

**ANALYSIS 7**  
AUTONOMY PLUS ACCOUNTABILITY

**MONEY 8**  
\$271 BN CONSUMER SPENDING TO SHIFT FROM CASH TO CARDS, DIGITAL

**SPORTS 11**  
ROHIT, VIRAT'S ABSENCE WILL LEAVE BIG HOLE: SMITH

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 25, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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**RANA OPENS UP ABOUT HIS HEALTH ISSUES**  
Page 12

## TOOTER 'SWADESHI' SM PLATFORM FINDS ACCEPTANCE LIKE TWITTER

Tooter is a new social media platform that seems to be gaining traction for being "swadeshi" or made in India. Tooter, as the name suggests, is conspicuously modelled after the microblogging platform Twitter. Its interface with a white-and-blue colour scheme, however, is somewhat a cross-over between Facebook and Twitter. The platform follows the same mechanics as Twitter where a user can create an account with a @username and email address, follow other accounts, read through a feed populated with posts from other accounts, as well as customise group-ups and lists. Its posts are called toots.



## AMID 'LOVE JIHAD' ROW, UP CLEARS ORDER ON FORCED CONVERSIONS

Amid furious nationwide debate over "love jihad" - the right-wing conspiracy theory that Muslim men enter into relationships with Hindu women to forcibly convert them - the Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday evening passed an ordinance to check forced religious conversions. The ordinance comes less than a month after Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, while campaigning for UP Assembly bypolls, cited an Allahabad High Court order to invoke "Ram naam satya" - a Hindu funeral chant - to issue a thinly-veiled threat to "those who... play with our sisters' respect". The Ordinance says religious conversions that use falsehood, force or an incentive, or marriage will be declared a crime.



## REPUBLIC TV OFFICIAL AMONG 12 NAMED IN FAKE RATINGS SHEET

A Republic TV official has been named in a charge sheet filed in the fake ratings case by the Mumbai police today. Ghanashyam Singh, Republic TV's Head of Distribution, is among the 12 accused named in the 1,400-page charge sheet. Seven of the accused are out on bail. Former employees of Hansa Research, the agency involved in assessing channel ratings, and two more channels accused of manipulating ratings are among the accused. The document names 140 witnesses, including forensic auditors and members of BARC or Broadcast Audience Research Council, which assesses TRPs or Television Rating Points by monitoring select households.



## PREZ TAKES CUSTOM-MADE AI-ONE AIRCRAFT INAUGURAL FLIGHT

President Ram Nath Kovind boarded the Air India One-B777 aircraft on Tuesday for its inaugural flight to Chennai, according to a Rashtrapati Bhavan statement. President Kovind is visiting Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh to offer prayers at the Sri Venkateswara Swamy temple, it said. "This is the first flight of the Air India One-B777 aircraft with the head of State on board. The aircraft is fuel efficient and has a longer range than the B747-400 that are deployed for similar VIP operations," the statement said.



Markets surge to lifetime highs; Nifty breaches 13K

8



Fadnavis dubs Thackeray-led Maha govt as 'unnatural alliance'

5



Local body polls allow parties to correct course

2

# State exempts 'Power For All' project from Judicial Preview

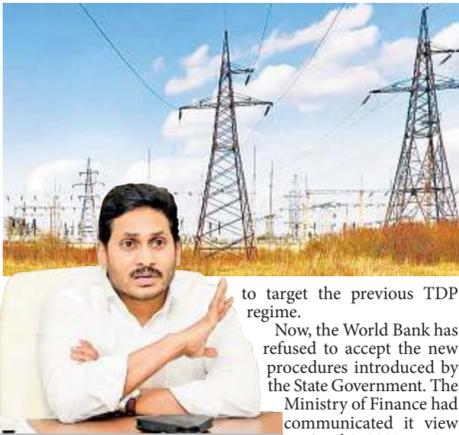
SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government has exempted works related to 'Power For All (PFA)' from judicial preview as well as reverse tendering.

The move comes after international agencies — World Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank — that are jointly financing the PFA project, refused to accept the new tendering procedures introduced by the Jagannathan Reddy Government.

The total project cost is estimated to be USD 571 million of which the World Bank has agreed to finance USD 240 Million and AIIB USD 160 Million. The remaining costs were to be borne by the State Government.

YSRC chief YS Jagannathan Reddy, soon after coming to power, had announced that a new tendering system that will come under Judicial Preview will be introduced for financial transparency and also old ten-



ders will be reviewed and introduced the Reverse Tendering option.

The announcement of reverse tendering and review of the old contracts generated enough heat with critics claiming they were introduced only

to target the previous TDP regime.

Now, the World Bank has refused to accept the new procedures introduced by the State Government. The Ministry of Finance had communicated it view on April 3, 2020, stating that the Loan Agreements are with International Agencies and the state laws shall be exempted from the implementation of such projects.

The Union Government had pointed out that the Loan Agreement with the interna-

tional financial agencies was signed on June 22, 2017, prior to issuance of the new guidelines of Judicial Preview and reverse tendering in August 2019.

"The Chairman and Managing Director, AP Eastern Power Distribution Company Limited, Visakhapatnam has requested the Government to exempt the Power For All works under the World Bank project from Reverse Tendering and also Judicial Preview issued by the State Government and to follow the tender process as per the World Bank procurement guidelines. Government, after careful consideration, hereby accord permission to exempt the 24 X 7 power for all works funded by the World Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank purview of Reverse Tendering and also Judicial Preview," said an order issued by the Energy Secretary Nagulapalli Srikanth.

2

# Govt takes back land allotted to YSRCP MP-backed firm

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government on Tuesday issued orders cancelling the allotment made to a private power generating company to develop a coal fired power plant near Krishnapatnam port in Nellore district.

The land allotment was originally done to M/s Kineta Power (P) Limited (KPPL), promoted by YSRCP's MP from Machilipatnam, Vallabhaneni Balashowry.

However, the company later changed hands to Naveen Jindal's Jindal Steel & Power. The allotment was cancelled for not taking up the project as per the stipulated timeline and also violation of certain land sale agreement. Balashowry is seen as a close confidante and part of close coterie of Chief Minister YS Jagannathan Reddy's father and former chief minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Around 840.76 acres of land in Thammipatnam and Mommidi villages in Chilikur mandal of Nellore district were allotted by the then Congress government in two instalments on June 6, 2009 and March 30, 2012 to KPPL.

The original promoters had proposed setting up a 810 MW (3X270 MW) initially and later 1,080 MW (4X270 MW) coal fired Thermal Power plant at Krishnapatnam of Nellore district with an investment of Rs 2,997 crore and generate employment to 600 people.

The Agreements of sale were concluded accordingly and the land handed over for implementation of the project.



## Performance audit unravels trail

After noticing the violation of certain terms and conditions of agreement for sale, the State Government on April 29, 2014 instructed APIIC to conduct an inquiry observing that M/s Kineta Power (P) Ltd., has made change/dilution of share holding before implementation of the project without intimation/permission of the Government and APIIC Ltd. The Government nominated Narasimha Murthy & Co, Cost Accountant to conduct

performance audit. The performance audit report revealed that the original promoters have already sold the shares to Navayuga who in turn sold to Jindal Group who is controlling the interest in M/s KPPL as on date. M/s KPPL name also stands changed as M/s KPL which could not implement the project. In the 201st Board Meeting of APIIC held on December 31, 2014, it was resolved to cancel the allotment.

The time frame fixed to implement the project as per the agreement of sale was two years and any extension of the deadline was subject to levying a penalty at 10 percent on the land cost at the prevailing rates and no extension of time for more than two years was to be entertained.

However, later state government observed that as per a report of APIIC, the sale agreement executed between APIIC and M/s KPPL does not have provisions for transfer of allotment of land before or during

the implementation of the project.

The allotment was made in the year 2009 and a period of 11 years were elapsed from the date of conclusion of agreement and till date, the project could not be implemented. Further, M/s KPPL themselves admitted that they cannot accomplish financial closure in the present scenarios.

M/s.Kineta Power (P) Ltd., has not implemented the Project within the timeframe, the order said.

2

# Jagan puts officials on alert as Nivar looms

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagannathan Reddy on Tuesday reviewed the preparedness and possible impact of Cyclone Nivar on the state with district Collectors and SPs and asked them to be on high alert when a storm crosses the coast.

During the review meeting held at the camp office here, the Chief Minister said though the cyclone was not going to make landfall in Andhra Pradesh, it would

have an impact in areas close to Tamil Nadu.

The Chief Minister said inclement weather would prevail on Tuesday and Wednesday and asked the officials to be prepared for all eventualities.

Nellore, Chittoor, some parts of Kadapa, Kurnool and Anantapur districts and coastal areas of Prakasam are likely to receive 11-20 cm of rainfall, he said and added that winds with speeds gusting up to 65 to 75 km/hr are expected.

## Nivar may intensify into very severe cyclonic storm

NEW DELHI: Cyclone Nivar is expected to intensify into a 'very severe cyclonic storm' and cross Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts between Karaikal and Mamallapuram on the late evening of November 25, IMD Director General Mrunujay Mohapatra said on Tuesday. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had initially predicted that Cyclone Nivar was likely to intensify into a 'severe cyclonic storm' but has now estimated that it will intensify further.

## Nivar to bring widespread rains to AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM  
Cyclone Nivar is very likely to bring widespread rain over South Andhra Pradesh post its landfall as the influence of the tropical system is seen till Tirupati. Windspeed could reach 65-75 kmph, gusting up to

85 kmph on November 26. Under the influence of the system, Guntur and Prakasam districts received good rainfall on Tuesday with gale wind blowing over the coastal districts. Cyclone Nivar may cross Tamil Nadu-Puducherry

coasts between Karaikal and Mamallapuram as a very severe cyclonic storm during the late evening of November 25 or midnight. Rayalaseema will witness widespread rainfall after the system crosses the coast.

**TODAY**

**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Kartik & Shukla Paksha Panchangam  
Tithi: Ekadashi: 05:09 am (Next Day)  
Nakshatram: Ulara Bhadrakpadi: 05:20 pm  
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)  
Rahukalam: 12:03 pm - 01:26 pm  
Yamagandam: 07:53 am - 09:16 am  
Varjyam: NIL  
Gulika: 10:39 am - 12:03 pm  
Good Time: (to start any important work)  
Amritakalam: 12:59 pm - 02:46 pm  
Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL

**VJAYAWADA WEATHER**  
Forecast: Mostly cloudy  
Temp: 29/22  
Humidity: 66%  
Sunrise: 06:26am  
Sunset: 05:39pm  
Current Weather Conditions Updated November 24, 2020 5:00 PM

# Govt ready to fly Indians to countries like Saudi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is ready to fly passengers to countries like Saudi Arabia whenever they remove restrictions on the entry of Indian nationals, the Civil Aviation Ministry said on Tuesday.

It said India has been operating international flights under Vande Bharat Mission since May 6 and now has air bubble arrangements with 22 countries.

"Some countries, including Saudi Arabia, have not removed restrictions on the entry of Indian nationals. We are ready to fly passengers to these countries when the restrictions are eased," the ministry said on Twitter.

Under the bilateral air bubble pacts, the airlines of both countries can operate international flights with certain restrictions.

# Cops rescue transsexual doc begging, help her

PNS ■ MADURAI

A young transsexual doctor found in the company of transgenders and begging on the streets of this temple town was rescued by the police who are now helping her open a clinic.

The transsexual, who did not want her name to be revealed, hopes to move the Medical Council of India for making appropriate changes in the records, and open the clinic to resume medical practice soon.

This young doctor who graduated from the Madurai



Government Medical College in 2018, was ostracised by her family for undergoing sex transformation to become a woman.

Her profession almost came to an end when she was sacked from a hospital, where she was working for a year, after the sex change surgery.

"At first I didn't believe that she was a doctor. She broke down and insisted that she possessed a medical degree but it was on her earlier name," said Thilagar Thidal police inspector G Kavitha, who rounded up a group of transgenders for reportedly begging and bothering traders here, recently.

The police, after verifying the documents, got in touch with the doctors from Madurai

Medical College, and corroborated the fact that the transsexual doctor, was a male in college. Only recently she landed in the midst of transgenders to beg as she had no means to sustain herself, after being sacked from a hospital here.

The surprised inspector then took up the case of the transsexual doctor with her superiors, to extend all possible help.

For her part inspector Kavitha provided her a stethoscope and a doctor's coat.

changing her records with the MCI (updating the gender change). Her rights can't be denied."

As a first step she has to notify the name and gender change in the gazette which would help her go ahead with the rest of the process to establish her new identity, she said.

Speaking to PTI on Tuesday, Kalki, founder of Sahodari Foundation, an organisation which works for transgenders, said, "It is nothing but human rights violation to deny her a job based on her gender."

2

# Local body elections allow parties to correct course

Generally, elections to the local bodies in any state reflect the mixed opinion of the people as they are mostly conducted between two general elections. Also, the ruling party is at a slight disadvantage, since the 'honeymoon' period is just about ending and the people waiting for the ruling party to fulfil its poll promises get restless. Also, voters are generally more invested in local body elections since their choice will affect their immediate vicinity.



**PIN POINT** well acquainted with every nook and corner of the constituency while in local body polls, it's the credibility of the candidate that is under scrutiny of the voter. Importantly, results of local body elections tend to influence both the Opposition and ruling party to do a course correction, hence these polls are considered important in more ways than one for all stakeholders.

**In General Elections, the candidates are prominent figures and are not necessarily well acquainted with every nook and corner of the constituency while in local body polls, it's the credibility of the candidate that is under scrutiny of the voter**

The importance of local body polls can be gauged by the violence that followed the MCH elections held on February 15, 1986. Opposition parties, particularly the Congress, held NTR responsible for irregularities that took place during those polls. Then, film star-turned-politician NT Rama Rao had completed three years in office

and the electorate was getting restless. Resultantly, nearly half of urban local bodies were bagged by the Congress. Interestingly, one Opposition leader described NTR as 'Idi Amin (the dictator Uganda) of India' and accused him of sabotaging the democratic process. Coincidentally, the then President of Philippines Ferdinand Marcos was unseated on the same date, leading to enthusiastic Congress lead-



ers saying that NTR will meet the same fate as the dictator. The next year, 1987, elections to the urban local bodies were conducted in Undivided Andhra Pradesh. The Congress, despite having tasted defeat at the hands of NTR twice (1983 and 1985) in a row, managed to bag 10 municipalities across the state. The party's performance in the elections to the local bodies propelled Congress to power in the 1989 elections, a

perfect example of how results in such elections could make a difference to the fortunes of a political party. In the 2001 local body elections, the Congress focussed on the Panchayat Raj system and pressed its cadres to conduct sessions on strengthening the system and grant it more powers.

The then Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly YS Rajasekhara Reddy and Pradesh Congress Committee president M Satyanarayana Rao closely monitored the situation to instil confidence in the party cadres who in turn actively participated in elections by implementing 'select and elect' policy framed by party leadership. This ensured genuine candidates got an opportunity to contest.

This well designed approach yielded the desired results and encouraged the party to rededicate itself to strive hard and capture power in 2004.

But can the TRS, a party that has registered stunning victories in the State live up to its promise of winning more than 100 divisions in the GHMC this year?

It's a known fact that AIMIM depends on polarisation of votes and has been holding sway on no less than 45 municipal divisions over the years.

Undoubtedly, the AIMIM will have to work extra hard if it wants to extend its reach beyond these 45 divisions. The most obvious way to do this is to target the TRS, attacking the ruling party over the recent floods, at the same time cornering the BJP by accusing it of provoking voters on religious lines.

Both the AIMIM and TRS well realise the threat from the BJP that is trying hard to get a grip over the GHMC. End of the day, the AIMIM can be

relied on to extend support to the TRS and help it capture the Mayor's post.

It may be mentioned here that the TRS is more or less assured of the Mayor's post as it has a sizeable number of ex-officio members in the GHMC in the form of MPs, MLAs and MLCs. With this background, the comments of MIM senior legislator Mumtaz Ahmad Khan that his party could topple the TRS government if necessary, could be seen as a deliberate attempt to create confusion in the minds of people over the understanding between MIM and TRS and to give no scope for BJP to benefit from this friendship.

Double speak is now a malaise common to all political parties and we may see more of this before campaigning for the GHMC elections ends.

# STARTUP BY AMARAVATI STUDENTS GOING PLACES

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Fourth-year engineering students from Amaravati have become successful entrepreneurs.

With the vision of bringing surveillance cameras to life, Sourav Sanyal, Miran Junaidi and Saurabh Ghanekar, fourth year, Department of Computer Science and Engineering, SRM University-AP, founded OurEye.ai, an automated, end-to-end video intelligence solution for enterprises to monitor surveillance camera recordings, leveraging pre-existing CCTV-IP infrastructure.

The StartUp by the three students had recently received \$35,000 funding from Sanjay Mehta led 100X.VC, and currently comprises 23 team members including the three co-founders.

Being used by 11 companies across 17 outlets, the start-up generated a revenue of Rs 1.7 million in the recent financial year. "SRM AP gave us something



that no other university has, which was Next Tech Lab. I met my batchmates, the co-founders of OurEye, at Next Tech Lab, where we built so much every day round-the-clock while having fun with technology. We could not be more grateful for the opportunity and freedom that we got at the lab. Also, SRM AP has introduced us to mentors like Adithya and Anshuman, founders of Next Tech Lab, who have been there for us every single day and helped us

in developing a problem solving and curious mindset," said one of the co-founders, Miran Junaidi. Initially, the students commenced their journey by showcasing their platform in international hackathons. Recalling, Miran says, "The biggest challenge was to raise funds as it entails the daunting task of sharing your idea and vision with the rest of the world. We are learning so many new things and growing so very fast. We also plan to add more features to the plat-

form, hire a sales team to expand the client base to hospitals, schools, and commercial spaces. Very soon after the pandemic, we would be opening an office in Bangalore that would house 35 engineers, and other employees," he added.

OurEye uses cameras that are either preinstalled or consults on adding a new infrastructure of cameras that helps a business keep track of all their compliances.

Personal hygiene or safety equipment are tracked throughout factories, restaurants and offices increasing the efficacy of hygiene compliance and reducing workplace injuries.

With sophisticated Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning models all developed in house and a dashboard that helps businesses keep a log of events as well as look at deviations in real time and act upon them immediately as compared to a post mortem analysis, said another founder Sourav Sanyal.

# CM to launch Jagananna Thodu today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy will launch the Jagananna Thodu on Wednesday, a scheme that aims at providing a helping hand to small and petty vendors across the State.

Interest-free loan of Rs 10,000 would be provided to small and petty vendors under the scheme. So far, nearly 10 lakh vendors have applied to avail the scheme. With regard to this, the Chief Minister will be releasing Rs 1,000 crore and the amount will be directly credited into beneficiaries' bank accounts.

