



## the pioneer

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NITHYA TO  
HEADLINE A  
TELUGU WEB SERIES

Page 12

LENDERS TO CREDIT INTEREST ON  
INTEREST TO BORROWERS BY NOV 5

The Centre has informed the Supreme Court that lenders have been directed to credit in the accounts of eligible borrowers by November 5 the difference between compound interest and simple interest collected on loans of up to ₹2 crore during the RBI's loan moratorium scheme. The Ministry of Finance has said that after crediting this amount, the lending institutions would claim reimbursement from the Central government. In an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, the government has said that the ministry has issued a scheme as per which lending institutions would credit this amount in the accounts of borrowers for the 6-month loan moratorium period which was announced following the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

UNLOCK5 GUIDELINES ISSUED IN SEPT  
TO REMAIN IN FORCE TILL NOV-END

The Unlock5 guidelines that last month allowed reopening of cinema halls, swimming pools for sports training and gatherings with restrictions, will be valid till November 30, the Ministry of Home Affairs has ordered. "The MHA issued an order today to extend the guidelines for re-opening, issued on 30.09.2020, to remain in force upto 30.11.2020," a Press Information Bureau release said. The ministry, in September, had allowed resumption of cinema halls with 50 per cent occupancy, international air travel as permitted by the government and gatherings in closed spaces with 50 per cent strength, not exceeding 200 people; all these activities will function as before until further order.

FARMERS' BODIES ANNOUNCE  
NATL ROAD BLOCKADE ON NOV 5

Various farmers' outfits protesting against the new farm laws of the Centre on Tuesday announced a nationwide road blockade on November 5. At a meeting held in New Delhi, it was further decided that there shall be a complete coordination of various farmers' outfits "to spearhead the fight against three anti-farmer, anti-people farm laws and the Centre's proposed Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2020". Major farmer federations with over 500 constituent organisations, including the entire working group and state chapter representatives of the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC) and the federations led by farmer leaders Balbir Singh Rajewal of BKU (Rajewal) and Haryana BKU chief Gurman Singh, met at Delhi.

ACTRESS VIJAYASHANTHI MEETS  
KISHAN, TO JOIN BJP BEFORE NOV 10

TPCC campaign committee chairperson Vijayashanthi is likely to join the Bharatiya Janata Party before November 10. According to sources, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy held discussions in this regard with Vijayashanthi at her residence on Monday. Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar also met her at her residence a few days ago, it is learnt. Vijayashanthi has not been taking active part in TPCC activities since the party's drubbing in the Assembly elections. She has confined herself to issuing statements, including those praising the Modi government.



Diversified  
product portfolio  
to reduce virus  
slowdown impact  
on chemical  
players: Icr

8



Arts can create  
climate of  
sensitivity

5



While parties play  
game of  
one-upmanship,  
Polavaram suffers

2

## TODAY

## ALMANAC

Month &amp; Paksham:

Ashwin &amp; Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi: Dwadashi: 12:53 pm

Nakshatram: Purva Bhadrapada: 09:11 am

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start

any important work)

Rahukalam: 11:59 am - 01:25 pm

Yamagandam: 07:42 am - 09:08 am

Varjyam: 07:54 pm - 09:42 pm

Gulika: 10:33 am - 11:59 am

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: NIL

Abhijit Muhurtham: NIL

VIJAYAWADA  
WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 32/23

Humidity: 67%

Sunrise: 06:13 am

Sunset: 05:46 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated October 27, 2020 5:00 PM

Jagan prevails, Centre to  
bear R&R cost of Polavaram

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

If well placed sources are to be believed, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has 'more or less' sorted out the confusion that had crept in, inadvertently, over who would pay for the resettlement and rehabilitation of the Polavaram irrigation project displaced, by vigorously pursuing the issue with the Centre.

According to the sources, Jagan has been given 'concrete assurance' by the Jal Shakti Ministry that Andhra Pradesh will not be burdened with the cost of resettling and rehabilitating the people displaced by the project. 'in principle' and the Centre will honour the promise made in the AP Reorganisation Act-2014.

In a reply to an RTI query, received on October 20, by one Saurabh Khamar of Vijayawada that was made public on Monday, the Centre skipped mention of the rehabilitation and resettlement cost, leading to confusion that it would release funds only for the execution of the irrigation component of the project.

In its reply to the RTI query, the Ministry of Jal Shakti said



that so far, Rs 8,614.16 have been released for the project since 2015. While the Centre gave Rs 950 crore for the project on its own, NABARD released Rs 7,664.16 crore, it had said.

"Not just this past week, but right from the day he has taken charge as the Chief Minister, Jagan has been pursuing the matter regarding Polavaram construction and its completion with the Centre. The absence of R&R component in the response to the RTI query may have been inadver-

tent, especially since the question was precise and so was the answer too," the source said.

The RTI reply said that only 41.05 per cent of the Polavaram project, identified as the national project, has been completed so far.

At a review meeting on Saturday, Jagan had expressed wonder at the Ministry of Finance approving the Revised Cost Estimate for the irrigation component of the Polavaram Project at Rs 20,398.61 crore.

Sources said that off the record, Jagan had told his

Cabinet colleagues that he was seized of the matter and was confident of getting every paisa due to the State from the Centre. He also told them that they need not worry about the fact expenditure incurred on land acquisition and resettlement and rehabilitation itself was around Rs 29,000 crore, as approved by the Polavaram Project Authority, the Central Water Commission and the Ministry of Jal Shakti, the Centre had calculated the revised cost at Rs 20,398.61 crore.

2

India, US ink defence pact  
BECA with eyes on China

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

China's military belligerence in eastern Ladakh and Indo-Pacific region figured prominently during the third edition of the 2+2 strategic dialogue between India and the US with Washington strongly affirming that it stands firmly with New Delhi in its efforts to defend sovereignty as the two sides vowed to ramp up their security ties, and inked the strategic defence pact, BECA.

During the high-level dialogue, which was led by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar from the Indian side and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary Mark T Esper from the US side, the two countries also denounced the use of terrorist proxies and asked Pakistan to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of all terror attacks, including 26/11 Mumbai, Uri, and Pathankot. Both sides were assisted by



their top military and security officials.

In a blunt criticism of China, Pompeo, cited killing of 20 Indian Army personnel in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh in a clash with the Chinese military, and asserted that both India and the US are taking steps to strengthen cooperation against all threats and not just those posed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Top government sources said China's "expansionist behaviour" in eastern Ladakh and in various parts of the world was a major talking

point during the meeting with both sides vowing to firmly confront the challenges in the region and beyond as part of their common vision and shared interests.

"This morning we visited the national war memorial to honour the brave men and women of the Indian Armed forces who sacrificed for the world's largest democracy including the 20 soldiers who were killed by the PLA forces in Galwan Valley in June," Pompeo said at a joint media briefing with Jaishankar, Singh and Esper.

2

Economy reviving,  
but GDP growth to  
be negative: FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said there were visible signs of revival in the economy but the GDP growth may be in the negative zone or near zero in the current fiscal.

She said the economy saw a contraction in the April-June quarter, but demand has picked up in the festival season.

Sitharaman was speaking at the India Energy Forum of CERAWeek.

2

## Quizzed, FB India policy head quits days later

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Facebook executive Ankhi Das, whose name came up in a recent controversy over alleged bias by the social networking giant in dealing with hate speeches, has resigned from the company.

A statement by Ajith Mohan, Facebook India MD, said: "Ankhi has decided to step down from her role in Facebook to pursue her interest in public service. Ankhi was one of our earliest employees in India and played an instrumental role in the growth of the com-

pany and its services over the last nine years. She has been a part of my leadership team over the last two years, a role in which she has made enormous contributions. We are grateful for her service and wish her the very best."

Ankhi Das' resignation

comes weeks after both the company and she faced questions — both internally from employees and from the Indian government — over how political content is regulated on the popular social media platform, which boasts over 300 million users in the country.

2

## Kinetic to invest Rs 1,750 cr in AP on EV project

■ Firm plans facility for electric golf carts, battery swapping centres as part of joint venture with Tonino Lamborghini

PNS ■ MUMBAI

EV maker Kinetic Green is looking to set up a manufacturing facility for electric golf carts besides a battery swapping unit at an investment of Rs 1,750 crore in Andhra Pradesh, a top company official said.

Soon after Kinetic announced the news, YSRC general secretary V Vijayasai Reddy took to twitter, saying: "One more mega investment in AP. Luxury automobile manufacturer Lamborghini has come



forward to manufacture electric vehicles in Andhra Pradesh with an estimated investment

of Rs 1,750 crore. AP is the preferred destination for investments in India, under our CM

YS Jagan (sic)". Kinetic Green Energy & Power Solutions, which is a part of the Pune-based Kinetic Group, had in February 2018 announced setting up of a joint venture with Tonino Lamborghini in India for design and manufacture of premium segment golf carts and other electric off-road vehicles.

"We are exploring the possibility of setting up a unit in SEZ for the golf cart project. It is in the proposal phase. It is a

combination of a unit in SEZ and we are also looking at investment in setting up battery swapping (infrastructure) to promote electric three-wheelers irrespective of the brand," Kinetic Green founder and CEO Sulajja Firodia Motwani told PTI in an interaction.

She said the company has submitted a proposal to the Andhra Pradesh government, and it is awaiting the government's response.

2

Covid declining in India,  
except in '2 to 3' states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Covid-19 pandemic in India is showing a declining trend, except for two to three states, the government said on Tuesday, noting that it is "particularly noteworthy" vis-a-vis some countries in the northern hemisphere where a severe increase in the intensity of the virus' spread is being seen.

The situation related to the pandemic in the world is particularly concerning and it

has been seen that countries of much greater economic capability and per capita income, and having a good health system can succumb to a huge second peak, chairperson of the National Task Force on Covid-19, VK Paul, said.

"We are very fortunate that our trend is in the opposite direction. We are fortunate that today we are showing a decline of the (Covid-19) pandemic, except in two or three states," Paul said.

2



# While parties play game of one-upmanship, Polavaram suffers

While people wait eagerly for the completion of the Polavaram irrigation project, the 'lifeline of AP' is caught in the political blame game.



Centre to curtail the project's estimates to merely Rs 20,398 crore is being seen as another speed bump in the project's completion.

Being a lower riparian state of River Godavari, AP has nearly 1,000 tmc ft at its disposal and nobody would object to its utilisation.

This is what makes Polavaram such a potent tool — if leaders can draw political mileage from the project, they can reap dividends for decades. This is also why the project is being deliberately dragged into controversy by political forces out to score over their rivals.

Be it the ruling party or the opposition, each side holds its rival responsible for the tardy progress of the project.

The sudden move of the

The previous TDP regime had grandiosely announced, after completion of the Pattiseema project, that it would complete Polavaram by 2019. In fact, former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had concentrated on Pattiseema as water would flow through project canal.

Polavaram canal was completed by the YSR regime earlier, but it came in handy for Naidu to bring Godavari water to Krishna delta as part of stabilisation of ayacut.

The YSR government had to face allegations that it took up work on Polavaram canal instead of initiating the con-

**AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan hails form Odisha and had opposed Polavaram project on the floor of the Lok Sabha. Almost certainly, the Centre would have taken his views before its 'calculated clarification' on the Polavaram cost revision**

struction of the main project only with an intention of getting kickbacks. There is no doubt that Naidu gained politically from YSR's decision.

Politics over the project continued — each politician worth his salt blaming his rival for the tardy pace of works.

Then like a bolt from the blue, came the Centre's 'calculated clarification' on the cost

estimates, leading to a war of words between the YSRCP and TDP.

This was expected, but very few have paused to understand the reason behind the Centre's move.

If the entire situation is seen from a political angle, it's only the BJP that would gain with this move.

It goes without saying that the BJP wants to expand its



M D RATNA KUMAR  
Senior Journalist

base in AP, but its immediate priority is coming to power in Odisha.

Odisha is opposing the Polavaram project along with Telangana, the upper riparian state. In fact, TS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao met

his Odisha counterpart in Bhubaneswar and discussed the submergence of tribal habitations and vast tracts of forest lands in their respective states due to Polavaram.

The BJP does fancy its chances of storming to power in Odisha by trouncing the ruling BJD that faces anti-incumbency.

Moreover AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan hails form Odisha and had opposed Polavaram project on the floor of the Lok Sabha. Almost certainly, the Centre would have taken his views before its 'calculated clarification' on the Polavaram cost revision.

While it's true Naidu's failure to complete Polavaram despite being in power from 1995 to 2004 and then from 2014 to 2019 did hurt the TDP politically, what was most

damaging was the fact he is unable to clearly tell the people the reasons for the delay.

Likewise, delay by Jagan in completing the project within a specific time-frame will undoubtedly hurt the YSRCP politically. The YSRCP government is in a bind, since it cannot go into agitational mode and get the required funds for Polavaram. Jagan has already written to the Centre, objecting to the downscaling of estimates but would a mere letter serve any purpose?

While he asked the Centre why its imposing conditions on the AP government to get the incurred expenses of Rs 2,000-plus crore, Jagan may face political ramifications if he cannot get the desired results from the Modi dispensation.

The YSRCP has 22 MPs (plus a rebel) in the Lok Sabha — a sizable number in a coali-

tion era, but meaningless when the ruling party has a majority of its own.

Naidu and Karunanidhi had literally toyed with the Vajpayee regime and got almost everything they wanted for their respective states. But for Jagan, convincing Modi is an uphill task.

The YSRCP's unconditional support to Modi government on crucial Bills recently had given rise to speculations that Jagan may join the NDA.

However, in light of the latest blow from the Centre in the form of revised estimates of the Polavaram, such a move now may prove to be suicidal.

At the end of the day, it's unfortunate that everything that has got to do with Polavaram gets a political colour, and the interests of the state are relegated to the back-ground.

## SC notice to TDP over legality of its party head office

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Supreme Court on Tuesday gave three weeks to the Telugu Desam Party to file a counter on the construction of the party's state head office at Mangalagiri in violation of environmental norms.

A division bench of the apex court, comprising Justice Rohinton F Nariman, Justice Navin Sinha and Justice Krishna Murari, also served notices to the Andhra Pradesh government and erstwhile AP Capital Region Development Authority to file their counters and adjourned the hearing for three weeks.

The SC bench was hearing a



petition filed by YSRCP MLA Alla Ramakrishna Reddy challenging an order of the High Court which struck down his petition questioning the allotment of land for the TDP

office at Mangalagiri in Guntur district in violation of environmental regulations.

Senior counsels Prashant Bhushan and Ramesh, appearing on behalf of Ramakrishna

Reddy, said the previous government had issued a GO (No 228 dated June 22, 2017), allocating 3.65 acres of land belonging to Vagu Poramboku under Atmakuru on lease for 99 years for the construction of the TDP office.

Counsels submitted that permission was given for constructions against the rules, which is illegal and unconstitutional and against the rules of law already laid down by the Supreme Court and the High Court.

They said the regulations were violated despite the ban on allocating water resources and lands associated with them.

## Economy reviving, but GDP growth to be negative: FM

Continued from Page 1

She said that infrastructure, Fintech and all employment generating and asset creating industries would be priority sectors for the government.

Sitharaman further said recent data indicates revival in the economy, with PMI number being the highest since 2012.

"Which sort of indicates that the revival is there which is going to be steady and sustainable revival. If that sustainable revival is going to happen between quarter three and quarter four, we expect that the overall GDP growth... (is) going to be in the negative or near zero this time," she said.

India will regain the tag of the fastest growing major economy next year, she asserted. The Indian economy had contracted by a huge 23.9 per cent in the April-June quarter, hit by the Covid-19 crisis.

## TTD staff take oath to observe probity as Vigilance Week starts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TTD Executive officer KS Jawahar Reddy on Tuesday morning inaugurated the Vigilance Week celebrations, an event that is celebrated across the country at the behest of the Central Vigilance Commission to highlight the campaign for promoting national integrity, vigilance awareness and against corruption in public life.

As part of the celebrations and under the leadership of CVSO Sri Gopinath Jatti, a pledge was sworn by all TTD staff and officers to adhere to moral practices of fighting corruption, transparency and service orientation, national integrity and vigilance awareness in public life.

It may be mentioned here that the birth anniversary of Iron Man of India Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is observed as the Vigilance Week across the country.



TTD additional EO AV Dharma Reddy, JEOs Sr P Basant Kumar, Sada Bhargavi, CE Ramesh Reddy, additional CVSO Shivkumar Reddy, VGOs Bali Reddy and Manohar were present.

Meanwhile the TTD authorities released the schedule of festivals at Srivari temple, Tirumala for November.

On November 14 - Deepavali Asthanam, November 18- Nagula chavati,

November 20 - Ankurapnam for annual Pushpayagm, November 21 - Srivari annual Pushpa Yagam, November 25 - Smarta Ekadasi, November 26 - Madhva Ekadasi, Kshirabdi Dwadasi, Chaturmasa Vartulu sampti and Chakra thirtha Mukkoti, November 27 - Kaishika dwadasi Asthanam and on November 30 - Karthika Deepam and Thirumangai Sattumora.

## Outsiders now allowed to...

Continued from Page 1

Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir Manoj Sinha clarified that the new law does not apply to agricultural land.

"I want to say this forcefully and with full responsibility that agricultural land has been kept reserved for farmers; no outsider will come on those lands," said the Lieutenant-Governor.

"The industrial areas that we have defined — we want that like the rest of the country, industries too come here so that Jammu and Kashmir also develops and employment is generated," he said at a press conference.

The move, however, set off a stream of protests from the local political parties.

"Unacceptable amendments to the land ownership laws of JK. Even the tokenism of domicile has been done away with when purchasing non agricultural land and transfer of agricultural land has been made easier. JK is now up for sale and poorer small land holding owners will suffer," former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah tweeted.

## India, US ink defence pact...

Continued from Page 1

"The US will stand with people of India to confront threats to their sovereignty and their liberty," he added.

In the talks, which were held just a week before the US presidential elections, the two countries inked a total of five agreements including the long-negotiated Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) that will allow sharing of high-end military technology, classified satellite data and critical information between their militaries.

The US Secretary of State also said that the challenge of defeating the coronavirus pandemic that came from Wuhan figured in the "robust discussions" about the Chinese Community Party.

"Our leaders and our citizens see with increasing clarity that the CCP is no friend to democracy, the rule of law transparency...I am glad to say that the US and India are taking steps to strengthen our cooperation against all manner of threats and not just those posed by the Chinese communist party," Pompeo said.

A joint statement issued after the talks said the two sides also denounced the use of terrorist proxies and asked Pakistan to take immediate, sustained and irreversible action to ensure that no territory under its con-

trol is used for terrorist attacks, and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of all such attacks, including 26/11 Mumbai, Uri, and Pathankot.

"They emphasised the need for concerted action against all terrorist networks, including al-Qaeda, ISIS/Daesh, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Hizb-ul-Mujahideen," it said.

At the press conference, US Defence Esper said the US stands "shoulder-to-shoulder" in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific for all, particularly in view of "increasing aggression and destabilising activities" by China, and noted that the bilateral defence cooperation is continuing to grow.

"I am pleased to report that today we made substantial progress in further strengthening our relationship," he said.

Esper said the US reaffirmed its commitment to a comprehensive and forward looking defence partnership with India which includes bilateral defence cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region, South East Asia and in the broader Indo-Pacific.

