

ANALYSIS 7
TIME TO TURN NOCEBO
TO PLACEBO IN INDIA**MONEY 8**
EXPORTS ROSE TO \$13.72 BN DURING
APR 1-14: COMMERCE MINISTRY DATA**SPORTS 11**
SHAHRUKH STEERS
PBKS TO 106

VIJAYAWADA, SATURDAY APRIL 17, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

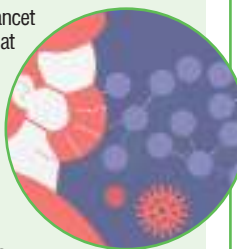
www.dailypioneer.com

VISHWAK SEN'S
NEXT A LOVE
ENTERTAINER

Page 12

**'STRONG EVIDENCE' COVID PREDOMINANTLY
SPREADS THROUGH AIR, SAYS LANCET STUDY**

A new assessment in the medical journal Lancet has found "consistent, strong evidence" that the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes Covid, is predominantly transmitted through the air. Therefore, public health measures that fail to treat the virus as predominantly airborne leave people unprotected and allow the virus to spread, according to six experts, including Jose-Luis Jimenez, a chemist at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences and the University of Colorado Boulder. The team of experts, led by the University of Oxford's Trish Greenhalgh, reviewed published research and identified 10 lines of evidence to support the predominance of the airborne route.

**PAK ORDERS 'COMPLETE BLOCKING'
OF SOCIAL MEDIA TEMPORARILY**

The Pakistan government on Friday ordered an hours-long shut down of social media and instant messaging platforms, after days of violent anti-France protests. In a notice to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, the Interior Ministry requested a "complete blocking" of Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, YouTube and Telegram until 3pm (1100 GMT). It gave no reason for the ban, but it comes a day after French nationals and companies in Pakistan were advised by their embassy to temporarily leave in the wake of the rallies led by an extremist party that paralysed large parts of the country and left two police officers dead.

**BS YEDIYURAPPA TESTS POSITIVE,
SECOND TIME IN MONTHS, HOSPITALISED**

Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa today tweeted to say that he had tested positive for the novel coronavirus. In a brief post on Twitter, Mr Yediyurappa said that he was fine but had been hospitalised on the advice of doctors. The 78-year-old Yediyurappa was earlier hospitalised on August 2, 2020 after he tested positive for coronavirus. "Upon having mild fever, today I got tested for Covid-19 and my report has come out positive. Although I am doing fine, I am being hospitalised based on the advice of doctors. I request all those who have come in my contact recently to be observant and exercise self-quarantine," the Chief Minister's tweet read.

**'NEED TO DO BETTER JOB FOR EMPLOYEES':
JEFF BEZOS IN LAST LETTER AS CEO**

US tech giant Amazon on Thursday sounded conciliatory notes as the US government considers stricter regulatory measures against America's largest digital platforms. Founder Jeff Bezos told investors his e-commerce empire needs a better "vision" for its workers, just days after an effort to create the company's first labor union was defeated. Some Amazon executives had fired off snappy comments at various politicians who supported the labor campaign, but their chief executive took a more circumspect approach to the anti-union victory at its plant in Bessemer, Alabama.



AP runs out of Covid vax stock

■ Jagan writes to Modi; officials optimistic 60 lakh doses will arrive by Sunday

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday announced it has no stock of Covid vaccine even as Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy wrote another letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting that 60 lakh doses be immediately sent to the state.

On Friday, only about 4,300 doses of the coronavirus vaccine could be administered, the lowest in a day so far, before the stocks completely dried up.

The Chief Minister thanked the Prime Minister for sending 6.4 lakh doses of the vaccine to AP (on April 12 and 13) in response to his letter on April 9.

"I request you, sir, to instruct the officials concerned of Health Ministry to supply 60 lakh doses of Covid vaccine to my state to ensure that all the population above 45 years is vaccinated for the first dose in the next three weeks," he said in the letter, the second he sent to the PM in a week.

Jagan said 6,28,961 people were vaccinated in Andhra Pradesh on April 14, "the highest single day Covid vaccination numbers by any state in the country".

"We have not only established our capability of vaccinating over six lakh people per day, but also set up a model for all the states to emulate. However, we could not continue the same drive as the vaccine stocks have completely run out," he said.

"The state was poised to make the dream of vaccinating all vulnerable people a reality in the next three weeks if sufficient stocks of vaccine were made available," Jagan said.

2



ASI closes Ontimitta temple, may affect Rama Navami celebrations

DHV SAMBASIVA RAO
■ KADAPA

The Archaeological Survey of India has ordered some prominent temples being administered by it in the state, including the Ontimitta Kodandarama temple in Kadapa district, to remain closed for devotees at least till May 15.

This has left in doubt the visit of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to the temple on April 26 to present silk clothes and pearls to deities on Sri Rama Navami Day.

The Kodandarama temple was

closed at 10:30 am on Friday and its reopening depends on the intensity of the Covid-19 cases.

For the time being, the Centre ordered its closure till May 15 in view of the spurt in the number of Covid-19 cases.

Similarly, the Archaeology Department sent letters to EOs of three Lord Siva temples in Samalkot and Draksharamam and Lord Subrahmanya Swami temple in Bikkavolu in East Godavari district to close them till May 15 because of the rising number of cases.

2

Shortage of testing kits, symptomatic get preference

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Districts, especially those bordering other states, are facing an increasing shortage of testing kits.

This is because neighbouring states have Covid-19 negative test reports mandatory for entry into their jurisdiction and asymptomatic people are willing to go through the test due to surge in cases.

2

No lockdown in AP, hints Jagan

■ CM balances financial constraints and health, tells officials to control spread

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In an apparent indication that the government will not impose a lockdown in Andhra Pradesh in the wake of rising number of Covid-19 cases, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday said imposing such drastic restrictions had worsened the financial condition of the State and that people suffered a lot. He said that Covid should be controlled without imposing a lockdown this time.

Jagan was addressing a videoconference with Collectors and SPs of

all the districts on the prevailing Covid-19 situation and vaccination on Friday. Stating that the only effective weapon against Covid-19 is vaccination, he directed the officials to focus on vaccination, tests and preparedness of hospitals.

Jagan directed the officials to focus on controlling Covid-19 through focused testing (testing primary contacts of those who have tested positive for Covid).

"Prepare PHCs and sub-centres to collect samples for testing," the Chief Minister said, adding that composition of 'positivity cases' was

62 percent in urban areas and 38 percent in rural areas.

"However, mortality rate is higher in rural areas. Deaths in positive cases are higher in rural areas as they are going to the hospitals too late," the Chief Minister said.

He said the second wave of Covid-19 has taken the country in its grip and infections are also on the rise in the state.

"From December to April, the positive rate was 7.77 percent. While the rate of infection and positivity is higher in Chittoor followed by Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam,

Krishna, Guntur and Nellore districts," he said.

The Chief Minister said that 1.55 crore tests have been conducted in the state since last year and 9.37 lakh cases have been tested positive. The positivity rate in our state is 6.03 percent while the recovery rate is 96.19 percent. At the same time, the national average recovery rate is only 88.9 percent, he added.

While the death rate in the state is 0.78 percent, it is 1.24 percent at national level, Jagan pointed out.

2

Jagan launches AP Amul Project

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday launched the 'AP Amul Project' in Guntur district virtually from his camp office here.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said the project was started with a MoU signed between Amul and the State Government on July 21 to give a fillip to empowerment of women self help groups by encouraging milk cooperatives in the Government sector.

The 'AP Amul Palavellu' Project was started on December 2 and milk has been collected in 400 villages in Chittoor, YSR Kadapa and Prakasam districts. He said the AP Amul Project will start in Guntur and milk will be collected from 129 villages in the district and also in 174 villages in Chittoor district from today.

He said the women in 400 villages are getting Rs 5 to Rs 7 more than the existing price per litre and added that milk was being collected in some villages of his own Pulivendula constituency.

2



Actor-politician K Pawan Kalyan recuperates after testing positive for Covid-19 on Friday.

Pawan Kalyan tests positive for Covid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Actor-politician and Jana Sena Party supremo K Pawan Kalyan on Friday confirmed that he has tested positive for Covid-19 and is undergoing treatment under the care of expert doctors.

According to a statement issued by the party, Pawan Kalyan had recently isolated himself after many of his staff members and others working closely with him tested positive.

According to the statement, Pawan Kalyan had on April 3 undergone a Covid-19 test on returning from campaigning in Tirupati for the upcoming Lok Sabha by-election. Although the test returned negative, he had been in quarantine in his farmhouse on the advice of doctors.

However, the actor-politician has since been suffering from fever and body ache, the statement said.

2

ABV offers info on Viveka murder to CBI

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Suspended IPS officer and former state intelligence wing chief, AB Venkateswar Rao has written to the CBI director, lamenting inaction by the team of CBI's Investigating Officer (IO) NM Singh into the murder case of former minister YS Vivekananda Reddy and tardiness in collecting information from him regarding the murder.

In a letter to the CBI chief on Friday, ABV said: "A few months after the CBI took up the case and coming to know from newspaper reports that the case was not yet solved, I contacted NM Singh telephonically and offered to share whatever

information was available with me related to the case in an effort to help the investigators solve the murder."

In his letter, ABV goes on to say that NM Singh agreed to take the information but "there was no effort from his team in that direction".

"I called him again on July 22, 2020 at his Delhi office and reminded him. He agreed to direct his team to gather the available information from me but so far, there's no action," the senior IPS officer said in his letter.



2

High stakes Tirupati by-poll today

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

The stage is set for the high stakes battle for the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat that will go for polling on Saturday.

All the main political parties who have concluded their high decibel campaign by Thursday evening shifted focus to booth level poll management till Friday.

YSRCP supremo and Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's personal physiotherapist M Gurumoorthy, former Union Minister of State Panabaka Lakshmi from TDP, former bureaucrat K Ratna Prabha from BJP and Congress's Chinta Mohan are in the fray for the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-poll.

The by-poll, which was necessitated due to the sudden demise of the sitting YSRCP MP Balli Durga



Poll officials verify the polling material entrusted to them before leaving for their designated booths ahead of the Tirupati by-poll, on Friday.

Prasad, is perceived to set the tone for politics in the state in the near future and especially the 2024 polls.

Though he didn't campaign per-

sonally, Jaganmohan Reddy had been busy with micro-planning and management so that the party candidate gets a thumping majority.

This will send a strong message to the opposition, consolidate his position and vote bank as he completes two years in office next month.

The by-poll is more important and prestigious for TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu as Tirupati is in Chittoor district where he started his political career and learned the nuances of politics. It is from the SV University in Tirupati that Naidu started his political career as a student leader.

Naidu considers Chittoor, especially Tirupati, as his bastion. However, cracks have appeared in his bastion as TDP supported candidates had lost majority of gram panchayats in his home turf in Kuppam Assembly constituency that he has been representing for over two decades.

2

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Chaitra & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Panchami: 08:31 pm

Nakshatram : Mitrasheeta: 02:33 am (Next Day)

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

Rahukalam : 09:09 am - 10:42 am

Yamagandam : 01:49 pm - 03:22 pm

Varjyam : NIL

Gulika : 06:02 am - 07:35 am

Good Time : (to start any important work)

Amritakalam : 04:42 pm - 06:29 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:50 am - 12:40 pm

VIJAYAWADA

WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 37/26

Humidity: 53%

Sunrise: 05:59 am

Sunset: 06:32 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated april 16, 2021 5:00 PM



Yet another political party in Telangana is Quixotic

A head of launching her political party on July 8, YS Sharmila, daughter of former chief minister YS Rajasekhra Reddy, sat on fast in Hyderabad on April 15 demanding among other things, employment to youth in Telangana. She declared that she would continue her agitation for the filling up of the government vacancies.

Anyone who observed Sharmila's political statements made so far referring to Telangana State, will conclude that she has no clue about the developed Telangana and the way it has been made a role model by Chief Minister K Chandrashekhara Rao during the last seven years.

Sharmila is merely making demands that lack essence, basis or evidence. So far, the reasons present by her on why she is launching a party have no takers.

At the Khammam public meeting, she said she wants to question the present dispensation. If that be so, Sharmila will go down in history of this country as the only person who launched a political party to merely question the state government.

Which scheme, programme or project will Sharmila question?

Is it the Kaleshwaram project, considered to be a man-made wonder and which has won accolades the world over? Will she question the government on how it turned Telangana, which was on the verge of power crisis, into a power surplus state?

Will she question the government on why it is supplying quality and free power to the agriculture sector and uninterrupted power to all sectors? Will she question the KCR Kits scheme which is helping pregnant women or the financial help to young women of all communities for their marriage through Kalyan Lakshmi and Shaadi Mubarak schemes?

Will Sharmila question the government on why it is helping farmers through Rythu Bandhu and Rythu Bima? Will she question the government for eradicating illicit liquor and playing cards clubs? Will she question the financial help to all the hereditary professions in the State or the creation of SHE teams? The list is endless.

Unfortunately for

At the Khammam public meeting, she said she wants to question the present dispensation. If that be so, Sharmila will go down in history of this country as the only person who launched a political party to merely question the state government. Which scheme will she question?



VANAM JWALA NARASIMHA RAO
CHIEF PUBLIC RELATIONS
OFFICER OF CHIEF MINISTER
OF TELANGANA

Sharmila, she does not have a single programme, policy or scheme that she can question!

In a vibrant democracy like ours, anybody can question the government but launching a political party can never be the reason for this.

No political leader or anyone ever had been successful launching a political party all by himself or herself.

In the past, leaders like Nadendla Bhaskara Rao, KE Krishnamurthy, Jana Reddy, Mudragada Padmanabham, Vijayashanti, A Narendra, P

Indra Reddy, Devender Goud and others launched political outfits and wound them up sooner or later.

At a time when national parties like the Congress and BJP are unable to make gains against the TRS in the State, what will Sharmila gain under these circumstances?

Why should people or leaders from other political parties rally behind her? There is absolutely no sentiment or a great issue on which she can take a political ride.

Telangana state does not require another political party as there are a dozen already in existence.

Since 1947, the Congress had total control over the political scenario in the country till 1996, except in 1977-

79 (Morarji Desai) and 1989-90 (VP Singh).

The turning point came in 1996 when the people gave a fractured verdict.

For the first time, the BJP dethroned Congress and Vajpayee became the PM for 13 days. After the BJP failed to clear the floor test, 13 regional parties formed the United Front that ruled for two years.

Since 1996, all regimes at the Centre have been coalition governments, led either by the Congress or BJP. Since then, the days of a single party forming the government at the Centre were over till 2019 when the BJP led by Modi secured 303 seats.

A cursory look at the rise and success of the regional parties shows that their existence and ability to come to power was always based on mass issue or sentiment.

In Tamil Nadu, the DMK and later AIADMK came to power and still exist drawing their strength from the Dravidian movement.

Parties like the Samajwadi Party, BSP came into being on the issues of SCs, STs, Minorities and BCs; TRS was born out of a people's movement for separate Telangana State.

TDP came to power appealing to the Telugu pride and sentiment; CPI and CPM were born out of Communist ideology while the AIMIM and Akali Dal were formed on religious lines. AAP rode to power on the issue of statehood for Delhi.

Sharmila's party definitely does not fit into any of these categories.

The question remains — for what purpose is Sharmila launching her party, and at whose behest?

Such experiments of starting new political parties are nothing but quixotic and end up like Don Quixote de la Mancha as described in the Spanish novel written by Miguel de Cervantes.

State records 6,096 Covid cases, 20 more succumb

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The rapid surge in fresh cases of coronavirus in Andhra Pradesh continued as 6,096 were reported in 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday, a new high after October 6, while the state also saw 20 more fatalities, the highest in a day in about six months.

The number of active Covid-19 cases shot up to 35,592, another six-month high.

From 1,271 on April 1, the fresh daily cases in the second Covid-19 wave saw a steep ascent to 6,096 in the state now.