The scheme took shape after the Chief Minister has seen the plight of small and petty traders during his 3,648-km Praja Sankalpa Yatra.

The objective of the scheme is to free vendors from paying heavy interest on loans taken from private parties and falling into debts. Banks will be providing loans to all the eligible

members and the government shall pay the interest of the loan amount to the banks by reimbursing it to beneficiaries' accounts.

The State government had also started a special web portal to coordinate with banks and to implement the scheme giving no scope for corruption. The beneficiaries will also be provided with QR based smart ID cards and the scheme will be monitored by SERP, MEPMA officials.

Vegetable vendors, fruit vendors, small shopkeepers, pushcart vendors, and traditional artisans are eligible to apply for the scheme.

The volunteers of the village/ward secretariat have identified the beneficiaries in the recent survey and the list of beneficiaries is being displayed at secretariats for social audit. If any eligible person was not covered in this scheme, they can still apply through volunteers.

# Nivar may intensify...

Continued from Page 1

Nivar is the second cyclone in the Bay of Bengal this year. In May, Cyclone Amphan had developed into a 'super cyclonic storm'.

"Our forecast is it will intensify into a very severe cyclonic storm by (Tuesday) tonight. It is very likely to cross Tamil Nadu and Puducherry coasts between Karaikal and Mamallapuram around Puducherry during November 25 late evening as a very severe cyclonic storm with a wind speed of 120-130 kilometres per hour gusting to 145

kmph," Mohapatra said. Besides strong winds, the cyclone is also expected to bring heavy rains. The IMD has issued a red alert for coastal and north interior Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and Karaikal, for November 25, the top meteorologist said.

"Isolated extremely heavy rainfall activity also very likely over coastal and north interior Tamil Nadu and Puducherry and over Nellore and Chittoor districts of Andhra Pradesh on November 25 and over Rayalaseema and southeast Telangana on November 26," the IMD said.

# Cops rescue ...

Continued from Page 1

The hospital cannot sack a person based on gender and may have to reinstate if the doctor gets a court ruling in her favour, Kalki remarked.

Recalling the 2014 Supreme Court order, Kalki said the apex court verdict recognising the transgender community as

a third gender along with male and female, is clearly in favour of the doctor too.

The apex court had also affirmed that the fundamental rights granted under the Constitution will be equally applicable to them, and gave them the right to identify themselves as belonging to any gender.

# Govt takes back land allotted...

Continued from Page 1

"Show cause notices were issued to the company on March 2, 2010, May 7, 2012 and July 10, 2013. The company has replied stating that they are in process of obtaining necessary CRZ clearance besides the EC & CFE already obtained and therefore sought permission to include a strategic partner by exempting them from Clause No.9 (i) of Sale Agreement. Accordingly M/s Jindal Power (P) Ltd., came into issue stating that they are willing to implement the Project of M/s KPPL and therefore requested to exempt them from the purview of Clause No 27 (1) of APIIC Allotment Regulations, 2012. In the 197th Board of APIIC

**The APIIC informed that the company has addressed a letter submitting the reason for non-implementation as the land allotted is not contiguous**

Meeting the request of M/s JSPL was approved to implement the project," said the GO issued by Principal Secretary, Industries, Karikala Vaalaven. In their further remarks, on November 22, 2020, the

APIIC informed that the company has addressed a letter on July 24, 2012 to it, submitting the reason for non-implementation as the land allotted is not contiguous and Rehabilitation & Resettlement of the Villages falling amidst is pending.

"Government, after careful examination of the matter duly taking into consideration of the facts and circumstances of the case, and in view of the public interest, hereby accord permission to APIIC Ltd, to cancel the allotment made to M/s Kineta Power Ltd, and to resume the government land of 840.76 Acres immediately as per the APIIC allotment Regulations in vogue in order to make use of the land for Industrial development," the order further said.

# Nivar to bring widespread rains to AP

Continued from Page 1

Sea conditions will be very high over Southwest and adjoining west central Bay of Bengal and volatile over the same area from noon to night. Fishermen have been advised not to venture into these areas.

After crossing the coast, the adjacent sub-divisions of Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema need to be observed for spillover of intense weather activity in some areas. Relief can be expected from marginal weather conditions from November 27 onward.

# Jagan puts officials on alert as Nivar looms

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister said measures should be taken to protect crops and information should be sent to farmers through RBKs. Awareness should be created among farmers on protecting the harvested crops and standing crops shouldn't be harvested in wake of the cyclone, he said and added care should be taken to prevent loss of life and property.

The Chief Minister said ponds may leak due to heavy rains and continuous monitoring should be done and precautionary measures should be taken. He directed the officials to ensure no loss of life in coastal areas and fishermen should not go into the sea. He asked to utilise the services of village secretariat employees and volunteers and prepare

**The cyclone dubbed Nivar, will have an impact on areas like Railway Koduru, Rajampeta and Badvel, the IMD has predicted.**

officials to keep ready the required tools and equipment to remove all green debris. A booklet outlining the steps to be taken during a cyclone has been made available at all village secretariats and officials were told to make sure that the information was shared with staff and general public.

The cyclone will have an impact on areas like Railway Koduru, Rajampeta and Badvel. The Chief Minister directed the officials to focus on setting up relief and rehabilitation camps wherever required in Nellore, Chittoor and Prakasam districts.

Collectors, SPs and other officials from East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, Nellore, YSR Kadapa, Kurnool, Anantapur and Chittoor districts were present in the video conference.

# Govt ready to fly Indians to countries...

Continued from Page 1

While India resumed scheduled domestic passenger flights on May 25 after a gap of two months, scheduled international passenger flights continue to remain suspended in India since March 23 due to the pandemic.

However, Indian airlines have been permitted to operate special international flights under the Vande Bharat Mission since May and under the air bubble pacts since July.

Meanwhile, citizens are waiting for bated breath for Saudi Arabia to allow flights.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
<b>GOLD</b>	
₹ 50,400 (10 gm)	↓
₹ 980	
<b>SILVER</b>	
₹ 64,500 (1kg)	↓
₹ 2200	
<b>CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG</b>	
Dressed/With Skin	₹158
Without Skin	₹180
Broiler at Farm	₹109
<b>EGG RATES ₹/100</b>	
VIJAYAWADA	445
HYDERABAD	445
VISAKHAPATNAM	435
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.45

# Property tax rules amended; capital...

Continued from Page 1

The new rules will be effected from the Financial Year 2021-2022.

Vacant land tax will be levied at 0.20 percent of the estimated guideline value of the land in case of Municipalities and 0.50 percent in case of Municipal Corporations.

In the case of vacant lands where garbage is being dumped and unhygienic conditions are prevailing, a penalty of 0.10 percent of the guideline value in case of Municipalities and 0.25 percent in case of Municipal Corporations will be levied till the garbage is lifted and unhy-

gienic conditions cease.

Also, the respective civic body chief is competent to levy property tax along with 100 percent penalty on buildings constructed without authorisation on private land, municipal land, government land, land under urban land ceiling, endowment land, Wakf land or any other category of public land without documents or patta or possession certificate from Revenue Department on the name of the "the holder of the premises" and not in the name of "the owner of the land".

The levy of tax and penalty shall continue till such unauthorised construction is regularised or demolished.

# State exempts 'Power...

Continued from Page 1

While a significant portion of the PFA project cost was aimed at improving power supply to rural areas, the project will also focus on demonstrating the deployment of smart grids in selected towns.

The project is part of the Government of India's Power For All programme launched in 2014. Andhra Pradesh is one of the first states selected for the rollout of the Power for the scheme.

Some of the major components of the project include strengthening of the intra-state transmission and distribution network to disperse power to the load centres in the state, reduce transmission losses by setting up modern substations, underground cabling,

■ As on November 10, contracts worth 85 pc of the total cost awarded by APTRANSCO, 70 pc by APSPDCL and 50 pc by APEPDCL

■ Construction progress severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns

■ The transmission and distribution companies in Andhra Pradesh, APTRANSCO, APEPDCL and APSPDCL are the Implementation Agencies of the Power for All Project

■ All three Implementation Agencies have established dedicated project implementation units (PIUs) to implement the project

smart consumer meters, with two-way communication and backend IT infrastructure, deployed in select urban towns. These meters will not only reduce technical and commercial losses, but also improve peak load management.

The USD 240 million loan

from the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and AIIB has a 5-year grace period, and a maturity of 19 years.

The World Bank and AIIB are providing loans in a 60:40 ratio for all components of the project.

# AP adds 1,085 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh reported 1,085 fresh cases of coronavirus on Tuesday, taking the gross positives so far to 8,63,843.

In the 24 hours ending 9 am on Tuesday, 1,447 patients got cured and eight more succumbed in the state, the latest bulletin said.

The state Covid-19 table showed 8,43,863 total recoveries and 6,956 deaths, with 13,024 active cases.

Krishna district has been showing a rather upward spiral in daily cases as it added 224 in 24 hours, the highest in

the state. It also reported two more Covid-19 deaths.

West Godavari, East Godavari, Guntur and Chittoor reported less than 150 new cases each while Kadapa and Visakhapatnam added between 50 and 100 each.

Six other districts reported less than 50 new cases each, with Anantapur adding the lowest ten.

Six districts saw one fresh fatality each in 24 hours, the bulletin said.

After 97.27 lakh sample tests so far, the overall infection positivity rate in the state stood at 8.88 per cent.

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## Women kill kids, end life owing to domestic issues

PNS ■ RAJAHMUNDRY

Two women died by suicide after killing two children, all from one family, allegedly due to domestic issues on Monday, police said.

Sangiseti Krishnaveni (55), her daughter Sivapavani (27) and the latter's children Nishant (9) and Ritika (7) were found dead in their house, the police said.

The women were apparently upset after the younger woman's husband married another recently, they said.

The mother and daughter poisoned the children to death before hanging themselves, they said.

"We are investigating into the case from various angles to establish the real reason for the suicide. We are questioning Sivapavani's husband and other relatives," a senior police official said.

The bodies have been removed for postmortem and a case under Section 174 Cr P C has been registered.

# TDP wants Central forces to oversee local body elections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party state president K Atchannaaidu on Tuesday wrote to the State Election Commission, complaining of 'unabated' attacks by people he claimed were activists of the ruling YSRCP and demanded that all local body elections be conducted under the watchful eyes of Central security forces.

In his letter, Atchannaaidu said that the ruling YSRCP was continuing with its violent attacks against opposition leaders in general and contesting candidates in local body elections, cadre, sympathisers and leaders, in particular, belonging to the TDP.

"As you are aware, the process of local body elections in March 2020 witnessed violent attacks on an unprecedented scale unleashed by the ruling YSRCP goons and the violence appears to be on hold temporarily due



to the postponement of elections due to Covid," Atchannaaidu wrote.

He said that YSRCP henchmen were resorting to violence again in the backdrop of proposed conduct of local body elections in February 2021.

The TDP AP president said that Bommineni Krishnaya

**Atchannaaidu alleged YSRCP henchmen were resorting to violence again in the backdrop of proposed conduct of local body elections in February 2021.**

Yadav and Veeraswamy were attacked by the YSRCP henchmen as a part of their threat to withdraw Raghavamma's, wife of Krishnaya Yadav, from contesting as MPTC.

It is strongly suspected that local YSRCP leaders Jada Veeranjenyulu, Venkateswaralu, Srinivasa Rao

and six others acted at the behest of Adavi Srinu, YSRCP candidate for ZPTC.

The involvement of YSRCP local leaders clearly shows that the YSRCP is adopting violence and threats as a strategy in the upcoming local body elections, said Atchannaaidu.

He said that in this backdrop, the SEC must order a comprehensive inquiry into the election related violence by the YSRCP in March 2020 by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), inquiry into violent attacks and threats that followed and continued unabated in spite of the postponement of local body elections, strict punishment of perpetrators of violent attacks, protection to all contesting candidates in the local body elections, option to file nominations online and elections to local bodies shall be conducted under the aegis of central protection.

## 2 die as car rams into bike

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Two persons lost their lives when a car hit a two-wheeler on the National Highway at Nidumolu under Kuchipudi police station limits in Krishna district in the wee hours of Tuesday.

According to police, the mishap occurred when a car hit the two-wheeler on its way from Machilipatnam to Vijayawada.

One person died on the spot while the other breathed his last on the way to hospital. A third person involved in the accident was stated to be out of danger.

Police identified the victims as M Srinu of Kalapatam village who died on the spot while Md. Imtiaz of Penugudi village died on the way to hospital. On knowing about the accident, the Kuchipudi S-1 along with his police team reached the spot and examined.

The car driver was arrested. A case has been registered and investigation is on.

## Prioritise vaccine recipients: Jagan



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Soon after participating in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video conference with Chief Ministers on the prevailing Covid-19 situation, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday asked officials to focus on methods to be followed on storage and distribution of the vaccine.

During the interaction with various Chief Ministers, Modi discussed various issues related to Covid-19 vaccination including to whom it has to be

given first, priorities, policies to be followed at the field level, and procedures to be followed while distribution of the vaccine.

Later, the Chief Minister directed the officials to prepare an action plan on storing the vaccine at optimum temperature, as well as transporting it to remote areas at the same temperature.

He directed the officials to prepare an action plan on readiness of vaccine distribution.

Jagan also instructed officials to collect technical information on the respective issues and also take relevant information from various companies and conduct a study on it. The Chief Minister said a review meeting should be held on vaccine-related issues.

Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharitha, Transportation Principal Secretary T Krishnababu and other officials were present in the video conference.

## Naidu goads 'victims of YSRCP' to join hands

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Alleging that a muezzin attempted suicide due to harassment by YSRCP leaders, TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday called upon all "victims of the Government" to rally together and wage a relentless battle against the ruling party's atrocities and oppression.

He alleged that the suicide attempt by the Muezzin, identified as Abdul Hanif, was yet another entry in the long list of atrocities against the minorities.

Stating that the ruling party leaders were afraid of being routed in the polls if they were to be held immediately, Naidu said that the YSRCP feared that the victimised sections of society would unite and defeat its candidates. He alleged that the Chief Minister does not discourage atrocities but encourages miscreants and their atrocities.

"What wrong did the family of Abdul Salam do that they were terrorised to such an extent that they had to commit suicide?" Naidu asked.

He claimed that just for try-



ing to stop illegal digging up of a graveyard, the muezzin was harassed and had attempted suicide. "It is a crime to oppose illegal soil digging?" the former chief minister asked.

Naidu claimed that the YSRCP regime was scared of facing a backlash from BCs, SCs, STs and Muslims and this was why it was creating hurdles for the local body elections. He stressed the need for a united effort among all the affected sections to give a tough fight against the oppressive regime.

"The responsibility to save AP now rests upon the shoulders of each and every citizen of the State," the TDP chief said.

## President offers prayers at Tirumala shrine

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

President Ram Nath Kovind on Tuesday afternoon offered prayers in the Srivari temple at Tirumala along with his wife Savita and daughter Swathi.

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan accompanied the President and his entourage.

Following the temple tradition, the President initially offered prayers to Swami Pushkarini and later had darshan of Varahaswami.

Thereafter when the President reached the Srivari temple where he was received by TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy along with TTD EO KS Jawahar Reddy, Additional EO AV Dharm Reddy and CVSO Gopinath Jatti.

The temple Archakas welcomed the First Citizen of India with the traditional honours. The President and his entourage went for Srivari darshan and offered prayers to the presiding deity of Lord Venkateswara inside sanctum sanctorum.

The chief priest explained about the significance of the Mula Virat, the jewels adorned to the lord and Kshetra Mahatmyam.

Later, the President and his entourage were offered Veda Ashirvachanam at Ranganayakula Mandapam.

The TTD Chairman and EO together presented Srivari Theertha Prasadams and a lam-



TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy gifts President Ram Nath Kovind a portrait of Lord Balaji during his visit to Tirumala on Tuesday. TTD officials are also seen.

inated photo of Lord Venkateswara along with 2021 TTD diaries and calendars to the President. They also presented prasadam, photo of the Lord, calendars and diaries to Harichandan.

Kovind offered prayers at the temple of Goddess Padmavathi Devi at Tiruchanoor on Tuesday along with his family members, accompanied by the Governor.

On his arrival at the entrance of the temple he was welcomed by TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy and JEO P Basanth Kumar. Agama Advisor Srinivasa Acharyulu along with

priests offered the dignitary with traditional welcome chanting relevant hymns.

After darshan of presiding deity, theertha prasadam were offered to the President and his entourage. Earlier, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy along with Harichandan had welcomed the President and his wife at the Renigunta airport on Tuesday morning.

Soon after receiving the President, the Chief Minister rushed back to take part in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video conference with Chief Ministers on the prevailing Covid-19 situation.

The Chief Minister was accompanied by Ministers K Narayana Swamy, Mekapati Goutham Reddy, Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy, TTD Chairman YV Subbareddy, Government Whip Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy, MPs V. Vijayasai Reddy, Reddeppa, Peddireddi Midhun Reddy, MLAs RK Roja,

Adimulam, Biyapu Madhusoodhana Reddy, Bhumana Karunakara Reddy, Chinthala Ramachandra Reddy, Nawaz Basha, Peddireddy Dwarakanatha Reddy, Jangalapally Srinivasa and other officials.

## VSEZ sees growth in export despite Covid pandemic

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

VSEZ has seen an increase in exports by 42.1 percent during October this year, with perceptible growth 17.5 percent in the merchandise sector compared to last year despite recession in the country, according to Development Commissioner A Rama Mohan Reddy.

Rama Mohan Reddy chaired a meeting of the Unit Approval Committee of VSEZ, Visakhapatnam that gave its nod for various new unit proposals on Tuesday.

He said the exports made from VSEZ were to the tune of Rs 63,231 crore and recorded an increase in the exports of 11.6 percent so far in the current fiscal, 2020-21. There was a minimal impact of lockdown on the performance, Rama Mohan Reddy said.

With expected exports to the tune of Rs 292 crore, the company will earn net foreign exchange of Rs 241 crore and will employ manpower of 137 persons. The company will invest Rs

42 crore to start with and is expected to commence its operations in one year, he said.

The Unit Approval Committee of VSEZ, Visakhapatnam gave nod to Jyothi Quartz Surfaces to set up a new unit at Ongole.

Besides this the UAC has approved many broad banding proposals of various pharma companies which include Dr Reddy's, Natco Pharma in Ramky SEZ and Laurus Labs in APSEZ.

Another unit Akrovix Health proposed in VEPZ at Duvvada will manufacture PPEs and medical kits and is expected to generate economic activity of Rs 1,643 crore in the next five years as per the project report submitted by the company.

