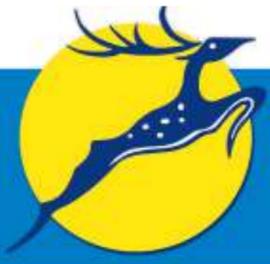


**ANALYSIS 7**  
IS THE DELIVERY OF JUSTICE  
A MYTH OR REALITY?

**MONEY 8**  
'INDIA'S UNION BUDGET CREATES  
BUZZ AMONG GLOBAL INVESTORS'

**SPORTS 12**  
KOHLI LAMENTS  
'1ST INNINGS DIFFERENCE'

HYDERABAD, WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 10, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



# the pioneer

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17TH CENTURY  
CHARMINAR SET  
FOR PAWAN'S  
NEXT  
Page 11

## GOVT TO ISSUE OTT GUIDELINES SOON: MINISTER JAVADEKAR

The government will soon issue guidelines for regulation of OTT (over the top) platforms that will address issues such as sensitive content, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Tuesday. Replying to a Zero Hour mention, Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said a lot of suggestions and complaints on the regulation of OTTs have been received. "Guidelines and direction are almost ready. It will be soon implemented," he said in his brief submission. Earlier, raising the issue through a Zero Hour mention, Mahesh Poddar of the BJP said the content and language on OTT platforms was discriminatory and offensive.



## FIRM WITH ALMOST NO REVENUE POSTS 3,000% GAIN IN 8 MONTHS, BEATS TESLA

There is nothing about the finances of Blink Charging Co. that would suggest it's one of the hottest stocks in America. It's never posted an annual profit in its 11-year history; it warned last year it could go bankrupt; it's losing market share, pulls in anemic revenue and has churned through management in recent years. And yet a hot stock it is. Investors have bid Blink's share price up 3,000% over the past eight months. Only seven stocks -- out of about 2,700 that are worth at least \$1 billion -- have risen more over that time. The reason: Blink is a green-energy company, an owner and operator of charging stations that power up electric vehicles.



## PETROL, DIESEL PRICES TOUCH FRESH RECORD HIGHS ACROSS INDIA

Petrol and diesel prices touched new highs across the metros on Tuesday February 9 after oil marketing companies increased the rates by 35 paise after a 3-day lull. The price of petrol was hiked by 35 paise from ₹ 86.95 per litre to ₹ 87.30 per litre, and diesel rate was increased by a similar amount from ₹ 77.13 to ₹ 77.48 per litre in Delhi, according to Indian Oil Corporation, the country's largest fuel retailer. Meanwhile, in Mumbai, the revised petrol and diesel rates stood at ₹ 93.83 and ₹ 84.36 per litre respectively, the highest among all four metros. Petrol and diesel prices have recorded an upswing since January 6, 2021 after staying unchanged for almost a month.



## NO INDICATION OF COVID VIRUS IN WUHAN BEFORE DEC 2019: WHO TEAM

The WHO mission to China to uncover the origins of the coronavirus has failed to identify the animal source, scientists said Tuesday. Experts believe the disease -- which has gone on to kill more than 2.3 million people worldwide -- originated in bats and could have been transmitted to humans via another mammal. While transmission from animals was the likely route, so far "the reservoir hosts remain to be identified", Liang Wannian, head of the China team, told reporters. He added that studies showed the virus "can be carried long-distance on cold chain products."



Violence in  
Afghan a cause for  
concern: PM

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## TS LOCAL BODIES TO GET LIFE AND FUNDS TOO

■ KCR takes revolutionary step in line with 15th Finance Commission recommendations  
■ Govt may table SFC Report in Budget session

ML MELLY MAITREYI  
■ HYDERABAD

Local bodies in Telangana State will soon directly get a share of the State government's own resources, following a revolutionary step taken by the K Chandrasekhara Reddy government in line with the recommendations of the Fifteenth Finance Commission.

In fact, going beyond the 15th FC recommendations, the State Finance Commission is learnt to have recommended, in its report to the state



government, two types of resources and a portion of the Centre's devolution.

## No Covid death in last 24 hours in 15 states, UTs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Fifteen states and Union Territories have not reported any death due to COVID-19 in last 24 hours, the government said today, highlighting the weakening hold of the virus over the country. While the number of fresh daily cases has been on a steady decline, over the last five weeks, there has been a 55 per cent decline in the average daily deaths. In the last one week, seven states and Union Territories have recorded no fatality, the Union health ministry said.

The seven states and Union Territories which reported zero deaths in the last week are Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar, Tripura, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Nagaland, Mizoram and Lakshadweep.

## 197 persons missing, 20 dead in Uttarakhand flood: Amit Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 197 people are missing while 20 people have died due to floods in Uttarakhand, Union Home Minister Amit Shah told Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

In a separate tunnel in the NTPC project, it is estimated that around 25 to 35 people are stuck inside, he said, adding "rescue operation to evacuate these persons is going on a war footing and all-out efforts are simultaneously being made for searching missing persons".

Making a statement in the House "regarding an avalanche in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand", the Union

minister said these inputs were based on the information received till Monday 5 pm from the state government.

Noting that an avalanche had occurred in the upper catchment of Rishiganga river, a tributary of Alaknanda river in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand, which led to sudden rise in the water level of Rishiganga River, he said as per information, a total of 197 persons are reported missing

which includes 139 are from the under-construction NTPC project, 46 people working on Rishi Ganga project and 12 villagers.

He said in the financial year 2020-21, Rs 1041 crore has been allocated to the State of Uttarakhand under the State Disaster Risk Management Fund (SDRMF) and the first installment of the central share amounting to Rs 468.50 crore has been released to the State Government.



Making a statement in the House "regarding an avalanche in Chamoli District of Uttarakhand", the Union minister said these inputs were based on the information received till Monday 5 pm from the state government



Telugu CMs want  
to be in the good  
books of Modi!

2

## One in 4 has antibodies against Covid in TS, ICMR Sero-survey

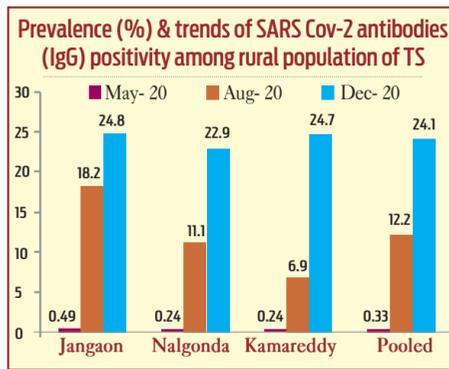
ANUSHA PUPPALA  
■ HYDERABAD

Among Telangana people, one in every four has antibodies against the Covid-19 virus, suggests ICMR Sero-survey. The sero-survey was conducted in Jangaon, Nalgonda and Kamareddy in December 2020.

The first round of the sero-survey, conducted in May 2020, in the same districts showed a sero prevalence of 0.33%, while the second round done in August showed 12.5% prevalence. The present round has shown 24.1% prevalence.

The third round of sero-surveillance, led by the National Institute of Nutrition in the three districts of Telangana in December 2020, as part of the National Sero-Survey conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), has put the sero-positivity rate (IgG positivity, indicative of silent, prior exposure to SARS-CoV2) at 24%.

The sero-prevalence at the national level went up 3.1 times between August and December, but in Telangana State, this went up by 2 times. Telangana's sero-prevalence (24.1%) as of December 2020



was similar to that of the national average (24%). "This shows the effectiveness of robust containment measures in the State, including quarantine, contact tracing and testing strategies", said Dr Hemalatha R, Director of ICMR-NIN.

The ICMR strategy has been to do repeat cross-sectional sero-surveys in the same geographic locations so that the infection transmission trends could be documented and studied.

Dr. Laxmaiah, ICMR-Nodal Officer, said that good compliance and cooperation shown by the public in adopting universal mask wearing and other Covid-19 protocols before the survey ensured that infection transmission remained slow and steady in the State. Since three-fourths of rural population is still susceptible, all non-pharmaceutical Covid-19 measures like wearing masks, hand sanitization, physical distancing should be continued.

## No relaxation of age limit, Centre tells SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre Tuesday told the Supreme Court that it is against granting one-time relaxation on age limit to UPSC civil service aspirants, including those who had exhausted their last attempt in 2020 exam amid the COVID-19 pandemic and would get one more chance this year provided they are not age barred, as it would be discriminatory to other candidates. The Centre told this to a bench headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar which reserved its verdict on a plea.

## SC to hear Amaravati land probe stay on Mar 5

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Tuesday said it would hear on March 5 a plea filed by the Andhra Pradesh government challenging the high court order which stayed SIT probe into alleged irregularities in land deals in Amaravati Capital Region during the previous TDP regime

of N Chandrababu Naidu. The apex court said it would also hear on March 5 the separate petition filed by the state government against another high court order in a matter which relates to alleged illegal land transactions during shifting of the state capital to Amaravati.



Rupee remained  
among better  
performing currencies  
in 2020

8

## TS SSC exams to begin from May 17

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination in Telangana State will be held from May 17 till May 26, 2020. The TS Board of Secondary Education on Tuesday released the schedule for the SSC public examination. Accordingly, SSC and OSSC exams will be conducted from 9.30 am to 12.45 pm, and SSC Vocational course exams from 9.30 am to 11.30 am. According to the schedule, SSC exams will conclude with the Social Studies paper on May 22. The OSSC exams will be held on May 24 and 25, while SSC vocational course (theory) is scheduled to take place on May 26, 2020.