The (fresh) infection positivity rate that was 4 percent at the beginning of this month, swelled to about 15 percent in the first fortnight, government data revealed.

The overall positivity rate also increased to 6.08 percent, against the national average of 5.42 percent, after over 1.56 crore tests were completed at the rate of 2.92 lakh per million population.

The gross Covid-19 positives has now risen to 9,48,231.

In 24 hours, the state also



saw 2,194 recoveries, taking the total to 9,05,266.

The overall recovery rate that once touched 99 percent, has now dipped to 95.8 percent, as per government data.

The case fatality rate in the state slid to 0.78 percent.

Data showed that 62 percent of the fresh cases were being reported in the urban areas, particularly affecting the middle and above classes of the society. Urban areas were also accounting for 56 percent of the fresh fatalities.

A weekly analysis of the pandemic spread in the state revealed that 99.7 percent of the cases were reported from existing containment clusters and

only 0.3 percent from outside.

In 99.7 percent of the cases, the source of the infection has been identified.

All the Covid-19 fatalities were reported from the existing clusters only, the analysis said.

In 24 hours, Chittoor district reported 1,024 fresh cases of Covid-19, the highest in a day in a district in more than six months, and five fatalities.

Temple town Tirupati alone added 339 new cases, making it the single largest coronavirus hotspot in Andhra Pradesh.

Chittoor's cumulative positives crossed 98,000 and the overall toll touched 909. After 90,695 total recoveries, it has 6,428 active cases, the highest

in the state now.

In the first 16 days, Chittoor district added a sum of 8,231 new cases and 42 deaths, making it the state topper.

Srikakulam district crossed the 50,000 total cases mark and reached 50,214 as it added 534 afresh in a day.

Of the 13 districts in AP, only Vizianagaram remains below the 50,000 mark.

In 24 hours, East Godavari district registered 750, Guntur 735, Kurnool 550, Prakasam 491, Visakhapatnam 489, SPS Nellore 354, Anantapur 313, Vizianagaram 299, Krishna 246 and Kadapa 243 new cases.

West Godavari district, the native of Deputy Chief Minister (Health) AKK Srinivas (Nani), continues to report relatively lesser cases, adding only 68 in a day, though in the overall tally it stands third in the state with close to 95,000 positives.

In 24 hours, Krishna reported three, Anantapur, Kadapa, Kurnool, SPS Nellore, Prakasam and Visakhapatnam two fresh Covid-19 fatalities each, the health department bulletin said.



Pawan Kalyan...

Continued from Page 1

On taking the test again two days ago, it returned positive for the coronavirus.

According to the statement, Dr T Suman, a cardiologist from Khammam, came to Hyderabad to treat Pawan Kalyan. "Necessary tests were also conducted. He was given antiviral drugs as he has suffered infection in lungs, and was also provided oxygen support. His brother K Chiranjeevi and nephew Ram Charan are making necessary arrangements for his treatment," the statement said.

"A medical team from Apollo Hospital has examined Pawan Kalyan as well. Medications have been given to reduce fever and nausea in the lungs. Producer Naga Vamsi is staying with Pawan Kalyan to oversee necessary arrangements," the Jana Sena Party said in its statement.

Jagan launches AP Amul Project

Continued from Page 1

The Chief Minister said to strengthen Amul and benefit women dairy farmers, through AP-Amul project, 9899 villages across the State will be brought under milk production, where Bulk Milk Cooling Units (BMCU) and Automatic Milk Collection Units (AMCU) will be set up with an expenditure of

Rs 4,000 Crore.

The Chief Minister said quality animal feed will be supplied to Dairy farmers through Rythu Bharosa Kendras in coming days.

The Chief Minister said he is committed to empowerment of women and listed out the women oriented welfare schemes and programmes being implemented in the state.



AP runs out...

Continued from Page 1

The state government set a target of vaccinating 24 lakh people during the four-day Tika Utsav (April 11 to 14).

However, the target could not be accomplished as both the Covaxin and Covishield stocks went dry by the first day of the four-day nationwide event.

The 6.4 lakh doses sent by the Centre on April 12 and 13 enabled AP to accomplish a total of 7.15 lakh vaccinations during the Tika Utsav.

AP has so far received a total of 46 lakh doses.

The Medical and Health Department said in a release on Friday that 28,677 people were inoculated (first and second doses) in the state on April 15 and, with that, the entire Covid-19 vaccine stocks have been exhausted.

Shortage of testing...

Continued from Page 1

Consequently, not enough testing kits are available at private hospitals and also at some government designated hospitals.

Since the last three days, there has been a huge shortage of testing kits in Vizag. It may be noted that people of many neighbouring states come to Vizag for medical treatment.

The Odisha Government has made Covid-19 negative test report (72 hours) compulsory to enter the state from other states. Hence, people of Odisha and even Chhattisgarh are depending on Vizag for the tests.

Moreover, according to the hospitals, asymptomatic people are also willing to get tested because of the rapid rise in the cases.

District Medical and Health

Officer, Dr P Suryanarayana explained that testing kits are available but people with serious symptoms of Covid-19 are being allowed to get tested. He said the number of tests conducted has been reduced from approximately 7,000 to 3,000 due to shortage of kits.

"Earlier, we were allowing everyone and anyone to get tested. But, now only people with symptoms are being encouraged. This is to ease the workload on the KGH lab which is working round the clock," he said. The DMHO said that symptomatic patients are being given preference.

The health department reducing the number of tests also indicates that the number of positive cases could be more than what is being reported.

No lockdown in AP, hints Jagan

Continued from Page 1

He asked officials to create awareness on Covid-19 using volunteers, Asha workers and ANMs and conduct tests to the people identified with symptoms during the survey. He directed the district collectors to hold review meetings with Joint Collectors every day on Covid situation and preparedness of hospitals.

The Chief Minister said 108 hospitals are empanelled for Covid-19 treatment and of the 15,669 beds available in those hospitals, 4,889 are occupied. He directed the officials to increase the availability of beds in the hospitals.

Jagan also instructed the officials to ensure oxygen facilities, infrastructure, food quality in hospitals, sanitation, medication, doctors, para medical staff are adequate in hospitals as it's

the responsibility of the government. He said 13,500 beds are available in Covid care centres and they should be increased to 50,000 and the patients with no separate room for isolation in their homes should be shifted to Covid care centres.

The Chief Minister asked officials to ensure GO 77 and GO 78 are implemented and take stringent action against private hospitals that charge in excess for Covid treatment. He said the district collectors should monitor the availability of oxygen and added that the Health Minister and senior officials of the health department will review the situation every day.

The Chief Minister said that six lakh vaccines should be administered every day in the state and added that he has written to the Central government seeking required vaccine doses.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES

GOLD	
₹ 48, 000 (10 gm)	
SILVER	
₹ 330	
₹ 73, 400 (1kg)	
₹ 1600	

CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg

Dressed/With Skin	₹177
Without Skin	₹201
Broiler at Farm	₹122

EGG RATES ₹/100

VIJAYAWADA	457
HYDERABAD	441
VISAKHAPATNAM	505

RETAIL PRICE ₹4. 57

Panchayat officer in ACB net for assets

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

ACB sleuths on Friday unearthed disproportionate assets from the house of Aguru Venkata Rao (52), the secretary of the Pydibheemavaram panchayat, Ranasthalam Mandal in Srikakulam district.

According to the ACB, the officer was unable to explain how he came to be in possession of disproportionate assets worth Rs 1.38 crore.

Accordingly, Venkata Rao was arrested and produced before the Special Court for SPE & ACB cases, Visakhapatnam.

A case was registered against him.

Earlier, searches were conducted at the rented residential house of the



officer at Visakhapatnam and office premises of the accused officer at Pydibheemavaram in

Srikakulam.

Residences of his relatives at Arasada, Vangara Mandal and Tangudubilli village,

Nellimarla Mandal, Vizianagaram District were also searched.

According to a release, Venkata Rao was appointed Panchayat Secretary in 1995 and was presently working at Pydibheemavaram of Srikakulam district. He is also holding Full Additional Charge for the post of Extension Officer, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development.

Assets held in the name of the accused and his family members were identified as :- one plot in the second floor of RK Residency at Naidu colony, Vizianagaram, three vacant sites at Visakhapatnam, one vacant site at Srikakulam and six vacant sites at Vizianagaram.

ASI closes Ontimitta temple...

Continued from Page 1

Srirama Navami is scheduled to be celebrated at the temple on April 26. Annually the celestial wedding of Lord Ram with his consort Goddess Sita takes place on that day.

Since bifurcation of the State in 2014, the annual Srirama Navami is celebrated at Ontimitta Srirama temple in Kadapa.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy is scheduled to present silk clothes and pearls to deities at Ontimitta Lord Sri Rama temple on April 26 and arrangements for his visit were underway.

The Centre took the decision to close temples being run under the Archaeology department which have more footfalls of devotees to prevent spread of the virus among the

people.

Besides the Ontimitta temple, the Pushpagiri temple and the Soumyanatha temple at Nandalur have been closed. The ASI has made it clear that the orders of the centre will come into effect immediately.

Last year, the Kodandarama celestial wedding was conducted without the participation of the devotees in the presence of some priests and officials.

K Srivenkateswara Swamy, administrative officer of the ASI, Amaravati Circle, on Friday sent letters to the EOs of Sri Kumara Bhimeswara Swamy temple at Samalkot, Sri Bheemeswara Swamy temple at Draksharamam and Sri Subrahmanya Swamy temple in Bikkavolu and asked them to close their doors for the

devotees.

These temples have high footfall of devotees. Though the Endowments Department runs them, these shrines are very ancient and are under the control of the Archaeology Department at the Centre.

The EOs of the temples — Puluri Narayana Murthy, KNVD Prasad and CH Subrahmanyam — on Friday confirmed that they have received the letters.

They brought it to the notice of the deputy commissioner Medepalli Vijayaraju, who clarified that the letters would be forwarded to the Endowments Commissioner and the temples would be closed after his orders. The commissioner's decision would be made known to the archaeology department, he added.

Govt revives Covid control centre as infections continue to rise

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The state government has revived the state Covid command and control centre and assigned various responsibilities to as many as 35 bureaucrats across the state as the Covid cases continue to rise in the state.

"The Covid pandemic being dynamic in nature, to take appropriate measures to handle the evolving situation in the state of AP, the government hereby revives the state Covid command and control centre with the following officers," said chief secretary Aditya Nath Das on Thursday.

Senior IAS officer MT Krishna Babu has been entrusted with the job of food and sanitation quality in Covid hospitals and Covid care centres (CCCs).

Likewise, senior bureaucrat M. Ravi Chandra has been assigned with the job of primary contact tracing, testing and testing on demand facility.

Similarly, other senior officers have been tasked with the



job of monitoring help desk and CCTVs, effective functioning of 104 call centres, lab management and Covid services in all Aarogyasri hospitals and procurement of essential medicines and supplies to Covid hospitals.

Other duties for the senior

officers include ensuring medical oxygen supply, clinical management protocols, availability of essential drugs and other consumables to Covid hospitals, publicity, media and social media and availability of essential drugs consumables in Covid hospitals.

Given the notorious legacy of profiteering private hospitals, an IPS officer, Abhishek Mohanty, has been dedicatedly tasked with the job of monitoring complaints about private hospitals and particularly on the crime of excessive treatment charges.

Likewise, 10 young IAS officers at the level of undersecretary have been assigned with the job of attending 104 call centres duty.

They include Chahat Bajpai, G. Surya Sai Praveen, Bhawna, Mallarapu Naveen, V. Abhishek, Aparajita Singh Sinsinwar, C. Vishnu Charan, Nidhi Meena, Katta Simhachalam and Vikas Marmat. Focusing on the districts, Aditya nath Das said 13 officers have been deputed to a district each to monitor and guide the district administration in taking necessary steps for coronavirus management and vaccination.

All the 13 officers have been directed to report to their respective districts immediately and attend the chief minister's video conference with district collectors on Friday.

Andhra Pradesh on Thursday reported 5,086 new Covid-19 cases, raising the tally over 9.39 lakh, while the state's active cases breached the 31,000-mark to reach 31,710.

KGH superintendent appeals to Covid-hit to shrug off fear

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

After a Covid-19 patient jumped off from an ICU building as she was depressed over thinking about the consequences of the virus, the Superintendent of KGH appealed to the Covid patients not to be afraid of the disease as most of the patients are recovering from the illness fully without any problem.

"Only few cases are having complications which are also treated successfully. Majority of the cases are mild and recover even without treatment. So patients are advised to get tested for Covid-19 if they have symptoms and get treated in a nearby hospital / in home isolation after taking medical advice," he explained.

Patients are advised not to get depressed if they are tested positive, because free treatment is available in all government hospitals and early treatment is advised. Testing and



treatment are easy and available free of cost in all the government hospitals. Doctors, nurses, paramedical staff are readily available in all the centres to help these patients. Patients should attend the hospitals without any fear and all the necessary help will be available in government hospitals.

tals. "All the people who are above the 45 years are advised to take vaccination to prevent this infection and also maintain Covid-19 appropriate behavior by wearing the masks and washing hands frequently and using sanitisers," he added.

State government caps private hospital charges

The state government on Friday issued the list of capped charges for Covid treatment in private hospitals and a violation of these rules will lead to stringent action. "Please report grievances, if any, pertaining to hospitals charging rates over and above the fixed price caps and any other complaints related to Covid at 1902," said

an official. The state government issued these price caps under critical and non-critical Covid treatment, which include fees for medical personnel, PPE, disinfection, investigation, medicines, nutrition and others. Covid treatment rate per day under non-critical category has been fixed at Rs 3,250.

However, treatment charges under critical care treatment has been divided under six heads: ICU without ventilator and without NIV (Rs 5,480 per day), ICU with NIV (Rs 5,480), ICU with NIV (Rs 5,980), ICU with ventilator (Rs 9,580), Sepsis without ventilator (Rs 6,280), Sepsis with ventilator (Rs 10,380) and Septic with

ventilator (Rs 10,380). One dose of antiviral drug Remdesivir has been capped at RS 2,500. These treatment charges apply to all private hospitals not empanelled under the Aarogyasri scheme. "Jaganna government has issued an order fixing rates for all relevant medical procedures so as to reduce the financial

burden on the people," the official added. Given the notorious legacy of profiteering private hospitals, an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, Abhishek Mohanty, has been dedicatedly tasked with the job of monitoring complaints about private hospitals and particularly on the crime of excessive treatment charges.

Govt makes arrangements for last rites of deceased Covid patients

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The civic officials have made all necessary arrangements to perform the last rites as per the religious traditions of the deceased Covid patients. As the Covid cases are on the rise, the government officials swung into action and made arrangements for the last rites as per their traditions - Hindu, Muslim and Christian

Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Health officer Dr Geetha Bai said that the department was prepared to provide all arrangements for performing last rites to people who succumb to Covid.

She said that there are three crematoriums besides the new one which would come up shortly. The present crematoriums can handle about 35 bodies a day following strict

Covid protocols.

Initially, when Covid broke out, the family members refused to take the bodies of Covid victims. However, now they are coming forward to take the body and perform the last rites as per their customs. The VMC was providing Mahaprastanam vehicles to carry the bodies to the burial ground, she added.

She said that though the number of Covid cases are being reported in large numbers, the death rate is very much low as of now. However, the department has made elaborate arrangements for the convenience of the people in all aspects.

Ms Irfan, in-charge of Jannatul Firdous Khabarastan, Governorpet, said that they have made arrangements in a systematic way for performing

last rites of the deceased Covid patients.

Apart from allocating separate land in the burial for deceased patients with Covid, they have set up two separate gates - one for common people and other for bodies of Covid patients.

Following Covid guidelines, they dig a pit with a depth of 10-feet and lay the body mechanically with very less manpower. Only a few relatives are allowed during the rituals, he said.

M Koteswari Rao, former corporator, Vidyadarapuram, said that following bodies of Covid patients would be sealed in a specialised cover in the coffin to contain the spread of the disease. The rites will be performed with less number of people, she added.