Jyothi Quartz Surfaces, to be set up in Ongole with the investment of Rs 41 crore, will manufacture 3.94 lakh square meters of engineered quartz slabs, with all indigenous raw material and machinery and technical know-how imported from Italy.

## RINL launches skill development training programme

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Kishore Chandra Das, Director (Personnel), RINL on Tuesday inaugurated skill development training programme as chief guest at Indo-German Institute of Advanced Technology (IGIAT), an entity of Government of Andhra Pradesh functioning under the guidance of Department of Industries and Commerce.

RINL has extended financial assistance to IGIAT for training of 60 unemployed youth in trades CNC Machine Operator (35) and Welding Technology (25).

The institute has dedicated workshops for various trades such as motor mechanics, stitching and tailoring, welding, plumbing and fitting, electrician, AC repair, building maintenance, solar workshop, besides canteen, library, etc.

Addressing the gathering of trainees, KC Das emphasised on the need for development of skills in both the chosen courses as the demand for skilled persons in said trades is huge. He also emphasised on strict adherence to Covid-19 precautions such as wearing masks, regular sanitisation and most importantly, social distancing.

The function also entailed plantation of a sapling within IGIAT premises. Dignitaries present included KC Das (Director-Personnel, RINL) and B. Vinod Kumar (Director, IGIAT).

## Withdraw tax hike or face protests: Citizen's Forum

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP Urban Citizen Forum on Tuesday demanded the State Government withdraw the proposed hike of property, water, drainage and other taxes saying that this would put huge extra financial burden on the people already suffering due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

APUCF convener Ch Babu Rao said that the State Government has approved a proposal to increase the aforementioned taxes. "The Government has decided to collect Rs 10,000 crore through property tax against the normal of Rs 1,270 crore hence decided to increase taxes," Babu Rao said.

He said that collecting user charges on garbage was

**While the TS Govt has reduced property and water taxes, here, our Government is burdening people through tax hikes.**

unheard of, but the Government has discarded all norms and is eager to burden the people.

"While the Telangana State Government has reduced property and water taxes, here, our Government is burdening people through tax hikes. The Government must withdraw the hike otherwise we will be forced to launch protests," Babu Rao warned.

## APNGOs urge SEC to rethink on local body polls, warn of lawsuit

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Objecting to the decision of the State Election Commission to conduct local body elections in February, the APNGOs Association on Tuesday urged the poll panel to rethink on the decision and said that if needed, it would knock the doors of the court to stop the process.

This was disclosed by APNGOA leaders during the launch of the Association's website at a programme in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

APNGOA president Chandrasekhar Reddy said that many Government employees succumbed to Covid hence the SEC should not go ahead with the local body elections and thus save the lives of government employees and also voters. He

**Sajjala pointed out that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was resolving all issues of the employees and would fulfil all the promises he had made.**

said the SEC did not conduct elections when the number of Covid infections were in single digit in the State, but was now keen to go ahead with the polls when the infection count was

hovering around 2,000 Covid-19 positive cases per day.

Chandrasekhar Reddy said that the SEC would be held responsible for the lives of employees if it conducts elections. He declared that the APNGOA would knock at the doors of courts to protect the lives of employees.

Advisor to the Government (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy inaugurated the APNGOA website. He said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy aimed to fulfil all the promises given to Government employees but it was slightly delayed due to the financial crisis as a result of Covid.

Sajjala pointed out that the Chief Minister was resolving all issues of the Government employees and would fulfil all the promises he had made.

The YSRCP leader He said that employees play a crucial role in the administration and that the Government has successfully implemented a majority of welfare schemes in the past 17 months due to the cooperation of employees.

APNGOA general secretary Bandi Srinivas Rao said that the Chief Minister responded positively to calls for cancellation of the Contributory Pension Scheme, sanctioning of one month leave to employees infected from Covid and regularisation of contract employees.

Recalling the promise of providing houses to government employees, he hoped that it would be a reality soon.

Later APNGOA leaders felicitated Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy.

## HC urged to order CBI probe into Salam suicide case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Urging the AP High Court to order a CBI probe into the suicide of four members of the Abdul Salam in Nandyal, All India Muslim League general secretary Khaja Vali filed a PIL on Tuesday.

In his petition, Khaja Vali argued that only the CBI could determine the real reason why auto-rickshaw driver Abdul Salam and his family took the extreme step.

"Since some police personnel are accused in the case, any inquiry into the tragedy by the department would be suspect, hence it's prudent that a Central investigative team takes up the probe," Khaja Vali told the court through his counsel Sravan Kumar.

## Has Covid induced behavioural change reduced water borne diseases?

Health experts opine there was drastic improvement in personal hygiene levels among people

SUMIT ONKA  
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

While a significant reduction in the vector-borne diseases garnered praise for Andhra Pradesh, the water-borne ailments has also seen a drastic fall in 2020 compared to the previous year.

Diarrhoeal cases registered a 65 percent fall with 1,58,000 cases in 2020 against 4,60,000 in 2019. Similarly, typhoid cases also declined by 71 percent with reported cases of

7,869 compared to 28,000 in the previous year, 2019.

People residing in rural and tribal areas of some districts in Andhra are prone to the vector-borne fever and diseases related to polluted water. For instance, Visakhapatnam's Agency area reports the maximum number of malaria cases.

The AP government claims that supply of safe drinking water, proper sanitation and awareness campaigns led to a reduction of the cases.

Health experts, however, attributed it to the behavioural change in people due to Covid-19. Doctors are of the opinion that the people were not eating or drinking outside due to the Coronavirus fear. Moreover, improvement in personal hygiene and awareness could have also played a key role. The spread of the vector or water borne disease have declined as the movement of people was less during the lockdown.

Speaking to The Pioneer, Regional Director (AP) for

Health and Family Welfare, Dr Anuradha Medoju said despite the pandemic, health department employees were discharging their duties as per instructions issued in pre-monsoon and monsoon season. Bengaluru-based Tata Institute of Genetics and Sciences has also commended the efforts being taken in the State to check vector-borne diseases.

The number of cases of vector-borne diseases, like dengue and malaria by 97.4 percent

and 50.4 percent respectively compared to corresponding period of previous year (June to August).

The State Government has attributed the success to its pilot sanitation drive, 'Manam Mana Parisubhratha'. Months of hard work resulted in a drastic decline in the number of cases pertaining to vector-borne diseases like Malaria, Typhoid and Dengue when compared to last year for the same period (June to October), the state government claimed.



# PM asks states to prepare plan for Covid vaccine



PNS ■ PANAJI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday asked various state governments to work out the logistics and modalities for administering COVID-19 vaccine, Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant said.

Sawant participated in a virtual meeting of chief ministers of eight states, which have reported higher number of COVID-19 cases, addressed by the PM via video conferencing. The chief minister also informed that services of NCC (National Cadet Corps) cadets, local bodies, and NGOs will be taken for vaccination in urban and rural areas of the state. "We have made preparations for training vaccinators (a person who administers a vaccine) and for the cold chain storage of the

## Frontline workers should get COVID-19 shots on priority: MP CM

PNS ■ BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government has made preparations like cold-chain storage for COVID-19 vaccine and is also imparting training to health personnel. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan told Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday even as he demanded the shots be administered to frontline workers on priority. The CM made this demand during a meeting of chief ministers of eight states, which have reported higher number of COVID-19 cases, addressed by the PM via video conferencing. The chief minister also informed that services of NCC (National Cadet Corps) cadets, local bodies, and NGOs will be taken for vaccination in urban and rural areas of the state. "We have made preparations for training vaccinators (a person who administers a vaccine) and for the cold chain storage of the

vaccine. I request you to give a priority to frontline workers to receive COVID-19 vaccine," the CM is quoted as saying by a public relations department official. He said the COVID-19 vaccine should be administered on priority in those cities and areas where the coronavirus infection is spreading fast. As on Monday, Madhya Pradesh's cumulative caseload stood at 1,94,745 with 3,172 fatalities. Chouhan also told the PM that a state-level committee has been formed under its chief secretary. Task force teams are being formed at the district and block levels for the vaccination purpose, the CM is quoted as saying. Chouhan also demanded that the vaccine be made available for those people who can afford to pay for it on a commercial basis, the official said. The CM assured the prime minister that the vaccination programme will be conducted smoothly and on a priority basis in the state, he added.

## After devotees, Covid -ve must shop employees in Sabarimala

PNS ■ BHOPAL

After Lord Ayyappa pilgrims, a COVID-19 negative test report has been made mandatory for those working in temporary shops operating in Sabarimala and the temple premises now. With the annual pilgrimage season progressing at the Lord Ayyappa temple here, a high level committee, which reviewed the arrangements made for devotees, took a decision in this regard on Monday. The meeting, led by Additional District Magistrate Arun K Vijayan and Police Special Officer B Krishnakumar, evaluated that the pilgrimage was progressing well adhering to COVID-19 protocols and the hill temple was fully prepared for more devotees arriving here in the coming days. Among many significant decisions taken, the high level committee resolved to make stringent the COVID-19 protocols at Sannidhanam (temple complex) and premises of the shrine. The COVID-19



protocol committee would be expanded further, Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) officials said after the meeting. Besides pilgrims, the officials on duty also should follow the COVID-19 protocols strictly. Social distancing should be followed at the Sannidhanam and nadappanthal, the rest area, they said. "Employees of temporary shops, operating in Sabarimala, should produce COVID-19 negative test result," the order said.

## Central government asked states to set up panels for vaccine distribution, says Karnataka minister

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Centre has asked states to constitute a steering committee at state-level and district and taluk levels for quick and effective distribution of COVID-19 vaccine once available, Karnataka Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai said on Friday. Bommai, who participated in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video conference along with Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, said the plan was to provide the vaccine on priority basis

for 30 crore people. There should be election like meticulous preparation from the booth level by having in place vaccination centres and trained health workers or volunteers, for quick and effective distribution of the vaccine, he told reporters here. "The Prime Minister's video conference was to ensure proper implementation, whenever the vaccine is ready and towards ensuring that it reaches certain sections of people on priority," the Minister said. Among the priority category, about one crore would be health workers, two crore corona warriors, about 26 crore people above the age of 50-60 years and remaining are those with comorbidities, he said. A steering committee under the Chairmanship of the Chief Minister will be constituted at the state level. There will be committees at the district and taluk levels, Bommai said.

Volunteers have to be trained and health workers both in public and private sectors have to be used for this purpose, he said, sharing details of the deliberations in the video conference. "During elections how we plan meticulously at every booth

level in such a way vaccination centres have to be set up, digital information has to be created and track record has to be maintained as vaccination is to be administered in two to three doses," he added. Modi on Tuesday interacted via video conferencing with chief ministers of various states regarding COVID-19 situation and vaccine distribution plan. Home Minister Amit Shah, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and senior officials also attended the meeting. The meeting comes as the central government has been putting in place measures for quick and effective distribution of coronavirus vaccine when it becomes available. Besides Yediyurappa and Bommai, Revenue Minister R Ashoka, Social Welfare Minister B Srimamulu, Chief Secretary T M Vijay Bhaskar and other senior officials were present at the meeting on Karnataka's behalf. Karnataka Health Minister K Sudhakar, who participated in the video conference from Hyderabad, in a statement said, as per directions of the union government, preparations were under way for vaccine distribution in the state.

## Covid under control in Chhattisgarh, says Chief Minister Baghel at PM-CMs meet

PNS ■ RAIPUT

The spread of COVID-19 has been brought under control in Chhattisgarh, where 23,000 tests are being conducted per day, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said on Tuesday. Baghel made the remarks while speaking at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's video conference meeting with chief ministers of eight states which account for bulk of the coronavirus cases in the country, an official statement issued here after the meet said.

During the meeting, steps being taken to contain the infections were reviewed and an action plan for potential COVID-19 vaccination drive was also discussed, the release issued by

the states public relations department said. The coronavirus situation is under control in the state. After October, the state has registered around 50 per cent decline in new cases," Baghel said. Earlier very few cases were being reported from rural areas, but the number of infections has increased there to some extent, he said. "Mitansins (female health volunteers) have contributed a lot in containing the infection in these (rural) areas, the statement quoted Baghel as saying in the meeting. The arrival of people from other states had led to a rise in infections in Chhattisgarh, which had initially reported less number of cases, he added. In October-November, the fatality rate stood

at 1 per cent, he added. Highlighting preventive measures being taken in the state, the CM said, As many 23,000 tests are being conducted per day. All medical colleges have RT-PCR testing facilities while four new labs have been set up for testing. The number of general beds and ICU (intensive care unit) beds equipped with oxygen has been increased in hospitals. Oxygen plants have been set up at hospitals attached to medical college," Baghel added. Along with the CM, Health Minister TS Singh Deo and senior officials were also present at the meeting, the release added. Till November 23, Chhattisgarh had registered 2,25,497 COVID-19 cases and 2,746 deaths.

## 'Increased testing, improved infrastructure to tackle coronavirus'

PNS ■ JAIPUR

In a video conference with PM Narendra Modi over coronavirus on Tuesday, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said his government has increased testing and strengthened infrastructure to tackle the infection. Highlighting the steps taken by the state government to contain the infection, the chief minister told the PM about the ban on firecrackers, law on wearing of masks, night curfew in worst-hit districts and the restrictions on gatherings, according to sources. He also shared with the prime minister inputs about the strengthening of infrastructure like oxygen generation plants, increase in the number of ICUs and oxygen beds in hospitals, the sources added.

## SC seeks Centre's response on PIL seeking to fix maximum rate for RT-PCR test

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Tuesday sought the Centre's response on a PIL seeking direction for fixing the maximum rate for the RT-PCR test for COVID-19 uniformly all over India. A bench comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian issued notice to the Health Ministry and listed the PIL filed by lawyer Ajay Agrawal for hearing after two weeks. The bench, in a hearing conducted via video conferencing, said that the plea would be heard with another pending plea pertaining to the cost of treatment for COVID-19. It took note of the submission of Agrawal that the plea needed an urgent hearing. The petition has sought a direction to the governments to fix the

maximum rate for the RT-PCR (real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) test to Rs 400 uniformly across the country, instead of Rs 900 to Rs 2800 as fixed by different state governments, Union Territories and NCT of Delhi. "There is a big loot by laboratories and they are minting money to the tune of crores and crores of rupees. The margin of profit is so high as it is as high as 1400 per cent in Andhra Pradesh and 1200 per cent in Delhi," said the petition filed by advocate Ajay Agrawal. It claimed that the RT-PCR kits are presently available for less than rupees 200 in the Indian market. "There is no other cost as the machines used for the RT-PCR test are already there with the laboratories as they conduct a large number of tests.

## Bengal will work with Centre to implement COVID-19 vaccination prog: Mamata to PM

PNS ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday assured Prime Minister Narendra Modi that her government is fully prepared to work with the Centre and all other stakeholders for the speedy implementation of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in the state. The prime minister reviewed the COVID-19 situation in various states through video conferencing with chief ministers. Noting that West Bengal has successfully reduced COVID-19 positivity and death rates, Banerjee said the recovery rate among the patients in the state has improved as compared to other parts of the country.

# Mumbai Police's Crime Branch unit files charge sheet in fake TRP scam

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai Police on Tuesday filed a charge sheet in a court here in the alleged TRP (Television Rating Points) rigging scam.

The charge sheet was submitted before a magistrate's court by the police's Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU), which is conducting a probe into the case, an official said.

The crime branch has so far arrested 12 persons, including Republic TV's western region distribution head and owners of two other channels, in connection with the case, he said.

The fake TRP scam came to light last month when ratings agency Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) filed a complaint through Hansa Research Group, alleging that certain television channels were rigging TRP numbers.

Hansa had been tasked with installing barometers, which record viewership data (which channel has been watched and for how long) at sample house-



holds. TRP is important as advertising revenue of channels depends on it. Mumbai Police Commissioner Param Bir Singh last month claimed that Republic TV and two Marathi channels Box Cinema and Fakt Marathi were involved in manipulating TRPs. Republic TV and other accused have denied wrongdoing and manipulation of the

TRP system. Earlier, Republic TV's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and two Chief Operating Officers (COO) and Chief Finance Officer (CFO) were summoned by the police for questioning in the fake TRP racket case. The statements of Republic TV's executive editor Niranjan Narayanswamy and senior executive editor Abhishek Kapoor were also recorded by the police.

The Maharashtra government last month withdrew its "general consent" given to the Central Bureau of Investigation to probe cases in the state, in the wake of the CBI taking over a case registered by Uttar Pradesh Police against "unknown" channels and persons over alleged fudging of TRP.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) recently filed a money laundering complaint in the alleged TRP rigging scam being investigated by the Mumbai Police.

The central probe agency has filed an enforcement case information report (ECIR) that is equivalent to a police FIR under provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, official sources said last week.

The ED complaint was filed after studying a Mumbai Police FIR that was registered in October and it had named the Republic TV channel, two Marathi channels and few other individuals.

## INS slams Kerala govt's ordinance

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Newspaper Society on Tuesday strongly protested the Kerala government's ordinance making a controversial amendment to the state Police Act and urged Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to withdraw it and "restore" press freedom.

In a statement, INS president L Adimoolam expressed "dismay and shock" over the ordinance issued by the Kerala government to amend the Kerala Police Act to enable stringent punishment for publication of material deemed to be defamatory.

The INS' strong statement comes a day after the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front government in Kerala put on hold the implementation of the amendment, citing criticism from various quarters. The INS said promulgation of this "draconian ordinance" which will give the police and the state government unbridled powers.

# Sena MLA Sarnaik's son brought to ED office for questioning

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik's son Vihang was on Tuesday brought to the ED's office here for questioning following raids at premises linked to his father in connection with a money laundering case being probed against a security service provider company and others.

The ED on Tuesday raided various premises linked to Sarnaik in Mumbai and neighbouring Thane, official sources said.

The ED officials picked up Sarnaik's son from his residence and reached the probe agency's office at Ballard Estate in south Mumbai around 3.15 pm, an official said.

Sources said the searches are being conducted by the central agency at 10 locations in Mumbai and Thane.

CRPF personnel were seen assisting ED sleuths during the operation that was launched early morning.



Sarnaik, 56, represents the Ovala-Majiwada constituency of Thane in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly.

He was in news when he wrote a letter seeking re-opening of an alleged abetment to suicide case of 2018 in which Republic TV's editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami was arrested by Mumbai Police recently.

Goswami is now out on bail. Sarnaik had also

demanding a unanimous resolution in the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly for legal action against actress Kangana Ranaut, who, he said, has "maligned" the image of Maharashtra and Mumbai through her tweets.

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut called the raids a "political vendetta" and said the Maharashtra government or its leaders will not surrender to pressure from anyone.

## NDA, GA stake claim to Bihar Speaker's chair

PNS ■ PATNA

The newly constituted assembly in Bihar is all set to witness its first trial of strength with both the ruling NDA and the opposition Grand Alliance on Tuesday fielding their respective candidates for the Speakers post.

