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VIJAYAWADA, THURSDAY APRIL 15, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



WE'RE ENTERTAINERS, NOT FACT-CHECKERS, SAYS SAMANTHA
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TIKTOK FOUNDER AMONG WORLD'S RICHEST WITH \$60 BILLION FORTUNE

Just last year, the world's most valuable startup, ByteDance Ltd., was being squeezed from all sides. The Trump administration wanted the Chinese firm, which owns the ubiquitous TikTok video-sharing platform, to get rid of assets. Beijing was cracking down on tech businesses, and India blacklisted some of its social-media apps. For all the obstacles, ByteDance kept growing. Now its founder, 38-year-old Zhang Yiming, is among the world's richest people -- a distinction that lately has carried increased risks in China. Shares of the company trade in the private market at a valuation of more than \$250 billion, people familiar with the dealings have said.



POLL PANEL FORMER CHIEF GVG KRISHNAMURTY PASSES AWAY

Former election commissioner GVG Krishnamurty died here on Wednesday due to age-related ailments. According to details shared by his family with the EC, the 86-year-old Krishnamurty passed away around 10 am. An Indian Legal Service officer, Krishnamurty became the election commissioner in October, 1993. His last rites will take place this evening at the Lodhi Road crematorium. Interestingly, the former poll panel chief had retired in the middle of the 13th Lok Sabha elections and when asked about it, he famously said: "Individuals do not matter, institutions do. And the Election Commission has grown into a strong, viable institution."



1.84 LAKH INDIA COVID CASES IN NEW DAILY HIGH, 1,027 DEATHS IN 24 HOURS

India, gripped by the deadly second wave of the pandemic, reported 1,84,372 new coronavirus infections, hitting the highest daily tally once again. The new cases pushed the total cases to over 1.38 crore. Deaths rose by 1,027 to 1,72,085. With over 1,000 people dying in the last 24 hours, this is the highest daily death count in nearly six months. This is also the fourth straight day of the country seeing over 1.5 lakh new cases and the eighth straight of over one lakh cases. India's tally of more than 1.38 crore Covid cases is the second-highest globally, behind the United States and ahead of Brazil's.



EGYPT 'SEIZES' MEGASHIP, SEEKS NEARLY \$1 BILLION COMPENSATION

The megaship which blocked Egypt's Suez Canal and crippled world trade for nearly a week has been "seized" on court orders until the vessel's owners pay \$900 million, canal authorities said Tuesday. The 200,000-tonne MV Ever Given got diagonally stuck in the narrow but crucial global trade artery in a sandstorm on March 23, triggering a mammoth six-day-long effort by Egyptian personnel and international salvage specialists to dislodge it. The blockage by the vessel held up an estimated \$9.6 billion-worth of cargo between Asia and Europe each day it was stuck.



India's National Education Policy is futuristic: Modi

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Vax exporter India now seeks imports as Covid cases mount

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday said it will fast-track emergency approvals for COVID-19 vaccines authorised by Western countries and Japan, paving the way for possible imports of Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Moderna shots.

The move, which will exempt companies from carrying out local safety trials for their vaccines, follows the world's biggest surge in cases in the country this month.

Since April 2, India has reported the highest daily tallies of infections. It reported 161,736 cases on Tuesday, taking the total to 13.7 million, while deaths rose by 879 to 171,058.

On Tuesday, India's richest state Maharashtra, which accounts for about a quarter of the country's cases, said it would impose stringent restrictions from Wednesday to try to contain the spread.

India has the biggest global vaccine manufacturing capacity and had exported tens of millions of doses before its own demand skyrocketed and led to a shortage in some states.

Dozens of poor countries have relied on Indian exports to run their inoculation drives.

The health ministry said vaccines authorised by the World Health Organization or authorities in the United States, Europe, Britain and Japan could be granted emergency use approval in India.

"If any of these regulators have approved a vaccine, the vaccine is now ready to be brought into the country for use, manufacture and fill-and-finish," Vinod Kumar Paul, a senior government health official, told a news conference.



Lakhs take holy dip in Ganga at Haridwar

PNS ■ DEHRADUN(UTTARKHAND)

Throwing caution to the wind amid rising cases of coronavirus, thousands of seers congregated on Wednesday at Har ki Pauri in Haridwar to take a dip in the Ganga during the third shahi snan of the Kumbh mela.

The royal bath marked Mesh Sankranti and Baisakhi, and fell two days after a similar convergence of sadhus' and other devotees for the second shahi snan -- events where following social distancing norms appears almost impossible.

By noon between eight and 10 lakh people had taken a bath in the river, Uttarakhand DGP Ashok Kumar, who was supervising the arrangements at Haridwar, said. Sadhus from four of the 13

akhadas were through with the snan' by this time. The officer said the event was going on without any hindrance. He said the crowds at the Ganga ghats were much smaller than expected at the third shahi snan - considered the most important in the series - and attributed this to the Covid restrictions in place. Police personnel were seen distributing masks among people in the Mela area. However, social distancing norms were violated openly by the seers when they and their followers descended the steps at Har ki Pauri to wade into the river. No masks were worn by a large proportion of them.

AP reports 18 Covid deaths, most since Oct

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported 18 Covid-19 fatalities on Wednesday, the highest in a day after October 27 even as 4,157 fresh cases of the infection were registered in the state.

A health department bulletin said 1,606 coronavirus patients had recovered in the state in 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday, while the number of active cases increased to a near six-month high of 28,383.

After 1.55 crore tests, at an overall infection positivity rate of 6.03 per cent, the cumulative Covid-19 positives shot up to 9,37,049.

Covid forces CBSE to defer Class XII exams

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Class 10 board exams have been cancelled and Class 12 exams have been deferred because of a nationwide Covid surge that had led to demands by parents, students, politicians and various states for a government rethink. The big announcement affecting over 35 lakh students followed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting this afternoon with the Education Minister and top officers.

The CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) exams for Class 12, which were to be held from May 4 to June 14, have been postponed, said Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank in tweets. A decision will be taken on fresh dates on June 1, he said, adding that students will have at least 15 days' notice before the exams.

On the Class 10 exams that were cancelled, the minister said the results would be prepared "on the basis of an objective criterion to be developed by the Board" and students not satisfied with their marks



would be given the chance to take the exams whenever they can be held.

For schools under the ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education) board, a decision is yet to be announced.

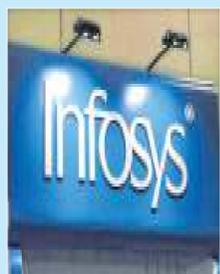
Around 21.5 lakh students were to take the Class 10 exams and some 14 lakh students are registered for Class 12, according to the CBSE.

PM Modi reportedly said in the meeting that while academics are important, "the health and well-being of students has to be the top priority for the government".



Democracy sans decency is the hallmark of campaign for Tirupati by-poll

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Infosys board approves up to Rs 9,200-crore buyback plan

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TODAY

ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Chaitra & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi : Tithya: 03:26 pm
Nakshatram: Krittika: 08:52 pm
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 01:49 pm - 03:22 pm
Yamagandam: 06:03 am - 07:36 am
Varjyam: 06:57 am - 08:46 am
Gulika: 09:09 am - 10:43 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritkalam: 05:49 pm - 07:38 pm
Abhijit Muhurtam: 11:51 am - 12:41 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 38/
Humidity: 54%
Sunrise: 06:01 am
Sunset: 06:31 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated April 14, 2021 5:00 PM

Jagan is implementing ideology of Ambedkar in letter and spirit: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

YSRCP leaders on Wednesday marked the 130th birth anniversary of 0Dr BR Ambedkar by paying rich floral tributes to the man who drafted India's Constitution and champion of human rights.

Taking part in the celebrations at YSRCP central office here, Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy garlanded a portrait of Ambedkar and released a book published by Varaprasad based on real events that took place in the life of the late leader.

Speaking on the occasion, Sajjala said Ambedkar was a great leader



and his ideology has shown a path to the country and to the world. He said Ambedkar had made tireless efforts to advocate equality in the

society and that it was becoming distressing that the later generations had limited themselves to only making speeches on human rights.

He said for the first time in the history of the state that the government, under the leadership of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, has been working to fulfil the vision of Ambedkar and has succeeded in the last 20 months.

The Chief Minister had been working for the empowerment of women, politically adequate representation of Dalits and development of the poor irrespective of caste and religion.

Professional education no government largesse: SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Access to professional education is not a governmental largesse and state has an affirmative obligation to facilitate its reach at all levels, the Supreme Court has said.

This obligation assumes far greater importance for students whose background imposes formidable obstacles on their path to access quality education, the apex court said.

GI tag for 17 products; Anakapalli jaggery too?

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

While 17 products from AP have already received GI tag, many more items originating from the state have potential to make it to the GI Registry.

According to the last annual report released by the office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks, 17 products from AP have been registered in the GI Registry (March, 2019).

Anakapalli Jaggery, Ponduru Khadi, Kakinada Kaja, Pootha-

rekulu have the high potential to get the GI tag.

Among already GI tags, Banaganapalli mangoes, Guntur chilli, Araku Valley Arabica Coffee (shared), Tirupati Laddu, Bandar Laddu, Kondapalli Toys, Budithi bell and Brass craft, Bobbili Veena, Tholu bommalata, Srikalahasti Kalamkari, Pedana Kalamkari, Uppada Jamdani Sari, Venkatagiri Sari, Mangalagiri Sarees, Dharmavaram Handloom pattu are registered in the GI Registry of India.

Muslims flock Venkateswara Swamy temple

G GOPIKRISHNA
■ KADAPA

The sight of Muslim women, wearing burkhas, being blessed by the priest of Lord Venkateswara Swami temple, also known as 'Devuni Kadapa', may be intriguing for some, even shocking for others, but for pilgrims who visit the shrine regularly on Ugadi day, its not surprising at all.

Muslim devotees have been taking part in special pujas to Lord Venkateswara Swami for centuries. Kadapa, also called Gadapa, is considered the first step, indeed the gateway, for the pilgrimage to



Tirumala. The 'Devuni Kadapa' temple has a history of over 500 years. Once a year, the Celestial Wedding ceremonies and

Brahmotsavams are held under the auspices of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams.

According to the lore, the

Seshachalam Forest of Tirumala starts from this gate. Anjaneya Swamy was the landlord of this temple. Similar to the golden lizard in Kanchi, there was once a stone lizard sitting on a stone beam at the temple. Devotees who visit the temple believe that touching it leads to redemption.

According to Sthala Puranam, Lord Venkateswara Swamy married Bibinanchamma, the mother of these Muslim devotees. From then on, the Swami is considered by the Muslim devotees as their nearest relative.

Democracy sans decency is the hallmark of campaign for Tirupati by-poll

Democracy without decency! That's the trend of electioneering by the principal political players in the electoral battlefield of Tirupati Lok Sabha constituency.



attacks made by several Hindu organizations, including self-styled 'protectors' of Hindutva ideology, against Dalits on various forums and social media.

There is no place for religion, caste in democracy and politics as stated by the statute of this country. But every principal norm of electoral practice of democracy is simply and voluntarily being violated by the main contenders in the by-polls at Tirupati.

Dividing people on the lines of religion, caste is prominently seen in the electioneering process.

BJP's in-charge of Andhra Pradesh affairs Sunil Deodhar lambasted the ruling YSRC candidate Dr Gurumurthy for not having darshan of Lord Venkateswara, despite being a Dalit. Another MLA of the ruling party in this same parliamentary constituency preferred to bear the Holy Cross on Good Friday, rather than claiming himself as a Hindu. BJP in-charge raked up this issue in the backdrop of fierce

Caste factor is one factor that rules the fate of elections at Tirupati. It assumed significance with the film actor and Jana Sena Party Chief Pawan Kalyan's role in by-polls here. Initially he wanted that his party should be in the fray with support of his friendly party BJP. But BJP's thoughts go in a different way. It picked up a retired IAS officer of Karnataka cadre and former chief secretary of Karnataka government K. Ratna Prabha and fielded her as its nominee with the support of Pawan.

Interestingly the same Ratna Prabha too faced court cases following Jagan's alleged involvement in several cases, during deputation period in YSR's regime in undivided AP.

Now she is pitted against Jagan's candidate. Tirupati is a peculiar constituency that has some predominance of

There is no place for religion, caste in democracy and politics as stated by the statute of this country. But every principal norm of electoral practice of democracy is simply and voluntarily being violated in the Tirupati by-poll. Dividing people is prominently seen in the electioneering process.

Balija community. Because of this reason only Pawan (who belongs to Kapu community) whole-heartedly wanted this seat by claiming that it would be easier for his party to win.

But with more reasons, BJP took the opportunity to contest by strategically fielding candidate from SC Madiga community with a hope to garner more votes than its competitors like TDP and YSR Congress party whose candidates are from SC Mala community.

The AP government's acts on some issues may come in handy for the opponents of ruling YSRC. BJP's alliance partner Pawan Kalyan's new

film 'Vakeel Saab' got raw deal at the hands of the state government. The intention of YS Jaganmohan Reddy government may be good and understandable to curb the exploitation in the name of screening benefit shows with exorbitant rates.

"Whose benefit these shows are being conducted for?" was the question from AP Information Minister Perni Nani that made sense.

This practice has been followed since many years with the permission of successive governments. But this time Jagan's government whipped the ban on benefit shows that considerably, adversely influ-



M D RATNA KUMAR Senior Journalist

enced gross collections of the movie.

Since the hero of that film Pawan Kalyan happens to be the political bête noire of chief minister Jaganmohan Reddy, this issue flared up and flames of discontent were fanned in some sections. This development may influence Balija community that has soft corner for Pawan.

Stones allegedly pelted at Chandrababu Naidu's election meeting in Tirupati LS seat may also have some impact. TDP planned to bring

this incident to the notice of Central Election Commission and AP Governor by painting it in a political colour. Who is in need of pelting stones at Naidu? Ruling YSRC asks. It claimed that it took place because of melee among TDP workers and it was a creation of TDP. This incident raised several eyebrows in the last leg of campaigning in Tirupati by-polls.

The BJP-Jana Sena combine would have got more mileage had Pawan Kalyan participated in the election campaign as decided earlier. The actor had to confine himself in home isolation due to Covid scare as his personal staff tested positive.

Who will have the last laugh at Tirupati, is the million-dollar question as three main contenders YSRC, TDP and BJP-Jana Sena combine are relying on their carefully knitted poll strategies. They have already readied their arguments for their possible victory. If YSRC wins the seat, it would be the acceptance of people of its 22 months of ruling and nothing but a go-

ahead sign for its agenda. What particular purpose will be served additionally on the part of YSRC by winning one more seat? Had it succeeded in getting SCS with 22 MPs? These questions are causing irritation to the ruling party naturally as it on the same question earlier thought that resignations of all 25MPs would be a powerful weapon to achieve SCS.

If TDP manages to get the people's mandate, then it may be viewed as a slap on the face of YSRC government and its policies implemented hitherto. It would give a new lease of life to TDP that had to boycott recent elections held for zilla and mandal parishads due to lack of competitive spirit following ruling party's winning spree in ULB and RLB polls! In the event of BJP winning the seat, it would enable the party to draw a road map for expansion in AP.

It had got four Lok Sabha seats of Kakinada, Rajamahendravaram, Secunderabad and Karimnagar on its own in the

1998 mid-term polls in undivided state of AP that rejuvenated the party in the state. In subsequent elections of 1999, BJP won seven LS seats, including Tirupati with alliance with TDP.

The Congress may not be the main contender here as it has been decimated in 2014 elections itself following AP's bifurcation. It has found a neat burial for itself due to that infamous decision.

Actually Congress candidate Dr.Chinta Mohan is considered to be the most eligible person to seek vote from Tirupati electorate with whose support he enjoyed victories on six occasions earlier besides becoming Union minister three decades ago in PV Narasimha Rao's government! Such glory has become past for Congress now and there may be no signs of rejuvenation for it even in days to come. It's simply an uphill task for Congress to get entry into both central and state's legislature on its own.

GI tag for 17 products; ...

Continued from Page 1

Karnataka (41), Maharashtra (30), Kerala (27), Uttar Pradesh (26) are at the forefront among all the states in India.

"We have been organising awareness programmes throughout India to promote registration of Indian GIs. The sectors being focused on are tea, coffee, spices, agriculture and horticulture products, handloom products, handicrafts, textiles, processed food items, dairy products, natural goods, spirits and wines," said Dr Bijay Kumar Sahu, the head of NRDC Intellectual Property Facilitation Centre and WIPOTechnology Innovation Centre.

"We must obtain Geographical Indication Protection of our goods and products. There is a great benefit of the registration of GI, it not only recognises products of the origin but also enhances economic growth, prevents unauthorised use of GI products or tag, expands business and increases tourism," he said.

Araku Valley and its coffee is one of the best examples of GI of Andhra Pradesh. Last but not least, the protection of geographical indications creates a positive image and reputation of the product in the minds of the consumers and rewards the producers with incentives and better return on investment," said Sahu, who also heads the WIPOTechnology Innovation Centre based out at Incubation Towers at Visakhapatnam.

"Anakapalli jaggery has potential to get the GI tag. Local MLA had also approached us and the documents related to the jaggery are also available. We have been doing extensive awareness and reaching out to all stakeholders both in academia and probable GI communities," he added

Dr Reddy's Labs working on stability data for Sputnik V

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Dr Reddy's Laboratories is in the process of generating additional stability data on Russia's Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik V, which has a storage condition of -18C, on 2 0C to 8 0C, a senior official of the drug-maker said on Wednesday.

Deepak Sapra, Dr Reddy's Chief Executive Officer, API and Services said in a press conference that the vaccine will be imported in a frozen condition from Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) with which it has an agreement to distribute 125 million human doses (250 million vials) in India, maintaining -18 0C to -22 0C.

The doses will be kept outside for 15-20 minutes before being administered to the people.

