring behind closed doors and is less talked about. In fact in India, less than 14 per cent of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence seek help.

While a majority of us are following the shelter-in-place order, many first responders like postal workers, garbage collectors, food delivery staff

are out and about through neighborhoods doing their jobs. They may have an opportunity to detect violence and report to the authorities. If you know of someone facing violence, ask them how they would prefer to connect? Stay in touch with them through creative ways. Once you have safely established a way to connect, help them find a DV shelter or a helpline number. Think through a safety plan with the victim. One safety plan does not fit all. Abuse, harassment and violence is different in each incident. Each situation is unique and will require a different intervention.

These are difficult and unusual times for all. While we are physically cut away from each other, don't let that prevent you from raising your voice and using your resources for another pandemic called gender-based violence. When will we try to flatten this persistent curve?

(The writer is founder and CEO, Saify)

CAPSULE



Dr Reddy's gets inspection closure report from USFDA for TS

New Delhi: Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Thursday said the US health regulator has closed inspection of its Telangana-based facility. The company has received the establishment inspection report (EIR) from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) for Medchal-Malkajigiri-based integrated product development organisation (IPDO) indicating closure of the audit, Dr Reddy's Laboratories said in a regulatory filing. The USFDA issues an EIR to a company when an inspection is satisfactorily closed.



BSE to discontinue liquidity enhancement scheme

New Delhi: Leading stock exchange BSE has said it will discontinue liquidity enhancement scheme (LES) for equity derivatives segment from June 11. The exchange had introduced LES in equity derivative segment in August 2019. The scheme was provided on index futures and options and 50 stock futures and options. "The exchange shall discontinue the LES...with effect from June 11, 2020," BSE said in a circular. Under the LES, brokers and other market intermediaries are given incentives for a specified period of time to bring in and generate investor interest in securities that have limited trading activity.



EasyJet to cut a third of workforce as pandemic hits travel

London: European budget airline eastJet said Thursday that it plans to cut up to a third of its workforce as it restructures amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The airline did not specify how many jobs would go, but some 15,000 were employed at the start of 2020. CEO Johan Lundgren, says the carrier remains focused on doing what is right for the company and its long-term "health and success." EasyJet plans to resume limited service on June 15, but estimates that it may take three years to get back to 2019 demand levels. Lundgren says that "against this backdrop, we are planning to reduce the size of our fleet and to optimise the network and our bases."

Air India employees seek Rs 50k-cr for flag carrier

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A joint forum of Air India employees and staff unions has sought a Rs 50,000 crore financial succour from the government for the national carrier, stating that the airline is a necessity for the country.

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Joint Forum said that Air India is a "necessity" for the country, especially in times of crises, and a financial package will not only help the flag carrier but also the entire aviation sector and the economy.

The prime minister earlier this month announced a Rs 20 lakh crore package, which combined the government's earlier announcements on supporting key sectors as also measures rolled out by the Reserve Bank of India, to help revive the economy amid the coronavirus pandemic crisis.

Leading rating agencies have forecast the Indian economy to contract by 5 per cent in the current fiscal due to the impact of the crisis.

"We thank you for the financial package of Rs 20 lakh crores to boost industry and the economy. As you will agree that civil aviation is of paramount importance in today's context and therefore it is extremely necessary to boost the aviation

India emerges as the strongest and best airline of India," the Joint Forum said in the letter. Stating that Air India has once again played a crucial role for the nation by bringing back



industry and restore normal operations at the earliest, which is crucial for the economy to stabilise.

"In view of this, we request you to kindly grant Air India a financial package of Rs 50,000 crore which will go a long way in ensuring that Air

India emerges as the strongest and best airline of India," the Joint Forum said in the letter. Stating that Air India has once again played a crucial role for the nation by bringing back

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which is the origin and centre point of the coronavirus."

Besides, Air India staff went out of the way at considerable "personal risk" to ensure smooth operations of several cargo and charter flights all through this period thereby facilitating the smooth movement of medicines and medical equipment between India and many other countries including China, it said.

Air India has always performed national duties irrespective of the serious risks involved, it said adding it has been established beyond doubt that Air India is a necessity for the country especially in times of crises.

Piyush Goyal expects better exports performance in May

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The performance of the country's exports is expected to be better in May as compared to April, when the shipments contracted to an all-time high of 60.28 per cent, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

He also hoped that the contraction in the growth rate of exports in June would be around 10 per cent only.

There was a huge decline in exports in April but "my sense is that in May, it will improve significantly", he said while speaking at CII's Export Summit through video conference.

The minister expects that the exports will be down by about 30-35 per cent in May.

Goyal said three main things -- reviving manufacturing, diversifying export basket, focusing on newer and accepting markets -- will drive the economy going forward.

Further, he said Indian industries, entrepreneurs and start-ups should see what new markets have opened up domestically for them and work on those.

"Our agriculture export potential is huge. Rice, including Basmati, animal husbandry



Industry Minister Piyush Goyal expects that the exports will be down by about 30-35 per cent in May

products and organic products, among many others, we have an opportunity to work together as partners and expand India's footprint," he said adding that diversification along with consolidation will help grow product basket and expand India's presence horizontally across the world.

He said building upon the domestic demands, with surplus going to export, will push India to newer heights.

The ministry, he said, is working on identifying several sectors that holds potential for the domestic industry.

He added that the sectors include auto components, furniture, air conditioners (ACs), set-top boxes, pharma, organic products, agri-chemicals, textiles, toys and lithium-ion batteries.

"Why we should be importing auto components. That needs to be changed. Why we should import USD 2 billion worth of furniture. Why we are importing ACs and components like compressors... We are looking at promoting APIs (active pharmaceutical ingredients) in India," Piyush Goyal said.

Adani sees Covid-19 as opportunity for transition to clean energy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Billionaire Gautam Adani on Thursday said COVID-19 had an immediate economic impact but the pandemic presents an opportunity to design a new and faster transition to a low-carbon future as he expects the price of solar modules to drop further.

Writing on LinkedIn, he said the urgency of a green revolution in the energy sector has gained greater importance in view of COVID-19 challenges.

"While the immediate economic impact may slow us down, we are presented with an opportunity to pause, rethink, and design a new and faster transition to a low-carbon future," he said.