In his remarks, Defence Minister Singh said both sides shared assessment of the security situation across the Indo-Pacific, and reaffirmed commitment to peace, stability and prosperity of all countries in this region. "We also agreed that

upholding the rules-based international order, respecting the rule of law and freedom of navigation in the international seas and upholding the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states are essential," Singh said. On his part, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar said the Indo-Pacific region was a "particular focus of our talks", adding a "multi-polar world must have a multi-polar Asia as its basis", comments seen as a clear articulation of India's position that China's dominance is not acceptable to it.

"We reiterated the importance of peace, stability and prosperity for all countries in this region. As Raksha Mantri stated, this is possible only by upholding the rules-based international order, ensuring the freedom of navigation in the international seas, promoting open connectivity and respecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states," Jaishankar said.

The external affairs minister said the discussions also covered developments in India's neighbouring countries.

"We made clear that cross-border terrorism is completely unacceptable. In Afghanistan, India's stakes in its security and stability are evident, as is our willingness to contribute to international efforts to that end," he said.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The number of coronavirus cases reported in India in a span of 24 hours dropped below 40,000 after over three months, while the new fatalities registered during the same period remained under 500 for the second consecutive day, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

India's Covid-19 caseload mounted to 79,46,429, with 36,470 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll climbed to 1,19,502 with 488 new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

A total of 72,01,070 people have recuperated from Covid-



19 so far, pushing the national recovery rate to 90.62 per cent while the case fatality rate stands at 1.50 per cent.

The number of active cases of coronavirus infection has

remained below 7 lakh for five days in a row.

There are 6,25,857 active cases of coronavirus infection in the country as on date, which comprises 7.88 per cent

of the total caseload, the data stated.

India's Covid-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 30 lakh on August 23 and 40 lakh on September 5. It went past 50 lakh on September 16, the 60-lakh mark on September 28 and crossed 70 lakh on October 11.

According to ICMR, a cumulative total of 10,44,20,894 samples have been tested up to October 26 with 9,58,116 samples being tested on Monday.

The 488 new fatalities include 84 from Maharashtra, 59 from West Bengal, 54 from Delhi, 43 from Chhattisgarh, 42 from Karnataka and 32 from Tamil Nadu.

the cost of irrigation component in Revised Cost Estimate shall be construed as approved by Polavaram Project Authority at Rs 20,398.61 crore as on April 1, 2014 which the Finance Ministry asked PPA to confirm.

The State Government has been emphatic that since the Polavaram project has been declared a National project, it is the responsibility of the Centre to complete the project as per the AP Reorganisation Act.

## Kinetic to invest Rs 1,750 cr...

Continued from Page 1

Motwani said the two projects — setting up a manufacturing facility for electric golf carts and a battery swapping unit — entail an investment of Rs 1,750 crore.

"For Lamborghini, we are looking to set up a plant in SEZ because that will allow us to have an attractive export opportunity," she said adding that separately the company is looking at setting up a battery swapping unit for three-wheelers. "We are looking at these opportunities as part of

our proposal," Motwani added. She said Andhra Pradesh is the largest three-wheeler market in the country but only for the high-speed three-wheelers. "There is no e-rickshaw market there. So, if you have to penetrate in the high-speed market you have to have battery swapping (facility) because then the vehicle becomes very attractive."

Kinetic Green plans to set up the battery swapping infrastructure in the key cities of Andhra Pradesh so that three-wheelers can be sold in a large number, Motwani said.

## Covid declining in...

Continued from Page 1

This decline is particularly noteworthy because in other countries of the northern hemisphere there is a severe increase in the intensity of pandemic," he said.

The pandemic, largely in the northern hemisphere, has struck again in several countries. The third peak has come in the US, Paul said, adding that "becoming a bit lax ... slowing down surveillance, containment strategies also must be playing a role".

He said that Kerala, West Bengal and Delhi are proceeding towards a third peak.

This is a matter of concern and there can be no complacency in following Covid-19 "appropriate behaviour" in the coming times as more challenges will emerge, Paul said.

More festivals are coming and "wherever we have faltered in the last few days, it will show in 10 to 12 days," he said.

Secretary in the health ministry, Rajesh Bhushan, said that it has been observed that states and union territories like Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Delhi.

Fifty-eight per cent new Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours were reported from Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka, he said.

Delhi have reported rise in cases during the festival season.

"It is mandatory for all of us to follow Covid-19 appropriate behaviour in the festival season," he said.

Continuous decline in average daily new coronavirus cases has been observed and the figure has come down from 83,232 between September 23-29 to 49,909 for October 21-27, Bhushan said.

"India's Covid-19 case fatality rate has declined from 1.77 per cent on September 1 to 1.50 per cent as on date. India's Covid-19 recovery rate has increased from 76.94 per cent on September 1 to 90.62 per cent as on date," he said.

Bhushan also said that 49.4 per cent of new Covid-19 cases in the last 24 hours were reported from five states and union territories, which are Kerala, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Delhi.

Fifty-eight per cent new Covid-19 deaths in the last 24 hours were reported from Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Karnataka, he said.

## AP's tally rises to 8.11 lakh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Covid-19 tally in Andhra Pradesh rose to 8,11,825 as 2,901 more cases were reported on Tuesday.

The latest bulletin said 4,352 people got cured in 24 hours ending 9 am on Tuesday, taking the total recoveries to 7,77,900. The number of active cases in the state now declined to 27,300, the bulletin said.

Another 19 coronavirus patients succumbed, increasing the overall death toll in the state to 6,625.

West Godavari, one of the worst hit in the state, added 555 more cases, followed by East Godavari with 464. Krishna has remained another worrisome district where 411 new cases

were reported.

Guntur added 385, Chittoor 272, Prakasam and Anantapur 153 each, Kadapa 127 and Visakhapatnam 106 more cases. SPS Nellore (76), Srikakulam (73), Vizianagaram (71) and Kurnool (55) reported new cases of less than 100 each. In terms of active cases, SPS Nellore has the lowest 262, followed by Vizianagaram 345 and Kurnool 519.

All other districts in the state have more than 1,000 active cases each, with East Godavari having the highest 4,931 and West 3,923.

After 76.96 lakh sample tests, the overall infection positivity rate in the state slipped to 10.55 per cent while the recovery rate rose to 95.82 per cent.



## Beggar stoned to death for not paying loan

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a barbaric incident, a 40-year-old-man was murdered by four persons near RTC Complex under Two-Town Police Station limits in Vizag city on Monday night. The deceased was identified as G Appala Naidu, a beggar, who resided near RTC Complex in the city.

Police said that Naidu had taken a loan of Rs 3,000 from four persons, who were involved in petty trade in the city. When Naidu was asked to repay the amount, he denied repaying the amount citing several reasons. On Monday night, the four persons allegedly under the influence of the liquor argued with Naidu over the delay of payment.

In a fit of rage, the four persons beat Naidu with a cement brick to death. The accused fled the spot after committing the crime. Police are suspecting that the accused belong to Seethammadhara locality in the city. Locals rushed the injured to the nearby hospital but the doctors declared him dead.

# Sirimanotsavam held sans crowd in Vizianagaram

PNS ■ VIZIANAGARAM

The annual Sirimanotsavam of presiding deity of Vizianagaram, Sri Pydithalli Ammavaru, was a low-key affair without the usual congregation of devotees in north Andhra on Tuesday. Normally, over three lakh devotees from various districts of north Andhra such as Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and parts of south Odisha visit the festival in Vizianagaram to seek the blessings of the presiding deity. However, this year the festival was held with over 5,000 devotees owing to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As per schedule, the procession of Sirimanu was started at around 3.35 pm at Chaduru Gudi of Pydithalli and moved slowly towards the fort. The chief priest of the temple, Bantupalli Venkata Rao, was perched on top of a 35-foot-high pole (Sirimanu) and paraded from the temple to the



Chief priest Bantupalli Venkata Rao perched on top of a 35-foot-high pole (Sirimanu) during Sirimanotsavam in Vizianagaram on Tuesday

fort three times before returning to the temple.

Speaker Tammineni Sitaram, Minister for Municipal Administration Botsa Satyanarayana and several political leaders offered prayers to Goddess in the morning session. Pujas were performed at the Pydithallamma temple and devotees sought Her blessings. Vizianagaram police chief B



A procession being taken out as part of celebrations

Speaker Tammineni Sitaram, Minister for Municipal Administration Botsa Satyanarayana and several political leaders offered prayers to Goddess

Normally, over three lakh devotees from Visakhapatnam, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and parts of south Odisha visit the festival to seek the blessings of the presiding deity. However, this year the festival was held with over 5,000 devotees owing to the Covid-19 pandemic

Raja Kumari deployed over 3,000 police personnel at various locations in Vizianagaram town to prevent the entry of devotees during the Sirimanotsavam to prevent the possible spread of the virus.

## Polavaram hit a roadblock due to CM's inefficiency: TDP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The future generations would have better opportunities only if the prestigious projects like Polavaram and Amaravati capital city were completed successfully, asserted TDP State president K Atchannaidu. He deplored that both these landmark projects were being destroyed by the government due to irresponsible and crude politics of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

Stating that the YSRCP regime was responsible for the present crisis here on Tuesday, Atchannaidu demanded that the Chief Minister explain to the people what he had achieved with his Delhi tours. He alleged that it was because of the inefficiency of the Chief Minister that the Polavaram project has hit a roadblock now. He alleged



that Jagan was going in a reverse direction only to spoil the projects launched by TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu. He recalled how their government in the past expedited the Polavaram works and completed the same up to 71 per cent. He deplored that but now, the YSRCP regime's misplaced policies pushed the future of this all important project into uncertainty and darkness. He refuted the allegations of Minister for Irrigation Anil

**Stating that the YSRCP regime was responsible for the present crisis, Atchannaidu demanded that the Chief Minister explain to the people what he had achieved with his Delhi tours**

Kumar Yadav on the Polavaram project and claimed that the estimated cost of Rs 55,000 crore was announced and approved in the Rajya Sabha.

## Naidu plays police, demands release of TDP leaders

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday demanded that the Chittoor district Superintendent of Police release the TDP leaders, who were arrested, despite staging a peaceful protest observing the Coronavirus guidelines in Kuppam Assembly constituency. He stressed the need for the police to act in an unbiased and non-partisan manner in order to protect the constitutional rights of all sections of people.

In a letter to the SP on Tuesday, Naidu said that water is a right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution and the TDP leaders were only protesting for this right to the people.

The Handri Neeva Sujala Sravanthi (HNSS), along with Galeru Nagari Sujala Sravanthi (GNSS), have been envisaged as the elixir of Rayalseema region. Naidu recalled that the Supreme Court in many judgments has made it clear that the



right to water is a fundamental right and is an integral part of right to life as guaranteed under Article 21. It is for this water, that people in and around Kuppam are trying to draw the attention of the government through peaceful protest by following the Covid norms.

The TDP chief said that Article 19 (1) (b) of the Constitution guarantees people the right to assemble peacefully without arms. However, the police in Kuppam Assembly constituency are violating this by selectively detaining the

The TDP chief said that Article 19 (1) (b) of the Constitution guarantees people the right to assemble peacefully without arms

The detentions and house arrests of TDP leaders and cadre, along with the general public, are illegal. It is pertinent to prevent such unconstitutional and undemocratic arrests, he demanded

TDP leaders and cadre. Dissent is the cornerstone of democracy and it is through peaceful protests that our forefathers have achieved independence from the British rule. The detentions and house arrests of TDP leaders and cadre, along with the general public, are illegal. It is pertinent to prevent such unconstitutional and undemocratic arrests.

## Silver biscuits for Goddess Durga

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A devotee from Visakhapatnam offered nine silver biscuits to Sri Durgamalleswara Swamivarla Devastanam atop Indrakeeladri on Tuesday. The donor, A Gautam Nanda Vijaya Bhargav, from Siddhartha Nagar, Visakhapatnam, presented

nine silver biscuits weighing 4,126 grams. The donor visited the temple and met temple Executive Officer MV Suresh Babu and handed over the silver biscuits to him. Later, the temple authorities ensured special darshan of the Goddess to the donor family members on the occasion. They were given a Goddess Durga portrait and prasadam.



A devotee from Visakhapatnam hands over nine silver biscuits to Executive Officer MV Suresh Babu at Durga temple in Vijayawada on Tuesday

### ROJA OFFERS PRAYERS AT DURGA TEMPLE



APIIC Chairman RK Roja had darshan of Goddess Kanakadurga in Vijayawada on Tuesday. She was accorded a warm welcome by the temple authorities

## Nani ridicules Lokesh for tractor ride

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Civil Supplies Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao (Nani) ridiculed TDP National General Secretary Nara Lokesh for meeting with a freak mishap while driving a tractor on Monday. The Minister questioned Lokesh's timing of the visit to flood-affected areas for consoling farmers.

He stated that TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu is sending his son Lokesh for meeting the people in order to promote him as the heir of the TDP.

The minister advised the TDP leaders to quit the party as Lokesh is incapable of handling the TDP affairs.

He said that Lokesh's over-action by trying to drive a tractor and narrowly escaping from being drowned in a canal at Siddhapuram village in West Godavari district has not brought him any sympathy, instead, he was ridiculed.

Giving a piece of advice to the TDP leaders, Nani said that as Lokesh could not run the tractor properly, he would also sink the TDP.

## 30 diploma engineers to undergo training

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) in association with Alstom has begun imparting training to the first batch of diploma engineers at the APSSDC Training Centre in Sri City. Under the Skill AP initiative by the government, this programme will train 30 diploma engineers and make them industry ready. The launch of the pilot batch was attended by Anantha Ramu, Special Chief Secretary, Department of Skill Development Centre, KV

Chakradhar Babu, Collector and District Magistrate, Nellore district, Challa Madusudhan Reddy, Chairman APSSDC, Arja Srikanth, IRTS, MD & CEO APSSDC, and Vijay Subramanian, Site MD-Alstom, Sri City.

Speaking on the occasion, Alain Spohr, Managing Director, Alstom, said: "We have the state-of-the-art rolling stock manufacturing facility at Sri City where technically advanced metro train sets are being developed for Indian and international customers."



Officials going around APSSDC Training Centre in Sri City

## Virtual Arjita Sevas on trial basis from Nov

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a major devotee-friendly move, TTD has decided to resume a few more Srivari Arjita Sevas through virtual platform in November upon the request of devotees on an experimental basis on the lines of virtual Kalyanotsava Seva, which is already in vogue since August 7.

Among the Sevas slotted for the virtual platform are Arjita Brahmotsavam, Dolotsavam and Sahasra Deepalankara Seva through a virtual platform. The devotees, who book the online tickets for these Arjita Sevas, will have to purchase Rs 300 special darshan tickets separately online to have darshan, which they could avail within 90 days from their Seva date.

As the Covid impact has now shown signs of a gradual reduction in the State and as well in Tirumala, TTD has decided to conduct the Sahasra Deepalankara Seva outside the Srivari temple on an experimental basis upon the request of devotees.

After the Seva, the utsava idols of Sri Malayappa Swamy and His consorts will be paraded on the four Mada streets before they are brought back inside the Srivari temple. All the virtual Arjita Sevas will be telecast live on SVBC.

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## Durga temple earns Rs 4.36 cr during Navaratri celebrations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kanakadurga temple has earned Rs 4.36 crore during the Dasara Navaratri celebrations through online, current ticket sales, laddu, saree sales and various special pujas, disclosed Trust Board chairman P Somi Naidu.

Addressing the media here on Tuesday, the chairman said that Navaratri celebrations were conducted on a grand note peacefully following the Covid guidelines. In the wake of Covid restrictions, the regular and Bhavani devotees cooperated with the temple authorities during the celebrations. He thanked the authorities for their cooperation for the peaceful conduct of Dasara festivities.

He informed that 85,000 devotees booked the darshan slot online, however, 35,000 devotees could make it to the darshan. A current ticket booking counter was set up for dar-



Kanakadurga Temple Trust Board chairman P Somi Naidu addresses a press conference in Vijayawada on Tuesday

shan and about two lakh devotees had darshan of Goddess. He said Minister for Endowments Velampalli Srinivas instructed the officials concerned to prepare estimates for the development of the temple at the earliest.

Executive Officer MV Suresh Babu said that facilities were provided during the Navaratri

celebrations for the convenience of the devotees.

The temple authorities are encouraging an online system for darshan of Goddess Kanakadurga. They have been insisting devotees to book their darshan online and appealed to Bhavani devotees to book their slot online for hassle free darshan.

## Preventive vigilance a tool to curb graft: DCIL MD

VPT, DCIL, NTPK and RINL observe Vigilance Awareness Week

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Employees and stakeholders of Visakhapatnam Port Trust and Dredging Corporation of India Limited took an integrity pledge as part of the Vigilance Awareness Week. Integrity pledge was administered to all by J Pradeep Kumar, Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) of VPT and Dredging Corporation of India Limited in the presence of K Rama Mohana Rao, Chairman of VPT, along with HoDs, Deputy HoDs and senior officers of VPT on Tuesday.

Inaugural function of Vigilance Awareness Week was observed jointly by VPT and DCIL. This year, the theme of



PK Rath, CMD, RINL-VSP, takes the integrity pledge, along with employees at the main administrative building, to mark the beginning of the Vigilance Awareness Week in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday

VAW is 'Satark Bharat, Samridh Bharat Vigilant India, Prosperous India', said Rajesh Tripathi, Managing Director, DCIL and

Sumiran Bansal, Chief Financial Officer, have administered the integrity pledge in English and Hindi respectively.

Speaking on the occasion, J Pradeep Kumar, Chief Vigilance Officer, VPT & DCIL, emphasised on the internal house-keeping activities-Land management, allotment of quarters, updating of policies and manuals, policy on outsourcing activities and systemic improvement through leveraging technology, which are being taken up in a campaign mode, as a part of Vigilance Awareness week.

He stated 1.25% of the global GDP was lost due to corruption. He further added, by creating an environment, as a part of systemic improvement, with the help of technology, where discretion would be minimised and direct interface to be

reduced as corruption affects the quality of life of common people.

Rajesh Tripathi, Managing Director, DCIL, in his address, emphasised efficacy of preventive Vigilance as a tool to curb corruption. Chief guest LKV Ranga Rao, DIG, Visakhapatnam Range, explained the side effects of power and how power could corrupt and how corruption was systematically ingrained in government offices. He stated that the basic problem lies with us as what we preached, we didn't practice. He further added that the best way to combat corruption was to strengthen the system.

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

The Andhra Pradesh Revenue Department Employees Association demanded an apology from senior TDP leader Chintakayala Ayyanna Patrudu for abusing them as their discharging of duties involved reclaiming encroached land from GITAM University.

Bopparaju Venkateshwarlu, Andhra Pradesh Revenue Services Association (APRSA) head, demanded Patrudu to retract his abusive statements on government employees doing their rightful duty obeying laws. He condemned the TDP leader's abusive statements and highlighted that it was uncalled for from a former minister and a senior leader like Patrudu.

Instead of telling the government employees to take action against the people, who violated the laws, Venkateshwarlu said Patrudu is abusing the revenue employees, who reclaimed the

**Instead of telling the government employees to take action against people who violated the laws, Bopparaju Venkateshwarlu, Andhra Pradesh Revenue Services Association (APRSA) head said TDP leader Ayyanna Patrudu is abusing the revenue employees, who reclaimed the land illegally occupied by GITAM University in Visakhapatnam**

land illegally occupied by GITAM University in Visakhapatnam. "This is not new for you (Patrudu). Earlier also, you have abused Narsipatnam's woman municipal commissioner. Even she lodged a complaint against you," reminded Venkateshwarlu.