## TODAY

**ALMANAC**  
Month & Paksham: Paush & Krishna Paksha Panchangam  
Tithi : Chaturdashi 01:08 am (Next Day)  
Nakshatram: Uttara Ashadha: 02:12 pm  
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)  
Rahukalam: 12:30 pm - 01:55 pm  
Yamagandam: 08:14 am - 09:39 am  
Varjyam: 06:10 pm - 07:46 pm  
Gulika: 11:04 am - 12:30 pm  
Good Time: (to start any important work)  
Amritkalam: 07:55 am - 09:29 am  
Abhijit Muhurtam: NIL

**HYDERABAD WEATHER**  
Forecast: Sunny  
Temp: 30/15  
Humidity: 39%  
Sunrise: 06:45 am  
Sunset: 06:15 pm  
Current Weather Conditions  
Updated February 10, 2021 5:00 PM

## Sharmila mum on new party, sticks to 'Rajanna rule'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Keeping aside apparent resistance within AP YSRCP circles, a defiant, but confident YS Sharmila, daughter of undivided Andhra Pradesh's former chief minister and Congress leader late YS Rajasekhara Reddy, asserted here on Tuesday that Telangana State needed a party that would bring back 'Rajanna rajyam' with focus on pro-poor and welfare measures.

Amidst speculations that she would formally launch 'Telangana YSR Party' on Tuesday during 'Atmeeya Sammelan' at Lotus Pond here and follow it up with meetings involving YSR's fans in Chevella and Nalgonda, Sharmila, however, did not lay bare the contours of the political outfit she has in her mind.



YS Sharmila, daughter of undivided Andhra Pradesh's former chief minister and Congress leader late YS Rajasekhara Reddy, greeting YSR's fans and aides at Lotus Pond in Hyderabad on Tuesday

Leaving no one in doubt about her political ambitions, Sharmila stated, in response to a query on whether she had any differences with Jagan,

that while her brother Jaganmohan Reddy would take care of his work in Andhra Pradesh, she would take care of her work in

## Differs with YSRCP leaders, to tour Telangana

While YSRCP party leaders in Andhra Pradesh distanced themselves from her decision, suggesting that her brother and AP Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy may not have concurred with her decision, Sharmila denied having any differences of opinion with her brother on her mission in Telangana. "We are not opponents. He is my own brother," she observed. Sharmila's move to confer with YSR's aides and fans in Telangana has surprised political circles in Telangana and intrigued those in Andhra Pradesh. Sharmila, who chose to meet leaders from Nalgonda districts on the 50th wedding anniversary of her parents, told media persons that she would go round the districts to meet leaders and followers of YSR. She said she would make field visits to understand people's problems, without indicating whether she would undertake a 'Padayatra'.

Telangana. She clarified that her yet-to-be-floated party would work in association with YSRCP in Telangana. She did mention that she did

not consult her brother on her political move. She said 'Rajanna Rajyam' would come in Telangana.

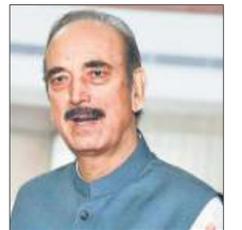
## 'Proud to be Hindustani Muslim': Azad farewell speech

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress MP Ghulam Nabi Azad during his retirement speech in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday summed up his more than four-decade-old political career in few Urdu couplets and a brief speech.

"I would like to depart with only a few words using a few couplets. A ten-hour speech can be summed up in merely two couplets by a poet. And I would like to take that approach. To express my thoughts on my entire political career would be a tough task to perform," Mr Azad said in Rajya Sabha.

Going back to the early days of partition, the senior



Congress leader said, "I am among those fortunate people who never went to Pakistan. When I read about circumstances in Pakistan, I feel proud to be a Hindustani Muslim."

# Telugu CMs want to be in good books of Modi!

Regional parties, notwithstanding their influence at the state level and beyond, can sustain themselves only by consciously being on friendly terms with the ruling dispensation at the Centre. No wonder, the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, YS Jaganmohan Reddy and K Chandrasekhar Rao respectively, are following this unwritten national code in their respective states. Both are trying to be on the same page with the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, which has become very powerful by building on BJP's brute majority in the Lok Sabha.



**PIN POINT**

of the Congress party in the aftermath of his mother Indra Gandhi's assassination just two months before the advanced General Election. It is now clear for non-BJP parties that clashing with the Union government would be futile since Prime Minister Narendra Modi has become the 'Bahubali' of Indian politics.

In TS, despite brushing aside rumours of possible anointment of IT Minister K T Rama Rao as the new boss of state's administration, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao might be looking for an opportune moment for the eventual coronation. Since his government is facing the heat from various sections of society, KTR may have decided to continue in the present post for some more time. Congress and BJP are struggling to establish their presence in TS by exposing the omissions and com-

**In TS, despite brushing aside rumours of possible anointment of IT Minister KT Rama Rao as the new boss of state's administration, Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao might be looking for an opportune moment for the eventual coronation.**

missions of the TRS government. Further, the political situation in the country presents a scenario whether there is room for a political force involving non-Congress and non-BJP parties. The presence of such a third force might weaken anti-BJP combine. Hence, other political parties are keeping themselves away from attempts to form a Third Front of the kind envisaged by KCR, who too has occasionally flexed his muscles in this regard. So, KCR appears to have shelved

his idea of bringing like-minded regional parties on one political platform. His idea is to replicate what his political guru and TDP founder NT Rama Rao did in the late eighties that saw the unfolding of the National Front. But the present political atmosphere in the country is not conducive for him. The present situation has compelled him to redraw his political plans, including the one to make KTR his successor.

The BJP TS unit, with the support of its national leadership, has been expanding its base in



**M D RATNA KUMAR**  
Senior Journalist

Telangana with the target of assuming power in the 2023 General Election. KCR has to run the show on the strength of his own image and return to power. But BJP national leadership's 'NOC' might strengthen KTR's future role in state's politics. So, a give and take policy may work for TRS and BJP in the future. BJP will be completing 10 years of its

rule; so, anti incumbency factor could be there. In such circumstances, BJP might not get a huge majority in the Lok Sabha and such a situation would force BJP to go with an 'inclusive policy' that would bring more parties like TRS and YSRCP into the fold of National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Well-settled regional parties like TRS and YSRCP will actually be looking for such a political situation that gives them leeway to effectively deal with the Union government. So, TRS and YSRCP are trying to impress the Modi government by supporting the farm laws, against which thousands of farmers have been agitating for over three months.

In Andhra Pradesh, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has shown a soft corner for the Union government led by Modi. Jagan is currently out on bail, though he is facing several cases filed against him by CBI & ED. The situation will be unimagineable if his bail gets cancelled by

the CBI court. Therefore, Jagan is monitoring developments in Tamil Nadu, where the Modi government is trying to gain an upper hand in government affairs, particularly after the demise of J. Jayalalithaa. The Jagan government is also running for cover in the backdrop of the move to privatise Vizag Steel Plant, which was achieved following an agitation and after the supreme sacrifice of 32 persons almost five decades ago. Jagan preferred to write a letter to Prime Minister Modi requesting him to drop the privatisation move. Everybody can guess the fate of the letter! The YSRCP government is red-faced because of the Modi government's firm decision on Vizag Steel Plant. People are asking about thousands of acres of land that was given by farmers then.

Those lands, worth more than one lakh crore rupees, will go into the hands of private firms. The entire issue becomes even more

complicated if one considers the fact that Vizag is going to become the executive capital of AP under the three-capital formula of Jaganmohan Reddy.

YSRCP is seriously thinking of keeping its principal political rival -- TDP -- away from the BJP government at Centre. TDP supreme Chandrababu Naidu has conceded that it was not right on his part to leave the NDA after the last elections.

Since then he has maintained silence, while keeping himself away from anti-Modi rant at the national level. He appears to be desperate to forge an alliance again with Modi for the next elections as TDP thinks that it cannot take on YSRCP by going alone in the state. Noticeably, AP and TS Chief Ministers did not visit farmers agitating at Delhi borders. They want to strike a deal with BJP, saying apna time aayega! In local parlance, it is called 'Delhi mein dosti, aur gauri mein kusti!'

## Having moustache a must in this TS village

PNS ■ KAMAREDDY

If you are a male and living in Lingampalli Kalan, in all likelihood you have one thing in common with all other male members of your village - your thick moustache. It's not just a sign of masculinity for you in which you take pride, but an age old tradition. For generations the male members - most of them - of the village had been sporting a moustache and they all dislike a break with the tradition.

A resident of the village, Kadem Lakshmayya, said that all male members in his family, dating back to antiquity, had been wearing the moustache. His grandfather and father emulated their forefathers. Therefore, he said, he also emulated the example of his father. He said that he

would always protect his moustache with a lot of care. Twitching the moustache gave him unexplained happiness, he said. In the same breath he however expressed concern over the present generation males, who have been shaving their moustaches clean.

The not-so-young male members are however not impressed with the clean shaven look. The grace that wearing the moustache gives a male is totally different, they would say. If anyone confronted them with the question why they were growing the moustache, they would say that they regarded it as a symbol of masculinity. But for many village elders it is much more than that.

If anyone new entered the village, all elders, who are above 50 years, would wel-

come him - all sporting a moustache and without fail. The village has at least 100 males sporting the moustache. On a scale of one to 10, at least seven - eight persons will sport the moustache.