In January, Adani had said that his group is aiming to become the world's largest solar power company by 2025 and the biggest renewable



energy firm by 2030. Its existing portfolio of renewable power generating assets stood at over 2.5 GW. This is expected to more than double by 2020, with the implementation of 2.9 GW under construction capacity and would further touch 18 GW by 2025.

The head of India's biggest infrastructure conglomerate Adani Group on Thursday said many of the system operators in Europe, faced with falling demand, are learning to manage grids at a remarkably high level of renewables in the energy mix, often up to 70 per cent.

Govt seeks USD 520 mn from Cairn Oil & Gas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has slapped a USD 520 million (around Rs 3,941 crore) demand notice on billionaire Anil Agarwal's oil and gas unit Cairn after an audit found alleged discrepancies in cost recovery in the Rajasthan oil and gas fields operated by the company, sources said adding the firm has disputed the demand and initiated arbitration proceedings. The Director General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), the upstream technical arm of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, sought USD 520 million in additional profit petroleum for the government after an audit of capital and operating expenses incurred on the Mangala and other oilfields in the Rajasthan block RJ-ON-90/1, sources with direct knowledge of the development said.

The audit alleged discrepancies in the way capital expenses made on setting up the infrastructure to produce oil were booked.

The law provides for operators recovering all the capital and operating cost from revenues



The audit alleged discrepancies in the way capital expenses made on setting up the infrastructure to produce oil were booked

earned from the sale of oil and gas before sharing a fixed percentage of profit with the government. Booking a higher expenditure curtails government's profit share.

Cairn Oil and Gas, a venture of Agarwal-controlled Vedanta Ltd, earlier this month sent an arbitration notice, disputing the demand, they said. A company spokesperson declined to com-

demand in case the arbitration panel upholds the DGH demand.

The arbitration notice sent by Cairn triggered disputed resolution proceedings under the Production Sharing Contract (PSC). A three-member arbitration panel, comprising a nominee each of Cairn and the government and a neutral judge, will be set up to adjudicate on the dispute. Cairn and ONGC are already in a dispute over payment of royalty from the block. Cairn had stopped paying for its share of royalty on oil produced from its Rajasthan block following differences with partner ONGC on cost recovery.

GHCL to defer all capital projects, except those in advanced stage

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chemicals and textiles major GHCL on Thursday said it has decided to defer all major capital projects, except those in advanced stage, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The company, which had no material production in April, said currently its plants are operating at 50-60 per cent utilisation levels based on demand outlook and labour availability, and it doesn't see any liquidity challenge in the near term, with around Rs 397 crore of unutilised fund based limits as



on April 30 ensuring adequate liquidity. In a regulatory filing regarding material impact of COVID-19 pandemic, GHCL said, "The company has decided to defer all major capital projects except those in advance stages which will be completed."

It, however, did not elaborate on the major capital projects. On commencement of operations, the company said its manufacturing operations have gradually restarted with due approvals from the respective government authorities.

NODWIN Gaming, Airtel team up to grow e-sports

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel and NODWIN Gaming on Thursday announced a partnership to promote and grow e-sports in India.

E-sports have the potential to become a sizable part of the country's mainstream sporting culture given India's large youth population and rising internet penetration, according to a statement by the companies. It is estimated that by 2021, online gaming will become over USD 1-billion market in India with over 620 million gamers.

MTal seeks govt intervention to resume elective surgeries

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Industry body Medical Technology Association of India (MTal) on Thursday sought the government's intervention to ensure that elective surgical procedures are resumed at the earliest, as this would enable hospitals to re-start their normal operations.

The hospitals had to shut down their OPDs due to various government restrictions to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted their revenue flow, MTal said in a statement.

Elective surgeries account for about 50 per cent of revenues for hospitals in normal business conditions.



SBI cuts interest rates on fixed deposits across tenors

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has reduced interest rates on retail term deposits by up to 40 basis points (bps) across all tenors.

This is the second reduction in fixed deposits interest rates by the lender in May. It had reduced its deposit rates on May 12.

The new rates of interest, effective from Wednesday, shall be made applicable to fresh deposits and renewals of maturing deposits.

For deposits maturing in seven days to 45 days, the lender is offering an interest rate of 2.90 per cent as against 3.30 per cent earlier, according to the SBI website.

The revised rate for 180 days to 210 days bracket is 4.40 per cent compared to 4.80 per cent.

FDS maturing in one year to less than two years will now



fetch an interest rate of 5.10 per cent as against 5.50 per cent.

Interest rate on deposits in the five years to up to 10 years tenor will be 5.40 per cent compared to 5.70 per cent.

For senior citizens also, interest rates on retail term deposits across all tenors have been cut by up to 40 basis points.

The lender has also slashed interest rates on bulk deposits (Rs 2 crore and above) by up to 50 basis points.

Recently, SBI chairman Rajnish Kumar had said that in the current scenario interest rates are going to reduce. "The reduction in interest rates will be for both borrowers and depositors," he had said.

'Need to look at building economy with local skills'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country needs to go back to the basics and look at building an economy based on local skills and naturally available resources, Rajya Sabha MP and former Union minister Suresh Prabhu said on Thursday as he emphasised the importance of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

The five pillars of Atma Nirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) are economy, infrastructure, system, vibrant demography and demand.

Speaking at a webinar organised by the Institute of Cost Accountants of India, Prabhu said there is a need to work in a way that people's needs are adequately taken care of and demand of the world is also catered to. Noting that each district



has unique traditional characteristics, he said that if a proper study and documentation are done to make the districts self-sufficient, then it would have a transformative effect on rural India.

"In ancient times, India was

a large economy and its products were sought after. It didn't produce steel, cement or automobiles at that time but it produced things based on local skills. We again need to go back to the basics," Prabhu said.

The five pillars of Atma Nirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) are economy, infrastructure, system, vibrant demography and demand

Prabhu is also India's Sherpa for G20 nations.

Speaking at the webinar, BJP National General Secretary Ram Madhav said Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a categorical call for Atma Nirbhar Bharat amid the COVID-19 pandemic and that the government's motto has been self-reliance for the last six years.

He said India has managed the COVID-19 crisis well compared to many other countries and attributed it to three factors. Prime minister who has taken right decisions at the right time, an efficient

administrative machinery and the 1.3 billion people of the country who have shown great unity and discipline in handling the situation, he noted.