"In addition to the product which is at -18 0C, today we are



in the process of generating additional stability data on the 2 0C to 8 0C temperature range. This data will be available in a few months, after which we will make the necessary amendment request to the regulator and request for the storage condition to be modified to 2 0C to 8 0C," Sapra told

reporters. He said necessary cold storage infrastructure is in place to distribute Sputnik V vaccine in India, which will be available during the current quarter.

Dr Reddy's Laboratories on Tuesday said it has received approval from Indian drug regulator for restricted emer-

gency use of Covid-19 vaccine Sputnik in the country.

The company has received the permission from the Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) to import the Sputnik vaccine into India for restricted use in emergency situations as per the provisions of the New Drug and Clinical Trials rules, 2019 under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, Dr Reddy's had said in a regulatory filing.

In September 2020, Dr. Reddy's and RDIF entered into a partnership to conduct clinical trials of the Sputnik V, developed by the Gamaleya National Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology and the rights for distribution of the first 100 million doses in India.

Later it was enhanced to 125 million. Sapra further said the quantity can be further enhanced with mutual agreement.

Vax exporter India now seeks imports as Covid cases...

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"We hope and we invite the vaccine makers such as Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson and others ... to be ready to come to India as early as possible."

Pfizer said it would work towards bringing its vaccine to India after withdrawing its application in February.

Jagan is implementing ideology of Ambedkar in...

Continued from Page 1

He called upon the people to be a part of this process irrespective of politics.

MP Nandigam Suresh said Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy who treats SCs as one treats a close relative, is working hard for their welfare and development. Despite being an ordinary activist of the party, he was made an MP, said Suresh and added that the Chief Minister always supports Dalits.

MLA Merugu Nagarjuna said Jaganmohan Reddy has been working with the constitutional spirit of Ambedkar and implementing various schemes and programmes for the justice and development of all the sections.

Lakhs take holy dip in Ganga...

Continued from Page 1

The seers from the akhadas took the dip along with their revered deities carried in ornate palanquins at Har Ki Pauri, which was reserved exclusively for them.

Lakhs of common devotees bathed at the other ghats of the river in Haridwar and Rishikesh.

Seers and Naga sanyasis of the Niranjani Akhada led by Acharya Kailashanand Giri were the first to bathe in the river along with Anand Akhada seers. They were followed by the Joonak Akhada,

which has the highest number of sadhus led by Swami Avadheshanand.

The Mahanirvani Akhada seers came next, as the batches followed one another according to their allotted time slots.

All akhadas have to finish taking a dip at Har Ki Pauri before sunset so time management is very important.

Mela IG Sanjay Gunjyal said. The shahi snans, and the Kumb Mela, have raised concerns over their role in possibly adding to rising coronavirus cases in the country. Uttarakhand recorded its

highest single-day spike in Covid-19 cases on Tuesday with 1,925 people testing positive.

Dehradun with 775 cases and Haridwar with 594 were the biggest contributors to the day's tally.

On the initial hours of the third shahi snan, the DGP said there was no disorder anywhere. He said this was because of the expansion of infrastructure in Haridwar over the past few months, including the addition of more ghats which has helped in better crowd management.

Bankrupt TDP behind Naidu's aloofness?

Continued from Page 1

They point out that Naidu had worked with a lot of energy up to the last Assembly elections and has been a shell of his former self ever since.

Following Income-Tax raids on those who finance TDP activities, the party advised contestants to raise funds with the promise that they would be reimbursed later.

Banking on the assurance, TDP candidates raised loans, but the party leadership has since been silent on the reimbursement promise. Naidu is not taking phone calls nor is he giving appointments to party leaders, is the complaint from contestants who say they have been left in the lurch.

It may be recalled that TDP Kapu candidates at the Kakinada meeting demanded solutions — and soon after many dumped the TDP for the YSRC.

A former TDP Minister, who is now a YSRC MLC, took his creditors to Naidu

directly, making it a big issue in party circles then.

This leader sought Naidu's assurance to his creditors so that he can buy time. But Naidu demurred, leaving little option to the leader to jump ship to the YSRC.

Jagan kept his word to the former minister and made him MLC.

A former Union Minister faced the same situation. His creditors are doing rounds of his house to recover the Rs 4 crore they had lent him. He is still doing rounds of the office of Naidu.

A former TDP leader of Cantonment area in Secunderabad, who is now with the BJP, Ramakrishna owned an event management company titled RK Events and Logistics. The TDP has to pay Rs 23 crore to the company, which organised 12 Dharma Porata Deeksha meetings, public meetings, made arrangements for Mahanadu held at Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam in the last leg of TDP regime.

The firm organised 80 public meetings. It submitted bills, but there has been no response from the TDP.

Phone calls to Naidu's office too evoked no response.

The TDP has to pay the cameramen and videographers who worked to shoot party activities and owes money to media organisations for advertisements inserted prior to polls.

It defaulted on payment to small newspapers too, whereas the YSRC cleared its media bills. Many TDP candidates are yet to clear their media and transport bills. The TDP defaulted on payments to suppliers of PA systems, party flags and food. The list runs long.

Many are seen waiting to meet Naidu at the party office to narrate their problems to him, but the TDP chief has not been visiting the office.

Even when he does visit the party office, he meets only party leaders. Lokesh is no exception.

CM releases calendar of Govt schemes for '21-2022

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday unveiled the calendar of the schemes, development works and welfare activities to be taken up by the State Government during 2021-2022 as part of Ugadi celebrations at his camp office here.

The State Government has been implementing various schemes and programmes for the welfare and development of all sections of the society and has fulfilled more than 90 percent of the promises in one year. Despite the financial difficulties due to Covid, there was no delay in the implementation of the schemes. The Government has prepared a calendar for welfare schemes and implemented them.

The calendar for 2021-2022 was released on the occasion of Plava Nama Samvatsara Ugadi which specifies the schemes and programmes that will be implemented during the year.

The first page of the calendar contains the details of all the schemes and the second page details of the number of people that benefitted from different schemes including financial details in the last 22 months from June 2019 to March 2021.

On the third page, the details of YSR Aasara and Pension Kanuka are published. Next to it, the details of implementation of various schemes are published. Earlier, the Chief Minister participated in Plava Nama Samvatsara Ugadi celebrations at the camp office and released the Panchangam.

Priests of Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanams (TTD) blessed the Chief Minister with Vedic hymns and presented him the TTD Panchangam and Prasadam.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said the meaning of Plava is a ship and the Siddhanthi also said the upcoming year will be good. The Chief Minister wished

for abundant rainfall, good luck to famers, and every sister to be happy.

He also wished every house in the state to prosper and everyone should win in war against Covid and wished a very happy Ugadi to all.

After the Panchanga Sraavanam, the Siddhanthi blessed the Chief Minister and presented Ugadi Pachadi.

The Chief Minister felicitated Government Siddhanthi Koppaganthula Subbaraju Somayajulu, Chief Priest of Durga Malleshwara Swamy temple Lingambatlal Durga Prasad, AVK Narasimhacharyulu, priest of Markapuram in Prakasam district, Mamillapalli Mruthyunjaya Prasad, priest of Tenali in Guntur district and deputy chief priest Kota Ravi Kumar and Vedic scholar RVS Yajulu.

Later, the Chief Minister released the government calendar along with Vyavasaya Panchangam prepared by Agricultural University.

AP reports 18Covid deaths, most since Oct

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The total recoveries crossed the nine lakh mark to touch 9,01,327 while the gross toll rose to 7,339.

SPS Nellore district reported four fresh Covid-19 fatalities, Chittoor and Krishna three each and Visakhapatnam two.

Anantapur, East Godavari, Guntur, Kurnool, Prakasam and Srikakulam reported one death each.

East Godavari district saw a sudden spurt in cases as it logged 617 in 24 hours, the highest in the state, while Srikakulam that was

also somewhere in the lower end, added 522. Srikakulam crossed the 49,000 total cases mark.

Chittoor district reported 517, Guntur 434, Visakhapatnam 417, Kurnool 386, Anantapur 297, SPS Nellore 276 and Prakasam 230 fresh cases in a day.

Anantapur's overall count crossed 70,000, placing it at the fifth place in the state Covid-19 chart.

Vizianagaram (154), Krishna (135), Kadapa (112) and West Godavari (60) districts showed relatively less number of fresh infections.

Professional...

Continued from Page 1

A bench of Justices D Y Chandrachud and M R Shah made these observations in a verdict on separate pleas filed by two students from Ladakh who were not admitted to MBBS degree course in medical colleges here despite due nomination by the Union Territory and in terms of the seats notified by the Centre.

While the right to pursue higher (professional) education has not been spelt out as a fundamental right in Part III of the Constitution, it bears emphasis that access to professional education is not a governmental largesse.

Muslims flock Venkateswara...

Continued from Page 1

About 150 Muslim families in Kadapa continue to claim to be descendants of Bibi Nancharamma.

Every year, they visit the temple to invite Venkateswara Swami, who they consider their son-in-law, and presents silk garments to the deity in the temple. Later, they present rice, tamarind, dal and perform special pujas. Still later, special pujas would be performed at the Bibi Nancharamma temple. This tradition has been continuing over the past hundreds of years on Ugadi, the Telugu New Year.

From morning till evening on Ugadi, Muslim families visit the temple and perform pujas and make vows.

Tallapakaki Annamayya also wrote about 12 hymns on this deity Kadapa Tirumaleshu.



At that time, people used to go to Tirumala on the Kadapa trail of God, where Swami used to visit and go to Tirumala.

Hasina Begum, a Muslim woman who was at the temple to make vows said, "We are following the footsteps of our ancestors. My father had told me that Venkateswara Swamy

would come to our home and fulfil the vows on Ugadi every year."

She said she has been coming to this temple with her parents and other family members since she was a child. Almost all of the 150 Muslim families in Kadapa perform special pujas once their wishes are fulfilled, Hasina Begum said.

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Holy Ramzan prayers begin following Covid restrictions

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Corona pandemic is haunting the Ramzan prayers for the second consecutive year. The month-long Ramzan prayers were performed despite Corona restrictions that began on Wednesday. The Muslim fraternity observed Ramzan prayers in the backdrop of Corona as was done last year with some relaxation. The Ramzan month, which is treated as a holy month by Muslims has begun on a low key with the government issuing Corona guidelines for prayers in Mosques.

The Andhra Pradesh State Waqf Board (APSWB) issued a circular on the commencement of Holy Month of Ramadan that began on Wednesday, instructing all the Inspector Auditor Waqfs and management of the Waqf institutions of the State to make necessary arrangements at the Masjids and Idgahs to avoid inconvenience to the Musallis (Namazis) during prayers and Iftar following Covid-19 protocol.

APSWB instructed the managements of Waqf institutions like Masjids, Eidgahs and



Dargahs to ensure safety of the Musallis after duly taking necessary health precautions and maintaining safety standards during the Holy month of Ramadan. Instruction that hand sanitizers have to be made available at the entry and exit points at every Waqf institution by the respective man-

agements has been issued. Before entering the Masjid, hands shall be cleaned with sanitizer or soap besides maintaining social distancing at entry and exit of the Masjid shall be maintained, the instructions elaborated.

The Namazis/Musallis visiting the Waqf institutions

must use masks and follow social distancing. Hugging / handshake need to be avoided. Only asymptomatic persons would be allowed in the mosques. Senior citizens, children and people with cough, cold or fever are advised to avoid coming to the Masjid.

APSWB instructed that fre-

quent cleaning and disinfecting must be done by the management particularly after every prayer. Masjid floor, Wazu area, toilet area, etc, shall be cleaned multiple times with phenyl, detol and other disinfectants. Cleaning of Masjid carpets and the wadhu/ablution tank (House) must be ensured. The community kitchens/ langars/ annadaan etc., shall follow physical distancing norms, especially during preparation and distribution of food. APSWB strictly instructed everyone coming to the Masjid for prayers to perform wadhu at home and bring his own prayer mat/Jaye Namaz (Janimaz) and maintain social distancing.

Namazis Md Ishtiyak and Shujaur Rahman said that last year they were deprived from conventional five times Namaz and Taraveeh prayers due to lockdown and observed Ramzan under restrictions. They said that this year the same had been continuing but there was no lockdown which was a great relief and they were going to follow Corona protocol without fail in Mosques to contain the spread of the pandemic.



Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswa Bhusan Harichandan paying floral tributes to the portrait of Dr BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary at Durbar Hall in Raj Bhavan on Wednesday.

Dr Ambedkar was a great son of India, says Governor Harichandan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswa Bhusan Harichandan paid rich tributes to Bharat Ratna Babasaheb Dr BR Ambedkar on the occasion of his 130th birth anniversary at a programme held at Durbar Hall in Raj Bhavan on Wednesday.

The Governor paid floral tributes to the portrait of Dr BR Ambedkar and said that

Dr Ambedkar was a great son of India who fought for the rights of Dalits and emancipation of downtrodden people of the society.

He said: "Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar was an economist, jurist, politician and a social reformer who fought relentlessly against social discrimination of Dalits. He raised voice against the injustice, discrimination and inequality meted out to Dalits."

The Governor said that Dr BR Ambedkar was the Father of the Indian Constitution and chief architect of the drafting committee.

The Governor said that the Indian Constitution is considered to be the best Constitution in the world that guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of expression, equality before law and equal protection to all citizens.

Tika Utsav proves a damp squib in AP

NOT MORE THAN FOUR LAKH VACCINATED DURING 4-DAY PROGRAMME

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

Acute shortage of vaccines in the state hit the Tika Utsav planned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a big way. AP had planned to administer six lakh vaccinations per day, but the state could not achieve the target during the past four days due to shortage of vaccines and their late arrival.

As per the latest information from the department on Wednesday, a total of 3,97,857 people were vaccinated across the state.

In Srikakulam, 33,335 people were vaccinated while in Vizianagaram 23,858,



Visakhapatnam 26,234, East Godavari 38,390, West Godavari 27, 548, Krishna 43,594, Guntur 34,112, Prakasam 22,322, Nellore 27, 153, Chittoor 46, 415, Kadapa 25,902, Ananthapuram 30,916 and Kurnool 18,078.

On April 11, on the first day of the four-day, Tika Utsav programme, about 2.38 lakh people were vaccinated across the state.

However, no one was vaccinated on April 12 and 13 due to shortage of vaccine doses.

The state government wrote to the Central government demanding one core vaccines immediately. However, the state government received only 6.4 lakh doses that include 4.4 lakh doses on April 12 and two lakh doses on April 13 and they are being distributed to districts across the state.

The four-day Tika Utsav programme was launched on Sunday with an aim to vaccinate maximum number of people against the deadly Coronavirus. According to the officials, the government planned to vaccinate 24 lakh (six lakh people every day) people during the four-day Tika Utsav.

Thunderstorms in parts of AP in next 3 days

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Met department forecast mid-summer thunderstorms in parts of north coastal Andhra Pradesh, Yanam and Rayalaseema, accompanied by lightning for the next three days.

"Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds (30 to 40 kmph) are likely to occur at a few places in north coastal AP, Yanam and Rayalaseema," said a Met official about the forecast.

The department forecast similar weather conditions at isolated places in south coastal AP on Wednesday.



Mangoes being loaded into special trains at vizianagaram railway station on Wednesday.

First special train ferrying mangoes leaves Vizianagaram

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The first special train of this year ferrying mangoes started from Vizianagaram on Wednesday carrying 200 tonnes of mangoes in 11,600 boxes to New Adarshnagar railway station at New Delhi.

In the last financial year, Waltair Division has transported 4,350 tonnes of mangoes in 20 parcel special trains.

In a bid to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities, Waltair

Division of East Coast Railway is running parcel special express trains from Vizianagaram, the nodal point for transport of mangoes from north Andhra Pradesh to Adarsh Nagar, New Delhi for transport of mangoes.

Taking into consideration the requirement of the mango traders, Waltair Division will run special parcel train services. Despite the pandemic situation, Waltair Division made all efforts to continue the supply chain of essential commodities.

Srisaillam power plant restoration works going at snail's pace

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Though a major fire broke out at 3 and 4 units of Srisaillam power plant which was built with German technology, no efforts were still made to restore the plants even after ten months. The works were going at a snail's pace drawing flak from the people and political leaders.

It may be recalled here that a fire accident occurred on the left bank of the power plant on August 20 last year killing nine technical experts and causing a huge financial loss. Ironically, the families of the deceased were still waiting for assistance from the government.

The officials should have installed new generations in the place of the old ones which were completely gutted in the fire by this time. But, owing to the apathy of the officials concerned, 3 and 4 units of the power plant were still not brought into production. The panel board was destroyed in the 150 MW unit at around 10.30 pm and flames engulfed



the whole unit. All the 17 engineering and technical staff had strived hard to put out the flames. Eight officials had managed to escape from fire through an underground tunnel, the remaining nine members unable to come out from the plant and died of suffocation. A team of National Disaster Management and Singareni Collieries rescue teams which were pressed into service closed the power plant, after they found it difficult to deal with the situation.

The power plant had incurred a loss of Rs 1,000 crore due to the fire accident

and another Rs 2,000 crore loss due to the stoppage of production. Efforts were on to summon the experts from Germany to restore the plant to get the motors repaired. Apart from German experts, several engineering experts have to be deployed from various institutions.

Meanwhile, the officials said that the plant required facilities like motors that could withstand high voltage, cabling system, starters and technical staff for supervision should be available as standby before launching the restoration works to overcome the technical snags and produce additional power production from these units. The experts revealed that the fire accident took place because of failure to control high-voltage when the power being generated in high-voltage from all the units in the power plant. The question was now being raised as to why it was happening only in Telangana when many power plants were running successfully across the country with German technology.

Two burglars held, jewellery worth Rs 8.38 lakh recovered

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Gudivada police on Wednesday arrested two inter-district criminals and recovered gold and silver ornaments worth Rs 8.38 lakh from them. The culprits were identified as Vemulapalli Siva Kumar (28) and Vemulapalli Vijay Kumar (26), both brothers and residents of Gudivada town. The Gudivada Town police inspector CV Murali Krishna and team were conducting vehicle checks when they found that the Siva Kumar and Vijay Kumar were moving



suspiciously and trying to give a slip to the cops.