Bandalam Ashok, another resident of the village, is one of the six siblings in the family. He said that growing moustaches had become a tradition in the family since olden days. He said he was also following the same example. People would watch men sporting moustaches with a lot of interest, he said. Therefore many males in the village would be wearing their moustaches for years to come even though new comers to the village might watch the elders with thick moustaches with a lot of amusement, he said.

## TS local bodies to get life and funds...

Continued from page 1

Besides, SFC has recommended an administrative set-up to oversee spending of these resources by local bodies.

All told, Telangana will be among the few states that have initiated steps in accordance with the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 and the 74th Amendment Act 1992. The 73rd Amendment Act, which added a new part IX consisting of 16 Articles and the Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution, envisages the Gram Sabha as the foundation of the Panchayat Raj System to perform functions and powers entrusted to it by the State Legislatures. The 74th Amendment Act seeks to provide a common framework for the structure and mandate of urban local bodies to enable

them to function as effective democratic units of local Self Government.

The Finance Commission had recommended direct release of grants to all the three tiers of the panchayat raj set-up -- village, mandal/block and district -- from the Central resources. So, enthused local bodies in the State were eagerly waiting for the TRS government to follow suit. The Telangana State's first Finance Commission, which wrapped up its report in March, 2020, is learnt to have made recommendations to enable proper allocation of funds to local bodies. It is presently under the consideration of the Panchayat Raj and Finance departments. Expectations are that the State government may table it, upon Cabinet approval, in the upcoming Budget session.

## Apollo Hospitals told to pay Rs 2.5-L payout for deficiency in services

ANUSHA PUPPALA ■ HYDERABAD

The Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission has asked Apollo Hospitals, Hyderabad to pay Rs 2,50,000 as compensation to a complainant for deficiency of service and alleged medical negligence.

The complainant Adi Damu Nirmala Shekar's husband who was suffering from difficulty in swallowing was diagnosed with poorly differentiated squamous cell carcinoma after conducting various requisite diagnostic tests of ultra sound endoscopy, Esophageal biopsy and PET CT scan. The doctors advised trimodality treatment involving surgery followed by radiotherapy and chemotherapy as the line of treatment.

Accordingly the surgery

was conducted and the patient was discharged with uneventful post-operative period and stable condition of all vitals. The complainant's husband went for review adhering to the post-operative medical advice.

The patient had vomiting and body pains in the second review visit. Subsequently, an ex-ray & PET CT SCAN was conducted and chemo therapy was started. It is alleged by the complainants that hepatic metastases was diagnosed very late by the opposite parties, which has to be treated on time, amounting to deficiency in service on the part of opposite parties. It is the contention of the complainant, had the nature of malignancy been diagnosed at an early stage her husband would have been saved.

The basic allegation of the

complainant is that the spread of metastasis to other organs like liver, lungs and bones could have been prevented and that her husband could have survived at least another 10 years.

Hence, the consumer court directed the hospital authorities to refund all the amount of Rs 14,00,000 paid towards the 'negligent' medical treatment of the complainant's husband and also instructs to pay Rs 63,000 towards interest on the amounts collected by the opposite parties.

The consumer court has also asked them to pay Rs 25,000 towards transport charges incurred by the complainant during the medical treatment and Rs 2,50,000 as compensation to a complainant for deficiency of service and alleged medical negligence.

## TS SSC exams to begin from...

Continued from page 1

The objective paper (Part-B) in all the subjects has to be answered in the last half an hour only. All the academic course subjects/papers are common for both SSC Academic Course and OSSC course candidates. SSC Public Examination will be conducted strictly as per the schedule even if the government declares public holiday or general holiday in respect of the any dates mentioned in the schedule.

The performance of candidates in the examination will be cancelled if the candidates appear in any examination centre other than the one originally allotted by the authorities.

The performance of the candidates who answer wrong combination of question papers will be cancelled. Hence, candidates are instructed to demand and answer only the right combination of question papers.

BOARD OF SECONDARY EDUCATION TELANGANA STATE : HYDERABAD		
SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS, MAY-2021.		
EXAMINATION TIMETABLE FOR ACADEMIC SSC, OSS AND VOCATIONAL CANDIDATES		
REGULAR AND PRIVATE ONCE FAILED CANDIDATES		
NOTIFICATION		
DATE&DAY	SUBJECT&PAPER	Timings
17-05-2021 MONDAY	First Language Paper 1 (Group A)	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
	First Language Paper 1 (Composite Course)	
	First Language Paper 2 (Composite Course)	
18-05-2021 TUESDAY	Second Language	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
19-05-2021 WEDNESDAY	English	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
20-05-2021 THURSDAY	Mathematics	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
21-05-2021 FRIDAY	General Science	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
22-05-2021 SATURDAY	Social Science	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
24-05-2021 MONDAY	OSSC Main Language Paper-I (Sanskrit & Arabic)	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
25-05-2021 TUESDAY	OSSC Main Language Paper-II (Sanskrit & Arabic)	9:30 AM to 12:45 PM
26-05-2021 WEDNESDAY	SSC Vocational Course (Theory)	9:30 AM to 11:30 AM

## Sharmila mum on new party... Differs with YSRCP leaders...

Continued from page 1

Going by her utterances at the 'Atmeeya Sammelan' and during her interactions with media persons, Sharmila is charting her own independent course. She is set to approach people of Telangana only after giving shape to her party, which may be confined to Telangana developmental issues. Almost confirming this, her own fans and activists from YSRCP circles in TS said that Sharmila and Jagan were akin to 'two eyes' for them. They offered 100 per cent support to her. They advised her to continue her activities from Vijaya Vihar, and offered to carry out her orders.

years ago in a case related to Disproportionate Assets case, said it was her father's dream that every poor person should have a house, every poor student should have access to good education. Her father implemented 'Arogya Sri' to ensure poor patients would not end up in debts when seeking medical treatment. Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, YSRC general secretary, addressing media persons at Tadepalli on Tuesday, said that the Congress party divided the integrated AP with vested interests and YS Jaganmohan Reddy subsequently grew up as a tall leader in the residual AP.

## No relaxation of age limit, Centre tells SC

Continued from page 1

Which had sought one more chance in the UPSC's civil services exam to those aspirants who could not appear in their last attempt in 2020 due to the pandemic. Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the Centre, said that initially the government was not willing to concede the extra chance and it was later done at the suggestion of the bench.

September 16 last year order came up for hearing on Tuesday, the top court granted last opportunity to the respondents to file their replies within two weeks and said that rejoinder be filed within one week thereafter.

Separately, the Andhra Pradesh government has also moved the apex court against the September 15 last year order of the state high court which had restrained the media from publishing news regarding an FIR lodged in connection with alleged irregularities in land transactions in Amaravati. The top court had on November 25 last year stayed the high court direction restraining the media from publishing news regarding the FIR. The apex court had also said that the high court shall not decide till January last week the pending matter which relates to the alleged illegal land transactions during shifting of the state capital to Amaravati.

## SC to hear Amaravati land probe stay on Mar 5

Continued from page 1

These petitions came up for hearing before a bench comprising Justices Ashok Bhushan and R S Reddy.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on September 16 last year had granted a stay on the actions of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted by Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government to conduct a comprehensive probe into various irregularities, particularly the land deals in the Amaravati Capital Region.

The top court had on November 5 agreed to hear the state's plea challenging the high court order and had sought responses including from two Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leaders -- Varla Ramaiah and Alapati Rajendra Prasad, a former minister -- on whose petitions the high court had stayed the probe initiated by the SIT. When the plea against the high court's

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## 197 persons...

Continued from page 1

The state government has reported that there is no danger of downstream flooding and the rise in water level has been contained, he said.

He added that the Centre and the State Government have been keeping a strict vigil on the situation.

"It is observed from the satellite data (Planet Lab) of 7th February, 2021 in catchment of Rishi Ganga river at the terminus of the glacier at an altitude of 5600m a landslide triggered a snow avalanche covering approximately 14 sq.km area and causing a flash flood in the downstream of Rishi Ganga river," he added.

## Protein behind slow spread of...

Continued from page 1

This variant spread so rapidly that in just 10 weeks between February and March 2020 over 64.11 per cent of globally infected individuals were identified to carry the mutant virus starting from only 1.95 per cent in January.

However, the researchers, including those from the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG) in Kalyani, West Bengal, said this subtype took a significantly longer time to reach a 50 per cent relative frequency in East Asia -- 5.5 months -- compared to the 2.15 months it took in Europe, and the 2.83 months it took in North-America.

According to the scientists, a deficiency of the protein

Alpha-anti-trypsin (AAT) across the populations of Europe and North-America is one of the main factors that explain the rapid spread of this variant in the two continents compared to its transmission in Asia. "For the coronavirus to enter cells, its spike protein binds with the ACE2 receptor in human cells, and the human enzyme TMPRSS2 cleaves at the junction of two subunits S1 and S2 of the protein, enabling the virus to fuse with the cell," said study corresponding author Nidhan K Biswas from NIBMG.

"But due to the D614G mutation in the spike protein, the virus gained an additional cleavage site which enables it to fuse better with cells," Biswas told PTL.

In lineages of the coron-

avirus carrying the D614G mutation, the 614th molecule of the virus spike protein -- aspartic acid -- denoted by D is replaced by the molecule glycine, noted as G.