Talking about post COVID-19 world, Madhav called upon people all over the country to show greater unity.

Industry body Ficci's President Sangita Reddy said, "we are in a complex situation" and going forward, there is a need to build an economy that is driven by digitisation, societal collaboration and self-reliance.

Cinema halls being shut for so long has saddened many, for reasons of entertainment, but there is an other section of people who is a worried lot: the staff at these theatres. *The Pioneer's* RACHEL DAMMALA talks to the staff of various theatres across the state to find out how they're faring and more

'FORCED PAY CUT' IRKS THEATRE STAFF

For over two months now, cinemas across India have remained shut, as most of the country is under lockdown to curtail the spread of coronavirus. The move has hugely dented the earnings of theatre staff, who were dependent on daily collections. With cinema halls shut across the state, the staff and other workers are left to fend for themselves. Several employees of theatres across the state have either been forced to accept pay cuts or have not been paid, and a few of them have been fired. Last week, members of the Telangana Cinema Theatre Employees' Union (TCTEU), which includes gatemen, security person-

nel, booking clerks, operators, electricians, and other employees working in cinema halls, staged a protest in the city urging the government to come to their rescue. They sought government's intervention and ensure that the theatre management pay full salaries to their employees. It is said that several employees working in theatres across the city have lost their jobs. Ravi (name changed), an employee of Asian Cinemas said that he had been receiving only 40 per cent of his salary since March. "Freshers earn somewhere between Rs 10,000-Rs 12,000. However, following lockdown, we are being paid only Rs 4,000 to Rs 5,000 per month. This barely covers our monthly needs.

Some of us are the only breadwinners of our families." One of the employees had also said that migrant workers, who left for their villages, have not been paid and have been asked to write and sign a letter stating that they are fine with not being paid their salaries. Nirav (name changed), another employee of Asian Cinemas informs that he and his colleagues have been receiving only 30 per cent of their salaries. But their employer had a different story to tell. Sunil Narang, the owner of the multiplex chain Asian Cinemas, says, "Our employees are like family to us. We are paying them in full. None of our employees have been removed from their jobs."

When pointed out that an employee spoke about a pay cut, he said, "If there are any pay cuts, care will be taken to pay the remaining later." While this assurance does bring hope in the lives of some employees, others only wish this was the same deal with them. Some allege that they have also been called to work for the past 2 weeks, but they haven't been going since there's no public transport and the money their employers promise to give would be sufficient only for their petrol charges and won't cover their other needs. Some others say that while their jobs are safe, they might not see an increment any time soon. They also said that may not be able to shift jobs because nobody is willing

to hire but only looking to fire. Theatres' Association President Vijayender Reddy, who is an employer himself says, "I have been paying my employees in full and will continue to even after June. Most of our staff are permanent members, so we can explore the Provident Fund option too. We share a beautiful bond of employer-employee for decades now. If the lockdown does get extended, we might have to resort to pay cuts, but we have promised our employees that as soon as profits pour in after theatres open to the public, their remaining salaries will be paid." On most staff not receiving their salaries across the city, he says, "Individual theatre own-

ers are ensuring they pay their employees well, but multiplexes, I hear, aren't doing the same, it's a sad state of affairs. Their employees fear their jobs' security." Pinnu Kranthi Kumar, who works in Karimnagar for BookMyShow at Asian Mukta Srinivas Theatres, said that his employers have been paying him and his colleagues in full. "I did get to know through some of my friends in Hyderabad that the staff of most theatres aren't getting paid or have been removed from their jobs without any intimation," he said. But employees of a few other theatres are being treated well and are making the most of the lockdown. "We have been paid our salaries for the last two months. We have

been asked to stay safe at home. Our employers are using this time to train us on better ways to sanitise and maintain hygiene in our cinema halls after this lockdown ends," inform Arun who works for Cinepolis. It's been a week since, TCTEU, on behalf of all the theatre workers, reportedly has given a representation to the Telugu Film Producers' Council President C Kalyan and former president of Telugu Film Producers' Council Tammareddy Bharadwaj. Nothing concrete seemed to have taken place since then, while over 25,000 employees who work for theatres across the state, continue to fear their jobs' security and are waiting in the hope of a solution soon.



Our employees are like family to us. We are paying them in full. None of our employees have been removed from their jobs. If there are any pay cuts, care will be taken to pay the remaining later.

SUNIL NARANG



I did get to know through some of my friends in Hyderabad that the staff of most theatres aren't getting paid or have been removed from their jobs without any intimation.

KRANTHI KUMAR



I learnt to lead with grace from my character: Freida Pinto

Bored? Looking for something interesting to beat lockdown blues? Disney+ Hotstar is here to your rescue. The OTT platform presents to you its new animated originals titled *Mira-Royal Detective*, voiced by South-Asian superstars like Freida Pinto, Kal Penn, Jameela Jamil, finds SHIKHA DUGGAL

aren't your earliest memories connected to those animated series you watched as a kid? If nostalgia's hitting you amid the lockdown, Disney+ Hotstar is here to your rescue. The OTT platform presents to you its new animated originals titled *Mira-Royal Detective*, voiced by South-Asian superstars like Freida Pinto, Kal Penn, Jameela Jamil, etc. A mystery adventure, *Mira* is soon going to be the newfound favourite of kids. The story revolves around the life of a brave girl of the same name, who is appointed a detective by the royal queen. Together with her friend Prince Neel — a talented inventor, Priya — her creative cousin, and comical mongoose sidekicks — Mikku and Chikku, she sets out on a mystery adventure. Dubbing need not require makeup or body language to express oneself, voice is the only medium to reach the audience and that's

how *Slumdog Millionaire* fame Freida Pinto was roped in for the voice of the Queen. "I think Queen Shanti and I have this one thing in common — we both like to lead, and while I was voicing the character of Queen Shanti, I think I did embody those leadership qualities. I learnt how to lead with grace and kindness from the Queen," shares Freida. Talking about her experience of being a voice artiste, the actress said, "It was a really interesting experience of being a voice artiste because I don't do this so often. This was kind of a no-brainer. I had to do it as soon as

they told me about the show and the characters. But I feel the exaggeration that comes with voicing these characters, when you don't have any visual reference because the animation is happening side by side while you are voicing it." This weekend's newbie *Mira* has mystery, animation and is full of entertainment for the kids. The originals will fill you with wonder and wouldn't let you control your curiosity about what's going to happen next. Kal Penn aka Kalpesh Suresh Modi, is also thrilled to join the originals. He says, "I hope that what kids learn the most from *Mira, Royal Detective* are these incredible inquisitive skills, these characters that are confident. I mean, *Mira* is incredibly confident and capable and what an incredible message that sends to young girls obviously, but to young boys, who watch the show, *Mira* will inspire them too." The series features an all-star cast of prominent South Asian actors including Jameela Jamil, Kal Penn, Freida, Hannah Simone, Utkarsh Ambudkar, Aasif Mandvi and Aparna Nancherla amongst others. So fasten your seat belts to find answers to some unresolved questions and the multiple speculations around them!