The police nabbed the duo when they tried to flee the spot. The police said that gold and silver ornaments worth Rs 8.38 lakh were recovered from the culprits in connection with

the theft cases filed at Ravulapalem of East Godavari district, Kalidindi, Gudivada police stations and other places.

The police said that both the culprits are own brothers. The duo was addicted to liquor, gutka, khaini, gambling and betting. They used to target houses that are locked. They were habitual offenders and were kept behind bars several times, said the police.

Gudivada DSP Satyanandam appreciated the police team in nabbing the culprits.

TDP MPs write to EC on stone pelting attack

PNS ■ TIRUPATI/NEW DELHI

Condemning the alleged stone-pelting attack of TDP chief Nara Chandrababu Naidu on Monday night, the TDP MPs have written to the Election Commission of India (ECI) demanding an inquiry into the incident.

"TDP demands that the following aspects be implemented on emergency basis to conduct free and fair by-election in Tirupati Parliamentary constituency: Inquiry into the attack on Naidu and initiate appropriate action against the concerned," wrote TDP leaders Galla Jayadev, Kanakamedala Ravindra Kumar, Kesineni



Srinivas and Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu on Tuesday.

Their other demands include deployment of central forces for free and fair election, installation of web cameras at

all polling stations for live streaming, alternative identity cards as alleged fake voter identity cards exist, deploying micro observers and election observers.

Other demands include ban on village and ward volunteers in the poll process, checks on money and liquor distribution, adequate security to contesting candidates and avoiding illegal votes.

"Only a quick and impartial probe by the Election Commission would restore faith in democratic elections among voters of Tirupati Parliamentary constituency," they wrote.

This letter to the Constitutional body is a consequence of the alleged stone-pelting attack on Naidu on Monday night when he was campaigning for TDP's Tirupati by-poll candidate

Panabaka Lakshmi.

According to the TDP leaders, this attack was allegedly launched by the ruling Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) supporters. "The police during and after the incident were complacent raising doubts that they were in support of the ruling YSRCP. In this regard, we are apprehensive that the local police would not inquire into the attack seriously," the MPs alleged.

They called on the ECI to 'save' democracy in the state. The Scheduled Castes-reserved Tirupati by-poll is scheduled to be held on April 17.



STARRY AFFAIR

Tollywood actor Nikhil Siddharth inaugurating the Gismat Mandi in Vijayawada on Wednesday. The Arabic restaurant, which has been designed like a prison, gives the feeling of dining in prison, while the waiters are also dressed up in white clothes.



Ban on fishing hits 60k fishermen

ABOUT 5,200 BOATS STAY OFF THE COAST

DHV SAMBASIVARAO
HYDERABAD

The government has issued orders banning fishing in the sea for two months. The fishing ban would come into effect from midnight on April 15 to June 14 and about 1.20 lakh of fisheries families directly and another two lakh workers indirectly dependent on the fishing would lose livelihood during this ban period.

The government has said that the season is the time for fish to lay eggs and increase fertility. Therefore, the government was enforcing the ban on hunting during this period every year.

The hunting ban period, which was only 45 days in the past, has been extended to two months for the last 5 years. However, the ban was extended to 61 days in the wake of declining fish production and the extinction of fish species due to various reasons.



Prohibitions have been imposed to prevent anyone from going hunting during the ban. The ban would prevent motorboats, mechanized and engine boats from entering the sea except for traditional rafts and non-mechanized boats. The government has been providing assistance to

fishing families who would not go hunting during the ban. In the district, 5,200 boats would be restricted to enter the sea due to the hunting ban in U Kothapalli mandal, Kakinada urban and rural, I Polavaram, Tallarevu, Katrenikona, Uppalaguptam,

Allavaram, Sakshinetipalli and other mandals. Besides, the district has 30 jetties in 13 mandals. Some fish varieties have been kept for drying and traded at jetties in the area. Moreover, 35,000 families were directly dependent on the fishing operations in the district. Indirectly another 25,000 fam-

ilies were depending on the fishing activity.

The previous government used to pay only Rs 4,000 as compensation to fishermen during the ban. However, the current YSRCP government in the auspices of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has increased it from Rs 4,000 to Rs 10,000 after it came to power. Hence, the government would provide compensation from the day of implementation of a ban of Rs 34 crore through banks at the rate of Rs 10,000 per fisherman in the district.

PV Satyanarayana, Joint Director of the District Fisheries Department said that details of the fishermen in the district have already been collected based on the guidelines provided by the state Fisheries department. The government was making all arrangements so that the compensation would be handed over the next day to a ban on fishing this year, he added.

Govt: Covid situation may worsen

Wear masks even if you are at home, says TS DPH

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Amidst nationwide spike in Covid-19 cases on the crest of the pandemic's second and subsequent waves, with share markets reacting wildly to the talk of imminent lockdown and inevitable curfews in many states, Telangana State's Director of Public Health on Wednesday issued an ominous warning that the situation in the state could get worse. "If one in the family is infected, most certainly the entire family will be infected in a matter of few hours to days, he told the media.

"In the last 3-4 weeks the situation has been bad. For the next 6 weeks, it will be bad. If we don't take precautions we will be another Maharashtra. People are already finding it difficult to get beds. It will be worse. So, please take care. Thus virus is spreading faster than before," he observed.

Suggesting that people should not be complacent, he said: "We are not imposing lockdown or restrictions because they are bad for state's economy. No lockdown' does not mean the situation is not serious and bad. The situation is deteriorating... Cases are

increasing in the state and in the 4 to 6 weeks, it'll remain like that."

According to the Director of Public Health, if the cases do not decline, there are chances of a shortage of beds. People should voluntarily take preventive action to stop it. He remarked: "Wear masks even if you are at home!"

TS records 2,157 new cases Telangana State recorded 2,157 new COVID-19 cases and eight deaths over the last 24 hours, the State Health Department said on Wednesday. The overall COVID-19 tally of the state has reached 3,34,738, including 25,459 active cases.

In all, 821 patients recovered in the last 24 hours, taking the total recovery count to 3,07,499. A total of 1,780 people have succumbed to the lethal virus in Telangana.

As per the state government data, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) accounted for 361 cases --- the most number of the reported cases, followed by Medchal Malkajgiri (245), Ranga Reddy (206) and Nizamabad (187).

Telangana's recovery rate stands at 91.86 per cent and the

case fatality rate is at 0.53 per cent. As many as 72,364 samples were tested on Tuesday, with 16,892 patients under home/institutional isolation.

India hits highest daily tally once again

The scenario across the nation is worse. With 1,84,372 new COVID-19 cases being recorded in the last 24 hours, India's tally has reached 1,38,73,825, hitting the highest daily tally once again, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said on Wednesday. Wednesday's caseload marked the fourth straight day of the country seeing over 1.5 lakh new cases.

The new cases pushed the total cases to over 1.38 crore. Deaths rose by 1,027 to 1,72,085. Over 1,000 people died in 24 hours ending Wednesday evening, making it the highest daily death count in nearly six months. At present, there are 13,65,704 active cases, while the overall recoveries have reached 1,23,36,036. In all, 82,339 people were discharged in the last 24 hours.

Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Madhya Pradesh are the five states which saw the highest number of Covid cases in the last 24 hours.



Six bombs explode, street dog dies

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A total of six country-made bombs exploded killing a street dog at Kandulapuram village in Kambham mandal of Prakasam district on Wednesday.

On the info, Kambham SI Madhavarao visited the spot and found that the bombs blasted in the toilet of a house near Kambham government hospital. A total of 6 country-made bombs were found to have exploded in the incident. The SI said that the accused Ramesh alias Khan was taken into custody and a total of eight bombs were found, six of which exploded and the remaining two were diffused with the help of a bomb squad, he added.



Minister for Home Mekatoti Sucharita paying floral tributes to Dr BR Ambedkar in Guntur on Wednesday.

'Jagan's rule fulfilling Ambedkar's aspirations'

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Dr BR Ambedkar was a great visionary, who worked for the betterment of the downtrodden and weaker sections, Home Minister Mekatoti Sucharita said on Wednesday.

On the occasion of Ambedkar's birth anniversary, she paid floral tributes at his statue in Guntur.

Addressing the media, she said that CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy was working in line with Ambedkar's ideals. She also claimed that under Jagan's rule, those belonging to the weaker sections of the society were getting many welfare pro-

grammes. The YSRCP government was the pro-poor Home Minister Sucharita was accompanied by MLA Maddali Giri, Mayor Kavati Manohar, Mirchi Yard Chairman Yesuratnam, YSRCP leader Lella Appi Reddy and Lalupuram Ranu. Meanwhile, PCC Working President Mastan Vali, Congress leaders JD Seelam and Lingamsetti Eshwara Rao along with party leaders paid tributes to Ambedkar at the Guntur district Congress party office. On the occasion, former Rajya Sabha member JD Seelam said that everyone wants to work for Dr BR Ambedkar's aspirations.



Nara Lokesh alleges Jagan's hand in YS Viveka's murder

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh said that if Jagan Reddy did not accept the challenge, he would have accepted that he has a hand in the assassination of YS Vivekananda Reddy.

Nara Lokesh who was in Tirupati for the campaign of MP by-polls in support of TDP contestant Panabaka Lakshmi organized an election rally at Garuda Circle at Alipiri in Tirupati on Wednesday. He was accompanied by TDP party president Acham Naidu, MLA Nimmala Ramanaidu, MLC BT Naidu, Kesineni Swetha and the party cadre to fulfil the challenge he had thrown in Naidupeta, Sullurupeta constituency on April 7.

Lokesh waited at the circle for about an hour for the YCP leaders to respond. Later, Lokesh told media persons that he was prepared to testify and swear on the God Venkateswara that neither Jagan nor any of his family members were directly or indirectly involved in the murder of YS Vivekananda Reddy. He further stated that he was ready to take an oath and asked why did Jagan not yet turn up. He said, "I wonder why Jagan is afraid to take the oath if he has nothing to do with the murder".

He lashed out at YSRCP leaders for levelling charges frequently and expressed his ire for carrying an article in the newspaper targeting the Nara family. He recalled that YSRCP MP Vijayasai Reddy said that YS Vivekananda Reddy died due to cardiac arrest, but the police investigation mentioned it as a

murder. He further said that his family was not having any faction history like Jagan Mohan Reddy and questioned why they failed to visit Alipiri for swearing. Challenging Jaganmohan Reddy to come to Alipiri for swearing, Lokesh said "it takes only 45 minutes to reach Alipiri from Tadepalli palace of the CM." He alleged that Jagan Mohan Reddy has killed his own family member and he was the one, who is behind the murder of YS Vivekananda Reddy. Hence, he did not come for swearing. Lokesh further stated that Jagan doesn't want to catch the murderers of YS Vivekananda and hence he was not ordering for CBI investigation though Vivekanand's daughter Sunitha sought a CBI probe in her father's death.

Thackeray, Mumbai Mayor pay glowing tributes to Ambedkar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pedekar and leaders across parties paid rich tributes to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar on his 130th birth anniversary on Wednesday.

Thackeray and others visited Chaitya Bhoomi, the Constitution architect's memorial in central Mumbai in the morning and paid floral tributes to India's first Law and Justice

minister.

Because of the lockdown due to the coronavirus outbreak, the birth anniversary celebrations were subdued.

A large number of people visit Chaitya Bhoomi each year on the occasion of Ambedkar birth anniversary. On this day last year and this year, the municipal administration appealed to people that gatherings should be limited to five people at a time for visiting the memorial.

Man held for outraging modesty of Covid patient

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A medical coordinator has been arrested for allegedly outraging the modesty of a COVID-19 patient quarantined at a hotel in suburban Andheri here, police said on Wednesday. The matter came to light on Monday when the victim called the police control room and lodged a complaint, an official said.

Tripura CM directs police to contain post-poll violence

PNS ■ AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb on Wednesday directed the police to contain post-poll violence in the tribal council areas of the state.

The BJP has accused newly floated TIPRA led by royal scion Pradyot Kishore Deb Barman of letting loose a reign of terror on saffron party workers after sweeping the recently concluded elections to the 30-member Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), which



governs two-thirds of the state's area and one-third of the population.

I have been worried after receiving news about incidents of post-poll violence in the tribal council areas after

election results were announced on April 10.

"I have directed the police to arrest culprits irrespective of their political affiliations to restore peace and tranquility," the chief minister told PTL. The Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) has won 18 of the 28 seats in which polls were held. The remaining two seats are nominated by the governor as per the state government's advice. The ruling BJP came a distant second bagging only nine seats.

Record 29 single-day deaths in Jharkhand'

PNS ■ RANCHI

Jharkhand reported a record 29 COVID-19 deaths in a single day, pushing the toll to 1,261, while the tally climbed to 1,44,594 with 2,844 fresh cases, health department official said on Wednesday.

The state now has 17,155 active cases following the recovery of 1,26,178 patients, he said.

RICH TRIBUTES TO A SOCIAL REFORMER



Deputy CM and Health Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas garlanding the statue of Baba Saheb Ambedkar at Old Bus Stand Center in Eluru on the occasion of Bharat Ratna Dr B.R. Ambedkar's 130th birth anniversary on Wednesday.



Nellore Rural MLA K Srihar Reddy paying floral tributes after garlanding the statue of Dr B R Ambedkar at Netaji Nagar in Nellore on Wednesday on the occasion of Ambedkar's birth anniversary.



Prakasam District Collector Pola Bhaskar, Ongole Mayor Gangada Sujatha and others garlanding the statue of Baba Saheb Ambedkar and paid tributes in Ongole on Wednesday.



Sub collector KS Viswanath paying floral tributes to Dr BR Ambedkar on the occasion of his 130th birth anniversary at the Sub-Collector's Office in Narasapuram of West Godavari District on Wednesday.

Odisha reports record 2,267 new cases, 3 more fatalities

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha's COVID-19 tally mounted to 3,55,353 as the state registered this year's highest single-day spike of 2,267 new cases on Wednesday, a health department official said. The daily count crossed the 2000-mark for the first time in 2021, he said. The death toll rose to 1,933 as three more people from Bolangir, Ganjam and Jajpur districts succumbed to the disease. Talking to Twitter, the Health and Family Welfare Department said, "Regret to inform the demise of three COVID positive patients while under treatment in hospitals." Of the fresh cases, 1,314 were reported from quarantine centres and 953 detected during contact tracing.

India's National Education Policy is futuristic: Modi

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the new National Education Policy is futuristic and as per global standards. "India takes pride in being the mother of democracy as its values are embodied in our social life," Modi said addressing the Association of Indian Universities' 95th annual meet and a national seminar of vice-chancellors via video conference. The Centre unveiled the new National Education Policy (NEP) last year. "The National Education Policy is futuristic and as per global parameters," Modi said.

He said the role of skilled youth is continuously increasing as India walks the path of 'aatmanirbharta' (self-reliance). "Babasaheb Ambedkar has given a strong foundation for us to take forward all our democratic values after the independence," Modi said on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Dr Ambedkar. The city-based Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University hosted the event. Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank', Gujarat Governor Acharya Devvrat and Chief Minister Vijay Rupani attended the meet.



Will probe Cooch Behar killings to track, punish culprits: Mamata

PNS ■ MATHABHANGA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday met family members of those killed in CISF firing during the fourth phase of assembly elections, assuring them of a probe that will track down and bring the culprits to book. Banerjee lamented that she could not meet the next of kin of the deceased earlier, owing to a 72-hour ban on entry of political leaders in Cooch Behar, where four people were gunned down by CISF personnel in "self defence", on April 10. "Our inquiry will track everyone responsible for the cold-blooded killing and ensure they are punished as per law," she said. Banerjee said she will also ensure justice for the family of Ananda Burman, an 18-year-old first-time voter who was shot dead outside a polling booth in the same district.



The Trinamool Congress supremo interacted with the family members of all the deceased, including the widows and parents of the four killed in firing, and the grandfather and maternal uncle of Burman. "I will come again immediately after the elections are over (May 2). We will help you in every possible way," she said. The chief minister also said a martyrs' column will be built in memory of the five who lost their lives. Four people were killed Cooch Behar's Sitalkuchi as central forces opened fire amid polling for the fourth phase allegedly after coming under attack from locals, who "attempted to snatch their rifles", police had said. Following the violence, the Election Commission put in place restrictions, including extending the "silence period" from 48 hours to 72 hours, for the fifth phase of elections, and barred the entry of politicians in the district for the next 72 hours from April 10, to prevent any possible law and order flare-up.

INDIA CORNER

Parties doing politics in name of Ambedkar: Mayawati

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Wednesday accused rival political parties of indulging in politics in the name of B R Ambedkar, and asserted that only the BSP can fulfil his dreams. In a statement issued here, Mayawati said that despite tremendous respect for Ambedkar in the country, he was not honoured with the Bharat Ratna for long, and for this "heinous crime", the Congress party can never be forgiven. "It was eventually because of the BSP's strong efforts that in 1990, he was honoured with the Bharat Ratna," Mayawati said. Taking a jibe at rival parties, Mayawati said political parties have penned history as per their own whims to instigate the people and for their vested interests, while the BSP, which was in power for four times, has made history by undertaking public welfare. The former UP chief minister also said that most of the public welfare schemes, which are running in the state and in the country, and which have been cited to seek votes, were started during the BSP government, and implemented in Uttar Pradesh.



Elderly man falsely accused of molestation, 3 held

Three women have been arrested for allegedly trying to extort Rs 10 lakh from a 61-year-old man in west Delhi by falsely implicating him in a molestation case, police said on Wednesday. Kiran (30) filed a complaint of molestation at the Rajouri Garden police station on April 7 against Dinesh Chand Mahajan, who lives in Tagore Garden Extension. Her medical examination was done the next day, according to police. During preliminary inquiry, it was found that the complainant was instigated by her sister -- Poonam (31) -- and Sonia (28) to make false allegations against Mahajan in order to extort Rs 10 lakh, an officer said. A police team was sent to Jaipur following information that the three had fled there. It traced a person who knew the three women, following which the suspects were apprehended, the officer said.



