

**OPINION 6**  
UPPER HOUSE: TO BE, OR NOT TO BE?

**WORLD 8**  
MYANMAR ANTI-COUP PROTESTERS KEEP PRESSURE ON JUNTA

**SPORT 12**  
WINDIES BEAT B'DESH IN 2ND TEST, WIN SERIES

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AJAY BEGINS SHOOT FOR MAIDAAN 10 VIVACITY

**CAPSULE**

**14 KILLED AS MINI BUS HITS LORRY IN KURNOOL**

**Kurnool:** Fourteen people, including eight women and a child, were killed and four others injured when a mini bus collided with a lorry in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh early on Sunday.

**WON'T LET GOVT SIT IN PEACE, SAYS TIKAIT**

**Karnal:** Upping the ante against the Government, Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Sunday said the farmers won't let it sit in peace till their demands are met.

**DELHI REPORTS 150 COVID CASES, 2 DEATHS**

**New Delhi:** Delhi recorded 150 fresh Covid-19 cases and two deaths on Sunday, even as the positivity rate stood at 0.26 per cent, authorities said here. No death related to the disease was recorded in the national capital on Saturday, the second time in February when the single-day fatality count was nil.

**MARKETS**

SENSEX	51,544.30	(+12.78)
NIFTY	15,163.30	(-10.00)
GOLD	47,292.00	(+216.00)
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## Terror plot on Pulwama anniv foiled

### 6.5 kg IED recovered from arrested nursing student in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A sinister plot to bleed Jammu on the occasion of second anniversary of "ghastly" Pulwama terror attack was foiled by the alert jawans of Jammu & Kashmir Police after they recovered 6.5 kg explosives from a Kashmir-based nursing college student near Jammu bus stand late on Saturday evening.

The IED was to be used for triggering a blast at any one of the major installations in Jammu, including its famous Raghunath Mandir, railway station, bus stand and jewellery market located in the walled city area of Lakhdatta Bazar.

Nursing college student from Pulwama, currently studying in Chandigarh, was directed by the Pakistan-based handlers of Al-Badr terror outfit to execute the terror plot.

In a separate development, a consignment of weapons was also recovered from Samba. The weapons could have been airdropped in the area using Pakistani drones. Meanwhile, J&K DGP Dilbagh Singh also made a major revelation on Sunday that terrorist commanders in Kashmir are smuggling weapons from Bihar with the help of their over ground workers network to carry out operations in the region.

He confirmed that chief commander of Lashkar-e-



Jammu & Kashmir Police personnel display arms and ammunition recovered from a bus stand in Jammu on Sunday PTI

Mustafa, a front organisation of Jaish-e-Mohammad, had conducted a recce of the office of NSA Ajit Doval and had also dispatched the video footage to his handler Ilyas doctor of JeM to plan a major terror strike in New Delhi.

Addressing a joint Press conference here in the district police lines in Jammu, Inspector General of Police, Jammu range Mukesh Singh said they have been on high alert for the last three days as there were inputs of

Pulwama attack terrorist groups may carry out some major attack in Jammu city. He said based on these inputs checking points were established at critical points and on Saturday night a person named Suhail was found roaming suspiciously in the area.

"He was carrying a bag. On being questioned and checking of the bag around 6.5 kg IED was recovered which was not active. During questioning he said he was a student of nursing college and was studying in Chandigarh. He was tasked by

Al-Badr handlers in Pakistan to place this IED at places," he said.

Singh said on further questioning Suhail also revealed that after placing the IED he was supposed to take a flight to Srinagar and he was to be received by a high ranking over ground worker of Al-Badr, Athar Shakeel Khan at Srinagar.

"After meeting Athar he was supposed to become an active militant. This was his planning. Another person in Chandigarh was also in the

know-how of this planning. He has also been picked up from Chandigarh and has been identified as Qazi Waseem and there is another person Abid Nabi associated with this outfit. He has also been arrested," he said. The IG said by his arrest and by the recovery of this IED a major terror attack has been averted.

Addressing mediapersons on the occasion, Director General of Jammu & Kashmir Police Dilbagh Singh said police carried out two major successful operations and arrested two chief commanders of The Resistance Front (TRF) and Lashkar-e-Mustafa in the last one week from different areas of Jammu.

He said the TRF is being run by Lashkar-e-Tayyeba while the terror outfit Lashkar-e-Mustafa is being run by Jaish-e-Mohammad from across the border to carry out terror activities not only in Jammu & Kashmir but in some other parts of the country including Delhi. "Lashkar-e-Mustafa came into being recently in August last year," he said.

Singh said the chief commander of Lashkar-e-Mustafa, Hidayatullah Malik, who was leading this outfit and was active from the last few months, was arrested by the police from Kunjwani area of Jammu. He said Hidayatullah was working as an OGW for a long time and

later became active to carry out terror activities sponsored by Jaish-e-Mohammad. He said Malik was tasked to expand the terror base of the outfit from the South Kashmir areas to Jammu region. Singh said, "Hidayatullah had set up a network of OGWs to ferry arms consignment arriving from across the border to Kashmir Valley. In addition, he was also in touch with terror associates in Bihar from where he was smuggling pistols. So far seven pistols have reached Kashmir via Chapra in Bihar."

"Hidayatullah had also set up a network of Kashmiri students studying in different cities across Punjab and was using them to ferry these consignments to Kashmir," he said.

Referring to the modus operandi of terror outfits using tunnels, the DGP said during his interrogation Malik had also revealed that one of the active terrorist Ashiq Nengroo, who used to ferry infiltrators from Jammu to Kashmir Valley via road link, himself used the tunnel route to return to Pakistan along with his family.

He said now Ashiq Nengroo is working as an active handler and organising logistics support for terrorists across Jammu & Kashmir. During 2017-18 Nengroo had managed to ferry around three dozen terrorists from the International Border to Kashmir Valley.

**Trump acquitted as impeachment trial in Senate fails by 57-43**

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US Senate has acquitted a defiant Donald Trump in his second impeachment trial in just over a year, after the Democrats failed once again to muster enough votes to convict the former president on a charge of inciting the deadly insurrection at the Capitol on January 6.

The Senate voted 57-43 on Saturday to convict Trump on a single impeachment count — incitement of insurrection. But that majority of all 50 Democrats in the upper chamber of the US Congress, joined by seven Republicans, fell 10 votes short of the 67 needed for a conviction, two-thirds of the 100-member Senate.

The Senate acquitted the 74-year-old Republican leader of inciting insurrection at the US Capitol last month after he urged hundreds of his supporters to confront lawmakers as they were certifying that he had lost the November 3 presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden.

He was accused of inciting riots in the Capitol which left five people, including a police officer, dead. Trump is the first president in US history to be impeached by the House of Representatives twice, and the first to be tried for impeachment after leaving office.

## 12 bodies pulled out from U'khand site, toll rises to 50

PNS ■ TAPOVAN/DEHRADUN

As massive operation intensified to reach about 30 people trapped inside tunnel began after a flash flood in Chamoli district a week ago, rescue teams on Sunday recovered 12 more bodies, including the first ones to be pulled out from the sludge-choked Tapovan tunnel.

Five bodies were recovered from the Tapovan power project tunnel, six from Raini upstream and one from the riverbank in Rudraprayag, taking the confirmed death toll in the Uttarakhand disaster to 50. Officials said 154 people still remain missing after the February 7 devastation, possibly triggered by an avalanche in the upper reaches of the Alaknanda river system.

A surge of water in Dhauliganga and Rishiganga rivers had ripped through two hydel projects. Bodies of victims were being found at dif-



NDRF personnel carry the mortal remains of a flash flood victim near Raini village on Sunday PTI

ferent locations by the river over the past week, but rescuers had so far failed to reach anyone — dead or alive — in the tunnel network at the National Thermal Power Corporation's 520 MW Tapovan-Vishnugad project.

## Get FASTag by midnight of Feb 16 or pay double: Govt

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways on Sunday announced that all lanes in the fee plazas on National Highways will be declared as "FASTag lane of the fee plaza" from midnight of February 15, 16 of 2021.

Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari made it clear that the deadline for the implementation of FASTag would not be extended further, and the vehicle owners should immediately adopt the e-payment facility. The Central Government had last extended the FASTag deadline for the vehicles from January 1, 2021, to February 15, 2021.

"Therefore, as per NH Fee Rules 2008, any vehicle not fitted with FASTag or vehicle without valid, functional FASTag entering into the FASTag lane of the fee plaza shall pay a fee equivalent to two times of the fee applicable to that category," the Ministry said in a statement.

## Omar claims father and he under house arrest again

PNS ■ JAMMU

Former Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, along with his father Dr Farooq Abdullah (sitting Parliamentarian from Srinagar), found themselves locked up inside their Gupkar road house early Sunday morning after they noticed a police van stationed outside the front gate had blocked their way.

Angry over this development, Omar Abdullah immediately took to Twitter to vent his ire against the security establishment. In a series of tweets Omar wrote, "This is the 'naya/new J&K' after Aug 2019. We get locked up in our homes with no explanation. It's bad enough they've locked my father (a sitting MP) & me in our home, they've locked my sister & her kids in their home as well."

In response, a Twitter handle of Srinagar police said, "Today is the 2nd anniversary of the dreaded Lethpora Terror incident. There shall be NO ROP on ground."

## PM launches job-creating projects in TN, Kerala

PNS ■ CHENNAI/KOCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's day out on Sunday to Tamil Nadu and Kerala saw the dedication and commissioning of a slew of development projects in both the poll-bound States which would result in creation of thousands of jobs and savings in foreign exchange.

The Prime Minister also laid foundation stones for projects meant for farming, development of innovation for youths, strengthening of skill of technically qualified youths and development of tourism projects.

One of the important functions presided over by the Prime Minister was the handing over of Arjun Mk-1A the state-of-the-art main battle tank to Indian Army. The high performance tank was developed by the scientists of Chennai-based Combat Vehicles Research and



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Tamil Nadu CM Edappadi K Palaniswami and Deputy CM O Panneerselvam during the inauguration of Chennai Metro Rail Phase-I extension, that will link North Chennai with the Airport and Central Railway Station in Chennai on Sunday PTI

Development Establishment (CVRDE), a unit of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and other allied institutions. General MM Naravane, Chief of Army Staff, received Arjun Mk-1A from Prime Minister Modi in an elegant function held at Chennai's Indoor Stadium.

Paying homages to the soldiers ambushed at Pulwama two years ago, the Prime Minister said, "No Indian can forget this day. Two years ago, Pulwama attack happened. We pay homage to all the martyrs we lost in that attack. We are proud of our security forces. Their bravery will continue to inspire generations."

Quoting the verses of Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi in Tamil, Modi said, "Let us make weapons; also make paper; let us make factories; let us also make schools; let us make vehicles that can move and fly — also let us make ships that can shake the world." Inspired by this vision of Subramania Bharathi, India has undertaken a massive effort to become self-reliant in the defence sector.

Later, Modi inaugurated the Chennai Metro Rail Phase-I extension project completed at a cost of ₹3,770 crore which would ease traffic flow in the city. A long time dream of the farmers in the Cauvery Delta districts (the five districts on the banks of Cauvery river) got a boost as the Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for the extension, renovation and modernisation of the Grand Anicut Canal System to be completed at a cost of ₹2,640 crore.

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# Switch Delhi campaign Impetus given to e-autos

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Keeping in view that three-wheelers are one of the major contributors to vehicular emissions in Delhi, the second week of the 'Switch Delhi' campaign launched by the Delhi Government, is aimed at sensitizing, informing and encouraging Delhiites to adopt electric three-wheelers in the national Capital.

Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot, while launching the next leg of the Switch Delhi campaign, said that two and three-wheelers contribute to two-thirds of the pollution in Delhi.

"Three wheelers run on the road for 12-16 hours every day. The focus of Delhi EV policy on this segment to enable their transition to electric will greatly benefit Delhi's air quality," he added.

While e-rickshaws have a top speed not exceeding 25 kmph, e-autos are comparable to CNG autos and have top speed of around 50-60 kmph and can travel longer distances.

"E-autos can complement e-rickshaws in providing zero pollution last mile connectivity in Delhi. Delhi government will soon bring out a scheme to facilitate easy registration of e-



autos in Delhi," said Gahlot.

The Delhi government has already been giving subsidy of Rs 30,000 on e rickshaws but now under EV policy, the same subsidy has been extended to e-carts or loaders and e-autos.

"Purchase incentives of upto Rs 30,000 per vehicle shall be provided and scrapping incentives upto Rs 7500 are available for scrapping and de-registering old CNG auto rickshaws registered in Delhi. Road tax and registration fees will also be waived for all electric three-wheelers," the government said in a statement.

Gahlot said, "Subsidies provided by the Delhi government under Delhi's EV policy on electric three wheeler autos reduce the total cost of owner-

ship of the electric three-wheeler by upto 26 per cent. By switching to electric three wheeler auto, an individual buyer can save approximately Rs 29,000 annually. Similarly, the subsidies provided on electric three wheeler e-rickshaw under the Delhi EV policy reduce the total cost of ownership by upto 33 per cent."

Under Delhi's EV policy, 177 three-wheeler models are available and eligible for purchase and scrapping incentives across 68 manufacturers. Delhi government has recently also released the tender for installation of 500 charging points at 100 sites, majority of which will have slow chargers that are suitable for two and three wheelers especially.

**Switch Delhi is an eight-week mass awareness campaign by the Delhi Government to sensitise each and every Delhiite about the benefits of switching to EVs**

"We have done the groundwork for the smooth transition to electric vehicles in Delhi. Now we seek the cooperation and commitment from Delhiites to make this movement a success and make Delhi the EV capital of India," Gahlot added.

Switch Delhi is an eight-week mass awareness campaign by the Delhi Government to sensitise each and every Delhiite about the benefits of switching to EVs to the environment as well as to make them aware of the incentives and infrastructure being developed under Delhi's EV policy. The campaign aims at informing, encouraging, and motivating each and every person in Delhi to switch from polluting vehicles to zero-emission electric vehicles.

## Rinku Sharma's killing Family alleges uttering 'Jai Shri Ram' unsafe under BJP: AAP Minister



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and national spokesperson Raghav Chadha on Sunday said that the family of victim Rinku Sharma alleges that uttering 'Jai Shri Ram' has become unsafe under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) regime.

Chadha said that in Delhi neither the Hindus nor the Muslim, Sikhs and others are safe under the BJP rule. He said that the citizens of Delhi have voted for the BJP at the centre in a huge majority for the last two consecutive terms but instead it has miserably failed to protect the Delhiites.

The AAP leader demanded that every aspect of the case should be probed very carefully. "The Delhi police comes under the BJP ruled central government. The citizens of Delhi have voted for the BJP in the last two general elections but despite that, the BJP is miserably failing to protect the law and order situation of the national capital.

## Kherki Daula toll will be shifted within 6 months: Haryana CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar announced that the Kherki Daula toll plaza will be shifted within six months, for this land has been identified.

The land possession will be given to the agency concerned by 28 February. After that the toll construction will take 3 to 4 months and then the toll plaza will be shifted, Khattar said.

Khattar also informed that a project of Rs 8,000 crore is being prepared to connect Manesar with Metro Rail. The project is currently in the pipeline.

The project is to be implemented by the Haryana Mass Rapid Transport Corporation. The Metro rail line will be built up to Bawal via Manesar.

This announcement was made by the CM at a program organized at Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC) auditorium at IMT Manesar, in Gurugram.

The shifting of the toll plaza has been in the pipeline

for more than five years now.

The high court had vacated the stay on the 50 acre of land in January 2020, allowing the state government to take over the land in Panchgaon. The high court had also formed a committee to end a dispute between HSIIDC and the land owners.

According to an sources, the 50 acre of land owners had filed compensation litigation. The officials said most of the cases have been resolved.

"one case is pending which will be sorted out soon," said a senior official requesting anonymity.

HSIIDC had identified 38 acres of land for shifting the toll plaza in Sehrawan, but environmentalists raised objection saying that the area was a wildlife corridor. Later the Panchgaon was earmarked for toll plaza.

The decision to shift toll plaza is expected to bring relief for people staying in the newer sectors of Gurugram. This toll plaza connects Gurugram to Manesar.

## COVID-19 Delhi records 2 deaths, 150 new cases on Sunday

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded 150 new Covid-19 cases and two more deaths on Sunday, while the positivity rate stood at 0.22 per cent.

These new 150 cases came out of the 56,902 tests conducted the previous day, according to the latest bulletin issued by the Delhi health department. The total number of tests conducted the previous day, included 38,213 RT-PCR tests and 18,689 rapid antigen tests, the bulletin said.

The infection tally in the city rose to 6,36,947 and the death toll mounted to 10,891 with, authorities said. The tally of active cases on Sunday rose to 1,031.

The Delhi Government has also increased COVID-19 vaccination sites to 265 from existing 183 in the national capital from February 11.

According to the bulletin issued by the Delhi health department, out of the total number of 5775 beds in COVID hospitals, 5323 are vacant.

The health bulletin further stated that 245 beds in COVID care centres are occupied by persons under quarantine.

## U'KHAND FLASH FLOODS High turbidity likely to affect water supply in parts of Delhi, says DJB

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Flash floods in Uttarakhand's Chamoli have increased turbidity of raw water fetched by Delhi from Upper Ganga Canal to "unprecedented levels" which is likely to hit water supply in many parts of the national Capital, DJB vice chairman Raghav Chadha said on Sunday.

In a series of tweets, Chadha said the Sonia Vihar and Bhagirathi water treatment plants were functioning at reduced capacity. He said the supply is likely to be affected in south, east and northeast Delhi and urged people to use water judiciously.

"In the aftermath of #UttarakhandDisaster, turbidity in raw water fetched by Delhi from Upper Ganga Canal has increased to unprecedent-



ed levels (8000 NTU). As a result, @DelhiJalBoard's Sonia Vihar & Bhagirathi Water Treatment Plants currently operating at reduced capacity," tweeted Chadha, who is also an Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA.

The DJB is deploying water tankers in adequate numbers and all possible efforts are being made to reduce turbidity in water, he said.

"Turbidity is the measure of relative clarity of a liquid.

Turbidity is measured in Nephelometric Turbidity Units (NTU). High turbidity can be caused by debris, silt, mud, algae, plant pieces, melting glaciers, sawdust, wood ashes or chemicals in the water," he tweeted.

Following a break in a glacier in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, flash floods in Dhauliganga and Alaknanda rivers caused massive destruction of lives and property, last week.

Chamoli District Magistrate Swati Bhaduria had said 38 bodies were recovered from the flood-hit areas of Chamoli district while 166 are still missing.

The rescue operations are still underway to save those who are trapped in the destroyed hydel projects in the area.

## Min flags off Mau-Anand Vihar Biweekly Special train

TRAIN SHALL DEPART FROM MAU ON EVERY TUESDAY AND FRIDAY AT 20.50 HRS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Minister of Railways Piyush Goyal flagged off Mau-Anand Vihar Biweekly Special train through video conferencing on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, Goyal said, "This new train connecting Mau with Anand Vihar will fulfill the long pending demand of the people of the Purvanchal. The new train will boost economy of this region. In the present Government under PM Narendra Modi, the budget allocation for Rail projects in Uttar Pradesh has been increased to ten times as compared to 2009-14. This shows the commitment of the Government for development of infrastructure in Uttar Pradesh."

The train will connect Mau with National Capital and bring socio economic development in the Purvanchal region. Local industries in the region shall get the boost with improved connectivity.

The minister further said that train no. 05139 Mau-Anand Vihar Terminus shall depart from Mau on every Tuesday and Friday at 20.50 hrs and shall reach Anand Vihar Terminus next day at 11:30 hrs. "Train no. 05140 Anand Vihar-Mau Biweekly Special shall depart from Anand Vihar terminus on every Wednesday and Saturday at 16:45 hrs and shall reach Mau at 06:20 hrs next day," he added.

This train will have total 21 LHB Coaches. It shall have stoppages at Aunrihar, Jaunpur, Sultanpur, Lucknow and Kanpur Central stations enroute in both directions.

## 1 held for selling DDA plots after forging documents Evaded arrest for last eight years

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police has arrested a 42 year old man for allegedly selling Delhi Development Authority (DDA) plots to people after forging documents. Police said that the accused was also declared 'Proclaimed Offender' and was evading arrest for last eight years.

Police said that the



accused, identified as Suresh Sharma, a resident of Faridabad in Haryana, was nabbed by the EOW team from Faridabad after long surveillance.

According to Dr O P Mishra, the Joint Commissioner of Police, EOW, a complaint was received in which the complainant stated

that he and his other family members were cheated by a property dealer Jitender Gupta in connivance with his other associates by executing agreements to sell and sale deeds in their favour on the basis of forged documents of different DDA Plots.

"The alleged misrepresented and allured the complainants to buy six different DDA plots and duped the family to the tune of Rs 7 crores," said the Joint CP adding that a case was registered and investigation was taken up.

"During investigation, when documents were verified from the DDA, it was revealed

that the accused persons had conspired with each other and had enticed the complainant and his family to purchase these plots. On their false representation and inducement the complainant had fallen prey to the or evil designs and paid total 7 crores to them," said the Joint CP.

"So far six accused persons including main accused Jitender Gupta have already been arrested and present accused Suresh Sharma who also impersonated as Dinesh Sharma and one woman accused were declared PO in 2014 by the Delhi court," he said.

## FARMERS' PROTEST SKM condemns Hry Agri Min statement, says it's inhuman

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Sunday condemned Haryana agriculture minister's statement as inhuman and warned that people would teach a suitable lesson for such arrogance.