Election to the post is scheduled on Wednesday and according to the Vidhan Sabha secretariat nominations have been filed by senior BJP leader Vijay Kumar Sinha, on behalf of the NDA, and Awadh Bihari Chaudhary of RJD who is the five-party opposition coalition candidate.

Talking to reporters after Chaudhary filed his nominations, RJD de facto leader Tejashwi Yadav said "we have made the first move. Our candidate filed his nomination

papers much before the NDA decided its nominee. I am hopeful that our nominee will win".

Yadav pointed out that Chaudhary is a fifth term MLA, member of this house since the 1980s, well-versed in the proceedings with an excellent command over language and has a reputation of taking everyone along. In short, all the qualities that one would expect in an assembly Speaker.

When pointed out that as per convention, the ruling alliance fields its candidate and receives unanimous support from all, Yadav replied testily "convention also has it that the opposition has its candidate appointed to the post of Deputy Speaker. It is true for assemblies as well as the Lok Sabha.

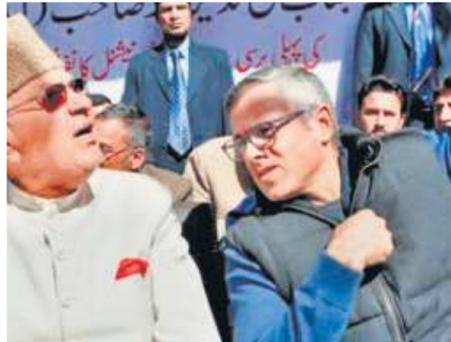
# 'Abdullahs' house in Jammu built on encroached land'

PNS ■ JAMMU

Former chief ministers Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah have been named by the Jammu and Kashmir administration in a list which alleges that their residential house in Jammu is built over illegally-possessed land, a charge denied by the father-son duo.

The administration of the union territory as directed by the Jammu and Kashmir High Court to make public land given under the controversial Roshni land scheme, since scrapped by a court, came out with the list of beneficiaries. On Tuesday, it came out with a list of those who had allegedly encroached land other than those given under the scheme.

The list also highlighted the headquarters of their National Conference in both Srinagar and Jammu were legalised under the controversial Roshni Act.



Displaying the lists on its website - one showing encroached land outside Roshni Act, the divisional administration Jammu revealed that the residential house of the Abdullahs, build over an area of nearly an acre at Sunjwan, is encroached state

land (physically encroached but not shown in revenue record) other than Roshni Act. Reacting to the fresh list, party vice president Omar Abdullah said, "The news attributing to sources that Dr Farooq Abdullah is a beneficiary of the Roshni Act is com-

pletely false and is being spread with a malicious intent. Both his houses at Jammu and Srinagar have nothing to do with the said Act.

"Dr Farooq Abdullah has NOT availed of the Roshni Scheme for either his residence in Srinagar or in Jammu and any one who says otherwise is lying. The fact that they are using sources to plant this story shows that it has no legs to stand on," Omar said.

The house of senior Abdullah was built in late 1990s for which timber was allocated from the government depots, which is issued only after furnishing all revenue records, officials in the know said.

Earlier, three former ministers, several politicians and a former bureaucrat figured in the list of beneficiaries who have availed land under now scrapped Roshni Act or encroached state land for residential or commercial

purposes.

The lists were made public by the divisional administration, both in Kashmir and Jammu regions, in accordance with the October 9 directive of the high court which has declared Roshni Act "illegal, unconstitutional and unsustainable" and ordered a CBI probe into the allotment of the land under this law.

Issuing the first list of 35 beneficiaries who included former finance minister Haseeb Drabu and some top hoteliers and a former bureaucrat, the divisional administration Kashmir showed that National Conference headquarters, several hotels and over a dozen commercial buildings at prime locations in and around Lal Chowk have been regularized under the act.

Majority of the beneficiaries including Drabu and his wife have one Kanal of land under residential use, while Congress

leader K K Amla is the owner of Broadway hotel and prominent businessman Mushtaq Ahmad Chaya owns a guest house and a hotel.

On November 1, the Union Territory government cancelled all land transfers that took place under the JK State Land (Vesting of Ownership to the Occupants) Act, 2001 - also known as the Roshni Act - under which 2.5 lakh acres of land was to be transferred to the existing occupants.

The principal secretary and revenue department has been asked to work out a plan to retrieve large tracts of state land vested under the Act. According to the high court order, a total of 6,04,602 kanals (75,575 acres) of state land had been regularised and transferred to the occupants. This included 5,71,210 kanals (71,401 acres) in Jammu and 33,392 kanals (4174 acres) in the Kashmir province.

# Fadnavis dubs Thackeray-led Maha govt as 'unnatural alliance'

PNS ■ PUNE

Terming the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra as an "unnatural alliance", BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday said the day this tie-up breaks, his party will give a strong government to the state.

"Till that time, the BJP will work honestly as a strong opposition and it is not eyeing any shift in power in the state, Fadnavis said at a press conference in Solapur.

Such governments (like MVA which comprises the Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress) have not lasted long in the country or state and this government is no exception, the leader of opposition in the state Assembly said.

"The day this unnatural alliance breaks, we will give a strong government to this state, but till that time, we will remain in the opposition," he said.

Asked if the BJP is eyeing a shift in power in Maharashtra after win in the Bihar Assembly polls, Fadnavis denied it, say-



ing, "We are in the opposition (in Maharashtra), and we are playing the role of a strong opposition honestly."

On the Uddhav Thackeray-led government's intention to inquire into the outstanding power bills during the previous BJP-led dispensation, Fadnavis said if the state government starts an inquiry, it "will fall on its own face".

"My point is why to inquire about our five years, why not last 20 years (five of BJP and 15

of Congress-NCP rule), because it was not our government which gave birth to the power utility company. Whatever legacy they have given us, we took it ahead," he said.

Fadnavis claimed the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government is adding the outstanding bills of 15 years (of Congress-NCP rule) to the figures of the last BJP-led regime.

"Yes, we had some outstanding bills, but it was because we

took a decision not to cut electricity connections of farmers," he said.

On the contrary, the present state government has an attitude of a "money lender" and is resorting to tactics of forcible recovery of power bills, he alleged.

He also criticised the state government for not providing relief to consumers who complained of receiving inflated power bills during the lockdown.

The BJP leader claimed the MVA government is so "incompetent" that if there is no strong opposition, it will exploit the common man.

Asked about the Enforcement Directorate's raid on Shiv Sena MLA Pratap Sarnaik's premises in Maharashtra in a money laundering case, Fadnavis said the probe agency must be having some complaints or material.

"The ED will not raid without any ground. I cannot comment on it as I do not have any information about it.

"But I would like to say that if anyone has not done anything wrong, there is no need to be scared, and if there is a wrongdoing, any agency can initiate action," he said.

Former BJP leader Eknath Khadse, who joined the NCP, last month, recently said he will not cower down by threats of probe agencies. "If you have ED, I have the CD," Khadse said.

When asked about it, Fadnavis said, "Why wait for the EDs action. If he has a CD with him, he should release it immediately."

Leader of opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Council Pravin Darekar said if the Shiv Sena can take action against actress Kangana Ranaut when she was not in her office, the party should not complain about the ED's action against Sarnaik, who is abroad.

"The ED takes its course of action (irrespective of the person)," Darekar said.

BJP MP Narayan Rane also hit out that Sarnaik, saying "he is not a saint".

"You should gather information about Sarnaik before calling it (ED's action) vendetta politics," he said.

# NGT slams MoEF : Rs 800 cr Env fund for victims unused

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has slammed the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) for non-utilisation of over Rs 800 crore meant towards Environment Relief Fund for victims of accidents in the process of handling hazardous substances.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel and Justice S K Singh noted that Public Liabilities Insurance Act provides that United India Insurance Company Ltd. shall be the Fund Manager for five years who shall open an account in a nationalized bank and credit the amount of premium received as well as the amount awarded by the tribunal.

"It is acknowledged that an amount of Rs 881 crore has been deposited till March 31, 2020 with the Fund Manager, United India Insurance Company Ltd., there is no information whether any amount has been utilised.

We find it to be travesty of justice that even after 29 years of the enactment of a laudable welfare legislation and in spite of deposit of huge amount meant for the needy victims, the amount remains unutilised to the detriment of the victims for whose benefit the law was enacted," the bench said.

The NGT said there is an urgent need for bridging gaps in existence and enforcement



of such law by all concerned. The MoEF being nodal Ministry may look into this aspect and take necessary action. Industrial chemical accidents lead to injury to workers and fatalities.

There is need to link Liability Risk Policies to be taken by the industries under the PLI Act, 1991 with the consent conditions under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 as well as Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and the Rules," the bench said.

State pollution control boards may ensure that industries required to take policies under PLI Act, 1991 are not granted with consents under the Water and Air Acts and the Authorization under Environment (Protection) Rules, 1986 till such a policy is obtained, the bench said.

We also request the National

Legal Service Authority and the State Legal Service Authorities, constituted under the Legal Service Authority Act, 1987, for assistance to the victims of injustice to access justice to look into the matter and take such action as may be found appropriate at their end," the bench said.

The tribunal was hearing a plea filed by retired government official Gyan Prakash highlighting the non-utilisation of more than Rs. 800 crore meant towards Environment Relief Fund under the Public Liabilities Insurance Act, 1991 (PLI Act, 1991) for victims of accidents in the process of handling hazardous substances.

The plea said the fund is lying unutilised and the purpose for which law was enacted is not being achieved.

The victims are suffering on account of ignorance and even Collectors who are required to publish information are not doing so, the plea said.

# Speakers' Conference from today in Gujarat

PNS ■ GANDHINAGAR

The two-day 80th All India Presiding Officers Conference, aiming to facilitate a dialogue between presiding officers of the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and other legislative bodies, will be held from Wednesday near the 'Statue of Unity' at Kevadiya in Gujarat's Narmada district.

The event, also known as the Speakers' Conference, will be inaugurated by President Ram Nath Kovind, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla told reporters here on Tuesday.

Birla is also the chairperson of the conference, which began in 1921 and is in its centenary year now.

The conference is being organised on the theme: 'Harmonious coordination between Legislature, Executive and Judiciary--key to a vibrant democracy'.

Birla said Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu will also attend the conference along with dignitaries like governors of Gujarat and Rajasthan, and Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani.

Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi and presiding officers of various legislative bodies from across the country will also participate. During the conclusion of the conference on the Constitution Day on Thursday, delegates will recite the Preamble to the Constitution under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will also address the concluding session, Birla said.

During the two-day conference, discussions would be held on topics related to anti-

defection law and use of information technology in relaying proceedings of Parliament and the Assemblies on one platform.

There will also be discussions on finding out ways to ensure that the workings of Parliament are not hindered due to ruckus and disruption, Birla said.

"In the last conference held in Uttarakhand, we discussed three main points- one was about the anti-defection law. We had formed a committee under Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha Speaker C P Joshi, and we will analyse the report at the conference," he said.

"We will also hold a discussion on the use of information technology. We have decided to computerise the system in such a way that a person can watch proceedings of the Vidhan Sabha and Parliament on one platform," he said.

## DDC POLLS

# Farooq Abdullah urges people to vote for PAGD

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday appealed to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to vote for the candidates of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) in the District Development Council (DDC) polls beginning on Saturday.

In a video released by the PAGD, Abdullah, who is under self-isolation after a member of his household staff tested positive for COVID-19, urged the people to ensure the victory of the alliance candidates by huge margins so that it succeeds in its aim of restoration of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir which was revoked by the Centre in August last year.

"My countrymen, the election bugle has been sounded. I appeal to you to vote only for the alliance candidates. The others, who are saying they are also alliance candidates, are not of the alliance, but its enemies," Abdullah, who is also the president of the PAGD, said.

"If we have to succeed, then you should vote only for the alliance. This alliance was formed to restore our identity, restore the statehood and that which was taken away from us - the Articles 370 and 35-A. We have come together to keep this state united," he said. The PAGD has announced a seat-sharing arrangement between the constituent parties which are contesting the polls on their respective symbols.

# SC dismisses sacked BSF jawan's plea against rejection of his nomination to contest against PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Tuesday dismissed sacked BSF jawan Tej Bahadur's plea against the rejection of his nomination papers to contest the 2019 Lok Sabha polls against Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the Varanasi constituency.

A bench comprising Chief Justice S A Bobde and justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian, that had

reserved its verdict in the case on November 18, upheld the Allahabad High Court judgment dismissing Bahadur's election petition against the poll panel's decision to reject his nomination papers.

On May 1 last year, the Returning Officer had rejected the nomination papers of Tej Bahadur, a Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate, who was dismissed from the Border Security Force (BSF) in 2017

after he posted a video online complaining about the quality of food served to the troops.

The high court had upheld the returning officer's decision to reject his nomination.

Bahadur's lawyer had argued before the top court that the petitioner had earlier filed his nomination as an independent candidate and later as SP candidate.

Referring to the high court's verdict, the lawyer had claimed

that Bahadur's nomination was rejected for "extraneous reasons".

While rejecting the nomination papers of Bahadur, the Returning Officer had observed that "the nomination paper is not accompanied by certificate issued in the prescribed manner by the Election Commission to the effect that he has not been dismissed for corruption or disloyalty to the state".

# Man rapes friend's mother in Rajasthan

PNS ■ JAIPUR

In a shocking incident, a 21-year-old man allegedly raped his friend's mother in Alwar district of Rajasthan, police said on Tuesday.

The 58-year-old victim was alone in her house when the accused committed the crime on Sunday, Sunil Jangid, Station House Officer (SHO), Shahjahanpur (Bhiwadi) said.

# People pay tributes to Gogoi on his final journey

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

"Baad Diya He" (just leave it) a phrase that former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi often uttered when faced with a quandary. And when he departed from the world, people fondly remember him as a leader who never left them in difficult times.

Gogoi's final journey began on Tuesday morning from Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), where he breathed his last due to post-COVID-19 complications, to his official residence in Dispur.

The 84-year-old Congress politician died here on Monday while undergoing treatment. He is survived by wife Dolly, daughter Chandrima and son Gaurav.

Officials said Gogoi would be cremated with full state honours on November 26.

His body was embalmed at the hospital and brought to his residence.

The veteran politician's son and Lok Sabha MP Gaurav Gogoi, accompanied by senior leaders and hundreds of supporters, received the body from GMCH, which was then taken out in a procession.

His glass coffin, wrapped in



flowers, was shouldered by Gaurav, Congress Assam unit chief Ripun Bora, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia and other senior leaders such as Pradyut Bordoloi and Rakibul Hussain.

Many senior leaders and legislators accompanied the veteran Congress leader's cortege along the arterial Guwahati-Shillong Road.

Passersby offered floral tributes to their former CM. "I am 75 years old and haven't stepped out of home since the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Today, however, I

came out mto bid farewell to our beloved leader," said Ramani Sharma, a resident of Tarun Nagar locality, as he stood amid a sea of people on the GS Road.

Hiranaya Sharma, another local in his 40s, said Gogoi led Assam in one of the most difficult phases, when salaries were put on hold for nearly two years, insurgency was at its peak, secret killings were rampant and nobody dared to leave home after sunset.

"He was a central minister and a six-time MP. He could have enjoyed a luxurious life in Delhi, but he came back for us.

He did not leave us in difficult times. We, the youths, had no future. But he changed that scenario completely," Sharma added.

Congress spokesperson Rhituporna Konwar, who, for years, had been handling the media for Gogoi, said he never hesitated to call a spade a spade.

"He even wore the black robe after nearly four decades to fight against the Citizenship Amendment Act in the Supreme Court. He was a man who lived his life for the people of the state and Northeast region at large," he added.

# Arnab Goswami urges SC to issue notice to Maha Assembly Speaker

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Journalist Arnab Goswami urged the Supreme Court on Tuesday to issue notice to the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker to clarify his stand on the claim of a House official who said he sent a letter to the scribe in a matter of alleged breach of privilege motion at the Speaker's direction.

A bench headed by Chief Justice S A Bobde initially observed that it might be "necessary in all probability to serve the Speaker" to know his version, but later adjourned the hearing on Goswami's plea by two weeks saying that it has not gone through the reply of the assistant secretary of the assembly.

The top court had on November 6 issued a show cause notice to Vilas Athawale, Assistant Secretary of Maharashtra Vidhan Mandal Sachivalaya, asking him to explain as to why contempt proceedings be not initiated against him for his letter to the journalist seeming to "intimidate" him for approaching the

apex court on the issue of alleged breach of privilege motion. The bench, also comprising Justices A S Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian, was informed by senior advocate Harish Salve, appearing for Goswami, that the reply to the show cause notice for contempt by the assembly official has said that the letter was sent at the direction of the Speaker.

"He (Athawale) is saying that he had acted on the direction of the Speaker. Please issue notice to the Assembly Speaker," Salve said.

Senior advocate Dushyant Dave, appearing for Athawale, opposed Salve's submissions and said that no contempt was made out and just because the official has said that he acted on the direction of the Speaker, it did not mean that the Speaker be called at this stage.

Before issuing the notice to the Speaker, the court has to first see whether any contempt is made out or not, Dave said.

"The apprehension is that the Speaker may say later that

he was not heard," the bench observed and sought to know the views of senior advocate and amicus curiae Arvind Datar on the issue.

"If the officer (of assembly) is saying that he acted on the direction of the Speaker, then the Speaker should be heard," Datar said.

"You (assembly official) have said all this but you have not withdrawn the letter (written to Goswami)," the bench said, adding that it will go through the reply of the official and then hear the case after two weeks. Meanwhile, the bench termed as reasonable the submission of Dave that the assembly official be exempted from personal appearance before it due to COVID-19 pandemic. The letter, a portion of which was quoted in the November 6 order, said: "You were informed that the proceedings of the House are confidential...despite this, it has been observed that you have presented the proceedings of the House before the Supreme Court on October 8, 2020.

## Freedom of choice

Allahabad HC dismisses case alleging love jihad, upholds the right to personal liberty of mature adults but UP pushes ordinance



Unfortunately, it is left to the courts these days to defend personal liberties of citizens. For politics brazenly tramples them. And given the implications of proposed legislations by certain State Governments to criminalise inter-faith marriages, ostensibly to stop conversions in the guise of love, the Allahabad High Court did some tough talking. Denouncing a previous single-judge bench decision that declared religious conversions only for the sake of marriage as unacceptable, it said such a ruling was “bad in law” because it overrides the right to life and personal liberty of mature adults. Defending the right of a Hindu

girl to marry a Muslim man, who converted to Islam voluntarily and whose parents filed the case, the Bench made it clear that two mature individuals were entitled to a freedom of choice under Article 21 of the Constitution. No doubt the court foresaw what attributing ulterior motives to every inter-faith relationship and subjecting each to societal perception could do. For example, even if the partners were to choose conversions on their own, could their disagreeing and vindictive families stop them with a new love jihad law? The court even warned how such obstructive norms on inter-religious marriages could affect “unity in diversity.” And then came its most scathing observation that targetted the Islamophobia implicit in all such proposed legislations: “We fail to understand that if the law permits two persons even of the same sex to live together peacefully, then neither any individual nor a family, nor even the State can have an objection to the relationship of two major individuals who out of their own free will are living together.” And by consistently highlighting that adults were entitled to live free without being monitored by societal malice, the court sought to douse the fire around the growing love jihad campaign. Of course, the ruling did not deter the Yogi Adityanath Government from issuing a punishing ordinance the same day to check forced conversions and marriages based on them.