112 with criminal records externed from Muzaffarnagar

More than 100 people with criminal records have been externed from Muzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the panchayat elections, a police officer said on Wednesday. Senior Superintendent of Police Abhishek Yadav said 112 anti-social elements from different police station areas have been externed from the district for six months. Anyone found in the district would be arrested, the police officer warned. He said these people have been involved in several criminal cases in the past. Panchayat elections in Uttar Pradesh will be held in four phases from April 15. Polling in Muzaffarnagar district will be held on April 19.



NGT refuses to entertain plea on unauthorised construction

The National Green Tribunal has refused to entertain a plea seeking direction to stop unauthorised construction in Ghitorni village in South West Delhi. A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice A K Goel said the issues of removing encroachment from the Gram Sabha land is in the purview of the Revenue Authorities and an order has already been passed by the Tehsildar in the matter. "In these circumstances, we do not find any substantial question of environment to be dealt with by this tribunal. The application is accordingly disposed of without prejudice to the remedies of the applicant at an appropriate forum," the bench said. The tribunal was hearing a plea filed by Kamran Siddique and others seeking direction to stop unauthorised construction in Ghitorni village in South West Delhi. According to the plea, encroachment in question, in the present case, is still continuing even though an order had already been passed by the Tehsildar Vasant Vihar. The plea stated that representation has also been given to the Police Commissioner, Delhi and reference has been made to certain orders by which Sub-Divisional Magistrate Saket has restrained from raising unauthorised constructions.



4 held, 207 cartons of smuggled liquor seized

PNS ■ GHAZIABAD

Police here have arrested four suspected bootleggers following a seizure of 207 cartons of country-made foreign liquor smuggled from Haryana, and allegedly meant for wooing voters during the panchayat polls in Uttar Pradesh, officials said. Police said they have arrested the kingpin of the alleged bootleggers, Ravi Jatav of Modinagar, along with his three accomplices Sonu, Nicky and Gaurav from Nabipur village. Seven other bootleggers are absconding, they said.

'PM negligent in tackling Covid'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With COVID-19 infections spreading rapidly in the country, the Congress on Wednesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being negligent, careless and callous in tackling the virus and jeopardising the lives of Indians, and asked him to follow 'raj dharma'. Congress general secretary and chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the Modi government has been completely careless and cruel when it comes to ensuring life-saving drugs, providing oxygen and vaccines to Indians, and has proved incompetent in controlling the spread of the virus. India reported a maximum of around 1.85 lakh cases and 1,027 deaths due to COVID-19 on Wednesday and now has the second highest number of



infections after the United States. Surjewala said while there is an acute shortage of vaccines across the country, the government is busy abusing state governments raising the issue with baseless and senseless allegations. He also demanded that the government agree to the requests of students by postponing or cancelling the CBSE board exams and not risk their lives by making them sit for the exams physically when infections are spreading fast.

Covid: Delhi HC dismisses plea to defer DSGMC polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has dismissed a petition seeking postponement of Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) elections, scheduled for April 25, on the grounds of unprecedented spike in COVID-19 cases.

The high court said that once a decision to hold the election has been taken and the process has not been stopped in spite of rise in the number of infected persons in the city, which is functioning barring a few restrictions, the court would not interfere in such policy matters.

A bench of Justice Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Amit Bansal said once it is shown that guidelines for ensuring that the holding of election do not lead to spread of the virus any more than it is already taking place, the court would not interfere in such policy matters.



"The respondent Delhi government as well as the central government is already taking all steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, without however restricting day to day life any more than necessary," the bench said. It added that besides the general restrictions put in place by the governments, each institution is taking its own steps for restricting the spread of COVID-19 virus. "We are confident that not only will Delhi government enforce guidelines already issued to prevent spread of virus during the election, a body as the DSGMC also, will take all possible steps to ensure that the conduct of elections is not a source of spread of the COVID-19 virus," the bench said in its April 8 order. A letter was sent to the Chief Justice on April 7 by petitioners Jagmohan Singh and Manjeet Singh Chugh, voters in the list maintained by the Directorate of Gurdwara Elections, and it was registered as a petition and placed before the bench.

'Efforts on to stop me from campaigning'

PNS ■ BARASAT/BIDHANAGAR

Minutes after the 24-hour ban on canvassing ended, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said that efforts are on to stop her from campaigning and asserted she is a street fighter and won't be cowed down by the "intimidation tactics" of the BJP. Banerjee, who earlier in the day had conducted a 3.5-hour long dharna against the EC's decision to prohibit her from

campaigning for 24 hours, said the people of the state would take a call on stopping her from campaigning whereas the saffron party leaders can campaign. "In the fifth phase (of polling on April 17), the silence period is 72 hours, and I could not campaign for 24 hours. So I cannot campaign for 96 hours. The BJP can campaign, and I am not allowed to campaign. I will not say anything, the people of

Bengal will take a call on it. They are watching everything," she said while addressing a rally at Barasat. Asserting that she has been a street fighter and won't be cowed down by such "intimidation tactics" of the saffron camp, the feisty TMC boss said, "Efforts are on by the BJP and its agencies to stop her from campaigning." "The BJP wants to stop me from campaigning as they have sensed defeat," she said.

Govt not going for lockdowns in big way, says FM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday made it clear that the government would not go for lockdowns in a big way and only resort to local containment. In a virtual meeting with World Bank Group President David Malpass, Sitharaman appreciated the initiatives of the international financial institution to increase the lending space for India to enhance availability of finance for development. "FM @nsitharaman shared the measures being taken by India to contain the spread of

second wave of pandemic including the five pillars strategy of test-track-treat-vaccination and #COVID19 appropriate behaviour," the finance ministry said in a tweet. "Even with the second wave, we are very clear that we are not going in for lockdowns in a big way. We don't want to totally arrest the economy. The local level isolation of patients, or households which have people in quarantines are the methods through which the crisis will be handled, the second wave will be handled. There shall not be lockdown," Sitharaman said.

Gehlot for imposing strict anti-Covid norms in state

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot on Tuesday said it is necessary to take strict and effective steps similar to lockdown and directed officials to form guidelines to curb the virus spread. He appealed to the people to behave as if there is a lockdown, saying the second wave of Covid-19 is more dangerous. Gehlot said the socio-religious and cultural activities in the state need to be restricted as the death rate is increasing.

Neither prepared nor submitted report on Mumbai blasts: IB to HC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Intelligence Bureau has told the Delhi High Court that it has not prepared or submitted any report to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on the 2006 Mumbai train blasts. The submission has been made by the IB in an affidavit filed pursuant to the court's direction in January this year to state on record that it had not prepared any report in 2009 or shortly thereafter on the bombings of July 11, 2006 when seven RDX bombs ripped



through as many Western line local trains in Mumbai killing 189 people and injuring 829. "It is respectfully submitted that no report was prepared and/or submitted in 2009 or any time shortly thereafter by the IB to MHA in respect of the

7/11 Mumbai bomb blasts," the agency has said in its affidavit, filed through central government counsel Rahul Sharma. The IB, also represented by advocate C K Bhatt, has further said that the case was investigated by the Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) of Maharashtra Police. Justice Prathiba M Singh on January 27 had asked IB to record on an affidavit that it had not prepared any report in 2009 or shortly thereafter on the 2006 Mumbai train bombings case.

6 held for duping Japan nationals

PNS ■ GHAZIABAD

Six people were arrested by the cyber cell team here Tuesday for allegedly duping Japanese nationals using social media sites on the pretext of updating their software at throwaway prices, police said. The accused had learnt the Japanese language at a Delhi-based institute for calling their prospective victims, DIG/SSP Amit Pathak told reporters. He said they were arrested from Gaushtala and Indrapuram areas. They have been identified as Ashish, Avinash, Edvin George, Adarsh, Umesh, and Vikram, he said. The gang used to contact elderly computer-friendly people



in Japan after scanning their data on social sites through Skype and X-LITE APP, according to police. They used to demand Google scratch cards in turn of money for updating, the police said. The gang used to encash Japanese currency through currency changer brokers.

'India will raise its climate ambitions'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar on Wednesday said India will raise its climate ambitions but not under pressure, and that it will not allow anybody to forget their historical responsibility. He also said that India is suffering because of the mistakes of others and "is not responsible for climate change that is happening". Javadekar made the remarks during a speech after a meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian at the French Embassy. French minister Le Drian said the consequences will be disastrous if the world is not able to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius, or even 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels. That's why it is absolutely



indispensable that all countries increase their climate commitments by the time the COP26 takes place in Glasgow, as required by the Paris Agreement, he said. "This increase in ambition must include setting new nationally determined contributions by 2030 and also long-term strategies to achieve carbon neutrality. We must stop

building new coal-based power plants and it is essential that we progressively stop this mode of electricity production at a global level," Le Drian said. Javadekar said, "We will complete our commitments, raise our ambitions but not under pressure. And we will also ask countries to provide finance and technological support and about their (climate) actions." He said India is the only G-20 country to walk the talk on the Paris climate agreement and "we have done more than we promised". The minister said that the frequency of abnormal (weather) events has increased but "let us not forget that this is not a new phenomenon". "What we are suffering today was caused 100 years ago. European and American countries and China, in the last 30 years, emitted (greenhouse gases) and therefore, the world is suffering... India is suffering because of the actions of others," he said, adding that historical responsibility is a very important aspect in climate debate. "We cannot just forget it (historical responsibility), and we will not allow anybody to forget it," Javadekar said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Going all out

The Govt's decision to procure COVID jabs from abroad should be welcomed for a variety of reasons

The Indian Government's "vaccine *maitri*" may have earned it laurels among the nations that received the approximately 6.45 crore COVID shots, but it has left it clutching at straws and getting the flak in its own backyard. With the Coronavirus cases rising exponentially across India and with more deaths being recorded due to its new strains, the Centre is facing criticism that in its enthusiasm to earn global brownie points it put its own citizens at risk by distributing the shots to other nations instead of ensuring that all its citizens were inoculated first. As the second wave of infections tears across the country, there are calls for opening up the inoculation process for everyone as the new strain is not sparing children and the youth this time around.



Hence, faced with a shortage of the COVID jabs the Centre first gave the nod for the use of Russia-made Sputnik Vaccine for emergency use and moves are now afoot to enlarge the COVID-19 vaccine basket by giving approval to the shots manufactured in the US, the UK and Japan. The National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 (NEG-VAC) has recommended that shots being manufactured abroad as well as those which have already received approval for "restricted use by the USFDA, EMA, UK MHRA, PMDA Japan may be granted emergency use approval in India". It is understood that the "vaccines, which are listed in the World Health Organisation's emergency use listing, may also be granted emergency use approval in India".

The decision has come at the right time as it would encourage imports of bulk drug material and help in optimal utilisation of domestic fill-and-finish capacity which will, in turn, provide a fillip to our vaccine manufacturing capacity and total job availability for domestic use. The Centre, trying its best to calm the citizens, has assured them that there is no vaccine shortage and over 1.67 crore doses are still available. While there is some strength in the argument that the Government should have catered to its citizens first, the fact remains that the healthcare authorities and the public, too, is to a certain extent responsible for the state we are in today. First of all, given the fact that vaccines are direly needed at this time, how do we explain the criminal average wastage of 6.5 per cent in India? Plus, if people had listened to the Government, got inoculated in massive numbers and observed the Corona protocols diligently, there would not have been such a surge in cases. When the number of infections dipped after the first wave, had we shunned vaccine hesitancy, things would have moved with assembly-line precision and a large part of the population would have had the shots by now. However, it's not too late and the Centre is doing its bit to provide succour to its citizens. We need to calm down, behave like responsible citizens and help the Government in its endeavour in any way we can. After all, this is a situation that none of us had ever faced before.

PICTALK



Nihangs show their horse-riding skills on the last day of Baisakhi Mela in Bathinda district

Elections in the time of COVID



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

With half the phases in the Bengal polls remaining, the virus management measures appear to be missing on the ground

The Congress candidate from the Srivilliputhur Assembly constituency, 63-year-old PSW Madhava Rao, passed away of COVID-19 complications five days after the Tamil Nadu election concluded on April 6. If he wins the election posthumously, the constituency will head for a by-election. Tamil Nadu is one of the 16 States in India experiencing a significant surge in fresh Coronavirus infections. However, the pictures of bulging election rallies/road shows that capture only people's indifference towards the virus. The wearing of masks seems to be a luxury rather than a compulsory practice.



The Election Commission of India (ECI) has laid down strict COVID-19 protocols for the elections in five States. It forms a part of the February 26 announcement of the poll schedule. The guidelines remain virtually unchanged since the Bihar Legislative Assembly election in October-November 2020. However, they seem to be honoured more in the breach than in observance, at least with regard to campaigning.

The instruction is that the District Election Officer (DEO), who is mostly the District Magistrate should identify dedicated grounds for public gatherings with clearly marked entry and exit points, put markers to ensure social distancing norms by the attendees, and the nodal district health officer should ensure that the COVID-related guidelines are adhered to by everyone in the district. The DEO and the District Superintendent of Police should ensure that the number of attendees does not exceed the limit prescribed by the State Disaster Management Authority for public gatherings. However, the swelling crowds at the rallies/road shows seem to throw these protocols out of the window.

While elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry and Assam were over by April 6, those in the State of West Bengal will continue till April 29. There,

only four of the eight phases have been completed until now. The elections are already scarred by violence, and the media is fully fixated on it. By contrast, the large-scale flouting of the pandemic norms has not engaged the media's attention sufficiently.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly exhorts people to wear masks and maintain physical distancing norms in public. He is emphatic that nobody should be lax about the COVID-19 protocols. These are indeed meant for the people's own safety, and tens of millions of ordinary Indians like me follow his advice in letter and spirit. However, does he follow his own advice at the mammoth rallies that he has been addressing frequently in West Bengal? The crowd strength at his rallies is so oppressive that there is hardly any place to stand. There was palpable fear of a stampede at his rally in Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground on March 7.

As the camera zooms in on different segments in the crowds at the Prime Minister's numerous rallies, it is easy to spot that masks are a rarity. Does Modi demand that those not wearing masks

or flouting the social distancing norms should leave immediately? Far from it, the Prime Minister seems to be oblivious of the subject as he vigorously launches a broadside on Mamata Banerjee's "misrule". The official candidates of his party — who otherwise pretend to follow Modi religiously — throw their masks (read caution, please) to the wind while going to file their nomination papers or campaigning.

None of the political parties seem to behave responsibly against the threat of COVID-19. Their delinquency is punishable under Sections 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, besides legal action under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code as specified in Order No 40-3/2020-DMI (A) of November 25, 2020, by the Ministry of Home Affairs. However, there are hardly any publicised incidents of punishment on this account until now.

With respect to the Coronavirus, no political party can evade moral responsibility. They should have by themselves appointed nodal officers for ensuring COVID-appropriate arrangements. If

electorates to govern, they themselves will have to deal with the pandemic upsurge. It is shameful that their behaviour should be COVID-inappropriate in public while seeking votes. The battle against the virus cannot be wholly dependent on vaccinations. Experience has shown that even those vaccinated can contract COVID-19.

The second wave of the pandemic has gripped India even as half the phases in the West Bengal election remain. It devolves upon all political parties to come together and take recognisable measures so that the poll campaign does not aggravate the situation. It might involve curtailing big rallies/road shows featuring star campaigners. One is reminded how ahead of the Fourth General Elections in 1967, the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal showed the way for developing a Code of Conduct through all-party meetings. The ECI officially adopted it in 1968. Such all-party meetings on the COVID-19 situation are the need of the hour.

(The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)



AHEAD OF THE FOURTH GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 1967, THE CHIEF MINISTERS OF TAMIL NADU AND WEST BENGAL SHOWED THE WAY FOR DEVELOPING A CODE OF CONDUCT THROUGH ALL-PARTY MEETINGS. THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA OFFICIALLY ADOPTED IT IN 1968

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WE ARE NOT PREPARED AT ALL

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Double mutant strikes' (April 14). Your article is right on the money when it says that this variant multiplies quickly. You rightly raised the point about the lack of data and studies — that is peer-reviewed — it does not give the guarantee that these vaccines would work. One does need to be an Einstein to know that if things keep spiralling downwards, the day is not far when we surge past the US in becoming the worst-hit country.

We are importing vaccines but the recent halt in the rollout of Johnson & Johnson's vaccine in the US is also concerning as blood clots have been reported in patients who took this jab. It is bizarre that a country producing top doctors and scientists cannot figure out how this virus operates. The health briefings are an elephant dart to the public's face as all it does is present a rosy picture. It seems that our pandemic response is absolutely misguided and an absolute disgrace.

Sadly, our people could not refrain from going to events like the Kumbh Mela. Even the politicians are busy holding rallies as their priority is to win elections rather than to control the virus. All this has led to pandemic fatigue as people have been following the rules for long, for something that isn't even their fault. It's too late in the day to wish for this pandemic to have never afflicted humankind. The only thing to do now is to just mask up and stay home!

Sean Colin Young | New Delhi

EXERCISE CAUTION WHILE CAMPAIGNING

Sir — It doesn't behave Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak insultingly of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and repeatedly call her "Didi o Didi". Such words belittle the dignity of a woman and the Election Commission must take note of it. Mamata was right in saying that the way the PM is cracking jokes on her, it sounds like a young man making a pass at a local woman. This is certainly below standard. "I know many things about you, Modi and Shah. But I have the dignity not to stoop so low," she said. She targeted Modi, saying that

Punish vaccine hoarders



Amid the current surge in the number of Coronavirus cases, several States have reported the shortage of anti-viral drug Remdesivir. It is surprising that Gujarat BJP chief CR Patil has announced that 5,000 doses of Remdesivir would be made available free of cost by the party in Surat. But he didn't explain how he managed to get the stock despite the Government mandating that not more than six doses of medicine will be sold without a doctor's prescription.