The farmers leaders said that in the Kisan Mahapanchayat at Indri of Karnal on Sunday, the sacrifice of India's jawans and kisans in the current movement was remembered respectfully.

The SKM said that unlike the pseudo nationalism of BJP - RSS, farmers of this country are truly dedicated to protect-

ing the country's sovereignty, unity and dignity.

SKM condemned the fact that the Government is unashamedly admitting in the parliament that it has no data of the farmers who sacrificed their lives in the ongoing movement.

SKM is maintaining a blog site where such data is readily available if the government cares. "It is the same callousness which resulted in the loss of lives so far," said farmers leaders.

In the mahapanchayat at Indri at Karnal district of Haryana, SKM leaders warned that BJP's days are numbered as more and more farmers are getting awakened.

Farmers resolve to fight unitedly, cutting across states and religions is getting stronger with each mahapanchayat despite the govt's divisive efforts." Rural India and agriculture is the main agenda for us" said SKM leaders.

"Mashal Juloos and candle march were organised in villages and towns across the nation between 7 and 8 pm on Sunday. More farmers are expected to join the protest sites in the coming days and make the movement formidable strong. It is only a matter of time that the govt has to accept all our demand," said Darshan Pal, SKM leader.

## People troubled by policies of BJP Govt, says PCC chief

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Pradesh Congress Committee president Pritam Singh averred that the general public is troubled by the anti-people policies of the Bharatiya Janata Party government. He said this after several women including Panchayat representatives from the rural areas of Mussoorie Vidhan Sabha constituency joined the Congress party at a function organised at the Congress Bhawan here on Sunday. The women joined the party under the leadership of the party's state general secretary Godavari Thapli.

Speaking on the occasion, the PCC president said that the people are stricken by the policies of the BJP government which have resulted in changes like the steep hike in the price of petrol, diesel and cooking gas among others. Singh said,



"The price of food items is rising consistently. On the other hand, the state government has achieved the first position in the nation when it comes to unemployment. The BJP government wants to dupe the

public with false promises but the people have understood this game and will not fall for lies. The conditions in the state are worsening alarmingly which is why people are now looking at the Congress with hope," claimed the PCC president.

Speaking on the occasion, Thapli opined that there is a rising sentiment in favour of the Congress party with the faith of the people in the party witnessing a rise. The Congress state vice president Suryakant Dhasmana, Mahanagar head Lal Chand Sharma, Mahesh Joshi and other office bearers of the party were also present on the occasion.

## NDS releases manifesto for Uttarakhand Assembly elections 2022



PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Haridwar-based political party, Nyay Dharm Sabha (NDS) issued its manifesto for Uttarakhand assembly elections 2022 in Uttarakhand Press Club on Sunday. The founder of the party, Arvind Ankur said that if their party wins the assembly elections, they will

provide free education to children upto 25 years, employment opportunities to everyone and will make facilities like electricity, internet and well connected roads available in every rural area. The party also promised free electricity, water and internet to the citizens of Uttarakhand in the manifesto. According to the party head,

Ankur, they will give the residents the power to issue or cancel any policy, law or decision through voting system. He also talked about introducing digital currency to restrict corruption in the State. He asserted that his party will truly make a government which would be run by public and not just through some political heads.

## Last date to deposit property tax with 20 percent rebate today

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Though the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) has announced February 15 to be the last date of depositing property tax with 20 percent rebate, the mayor Sunil Uniyal 'Gama' will take the final decision of extending the period of rebate today.

According to the officials, the corporation has collected the property tax to the tune of Rs 23 crore which is quite less than the tax collected by MCD last year in the last 11 months. The corporation has also started conducting camps for property tax collection in various wards and also kept the tax section open for tax submission on Sunday but the tax submission remained low.

Referring to this, the deputy municipal commissioner, Sonia Pant stated that the corporation has sent bills, notices and reminders to the proprietors of various organisations like ISBT and City Junction mall. These taxpayers, especially those who would fail to deposit property tax even after repeated reminders by MCD, will have to pay penalty on their pending dues after March, said Pant. "The operators of ISBT and City Junction mall had to deposit 50 percent of their pending dues of over Rs one crore after multiple notices and reminders of the corporation were sent to them. We have asked them to deposit the pending dues by March 31 or else, they will have to deposit the dues with penalty," said Pant. The officials said that they are optimistic to achieve the target of the property tax collection of over Rs 50 crore by March 31.

# Chamoli disaster Toll rises to 50; search on for missing persons

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**  
Amidst ongoing search and rescue works in the disaster affected area of Chamoli district, 12 bodies were recovered at different locations on Sunday. According to the Chamoli district administration, five bodies were recovered in the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydro power project tunnel while seven bodies were recovered in Reni area. On being informed about the discovery of bodies in the tunnel on Sunday morning, the district magistrate Swati Singh Bhadauriya and superintendent of police Yashwant Singh Chauhan also reached the tunnel to inspect the site and ongoing search operation on Sunday. The personnel were directed to send the bodies for post mortem and identification. Later, the district magistrate went to the Reni village to see the rescue and relief works. Bhadauriya informed that out

of the 204 people reported missing in the disaster on February 7, the bodies of 50 persons had been found so far from various locations. Now the search and rescue operations are continuing to ascertain the whereabouts of the 154 persons still missing. Meanwhile, the last rites of two bodies and four body parts were conducted ritually as per the regulations after a period of 72 hours on Sunday. At the same time, the authorities have continued the supply of ration kits, medical items and other daily needs in the disaster affected areas. Medical teams are holding camps to administer health checks to the residents in the disaster affected villages. A total of 998 persons have been checked so far, according to the authorities. While a trolley is being used to cross the river at Tapovan, the PWD is working to set up a trolley at Jugiu. Work on construction of a bridge is also



underway at Reni Palli. Further, 445 persons who were stranded at different locations were taken to their destinations by helicopter. The district magistrate further informed that as per the directions of the chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, financial assistance had been provided to the families of

eight persons who had died in the disaster and four persons who were injured while one family was provided grant for home. The Garhwal commissioner Ravinath Raman, ITBP DIG Aparna Singh, Garhwal DIG Neeru Garg, NDRF commandant PK Tiwari and SDRF commandant Navneet Bhullar

among others were also present at the affected site in Tapovan. Meanwhile DIG (Law and Order) and State police chief spokesman, Nilesh Anand Bharné said that of the 50 bodies recovered till Sunday, 25 had been identified while the remaining are yet to be identified.

# SPECS to open 100 centres in Dehradun for assembling and repairing of LED bulbs

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**  
Around 100 centres will be set up by the Society of Pollution and Environmental Conservation Scientists (SPECS) in Dehradun for the assembling and repairing of LED bulbs.

Some centres will be completely dedicated for the collection of electronic waste so that locals can dispose of their e-waste there rather than in open areas that adversely damage the environment. This was informed by the secretary of SPECS and environmentalist Dr Brij Mohan Sharma who was recently awarded by the chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat with the prestigious Indian Excellency Award instituted by Indian Book of World Records for his work towards the conservation of environment.

Dr Sharma disclosed there are currently six main centres in Dehradun district for assembling and repairing of LED

bulbs that include three centres in Doiwala, two centres in Sahaspur and one in the Dehradun city. He informed that over 100 women of several Self Help Groups (SHGs) are associated with this programme. He pointed out that all the LED bulbs at these centres were assembled by villagers, youth, dropout student, girls and inmates. He said the repairing centers are helping generate awareness on minimizing E-WASTE, environment conservation, climate change mitigation and science and technology popularization.

He said that they are planning to open 100 more such centres and are currently working to select locations and individuals that can operate the centres. "We want to make a small but self-sufficient industry where local women can pre-



pare, sell and repair LED lights, light bulbs, tubelights and other electronic products. These women will soon start making decorative items using LED bulbs, recycled bottles and other items," said Sharma. He further added that the machines for making LED light bulbs are generally big but they made a smaller model of the same machine in which more people can work together.

Sharma stated that they also raise awareness among locals regarding the proper e-waste disposal through Nukkad Natak and folk songs besides some short films and rap songs in order to draw the attention of youth toward the issue.

# MCD now to approach MoHUA on March to seek relaxation in forthcoming field inspection

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**  
The Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) has decided to approach the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) on March seeking relaxation in the forthcoming field inspection for Swachh Survekshan 2021 due to the chaos created by ongoing construction work under the Dehradun Smart City Limited (DSCL). Earlier, the officials have stated that the corporation would write to MoHUA in February if DSCL will fail to finish their construction work by January 31. However, the construction work under the smart city project is still under process across the city but MCD has not approached the ministry so far. Referring to the chief municipal health officer, Dr Kailash Joshi stated that the State Government has already instructed DSCL

to complete all the ongoing construction projects in the city by the end of this month. "Though we are hopeful that DSCL will finish their construction work by February 28 as per the instructions, we will have to approach MoHUA if they fail to do so," said Joshi. He stated that the chaos created due to construction work in public areas can adversely affect the position of Dehradun city in Swachh Survekshan despite several initiatives taken by MCD this year. Due to which, the corporation will try to make the ministry aware of the issue in order to get some relaxation during field inspection the next month," said Joshi. It is pertinent to mention here that Dehradun got 124th position in the Swachh Survekshan last year and the first position in Uttarakhand but this year, MCD is trying the city to get to the position among the top 100 cleanest city of India.



A couple takes a selfie at a park in Dehradun on Valentine's Day on Sunday

Mangesh Kumar | Pioneer photo

# 1,470 vaccinated on Sunday, 54 new cases reported in State

**PNS ■ DEHRADUN**  
A total of 1,470 beneficiaries were vaccinated against Covid-19 in the State on Sunday. On the same day 54 persons tested positive for Covid and one patient of the disease recovered while no deaths were reported.

According to information provided by the health department, the beneficiaries were vaccinated in 44 sessions on Sunday. The cumulative number of beneficiaries vaccinated in the state so far is 1,15,648 while the cumulative sessions held for vaccination so far is 2,090. Meanwhile, the total number of active cases of Covid-19 in the state currently stands at 687 while the recovery percentage is 96.12 per cent. Of the total cumulative positive Covid cases detected in the state - 96,820 a total of 93,061 persons have recovered so far. Of the Covid

patients, 1,680 have died in the state so far which is about 1.74 per cent of the total cases. Of the positive cases reported on Sunday, 26 are from Dehradun district, 12 from Nainital, nine from Haridwar, six from Udham Singh Nagar and one from Champawat district. Not a single Covid positive case was reported on the day from Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Pauri, Pithoragarh, Rudrapur, Tehri and Uttarkashi districts. Further, according to official data, out of the 687 active Covid-19 cases in the state, 134 are in Haridwar district, 101 in Nainital district and 81 in Almora district. Among the other districts, there are 52 active cases in Bageshwar, 28 in Chamoli, 16 in Champawat, 75 in Dehradun, 31 in Pauri, 45 in Pithoragarh, 19 in Rudrapur, 26 in Tehri, 65 in Udham Singh Nagar and 14 in Uttarkashi.

# HILLBILLY Is it too much to ask for at-least one free-flowing river system?



■ LOKESH OHRI

The recent flooding of the Ganga in the Himalayas—and I would insist on calling it Ganga because our political masters easily fragment the sacred river in our minds by employing names such as Rishiganga for projects along this river system—has once again exposed human triviality against nature's brute force. The Himalayan river systems are complex, and several rivulets and streams join to form the Ganga as we see it in Rishikesh or Varanasi. Therefore, every dam constructed in the region is a threat to the ecology of the sacred Mother Ganga and endangers the water security of every Indian.

In the current incident, a number of people have lost their lives and disturbing video footage of people running helter-skelter, only to be finally trapped in the deluge are emerging. Perhaps the most poignant aspect of the tragedy is the fact that residents of Reni village, a hamlet that showed the global environmental movement a new light through Chipko are now demanding relocation. The same people of Reni, living on the edge of India's most pristine high altitude UNESCO world heritage site, the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, had approached the courts almost two years ago against "rampant blasting, reckless dumping of debris next to the riverbed and tree felling", with little relief granted to them.

Does it not rattle our political masters that the people who voted them in, the people whose aspirations they were elected to meet, have emerged as the worst afflicted from the processes of "development"

unleashed upon them? The question that I would like to pose today is whether it would be too much to ask of our government to allow just one river system, the Ganga that is revered by the entire mass of humanity that voted them to power, to remain encumbrance free.

While the world is realising the benefits of free-flowing rivers, why are our policy makers still stuck in the mire of damming our water sources? For instance, the United States, which has more than 80,000 dams of all sizes, gets only seven per cent of its energy from hydropower today. There are no plans to build any more hydropower plants in that country. Instead, the US has embarked on a large-scale effort over the last several decades to take down dams and restore rivers. So far, nearly 1,500 dams have been removed throughout the country. Two of those, the Elwha and Glines Canyon Dams on the Elwha River in the Pacific Northwest, were removed in 2012 and 2014 respectively. Since then, several species of adult fish, including sockeye salmon and bull trout, have returned to the Elwha. Similar dam removal projects are underway in western Europe, with France, for example, planning to soon remove two large dams from the Selune River in Normandy. Meanwhile, a project called Dam Removal Europe is focusing on clearing European rivers of the 30,000 old or obsolete dams that still exist.

Our cities are starved for power, and hydropower may not be as hazardous if we manage to keep our projects small scale, without disturbing the flow of the river. Rather than large dams blocking the flow of rivers and damaging the ecology, subjecting communities to disasters, can we not think of thousands of small units along streams and rivulets?

Today, more than ever, I am reminded of the words of scientist friend Yogeshwar Kumar, who has been working on small hydro-power projects for years. He has demonstrated that one can generate electricity from even small streams and torrents, so abundant in the Himalayas. He had



Children crossing a mountain rivulet

presented a paper at a conference I organised on the Ganga, and this is what he had to say, "Hydropower from large dams and large reservoirs may lead to disasters, but there are thousands of small and tiny power houses that have been workhorses for small and cottage industries for more than two centuries. These tiny power houses have provided electricity and mechanical power for irrigation, drinking water and livelihoods at lowest cost to dispersed communities in rich and developing world. There is no replacement by any other source at this cost."

In fact there are numerous smaller streams and waterfalls in the Himalayas that can be further harnessed without damaging ecology, and provide much needed energy to communities eagerly waiting for low cost power. There is a large percentage of population still living in darkness without access to low cost energy, in these mountains, which makes them jobless, eagerly waiting to migrate. Small or micro hydro-electricity generation can emancipate them, giving the much needed boost to micro-industry and ecotourism.

In no case should we now opt for gigantic hydropower units. When we dam a river, we suddenly alter the ecology, creating a large reservoir, with the fish and other living organisms disappearing. What is worse is that the stagnant waters become warmer. This has affected the Ganga in great measure with the river waters losing some of their self-renewing qualities. In the past, this quality of the water, of not putrefying even when kept in bottles for extended periods had rendered it sacred. More

than ever, this disaster must become a call to save our sacred river.

In fact, we must now look into the benefits of small and micro hydropower, how small investment can lead to prosperity by giving locals employment in mountain regions. These micro-units are capable of producing power twenty-four by seven. There had been more than a hundred thousand watermills across the Himalayan region in the past, now mostly lying defunct. Their partially surviving structures can be seen all over the mountain areas. Most of the owners have rights over land and water, and thus unnecessary permissions are not required. Can we not convert these into economic powerhouses through infusion of latest technical advances in micro-power generation?

All these units can be salvaged and transformed into efficient multipurpose hydropower mills for irrigation, drinking water, rural industry, ecotourism and generation of power. The power of these units can be used for rural infrastructure, e-medicine, e-banking, agro processing heating and refrigeration for further processing and storage of horticultural produce or even mushrooms. The uses will depend on how you want to use the energy. One sees a great potential for these units if we, and government agencies, apply themselves to the task.

Is anyone listening?

(The writer is an anthropologist, author, traveler & activist who also runs a public walking group called 'Been There, Doon That?')



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# Modi dedicates Arjun battle tank to Army



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Army on Sunday added muscle to its firepower capabilities when Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over to the force the indigenously designed and manufactured Arjun Main Battle Tank (MBT) MK-1A in Chennai.

Presiding over the ceremony, Modi said the tank represented the united Indian spirit as the weapon system manufactured in the south will guard the frontiers in the north.

The Arjun tank manufacturing factory at Avadi in Chennai will shortly get an order for 118 such front-line fighting machines and the total contract is worth over ₹9,000 crores.

It is an improved and upgraded version of the original Arjun-MK 1 MBT which was also indigenously designed and manufactured within the country. The new tanks has incorporated more than 50 upgrades and 71 new features. The Army will get an edge over its enemies as the new tank has accurate firing capabilities during day and night thereby providing the army to launch counter-offensive with lethal effect, officials said here.

At the handing over function, the Prime Minister also accepted a salute by the state-of-the-art tank, indigenously designed, developed, and manufactured by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)'s Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) in Chennai. Modi later handed over a replica model of the tank to Army Chief General M M Naravane.

"Today I am proud to dedicate to the country one more warrior to protect our frontiers. I am proud to hand over the

Later, in a tweet, he said it was "a special day in our journey to become Aatmanirbhar in the defence sector," referring to Arjun Main Battle Tank (MK-1A). Fifteen academic institutions, eight labs and several MSMEs were also involved in the Arjun MK 1A.

The new tanks with its first round hit probability has one of the most accurate tank gun in the world. This majestic tank has indigenous Kanchan Armour strapped with DRDO developed Reactive Armour Panels.

After using in different conditions, the Army had recommended a number of improvements to MBT Arjun Mk 1, which enhanced the mobility and fire power of MBT Arjun Mk 1A. With these changes, this upgraded version has successfully undergone extensive trials by the Indian Army. The precise target tracking of the tank ensures accurate engagement during day and night in both static and dynamic conditions.

The country decided to build its own main battle tank and a project was initiated by the DRDO in the 1970s at the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE).

The scientists were given the objective to design and build a state-of-the-art tank with superior fire power, high mobility, and excellent protection. The production of the Arjun tanks started in 1996 at the Indian Ordnance Factory's production facility in Avadi.

At present, the Army has more than 100 Arjun MK-1 tanks in its armour and is likely to induct 20 odd more tanks shortly. The first batch of 16 Arjun tanks were inducted into active service in 2004.

The old and new version of the MBT has a highly sophisticated computer-controlled integrated fire control system with stabilised sighting that works in all lighting conditions. The secondary weapons include a coaxial 7.62-mm machine gun for anti-personnel and a 12.7-mm machine gun for anti-aircraft and ground targets.

Officials also said the new version launched by the Prime Minister has more than 55 per cent indigenous content as compared to 40 per cent of the earlier version of the Arjun.

# Disengagement in Pangong Tso Lake, Galwan areas surrender of India's rights, claims Antony



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Mounting more pressure on the Modi Government to come clean on the Indo-China skirmishes in recent months, former defence minister A K Antony on Sunday alleged that disengagement in both the Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso Lake areas and the creation of a buffer zone was a "surrender" of India's rights.

Antony said he was sad that the Narendra Modi Government was not giving proper priority to national security at a time when China was getting belligerent and Pakistan continued to promote terrorism.

Addressing a Press conference, the senior Congress leader said that at a time when India was facing multiple challenges at the border and was facing a two-front war-like situation, the increase in defence budget this year is meagre and insignificant and was a "betrayal" of the country.

The Government had on Friday stated that India has not "conceded" any territory following the disengagement agreement with China in Pangong lake areas in eastern Ladakh.

Antony said disengagement was good as it reduced tension but it should not be done at the cost of national security.

"Both disengagements in Galwan and Pangong Tso are a surrender," he alleged, adding that it amounted to surrendering of areas traditionally controlled by India. We are surrendering our rights," he alleged, noting that Galwan Valley as Indian territory was never a disputed land even in 1962.

"Disengagement and buffer zone means surrender of our land at the moment," he alleged, while warning that the Government is not understanding the importance of this disengagement and creation of the buffer zone.

He warned that China can play mischief anytime by

**When the whole country is facing serious challenges from both China and Pakistan, the senior Congress leader said the Armed forces are demanding support and substantial increase in the defence Budget**

helping Pakistan in Siachen.

"We want to know from this Government when there will be status quo ante as on mid-April 2020 in the entire India-China border," he said, asking what was the government's plan in this regard.

He also said that the government must take the country and the people into confidence on restoration of status quo ante at the borders.

He said the Government always consulted leaders of all political parties before taking such a decision and must keep national security in mind.

Antony alleged that the government did not increase the defence budget to "appease" China and to give a message that it did not want to confront them.

"To appease China, the government sent a message by not increasing this defence budget that we do not want to confront you.

To appease China, we have agreed to disengagement on China's terms," he alleged.

When the whole country is facing serious challenges from both China and Pakistan, the senior Congress leader said the armed forces are demanding support and substantial increase in the defence budget.

"But compared to last year's revised defence budget, this budget has made a meagre and insufficient increase of only 1.48 per cent. It is a betrayal of the country. The government has let down our armed forces. The Government is not paying proper attention of national security," Antony said.

# Parl panel asks Govt to examine delay in road construction under Bharatmala ph-1

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Of the total 29,337 km length of projects, only 8,632 kms length of projects has been awarded and 1,040 kms length of projects have been appraised so far under the Bharatmala Project phase-1 which is targeted to be completed by 2021-22. The Detailed Project Report for a length of 19,665 kms is still under preparation stage when only two years are left as per the schedule fixed for completion of Phase-I. Taking note of slow pace of work, a parliamentary committee on transport, tourism and culture asked the Government to examine the causes for delay in construction of Roads under Phase-I and take requisite remedial measures expeditiously so as to remove the stumbling blocks in order to achieve the targets fixed.