Well-known CPI leader Subbaraju passes away

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Noted CPI leader and former legislator of Vijayawada West Constituency Kakarlupudi Subbaraju died due to heart attack at his residence in Vijayawada on Friday.

CPI leaders, politicians and other mourned Subbaraju's death. The last rites would be held after the arrival of his son and daughter from the US.

He is survived by wife Devikadevi, daughter Umadevi and son Arun Kumar. The body of Subbaraju has been shifted to mortuary.

Right from school days Subbaraju was a student leader and worked as secretary for student union AISF during

college days

He was CPI Vijayawada secretary for more than ten years and became a state leader during the undivided AP.

He won as a corporator and was a floor leader and opposition leader.

Later, he became deputy mayor of VMC for two terms and rendered his services as West Vijayawada MLA. Subbaraju worked as

secretary and treasurer of Vishalandra daily. He played a key role in state-wide electricity movement during year 2000 and sustained injuries in lathicharge and firing in Hyderabad. He also led a moment to ensure that poor people are given houses and pattas.



TDP alleges bias in voter slips' distribution

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP state president Kinjarapu Atchannaidu on Friday alleged that the ruling YSRCP is influencing the booth level officers (BLOs) not to distribute voter slips to non-YSRCP voters.

In a letter written to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), the TDP leader Atchannaidu said: "The ruling YSRCP has been influencing BLOs to distribute voter slips only to YSRCP supporters. As a result, it has been observed that the BLOs are not distributing voter slips to neutral voters and to supporters of the TDP in Tirupati parliamentary constituency."



He claimed that the 'government paid' village and ward volunteers are allegedly distributing voter slips instead of BLOs. "Such practice is a gross violation of the model code of conduct, discriminatory in nature and does not provide an equal level playing field to all the political parties," high-

lighted the TDP state president.

According to Atchannaidu, many voters in the constituency are not aware of their polling station and other details to exercise their franchise on Saturday. He claimed that due to the alleged non-distribution of voters' slips, many people may not turn up to vote, leading to lower voter percentage.

Hence, the TDP leader called on the CEC to ensure that the voter slips are distributed to all the voters without discrimination.

He alleged that even though the Election Commission has issued a memo not to allow outsiders into Tirupati parliamentary constituency after the

end of campaigning at 7 pm on Thursday, the ruling party is allegedly harbouring a large number of outsiders.

"It has come to our notice that a large number of outsiders are being brought from neighbouring Assembly segments and districts in private buses during dark hours into Tirupati parliamentary constituency," he alleged.

Atchannaidu alleged that around 3000 people are staying at Nehru hotel in Anjmedu, 50 people from Punganuru at Sambasiva Reddy's house and 100 more from the same place at BC colony, all in Yerpedu mandal, totalling 500 from Punganuru.

Former Vizag MP, wife test Covid positive

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former Vizag MP K Hari Babu and his wife have been tested Covid-19 positive. After showing Covid symptoms, he and his wife underwent medical tests and have been admitted in a corporate hospital.



5 held for vandalising Ambedkar statue

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The police on Friday arrested five persons within three days in connection with the vandalism of Dr Ambedkar's statue here at Pathakottam village in Kotanandur mandal.

The accused were identified as Kuniseti Sairam (19), Kuniseti Anvesh (20), Kuniseti Rajasubrahmanya Ganesh (19), Allu Srinivas (19) and Kuniseti Sivaji (21). The incident took place late on April 13 and has generated lot of heat with the Dalits of the village lodging protest seeking stringent action against the erring.

Basing on the complaint lodged by Tholem Raju of

Pathakottam village, the Kotanandur police have registered a case.

SP Adnan Nayeem Asmi took a serious view of the incident and instructed the sub divisional police officer of Peddapuram Aritakula Srinivasarao to investigate and bring the culprits to book.

The SDPO has constituted special teams led by Tuni Rural Inspector Kishore Babu with Kotanandur sub-inspector Ashok, Tuni Rural sub-inspector Ganesh Kumar and Thondangi sub-inspector Vidyasagar to investigate in depth and nab the culprits.

Basing on the clues available at the site and also the technical evidence, the police

teams arrested the five accused who belong to the same village on Friday morning.

The motive for vandalising the Ambedkar statue, according to police was old rivalry with the Dalit youths of the village. The accused had dismantled the statue by hitting with a boulder. The accused understood to have confessed the crime and sent to judicial remand. SP Adnan has complemented the SDPO Aritakula Srinivasarao and his team of officials for the speedy detection of the case and bringing the culprits to book within a record time of three days, police sources added.

Kakarla dies at 94

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Noted radiologist and former Director of Nizam's Institute of Medical Sciences (NIMS) Dr Kakarla Subba Rao passed away on Friday here. He was 94. The family members of Dr Kakarla Subba Rao informed that he breathed his last due to the current Covid conditions. "Ceremonial meeting will not be held due to Covid," Sushrut, Shobharani and Dr Sushanth Kakarla, the family members of the departed soul said.

The renowned hospital administrator was well-known for his efforts to transform NIMS into a super-specialty hospital. He was the first Director of NIMS between 1985 and 1990 and later between

1997 and 2004, before retiring. Held in high regard by his peers, Dr Rao was admitted to KIMS a month ago with age-related health complications. According to doctors at KIMS, Dr Rao breathed his last, following health complications.

He was a Professor of Radiology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York, before he returned to India in 1985-86. Influenced by the call of the late Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, N T Rama Rao, he joined NIMS and strived towards its development into a highly specialised hospital. In recognition of his valuable contributions in the field of medicine, the Government of India honoured Kakarla Subba Rao with Padmasri in 2000.

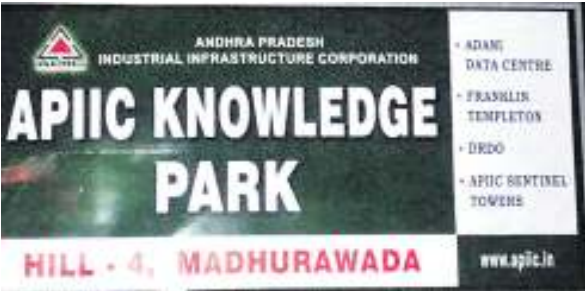
Vizag IT Hill-4 gets a shape as activity picks pace

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

While significant activity in the Information Technology industry in Vizag has been missing for at least the last three years, a new signboard erected on the Kapuluppada hill, coined as IT Hill-4 of APIIC Knowledge Park in Madhurawada has made the sector optimistic about the progress now.

Change in the ruling party, delay in the release of new IT policy by the government and later the pandemic had stalled the IT activities in Andhra Pradesh.

There are three IT hills in the Madhurawada IT Special Economic Zone and several



companies have been functioning from there.

A signboard spotted on the hill had the names of the Adani Data Park, Franklin Templeton, DRDO and APIIC Sentinel Towers on it. This clearly indicates that the new IT Hill-4.

Some IT Hill employees said

APIIC is putting up the new boards on the hills and the new one springing up on the Kapuluppada Hill.

Kapuluppada hill has around 1,400 acres of land. The Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation (APIIC) had got permission to



lay the approach road from the police department as the department owns a firing range on the foothill and was initially hesitant about giving its nod.

In a major thrust to its project, Adani's solar powered 'Integrated Data Centre Park and Technology/Business park' was

listed in the stock exchange as Vizag Tech Park Ltd (VTPL). The stock market has apparently seen potential in the project as Adani's share value increased soon after it incorporated VTPL.

Adani Enterprises has promised an investment of Rs 14,634 crore on the data centre project and provide jobs to 24,990 people.

After launching its facility in Vizag, Franklin Templeton had proposed to make a full-fledged development centre with its own campus in the city. And, the signboard shows the land for its permanent facility has been allocated here.

A DRDO project is also apparently coming up on the new IT Hill.

A signboard was put up on the Kapuluppada hill, naming it as IT Hill 4 with names of Adani Data Park, Franklin Templeton, DRDO and APIIC Sentinel Towers on it. This clearly indicates that the new IT Hill-4.

Tirupati by-poll: Acid test for ministers

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ TIRUPATI

Tirupati by-election is an acid test to performance of Ministers. Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy in Chittoor district and Anil Kumar Yadav and Mekapati Gautam Reddy in Nellore district besides that of Narayanaswamy, the deputy CM, who hails from Chittoor district.

The ministers have been

Crucial for TDP

The TDP is fighting the last elections as ZPTC, municipal elections are over. No other elections are scheduled in the state till the next Assembly elections. Therefore, the by-elections are very crucial for the TDP to prove its worth. TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu and his son Lokesh Naidu toured the constituency continuously for eight days campaigning in seven Assembly segments evoking more than expected response from the people. They focussed more on corruption in the Chittoor district. The TDP sources say the stone-pelting incident on Chandrababu will yield sympathy votes for the party. Former ministers and MLAs also took part in the campaign for the victory of candidate Panabaka Lakshmi, who also actively campaigned in all segments. The TDP pinned hopes on voter support from Guduru, Venkatigiri, Tirupati and Srikalahasti segments. If the TDP did not get votes in satisfactory range in the three Assembly segments of Babu's native Chittoor district, it is sure to cause a dent in his image. It may be recalled that the TDP tasted defeat in the recent sarpanch and municipal elections.



facing a huge challenge in the form of a by-election after they successfully helped the YSRCP win majority of seats in the recent municipal and local body elections.

The election fever has reached its crescendo with top leaders of the TDP and BJP campaigning in the constituency. Jagan Mohan Reddy fixing the target for ministers to ensure the victory of YSRCP candidate Gurumurthy with over five-lakh majority, TDP complaining to the EC irregularities, including stone-pelting on Babu, the threat of Covid and sweltering heat affecting the voting percentage are some of the major hurdles before the YSRCP ministers to reach their target. The constituency has come under the scanner of the EC following the stone-pelting

incident. Will YSRCP ministers continue the winning streak in by-election too? Their future is dependent on the victory and the majority in the by-elections. The election results will decide their fate as Cabinet expansion is reportedly on the cards soon.

The campaign, political and financial strategies are being implemented under the watchful eyes of Peddireddy in Srikalahasti, Satyavedu and Tirupati Assembly segments. He is responsible for ensuring a huge majority in these segments, while the role of Narayanaswamy, deputy CM, is stated to be nominal.

Despite the cancellation of Jagan's public meeting because of a spurt in Covid-19, ministers deployed MLAs from various

castes to woo voters of various communities in all segments.

The campaign by YSRCP veered around the failure of Chandrababu as the former CM instead of focusing on YSRCP achievements.

Tirupati Lok Sabha has Guduru, Sullurupet, Venkatagiri and Sarvepalli Assembly segments of Nellore district, the onus of ensuring Gurumurthy's win rested squarely on Anil Kumar Yadav and Mekapati Gautam Reddy, ministers from Nellore district.

As the YSRCP won in Nellore and Chittoor Assembly seats, the by-election will test the performance of the MLAs too. The by-election will decide the people's faith in the YSRCP MLAs and Ministers.

Pawan Kalyan, the saviour for BJP

The by-elections will test the leadership of Somu Veerajulu and Sunil Deodhar if the BJP candidate did not get a considerable number of votes. Under their leadership, the BJP fared badly in municipal and sarpanch elections. The BJP leaders have been commenting that a sword is hanging in balance over the heads of the Andhra BJP leadership. Somu Veerajulu failed to coast the BJP to victory in his native East Godavari district in the local body elections. Sunil Deodhar who is officiating as party in-charge for over two years is facing a huge challenge to his leadership. However, the Janasena support to the BJP brings some solace to the BJP. The BJP deployed party activists from all districts in the Tirupati Assembly segment as the party has no strong cadre in Chittoor and Nellore districts. Announcing the candidature of Ratnaprabha as the BJP candidate at the last minute and lack of familiarity among people are some of the hurdles. Criticism against her is that she campaigned well, she failed to give a tough fight in electioneering to her rivals. Lack of coordination is also stated to be one of the inherent defects. BJP national president JP Nadda's public meeting ending in a fiasco left the party cadres highly disappointed. However, the campaign by Pawan Kalyan infused energy into them. The BJP is highly dependent on Janasena as far as the Tirupati by-elections are concerned.

TDP complains to poll observer against YSRCP

PNS ■ NELLORE

The Telugu Desam leaders on Friday filed a complaint with the election observer about the ruling YSRCP's irregularities committed in the Tirupati Lok Sabha by-elections.

TDP Nellore parliament president Abdul Azeez, district general secretary Chejerla Venkateswar Reddy, Panabaka Krishnaiah, Jaladanki Sudhakar and others submitted a complaint to Election observer Dinesh Patil on the

YCP's misdeeds in the elections.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdul Azeez told reporters that the ruling party has misused the voluntary system in the Tirupati by-poll and used their services for political gain. He alleged that the ruling party has engaged village volunteers from distribution of pamphlets to money with a target to win the election by hook or crook. It was unfair and undemocratic. The volunteers were unable to disobey

the orders of the ruling party as pressure mounted on them. With the fear of defeat, the YSR Congress party was resorting to irregularities to win the election. He further said the party urged the election observer to hold the elections fairly and peacefully and the election staff has to act as people's officials. The police were creating terror among the voters and TDP poll agents and it would not be tolerated if they did not change their attitude, he remarked.

Call to emulate ideals of Veeresalingam

■ APFDC observes Telugu Drama Day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kandukuri Veeresalingam occupied a unique place in the history of Telugu literature and art history of drama as a veteran and he was popular as the first drama writer, a novelist who wrote the first satirical, journalist, social reformer and a sociologist, APFDC Managing Director T Vijayakumar Reddy has said.

On the occasion of 174th birth anniversary of Veeresalingam Panthulu, Vijayakumar Reddy and other staff members paid rich tributes to him at the APFDC office located at the local RTC complex administrative building here on Friday by garlanding his portrait. He said the birth anniversary of Veeresalingam was celebrated every year as a Telugu Drama Day on April 16.

Speaking on the occasion, the APFDC Managing director said Veeresalingam had fought against corruption by establishing a newspaper 'Vivekavardhini' and created



awareness among women by writing articles through his 'Satihita Bodhana' magazine. Veeresalingam was a pioneer and an adorable person as a father of modern Andhra society, he said.

Vijayakumar Reddy said Kandukuri Veeresalingam had donated all his properties to establish Brahma Samaj as part of his social service as a social reformer. He said Veeresalingam had written as many as 130 books in Telugu, Sanskrit and English. Vijayakumar Reddy called upon the journalists and enthusiastic journalists to study

the books of Veeresalingam and get inspiration from his thoughts.

Kandukuri Veeresalingam, who was born on April 16, 1848, in Rajahmundry in a traditional family, had launched a crusade for women's education and opened schools exclusively for women. In the later stages, he was the first person to encourage a co-education system allowing boys and girls in schools. Despite opposing child marriages, Veeresalingam was a great person as he dedicated himself to the eradication of the caste system.

Six more temples in EG to go for e-hundi

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The Endowment Department is all set to introduce the e-hundi system in all the major temples in the state. Since the e-hundi system was introduced on an experimental basis at the Annavaram temple and it became successful. Hence, the officials were planning to introduce the e-hundi system in six more major temples in the district.

The Endowment Department has taken up the e-hundi system as a pilot project at Annavaram Devasthanam. The details of the bank account number, IFSC code and other information was uploaded to the website inviting devotees to donate funds for the temple to perform daily kalyanams, to fulfil their vows and other purposes.

Many devotees used the opportunity and started sending their donations through an online platform.

The department was contemplating introducing the same e-hundi system in temples like Talupulamma Lova, Pithapuram Kukkateswara Swamy temple, Kakinada Balatiruppa Sundari temple, Sarpavaram Bhavanarayana Swamy temple, Jagannadapuram Venkateswara Swamy temple, Gandhinagar Venkateswara Swamy temple, Venkatnagar Venkateswara Swamy temple, Ramaraopeta Siva temple, Vadapalli, Muramalla, Ayinavilli, Kotipalli, VAdapalli, Mandapalli, Rali and others temples in the district.