The Government must respond and explain that when people are unable to get the

injection despite standing in queues for hours, how did 5,000 injections reach Patil? Gujarat Chief Minister Vijay Rupani's innocent response was that he is unaware of Patil's claim. "I don't know. Ask Patil," said Rupani. This response is careless and is not expected from a CM. It is a blatant case of corruption and a CBI inquiry must be initiated to find out how he managed to stockpile the Remdesivir injection. Worse still, this is the situation despite the Gujarat High Court pulling up the State Government over the worsening Coronavirus situation.

The COVID-19 patients are experiencing unimaginable difficulties due to the shortage of beds, oxygen and medicine supply and lack of proper testing and tracing. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that India has "walked the talk" on helping the world counter the pandemic despite its "limited resources", much is needed to be done to effectively deal with the rising COVID cases at home. Nailing the corrupt politicians who stockpile or hoard the vaccine is one such step.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

only someone who did not give due recognition to the women in his life can crack such jokes. However, Mamata also has crossed her limits several times in past.

Our political leaders must exercise caution while speaking in public. The common people follow the politicians blindly and such statements set a wrong precedent in politics. There are politicians like Uttar Pradesh's former Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and Samajwadi Party leader Azam Khan who have made insulting remarks against women. The politicians should maintain dignity and decorum in public life.

G David Milton | Tamil Nadu

STOP THE HATE SPEECHES

Sir — The overzealous campaign of the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari, with the choicest of abuses for our Islamic brethren, follows the culture of his new political masters. Sadly, such

leaders vouch for the constitutional ethos and cry "India first" at every possible opportunity! Despite the rampant abuse of religion and attempts to create a rift among communities, these leaders surprisingly are not prosecuted. Hate speeches have become the order of the day in elections.

These things work in elections since the people are still not educated or well-informed enough and fall into the trap of the political leaders. We will never have good and accountable governance unless and until we vote for those who are secular in the real sense and do not create rift among people. Else, we cannot continue to blame the politicians for our plight as we only vote them to power and give them the opportunity to make the laws to govern us.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

The 'Tika Utsav' will continue for 10-12 days. Lockdown is not the solution for COVID-19 but vaccination, social distancing and wearing masks is.

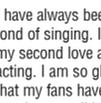


Goa Chief Minister — Pramod Sawant



It is the lockdown that has been overwhelmingly important in bringing down infections and deaths. It has not been achieved by the vaccination programme.

British Prime Minister — Boris Johnson



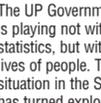
I have always been fond of singing. It's my second love after acting. I am so glad that my fans have loved my renditions. I hope to do a lot more soon.

Actor — Sara Khan



I'm very happy with the progress of the team over the last 18 months. If we continue to build on this, I am sure we can defeat any team.

Indian hockey captain — Manpreet Singh



The UP Government is playing not with statistics, but with the lives of people. The situation in the State has turned explosive.

Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra



FIRST COLUMN

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SOUTH

If we want real integration, North Indians must study the history and literature of South India, too, right from school



MARKANDEY KATJU

All Indians, including those from the South, have read about the great Mauryan Empire, the Gupta Empire, the Empire of Harshavardhan, the Mughal Empire, and so on in their school history books. But, how many North Indians have heard of Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire (whose statue along with his two queens, still stands in the Tirupati temple), or of the great Chola and Pandya kings? Regrettably, very few North Indians would be aware of these great kings from the South. Most Indians have read the 'Ramayan' and the 'Mahabharata', which are epics about North Indian kings, and most Indians have read the works of Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, and the stories of Munshi Premchand. But how many North Indians have read the great Tamil epics 'Silappathikaram', 'Manimekalai', or the great Tamil treatise 'Tirukkural' by Tiruvalluvar, about whom the great Tamil poet Subramania Bharati wrote: "Tamil Nadu is known throughout the world because of Tirukkural." How many have heard the 'Tiruppavai' by the poet saint Andal, which is sung in the month of January all over Tamil Nadu, or the great poetry of Subramania Bharati who wrote powerful verses for women's emancipation around 1910 much before anyone dared to do so in the country? Very few.



North Indians know of Hindustani music but how many know of Carnatic music, and its trinity of Tyagaraj, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri? Hardly any. How many North Indians have heard of the great Kerala social reformer Narayan Guru, who belonged to the low-caste Ezhava community and fearlessly criticised and campaigned against the inhuman caste system? Practically none. For long, North Indians have regarded South India as a dark land populated by uncivilised people and are blissfully unaware of the South's great achievements in various fields. Indeed in the 'Ramayan', Kishkindha, which is believed to be in the present State of Karnataka, was regarded to be a land populated by monkeys from whom Lord Rama raised a 'vaanar sena' (monkey army) to invade Sri Lanka. Regrettably, even today, many North Indians look down on South Indians due to their ignorance of the culture and achievements of the South. For instance, South Indian temples are massive and unbelievably beautiful. They reveal the high level of knowledge of architecture and geometry of the ancient and medieval South Indians. For example, the Brihadishvara temple of Tanjore is simply astounding and one wonders how the builders could use such huge stones to create it. In fact, it reminds one of the Egyptian pyramids. The gigantic rock relief 'Descent of the Ganges' in the ancient port city of Mahabalipuram, capital of the Pallav Empire, is truly amazing.

The large number of Roman coins found in South India show the extensive trade between it and ancient Rome from the time of Emperor Augustus (who reigned from 27 BC to 14 AD). This indicates how highly developed the economy in ancient and medieval South India was as they, unlike North Indians, were seafaring people, with extensive commercial contacts in Southeast Asia. The Chola king Rajendra Chola is believed to have executed military campaigns in Southeast Asia (Sri Lanka, Sumatra, and so on), which could only have been possible with the aid of a powerful navy. In Ilango's epic 'Silappathikaram' one comes across these lines: "May the Pandya king prosper, who ruled over the South, after conquering the Ganga and the Himalayas in the north." At first I thought this was only poetic exaggeration, however, later I read of credible accounts of a South Indian king (perhaps Rajendra Chola) leading a Napoleonic invasion of north India up to the Ganga and even beyond (apart from invading Sri Lanka, the Malaya peninsula, southern Thailand and so on.) If we want real integration of India, North Indians must study the history, culture and literature of South India, too, right from school and give the South Indians the respect they deserve.

(The writer is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal.)

Irreconcilable differences?

While India insists on de-escalation in Eastern Ladakh, the Chinese prefer the *status quo*. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent



ANIL GUPTA

The 11th round of India-China military talks to defuse tension in Eastern Ladakh, that was held after a gap of nearly two months, has again ended without any major breakthrough. The marathon talks lasted 13 hours as has been the trend in the past, but the Chinese side this time was rigid and uncompromising. Ever since the successful disengagement of troops from the lake area and the Kailash Range in February this year, a stalemate exists as far as further disengagement is concerned from the areas of Hot Springs, Gogra, Demchok and over stopping of Indian patrols in Depsang.

Immediately after the disengagement was completed, the 10th round of talks was held between the military commanders of the two nations. But it failed to arrive at any consensus as far as further disengagement from the remaining areas was concerned. However, the talks were dubbed as "constructive" and both sides hoped for a fruitful outcome. A joint statement issued by the two countries after the talks positively appraised the disengagement from the lake area, terming it a significant step that would provide a good basis for resolution of other remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Western Sector.

Though the much-awaited 11th round has once again ended in a stalemate, there are two noticeable differences. Unlike in the past, no joint statement has been issued by the two nations. In another first, the Chinese side has responded with a statement from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with the Press statement issued by the spokesperson of its Western Theatre Command instead of its Defence Ministry. The statement issued by the PLA was full of rhetoric and laced with diplomatic niceties, indicating that it may have been drafted at the Ministry level but was issued by the PLA. This indicates some sort of unhappiness or disagreement which may need intervention at the highest level.

The PLA's statement said, "We hope India can treasure the current positive situation of de-escalation in the China-India border regions, abide by related agreements reached by the two countries and the two militaries in previous meetings, meet China halfway and safeguard peace and stability in the border regions together"; once again reiterating the "half-way" offer rejected outrightly by India in the past. What's the point of talking about de-escalation when the Chinese have not even completed the promised disengagement?

A couple of weeks earlier, General Naravane, the Indian Chief of the Army Staff, had observed that the threat in Eastern Ladakh has "not gone away altogether" since the PLA was still maintaining its considerable troop strength in the "rear areas" as before. "De-escalation will take place only when these elements go back to their garrisons," he had said. The much-needed de-escalation still eludes both sides.

While the Indian side insisted on complete disengagement from Hot Springs, Gogra, Kongka La and Demchok, including the lingering issue of Depsang, the Chinese did not concede to troop pullback from these friction sites as earlier agreed to, leave alone discussing Depsang. The disengagement from the Depsang plains is believed to be the bone of contention since it is not directly relat-



TO WARD OFF ANY THREAT IN THE AREA, INDIA HAS ALSO BUILT UP A STRONG FORCE THERE, INCLUDING ARMOURED VEHICLES. THE LOGISTICS OF SUSTENANCE OF SUCH A LARGE FORCE AND KEEPING THE ARMOURED FLEET FUNCTIONAL IN SUCH EXTREME COLD WEATHER CONDITIONS IS A HERCULEAN TASK

The writer is a political commentator, security and strategic analyst. The views expressed are personal.



ed to last year's aggression. Hectic diplomatic activity had preceded the 11th round of talks for "maintaining peace and tranquillity and providing conditions for the progress of bilateral relations." The Indian Foreign Minister, in a telephonic conversation with his Chinese counterpart, had insisted on "early resolution of remaining issues along the LAC and disengagement at all friction points."

In a virtual meeting of the Working Mechanism of Consultation and Coordination on India China Border Affairs (WMCC), held in the last week of March, it was decided to hold the 11th round of talks between the Corps Commanders as early as possible in order "to further ease the situation on the ground and jointly safeguard the hard-won peace and stability in the border areas."

All eyes were thus set on the 11th round of negotiations, hoping not only for disengagement from the remaining areas but also for the resolution of the Depsang imbroglio. So, the big question is, why are the Chinese so sensitive about this area and unwilling to concede? The Depsang plains are sandwiched between the Aksai Chin and Siachen glacier. Located at the height of 16,000-17,000 feet above sea level, the area provides good mobility to the armoured vehicles. The Karakoram Pass and the Sasser Law Pass, both strategically important to India and located within its territory, are on its flanks. Much of these plains had been

under Chinese control since the mid-1950s. Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) is also located adjacent to the plains. In 1962, the Chinese occupied much of the Depsang plains west of the DBO, with India left with a small bulge. The new road built by us to connect the DBO with the Shyok area and beyond is under the observation of the Chinese and remains vulnerable to its artillery fire. The area is strategically important because China and Pakistan can jointly threaten India with a pincer movement in a strategic collusion and cut off the vital area from the rest of Ladakh. Conversely, India can threaten Aksai Chin and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), though a build-up for any large-scale offensive would pose serious challenges.

Apart from the varying perception of the LAC, another peculiar factor in the area is the Limit of Patrol (LOP). India and China differ on the alignment of the LOP as well. The Chinese perception of the LOP is almost 20 km beyond our perception inside our territory. The tensions in this area are not recent. The Chinese had intruded in the area in 2013 and again in 2015 during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping and then during the 2017 Doklam crisis.

The crux of the problem lies in both sides denying each other access to the Patrolling Points (PPs) located on the LOP. Earlier Indian troops had been patrolling up to PP 11, 12, 12A and 13 and had not moved beyond that till the perceived

LAC. But lately, the PLA has been preventing Indian troops from even patrolling till these PPs and the phenomenon has become more pronounced after the Doklam stand-off. Unlike the Chinese incursions in the Fingers Area (between Finger four-eight), the Chinese did not physically move into the area.

The Indian patrols can move in vehicles only up to an area called "Bottleneck" beyond which their movement is on foot. A kilometre or so beyond the bottleneck is "Y-Junction" where the route bifurcates, with one fork leading to PP10 to 12 and the other fork leading to PP13. When Indian patrols approach Y-Junction, the PLA troops come in vehicles from a nearby post and stop them from going further up to the LOP. In a *quid pro quo*, the Indian troops prevent the PLA's men from going ahead of the "Bottleneck" area to their perceived LOP.

To ward off any threat in the area, India has also built up a strong force there, including armoured vehicles. The logistics of sustenance of such a large force and keeping the armoured fleet functional in such extreme cold weather conditions is a Herculean task. While India insists on de-escalation in this area simultaneously with the others, the Chinese prefer the *status quo*. As it appears, both sides are unwilling to relent. Indian troops are still in possession of a feature in the lake area that can prove as a "trump card" for hard bargaining with the Chinese to secure our interests in the Depsang plains.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

IN THE ELECTION, THE CONSCIOUS PEOPLE OF BENGAL HIT SO MANY FOURS AND SIXES THAT THE SEATS OF THE BJP HAVE BECOME CENTURIES.
—PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



I CAN SAY THAT AFTER THE ELECTIONS ARE OVER, THE BJP WILL NOT EVEN GET 70 OUT OF THE TOTAL 294 SEATS.
—WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER MAMATA BANERJEE

Time to bridge the healthcare gap and tap indigenous potential

There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development activities towards advanced health solutions

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the disparity among the haves and have-nots in access to healthcare in the country. However, everyone should have working and living conditions that are conducive to good health. The collaboration of various stakeholders in the health sector, who must work as a team as well as individually, is essential to achieve a fairer and healthier world in which all members of society have access to quality healthcare services irrespective of their socio-economic status.



KM CHERMAN

The first step towards achieving universal access to affordable health services is to have uniform, unbiased and economical healthcare facilities available for all. This will help in early detection and treatment of various diseases and infections. Preventive healthcare measures are of

The writer is a Padma Shri awardee and a cardiothoracic surgeon credited with India's first bypass. He is Chairman and CEO of Frontier Lifeline Hospital. The views expressed are personal.

utmost importance in ensuring the overall health of a community.

While we have a plethora of health schemes in India like the 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY)' to cater to the health of our citizens, it's the execution part of such schemes that we lack in. Efforts are required to ensure that people are enrolled, databases are updated regularly and citizens avail the benefits of the scheme.

The Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) model can help in achieving the goal of accessible healthcare and realising the targets in the field. Private and Government entities need to collaborate and work in consonance, supplementing each other's effort. They have to come up with specific strategies for various sections, such as those below

the poverty line.

It is imperative to monitor health inequities and help provide better access to affordable and quality healthcare. Many people in our country struggle to avail primary healthcare services. It is important that the Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in every State cater to the healthcare needs of migrant workers who are from varied backgrounds.

Fostering and nurturing indigenous technology is extremely important in building affordable healthcare infrastructure in India. There has to be support from the Government for medical Research and Development (R&D) activities towards advanced health solutions.

As far as possible, bureaucratic hurdles must be removed so that innovators and scientists are able to avail the benefits of various policy



initiatives. There has to be some provision for financial support and tax benefits so as to encourage these R&D entities. For instance, if a patient needs a heart valve replacement, Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) is an alternative to conventional heart surgery but the long-lasting results of it are still in question.

It seems that there is an industry-wide push to make

these procedures popular, without really thinking about the long-term results. Currently, these valves are highly expensive in India (approximately ₹22.5 lakh) owing to which a majority of the people cannot afford it. Even the cost of conventional valve replacement (approximately ₹3 lakh) is also out of reach for many. The solution is indigenisation. The Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation (TAVI) using Nitinol stents developed by the National Aeronautical Lab (NAL) and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is promising in this respect. Unfortunately, there has been no support from any Central Government agency.

We all know that several organs are received only from human donors and there is a wide gap in the supply and

demand. Today, science has reached a stage where these organs could be manufactured using one's own cells through the 3D printing technology or by using a biological scaffold — like a shark fin — on which it could be grown. Shark skin is another potential tissue substrate to create biological tissue in view of its inherent tensile strength and durability. The Governments, both Central and States, as well as financial institutions mainly banks, should support these initiatives.

Unfortunately, due to ignorance on the part of regulatory bodies and other law enforcing agencies, even the licence for producing or manufacturing these has been poorly formulated and prioritised. Another important area is the realm of stem cell research with its tremendous regenerative potential, but we

face too many hurdles in manufacturing and commercial production.

Further, it's critical to create awareness about various health issues in regional languages that people understand. Plus, there is a pressing need to emphasise upon the importance of nutrition and immunity development in maintaining individual health.

Vaccination can help in keeping vaccine-preventable diseases away but there are new viruses and strains that are being discovered every day. Recently, we have witnessed how the second wave of the COVID-19 virus has taken the country by storm. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that our population has a fairly strong immune system, along with affordable healthcare and indigenous R&D in medical science.

Infosys board approves up to Rs 9,200-crore buyback plan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Infosys on Wednesday said its Board has approved up to Rs 9,200-crore buyback plan, wherein the IT major will buy back shares at a maximum price of Rs 1,750 apiece.

The buyback is part of the Bengaluru-based company's capital return of Rs 15,600 crore, which also includes a final dividend of Rs 6,400 crore.

The shares will be bought back via the open market route through the Indian stock exchanges, a regulatory filing said on Wednesday.

From FY20, Infosys had enhanced its capital allocation plan and said it will return 85 per cent of free cash flow cumulatively over five years via buyback and dividends.

"We've declared Rs 6,400 crore of dividend and Rs 9,200 crore in the buyback. Our cumulative payout for FY21 and FY20, which are the first two years of the capital allocation policy, would have paid out 83 per cent of the 85 per



cent. So in that sense, I think this is completely in line with our policy and that's what the board also considered when deciding the amount of buyback," Infosys Chief Financial Officer Nilanjan Roy told reporters.

Trading was closed on Wednesday.

Shares of Infosys had closed at Rs 1,398.60 apiece on Tuesday, down 1.91 per cent on BSE. The buyback price offered is over 25 per cent higher than the last closing price.

Elaborating on capital allocation exercise, Infosys statement said for FY 21, its board has recommended a final dividend of Rs 15 per share, and that together with the interim dividend of Rs 12 per share already paid, the total dividend per share for FY21 will amount to Rs 27, which is a 54 per cent increase over FY20.