The revenue employees' representative also said that Patrudu abused police personnel. He warned Patrudu that if he fails to apologise, revenue employees

will start an agitation in all districts, starting from his home in Narsipatnam.

"In the recent reclamation of a part of encroached land, an RDO level officer spearheaded the demolition of GITAM's compound wall. In the light of this development, Patrudu convened a press conference and criticised the government, including explosive-laced statements on the employees involved in that operation," he alleged.



# Government in talks with pharma firms over cold-chain management

NAVEENA GHANATE  
■ HYDERABAD

While Coronavirus vaccine development is being watched closely by people from all walks of life, governments and Pharma companies are preparing for a cold storage mechanism for storing the vaccines. Most of the Covid vaccines being developed are RNA-based vaccines, which need a cold-chain management of minus 80 degree Celsius in the entire country.

The Central government reportedly asked the state governments to plan for a cold storage supply chain for handling the vaccine.

Apart from identifying who gets the vaccine first, states were apparently asked to gear up with cold chain management including sites, district level vaccine stores among



others.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stressed upon the importance of cold chain management. Telangana Government has already contacted Pharma companies about cold chain management.

Girish Bhat Medihauxe Pharma Pvt. Ltd said, "Telangana Government - Health Minister, State and Union Health Ministry

Officials, Drug Controller, their authorities and all super specialty hospitals have been in constant touch with us about vaccine management. The SARS-CoV-2 vaccine, like any other vaccines, needs to be kept in cold, fixed within a precise temperature range from the moment it leaves the manufacturer to the moment it's administered. This is very hard, even some developed countries with

strong supply chains find it difficult. But, in our case, we have been achieving uninterrupted temperature maintenance even in transit for the past so many years with a proven track record".

He added that as we are nearing the vaccine, companies and the government machinery is looking at us for its delivery in Telugu states as we have a proven track record.

Hyderabad at large has so much of infrastructure already pre existing and running well, that the city based pharma companies are ready to accept the challenges and responsibility of corona vaccine distribution.

Pharma companies in Hyderabad are announcing that they are fully geared up to handle, store and distribute Corona vaccine in both Telugu states as and when the vaccine

is made available. Even recently Apollo hospitals announced that it secured a cold chain to manage the safety of 300 million doses per annum. As per Apollo hospitals, "Apollo Hospitals have been strengthening its vaccine cold chain for supply and gearing up all Apollo facilities for efficient and fast administration with the highest safety standards, for up to 1 million doses per day. We will leverage our India web of 19 medicine supply hubs with cold chain facilities to deliver the vaccines".

A vaccine's journey can be risky with underdeveloped infrastructure. If there's a break in the cold chain as a vaccine has to be taken to many places, it will lose its potency. And the entire purpose is defeated. Even logistics providers are ramping up its cold chain infrastructure.

## ‘Ensure hassle free mutation, registration through Dharani’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar on Tuesday instructed the revenue officials to extend hassle free registration and mutation services through Dharani portal to the citizens as envisioned by Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao.

He appealed to the revenue staff to live up to the expectations of the Chief Minister in the successful implementation of Dharani portal by providing services in a simple, transparent, and speedy manner without any discretionary powers. He said that under the portal, registration and mutation will be completed immediately. Dharani would become a trend-setter in the country, he said.

Addressing a training programme of officials and staff of the revenue and registration departments on Dharani here, Somesh Kumar said the Chief



Minister will launch Dharani on October 29. Through a power-point presentation on the functioning of the portal, he explained slot booking, citizen open portal, successor modules and partition modules. The roles and responsibilities of Tahsildars and data entry operators were also explained in detail.

The Chief Secretary observed that the role of the revenue department would increase manifold as they would henceforth function as joint sub registrars. He urged

the revenue employees to work as a team and bring good name to the government. The government, he said, was committed to resolve issues pertaining to the Revenue department.

He said that a State level control room will be set up to address technical issues. Similarly, a district level technical support team would resolve issues arising at the district level. Necessary infrastructure should be in place at all the offices for the purpose, he added.

## Farmers set ablaze fields with damaged crops in Kamareddy

SHABBIR ALI DEMANDS COMPENSATION FOR RAIN-HIT FARMERS

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

Former Minister and ex-Leader of Opposition in Telangana Legislative Council Mohammed Ali Shabbir on Tuesday demanded that the state government to give compensation to the farmers who lost their paddy and cotton crops due to excess rains, spurious seeds and other reasons.

Shabbir Ali, along with Medak and Kamareddy DCC Presidents and other leaders, visited various farms in Narsingi mandal where farmers set ablaze the fields of damaged paddy cotton and crops.

Speaking to media persons later, Shabbir Ali pointed out that Ganesh, a tenant farmer, suffered heavy losses due to the damage caused to his superfine varieties of paddy. Similarly, other farmers, Ailash Yadav and Balamma, lost their cotton and paddy crops due to the



excess rainfall and other plant diseases. He said each farmer has suffered losses to the tune of several thousands of rupees per acre. The tenant farmers are the worst sufferers. However, he said that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao did not even conduct a review meeting to discuss the damage caused to the crops and did not initiate any action to even enumerate the losses.

The farmers had set ablaze the fields of damaged crops in the presence of Shabbir Ali and other Congress leaders. The Congress leader said that the farmers followed the Chief Minister's advice in sowing cotton and paddy under the Regulated Cropping system. However, a majority of farmers lost their crops due to excess rainfall, spurious seeds, diseases and other causes.

## Speed up bus stand works: Puvvada Ajay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Khammam: Transport Minister P Ajay Kumar has set a deadline of seven weeks for completing the construction of a new RTC bus stand at NSP camp area in Khammam.

The Minister, accompanied by District Collector RV Karnam, inspected the bus stand construction works on Tuesday. "The works have to be completed within the next two months," he said, adding that he would review the progress every week.

The bus stand being built at a cost of Rs 17.50 crores will consist of a shopping complex and cargo services hall besides parking area, waiting hall and bus platforms. The bus stand would be a modern one with state-of-the-art facilities, he said.

It was planned to relocate the existing RTC bus depot adjacent to the new bus stand for the convenience of the passengers and betterment of services.

## TS again sees less than 1,000 Covid cases

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

For a third consecutive day on Tuesday, Telangana reported less than 1,000 Covid positive cases as the authorities halved the daily number of tests.

During the last 24 hours, 21,099 samples were tested and out of these 837 were found positive, taking the state's tally to 2,32,671.

While laboratories test fewer samples every weekend, this time the test numbers were reduced for three days, apparently due to Dussehra holidays.

A total of 27,055 samples were tested on Friday-Saturday and 14,729 on Saturday-Sunday.

Four more people succumbed to the virus during the last 24 hours, taking the death toll to 1,315.



The fatality stands at 0.56 per cent against the national average of 1.5 per cent.

Officials said the percentage of deaths due to Covid-19 was 44.96 while the remaining 55.04 had co-morbidities.

Greater Hyderabad reported 185 new cases. For a third consecutive day, none of the other

districts reported new cases in three digits. Khammam recorded the second highest number of cases at 76 followed by Rangareddy (59), Karimnagar (51), Bhadrachalam (48) and Medchal Malkajgiri (41).

According to the daily media bulletin released by the office

of the director of public health and family welfare, 1,554 people recovered from the virus during the 24-hour period that ended 8 pm. Monday.

The state's recovery rate stands at 91.14 per cent as against the national average of 90.3 per cent.

The total number of active cases stands at 17,890 of which 14,851 are in home or institutional isolation.

The cumulative number of tests mounted to 41,15,516. Eighteen government-run laboratories, 46 private laboratories and 1,076 Rapid Antigen test centres are conducting the tests.

Out of 21,099 samples tested during the last 24 hours, 20,172 samples were tested in government-run laboratories and 927 in private.

## BLOs threatening MLC voters: TJS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Jana Samithi (TJS) has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission on Tuesday alleging that irregularities are taking place in the enrollment of graduate MLC voters in Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency.

The party submitted complaint to the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Shashank Goel alleging that the local booth level officers (BLOs) are behaving against the election guidelines. The BLOs are stating that application seeking vote will be rejected in case the applicant, who applied vote through online, failed to submit their certificate physically at MRO



**The TJS requested the CEO to direct the EROs and AEROs to control the revenue staff threatening.**

office. It is against the constitution, TJS said.

The TJS said that as per Article 9 of a memo 1069/Elecs.B/A/2020-3 issued by the Election Commission on September 24, 2020, the BLOs have to verify the certificates of the applicant by going to the person applied for vote

through online. However, the BLOs are stating that they will reject the application for vote in case the applicant failed to submit the original certificate by going to MRO office and TJS asked the CEO to consider the issues seriously.

The party alleged that the local revenue staff is ridiculing

the democracy succumbing to the pressure mounted by the ruling TRS party leaders. The party said that the vote is a weapon in the democracy, however, it is not correct to the revenue staff to indulge in threatening instead of encouraging voter enrollment. The TJS requested the CEO to direct the EROs and AEROs to control the revenue staff threatening.

The TJS also requested the CEO to direct the collectors, MROs and BLOs to give another chance to the applicant to show their certificates by going to MRO office in case if there any problem arises when BLOs goes for the verification of the certificates to the residence of applicant.

### ON FAST TRACK



Finance Minister Harish Rao addresses people at "TRS Yuva Garjana" cycle rally at Toguta in Dubbak Constituency on Tuesday

## Minister tells officials to ground PMGSY works

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Panchayat Raj Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao has asked the officials of his department to ground the (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) PMGSY phase-3 batch-1 works and send proposals for the

batch-2 works immediately to the Centre.

He told the officials that more road projects should be obtained from the Centre and more villages should be provided with road facility. The existing roads should be

improved.

In a review meeting held here on Tuesday, he asked the officials to complete construction of Rytu Vedikas before the deadline. The works related to construction of Rytu Kallam should begin as the har-

vesting of crops is going to begin soon. Under the PMGSY, the Centre has sanctioned 2427.5 km long roads with an estimated cost of Rs 658 crore. Under the batch-1, works for development of roads up to a distance of 1,119.94 km have been sanctioned.

## Cops foil BJP's 'Chalo Pragathi Bhavan' march, arrest leaders

L VENKAT RAM REDDY  
■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana State police foiled the BJP's 'Chalo Pragathi Bhavan' march, sought to be carried out on Tuesday by the saffron party, along with ABVP and BJYM, by placing several BJP leaders under house arrest. Some of the leaders were taken into preventive custody, after the party announced its programme to protest at Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's official residence in an effort to highlight the 'high-handedness of the police'.

Early in the morning, police personnel were deployed outside the residences of many BJP leaders to prevent them from stepping outside. As a preventive step, several top BJP leaders, including BJP vice-president DK Aruna, MLC Ramachandra Rao, MLA Raja Singh and senior leader Motkupalli Narasimulu were put under house arrest. Some of the BJP leaders were taken into preventive elsewhere in the state too.



When cops deployed at the residence of Aruna sought to prevent her from leaving the residence, she told the police officials that she had to leave for Dubbak to campaign for the November 3 by-election to the Assembly seat. Ramachandra Rao termed the house arrest as 'murder of democracy'. He asserted that the BJP leaders

had the freedom to meet the Chief Electoral Officer and the Governor to complain about Monday's incidents in Siddipet. The BJP leaders and its youth outfits had given the 'Chalo Pragathi Bhavan' call to protest the arrest of State BJP president Bandi Sanjay Kumar and searches at the office and residence of Dubbak BJP candidate Raghunandan Rao and

at the residences of his kin in Siddipet without search warrants and without cops and revenue officials doing due diligence.

The BJP leaders decried police action against Raghunandan Rao, stating that the TRS government had targeted him ever since the party announced his name as BJP candidate for Dubbak bypoll.

The state BJP leaders said they would complain to the State Election Commissioner over the TRS government's alleged harassment of the BJP leader ahead of the bypolls.

Trouble began on Monday when the police seized nearly Rs 19 lakh cash from the kin Raghunandan Rao, BJP candidate for Dubbak by-election.

A clash broke out between the police and BJP leaders when the police raided the office and residence of Raghunandan Rao and later the residences of his kin and seized the cash in Siddipet. In the ensuing clash, Raghunandan Rao reportedly fainted.

## Kishan asks DGP to submit report on Siddipet incidents

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home Kishan Reddy on Tuesday directed Telangana DGP Mahender Reddy to conduct a 'thorough probe' and submit an 'unbiased report' on Monday's incidents in Siddipet following raids by police and revenue personnel at the office and residence of BJP candidate for Dubbak bypoll Raghunandan Rao and at the residences of Rao's kin. Kishan Reddy asked the DGP how police personnel in civil dress could raid the residences of Raghunandan Rao's relatives without a valid search warrant. The Telangana government was misusing official machinery and harassing BJP leaders ahead of the byelections in Dubbak, he said. The MoS for Home directed the DGP to submit a detailed report on the arrest of Telangana

BJP president Bandi Sanjay Kumar and the entire search operation at the residences of the kin of Raghunandan. The police on Monday had seized Rs 18.67 lakh cash in Siddipet town from the house of a relative of BJP candidate M Raghunandan Rao. Meanwhile, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday telephoned Sanjay to enquire about the incident in Siddipet. Bandi Sanjay briefed Amit Shah about the sequence of events that took place in Siddipet and the way police mishandled the entire issue. He told Amit Shah that the Telangana police had acted in a high-handed manner. Sanjay Kumar on Tuesday undertook 'Deeksha', alleging that the ruling TRS party was planning to postpone the Dubbak Assembly by-poll by hook or crook and hence was using the police force to harass his party workers.

## TS BJP seeks suspension of Siddipet Commissioner

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Alleging that the TRS government was misusing police and revenue officials in the run up to the November 3 Dubbak by-poll, the BJP in Telangana on Tuesday requested the Election Commission to suspend the Siddipet Police Commissioner. The party, in a memorandum to the Chief Electoral Officer, also sought a CBI inquiry into the incident of cash seizure and subsequent developments on Monday at Siddipet and to appoint a Police Observer to oversee the Dubbak assembly by-election.

The party also requested the CEO to deploy central forces in the Constituency for conducting free and fair elections. Sanjay told that the TRS, fearing defeat, was plan-

ning to get the polls postponed.

"I, along with other leaders, was prevented from going to Dubbak (on Monday night). Despite me being an MP and astar campaigner, the Siddipet Commissioner shoved me."

Dismissing the BJP's charge that police were trying to plant the cash bag at the residence of the party leader's relative, Police Commissioner Joel Davis termed them as 'absolutely wrong and rubbish'.

"With allegations against the police, selective clippings were shown on tv as if police brought the cash and planted the money bag... all such allegations are absolutely wrong," he said adding that searches were conducted after serving notices and it was video-graphed.



## INDIA, US INK DEFENCE PACT

# Pompeo says US stands with India, mentions killing of Indian soldiers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and the US signed the landmark defence pact, BECA, that will allow sharing of high-end military technology, geospatial maps and classified satellite data between their militaries as the two countries held a high-level dialogue on Tuesday, and vowed to ramp up their security ties and boost strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific amidst China's growing economic and military clout in the region.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held the third edition of the 2+2 talks with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary Mark T Esper. Both sides were assisted by their top military and security officials.



The high-level interaction assumes significance as it comes at a time China is attempting to expand its economic and military clout in the Indo-Pacific region, and is also engaged in a tense standoff with India in eastern Ladakh.

During the talks, the US side also assured India that America stands with it as they confront threats to their sovereignty

and liberty. Addressing a joint media event along with Jaishankar, Pompeo and Esper, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the two sides held comprehensive discussion on range of key issues, and dubbed the inking of BECA with the US is a "significant move".

"Our military-to-military cooperation with the US is moving forward very well," he

The US and India are taking steps to strengthen cooperation against all manners of threats and not just those posed by the CCP, Pompeo said

said, adding that projects for joint development of defence equipment have been identified.

"We reaffirmed our commitment to peace and security in Indo-Pacific region," Singh said.

Pompeo, in his remarks, said, during the visit they visited the war memorial to honour the soldiers that sacrificed their lives for the world's largest democracy, including the 20 that were killed by China's PLA forces in the Galwan Valley in June.

"The US will stand with people of India as they confront threats to their sovereignty and to their liberty," Pompeo asserted.

Slamming the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Pompeo said the US leaders and citizens see with increasing clarity that the "CCP is no friend to democracy, the rule of law and transparency".

The US and India are taking steps to strengthen cooperation against all manners of threats and not just those posed by the CCP, Pompeo added.

## Covid vax could be available in early 2021, says minister

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka health minister Dr KSudhakar on Tuesday expressed confidence that that a vaccine for COVID-19 would be available early in 2021 and said the government would ensure that it reaches every nook and corner of the state after its launch.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting with AstraZeneca Managing Director Gagan Singh Bedi, he said the first phase of trials of the vaccine were encouraging.

"The first phase trial of the vaccine developed by Oxford/AstraZeneca has been completed and has shown encouraging results.

The second and third phase trials are underway," he said.

The Minister said Bedi had told him that the company, which was trying to launch the vaccine in the initial months of 2021, had the capacity to supply a billion doses. Once it came out in the market, the



Karnataka government would ensure that it was made available "in every nook and corner of the state," he said.

The first set of people to get it would be the Covid frontline warriors like doctors, nurses and paramedics, followed by elderly people with comorbidities, pregnant and lactating women and children, the minister said.

To a question, he said the results of the first phase trial were encouraging, with 56 people who were administered the vaccine developing

antigens, which has remained intact in them since then.

"We need to wait for six months to see whether the antigens are maintained," Sudhakar said.

To a question on the price of the vaccine, he said he did not wish to get into the "controversy" over it and would leave

it to the discretion of Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa. He however, maintained that the state had been conducting tests and providing treatment free of cost.

## SC extends time for trial in Tarun Tejpal's case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Tuesday extended till March 31 the time for completing trial in the sexual assault case against Tehelka magazine founder Tarun Tejpal.

Tejpal is alleged to have sexually assaulted a former woman colleague inside an elevator of a five-star hotel in Goa in 2013. He has denied the allegations levelled against him.

He was arrested on November 30, 2013 by the crime branch after his anticipatory bail plea was rejected by the court. He has been out on bail since May 2014.

The matter came up for hearing on Tuesday before a bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench, also comprising Justices R S Reddy and M R Shah, that the trial judge has made a request for extension of time.

The Goa government had earlier moved the top court seeking extension of time to complete the trial.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Tejpal, said the apex court had already extended the time till December 31 this year for completion of trial and the bench may put up the matter for hearing in last week of December or in January.



He was arrested on November 30, 2013 by the crime branch after his anticipatory bail plea was rejected by the court

"If the trial is completed by December end, then this application by the trial judge would become infructuous and if it is not completed, then time can be extended," Sibal said.

"There is no question of completion of trial by December 31 as there are witnesses to be examined. It will be better if we extend it till March 31," the bench observed.

The bench said, "The problem is Mr Sibal you are not even ready for video-conferencing or it would have got completed in two months".