The worst affected will be women, who continue to fight against and are killed by the devil called family or community honour, the terms of which are framed for the convenience of a patriarchal society. If as an adult, she loses the right to choose her kind of life, nothing could be more disempowering. And laws on love jihad anyway are built on the assumption of young women being impressionable than decisive. For example, both the UP ordinance and the Madhya Pradesh Government’s Dharma Swatantra Bill 2020 make coercing an individual into marriage a punishable offence, non-bailable in nature, deserving of a five-year rigorous punishment. Question is how would you prove coercion if the girl in question is already hostage to her dissenting family and cowering in fear? How would she give her independent opinion? This is why the Supreme Court in the Kerala love jihad case separated the 24-year-old girl from both her family and husband before respecting her choice. The Kerala High Court had handed over Hadiya’s guardianship to her parents, who locked her down for 11 months and discontinued her studies at a college in Salem, fearing her husband Shafin was indoctrinating her. The apex court appropriately prioritised individual freedom of an adult while separating the particularities of whether all of her choices were born of her freewill or were they imposed, given her supposed “conversion”, or indeed if she had the ecosystem to decide for herself, free of pressure and insinuation. That’s why it freed Hadiya from her parents, even kept her away from her husband. And in the end found that her relationship was genuine. It proved that the rights of two adult people to be together cannot be infringed upon on the ground of societal taboos, an alleged threat perception or external bogeyism. But even if the court respects the couple’s choice, where is the security guarantee? For example, the UP ordinance says that in case someone wishes to convert after marriage voluntarily, s/he will have to apply to the district magistrate two months in advance. In MP that sanction has to be taken from a collector. In a society that is yet to come out of the revenge code of honour killings, would not a public declaration of love and conversion invite a hitback? We just saw the backlash following an advertisement campaign by a jewellery brand of an inter-faith marriage, where none of the partners were shown as changing their religion. If that had to be taken down, imagine what could happen to two people making independent choices. It is not that there aren’t laws against forced conversions. Section 366 of the Indian Penal Code criminalises any act of kidnapping, abducting or inducing a woman to marry by force and punishes such an act with imprisonment for up to ten years. Besides, according to the Government’s own admission in Parliament, the term “love jihad” had not been defined under any law and no case had been reported or registered by any Central agency. Where then is the need for a law in the first place? Also, doesn’t a love jihad law go against the grain of the BJP’s pet agenda of the Uniform Civil Code, which would bring all inter-faith marriages under a common set of rules? Of course, nobody wants to see reason when the politics of polarisation has completely taken over the collective mindspace. Even now, inter-faith marriages are few and far between. According to the India Human Development Survey, only about five per cent of all marriages are inter-caste and inter-faith relations are even fewer. A 2016 survey by Social Attitudes Research for India (SARI) found that the majority of respondents opposed inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. In Delhi, about 60 per cent of both Hindus and Muslims were against them. Then there are legal challenges for ordinary couples trying to get a marriage registered under the Special Marriage Act, with courts insisting on all sorts of conditions. Love is never under discussion.

## Bad idea

The Reserve Bank of India would do well to prevent corporates from entering the banking sphere



While Raghuram Rajan often sounds like he is yet to come to terms with his effective removal from the Governorship of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), he and his successor Viral Acharya do have a point when they panned the idea mooted by the central bank to allow the corporate sector to enter banking. In a piece, they argued that this would be devastating and would lead to “connected banking” and it isn’t hard to see their point of view. We have seen what happens with “connected banking” and the dramatic collapse of Yes Bank and the more recent rescue of Laxmi Vilas Bank by the RBI are cases in point. As Rajan and Acharya asked, “How can a bank make good loans when it is owned by the borrower?”

The central bank would be stupid to ignore the advice of its own former honchos as well as India’s top legal eagles that were consulted on this. India has had far too many banking disasters in the recent past for another one to be made through bad policy making. Even if the RBI promises to continue through regulatory oversight, the scandals involving Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi highlight that promoters can bend the rules and cover their tracks (for a while at least) if they want to. Even if corporate-owned banks are prevented from giving loans to non-financial entities of the corporate, what will stop them from giving loans to relatives of bureaucrats and politicians in order to curry favour? Even in the best-run banks, allegations of underhand dealings and impropriety exist as we are learning in the case of ICICI Bank and its disgraced former chief executive against whom there are damning allegations. Instead, it would be more prudent for the RBI and the Ministry of Finance to explore possibilities of privatising India’s burdensome public-sector banks. Are the rule changes being made to assist one or two particular corporate groups in India and make them even stronger? Until the RBI and the government cannot answer this one question, one will assume it to be true. Ergo, this bad idea should be dispensed with forthwith. As for private lenders failing, just remember the lasting impact of the IL&FS fiasco.



**BHOPIINDER SINGH**

The lacklustre township of Nagrota, just outside the unplanned concrete of Jammu city, was once best-known for housing the largest military corps in the world, White Knights Corps or the XVI Corps, as also for rehabilitating fleeing Kashmiri Pandit migrants from the Valley. The small garrison town snakes around the lifeline of the Jammu-Kashmir highway, which connects the Jammu plains to the Kashmir valley, bisected by the Pir Panjal ranges and the minor Trikuta mountains, which harbour the Vaishno Devi shrine in one of their heights, along with the Nagrota dwelling, in the foothills. Another 54 km down the same road is the Indian Army’s Northern Command headquarters at Udhampur.

The conspicuous presence of the Indian military in this township, barely 40 km from the nearest Pakistan border, as also its service mandate of overseeing operations along the “live”, strategic and frequently contested Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan, has drawn unwarranted attention of those who seek to create terror and violence, as per the direction of their handlers across the LoC. Four years ago, terror had struck Nagrota as heavily-armed terrorists had sneaked across the border and fired indiscriminately at the sentries guarding the resident 116 Medium Regiment. A hostage-like drama had ensued and by the time the situation was neutralised, seven Indian soldiers and three terrorists were killed. All indications at the Nagrota site had pointed to the role of the terror organisation, Jaish-e-Mohammed, as notes recovered from the slain terrorists pointed to the involvement of the so-called “Afzal Guru Squad.” The said group had earlier carried out similar terror attacks at Pathankot, Baramulla, Uri and so on. Last year this group was responsible for a deadly strike, involving at least 350 kg of explosives at Pulwama, which had killed 40 Indian security personnel – this provocation had led to the reciprocal Balakote airstrike by the Indian Air Force. Last week, Jaish-e-Mohammed resurfaced again when four of its terrorists were killed in a fierce encounter on the Jammu-Srinagar highway, at Nagrota again.

What is significant is the irrefutable Pakistan hand in the lat-

# The Nagrota link

Connecting the dots between Pakistan and the Nagrota encounter is crucial to deny Islamabad a convenient plank of dismissing it as a local expression of animus



est encounter, as the Bhawalpur-based jihadist group, Jaish-e-Mohammed, owes its genesis and sustenance to the Pakistani establishment or the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). At an oversimplified level, there is also a turf war among the competing insurgent groups in the Kashmir Valley, where the once predominantly local “pro-independence” groups have been marginalised and it is only those with State support from across the LoC for being “pro-Pakistan” (or at an even more extremist level, the pan Islamic Caliphate-seeking groups), who have managed to hold sway. Jaish-e-Mohammed has the notoriety of having Masood Azhar as its ideologue and leader, who has been declared an international terrorist by the United Nations Security Council. He also infamously and incredibly got support from China, which vetoed moves to put him on the UNSC sanctions committee on “technical grounds” and even posited the flimsier excuse of “lack of evidence.” The realpolitik of Pakistan and China in supporting Jaish-e-Mohammed aside, which brooks no morality or consistency in international affairs (hence the perennial struggle for Pakistan in avoiding getting “blacklisted” by the international watchdog agency, FATF for sponsoring terror), the outfit is banned by UN and almost all Western and even Islamic countries like UAE. Owing to global pressure, Pakistan was forced into the sham of banning the same though the group kept renaming itself as Tehrik-ul-Furqan,

“**PAKISTAN SHOULD BE DISALLOWED THE WINDOW OF TRANSITION BETWEEN THE CHANGING US REGIMES TO FURTHER ITS NEFARIOUS DESIGNS, ESPECIALLY AS TRUMP HAD GIVEN IT THE LONG ROPE TO ENSURE US TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN**”

then Khuddam ul-Islam, then Al-Rehmat Trust and, so on and so forth. Amid all pressures, Masood Azhar remained loyal to the Pakistan “Deep State” and it paid him back by allowing a free run to his group’s operations and machinations in Kashmir. Temporary “protective custody” enforced on Azhar from time to time has impressed no one, and his ability to sustain his operational capabilities in Jammu & Kashmir points to the continued handiwork of the Pakistani establishment, solely and wholly. The latest Nagrota incident reeks of the scale, sophistication and brazenness of Pakistani complicity. The sheer cache of arms from the terrorists (11 AK-47, three pistols, 29 grenades, six UBGLs, mobile devices and so on) and the subsequent unearthing of a 150-metre long tunnel in the nearby Samba area for the facilitation of the cross-border movement, is impossible without State support. The construction of this tunnel has all the hallmarks of engineering complexities (at least 25-30 metres deep and almost 2.5 metres wide) and facilitation, which could not have been arranged without the acquiescence and material support from the nearby Pakistani posts of Rajab Sahib and Asif Sahib. The presence of the protective *Sarkanada* (elephant grass) on the Pakistani side of the tunnel to hide the literal spade work is self-explanatory. To suggest ignorance or naivete in overlooking the efforts and time to construct such a sized tunnel and arrange for the disposal of the dug-out soil without its

discovery by the Pakistani patrol and posts, is unthinkable. Rightfully, an indignant New Delhi summoned the Pakistan charge d’affaires with incriminating evidence towards a “major attack to destabilise the peace and security.” This was expectedly denied by the Pakistani Foreign Office, as it has done for decades even though it has earned international ignominy as the “nursery” for global terror. Importantly, India has dialled up the charges against Pakistan, with the Prime Minister himself tweeting about the incident. This escalation is timely as neighbouring Afghanistan is imploding with terror unleashed by the Pakistan-supported Taliban and the situation is expected to worsen. Pakistan should be disallowed the window of transition between the changing US administrations to further its nefarious designs, especially as Donald Trump has given it the long rope in order to fulfil his personal commitment of troops withdrawal from Afghanistan. Nailing Pakistan with “naming and shaming” is the key to ensure that the global pressure does not wane. Connecting the dots between Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Nagrota encounter is crucial to deny Islamabad the convenient postulation of Nagrota as a local expression of animus. Pakistan has been and continues to be the singular source of armed terror in Kashmir – Nagrota has proved this yet again. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands)

## SOUNDBITE

<p>The BJP has been constantly targeting political opponents like this. Have you ever heard about any CBI or ED raids on people linked with the BJP?</p> <p><b>Maharashtra Revenue Minister</b> —Balasaheb Thorat</p>	<p>My father’s wish was to see me play for India and make the nation proud. Now, all I want to do is fulfill my father’s dream.</p> <p><b>Indian fast bowler</b> —Mohammed Siraj</p>	<p>I call myself a Manist. I believe men should be feminists and women should support men. Then automatically the world will become a better place!</p> <p><b>Actor</b> —Bidita Bag</p>	<p>Every child deserves quality education and this includes the right to have access to safe and clean drinking water and toilet facilities in schools. I hope we can contribute to this.</p> <p><b>Former India cricketer</b> —Suresh Raina</p>
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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Be responsible**  
 Sir — People must follow COVID-19 safeguards or else this pandemic will destroy many lives and the economy of the nation, too. Governments all over the country will have to get very strict with people endangering others by not following Coronavirus protocols. For instance, the Delhi Government is penalising those who are not wearing masks in public places even as a third COVID-19 wave spreads through the State. The Madhya Pradesh Government, too, has launched the “*Roko, Toko* (stop, and check)” campaign to admonish and penalise those people who refuse to wear masks in public places. Over ₹1.34 crore has been collected in Madhya Pradesh’s Jabalpur district alone due to the fines slapped on people violating COVID-19 protocols under this campaign. Many other States, too, have been mulling imposing restrictions on citizens in order to break the COVID-19 infection chain. Till we don’t get the vaccine, people will have to mask up and observe social distancing and hygiene protocols. But the sad reality is that people are not tak-

**Owaisi needs to join secular forces**  
 Apparently Asaduddin Owaisi has gained in visibility, grown in stature and emerged as a political player who could influence electoral outcomes in his own way in constituencies with a certain percentage of Muslim voters. Certainly it was to the credit of his party, the All-India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), that it won five seats in the recently-held Bihar Assembly election. But then it cannot evade the question whether it didn’t help split the secular vote and facilitate the BJP-led combine’s return to power in some measure. Of course, Owaisi has justifiable reasons to oppose the Congress, which hesitates to take a principled stand on secularism. The party’s soft Hindutva line is quite obvious and its Muslim appeasement has not gone beyond the votebank. It has not taken a clear stand on the discriminatory amendment to the citizenship law, abrogation of Article 370 and so on. The Sachar Committee report showed the destitution of the Muslims as a community and debunked the “Muslim appeasement” myth. Still it shouldn’t be difficult for Owaisi to make “tactical” preferences going by the track records of the Congress and the NDA. Politics in our diverse and disparate country is complex as evidenced by the differences between AIMIM and TRS in the run-up to the civic election and



requires a lot of skill to uphold principles and the country’s overall interest. Owaisi has to concede that he has fewer reasons to adduce for not combining forces with parties like the RJD, the TMC and the DMK. By winning a few seats here and a few seats there, the AIMIM cannot substantially contribute to the fight against the Hindutva forces. By fielding candidates in constituencies where it will indirectly help the BJP, it will only earn the “BJP’s B-team” tag. AIMIM has no option but to join the secular forces or come clean on its political ambitions.  
**David Milton**  
*Maruthancode*

dangerously high levels of pollution, the latter adding to the number of deaths in the country each year. Apart from the meteorological and geographical factors, we only have ourselves to blame for this sorry state of affairs. Burning of waste and bonfires, bursting of firecrackers despite restrictions, emissions from vehicles, construction dust, polluting industries, coal-fired power plants, biomass burning and cooking fires have quickly deteriorated the air quality to hazardous levels. Research has proven that the Coronavirus and toxic air are closely connected and both affect the respiratory system. Health experts confirm that there is a direct correlation between the rise in air pollution and more and more people becoming susceptible to COVID-19 and falling sick as the pollutants carry the virus and allow it to stay for a longer duration of time. We are in the end paying for our own mistakes and blatant violation of anti-pollution norms.  
**Ranjeet Singh**  
*Noida*  
 Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

## FIRST COLUMN

## Time to board the algo-trading bus

AI's modus operandi involves mining the relevant stock data, performing the required and appropriate analysis and making a quick decision



GAURAV GARG

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionising every aspect of our lives, right from chatbots on websites to applications in defence systems. It is also being comprehensively used in the field of analytics. Trading, i.e. buying and selling of shares, is no exception to it too and over the years, AI has gradually become an integral part of the trading environment. Financial markets are so dynamic that it is sometimes difficult to take proper decisions on particular stocks as there are many factors to consider and the decision to buy or sell must be taken on a split second basis. Emotions are the biggest enemy of the trader in the market but it becomes very difficult to control them. This is where AI plays a major role in helping traders. AI is a programme to which we provide algorithms. An algorithm is a set of instructions using which AI learns and understands its role and executes the required functions. The advent of Information Technology has disrupted many activities and now many advanced methods are available, which have made trading an easy process for the public at large with required tools at its disposal.

The use of AI in trading is generally known as algo-trading because the AI programme receives the algorithm, using which it helps investors trade. These empower AI with complex mathematical models and techniques to take proper decisions regarding the optimal quantity of stocks to buy and decide the price for execution. This removes emotions from the scene and effectively processes various factors at the same time in order to make an appropriate decision. Another important aspect which works in favour of algo-trading is that the reaction time is extremely fast as compared to humans and decisions can be made in a wink. With the advent of tools like neural networks, algo-trading has become refined and more efficient as it continuously learns from the environment. This Machine Learning (ML) is what makes algo-systems quite reliable.

Automation of trading activities is very beneficial as the strategies are scientific, and being rule-based, the approaches are very disciplined. Hence, AI has proved to be a very good monitor of the stock markets with a quick response to any anomaly or change. This is very useful when there are a number of asset classes or scrips and keeping an eye on them continuously is not possible for one person to do efficiently. As opposed to this, AI has the ability to process a humongous amount of historical stock data, analyse the market behaviour and capitalise on any particular pattern or expected movement, such as price action. This has also led to the elimination of a lag between the action in the market and a trader's reaction to it, basically making trading real-time. In many cases this has bestowed people using neural networks with an added advantage over their competitors and traders who are still using manual methods.

However, AI and ML need not be used for developing trading strategies alone and can be used for many other purposes like liquidity searching, creating model portfolios for the clients and so on. The traditional technical analysis, which is known to traders at large, sometimes fails to catch the statistical elements in the markets as this can only be identified after considerable examination. But AI can help overcome this problem as it can eliminate confirmation-bias. AI does not account for subjective valuation and, therefore, investments based on pure quantitative and scientific basis can be made and the so-called "luck-based" trading can be avoided. Comprehensive statistical tools and appropriate mathematical models help to identify the proper time and optimal level for entering the market. With a considerable study of historical data, appropriate indicators and predictors can raise the red flag ahead of other market participants. With the arrival of neural network tools, AI can be put to use for predictive trading, i.e. it can analyse news, information, blogs and so on and come up with a trading recommendation. Although AI is costly due to the huge amount of R&D as of now, it is only logical to assume that it will become cost-effective in the long-term. Since it is just a programme, it has no impediments like fatigue and thereby it keeps the integrity of vital financial decisions intact.

In a nutshell, the AI's *modus operandi* is mining the relevant stock data, performing the required and appropriate analysis and making a quick decision. Such an investment decision will be scientific, calculated, unbiased and free from emotions.