American Depository Shares holders are permitted to convert their ADS into equity shares and subsequently opt to sell such equity shares on the

Indian stock exchanges during the buyback period, the filing said.

"Subject to the market price of the equity shares being equal to or less than the maximum buyback price, the indicative maximum number of equity shares bought back would be 52,571,428 equity shares (maximum buyback shares), comprising approximately 1.23 per cent of the paid-up capital of the company as of March 31, 2021 (on a standalone basis)," it said. Infosys will utilise at

least 50 per cent of the amount earmarked as the maximum size for the buyback i.e. Rs 4,600 crore, and purchase a minimum of 26,285,714 equity shares.

The Board has constituted a buyback committee comprising Chief Operating Officer (UB Pravin Rao), Chief Financial Officer (Nilanjan Roy), Deputy Chief Financial Officer, General Counsel and Company Secretary.

The buyback is subject to the approval of the members of the company by way of a special resolution and all other applicable statutory/regulatory approvals.

The public announcement setting out the process, timelines and other statutory details of the buyback will be released in due course, the filing said.

In August 2019, Infosys had bought back 11.05 crore of shares under its Rs 8,260-crore buyback offer. It had completed its maiden buyback of Rs 13,000 crore in December 2017, comprising 11.3 crore equity shares at Rs 1,150 per share.

IMPCL achieves highest-ever turnover of over Rs 160 crores

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With its products attracting more buyers, Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited (IMPCL), the public sector manufacturing unit of the Ministry of AYUSH, has recorded its highest-ever turnover of Rs 164 crore in 2020-21.

The company has recorded an all-time high profit of approximately Rs 12 crore, the A Y U S H Ministry said.

Its previous highest turnover was Rs 97 crore in 2019-20.

This growth is reflective of the fast-growing adoption of AYUSH products and services by the public following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the statement said.

Adding another feather in IMPCL's cap, the World Health Organisation

(WHO) recently recommended its 18 Ayurvedic products for WHO-GMP/COPP certification subject to certain observations in March 2021.

The WHO provides 'World Health Organisation, Good Manufacturing

Practices / Certificate of Pharmaceutical Product (WHO-GMP/CoPP)' certification to companies after conducting an inspection.

This certification is an endorsement of the quality of IMPCL's products. It will help IMPCL to commence export of quality medicines.

IMPCL is one of the most trusted manufacturers of AYUSH medicines in

the country and is known for the authenticity of its formulations.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was able to cater to the needs of the country in the shortest time, probably the first company in the country to provide Immuno boosting medicines as

Auraksha Immuno Boosting Kit. At Rs 350, it is one of the lowest-priced such kits and is also available on Amazon. Nearly 2 lakh such kits have been sold in the last two months," the statement said.

At present, IMPCL is manufacturing 656 classical Ayurvedic, 332 Unani and 71 proprietary Ayurvedic medicines for various diseases spectrum.



MINISTRY OF AYUSH

सत्यमेव जयते



Fundraising through public issues more than doubled

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Wednesday said fundraising through public and rights issues surged 115 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, in 2020-21 as compared to last year, the ministry said.

Similarly, around 2003 issues of corporate bonds for an amount of Rs 7,82,427.39 crore happened in 2020-21, surpassing the amount raised (Rs 6,89,686.19 crore) through 1,821 issues for the fiscal year 2019-20, it noted.

Thus, it said, while the number of issues increased by 10 per cent in 2020-21, the amount raised increased by 13.5 per cent as compared to the previous financial year.

Rights Issue, respectively, as against Rs 21,382.35 crore and Rs 55,669.79 crore raised last year. This is an increase of 115 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively, in 2020-21 as compared to last year, the ministry said.

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Global stocks follow Wall St higher after US inflation rises

PNS ■ BEIJING

Global stock markets and Wall Street futures rose Wednesday after traders shrugged off higher US inflation and a decline in Japanese machinery orders.

London and Paris opened higher while Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul rose. Tokyo was off less than 0.5%.

On Tuesday, Wall Street's benchmark S&P 500 index climbed 0.3% to a new high, propelled by tech and consumer stocks on optimism the vaccine rollout will allow business activity to return to normal. Johnson & Johnson fell 1.3% after US regulators suspended use of its single-dose vaccine to investigate possibly dangerous blood clots.

The US government reported consumer prices increased by a stronger-than-expected 0.6% in March, the fastest rate since 2012. Higher inflation normally fuels fears interest rates might be raised to keep prices stable, but the Federal Reserve has said the economy



will be allowed to "run hot" to ensure a recovery is in place.

Traders "took the well-telegraphed inflation pick-up in stride," Stephen Innes of Axi said in a report. Markets also are "seemingly unfazed" by the J&J suspension.

In early trading, London's FTSE 100 was up less than 0.1% at 6,896.64. Frankfurt's DAX declined less than 0.1% to 15,222.10 while the CAC 40 in Paris gained 0.2% to 6,196.15.

On Wall Street, the future for the S&P 500 index was up less than 0.1% while that for the Dow Jones Industrial

Average was unchanged.

The Dow, which includes J&J, fell 0.2% on Tuesday. The Nasdaq, with more technology stocks, gained 1.1%.

In Asia, the Shanghai Composite Index advanced 0.6% to 3,416.72 and the Hang Seng in Hong Kong added 1.3% to 28,855.83.

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo shed 0.4% to 29,620.99 after government data showed February machinery orders fell by an unexpectedly wide margin of 8.5% from the previous month, adding to concern about the country's recovery.

Simplilearn partners with KPMG

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Online digital skill provider Simplilearn on Wednesday said it has tied up with KPMG in India to offer postgraduate programmes in digital business transformation and process excellence.

The KPMG in India and Simplilearn partnership will provide a high-touch learning experience to the professionals enrolling in the post graduate, who will gain a real-world perspective of digital lean and business transformation through business case studies and masterclasses, according to a statement.

The learners will also be mentored by experts from KPMG in India in-person to help them apply the theoretical frameworks to solve real-world business challenges.

MONEY MATTERS

Syska LED wins CESL tender to participate in Gram Ujala LED



Syska LED on Wednesday said it has won a unique tender of state-run Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) to participate in carbon finance based Gram Ujala LED scheme for rural India. "Syska LED has won a uniquely structured tender by public sector entity Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) to supply LEDs for homes in rural India based on carbon finance," a statement said. In a first-of-its-kind structure, the CESL had invited participation of bidders for co-investment on a revenue sharing basis, where costs and profits would be shared in a manner that will encourage public-private participation in climate change mitigation. In this tender, Syska is downside protected through a fixed price offered by CESL; upside from carbon credits is shared in equal proportion between the two parties.

McDonald's to mandate anti-harassment training



McDonald's will mandate worker training to combat harassment, discrimination and violence in its restaurants worldwide starting next year, the company said Wednesday. The training requirement will impact 2 million workers at 39,000 stores worldwide. "It's really important that we be very clear: a safe and respectful workplace where people feel like they're going to be protected is critically important for our business," McDonald's President and CEO Chris Kempczinski told The Associated Press in an interview. "It's just what society is expecting." The change is part of a larger reckoning over sexual harassment at McDonald's.

FMCG firms assure supply amid Covid curfew in Maha

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

FMCG firms such as ITC, Parle Products, Marico, Emami and CG Corp Global on Wednesday assured uninterrupted supply of their products based on the learnings from the previous year's lockdown, even as surge in COVID-19 cases in India forced Maharashtra to declare a 15-day curfew while other states also impose various restrictions.

Maharashtra on Tuesday announced a statewide curfew from Wednesday, entailing stricter curbs on public activities, to curb spread of coronavirus but stopped short of announcing a full-scale lockdown. "There is a lot of learning that has gone in from last



year...this time things are far better managed. Companies have learnt how to deal with it.

"Governments have also learnt what they should be doing when they announce a lockdown," Parle Products Senior Category Head Mayank Shah told PTI.

Asserting that there is no worry on the supply side, he said, "There is much clarity this time. Things are smooth, even local administration knows and companies are better

geared up."

An ITC spokesperson said, "ITC has taken all necessary steps to ensure enhanced availability of products for consumers across all channels. Over the period of the pandemic, we have developed strong operating policies and agile organisational structures for dealing with all types of market constraints and volatility."

The spokesperson further said the company is confident that its robust supply chain system will ensure that all sales channels, including e-commerce are serviced adequately during this time. "We also now have a fully operational ITC e-store in six metro cities which can meet consumer requirements directly."

Govt appoints Anil Kumar on central board of SBI

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State Bank of India on Wednesday said the government has nominated Anil Kumar Sharma, the executive director of the RBI, on its board with immediate effect.

Citing a DFS notification dated April 13, 2021, SBI said, "...the central government hereby nominates Anil Kumar Sharma, executive director, Reserve Bank of India as director on the central board of State Bank of India with immediate effect... until further orders, vice Chandan Sinha."

Madhavan elevated as Prez of Disney

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Walt Disney Company India and Star India on Wednesday elevated K Madhavan naming him the president of both the firms, effective immediately.

Since 2019, Madhavan has been the country manager for Star and Disney in India, overseeing their television and studios business.

In this new role, Madhavan will drive strategy and growth of the group in the country, with responsibility for the vast Disney, Star and Hotstar businesses and operations spanning across entertainment, sports, regional channels, and direct-to-consumer businesses, Rebecca Campbell, chairman of international opera-



tions and direct-to-consumer businesses at Walt Disney said.

His new role also includes oversight of channel distribution and advertising sales as well as local content production business that currently is responsible for creating 18,000 hours of original content across fiction, non-fiction, sports, and movies in eight languages, she added.

Nova raises USD 1 mn seed funding

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Nova Benefits, a corporate health insurance platform, on Wednesday said it has raised USD 1 million in seed funding round led by Multiply Ventures, Better Capital and Titan Capital.

Rupeek Gold Loans CEO Sumit Maniyar and Early Salary co-founder Ashish Goyal also participated as angel investors, a company release said.

Bengaluru-based Nova Benefits is an employee benefits platform centered around corporate health insurance. It helps save HR time by elimi-



nating manual workflows.

Through the platform, employees can access their insurance e-cards, find cashless hospitals and make claims.

The company plans to use the capital to integrate with insurance and HRMS companies, co-create a new category of health insurance products with insurers and expand its engineering and business development efforts, the release said.

'Long term policies needed for EV sector growth'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Central and state governments need to reduce uncertainty and roll out clear long term policies to enable growth of the electric vehicle sector in the country, according to CEEW Centre for Energy Finance's (CEEW-CEF).

The think tank also noted that the authorities need to work towards reducing the high upfront cost of electric vehicles (EVs) and enhancing charging infrastructure.

"Electric mobility is poised to be at the forefront of India's green recovery. In the coming years, the central and state governments need to reduce uncertainty by rolling out detailed and clear long-term policies," CEEW CEO



Arunabha Ghosh said in a statement.

Further, targeted efforts are needed to solve critical challenges such as higher upfront cost of EVs, lack of end-user financing, consumer's range anxiety, and inaccessible charging, he added.

Besides, the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME)-II scheme has achieved only 4.25 per cent of its sales targets till now, the

think tank noted.

"One major barrier could be that many potential EV buyers are unaware of the financial incentives available to them such as user subsidies and significant exemptions from road tax and registration fees," it added.

The CEEW-CEF, however, pointed out that the country's electric mobility sector is in a recovery mode having witnessed sales of around 1.35 lakh units in the 2020-21 fiscal. EV registrations formed 0.88 per cent of all vehicle registrations in the last financial year - the highest share ever achieved, it added.

The think tank also noted that the Indian automobile market has registered over 6.38 lakh EVs since 2011-12.

Two-wheeler and three-wheeler EV sales accounted for nearly 96 per cent of the electric mobility market in FY21, it added.

Further, the electric mobility dashboard noted that Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Karnataka were the top three states in terms of EV sales in FY21.

Uttar Pradesh alone contributed 23 per cent of the country's sales, with 31,584 EVs sold in the last fiscal, it added. "The top 10 states together made 88 per cent of all EVs sold in India. Tripura, however, leads with the highest share of EVs per 1,000 internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles, with 52 EVs sold for every 1,000 ICE vehicles in FY21," a CEEW-CEF analyst said.

Amazon moves SC against Delhi High Court stay order



Future Retail on Wednesday said Amazon has approached Supreme Court against a Delhi High Court order which stayed a single judge's order restraining Future Retail Ltd from going ahead with its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Reliance Retail to sell its business. "The company's advocates are in receipt of communication dated April 13, 2021, from advocates of Amazon.com NV Investment Holdings LLC informing that Amazon has filed a Special Leave Petition before the Supreme Court of India against the captioned order dated March 22, 2021 passed by the Division Bench of the High Court of Delhi," Future Retail informed the stock exchanges. Future Retail said it will "defend the matter/proceedings through our legal counsels". On March 22, the Delhi High Court stayed a single judge's order restraining Future Retail Ltd (FRL) from going ahead with the deal with Reliance Retail to sell its business, which was objected to by US-based e-commerce giant Amazon.

Design of ToU framework for electricity tariff in Gujarat



Pricing of electricity is one of the key challenges in the efficient functioning of the power sector. Electricity tariffs typically do not reflect the true costs of generation, transmission and distribution in India. Knowledge about the demand-price relationship, consumers' willingness-to-pay for electricity, and demand forecasts are necessary to plan the supply and design of tariff structures. Increase in distributed energy resources (DER) such as solar photovoltaic (PV), wind turbines and electric vehicles (EVs) will result in unanticipated peaks in demand-generation balance leading to huge stress on the power system equipment and networks. Typically, in most cities, the last 100 MW of the peak demand is experienced for about 100 hours or less in a year; and creating an entire infrastructure to meet this load makes the whole system uneconomical.

what's brewing?



HUMA MAKES BLINK-AND-MISS APPEARANCE IN ARMY OF THE DEAD TRAILER

The trailer of the much-anticipated zombie thriller film *Army of the Dead* dropped. The film comes from the director of *Justice League* series of movies, Zack Snyder. The trailer is gripping from the word go. Expect some high-octane action sequences and some edge-of-the-seat moments from this upcoming film by Snyder.

Starring Dave Bautista, Ella Purnell, Omari Hardwick, Ana de la Reguera, Theo Rossi and Hiroyuki Sanada, *Army of the Dead* marks Huma Qureshi's Hollywood debut. The actress also makes a blink-and-miss appearance in the trailer.

The trailer of *Army of the Dead* begins with casino boss Bly Tanaka (Hiroyuki Sanada) approaching former zombie war hero Scott Ward (Dave Bautista) with a proposal.

Scott, who leads a quiet life working as a chef in a humble eatery now, is approached to enter Las Vegas, a zombie-infested quarantined zone to retrieve \$200 million lying in a strip club. Scott is

offered \$50 million for the job. He accepts the proposition, builds a team and enters the zombie-infested land. Scott and his team have to retrieve \$200 million and dodge the zombie attack. Mind you, these are alpha zombies — smarter and much faster.

Huma Qureshi appears to be a survivor of the zombie attack. Huma Qureshi is playing a small part in the Zack Snyder-directed film, the actress revealed. Sharing the trailer of the film, Huma wrote, "Super proud to be a small part of this genius man's vision @ZackSnyder always a fan and friend forever (sic)." *Army of the Dead* will release on Netflix on May 21.

Ajay Devgn-starrer *MayDay* inspired from the 2015 Doha-Kochi flight incident

Ajay Devgn is on a roll nowadays. As an actor, he's at the best phase of his career. His last film, *Tanhaji - The Unsung Warrior* was 2020's biggest grosser, earning Rs. 279.55 crore. As a producer, his company, Ajay Devgn Ffilms, is doing great. And now as a director, he has begun work on his fourth directorial, *MayDay*. The superstar also acts in this film besides Amitabh Bachchan and Rakul Preet Singh.

It is scheduled for release on April 29, 2022 and is already one of the most awaited films of Bollywood.

The title of the film had already made it evident that the film is something to do with an aircraft in need of help. But not much was given out by the film's team about its premise. However, now it has come to light that *MayDay* is inspired by an astonishing but little known true incident. As per recent report, the film is inspired by the 2015 episode of Jet Airways Doha-Kochi flight that had a close shave due to poor visibility.

place on August 18, 2015 early in the morning. The flight 9W 555 had 141 passengers and eight crew members on board.

Trouble arose when the flight, which took off from Doha, tried to land at its destination at Kochi but was unable to do so due to poor visibility. The plane was then diverted to Trivandrum where the visibility was equally poor, prompting the pilots to initiate a May Day call. After three failed attempts, the plane landed at Trivandrum airport with only 250 kg of fuel left, although some reports say it had around 350 kg of fuel left.

However, the minimum a Boeing 737 aircraft should have as fuel reserve is about 1500 kg.

A trade expert says, "The incident made news at that point but was soon forgotten. Hence, audiences would be in for a surprise when they'll see *MayDay* and realise that it's inspired from a shocking, true incident. Also, the papers only reported about the incident but didn't follow up with the case. So one hardly knows what happened later on. It's an exciting idea that Ajay Devgn has chosen for his directorial venture."



MayDay went on floors in December 2020 and most of the shoot is already over. Last week, the second last schedule was wrapped up in Mira Road and Vasai and now the final schedule will

take place in Doha. This three-day shoot was scheduled to happen in April-end but due to the surge in Coronavirus cases, Ajay Devgn has decided to put this schedule on hold.

Katy Perry and Miranda Kerr talk 'unconditional love' of motherhood



The singer, 36, joined the supermodel, 37, on Instagram Live Tuesday evening to discuss the launch of Kerr's KORA Organics skincare line's new turmeric moisturiser.

During their chat, the pair also bonded over motherhood and spoke about their "close" relationship with each other.

"In our modern family, she's probably the most health conscious of everyone," Perry said of Kerr, who shares 10-year-old son Flynn with her fiancé, Orlando Bloom. Kerr and the actor were married for three years from 2010 to 2013.

"One of the great things about being close to Miranda is I get to try out all her products, especially when her son [Flynn] comes

home with them in his backpack," Perry said, laughing. In addition to his mom's products, Perry said "Flynn will always bring this amazing nugget of knowledge on either skincare or food."