"Instead of one cleavage site, the mutated virus has two such sites, and it can take dual advantage of this and enter cells more easily," Biswas explained.

Based on the current study, he said this site in the virus is cleaved by the host protein neutrophil elastase which is normally involved in clearing up bacterial infections in the lungs. The levels of the elastase molecules in the body are naturally kept in check by AAT whose main function is to protect the lungs from inflammation and tissue damage, the study noted.

## 'Proud to be Hindustani Muslim': Azad farewell speech

Continued from page 1

"If any Muslim should feel proud in the world, it should be the Indian Muslim. Over the years, we have seen how Muslims countries from Afghanistan Iraq getting destroyed. There are no Hindus or Christians there - they are fighting amongst themselves," he added.

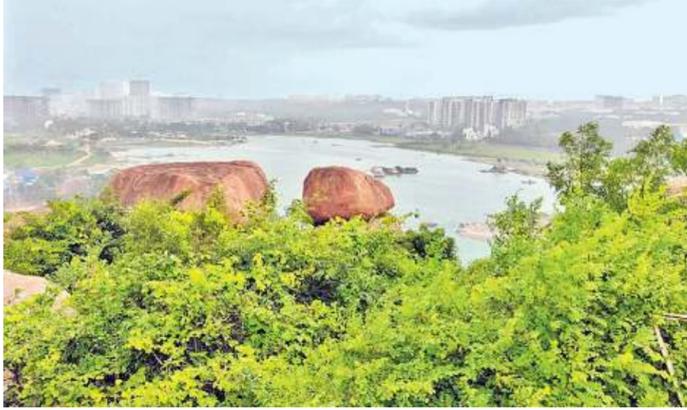
Prior to this, Rajya Sabha witnessed emotional scenes as Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled the contribution of Ghulam Nabi Azad to the country, the House and also his party.

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# Infra needs religate heritage aspects

**ANUSHA PUPPALA**  
■ HYDERABAD

A large portion of the Khajaguda heritage rock precinct has been reduced to open ground. Massive dumpers move through the day and night, making quite a racket. Where there used to be rock formations leading to the top, now lies a wide road that is perpetually covered with the haze of fine dust as the vehicles move on a continuous basis.



Known as Faqrudin Baba Gutta or Meher Baba's Cave, the massive rock formation near Khajaguda in Puppalguda Village, which is a geological landmark in the evolution of earth, has become one of the prime localities in the city with the Outer Ring Road (ORR) passing through one side and the Old Bombay Highway through the other. Over the past few years, plush schools, apartment blocks and restaurants have opened up in the areas.

An ancient dargah, Baba Fakhruddin Aualia's tomb, is situated in the hill and 800-year-old Ananta Padmanabha Swamy shrine is nestled at the back of the hill. Khajaguda is also known for its various adventurous activities and even

outdoor clubs conduct many hiking, trekking, rock climbing and outdoor activities for the local citizens. Fakhruddin Gutta is a recreation center for many citizens and children in Hyderabad city.

Hyderabad's wants to save Khajaguda rocks from destruction and demands to develop it into a rock, nature and adventure park and thus create an oasis of unique nature in the bustle of the new developments that are choking more and more of the natural envi-

ronments of Hyderabad city. Society of Save Rocks has filed an online petition appealing Telangana government to protect the beautiful hillock of stunning, 2,500 million year old granite formations.

The citizens alleged that Fakhruddin Gutta is currently under severe threat of encroachment and destruction, it being situated in one of the fast developing areas of Hyderabad, near Gachibowli. The Society to Save Rocks had filed a Public Interest Litigation

(PIL) in May 2019 to list Fakhruddin Gutta back in the heritage list and to stop the destruction of the rocks. The Honorable Judge granted a stay order on breaking the rocks.

According to Society to Save Rocks, there are still incidents of breaking of rocks and we appeal to protect Fakhruddin Gutta and its natural and historic and geological heritage without delay. The citizens demand to immediately stop destruction of rocks at

Fakhruddin Gutta and to include all the heritage rock formations list as per previous GOs in the Telangana Heritage (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Maintenance) Act, 2017.

Members of Society to Save Rocks said, "We appeal the state government to take action for the protection and preservation of heritage rocks around Hyderabad especially the Fakhruddin Gutta hillock".

Manga Sreekanth a resident of Khajaguda told The Pioneer, "Khajaguda hill is one of the best getaways within the city. It's a hidden gem and is getting all the attention it deserves in the recent times. This hill has several small hidden caves which one has to explore. It's a natural habitat for hundreds of peacocks which is our national bird. Many youngsters go for trekking and rock climbing over the weekends. I myself go there every week to get relaxed and some time to meditate. On the top of the hill at south side you can see a wonderful temple of Ananta Padmanabha Swamy and to the north a very old Dargah. To the west you can see beautiful Khajaguda lake. The city really needs to preserve this wonderful creation of the God".

# Man gets capital punishment for rape, murder of a 5-year-old girl

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

A court here on Tuesday awarded death penalty to a 23-year-old man for raping and murdering a five-year-old girl in December 2017.

Judge B Suresh Babu of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge (MSJ) Court found Dinesh Kumar Dharne, a labourer, guilty under relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, IPC Section 302 (murder) and other provisions, police said.

The court also imposed a fine of Rs 1,000, Cyberabad Police officials said.

According to the prosecution, on December 12, 2017 he lured the girl from a shop on the guise of providing chocolate. She was taken to nearby bushes where he raped and murdered her by hitting her head with a boulder.

When he returned to the labour camp the girl's mother asked him about her daughter. But, he replied that he had dropped her at the camp some time ago and she might be playing somewhere. The girl's family members (native of



Odisha State) were working as labourers and used to stay at a labour camp in Narsingi Police Station limits here. The woman later filed a complaint with police against the man.

The accused, a native of Madhya Pradesh, was subsequently arrested and remanded to judicial custody.

Police said after committing the offence, he joined the crowd at the labour camp and acted as a spectator when the parents were searching for their daughter.

Police raided his room and on interrogation, he confessed to having committed the offence, the release said.

Key witnesses were examined and charge sheet was

filed and steps were taken to conduct a speedy trial.

However, the accused absconded after obtaining bail and went into hiding in Madhya Pradesh and the trial was interrupted for a brief period.

Special Teams were formed to trace him and he was arrested. The Court directed authorities to keep the accused in judicial custody till trial was completed.

The Telangana Police till now has successfully got seven death penalties awarded by courts pertaining to different cases of rape and murder of girls and a woman besides murder of nine people in Warangal district.

## CITY LIGHTS

### Telangana pioneer in extending support to startups, says Jayesh

Social Impact Bootcamp 2020 launched by Telangana State Innovation Cell (TSIC), IT & IC Department, Government of Telangana in collaboration with T-Hub Hyderabad, Bala Vikasa International Centre, Nutrihub-TBI, ICRISAT, and AISEA sees a successful completion with 61 social startups across undergoing mentorship and workshops on various aspects of the Social Impact and pitched to 20+ investors and 9 Government Departments of Telangana state. Social Impact Bootcamp (SIB) was an intensive 4-week long mentoring program for social startups and enterprises that are solving some of the most pressing challenges we are facing today while contributing towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Speaking about the Bootcamp, Principal Secretary of IT Jayesh Ranjan said, "Telangana has been a pioneer in extending support to startups during unprecedented times. But during these times what we saw was a need for solutions inclusive of an empathetic approach to solve the social issues. The bootcamp is a testimony to that notion. The bootcamp paved way for 60+ startups across India to dialogue with State Government Officials in exploring the potential collaborations and has also set a strong base for Social Innovation Policy, the state is planning to launch."



### IGNOU invites applications for admissions to courses for 2021

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has invited applications for its various programmes like certificate Diploma, PG Diploma, Degree and PG programmes for January, 2021 admission cycle. The last date for submitting the filled in application forms for all the programmes is February 28, 2021 through online link given in the IGNOU website www.ignou.ac.in. Fee is exempted for the students from SC and ST categories joining all the IGNOU Programmes except Master's Degree Programmes, as per the guidelines of the University. All the aspiring candidates can avail the above facility extended by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The details of the programmes offered for January, 2021 admission cycle are available on the IGNOU website www.ignou.ac.in or call IGNOU Regional Centre, Hyderabad on Mob.No. 9492451812 or 040-23117550.



### Actress Archana Shastri takes part in Green India Challenge

The Green India Challenge initiative of TRS Rajya Sabha MP, Santosh Kumar has continued to attract celebrities, actors and people from all walks of life. On Tuesday, popular actor Archana Shastri accepted the challenge, after being nominated by Telugu anchor Deepthi Vajpayee, by planting saplings at the Jubilee Hills Park. After planting the saplings, Archana Shastri praised the concept of Green India Challenge. "This is a unique initiative because it promotes afforestation and improving green cover across all the urban centres in Telangana. I also take this opportunity to urge general public to participate in the Koti Vruksha Archana on February 17, which is being organised across the State to celebrate the birthday of Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao," she said. Archana Shastri has now nominated actors Madhumitha, Shiva Balaji, Neha Naman Sha and Ashima Prachi to continue the Green India Challenge.



# 149 new virus cases, 1 death in Telangana

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Telangana logged 149 new Covid cases and one death during the last 24 hours, health officials said on Tuesday.

The fresh cases pushed the state's total tally to 2,95,831. The death toll mounted to 1,612. Hyderabad reported 25 new cases. The count in the remaining 32 districts was in single digits.