"In the course of examination, it was seen that there were about 375 projects of National Highways including Bharatmala, pending due to reasons like Land Acquisition, forest clearance, utility shifting, and contractor issue and so on in various States. These included projects across the country namely in Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and West Bengal. These projects have surpassed their date of completion and the

Government apparently has not reviewed them," the parliamentary committee said in its report, which tabled in the Parliament on Tuesday.

The Committee noted with concern that some NH projects are delayed due to multiple reasons which inter alia include poor performance of contractor, utility shifting, delay in environment/forest clearance, land acquisition, cash flow problem of the concessionaire/contractor and so on. Delay in the projects has resulted in increase in the overall cost of the projects.

The Committee are constrained to note that there is time and cost over-run in many projects of the Government. Amongst them, for example, is the Char-Dham Mahamarg Vikas Priyोजना - Improvement of NH Connectivity to Char-Dham (Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri & Gangotri) in the State of Uttarakhand, foundation stone of which was laid in December, 2016 by the Hon'ble Prime Minister. It was initially targeted for completion by March 2020, but the Committee was informed that it has been delayed due to litigation relating to forest and environment clearance in various 63 courts and the exact date of completion of the programme depends on the final outcome of the case," the report said.

The Committee also recommended that 4-laning of Pune-Nashik (NH-60), Pune-Tambhoni-Mangaon-Diveagar (NH-756), Hadapsar-Saswad-Jejuri-LonandPhaltan-Mohol (NH-965), Patas-Baramati-Akluj-Tondale (NH-65G) and 6-laning of Pune-Solapur (NH-65), Kolhapur to Vaibhavwadi-Vijaydurg under Bharatmala and Alibaug to Sindhudurg coastal National Highway in the State of Maharashtra, extension of Patna-Areraj road to Bettiah, Ramgarhwa and Raxaul in the State of Bihar, road connecting Anmod at the border of Goa to Londa, widening of Sundar Bani-Seri-Jangar-Lam Road in Rajouri district in Jammu be taken up at the earliest.

# Prez, PM, others pay tributes to Pulwama martyrs on 2nd anniv



DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

On the second anniversary of the Pulwama terror strike on Sunday, dignitaries, film actors and political leaders by the President and the Prime Minister paid rich tributes to the 40 CRPF personnel killed in the attack that days after had also prompted Indian Air Force to go across borders on a "punishing mission", hitting terror camps at Balakot in Pakistan.

Remembering the soldiers who died in Pulwama terror attack, President Ram Nath Kovind said the nation is committed to eliminating terrorism. "Nation salutes the sacrifice of our brave soldiers," he said.

Modi described CRPF 'jaws' as "exceptional individuals who devoted their lives to the country".

On February 14, 2019, 40 personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were killed after a suicide bomber rammed an IED-laden truck into a CRPF convoy. Pakistan-backed Jaish-e-Mohammad-executed attack took place when a convoy of 78 buses with 2,500 CRPF personnel was heading to Srinagar from Jammu.

"No Indian can forget this day. Two years ago, the Pulwama terror attack occurred. We pay homage to all the martyrs. We are proud of our security forces and their bravery will continue to inspire future generations," he said during a public event in Chennai.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi also expressed his grief by tweeting in Hindi saying "tribute to the brave soldiers, who died in the Pulwama terror attack. A tribute to their families as the country owes you."

Actors including Akshay Kumar, Varun Dhawan and Rajkumar Rao paid tributes and said the country will forever remain indebted to the brave hearts. Kumar took to Twitter and shared a picture of the martyrs. "Remembering our brave hearts of #PulwamaAttack. We will always remain indebted for your supreme sacrifice," the 53-year-old actor tweeted.

Dhawan shared the same image on Instagram and captioned "Jai Hind". Actor Kartik Aaryan prayed for the families of those who were killed in the terrorist attack.

"On this day, two years



back, 40 soldiers sacrificed their lives for our nation in Pulwama attack. Prayers for the brave souls and their families. We'll always be in debt of yours," the actor tweeted.

Rest In Power Bravehearts of Pulwama!, actor Suniel Shetty wrote.

While paying homage to the slain soldiers, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu said he stands in solidarity with the jaws' families.

"I join the nation in paying my humble tributes to the CRPF personnel who were martyred in the dastardly Pulwama terror attack. The grateful nation will always remember their patriotism & supreme sacrifice," the Vice President Secretariat tweeted quoting Naidu.

Union home minister Amit Shah said that the slain soldiers' sacrifice will never be forgotten. "I bow down to the brave martyrs who lost their lives in the gruesome Pulwama attack on this day in 2019. India will never forget their exceptional courage and supreme sacrifice," Shah tweeted.

"Entire nation stands united against terrorists", said the Defence Minister.

BJP president JP Nadda also remembered the sacrifice of CRPF personnel.

"India will always remember their martyrdom. We should all unite to completely end terrorism from its very roots," Nadda said on Twitter.

Days after the attack, the Indian Air Force on February 26 carried out multiple aerial strikes at JeM terror camps in Pakistan's Balakot, killing a "large number" of terrorists and destroying their infrastructure.

On its part, the CRPF tweeted "We did not forget, we did not forgive". The CRPF renewed its resolve to end terror saying they have not forgiven or forgotten the gruesome attack.

"Be brave enough to die as martyr", said BJP MP and former test player Gautam Gambhir and asked people to be "brave enough to die the death of a martyr" as he paid his tributes. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal offered "heartfelt homage" to martyrs, while Union Minister Smriti Irani said: "Salute to brave sons of mother India".

# India recording steady decline in Covid deaths

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Sunday said that India has been recording a steady decline in the number of daily new deaths since October 1, 2020, while the national recovery rate is amongst the highest in the world. Now the 17th most-affected country by active cases, fourth by fatality, and second by total and recovered cases, India has added 78,577 cases in the past 7 days.

"Since 1st October 2020, the nation has seen an unabated decline in Case Fatality Rate. The Case Fatality Rate today stands below 1.5 (1.43%). With only 92 people succumbing to the deadly coronavirus disease, India's Case Fatality Rate is one of the lowest in the world," the Union Health Ministry said.

The recoveries have surged to 1,06,11,731 with 11,016 patients getting discharged in a span of 24 hours. "India's Covid-19 recovery rate of 97.31 per cent is amongst the highest in the world. The difference between the recovered and active cases has grown to 1,04,74,164 as on date," the ministry highlighted. Till date, the cumulative number of healthcare and frontline workers vaccinated against Covid-19 in the country has surpassed 82 lakhs.

A total 82,63,858 beneficiaries have been vaccinated through 1,72,852 sessions, as per the provisional report till 8 am on Sunday. These include 59,84,018 HCWs (1st dose), 23,628 HCWs (2nd dose) and 22,56,212 FLWs (1st dose). The 2nd dose of Covid-19 vaccination started on Saturday for those beneficiaries who have completed 28 days after receipt of the 1st dose. As on day-29 of the vaccination drive (February 13), a total of 2,96,211 beneficiaries received vaccination. Out of which, 2,72,583 beneficiaries were vaccinated across 8,071 sessions for 1st dose and 23,628 HCWs received 2nd dose of vaccine.

"The country is witnessing a progressive increase in the vaccination day by day," the ministry said adding 68.55 per cent of total vaccinated beneficiaries are from 10 states.

It said 81.58 per cent of the new recovered cases are observed to be concentrated in 6 States. Kerala has reported the maximum number of single day recoveries with 5,835 newly recovered cases. A total of 1,773 people recovered in Maharashtra in a span of 24 hours followed by 482 in Tamil Nadu.

# TACKLING COVID SPREAD

## Indian Consulate issues advisory asking expatriates not to visit Dubai mission



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Consulate in Dubai has issued an advisory asking Indian expatriates based there to avoid visiting the mission for consular services and instead use online means like a WhatsApp number, email or a helpline number to check the spread of Covid-19. A section of the 2.6 million Indians, many of them also engaged in blue collar jobs, based there are, however, concerned over the move as a visit to the mission is necessitated only when the online means are exhausted.

"Members of the Indian community who wish to visit the Consulate for any consular services are advised to avoid such visits unless absolutely necessary. They should, instead, make use of the various electronic platforms offered by the Consulate without having to physically visit the office," the mission said in the advisory issued on Thursday on Twitter.

Being the largest expatriate community, it is the responsibility of all the Indian nationals residing in the UAE to strictly comply with COVID preventive measures and guidelines issued by the UAE health authorities from

time to time such as wearing face masks at all times, maintaining social distancing and avoid public gatherings, it further said.

Many of the expatriates there are labourers and will now be left with no grievance redressal mechanism when online mechanisms are not able to resolve their issues, a PIO settled in UAE said, adding why would a person visit the consulate if all the issues are settled online.

Another expat who did not wish to be identified said it is illogical to restrict the Indians from visiting the consulate in the name of preventing Covid-19. There are always means to regulate the flow of visitors to a place and instead a home service should be launched to cater to such Indians who are under any kind of distress or an emergency due to lack of consular access, he further said, adding the rich and mighty cannot have exclusive access to the consulate.

The Indian mission houses a help centre for distressed Indians -Pravasi Bharatiya Sahayata Kendra (PBSK), that runs a 24x7 toll free helpline number 800 46342 of PBSK there are cases wherein physical interaction is also required to resolve the issues, the experts said.

Other online options to connect to the mission are sending emails at pbsk.dubai@mea.gov.in or send messages on a WhatsApp number +971-54-3090571 besides using the PBSK Dubai Mobile Application.

# IMA seeks withdrawal of move letting Ayurveda practitioners to perform surgery

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Sunday announced a mass petition movement from February 15 to March 31 to protest against a Central Council of Indian Medicine notification that authorises post-graduate practitioners in specified streams of ayurveda to perform general surgical procedures. The IMA said that this notification will lead to "mixopathy" and demanded its immediate withdrawal.

The IMA had held a pan-India relay hunger strike from February 1-14 on the issue.

The "impractical, unscientific and unethical notification" should be immediately withdrawn, it said in a statement, adding that besides the petition movement, it will also spread awareness among the people on the notification.

The IMA also said that it will submit a list of 1,000 modern medicine doctors willing to serve in remote areas of the country to counter the false claim of lack of doctors.

"All IMA members, all speciality organisations, all modern medicine students, all women doctors across the country will educate people about this retrograde and unscientific mixing of different systems of healthcare. All modern medicine hospitals will promote the importance of scientific ethical surgical expertise," the doctors' body said.

The IMA also announces non-cooperation movement "henceforth in which modern medicines surgeons and anesthesiologists shall not cooperate with AYUSH persons training and performing surgery," it said.

The doctors' body has been opposing the notification by Central Council of Indian Medicine, a statutory body under the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy).

The notification authorises post-graduate practitioners in specified streams of Ayurveda to be trained to perform surgical procedures such as excisions of benign tumours, amputation of gangrene, nasal and cataract surgeries.

# AIMPLB moves SC opposing plea seeking uniform grounds of maintenance, alimony

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board has moved the Supreme Court against a plea seeking laying down of "gender and religion neutral" uniform grounds to award maintenance and alimony in matrimonial disputes as per international conventions and Constitution.

The Board has opposed the plea filed by advocate and BJP leader Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay which also seeks directions to the government to take appropriate steps to remove the prevailing anomalies in the grounds of maintenance and alimony, and make them uniform for all citizens without discrimination.

"The applicant would like to submit that the expression



and 'Custom and Usage' in Article 13 of the Constitution does not include faith of a religious denomination embedded in personal laws," the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) plea said.

"The constituent assembly was aware of the distinction between 'personal law' and the 'Custom and Usage' and chose

advisedly to exclude personal law and include Custom and Usage in Article 13 of the Constitution," it said while seeking implementation in the petition filed by Upadhyay.

The AIMPLB opposed Upadhyay's plea on the basis that personal laws cannot be tested on the anvil of Articles 14, 15, 21 and 44 of the Constitution.

# 14 killed, 4 hurt as mini bus hits lorry in Kurnool

**Kurnool (AP):** Fourteen people, including eight women and a child, were killed and four others injured when a mini bus collided with a lorry in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh early on Sunday, police said.

The incident took place at around 4 am when a group of people hailing from Chittoor district of the state were travelling in the mini bus towards Hyderabad, a senior police official told PTL.

They were all on their way to Ajmer in Rajasthan, he added.

Preliminary investigation suggests that the driver of the bus apparently lost control and the vehicle first crashed against the road median and then rolled to the other side of the



Police inspect the mangled remains of a traveller van after it collided with a truck on the Hyderabad-Bengaluru National Highway, near Veldurthi in Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh, Sunday early morning. PTL

road hitting a lorry, the official said. The injured have been hospitalised and the condition of two is stated to be serious, police said.

# Devendra Kula Vellalar community to get delisted from SC soon, announces PM

**KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI**

A long pending demand of the Devendra Kula Vellalar community to delist from the Scheduled Caste and put them in the Other Backward Community would soon become a reality, according to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing a public meeting at the International Indoor Stadium at Chennai on Sunday after laying foundation stones for various development schemes in the State including a Discovery Centre for the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras, the Prime Minister declared that the long pending demand of the Devendra Kula Vellalar community would soon become a reality. "The law which meets this demand would be introduced in the Parliament when it meets the next time," said Modi.

The demand of Puthiya Tamilakam, representing the scheduled caste community was

to merge the seven sub sects Pallar, Kudumbar, Pannadi, Kaaladi, Kadayar, Devendra Kulataar and Vadhiriyaar and rename the integrated entity as Devendra Kula Vallalar, according to Dr Krishnasami, party president.

The Prime Minister said in his speech that the Devendra Kula Vellalar was a community in search of its original identity. He remembered the meeting he had with the representatives of the community sometime back in Chennai. "Their craving for the reclamation of their original identity was discernible and I had assured them that the demand would be considered favourably," said Modi.

According to Dr Krishnasami, the DKV constituted eight per cent of the Tamil Nadu population which means that there were 90 lakh members belonging to the community.

The DKV leaders had asked the State and Centre to delist them

from the status of Scheduled Caste and they be included in the OBC list. "It was a travesty of history that a community which was experts in wet-land farming was dispossessed of their land and listed as scheduled caste by the colonial Britishers. Sreenivasan Pillai, the then leader of our community had written to the British administrators that we were culturally and traditionally different from Adi-Dravidar," said Dr Krishnasami who also disclosed that because of the poor financial status of the community, they could not travel to London to argue their case.

He said the stigma attached to the community could be removed only after it was delisted from the Scheduled Caste and incorporated in the list of OBC. According to Dr Krishnasami, hundreds of thousands of DKV had been forced to get converted into Christianity because of the harassment meted out to the community members by caste Hindus.

# 80 Shia orphans donate money for Ram Temple

**IAN S ■ LUCKNOW**

Over 80 orphans from the Saadatganj orphanage of the All India Shia Orphanage in Lucknow and people from the minority community donated more than Rs 1.5 lakh for the construction of the Ram temple.

The donations ranged from Rs 1,100 to Rs 10 and Rs 100. Former chairman of Shia Waqf Board, Wasim Rizvi, said: "Such an initiative will send a message of unity to those who work to divide people in the name of religion."

RSS executive member, Indresh Kumar, said a new chapter of mutual harmony would be written with the construction of the Ram temple.

The Shri Ram Janambhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust is conducting a mass contact and fund-raising campaign from January 15 till February 27 for the construction of the grand temple in Ayodhya.

Shri Ram Janambhoomi Teerth Kshetra Secretary Champat Rai was quoted as saying: "The accounts of the trust in three nationalized banks show an amount of over Rs 1,000 crore. Nearly 1.50 lakh VHP activists are collecting funds for the Ram temple. 37 activists have been deputed to deposit the donations in the bank accounts.

# Army personnel killed by unidentified men in UP

**Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh):** An Army personnel, on a visit to his home, was attacked and killed by unidentified miscreants. His body was found on Saturday with severe head injuries in his car from the Neem Sarai area here.

Police have registered an FIR against unidentified assailants and a woman, who was with the army man in his car at the time of the incident.

Police have detained the woman and are also looking into her allegation that she was gang-raped by the assailants. Reports said the army havildar's blood-stained body was found by his family members on the information given by the woman.

They rushed him to the Military Hospital in Prayagraj, where the doctors declared him dead.

Superintendent of Police (City) Dinesh Kumar Singh said, "The 38-year-old victim, identified as Ashutosh Kumar Singh, was a resident of Mahendra Nagar under Manganganj police station. He was working on the post of havildar in the Indian Army and was posted at Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir. He had come home on leave a few weeks back and was set to return back soon."

His father Ashok Kumar Singh informed the police that Ashutosh left home on Friday night on some errand. Later that night, Ashutosh's wife received a call on her mobile phone from a woman who informed her that Ashutosh was seriously injured and that his car was parked

at a ground in Neem Sarai area. The family members soon rushed to the site and found him with severe injuries.

The woman informed the victim's kin that she was accompanying Ashutosh to check on a plot of land when they decided to buy momos but lost the way and ended up at Neem Sarai.

Suddenly, they were interrupted by a few men who were blocking the road and this led to an argument with Ashutosh when he asked them to give way for the car to pass.

The men attacked Ashutosh with bricks causing him serious injuries on the head.

The SP said that on the complaint of the family members, an FIR has been registered against the woman who was accompanying Ashutosh and unidentified miscreants in connection with the crime.

"We have detained the young woman named by the family members in the FIR. During questioning she first claimed that the unidentified miscreants also tried to rape her. However, she later changed her statement and claimed that she had been gang-raped. In the light of her conflicting statements, we are getting a medical examination of the woman conducted and have also sent her clothes for forensic examination," he added. "The body of the victim has been sent for a post-mortem examination. Efforts are now on to identify and arrest the miscreants," the police official said. IANS

# Girl thrown off terrace after failed rape bid

**Pilibhit (Uttar Pradesh):** A 16-year-old girl was allegedly thrown off a terrace after a failed rape attempt by two of her neighbours, police said on Sunday.

The two pushed the girl down when they saw her father enter the house, alleged the family. The girl has suffered several fractures and internal injuries, said her father while lodging a complaint with the police in Jahanabad area.

Harish Vardhan Singh, Station House Officer (SHO), said the accused, identified as Arvind and Mahendra, have been booked under IPC section 354 (applying force to a woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 504 (intentional insult) and 323 (causing hurt), besides provisions of the SC/ST Act and the POCSO Act.

The police have set up teams to arrest

the two youths who are now absconding.

According to reports the incident took place on Saturday.

The minor's father alleged that he found his daughter missing from her room. On searching, he discovered the mobile phone of the key accused, a 21-year-old youth who resides in the neighbourhood. He went to the youth's house to enquire about the whereabouts of his daughter. He claimed he was just in time to prevent them from sexually assaulting his daughter.

The two youths allegedly abused him, making casteist remarks against him. They then threw his daughter off the roof.

When she regained consciousness, she narrated her ordeal, saying the duo had tried to outrage her modesty. IANS

# Lucknow Varsity students form blood donors' group

**Lucknow:** Six students of B.A. (Hons) final year in Lucknow University (LU) have launched 'Mission Zindagi', an online blood donor group, to extend a helping hand to people facing medical emergency.

The students are creating online database of students, teachers and staff who are regular donors or are keen to donate and coordinate to make donors available to the needy. Group coordinator, Devansh Krishna Srivastava, said: "We have created a link, 'Mission Zindagi', on the website where interested people may register themselves by providing their details and suitable time for donation. A registered donor closest to the patient's location will be alerted for help."

"Any resident who requires blood may go to the Lucknow University website where contact numbers of 'Mission Zindagi' members are available. They can call our team and we will provide help at the earliest," he added.

The biggest benefit of the initiative is that it would save time and help save lives.

"Students will receive calls and coordinate blood donation round the clock. More members from all undergraduate and post-graduate courses will be added later," he said.

Other members of group are Mangesh Kumar Vishwakarma, Ayushi Tripathi, Shivangi Srivastava, Utkarsh Chitranshi and Sriya. IANS

# Tributes paid to late Malti Mohinder on her second death anniversary

**New Delhi:** On the occasion of second death anniversary of late Malti Mohinder Singh, the inspiration and guide to teachers in the field of education, it was resolved to follow the path always paved by them.

Tributes were paid to the late Malati Mohinder Singh on her second death anniversary with devotional songs held at the Sri Sathya Sai International Center in New Delhi. Former Union Minister for Women and Child Development, Smt Maneka Sanjay Gandhi while paying tribute to the late Smt. Malti Mohinder Singh and said that the path paved by them will always be exemplary for all of us. Former Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, Shri Devendra Singh, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Haryana, Dr.



Sonia Rajesh Khullar and other dignitaries paid homage paid to late Malti Mohinder Singh.

It is noteworthy that in the way to encourage and honor teachers, Malti Gyanpeeth Awards were started in the year 2013 in Punjab.

Under the Malti Jnanpith Awards the best 15 teachers of state and government aided high schools and senior secondary schools of Punjab are given award of Rs. 01 lakh for each every year. IANS

# 73 new Covid cases in J&K

**Jammu:** J&K saw 73 new Covid cases on Sunday while 65 patients were discharged from different hospitals after recovery during the last 24 hours.

An official bulletin said that of the new cases, 15 were from the Jammu division and 58 from the Kashmir division while of the recovered patients, 16 were from the Jammu division and 49 from the Kashmir division.