With the increased usage and development of technology, it will not be wrong to say that AI will play a dominant role in the financial markets in the near future. As with other emerging technologies, the immediate implementation of AI may not be round the corner but with gradual evolution and development, of both software and hardware, AI or algo-trading are on their way to becoming the future of trading. The faster traders get used to the fact, the better it is for them because the future is here.

(The writer is Head Research, CapitalVia Global Research Limited, Investment Advisor)

FIRST THE BJP TARGETTED SHARAD PAWAR AND THEN MANY OTHER OPP LEADERS IN RAJASTHAN AND OTHER STATES. THIS IS VENDETTA POLITICS.  
—NCP MINISTER  
CHHAGAN BHUJAL

## POINTCOUNTERPOINT



PRATAP SARNAIK IS NO SAINT AND THE ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE ACTION IS BEING TAKEN AS PER THE LAW.  
—BJP LEADER AND MP  
NARAYAN RANE

## Autonomy plus accountability

The liberty of the Vice-Chancellor of a university is not a shield against malpractices. In a democratic set-up, all individuals, no matter how high an office they hold, are accountable



DEVENDER SINGH ASWAL

Disciplinary action against over a dozen Vice-Chancellors (V-Cs) of Central Universities (CUs) over the last few years has been a cause of consternation. However, the polarised politics of universities views this from diametrically opposite prisms. While a larger segment hails it as much-needed spring cleaning, some consider it a pernicious design to whittle down institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The overall spectacle is worrisome and needs to be seen in the correct perspective, albeit in a detached manner.

The office of the V-C is an exalted one, and the academia views him as a friend, philosopher, guide and the high priest of the temple of higher learning. The constituting Act and the statutes, Ordinances and regulations of every university vest the V-C with certain powers and autonomy so that s/he executes her/his office efficiently and faithfully. The autonomy of the V-C is not a shield against accountability. In a democratic set-up, all individuals, no matter how high an office they hold, are accountable. In fact, higher the station, greater is the public scrutiny.

The Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws. It is unsparingly unexceptional as the President of India, too, can be impeached by the Parliament for violation of the Constitution. All public functionaries and public bodies are ultimately accountable to the legislature through the Minister-in-Charge.

The Indian higher education system, which is the second-largest in the world, comprises 54 Central Universities, 411 State Universities, 123 deemed universities and 282 private universities. The V-C is the chief executive and the administrative head of the university. A great responsibility, therefore, lies with the V-Cs in terms of the implementation of the national higher education policy, institutional reforms, nurturing the spirit of enquiry and research, building an ecosystem of innovation and adoption of international best practices of good governance.

According to the University Grants Commission's (UGC's) handbook, "the V-C has to evolve as the leader of a symphony orchestra" with the attributes of developing teams and teamwork. S/he also has to build partnerships and collaborations delicately intertwined with collegiality, friendship and intellectual engagement. This goes hand in hand with devising a deliverable action strategy, ensuring accountability of the self and various governing bodies of the university and steering an institutional monitoring and evaluation mechanism on the university's performance, built on transparency. An ideal V-C is a great visionary, a true leader able to procure willing cooperation of the teachers, a constant source of inspiration to the students, an ace administrator who is able to maintain a conducive educational ecosystem, and is well-acquainted with the latest developments so as to bring global visibility to the university.

Plus, s/he must have the highest level of competence and her/his integrity must be beyond reproach. Like Caesar's wife, the V-C must be above suspicion. S/he must execute her/his office faithfully and diligently and ensure that the provisions of the constituting Act, statutes, ordinances and regulations are fully observed. S/he must make various appointments as per procedure, delegate powers for day-to-day work to the officers of the university and audit their performance and exercise all administrative, disciplinary and financial powers as defined in the statutes and ordinances.

In fact, the catalogue of duties of the V-C is vast and varied, which adds a certain aura of reverential

“THE VENEER OF AUTONOMY CANNOT CONCEAL OR CAMOUFLAGE ACTS OF OMISSION AND COMMISSION. A ZERO-TOLERANCE APPROACH TOWARDS CORRUPTION DEMANDS THAT THE GOVERNMENT BE SWIFT AND SURGICAL TO WEED OUT CORRUPTION OR UNETHICAL PRACTICES. THE IMPORT OF THE OFT QUOTED STATEMENTS 'MINIMUM GOVERNMENT AND MAXIMUM GOVERNANCE' AND 'LIGHT BUT TIGHT REGULATIONS' IS LOUD AND CLEAR



mystique to the office. S/he represents the vibrant face of the university, engages in constructive stable policy dialogue with the Government, other universities, research funders and academia. It's for these reasons that the V-Cs are selected by the Visitor (the President in case of Central universities and the Governor in case of State Universities) from the panel recommended by the search committee. This committee comprises three to five members who are persons of eminence in the sphere of higher education and the choice of the V-C is based on rigorous screening of the academic attainments and administrative experience of the people on the panel.

Interestingly, the V-Cs, who faced the axe, were appointees of the same Government. A critical scrutiny of the disciplinary proceedings initiated against the V-Cs broadly falls into four categories: Allegations of financial irregularity; allegations of dereliction of duty and defiance; wrongful appropriation of funds and academic fraud.

The Visitor does not initiate disciplinary proceedings against a V-C *suo motu*, but on the aid and advice of the Ministry of Education or the concerned administrative Ministry. This is because Central universities relating to maritime, agriculture, aviation, sports education, and so on, fall outside the domain of the Education Ministry. The trigger point for initiating disciplinary action is provided by the media, complaints by legislators, students and teachers and in some cases, the Chancellors themselves have demanded enquiries against the V-Cs. So, the Visitor is duty-bound to refer the complaints to the administrative Ministry for ascertaining facts and considered advice with respect to the corrective action required to be taken.

Some glaring examples of acts of omission and commission deserve mention. President Pranab Mukherjee

approved the sacking of the V-C of Visva Bharati university, Sushanta Duttagupta, for alleged irregularities in appointments and flagrant violation of financial rules. The V-C of Pondicherry University, Chandra Krishnamurthy, was removed for alleged academic fraud (that is claiming to have written three books though an enquiry allegedly revealed authorship of only one). The V-C of Mahatma Gandhi Central University, Arvind Agrawal, allegedly resigned when governments sought his comments on the allegations of fudging vital information in his C-V.

Similarly, amid a spate of questions in Parliament and public complaints about financial and academic irregularities, the V-C of Allahabad University, RL Hangloo, allegedly resigned before the Union Government could initiate punitive proceedings. The V-Cs of HN Bahuguna Garhwal University, JL Kaul, and Manipur University, AP Pandey, were sacked for alleged financial irregularities and long absence from duty. The V-C of Tripura University, V Dharurkar, resigned when a sting operation showed him receiving alleged bribe.

In cases where the V-Cs appropriated funds for purposes other than the approved budget heads, the enquiries were closed as there was no personal pecuniary gain or enrichment. The cases of Dinesh Singh, V-C, Delhi University and Talat Ahmad of Jamia Millia Islamia fall in this category, both of whom were known for their competence and integrity. The V-C of Jamia Hamdard, Seyed Ehtesham Hasnain, a deemed to be university (self-financed but partly funded by the UGC), has been suspended by the Chancellor following the decision of the UGC to set up a fact-finding committee to probe allegations.

The Centre has no say in the appointment or removal of the V-C of a deemed university. In a recent case, the Tamil Nadu

Government ordered an inquiry against Anna University V-C, MK Surappa, following complaints of alleged financial irregularities and malpractices in semester examinations and re-evaluation, even though the DMK has demanded his sacking.

The burning question is whether stringent disciplinary action against the V-Cs impinges upon the autonomy and academic freedom of the universities, which are emulated as role models and occupy a place of pride in the academia globally? Will these penal actions impact, dilute or undermine the autonomy and freedom of the institutions of higher learning? Autonomy and academic freedom are crucial to the well-being and smooth functioning of universities and key to attaining excellence in a globally-competitive environment.

The National Education Policy, 2020, lays great focus on the autonomy of institutions of higher learning, making every college in course of time an autonomous, degree-granting college and making India a global hub of education. It is, therefore, the right time to ponder and look to the future as autonomy is not a goal to be pursued in itself, but a fundamental prerequisite for universities to be able to develop strategic profiles, operate in a competitive environment, deliver on their very important societal duties in an ecosystem of transparency and accountability.

The veneer of autonomy cannot conceal or camouflage acts of omission and commission. A zero-tolerance approach towards corruption demands that the Government be swift and surgical to weed out corruption or unethical practices. The import of the oft quoted statements "minimum Government and maximum governance" and "light but tight regulations" is loud and clear.

(The writer is former Additional Secretary, Lok Sabha and an author)

## India needs to bite the bullet to fight climate change

When 51 per cent of pollution is caused by industries, we cannot harp on the progress we made by reducing cooking smoke and transitioning to a better bulb



KOTA SRIRAJ

The recently-concluded G20 summit was the 15th meeting of the grouping. It was expected to be held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia but due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it was conducted virtually. On this year's agenda was the socio-economic and environmental impact of tourism and how both, tourists as well as local communities, stand to benefit from tourism as a bridge between different societies.

However, the spotlight was on a side event, titled "Safeguarding the Planet: The Circular Carbon Economy Approach", that was

addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The event garnered appropriate attention as the environment is increasingly being seen to be on the back foot, especially as battered economies open up after a pandemic-induced lockdown.

Addressing the meeting, Modi assured the grouping that India, as a signatory to the Paris Agreement, was effectively meeting its targets on climate change. One of the ways it was doing so was by popularising LED lights that have become instrumental in saving 38 million tonnes of carbon dioxide each year. Similarly, the Ujjwala Scheme provides clean cooking energy to 80 million households across the country, making it one of the largest green energy drives. Modi highlighted India's plans to achieve its 175 GW clean energy target by 2022 and its ambition to be in a position to achieve 450 GW of clean energy by 2030. Though these are commendable efforts towards negating the

adverse effects of climate change, the question we need to ask ourselves is, are they enough?

Recently, the Prime Minister of the UK, Boris Johnson, unveiled a "10-point plan" to tackle global warming. The most notable point was the plan to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles from 2030 onwards. In fact, plug-in hybrid vehicles, too, will face the axe after 2035. This unprecedented step towards cleaner transportation has captured the world's imagination, thanks to the scale of the proposed initiatives to address the problem of climate change.

While curbing air pollution, the step would ensure unprecedented demand for electric vehicles (EVs), too. The EV segment in the UK has already been stimulated by the allocation of 1.3 billion pounds to bolster the charging infrastructure throughout the nation. This is further complemented by a funding of 582 million pounds to aid in EV manufacturing and an additional

500 million pounds funding to help the auto industry conduct research and development on EV batteries.

This policy of the UK to put the "environment first" in the post-pandemic economic scenario is silencing critics, who regularly hauled up the lacklustre environmental commitments of Great Britain. With this one proposed step of deleting fossil fuel guzzlers from its roads, Britain would make a huge difference in its carbon emission numbers and alternatively put its EV usage, which is currently stuck at 10 per cent, on a fast track.

To its credit, the UK has shown that in order to make an impact, the fight needs to be taken to where it matters. In this case, other secondary sources of pollution have been bypassed and vehicular pollution has been met head-on.

There is a lesson for India here. Incremental successes in the fight against climate change and pollution are akin to winning smaller battles while losing the larger war to pro-

tect the environment. India, too, needs to come out and identify the largest polluters boldly without the concerns of a backlash.

In a nation where 51 per cent of air pollution is caused by industries, our claim to fame cannot be the progress we made in reducing the smoke from the cooking stoves of our villages or transitioning to a better bulb. The Government has to have the political will to come out with stringent measures to curb industrial pollution.

If anybody can achieve this, it is the Modi Government because it has the mandate of the people and is not dependent on any coalition partners to hammer through difficult decisions if it wants. And its increasing clout in both Houses of Parliament will also make it easier for it to make the changes on the ground if it wants to win the war against pollution and negate the effects of global warming.

The Centre has to be cognisant of the fact that 21 out of the 30 most polluted cities of the world are in

India and millions of people daily breathe in air that is 10 times more polluted than the norms specified by the World Health Organisation. This daily trial by pollution takes a toll on the health of citizens, with nearly two million Indians dying a premature death every year due to pollution-related complications. The reach or the lack of it of the Government's authority and efficacy of its rules can be gauged by the fact that crop residue burning continues defiantly in Delhi-NCR in spite of the best efforts of the Delhi Government, the Centre and the judiciary.

One of the major reasons for Western nations succeeding in matters pertaining to common good is their higher levels of awareness regarding societal and common good. In India it is more like "each man to himself". This attitude puts common assets such as environmental concerns firmly in the back seat. The Government, under pressure to show progress on pressing environ-

mental issues, clutches at nominal achievements and leaves bigger problems for another day. India must fight the bigger battles first. Industrial pollution is one of them and in the post-pandemic era, where every nation is re-scripting its economic journey based on a "green industrial revolution", India must not be left behind.

In order to make a successful transition from polluting industrial infrastructure to a green one, India will have to take bold measures such as cutting down on coal consumption for generating power, rapidly increasing the infrastructure to include clean energy in our daily lives such as EV technologies and, of course, ensuring that polluting industries are shown the door.

Green industrial revolution can usher in the next phase of economic growth for India. The more we delay clean industries, the more we deny ourselves this growth.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)

# Markets surge to lifetime highs; Nifty breaches 13K

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rallied to fresh lifetime highs on Tuesday following heavy buying in banking, financial, realty and auto counters amid persistent foreign capital inflows.

A strengthening rupee also boosted market sentiments, traders said.

After scaling a record intraday high of 44,601.63, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended 445.87 points or 1.01 per cent higher at a record 44,523.02.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty rose 128.70 points or 1 per cent to close above the 13,000-mark for the first time at 13,055.15. Axis Bank was the top gainer in the Sensex pack,



surging around 4 per cent, followed by M&M, HDFC Bank, ITC, SBI, ICICI Bank, Maruti, Kotak Bank and Sun Pharma.

Sector-wise, BSE bank, auto and finance indices rose up to 2.37 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors remained net buyers in the capital market as they purchased shares worth Rs 4,738.44 crore on Monday, according to provisional exchange data. The rupee appreciated 10 paise to close at 74.01 against the US dollar.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul ended with significant gains, while Shanghai closed in the red. Stock exchanges in Europe were trading on a mixed note in early deals. Meanwhile, Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.85 per cent to USD 46.45 per barrel.

On the other hand, HDFC, Titan, Nestle India, Bharti Airtel, ONGC and Infosys were among the laggards.

## 'DCGI will give EUA for Oxford's vax immediately after MHRA nod'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Biocon Executive Chair person Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw on Tuesday said hopefully drugs regulator DCGI will give Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) for the Oxford-AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it gets approval from the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

"100 Million Doses By January," Says Adar Poonawalla On Oxford Vaccine - hopefully DCGI will give EUA immediately after MHRA in December to start vaccination in India which is the need of the hour," Mazumdar-Shaw said in a tweet.

On Monday, Poonawalla had said that by January, Serum Institute will have 100 million doses. It already has 40 million doses.

He had also expressed happiness at pharma major AstraZeneca's announcement that its COVID-19 vaccine candidate has been found to be 70 per cent effective on average.

## \$271 bn consumer spending to shift from cash to cards, digital

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

About 66.6 billion transactions worth USD 270.7 billion are expected to shift from cash to cards and digital payments by 2023 in India, and further increase to USD 856.6 billion by 2030, a report by Accenture said on Tuesday.

This rapid shift to digital payments due to the COVID-19 pandemic is urgently increasing the need for banks to modernise their payment systems, the report, titled 'Playing the Long Game in Payments Modernisation', said.

The report is based on a survey of 120 payments executives at banks globally regarding the transformation of their payments business, as banks make multi-year investments to compete with non-bank digital-payments providers and comply with new regulations.

Conducted between July and August this year, the report surveyed markets including Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Norway, Singapore, Thailand, the UK and the US. It noted that the expected drop in cash volume is based on GlobalData and Accenture Research assumptions. Also, the forecast of non-cash transactions in con-



sumer spending is calculated using cash evolution data and MSC rates provided by GlobalData.

The report forecasted that nearly 420 billion transactions worth USD 7 trillion, globally are expected to shift from cash to cards and digital payments by 2023 - and increase to USD 48 trillion by 2030.

"In India, 66.6 billion transactions worth USD 270.7 billion are expected to shift from cash to cards and digital payments by 2023 - and increase to USD 856.6 billion by 2030," it said. The rapid move to digital payments has put additional pressure on banks, with three-quarters (75 per cent) of surveyed bank executives saying that the pandemic has

increased the urgency of their plans to modernise payment systems, the report added.

"COVID-19 has accelerated the shift to digital payments at a pace banks could not have predicted. The pandemic will permanently change how consumers shop and pay for products as they prioritise convenience above all else," Sulabh Agarwal, who leads Accenture's Payments practice globally, said.

He added that while banks' investments in new payments have focused primarily on meeting compliance deadlines, the way they will drive value moving forward is by embracing the changing consumer dynamic and improving the customer experience.

## AIBEA to join trade unions in nationwide stir tomorrow

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The All India Bank Employees' Association on Tuesday said it would be joining the one-day nationwide strike on November 26 called by central trade unions to protest against the government's anti-labour policies.

Ten central trade unions, except Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, will observe a nationwide general strike on November 26.

"Lok Sabha in its session has passed three new labour enactments by dismantling existing 27 enactments in the name of 'Ease of Business', which are in the interest of corporates. In the process, 75 per cent of workers are being pushed out of the orbits of labour laws since they will have no legal protection under the new enactment," the AIBEA said.

## German business confidence down for 2nd consecutive month

PNS ■ BERLIN

Business confidence in Germany, Europe's biggest economy, fell for a second consecutive month in November as a resurgence of coronavirus infections led to partial shutdowns across the continent, a closely watched survey showed Tuesday.

Still, the decline was smaller than economists had predicted. And official data released separately on Tuesday showed that the economy performed a bit better in the third quarter than previously reported.

The Ifo institute said that its business confidence index declined to 90.7 points from 92.5 a month earlier. Economists had forecast a drop to 90.2. The drop was driven largely by a considerable worsening of companies' expectations for the next six months. Their assessment of



their current situation was only slightly worse. Ifo's survey is based on monthly responses from about 9,000 companies in various sectors.

Germany entered a partial shutdown on Nov. 2, with restaurants, bars, leisure and sports facilities closing but nonessential shops and schools remaining open. It was originally slated to last four weeks, but federal and state officials

appear certain to extend it until shortly before Christmas on Wednesday. Although German authorities hope to start vaccinations by early in the new year, it is likely to be months before all restrictions can be dropped.

Officials are hopeful that the overall damage from the pandemic to Germany's economy and finances will be manageable.