## Kerala gets check posts to protect eco-system

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

For the first time, a scenic hill station in Kerala has got the protection of "green check posts" and around-the-clock vigil by "green army" in a bid to guard its serene eco-system and keep it plastic-free.

Vagamon, a British era plantation town in highrange Idukki district in central Kerala, has now got five check posts at all its entry points under an innovative initiative of the state-run Haritha Keralam (Green Kerala) Mission.

Known for its lush greenery, misty valleys and splendid meadows, the sought-after tourist destination had been choked by plastic and other



non-degradable waste dumped by the visitors for long and the present effort was to reclaim its beauty and protect its serene ecosystem, officials said.

Haritha Keralam, launched nearly four years ago by the state government, envisages a clean and green state through waste management, organic

farming and conservation of water resources with the support of the people.

The check posts at Vagamon were the first of its kind in the southern state and the initiative was an experimental model of 'green tourism', conceptualised and implemented by the mission, its Executive Vice-

Chairperson T N Seema said.

Elappara village panchayat, where the major part of the tourist hub is located, and the district administration have also joined hands with the Haritha Keralam in this endeavour.

As part of the initiative, members of "Haritha karma sena", the green army, stop vehicles entering into Vagamon at the check posts and screen whether the visitors are carrying any plastic carry bags or other harmful materials.

The 'green counters', attached to the check posts, offer tourists eco-friendly articles like cloth bags.

They can deposit plastic bottles and other materials at the 'bottle booths', set up at various points, officials said.

## ‘Arrogant’ Bihar government deviated from its path:sonia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day before the first phase of voting in Bihar Assembly election, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday accused the JDU-BJP government of being high on power, arrogant and deviating from its path, as she made a fervent appeal to the electorate to herald a change in the state and build a "new Bihar". In a four-minute video

message in Hindi, she claimed the present dispensation led by Nitish Kumar was "neither saying good nor doing good" while the labourers were helpless, farmers upset and youth disappointed with it. "Drunk on power and arrogance, the government in Bihar has deviated from its path. Their words and deeds are suspect. The labourers are helpless, the farmers upset and the

youth disappointed. People are bearing the brunt of the fragile state of the economy. "A serious crisis has befallen the farmers of India. The lives of Dalits and Mahadalits have been destroyed and similar is the fate of the backward sections of the society," she charged while asserting the people of the state are with the Congress mahagathabandhan and "this is the call of Bihar".



## Samajwadi Party eyes upcoming bypolls

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday said his party is set on returning to power in Uttar Pradesh in the 2022 assembly elections and next month's bypolls for seven seats will mark a beginning towards that goal.

"The party's target is the next Assembly election and its beginning is being made through the coming by-elections in which SP's performance would be good. The next elections will decide the future of the country's politics," the party chief told newsmen here. He said his party's efforts would be to connect with the maximum number of people and claimed that the voters of UP are prepared to remove the current state government.

## 34% candidates in 2nd phase Bihar polls face criminal cases

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

About 34 per cent of 1,463 candidates in the second phase of the Bihar Assembly election have declared criminal cases against themselves, according to a report by poll rights group Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

About 27 per cent or 389 candidates have declared serious criminal cases against themselves, it said. Serious criminal cases are non-bailable offences with over five years of



imprisonment. As many as 502 or 34 per cent candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves.

A total of 495 or nearly 34 per cent have given their financial assets worth crores of rupees while three candidates have declared zero assets, the

report said. According to the report, 36 (64 per cent) out of 56 candidates analysed from the RJD have declared criminal cases against themselves and 28 (50 per cent) have declared serious criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

About 29 (63 per cent) out of 46 candidates analysed from the BJP have declared criminal cases against themselves and 20 (44 per cent) have declared serious criminal cases against themselves in their affidavits.

## Sallahuddin, IM's Bhatkal brothers among 18 'terrorists'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Continuing to deal with terrorism with an "iron hand", the government on Tuesday designated 18 more individuals as "terrorists" including chief of the banned Hizbul Mujahideen Syed Sallahuddin, founders of IM Bhatkal brothers and a close lieutenant of underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, Chhota Shakeel, taking the total number of such proscribed persons to 31.

The announcement by the Union Home Ministry came on the day the India-US 2+2

ministerial dialogue took place here where Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met their American counterparts.

Earlier, only terror outfits could be designated as such under the stringent law and not individuals. But the amended anti-terror Act, passed by Parliament in August 2019, introduced a provision to designate as "terrorists" individuals who commit or participate in acts of terrorism, prepare for them, or promote such acts.

## Golu Raja injured in firing in UP

PNS ■ BALLIA

Bhojpuri singer and actor Golu Raja was injured in celebratory firing at the home of a local BJP leader in a village here, police said on Tuesday.

The incident took place on Monday night when Raja was performing at the birthday function of local BJP leader Bhanu Dubey's son at his home in Mahakarpur village, Station House Officer (SHO), Garwar, Anil Chandra Tiwari said.

Raja was injured and rushed to a private hospital in Buxar from where he was referred to Varanasi, the SHO said. The matter is being investigated, Tiwari added.

## Arts can create climate of sensitivity

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran actor Shabana Azmi says she is an optimist by nature and believes art can nurture a "climate of sensitivity" which in turn can spur societal change.

This is why, the actor said, she decided to star in "Kaali Khuhi" (Black Well), a horror thriller directed by Terrie Samundra which explores the enduring impact of female foeticide, a malpractice still prevalent in India. Azmi, known for her powerhouse performances in films like "Ankur", "Mandi", "Khandhar", "Fire", "Godmother", exploring the genre for the second time after Vishal Bhardwaj's 2002 horror comedy "Makdee".

Set in a Punjabi village, the Netflix Original film traces the journey of a girl named



Shivangi (Riva Arora), who is put to the ultimate test when she witnesses her entire family fall deeper into the secrets of the black well.

Azmi, 70, said it is "outrageous" that female foeticide continues to exist in the 21st century India when addressing this should be the first step towards women empowerment.

"Female foeticide and infanticide exist all around - not in

the back or beyond only but in our metropolitan cities too. And yet we aren't as focused on it as we should be. The right to be born is taken away from a girl just because she is a girl.

"That has to be the starting point of any work that you do about a girl who doesn't even have a right to be born. How cruel, unjust and unacceptable that is? We are a patriarchal society. We entitle the boy

Azmi, 70, said it is "outrageous" that female foeticide continues to exist in the 21st century India when addressing this should be the first step towards women empowerment.

from birth just for being male and the girl is made to go through a lot of discrimination," Azmi, also an activist, told PTI in an interview over Zoom. The National Award winner said she decided to board the project as first-time feature film director Samundra had her heart in the right place. Los Angeles-based Samundra, who has written and directed short films and documentaries including "Kunjo" and "Ice Cream Wallah", has told the story in a cinematically "compelling" manner, the actor said.

"Terrie could have quite easily made it into a documentary that would have its own reach. But the fact that she does it through this thriller is what makes it more accessible to audiences. My parents always told me that art should be used as an instrument to societal change. "I am not saying it has an immediate reaction. You don't watch the film 'Gandhi' and the next day start behaving like Gandhi. But all arts have the possibility to create a climate of sensitivity in which it is possible for change to occur," Azmi said.

## Nitish fires '8-9 kids' jibe; Yadav retorts with 'mentally tired' barb

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar fired another salvo at RJD supreme Lalu Prasad, though without naming him, saying no development can be expected from people producing "8-9 kids" for a son, inviting a strong retort from Tejashwi Yadav who said the JD(U) boss is tired -

"both mentally and physically". Kumar used the slur at an election meeting at Mahanar in Vaishali district Monday. "Kisi ko chinta hain 8-9 bachha paida karte hain. Beti par bharosa nahi hai. 7-8 beti ho jane ke bad ladka hua. Kaisa Bihar Banana chahte hain...agar logo ka yahi aadarsh hain to Bihar ka kya hoga." "Does anybody care? They produce 8-9 kids. They had 7-8 daughters before a son. What kind of Bihar they want to make? If this is their ideal, what will happen to Bihar?" Kumar said, without naming anybody but his obvious target was RJD chief Lalu Prasad and his wife Rabri Devi, who have nine children. Reacting to Kumar's statement, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav told reporters in Patna Tuesday that by making such comments Kumar is "targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has 5-6 brothers and sisters." Yadav further said he takes Kumar's "abuses" too as "blessings". He said the chief minister's remark was an affront to the dignity of his mother as well as to other women's.





## Bihar's new chapter

As the State goes to the polls today, the question is whether BJP will sweep federalism away or a young Tejashwi can halt the tide



This is probably one time when Nitish Kumar is relevant because of his irrelevance. And his young opponents, sons of his peers, thought to be irrelevant, are carving their own generational relevance at his jaded expense. The Janata Dal (United) leader and Bihar Chief Minister is for all practical purposes a face that nobody wants to see despite the BJP's repeated endorsement of him as a chief ministerial candidate. And for a short time he may own the chair, towed by his hefty alliance partners, who don't want to be seen as sinking him mid-course or appear unprincipled. For a man, who was once seen as a messianic figure and

deeply trusted to pull the State out from the dark ages of Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Yadav's misrule, he has ended up being as one of its worst performers. For all the gush of the early years and the morality of prohibition, he stumbled and fumbled along the way without notching up the State's development index significantly. And the pandemic sealed his fate as an inept administrator who had bungled on rehabilitating returnee migrants, students and flood refugees. For an entire generation growing up under Nitish's rule, development has still been a pipe dream. Politically, the man who crafted his survival by pitting the majoritarian BJP against the secular-socialist Lalu, swinging between both depending on trade winds, and retaining the throne in the bargain, is now trapped by his own machinations. He cannot go back to Lalu, having shut the door forever when he deserted him and chose the BJP. And his relationship with the BJP, built on political expediency, is coming apart as its ideological push is against the grain of his inclusive politics. And although he crafted a new caste equation, rallying the downtrodden and nowhere people, the extreme backward castes and Mahadalits, that, too, can no longer be overplayed in a statewide epidemic of joblessness and hopelessness. At one time an asset as a regional leader, today Nitish is the BJP's biggest liability. He knows that and can scarcely do anything about it except give in to uncharacteristically angry outbursts. The BJP, by all estimates so far, is expected to be the biggest gainer in these elections, and will be charioting Nitish. For long, it has been ambitious about being the single largest party in the State and having its own CM face but publicly, it didn't want to appear as an unreliable ally, which used regional partners for its own benefit and gobbled them up in the end. And despite promising big economic packages and special status in 2015, it didn't quite push them, unwilling to benefit Nitish by association. But it did push the Modi aura and Central schemes aggressively and even deployed Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who is the new-found favourite of Bihar's electorate, comprising a large number of migrants and students, whom Nitish did not want to accept for fear of a disease spread but who found a home at camps in UP. And for all the public denials of losing faith in Nitish and denouncing co-ally Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) leader Chirag Paswan for contesting against JD(U) outside the NDA fold, the fact is it wants the exact opposite. Chirag has been relentless and savage in his criticism of Nitish and proportionately laudatory about Modi, even vowing a life-long commitment to him and promising a BJP-LJP Government. The tacit support is evident as the central BJP leadership has barely pulled up Chirag in public or shared the stage, Modi included, with Nitish. If the verdict swings decisively in the BJP's favour, then there's no guarantee how long it will continue to back its CM nominee. As more and more of its allies get pushed into a corner, are choked and part ways, like the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab, the big question arising out of the Bihar results, assuming the BJP does deepen its footprint, will be whether the central party's new target will be co-optive federalism, transplanting regional satraps with single-party rule in States and subverting the local agenda altogether. In his speeches, Modi has largely focussed on Central achievements than his plans for the State. The BJP's biggest strength, that of the Modi aura, is also its biggest handicap at the State-level where it lacks magnetic leaders. The halo is good for swinging a verdict but deliverables need to be felt at the State level with a well-meaning leader.

It is here that RJD leader and Lalu's son Tejashwi Yadav has undoubtedly seized the narrative in the public imagination. The huge crowds may not be a litmus test of a vote shift but he has certainly given what would have been a colourless election a talking point. Criticised much for not performing as Nitish's deputy and cooling heels in Delhi, he has woken up to the duty of legacy, parked himself in the State, worked the grassroots and built a connect across segments. He knows full well that he cannot fill his father's big shoes just yet and that RJD would still get the traditional caste-based loyalty and minority votes based on Lalu's goodwill. He also knows that people know why his father is incarcerated, because of the scams in his time. So he wants to carve out a broader constituency for himself that is more contextual than historic, which will focus on what he has to offer afresh and help him bury taints of the past. So instead of harping on the RJD's core plank of caste, he has made unemployment of the State's youth the pivot of his campaign, promising 10 lakh jobs to the surging crowds that gathered to hear him out. Such was the impact of his speeches that the BJP, while appearing unfazed, had to promise 19 lakh jobs in its manifesto as a reactive strategy. He has even co-opted the Left to appeal to all marginalised voters irrespective of caste and evolved an inclusive umbrella of those cheated by the NDA-Nitish combine. In that sense, he embodies Bihar's cure. Question is if he is too late for this round?

## Be prepared

As India and the US enter into more formal agreements on the military front, we are also making major operational adjustments



The founder of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, Lord Robert Baden-Powell, had a simple motto for the children who signed up. Just "be prepared", he would say. Twice in the space of 20 years, India's military intelligence and border guards have been caught napping, first during the Kargil intrusion and then the recent events in eastern Ladakh. The ferocious riposte by our soldiers has caught the enemy off-guard in both instances albeit with a heavy price in blood. However, the recent incident with the Chinese has led to further strengthening of the India-US military relationship and the presence of the US Secretaries of State and Defence

in New Delhi a week ahead of the presidential election is a sign that this will be priority for any regime that comes in. The signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), the fourth and final foundational agreement between both nations, is significant. While this does not mean that India and the US are military partners or are close to forming any alliance, it does set in stone the military partnership for the coming decades, particularly with respect to the Indo-Pacific where China wants to make a mark.

In addition to these changes, there is also the dramatic shift in India's own military preparedness with the creation of five theatre commands and finally better integration between the various arms of the forces. Until now, communications frequencies of the three forces were separate even in an era of combined arms warfare. That it took the lives of 20 of our gallant soldiers to commit to such changes is tragic but it appears that the loss of Colonel Babu and his men will not have been in vain. An integrated northern command keeping an eye on China is a start but India needs to dramatically improve its intelligence gathering resources and on that front, the collaboration with the US will help tremendously. One thing is certain now, while China might benefit from a less aggressive Democratised US, India is certain to have a permanent ally. India is preparing to be prepared.



GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

There have been plenty of debates and discourses about the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP) but not many focussed on its implementation. No doubt, the NEP is the most progressive and futuristic document and if implemented with sincerity in letter and spirit, it has a tectonic potential to transform India from an educationally lagged nation into a knowledge superpower. Indeed we have never had any education system, only a system of examinations and that, too, an inefficient one, based on rote learning that kills all creativity and innovation. The NEP aspires to transform this moribund system by aiming to produce "good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals," who are needed to transform the 21st century India. But it has failed to provide a specific implementation roadmap, except specifying some broad targets.

Neither has it prescribed any accountability mechanism for its implementation. But most importantly, any great idea like this needs great finances. Education being a concurrent subject, both the Centre and the States need to share the responsibility for its implementation as well as finances. But the NEP has almost skirted the issue altogether.

The higher education in the country has seen phenomenal growth during the last two decades. The number of colleges, universities and students has quadrupled since 2001, and the private sector has grown much faster than the public institutions. Today, we have 993 universities, about 40,000 colleges and 10,000 standalone institutions, and nearly four crore students. But unfortunately, most of these institutions produce unemployable graduates and postgraduates annually, with very little knowledge and skill.

If we can forget for a moment our current military standoff with China, a comparison with that country might be instructive in many respects. In *India Unlimited: Reclaiming the Lost Glory*, Arvind Panagariya has provided some tell-tell statistics about China and India. Based on the Scopus database of articles published and cited in international journals, the National Science Foundation of US brings out annual rankings of different countries. In 1996, in almost all subject areas, China and India were ranked more or less evenly. In fact, India was a tad better. In terms of the total citations, India was ranked 19th

## NEP: Promise or platitude?

Without increasing public investment, neither the infrastructure, nor the standards required for the New Education Policy 2020 can be achieved



amongst all countries, while China was ranked 21st. In social sciences, India was ranked 21st against China's 24th, in chemistry and molecular sciences, India was ranked 11th and in physics 17th against China's 13th in both. But by 2017, China moved far ahead of us in all subjects — third in terms of total citations against India's 14th. In social sciences, chemistry and physics, China ranked fifth, first and second while India lagged way behind with 14th, fifth and eighth ranks respectively in these subjects. In the Times Higher Education Ranking 2020, China has three universities among the top 100 of the world, four in the next 100 and altogether 72 among the top 1,000. India has none among the first 200 and 36 among the top 1,000, half of China's 72.

How could China race so much ahead of us in just two decades? Actually, it had started its economic liberalisation in 1976, a good 15 years ahead of us. But it started reforming the education system in 1995, 25 years ahead of us. It realised that to become a great power and a great nation, the primary need is to have a good system of education.

What is a good system of education? If we take the US as the model, we would appreciate that a good system of education needs basically two things: adequate funding and decentralised governance with a very high degree of autonomy to the institutions. The US universities have complete autonomy in deciding admission, courses and faculty and they compete amongst

themselves to attract the best faculty, students and research endowment funds. They function independent of federal and State Government regulations with practically no interference by the State.

We had inherited a colonial legacy of higher education where universities were primarily tasked with granting degrees with very little focus on research, and by and large, we still remain the same. China has modelled its system of education in the Soviet-style after 1949 but Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution nearly did it in. Then in 1995, as Panagariya informs, it launched the so-called Project 211 with the slogan: "For the 21st century, manage the top 100 universities successfully." In 1998, it passed the Higher Education Law, which liberalised and decentralised its higher education just like the US, with academic and administrative freedom given to higher educational institutions (HEIs). That law recognised the need for ensuring adequate funding and allowed tuition fees to be hiked by the universities, with State subsidies for those who couldn't afford it. So the tuition fees rose steeply from ₹600 in 1992 to ₹10,000 by mid-2010. The Project 211 funded \$4.6 billion (30 per cent on infrastructure) to 107 universities between 1995 and 2005. In 1998, China launched another project — Project 985 — to create world-class universities out of the 107 universities selected for Project 211. Under this, the top two universities (Peking and Tsinghua) received \$240 million for three

years. By 2007, the project had covered 39 universities. Of these, 27 are now ranked within the top 600 universities of the world.

The NEP has correctly identified many of the problems that beset our higher education system — like a severely fragmented ecosystem characterised by a rigid separation of disciplines with little emphasis on cognitive skills, learning outcomes or quality research, limited institutional autonomy, poor leadership and ineffective regulatory and governance systems. The result is that the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education is a paltry 26 per cent compared to 58 per cent in Senior Secondary and 79 per cent in Secondary schooling. The NEP promises to correct this by focussing on multi-disciplinarity, flexibility, emphasis on skill acquisition and quality research. To fix the problems, it prescribes that there would no more be any rigid separation between arts and sciences, curricular and extra-curricular activities, or vocational and academic streams. Students will select subjects of their choosing across all streams to excel wherever they can and discover their aptitude and potential. For this, it prescribes a roadmap of credit-based undergraduate degree courses with multiple exit options.