The office of the Endowment Commissioner has gathered information about these temples.

Janasena loses 'glass' symbol in TS civic polls

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Janasena Party has lost the 'glass' symbol in the Telangana mini civic body polls. Not convinced with the explanation given by Janasena Party, the Election Commission has announced to remove the 'glass' symbol from the list of poll symbols.

The Election Commission made it clear that the symbol was removed as the Janasena Party could not contest even in 10 per cent of seats in the municipal elections. The Janasena Party told EC that owing to an alliance with BJP, it could not contest in the last elections.

12 Gurukul students test +ve for Corona

PNS ■ GUNTUR

As many as 12 students of Gurukul School in Tsuduru of Guntur district tested positive for Covid-19 on Friday. The students studying the sixth and ninth standard and the school watchman tested positive for Corona. The parents expressed concern over increasing cases in the area.



Sri Ramanujacharya avatarotsavam begins

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The 1005-years of Sri Ramanujacharya avatarotsavam commenced at Annamacharya Kala Mandiram in Tirupati under the aegis of Alwar Divya Prabandha Project of TTD on Friday. Sri Chinna Jeeyar Swamy of Tirumala inaugurated the programme.

Alwar Divya Prabandha Project special officer Prof K

Rajagopalan, Annamacharya Project Director Sri Dakshinamurthy Sharma, HDPP special officer Sri Hemanth Kumar and others were present.

Pushpa yagam: The TTD is organising the annual Pushpa yagam at Sri Kodandaramaswami temple on April 19 in ekantham (isolation) as per Covid guidelines while it's Ankurarpanam on April 18.

As part of the fete, Snapana Tirumanjanam is performed for the utsava idols while Pushpa Abhishekam to Sita Lakshmana along with Sri Kodandaramaswami in the evening followed by a grand procession inside the temple.

The purpose of Pushpa yagam is to ward off the impact of any lapses in rituals during the recently held annual Brahmotsavams from March 13-21.

Tamil comedian Vivek hospitalised

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Popular Tamil actor Vivek was hospitalised here on Friday after he complained of chest pain and fainted, film industry and hospital sources said. He has been admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of a city hospital, they said.

The 59-year-old comedian, who had taken the COVID vaccine on Thursday, complained of chest pain and fainted and was rushed to a private hospital, the sources said. His publicist Nikil Murugan told reporters that the actor has undergone angiogram (a procedure that uses x-rays to take pictures of blood vessels)

and was "doing fine." "He is conscious and talking," he added. Vivek, a Padma Shree recipient, has acted with top Tamil heroes including Rajinikanth, Vijay and Ajith Kumar. He has also appeared as the lead artiste in a couple of movies and has been involved in social causes including afforestation.

Diagnostic centre opened for cops

PNS ■ KADAPA

A diagnostic centre was made ready for police personnel in Kadapa as part of the police welfare initiative taken by the State government. Superintendent of police Ambhurajan Friday inaugurated the diagnostic centre in Kadapa, which was set up in a collaboration with Sunshine Diagnostics.

The SP said the laboratory was established with all modern technology and it would fulfil the needs of the police and the general public as well with quality service, accuracy and lowest price. Apart from the Covid test, all cancer diag-

nostic tests, biochemistry, molecular biology and other examinations would be done here, he added.

Ambhurajan said people need not go to other cities for blood tests as skilled workers would render services to the people at the Centre. He appealed to the police personnel and their families to use these facilities. AR Additional SP Rishikesava Reddy, Kadapa DSP B Sunil, AR DSP Ramanaiah, Police welfare hospital doctor Sameera, RIs Mahaboob Basha George, Somasekhar Nayak, RSIs, police officials and others were present on the occasion.



SHORT TAKES



ONGC test-fire causes panic

NARSAPURAM : Leakage to the ONGC gas pipeline which caught minor fire caused panic among the people of neighbouring areas on Friday at Seetharamapuram north panchayat in Narsapuram mandal of West Godavari district. On information, the revenue staff and the locals reached the spot. When asked, the ONGC officials said that it was a test-fire carried out by the fire personnel under the supervision of ONGC production executive engineer adhering to safety standards. The operation was taken up to find out the level of gas deposits in the area. They clarified that there was no danger to the neighbouring people. The test was done following the safety standards and it would be closed within 2-3 days and need not worry about the test fire, they added.

Three killed in road accident



GUNTUR : Three persons were killed and two others sustained injuries in a road accident that took place in Guntur district on Friday. A mirchi-laden lorry has a head-on collision slightly with a cement-laden lorry at Gamalapadu village in Dachepalli mandal. When the drivers and cleaners of the two lorries had an altercation over the accident, another lorry rammed into the two stationary lorries and people who were arguing over the road rage. Shaik Jani and Pidugu Venkataramaiah of Gamalapadu, Govindarajulu of Piduguralla died on the spot. Two persons who received injuries were shifted to the hospital. Police reached the spot and are investigating.

Prakasam district gears up for Covid-19 treatment

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The influence of the second wave of Covid-19 was alarming in Prakasam district and efforts were on to contain the pandemic the state government was coordinating with the district administration, said special Chief Secretary Sisodia, who has been appointed as a special senior officer in Prakasam district to take measures on war-footing to control spreading of Corona.

The Chief Secretary participated in a review meeting through a video conference with Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy along with district Collector Pola Bhaskar and SP Siddhartha Kousal on Friday. Later, speaking to media persons, Sisodia said about 65,000 cases were registered in Prakasam district and on Friday there were 2,200 active cases. A task force has been set up under the leadership of the

Joint Collector by the district Collector, who alerted the mandal officials. Keeping in view of the spurt in cases on a daily basis as people were conglomerating in groups for functions, a strong surveillance system was introduced. Steps were being taken to check people coming from the outside as cases were spreading from them and the outsiders would be tested soon they landed in the district to prevent the spreading of the pandemic, he said.

The Chief Secretary said containment zones have been established where many cases were reported and movement of people was restricted in those areas. Experts' opinion has been taken to take precautionary measures and the district administration was asked to take strict vigilance over the cases. He said a quality treatment would be given to Covid patients with facilities like oxygen, medicines, availabil-



ity of beds, ambulance and ventilator support at the Covid care centre in the district. Within three hours, the beds would be made available after people calling '104' and '1902' numbers and people have to call '104' if they wanted to have tests. All the frontline warriors have been given vaccination and suggested people above 45 years take a jab. People should follow Covid restrictions such as wearing a mask and maintain social distance.

- Spl CS Sisodia reviews health situation
- 65,000 cases registered in district

tance. The Prakasam district machinery was ready to face Covid challenge, he added.

Sisodia warned the management of private hospitals and medical shops that action would be taken if they sold med-

icines at higher prices more than the prescribed. If people filed complaints, action would be taken against the erring shops and hospitals and sought media support in this regard.

He further said the free treatment would be given in Covid hospital and thermal tests were being conducted in public places and sanitization has been done in the areas.

Collector Bhaskar said the officials were all set for facing Covid operation and tests were

conducted for the people in the public gatherings and they were sent to hospitals for treatment. Earlier the officials had established big containment zones and now micro containment zones were set up and people alerted.

The Collector said there were only 1300 beds and it was increased to 1800 beds with oxygen, ICU and ventilator facilities. The outsourcing employees were again taken into service and patients who were in home isolation could come to Covid hospital for treatment.

SP Siddhartha Kousal said corona would be prevented from spreading by working together with all departments. Stating that people should not worry about coronavirus, he said it was easy to face the virus with advice from doctors. He appealed to the people to wear a mask and do not come out unless and until there was an emergency.

SII CEO urges US to lift raw material export ban

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla on Friday said the US needs to lift its embargo on raw material exports to help ramp up vaccine production.

SII is currently manufacturing anti-coronavirus vaccine Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. The vaccine is not only being used in India, but exported to a number of countries.

Poonawalla had earlier admitted that SII has been facing problems in sending out required number of batches of vaccines due to the bureaucratic and government-related hurdles.

Tagging the twitter handle of the President of the United States, Poonawalla said in a tweet, "Respected @POTUS, if we are to truly unite in beating this virus, on behalf of the vaccine industry outside the U.S.,

SII is currently manufacturing anti-coronavirus vaccine Covishield, developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University. The vaccine is not only being used in India, but exported to a number of countries

I humbly request you to lift the embargo of raw material exports out of the U.S. so that vaccine production can ramp up. Your administration has the details."

Earlier in March, Poonawalla had said that the production of coronavirus vaccines and scaling up global availability could be seriously limited due to the ban on exports of critical raw materials by the US.

Speaking at an event organ-



ised by the World Bank in March, Poonawalla had said one of the constraints that needs to be addressed but nobody is able to address so far is the availability of critical items from the US.

"...There are lot of bags and filters and critical items that manufacturers need. I will give

you an example. The Novavax vaccine that we are a major manufacturer of, need these items from the US...Now the US has chosen to invoke the Defence Act, in which there is a sub-clause which prevents the export of critical raw materials required for their local vaccine manufacturers," he had said.

5 poll contestants test positive for Covid in WB

PNS ■ KOLKATA

At least five candidates of different parties contesting the ongoing assembly election in West Bengal have tested positive for COVID-19, a health department official said on Friday.

Out of the five candidates who tested positive, three are from the Trinamool Congress (TMC), and one each from the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), he said.

RSP's Jangipur candidate, 73-year-old Pradip Kumar Nandi, tested positive on Wednesday and is now in home isolation, the official said.

BJP's candidate for Matigara-Naxalbari seat Anandamay Barman (38), TMC's Goalpokhar nominee Mohammed Ghulam Rabbani, Tapan candidate Kalpana Kisku, and Jalpaiguri candidate Dr Pradip Kumar Barma have tested COVID-19 positive, the health official said.

Mumbai's Haffkine gets Centre's nod to produce Covaxin

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Union government has given its permission to the Mumbai-based Haffkin Institute to manufacture Covaxin, an anti-coronavirus vaccine of Bharat Biotech, an official said on Thursday.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had earlier requested the Centre to allow the Haffkin Institute to produce Covaxin, which is currently produced by the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, the official from the chief minister's office (CMO) said. Renu Swarup, secretary of the Union Science and Technology Department sent the approval letter to the Maharashtra chief secretary Sitaram Kunte, the official said.

"Swarup informed the state government that the Centre has approved its request of



using infrastructure of Haffkin Bio-pharmaceutical Corporation Limited for Covaxin production. It was done after approval given by the experts," he added.

The Union government has granted one year period to the

state to carry out the production.

Accordingly, the chief minister has asked Kunte to appoint a senior officer to monitor and carry out the production in the given time-frame, the official said.

INDIA CORNER

Plan to convert Jaslok Hospital into Covid facility hits roadblock

The Mumbai civic body's plan to convert the Jaslok Hospital here into a dedicated facility for Coronavirus patients seems to have hit a roadblock with the hospital saying that it would continue to treat other critically ill non-COVID patients as well.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) had on Wednesday issued a circular, in which it had said that the Jaslok Hospital will no longer admit non-COVID-19 patients and added that instructions to this effect had been issued to the hospital's management. It had taken this decision in view of the spike in infection cases in the city. However, the hospital issued a statement late night on Thursday, saying that it has increased the number of beds for coronavirus patients, but it would continue to treat other critically-ill patients also.

"Keeping in view the rising cases of COVID-19 in Maharashtra, Jaslok Hospital and Research Centre, Mumbai has increased the number of beds allotted to the COVID-19 patients from 58 to 150 to support the current crisis. But we continue our efforts in treating other critically-ill chronic patients and (conducting) procedures," it said in the statement.



Cop Riyaz Kazi remanded in judicial custody till April 23

A court here on Friday remanded police officer Riyaz Kazi, an associate of suspended cop Sachin Waze, in judicial custody till April 23 in connection with the case of an explosives-laden SUV found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence and the subsequent death Thane-based businessman Mansukh Hiran. Kazi, an assistant police inspector, was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on April 11. He was produced before a holiday court here at the end of his NIA remand on Friday.

The court sent him to judicial custody as the central probe agency did not seek his further remand. The NIA has alleged that Kazi is involved in the conspiracy of the case, along with Waze, who is the prime accused. Kazi was involved in destroying the evidence, the NIA has alleged.

'MP to get 450 MT of oxygen for Covid patients soon'

Madhya Pradesh would get 450 metric tonnes of medical oxygen from other states shortly for treatment of critical COVID-19 patients, Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Thursday. The new stock of medical-grade oxygen, whose demand has shot up due to the rising coronavirus cases, is being arranged after talking to the Centre, he said.

"I had requested Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for oxygen supply to Madhya Pradesh. A consensus has been reached for supply of 450 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen from Bhilai, Devari (Chhattisgarh) and Rourkela (Odisha) to the state shortly," Chouhan told reporters here. "I am thankful to them," he added.

The chief minister said the private sector is being roped in to transport the life-saving gas in the state, which has been witnessing a surge in COVID-19 cases. "Transportation of oxygen is being done on a war footing," the CM said, adding the support of the private sector, too, is being taken. He said continuous efforts are being made to procure Remdesivir, an anti-viral drug used in treatment of COVID-19 cases.



CID takes over probe into Cooch Behar CISF firing



West Bengal CID Friday took over the case of killing of four people in firing by the CISF during polling in Cooch Behar district on April 10, a senior government official said. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Criminal Investigation Department

(CID) has been constituted to conduct the probe in the incident which happened during the fourth phase of polling at Sitalkuchi. The incident had set off an acrimonious war of words between the ruling TMC and challenger BJP, and triggered public outrage. Investigators will visit booth number 126/5 in Jorpatki in Sitalkuchi assembly constituency where CISF personnel had opened fire after they allegedly came under attack from a group of villagers. The TMC has claimed those killed were its supporters who were gunned down when they were standing in queue to cast their votes.

Bengal elections: 45 constituencies to go to polls in fifth phase today

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Over one crore voters in West Bengal will decide the political fate of 342 candidates on Saturday, when 45 assembly constituencies go to polls in the fifth phase, amid a raging second wave of COVID-19.

Security measures have been heightened for phase five in view of the violence in the previous phase, which witnessed the death of five people in Cooch Behar, including four in CISF firing.

The Election Commission has decided to deploy at least 853 companies of central forces to ensure free and fair voting, an official of the poll panel said.

It will also put in place measures to ensure strict adherence of COVID-19 pro-



ocols during the voting process, he said.

West Bengal on Thursday recorded the highest single-day spike of 6,769 coronavirus cases and at least 22 more fatalities.

Prominent names in the fifth phase include Siliguri Mayor and Left Front leader Ashok Bhattacharya, state ministers Gautam Deb and Bratya Basu and BJP's Samik Bhattacharya.

Mumbai: Man booked under Atrocities Act for assaulting traffic cop

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai police have registered a separate case under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act against a man who assaulted an on-duty traffic constable here, an official said on Friday.

The accused Jatin Satara (35) had allegedly abused and used foul language, while assaulting traffic constable Dyneshwar Wagh (32), who had asked him to remove his scooter, which was obstructing traffic in Mulund (west) on Thursday, the official said.

Satara, who was without a mask, started arguing with the constable and mentioned a particular community while abusing him, he said.

Following this, a separate FIR under relevant sections of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act was registered, he said. A video of the incident had gone viral on social media, it was stated.

The accused, who was arrested under relevant sections of the IPC and Disaster Management Act (in force due to the COVID-19 outbreak), was later released on bail.

Manipur makes Covid negative report mandatory for entering state

PNS ■ IMPHAL

The Manipur government has issued an order making it mandatory for all persons entering the state to produce a negative COVID-19 test report, an official said on Friday. The official said the order shall become effective from April 18.

The order issued by Deputy Secretary, Health department, Soiminlian Lengon on Thursday said that "All persons entering Manipur,



whether by air or by road, and irrespective of place of origin, shall be allowed entry only on mandatory production of a

negative RT-PCR/ TrueNat/ CB-NAAT COVID-19 test report taking within 72 hours from arrival in Manipur."