According to the director of public health and family welfare, the fatality rate remained 0.54 per cent against the national average of 1.4 per cent. While 44.96 per cent of deaths occurred due to Covid, 55.04 per cent had co-morbidities. A total of 186 people recovered from the virus during the period, taking the cumulative numbers to 2,92,415. The state's Covid recovery rate improved further



to 98.84 per cent against the national average of 1.4 per cent.

The number of active cases dropped further to 1,804 including 694 who are in home/institutional isolation.

During the last 24 hours that ended 8 p.m. Monday, 31,831 samples were tested - 29,419 in government labs and 2,142 in private labs. With this the cumulative number of tests conducted in the state rose to 81,54,347.

### 7K Cyb cops to be vaccinated in 3 days: Sajjanar

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Cyberabad Commissioner of Police VC Sajjanar took Covid vaccine along with other frontline warriors at Unit Hospital in Cyberabad.

Addressing the frontline officers of Cyberabad, VC Sajjanar said, "I would like to congratulate all frontline workers who have been risking their lives to keep people safe. I would also like to extend my special compliments to the management of Bharat Biotech, Hyderabad/ Serum Institute and also all the scientists staff for coming up with the vaccine within a span of less than one year."

He further stated that as many as 7,000 Cyberabad Police frontline workers would get vaccinated in next three days. VC Sajjanar, IPS urged all frontline workers/public to come forward and make this vaccination drive a successful one as the "Made in India" vaccines are safe.

# Police bust inter-state human trafficking racket, arrest four

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

A human trafficking racket has been busted by the Rachakonda police here on Tuesday with the arrest of four people and a woman, allegedly being trafficked by them to Oman.

Police raided a Tours and Travels office and nabbed the four, including two travel agents, who were trying to send the woman to Oman in a fraudulent manner on visiting visa instead of working visa, Commissioner of Police Mahesh M Bhagwat said.

The arrested persons were identified as Shaik Mohammed Imtiyaz, 35, N Subbamma, 27, both travel agents, G Subba Rayudu, 38, a driver, all from Kadapa in Andhra Pradesh, and Mohd Haroon, 52, an office assistant at the travel agency in Malakpet. The managing director of the agency, Mohd Naseer, and his daughter Sumaiya Fathima, 23, who is also the owner of the travel



**HIT IT AWAY**  
It was a different field that Telangana Finance Minister T Harish Rao took to on Tuesday. The Minister exhibited his batting skills after inaugurating the KCR Cricket Tournament at Janagama in Siddipet District on Tuesday. Harish Rao's running between the wickets was a treat for the spectators who cheered him.



# BioAsia 2021 to focus on Covid, health & pharma

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Asia's largest life-sciences and healthcare forum BioAsia, in its 18th edition, will focus on Covid, Global Health, Pharma and MedTech.

To be held on February 22 and 23, 2021, the conference will provide a unique opportunity to Pharma and Biotech companies, CROs, CMOs, CDMOs, Biotech start-ups, Academic Institutions, Scientists and Researchers, Policy Makers, and Regulatory Experts across the globe to discuss the Coronavirus and other insightful topics related to the life sciences industry.



The two-day event will witness a wide array of panels focussing on the Covid pandemic and how it has led to various changes in the life sciences industry across the globe. The conference will offer insightful sessions on India's current and future potential in immunizing the world and key actions taken actions to become the future global innovative vaccines provider. The participants will also hear the experts discussing innovation at the intersection of healthcare, technology, and finance, promoting affordable and accessible innovation in the healthcare sector.

# Make changes in diet to prevent cancer: CP

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

As part of medical camps being conducted by Rachakonda Police Commissionerate to its police personnel, an awareness talk has been organised for the women police personnel by Dr Rajesh Bollam from Yashoda Cancer Institute.

Rachakonda Commissioner of Police Mahesh Bhagwat stated that due to stress among women, they are also more prone to cancer. He emphasised that women should be balanced diet and eat healthy food more so in case of women police as they require more energy to perform duties.



# RTC to convert its diesel fleet into e-buses

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

With diesel prices touching an all-time high and to reduce pollution emission, Telangana State Road Transport Corporation is exploring ways and means to convert diesel buses into electric buses.

The TSRTC, which is caught in a debt crisis, has embarked on this unique experiment by allotting a city bus to a private firm for conversion. The modified bus would be tested for about three months.

For a period of three months, the maintenance cost of diesel bus vis-a-vis electric bus would be compared. If the manufactured bus is cost-effective, the TSRTC will entrust the rest of the fleet of its buses to



the private company for the conversion into an electric bus. The RTC has plans to award the lowest bidder the contract to convert the diesel buses. If the experiment were to be successful, the RTC

would be saved from the burden of Rs 460 crore by way of diesel expenses per year. In all regions put together, the RTC would be benefited to the tune of Rs 1,926 crore. Currently, the RTC is not in a

position to bear the cost of conversion of diesel buses into electric buses. The cost of running the diesel buses works out to be Rs 18 per kilometre, whereas the cost of running electric buses works out to be Rs 6 km, saving the TSRTC Rs 12 per km by way of operational expenses.

The private firm converting the buses would take the Corporation per km savings for a period of five years as a consideration for converting diesel buses to electric buses. After five years, the converted electric buses would become the property of the RTC.

The TSRTC is going to take a decision by the time bids are invited for conversion of the buses.

**Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority**  
7th Floor, Swarnajayanti Commercial Complex, Amserpet, Hyderabad  
**Public Notification U/s. 15(3) of HMDA Act, 2008 (G.O.Ms.No. 95, dated 21.01.2021)**  
In exercise of powers conferred by Sub-Section (1) of Section 15 of Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority Act, 2008 (Act No. 8 of 2008), the Government hereby makes the following variation to the land use in the Notified MDP-2031 vide G.O.Ms.No. 33 MA & U.O. dt. 24.01.2021 as required by sub-section (1) of the said section.  
The site in Sy.No. 299A/P, 315A/P, 316, 297/P, 317/P & 303/P situated at Turkapalle (V), Shamirpet (M), Medchal Dist. to an extent of 15079.14 Sq.mts which is presently earmarked for Residential use zone in the Notified Master Plan MDP-2031, vide G.O.Ms.No.33 MA dt. 24.01.2013 is now designated as Manufacturing use zone for setting up unit of Ware House under "Green" category.  
The details of the above are available in Website: <http://governor.telangana.gov.in> and <http://hmda.gov.in>  
Sd/-  
R.O.No: 148-PR/CL-AGENCY/MDV/12020-21, Date: 08-02-2021 for Metropolitan Commissioner, HMDA

# Sharmila stirs up a hornet's nest

K VENKATESHWARLU  
■ HYDERABAD

YS Sharmila, daughter of the late YS Rajasekhara Reddy, has stirred up hornet's nest by indirectly hinting at floating a new party in Telangana.

The news has become a hot topic for discussions across the State, as nobody was expecting the emergence of a new party assuming that there is no political vacuum in the State as of now.

But, politicians never leave a chance to make their presence felt if they feel that there is an opportunity to expand their party, or launch a new party to be in power in their respective States, or other States.

Discussions are going on across the State as to who was behind Sharmila's party. From political leaders to the common man are indulged in deliberations curiously was there anybody, or any political party behind her proposed party.

The BJP supporters are stating that the TRS is behind the Sharmila's new party to ensure that the votes of anti-incumbency in the next elections should not go to the BJP, which became almost an alternative party to the ruling TRS party by winning the Dubbak bypoll and GHMC elections. They are saying that it is a

strategy by the TRS masterminds to see that the leaders of the TRS did not go towards the BJP in the future.

However, Minister for Civil Supplies Gangula Kamalakar stated that no other new political party will survive in the State. Split of votes in the next elections would help the TRS. They were also giving the main reason for the TRS backing Sharmila is that the TRS will get a chance to raise the Telangana sentiment once again to register a hat-trick victory by winning the next Assembly elections.

While the TRS supporters are stating that the BJP is behind Sharmila's new party. They were giving reasons saying that the BJP will be strengthened further in case Sharmila distances minorities and Reddy communities from the TRS by attracting them towards her new party.



**Minister for Civil Supplies Gangula Kamalakar stated that no other new political party will survive in the State**

Already, the BJP showed its impact in the GHMC elections by raising the MIM issue.

However, some political analysts are stating that the YSRCP was there behind YS Sharmila's new party proposal. They are stating that Jagan had given an assurance to Sharmila that he will make her float a new political party in Telangana State and ask the YSRCP leaders from Telangana to join Sharmila's new party.

Head of Mass Communication and Journalism of Osmania University Prof Stevenson

opined that Sharmila and Jagan may have a difference of opinion on accommodating Brother Anil Kumar for the Rajya Sabha. Hence, it may be one of the reasons behind her decision on floating a new party.

However, one cannot rule out the backing of political parties vying to expand their base in Telangana. But the writing on the walls says that building an organisational network and sustaining the cadre is not an easy task. Such individual-centric parties have not fared well and vanished into thin air, he said.

## TELANGANA NEEDS 'RAJANNA RAJYAM', SAYS KONDA RAGHAVA REDDY

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana needs 'Rajanna Rajyam' as the people have been facing many problems in the State, asserted YSRCP general secretary Konda Raghava Reddy. The present government is not implementing welfare schemes properly, he alleged.