So far, 125,341 people have been infected with coronavirus in J&K out of which 122,768 have recovered, while 1,951 people succumbed, including two on Sunday.

The number of active cases is now 622 out of which 160 are from the Jammu division and 462 from the Kashmir division. IANS

# Army helps douse major forest fire along China border in Arunachal

**Itanagar:** Army troops successfully doused a major forest fire in Arunachal Pradesh's Dibang Valley district along the China border, officials said on Sunday.

Defence spokesman Lt Col P. Khongsai said that troops of the Spear Corps extended immediate and critical help to the civil administration in dousing the major forest fire near Anini in Dibang Valley.

"The forest fire broke out at Koylabasti and Anini on Thursday night and soon engulfed the surrounding mountain ridges. In a quick response to the developing situation, the units of the local formation quickly deployed three response columns and immediately took charge of the situation. It took the Army and local administration almost 11 hours to douse the forest fires," he said.

Khongsai said the well-coordinated and timely response by the Army averted a major disaster and

saved lives and property. The local authorities and members of civil administration lauded the Indian Army's effort in averting a major tragedy in the area.

Last month, the Army, Indian Air Force, National and State Disaster Response Force, local volunteers and administration jointly doused a major wildfire in the famous Dzukou Valley on Nagaland-Manipur borders after two weeks of battle.

The forest fire caused huge damage to the flora and fauna, forest and environment of the Dzukou Valley, which is one of the 10 most beautiful places in the mountainous northeast India.

The Dzukou valley, situated at an altitude of 2,452 metres above the sea level and 30 km from Nagaland capital Kohima, is also a sanctuary for the endangered Blyth's tragopan - Nagaland's state bird - and other species of birds and animals. IANS

# Yogi assures seers of development in Braj region

**Mathura:** Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday met saints and seers in Vrindavan town and assured them of the development of the Braj region. "The government is working in tandem with the religious leaders for the development of this region. We will take this region to the global level," he said while addressing saints.

He said that after Independence, the governments had not worked for religious tourism. "The Kashi Vishwanath corridor work is being done under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj is another example of development of religious tourism. Ayodhya is also coming up as a world class city," he said.

Yogi Adityanath said he had set up the Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad and various developmental projects were being taken up. The Chief Minister also visited the famous Banke Bihari temple and offered prayers. IANS

# Three held in UP for making fake HSRP

**Meerut (UP):** Three persons have been arrested in Meerut for allegedly manufacturing and selling fake high security registration plates (HSRP).

In a surprise raid on the intervening night of Friday/Saturday in Mohanpuri area, the police recovered about 400 finished plates and more than 300 'empty' ones on which number was yet to be written.

Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, station in-charge of Civil Lines police station said: "We have arrested manufacturing unit owner, Tanuj Agarwal, his associate Shriram and a seller named Sandeep Kumar who was picked up from Gurdwara Road and possessed at least 18 fake plates. Police are searching for fourth associate Mohd Wasim. We have also seized machines and equipment, including hydraulic press, fake holograms, dye, etc. used to make these fake number plates."

During questioning, the accused have revealed that machinery, plates and equipment were brought from Delhi and were being sold to various shop owners that claimed to provide the high security number plate to prospective buyers who had no idea that the plate was fake. IANS

# Fancy garb, gowns, siblings in fray in Andhra panchayat polls

**Amaravati:** Being held under the Covid shadow, the ongoing panchayat polls in Andhra Pradesh are witnessing the same colour, theatrics and human interest stories that accompany elections in India at all levels.

Though there was uncertainty whether the polls to the rural local bodies would be held as announced by the State Election Commission, the Supreme Court's dismissal of the state government's appeal to defer them led to the four phase elections kick off.

As the polls are midway, some interesting aspects include village volunteers contesting polls, a contestant wearing a gown to campaign, siblings testing electoral waters and alcohol and money allegedly being distributed as usual. In Nellore district, two siblings are contesting but for different panchayats.

Piduru Venugopal Reddy contested the election in Nellurupalli village while his younger sister Sannareddy Rajani fought for the Nellaballi panchayati.

In Vizianagaram district, a government official's mother is in the fray. Krishna District Joint Collector Lotheti Shivashankar's mother Lotheti Krishnaveni filed her nomination for the sarpanch post in Srungavarapukota village.

A good number of village and ward volunteers are contesting, and a few have also won.

Three former village volunteers managed to win the Sarpanch posts in Visakhapatnam district. Ainaampudi Bhaskar Raju won in Melipaka, Padmarekha in Mangalapuram and Karaka Rajyalakshmi in Jamadulapalem. Subhalekha, a former vil-

lage volunteer from Muthyalacheruvu village in Ananthapur district's Kadiri mandal, has filed her nomination for the sarpanch post and so did three others. However, all three withdrew them, recognising the service Subhalekha rendered as a volunteer, enabling her to win unanimously. A young Russia-educated doctor contested the Sarpanch election in Guntur district recently.

Jada Jitin Dev, who was working as a doctor in Guntur town, sought to test his electoral prospects in his village Gopalavaripalem.

In Guntur district's Pedakurapadu village of Krosuru mandal, former sarpanch, Picchaya Chowdary, donned the garb of Satyahasichanduru, a mythological character to campaign and propel Janga Soubhagyalakshmi's electoral

prospects for the sarpanch post.

Meanwhile, Gundepudi village in Krishna district has emerged as one of the smallest panchayats in fray during the second phase of elections which happened on Saturday. Gundepudi separated from Polukonda panchayati in 1956. It is 20 km far away from Nandiwada, with a population of just 196 people, out of which 150 are voters.

Among these 150, 74 were men and 76 women. Despite being one of the smallest panchayats, the village hasn't seen unanimous elections until now, though bigger villages with far larger populations were going for unanimous polls.

Setting an example that come what may one must always keep fighting, a contestant in Guntur district straightaway went from the hospital to file her nomination papers.

Eluru Aruna was suffering from an ailment related to the nerves. She even had to be put on a ventilator but on the last day of nominations and in a better condition after treatment, she drove down to Chamallamudi office to file her papers.

As she reached the office, the poll officials, empathising with her, went to her car to take her papers. In East Godavari district's Kadiyam village, famous for horticulture, a 92-year-old woman mustered all her strength to personally visit the office and file nomination for a ward member's post.

In a peculiar development, a panchayat election contestant at Gummalaxmipuram in Vizianagaram district literally wore his election symbol -- a gown -- to impress upon the voters to cast their vote in his favour. IANS



Artists perform Jhumur dance during a workshop of Folk Safar festival at Mohor Kun in Kolkata on Sunday. PTL

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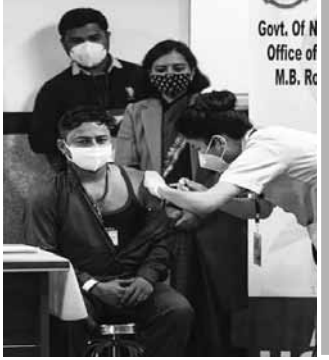
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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Halfway through

Round one of first-phase COVID-19 vaccination drive over, India gets its act together to accolades

India has begun the second round of its phase one COVID-19 vaccination drive. The first round that began on January 16 saw 58,65,813 healthcare workers and 19,00,506 front-line workers being inoculated till February 12. Once India administers both the shots, the vaccination process for the first lot of chosen people will be complete. Thankfully, from the time the venture got underway, the number of infections and casualties has seen a downward spiral. According to the Union Health Ministry, on February 11 the country reported 12,923 new infections in 24 hours, taking the number of those infected to 10,871,294. There are 142,562 active cases and 10,573,372 recoveries as India's death toll stood at 155,360 with 108 deaths during the same period. India is witnessing a consistent decline in the number of infections reported daily since the peak in mid-September 2020. This has earned the Government a pat on the back from the World Health Organisation (WHO), as has the fact that over seven million people have been inoculated since the world's largest vaccination drive began in January. "It's the fastest rate of vaccination happening," Roderico Ofrin, the WHO's India representative, has said. However, despite its relative success, the first round was not without challenges. For instance, there was the issue of procuring enough vaccines, which still remains. AstraZeneca's Covishield, which is the main vaccine being administered, is given in two doses, four weeks



apart. This means that India needs 60 crore shots for the first phase.

The Serum Institute of India (SII), which makes Covishield, has said it has a stockpile of five-seven crore doses and aims to produce 50 crore shots by July 2021. So, by the SII's own admission, there will be shortages in the first half of 2021. However, this shortage will ease when other vaccines are cleared for use. But other issues like inadequate cold storage facilities will continue to haunt the system in the second round too. The fact that more than 52 per cent of the country's 29,000 cold chain points and 40 per cent of the equipment are concentrated in just six States doesn't help. As the drive speeds up, the Government will have to increase the number of cold chain facilities, keeping in focus the States without an adequate infrastructure. Plus, Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, the other approved vaccine, can be kept at room temperature for at least a week. So the Government needs to ensure that going forward the campaign has a healthy mix of both the vaccines. But, for that to happen, the people's hesitation in using Covaxin needs to be overcome by releasing its efficacy data. Also, with the registration process being mostly electronic till now, the Government should ensure some amount of "on-the-spot" registration as not everyone has a mobile phone and internet connection in a poor country like ours. With Indians developing antibodies faster than the Government can get the jobs, there is hope for the country. But for a lot of people, as for the economy, it would have come a bit too late.

### PICTALK



Wreckage at the scene of a bombing in Mogadishu, Somalia

# Upper House: To be, or not to be?



PRAFULL GORADIA

Political parties need to realise and decide whether they wish to make serious use of the Upper House or exploit it for their convenience

As expressed in this journal, others have voiced, from time to time, doubts about the utility of the Upper House of legislature whether in the States or at the Centre. The cause of these doubts is the not-so-infrequent misuse of the Rajya Sabha as well as the Vidhan Parishads. As Sanjay Gandhi's influence grew in the 1970s, many of his friends were lifted into the Rajya Sabha. Fortunately for them, the election rule-framers prescribed the minimum age for such candidates as 30. Hence, like the minimum age of 25 years for the Lok Sabha, anyone who was over 30 years was eligible for the Upper House. In many ways, this was the first reason of misuse.

The Upper House was never meant for the young woman or man to get into. They, being young and fit, should cultivate the common folk, broaden the party base and, in due course, contest a Lok Sabha seat. The young and raw individuals reflected on the House discipline as well as the quality of debates and their contribution to Parliament. The purpose of the Upper House, whether at the Centre or in States, was the exact opposite: Older, mature individuals, preferably well educated who could devote time to study issues and then speak on them in an informed manner. They may or may not relate to the common folk of a constituency, nor perhaps may the mass voters relate to such members.

The Upper House should be used to accommodate leaders who made competent Ministers and had to get elected within six months of their appointment by the Prime Minister or a Chief Minister.

One recent example is that of Yogi Adityanath. He was in the Lok Sabha when the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections were held in 2017 and he had not contested from any constituency. Yet he was selected to be the Chief Minister and,



therefore, had to enter the Assembly. He could have requested an MLA to give up his seat. But instead of doing that, he chose not to disturb anyone; there was a Vidhan Parishad seat vacant which he used to become an Assembly member. In 2001, when Narendra Modi was in a similar situation in Gujarat, he could not do the same. There being no Vidhan Parishad in his State, Modi had to get elected from an Assembly seat vacated by an MLA.

Having been a member of the Rajya Sabha, I found that the level of debates and discussions was, on the whole, more sober and mature than in the Lok Sabha. Generally, the speakers in the Upper House ensured that they had studied and reflected on the subject they spoke on whereas, in the Lok Sabha, more members spoke off the cuff; most of them had spent time in their constituencies over the weekend. Many of them regularly left Delhi on Friday afternoons, if not on Thursday evenings, to return on Monday mornings. The Rajya Sabha members could afford to spend the weekends



THE UPPER HOUSE SHOULD BE USED TO ACCOMMODATE LEADERS WHO WOULD MAKE COMPETENT MINISTERS AND HAVE TO GET ELECTED WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF THEIR APPOINTMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OR A CHIEF MINISTER

in Delhi and read up before speaking the following week.

The Communist parties had a commendable system; most of their Upper House members spent the weekends in Delhi. They not only studied the contemporary subjects but also collected the Bills coming up for debate and passed on their notes to their Lok Sabha colleagues. I offered to organise a small secretariat at my cost for all my party members so that all of us could be better prepared for discussions. Being in power after long and with a lenient leadership, the general mood in the party was one of overconfidence. Little wonder then that the 2004 general election was lost on a manifesto which projected "India shining". To every Indian shining, there were citizens not shining.

In India, our constituencies are large and the voters are much more varied than, say, in western countries. Moreover, our diversity makes it useful for the Members of Parliament and even Assemblies to know other parts of the country. The Upper House members would have the leisure to do

this kind of work during the weeks when the House does not sit. The Lower House members cannot normally have much leisure; their focus has to be on their own voters. If the legislators do not take their knowledge seriously, they would yield helplessly to the dominance of the Executive or the Ministers.

It is for the political parties to realise and decide whether they wish to make serious use of the Upper House or exploit it for their convenience. But, truly, these chambers can be useful as knowledge-cum-wisdom banks for the parties as well as for the country. They can help raise the quality of politics.

Getting elected by lakhs of people is related to popularity or, at least, acceptability whereas knowledge depends on education and experience. Both are necessary virtues; the Lower House more for the party while the Upper House more for the country in the long run, if used wisely.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### INDIA CANNOT BE A SURVEILLANCE STATE

Sir—The Union Home Ministry's call for citizens to become "cyber volunteers" and identify, flag and report illegal, unlawful and "anti-national" online content is perhaps the most brazen and dangerous sign of an attempt to turn our democratic and free society into a "surveillance State".

Though vigilante activities directed against individuals, social groups and communities have increased in the past few years and the Government has ignored and sometimes even patronised these, it was not expected of it to move towards setting up a virtual vigilante force. The pilot project is to be implemented in Jammu and Kashmir and Tripura, and then extended to other States. This will have dangerous consequences for citizens, as it will curtail their rights and will jeopardise freedom of society. It is illegal as it violates the basic tenets of the Constitution which guarantee freedom of speech and privacy to every individual.

These volunteers will act like secret police service agents reporting to the Government and its machinery about any post or comment which they dislike or disapprove of. Where we are moving? It's really a matter of great concern. A time will come when these volunteers will dictate terms to the common man and will assume the role of courts. They will pronounce judgments on social media and will lynch anybody they feel like without any fear. We are building a "Taliban" State.

Shovanlal Chakraborty | Kolkata

#### FUEL PRICE RISE WILL HIT POOR FARMERS

Sir—In March 2020, international oil prices were raised due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Central Government is not taking immediate steps to reduce taxes on oil or petroleum. The retail petrol and diesel rates are governed by international prices. India is 85 per cent dependent on oil imports to meet its needs. Of course, it is well known that Central and State taxes account for about 60 per cent of retail prices. But the Union Budget included petrol and diesel among those products,

#### TMC is shaken to the core



The Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress is shaken to its core as many big leaders are leaving the party to join the BJP. The recent jolt came on Friday when Rajya Sabha MP and former Railway Minister Dinesh Trivedi announced his resignation from the Rajya Sabha on the floor of the House. It is no secret that these defections are fanned by the BJP leaders who

are making all-out efforts to weaken the TMC when State Assembly elections are round the corner. These will likely prove a grave setback to the TMC and will diminish its prospects of making to the power corridors in one of the most politically sensitive State.

The BJP, which enjoys power at the Centre, knows that winning the battle of West Bengal is easier said than done. However, if the old guard and most trusted lieutenants of Chief Minister Banerjee are leaving the party's fold at such a crucial time, it indicates that something is not well internally. The fault lines are now apparent. Not to mention, these leaders are disgruntled by the party leadership and the alleged dictatorial manner of Didi who is the party supremo.

These defections will also be a setback to the BJP's image in the long run as the saffron party is already infamous for creating rifts and fanning defections in opposite camps.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

on which a new agricultural structure and development cess has been imposed.

Fuel prices are increasing time to time in Pakistan and Nepal but in India, relatively high rates will trouble the oil consumers or end users. By increasing the rates of petrol and diesel, the Central and State Governments will generate more revenue from taxation. But this will only enrage the common people as the prices of commodities would increase. The oil expenditure of a farmer who operates various agricultural apparatus and machines like diesel pumps, generators and so on, will increase but the income will not rise proportionately. Hence the Centre and the State Governments should reconsider relaxing the prices keeping in mind the interests of marginal farmers and common oil consumers.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

#### DON'T IMPOSE MORALITY ON CHILDREN

Sir—Parents must stop telling their children that the attraction they feel towards

the opposite gender is merely infatuation and love has nothing to do with it. By doing so they are suffocating their children, demoralising their spirit and also doubting their sense of judgment. Most of the parents do it because they think that in this way they would prevent the young minds from getting distracted. They are unaware of the fact that by imposing sanctions and unnecessary high moral principles on their children, they are actually making them weak from within.

Gradually and slowly, such children will stop discussing their problems with their parents. The distance between them will increase which will have adverse consequences for the family. Adolescents who have reached the age of puberty need to be convinced that their love is real and that if they marry for love, then they will have a great deal of parental support.

Srinivas Reddy | Hyderabad

### SOUNDBITE

I request village panchayat representatives to identify and make a list of all unused Government land in their respective areas. We can restore and renovate them.



GOA CM —Pramod Sawant



The overriding priorities of 2021 are to defeat the pandemic, accelerate the country's economic recovery, implement economic reforms and fight corruption.

South African President —Cyril Ramaphosa

I'm truly overwhelmed with the love that I'm receiving from the people here in the Northeast. I have met all those who have been kind enough to come to our sets to wish me luck.



Actor —Ayushmann Khurrana



It is disappointing not to get 100 but I have been working hard on my batting. There will be other opportunities for me to get that score.

Cricketer —Joshua Da Silva

The reign of suppression and terror in Kashmir is the unvarnished and unpalatable truth that Government of India wants to hide from the rest of the country.



Former J&K CM —Mehbooba Mufti

## Foolhardy acts

Uttarakhand's fragile ecosystem is being abused by the builders' lobby in cahoots with babus and netas

One calamity leads to another and if it is a man-made disaster it most certainly will, unless extraordinary steps are taken to forestall the impending danger. What is happening in Uttarakhand is a case in point, if aerial surveys are anything to go by. The debris accompanying the deluge earlier this week has blocked a stream that joins the Rishi Ganga river, forming a temporary lake which if it breaches can cause further devastation. With the threat still looming, if authorities fail to take timely and adequate precautionary measures, the loss to life, property and flora and fauna may be colossal.

Due to (often illegal) rampant construction, mining and blasting activity in the hills — to most of which the complacent babus and their political masters turn a blind eye — the fragile local ecosystem is facing an existential crisis. We might pompously bellow about our sustainable development goals but the reality is to the contrary. In our quest for development, we have messed up the region's biodiversity and pushed many exotic and indigenous varieties of plants and animals to the verge of extinction.

Not only that, we have been quite an ignoramus people with respect to the importance of knowledge as passed down by the local generations. The villagers and tribals have traditional wisdom to foresee any catastrophe by studying the signs of nature, changes in the behaviour of domestic and wild animals, insects, change in wind speed and direction and so on. This begs the question as to how many times have successive Governments made serious attempts to tap this traditional knowledge base as a means of forewarning against natural or man-made disasters? But, more importantly, what should be done for now? Should the authorities work on a contingency rehabilitation plan, or should a safety valve be drilled to drain out the water from this temporary lake? Are the authorities in a position at all to regulate the flow? Or will the Government leave the people to their fate, only to announce compensations later? These and other such questions will keep crossing our mind.

According to a report by the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, an autonomous research institute under the Department of Science and Technology, the assessment of the actual magnitude of risks involved due to this impoundment of water requires a detailed survey. However, the scientists, NGOs and the Government must put their heads together and work out an action plan before it gets too late.

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

### UNDERSTANDING ENERGY CONCERNS

A grasp of the methods of transition in the past, from one energy era to another, is important



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

Each social grouping has its mythology. The sense in which the phrase social groupings is being used in this text refers to human aggregations popularly clubbed as a category, such as "the rich", "the poor", "the professional", "the sailor" and so on. The rich have a sub-category that is derisively referred to. This sub-category is called "the nouveau riche," which is supposed to be loud in its display of recently-acquired wealth. Whether as a characteristic this is true or not has never been empirically tested, however it is believed to be true. Similarly, many professional groups such as engineers, doctors, et al look down upon history as a discipline. A professional historian is neither taken seriously nor referred to with the mellowness which any "serious" professional would have been. So be it!

Applying this yardstick of traits to the profession of energy specialists, the same kind of syndrome can be found. Unexplained professional myopia prevents many of them from recognising that the need for green energy is not a first energy shift that has ever touched the human civilisation. Energy shifts are as old as humanity. When the physical energy of human beings was used to break down aggregations of natural material, such as branches or boulders, the substitution of physical human energy by power of draft animal energy was a major energy revolution. For any kind of traction or movement being substituted with the use of animal energy, there was an equally big revolution.



Ostensibly human beings took a long time to recognise that they need not walk to move from one point to another but they could instead ride an animal. This too was nearly as big a revolution as any. Lions remained untameable, elephants lost on speed what they gained on bulk. The horse was the clear winner and its popularity became so much that horse power became the unit of measurement and even today the strength of an engine is explained in terms of how many horse powers it represents. The message is simple. Each source of energy was a process which had its era of dominance. The shift from one era to another was as fundamental, drastic and dramatic as the shift one talks of today for an aspirational or needed change from fossil fuel to green energy.