It has also suggested a new institutional framework comprising a new overarching body — the Higher Education Commission of India — with four verticals for regulation, accreditation, funding and learning outcomes, which will end the

multiple conflicts of interest that bedevil our current regulatory system. Research gets the maximum emphasis with a National Research Foundation to "seed, grow and facilitate research" in academic institutions. Most importantly, the NEP recognises that the HEIs need to be depoliticised and educationists appointed on their Board of Governance instead of bureaucrats. But given the present stranglehold of retired bureaucrats and politicians over the HEIs and their stubborn objections to any reform, it would be difficult to end their dominance over our higher education anytime soon.

The most revolutionary part of the NEP is perhaps its single-minded focus on multi-disciplinarity by creating large universities and HEI clusters and ending the present system of affiliated colleges. But such a major shift would also need enormous resources, and it is here that the NEP disappoints. The total combined public expenditure on education by the Centre and the States, currently at only about four per cent of GDP, falls way behind the target of six per cent envisaged in all our previous education policies. Consequently, our expenditure on research remains a pathetic 0.69 per cent of GDP. Without investment, neither the infrastructure nor the standards required for the NEP would be achieved.

The NEP only paid some lip-service to this crucial element — by hoping that the Centre and the States will work together to raise expenditure to six per cent of GDP which it recognises as essential for "progress and growth." But it stops short of recommending that a law should be enacted to enforce the same. Thus, there is neither any commitment nor an accountability structure built into the NEP to ensure implementation. Maybe the committee had felt restrained by pandemic-related budgetary stress. This would be over some day but the future will not wait.

Meanwhile, universities can think of going beyond operating from their individual silos. They can form provincial and regional consortiums for better synergy. By mapping their educational resources and sharing these among themselves, they can together provide students access to the best facilities. Each institution can expand capacity in its strength area to optimise investment and specialisation and share this through a network of institutions. The mantra should be to give access to quality learning to all who desire to learn.

(The writer is former Director-General from the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India and an academic)

## SOUNDBITE

Minorities in India have been under continuous suppression. Lockdown in Indian illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) is the worst example of suppression and barbarity.

**Pakistan Prime Minister**  
—Imran Khan



International cooperation is the only way to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate emergency, rising inequality and the spreading of hatred.

**UN Secretary-General**  
—Antonio Guterres



We had taken up a target of covering at least two people in each panchayat who are in need of financial assistance. I'm happy to announce that we have covered nearly 10,000 cases.

**J&K Lieutenant Governor**  
—Manoj Sinha



The plan for the Olympics is very clear to everyone and more importantly all players are clear about their own roles. Everyone is gaining confidence day by day.

**Hockey player**  
—Navjot Kaur



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A new Bill

Sir — As the world continues to live with the Coronavirus and there is no vaccine in sight, Governments across the world are trying everything possible to curb its spread. In a first, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said that he is considering to make wearing face masks mandatory in the State by proposing a Bill in the forthcoming Assembly session. Interacting with district collectors, college principals and other officials through a video conference on October 27, Gehlot said that every section of society should join the Government's initiative and make it successful. Given the fact that many are reluctant to follow the necessary precautions even during these trying times, passing a law to implement the same might help curb the spread of the virus, especially since we have just entered the festive season.

**Amit Singh Kushwaha**  
Satna

### Free vaccine?

Sir — The announcement of free Corona vaccine in the poll-bound State of Bihar by the BJP

### Air quality in Delhi worsens after Dussehra

Air pollution levels in Delhi have drastically increased after the city celebrated Dussehra and burnt firecrackers in the process. The concentration of pollutants nearly doubled post the celebrations but bear in mind that Diwali is yet to come and with it, the Air Quality Index (AQI) will deteriorate further. However, this has become a yearly phenomenon and the problem lies with the Government taking only reactive measures like Graded Response Action Programme (GRAP) rather than opting for institutional steps before the quality of air decreases. In these grim times when the entire world is fighting the pandemic, this is aggravating our chances of falling sick.

Burning of agricultural waste in Punjab and Haryana is the main reason for the high air pollution levels and the Centre and State Governments should introduce an action plan to recycle the waste. Alternative uses of crop stubble should be discovered and made viable for the farmers. Improving public transport, increasing the use of clean renewable energy, using more electric vehi-



cles, introducing less polluting fuel and strict emission regulations can also keep us away from serious detriments. Obviously, there is no quick fix for reducing air pollution, it requires a series of different actions. However, the time has come to prioritise people's health by controlling the factors which affect the quality of air.

**Ravi Teja Kathuripalli**  
Hyderabad

should not agitate those in the Opposition as people are well aware that such a promise will not be translated into action. It is no secret that scientists across the globe are racing to develop a vaccine for COVID-19 which has killed over 1.16 million people globally. And several dozen vaccine candidates are currently undergoing clinical trials. So, if and when a vaccine does work,

every citizen of the country should get the vaccine free of cost. BJP's sad attempt to lure the electorate in Bihar with "free vaccine" has not worked but it has definitely started a debate on whether these kinds of promises should be allowed to be made during elections. Also, while the BJP is trying to play the COVID card, it seems to have forgotten to take the basic preventive measures

during its rallies where people are neither following social distancing nor wearing masks. It is crucial to remember that such mass gatherings can easily become large virus spreading events. Though the BJP claims to be concerned about the people of Bihar, in reality, its only concern is winning the elections.

**KV Seetharamaiah**  
Hassan

### Goa's blue economy

Sir — Goa's locational advantages have allowed it to exploit economic gains from tourism and fisheries. While arguments over the under-utilisation of the available resources to boost marine tourism cannot be overlooked, it must be said that the ingenuity of locals in tapping the business potential from the ocean has been less innovative and more destructive. The matter of big trawler owners using Light Emitting Diode (LED) lights to net a better catch of fish comes readily to one's mind. Given its natural dependence on marine assets, the State could only be charting a disastrous course if it doesn't follow eco-friendly practices. Hence the foundation stone ceremony of the construction of a common facility centre for the Konkani Maritime Cluster at Verna Industrial Estate could be seen as a welcome step towards the State reaping the benefits of a sustainable ocean-based development pathway.

**Pachu Menon**  
Margao

Send your feedback to: [letterstopi@pioneer.com](mailto:letterstopi@pioneer.com)



FIRST COLUMN

## Next poll stop in Tamil Nadu

One thing is for sure, the Sasikala and Rajinikanth factors will certainly play out in the 2021 elections in the State



KALYANI SHANKAR

The ruling AIADMK in Tamil Nadu (TN) is quietly preparing to face the Assembly elections scheduled for early next year. With just a few months left for the polls, the party is sorting out its internal problems by declaring the incumbent Chief Minister E Palaniswami (EPS) as its chief ministerial candidate and sidelining the other claimant and Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam (OPS). Significantly, the 2021 polls will be the first without the two icons, M Karunanidhi and J Jayalalithaa, and will be a litmus test for the AIADMK and DMK leadership. In fact, none of the two parties has a charismatic leadership and more importantly, no party has ever had a hat-trick so far.

Though the fight is between the two major Dravidian parties, there are two X factors. The first is Sasikala Natarajan, companion and confidante of Jayalalithaa for years. Sentenced to four years in jail in a disproportionate assets case, she will come out of prison in February 2021. She has enough money and political skills to either take over the AIADMK or join hands with her nephew TTV Dinakaran. He has floated an outfit (Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam) of which Sasikala is the chief. So far Sasikala has kept her cards close to her chest. *Chinnamma*, as she is affectionately called by her followers, Sasikala has many loyalists within the AIADMK, too, as she was a major force during Amma's time.

Sasikala's re-entry in the Tamil political scene at this time might ruffle many feathers. The only consolation is that as per law she cannot contest elections for the next six years. The party backed Sasikala soon after the demise of Jayalalithaa but after her sentencing, it united under EPS. The Chief Minister believes that his Government has managed to deliver on several fronts, including the management of the Coronavirus crisis, and he has strengthened himself within the party and the Government. Second, it is not clear whether *Chinnamma* will continue to have the same clout in the influential Thevar community, whom she empowered earlier. Third, Sasikala could also break the AIADMK and draw the disgruntled elements in the party to her side.

Fourth, the party faces several other challenges, including anti-incumbency, internal instability, the absence of a charismatic leader, and the onslaught of the DMK, which has been painting the EPS Government as weak and a pawn in the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This is not surprising as the BJP has so far controlled the AIADMK Government from Delhi as EPS has a good equation with the Centre. The BJP has also worked to keep the party united in the State. It has no interest in dealing with Sasikala or her nephew and the sudden raid on Sasikala's property in Poes Garden last month reveals the party's strategy. Sasikala plans to move into the palatial mansion which she is currently constructing opposite Jayalalithaa's house in Poes Garden. As many as 64 of her properties have been attached, too.

The second unknown factor is the Tamil superstar Rajinikanth. Though he is depending on his fan clubs, it is not known whether he has the skills to organise and run his proposed party. Though wooed equally by the Congress and the BJP, it was only in 2017 that Rajinikanth announced his intention to launch a political party, ending two decades of suspense. In March he announced that his proposed party would contest all 234 seats in the Assembly elections. Rajinikanth is now focussed on strengthening Rajini Makkal Mandrams (a political variant of his fan clubs).

He also stated that issues such as power-sharing in case of an alliance with fellow superstar Kamal Haasan, who had floated his Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) last year, would be discussed only ahead of the polls. Together, the two superstars would certainly draw a huge crowd but their vote-catching capacity is as yet unknown. Rajinikanth has been out of touch with the masses due to the contagion while Kamal's party got just two per cent votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and failed to win any seat. Rajinikanth wants to fill the huge political vacuum left by Jayalalithaa and Karunanidhi. "This is the opportune time to create a movement (to oust the Dravidian behemoths). If not now, it will be never," he commented some time ago. The superstar once declared that he would not project himself as the chief ministerial candidate and would prefer to nominate someone young for the job in 2021. This clearly shows that he wants to be a puppeteer. However, many of Rajinikanth's fans believe in his famous dialogue from the blockbuster movie *Muththu*, "Nobody knows when I will come, how I will come, but I will be there when the time comes."

The political momentum and regrouping of parties will pick up in the next few weeks. As of now, it will be a huge challenge for Rajinikanth to fight the cadre-based Dravidian parties. He might have an alliance with the BJP given his Right-wing sympathies. The forthcoming polls in TN will show whether the arithmetic or the chemistry of the players wins. One thing is for sure, the Sasikala and Rajinikanth factors will play out certainly.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

UDDHAV DID NOT SAY A WORD ABOUT THE CONGRESS CRITICISING SAVARKAR AND NOW HE HAD TO ADDRESS A RALLY FROM SAVARKAR AUDITORIUM. POETIC JUSTICE —MAHARASHTRA BJP SPOKESPERSON KESHAV UPADHYE

POINTCOUNTERPOINT



THOSE WHO ARE RAISING QUESTIONS ABOUT US... WHY ARE THEY NOT GIVING THE BHARAT RATNA TO VEER SAVARKAR, THE MENTOR OF HINDUTVA? —SHIV SENA'S CHIEF SPOKESPERSON SANJAY RAUT

# The FCRA fracas

When a few entities flout norms, the governmental system reacts by clamping down with more controls, inspections, reports, which are a hassle for all



SUBHASH CHANDRA PANDEY

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) play an important role in the development of society and a country. In India, too, many NGOs are engaged in implementing Government schemes to help the poor and many of them have their own ways of aiding the underprivileged, restoring human rights or working for the environment and so on. However, friction between NGOs and the Government arises when foreign-funded ones venture into prohibited areas like politics and take a stand on communal and social disharmony. The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 1976, was enacted to regulate foreign funding, requiring prior permission or intimation of/to the Government. While retaining the basic framework, the Act was rewritten in 2010 and amended in the last Parliament session in September. The law aimed at curbing foreign funding influencing politics, religious conversions and fomenting strife among communities. We are a proud, open democracy. Like any human institution, our systems may not be perfect. We do have problems to resolve but we don't need foreigners who try to accentuate divisions, disaffection and alienation among people, playing on the insecurities of the wronged, deprived and misguided sections.

The NGOs engaged in "proxy politics" were unwelcome right from 1976. If they fish in troubled waters, they will face a pushback. They are free to go to undemocratic countries to help their voiceless people if they are allowed to operate there. Specifically, the 1976 Act banned election candidates, "correspondent, columnist, cartoonist, editor, owner, printer or publisher of a registered newspaper", judges and Government/PSU employees, legislators, political parties and their office-bearers from accepting any foreign funds. (The 2010 Act added television and digital media too.) It prohibited "organisations of a political nature, not being a political party" from accepting any foreign contribution directly or indirectly through any proxy without prior permission of the Government.

It allowed non-political entities "having a definite cultural, economic, educational, religious or social programme" to receive foreign assistance provided they register with the Government and keep it informed about its quantum, source, time, purpose, bank account and actual utilisation. But the 2010 Act tightened control on ultimate recipients of foreign contributions by stipulating that FCRA-registered entities can transfer funds only to other FCRA-registered/regulated entities. The recent 2020 amendment has totally banned transfer of funds to others. The receiving NGO must spend all foreign contribution itself. It cannot become a distributing intermediary. The 1976 Act authorised the Government to deny access to foreign contributions if it prejudicially affected the sovereignty and integrity of India; or public interest; or freedom/fairness of election to any legislature; or friendly relations with any foreign State; harmony between religious, racial, linguistic, regional, social groups, castes or communities. The term "social" was added in 2010. The evolution of the FCRA law clearly shows its basic intent: Foreigners indulging in local politics are not welcome. The legislative intent was to curb foreign interference in domestic politics, the media, judiciary and the Government.

Critics saw the law as an attempt to clamp down on political dissent and the religious freedom of people to preach and of citizens to change their faith if they so wished. There was also criticism that the broad, vague restrictions for NGO funding and operations would have a stifling effect on the constitu-

“ LIKE ANY HUMAN INSTITUTION, OUR SYSTEMS MAY NOT BE PERFECT. WE DO HAVE PROBLEMS TO RESOLVE BUT WE DON'T NEED FOREIGNERS WHO TRY TO ACCENTUATE DIVISIONS, DISAFFECTION AND ALIENATION AMONG PEOPLE, PLAYING ON THE INSECURITIES OF THE WRONGED, DEPRIVED AND MISGUIDED SECTIONS ”



tionally guaranteed rights to freedom of association, expression and assembly. Plus there were fears that with the amendments, the Government had expanded its own discretion, bureaucratic control and oversight with respect to the day-to-day functioning of NGOs in India and left them vulnerable to partisan behaviour and favouritism. While basic human rights are assured by India to everyone, including foreigners, some rights are available only to Indian citizens. Foreigners everywhere are expected to comply with local laws. Foreign debt, equity and grants are regulated when they prejudicially affect national security, local culture, education, religion and social harmony. If an NGO indulges in political and religious activities, it is bound to invite political backlash. The following amendments to the FCRA Act have generated controversy.

**Cap on administrative expenses:** The 2010 Act stipulated a ceiling of 50 per cent on administrative expenses, which can be relaxed with the approval of the Government. The recent amendment has reduced this 50 per cent to 20 per cent. NGOs must seek Government approval to exceed the 20 per cent limit with proper justification (like expenses on a non-recurring event or being advocacy NGOs, not having projects). NGOs should spend more on implementation of projects, help poor beneficiaries rather than lavishly spend on their salaries, office rent, allied charges, business class travel, expensive event venues and so on. Only 1,328 NGOs reported administrative expenses over 20 per cent in 2018-19.

**AADHAAR/Passport/Overseas Citizenship of India card for key managerial personnel:** The new law requires NGOs to furnish Aadhaar numbers of all key functionaries while seeking FCRA registration, renewal of registration or prior permission to obtain foreign contribution. For foreigners/OCIs, a copy of passport or OCI card will do. This is a one-time requirement.

**Routing of funds through a bank account in the SBI:** The new law requires foreign contributions to be routed through a bank account with the SBI in New Delhi. From there, funds can go to other FCRA accounts and these must not receive other funding to avoid mixing of regulated and unregulated funds. NGOs can continue using their preferred bank account after foreign funding inflows pass through this SBI account. This is a one-time hassle. NGOs don't need to come to Delhi. They can approach the nearest SBI branch. Of the 21,490 NGOs filing FCRA returns in 2018-19, 1,488 were Delhi-registered. As many as 2,214 NGOs were registered in three years between 2017 and 2019. The SBI is expected to facilitate/fast-track the process. The Government may give some transition time so that the fund flow does not come to a halt during the current pandemic.

**NGOs can't be financial intermediaries to route foreign contributions:** The most substantive change in the 2020 amendment is that an FCRA-registered NGO cannot transfer funds to other NGOs. It has to directly spend all foreign funds it receives. Under the 2010 law, such transfer was permitted to other FCRA-registered entities. So bigger NGOs could act as a funnel to route foreign funds to grassroots organisations. Now these larger NGOs will have to re-orient their working to start either direct spending or start connecting foreign donors and FCRA-registered grassroots organisations. Foreign funds will bypass the bank accounts of these intermediary NGOs and go directly to the ultimate beneficiary NGOs.

Foreign funds received by NGOs totalled ₹18,337.66 crore in 2016-17, ₹19,764.64 crore in 2017-18 and ₹20,011.21 crore in 2018-19. About half of 21,490 NGOs filing returns in 2018-19 reported nil foreign grants in 2018-19.

In 2018-19, 4,107 NGOs received ₹1,768 crore as re-grants from bigger NGOs, with a median transfer value of ₹7.6 lakh. Half of them received less than

₹7.6 lakh. Pruning of intermediation cost would mean more bang for the buck for genuine foreign donors. It will help the Government to know which foreign donor is funding which Indian NGO. Intermediary NGOs were an obstruction to this transparency and may be adding to the cost. Sub-granting entailed double counting of foreign contribution, by intermediary and final recipient. Who received what and from which foreign donor was unclear. Transparency should be welcomed. Of course, to avoid sudden disruption of fund flow during the pandemic, some transition time should be allowed.

**Non-compliance:** The 2010 Act barred following types of entities from getting/renewing FCRA registration: Fictitious or *benami* entities; entities prosecuted or convicted for indulging in activities aimed at religious conversions through inducement or force; prosecuted or convicted for creating communal tension; found guilty of diversion or misutilisation of funds; engaged in propagation of sedition or advocating violent methods to achieve its ends; using foreign contributions for personal gains or diverting for undesirable purposes.

The Government has strengthened the mechanism to root out non-compliant NGOs. The period of cancellation of registration has been changed from up to 180 days to 360 days. The FCRA registrations of 14,500 NGOs were cancelled in five years ending December 2019. These were mostly duplicate registrations held by some NGOs. Failure to file annual returns also invited some cancellations as was the case with the crackdown on shell companies. In 2017-18, names of 2.26 lakh companies were struck off.

When a few entities flout norms, the governmental system reacts by clamping down with more controls, inspections, reports, which are a hassle for all. But it is necessary to keep errant NGOs in line.

(The writer former Special Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry)

## Still awaiting an inclusive election

The political participation of *divyangs* and the elderly remains slim even though 2019 was pitched to be 'Year of Accessible Elections' by EC



SANTOSH BISWAL

SHIBA PARHI

With Bihar Assembly elections beginning today, political parties have been busy wooing voters with major sops. The BJP's promise to provide free Coronavirus vaccines to all in poll-bound Bihar stirred a political controversy and drew the attention of the Election Commission of India (ECI). However, most parties are ignoring voters with disabilities.