Speaking to the media after Sharmila's first review meeting with Nalgonda leaders at Lotus Pond here on Tuesday, Konda said that Sharmila had a review

meeting with the leaders of Chevella and Nalgonda and she will complete all districts review meetings one after the other in 30 days and then only she will announce a future course of action plan.

He felt that the Telangana people would support Sharmila's decision of floating a new political party. He said that there were no disputes between Jagan and Sharmila. He warned saying that countdown had started for the KCR government as it was already proved in GHMC elections. He has been actively participating in the activities of Sharmila for the past several days.

# KCR behind Sharmila's new outfit, alleges Revanth

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao is behind the new party proposal of YS Sharmila, alleged TPCC working president and Malkajgiri MP A Revanth Reddy. He said that Sharmila has to spell out her stand on the Pulichintala, Pothireddypadu and Sangameshwaram projects before launching her party.

He asked Sharmila to enter Telangana politics only after filing a case in the court against Andhra Pradesh for constructing the Pothireddypadu, Sangameshwaram projects. He also demanded Sharmila to tender apologies to those who sacrificed their lives for the formation of Telangana for stating 'No Telangana...only United State' during the Telangana movement.

YSR had become the Chief Minister being in the Congress only and he had introduced all schemes as a Congress leader. The Telangana society has respect towards him, however, they don't agree if Sharmila floats a new party. He said that the people had achieved Telangana State to be ruled by Telangana leaders, but not Rajanna's daughter. He said that he will offer 'Saare' to her, but people won't accept

- TPCC working president and Malkajgiri MP A Revanth Reddy asked Sharmila to enter Telangana politics only after filing a case in the court against Andhra Pradesh for constructing the Pothireddypadu, Sangameshwaram projects
- He also demanded Sharmila to tender apologies to those who sacrificed their lives for the formation of Telangana for stating 'No Telangana...only United State' during the Telangana movement.



the State. He asked Sharmila to tell whether she will stand by the side of Telangana people facing her brother. Not to insult the sacrifices of Telangana people, he said.

It is time for the YSR fans from Telangana to take a clear stand regarding Sharmila. He asked the people to decide whether their own State leaders should rule the State, or from other States.

He said that the Sharmila's party will not survive here. He said that the people, who insult sacrifices of 1,200, will welcome Sharmila. He alleged that KCR slept at his farmhouse and was not responding to Sharmila's party. He asked KCR to tell whether he has been encouraging the new party to see the split of KCR's anti-incumbency votes. He called upon the Telangana people not to fall prey to KCR's conspiracy.

Sharmila floats a new outfit. He said that Sharmila has to settle her dispute with her brother in Andhra Pradesh. Speaking to the media on Tuesday during his padyatra, which was going on for the past three days, Revanth Reddy said that KCR would not become Chief Minister again. He said that he will extend support to her if she had any problem, however, Telangana would not accept her to rule

### CAPSULE

#### TRS ex-MLC Ravinder quits

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a shocking development, TRS former MLC Poola Ravinder tendered his resignation to the party. On Tuesday, Ravinder announced his decision when he participated in the teachers' dharna demanding the release of PRC at the Collectorate in Bhongir. He said that he has been tendering resignation following the pressure from the teachers. He also made it clear that he will make other MLCs tender their resignation in support of teachers' demands.

#### Ranulu Naik, Chinna Reddy nominees for MLC polls

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Congress has announced its MLC candidates for the Graduate MLC elections for Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal constituency and Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabunagar constituency. In a communiqué released by AICC general secretary Mukul Wasnik said that Congress president Sonia Gandhi has approved Ranulu Naik's candidature for Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal constituency and G Chinna Reddy's candidature for Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabunagar constituency for the ensuing biennial elections to the Telangana Legislative Council from the Graduate constituencies.



#### ACB raids Jagtial municipal office

PNS ■ JAGTIAL

The ACB sleuths carried out raids on the Jagtial municipal office on Tuesday. The municipal employees were caught red-handed while taking bribes. The details of the raid by the ACB officials are yet to be ascertained. Anti-corruption officials are continuing the investigation. Civil engineer and Jagtial municipal TPO were accused of taking a bribe of Rs 95 lakh for granting permission for the construction of an apartment.

## Sharmila floating party to save KCR's chair: BJP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao has been inventing new political equations in Telangana to save his chair, said former MLA and BJP state unit vice-president NVSS Prabhakar.

Responding on a new political outfit of YS Sharmila at a media conference at state BJP headquarters here on Tuesday, he said that Sharmila is floating a political outfit as part of KCR's grand plan to save his chair.

To save KCR from the crisis, senior leader of Congress KVP Ramachandra Rao has been taking steps and making Sharmila float a party. Launching of the party is taking place under the watchful eyes of KCR and as per the ideas of KVP Ramachandra Rao, he alleged.

The people of the State are



in no mood to believe in KCR, who, he said, is unveiling new political equations because of the pressure mounted on him by KTR's kitchen cabinet. To withstand the pressure, KCR has been seeking support from the Congress and also Communists, he alleged.

In spite of KCR making several attempts to save his chair, the people of Telangana would not believe him, he predicted. The TRS has come under a cloud, he said.

KCR has been involving the Communists to stem the problem that cropped up in the TRS, he said.

## Keep mum on Sharmila's party, TRS leaders told

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Pragati Bhavan has issued directions to the TRS leaders asking them not to respond on the political outfit to be floated by YS Sharmila soon fuels doubts in the minds of political pundits whether the TRS is behind she floating the party.

The TRS social media team became alert following the orders from the Pragati Bhavan and has been removing the messages posted on social media against Sharmila. Earlier, flexis carrying the image of Sharmila garlanded with chappals was made viral on the Internet. Acting on directions from elders in the party, the social media activists have been removing such messages.

The political analysts feel that the latest move of the TRS has been lending support to the debate.

### BC WELFARE MINISTRY

## Gangula challenges BJP leaders to exert pressure on Centre

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Minister for BC Welfare Gangula Kamalakar has dared the BJP leaders to mount pressure on the Centre to set up BC Welfare Ministry provided the BJP is sincere in BC welfare. He also dared the BJP MPs to raise their voice in Parliament for quota for BCs in Legislative bodies. He demanded that the Centre order BC Census at least this year as the BCs lived the life as vassals in the undivided State.

The BCs have been leading a dignified life in the new State of Telangana. The site meant for construction of Atma Gourav Bhavan in Uppal in Hyderabad became desecrated as the BJP leaders set their foot on the site. The TRS government would cleanse it.

He reminded how the TRS government allotted 83 acres and Rs 95 crore funds to construct Atma Gourav Bhavans to benefit 75 BC communities.



Minister for BC Welfare Gangula Kamalakar addressing the media in Karimnagar on Tuesday. TRS leaders are also seen

The credit for allotting the most valuable site which costs Rs 40-50 crore goes to CM K Chandrasekhara Rao. Construction of Atma Gourav Bhavans for Mudiraj and Yadav communities has begun in Kokapet.

Tenders have been called to build these Bhavans to commence works in the first week of March. In Telangana, 260 residential schools for BCs have been started with a total student strength of over 1.13 lakh as

against 19 set up in the regime of undivided AP with a total strength of over 6,600.

He said there is no alternative to the TRS in the State. As long as Chief Minister KCR is alive, there is no other party would come to power in the State. People of the State are also not ready to give their vote to them.

On procurement of paddy during the Rabi, the ball is in FCI's court. The government is ready to procure paddy provided the FCI gives its orders.

## Shivaratri fete at Vemulawada

PNS ■ RAJANNA SIRICILLA

Mahashivaratri celebrations will be held from March 10 to 12 at Sri Rajarajeshwara Swamy temple in Vemulawada.

A meeting with the fire department, police, revenue, municipal and temple officials was convened here on Tuesday at the temple chairman's guest house under the chairmanship of local DSP Chandranath to discuss security measures to be taken to ensure the safety of devotees attending the Mahashivaratri fete.

Karimnagar joint district fire officer Venkanna said that precautionary measures will be taken to prevent any untoward incident. DSP Chandranath, AEO Sankepalli Harikishan, Karimnagar joint district fire officer Tagaram Venkanna, municipal commissioner, MRO, along with temple employees, were present at the meeting.

### 15TH FINANCE COMMISSION OBSERVATIONS

## Shabbir Ali demands inquiry

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former minister Mohammed Ali Shabbir demanded a high-level probe into the observations made by 15th Finance Commission on Telangana government in its report submitted in Parliament last week.

Addressing a press conference at Gandhi Bhavan here on Tuesday, Shabbir Ali said that the 15th Finance Commission has exposed several instances of financial irregularities committed by the TRS government. "The 15th Finance Commission made serious comments on many

issues, including the Kaleshwaram project. It vindicated the stand of the Congress that Kaleshwaram project was not financially viable and it would not benefit the farmers," he said.

It has been observed that, "At an estimated cost of Rs 80,000 crore, the Kaleshwaram lift irrigation project aims at irrigating over 18 lakh acres. Lift irrigation invariably notches up a massive electricity bill, bringing to question the financial viability of the project in the absence of a guaranteed revenue stream." It has also directed the Telangana government to 'generate adequate

revenue (say, through user charges) to at least cover the operations and maintenance cost of the project." Referring to other observations made by the 15th FC, Shabbir Ali said that the State government was not strictly complying with the constitutional provisions of constituting a State Finance Commission. After the creation of the new State, the first SFC was constituted in 2015. However, its report is yet to be submitted. He alleged that the SFC was deliberately avoided by the Chief Minister as it would have stopped fudging of budget figures.