## Sebi bans Tips4Market, proprietor for providing unauthorised trading tips

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Regulator Sebi has barred Tips4Market and its proprietor Mahesh Vaghajbhaj Ramani from the capital markets for providing unauthorised trading tips to investors.

Besides, they have been prohibited from carrying out investment advisory services till further orders.

Sebi conducted a preliminary examination and found that Tips4Market (T4M) was soliciting and inducing investors to deal in securities market on the basis of invest-



ment advice, stock tips among others, prima facie, without having the requisite registration as mandated under the IA norms.

The amount of money, prima facie, observed to have

been collected by the company was Rs 96.6 lakh from investors through such services.

By indulging in such activities, they violated the provisions of investment advisers (IA) Regulations, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in an interim order last week.

Sebi has directed T4M and its sole proprietor Ramani to "cease and desist from acting as an investment advisor" until further orders.

They have been asked to immediately withdraw and

remove all advertisements, in relation to their investment advisory activity until further orders.

Further, the regulator has prohibited them from diverting any funds raised from investors and restrained them from disposing of any assets, whether movable or immovable, including money lying in bank accounts, except with the prior permission of Sebi.

Sebi has asked them "not to access the securities market and buy, sell or otherwise deal in securities in any manner whatsoever, directly or indirectly, until further orders".

## Embassy group starts 1st co-living centre in Bengaluru; targets 100 facilities by 2021

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Embassy group, which recently entered into co-living business, on Tuesday said it has started its first centre in Bengaluru in tie up with a building owner and plans to touch 100 facilities by the end of next year through this asset-light model.

In August, Embassy Group announced its foray into the co-living segment with a planned investment of USD 500 million over the next three years to expand the business across major cities.



"We entered into the co-living business under the brand 'Olive by Embassy'. Now we are launching a sub brand 'Olive Residences' which is an asset-light model where we

will take up buildings or hotels from owners and operate it," Embassy group COO Aditya Virwani told PTI.

"We will enter into a revenue share model with building

owners," he said. Virwani said this model is more scalable and the target is to reach 100 buildings by 2021-end across major cities -- Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune and Delhi-NCR.

Under the main brand Olive, Embassy group will develop greenfield co-living facilities on its own land parcels or purchase new land.

"The pandemic has enhanced the need for flexibility, secure living and the importance of communities," Virwani said.

## FIMI to Centre: Ban export of iron pillets

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Miners' body FIMI has urged the Centre to immediately put a complete ban on illegal exports of iron ore pellets stating that such a move would help meet the domestic requirement of the key material used in making steel.

In a recent letter to Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, FIMI also made a plea to the government for urgent intervention to introduce a price monitoring and regulation mechanism for sale of steel by integrated producers so as to ensure that there is no unreasonable hike in domestic steel prices due to any increase in international iron ore prices.

"We also request you to put immediately complete ban on illegal exports of iron ore pellets by private entities other than exports by KIOCL. Such a facilitation would lead to meet the requirement of iron ore of domestic steel industry to this extent," the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries (FIMI) said.



The steel sector has been facing an acute shortage of iron ore, which is a key raw material for making steel.

"It can starkly be observed that 9 million tonnes of iron ore pellets have been exported mainly illegally by the pellet manufacturers other than KIOCL.

"Moreover, 62-64 per cent Fe (iron) is required for manufacturing of pellets. Had this illegal exports of pellets by private entities not been allowed, domestic steel industry would have met their requirement to that extent," FIMI said.

### MONEY MATTERS

#### Gold plunges Rs 1,049; silver tumbles Rs 1,588

Gold prices plunged by Rs 1,049 to Rs 48,569 per 10 gram in the national capital on Tuesday following weak global cues and rupee appreciation, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 49,618 per 10 gram. Silver also faced selling pressure as it tumbled by Rs 1,588 to Rs 59,301 per kg from Rs 60,889 per kg in the previous trade. In the international market, gold was quoting lower at USD 1,830 per ounce and silver was flat at USD 23.42 per ounce. "Gold prices traded lower in the morning trade extending decline on vaccine hopes and Biden's white house transition as US President," HDFC Securities Senior, Analyst (Commodities) Tapan Patel said.



#### Covid vaccine: India Aatmanirbhar for syringes, says industry

An industry body of syringe and needle manufacturers on Tuesday said that it has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi offering an additional capacity of over 350 million syringes per month depending upon the requirements during the vaccination programme against the COVID-19. This capacity is already built up by the manufacturers taking learning from mask and PPE kits experience India faced in March and April 2020, All India Syringe & Needle Manufacturers Association (AISNMA) said in the letter. "All the members of the association would like to assure the nation that our country is 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' on the availability of syringes and we as a country don't even have to look outside for our coming up requirements," it added.



#### Delhi ranks 27th, Mumbai 33rd as growing prime residential market

India's national capital has been ranked 27th, while Mumbai and Bengaluru were placed at the 33rd and 34th positions respectively in a global index that measures annual price appreciation of luxury residential properties, according to a Knight Frank report. Auckland in the Australasia region topped the index with 12.9 per cent price appreciation in the July-September quarter, compared to the same period last year. Manila and Shenzhen were at 2nd and 3rd positions respectively with 10.2 per cent and 8.9 per cent price rise. The property consultant on Tuesday released its Prime Global Cities Index Q3 2020 report. In the Q2 (April-June) report, Bengaluru and Delhi were at 26th and 27th positions, while Mumbai was ranked at the 32nd position.



## Rupee settles 10 ps higher at 74.1 against \$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated by 10 paise to close at 74.01 against the US dollar on Tuesday on sustained foreign fund inflows and positive development over coronavirus vaccine.

Traders said investor risk sentiment improved amid growing hopes of an early rollout and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines. Besides, strong domestic equities, sustained foreign fund inflows and weak American currency also supported the local unit.

At the interbank forex market, the domestic unit opened at 74.10 against the US dollar and then touched a high of 73.88 and a low of 74.12 in day trade. The local unit finally ended at 74.01 against the greenback, registering a rise of 10 paise over its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee had appreciated 5 paise to settle at more than two-week high of 74.11 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was down 0.32 per cent to 92.20.

## GM flips to California's side in pollution fight

PNS ■ DETROIT

General Motors is switching sides in the legal fight against California's right to set its own clean-air standards, abandoning the Trump admin as the president's term nears its close.

CEO Mary Barra said to environmental groups that GM will no longer support the

Trump administration in its defense against California's standards. And GM is urging other automakers to do the same. The move is a sign that GM and other automakers are anticipating big changes when President-elect Joe Biden takes office in January. Already at least one other large automak-

er, Toyota, said it may join GM in switching to California's team. In her letter, Barra wrote that the company agrees with Biden's plan to expand electric vehicle use. Last week, GM said it is testing a new battery chemistry that will bring down electric vehicle costs to those of gas-powered vehicles within five years.

## India's two-wheeler exports to see growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's two-wheeler exports will see sustained growth in the second half of next fiscal after witnessing temporary hurdles in the first half this year due to COVID-19 and weakened crude oil prices, hurting the economies of key exporting destinations, according to ratings agency Ind-Ra.

Exports momentum is expected to continue in the remaining part of FY21 and FY22, primarily driven by the exporting countries' lower penetration level, demand for usage as commercial fleet, stability in crude prices, lack of public infrastructure and aversion to public transport amid COVID-19, India Ratings and Research said in a statement. India exports two-wheelers



mainly to African, Asian and Latin American countries, constituting 37.5 per cent, 22.9 per cent and 21.4 per cent, respectively, during the first half of FY21, it added.

"Within this, Nigeria, Colombia, Nepal, Bangladesh and Philippines together

accounted for around 50 per cent of the total exports in FY20 (in terms of value)," the rating agency said.

Indian original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) will continue to gain traction for their key offering on the back of their strong market position

and robust distribution network, it added.

Indian two-wheeler manufacturers such as Bajaj Auto and TVS Motor Co will benefit from their exports-focused business model, with almost 49 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, of their total sales volume in the first half of FY21 coming from exports, it said.

However, Indian OEMs face tough competition, particularly from Japanese OEMs that have a strong market share globally. Though Chinese OEMs have a higher market share than Indian OEMs in the global markets, the competition is fragmented and Indian OEMs have superior quality, the agency noted.

Ind-Ra said it expects the two-wheeler (2W) exports decline for FY21 to be in line

with that of the domestic industry at 18-21 per cent.

"Since 2W exports only account for 16-18 per cent of the total 2W sales for Indian OEMs, this is not likely to be substantial enough to compensate for the domestic volumes during the same period," it added.

2W export volumes are likely to increase by mid-teens in FY22, the ratings agency said. The industry faced temporary hiccups in the first quarter of FY21 due to the COVID-19 spread as well as weakened crude oil prices, hurting the economies of key exporting destinations for India.

"This coupled with the nationwide lockdown, supply-chain and logistics disruptions impacted export sales significantly," Ind-Ra said.

## Author-readings, a delight for bookworms

**W**hat do we mean by a reading culture? Simply put, it's an environment where readings by an author are valued, promoted, and actively encouraged by avid bookworms. Paro Anand, the award-winning writer is an outgoing woman and a

spotlight lover who shines at readings. Her recent author reading of *Pure Sequence* at Goethe Zentrum shows how comfortable she is while reading out her favourite facets aloud. A platform like an author-reading is very interesting for fans who would like to meet the author, who want to

hear from them directly and have the opportunity to ask you questions in person.

A bit of an insidious performer that she is, it left a long-lasting impact on her listeners that surely convinced all of them to buy the new book!

"This is a story about older women but it is not only for older women. It is for anyone who wants to live life to the fullest. *Pure Sequence* is my homage to wonderful women and the power of friendship, especially during the advancing years. The pile of books on my bedside table is not a tottering moun-

tain but a seemly, humble little hill. At a literary fest, I like to pop into some unusual sessions where authors I may never have read before, are speaking," Paro Anand shares.

On her author-reading experience she goes on to say, "Similarly in my case, it's sometimes important to taste a story that is out of one's algorithm. What about an author whose words you've never tasted? That's why in my author readings, my blurbs

are always so impactful that it allows my book enthusiasts to stay and listen to me."

Readers are finding more creative, fun, and useful ways to stay connected during this weird time of social distancing and it seems to be fun!

A PLATFORM LIKE AN AUTHOR-READING IS VERY INTERESTING FOR FANS WHO WOULD LIKE TO MEET THE AUTHOR, WHO WANT TO HEAR FROM THEM DIRECTLY AND HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK YOU QUESTIONS IN PERSON.



## Sesame Street Muppets debut in India

**T**he iconic US children's television show *Sesame Street* has made its debut in India with the launch of new

YouTube channels in Hindi and Telugu — *Sesame Workshop*. It brings educational content featuring the colourful and furry Muppets of *Sesame Street* to children across India.

Both channels will stream a variety of content for kids aged 3-8 years and will introduce Indian kids and families to favourite global Muppet characters such as Elmo, Cookie Monster, Abby Cadabby, and many more.

Sonali Khan, Managing Director of *Sesame Workshop* — India, said, "Now more than ever, young children and families need quality early learning at home and the *Sesame Street* Muppets are here to help with the playfulness and humour for which the brand is known for around the

world. With many children remaining out of school, our new YouTube channels will bring early learning to young children at a time critical to their healthy development, all at no-cost to families and accessible at any time."

She added, "The content launching today on *Sesame Workshop* — India's YouTube channels will foster children's curiosity, learning, and healthy development, along with fun for the whole family. We know children around the world identify with *Sesame Street* Muppets in a powerful way, and we're thrilled to bring friends like Elmo, Cookie Monster, and Abby Cadabby to families across India in Telugu and Hindi."



## 'Downsizing is the new way forward'

### The battle of entertainment

The country thrives on theatrical entertainment, the moment there is an announcement of a new movie, social media and our homes are abuzz with news of it. Surely, theatres know how to woo audiences with their resonating power, exciting angles and larger-than-life visuals. I love a cinema's essence over OTT streaming because there's a certain aura created by a cinema hall.

### Ultimate portrayal

Serials show what viewers want and viewers want what the serials show! In this cycle, there has come a change of content. There is a growing demand for niche content and there is potential in the television industry. With times changing, our directors and scriptwriters are having a growing understanding of the market and the guts to present some-

thing new to the viewers. Nowadays, serials are garnering attention due to the iconic negative characters too. Many beautiful actresses are willingly playing an antagonist without being image-conscious.

The future, apparently, looks bright for television in Telangana.

### The camaraderie

A strong companionship is a must on sets. I'm affected by the way my co-actor behaves with me. I don't have any favourites, yet I can state this: that it makes a huge difference while performing with them depending on the rapport I have with them. I have had my co-actors giving me ample room to flourish, which has always in turn strengthened my

chemistry with them and increased some warmth.

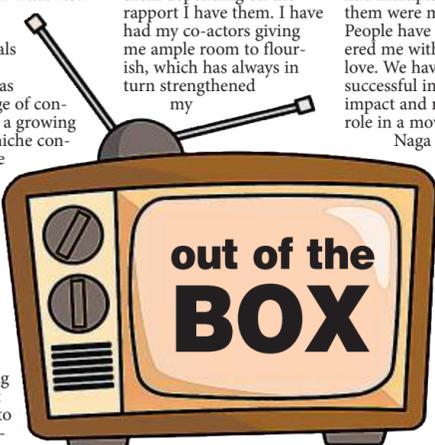
### Acting after Covid 19

For a while, the novel Coronavirus has put our professional lives on hold. Even now, multiple cancellations, postponements, or changes keep happening often, for the safety measures of cast and crew. If any of us is tests positive, the whole shooting can stop, which is scary! Downsizing is the new way forward.

### Memorable role

All my roles that have had multiple layers to them were my favourite. People have always showered me with so much love. We have always been successful in creating an impact and my upcoming role in a movie starring Naga Shaurya is going to be my new launchpad after television.

Some actors are really the star of shows, their presence is what uplifts an entire scene or pushes the story forward capturing the audience's interest. One such Telugu television actress is Poornika Saanve, whose face is the most recognised across mainstream television channels in Telugu. From playing the character of 'Chandramukhi' for Sun TV to currently being the lead actress of ETV's soap *Amma* to being the upcoming lead actress for *Guppadanta Manasu* on Star Maa, Poornika entered the world of Telugu glitz and glam through several channels. While she has aspirations to making it to movies, she's taking a detour with television shows and ad films, enjoying her projects on screen, she says, in her conversation with *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL





# Rohit, Virat's absence will leave big hole: Smith

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Star Australia batsman Steve Smith reckons Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's absence will leave a "big hole" in the Indian team but the visitors have a lot of talented players who can put their hands up in pressure situations.

Rohit, who is nursing a hamstring injury, is out of white ball series and is still doubtful starter for Test matches while skipper Kohli will be on paternity leave after the first Day/Night Test in Adelaide.

"Look, Rohit is obviously a tremendous white-ball player, he has proven that for a number of years now at the top of the order, so obviously it leaves a bit of hole," Smith said during a virtual press conference facilitated by Sony Network.

"But I guess the beauty with the Indian team is there are so many batters coming through, that are of high quality."

Smith spoke about Mayank Agarwal and KL Rahul, who were on fire during the IPL.

"You can look at someone like Mayank Agarwal in the IPL, just smashed, KL Rahul in the top order as well. There are plenty of options there for them so, look you leave a hole no doubt, but quality players there to back him up," Smith explained.

He feels that it's the same for Kohli in Test matches.

"The same (like Rohit) I think with Virat and the Test squad. You know there are a number of players who can come in and do a good job."

"Virat is of obviously of high quality, and we know how good he has been in all forms for a long period of times, so it is certainly



Rohit Sharma plays shot against New Zealand during 1st T20 match in Auckland AP/File Photo

going to leave a hole but I still do believe that they have got some quality batters waiting in the wings to fill that void."

During last India Test series in Australia, Smith was banned for ball tampering and missed out on challenging one of his favourite opposition.

Will it make him hungrier?

"I don't know if it makes me hungrier. I am always pretty hungry to go out and perform and do well. I guess it was tough watching from the sidelines and particularly with the team not doing as well," he said.

He admitted that it was difficult to see Tim Paine's boys lose the series 1-2.

"Obviously they wouldn't have liked losing that series. That was difficult to watch, that was hard but certainly look forward to this series, two of the top teams in the world going out, two quality pace and batting line ups and makes for an interesting and exciting summer."

Sledging according to Smith is over-rated in India versus Australia contests especially after all players converge during IPL and no one wants an awkward situation.

"People talk so much about sledging and stuff but really there is very little that happens in our days. I think that's probably a lot to do with things like IPL," he said.

"You know IPL brings players from all around the world together, so for instance if you get stuck in to someone one day, you might be playing with them a few weeks or few months later."

"...And then, it's a bit awkward sort of conversation, so honestly, it does not happen too much in our days."

## I think I found my hands: Smith ahead of India series

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australian batting mainstay Steve Smith on Tuesday said he has "found his hands" after a disappointing IPL campaign and is ready to torment the visiting Indian bowlers when the two sides lock horns in an eagerly-awaited showdown across formats starting November 27.

Smith, who captained Rajasthan Royals in the IPL, managed only 311 runs in 14 games and mostly looked out of touch but a couple of days back, he said he finally found his "touch" and is now ready to put his best foot forward.

"I was pretty disappointed with my batting throughout the IPL. For my sort of standards, I wasn't consistent enough. I did play a few innings here and there but not consistently," Smith said during a virtual press conference facilitated by the series' official broadcaster Sony Network.

"I think in the last few days, people who know me well, said that I have found my hands and I am excited about it. So I plan to have a few more hits at the nets and get started in a few days time," said Smith, who would be an integral part of the white-ball games also.

So when did he feel that he has got his rhythm back?

"It was about getting that feel in the way my hands come up. It's hard to explain but it probably wasn't quite being right till two days ago," Smith said.

"Then something clicked two

days ago. It changes where you meet the ball. I had that big smile on my face while training the other day. It's taken me a lot longer than usual.

"I didn't bat for four months during COVID (lockdown) so don't know if it took me a bit longer to get that rhythm back."

Smith admitted that during the IPL, trying to change his natural game affected his batting, something he realised after training with the national team.

"In IPL, I got caught up with trying to be a bit more powerful and that's not my game. There are players in the world who can hit sixes at will and I am probably not one of those."

"It is about playing the cricketing shots and manipulating the gaps available. Probably, it (natural game)

went away in the IPL from doing that. So now, I am keeping the thoughts clear that I will only hit the balls in my areas."

Ask how he has been so successful against India, he feels it's the quality of the opposition that brings the best out of him.

"I don't know. In a big series, I try and stand up and get the best out of myself. Ashes and India series are the two biggest and as an Australian cricketer, there is something inside me that comes out and I am not sure."