About 13 per cent of the elderly and *divyang* voters have decided to opt for the postal ballot drop-off and pick-up facility for the first phase of the election. Significantly, Bihar is

the first State to go to the polls since the enactment of the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016. Though the Office of the State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities has made extensive efforts to ensure greater participation of *divyang* voters, there have been some oversights. In Bihar 50 per cent of *divyangs* do not use public transport and nearly 70 per cent do not access Government buildings. Only 40 per cent possess the disability certificate that is required to avail all governmental incentives. This is because to procure that certificate, they have to visit a primary health-care centre, which is usually situated too far from rural areas. Further, the job does not get done in one trip and they have to make frequent visits because of the callous attitude of the medical authorities.

However, Bihar cannot be singled out for such irregularities. Even though Delhi saw a rise in the number of *divyang* and elderly voters in the last Assembly election, polling

booths, help desks, obstacle-free, wide and levelled pathways to the voting compartment and ramps were not as per Government regulations. Previously, too, various States like Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh failed to organise the voting system for this disadvantaged segment.

Hence, the political participation of *divyangs* and the elderly remains slim even though 2019 was pitched to be the "Year of Accessible Elections" by the EC. The REV-UP campaign (Register-Enable-Vote) was badly affected and the political rights of the elderly and the *divyangs* have been denied.

Equity and inclusion remain a distant dream for the differently abled who constitute 2.21 per cent of our total population. Now, with the exercise of social distancing necessitated by the pandemic, meeting the pressing needs of the elderly and the *divyangs*, right from sourcing essential supplies to accessing medical treatment, has become problematic.

This has also made them doubly marginalised and invisible in these troubled times.

The Accessible India Campaign, launched by the Government in 2015, attempts to make the overall environment more inclusive for the differently-abled. However, the campaign for equal opportunities and protection of rights is still unheard of and unnoticed and has taken a back seat in Government agenda. The picture remains grim as State governments have not shown a good response. Despite the Accessible India Campaign, accessibility to public institutions remained a major challenge and as of today, several Government-run and aided institutions are not disabled-friendly.

If data provided by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPWD) are to be believed, initially out of the 1,653 buildings audited by access auditors, State Governments had sent proposals for only 647. As many as 12 cities had not sent even

a single proposal. There have been glaring differences between the Centre and the States in terms of coordination, framing and execution of the policies for a barrier-free environment. Apart from accessibility issues, the differently-abled are subjected to socio-economic, educational and political deprivations.

The dimension of gender cannot be ignored, too, as 44 per cent of the total *divyangs* are women with challenges. Of this, around 21 per cent are married and divorce cases remain high for several reasons. Significantly around 69 per cent of the *divyangs* reside in rural India. The kind of predicament that the differently-abled face in rural pockets is significant. Yet, this is missing in the mainstream discourse and warrants urgent attention.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation reveals that 75 per cent of differently-abled children are deprived of elementary education. The scene is again dismal in higher education

because of varied reasons. Only about 28.8 per cent of the *divyangs* in the country possess the certificate of disability, which is required to avail their rights. As a result of this and due to the policy paralysis and inaccessibility pattern of workplaces, only 34 lakh *divyangs* out of 1.34 crore are employed in the country.

Recently, the Centre asked State Governments to make a list of the *divyangs* who are yet to be a part of the Public Distribution System and cover them under the National Food Security Act, 2013. However, the callous attitude of the State machinery is quite apparent.

There are umpteen cases which signal the violation of the human rights of the disabled. There should be an overhaul of public policy to mainstream this marginalised segment and achieve inclusive development.

(Biswal and Parhi are Assistant Professors at SIMC and SSBF respectively and are working at Symbiosis International, Pune)



FOREIGN EYE



### NOT A JUST THING TO DO

The unpredictable American system of life tenure has led to four presidents picking six or more justices and four presidents selecting none, as happened with Jimmy Carter. This gives some presidents too much influence on the Supreme Court and others too little. It also leads to justices remaining on the court when they are unable either physically or mentally to do the job. This must change. (The NYT editorial)



## Ceat Q2 profit surges four-fold to Rs 182 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tyre maker Ceat on Tuesday reported over four-fold increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 182.18 crore for the second quarter ended September 30. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 43.64 crore in the July-September period previous fiscal. The tyre maker's revenue from operations during the second quarter stood at Rs 1,978.47 crore as compared to Rs 1,691.55 crore. Ceat said it has commissioned the second phase of its Nagpur-based manufacturing facility with effect from August 24. "The plant would be ramped up over a period of time, based on market demand and overall capacities," it added.

# E-commerce firms sell goods worth \$4 bn in first week of festive sale

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce companies reported a 55 per cent jump in sale goods to USD 4.1 billion (Rs 29,000 crore) across platforms during the first week (October 15-21) of festive sales, research firm RedSeer said on Tuesday.

RedSeer, in its report, said the comparative number stood at USD 2.7 billion last year. RedSeer in its pre-festive sale had forecasted that platforms will clock USD 4 billion worth of sales this year.

Smartphones led the sale accounting for 47 per cent of total festive sales, driven by new launches and affordable models with Rs 1.5 crore worth of smartphones being sold



every minute across the online platforms in the first week of 2020's festive sales.

With a high share of tier-II and beyond shoppers coming in this time, Flipkart group emerged as overall leader during festive sales week one and accounted for 68 per cent of the total Flipkart group and

Amazon sales (which together accounted for over 90 per cent of the total online sales during this period), the report said.

"E-commerce sector has exceeded the aggressive forecasts we had made a few weeks before the festive season week 1 started out. This points to a revival of consumption senti-

**Smartphones led the sale accounting for 47 per cent of total festive sales, driven by new launches and affordable models with Rs 1.5 crore worth of smartphones being sold every minute across online platforms in the first week of 2020's festive sales**

ment amongst Indian shoppers, where they have been shopping online in big numbers driven by massive selection, great prices and the convenience and safety of shopping from home," Mrigank Gutgutia, Director at RedSeer Consulting, said. In many aspects this is indeed a 'festival of firsts' for Indian e-commerce which will build a strong foundation for its future

growth, he added.

The key factors that majorly boosted this year's sale include affordability, mobile phones and tier-II growth wave. These factors directly resulted in recovery of sales for brands and sellers, who have been strongly enabled by the online channels, to drive their sales growth which was affected by the COVID impact on offline channels, RedSeer said.

## RBI asks lending institutions to implement waiver of interest on interest scheme

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank on Tuesday asked all lending institutions, including non-banking financial companies, to implement the waiver of interest on interest for loans up to Rs 2 crore for the six months moratorium period beginning March 1, 2020.

On October 23, the government had announced the scheme for grant of ex-gratia payment of difference between compound interest and simple interest for six months to borrowers in specified loan accounts.

The scheme mandates ex-gratia payment to certain categories of borrowers by way of crediting the difference



between simple interest and compound interest for the period between March 1, 2020 to August 31, 2020 by respective lending institutions.

The government had asked the lending institutions to complete the exercise of crediting the amount in the

accounts of borrowers by November 5.

"All lending institutions are advised to be guided by the provisions of the Scheme and take necessary action within the stipulated timeline," the RBI said in a notification.

The finance ministry had issued the operational guidelines in the backdrop of the Supreme Court's direction to implement the interest waiver scheme.

The apex court on October 14, directed the Centre to implement "as soon as possible" interest waiver on loans of up to Rs 2 crore under the RBI moratorium scheme in view of the COVID-19 pandemic saying the common man's Diwali is in the government's hands.

Housing loans, education loans, credit card dues, auto loans, MSME loans, consumer durable loans and consumption loans are covered under the scheme.

As per the scheme, the lending institutions shall credit the difference between compound interest and simple interest with regard to the eligible borrowers in respective accounts for the said period irrespective of whether the borrower fully or partially availed the moratorium on repayment of loan announced by the RBI on March 27, 2020.

The scheme is also applicable on those who have not availed the moratorium scheme and continued with the repayment of loans.

## Granules India to set up Greenfield facilities in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Two city-based pharma companies- Granules India and Laurus Labs on Tuesday separately announced major investments in Genome Valley.

Granules India said it would be setting up a facility with a capacity to manufacture 10 billion units of finished dosages at an investment of Rs 400 crore. The proposed unit would generate employment for about 1,600 people, an official release from Industries Minister K T Rama Raos office said.

Laurus Labs, a leading research driven Pharmaceutical Manu facturing Company, announced setting up of a for-

mulation Facility with a unit capacity of 5 billion.

The company plans to invest Rs 300 crores in two phases of Rs 150 crore each.

Phase one of the plant is expected to provide employment to about 150 people, it said. Granules India has manufacturing sites in eight locations and presence in 75 countries. The company already operates the world's largest Commercial Pharmaceutical Formulation Intermediates (PFI) Facility at nearby Gagillapur. Krishna Prasad Chigurupati, Chairman and Managing Director of Granules India Ltd, met Rama Rao on Tuesday to formally make this announcement, it said.



## Hubilo raises USD 4.5 mn from Lightspeed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Hubilo, a global virtual events platform, has raised USD 4.5 million (about Rs 33.2 crore) in funding, led by venture capital firm Lightspeed.

Marquee tech angels, including Girish Mathru bootham (CEO Freshworks), Nishant Rao (ex-CEO LinkedIn India), Jonathan Boutelle (Co-founder, Slideshare), and Abinash Tripathy (CEO Helpshift) also participated in the seed funding round, Hubilo said in a statement late Monday night.

The company, which started its journey amidst the COVID crisis in April, has grown over 40X organically and is projected to exceed USD 10 million in booking run rate and host over one million attendees in the next few months, it added.

The USD 800 billion global events industry was one of the hardest hit by COVID-19 but organisers are migrating online rapidly and also expanding their attendee base.

## Vistara to start flights to Bangla from Nov 5

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Tata-SIA joint venture airline Vistara on Tuesday said it will launch flight services to Bangladesh from India, starting November 5, under the recently signed air bubble agreement between the two countries.

Vistara's announcement comes a day after budget carrier SpiceJet said it will operate flights to Dhaka and port city Chittagong from India from November 5, using bilateral traffic rights under the air



bubble pact. Vistara will operate special, non-stop flights between Delhi and Bangladesh's capital city, Dhaka, from November 5, the airline said in a release. The services will be operated on Thursdays and Sundays between the two cities,

using the airline's Airbus A320neo aircraft, as part of the bilateral 'transport bubble' formed between India and Bangladesh, it said.

Air bubble agreement between two countries helps airlines to operate interna-

tional flights, with certain restrictions, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are glad to be able to consistently expand our international network and widen our global presence, despite the current challenging times," Vistara CEO Leslie Thng said. "There is significant pent up demand for air travel between India and Bangladesh, and the resumption of flights brings relief to the traders, business communities and other regular travellers in the two countries," Thng added.

## Resumption of mining in Goa to give fillip to state economy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Goa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) on Tuesday made a case for the resumption of mining in the state, saying it will give much needed fillip to the state's economy in form royalty and taxes and also prove to be a viable source of livelihood for the people in these trying times.

The prolonged economic slowdown followed by the Covid has adversely affected almost all the sectors of the state economy, it said. Mining is at a standstill and tourism, which was the highest revenue



generating sector for the state, has all but dried up and inflows of visitors are at a standstill, the GCCCI said. This has caused huge discomfort and financial distress to the state and its people, the industry body said

adding that it is estimated by various agencies that the state's tourism industry -- which is the second largest revenue earner in Goa -- has lost about Rs 1,000 crore worth of business because of the lockdown.

## Gold declines Rs 137 amid tepid demand

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices in the national capital dropped Rs 137 to Rs 51,108 per 10 gram amid rupee appreciation and subdued demand, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had closed at Rs 51,245 per 10 gram in the previous trade. Silver, however, rose by Rs 475 to Rs 62,648 per kilogram from Rs 62,173 per kilogram in the previous trade. "Gold prices in India traded under pressure as spot gold prices for 24 karat in Delhi were weak by Rs 137 on rupee appreciation and subdued physical demand," Patel said.

## 'Vedanta's failed delisting to weaken holding firm's liquidity'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mining mogul Anil Agarwal-led Vedanta Resources Ltd's (VRL) failed attempt to take full ownership of its profitable operating subsidiary Vedanta Ltd will weaken liquidity, Moody's Investors Service said on Tuesday giving reasons for it placing VRL's rating under review for downgrade. Earlier this month, VRL did not get the mandatory shares from the public to delist Mumbai-listed Vedanta Ltd (VDL).

"Without operations of its own, VRL -- as the holding company -- needs to refinance debt maturities at a time of tight capital market liquidity, putting undue pressure on key subsidiaries to upstream cash," says Kaustubh Chaulbal, Moody's Vice President and Senior Credit Officer.

The takeover would have significantly improved the holding company VRL's cash flow and liquidity.

### MONEY MATTERS

## Maruti, Microsoft develop tech for testing applicants seeking DL

The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Tuesday said the company in association with Microsoft Research India has developed a smartphone-based technology for testing applicants seeking driver's license. The technology -



HAMS (Harnessing automobile for Safety) - has been deployed at Automated Driving Test Centre (ADTC), Dehradun, in association with the Transport Department, Government of Uttarakhand, MSI said in a statement. The technology is being developed and tested jointly by Maruti Suzuki-promoted Institute of Driving and Traffic Research (IDTR) and Microsoft Research India, it added. "HAMS, developed in partnership with Microsoft Research India, is an important tool to modernise the driving license test in our country. Starting with ADTC Dehradun, this technology will be introduced in more centres across several states," MSI Advisor Ajay said.

## IATO writes to PM Modi for announcement of SEIS benefits

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) has requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to announce Service Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) benefits for 2019-20 at the earliest.



All our members are reeling under the financial stress as it has become difficult for them to manage anymore and survive without any earnings in the past 7 months, IATO said in a letter to the PM. "For 2019-20, SEIS has not been announced by the government during this difficult time, whereas our members have already spent the funds for marketing, promotions to compete with our neighbouring countries, anticipating that SEIS will be given to tour operators," IATO President Pronab Sarkar said. Without the support of SEIS benefits, tour operators shall not be able to perform and compete with their neighbouring countries and attract more foreign tourists to India, he added.

## Sensex rallies 377 pts; Kotak Bank zooms 12 per cent

Equity benchmark Sensex rallied 377 points on Tuesday, tracking massive buying in Kotak Mahindra Bank after the lender posted strong quarterly earnings. The 30-share BSE index ended 376.60 points or 0.94 per cent higher at 40,522.10. Similarly,



the broader NSE Nifty surged 121.65 points or 1.03 per cent to 11,889.40. Shares of Kotak Mahindra Bank soared around 12 per cent after the lender reported a 22 per cent growth in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,947 crore for the July-September quarter. Without denying speculations about a merger with smaller rival IndusInd Bank, the private sector lender said the objectives of its recent Rs 7,000-crore capital raising exercise included acquisitions but added that it will be using the money judiciously. According to Emkay Global Financial Services, despite subdued credit growth, Kotak Bank reported a strong profit, mainly due to high treasury gains (including equity) and contained provisions as the bank believes that it is well guarded for the incoming asset quality stress.

## Sharing best practices among SCO members to help startups: Goyal

Sharing best practices, knowledge and engaging investors from the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation member nations will help strengthen startup ecosystem, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday. Launching the India-SCO Startup Forum, he said creativity, innovation and disruption will be the new mandate in the emerging future. The minister said the new unique concepts that startups come up with will get a much larger engagement through this forum. "Sharing our best practices, knowledge, engaging corporates and investors from all the member nations, monetising and mobilising capital, setting up incubators, providing exposure and scale with market access will certainly help the worthy ideas of our startups' innovations," Goyal said. SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) members are China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. He added that this forum is an opportunity for all the member nations to share and learn from their experiences.



## CEO: Dubai airport preps for possible 'slow' virus recovery

PNS ■ DUBAI

Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel, is getting busier. But it's a long way from what it once was amid the coronavirus pandemic as it prepares for a possible 'extended, slow recovery,' its CEO told The Associated Press.

After long-haul carrier Emirates drastically cut its flights in March and slowly resumed its routes, passenger numbers at the mammoth airport serving East-West travel have crept up to over 1 million a month -- just below 15% of what they were a year ago, CEO Paul Griffiths said.

To boost those numbers, Griffiths is urging countries to move away from mandatory quarantines on arriving passengers and toward the strategy embraced by Dubai. That includes aggressive coronavirus testing before departure, followed by mandatory mask-wearing on aircraft and testing on arrival.



"What we have to do is take appropriate measures to control and manage the risk, which actually are acceptable. I mean, life is full of risk management. It's not all full of risk elimination," Griffiths told the AP in an interview Monday. "Surely the same should apply to the virus. We need to get it under control to minimize the risk of infection."

"And that can be done with some of the measures that we've got available to us without prolonging the social and economic damage that is currently being inflicted." Across

the wider Middle East, passenger numbers this year are expected to reach only 60 million, down from 203 million in 2019, according to the International Air Transport Association. That's only 30% of last year's numbers. The recovery may take years. By 2021, the trade group hopes to see 90 million travelers in the Mideast, still drastically lower than 2019. In order to get passengers flying before a vaccine is widely available, the IATA is calling for mass, rapid testing of passengers rather than quarantines by countries.

With most basic chemical and petrochemical players having a diverse range of end-user industries, the impact of COVID-19 slowdown is likely to be moderated, ratings agency Icria said in a report. While the industry may face near-term headwinds, the medium to long-term credit outlook remains stable for the industry, Icria said. "Credit profiles of most of our rated basic chemical and petrochemical players are expected to remain resilient in 2020-21, supported by the diversification of products in their portfolio, wide applica-



tions of these chemicals and manageable leveraging levels," Icria Ratings Vice President and Co-Head -- Corporate

Ratings Ankit Patel said. "Despite the pronounced decline in revenues and margins in FY21, the credit profile

of most incumbents is supported by their large size, strong balance sheets, healthy liquidity and strong financial flexibility," he added. The global chemical industry has been dealt a series of blows from closures related to COVID-19 pandemic, demand destruction and logistical challenges, the report said. The severity varies as consuming sectors such as automotive and construction have been majorly impacted, while food packaging, pharma, sanitary and medical applications are witnessing a demand surge, primarily due to stockpiling, increase in delivery services, and high healthcare-focused activities.

Due to the weak demand scenario, the global industrial production is likely to ebb in 2020, before it witnesses a rise in 2021, Icria added.

For some basic chemicals like caustic soda, soda ash, methanol, among others, Icria expects that volumes are likely to be impacted by 300-500 basis points (bps) following the weak demand scenario.

"Margins will be impacted by a decline in capacity utilisation levels resulting in lower absorption of fixed costs and an increase in overheads such as freight costs this fiscal....," Icria Ratings Senior Vice President and Group Head -- Corporate Ratings, K Ravichandran said.



## I ensure content that you can watch with family: PRAJAKTA

**Y**ouTube sensation and influencer Prajakta Koli, popularly known for videos she creates for her channel *MostlySane*, says that at no point would she want her viewers to put on their headphones or pause her videos if someone older walked into the room. The 27-year-old has become a top YouTuber with over 5.74 million subscribers as on October 1, 2020.