Be that as it may, any such shift needed a change in technology. Other collaterals followed in the process of evolution: Size of the circle (often referred to as the wheel) and the concomitant size of the case which would contain the machinery (called the equipment). This meant change in the service industry and indeed the full gamut of ancillary skills. Hence, to understand green energy and the era in which many front-edge communities are locked in today, in a module of learning, is a complicated process. In the prevailing dominant social culture of "fast food", few have the time to pause and consider the nature of the problem.

There isn't any serious dissertation available on how long any era lasted before it gave way to the next era of energy usage. To recognise and change this framework of reference to a more holistic one is the need of the hour. The present obsession with one form of green energy or another, be it solar, wind, hydro, oceanic or biomass is proving good almost only for talking shop and the industry. There is a clear need to get our perspective right on the significance of power, *per se*. Energy is the underpinning of human civilisation. Its characterisation determines the periods of history. Understanding the methods of transition in the past, from one energy era to another, will help us to find solutions to the current energy concerns better.

*(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal.)*

# Need for affordable housing and microfinance for all



MOIN QAZI

While India continues to record improvement in dealing with poverty, homelessness has elicited a poor response from our policymakers

Among the many challenges that need urgent attention, more so after the COVID-19 pandemic invaded our lives, is housing. This vital segment needs a scientific and creative intervention to make it a sustainable proposition. Lack of proper housing is one of the reasons, apart from loss of jobs, that led to the mass migration of labourers from cities to the villages, during the initial days of the countrywide lockdown. Hence, expanding access to affordable housing is essential not just for equitable development but also for social stability.

Looking at the gravity of the issue, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech announced the extension of the tax holiday on affordable housing projects for one more year. The Government has done this to ensure affordable housing for migrant workers. The affordable rental housing projects are part of the 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban)'.

While we continue to record improvement in dealing with poverty, homelessness has elicited a poor response from our policymakers. Consequently, slums constitute 17 per cent of urban households in India and in Mumbai they make up 42 per cent of the households. These slum clusters lack necessary amenities like private toilets and potable water. A high population density and a weak public healthcare system mean more susceptibility to COVID-19 and other diseases and epidemics. Necessary precautions like social distancing to stay safe of the Coronavirus cannot be practised under such deplorable living conditions that prevail in slums and *jhuggi jhopri* clusters.

Human health and well-being depends on a range of interconnected social, economic and physical factors that impact the environment in which we live and sustain ourselves. The key to good housing is to ensure that residents have access to transportation, affordable healthcare, jobs, education as well as other essential services. A decent habitat and shelter can contribute in not just individual or societal well-being but also have the potential to catalyse overall economic growth. It is, thus, critical to recognise housing investment as a basic, fundamental building block of economic activity.

Housing is not a standalone issue and is closely intertwined with other factors and lack of sustainable housing is often the cause of a slew of health and developmental problems. Poor ventilation and the inability to maintain basic hygiene are major causes of poor health. Fragile building structures undermine safety and increase vulnerability to disaster. Lack of lighting and space limits the ability of children to study. Inadequate privacy and lack of sanitation contribute to a host of diseases, hence perpetuating poverty.

For many people in the developing world, the land on which they live is their only asset. If that property is not recognised as legally theirs, they lose out on several social benefits. Land ownership is often the bedrock of other development interventions. Owning land boosts nutrition, educational outcomes and gender equality. The converse is equally true. Where land security is absent or weak — when men and women do not have recognised legal rights to their land and can thus be easily displaced — all other development efforts



MANY LOW-INCOME VILLAGERS HAVE OWNED THEIR LAND FOR GENERATIONS BUT LACK FORMAL OWNERSHIP DOCUMENTS. HENCE, THEY DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO FORMAL FINANCIAL SERVICES. ONCE THEIR INHABITED LAND GETS FORMALLY TITLED, THEY COULD OBTAIN ACCESS TO SEVERAL PUBLIC BENEFITS, INCLUDING LOANS



go in vain and conflict arises.

Many who live in slums have little or no control over the ownership of the property they live upon. The lack of official land titles is a major impediment to the acquisition of housing finance. People do not have documentary proof of being owners of the land on which they live and are, therefore, legally insecure.

Many low-income villagers have owned their land for generations but lack formal ownership documents. Hence, they do not have access to formal financial services. Once their inhabited land gets formally titled, they could obtain access to several public benefits, including loans.

Traditional housing finance has not been able to offer much help to people in the low-income group. But a range of financial institutions are applying good microfinance practices, thus promoting housing. The increased provision of housing microfinance has resulted in safe and healthy housing conditions for millions. Successful housing microfinance providers have married the core principles of micro-credit — peer-based borrower selection and repayment enforcement, close follow-up on repayment and so on — with the technical expertise required to investigate land ownership and other classical housing finance principles.

This model has been highly successful wherever Governments are offering long-term tenancies

and shared-ownership housing. But the sector is still in need of more sustainable business models to get legitimacy in mainstream finance. Housing micro-finance can include a range of financial services that support improving or upgrading housing such as home repair and expansions, additional cooking space, water and sanitation services, energy efficiency upgrades, the purchase of inhabitable land or permanent structures and the construction of new housing.

The demand for housing micro-finance is high. The clients are already channelising a good portion of micro-enterprise loans for home improvement; micro-entrepreneurs also use their homes as productive assets for generating income. A home can be a place to store inventory, produce goods and run a business. A home is also a personal asset that usually appreciates in value over time. Home improvement, thus, not only enhances living conditions but is also an investment.

The Government also needs to use creative approaches for making rental housing a safe option for house owners. Its share in overall housing has been steadily declining. There is clearly a need to replace the current rent control laws with modern tenancy laws, so as to give full freedom to tenants and owners to negotiate the rent and the length of the lease.

Rules with respect to eviction also need to be reformed to restore

the balance between the rights of tenants and the owners.

We need a differently structured and more professional market rental sector. A model Rent Act is needed to promote rental housing. There should be mutual agreement between the landlord and the tenant for a stipulated lease period prior to which the tenant can't be evicted and after the expiry of the lease period, the tenant will not be permitted to continue in the housing unit.

However, rent control laws give tenants so much security that landlords worry that they may not regain possession of their property at the end of the lease period. People often leave their properties vacant until they get a tenant they are comfortable with.

It is time the Government puts rental housing to use. Its share in overall housing has been steadily declining. There is a need for replacing current rent control laws with a modern tenancy law, which would give full freedom to tenants and owners to negotiate the rent and the length of the lease.

Policymakers, financial institutions and housing experts also need to evaluate their current policies, cultures and ways of working. With a thoughtful approach, they can be better prepared to tackle this humongous problem. The Government will have to change course and shift away from the legacy mindset before the problem gets out of hand.

*The writer is a well-known development professional. The views expressed are personal.*

## POINTCOUNTERPOINT

NOT JUST DINESH TRIVEDI, WHOEVER WANTS TO DO HONEST WORK CANNOT STAY IN THE TMC. IF HE WANTS TO JOIN THE BJP, WE WILL WELCOME HIM. —BJP NATIONAL GENERAL SECRETARY KAILASH VIJAYVARGIYA



I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO THE BJP AND ITS SENIOR LEADERS. I WAS TOLD THEY HAVE SAID THAT I AM WELCOME. BUT LET ME SETTLE DOWN FIRST. —FORMER TMC MP DINESH TRIVEDI

# China in a tizzy to prevent 'feminisation' of male adolescents

This will eventually be resolved, as these things usually are, by the magic of generational turnover. The young will outlive the old and become the majority

It seemed innocent enough at the start: Just a surge in the number of boys coming to school with notes from doctors saying they were excused from playing contact sports. But pretty soon high schools all over China were having trouble finding enough willing young men to make up a football team. It was around the same time that attendance at the compulsory classes in Marxist-Leninist-Xi-Jinping-Thought crashed. Even when boys started talking about their feelings and trying to look like K-Pop stars, people tried to laugh it all off and dubbed them "little fresh meats." But some far-sighted people understood that the nation's soul was at stake here.

As early as last June, Si Zefu, member of the Standing Committee of the 13th Chinese People's Political



GWYNNE DYER

*Gwynne Dyer's new book is 'Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy and Work'. The views expressed are personal.*

Consultative Conference's National Committee and chairman of Harbin Electric Corporation, was warning that many of China's young males had become "weak, timid and self-abasing." From not playing football to not wanting to be an "army hero" is a short, slippery slope.

This "feminisation", Si harrumphed, "would inevitably endanger the survival and development of the Chinese nation unless effectively managed." And even as he spoke, limp-wristed young men with flowers in their hair were spotted lolling about in the street outside.

Just as Oscar Wilde heralded the fall of the British empire and hippie "peace and love" caused the US to lose the Vietnam War and start its long decline, so too, young Chinese men wearing make-up...Stop! Are you sure

that the Party wants you to go down this particular rhetorical road?

Well, okay, maybe not exactly those examples. But what would the veterans of the Long March say about these effeminate young girlymen? You can't turn them into proper soldiers. China will be easy meat for the first manly country that comes along. Harrumph!

China has a very big bureaucracy, so it takes a while for an issue to come to the top of the pile but by early this year it had arrived. It's not clear if President-for-Life Xi Jinping took a personal interest in the issue but his enthusiasm for football as a symbol of national strength and manliness is well-known, so the policy-makers knew they were on a safe track.

The Education Ministry took the lead, with the pub-



lication of a policy document last week entitled, 'Proposal to Prevent the Feminisation of Male Adolescents'. No, really, I swear I'm not making this up. Check it out online.

The document claims that China needs to hire more male teachers to serve as role models (at present four out of five teachers in urban

areas are women) and "vigorously develop" sports like football to "cultivate the students' masculinity".

The official Chinese news agency *Xinhua* instantly took up the cause, condemning "androgynous" young men as "slender but weak as willows," and there was a suspiciously instant chorus of support on social media for the notion that traditional forms of masculinity are the foundation of national military strength.

It probably sounds fresh to an adult generation of Chinese who don't even know their own country's real history. To people elsewhere, it sounds like a bunch of early 20th Century Englishmen in wing collars declaring that "the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton." (No, it wasn't. It was won when Blücher's Prussian

army joined the battle in the afternoon after a forced march.)

It sounds like a bunch of late imperial claptrap, because that's what it is. Playing football sometimes makes you better at playing football. It does not make you better at dominating foreigners or fighting wars — and why do you want to do that anyway? It's, therefore, pleasing to report that the response in Chinese official and social media was far from unanimously enthusiastic.

"Is feminisation now a derogatory term?" one Weibo user asked and received over 200,000 likes, and the *People's Daily*, no less, published an opinion piece arguing that diversity and tolerance should be encouraged among feminine and masculine men alike.

There is probably no

country on Earth where the generational divergence of opinions, especially among the male half, is greater than it is in China. From an almost entirely hierarchical society as late as the 1980s (Confucianism reinforced by the 'democratic centralism' of Communism) to a younger generation that is egalitarian and gender-fluid (at least in the big cities) is one hell of a leap.

It will eventually be resolved, as these things usually are, by the magic of generational turnover. The young will outlive the old and become the majority. And here is the authentic voice of the young, summed up in a single tweet: "There are 70 million more men than women in this country. No country in the world has such a deformed sex ratio. Isn't that masculine enough?"

# AFTER SECOND IMPEACHMENT ACQUITTAL Trump indicates active public life

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump has told millions of his supporters that he is ready for yet another phase of active public life after the US Senate acquitted him in his second impeachment trial.



Following four days of the impeachment trial, the 100-member Senate voted to impeach the former US president by 57-43 votes, 10 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed for conviction.

Trump, a Republican, is the first-ever president to have been impeached twice and the first president to have faced impeachment after leaving office.

Trump, 74, faced the charge of incitement of insurrection over the deadly January 6 assault of the US Capitol by his supporters.

"Our historic, patriotic and beautiful movement to Make America Great Again has only just begun. In the months ahead I have much to share with you, and I look forward to

continuing our incredible journey together to achieve American greatness for all of our people. There has never been anything like it!" Trump said in a statement.

"We have so much work ahead of us, and soon we will

emerge with a vision for a bright, radiant, and limitless American future," Trump, who received 74 million votes in the November 3 presidential election, higher than that of any president before him.

While Trump has

remained quiet on his post-presidency life, speculation has been rife that he might run for the presidency in 2024 or encourage someone from his family to fight out a battle for the White House.

There is also some talk that

the former president might part ways with the Republican Party to form his own party. However, there has been no statement on this from Trump.

"Our cherished Constitutional Republic was founded on the impartial rule of law, the indispensable safeguards for our liberties, our rights and our freedoms," Trump said.

After the end of his term on January 20, Trump flew to his resort in Palm Beach Florida, where he has been staying since then.

Trump has been banned from almost all the major social media platforms including Twitter and Facebook.

Meanwhile, several Republican leaders slammed the party's Senators who voted against Trump.

The seven Senators are Richard Burr, Bill Cassidy, Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski, Mitt Romney, Ben Sasse and Pat Toomey.

"The Louisiana GOP

immediately censured Sen. Bill Cassidy, while state party officials in North Carolina and Pennsylvania issued sharp statements expressing disappointment over the votes cast Saturday by Sens. Richard Burr and Pat Toomey," Politico reported.

"The moves are the latest in a series of censures and disciplinary actions doled out to lawmakers deemed to be critical of the former president in the wake of the Capitol riot," it added.

Republican Senator John Cornyn said that he had concerns about this snap impeachment from the start.

"The arguments of the House Impeachment Managers that the Constitution permits the impeachment of a private citizen, the free speech protections of the First Amendment don't apply, the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment is optional, and that the trial may include a presiding officer who also serves as a juror all were a bridge too far," he said.

# Biden admin appoints 2 Indian-origin experts to key positions

PTI ■ HOUSTON

Two Indian-origin experts in public service have been appointed by the Biden administration to key positions at AmeriCorps, the federal agency for volunteering and service.

Sonal Nijhawan has been named Director of AmeriCorps State and National, and Sri Preston Kulkarni, 42, was appointed the new Chief of External Affairs.

Though having run for Congress twice unsuccessfully in Texas, Kulkarni was certainly noticed by the leadership in Washington.



Kulkarni's appointment, along with Nijhawan and Dan Kohl, reflects "the Biden administration's commitment to diverse leadership," according to the release by AmeriCorps.

In their roles, these leaders will use service to support the administration's agenda, focusing on four of the most urgent challenges of our time: Covid-19, economic recovery, racial equity, and climate change, the AmeriCorps said.

**In their roles, these leaders will use service to support the administration's agenda, focusing on four of the most urgent challenges of our time: Covid-19, economic recovery, racial equity, and climate change, the AmeriCorps said**

Kulkarni lost his race for the Texas District 22 seat in the US House of Representatives to former Fort Bend County Sheriff Troy Nehls in November as the Democratic nominee in a deeply Republican district.

Kulkarni brings a variety of experience in service and public affairs to AmeriCorps, including 14 years as a foreign service officer with the State Department where he specialised in public diplomacy and worked in public affairs and international information programmes, completing tours in Taiwan, Russia, Iraq, Israel, Jamaica and Washington, the statement said.

Nijhawan has committed her career to developing leaders and growing national service. Most recently, she developed and served as the executive director of Stockton Service Corps, a six-year, USD 12 million initiative to address local needs through AmeriCorps.

Her professional back-

ground also includes extensive experience in education, AmeriCorps said in a press release.

Inspired by the students, families, and AmeriCorps community she met, she went on to help found City Year Sacramento and launch the organisation's 22nd site with 50 new AmeriCorps members.

Nijhawan also served as the California director of Education Pioneers where she recruited, placed, and supported managers in urban school systems and education non-profits, empowering people to challenge the status quo of our public education system.

She earned a bachelor's in education and psychology from Marquette University and a master's in social work from the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

## GLOBE TROTTER

**NEW ZEALAND CITY GOING INTO 3-DAY LOCKDOWN**  
Wellington: New Zealand's largest city of Auckland will be placed in a three-day lockdown beginning just before midnight Sunday following the discovery of three unexplained coronavirus virus in the community.

**JAPAN APPROVES ITS FIRST COVID VACCINE**  
Tokyo: Japan on Sunday formally approved its first Covid-19 vaccine and said it would start nationwide inoculations within days, but months behind the US and many other countries. Japan's health ministry said it had approved the vaccine co-developed and supplied by Pfizer Inc. The announcement comes after a Government panel on Friday confirmed that final results of clinical testing done in Japan showed that the vaccine had an efficacy similar to what overseas tests showed.

**KOSOVO VOTES FOR NEW PARLIAMENT**  
Pristina: Kosovo's voters defied freezing weather to take part in an early parliamentary election Sunday to form a new government amid the coronavirus pandemic, an economic downturn and stalled negotiations with wartime foe Serbia. Some 1.8 million eligible voters on Sunday are expected to cast their ballots in 2,400 polling stations. They're electing 120 lawmakers among more than 1,000 candidates from 28 political groupings.

**TURKEY SAYS 13 OF ITS CITIZENS KILLED IN IRAQ**  
Ankara: Troops have found the bodies of 13 Turkish citizens abducted by Kurdish insurgents in a cave complex in northern Iraq, the Turkish defense minister said Sunday. Hulusi Akar said 12 of the victims were shot in the head and one died of a shoulder bullet wound. They were discovered in the Gara region near the Turkish border during an operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

# Myanmar anti-coup protesters keep pressure on junta

AP ■ YANGON

Vast numbers of people all over Myanmar flouted orders against demonstrations and marched again on Sunday to protest the military takeover that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Large demonstrations were held in the major cities of Yangon, Mandalay and the capital, Naypyitaw, as well as in far-flung areas dominated by ethnic minorities.

Resistance also took place in cyberspace, as a group calling itself BrotherHood of Myanmar Hackers defaced the government's Myanmar Digital News website, replacing content on its home page with words and pictures against the military takeover.



A large image that has an X mark on the face of Commander in chief Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing, also chairman of the State Administrative Council, lies on a road as anti-coup protesters gather outside the Hledan Centre in Yangon, Myanmar on Sunday.

Protesters in Yangon again rallied outside the Chinese and U.S. Embassies. They accuse

Beijing of propping up the military regime and applaud Washington's actions sanction-

ing the military. "The civil disobedience movement and demonstrations

show that the people of Myanmar want democracy. We stand with them," said a statement Saturday on the U.S. Embassy's Twitter account.

Other protesters carried signs urging people to boycott businesses linked to the military.

Sunday's activism took place after the ruling junta issued a new order suspending several basic civil liberties.

The order, issued late Saturday and published Sunday in state newspapers, suspends provisions in an existing law on security and privacy protection, allowing the authorities to carry out searches and make arrests without court warrants.

It also allows the interception of electronic and other communications without a warrant and permits the detention of detainees for more than 24 hours without court permis-

ion. Civil servants have been very active in the protests, and social media postings on Sunday indicated that state railway workers have joined them, with some unconfirmed claims that they have gone on strike.

The military seized power on February 1, detaining Suu Kyi and members of her government and preventing recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament.

The junta, led by Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, said it was forced to step in because the government failed to properly investigate allegations of fraud in last year's election, which Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party won in a landslide. The state election commission refuted that contention, saying there is no evidence to support it.

# Prachanda-led group announces fresh agitation against House dissolution

**Kathmandu:** The Nepal Communist Party's splinter faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Sunday announced a fresh agitation programme against the dissolution of the House of Representatives by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.

Nepal plunged into a political crisis on December 20 after Oli, in a surprise move, recommended dissolving the 275-member House, amidst a tussle for power with the chairman of the Nepal Communist Party's (NCP) splinter faction led by 'Prachanda'.

Acting on the prime minister's recommendation, President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House the same day and announced fresh elections on April 30 and May 10, sparking protests from a large section of the NCP led by 'Prachanda', also a co-chair of

the ruling party. The faction led by 'Prachanda' and Madhav Kumar Nepal announced fresh agitations against the dissolution of the House of Representatives.

During a press conference on Sunday, the struggle committee led by leader of the faction Narayan Kaji Shrestha said a human chain will be formed on February 19 around Tundikhel Open Ground in Kathmandu as a symbolic protest against "the House dissolution" and corruption.

The protest rallies will be staged in various districts across the country including capital city Kathmandu from February 17 to 24. The party will also launch a campaign to collect signatures against the dissolution from February 19 to 27 at various public places.

The agitating faction had earlier staged protests from

# 2 killed, 2 hurt in NYC subway stabbing attacks

**New York:** An unidentified man could be responsible for four separate stabbings that occurred within a few hours in the New York City subways, leaving two people dead, authorities said. The assaults happened between Friday morning and early Saturday, New York Police Department officials said during a news conference.

Authorities believe all four victims were homeless.

Police said they were searching for a man they suspect could be behind all of the attacks. They were reviewing subway security camera footage as part of the investigation. All four stabbings occurred along the A subway line.

One of the victims was discovered dead on a train in Queens at about midnight on Friday with several stab wounds to his neck and torso.

# UK PM to host virtual meeting of G7 leaders

**PTI ■ LONDON**

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson is to host fellow G7 leaders for a virtual meeting on February 19 ahead of its presidency of a summit in June of the Group of Seven countries including the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the US, Downing Street said on Sunday.

The virtual meeting, the first hosted by Johnson as part of the UK's G7 Presidency this year and the first gathering of G7 leaders since April 2020, will bring together the world leaders to discuss how leading democracies can work together to ensure equitable distribution of coronavirus vaccines around the world and prevent future pandemics.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to attend the

G7 Summit in Cornwall in June after India was invited as a guest country by the UK, alongside South Korea and Australia.