I think Queen Shanti and I have this one thing in common — we both like to lead, and while I was voicing the character of Queen Shanti, I think I did embody those leadership qualities. I learnt how to lead with grace and kindness from the Queen. It was a really interesting experience of being a voice artiste because I don't do this so often. This was kind of a no-brainer. I feel the exaggeration that comes with voicing these characters, when you don't have any visual reference because the animation is happening side by side while you are voicing it.

FREIDA PINTO



TV actor Manas Shah in financial crisis, sells car



TV actor Manas Shah is going through a rough phase financially and has had to sell off his car because he hasn't been paid for his last show *Hamari Bahu Silk*. "This is the first time that I'm facing such a challenging situation. I'm facing a big financial crisis. I had to sell my car for survival. I also had to leave my rented house and shift with my cousin in Lokhandwala," he said. Talking about non-payment of dues, he said: "I started shooting on May 2, 2019, and



the last shoot was on November 5, 2019. We all have been paid only for May 2019, which was officially due in September 2019 but we received it in October 2019. After that nobody has received a single penny." "I have my parents to look after in my hometown Ahmedabad. My dad is retired after serving in a bank for years," said Manas. With shooting of shows being put on hold due to the ongoing pandemic, his problems have even worsened. "It's a very bad situation, not only for me but also for all the people who are working in this entertainment industry, because till now we haven't received payment of the past, in the present there is no work and the future is unknown," he said.

VIDYUT JAMMWAL STARTS INITIATIVE TO EMPOWER ENTREPRENEURS

Bollywood actor Vidyut Jammwal has started an initiative to support ideas from different parts of India. Vidyut has been helping and motivating fans to stay physically and mentally fit since the beginning of the lockdown in March, and now he wants to help people stay financially fit too. Talking about the initiative, Vidyut said, "I am what I am today because of the love and support I have received over the years. GoodwillforGood is an initiative that is very close to my heart and it is my way of giving it back to society. I have come across many ideas that have the power to make a difference but what they lack is a platform to showcase it. Through this initiative, I will promote these brilliant minds and their unconventional proposals." The fitness enthusiast is best known for starring in the *Commando* franchise. Vidyut will next be seen in the movie *Khuda Haafiz*.



MANUSHI CHHILLAR TO PROMOTE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE

Former Miss World and Bollywood debutant Manushi Chhillar has joined hands with Unicef to promote menstrual hygiene as she says there still is silence and misinformation. On World Menstrual Hygiene Day on Thursday, Manushi will be promoting the need to educate girls with all information on maintaining hygiene, constructing adequate sanitation facilities and providing quick access to feminine hygiene products. "Menstruation is still a taboo and we will have to work hard towards ensuring that every girl, every woman in every corner of our

country is safe," said Manushi, who has participated in the UNICEF global initiative called the Red Dot Challenge — a symbol adopted by the world body to depict menstrual cycle. Manushi, who also runs her own initiative on menstrual hygiene called Project Shakti, said that every girl has the right to accurate information about her body. "Every young girl has the right to accurate information about her body. Without the right information, girls often don't know how to safely manage their period. There still is silence and misinformation. We have come a long way but a lot still needs to be done. We all need to contribute towards raising awareness on this. I'm proud and honoured to be associated with UNICEF for this novel initiative that aims

at debunking misinformation, taboos and also raise awareness on this critical issue." Manushi is all set to make her Bollywood debut opposite superstar Akshay Kumar in the upcoming film "Prithviraj". Directed by Chandraprakash Dwivedi, *Prithviraj* is based on the life of king Prithviraj Chauhan. It stars Akshay as Prithviraj, while Manushi will play the role of the Sanyogita, the love of his life.

MARTIN SCORSESE captures lockdown experience in short film

Hollywood maestro Martin Scorsese has made a short film reflecting upon his lockdown experience in New York. "What I look forward to in the future is carrying with me what I have been forced to learn in these circumstances," Scorsese said. "It is essential. The people you love. Being able to take care of them and be with them as much as you can," he added. The 77-year-old director has made the self-shot short film for the BBC series *Lockdown Culture*

With *Mary Beard*, reports variety.com. Through the series, Beard examines the links between risk, culture and creativity. "Martin Scorsese makes a wonderful end to the series. We see him at home, thinking about lockdown through the lens of classic movies, like Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*," Beard said. "But what's really clever is that this great Hollywood luminary also gets us to look at Hitchcock again afresh through the lens of our current predicament. I was absolutely over the moon when he agreed to do it for us. It feels a bit like hosting a little premiere. And it all contributes to a pretty amazing finale," she added. The series will also feature director Lee Daniels, who will explain why the lockdown in Hollywood could be a radical creative opportunity for filmmakers.