### DANCING AROUND BONFIRE



Khammam Police Commissioner Taiseer Iqbal said that the armed police were playing a key role in maintaining peace and security while maintaining their professionalism and reflecting the dignity of the police force. He was speaking at the closing ceremony of the City Armed Police Force mobilisation held at the District Police Parade Ground on Tuesday. Additional DCP (Admin) Injarapu Puja, Additional DCP Law & Order Muralidhar, Additional DCP, RIs CIs Anjali and Sambaraju were present on the occasion

# Agri Minister promises Soil Testing Centre

PNS ■ WARANGAL RURAL

Minister for Agriculture S Niranjana Reddy has assured to get Soil Testing Centre, market yard, warehouses sanctioned to Pedda Kodepaka village in Warangal rural district.

Speaking in connection with inauguration of panchayat building and Rytu Vedika, along with Errabelli Dayakar Rao, here on Tuesday, Niranjana Reddy said that he would strive to get warehouses sanctioned to the village with a capacity to store 10,000 tonnes as the government has plans to build warehouses in the State to store 40 lakh tonnes.

The government wants to protect the interests of the farmers. Discussion on farm laws is going on. Under the new laws, farmers can maintain stocks of agricultural produce up to any extent. Similarly, any-

- Panchayat Raj Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao outlined the pro-farmer schemes of the TRS government, including 24x7 power supply to agriculture sector free of cost. He also highlighted the programmes like Rytu Vedika, Palle Pragati and Pattana Pragati programmes

one can take any land on lease. However, there is a risk of losing soil fertility in the exercise. The farmers of the country are accustomed to disposing of their crops in their farmyards. As per the new laws, the farmer should sell his crop at the price fixed by traders and the farmer should buy his needs at the price fixed by traders. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that agrarian reforms are necessary.

During the regime of Lal Bahadur Shastri, he constituted a committee in 1964 and obtained a report from it on the MSP. In 1976, When Jagjivan

Ram was the Agriculture Minister, the MSP for maize was granted. Over a period of time, the MSP was announced for over 29 crops. But, the farm laws are silent on MSP for crops, the minister said asking the farmers to take note of this. If corporate firms enter the agricultural field, too, the farmers would suffer. Lack of the MSP, anyone can sell his produce in any market and anyone can buy them did not find favour with the farmers.

He said that the lands in Telangana turned into fertile. Therefore, he asked the farmers of the State to raise crops in



Minister for Agriculture S Niranjana Reddy and Minister for Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao riding a bullock cart at Pedda Kodapaka village in Warangal district on Tuesday

tune with the climatic and geographic conditions. The government wants to encourage oil palm cultivation in 20 lakh acres. The oil palm needs water less than the water requirement of paddy and slightly more water than the

water used to irrigate maize. The Centre identified 25 districts suited for oil palm cultivation. In all, 20 lakh acres are suitable for the cultivation of potatoes. The CM is keen on growing potato seeds in the State.

## LIC apathy towards senior citizens deplored

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) asks its policyholders to submit medical tests as a proof to renew the policies that were lapsed. But during the Corona time, several companies relaxed the rules especially for senior citizens to ensure their safety. Strangely, the LIC stuck to its norms and asked the elderly, too, to undergo medical tests to renew their lapsed policies during the Covid time also.

In one such case, a senior citizen V Subash, whose policy was lapsed, as he was unable to pay the premium by visiting the LIC office for the four months starting from October 2020.

The policyholder made several trips to the agent and then

to the LIC CB-III branch located at Nampally, but in vain. Finally, he approached the senior divisional manager of the LIC headquarters office with a request to enable him to pay the due premium, along with the interest, but he declined his request. He was told to undergo tests to consider the premium payment.

"When the policy is due for the maturity and the policyholder could not pay the premium for various reasons, senior citizens should be given relaxation for lapses," bemoaned Subash, a policyholder. He said that he had spent around Rs 5,000 for the medical tests. He lamented the apathy of LIC officials as they believed in the third party, which conducted medical tests and made him run from pillar to post to renew his policy.

# Violence in Afghan a cause for concern: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday expressed concern over increasing violence in Afghanistan and called for a comprehensive ceasefire for ending the hostilities, while assuring India's full support in the development journey of the war-ravaged country.

In a virtual meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Modi said as close neighbours and strong strategic partners, both India and Afghanistan want to see the region free of extremism and terrorism.

The Prime Minister also said no "outside force" will be able to stop Afghanistan's journey towards development as well as its friendship with India.

Referring to the Afghan peace process, he said unity within the country was important and hoped that a "united Afghanistan" will be capable of dealing with any challenge facing it.

"We are concerned over increasing violence in Afghanistan...we support a

**"We are concerned over increasing violence in Afghanistan... we support a comprehensive ceasefire in the country," said the Prime Minister**

comprehensive ceasefire in the country," the prime minister said.

The online meeting was held to finalise an agreement under which India will construct a dam in Kabul river basin to supply water to the Afghan capital city.

In his remarks, Ghani said India's development assistance to Afghanistan is iconically marked on the country's landscape.

India has been a major stakeholder in the peace and stability of Afghanistan and it

has already invested USD 20 billion in aid and reconstruction activities in the war-ravaged country.

In November last, India announced a new package of over 100 high impact community projects worth USD 80 million for Afghanistan at a global conference on Afghanistan.

The Shahtoot Dam in Kabul is part of the new developmental package.

The agreement was signed by foreign ministers of the two countries.



## Pilot finds fault with BJP on farmers' issue

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Former Rajasthan deputy chief minister and Congress leader Sachin Pilot said on Tuesday while the BJP government has promised to double farmers' income, the saffron party is "standing against" the tillers in a time of crisis.

He reiterated the demand of withdrawal of the Centre's three contentious farm laws, saying the Congress is in support of the farmers. "A promise was made to farmers that their income will be doubled, but when there is a crisis, the entire BJP is standing against them. Farmers of the country want to remind the party of its promises," Pilot told reporters in Dausa.

"Raising farmers' voice is not a crime in a democracy. The Congress is with farmers and will continue to support them," he said.

# Cong MPs to move private member's bill in Lok Sabha to repeal farm laws

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress MPs from Punjab will move a private member's bill in Lok Sabha to repeal the three contentious new farm laws.

Congress leader and Lok Sabha member Manish Tewari told reporters that the Repealing and Amendment Bill 2021 will be moved in the Lower House by a group of party MPs from Punjab including himself, Preet Kaur, Jasbir Singh Gill and Santokh Chaudhary.

Tewari said they will seek the support of fellow MPs from other parties who have sympathies for the farmers and support their stand on the new legislations.

Asked whether a similar bill could be introduced in Rajya Sabha, he said they will request their counterparts in the Upper House to do so.

For over two months now, thousands of farmers have been protesting at Delhi borders against the three farm sector reform laws which were enacted in September last year.



## Labs to certify organic farm produce

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Laying emphasis on organic farming, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said laboratories certifying organic agriculture products should be established at divisional levels in the state. Chairing a high-level meeting of various departments at the Lok Bhavan here, Adityanath said that people were giving priority to organic farm products.

# J&K admin helping BJP violate people's mandate: Mehbooba

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti alleged on Tuesday that senior officers in the administration and police are helping the BJP in violating the people's mandate in the elections to the posts of chairpersons of the district development councils (DDCs). "So much for

Vajpayee ji's vision of insaniyat, Kashmiriyat & jamhuriyat. Not surprised at all by recent DDC Chairmanship results. Two months were given to buy & intimidate the DDC members," Mufti wrote on Twitter, referring to a slogan coined by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had already murdered "insaniyat" (humanity) and "Kashmiriyat" by scrapping Article 370 of the Constitution in August 2019 and now, by "manipulating the DDC election results", it has put "the final nail in the coffin" of democracy.

## ACTOR-ACTIVIST DEEP SIDHU ARRESTED

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Actor-activist Deep Sidhu wanted in connection with the Red Fort violence on Republic Day has been arrested by the Delhi Police, officials said on Tuesday.

The arrest was made by a team of Delhi Police's Special Cell, said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Sanjeev Kumar Yadav.

Later, Yadav told PTI that that Sidhu was arrested from Karnal Bypass at 10.40 pm on Monday, adding that he was wanted in connection with the case of instigating the crowd at the Red Fort on Republic Day.

"The Crime Branch will investigate his role in detail," the DCP said.

Asked where he was hiding after the January 26 violence, Yadav said the investigation is in an initial stage.

The police had announced a cash reward of Rs 1 lakh for information leading to Sidhu's arrest.

After the Republic Day 26



violence that had left over 500 security personnel injured and one protester dead, Sidhu was posting videos on social media.

"Sidhu was in contact with a woman friend who lives in California. He used to make videos and send it to her, and she used to upload them on his Facebook account," police sources said.

Sidhu kept changing his locations to evade arrest, they said.

On January 26, thousands of protesting farmers who reached ITO from the Ghazipur border clashed with the police.

Many of them driving tractors reached the Red Fort and entered the monument, where a religious

flag was also hoisted. In the FIR registered in connection with the Red Fort violence, police said two magazines with 20 live cartridges were snatched from two constables by protesters who also damaged vehicles and robbed anti-riot gear.