"I have always started the first Test well against India and that gives me a bit of rhythm throughout the rest of the series. It's something to do with that," said the man with 26 Test hundreds and 7000-plus runs.

There has been some talk about short-pitched bowling, which has also been his problem. Smith said that only someone like New Zealand's Neil Wagner, with a specific skill-set, has been an issue for him.

"You are alluding to the short pitched bowling approach that others might take. That's kind of flattering if people think that's the only way to get me out as they have exhausted all other options," he said.

He then complimented Wagner for bowling consistently in the line between his rib cage and shoulder.

"Wagner got the better of me in the last Test series. He has a set of skills that not many people can do and he does it for a long period of time while changing the pace."



## Kohli needs to set tone before leaving: Clarke

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Former Australia captain Michael Clarke has warned that India could be "smoked 4-0" in the Test series if skipper Virat Kohli does not set the tone in the white-ball games before his departure.

"These One-dayers and these Twenty20s is where Virat Kohli can really stand up and lead from the front," Clarke said on "Sky Sports Radio".

"If India don't have success in the One-dayers and the T20s, they are in deep trouble in the Test matches and they'll get smoked 4-0, in my opinion," he added.

Clarke feels that despite featuring in only one Test, the talismanic Indian skipper could still play a huge role in the outcome of the red-ball series by dominating in the limited overs game.

"I think the tone he sets with this team will play a big role when he leaves, after the first Test match."

The much talked about contest between the two best sides in the world would begin on November 27 with the ODI series-opener in Sydney.

The former World Cup-winning skipper said Jasprit Bumrah will also have a huge role in the much anticipated series, adding that the star pacer needs to bowl aggressively to put the pressure on the home side.

"Opening bowler, probably the best short-form bowler in the world at the moment but his success in Test cricket has been exceptional as well."

"He's quick, he's got a really different action, so I think he needs to set the tone and be really aggressive to the Australian batters," Clarke said.

The 39-year-old pointed out that Bumrah has been winning the duel against the formidable David Warner and also has the ability to trouble star batsman Steve Smith.

"Again, it's not just about the wickets he takes, it's how he bowls. He's got Davey Warner's measure at the moment, he's got him out a number of times."

"Even to someone like Steve Smith, he's got to use that short ball consistently and regularly, like Jofra Archer did to Steve Smith in the Ashes."

"They've (Bumrah and Kohli) got to take the Aussies on and those two players are India's best two players to be aggressive to the Australians," he added.

India's star opener Rohit Sharma and pacer Ishant Sharma will miss the first two Tests against Australia and are also doubtful for the remaining two after it was conveyed to the BCCI that the duo will require close to a month to be match fit.

The two, who are undergoing rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, are already out of contention for the limited-overs leg of the series, which begins with the ODIs on Friday.

They were kept in the Test squad for the series starting on December 17 but tough quarantine rules have made their availability uncertain.

"The NCA has given a report that both Rohit and Ishant will take at least another 3 to 4 weeks to get match fit," a Board source told PTI on Tuesday.

Rohit, while talking to PTI last week, had stated that his hamstring injury is fine now and he is only working on strength and conditioning to be battle-ready at the NCA.

Ishant, on the other hand, is recovering from a side strain. "Even if they travel now they will have 'hard quarantine' since they will travel by commercial flight. Hard quarantine means not being able to train during the 14

days like the whole team," the source said.

"So, now if only Cricket Australia can convince the government and allow them to train during quarantine," he added.

The Indian team, which landed here after the IPL earlier this month on a chartered flight, was allowed to train in quarantine as Australia battled a fresh wave of COVID-19 cases.

National coach Ravi Shastri had on Sunday stated that the two cricketers' chances of playing the Test series hinge on whether they are able to board a flight to Australia within this week.

"If you need to play in the Test series or any red-ball cricket, you've got to be on the flight in the next three or four days. If you aren't, then it's going to be tough," he had said.

## Smith will require fifth off-stump line bowling: Tendulkar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Steve Smith's unconventional technique will warrant a slightly wider line from Indian bowlers, the iconic Sachin Tendulkar said, urging the pacers to target the "fifth stump" to blunt the redoubtable batsman during the upcoming series in Australia.

Smith, who missed the last India-Australia series in 2018-19 due to a ball-tampering ban, will be itching to go out there and prove a point. He has always performed against India and has six hundreds and a 92, a statistic that won't be lost on India skipper Virat Kohli.

"Smith's technique is unconventional...Normally, we tell a bowler in Test matches to bowl on and around off-stump or may be fourth stump line. But for Smith, because he shuffles, it may be that line (of delivery) moves further away by four to five inches," Tendulkar told PTI in an interview.

"One has to aim between

(imaginary) fourth and fifth stump for Steve to nick one. It's just a mental adjustment of line, more than anything else," the former captain said.

"Smith, I read, said he is ready for the short-pitched stuff...Probably he is expecting bowlers to be aggressive upfront with him. But I think, he needs to be tested on and around that off-stump channel. Keep him on back-foot and induce that early mistake."

Can't an in-swinging yorker be more effective, considering Smith's pronounced trigger from leg to off stump?

"For that to happen, you have to see how much the ball is swinging. All those things matter. You can't

use saliva, so it's a different case, if wickets have a lot more life. In England during the Test matches, on occasions, the Dukes wouldn't be swinging much."

"I don't know if they will have greenish wickets for the ball to do a little bit. If the ball doesn't swing, that swinging yorker, you might not even see."

The Indian bowling attack comprising Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma and Umesh Yadav is a "potent one" but Tendulkar would ideally like the team management to identify a defensive bowler as well.

"As I have always said, we have one of the best and most balanced bowling attacks India has ever had. Eventually, you have to pick 20 wickets to win Test matches. But 20 wickets shouldn't be too expensive either."

"...Along with our attacking bowlers, we should also identify bowlers who can hold one end up on unresponsive pitches, bowl those continuous maiden overs to build the pressure."

## 2018 loss still grinds Paine

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Red-ball captain Tim Paine has admitted the "annoying" Test series defeat to India still "grinds" him, adding that Australia now has a better all round side which is pumped up to take on the holders of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

India had stunned Australia 2-1 to win their maiden Test series Down Under in 2018-19, which was Paine's first assignment as skipper on home soil.

The wicket-keeper batsman was handed the charge of leading the Baggy Greens after the 2018 ball-tampering incident that saw the then skipper Steve Smith and his deputy David Warner being slapped with year-long bans.

"Certainly for me sitting



back it still annoys me that we lost that Test series," Paine told 2GB's Wide World of Sports radio.

"Whether we had Steve or David or not you don't want to be losing any Test matches or Test series you're involved in, so that still grinds me a little bit," Paine added.

The 35-year-old said the every player involved in the loss has improved in the last couple of years.

"We're a much better all round side. Not just adding Steve and David back into it, which is a hell of a lot of runs to add back into a side, but I think every other cricketer in that team has improved in the

last 18 months as well and we've been playing some really good cricket."

"Whereas back then I think we were finding our way through a really challenging or different type of set up."

India had won the first and third Test at Adelaide and Melbourne respectively, while Australia claimed a victory in the second game at Perth with the final match ending in a draw.

Paine, who has led Australia to 10 Test victories in 19 outings, said the loss drives the players involved in the series to do better and even Warner and Smith are eager to show what they are

capable of.

"I know that it drives a lot of the guys that were involved in that and I certainly know Steve and David are looking forward to coming back and showing just how good they are as well."

The two teams are set to lock horns again on Australian soil in a four-Test series with the opening Day-Night game in Adelaide starting December 17.

"Everyone is absolutely pumped. The key is going to be last time we didn't get enough runs, this time, I think a few of our players have spoken about it."

"If we can make their fast bowlers bowl more overs than last time, I think our attack showed we can get the 20 wickets one way or another."

## Rohit, Ishant to miss first 2 Tests

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's star opener Rohit Sharma and pacer Ishant Sharma will miss the first two Tests against Australia and are also doubtful for the remaining two after it was conveyed to the BCCI that the duo will require close to a month to be match fit.

The two, who are undergoing rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru, are already out of contention for the limited-overs leg of the series, which begins with the ODIs on Friday.

They were kept in the Test squad for the series starting on December 17 but tough quarantine rules have made their availability uncertain.

"The NCA has given a report that both Rohit and Ishant will take at least another 3 to 4 weeks to get match fit," a Board source told PTI on Tuesday.

Rohit, while talking to PTI last week, had stated that his hamstring injury is fine now and he is only working on strength and conditioning to be battle-ready at the NCA.

Ishant, on the other hand, is recovering from a side strain. "Even if they travel now they will have 'hard quarantine' since they will travel by commercial flight. Hard quarantine means not being able to train during the 14

days like the whole team," the source said.

"So, now if only Cricket Australia can convince the government and allow them to train during quarantine," he added.

The Indian team, which landed here after the IPL earlier this month on a chartered flight, was allowed to train in quarantine as Australia battled a fresh wave of COVID-19 cases.

National coach Ravi Shastri had on Sunday stated that the two cricketers' chances of playing the Test series hinge on whether they are able to board a flight to Australia within this week.

"If you need to play in the Test series or any red-ball cricket, you've got to be on the flight in the next three or four days. If you aren't, then it's going to be tough," he had said.

international hundreds and is only behind Ricky Ponting (71) and Sachin Tendulkar (100).

He is third in the list of leading run-scorers of all time with 21,444 runs, behind Ponting (27,483) and Tendulkar (34,357).

In the past decade Kohli has amassed over 7000 runs in Tests while in the shorter formats, the Indian skipper has accumulated more than 11000 runs in ODIs and over 2600 runs in T20s.

The final winners will be decided on the basis of the number of votes a player receives.

Men's player of the decade: Virat Kohli (India) Ravichandran Ashwin (India), Joe Root (England), Kane Williamson (New Zealand), Steve Smith (Australia), AB de Villiers (South Africa), and Kumar Sangakkara (Sri Lanka).

Women's Player of the Decade: Ellyse Perry (Australia), Meg Lanning (Australia), Suzie Bates (New Zealand), Stafanie Taylor (West Indies), Mithali Raj (India), Sarah Taylor (England).

## India to play 4 Tests against Eng

PTI ■ MUMBAI

England's tour of India next year will comprise four Tests instead of the regulation five to accommodate the limited-overs series that had to be postponed earlier this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

BCCI President Sourav Ganguly confirmed the schedule for the series planned in February-March while speaking at an online event.

"England is touring India for four Test matches, three ODIs and five T20s, it is a lot easier having bi-laterals because the number of people are less," he said.

"When it gets to 8 teams, 9 teams, 10 teams, then it becomes a bit more difficult...We have to keep assessing the situation...Lot of them are talking about a second wave," he said.

The limited-overs series originally comprised three T20s and as many ODIs and was scheduled to be held in September this year but had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

The number of T20s has been increased in the revised schedule as the Board took into account the World T20 to be held in October-November next year in India.

## Virat, Ashwin in contention for Player of Decade award

PTI ■ DUBAI

The talismanic Virat Kohli and Ravichandran Ashwin were on Tuesday nominated for the coveted ICC Men's Player of the Decade Award with the Indian captain featuring in all five men's categories for his incredible run in the last 10 years.

Kohli and veteran off-spinner Ashwin are the two Indians among seven players nominated for the most prestigious award.

Besides the Indian duo, Joe Root (England), Kane Williamson (New Zealand), Steve Smith (Australia), AB de Villiers (South Africa), and Kumar Sangakkara (Sri Lanka) are the other contenders in this category.

In the Men's ODI Player of the Decade category, former India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and run-machine Rohit Sharma also found a place alongside Kohli, Lasith Malinga (Sri Lanka), Mitchell Starc (Australia), de Villiers and Sangakkara.

Kohli and Rohit also featured in the Men's T20I Player of the Decade category, which also included Rashid



Khan (Afghanistan), Imran Tahir (South Africa), Aaron Finch (Australia), Malinga and Chris Gayle (West Indies).

Kohli has also been nominated in the Men's Test Player of the Decade and ICC Spirit of Cricket Award of the Decade categories.

Besides Kohli, Dhoni also found a place in the ICC Spirit of Cricket Award of the Decade award category.

Kohli, who averages more than 50 in all formats, has already amassed 70



Ishant Sharma trains during practice session Twitter

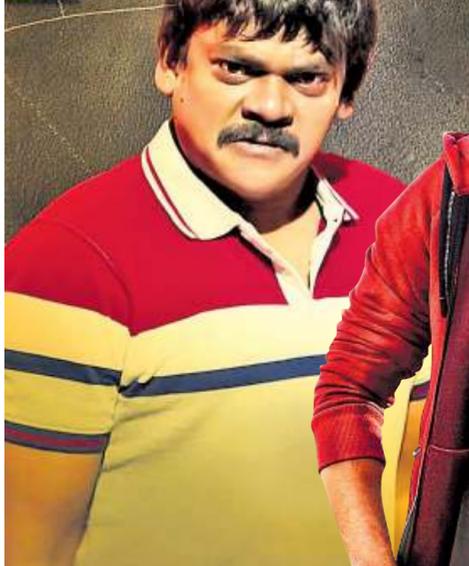
# RANA OPENS UP ABOUT HIS HEALTH ISSUES



In an interview with Samantha on her chat show *SamJam*, the actor finally ended his silence on facing severe health issues, a fact he had earlier denied

**R**ana Daggubati who appeared in Samantha Akkineni's chat show *SamJam* recently, has finally ended his silence on facing severe health issues, a fact he had earlier denied. The actor broke down as he addressed his past illness. "When life was on a fast forward, there was suddenly a pause button. There was BP, calcification around the heart and you have failed kidneys... It could have been a 70 per cent chance of stroke or haemorrhage and 30 per cent chance of death straight," Rana told Samantha. The actor, who married sweetheart Miheeka Bajaj earlier this year, had left his fans baffled as he shared a photo where he was looking extremely lean. As fans asked about his wellbeing online, the

actor had taken to Twitter to share an update about his health. "Hearing lots of strange things about my health, I'm fine guys just some BP based issues I'm addressing. Will be fixed and sorted soon," he had written, adding, "Thanks for the concern and love but don't speculate it's my health not yours :)" Rana had later told news agency IANS, "I think there was enough speculated about it and I am tired of clarifying that I am absolutely fine and healthy. So, I think rumours about my health are now a boring topic. Whenever I leave Hyderabad, people get apprehensive, but I am thankful for the love and the concern people have been showering on me." However, rumours had suggested that he was going abroad for a kidney transplant. People close to him had denied the news, chalking up his international visit to prep for an upcoming film.



## Wrong Gopal Varma to hit screens on Dec 4

**T**he film *Wrong Gopal Varma*, directed by senior journalist Prabhu, will hit screens on December 4. With music composed by Shakeel, the title song of the film has already gone viral. The film about filmmaker who once was in the top league and in the limelight for very long, also who makes controversial comments and statements has now turned a filmmaker directing obscene movies is being directed by journalist Prabhu with the name *Wrong Gopal*

*Varma*, that fiercely calls out his antics and brands him as one creating 'social pollution', the film, even before its release, is winning accolades all across. Apart from commenting on various incidents and people, the filmmaker has also courted controversy with his remarks on filmmakers and actors from the industry, earning their wrath. Prabhu's film has already stirred an interesting discussion in the news and on social media and fans and haters alike, can't wait for the film to hit the screens.

## Another milestone for Butta Bomma...

**A**la Vaikunthapurramloo, starring Telugu superstar Allu Arjun and actress Pooja Hegde, became an instant hit on release earlier this year, and the popular track of the film, *Butta Bomma*, has now garnered over 450 million views.



An excited Pooja took to Instagram stories to share the news. She posted a still from the song. It has "#BUTTABOMMA 450 Million+ views" written on it. On the image, she wrote, "This one has become unstoppable... Thank you for all the love." The song was released on Youtube in February this year. It currently has 450,913,957 views. *Ala Vaikunthapurramulo* is an action-drama directed by Trivikram Srinivas. The film also features Tabu, Jayaram, Sushanth, Navdeep, Nivetha Pethuraj, Samuthirakani, Murali Sharma, Sunil, Sachin Khedekar, and Harsha Vardhan. *Butta Bomma* had even become a blockbuster on short-video making application TikTok. Users were seen performing the superhit hook step from the number.

## Makers of *Vidyarthi* hopeful of a January release



**T**he shooting of the film *Vidyarthi*, which will have actor Chethan Cheenu and Instagram sensation Bunny Vox in lead roles has wrapped its shoot. Alla Venkat is producing the film under Mahas Films banner. With the tag line, *A Lone Fight For Love*, makers of the film are hoping to finish production works by the end of December and have a January 2021

release. Talking about the film, producer Venkat said, "The recently released teaser and a song from the film received a great response from the audience." Director Madhu Madasu added, "The film is based on true events. Everyone has a story. Every story has love. At a time when we're going as far as Mars in the field of science and technology, some people are unwilling to cross their boundaries because of untouchability. To bring people's attention to this very issue, this film is being made. We hope it'll bring about the change we want it to."

## Gopichand's *Seetimaarr* in final leg of shooting

**A**ctor Gopichand and mass Director Sampath Nandi's combinational sports action film *Seetimaarr*, being made with a backdrop of the mass game — Kabaddi, is being shot at record speed and is in its final leg of shooting. The team has released a video of erecting huge set for the film by production team. Makers of the film said that they're taking all necessary precautions and will complete the entire shoot in a non-stop schedule. Gopichand, who is struggling to get a hit, will be seen as a Kabaddi coach for the Andhra women's team and actress Tamannaah as the Telangana female team's Kabaddi coach. The first look posters of the film garnered terrific response. Presented by Pavan Kumar and Produced by Srinivasaa Chhitturi under Srinivasaa Silver Screen banner, *Seetimaarr* is being made with big budget and high technical values. Melody Brahma Mani Sharma is composing the music. Digangana Suryavanshi will be seen in a special role as a village girl while Bhumika is playing another crucial role. Posani Krishnamurli, Rao Ramesh, Rehman, and Bollywood actor Tarun Arora are playing other key roles.

## Nag impressed with *Bangarraju*?

**A**fter *Soggade Chinni Nayana*, one of the biggest hits in Akkineni Nagarjuna's career, the director of the film Kalyan Krishna Kurasala has announced a prequel titled *Bangarraju*. As the director failed to impress Nag with the script, the actor had moved on with other projects, putting *Bangarraju* on the back burner. The latest we hear is that Kalyan Krishna has finally managed to impress Nagarjuna with the final draft of *Bangarraju* and that the script has been locked. An official confirmation regarding the same is awaited. Meanwhile, Nagarjuna has completed the shooting of *Wild Dog* and he is to start the shooting of his next in the direction of Praveen Sattaru.