Science City Kolkata to remain closed for visitors till May 15

PNS ■ KOLKATA

In view of the sudden spike in COVID-19 cases, Science City Kolkata will remain closed for visitors from Friday till May 15, an official said.

A spokesman of the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) said in a statement the decision was taken following the directives of the Union Ministry of Culture. "In view of the

current COVID situation of the country, Science City, Kolkata will remain closed for visitors till May 15, 2021," the spokesman said on Friday.

He said this was in consonance with the directives of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. The Science City had opened on November 10 last year after being closed from March 16, 2020 due to the pandemic.

Odisha logs 3,108 new Covid cases

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odishas COVID-19 caseload on Friday mounted to 3,61,450 after 3,108 more people tested positive for the infection, hile three fresh fatalities pushed the death toll to 1,938, a health department official said.

Meanwhile, keeping in view the COVID-19 surge, Odishas major tourist destination, the Sun Temple in Konark, has been closed with immediate effect.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) said, due to the pre-



vailing COVID-19 situation, all centrally-protected monuments, sites, and museums in the state will remain closed with immediate effect.

It will remain in force till May 15, 2021, or until further orders,

Kejriwal to hold meeting over Covid situation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has called a meeting on Friday to review the COVID-19 situation in the national capital.

Coronavirus cases in the city have been spiralling with 16,699 fresh COVID-19 infections and 112 fatalities reported on Thursday. A senior government official said, "The chief minister has called a meeting to

review the COVID-19 situation in Delhi at 4 PM today. Health Minister Satyendar Jain and senior government officials will be present at the meeting at the Delhi Secretariat."

The Delhi government had on Thursday announced sweeping restrictions, including a weekend curfew to break the chain of COVID infections in the city.



Study paints rosy picture for women entrepreneurs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Businesses owned by women entrepreneurs in India are likely to grow up to 90 per cent in the next five years, according to a new study which also notes that the uptake of government schemes supporting such entrepreneurs is quite low.

The study by prominent philanthropic organisation, EdelGive Foundation, was conducted across 13 states and Union territories (UTs).

The mapping of these areas listed almost 3,300 women entrepreneurs who were classified into three categories--those engaged in manufacturing, retail and service delivery

enterprises. Out of these, 1,235 women entrepreneurs were sampled and interviewed for the study.

In addition to these entrepreneurs, their family members, employees and clients were also interviewed. Besides in-depth interviews were carried out with 20 NGOs that directly support women entrepreneurs.

According to the study, around 80 per cent of women, from semi urban and rural India, feel a significant improvement in their socio-economic and cultural status after starting an enterprise.

It also found out that despite several state-run schemes and policies supporting women



entrepreneurship, the uptake of such initiatives is quite low.

"Only one per cent of the women entrepreneurs sur-

veyed have availed of any government scheme and this is primarily because just about 11 per cent are aware of such pro-

grammes," the study says.

The multi-faceted study has focused on a cross-section of factors ranging from societal, financial, personal to familial to understand the overall journey of women entrepreneurs along with looking at the role of government, NGOs and corporates in the ecosystem.

While the study reports improvement in the socio-cultural lives of the women entrepreneurs, it reveals that there are still significant gaps in terms of financial knowledge and resources available to the entrepreneurs along with marketing, production, technological and socio-cultural challenges faced by them.

Ex- CBI director Ranjit Sinha passes away

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former CBI director Ranjit Sinha died here on Friday morning in what is believed to be a COVID-19 related death, senior officials said.

He was 68. It is understood that he was confirmed positive for coronavirus on Thursday night and breathed his last at 4.30 am on Friday, the officials said. Sinha, a 1974-batch officer of the Bihar cadre and who had cracked the coveted UPSC examination at the age of 21, had taken over as the CBI chief in 2012.

Bumpy road ahead

To avoid having a comatose economy now, we must bear the cross of our earlier negligence

India is hunkering down again to battle the second and more virulent wave of the Coronavirus outbreak. It would have been much better for us had we sincerely stuck to the COVID-19 protocols when the numbers were down and, who knows, we might have been rid of this pesky virus by now! While the average citizen decided that it was “okay” to return to the crowded restaurants, malls, airports and bus and railway stations without masks or social distancing, our short-sighted politicians postponed the all-important Board exams but considered it imperative to hold political rallies and road shows brimming with nonchalant people ahead of the Assembly elections, because their future depended on it. The religious leaders found it exigent



for us to wash away our sins by bathing in the millions in the holy Ganga. Now, here's the result of our collective endeavours: The Coronavirus cases across the country hit a record 2,17,353 fresh infections in the last 24 hours, the eighth record daily increase in the last nine days. In the same period, 1,185 people lost their lives due to the viral disease. The numbers coming out of the Health Ministry say that India registered a steady increase in the number of active Corona cases for the 36th day in a row. Now, we are scrambling to control the damage. The Home Ministry has asked its officers up to the level of Under-Secretary to avail the WFH option while the Deputy Secretary and above-ranking officials have been asked to attend office regularly with the option to stagger timings between 9 AM and 10 AM.

Various States, including the Capital, have also come up with local-level restrictions — ranging from shutting of malls, gyms, swimming pools and auditoriums, prohibiting dining at restaurants, besides imposing a weekend lockdown and night curfew. The Government has assured the citizenry that the “test, trace, treat” and vaccination drive will continue unabated and that the national drug controller will take just three days to process applications of the foreign-made vaccines once they've been approved for emergency use in India. One can only hope that this time around, the Government grits its teeth and stands by the Prime Minister's words that “we must learn to live with the virus”. No matter how many restrictions are placed on recreation and how many weekends are spent imprisoned indoors, the nation's economy must not be shut down again. The first wave gave us many lessons on how to identify hotspots, impose local lockdowns and create containment zones in order to keep the wheels of the industry churning. We have to ensure that our march towards a self-reliant, New India continues; our ailing economy that was just beginning to revive cannot be delivered another body blow in the form of a hard lockdown. Else, we risk having a comatose economy in our hands. So, the nation would do well to gird up its loins and prepare for a bumpy road ahead, but the wheels of the economy cannot stop, no matter what.

PICTALK



Smoke billows from a forest fire at the Ketti area in Shimla

PTI

Good omen

It's time for the CJI's wish for a woman judge to head the nation's top court to come true

Chief Justice of India SA Bobde deserves nothing less than the nation's applause and compliments for recently stating unequivocally that the time has come when a woman should head the top court. Hinting that the apex court was already moving along the right path on the issue, he underscored that there was “no need for a change of attitude” of the Collegium to ensure greater representation of women in the judiciary. Hearing a plea by a women lawyers' body seeking consideration of the “meritorious” lot among them for appointment as judges in the High Courts, a Bench comprising Chief Justice Bobde and Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Surya Kant said: “Why only higher judiciary? We think the time has come when a woman should be the Chief Justice of India.” At this juncture, it would be pertinent to mention that currently there are only 81 female judges in the 25 High Courts across the country against 1,078 male judges. Among them, the Madras High Court tops the list with 13 female judges, followed by Punjab and Haryana with 11, and the Delhi and Bombay High Courts have eight women judges each.

Interestingly, while the Supreme Court's emphasis on gender issues is to be lauded, it would truly have credibility and value if its own actions were consistent on this subject. Consider this: There is only one female judge among the 34 positions that currently constitute the Supreme Court. With Justice Indu Malhotra's retirement last month, the Collegium is considering a few women judges for elevation. The nation's top court has had only eight women judges since it came into existence on January 26, 1950. The first one, Fathima Beevi, made it to the elite club only as late as in October 1989. Not a single woman judge has figured in the list of 48 CJs since its inception. It would perhaps not be out of the context here to mention that the Supreme Court had recently pointed to the delay in giving women permanent commission in the military, blaming it on the “systemic bias” within the Ministry of Defence. While there certainly seems to be some truth in what it said, it is a complicated issue, especially the impact of women in combat roles. That said, in either case, there's no denying that women are up to performing any professional job with panache while balancing with finesse their roles as mother, daughter, sister, wife and homemaker.

India's flaming forests play havoc

Natural causes and human intervention are to blame for the rising number of conflagrations not only in India, but the world over



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR



The surge of forest fires in Uttarakhand once again underlines the growing incidence of the phenomenon in India. There has been a series of these this year in Himachal Pradesh, the Nagaland-Manipur border, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. According to the *India State of Forest Report 2019* (ISFR) — the latest in the line of such reports — released by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), Dehradun, over 30,000 forest fires were reported in the country in 2019. The report identified nearly 21.67 per cent (7,12,249 sq km) of the country's land area as forested. Another 2.89 per cent (95,027 sq km) was under tree cover.

The report identified 2,77,758 forest fire points across the country, and stated that about 21.40 per cent of India's forests are prone to fires. Of this, 3.89 per cent belonged to the category of extremely fire-prone, 6.01 per cent very highly fire-prone and 11.50 per cent highly fire-prone.

The forests in Assam, Mizoram and Tripura are “extremely prone” to conflagrations. According to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) annual report for 2020-21, the States with large forest areas and falling under the “very highly fire-prone” category — including Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha, Maharashtra, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — were turning into “extremely fire-prone” hotspots; so were regions like western Maharashtra, southern Chhattisgarh and areas of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, along with central Odisha. Areas under the “highly prone” and “moderately prone” categories make up about 26.2 per cent of the total forest cover — a staggering 1,72,374 sq km.

A State prone to forest fires is Haryana which suffered at least 540 of these from 2016 to 2020. Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are witness to the most frequent forest fires annually. According to the National Forest Inventory under the MoEFCC, the fires severely affect almost 10

per cent of the country's forest area while mildly affecting about 54 per cent, which makes about two-third of India's forests vulnerable to fires.

The question is: Why is it so? Lightning is the most important natural cause. Another is the spontaneous combustion of dried-up leaves and sticks. The one that has been an increasingly potent factor, and is set to become even more so, is global warming. It dries up the leaves and shrubbery on the ground, making them highly inflammable. It also dries up the soil. Thus, the lack of soil moisture as a result of rainfall deficiency during monsoons — less than 18 per cent and 20 per cent in 2019 and 2020, respectively — has been an important factor in this year's Uttarakhand fires. In fact, it has been a cause not only in many other parts of India but the entire world — the blazes bedevilling Australia, California in the US and the Amazon rainforests in Brazil are examples.

Human activity, however, is responsible for the overwhelming majority of forest fires the world over. In India, these blazes are mainly caused by the slash-and-burn method of shifting agriculture, known

FOREST FIRES ARE AS OLD AS FORESTS AND WILL CONTINUE TO OCCUR AS LONG AS FORESTS EXIST. ONE, HOWEVER, CAN LIMIT THEIR INCIDENCE AND ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES BY FIRMLY DEALING WITH THE TIMBER, BUILDER AND MINING MAFIA, AND THE POACHERS

as *jhum* in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam, where it is practised over about 15,000 sq km of forest land. The blazes are also set off to clear the ground for mining, timber felling and the construction of human settlements and industrial units, besides warding off the wild animals.

People burn dry leaves and shrubbery on forest grounds, believing that it would lead to the sprouting of new and healthier grass. Poachers light fires on three sides to corner fleeing wild animals in one area as their concentrated presence helps killing. People visiting forests are often careless and leave behind lighted butts of cigarettes or *bidis*, besides inflammable material.

Things are made worse by the fact that it is difficult to extinguish forest fires. The absence of roads prevents fire tenders from reaching the sites and high winds carry the sparks to new areas. Helicopters are pressed into service — as in Uttarakhand recently where two Indian Air Force helicopters, each with a 5,000-litre water tank, were deployed. There are, however, limits to the number of helicopters that can be used

and the availability of large lakes or rivers from which these can draw water.

Forest fires wreak havoc in India every year. They destroy forests, cause pollution, turn streams dry or adversely affect their water quality, damage soil nutrients and increase the risk of soil erosion. They kill wildlife and insects, including endangered species, and destroy their habitats, damage national parks and sanctuaries, driving the wild animals like tigers, leopards and elephants towards human settlements, thus aggravating the human-animal conflict. And, of course, they kill humans and destroy their property.

The question is: What is to be done? Forest fires are as old as forests and will continue to occur as long as forests exist. One, however, can limit their incidence by firmly dealing with the timber, builder and mining mafia, and the poachers, and simultaneously enlightening people not to carelessly leave incendiary material in forests. The Central and State Governments will have to launch sustained campaigns to this end. The consequences of not doing so will be severe.

(The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEGLECTED RESPONSIBLE FOR SITUATION

Sir — Instead of getting stunned by the rising number of COVID cases in the country, we must admit the fact that we are not moving towards a second wave but are actually in its grip. As the demand for Remdesivir surges, the Centre has fast-tracked applications from companies to manufacture the critical anti-viral drug in order to ensure its smooth availability. Night curfews and partial lockdowns are being imposed in many parts of the country as a measure to control the deadly virus. Amid the rising cases, the Centre has announced the cancellation of the CBSE Board exams for Class 10 and has deferred Class 12 exams.

On the other hand, lakhs of devotees have been taking a holy dip in the Ganga on the occasion of the Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, flouting the COVID norms. It is however ironic that while the Government has no compunction about cancelling the Board examinations, elections in the country are continuing as if nothing has happened. These fears have been magnified all the more with the dismal disregard shown by various State Governments to clamping down on mass public events and gatherings. While a proactive approach to control and manage the crowds when it comes to stonewalling the widely contagious virus, is a remedy to the problem, the complete disregard shown towards the basic safety precautions is indeed perplexing!

Pachu Menon | Goa

TROOP WITHDRAWAL WILL CREATE VACUUM

Sir — The US' decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan is not good at the present moment as the situation on the ground is far from satisfactory. The Taliban is still controlling parts of Afghanistan and there is considerable influence of Pakistan and support from China, too. The chances of disintegration of Afghanistan are quite high. The withdrawal of the US troops might create a vacuum which, if acquired by the disruptive forces, will push the country into turmoil. President Joe Biden has said the US troops will be withdrawn from

Politicisation of vaccines



Politics over the anti-Coronavirus vaccine started the day Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced free jabs to the people of Bihar in the run-up to the Assembly elections in October-November last year. The vaccine policy suffered from the play of politics and one-upmanship. Besides, appalling naivety in assessing the demand during the second wave, differing norms for affording authorisation for use, inertia in augmenting in-house capacity, exports as a policy and imports in fetters together impacted the availability of vaccines in the country. After the

authorisation of the Oxford-assisted Covishield and the indigenously-developed Covaxin for emergency use, the authorities soft-pedalled on giving authorisation and import/production licence(s) to other popular vaccine candidates in the world. According to the *Lancet*, Russia's vaccine Sputnik V had the efficacy of 91.6 per cent. While the chronic shortage was being felt, the Government allowed the exports to showcase India as a powerhouse of vaccines. To draw an analogy, the US has accumulated stocks which could vaccinate its entire population.

In fact, the possibility of a furious second wave was overlooked. India's daily COVID count has crossed 2 lakh now. This surge must be viewed against the overloaded hospitals, shortage in oxygen supply, inadequacy in life-saving ventilators and shortfalls in vaccines and medicines. There is an urgent need to reassess the situation carefully and honestly to mount a multipronged action to crush the climbing curve and augment treatment facilities.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

Afghanistan beginning May 1 and the process will be completed by September 11. For his part, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said he spoke to Biden and that his country respects the US decision.

Maybe the US troops might be shifted to some other regions of the world. The US is also facing domestic problems and is ravaged by the COVID pandemic. Washington needs a war to run its economy. The weapons industry needs insecurity among the countries to sell weapons and make profits. In my opinion, the US troops will be shifted to another war. Let's wait and watch till the withdrawal in September.

Sunil Pradhan | Odisha

BAN SUPER-SPREADER EVENTS

Sir — It refers to the editorial 'Matters of faith' (April 16). At a time when the Government has done away with bridging trials for foreign-made vaccines for

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Being a tourist State, if we impose night curfew, it will create a spin-off effect. People should remain alert. We have issued an advisory. We are continuing to create awareness.