Perry and Bloom welcomed their first child together, Daisy Dove, last year. Kerr also has two sons (Myles, 18 months, and Hart, 3) with husband Evan Spiegel, 30.

"The kids are my number one love," Kerr said as she and Perry chatted about parenthood Tuesday. "It's just the best thing in the world, being a mom."

"It's the best job. It's the most fulfilling," Perry agreed. "There was no feeling like the feeling when I had my daughter. That was like all the love I was ever searching for what like 'Bam.'"

Virat Kohli: Speaking to Katrina Kaif 'for 2 minutes' was biggest off-the-field moment

Cricketer Virat Kohli, who is married to actor-producer Anushka Sharma, had once revealed that Katrina Kaif speaking to him for two minutes was the biggest off-the-field moment in his life. A throwback video has now surfaced online where the cricketer had made the confession.

In the video, a young Virat was seen talking to VJ Bani. In it, Bani asked what was his biggest off-the-field moment. Virat said: "Katrina Kaif just spoke to me for just two minutes." When she asked "sachi (is that true?)" Virat replied, "Main jhoot kyun bolunga (why will I lie?)"

Virat and Anushka married in 2017 in Italy in a wedding attended by a selected few. They welcomed their first child, a daughter, in January this year.



FUN

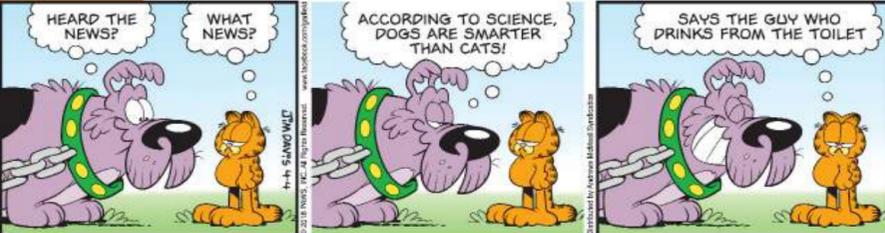
ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

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

ACROSS

- Dirty and unhealthy air or water
- More than is needed
- Water covering land that is usually dry
- A female relation
- A symbol on playing cards
- A passenger needs this
- Famous singer or actor
- Run after trying to catch
- Sooner than expected
- Squashed
- Stretchy stuff in clothes
- Wreck completely
- Choose
- Move along on hands and knees
- The number in a trio
- At this place

DOWN

- Frequently
- Jump over
- A chewed sweet
- Bad smell

SOLUTION



THE POWER OF PLAY



NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR KIDS ON THE STREETS

To ensure a life of dignity and respect for the children in street situations in Hyderabad city by ensuring a legal identity, and thereby access to their entitlements as rights, Save the Children has joined hands with Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation.

On the occasion of International Day for Street Children, J. Srinivasa Rao, Chairperson, Telangana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights virtually launched a collaborative project for the children living in street situations, 'Making #TheInvisibles Visible through Legal Identity in Hyderabad City' in the presence of Latifa Shaikh, Child Champion from Mumbai, Sri. Aswin Lakshmanan, Director - Strategy and Planning, Verizon India and leaders from Save the Children.

To begin with, the year-long project will ensure a legal identity document to over 5000 CISS to enable them to be visible on the government records and avail schemes for which they are eligible for their overall well-being and future growth. The project brings in multiple stakeholders including State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights, District Child Protection Unit, Department of Women and Child Welfare, Child Welfare Committees, State Juvenile Police Unit - Hyderabad Police and other civil society organisations on a common platform to bring about a collective impact on these lives.

Srinivasa Rao, Chairperson,

Telangana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, said, "I appreciate Save the Children for taking up such initiative to work on the issues of children living in street situations. It has been one of our major areas of work, addressing the issues of children in street situations. We need all the stakeholders to come together and address the issues holistically. I call for a detailed discussion on chalking out a plan of working together to promote and protect the rights of children in street situations. Giving an identity to them is an important beginning. I appreciate all the partners for coming together to make the launch a huge success. SCPCR will also be there to support not just 5000 children but every single child lives in street situations in Hyderabad."

Highlighting the importance of this collaborative initiative, Aswin Lakshmanan, Director - Strategy and Planning, Verizon India said, "We are happy to partner with Save the Children to provide a new lease of life to these homeless and underprivileged children through a legal identity as citizens of our country. Driven by our purpose of moving the world forward together, we are working closely with the communities around us to enable economic, environmental and social advancement. With this initiative, we aim to provide a robust support system for the street children by ensuring access to basic facilities, empowering them with information and awareness on their rights and entitlements and helping them lead their life with dignity and respect."



All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy! Despite the truth of this saying, we come across parents and educational institutions who restrict playtime for children of all ages. Nisha Sharma of 'Play First', which aims to revolutionise 'play' in the country, talks to *The Pioneer's* RACHEL DAMMALA about the need for play, its role in both classrooms and the personal development of a child, and more.

We know often we've seen parents 'rewarding' children with playtime for good behaviour or as positive reinforcement for having finishing chores, or homework. That's probably how it worked for most of us too. But did you know that play is a basic right of a child recognised by United Nations Convention for Right of the Child? This only shows the kind of impact 'play' can have on a child's development. Raising awareness and educating schools and parents about the saw is the organisation 'Play First', founded by Nisha Sharma.

Having been in the field of education for the last 15 years and working with children and adults of different age groups, Nisha's passion for exploring play and essential life skills with learners of different ages has only grown. As a mother, the birth of her son allowed her to observe, pause and reflect on how

play is unfolding in her son's life and the role it is playing. As a play enthusiast and trained play facilitator, she educated herself about the play by attending different conferences, being a member of playgroups, familiarising herself with the research in the field, conducting play sessions, and observing children at play. "As an experiential educator and a certified global trainer for 'Play for Peace', I realised that the flow which is generated during play is unparalleled. People are their own selves, they lose all their inhibitions and the connections built and discoveries made about oneself and the others are immensely powerful. I have been enamoured by this power of play for the last around seven years," Nisha tells us. Talking about the kind of learning she had as she saw her son growing up, she says, "The pure joy and control which a little infant (now a toddler) can feel during his uninterrupted and self-initiated play are

difficult to describe in words. Observing my son at play and the other children playing alongside him, intrigued me more about getting to know the biology of play. I started using my observations, my experience, and available research on play in a systematic manner to support this personal journey of my child and myself."

The amount of research happening in the field of play in the whole world is astonishing. No matter how one defines play, which methodology one uses to study its impact, the results have always been in favour of play. Play has been established as a fundamental and biological need of all animals, including humans. This renewed understanding of play and the paradigm of play as a right of children, made Nisha delve deeper into the nuances of play. "There are several questions which she got answers to in the last three years and there are many which are yet to be explored. This discovery

has now become a life goal. The aim of starting 'Play First' is simple: To enable children to respectfully enjoy play, to enable parents and teachers to value play and design their own role in the play journeys of their children, to enable individuals to find their play and live a quality life, to bring the study of play to formal teacher education programs of the country, and to make more people aware about play, its power and thus creating play champions in our society."

At 'Play First', they believe that each adult working with children is doing his/her best for the well-being of the children. The intentions are always beautiful and a bit of information and perspective can enable them to make more informed choices about children's lives. Talking about how play is a biological process, Nisha informs, "Play is always happening whether it's allowed or not. Whilst the children have to play and will play because they are built to play, our endeavour must be to respect this fundamental need and create enabling play environments. We must remove the barriers like lack of time, lack of space, lack of companions, lack of material, lack of autonomy, and other such basic things from our children's environment. As adults, all that we can do is to create an environment, the blueprint of how to play and what to play is already there with each child. Play is a state of mind which can be achieved when the child has the freedom to choose



- time, duration, space, material, people, and activities. Interventions of any kind must be done in the spirit of enabling children to decide for themselves."

Play First points out how children have been playing for millennia, adults have responded to their need to play intuitively all this while. However, the sharp discontinuities which have occurred in the last three decades in children's play lives, they say, need deliberate thinking and conversation about it. Thinking and talking about play is the new need of the new world order! Nisha, who has been working as an educator for more than a decade now, has also led different teams in schools as a teacher educator, principal, and coordinator. As a Global Certified Trainer for Play for Peace, she has facilitated sessions for children, youth, and adults in rural and urban contexts on life skills, teaching, equity, and inclusion. With Play First, she hopes to work with parents and sharing the value of play,



and supporting them to design a role for themselves to nurture their children's play and thus their lives. Play First will also work with schools and teachers, enabling schools to make play an important part of each school day - designing play spaces, designing sustainable material and practices to nurture play.

Nisha hopes more and more parents and educators will join her in the cause. "We hope to build a perspective about play and its value by designing and delivering a module that can be plugged into various pre-service teacher education programs. There's only so much I can do here. When a teacher, before her/she is corrupted by the limitations of the system, can form this perspective, the lives of many children can be positively impacted," Nisha believes.

It's time we stop seeing play as just instruments to teach a subject and enable every child to make the most of this enriching experience.



The growing cases of Covid-19, which includes people who have been fully vaccinated also testing positive, has raised an alarm. *The Pioneer* speaks with doctors who reason and explain why vaccination is still the best option.

Vaccine still best bet

Soon after the reports of doctors getting COVID positive even after receiving both the vaccine shots made headlines, the efficacy of the vaccine came under question.

With people wondering why to get vaccinated if one can anyway get infected with Coronavirus, doctors believe it is still the best bet.

"It is not correct to think that getting vaccinated will prevent one from catching the infection. A fully vaccinated person can still be infected but the viral load of such a person will be far less than someone who is not

vaccinated or partially vaccinated. The antibodies produced by the vaccine helps in fighting off the virus, which in turn, reduces the chances of that person transmitting the virus to other people," Dr Deepak Verma, Internal Medicine, Columbia Asia Hospital, tells you.

There are reports that not administering the jab at the right spot can be one of the reasons of a person catching the virus, however, Dr Verma dismisses all these facts.

"The vaccines approved for use in India are intramuscular in nature and a vaccinated person getting Covid has got nothing to do with how a vaccine is administered -



there is no evidence so far that a wrong way of administering a vaccine can affect its efficacy; however, it can increase pain, swelling and reduce the range of motion in that area," he says.

Dr Arunesh Kumar, Senior

Consultant & Head Respiratory Medicine/Pulmonology, Paras Hospital agrees with Verma and tells you that there is yet no vaccine that guarantees 100 per cent protection against the corona

virus. "Even if you are vaccinated, you must follow the safety rules suggested by doctors. Vaccination is a must to reduce the transmission rate and thus everyone must get it. Even after receiving the

Covid-19 vaccine, we must continue taking all precautions like the use of face cover or masks, hand sanitisation and maintain distancing. These behaviours must be followed both at the session site and in general. Vaccination reduces the severity of disease and reduce the transmissibility of virus," he explains.

However, the rising concerns may raise doubts in the mind of the people about getting vaccinated. But, experts say this is not the way out.

"One shouldn't be apprehensive about getting the vaccination done. While it doesn't provide 100 per cent efficacy, it is still the best bet. Keeping in mind the current situation, it is imperative that we must be on optimum guard. Even after getting the vaccination done, one must follow all the safety precautions that are laid out by the Government. Becoming complacent is one of the major reasons of people catching the infection even after the getting the jab," Dr Verma tells you.

Dr Satish Kaul, HOD and Director, Internal medicine, Narayana Hospital, Gurugram, says that vaccines are surely safe if doses are taken within prescribed time that too with all required precautions.

"We need to understand that vaccine basically provides protection from the severity of the disease; it saves us from getting chronically sick. It potentially saves us practically from ICU, ventilators and oxygen support, it helps to weaken the mechanism of disease in human body. Hence, vaccine beneficiaries are supposed to continue wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and Covid appropriate behaviour even after getting vaccinated," he suggests.

Also after taking second dose be extra cautious for at least two weeks, follow all precautionary measures. "Experts believe that one has to not get infected for at least two weeks after getting the second dose in order for the vaccine to be effective. Hence, these two weeks are the most crucial," Kaul adds.



BRAND NEW FUTURE

New-age career options are a rage among students. MUSBA HASHMI speaks with experts and academicians to tell you how equipped schools are to prepare job ready individuals and what the future holds for these courses

It's time that we have finally managed to get over the likes of engineering, law and medical sciences. Alternative career options are now in the driver's seat. Students, too, are preferring to land a job that not only helps them earn a handsome amount of money, but also give them that much needed job satisfaction. Not that, engineering and law lacks it, but it is, of course, not on everyone's cards.

As the innovations are mostly turning out to be multidisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary, even the careers are becoming one.

CM Faiz, Director, HKBK College Of Engineering, tells you that Sports Analytics/Sports Management and Audio Engineering are some of the few options that students can choose from.

"Sports Analytics is used at every level of sports management from school to the international level, while audio engineering opens a plethora of options in the music and film industry and also in the ad agencies," Faiz says.

Also, when one talks about technology an innovation, there is no way of not mentioning the growing careers of Full Stack Web Development and Cybersecurity.

"Full Stack Web Development is the combination of both front end and back end portions in the life of a web application. You'll be glad to know that full-stack development jobs are considered one of the highest paying jobs in India. This is primarily because of its demand and the lack of skilled professionals in the domain. The average salary of a Full Stack Developer is around ₹10 lakh per annum and an experienced professional can earn ₹20 lakh per annum according to Glassdoor," Diwakar Chittora, CEO & Director, IntelliPaat, explains.

On the other hand, cybersecurity jobs are in high-demand worldwide as every organisation professionals in their security teams to maintain their security and prevent any breach of data. "Organisations around the world are in need of cybersecurity

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Tailor made syllabus
- On the field exposure
- Academic and Industry sessions from subject matter experts
- State of the art infrastructure
- Real-time internships
- Organisations have to strike MOUs with expert entities for knowledge exchange
- Research mentoring by subject matter experts
- Hosting real time student conferences
- Student exchange programs
- Imparting crucial lateral thinking skills in the domain area

professionals as vacancies are left unfilled and these vacancies are still open," Chittora adds.

Another one on the list of the most-sought after jobs of the 21st century is Data Scientist. "Demand across the world for Data Scientists will only grow and the lack of competition for these jobs makes data science a lucrative option for a career path. People from across the world are getting into this domain due to its demand and popularity. According to an IBM report, Data Science jobs would likely grow by 30 per cent. The estimated figure of job listing is 2,720,000 for Data Science in 2021. Also, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, about 11 million jobs will be created by 2026," Chittora tells you.

While new-age career options are the way forward, the question is whether the school curriculum is well-equipped enough to help students take the alternative way and makes them job ready.

"The best route to creating job

ready individuals is to involve business organisations in the academic process. With the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) that focuses on industry-academia alliance and vocational learning, we will be able to produce job ready individuals, who will revolutionise the industry and fast-track the development of our country," Alka Kapur, Principal, Modern Public school, Shalimar Bagh, New Delhi, tells you.

She lists courses that are on the priority lists of students. "Technological advancement and digitisation of services have expanded the market, and they've opened up a plethora of job opportunities such as application developers, web creative writers, bloggers, wedding photographers, cinematographers, reviewers, influencers, social media handlers, digital marketers, motivational speakers, ethical hackers, web designers, image consultants, stand-up comedians and YouTubers, among others," she mentions.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Aim for success, not perfection. Never give up your right to be wrong, because then you will lose the ability to learn new things and move forward with your life. Remember that fear always lurks behind perfectionism.
— Mokokoma Mokhonoana

Making the country proud

Making the country and her compatriots proud, SRM Institute of Science and Technology's (SRMIST) student Nethra Kumanan has become the first Indian woman to qualify for the upcoming Olympics.

While confirming her berth in the Tokyo Olympics, Kumanan will be representing the country in sailing.

She qualified for the prestigious event by securing top position at the Laser Radial event in the Mussanah Open Championship, a joint Asian and African Olympic qualifying event.

A second-year engineering student of SRMIST, Kumanan has also represented the country at the 2014 and 2018 Asian Games in Incheon and Jakarta, respectively.

This is not all. She became the first Indian woman to win



a World Cup medal in sailing when she won Bronze at 2020 Sailing World Cup in Miami, USA.

Kumanan will now become the first Indian woman sailor to represent the country at the Olympics. This 23-year-old professional sailor is a resident of Chennai and has made her institution proud. She trains in the Canary Islands, Spain.

Bid to nurture talent

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's coaching capital, Kota, witnessed an unprecedented development when the doyens of coaching institutes get associated with Motion Education to give offline classes to JEE/NEET aspirants.

The presence of three directors, viz., Akhilesh Khater, Vishal Joshi, and Surendra Mishra from coaching institute Nucleus Education, in addition to the directors of Sarvottam Career Institute, namely, Lalit Vijay, Ashish Bajpai, Dr Ashish Maheshwari, Jitendra Chandwani, and GS Tiwari into Motion Education is considered a path-breaking event by industry insiders.

Apart from the esteemed faculty members of Nucleus Education and Sarvottam Career Institute, Motion Education is further strengthened by the arrival of Gaveesh Bhardwaj, Ramesh Sharda and Prashant Jain. They are the experts of Mathematics, Inorganic Chemistry, and Olympiads' preparation, respectively.

Nitin Vijay, Managing Director, Motion Education, said: "We believe in putting forth relentless effort to pass the expertise of our esteemed faculty members to the brightest Technocrats and Medicos of the world, and in order to succeed and improve the standard of education on a consistent basis, we persistently search and follow creative methods."

'NEP will be game changer'

DR RAMESH POKHRIYAL 'NISHANK' talks about how the NEP 2020 will help the country in overcoming several challenges by walking the footsteps of the Constitution's chief architect Dr Ambedkar

Bhimrao Ramaji Ambedkar, whom we fondly know as Babasaheb Ambedkar, the face of the Indian independence movement, chairman of the drafting committee of the constitution, a social reformer, an Indian jurist, an educationist, and above all was a staunch supporter of the Dalit Movement in the post-independent Indian history.