"The solutions to the challenges we face — from the colossal mission to get vaccines to every single country, to the fight to reverse the damage done to our ecosystems and lead a sustainable recovery from coronavirus — lie in the discussions we have with our friends and partners around the world," said Johnson.

"Quantum leaps in science have given us the vaccines we need to end this pandemic for good. Now world governments have a responsibility to work together to put those vaccines to the best possible use. I hope 2021 will be remembered as the year humanity worked together like never before to defeat a common foe," he said.

# White House aide resigns after threatening reporter

**AP ■ WASHINGTON**

White House deputy press secretary TJ Ducklo has resigned, the day after he was suspended for issuing a sexist and profane threat to a journalist seeking to cover his relationship with another reporter.

Ducklo had been put on a weeklong suspension without pay on Friday after a report surfaced in Vanity Fair outlining his sexist threats against a female Politico journalist to try to suppress a story about his relationship, telling her "I will destroy you."

The journalist had been seeking to report on his relationship with a political reporter at Axios who had previously covered the Biden campaign and transition.

# China fires back at US allegations of lack of transparency

**Beijing:** China fired back at the US on Sunday over allegations from the White House that Beijing withheld some information about the coronavirus outbreak from World Health Organization investigators.

In a statement on Saturday, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Washington had "deep concerns about the way in which the early findings of the Covid-19 investigation were communicated and questions about the process used to reach them."

"It is imperative that this report be independent, with expert findings free from intervention or alteration by the Chinese government," he said, referring to the WHO mission investigating the origins of the pandemic in the central city of Wuhan. "To better understand this pandemic and prepare for the next one, China must make

available its data from the earliest days of the outbreak," Sullivan's statement said.

China responded Sunday with a statement from its Washington Embassy that said the US Had already "gravely damaged international cooperation on Covid-19" and was now "pointing fingers at other countries who have been faithfully supporting the WHO and at the WHO itself."

While it welcomed President Joe Biden's decision to reverse the Trump administration's move to leave the WHO, China hopes the U.S. Will "hold itself to the highest standards, take a serious, earnest, transparent and responsible attitude, shoulder its rightful responsibility, support the WHO's work with real actions and make due contribution to the international cooperation on Covid-19," the statement said. AP

# Archaeologists unearth ancient beer factory in Abydos

AP ■ CAIRO

American and Egyptian Archaeologists have unearthed what could be the oldest known beer factory at one of the most prominent archaeological sites of ancient Egypt, a top antiquities official said Saturday.

Mostafa Waziri, secretary general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the factory was found in Abydos, an ancient burial ground located in the desert west of the Nile River, over 450 kilometres (280 miles) south of Cairo.

He said the factory apparently dates back to the region of King Narmer, who is widely known for his unification of ancient Egypt at the beginning of the First Dynastic Period (3150 BC-2613 BC).

Archaeologists found eight huge units — each is 20 meters (about 65 feet) long and 2.5 metres (about 8 feet) wide. Each unit includes some 40 pottery basins in two rows, which had been used to heat up a mixture of grains and water



This photo provided by the Egyptian Antiquities Ministry shows pottery basins, which archaeologists say had been used to heat up a mixture of grains and water to produce beer, in Abydos, some 450 km (280 miles) south of Cairo, Egypt.

to produce beer, Waziri said.

The joint mission is co-chaired by Dr. Matthew Adams of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and Deborah Vischak, assistant professor of ancient Egyptian art history and archaeology at Princeton University.

Adams said the factory

was apparently built in this area to provide royal rituals with beer, given that archaeologists found evidences showing the use of beer in sacrificial rites of ancient Egyptians.

British archaeologists were the first to mention the existence of that factory early 1900s, but they couldn't deter-

mine its location, the antiquities ministry said.

With its vast cemeteries and temples from the earliest times of ancient Egypt, Abydos was known for monuments honoring Osiris, ancient Egypt's god of underworld and the deity responsible for judging souls in the afterlife.

# Anti-viral coating on face masks may kill corona, UK study finds

PTI ■ LONDON

Scientists at the University of Cambridge working with an anti-viral coating technology called DioX believe that it could protect facemask users by killing the deadly coronavirus in as little as an hour.

According to "The Daily Telegraph", the invisible coating on facemasks attacks the virus by rupturing its outer layer, effectively eliminating all new mutant variants, including the UK's so-called Kent variant and the South African variant.

"The antiviral agent within the coating of the mask kills the virus by breaching its protective outer membrane, which is known as its envelope. Unlike other parts of the virus, the membrane remains the same regardless of any type of mutation. Hence this way of attacking the pathogen will work on

any new variant of coronavirus," Dr Graham Christie, senior lecturer at the Department of Chemical Engineering and Biotechnology at the University of Cambridge, told the newspaper.

"In fact, you could mutate the entire genome of the virus and it would have no effect on the envelope. We expect to see the same response regardless of the strain of coronavirus because structurally they are all very similar," he said.

The technology called DioX is based on quaternary ammonium salts — organic compounds widely used in the textile industry for their antimicrobial properties. Laboratory tests showed that the mask coated with it killed 95 per cent of pathogens on its surface within one hour and they were undetectable after four hours.



# GST officers to suspend taxpayer's registration for 'anomalies' in sales return

**New Delhi:** GST officers will immediately suspend registration of taxpayers whose sales return or GSTR-1 forms show "significant differences or anomalies" from the return filed by their suppliers, a move aimed at curbing tax evasion and safeguarding revenues.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) has issued a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for suspension of registration of a person on observance of such discrepancies/anomalies which indicate violation of the GST Act.

As per the SOP, the registration of specified taxpayers shall be suspended and system generated intimation for suspension and notice for cancellation of registration in form GST REG-31, containing the reasons of suspension, shall be sent to such taxpayers on their registered e-mail address.

The registration would be suspended in cases where a comparison of the returns furnished by a registered person with the details of outward supplies furnished in form GSTR-1, or the details of inward supplies derived based on the details of outward supplies furnished by his suppliers in their GSTR-1, show 'significant

differences or anomalies', indicating contravention of the provisions of the GST Act.

"Till the time functionality for FORM REG-31 is made available on portal, such notice/intimation shall be made available to the taxpayer on their dashboard on the common portal in Form GST REG-17.

"The taxpayers will be able to view the notice in the 'View/Notice and Order' tab post login," the SOP said.

Goods and Services Tax (GST) officers have already intensified their drive against fake invoicing and this has also contributed to increase in tax collections in the past couple of months.

GST collections have crossed the Rs 1 lakh crore mark for four consecutive months and surged to an all-time high of about Rs 1.20 lakh crore in January.

The SOP further said the taxpayers whose registrations are suspended would be required to furnish reply to the jurisdictional tax officer within 30 days from the receipt of such notice / intimation, explaining the discrepancies / anomalies and the reasons as to why their registration should not be cancelled. **PTI**

# Irdai asks insurers to issue Digilocker to policyholders to preserve documents

**New Delhi:** Insurance sector regulator Irdai has asked insurers to issue digital policies to their policyholders and also tell them how to use these documents.

The regulator has reasoned that the step will not only bring down the cost but also help speed up claim settlement process.

In its circular issued to all insurers excluding GIC Re, Lloyd's (India) and FRBs (foreign re-insurance branches), Irdai said that Digilocker will drive reduction in costs, elimination of customer complaints relating to non-delivery of policy copy, improved turnaround time of insurance services, faster claims processing and settlement, reduction in disputes, reduction in fraud and improvement in customer contactability.

On the whole it is expected that it will lead to better customer experience, said the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai).

In order to promote the adoption of Digilocker in the

insurance sector, the Authority advises all insurers to enable their IT systems to interact with Digilocker facility to enable policyholders to use Digilocker for preserving all their policy documents.

The insurers should inform their retail policyholders about Digilocker and how to use it. Insurers are also advised to enable the process by which the policyholders can place their policies in the digilocker, said the regulator.

As per the circular, the Digilocker team in NeGD (National e-Governance Division) under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology will provide necessary technical guidance and logistic support to facilitate adoption of Digilocker.

Digilocker is an initiative under the Digital India programme by the government where citizens can get authentic documents/certificate in digital format from original issuers of these certificates.

It aims at eliminating or

minimising the use of physical documents and will enhance effectiveness of service delivery, making these hassle free and friendly for the citizens.

Notably, the decision of Irdai has come against the backdrop of a letter written by Sanjay Dhotre, Minister of State for Electronics & IT, Communications and Human Resource Development, to Anurag Singh Thakur, Minister of State for Finance and Corporate Affairs with regards to issuance of digital insurance policies to citizen's Digilocker accounts.

In the letter, Dhotre had requested Thakur to advise Irdai to issue an advisory to all insurance companies to make available the digital insurance policy of all policy holders via their Digilocker account and acceptance of Digilocker issued documents as valid documents.

"This will provide an alternate channel to access and manage all their insurance policies in a safe and authentic manner. **PTI**

# Petrol with additives cross ₹100 mark in Maharashtra's Parbhani district

**Aurangabad:** The rate of petrol with additives has crossed the Rs 100 mark for a litre in Maharashtra's Parbhani district on Sunday morning, an official bearer of a petrol dealers' association said.

After a 28 paise rise on Sunday morning, the per-litre rate of petrol with additives for retail sale crossed Rs 100.

Parbhani District Petrol Dealers' Association President Amol Bhedsurkar told PTI, "The rates of petrol with additives in Parbhani has reached to 100.16 rupees for one litre. The cost of unleaded petrol is 97.38

here." The cost of petrol in Parbhani is one of the costliest in Maharashtra. The cost is higher due to longer distance of transportation.

Fuel in Parbhani comes from Manmad in the Nashik district, which is at a distance of 340 km.

"We need Rs 3,000 extra for every tanker if prices go up by 10 paise. Hence, the investment in buying fuel has also gone up," Bhedsurkar said.

The transportation cost for fuel stands at nearly 21 paise a litre now, he added. **PTI**

# Govt eases curbs on steel for highway construction to reduce cost

**New Delhi:** Doing away with restrictive conditions for use of steel in highways construction, the government on Sunday announced that all kinds of steel will be allowed for highways provided these meet the quality parameters.

Earlier, the contract provisions required use of steel produced by primary/integrated steel producers only. The move is aimed at ensuring cost reduction in highways construction using steel.

"The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued orders that all steel - whether produced from ore, billets, pellets or melting of scrap - would be allowed to be used for National Highway construction, as long as it meets the standards required for specific grades of steel," the Ministry said in a statement.

The steel proposed to be used would be tested in NABL-accredited laboratories as a third party check before

approval. The move is based on the analysis and discussions with stakeholders and also technical opinion.

In view of the increase in steel prices, which can impact the cost of building national highways, Road Transport & Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari had suggested the need to re-look at all conditions which could be restrictive, without impacting the quality of material used for highway construction.

With this step, the supplier base for steel used in the construction of national highways would increase, leading to more competition and better price discovery by the markets, the statement said.

This is also part of the continuous effort by the Minister to reduce costs through use of new technology, reducing restrictions on suppliers and making the procurement system transparent, it added. **PTI**

# ONGC takes leaf out of Reliance's book Floats subsidiary to buy own gas

**New Delhi:** Taking a leaf out of Reliance Industries Ltd's play-book, state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is forming a new subsidiary for gas business that could be used to bid and buy gas from the firm's own fields.

The board of ONGC at its meeting on February 13 approved creation of a new wholly-owned subsidiary company for gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) business value chain subject to necessary approvals, according to the firm's third quarter earnings announcement.

"The company is being formed with the objective of sourcing, marketing and trading of natural gas, LNG business, Hydrogen enriched CNG (HCNG), gas to power business, bio-energy/ bio-gas/ bio methane/ other biofuels business, etc," it said.

ONGC may use the new subsidiary to buy any new gas

that the firm produces from fields such as KG-D5 in the Krishna Godavari basin, people with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The government had in October 2020 allowed affiliates of gas producers to buy the fuel in open auction.

This policy change allowed Reliance to buy two-thirds out of the additional 7.5 million standard cubic metres per day of gas it along with partner BP plc of UK plans to produce this year from the new fields in KG-D6 block.

"ONGC too can look at this option now. The new subsidiary can participate in any auction that ONGC will do for incremental gas from KG-D5 block," a source said.

Besides ensuring competition and fair price discovery, the ONGC subsidiary can then sell the gas so sourced to firms such as Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) at a margin.

This would help ONGC earn better margins on the gas produced.

"Right now gas is a loss-making business for ONGC.

The government controls gas price which is less than cost of production," the source said. The government has fixed a price of USD 1.79 per million British thermal unit for ONGC's fields. This is half of the cost of production.

It allows a higher rate of USD 4.06 per mmbtu for difficult fields such as deepsea fields (KG-D6 and KG-D6) but even that is less than the cost of production from highly capital intensive projects.

The current regulation means even if Reliance discovered a price equivalent of USD 6-7 per mmbtu for the 7.5 mmscmd of new gas from KG-D6, it would get only USD 4.06 till March 31.

The same would apply for ONGC. It might discover a rate higher for the 15 mmscmd incremental gas planned from KG-D5 block but it can get only USD 4.06 as per current price.

"So, essentially the ONGC's gas subsidiary can bid and buy KG-D5 gas. It will pay ONGC USD 4.06 per mmbtu but can sell to MRPL or any other customer at a price higher than that, ensuring that the gas business

becomes a viable proposition," the source said.

The government has given operators the freedom to discover market prices but this rate is subject to a pricing ceiling or cap that the government notifies every six months. The cap for six months to March 31, 2021 is USD 4.06 per mmbtu.

In the February 5 auction, Reliance O2C Limited, an affiliate of Reliance Industries Ltd, picked up 4.8 mmscmd out of the 7.5 mmscmd gas auctioned.

State gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd won 0.85 mmscmd of supplies while Shell picked up 0.7 mmscmd.

Adani Total Gas Ltd got 0.1 mmscmd, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) 0.2 mmscmd and Torrest Gas 0.02 mmscmd. Other buyers included IRM Energy (0.1 mmscmd), PIL (0.35 mmscmd) and IGS (0.35 mmscmd), they said.

Sources said the gas was bought at a price of USD 0.18 per million British thermal unit discount to JKM (Japan/Korea liquefied natural gas import price), that is price of JKM (minus) USD 0.18 with tenures ranging from 0.3 to 15 years. **PTI**

# Keeping close eye on cost structure amid rising commodity prices: Maruti Suzuki official

**New Delhi:** Increasing commodity prices, especially those of rhodium and palladium, which are used in catalysers to meet strict emission norms, are putting cost pressure on automobile makers, according to a senior official of Maruti Suzuki India.

The company, which had hiked prices of its vehicles in January, however is not planning to pass on the burden to consumers in the near future although it is keeping a close eye on its cost structure.

With the supply of semiconductors becoming a challenge for the automotive industry, Maruti Suzuki is also watching the situation closely although it will have normal supply this month.

"In commodities, prices have gone up dramatically this year, especially that of steel, and rhodium and palladium, which are used in catalysers of BS-VI vehicles.

"Demand across the world has gone up but its mining happens only in Russia and South Africa. There, the mining was much lesser because of the pandemic," Maruti Suzuki India Executive Director (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava told PTI.

Supply was less and global demand is very high because all Euro VI, BS-VI and China VI vehicles require catalysers, he said adding, "so, the demand has gone up, whereas supply is constant and 80 per cent of demand for rhodium and palladium comes from the auto industry."

When asked if the issue is as critical as that of semiconductor, he said, "for rhodium and palladium, supply is not an issue but price is a problem but in semiconductor supply is a problem."

Commenting on Maruti Suzuki's position with regards to semiconductor supplies,

Srivastava said, "right now for semiconductors we don't have an issue. January was normal for us. February seems to be normal but there is a major semiconductor shortage in the auto industry. So, we are watching the situation very carefully. Right now we are not affected."

On whether the company plans to pass on the burden of increased rhodium and palladium prices to consumers, Srivastava replied in the negative stating the company had hiked vehicle prices in January because of increase in commodity prices.

"In fact all OEMs have increased prices largely because of the increase in commodity prices. We keep watching the cost structure, how the costs are evolving and take decisions accordingly."

Now we have to draw a fine line. We have to take care of the demand. **PTI**

# NCLAT asks Devas Multimedia shareholder to approach NCLT

**New Delhi:** The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has asked Devas Employees Mauritius to approach NCLT to raise its objection over the court's decision to admit a petition by Antrix Corporation seeking winding up of Devas Multimedia.

While disposing of its plea, the Chennai bench of the NCLAT has directed Devas Employees Mauritius to file an interlocutory application and be a party in the ongoing matter at the NCLT.

On January 19, the Bengaluru bench of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had admitted the petition by Antrix Corporation, the commercial arm of Indian Space Research Organisation, for winding up Devas Multimedia and has appointed a provisional liquidator for the company.

It had also directed the provisional liquidator to take control of the management, properties and actionable claims of Devas Multimedia.

The NCLT order was challenged before the NCLAT by Devas Employees Mauritius, which holds 3.48 per cent of issued equity share of Devas Multimedia.

Devas Employees Mauritius has submitted that being a shareholder of Devas Multimedia, being its constituent Board Member and owner and hence it has a say in the manner in which the company, its affairs, management etc are carried out.

According to the petitioner, the NCLT order of January 19, affects its right to participate in the affairs' and management of Devas Multimedia.

However, the NCLAT observed: "It is relevantly pointed out that just because an 'Order of Admission' is passed at the initial stage, the Appellant's interest is not likely to be affected or prejudicial because latent and patent reason that still it may get an opportunity to be heard when its Petition is Allowed."

The NCLAT Chennai bench, which consisted Member (Judicial) Justice Venugopal M and Member (Technical) Balvinder Singh directed it to file an application before NCLT, to be a party into the main matter.

"...Deems it fit and proper in 'Directing' the 'Appellant' to file necessary 'Interlocutory Application' before the 'Tribunal' (NCLT) seeking permission to implead itself in the main pending Company Petition setting out necessary facts/reasons for the same," said NCLAT in its order passed on February 11. **PTI**

ed out that just because an 'Order of Admission' is passed at the initial stage, the Appellant's interest is not likely to be affected or prejudicial because latent and patent reason that still it may get an opportunity to be heard when its Petition is Allowed."

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**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to notify the public at large that our client, Mr. Abdul Sabar Barak, son of Sh. Abdul Jalil is applying to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs for citizenship by naturalization and that any person who knows any reason why citizenship by naturalization should not be granted send a written signed statement of the facts to the said Secretary.

**Rohit Yadav (Advocate)**  
Ch.No.728, Lawyers Chamber Block, Rohini District Courts, Rohini Delhi-85 (M): 9266130562, 8383002256

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to notify the public at large that our client, Mrs. Mahboba Barak, wife of Sh. Abdul Sabar Barak is applying to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs for citizenship by naturalization and that any person who knows any reason why citizenship by naturalization should not be granted send a written signed statement of the facts to the said Secretary.

**Rohit Yadav (Advocate)**  
Ch.No.728, Lawyers Chamber Block, Rohini District Courts, Rohini Delhi-85 (M): 9266130562, 8383002256

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

To be known to all that I, SUBHASH NAGPAL, the allottee/holder of Flat No. 6247 ON THIRD FLOOR CAT-SFS-I, SECTOR-8, POKHETA, WASANT KUNJ, NEW DELHI-110070. Vide DOAs File No.125/982/83/SFS/VII. My original documents viz. 1. Fifth and Final Demand Letter, 2.Possession Letter, 3.NOC for electric & water connection, 4.Possession Slip, 5. Correspondence Letters from DDA 6. All Bank Chalisani Receipts in respect of the said property have been misplaced. An Information Report of this effect has been lodged in Police Station, Crime Branch, Delhi vide LR No.11878/2021 or 09/02/2021.

Any person(s) claiming any right, Interest having any objection or found in possession of the said original Documents may Write/ Contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 9891272788 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Dy/Director, LAB (H) or Director (H)-1, D-Block, 3rd Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

To be known to all that I, NAJINI MAHOTRA alongwith my son CHANCHAL MAHOTRA are the joint owners of Flat No. 1175 ON THIRD FLOOR CAT-SFS-II, SECTOR-C, POKHETA-I, WASANT KUNJ, NEW DELHI-110070. Vide DOAs File No.125/208/83/SFS/VIII. The original documents viz.1.Allocation Letter 2.Fifth & Final Demand Letter, 3.Possession Letter 4.NOC for electric & water connection, 5.Possession Slip, 6. Mutation Letter, 7.Conveyance Deed, 8.All Bank Chalisani/Receipts and 9. Correspondence Letters from DDA in respect of the said property have been misplaced. An Information Report of this effect has been lodged in Police Station, Crime Branch, Delhi vide LR No.12741/2021 or 11/02/2021.