In a candid interview with *IANSlife*, Koli shares more about her process of content creation and lockdown inspiration for her channel. Read excerpts:

**Q: What kind of content do you think works best with Indian viewers? Walking the tightrope between dumbing-down content and refining your content with time, how do you find a common denominator?**

**A:** Any piece of content that people can relate and identify to is what works the best. It is not something you will get your pulse on from the moment you start creating content, however, through trial and error you will eventually get an understanding of content and how people will react to it. Audience behaviour is extremely dynamic in our country and you will never really know what is going to work for sure. Over time however, you get a fair idea of what direction works best for your target audience.

**Q: While we're at it, please share how you shape your content keeping in mind the region, since everyone from Mumbaikars to the Indian diaspora watches you?**

**A:** I keep a diary with me where I add things that I find funny or humorous in everyday life situations and keep building on those ideas. When I usually script my videos I ensure I add instances and situations that happen to every family and not something that is region specific. Also, the language of delivery plays a very important role when making content.

**Q: If you had to name the three must-have ingredients in a Prajakta Koli video.**

**A:** One thing I ensure is that I create content that you can watch with your family. At no point would I want my viewers to put on their headphones or pause it if their parents or someone elder walked into the room. Second, I like my videos to be as relatable as possible. And third, is to try and make new ideas come to life every week.

**Q: You're diversifying your mediums, and your audience is loving that. What are your plans ahead?**

**A:** I have been someone who has always made

plans and stuck with it, but when my plan A didn't work out and I took a leap of faith and started creating content I decided to go with the flow and take on each day as it comes. But there definitely will be more acting and writing in the future.

**Q: The pandemic brought with it many hardships, but also a lot of content inspiration. Please share about both in your work's context.**

**A:** When the lockdown started my biggest fear was how will I still keep putting out content as I was so used to working with my team and relied on them heavily. Luckily, things worked out and I was able to maintain my weekly release schedule. With the lockdown I got more time to think about new content and implement them which people loved so I am thankful in a way that the lockdown happened and I could churn out more content pieces than I would have otherwise.

**Q: How has your audience changed during the lockdown, since most YouTubers registered a manifold increase in views.**

**A:** Well, the audiences haven't diversified that much since the lockdown; it is just the audience behaviour has changed wherein the viewers have started consuming more content on the internet than compared to pre-lockdown.

**Q: Your thoughts on malpractices like buying views on YouTube, which must be a fair platform.**

**A:** Major platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube allow you to boost your posts and videos to reach a wider audience, this is legitimate and doesn't violate any norms of social media, any other means of getting views should not be encouraged or indulged in.



When the lockdown started my biggest fear was how will I still keep putting out content as I was so used to working with my team and relied on them heavily. Luckily, things worked out and I was able to maintain my weekly release schedule. With the lockdown I got more time to think about new content and implement them which people loved so I am thankful in a way that the lockdown happened and I could churn out more content pieces than I would have otherwise.

## Books that spotlight children's mental health

**I**n these unprecedented times, when isolation, fatigue, gloom and the fear of losing a beloved has also come to grip children, taking care of their mental health is of paramount importance.

Here's a list of books that address the various emotions children struggle with, and can be companions to them during the hard times.

**'The Room on the Roof' by Ruskin Bond**

A classic coming-of-age story, which has held generations of readers spellbound! Rusty, a sixteen-year-old Anglo-Indian boy, is orphaned and has to live with his

English guardian in the claustrophobic European part in Dehra Dun. Unhappy with the strict ways of his guardian, Rusty runs away from home to live with his Indian friends. Plunging for the first time into the dream-bright world of the bazaar, Hindu festivals and other aspects of Indian life, Rusty is enchanted, and is lost forever to the prim proprieties of the European community. Written when the author was himself seventeen, this moving story of love and friendship, with a

new introduction and illustrations will be enjoyed by a whole new generation of readers.

**'Who Stole Bhaiya's Smile?' by Sanjana Kapur**

Bhaiya does not feel like playing these days. Could it be because of his new monster friend Dukduk, who is always hanging around him. No one in the family takes Bhaiya seriously. But Chiru knows there is more than what meets the eye. A story about the lingering effects of depression. The book is illustrated by Sunaina Coelho.

**'Hearts Do Matters' by Anita Myers**

What the world needs now in these times is love. 'Hearts Do Matter' supports children and adults through the losses and grief in their life. It teaches us that even when loved ones cannot be with us, we can feel their presence in our hearts. The new release is a beautiful picture book about a little girl who has a very special relationship with her mother. Her mother promised she would always be with her, and she shows in the book that she kept her promise in the most loving way.



## 'EMOTIONAL CONNECT IS WHAT THE AUDIENCES WANT'

Who knew a trained professional dancer will one day be known for his bad guy roles in the Telugu television industry and win numerous awards for it! Shaik Nagul Sharif aka Aadarsh, who defined cruel characters both in television and films with utmost 'sincerity' talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL on his journey, the new normal, OTT, and more



**B**e it his series of *Abhishekam* on ETV, *Agnipoolu* on Gemini, *Swathichinukulu* on ETV, *Gruhapravesham* on Zee Telugu, etc., he is immensely devoted to his characters. Acting constitutes a major part of his life and he wants to contribute more to this society in his own entertaining way.

**Accepting the new normal**

Now we have exclusive OTT platforms to showcase our creativity. It helps create a viewership for quality content, so why go to a multiplex? The lockdown saw many big-ticket films releasing online and this is becoming the new norm. However, they can always co-exist. Film or web series, both tend to reach a wider audience because of OTT, also it's viable. This move is a step towards optimism and millions of people are associated with it directly or indirectly, so for me, OTT is a likelier choice than cinema currently.

**Mass approval of audiences**

Telugu serials have come a long way, earlier viewers would wait for the weekend to watch their favourite soap opera. There are attractive content and a unique theme that we follow these days with the sole purpose of entertaining viewers. I am of the opinion that socially driven soap operas hardly sustain in our television industry because I have seen people changing the channel saying 'Oh, we know what's going to happen next and the outcome of it.' What do they actually want? An emotional connection. Sometimes our stories revolve around immortal beings having a godly dimension, dressed for glory and extreme dramatisa-

tion, yet they wouldn't switch the channel! We are progressing with love stories, comedy, and portraying strong, beautiful women on screen.

**Not to be forgotten**

A production house known for emphasising mostly on female-centric roles, one fine day decides to consider a male actor to be their protagonist, and by god's grace that was me. The role in *Agnipoolu* on Gemini as Ganga can never be forgotten. Some roles are really close to our hearts and this was one of them. It helped me transform my career graph by offering complexities, inspiring me, standing against the odds as a hero because I am known for doing villainous roles in the television fraternity.

**Dearest Jayalalitha ji**

In the times when Jayalalitha ji was at the top of her game in the entertainment industry, I got a chance to work with her for over two years in a serial. So humble, so dignified and so punctual! In comparison with today's times, where I witnessed many actresses throwing unnecessary tantrums before setting up the scene, Jayalalitha ji was something else despite being a superstar. She used to be instantly ready for the shot! She brought with herself a universe of creativity, I miss her.

**Resuming shooting**

I am in favour of these new SOPs, we are maintaining social distancing to protect our cast and crew. Hygiene measures are a must! Special camera angles are being used to make characters appear closer due to social distancing. The new normal only allows limited people in the area of a shooting, there are no intimate scenes and make-up is applied with utmost caution.

**Telugu serials have come a long way, earlier viewers would wait for the weekend to watch their favourite soap opera. There are attractive content and a unique theme that we follow these days with the sole purpose of entertaining viewers.**



# An actor must be thick-skinned: Kriti Kharbanda

Giving up and sitting back has never been an option for actor Kriti Kharbanda who insists that as an actor it is important to be thick-skinned in order to survive. Adding that for an actor, there are always enough people to put him/her down, but very few who will motivate, she says, “You should be your biggest cheerleader. The moment you give up on yourself, the world will refuse to help. And when one decides not to, nothing in the world can break you. Before my big hit, people would say, ‘she won’t last.’ However, I refused to pay any heed to that, and focussed on the positives — there were many still willing to put money on me. Then came the life changing hit. But it happened to me only because I didn’t give up and kept going.”

Kharbanda who will be seen in Bejoy Nambiar’s *Taish* along with Pulkit Samrat, releasing on October 29 on Zee 5, says that the director managed to bring out the best in her and the role was both challenging and intense. “It is unlike anything I have done before. *Taish* has introduced me to a very different side of my acting abilities. Working on this film has taught me several things which I would like to imbibe and utilize while working on other projects too.”

Expecting that the film will precipitate more work, the actor who made her acting debut in 2009 with the Telugu film *Boni* and has worked in Kannada, Hindi and Telugu language films does not really see any drastic contrasts between the industries in different



regions. “It is all about the the people you work with. I have had good and bad experiences everywhere. There is never a guarantee that if you are working within a particular region or with a production house, everything will be smooth or bad. For me, it has only been about personal growth, no matter which language I have worked in. How I used to understand and respond to a situation — I wouldn’t react the way I did five years ago, considering one matures with age.”

Excited about the kind of cinema being made by a newer crop of directors working on a smaller budget and willing to experiment with narratives, the actor who starred in films like *Veerey Ki Wedding* and *Pagalpanti* says she is always on a lookout for roles that pose new challenges. “So many talented people coming from across the country are coming forward with novel stories. I would love to be part of those tales.”

As one witnesses major films being released on OTT platforms, Kharbanda says that while an actor would love a theatre release considering the experience it offers to audiences, in times like these, premieres on digital platforms are understandable. “Well, if theatre releases are not happening, this cannot mean that we would stop working. Also, it makes all the sense to support the producer if he decides that the future of the film is on an OTT platform.”

For someone who does not mind spending time at home, the lockdown was not really brutal. “I am glad that I managed to learn several new things during that time including playing the piano. The idea is to constantly think ahead. The lockdown taught me to prioritize my physical and mental health. We now know not to take anything for granted.”

All set to start shooting for her next film *14 Phere* to be directed by Devanshu Singh, Kharbanda adds, “I have also signed something else, which should be announced by the last week of November.”



## Idris Elba banned from boxing by mother, wife

Actor Idris Elba, who trained to be a pro kickboxer back in 2017, shared that his mother Eve and wife Sabrina have told him to cut the nonsense out when he proposed making a movie on fighting.

Talking to actor Matthew McConaughey on a streaming website Fane, Elba said, “I really did think about developing an idea (for a film) around an ageing fighter, which means I will get back into the ring.”

He said that his wife was not impressed with the idea and neither was his mum, reports [femalefirst.co.uk](#). “They are like, Cut that nonsense out.”

Elba says the idea of going back to fighting excited him. “But I don’t need to fight some kid again.”

Elba has been putting his boxing skills to good use by teaching youngsters how to box, to turn them away from knife crime for his series *Idris Elba’s Fight School*.

## Javicia Leslie’s first look as Batwoman out

Actress Javicia Leslie has stepped into the suit of Batwoman, and she is loving it.

Two first-look images of the Batwoman suit redesign have been released, around actress Leslie’s character Ryan Wilder, reports [variety.com](#).

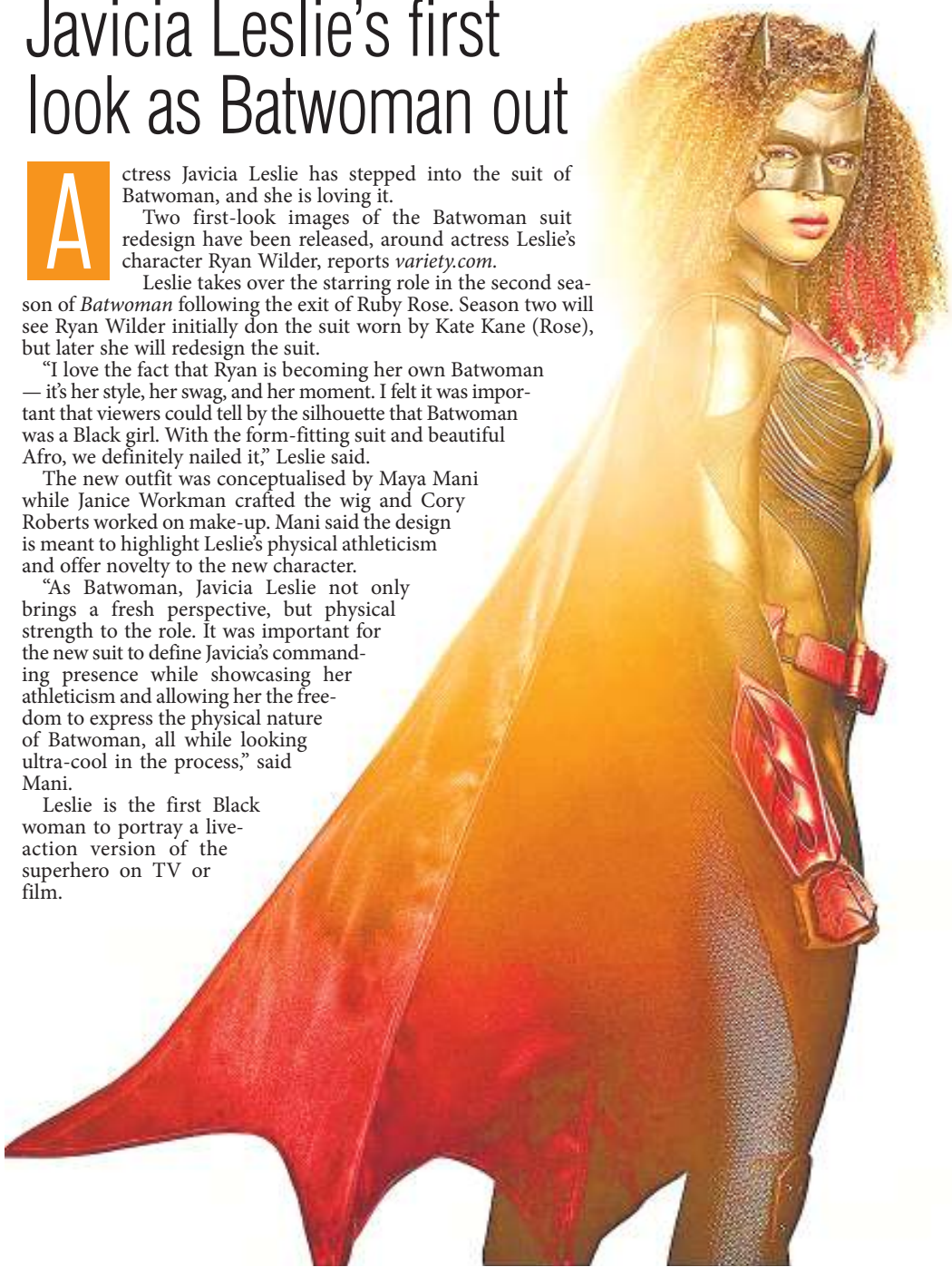
Leslie takes over the starring role in the second season of *Batwoman* following the exit of Ruby Rose. Season two will see Ryan Wilder initially don the suit worn by Kate Kane (Rose), but later she will redesign the suit.

“I love the fact that Ryan is becoming her own Batwoman — it’s her style, her swag, and her moment. I felt it was important that viewers could tell by the silhouette that Batwoman was a Black girl. With the form-fitting suit and beautiful Afro, we definitely nailed it,” Leslie said.

The new outfit was conceptualised by Maya Mani while Janice Workman crafted the wig and Cory Roberts worked on make-up. Mani said the design is meant to highlight Leslie’s physical athleticism and offer novelty to the new character.

“As Batwoman, Javicia Leslie not only brings a fresh perspective, but physical strength to the role. It was important for the new suit to define Javicia’s commanding presence while showcasing her athleticism and allowing her the freedom to express the physical nature of Batwoman, all while looking ultra-cool in the process,” said Mani.

Leslie is the first Black woman to portray a live-action version of the superhero on TV or film.



## Kapil Sharma: I don’t pay much attention to trolls

Comedian Kapil Sharma is no stranger to online hate, but he says he does not pay much attention to trolls because he believes in making the world a better place with his jokes.

Recently, *#BoycottKapilSharmaShow* trended on Twitter as netizens were not too thrilled about one of the show’s segments featuring Kiku Sharda and Krushna Abbashek.

A while ago, a netizen attacked Kapil on Twitter for not putting up anything regarding the late actor Sushant Singh Rajput. Though he shut down the troll in his own style, it’s not always that you see him reacting to all the negative comments coming his way.



Asked how he deals with trolls, Kapil told *IANS*, “My sole focus is to provide non-stop laughter to all my fans and I believe in making world a better and light place with my jokes. I don’t pay much attention to trolls.”

In fact, he is currently enjoying his current phase. Last year, he became a dad and now he is associated with a show for kids.

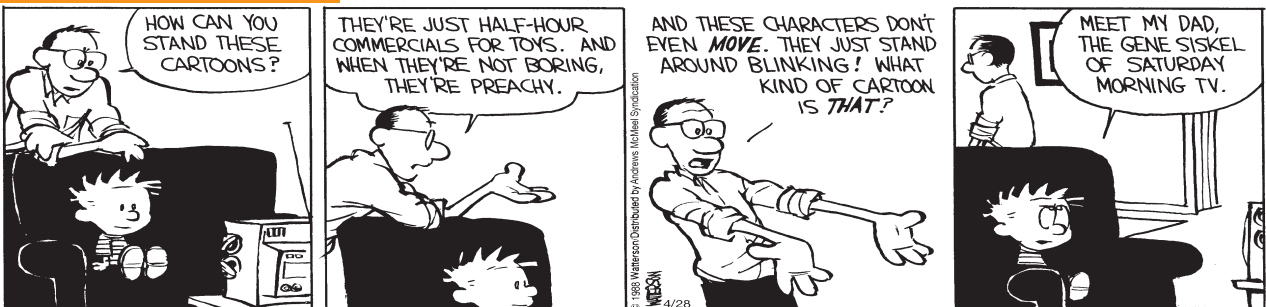
“I am extremely blessed. Each day offers something new. Even before parenthood, I always wished to do something for kids. Hence, you could see the kid avatar on *The Kapil Sharma Show*. But yes, I will try and do more for kids, and *The Honey Bunny Show With Kapil Sharma* is a good start,” he said.