FUN

ARCHIE



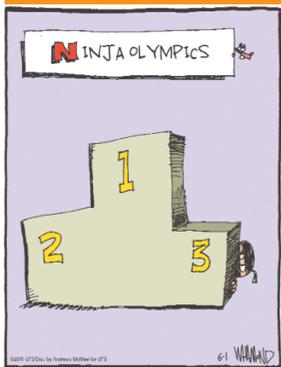
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



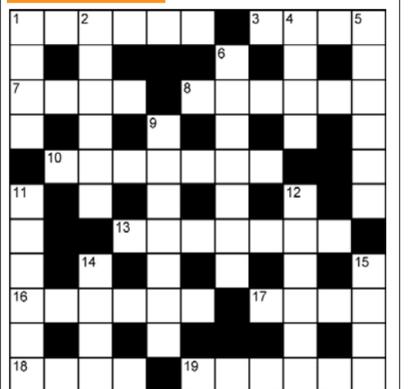
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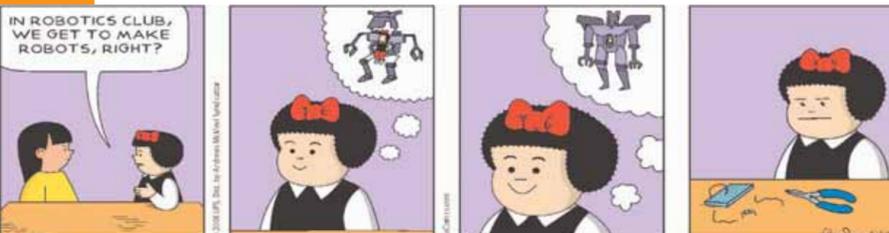
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- Mend
- Very thin metal sheet used in the kitchen
- The line where material is joined
- Murdered
- Tales
- The later part of the day
- Wanting food
- Money someone has to pay as a punishment
- A fruit from a palm tree
- A light wind

DOWN

- These birds hunt at night
- A climbing aid with rungs
- Birds that fly back home
- Courage
- Shoved
- Ask to come
- A tangle in your hair
- At this place

SOLUTION



DOWN

- Have a lie down
- Braided lengths of hair

ICC defers decision on WT20 postponement till June 10

NEW DELHI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) Board on Thursday deferred a decision on the fate of this year's T20 World Cup in Australia till June 10 as it continued exploring contingency plans amid a raging pandemic.

The ICC also launched an inquiry into concerns over the "confidentiality" of its functioning, which the Board felt has been breached in the past few days.

"The Board also requested the ICC management continue with their discussions with stakeholders in exploring various contingency options in light of the rapidly changing public health situation caused by the Covid-19 virus," the ICC said in a statement after the Board's teleconference.

It is learnt that most of the discussion on the day was pertaining to classified information, including internal e-mails, being leaked, an issue that outgoing chairman Shashank Manohar as well as board members addressed.

"A number of Board members had raised their concerns over this issue recently and felt it required immediate attention to ensure the sanctity and confidentiality of Board matters in line with the highest standards of governance," the ICC release stated.

In fact, the ICC's Ethics Officer will be probing the media leaks.

"There was unanimous

agreement to immediately initiate an independent investigation led by the ICC's Ethics Officer and supported by global experts. The Board will be updated on this by the ICC CEO at its next meeting on 10 June 2020," it further stated.

It is understood that ICC board discussed all options with regards to the World Cup but there was no unanimity on whether to go ahead with the World T20 as per schedule or postpone it to 2021 or possibly 2022, which for many is a practical solution.

With Cricket Australia announcing their itinerary on the day, which included T20 matches in October, there are questions as to why the World T20 cannot go ahead in such a scenario.

"If you look at the Australian itinerary, India's T20 games are scheduled in mid-October before the start of World T20. If you can play T20 games in mid-October, why is it not safe to play World T20," a source told PTI.

But having a World T20 is not only a health concern but also about commercial viability.

If BCCI is unable to organise the IPL in this window, it stands to lose ₹4000 crore, which certainly would be a big blow.

Also Star, which is broadcast partner of both the ICC and BCCI, will also need to be taken into confidence with regards to rejigging of the calendar. PMS

Dates set for series Down Under

Virat & Co will travel Australia for T20, Test & ODI series in the last quarter of 2020 with Adelaide to host D/N Test

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Ending weeks of speculation, Cricket Australia on Thursday confirmed that India will make the trip Down Under starting October this year for a financially critical assignment comprising four Tests, ODIs as well as T20 Internationals.

Cricket Australia announced the much-anticipated resumption of the game after the Covid-19 pandemic with a six-month home summer schedule, which will begin with a tour by Zimbabwe for a three-match ODI series from August 9.

India will tour the country for a T20 series, which will begin on October 11 at Brisbane followed by matches on October 14 (Canberra) and October 17 (Adelaide), the CA posted on its official website.

This is to be followed by the T20 World Cup, the likelihood of which going ahead is slim owing to the pandemic. The CA did not even mention the event in its official schedule unveiled on Thursday.

After the T20s, Virat Kohli's men will return for a four-Test series, beginning on December 3 at Brisbane. India are then scheduled to play a Day/Night Test, as committed by BCCI President Sourav Ganguly, from December 11 to 15 in Adelaide.

The third and fourth Tests will be held in Melbourne (December 26-30) and Sydney (January 3 to 7).

The ODI series is scheduled to begin with a match on January 12 in Perth and it will be followed by contests on January 15 (Melbourne) and



January 17 (Sydney).

"We are working closely with the BCCI to deliver the eagerly anticipated men's and women's tours, and we are looking forward to staging the important series against both the men's and women's New Zealand sides," Kevin Roberts, Cricket Australia CEO, said in a statement.

The India women's team will also travel to Australia for an ODI series with matches scheduled in Canberra (January 22), St Kilda (January 25) and Hobart (January 17).

Roberts hinted that if circumstances dictate, there could be changes

in the schedule which also features series against New Zealand (both men and women), West Indies and a one-off Test against Afghanistan (November 21-25).

"...But we'll be doing everything we can to get as much international cricket in as possible this summer. We will communicate any changes to the schedule if or when they are required," he added.

Cricket Australia also said that it will continue to act in accordance with public health advice and Government protocols to ensure the safety of the public, players and sup-

WACA chief lashes out at CA for India series snub

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Western Australia Cricket Association (WACA) chief Christina Matthews has lashed out at Cricket Australia for choosing Brisbane over Perth as one of the venues for the high-profile Test series against India in the summer.

Matthews said the newly built Optus Stadium is better than the Gabba in every way. Instead, Perth will be hosting the low profile one-off Test against Afghanistan in November.

"All the metrics associated with cricket over the last two years see us surpass Brisbane in every area, whether that's crowds, broadcast ratings, even better rainfall at that time of year, more corporate seats — just so many indicators — and a brand new stadium," Matthews was quoted as saying by Fox Sports on Thursday.