Any person(s) claiming any right, Interest having any objection or found in possession of original Documents may Write/ Contact with above named person at above address/phone No. 999972919 within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to this property can personally inform or write to Dy. Director, LAB (H) or Director (H)-1, D-Block, 3rd Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi-110023

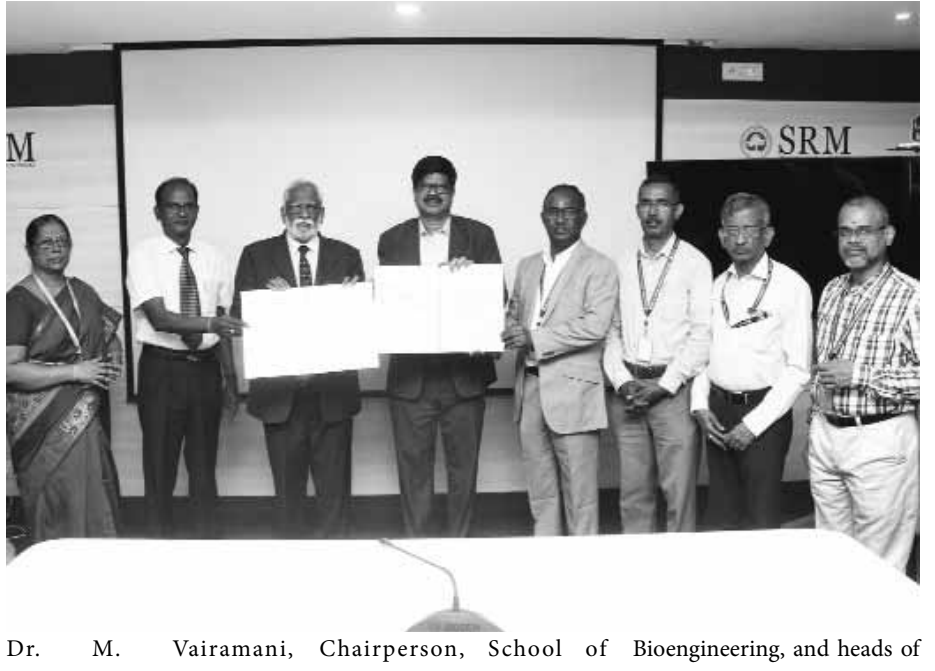
# SRM inks MoU with TANUVAS for joint research

**Kattankulathur:** SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University (TANUVAS). The signing was between the Department of Food Process Engineering, School of Bioengineering, SRMIST and College of Food and Dairy Technology, Koduvalli, TANUVAS.

As per the MoU, both institutes will have a broad scope to carry out faculty and student exchange programme to carry out training and research activities for a shorter duration. The area will be extended to joint research activities to explore opportunities to undertake research projects and seek research funding from external funding agencies. This agreement will also facilitate to con-

duct joint academic events such as short courses, seminars, workshops, or conferences based on mutual interests and available expertise in both the institutions. Both institutes can share and carry out joint research in technology for distance and computer-based learning.

The MoU was exchanged between Dr. C. Balachandran, Vice Chancellor, TANUVAS and Dr. C. Muthamizhchelvan , Pro Vice Chancellor (E&T), SRMIST in the presence of TANUVAS officials Dr. PTensingh Gnanaraj, Registrar; Dr. Cecilia Joseph, Director Research; Dr. V. Appa Rao, Dean Research and Dr. Premnath Manoharan, professor & HoD Food Processor Engineering. SRMIST officials Dr. S. Ponnusamy, Registrar; Dr. T.V. Gopal, Dean College of Engineering and Technology;



the departments and faculty members.

Speaking at the signing ceremony Dr. C. Balachandran, Vice Chancellor, TANUVAS said, "The outcome of this MoU may bring new innovative ideas and solutions for the growing demand and recurring issues of the Food Processing and Health sector in India. Both the universities can now share knowledge, technology, and faculty exchange program. We need engineers when it comes to technology hence the scope is more in this sector."

Dr. C. Muthamizhchelvan, Pro Vice Chancellor (E&T), SRMIST said, "Gone are the days when we worked as individuals, now it is important that we work with other with institutes/ universities. Such collaborations open up new avenues and will benefit both parties."

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REGD. OFFICE : E-5, South Extension, Part-II, New Delhi-110 049 CIN: L74899DL1994PLC058832 Website: www.rkjewelers.in Landline: (91)-11-26252416, 011-22625988, FAX:011-41640889 Email: id-2@zeljewellers@yahoo.co.in Extract of Unaudited Standalone Financial Results for the Third Quarter Ended December 31, 2019 (Rs in Lacs, except per share data)			
PARTICULARS	QUARTER ENDED 31-12-2020 UN-AUDITED	QUARTER ENDED 31-12-2019 UN-AUDITED	NINE MONTHS ENDED 31-12-2020 UN-AUDITED
Total Income from operations	1504.42	1181.31	2045.84
Net Profit/(Loss) for the Period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	89.87	48.22	148.61
Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	89.87	48.22	148.61
Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	66.73	37.29	110.34
Total Comprehensive Income for the Period (Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)	66.73	37.29	110.34
Equity Share Capital (In Qty.)	355.00	355.00	355.00
Earnings Per Share (of Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)	1.88	0.67	3.10
Basic Diluted	1.88	0.67	3.10

**NOTES:**

- The above is an extract of the detailed format of Unaudited Financial Results for the third quarter ended and nine months ended December 31, 2020, filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The Full format of the Financial Results for the third quarter and nine months ended December 31, 2020 is available on the Stock Exchange website (www.mseil.in) and Company's website (www.rkjewelers.in).
- The above unaudited financial results for the third quarter and nine months ended on December 31, 2020 have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and have been approved by the Board of Directors in its meeting held on 14/02/2021.
- The above results have been prepared in accordance with Ind-AS notified under the Companies (Indian Accounting Standard) Rules, 2015 and relevant amendments thereafter.

Zel Jewellers Limited  
Sd/-  
Rakesh Sharma  
Chairman  
Din:00122870

Place: New Delhi  
Date: 14th February, 2021

Dr. M. Vairamani, Chairperson, School of Bioengineering, and heads of



**Bollywood**  
 You can tell how smart people are by what they laugh at.  
 —Sonam Kapoor Ahuja

# PLAY YOUR MIND

Positive mental health helps athletes handle the pressure and boosts their performance on ground. AMRUTA KARKHANIS DESHMUKH shares how



strongly and keeping them on the same page. In this competitive world, increased exposure to international competitive events, advances in support from corporate and government sectors has led to increased performance pressure. With time, sports has moved from mere joy, sense of satisfaction to pride and professionalism. The demand to perform is so strong that it comes with the tag of "Success at any cost." But do we really need success at the cost of our mental peace? Mental health when disturbed

affects one's ability to recognise the self-potential and gets bogged down by stress. Talent wasted due to lack of professional help at right time can never stand the spirit of sports. Hence, it becomes essential to learn the mind-body connection and mental toughness to become resilient in testing moments of matches.

It's scientifically proven that exercise promotes positive mental health but sometimes this observation doesn't hold true. With increasing competition, competitive stress, pressure of expectations, financial crisis, logistic issues and infrastructural concerns, the challenges to perform good are not just vested in talent but in things beyond one's control too.

Anxiety, depression, personality disorder, mood disorders, panic, PTSD, eating disorders as well as more serious mental health issues are coming to surface in population as young as age 10. The peak years of sport performance and the onset of multiple mental health issues coincide and thus, this fact of understanding the underlying issues which need attention are simply side-lined. While the mind of a player is most important, even the mind-set of their coaches and the parents are equally important. It is essential to create a holistic approach in bringing a change in their perspectives towards winning and success. Lack of time, resources, myths that it is only for elite players have been wiped-out; the need of the hour is mental health training for all.

(The writer is a sports psychologist.)



## WEBBED

**BEHIND HER EYES (SEASON 1)**  
 A single mother enters a world of twisted mind games when she begins an affair with her psychiatrist boss while secretly befriending his mysterious wife. Starring Simona Brown, Eve Hewson and Tom Bateman, the TV drama releases on February 17 on Netflix.



**I CARE A LOT (2021)**  
 A court-appointed legal guardian defrauds her older clients and traps them under her care. But her latest mark comes with some unexpected baggage. Starring Rosamund Pike, Peter Dinklage and Eiza González, the film releases on February 19 on Netflix.



**PELÉ (2021)**  
 Against the backdrop of a turbulent era in Brazil, this documentary captures Pelé's extraordinary path from breakthrough talent to national hero. It releases on February 23 on Netflix.

Sports players are considered as fit individuals who showcase their strength, endurance and flexibility to flex their bodies through tough circumstances and pull through their sport performance. They train day in and out to have command over their body and techniques. Every sport has their own demands and likewise a training schedule is devised by their coaches and followed by players and their parents for optimal performance. Long ago it was identified that despite best body and technique, something was stopping the players to achieve their best. On deeper investigation it was found that mind

had a role to play in performance which was often not understood. With time, coaches, parents and players recognised this gap and started understanding the need for mental training.

Despite increased awareness, the taboo of visiting a mental health professional acts as a huge barrier to adopt a positive and progressive change. Over years sport psychology (area of specialisation that uses psychological interventions in sports set up) has found its space and parents, coaches and players are reaching out to professionals for performance enhancement.

Winning is still the biggest moti-

vator for everyone involved in sports. Even after having an emphasis on participation and excellence, achieving success and avoiding failures takes centre stage for one and all. Whether one is playing an individual sport or a team sport, chief coach to subordinate coaches, sport science experts along with player's parents make a crucial part of the team which together influences the course of action for long.

Management of sports players involves binding the entire team



Arjun Kapoor and Ranveer Singh's on-screen bromance in the film *Gunday* was a hit as audiences really loved their camaraderie. Past the seventh anniversary of the film's release, Arjun shares why *Gunday* is and will always be one of his favourite films.

**What did you love about the film that made you sign it instantly?**

At the time I was starting my career, I was hardly six months old in the business and Adi sir (Aditya Chopra) offered me a film which was a two-hero ensemble, big commercial set-up. When I met Ali (Abbas Zafar), I loved his energy and excitement towards treating it like a larger than life adventure. It was like a throwback and a tribute to the 70's & 80's cinema that I grew up watching. The 'Mukul Anand, Subhash Ghai space of cinema' and at the same time a film about brotherhood and gangsters. When you are a young actor starting out, these are all trappings that you love exploring and doing in mainstream cinema. You want to establish yourself at the beginning. You want to do mainstream stuff with a sense of heightened reality and that's what *Gunday* was all about. I got really excited about doing something so front footed and mainstream.

**Your bromance with Ranveer in the film was an instant hit. Tell us what made the bonhomie so special.**

I think it was the off-camera love and respect we had for each other because we realised we have too much in common. In fact we are born just ten days apart from each other. It was much simpler for us to bond than we realised. And when you are starting out, you are not thinking about your career and rivalry. You are just trying to make the best film possible and have the most fun. Ranveer and I also knew each other before the film so it made it a little simpler to break the ice onset. Credit to Ali for writing a film that allowed us to be best friends. He was a big factor for bringing me and Ranveer closer. It just happened, it was just the flow. It's like chalk and cheese where even



## Larger than life

Past the seventh anniversary of *Gunday*, actor ARJUN KAPOOR shares his love for the role and how his on-screen bromance with RANVEER SINGH instantly became a hit

though we are poles apart, we still manage to fit together. It's like sugar and spice, they are opposites but both sound good together. We were two people who were completely different but ended up getting along and working well together. People realised this when they saw the trailer where both of us looked good together.

**The film presented you in an all new avatar. What did you love the most about your character?**

Costumes. To play a character in the 70's, a gangster, it's always exciting to go into. It was my first-period film at that time. The way I was styled, presented, the low angle trolleys and just being treated larger than life, running in slow motion, that introduction coming out of the train,

landing on a coal train and much more. I think the presentation was way bigger than any third film could have gotten me and it was cool, unique and exciting. You usually feel that you need to work a lot, before you get that kind of scale but here I was immediately, in the third film, within the first six/eight months of my career.

**What do you think was the film's USP?**

I think the camaraderie between Ranveer and me and the big star cast coming together, was special. After a long time, there was a two-hero film and the youth loved the music. I know for a fact that the music and trailer made all the difference.

Here are five common myths around organic skincare products

Today consumers have become more aware and conscious of harmful chemicals hidden in their skincare products. They are skeptical of using skincare that wear the claim of being "organic" and "all natural", often questioning if these claims are just marketing gimmicks. Dr. Jagvir Singh, Founder and President, Refresh Botanicals lists five common misconceptions about organic skincare that will make you rethink your regimen.

**MYTH 1: Using DIY masks is same as using organic products**

People believe that whipping up a yogurt and honey smoothie in your blender and using it as a face mask will benefit their skin as much as an organic face mask.

While we're all up for a DIY face treatment once in a while, the ingredients you find in your kitchen can't really compare to the active ingredients found in organic skincare products. These special ingredients are usually extracted at the molecular level leaving behind the most active and potent part for your skin care.

**MYTH 2: Organic products are ineffective**

Many people are afraid of change and stick to a product that they are familiar with and have used for years. Unfortunately, many drugstore products have been diluted, watered down, and filled with an abundance of chemical preservatives to extend the lifespan. This means that while the product may offer quick results, you shouldn't hold your breath waiting to see any real long-term benefits for the health of your skin.

Organic products, on the



other hand, are jam-packed with vital nutrients, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals at high concentrations that truly feeds your skin. You'll instantly get that radiant, hydrated and clear skin.

**MYTH 3: Organic products need preservatives to last longer**

Highly organic products often require premium packaging that are equipped with airless pumps. This prevents the highly organic plant material from oxidising, thus spoiling. When looking for organic skincare, look for airless pumps — meaning that the product is being pumped through literally being pushed out of the container.

**MYTH 4: Eating healthy is enough for great skin**

There is no argument with the benefits of eating clean, antioxidant-rich foods and drinking tons of water. However,

a healthy diet alone is not necessarily enough for great skin. While everything you eat does have an impact on your skin, food cannot cleanse away impurities and environmental toxins the way a good face wash can, or provide a protective barrier on the skin the way a moisturiser can. For truly beautiful skin, be sure to eat healthy, exercise regularly and practice safe, organic skincare. Organic skincare products should accompany a healthy lifestyle for a more youthful and fresher complexion.

**MYTH 5: All "Natural Types" of skincare are created equal**

There is a thin line between organic and natural products. Note that we use the word natural here, and not organic. While many products may claim to be "all-natural" on their labels, it doesn't mean that their ingredients are in fact "organic." Natural products often contain natural

ingredients but may contain pesticides and other harmful chemicals.

For a skin care brand to be able to wear the claim of "organic," ingredient suppliers have to undergo a rigorous process where they are monitored for many years to ensure that their farming methods are free of pesticides, herbicides and chemicals. Additionally, skin care brands must ensure that their manufacturers follow stringent practices to ensure there is no cross contamination of organic and inorganic materials.

In today's time awareness about chemical-laden products is gaining momentum, which is highlighting the importance of natural organic skincare products. This increased awareness is making more people to switch to organic products. While more people are making the transition, more become mindful about the use of chemicals in regular everyday products and are adapting to the natural organic skincare regime.

## TRENDBLAZER



### AJAY BEGINS SHOOT FOR MAIDAN

AJAY DEVGN began shooting for the final schedule of his forthcoming sports film *Maidan* on Valentine's Day in Mumbai. The film is slated for a Dussehra release this year.

The film is inspired by the true story of Indian football coach Syed Abdul Rahim, who coached and managed the Indian national team from 1950 till his death in 1963, and is considered by many as the man who changed the face of modern Indian football. Major portions of the film, helmed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma, have been shot across Lucknow, Kolkata and Mumbai.

### fairtalk

TANVI AZMI



'At home, I tend to create a lot of drama. So, my daughter says that I am dramatic about everything. I tell her that is because of my profession. I feel as an actor, you play various characters. You leave a part of yourself in every character, and a bit of every character stays back in you. So you are really not the person that you are claiming to be.'

### dailytalk

GULSHAN DEVAIAH



'Every time there has been an adversity, my life seems to fall in place rather than fall apart. From failing exams, getting fired to heartbreaks, major sickness and serious injuries, my life has only fallen in place after every such event. I'm not exactly a super positive about everything kind of person but if it can happen to me, it can happen to you too.'

### JANNEY PRAISES HER CO-STARS

Actress ALLISON JANNEY enjoyed working with Mila Kunis, Regina Hall and Awkwafina in the film *Breaking News In Yuba County*, and has praises to shower on each of them.

"The script really grabbed me from the start. It was incredibly exciting, dark, funny, and violent — a great mix," said Janney.





Labour (NCCBL) responsible for conducting rescue operations across India said, "Amid the pandemic, many were trapped in the sites of exploitation as rescue operations remained stalled. As the nationwide lockdown was announced, brick kiln sites, several construction sites in remote parts of the country, including the agricultural sector continued to function."

However, the meagre wages that the bonded labourers were getting was also stopped. They had appealed in the Chandigarh High Court and the Allahabad High Court, but the state was overburdened at that point and undertaking rescue operations became difficult. Even those who could be rescued were not being given repatriation and police protection, making their chances of falling back in the trap of bonded labour much higher.

Though bonded labour was outlawed in 1976 when the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act came into force, the news of rescues is fairly common. Convictions, however, are a few.

A senior official in the Central Labour Ministry on the condition of anonymity said, "There is widespread prevalence of violence in case of the bonded labour and the assistance, especially during the times of COVID has been delayed. However, when it comes to rescues, the responsibility lies with the respective states to act on these complaints."

The Centrally Sponsored Plan Scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labourers has been in place since 1978 to rehabilitate those rescued. As part of this scheme, adult male rescuers are entitled to the financial assistance of ₹1 lakh, while those who come under special categories, such as women and children are entitled to ₹2 lakh. Others, who are rescued from forced or bonded labour from more extreme conditions like sexual exploitation, brothels or trafficking, as deemed by the District Magistrate, are eligible for financial assistance of ₹3 lakh along with some non-cash assistance from the state governments.

This financial assistance is funded by the centre but comes only after conviction. A person who is rescued is eligible to ₹20,000 as immediate assistance from the District Administration, regardless of conviction. Apart from the immediate assistance, those rescued are also entitled to a state-issued rescue certificate (RC), which makes them eligible for the rehabilitation measures; however, those getting the certificates remain abysmally low.

None of the people the writer spoke to had been provided with the compensation. Despite a large number of women workers, Women's work is unaccounted for and their labour is not recognised in the economy. Doubling the oppression of taking care of the food, family and suffering harassment from contractors, they remain invisible and unpaid.

Charkha Features



## Towards a better society

To change the current situation, the lifestyles of the people need to change, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

Population, when unchecked, increases at a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio..." said Thomas Malthus in his thesis, titled *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, which was published in 1798. When he made this observation, the world-population was not even one billion. During the last 200 years, it has grown to around 7.8 billion. And the prediction of Malthus that the world would run out of food due to its growing population, has not yet come exactly true. There is no doubt, Malthus did not foresee that at some time in the future, there would be a spectacular increase in food production and that the earth would not produce exactly in arithmetic progression, yet no sensible person can deny that, after all, there is an upper limit to production of subsistence by the earth. But, strangely, we find that there is no effective clarity in regard to this hard fact in the minds of those who formulate national policies.

One can see that, even today, in most of the under developed countries, the situation is still Malthusian and the people there do not have enough food. It is a well-established fact that the population growth-rate in these countries makes it extremely difficult for their governments to eradicate poverty and unemployment. So the living conditions for large sections of people there are really poor.

In such a critical situation of stark poverty, high incidence of disease and extreme scarcity of health care facilities, many welfare and social service agencies voluntarily help the impoverished, the sick, the handicapped and the mentally unwell people. No doubt, immediate help in the form of food, medicine, shelter, health-care, etc. is needed for quite a large number of people and these charitable institutions do commendable social service. Nevertheless, the basic problem remains because the root of all these maladies is not eradicated.

The population in these poor countries continues to rise enormously and, alongside it, the number of poor unemployed, diseased and hungry people also continue to multiply. The reason for this is that no sincere and concrete steps are taken to give a high degree of clarity to the people.

Another factor that is responsible for this critical situation is the highly consumeristic and wasteful lifestyle of affluent nations or of affluent sections of society in the same country. It is not known to many that about 80 per cent of the gross world-products are consumed by the developed countries which constitute only 20 per cent of the world-population while remaining world population that dwell in developing countries gets only 15 per cent of gross world products. So again there is need to give clarity to the people about the urgent need for simplicity in life. Hence, what people of developing nations should make to be understood that mere charity cannot solve the problems of poverty and hunger, created by exploitation, social injustice and the utterly selfish and wasteful life-style of some nations or some sections of society. In fact, some people have recently raised this vital question about the end-result of charity after a controversial documentary was made by a popular director in the West on charity work done by the organisations there.

Many scholarly people across the globe have made a strong observation and said that charity alone would not serve the purpose. One has, therefore, to reiterate that what is required more is clarity, by means of such knowledge that brings in its wake, the highly needed moral values of social justice, brotherhood, love, abstinence from sex-lust and inspiration for a simple lifestyle. Remember, to change the current situation, the lifestyles of the people need to change.



# BREAKING CHAINS

Innovative solutions are needed to prevent bonded labour, says SUMEDHA PAL

Azaadi hai toh sab hai (where there is freedom there is everything)," said Rehana Begum, who along with her husband and children, was rescued from a Municipal Corporation toilet compound in 2017. Originally from Purnia in Bihar, the family moved states looking for work opportunities. "My husband and I were married without the permission from our families, so we had no place to fall back on, that is the price one pays for being a woman who dares to love," said Rehana.

"Initially, we were offered ₹5,000. As we lived in a rented space, the idea of moving into the complex full time seemed lucrative. As our entire family moved into the complex, I had to do double shifts of guarding the toilet and on several occasions, had to clean it as well. My work started at nine in the morning until 11 at night," added she. Taking care of three children, cleaning toilets and juggling housework, clearly took a toll on her.

She shared, "Living on the site permanently, we worked in the compound day in and day out. Our wages were stopped and when I refused to work, I was threatened with sexual violence. I had fallen sick at one point and was diagnosed with pneumonia but was not allowed to go to a hospital for proper treatment. The only saving grace is that I am finally free."