Goa Chief Minister — Pramod Sawant

If we were to lift the border restrictions, you would see these cases increase and Australians would have to become used to dealing with 1,000 cases or more a week.

Australian Prime Minister — Scott Morrison

I would love to sing in films that I am going to be a part of, as well as for others, as a playback singer.

Actor — Adarsh Gourav

He is not the MS Dhoni which he used to be probably four or five years back, where he could just come in and start taking on the bowlers from the word go.

Former cricketer — Gautam Gambhir

There is no shortage of Remdesivir drug but if anyone is trying to misuse the pandemic situation by black-marketing, then all those will be punished severely.

Karnataka Home Minister — Basavaraj Bommai

FIRST COLUMN

THE NEW REALTY FOR INDIANS

People are acquiring slices of rent-yielding properties in a way that is comparable to investing in a firm's stocks



SONAM CHANDWANI

The pall of gloom over the real estate industry on account of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light several unconventional methods being applied to keep the dreams of property buyers alive, while developers strive to stay afloat. A growing number of Indians are acquiring slices of rent-yielding residential and commercial properties in a way that is comparable to investing in the stocks of a company. Fractional real estate, as the concept is known, allows investors to buy, say, one per cent of a vacation home for a minimum amount and use it whenever they want, while earning rental income, too. While weekend properties are neither essential nor urgent, the outbreak has changed this perception. Such a realty ownership concept has arisen predominantly from the Work-From-Home (WFH) culture and the work-vacation culture, attracting NRIs and domestic buyers alike. Such a property acts like an asset, attracting a plethora of investors, in the end becoming a potential Special Purpose Vehicle-related investment. From the taxation standpoint, the fractional ownership of a property opens up such owners to a plethora of taxable liabilities, when comparing the yearly taxation related costs of such interests, prospective buyers or their counsel/advisors need to be sure of the usage arrangement, location, ownership size, basic amenities and other items.



A unicorn investment refers to a startup avenue/venture, occupying less than \$1 billion of the industry share. Considering the fact that this sort of timeshare arrangement is a novel arena of investment for Indians, the value of such investment could possibly render the whole idea as a potential cash cow for real estate developers adapting to such forms of investment. With the pandemic having rendered the traditional and conventional real estate an under-yielding area of investment in the markets currently, fractional ownership might just pave way for a steady boom in the real estate sector. While fractional ownership may appear to be an inexpensive mode of investment to potential investors, it has its pros and cons. Procedures involving the investment in such ventures could involve detailed due diligences and legal red-tapism. Not paying attention to such procedures could end up putting stressed properties in the hands of lesser advised investors.

Moreover, expenses considering maintenance and management of the property and any such costs could essentially tip the scales against the owners should they not be able to actually utilise the property within their arrangements. Having said that, the benefits accruing out of part ownership of vacation properties, while not accounting monumentally in financial terms, are manifold where it comes to utilisation. Such a property allows the investors to change their workspace surroundings and choose rather inexpensive modes of vacation and even earn some money out of renting it out to other vacationers. Though fractional ownership could lead to a real estate investment boom the sector so greatly yearns for, the legal procedures involved might turn off a certain class of investors. Moreover, a relatively-new arena of investment always ends up taking a lot more time in yielding benefits, even if the time-value of money is rather unaccountable, since the property provides more leisurely than commercial benefits. Timeshare investments, while popular in the West, are considered to be a nascent area of investment, particularly while fractional ownership is considered. However, given the correct legal framework and taxation incentives, the current status of such investment could be elevated to providing the work-vacation culture the stability that the recent short-lived boom is testament to.

(The writer is Managing Partner KS Legal and Associates. The views expressed are personal.)

Time to turn Nocebo to Placebo in India

We must widely propagate the positives of getting inoculated, underplay the negatives and whole-heartedly support the Govt's initiatives towards massive vaccination drives



DEEPIKA BHASKAR



WHILE THE RUSSIAN VACCINE SPUTNIK V HAS BEEN GIVEN THE GO AHEAD AND WILL HIT THE MARKET SOON AFTER SHORT TRIALS HERE, THE CENTRE IS ALSO LOOKING AT FAST APPROVALS FOR VACCINES FROM OTHER NATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY THE WHO FOR EMERGENCY USE. IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME AND THE SHORTAGE WILL BE A THING OF THE PAST. BUT THE BIG QUESTION IS WILL VACCINE HESITANCY, TOO, BE GONE SOON?



Attitudes towards the COVID-19 vaccines have changed overtime and varied greatly. The theory of developing antibodies on being infected has also led to a decrease in the relevance of the vaccine. Infected individuals feel they have developed antibodies and are immunised against the disease, so they do not need a shot. However, the protective abilities of antibodies in sero-surveys is unknown and their effectiveness in preventing reinfection is still to be studied. The belief that the vaccine is rushed and has not been tested properly is another setback.

That some of the scientists have been supporting this belief has also given boost to hesitancy. It is also assumed that the efficacy of the vaccine is being underplayed so that people do not become lax in observing COVID-appropriate behaviour. Another view being expressed is that the immunity after vaccination lasts for only six months, which wrongly implies that the shot is not effective. People also think that if the survival and recovery rate is 99.6 per cent, why even bother getting a jab.

All these supposed opinions and views have stopped people from getting vaccinated. Giving compensation for getting vaccinated has always backfired as people think that they are being paid because there is something to hide. The only groups that have justifiable concerns are the elderly, people with co-morbidities, pregnant women and those with high allergic reactions to vaccines. Also,

there is no vaccine to protect our children, as of now. Though getting vaccinated is a personal choice, the most successful inoculation drives have been built on knowledge exchange, accessibility and successful stories of those getting vaccinated.

Sherita Hill Golden, vice-president, chief diversity officer and a Professor of Medicine at Johns Hopkins Medicine talks of 12 things you need to know in the wake of the current vaccine hesitancy. The facts and insights into making a personal choice to get inoculated include the following: Getting vaccinated can protect you from getting COVID as your body will be ready to fight the Coronavirus if you are exposed to it; the people of colour are especially vulnerable to severe COVID-19 and its risk factors; getting inoculated helps others in the community, more so when people have chronic medical conditions; more vaccinations mean a chance to return to normal after having to experience closures, cancellations and postponements; though the vaccine development was fast, no steps were skipped while testing for safety and efficacy; diversity in vaccine testing helped assess safety and effectiveness; side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are sparse and temporary, mainly limited to a sore arm, mild fever or body aches; it is possible to get the shot despite allergies except if you have severe allergic reactions to vaccines; the vaccine is safe for breastfeeding mothers, though pregnant women

should discuss it with their doctors as the vaccine have not been tested in pregnant women; the jab can give you extra protection, if you already had COVID-19; waiting too long allows the virus to spread in the community, hence, time is of the essence for the vaccine; the pandemic can only be shortened if the vaccine is well-received.

Hence, people have been advised to do their own research from reliable sources and take an informed decision regarding getting vaccinated. Where the issue of the shortage of the vaccine in the country is concerned, the Government is doing all it can to ensure that the needs of the people are met at the earliest. While the Russian vaccine Sputnik V has been given the go ahead and will hit the market soon after short trials here, the Centre is also looking at fast approvals for vaccines from other nations that have been approved by the WHO for emergency use. It is only a matter of time and the shortage will be a thing of the past. But the big question is will vaccine hesitancy, too, be gone soon?

It is time to put resolve into widely propagating the positives of getting vaccinated, underplaying the sparse negatives and whole-heartedly supporting the Government's initiatives towards massive vaccination drives so that the pandemic situation can be controlled, the economic downturn can be lifted and normalcy restored. Its time we turned this nocebo to a placebo and support humanity.

The writer is Registrar, IIT Delhi. The views expressed are personal.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

IF CENTRAL ARMED FORCES ARE ATTACKED THEN SHOTS SHOULD BE FIRED. IT DOES NOT MATTER WHO DIES OR LIVES. —BJP LEADER RAHUL SINHA



HE HAS UNMASKED THE TRUE FACE OF THE BJP. PEOPLE WILL GIVE THEM A BEFITTING REPLY. —TMC SPOKESPERSON KUNAL GHOSH

The Maha Kumbh of COVID and environmental risks

The Govt is not ignorant of the health costs of these events during the ongoing second wave of the outbreak but populist measures are the top priority during elections

The Kumbh Mela was first mentioned in the accounts of Hiuen Tsang, the famous Chinese traveller who visited India in the seventh century. The grand event, with a 2,000-year-old history, commenced this year in January and will continue till the end of April. Currently, at over two lakh new cases, India accounts for one in six of all new COVID infections globally. But these rather grim facts did not deter nearly 13.5 lakh devotees, including the members of the 13 Akharas from taking the holy dip or the *Shahi Snan* on April 13.

The consequences of the ongoing Maha Kumbh upon public health have been devastating, to say the least. In the last 24 hours, Haridwar has reported over 1,000 fresh Corona positive cases. With the Indian Railways running



KOTA SRIRAJ

The writer is an environmental journalist. The views expressed are personal.

25 special trains to ferry the pilgrims across the country, the Maha Kumbh is all set to become a "Maha COVID-19 super-spreader." The situation looks hopeless unless either the event is immediately terminated or social distancing norms are strictly adhered to. But nothing significant seems to have been done by the Government regarding it.

Health risks aside, the Kumbh Mela is also not something that is known for environment friendliness. The Maha Kumbh is held at four locations — Nashik, Haridwar, Prayagraj and Ujjain — on a rotational basis after an interval of 12 years.

While the Kumbh, in general, is celebrated four times over the course of 12 years, with the site of the observance rotating between

four pilgrimage places on the four sacred rivers, namely, at Haridwar on the Ganga, at Ujjain on the Shipra, at Nashik on the Godavari and at Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganga, the Jamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati.

The Nashik Kumbh Mela held in 2015 resulted in 25,000 tonnes of solid waste and faecal sludge that crept into the groundwater table from 33,000 hastily set-up mobile toilets without any effective waste disposal mechanism. It took an international outcry triggered by media coverage and the eventual intervention of the Bombay High Court to clean up the Nashik Kumbh Mela mess and rescue the environment. The event also caused a spike in river pollution making it unfit for bathing and other purposes. The



maximum permissible Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD) for safe bathing is 3.0 milligrams (mg) per litre but it ranged between 3.4-8.5 mg per litre during the event. Meanwhile bacterial coliform ranged between 3,300 and 39,000 Most Probable Number (MPN) per 100 ml while the permissible limit is 500 MPN per 100 ml for human

bathing. The Maha Kumbh at Haridwar, too, is no different either in terms of the colossal health risk it poses or the ecological collateral damage it brings.

In the run-up to the Haridwar Maha Kumbh, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has been working tirelessly to prevent ecological damage and as a part of its efforts, the NMCG has diverted one of the biggest local sewage drains — the Kassawan nullah — to a sewage treatment plant. But it should have been done a year ago. This nullah has emptied its effluents into the Ganga for years.

A recent study by the Doon University on the pollution levels in the Ganga establishes that in the stretch from Rishikesh to Haridwar the river was high on pollutants due to the pilgrim

bathing load and urban waste effluent flow.

The study also revealed that the overall concentration of Polypropylene Copolymer (PPCP), a form of plastic pollutant in the Ganga was found to be up to 1,104.84 nanograms per litre. Further, the presence of chemicals was also found to be high in the river water samples.

The election season, too, symbolised by huge political rallies, coupled with unrestrained religious gatherings are in total defiance of COVID-appropriate behaviour and protocol. Surely the Government is not ignorant of the health costs of these unabated events during the ongoing second wave of the Coronavirus pandemic, but populist measures and appeasement tactics are the top priorities during elections and they seem to score over

environmental and health concerns.

This is not surprising, but what is unfortunately startling is the inaction on the behalf of the judiciary which could have taken a *suo motu* initiative to shorten the duration of the Kumbh Mela, thereby, saving lives and the environment. In the absence of this, the Non-Government Organisations working in the field of environment protection and other individuals could have filed a Public Interest Litigation to this effect, but unfortunately, that also did not happen yet.

It is a classic case of who will bell the cat? Sadly, the reluctance of people to take on what is obviously a communally-sensitive issue will cost the environment and the health and economy of the country dearly. Where are the true nationalists now?

Exports rose to \$13.72 bn during Apr 1-14: Commerce Ministry data

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's exports have increased to USD 13.72 billion during April 1-14 this year on account of healthy growth rate in sectors such as engineering and gems and jewellery, according to the provisional data of the Commerce Ministry. Exports during April 1-14 last year were aggregated at USD 3.59 billion.

In April 2020, the outbound shipments had contracted by a record 60 per cent due to COVID-19 related lockdown. Imports during the period under review swelled to USD 19.93 billion as against USD 6.54 billion during April 1-14 last year, the data showed. The final figures for April 2021 would be released during mid-May by the ministry.

Exports have surged by 60.29 per cent to USD 34.45 billion in March, even as the outbound shipments contracted by 7.26 per cent during the full 2020-21 fiscal to USD 290.63 billion.



Boat raises funds from Qualcomm Ventures

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Consumer tech products brand Boat on Friday said it has received funding from Qualcomm Ventures, the investment arm of Qualcomm Incorporated. While Boat did not disclose the quantum of funding received, it said the investment will support the brand's plans of rolling out new audio and lifestyle products across geographies as well as building up R&D and manufacturing capabilities.

Qualcomm is a world leader in wireless technologies and Boat has a shared vision of building world-class products for India and the world, Boat co-founder Sameer Mehta said in a statement.

"As Boat enters the next phase of growth and innovation, we look forward to building a relationship with Qualcomm to deepen our R&D capabilities and further augment our efforts to manu-



facture products in India. We believe this relationship will contribute to greater technology collaboration," he added.

Boat has clocked a rapid revenue growth, witnessing over 100 per cent over the past several years. In the past year, it doubled its employee strength and built up a local R&D in Bengaluru.

The company also expanded into newer categories like smartwatches, besides launching over 20 new products in the audio category in 2020-21.

In January this year, Boat had announced raising USD 100 million (about Rs 731.6 crore) in funding from an affiliate of Warburg Pincus, a global private equity firm.

Senators to Biden: Waive vax intellectual property rules

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Ten liberal senators are urging President Joe Biden to back India and South Africa's appeal to the World Trade Organisation to temporarily relax intellectual property rules so coronavirus vaccines can be manufactured by nations that are struggling to inoculate their populations.

The lawmakers, in a letter delivered to the White House on Thursday evening, wrote that Biden should "prioritize people over pharmaceutical company profits" and support the temporary waiver of the rules. A waiver could pave the way for generic or other manufacturers to make more vaccines.

The letter was led by independent Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, along with Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin and Sherrod Brown of Ohio.



Democratic Sens. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, Chris Murphy of Connecticut, Edward Markey of Massachusetts, Jeff Merkley of Oregon, Chris Van Hollen of Maryland and Raphael Warnock of Georgia also signed the letter.

"Simply put, we must make vaccines, testing, and treatments accessible everywhere if we are going to crush the virus anywhere," the lawmakers say in the letter, which was obtained by The Associated Press. More than 100 nations support a temporary waiver,

which could help vaccine manufacturing ramp up in poorer countries that are struggling to acquire vaccine supplies. The Biden administration has said it is studying the issue.

Opponents, including pharmaceutical companies, worry that it would set dangerous precedent in allowing scientists around the globe to copy American and European companies' research — some of which was funded by the US government — long before patents expire. The Trump administration had opposed calls for the waiver.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment on the lawmakers' letter.

The lawmakers' appeal to Biden came after a group of 170 former world leaders and Nobel laureates earlier this week sent a similar letter to Biden urging him to support a temporary waiver of the WTO's intellectual property rules.

Maruti hikes prices by up to Rs 22,500



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Friday said it has hiked prices of most of its models by up to Rs 22,500 with immediate effect to partially offset the impact of the rise in input costs.