"When Australian cricket's primary objective is fans first, it is astounding that the 10,000 members who pay money to support cricket year after year in this state are not afforded the number one Test team to tour this year."

"The last time (India tour of 2014), we were told it was because our venue wasn't good enough and if we supported a new stadium, this would never happen again. And here we are again," Matthews said referring to the old WACA stadium.

India played in Perth when they toured last year (December 2018) with Australia winning the second Test by 146 runs to level the series.

The reinstatement of the Gabba comes after support from none other than Australia captain Tim Paine. Australia have not lost there in more than 30 years.

port staff.

"Australian cricket will survive and thrive after the coronavirus pandemic dissipates, just as we have after world wars, depressions, recessions and the many other challenges that have confronted us over the past 140-plus years," he added.

AUS SCHEDULE AGAINST INDIA

Men's T20I Series

First T20: October 11, the Gabba, Brisbane

Second T20: October 14, Manuka

Oval, Canberra

Third T20: October 17, Adelaide Oval

Men's Test Series

First Test: December 3-7, the Gabba, Brisbane

Second Test: December 11-15, Adelaide Oval (day-night)

Third Test: December 26-30, MCG

Fourth Test: January 3-7, SCG

Men's ODI Series

First ODI: January 12, Perth Stadium

Second ODI: January 15, MCG

Third ODI: January 17, SCG.

Sakshi Singh @SakshiSRawat
Its only rumours ! I understand Lockdown has made people mentally unstable ! #DhoniRetires .. Get a life !
11:57 PM · May 27, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

MS Dhoni's wife Sakshi has once again rubbished the rumours of the former Indian skipper's retirement from international cricket. On Wednesday, certain users on Twitter started to spread rumours of Dhoni's retirement with hashtag #DhoniRetires. Sakshi took note of the trend and lashed out at those spreading these rumours. However, just a few minutes after posting the tweet, she deleted it.

Bharat bats for use of external substance to shine ball

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The use of saliva to shine the ball is a "difficult habit" to get over but India's bowling coach Bharath Arun says he won't mind an "external substance" at its expense if it is used across teams.

In the wake of Covid-19 pandemic, ICC Cricket Committee has decided to ban the use of saliva as a part of health safety protocol.

A lot of premier play-



ers and coaches now feel that the use of external substances should be

allowed to shine the ball in order to maintain a balance between the bat and ball.

"As far as use of external substance is concerned, as long as it is same and uniform for all the teams, why not try it," Arun said.

"Use of saliva will be a very difficult habit to get over but we will make a conscious effort during our training and practice sessions to get rid of this habit," he added.

Virat right guy to take Indian cricket forward: Botham

PTI ■ LONDON

England all-rounder Ian Botham has said he would have loved to play against Indian captain Virat Kohli, saying he is the right guy to lead the Indian cricket team.

Speaking in an online chat session with Playwrite Foundation, Botham was quoted as saying by The Times of India: "Virat takes the game to the opposition, he takes a stand for his players. I would have loved to play against him. He is the right guy to take Indian cricket forward."

Asked about all-rounders in modern day cricket, he said: "All-rounders can't be manufactured, they don't grow on trees. The workload is double and it obviously takes a toll on your body. Just imagine Kapil... the amount of bowling he did on those Indian pitches, which had very little to offer, that too in the scorching heat of Chennai and Delhi. I can't see anyone in the present generation being able to do that," Botham said.

Botham also rated Ben Stokes higher than Andrew Flintoff, saying the 2019 World Cup and Ashes hero is like him.

"Ben (Stokes) is better than a mile to Freddy (Flintoff). Ben Stokes is the closest version of me, he plays like me with his heart on his sleeve. Flintoff was good but Stokes is just exceptional. He is the best cricketer in the world now." IANS



PL to restart on June 17



AFF ■ LONDON

The Premier League season is set to restart on June 17, three months after it was suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic, British media reported on Thursday.

No matches have been played since Leicester's 4-0 win over Aston Villa on March 9, with Liverpool just two wins away from securing the title.

Top-flight clubs voted unanimously on Wednesday to return to contact training and were meeting again on Thursday to discuss issues such as the restart date and the rebate to broadcasters.

The BBC reported that the first two matches would be Aston Villa vs Sheffield United and Manchester City vs Arsenal. Those matches are the two games in hand.

A full fixture list would then be played on the weekend of June 19-21.



Leipzig drop more points



Leipzig drop more points

LEIPZIG: Julian Nagelsman slammed 10-man RB Leipzig for defending like "a school team" in Wednesday's 2-2 draw at home to Hertha Berlin behind closed doors which cost them the chance to go second in the Bundesliga.

Hertha forward Krzysztof Piatek equalised with a late penalty to seal the draw and save the blushes of goalkeeper Rune Jarstein who had made a blunder for Leipzig's second goal.

However, Nagelsman was furious that Leipzig conceded a weak goal from a corner with only nine minutes gone when Hertha midfielder Marko Grujic, on loan from Liverpool, fired home unmarked.

"We started well, but fell behind because we defend a set piece like a school team," fumed Nagelsman.

"We simply did nothing, everyone is standing in position, yet he (Grujic) could finish with his foot, in the box."

"This is the second time in a row in a home game that we conceded from a set piece," said Nagelsman whose team drew 1-1 against Freiburg in their last home game.

"We have to blame ourselves for this. We're happy that we scored another point, but I'm not happy at all."

The result leaves Leipzig third in the table, two points behind Dortmund. AFF

Kumble optimistic of IPL this year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India captain and Kings XI Punjab head coach Anil Kumble is hopeful of the IPL happening this year and is not averse to the idea of conducting the cash-rich event without spectators due to the Covid-19 threat.

"Yes we are hopeful and optimistic that there is still a possibility (to hold IPL this year) if we can cram in the schedule," Kumble said on Star Sports show Cricket Connected.

"If we are going to have a stadium without spectators, then probably have 3 or 4 venues; there's still a possibility, we are all optimistic," said the former spinner, who is also the chairman of ICC's Cricket Committee.