Rehana and her family were rescued by National Campaign Committee for

Eradication of Bonded Labour (NCCBL). A court case is pending in Delhi for her rightful compensation and lack of accountability on the part of the Delhi Municipal Corporation. To survive, Rehana's husband, at present, is working as a rickshaw puller while she is trying hard to find a job as a domestic worker. The family fears that they may be trapped in debt bondage again as they look for jobs.

Not just Rehana, across India, an estimated 12 million workers are employed in brick kilns, garment factories, construction units among others. Over three lakh informal workers have been released according to the Government of India. India identified at least 1,35,000 bonded workers in its 2011 census, while the Australian charity Walk Free Foundation put the number at eight million in its 2018 Global Slavery Index.

Most of these workers are sourced from remote rural pockets with concentration of poverty through a vast network of contractors. While most of these

pockets exist in the Northern and Eastern part of the country, some developed states in the West and South, also have such pockets.

Desperate and vulnerable population of unorganised workers, who are in no position to negotiate wages or their rights, have become a massive pool for cheap labour. A large number of these labourers are children, forced out of school, bearing the burden of sustaining their families.

"I lost two of my children, an eight-years-old boy and one girl, who was barely 10, as they were sent off to work in a kiln in Himachal Pradesh. We were just informed that they both died but no one bothered to tell us how," shared Pinki, the mother of the two children.

Pinki and her husband, Kale, live in a small hamlet of Bandhera Khas in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, a colony where several migrant workers like herself and her husband now reside. In 2014, Pinki and Kale, originally from Saharanpur, were taken to work in a brick kiln in Nawanshahr in Punjab and were

promised ₹1,500 per person per week by the contractor. The same person promised to pay the same amount for two of her children, giving them a chance of making more money.

Explaining what transpired at the kiln, she said, "The only means for us to have made money was to move cities. My children were taken to Himachal Pradesh. Instead of ₹1,500, we were paid only ₹500 every week or even less. With no money and no clue of our children, there was a sense of feeling trapped. I remember working around the clock carrying bricks on my back. It feels like a blur to me, the life that I lived for five years."

Pinki survived by living in a makeshift tent, eating corn kernels and bread. She was finally rescued in 2017 along with her husband by NCCBL. As per the wages promised to the couple, the contractors owed them over one lakh rupees. However, the family hasn't received a single penny so far.

For her, losing her children and never getting to see them again was the biggest trauma. "I was beaten up several times, I was not paid for my work, but losing my children was the scariest part," said she.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown imposed to contain the spread of the virus has worsened the situation for the bonded labourers as rescue operations have also come to halt. Nirmal Gorana of the National Campaign Committee for Eradication of Bonded

# Train together, stay together

Working out with your partner can have psychological benefits, shares SOHRAB KHUSHRUSHAHI



You are most influenced by the people you surround yourself with, so choose wisely. This was some really good advice I was given very early on in life. In my opinion, one of the biggest reasons people falter on their fitness plans or goals is peer and family pressure. So what happens when your spouse or partner joins you on this journey of yours? Would that make your life easier? Would it help you stick to your plan and process? Most likely, yes!

The pandemic has been a huge learning curve for a lot of people. Not only have their priorities changed, but also their attitude towards health and fitness. For someone like me, fitness has been a part of life since a very young age and even though I've suffered through my fair share of family or peer pressure, it's never actually made me waiver. My wife never really worked out in life to be honest. The only time she started taking her fitness seriously was after we had our first child. She's always been thin, but fit is something she's had to work on and really hard. I wasn't really enthused about the idea of us working out together if I'm being absolutely honest, but having a goal and working on it together has been a lot of fun. It also gives me an opportunity to make her push a little because I know if she trains alone, she isn't going to work as hard as she should. For people who are just start-

ing out, the peer and family pressure can get a bit too much and nine times out of 10 they will falter. So having your partner or spouse join you on your journey will only make it easier. Having said all of the above, there are documented advantages of working out with your spouse

that can benefit both parties. **It improves the emotional bond you share with your partner** According to various studies, working out with your partner like sprinting or jogging at the same pace, rhythmic weight-training or any workout has a plethora of positive effects. As a result, couples who work out together may feel more "emotionally attuned" with one another as compared to others. **Accountability** Working out together sets the accountability for both partners

and each one motivates the other to achieve goals, both as individuals and as a couple. And let's be honest, we have our bad days where we don't feel like working out, on such days your partner could be the person who pushes you to get the work done. If one needs a push to get out of bed in the morning to workout, setting couple goals could be the answer. If they're awake and ready to go, you will be more likely to get your workout done instead of hitting the snooze button on the phone for the next hour. Having a partner can make you stick to your goals, even on days when a working out is the last thing on your mind. **It brings happiness to your relationship** Exercise makes you a happier person individually, thanks to all the endorphins you release during and after your workout. If you work out with your partner, you get to experience that together. Pushing and motivating each other, then seeing the results of all the hard work you've put in,

creates positivity for your relationship. **It's a commitment to each other** If you and your partner make working out together a regular thing, you establish a common goal and respect that physical activity is important for yourselves and your relationship. There are a bunch of studies that show that individuals are more likely to make a positive health behaviour change if their partner does too. Overall, fitness regimes can be made more interesting and working out as a couple is one of the ways to make that happen. What adds to the fun are those moments of slight humour in between workouts that is just understood between you and your partner through mere eye-contact. Also, following healthy eating habits becomes easier and a fun thing to do if the same is shared. Hence, the saying 'couples who train together, stay together.' (The writer is the founder of Sohfit.)

**Don't let yesterday take up too much of today.**  
 —Will Rogers

### APPS THAT MAY ENHANCE YOUR PERSONALITY

A team of researchers have developed a smartphone app that may help people who are looking to work on their personality. The majority of participants, who used the app for three months, said that they wanted to reduce their emotional vulnerability, increase their conscientiousness or extraversion. Those who participated in the intervention for more than three months reported greater success in achieving their change goals than the control group who took part for only two months, indicated the findings published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. "The participants and their friends alike reported that three months after the end of the intervention, the personality changes brought about by using the app had persisted," said researcher Mathias Allemand from the University of Zurich in Switzerland.



### GREEN VEGGIES MAY UP THINKING SKILLS

People who eat a Mediterranean-style diet — particularly one rich in green leafy vegetables and low in meat — are more likely to stay mentally sharp in later life, a study shows. The study indicated that closely adhering to a Mediterranean diet was associated with higher scores in a range of memory and thinking tests among adults in their late 70s. "Eating more green leafy vegetables and cutting down on red meat might be two key food elements that contribute to the benefits of the Mediterranean-style diet," said researcher Janie Corley from the University of Edinburgh. The individual components of the diet that appeared to be most strongly associated with better thinking skills were green leafy vegetables and a lower red meat intake. "In our sample, the positive relationship between a Mediterranean diet and thinking skills is not accounted for by having a healthier brain structure, as one might expect," said Corley.



### STRESS LINKED TO RISK OF HEART ATTACK

Taking stress may not be good for your heart as a new study suggests that long-term stress may lead to increased risk of heart attack. The study, published in the journal Scientific Reports, indicated that people with higher levels of cortisol are at an increased risk of heart attack. "The levels of the stress hormone cortisol differed between people who have had a heart attack and those not affected. This suggests that cortisol in hair may be a new risk marker for heart attacks," said Tomas Faresjo from the Linköping University in Sweden. Cortisol is a steroid hormone that regulates a wide range of processes throughout the body, including metabolism and the immune response. It also has a very important role in helping the body respond to stress. The researchers showed that patients who suffered a heart attack had statistically significant higher levels of cortisol during the month preceding the event.



### VR-BASED APP TO TREAT FEAR OF HEIGHTS

A team of researchers have developed a virtual reality (VR)-based app for smartphones to reduce fear of heights. The findings indicated that trial participants who spent a total of four hours training with the app at home had an improvement in their ability to handle real height situations. "What is new, however, is that smartphones can be used to produce the virtual scenarios that previously required a technically complicated type of treatment, and this makes it much more accessible," said lead author Dorothee Bentz, from the University of Basel in Switzerland. Fear of heights is a widespread phenomenon. Approximately five per cent of the general population experiences a debilitating level of discomfort in height situations.



### DOUBLE MASKS REDUCE EXPOSURE TO VIRUS

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has recently conducted experiments to improve the fit of masks amid COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that combining cloth mask and medical procedure mask could reduce a wearer's exposure to virus by over 90 per cent. In January, the CDC conducted experiments to assess two ways of improving the fit of medical procedure masks: Fitting a cloth mask over a medical procedure mask, and knotting the ear loops of a medical procedure mask and then tucking in and flattening the extra material close to the face, the Xinhua news agency reported. Each modification substantially improved source control and reduced wearer exposure, according to a report released by the CDC on Wednesday.



# ASHWIN SPINS OUT ENG

India take firm control of 2nd Test after Ashwin & Co wreak havoc on Chepauk track

2nd Test, Day 3  
Live from 9:30am IST  
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India took command of the second Test after an exhilarating day two when 15 wickets fell on a rapidly deteriorating pitch with star spinner Ravichandran Ashwin ensuring a massive first innings lead for the hosts with his 29th five-wicket haul, here on Sunday.

Resuming the day at 300 for six, Rishabh Pant took India to 329 in their first innings with an unbeaten 58 before running out of partners.

Ashwin (5/43) and company then bundled out England for 134 on a pitch that is getting more vicious by each passing session. The 34-year-old picked up his second five-wicket haul of the series by uprooting the stumps of number 11 Stuart Broad.

By close of play, India were 53 for one in the second innings, extending their lead to 249 runs.

Wickets fell in a heap on Sunday but it was by no means an unplayable surface, as demonstrated by Rohit Sharma on the opening day and with 25 off 62, he was going strong even by stumps on day two. Cheteshwar Pujara (7 batting off 18) was at the other end.

However, barring Ben Foakes (42 not out), England batsmen had no answers to the challenge posed by the Indian bowlers. The sweep shot that came to their rescue in much easier conditions in the previous Test, brought their downfall including Root.

So far, the script has played out perfectly for India, who won the all important toss on the opening day and put up a decent enough total on a dustbowl in their bid to level the series.

Ishant provided the first



## Sorry Bhajju pa: Ashwin after breaking Harbhajan's record

**CHENNAI:** With apologies to Harbhajan Singh, R Ashwin on Sunday cherished surpassing his former India teammate's number of Test wickets in the country.

With 266 scalps, Ashwin is now only behind spin legend Anil Kumble's 350 wickets in home Tests. Ashwin went past Harbhajan, who took 265 wickets in India at an average of 28.76, by dismissing Ben Stokes with a perfect off-spinner on the second

day of the second Test.

"When I was watching the 2001 series where *Bhajju Pa* (Harbhajan) was playing, I didn't even imagine that I would go out and become an off-spinner for the country.

"I was still a batsman for my state, trying to accelerate a career towards batting and playing for the country, I wasn't sure whether I would go on and become a player for the Indian team," Ashwin

said at a post-day conference.

The 34-year-old Ashwin, who has so far taken 391 wickets from 76 Tests at an impressive average of 25.26, was not aware of his feat until he had come for the media interaction at the end of the day's play.

According to Ashwin, a lot of his teammates, when he was young, would make fun of him as he used to try bowling like Harbhajan.

"Lot of my teammates from that age, from that generation, you know, used to make fun of me, because I used to bowl like *Bhajju Pa*, my action, I used to try and bowl like him and all that.

"So, from there on to come one and actually break the record of something that he possesses, has to be incredibly special. I didn't know of it, now that I do know of it, I feel happy. Sorry, *Bhajju Pa*..." said Ashwin. **PTI**

breakthrough for India when he had left-handed opener Rory Burns LBW for a duck with a ball that nipped back and beat his

defensive push. The other opener Dom Sibley (16) was the next to go, caught by Virat Kohli at leg-slip off Ashwin,

which was given by the third umpire after India chose to review as the on-field umpire turned down the appeal for a catch.

The big wicket of captain Joe Root (6), who tormented the host bowlers in the first Test, was taken by debutant Axar Patel

## Pant needs break from constant comparisons: Ash

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Give Rishabh Pant a "break" from constant comparisons and let him go from strength to strength, his senior India teammate Ravichandran Ashwin suggested on Sunday.

Be it for his keeping or batting, be it with one of India's greatest or any other player, Pant needs a break from all sorts of comparisons, expressed Ashwin, who has been keeping the young stumper on his toes with deliveries that look like fetching their team wickets every now and then.

"He was constantly compared with the great MS Dhoni for a long time. Now he gets compared for his wicket-keeping with (Wriddhiman) Saha, this that and all that, sometimes it's just better to give a break and let people build on confidence," Ashwin said at the end of the second day's play during which he collected his 29th five-for in Test cricket.

On his swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batsman, Ashwin continued, "With respect to Rishabh's keeping,



the name of the game is confidence right, he has been batting well, he has been working incredibly hard on his keeping as well... "And sometimes, when you are constantly being com-

## 'Chennai pitch is incredibly challenging'

**CHENNAI:** It is an incredibly challenging surface, said England assistant coach Graham Thorpe as India took upper hand after dismissing England for 134 in their first innings on Sunday.

"It is a very challenging surface that is what I am going to say. In terms of me commenting on the pitch I think that is for someone above me to look at.

"It was incredibly challenging on that surface for us on day two. Theirs is obviously a very skilled spin attack as well on their own conditions. And it was a very good toss to win," Thorpe said at press conference.

Decisions by the third

umpire have come in for criticism in the match so far and on Sunday there was an issue over Rohit Sharma being ruled not out on review after he was ruled out by the on-field umpire.

However, Thorpe offered straight bat, saying "we have to accept the decision."

"We have to trust the technology...That's really all I can say," the former England batsman said to a question if there was a sense of frustration with the Decision Review System.

Asked how the England batsmen would need to bat on a tricky pitch like the one here, Thorpe said the batsmen had plans but could not execute. **PTI**

pared to someone who has done well for years, it can be really hard, I really do feel for Rishabh, on a lot of occasions, when I am watching games from home where he is playing the white-ball format.

"He has definitely got the ability, that is why he is here

and I have no doubt he will go from strength to strength."

After playing a key role in India's incredible series win in Australia last month, Pant said the comparisons with Dhoni are flattering but added he wants to carve his own identity in the game.

## Caribbeans pull off another thrilling win

AFP ■ DHAKA

The West Indies beat Bangladesh by 17 runs in the second Test on Sunday to complete a 2-0 series sweep.

Rakheem Cornwall claimed 4/105 and completed a superb catch at first slip to end the match as the tourists bowled out Bangladesh for 213 in the second innings on the fourth day, 18 runs short of their victory target.

While Cornwall took centerstage, Kraigg Brathwaite (3/25) and Jomel Warrican (3/47) grabbed the remaining wickets as Bangladesh were bowled out for 213 on the fourth day.

The West Indies made 409 and 117 runs in their two innings and Bangladesh were all out for 296 in their first innings. The tourists had won the first Test by three wickets, which was another thriller with debutant Kyle Mayers scoring a record-breaking fourth-inning double century.

Cornwall took centerstage as spinners picked up all 10 wickets in a famous win.

Mehidy Hasan hit two sixes and three fours late in the day to add drama after the hosts lost their ninth wicket but the West Indies kept their cool to deny them a come-from-behind win.

"I would say this is a team effort. The one-day team didn't do well. But we had some plans and came on top," said skipper Kraigg Brathwaite.

The West Indies had lost the ODI series 3-0. "Coming over here with all the protocols in place, it is huge," he added.

"Very thankful for this opportunity. I'm very proud of the boys. It means everything back home."

## Pak hand Proteas fourth straight T20 series loss

AFP ■ LAHORE

Pakistan clinched a four-wicket victory over South Africa in the third and final T20I with eight balls to spare at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Sunday to clinch the series 2-1.

South Africa were all at sea and despite heroics from David Miller, who scored an unbeaten 85, and Tabraiz Shamsi's career-best of 4-25, Pakistan were too good for the visitors as Hasan Ali and Mohammad Nawaz clubbed 20 runs off the penultimate over, bowled by Andile Phehlukwayo (2.4-0-37-0), to clinch the game and the series with some space to spare.

Babar Azam had won the toss and had asked Heinrich Klaasen's men to bat first. South Africa had slumped to 48 for six and 67 for seven before Miller's exploits pushed the South African effort to a respectable 164 for eight.

Miller clubbed five boundaries and seven sixes, four of which came in the final over of the innings, bowled by Faeem Ashraf (3-0-38-0), in his 45-ball innings after the entire South African batting order had been caught like a deer in the headlights.

In reply, Shamsi had bamboozled the Pakistan top-order to leave South Africa with hope of clinching a victory from the jaws of defeat but a lack of



support proved the difference as Pakistan reached 169 for six with still eight balls remaining in the match.

The only support Miller received in the South African effort was from opener Janneman Malan. The Cobras man struck three fours and a six from 17 balls before being trapped leg before from debutant legspinner, Zihad Mahmood (4-0-40-3).

For Pakistan, Mohammad Rizwan, who scored a century and a fifty in the first two games, along with new partner Haider Ali (15), gave the home side a good start with an opening stand of 51 from just 37 balls.

## Osaka, Serena prevail in three-setters

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Gutsy Naomi Osaka saved two match points to outlast Garbine Muguruza in a tense comeback while Serena Williams was pushed to a decider but prevailed against Aryna Sabalenka in a thriller on Sunday and reach the Australian Open quarter-finals.

Hsieh Su-wei swept into her first Grand Slam quarter-final after 16 years of trying becoming the oldest player to make a last-eight debut in the Open Era. Also, Simona Halep fought back from a set down to beat French Open champion Iga Swiatek 3-6, 6-1, 6-4.

Third seed Osaka as on the verge of elimination at 3-5, 15-40 on her serve in the third set before rattling off four points in a row.

She then twice broke the serve of the two-time Grand Slam winner Muguruza to prevail 4-6, 6-4, 7-5 in one hour and 55 minutes of gripping action on an empty Rod Laver Arena.

She will now have an all-Asian quarter-final against Chinese Taipei veteran Hsieh Su-wei, who upset 19th seed Marketa Vondrousova 6-



4, 6-2 in the fourth round. The 35-year-old overwhelmed Vondrousova, a player 14 years her junior. Hsieh got an early break in the

opening set and never looked troubled in win over the 19th seed, a player she also toppled in an Abu Dhabi warm-up event in January.

### SERENA SURVIVES ONSLAUGHT

Serena Williams outlasted big-hitting Aryna Sabalenka in a three-set thriller to make Australian Open quarter-finals.

The American withstood a barrage from the seventh seed to prevail 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 in two hours and nine minutes and set up a mouth-watering clash with world number two Simona Halep.

Williams, 39, had never before played the Belarusian, who has collected more trophies than anyone else since last year French Open but never reached the quarter-finals of a Slam. Sabalenka, who has spoken about modelling her big-hitting game on Williams, showed off her power with blistering serves and groundstrokes in the high-octane contest.

A composed Williams, watched by older sister Venus in the stands, counter-attacked superbly in the early stages and broke Sabalenka's serve in the 10th game to win the

opening set.

Sabalenka, who was born four months after Williams made her Grand Slam debut in 1998, was unperturbed and stepped up her assault to dominate Williams' usually reliable serve.

The 22-year-old admonished herself before drawing level by pouncing on Williams' faltering first serve, which she landed just 36% of the time in the second set.

Williams regrouped and raced to a commanding 4-1 lead in the third set as a frustrated Sabalenka slammed her racquet to the ground as the match began to slip away.

Sabalenka won three straight games to get back on terms but Williams's experience saw her through as she maintained her unbeaten run since emerging from 14-day quarantine in Australia.

Halep exacted revenge on Swiatek with a comeback three-set victory, which set up a blockbuster quarter-final with Serena Williams.

The world No 2 was thrashed by the 19-year-old at Roland Garros, winning just three games, but turned the tide in Melbourne.

## 300th Slam win for Djoker

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

A tired-looking Dominic Thiem became the highest seed to fall at this year's Australian Open when the US Open champion was sent tumbling out in straight sets by Grigor Dimitrov in the fourth round on Sunday while ailing world No 1 Novak Djokovic battled past Milos Raonic to keep his title defence alive.

The night match's scheduling gave Djokovic the maximum amount of time to recover from a midriff muscle injury sustained in his five-set win over American Taylor Fritz late on Friday. And not operating at his best, Djokovic

dropped a set but won 7-6(4), 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 in a bruising battle. It was the Serb's win No 300 in Grand Slam events.

Earlier, Thiem, the Austrian third seed and last year's losing finalist, appeared to lack energy after rallying to beat Nick Kyrgios over five gruelling sets on Friday in front of a raucous crowd. He struggled to match the intensity of the 18th-seed-



ed Bulgarian on a silent, fan-free Rod Laver Arena and slumped out 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 in 2hr 1min.

Former world No 3 Dimitrov will now play giant-killing Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev in the quarter-finals after he stunned 20th seed Felix Auger-Aliassime over five sets. The power-hitting 27-year-old, a virtual unknown before the tournament started, battled back from two sets down to upset the Canadian

3-6, 1-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 on Margaret Court Arena.

Also, Alexander Zverev totted up his 50th Grand Slam win when he beat Serbia's Dusan Lajovic in straight sets to reach the quarter-finals.

The German sixth seed was tested in the first two sets but found it easier in the third, sealing his 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 victory with an ace.