Babasaheb was the principal architect behind the Constitution and played an integral part in evolving the intellectual tradition within the Indian society. Born in Mahu (Madhya Pradesh), Ambedkarji was a prolific student who earned doctorates from Columbia University in New York and received a D.Sc from London University to become one of the best-educated persons of modern India. Raised in a low-income family, he faced several challenges during childhood; nevertheless, he became one of the greatest icons of the India.

As one of the makers of modern India, he said, "Education is not only the birthright of every human being but also a weapon of social change." Ambedkarji was of the view that education is something that ought to be

brought within reach of everyone. It was him who deliberately included Article 45 in the Directive Principles of State Policy that "the state shall endeavour to provide, within ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years."

Only a few might be familiar that he contributed his views in the reform of education by taking an active part in discussing the Bombay university act and Primary Education Amendment Bill. His abiding interest in education was not limited to conjecture, but he diligently worked to give practical shape to his views. He founded the people's education society in 1945 and opened several colleges and hostels for the emancipation of Dalits and girls through education.

Besides, Dr Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly proposed to keep Sanskrit as a national language and advocated teaching in mother-tongue. He believed in making the child's learning process easy and smooth through education, taught in the mother tongue. Dr Ambedkar was an eminent supporter of job-oriented

Dr Ambedkar's vision on education will be accomplished through the NEP 2020. It is the first education policy for the 21st century, aiming to prepare the youth for gainful employment

and skill-based education. He firmly believed that technical knowledge and skill development were of prime importance for the youth's upliftment and economically backward people.

Our Government is committed to fulfilling these aspirations that he had envisioned for the nation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has always believed that BR Ambedkar's thoughts and ideas continue to give strength to millions, and it is in the respect and memory of Babasaheb's ideas that PM

inaugurated the Dr Ambedkar International Centre for socio-economic transformation in 2017.

Not only this, today, I am elated to highlight that the vision of Dr Ambedkar on education will be accomplished through the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The NEP is the first education policy for the 21st century, aiming to build character and prepare the youth for gainful and fulfilling employment while being aligned to the Indian ethos.

Dr Ambedkar, the Constitution's chief architect, supported the constitutional mandate of reservation as enshrined in Article 15 and Article 16 of our constitution. The NEP 2020 affirms that the provisions of reservations in educational institutions will not be diluted. Instead, new efforts will be made for bridging the gender gap as well as socio-economic disadvantaged groups in access, participation, and learning outcomes.

Further, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalas will be strengthened and expanded for girls from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The NEP 2020 is aligned with Babasaheb's vision of female edu-

cation and women emancipation. With the NEP, Sanskrit will be mainstreamed by being offered both at school and higher education and Sanskrit knowledge systems will be established and strengthened to conduct teaching and interdisciplinary research.

The NEP keeps teachers at the centre of the reforms in the education sector as they are the ones who will truly shape the future of India. The policy will help recruit and train the best and brightest to enter the teaching profession at all levels. These teachers will help in fulfilling the vision of Dr Ambedkar, who has been one of the enlightened minds of modern India; the man who had contributed immensely to shaping India's future as a democracy and the secular fabric of our country.

Thus, as one of the founding fathers of the Republic, the Bharat Ratna Dr Ambedkar will always be remembered fondly by the nation who was committed to the development and larger well-being of the entire nation.

The writer is Union Education Minister, Government of India



Top institutes to go for

Data science is the field of study that combines domain expertise, programming skills and knowledge of mathematics and statistics to extract meaningful insights from data. Today, from multinational companies to small startups, every organisation requires a Data Scientist for proper usage of the huge amount of data it generates and stores.

The rising demand for data science professionals presses on the need to have some significant courses and curriculum to skill-up the budding leaders.

Here is a list of India's top institutes offering comprehensive and advanced data science online courses that can help learners acquire the right skill set and land their dream job.

Henry Harvin: The course equips students with the most essential skills needed to apply data science in any number of real-world contexts. It blends theory, computation, and application in a most easy-to-understand and practical way. The training duration is 40 hours with 12 month free Brush Up sessions and 50 hours e-learning access. The course fee starts from ₹13,500 onwards.

IntelliPaat: IntelliPaat's Data Science training programme offered in collaboration with IBM lets learners gain proficiency in Data Science with Python, Machine Learning, AI, Deep Learning, Big Data Hadoop, Spark and Tableau Desktop. This programme comprises 10+ courses, 53+ industry-specific projects, and 232 hours of online instructor-led training with a CAPSTONE project. Learners will get access to the IBM

course and earn a certificate from IBM.

Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode: IIM Kozhikode has launched the Certificate Programme in Data Science, designed to give you a detailed insight into modern data science practices. The course helps participants to understand the differences between small data and big data, explore Python and learn to import Python libraries such as NumPy and Pandas amongst other skills. The three months programme is conducted online through session of four-five hours per week. Graduate or diploma holders in any discipline with minimum one year of work experience can apply. The fee is ₹71,750 excluding taxes.

Simplilearn: The Post Graduate Programme (PGP) in Data Science in partnership with Purdue University is a comprehensive Data Science bootcamp programme — leveraging Purdue's academic excellence in Data Science and Simplilearn's partnership with IBM. This programme is ideal for all working professionals, covering job-critical topics like R, Python programming, and machine learning algorithms. The programme duration is one year where classes are conducted online four-five hours per week. The admission fee is ₹2,15,000 (excluding GST)

Upgrade: It offers India's first NASSCOM certified Executive PGP in Data Science from IIITB. The duration is one year and classes are conducted. The eligibility for the course is to have a Bachelor's Degree with minimum 50 per cent or equivalent passing marks.

Being one of the major reforms introduced to the education system in recent times, the Central Universities Common Entrance Test (CUCET) is an All-India test for admission various undergraduate/integrated, post-graduate and research programmes in Central/State universities of India. Having a major change in this academic year, CUCET has been named the common entrance test for admissions to 54 central universities.

It is anticipated that the CUCET will be conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA). Recently, Delhi University has also hinted to conduct the admission process for 2021 through CUCET and based on Class XII marks. CUCET is not an entirely unfamiliar entrance test, the Central universities have been conducting it until last year for admissions. While the major difference would be that the earlier version of

Common platform for all

With CUCET being named as the common entrance test for admissions to 54 Central universities, ANKIT KAPOOR tells you what the students can expect from it

CUCET was conducted in the offline mode and now the proposal is to conduct the test as a Computer Based Test (CBT), which, with complete details of the exam is expected to be revealed soon.

The New Education Policy 2020 proposed a common entrance test for higher education. This will scrap the current domination of marks among the students. Over a period of time, we have seen the sky-scraping cut-offs of Delhi University creating a lot of pressure on the students and the parents to get the best so that they get admission to these colleges.

There will be no stream instead



there will be a multi-disciplinary setup with the option to choose a foreign language and more emphasis on critical thinking.

This will enable students to have a varied knowledge of the subjects. For example, a student wants to pursue Math Hons with it now it is possible to make history as a subject. This is the most important recommendation of NEP called multi-disciplinary.

The expected CUCET approach. The Computer-based aptitude test will test the students on:

- Verbal Aptitude
- Logical Reasoning
- Quantitative Aptitude

The CUCET entrance test will be compulsory for the students who seek admission to all the universities, and experts believe that it is absolute-

ly the need of the hour. It is important for the following reasons:

■ The rising cut-offs of the universities create unnecessary pressure on the students

■ Equal opportunities to all the students

■ This will enable the students to understand the importance of aptitude building and will make them market-ready.

■ The quality of students will get enhanced

■ This will aim to give students holistic development

This change of conducting one exam is the change for good and will allow students to experience equal opportunity in the real sense. For this, students need to continuously strive towards honing their skills and understand the importance of aptitude building.

The writer is Managing Director — Pratham Test Prep

WE NEED MORE FILMS ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: PRAKASH RAJ

Actor Prakash Raj who is riding high on the success of *Vakeel Saab*, speaks to K RAMYA SREE about his association with Pawan Kalyan, exchanging ideologies, future projects, and more

aspects in mind, the courtroom drama was been designed."

Speaking about his association with Pawan Kalyan, the Varsham actor shares, "Vakeel Saab is close to Pawan's ideologies. This story is relevant to him. During a few scenes in the film, it felt like those dialogues came straight from his heart. Keeping his image intact, Pawan delivered a terrific performance on women safety and empowerment."

For a film to be successful, story, screenplay, dialogues, play a key role. Prakash Raj feels the same. He says, "If anyone tells me the film is a hit because I'm in it, I take it as a compliment and consider it as their love towards me. Anybody can do the kind of acting I do if the storyline is perfect. When I came onto the sets of *Vakeel*

Saab, it felt like I really was in a courtroom."

Sharing one of the instances on sets, he said, "When I came to sets at 9 am one day, Pawan Kalyan reached the set by 7 am. When asked why he was early, he replied, 'I couldn't sleep, so I reached the sets early'."

He goes on to add, "Although Pawan and I have varied opinions regarding politics, when it comes to acting, we respect each other's work. On the sets, Pawan and I discuss a lot of

issues. We exchange books on poetry and current affairs. Pawan and I have a few thoughts on the welfare of the public. We want to do more films on women's empowerment."

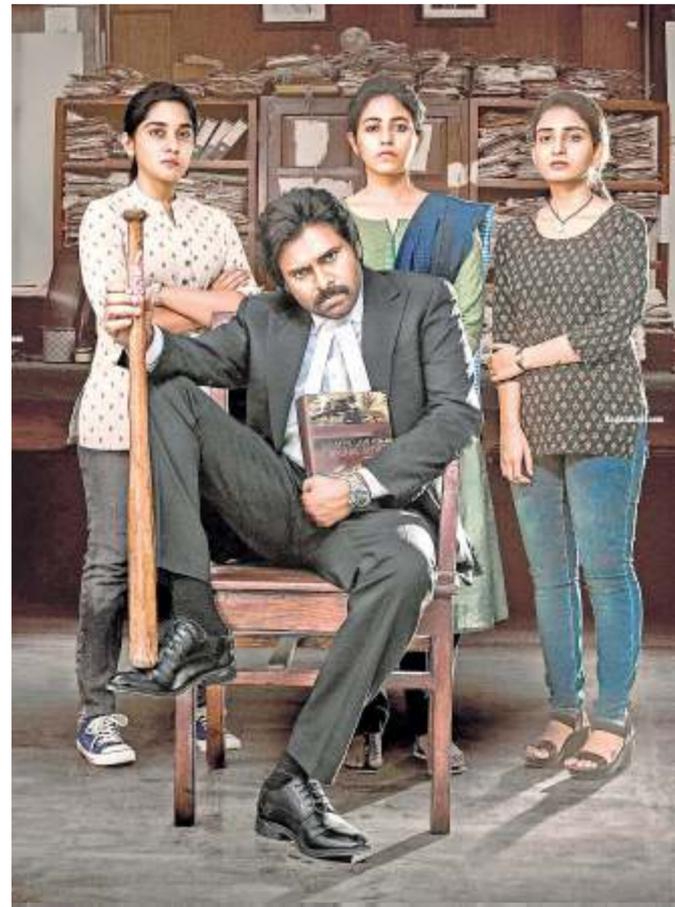
And men must change. It's the parents' responsibility to teach their sons their responsibilities and respect for women from a tender age."

The actor said he was heartbroken when he had to ask a few questions to the actresses while shooting for the film. "As an actor, it's my job to act; but I felt really guilty after every shot," he said.



Versatile actor Prakash Raj was recently seen playing a lawyer in Pawan Kalyan's courtroom drama *Vakeel Saab*. The actor opened up about working for *Vakeel Saab*, and shared, "When the audience watches this film, they will connect with a previous film of mine and Pawan — *Bhadri*. The way they loved me as Nanda in *Bhadri*, the audience showered me with the same kind of love for my role as Nanda in *Vakeel Saab* too." Prakash Raj said the direc-

tor named his character Nandakishore on purpose. "Not just conveying a message, the director wanted the film to be entertaining as well. I loved the way the audience enjoyed it when Pawan Kalyan called me Nanda ji and Nandagopal in *Vakeel Saab*," he said. He further goes on to add, "However message-oriented the film might be, it is as important to keep the audience entertained and when they step out of the theatre, they should feel happy and enjoy the moments they watched. Keeping these



VAKEEL SAAB NOT COMING ON OTT ANY SOON

Ever since the covid-induced lockdown, OTT has become everyone's go-to spot for all the latest shows. Ever since the release of Power Star Pawan Kalyan-starrer *Vakeel Saab*, the talk of the town is that it will premiere on OTT giant Amazon Prime on April 25.

However, Dil Raju's production house took to its Twitter handle and clarified that *Vakeel Saab* will not be streamed on

any digital platform any soon and he asked everyone to watch the film in the cinema halls.

Dil Raju refuted the rumor and said in a video said that until *Vakeel Saab* completes 50 days of its theatrical run, it will not be streamed on any digital platform.

It is known news that Amazon Prime Video bagged the streaming rights of *Vakeel Saab* for a high price of Rs 30 crore.

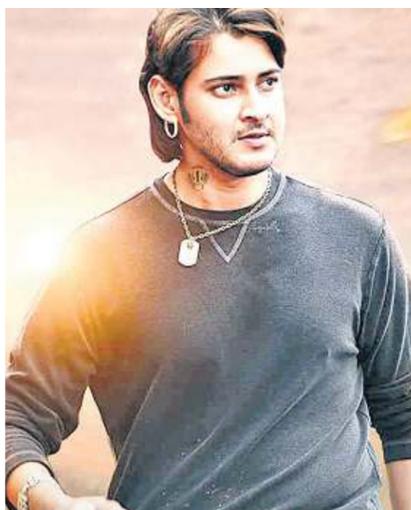
Mahesh begins SVP shoot in Hyderabad

Mahesh Babu's much-awaited film *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* has finished its first leg of shooting in Dubai. The actor has gone back to work to start the second schedule of *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* in Hyderabad, the makers and the team are taking utmost measures to run smoothly amidst the pandemic and follow all the new guidelines. Mahesh Babu will shoot for the film alongside Keerthy Suresh and the two are super kicked for this drama entertainer.

The first look of *Sarkaru Vaari Paata* showed us Mahesh Babu's hands holding a big ring of keys.

According to previous reports, the makers are planning for a 2022 Sankranti release.

The superstar even has SS Rajamouli's next in his kitty, where the two will collaborate for the first time.



We're entertainers, not fact-checkers, says Samantha

Actor Samantha Akkineni spoke her heart out against judging actors for not voicing their opinion on important issues in a witty Instagram post. Taking to her social media, she shared a reel as she took part in the 'What did she say' challenge. The text on the video read, "Them: We need your opinion on 'this important topi'. Me: Wondering since when did actors' opinions matter soooooo much." The caption with her post read, "We're entertainers, Not fact-checkers. Why are actors crucified for having an opinion about the important matters pertaining to the world? We are humans too and We

make mistakes too. But canceling us for speaking out or not speaking out aloud on each & every topic is a bit unfair, don't you think? Let us stick to what we do best .. making you fall in love with our performances #whatdidshe say is a fun way to speak your mind .. what's on your mind ? #reelit."

Several celebs and her fans reacted to her post and supported her on the matter. Yami Gautam wrote "spot on", Pragya Jaiswal said, "haha..love it!!" Vimala Raman commented, "Love it haha" on the post.

'What Did She Say' challenge encourages men and women to express how they went against societal norms.

The *Rangasthalam* actress made it clear that an actors' job is to entertain first and the rest comes next.

On the work front, Samantha will be seen in *Shaakuntalam*, a mythological drama film, written and directed by Gunasekhar and produced by Neelima Guna and Dil Raju. She will mark her digital debut with the second season of the popular Hindi series *The Family Man*.

Aparichitudu remake: Shankar to direct Ranveer Singh

After he shelved *Indian 2* midway, Tamil hit machine Shankar is lining up projects. It is very well known that Shankar will be directing Mega Power Star Ram Charan for a bilingual. He now announced to direct Bollywood star Ranveer Singh in the official adaptation of his 2005 Tamil blockbuster *Anniyan*, which stars

Vikram, which was dubbed into Telugu as *Aparichitudu*. The film is slated to go on the floors in Mid 2022. The director is thrilled to make *Anniyan* for the pan-Indian audience.

The yet-untitled project is being announced around the auspicious time of Baisakhi in North India and Puthandu in Tamil Nadu, which marks the New Year celebrations in these respective calendars.

Ranveer says: "I am blessed to have this opportunity to be a part of the spectacular cinematic vision of Shankar sir. He is an exception to the norm, a true disruptor who has shown us that no vision is large enough to achieve on screen. I had always hoped and dreamed that I would get a chance to collaborate with him, and I have a strong feeling that we will create magic together." Ranveer shared that to

lead a film like *Anniyan* is a dream come true for any artiste."

"Vikram Sir, one of our country's finest talents, an artiste who I hugely admire, gave a colossal performance in the original, one that can never be matched. I can only hope that my interpretation and rendition of the part also connects with audiences in the same way," he said. Calling it a "once-in-a-lifetime performance

piece", Ranveer added: "I am ready to give this role every single ounce of my being. Shankar Sir is a genius filmmaker and a true visionary. Words don't do justice to just how excited I am at the prospect of being directed by him."

Expressing his excitement, director Shankar said: "For it to be made into a Hindi film, *Anniyan* needed a maverick, charismatic showman like no other to play the part. I found this in the mercurial Ranveer Singh because he is a one-in-a-generation actor who has shown us that he can immortalise a character through his stellar performance."

"I'm confident that this powerful story will strike a

chord in the hearts of all," he added.

Anniyan is a psychological action thriller that revolves around a disillusioned man, whose frustration at what he sees as increasing social apathy and public negligence leads to a split personality that attempts to right the system.

Talking about the Shankar-Ranveer creative coup, Dr. Jayantilal Gada, Chairman and MD of the production house Pen Studios said: "Shankar and Ranveer are two forces of nature and them coming together is the biggest cinematic event in India."

The film will be co-produced by God Bless Entertainment.