Barring Celerio and Swift, all the models of the company will be covered under the price increase exercise.

"The company is increasing the price for select models owing to increase in various input costs," the auto major said in a regulatory filing.

The weighted average price increase in ex-showroom

L&T receives multiple orders across business segments

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Friday said its construction arm has received multiple orders across business segments in the domestic and international market.

The company did not provide the value of the contracts but said the orders fall under the "significant" category, which ranges between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 2,500 crore according to the classification of contracts.

"The construction arm of L&T has secured orders from prestigious clients for its various businesses," L&T said in a regulatory filing.

The company said its power transmission and distribution business has won orders to design and construct two 132/11kV substations in Dubai, UAE.

MONEY MATTERS

Escorts Heart Institute gets SEBI notice in funds diversion case



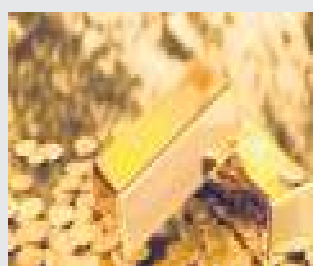
Fortis Healthcare on Friday said its subsidiary, Escorts Heart Institute and Research Center Ltd, has received a notice from capital markets regulator SEBI in the matter related to the alleged diversion of funds from the company by its erstwhile promoters. SEBI has issued a notice under

Transporters' body seeks more reduction fuel prices



Transporters' body AIMTC on Friday termed the recent 14-16 paise per litre cut in petrol and diesel prices across major cities as "ostentatious", and said there is still a room to reduction

Gold, silver marginally up



Gold prices rose marginally by Rs 9 to Rs 46,431 per 10 gram in the national capital on Friday, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 46,422 per 10 gram. Silver also gained Rs 53 to Rs 67,460 per kg from Rs 67,407 per kg in the previous

EU-UK talks over Brexit fail to reach breakthrough



Top European Union and British officials failed to get a breakthrough at talks on Northern Ireland trade rules and said Friday that contact would continue over the coming weeks. The dinner meeting late Thursday between European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic and U.K. Brexit minister David Frost took place a month after the EU started legal action against its former member country, arguing that the UK had not respected the conditions of the Brexit agreement and violated international law. A British statement said that "a number of difficult issues remained and it was important to continue to discuss them." Frost said that "there should be intensified contacts at all levels in the coming weeks." The two sides are trying to find common ground on trade rules in Northern Ireland, where Britain's exit from the EU has unsettled a delicate political balance.

China's economic growth surges to 18.3 per cent

PNS ■ BEIJING

China's economic growth surged to 18.3 per cent over a year ago in the first quarter of 2021 after factory and consumer activity returned largely to normal following the coronavirus pandemic.

The figures reported Friday were magnified by comparison with early 2020, when the world's second-largest economy fell into its deepest contraction in decades.

Manufacturing, auto sales and other consumer activity have revived to above pre-pandemic levels since the ruling Communist Party declared victory over the coronavirus last March and allowed factories and stores to reopen.

The economy "delivered a stable performance with a consolidated foundation and good momentum of growth," the NSB said in a report.

The outside jump in the headline number was in line



with expectations by forecasters due to the low basis for comparison in early 2020.

Some warn that despite China's impressive recent performance, a recovery still is uncertain because global demand is weak as some governments reimpose anti-disease curbs that disrupt business and trade.

The economy shrank by 6.8 per cent in the first quarter of last year as the ruling Communist Party took the then-unprecedented step of closing most factories, shops

'Operating Pune plant as per norms'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors on Friday said it is operating its Pune-based manufacturing facility with a limited number of employees as per the guidelines issued by the Maharashtra government amid surge in Covid cases.

Tata Motors rolls out models like Nexon, Harrier, Altroz and Safari from the Pune plant.

"The company is running Pune plant in strict compliance with the guidelines mentioned in the Break the Chain order of the Maharashtra government. A limited number of employees are attending duties adhering to all safety protocols, distancing norms and hygiene standards," Tata Motors said in a statement.

Wipro shares jump 10% after Q4 earnings

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Wipro zoomed nearly 10 per cent in morning trade on Friday after the company posted a 27.7 per cent jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,972 crore for the March 2021 quarter, and exuded confidence of sustaining strong growth momentum in the coming quarters. The stock jumped 9.51 per cent to Rs 472 -- its 52-week high -- on the BSE. At the NSE, it rallied 9.67 per cent to Rs 472.35 -- its one-year high. The results were announced after market hours on Thursday.

Wipro had registered a net profit (attributable to equity holders) of Rs 2,326.1 crore in the year-ago period, as per Indian Accounting Standards (Ind-AS).

Its revenue from operations rose by 3.4 per cent to Rs 16,245.4 crore in the reported quarter, from Rs 15,711 crore in the same period last fiscal.



WIMWIsure conducts 2L inspections remotely in FY21; turns profitable

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

WIMWIsure, AI-enabled insurance service platform for on-demand inspection of insurable assets, on Friday said the company conducted over 2 lakh virtual inspections of passenger and commercial vehicles through its on-demand artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled video inspection platform in the financial year ended March 2021 and also turned profitable during the year.

The Indian motor insurance marketplace has noted a clear shift towards remote "Do-It-Yourself" checks and inspection-as-a-service because of COVID-19 which has necessitated moving away from

physical vehicle inspections, WIMWIsure said in a release.

"During the lockdown, Insurtech WIMWIsure has conducted more than 2 lakh virtual inspections for passenger and commercial vehicles through its on-demand artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled video inspection platform in the financial year 2020-21," it said. The nearly four-year-old company said it saw the bulk of its over 3.5 lakh inspections till date during the lockdown, witnessing strong demand from tier-II and III cities for mid-range SUVs, sedans and hatchbacks.

'Covid 2nd wave poses risk to recovery'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The spike in coronavirus cases poses a risk to economic recovery, and the GDP is unlikely to achieve the earlier projected 3 per cent growth for March quarter 2020-21, Wall Street brokerage Bank of America Securities said on Friday.

Noting that a month-long nationwide lockdown can shave off 100-200 basis points off the GDP, the brokerage said growth is still weak, amplified by the steep fall in key economic activity indicators and the anaemic loan growth, and the surging pandemic cases is only increasing the worries on the growth front.



However, the report by BofA Securities did not offer a likely GDP number for the March quarter 2020-21.

The seven-component BofA India activity indicator slowed to 1 per cent in February from 1.3 per cent in January, the report said, as 4 of the 7 constituents of the India activity index slowed in February over the previous month.

The report also pointed out that this poses risks to their 3 per cent real GVA growth forecast for the March quarter. The index had first time in 2020-21 turned positive in

December 2020 after declining for nine straight months.

Spike in pandemic cases poses a rising risk to recovery. "We estimate that a month of national lockdown costs 100-200 bps of GDP," the report warned.

The pandemic caseload in India has been surging hitting new records everyday for the past fortnight. The latest official number puts the daily infections at 2.17 lakh in the past 24 hours and 1,185 deaths -- both are the highest in the world and more than the combined numbers of the second and the third most affected countries -- Brazil and the US.

KARTIK AARYAN REPLACED IN *DOSTANA 2*; KARAN DECIDES TO NEVER WORK WITH HIM?

There were reports that Kartik Aaryan will no longer be a part of Karan Johar's *Dostana 2*. The movie was announced in 2019 but the shoot had to be delayed due to the pandemic. While no one officially confirmed the news, a trade source has announced that the actor has been replaced from the movie and that Dharma will no longer work with Kartik Aaryan in the future. The reason stated behind this decision is a fallout between Karan Johar and Kartik Aaryan. Along with the creative differences, it has also been reported that Janhvi Kapoor and Kartik have had a fallout.

The actor initially had problems with his dates and schedule, later on, he started having creative issues. It was earlier reported that Kartik was replaced from the project for dilly-dallying the shoot for months now.

He decided to first wrap up Ram Madhvani's film *Dhamaka* and that annoyed Karan. A source told us, "For the longest time, Kartik gave a genuine reason of the Covid 19 pandemic to not start shoot. He wanted to ensure safety so Karan didn't push him much. But when he shot for *Dhamaka*, Karan was upset. They had an indoor meeting where Karan expressed his disap-

pointment." Kartik later did the unthinkable and that led to major fallout with Karan Johar. "Kartik got upset with the banner when they gave Shashank Khaitan's *Yoddha* to Shahid Kapoor. Although Shahid soon quit, they never approached Kartik for the role anyway. Also, since Kartik's dates were not available for *Dostana 2*, Karan decided to go ahead and start *Mr. Lele* with Vicky Kaushal and Janhvi Kapoor from April. The moment Kartik got to know about this development; he informed the production house that the only dates available for *Dostana 2* this year will be April onwards.

Karan understood what Kartik was doing and quickly reprimanded him for the same. He was genuinely upset with Kartik as Janhvi had to pick between *Dostana 2* and *Mr. Lele*. The last we heard, Karan and Kartik are not speaking a word



to each other." Another source said, "The reason for Kartik Aaryan to not continue with the film as stated by him is the creative differences after one and a half years and completing over 20 days of the shoot. This has never happened in the history of Dharma where an actor has walked out of the film for creative issues. Dharma has decided not to work with him in the future."

Karan Johar has decided to replace Kartik and not work with him in the future having enough of his tantrums. The source further informed, "Dharma is such a prestigious banner and KJo is reputed for launching careers – but never at the cost of a film's future and the livelihoods of its cast and crew." There have been no reports as to who will step in for Kartik Aaryan's role in *Dostana 2*.

Ajay Devgn, Siddharth Roy Kapur to produce *Gobar!*



mon man," says Kapur. He adds: "What makes the film entertaining and unique is that it is a situational comedy that sheds light on the inner workings of power. To be collaborating with Ajay, someone I have always respected for his creative choices, and his team at Ajay Devgn Films on bringing this film to life is very exciting."

Writer-director Shekhawat says that the film has been written keeping in mind true events.

"*Gobar!* is a film that will take viewers back to the charming days of the nineties and the simple life of small-town living. I wrote this story keeping in mind a few true events that unravelled a gamut of issues, the centre of which is a vet whose love for his cows and animals supersedes everything," says Shekhawat.

"I'm grateful and happy that two esteemed producers like Ajay and Sid showed faith in my vision and offered a sizable canvas to the storyline. Quality cinema has come from both production houses, and I'm sure that the treatment of my directorial will be no different. As a filmmaker, I'm absolutely thrilled!" he says.

Produced under the banners Ajay Devgn Films and Roy Kapur Films, the film will go on floors at the end of the year. The casting of the film is underway.



Shibani Bedi on why being content creator doesn't guarantee films

Shibani Bedi, who is known widely as Instagram's Prabha Didi, was recently seen in

the feature film *Flight*. The online sensation, who is trying to carve her space in Bollywood, says having lakhs of followers on social

media does not automatically guarantee film roles. "One presumes that one's presence online helps to get roles but I have realised that as far as Bollywood or acting is concerned, all bets are off. No rules apply. If that had to happen then all influencers with one or two billion following would become Shah Rukh Khan or Kareena Kapoor," she told a news agency. The Delhi-based actress adds: "I think there is a clear demarcation in the acting world, where nobody is impressed by

your presence online. You have to prove your mettle and hustle in the right direction, so that you are considered an actor more than a YouTuber or an Instagram person." "I don't know what particularly works for people to get into OTT platforms and I know that if you are a good actor and you crack an audition, your online presence helps. Channels narrow down to taking you as opposed to a social media celebrity, but as I said there are no rules, sometimes they actually

prefer not taking popular faces as long as you are a good actor," says Shibani, who has been seen in films like *No One Killed Jessica* and *Rang De Basanti*. "Another thing is that OTT doesn't have big budgets, so if they are getting a big celebrity, everyone else who they want should be within a budget range, which again becomes one of the markers to pick popular faces," the actress told the news agency. Shibani is currently working on her next yet-to-be-announced project.

actor-producer Ajay Devgn has announced his new production, a comic drama named *Gobar!* along with Siddharth Roy Kapur.

The film is to be directed by ad-filmmaker Sabal Shekhawat, who has also penned the script along with Sambhit Mishra.

The film's story is about a veterinary doctor who discovers a tangled web of corruption in his state hospital. Ajay feels people will love the story.

"The story of *Gobar!* is at once unique, relatable, and incredibly funny, as well as gripping and entertaining to the point that I'm confident it will compel people to go to the

theatres," he says.

"We are very clear about the impact we want to make. We want viewers to laugh, relax, perhaps think a little bit and be entertained. The standard that Siddharth observes in content creation and filmmaking makes this collaboration very exciting for us," the actor-filmmaker adds.

Kapur says that the film centres around the journey of a common man and comes with a simple message.

"*Gobar!* is a story that chronicles the seemingly pointless but ultimately heroic journey of a simple citizen who deals with corruption in a way that will bring on many laughs, much adventure, and ultimately a simple message about the power of the com-

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



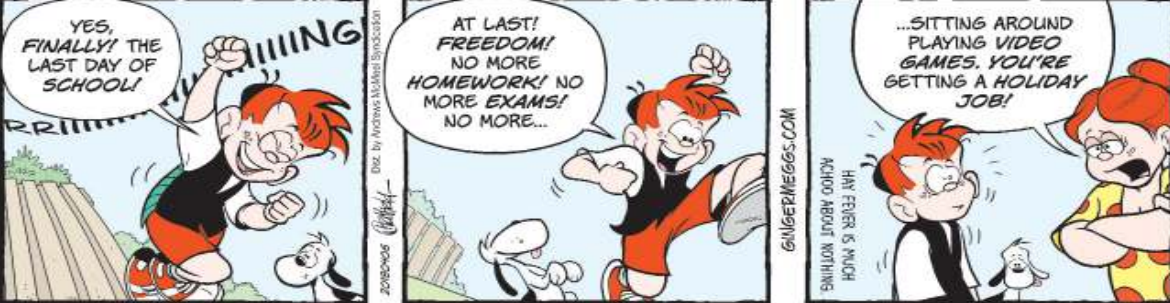
GARFIELD



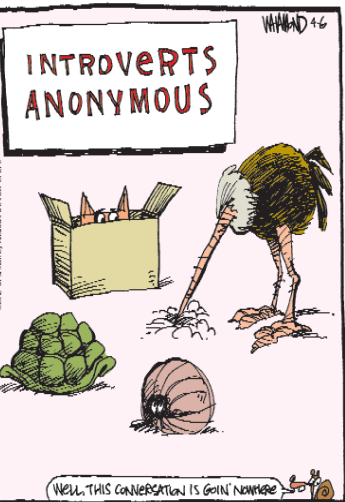
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



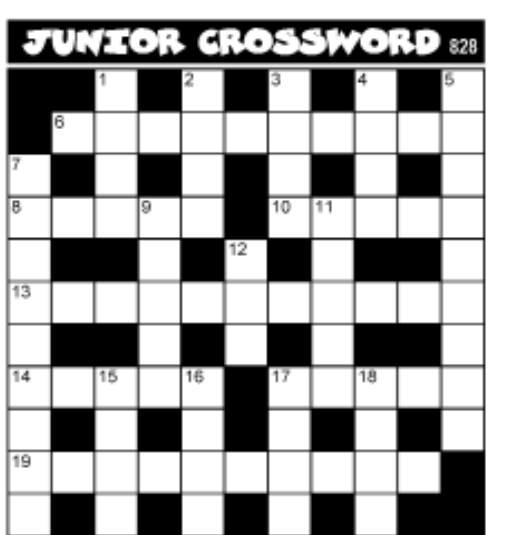
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 6 A flying machine
- 8 Light a fire with this
- 10 Our planet
- 13 In a coma
- 14 A feeling of rage
- 17 Less
- 19 Carrying on

DOWN

- 1 Remaining
- 2 Wealthy
- 3 Sleep lightly
- 4 Mix with a spoon
- 5 A large group of musicians
- 7 An emergency vehicle
- 9 Nearby

- 11 Living
- 12 Donkey
- 15 Firearms
- 16 Wet weather
- 17 The number in a quartet
- 18 A drink made from grape juice



SUDOKU

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

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

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.