Bradburn, Saqlain get high performance roles in PCB

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan fielding coach Grant Bradburn and spin great Saqlain Mushtaq were on Thursday appointed as PCB's Head of High Performance Coaching and Head of International Player Development, respectively, as part of a restructuring of its premier training facility.

Bradburn is presently the fielding coach of the Pakistan men's national team, a role he took in September 2018 following a successful coaching stint

with the Scotland national team.

He will be responsible for raising the overall standard of player support personnel across all the high performance centres of the country.

Saqlain played international cricket between 1995 and 2004 and will be responsible for identifying, developing and preparing players so that they can go on to become world-class cricketers.

Saqlain, known for intro-

ducing the *Doosra*, in his first full year (1996) with the Pakistan team established a record for the most ODI wickets in a calendar year (65).

He then did even better the following year, setting a mark (69) that still stands.

Saqlain has previously worked as a spin bowling coach with Bangladesh, West Indies and England, apart from serving as a consultant for PCB, Cricket Australia and New Zealand Cricket.

"It is an honour and

a privilege to represent Pakistan...I am delighted to have been offered this exciting opportunity to work on skillful and exciting young cricketers and help them grow in their careers.

"I am confident I will be able to translate all my knowledge and experience in the High Performance Centre and help the PCB raise the bar and set new benchmarks," said Saqlain.

The PCB will announce Bradburn's replacement in the national team in due course.

National Games postponed indefinitely

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The much-delayed 36th National Games, scheduled for October-November in Goa, was on Thursday postponed indefinitely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Indian Olympic Association (IOA) recently asked the Goa Government to host the National Games as scheduled from October 20 to November 4 this year.

However, a spurt in the number of novel coronavirus cases has led to a postponement.

"The National Games organising committee has decided to postpone National Games due to Covid-19 pandemic," Goa's deputy Chief Minister Manohar (Babu)

Ajgaonkar, who also holds the sports portfolio, was quoted as saying in a statement shared by IOA President Narinder Batra.

"... Committee to hold meeting in September end and decide on fixing dates for National Games. (Goa) Government to take advice from Union Sports Ministry, need four months advance notice to organise games," Ajgaonkar's statement added.

The previous edition of the Games was held back in 2015 in Kerala.

The upcoming Games, facing uncertainty for long, was originally scheduled for November 2018 but was postponed to April 2019. However, due to the general election, the Government of Goa ordered another cancellation.

With the Games infrastructure nearing completion, the postponement is set to bring in big losses to the state Government.

Last month, it had sought clarification from the Indian Olympic Association over the fate of the Games in the wake of the pandemic.

And there was hope for the Games to go ahead as scheduled as the state was marked in the green zone for quite a while.

But a sudden spurt has proved to be decisive.

Goa has so far reported 68 confirmed cases for the novel coronavirus.

Roland Garros planning for fans

AFF ■ LONDON

Roland Garros chiefs insist on Wednesday the French Open, delayed until September due to the coronavirus pandemic, will have fans attending even if they still have to abide by social distancing rules.

"In the autumn, we will play Roland Garros with an optimum spectator capacity which allows fans to respect social distancing," Jean-Francois Vilotte, the director-general of the French Tennis Federation (FFT), told AFP.

"The aim is that there will be spectators but we will have the capacity to organise Roland Garros whatever the option decided, including behind closed doors."

If fans are to be welcome at



the rescheduled tournament, then tickets would have to go on resale.

"We have set ourselves a deadline (for resale) ... but you will not know it," added Vilotte.

"It will be an exceptional tournament anyway," he said, adding the organisation was working on holding a "postponed tournament" and not a "downgraded" version.

In other words, juniors, singles, doubles and wheelchair tennis events will still be staged.

Top players say no to TTFI training camp

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) will make a fresh attempt to organise a training camp at the end of June but top players including Sharath Kamal and G Sathiyan are not ready to travel anytime soon as the situation remains "unsafe".

After the Government allowed sports complexes to open without spectators earlier this month, the TTFI had written to the players to assemble for a camp in the first week of June.

However, none of the top players was keen to travel and their response will be on similar lines when they receive the federation's letter for the second time.

"We should be looking at



July if at all. It is still too early to travel and things are not settling down. The cases continue to rise. Let there be some stability, until then we can keep training the way we have been at home," India's highest-ranked

player at 31, Sharath said. World number 32 G Sathiyan, who is based in Chennai like Sharath, is happy training in his home city under personal coach S Raman.

Asked the need for a training camp at this juncture, TTFI secretary general M P Singh said they are only acting on Government's direction and checking players' availability for June end.

"If the players think it is unsafe for June end also, it is their choice and we respect that. But we are only acting as per Government's direction," Singh said.

The plan is to have 16 players (8 men and 8 women) training under one roof and the venue options are Delhi, Sonapat and Patiala.

Pooja's Instagram account hacked

Pooja Hedge is the latest tinsel town celebrity to have fallen victim to one of social media's biggest issues: hacking. Taking to Twitter, the actress on Wednesday night informed to her followers that her Instagram account has been compromised. "Hi guys, so I've been informed by my team that my insta account has been hacked and my digital team is helping me with it. Please do not accept any invitations or pass out any personal information out to the person asking. Thank you. (Sic)," she tweeted.

She later clarified the problem has been attended to by her digital team and the account has been retrieved. "Spent the last hour stressing about the safety of my Instagram account. Thanking my technical team for instant help at this hour. Finally, got my hands back on my Instagram. Any message, follow back or post in d past hour from my account has been done will

be undone. Ty. (Sic)," she added. The hacker had control of Pooja's account for more than an hour, using it to post memes about her colleagues in the industry. One such meme was a screen grab of a scene from Samantha-starrer *Majili*. "I don't find her pretty at all," the hacker wrote, commenting on the meme.

On the work front, the actress has films with Prabhass and

Akhil lined-up to shoot for the remainder of the year. She has recently agreed to star in Hanu Raghavapudi's next with Dulquer Salmaan as well.

HUSHAARU director wants to go commercial



"I have a slight mass streak in me and I'm putting it to good use with the writing. The film will not be an out-and-out commercial entertainer though. It will be sensible yet woo masses," Harsha tells **NAGARAJ GOUD**



Still early days in his career, Sree Harsha Konuganti, director of the successful *Hushaar*, isn't relaxing a bit after the lockdown enforced his second film's shoot to come to a halt. He has used the time thus far to binge-watch shows like *Dark* and *Narcos* besides devoting time to writing. "I'm writing a commercial entertainer. I have a slight mass streak in me and I'm putting it to good use with the writing. The film will not be an out-and-out commercial entertainer though. It will be sensible yet woo masses," Harsha tells us.