## FUN

### ARCHIE



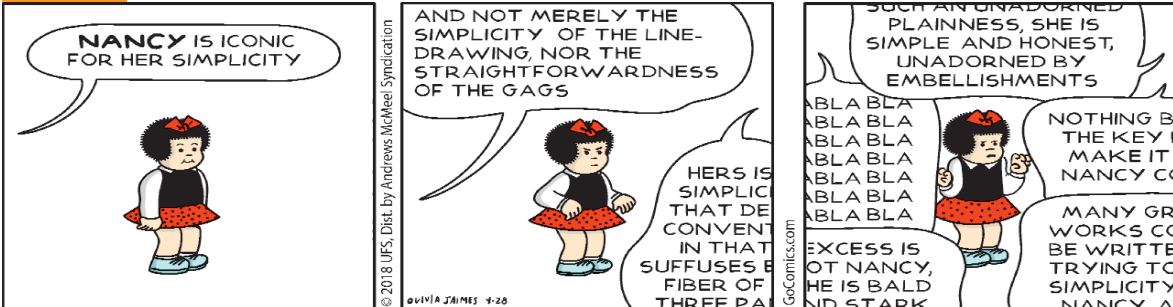
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



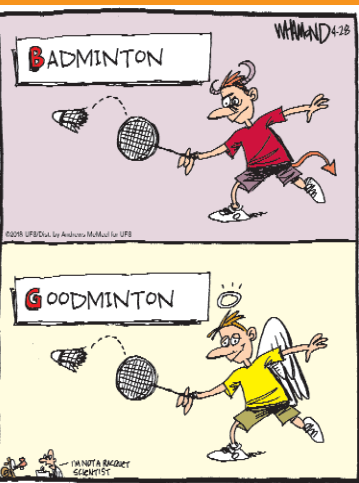
### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



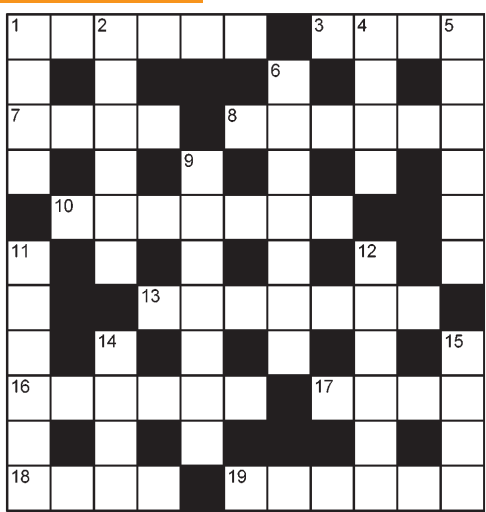
### REALITY CHECK



### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



#### ACROSS

- Baking instructions
- Factual
- Play this with two sticks
- Rub to a shine
- Young hen
- Fake document
- Extra-intelligent person
- Finished
- Playthings
- Almost

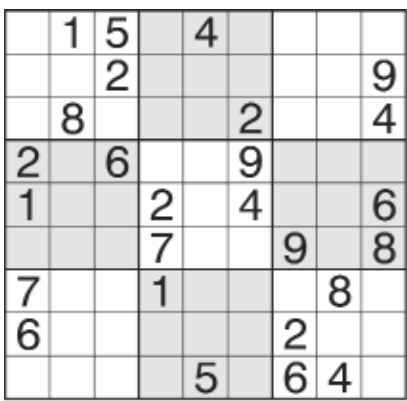
#### DOWN

- Travel by horse
- Captured
- Water from the sky
- Breathe out

- From another country
- A sea creature with many arms
- Aeroplane trip
- Motorist
- Jealousy
- Large group of soldiers



### SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution								
5	9	2	1	7	3	8	6	4
4	7	1	8	6	9	3	5	2
6	3	8	2	5	4	1	9	7
1	4	9	3	2	7	5	8	6
8	5	7	4	9	6	2	1	3
2	6	3	5	1	8	7	4	9
7	8	6	9	3	1	4	2	5
3	1	5	6	4	2	9	7	8

#### Rules

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





Chris (Gayle) makes the game so easy and I told him that you should never retire. I've never seen him struggle, and he's probably the greatest T20 player ever



We are still very happy, we are still very clear and we have nothing that we have to change drastically, it is just that on one day the opposition played better than you



Our batsmen got out early to some good balls. I think in the middle overs, we were still going well with 92/3 but after Morgan's wicket, we just lost momentum



It's so hard when you are away from your family. With the bubble, you don't have the close ones. The kind of toughness Mandeep has shown has rubbed off on other boys as well

# Rashid's magical spell powers SRH to 88-run win over Delhi

## Openers Warner (66) & Saha (87) add 107 for the opening wicket



Sunrisers Hyderabad openers David Warner and Wriddhiman Saha

**PTI ■ DUBAI**

Wriddhiman Saha stamped his class with a 45-ball 87 while captain David Warner hit a quick-fire half-century as Sunrisers



Shahbaz Nadeem celebrates after taking wicket of Marcus Stoinis

laid the base for Sunriser's huge total, the highest score in Dubai this season, while Manish Pandey (44 off 31 balls) provided the final flourish in the team's must-win game.

Sent in to bat, both Warner and Saha went after the Delhi bowlers from the word go. Fully capitalising on the field restrictions, the duo smashed boundaries (11 fours and two sixes) every over to collect 77-runs in the first six overs, the best Poweplay figures of the season.

In the sixth over, Warner smashed the tournament's leading wicket-taker Kagiso Rabada (0/54) for four boundaries and a six, helping the Sunrisers reach 100 runs in just 8.4 overs. Till Warner was taking on

# Gayle is greatest T20 player: Mandeep

**PTI ■ SHARJAH**

Kings XI Punjab opener Mandeep Singh, who is grieving the loss of his father, was in awe of Chris Gayle's power-hitting against Kolkata Knight Riders, and described the Jamaican as the "greatest T20 player" of the game.

Casing 150 on Monday night, Gayle, who was overlooked and was also ill in the first phase of the IPL, showed why he is called the *Universe Boss* during his innings of 51 off 29 balls.

Gayle and Mandeep, who anchored the chase with an unbeaten 66 off 56 balls, shared 100 runs in 10.1 overs to help KXIP jump to the fourth spot by registering their fifth win on the trot.

"Chris (Gayle) makes the game so easy and I told him that you should never retire. I've never seen him struggle, and he's probably the greatest T20 player ever," Mandeep said after the eight-wicket win over KKR here.

Gayle was adjudged man-of-the-match for his whirlwind knock, his second fifty in five matches.

"Like I said, he should never retire, he's always in great touch. I've been lucky that I've played with the likes of Chris Gayle, AB (de Villiers), (Adam) Gilchrist, Virat Kohli..."

"I started with Chris Gayle in KKR in 2010. I've been very fortunate to know him as a friend. He's so humble, down-to-earth," Mandeep said.

Mandeep has shown exceptional mental toughness by staying back in the UAE despite losing his father and was given the responsibility of opening the innings in the absence of an injured



Mayank Agarwal.

He made a quick 17 against Sunrisers Hyderabad but on Monday he stayed till the end to take the team through.

"I opened in the last game as well, they wanted me to have a go in the first six overs," Mandeep said.

"I told (skipper) KL Rahul that let me play my game, even if I take a few balls, I know I have the belief that I can win games for the team. That's what I did.

"I took some balls initially, but even in the middle overs, I was thinking that if I bat till the end I will win this game for the team," he said.

# Roma end Milan's perfect start

**AP ■ MILAN**

AC Milan's perfect start to the Serie A season ended with a 3-3 draw against Roma but the Rossoneri still moved two points clear of Napoli and Sassuolo.

Roma defender Marash Kumbulla on Monday equalised six minutes from time following an unintended assist from Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who was trying to clear a corner and instead redirected the ball toward the far post where Kumbulla rushed forward to pound it in.

Roma is ninth, five points behind Milan.

Edin Dzeko and Jordan Veretout, with a penalty, also scored for Roma.

Ibrahimovic scored twice for Milan, which also got a goal from Alexis Saelemaekers with Rafael Leao setting up two of the Rossoneri's scores.

Ibrahimovic needed only one touch to find the net following Leao's pass over the top less than two minutes in at the San Siro.

Milan was without goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma and winger Jens Petter Hauge after both players tested positive for the coronavirus and Donnarumma was missed when Dzeko made it 1-1.

Reserve keeper Ciprian Tatarusanu failed to bat away a corner, allowing the ball to reach Dzeko, who leaped over Alessio Romagnoli for a header by the far post.

Saelemaekers scored Milan's second after the break following strong work down the left flank and an expert cross from Leao.

Veretout equalised for Roma with a penalty in the 71st following a debatable foul from Ismael Bennacer.

Ibrahimovic then thought he had sealed victory with a penalty in the 79th following an equally dubious foul by Gianluca Mancini. But the Swedish superstar was to blame for the final goal from Kumbulla, who also scored the winner in Roma's 2-1 comeback win at Young Boys in the Europa League last week.



# Deadly duo does it again

Son nets from Kane's assist as Spurs win against Burnley

**AP ■ BURNLEY**

The partnership between Harry Kane and Son Heung-min is developing into the most prolific in Premier League history.

Son headed in from Kane's flick-on to secure a 1-0 win at Burnley on Monday, making it the 29th time they have combined for a goal. It was the ninth time in six league matches this season alone.

"They are top players but close friends," Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho said. "No jealousy."

Only Frank Lampard and Didier Drogba have linked up for more more goals — 36 — in the Premier League during their time at Chelsea.

Moments before setting up the only goal at Turf Moor, Kane cleared off the line to deny Burnley defender James Tarkowski.

While Spurs secured a third league away win thanks to Son's 10th goal in nine games in all competitions, the home form has let them down. Only two points have been collected in North London after



the team threw away winning positions in stoppage time in two matches.

Tottenham, which didn't manage a shot on target in the first half at Burnley, moved up to fifth in the standings and didn't even need Gareth Bale being deployed from the bench.

"We've dropped points where we shouldn't have this season so we've still got a lot to learn, but nights like this will definitely give us that confidence," Kane said.

"We're just at the stage

where we've been so close for so many years and I think the additions this season have given us more leaders on the pitch and made us more experienced."

Burnley is stuck on one point.

**WEST BROM WINLESS**

West Bromwich is still searching for its first win but Karlan Grant did rescue a third point of the season by equalizing for a 1-1 draw at Brighton.

Brighton took the lead five minutes before halftime when an attempted clearance from Branislav Ivanovic rebounded off Jake Livermore and into the back of the net.

But West Brom's second-half pressure paid off when Grant turned a ball from Callum Robinson past goalkeeper Mat Ryan in the 83rd minute to clinch the point.

Grant joined West Brom from Huddersfield in the off-season after netting 19 goals in the second-tier Championship last season.

Brighton is two points better off than West Brom with five points.

# Agiero could be out for a month: Pep

**AFP ■ MANCHESTER**

Manchester City striker Sergio Agiero will be out for perhaps as much as a month, coach Pep Guardiola told a press conference in Marseille on Monday.

City will be without the Argentine on Tuesday against Marseille in the Champions League.

Agiero, who had just returned from injury, suffered a muscle problem in the Premier League draw at West Ham on Saturday.

"We knew he wasn't in the best condition," Guardiola said. "When you are out four or five months for a knee injury you always have the risk when you come back of injuries."

"It will be 10-15 days minimum. If it is longer it will be three weeks to a month. I don't know."

Guardiola said he wants "Sergio to come back when he has fully recovered. We miss him a lot. What he has done for this club is extraordinary, he is a City legend."

Brazilian Gabriel Jesus is also absent, but Guardiola said he did not regret not recruiting a striker in the transfer window.

# Pak to tour SA in April: PCB

**PTI ■ KARACHI**

Pakistan will tour South Africa in April next year for a limited over series, including three One-Day internationals, which is part of the ICC men's World Cup Super League, the country's cricket board (PCB) said on Tuesday.

Pakistan will also play three T20 internationals during the tour, which was earlier scheduled to be held in September/October this year but had to be deferred due to the rising Covid-19 cases in South Africa.

"The Pakistan Cricket Board today confirmed the men's national team will tour South Africa in April 2021 for three One-Day Internationals, which will be part of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League, and as many T20 Internationals," PCB said in a statement.

"Pakistan has now agreed to fulfil its Future Tour Programme (FTP) commitment prior to visiting

# Pak, Zim squads get all clear

**Rawalpindi:** All 107 Covid-19 tests conducted on Zimbabwe and Pakistan players, support staff and match officials have returned negative ahead of the limited-overs series starting later this week, the Pakistan Cricket Board said on Tuesday.

The tests were conducted on Monday as part of the PCB's COVID-19 protocols for the bilateral series.

All players, officials and staff have moved into a hub in a five-star hotel in Islamabad, the PCB said, and "are now allowed to interact with each other and move freely within the bio-secure bubble."

AP

Zimbabwe for two Tests and three T20Is. The schedule of both the series will be announced in due course," it added.

# DUGOUT

## MOTION PICTURE



SRH skipper David Warner, who turns 34 on Tuesday, poses for photo with Priyam Garg and Abhishek Sharma



AB de Villiers has decided to skip Big Bash League this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic & the upcoming birth of his third child











Sanjay Manjrekar

KL Rahul in his last 5 Test series

- v SA - Avg 7.1
- v Eng - Avg 29
- v WI at home - Avg 18
- v Aus - Avg 10.7
- v WI - Avg 25.4

I say very lucky to get a recall based on IPL & white ball performance. But now let's just hope he makes the most of this chance. Good luck to him!

POINTS TABLE									
			P	W	L	NRR	PTS		
1		MI	11	7	4	+1.252	14		
2		RCB	11	7	4	+0.092	14		
3		DC	12	7	5	+0.030	14		
4		KXIP	12	6	6	-0.049	12		
5		KKR	12	6	6	-0.479	12		
6		SRH	12	5	7	+0.396	10		
7		RR	12	5	7	-0.505	10		
8		CSK	12	4	8	-0.602	8		



## Nithya to headline a Telugu web series

NAGARAJ GOUD

After receiving rich accolades for her turn in Amazon Prime's *Breathe: Into the Shadows*, Nithya Menen is set for another show with the streaming giant. This time around though, the show will mark her digital debut in Telugu, we learnt exclusively. According to a well-placed source, the show will be produced by Swapna Dutt, while actor-turned-filmmaker Avasarala Srinivas is acting as the showrunner.

The source says, "Swapna briefed the show's idea to Nithya and the actress loved it. It is family drama interspersed with humour, highlighting the intricacies of relationships and middle-class values. It will spread over eight episodes, with each episode running into 25 minutes. The script has been

locked recently but the writing team will go through it once again before the team swings into full-fledged pre-production."

The source adds that the show will mark the directorial debut of cinematographer/short filmmaker Gomtesh Upadhye. "He is directing it from a story of well-known writer Balabhadrapatruni Ramani. The project is set in the Godavari belt and the team will be undertaking a recce shortly to finalise the locations. The music director and cinematographer are yet to be confirmed, so is the supporting cast. Swapna is looking to start the production in December or in January and wrap it up in one-go," the source concludes.



## Akasaam Nee Haddhu Ra is very close to my heart: Suriya

Actor-producer Suriya says his upcoming *Soorai Pottru* (*Akasaam Nee Haddhu Ra* in Telugu) is a special one, and the makers want to give the message that nothing can stop you from chasing your dreams if you are true to yourself.

The action drama is a fictionalised version of the book *Simply Fly* written on the life of Air Deccan founder Captain GR Gopinath. The trailer, which dropped on Monday, shows how a "rebel with an idea" aims to make flying affordable for people.

"*Soorai Pottru* is a very special movie for me and one that's very close to my heart. With this film, we want to bring out the message that nothing in this world can stop you from chasing your dreams if you are true to yourself and dedicated to the task. We hope that the audience will continue to shower us with their unwavering support," said Suriya.

Helmed by Sudha Kongara, the film also stars Mohan Babu, Paresh Rawal and Aparna Balamurali.

"*Soorai Pottru* has given me a chance to work with incredible Sudha ma'am and versatile actors. This is like a dream come true for me. I have worked really hard for this role and it required a lot of physical and mental preparation to get into the skin of the character. The film is an inspiration to all those who dare to dream, by sharing a story of synergy, love, hardships and one man's dream to fly," said Aparna.

The film is produced by Suriya's 2D Entertainment and co-produced by Guneet Monga's Sikhya Entertainment. It will premiere on November 12 on Amazon Prime Video.



## FIRST LOOK

The look of Nandamuri Taraka Ratna's from *Saaradhi*, his next, was unveiled on Tuesday. He will be seen as a Kho kho coach in the film, directed by Jaakata Ramesh. A Kadapa -set sports drama with commercial bells and whistles, the film's shooting is over except for three days of patch work, which the director intends to wrap up in Hyderabad shortly. TV girl Kona Sasitha is cast opposite Taraka Ratna.



Actor Rajasekhar, who has been battling COVID-19, is doing better. Citi Neuro Centre, which has been treating him for the past 10 days, on Tuesday said that he has been weaned off non-invasive ventilatory support in the ICU. He received plasma therapy and cytosorb device therapy as a part of his ongoing treatment, the hospital informed.

The hospital added that the actor's clinical condition "is better". "He is responding to treatment and continues to be closely monitored by our clinical team," a statement from the hospital read.

The actor's wife Jeevitha, who has been admitted to the same hospital for COVID-19, was discharged last Saturday after her latest test proved to be negative.

In a career spanning more than 35 years, Rajasekhar, known for his angry young man image and forthright nature, has been part of memorable films like *Prathigatana*, *Vandemataram*, *Ankusham*, *Magaadu*, *Anna*, *Maa Annayya* and *Simharasi* among others. His last film was Prasanth Varma's *Kalki*, which underperformed at the box-office.

He will be next seen in the Telugu remake of Malayalam hit *Joseph*.

## Rajasekhar's condition improves



## Another actor from Krishna-Vijaya Nirmala family

After Ashok Galla, another member of Krishna-Vijaya Nirmala family is set for his T-town debut. Sharan 'The Light' Kumar, grandson of the late Vijaya Nirmala, is debuting with an action drama, which marks the directorial debut of Ramachandra Vattikutti. Presented by Manvitha and Kushala Kumar Bulemani, the film is a production venture of Srilatha B Venkat and Venkat Bulemani. It was launched in Hyderabad earlier this week.

As Nareesh VK sounded the clapper-board for the first shot, superstar Krishna directed it.

The script was handed over to Ramachandra by actor Sudheer Babu and his wife Priya. Jayasudha, Sai Tej, Nawin Vijaya Krishna were among others who graced the muhurat.

Speaking later, Krishna congratulated Sharan on debuting with a promising film. "A number of artists

**PRESENTED BY MANVITHA AND KUSHALA KUMAR BULEMANI, THE FILM IS A PRODUCTION VENTURE OF SRILATHA B VENKAT AND VENKAT BULEMANI.**

from our family have won the appreciation of the audience. I sincerely wish that Sharan, too, gets their love. I wish the producer and the director all the best," he said.

Happy to be blessed by Krishna, Sharan said that if it wasn't for Nareesh, the launch wouldn't have been possible. He added the script has been worked upon for the past 18 months and that he and the director have travelled through it.

The producers informed that the film will go in front of the cameras from November-end, with an intention to wrap it up in a start-to-finish schedule. The likes of Gemini Suresh, Jabardasth Trinath, Cyrus Shava Khan, Akula Gopal and D Satish are playing supporting roles.



## PATAAS GIRL FOR SRIKANTH

The makers of Srikanth's next, *Maranamrudangam*, have finalized Pataas girl Shruti Sodhi as the leading lady. Announcing her casting on Tuesday, producer Dr Kanchapuramrath said the film will roll from November. "The story is tailor-made for Srikanth and I hope it will give him a break. Director Venkatesh Rebba has developed it keeping in mind the taste of contemporary audiences," he said.

Speaking about the project earlier, Srikanth said the title is apt for the story. "I like the title a lot. I've watched Chiranjeevi garu's *Maranamrudangam* multiple times but our film has no relation to his film. I liked the story and I've signed it after listening to multiple narrations. I will be seen in dual roles," he had said.

Anand, who has composed music for Charmme Kaur-starrer *Mantra* last decade, is on board to render tunes. Thulasi Das has penned the film's story.