Born in Lucknow, educated in Delhi, Calcutta and Singapore, he landed in Hyderabad, and absolutely loves how his life panned out. In a candid interview, IT Secretary Jayesh Ranjan talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about his life in Hyderabad, what he loves most about the city, how it has been growing, and more.



'SOCIAL HIERARCHY IS LOW, LIVELIHOOD HIGH IN HYDERABAD'

say that more than half of my life has been spent in Hyderabad. The city is extremely supportive of my endeavours! Besides toiling for the government, I am also associated with a number of activities including social development projects, sports, arts and culture, literature, etc. In each of these, the city has embraced me to extents I can't imagine," he shares.

Jayesh Ranjan regards this city's culture as very valuable. He has shared experiences of it as a resident, he views the city as a patchwork of super cultures. The Telugu language used here can be variations of the many languages spoken here and what's even more special about it is that the ethnic neighborhoods thrive on it! "I am from Lucknow. Coming to Hyderabad for the first time, I was more concerned and apprehensive about the cultural differences, but to my pleasant surprise, I found that Hyderabad had a very syncretic culture which was very reassuring. The culture of food that exists in the city is quite commendable. What I appreciate the most about this city as compared to the other three other cities I have lived earlier, is that it is a very liveable city. Social hierarchies are low, livelihood opportunities are aplenty, the city is affordable and there is something of interest for everyone," he adds.

He holds a Masters Degree in Psychology from the Delhi University, a degree in



Business Management from the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and a Masters in Public Management from Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. But little did he know he'd end up in the neighborhoods of a Nawabi city serving the state government. The iconic visual scenes of Hyderabad made him realise the symbolic identity of the city! The one thing that comes to his mind when he thinks of Hyderabad is the Nizams. The fascinating lifestyle led by the Nizams is what leaves the dignitary in awe of it! From their palaces touching the sky, to the fact that they own one of the most precious diamonds in the world and stories about all the fancy cars they owned – there is a lot Jayesh has heard about the opulence and the luxurious lifestyle of the Nizams.

Sharing one of his fondest memories in the city, he reminisces, "I enjoy my early morning walk everyday at the KBR Park! Apart from imbibing the best of nature

from closed quarters, it also gives me a chance to plan for my entire day. Although, I would definitely prefer a more civic engagement from the common people in all the vital matters that concern everyone."

Talking elaborately about his association with the Telangana government and his distinct role in the progression of the IT industry, he gives a detailed account of it saying, "I look after the subjects of IT and industries in Telangana government and provide close support to our Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao. Both these subjects have done exceedingly well in the last six years, and I feel proud of the contribution that we have made. IT is one sector that has flourished and thrived after the new state of Telangana has come into being. In our entire country, Hyderabad has recorded the best annual growth in terms of IT turnover and number of new jobs created year after year."

With the many unspoken advancements of the economy vitality and dynamism, Jayesh Ranjan wholeheartedly wants to continue to settle here post his services because the very characteristics of people to assimilate with others is seemingly very beautiful to see for him.

While his close relatives are so awestruck about the Falaknuma Palace here, the Golconda Fort and Charminar continue to remain their perennial favourites!

Whether you're trying to treat your loved ones after dinner or you want to impress your friends on social media, you can't afford to go wrong with a pretty cake. Here are top 10 pastry tools every home-baker should have

Home-made pastries are becoming a new trend in India. It has become a form of expression, a stress relief exercise and most importantly a display of skills. As a beginner, whether you're trying to treat your loved ones after dinner or you want to impress your friends on social media, you can't afford to go wrong with a pretty cake.

Before you decide to go into a kitchen, start with the list of baking tools you must have. We'll help you set up a baking kit for beginners. For those who already own these tools, the list may provide motivation that you need to prepare the yummiest pastries or cakes. Building your essential baking toolbox starts here:

Pastry brush

This tool is one of the most important and has uses more than you can realise. It can be used to grease a pan before pouring cake in it, to coat dough with melted butter or egg wash or to paint milk on the top of pie crust. This is a must-have.

Measuring cups

Baking is all about accuracy, so having a full set of measuring cups and spoons is a must. One type of cup for measuring isn't enough for baking. You will need both dry and wet measuring cups to precisely measure all the ingredients you're



putting in your recipe. Most measuring spoons sets have a tablespoon, ½ teaspoon, and ¼ teaspoon, while most measuring cups come in sets with ½ cup, ⅓ cup and ¼ cup.

Whisk

Whisk is used to beat together a few eggs, but it is used for other things too. In particular, it's one of the best to thoroughly mix various ingredients but it is also great for stirring together a homemade custard.

Baking pan

From flat baking trays for cookies and loaf tins for breads and loaf cakes to square tins for brownies and round tins for classic sponge cake, the baking pans come in different sizes and shapes. Non-stick aluminum baking pan is better than a glass one.

While glass one looks more stylish and presentable, aluminum has high heat conductivity so that you cook evenly.

Stand mixer

An electric stand mixer is expensive, but once you use it, you'll wonder how did you ever manage without it, especially when you make

things like marshmallows, they require beating for 10 or more minutes.

It makes your cooking easier, takes off the physical load and saves a lot of time. Most importantly, it gives a better result in the final product.

Icing spatula

It is needed to evenly spread the cream all over the cake. It comes in different sizes and is needed as per the size/height of the cake. If you don't have an icing spatula, you can use the back, straight edge of a large knife to smooth your butter cream and then clean up the bottom of your cake plate with a paper towel.

Next, take a freezer bag and fill it with your icing. Push the icing into one corner and twist the bag.

Metal bowls

Baking often necessitates frostings, caramels, and creams, which can be finicky if they're not kept at a steady temperature, are too warm. A frosting might not whip properly, for example, if ingredients are too warm. Metal bowls are really helpful as they are a better conductor of heat than glass.

Serrated knife

This is the best knife for cutting a cake in half or thirds. It will help maintain a smooth, precise cut that's perfect for when you want to add a flavourful layer of fruit jam or fluffy buttercream to a pastry or a birthday cake.

Pastry decorating kit

If you want to decorate your pastries with rose petals or a basketweave to the top, then you'll need some pastry decorating tools. This kit contains six different shaped tips and two reusable nylon bags, which are more eco-friendly than disposable plastic bags because they can be used over and over again.

Gel-based food dye

Gel-based food dye is used to create vibrant pastries and cakes. You should avoid water-based dyes found in little tubes at the supermarket as these dyes are so weak they'll produce pastels in place of bold, saturated ones.

Natural dye is great too, but don't expect the same results. (The list is shared by top chefs from the Academy of Pastry & Culinary Arts.)

Hyderabad's 17-year-old teenager, Trisha not only conceptualises one of the earliest thrift stores in South India but also runs it successfully. The gen Z entrepreneur asks people to shop clothes sustainably for a price that will not leave a hole in the pocket.

When the Coronavirus pandemic resulted in lockdown, quarantine and shutting down of schools, what would a 17-year-old girl have done? Sit back, enjoy the unexpected holidays and chill? But Trisha Reddy, an 11th grader girl then (currently in 12th grade) studying at Oakridge International School in the city conceptualised and founded 'ThriftChicByTrish', an online thrift store. Three months into it, she shares her success as one of the earliest entrants into online thrifting business.

"With the increased conversation about repurposing pre-loved fashion and sustainability, thrift stores are growing in popularity particularly those with an online presence," says Trisha Reddy.

"ThriftChicByTrish is an age-old practice in India. In the days of my parents' childhood, unused clothes were always given to the younger siblings in the family. It was a well-accepted practice and nobody minded it. But,



somehow the present generation lost the practice. I wanted to revive that age-old practice very unique to our country but add a business element to it. Thus my online thrifting store 'ThriftChicByTrish' was conceived on Instagram," she informs. So, she became a CoronaStudentPreneur. Her thrift store that started just a few months ago in January, currently has almost 1000 followers.

She began with a sum of Rs 35,000/- loaned by her parents. The investment has gone basically into the packaging material for the store, she shares. "I have done a business of INR 70,000/-, having sold 75 pieces of garments out of 87 on display. Most of those clothes are mine and of a few of the people I know," Trisha adds.

ThriftChicByTrish uses Instagram as a platform and offers carefully curated pre-loved, trendy, affordable,

GIVING LIFE TO pre-loved clothes



pre-owned clothing pieces for sale on a particular day of the week and at a given time that are just a phone click away, and encourages

thrifting to become more than just a passing trend, a trend here to stay.

The good thing about thrifting is giving life to

clothes lying unused in wardrobes. It is an online sale of pre-used items at discounted prices. Thrifting is a new way of selling high-

end clothing well below retail prices.

When asked about her inspiration for the idea she said "Since I've always had a



passion to start something of my own in the field of fashion and have already gained an insight into it through blogging, I thought why not combine my love for fashion, contemporary and high street trends and turn it into a business that enables a sustainable life? So, I introduced 'ThriftChicByTrish.' "The new trend in the fashion industry today is 'Sustainable Fashion'. Socially conscious and responsible fashion is more important today than ever before. Eco-friendly fashion, ethical clothing, affordable luxury, clothing rental, buying second-hand clothing are the trends the industry is witnessing," says entrepreneur Trisha.

"I curated the collection of clothes I sell, style them for the picture and sport as a model wearing those clothes to showcase them to customers," Trisha explains how a thrift store works. "I then promote them through my store on Instagram. If there is any defect on the clothes it is mentioned in

the description. I have customers from Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai but most of them are from Hyderabad. My sister Anoushka Reddy helps me with the photography aspect and conceptualising the brand name, logo, packaging etc. All my pictures are taken on either an Android Samsung phone or an iPhone-11."

Currently, it carries only female clothes. Soon she is planning to add male clothing as well as Indian wear. She doesn't rule out expanding further.

Naturally, people are more inclined to give their old clothes a second life. Price is now an additional incentive for them to give clothes to thrifting stores, says the teenage entrepreneur. "No one expects any money for the discarded clothes. But, my venture adds monetisation, which is now encouraging more and more people to explore this."

Trisha is confident of doing well, she wants to go slow but leave her mark.

NEW BEE FARNAZ ON SHOOTING AMIDST PANDEMIC

With increasing Covid cases in the country, Maharashtra government has already announced further restrictions on public movement in the state resulting in film and TV shoots coming to a halt. Much like many other industries, this is the second time showbiz will be going through a major setback. Farnaz Shetty, who will be making her Tollywood debut with *Indu Vadana*, is anxious too but trying to stay positive.

Directed by MSR, story, and screenplay by Satish Aketi, the film is produced by Madhavi Adurti along with Giridhar.

"I just finished my second schedule of the film in Hyderabad. We started facing complications in the last few days but somehow managed to finish our work.

Now only the climax part is left to be shot. I just hope we finish shooting that portion soon otherwise everything would go for a toss," Shetty sounds worried.

"The pandemic is far from over and those who thought 'corona is gone' and flouted norms should now learn their les-



son hard", added the actor.

Farnaz shared a pic with a bridge in the background captioned: "We Build too many walls, and not enough bridges ?? #induvadana"

The actress urges everyone to follow Covid protocol.

"You have to understand the gravity of the situation and act accordingly. We have to follow all protocols to break the chain. Panicking is not the solution. I just hope this pandemic comes to a full stop. We need to go back to our normal lives soon. The entertainment industry is facing a cri-

sis of this sort for the first time. 2020 shouldn't get repeated, we must work towards that. Everyone should get vaccinated at the earliest," she adds.

Farnaz is known for shows such as *Laal Ishq*, *Kahaan Hum Kahaan Tum* and *Siddhi Vinayak*.

Aditi voices against street harassment

This International Anti-Street Harassment Week, Aditi Rao Hydari, proudly raises her voice against street harassment. Via a social media post on her official Instagram page, Aditi asked her followers to take the training and StandUp Against Street Harassment. In her video, Aditi shares, "StandUp is a program that is designed towards creating awareness and imparting training to combat street harassment. Sadly, street harassment is something that we all have been through, whether as bystanders or as victims and I know that it makes me very angry, it makes me feel very helpless and I am sure it does that to you as well. So, recently I went through this training program and I was lucky to

have this opportunity. It is called the Stand-Up 5 D's training created by L'Oréal Paris in partnership with Hollaback! Internationally and Breakthrough in India. It has really opened my eyes and showed me how easy it is and how we have such effective tools so readily available to us — which is basically our own mind — our presence of mind. So that we can effectively and confidently combat street harassment. I would really recommend that each one of us goes through this training program. It is simple, effective, it builds so much confidence and it gives us an amazing solution to help someone and to help ourselves. So spread the word, tell your friends, tell everyone. Because I think this one is essential. Let us help combat street harassment effectively."

NTR AS AN INNOCENT MAN FOR KORATALA'S NEXT?



It is all over the internet that Young Tiger Jr NTR and Koratala Siva is coming together once again for a big-budget movie, NTR 30, after

successful venture *Janatha Garage*, a message-oriented film.

According to the latest buzz, in this new film, NTR will be seen playing an innocent, naïve man, who comes to the city from the Himalayas, trying to bring change in the society for a good cause. The actor will be seen in a never-before avatar which will surely please fans.

This yet-to-be-titled film will be presented by Nandamuri Kalyan Ram. Kosaraju Harikrishna of NTR Arts and Mikkilineni Sudhakar of Yuvasudha Arts will be co-bankrolling this big-budget pan-India project.

Koratala Siva is currently busy with *Acharya* starring Chiranjeevi and Ram Charan in the lead roles which is on the verge of the completion whereas Tarak is working with SS Rajamouli for a pan-ndian film *RRR*, which will be released on October 13.

tollywood 'Busy exploring shades of myself'

Kriti Sanon is the busiest bee of tinsel town currently with more than six films in her kitty. What makes these even more interesting is the range of her films in terms of their genres. From a horror-comedy to an action film, the actor will be seen leading multiple genre films.

Talking about having so many different genres in her lineup the Adipurush girl says, "My work is so exciting because no set, no film is like the other. Doing such varied genres is helping me explore different shades of myself as an actor."

She adds, "From *Bhediya* being a horror-comedy to action in *Ganpath*, mythology in *Adipurush*, and an entertainer

like *Bachchan Pandey*, I have many genres that I am working on right now, which makes all the work even more exciting and interesting. It does also keep me on my toes."

Sanon has a bag of big-budget films in her lineup for which she has been shooting non-stop for a while with all safety measures being taken as per government guidelines. She has been shooting in Arunachal Pradesh for *Bhediya* with Varun Dhawan, which is a horror-comedy.

She will be seen playing Sita in Om Raut's mythological drama *Adipurush* with Prabhas. She has also signed an entertainer film *Bachchan Pandey* with Akshay Kumar and the drama — *Mimi*, which will star her as the solo lead.



Vishwak Sen's next a love entertainer

Hit actor Vishwak Sen's upcoming film's makers announced his seventh film's title as *Ashoka Vanamlo Arjuna Kalyanam* on Twitter. Going by the film's poster, the look and name of it reveal that it could be of a romantic genre.

From *Vellipomakey* to *Paagal*, the young star has mostly done mass action genres and this could be his first out and out love entertainer.

This new film of Vishwak had its pooja muhurtham on Friday. Vidya Sagar Chinta will be directing the movie which is touted to be an emotional drama. Ravi Kiran has penned the story. Vishwak, it is being said, will undergo a slight makeover for this film and sport a new look.

To be produced by Bapineedu and Sudheer Eedara under SVCC Digital banner, *Ashoka Vanamlo Arjuna Kalyanam* will be presented by noted producer BVSN Prasad.

Hit actor Vishwak Sen's upcoming film's makers announced his seventh film's title as *Ashoka Vanamlo Arjuna Kalyanam*. The film, whose story was penned by Ravi kiran, will be helmed by Vidya Sagar Chinta. Touted to be an emotional drama, the film will be produced by Sudheer Eedara.