That's not it. He has also completed penning a love story. "It's a concept-driven feel-good love story. I've had the idea since a long time and I've completed writing it recently. It's a characterization-based drama and

will be a whiff of fresh air for the audience," he promises, adding that he has been approached to helm web series as well. "I would love to do a series but I need to first wrap up my next feature. If I were to do a series, I'd like exploring mystery and investigative thrillers. Mystery thriller, especially, is my favourite genre."

Harsha is introducing leading producer Dil Raju's nephew Ashish Reddy in his still-untitled next, a feel-good young entertainer, but admits to be under no pressure to make it count.

"I'm not thinking on those lines because I've already worked with newcomers in my debut film. Otherwise as well, I generally don't take pressure. I believe the film's content will do the trick for us," he notes, adding that it is set on a big canvas and boasts of big action sequences as well.



Balayya furious at his exclusion from industry meetings

Nandamuri Balakrishna expressed confidence that production houses will adhere to guidelines like social distancing and operating with limited crew once the government gives the film industry authorization to resume film shootings. "Unlike say an IT sector whose offices have cubicles where social distance can be easily achieved with the employees, film industry doesn't operate that way, right? It will take time for the industry to get back on its feet but it surely will. I've come to know through news reports that industry is talking to the government on returning back to normalcy. I was told that shootings will resume from June second or third week. A government order to this end is awaited," the actor said when asked about the help government is extending to the industry in this hour of crisis. He was speaking to media after offering a floral tribute to his father NTR on his 97th birth anniversary at NTR

ghat on Thursday.

The actor seemed unhappy with the proposal that preference would be given to films that were close to completion followed by films that are 75 per cent and so on. "When a couple of industry aides sought my opinion on it, I've told them clearly to give every film the consent to get back on sets, for the simple reason that not everyone shoots at the same place," the actor, who will be seen in Boyapati Sreenu's next, an action-entertainer, noted.

Later in the noon at Basavarakam Cancer Hospital, of which is the chairman, when a reporter from a Telugu news channel quizzed about his absence from industry's recent meetings with Talasani Srinivas Yadav, a visibly upset Balayya said, "Nobody has invited me to the meetings. They are doing real estate business sitting with Srinivas Yadav. I need not fear anyone because it's the truth."

Telugu Film Producers Council President C Kalyan though chose to play down the raging contro-

versy. "The meetings so far conducted were not related to acting fraternity. Chiranjeevi garu lead them because he wanted his film to be back on sets like the whole of industry. Nobody would've stopped Balayya if he wanted to attend the meetings. In the past, when the TDP government was in power, we asked to lead him to get some things done for the industry. The question of differences or divide doesn't arise in the industry. He has not been insulted. First and foremost, as someone who has produced films with him, I will not tolerate him being insulted," he stated.

Reacting to Balayya's comments, Talasani said that the whole of industry was not invited to the meetings. "Only active members from varied crafts of filmmaking, exhibition sector and bodies like Telugu Film Chamber and Telangana Film Chamber were extended invitations. I'm open to discussing with the whole of industry if it initiates action," the minister said.

Rich tributes paid to NTR

The Telugu film industry paid rich tributes to legendary actor and former chief minister of united Andhra Pradesh, NTR, on his 97th birth anniversary on Thursday. From his family members like Nandamuri Balakrishna, Jr NTR and Kalyanram to several other industry personalities, social media was abuzz with their tributes to one of the greatest Indian actors.

K Raghavendra Rao, who holds the distinction of directing NTR in smash hits like *Adavi Ramudu*, *Vetagadu*, *Justice Chowdary* and *Major Chandrakanth* among others, mentioned that his career's biggest achievement was to direct the actor. "My cinematic journey has had numerous highs! But the biggest honour, even greater than accolades and awards is surely having had the opportunity to work with the legendary NTR garu. I will forever cherish this and consider it my biggest achievement," the director posted on Twitter.

Megastar Chiranjeevi while posting a picture of him with his senior-

SOCIAL MEDIA WAS ABUZZ WITH THEIR TRIBUTES TO ONE OF THE GREATEST INDIAN ACTORS

wrote, "You are Telugu community's pride and self-respect. You will never cease to exist from the hearts of Telugu people. I consider myself lucky to have acted alongside you."

Filmmaker Sreenu Vaitla posted, "Agagu... Acharya deva... emantivi emantivi... Felt your presence through your dialogues in *Ready*, *Dookudu* and *Baadshah*. Your legacy will continue forever."

Vishnuvardhan Induri, who produced NTR biopic along with Balakrishna and Sai Korrapati, noted that NTR was the only actor who impressed people with Ram and Ravana, Krishna and Duryodhana equally.

"It is no exaggeration to say that he is god to most of the Telugus irrespective of political affiliations," he stated.



Lockdown affected my sleep cycle: Seerat

Actress Seerat Kapoor says she struggled with sleep problems a lot during the initial days of coronavirus lockdown. "Initially, my sleep cycles were the first to be severely hit, perhaps due to the subconscious concern and chatter. A voice in my mind has been playing on loop, off late. It echos, 'How can I learn ways to be more compas-

sionate than I am already?'" Seerat shared.

Gradually, she managed to overcome her sleep problems as she reassessed her priorities.

"In addition, the lockdown has made me reassess my priorities and has shed light on the importance of leading a more simplistic way of life. My deepest empathy lies with the fright settled in the hearts of our people. I hope and

pray for this catastrophe to pass us all soon. Until then, we will withstand the pandemic and fight the test of covid-19 together," she added.

Seerat is right now awaiting the release of Krishna And His Leela and Maa Vintha Gaadha Vinura, in which she shared screen space with Siddu Jonnalagadda. Both the films will be dropping on OTT platforms shortly.

THE LOCKDOWN HAS MADE ME REASSESS MY PRIORITIES AND HAS SHED LIGHT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADING A MORE SIMPLISTIC WAY OF LIFE, SAYS SEERAT