"The mob later hoisted different flags there. They also started creating nuisance on the rampart. The unruly mob was asked to come downstairs. They went to Meena Bazar area to enter the into Red Fort. When the police tried to take them out of Lahore Gate, the mob became violent and attacked personnel. The mob thrashed the police personnel and threw them in the wells," police had said in the FIR.

"They damaged a bus, a government gypsy and other vehicles. The mob robbed the anti-riots gears - cane stick, shields, body protectors, helmets etc from the police personnel," it had also said.

## Bill to regularise illegal colonies in Delhi passed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Upper House of Parliament on Tuesday passed the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to regularise unauthorised colonies in Delhi.

The bill replaces the National Capital Territory of Delhi Laws (Special Provisions) Second (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 which was promulgated by President Ram Nath Kovind on December 30, 2020.

"1.35 crore people of Delhi, those living in unauthorised colonies, they will get their ownership right," Minister of State (Independent Charge) of Housing and Urban Affairs Hardeep Singh Puri said in Rajya Sabha. He said that tenders have been floated for "Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makaan".

## INDIA CORNER

### Sustained fall in active cases in country: Ministry



a sustained fall in active cases. continue to sharply decline.

NEW DELHI: India's daily COVID-19 cases continue to manifest a downward trend, the Union Health Ministry said on Tuesday underscoring that low number of daily cases and rising recoveries have ensured India's average daily deaths also continue to sharply decline. From a high of 211 in the second week of January, average daily deaths have reduced to 96 in the second week of February, registering a decline of 55 per cent, it said. India's total active cases has also dropped to 1.43 lakh which now consists of just 1.32 per cent of India's total infections. A total of 1,05,48,521 people have recovered so far with 14,016 patients having recuperated in a span of 24 hours. "The difference between the recovered patients and the active cases continues to progressively grow. It is pegged at 1,04,04,896 today," the ministry said.

### 5 rescued after house collapse in Delhi

NEW DELHI: Five people were rescued after a house collapsed in the Sadar Bazar area of north Delhi on Tuesday, fire services officials said. A call about the incident was received at around 10.30 am and six fire tenders were rushed to the spot, Delhi Fire Services Director Atul Garg said. Five people have been rescued, of whom three are in a critical state, he added. The injured have been shifted to the Bara Hindu Rao hospital. The rescue operation was stopped at 2.31 pm, officials said. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal tweeted about the incident and expressed his concern. "Deeply worried to hear about collapsing of a residential building in Sadar Bazar area. The rescue & medical teams and district administration are present at the spot. Rescue operations are underway. I am constantly monitoring the situation," he said in the tweet.

### ED raids premises of news portal, its promoters in Delhi

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday conducted searches on the premises of a news portal and its promoters here on charges of alleged money laundering, official sources said. They said the premises of the website -- Newslick -- and its promoters in South Delhi's Saidulajab and some other areas are being searched. The action is being undertaken to collect additional information to probe money laundering charges against the news company and its promoters, the sources said.

### Maha: Tiger found dead at Tadoba Andhari reserve



NAGPUR: A tiger was found dead in a buffer range of Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra on Tuesday, a forest official said. The carcass of the big cat, aged around three years, was recovered from Mudholi beat of Mohari buffer range of the reserve, field director of TATR Jitendra Ramgaonkar said. The carcass was intact, but bore signs of external injuries, the official said, adding the cause of death will be ascertained after post-mortem. All procedures are being carried out as per the standard operating procedures of the National Tiger Conservation Authority, he said.

# Nitish cabinet gets 17 new members

PNS ■ PATNA

The much awaited expansion of the Nitish Kumar cabinet in Bihar took place on Tuesday with the induction of 17 members, including Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain, the high-profile Muslim face of the BJP which walked away with the lions share.

The former union minister and party national spokesman, who got elected to the legislative council in a surprise move last month, was the first to be administered oath of office by Governor Phagu Chauhan.

He was among nine inductees from the quota of the BJP which now has 20 members in the state cabinet.

The Chief Ministers JD(U), which has suffered diminution in clout because of its poor performance in assembly polls, settled for eight and has been left with 12 members in the cabinet.

As per norms, the state cabinet can have up to 36 members including the chief minister.

With the expansion cabinet strength has risen to 34. One member each was inducted from the quotas of smaller allies Hindustani Awam Morcha (HAM) and Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) when the cabinet was formed in November last.

"Decision about the allocation of portfolios has been taken. You all will get to know about the same once the notification is issued", the chief minister told reporters, smilingly, after the ceremony.

With the exception of Pramod Kumar who held key portfolios in the previous government, the BJP placed its trust in "fresh faces".

Other BJP leaders who took oath were Nitin Nabin, Samrat Chaudhary, Neeraj Kumar



Singh "Bablu", Janak Ram, Subhash Singh, Alok Ranjan Jha and Narayan Prasad.

The JD(U) gave preference to experienced hands though there were also a handful of debutants, including Zama Khan who got elected on a BSP ticket but joined the party recently, and Independent MLA Sumit Singh who has pledged full support to the chief minister.

Others from the JD(U) who took oath included Sanjay Kumar Jha and Shrawan Kumar, both known to be trusted aides

of the chief minister who held key portfolios in the previous government.

JD(U) leaders Madan Sahni and Lesi Singh also returned as ministers. Sunil Kumar, a former IPS officer who joined the JD(U) last year shortly after retiring from DG rank, and Jayant Raj, a 35-year-old who is among the youngest party MLAs, have also been given ministerial berths. Sunil Kumar is an alumni of St Stephen's College, Delhi.

Lesi Singh's induction has raised the number of women in the cabinet to three. Earlier, BJP's Renu Devi and JD(U)'s Sheela Mandal had been sworn in and the former was elevated as a Deputy CM. The NDA had been facing flak from the opposition over the absence of a Muslim in the cabinet. With the induction of Hussain and Khan, it now has ammunition in its armour to counter the charge.

# Bengal's culture under threat: Nadda

PNS ■ BIRBHUM (WB)

BJP national president JP Nadda on Tuesday slammed the TMC for dividing communities by branding people as insiders and outsiders, and said the rich culture of West Bengal is under threat in Mamata Banerjee's rule. Nadda, while flagging off the second phase of the 'Parivartan Yatra' from Tarapith in Birbhum district, alleged that the state government "criminalised politics, institutionalised corruption and politicised the police".

The BJP chief also said the "cut money government" will be defeated by people in the upcoming assembly elections.

"Under Mamata Banerjee's rule, the rich culture and heritage of West Bengal are under threat. Only the BJP can protect



these. The insider-outsider culture is not the real culture of Bengal. "The Trinamool Congress is pitting people against one another by branding them as outsiders. This is shameful. It is not the culture of the land of Swami Vivekananda, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore," Nadda said.

The TMC's slogan of 'Maa, Mati, Manush' (mother, land and people) has been reduced to "dictatorship, tolabaji (extortion) and appeasement", he said.

## 'Cong in Punjab misusing govt machinery'

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A SAD delegation met Punjab Governor VP Singh Badnore Tuesday and alleged the ruling Congress was "misusing" the government machinery to influence the February 14 civic polls, and demanded the paramilitary forces be deployed for free and fair elections. The delegation comprising senior party leaders Prem Singh Chandumajra,

Maheshinder Singh Grewal and Daljit Singh Cheema also alleged the State Election Commission has "surrendered" to the state government in run-up to the civic polls and "failed" to perform its duty. Addressing the media here, Chandumajra alleged the state government had "hijacked" the civic polls and was "misusing" the State machinery to win the elections.

He claimed that the nomination papers of many Akali Dal candidates were rejected and several candidates were prevented from filling the papers.

"The system has collapsed and the State Election Commission has surrendered to the state government," alleged Chandumajra. "We told the governor that we do not have faith in the State machinery."

## 'Ram Teri Ganga Maili' actor Rajiv Kapoor dies

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Actor-director Rajiv Kapoor, son of celebrated filmmaker-actor Raj Kapoor, died on Tuesday due to heart attack. He was 58. Neetu Kapoor, wife of late actor Rishi Kapoor, was the first to confirm the news on Instagram.

She wrote "RIP" alongside a picture of her brother-in-law. Brother Randhir Kapoor said Rajiv Kapoor died due to heart



attack. "He passed away about 1.30 pm due to heart attack," Randhir Kapoor said.

Rajiv Kapoor made his acting debut with 1983 film "Ek Jaan

Hain Hum", but made first appearance as a leading man in blockbuster "Ram Teri Ganga Maili" (1985), which was Raj Kapoor's last directorial venture. He went on to feature in films like "Aasmaan", "Lover Boy", "Zabardast" and "Hum To Chale Pardes". Rajiv Kapoor's last film as a leading man was 1990's "Zimmedaar". A lesser known face from the famous Kapoor film clan, he then made a switch to production and direction.

# People told to register as cybercrime volunteers

PNS ■ JAMMU

In a bid to keep an eye on the cyber world in a "coordinated and comprehensive manner", the government has asked common people to register as cyber crime volunteers to help check posts against the sovereignty of the nation, on child and women abuse and attempts to disturb the law and order situation.

The project known as Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) is an initiative of the Union Ministry. It was started in militancy-hit Jammu and Kashmir last week where the police issued a circular asking citizens to register themselves

as volunteers. The volunteers are asked to keep an eye on posts which are against the sovereignty and integrity of India, against the defence of India, against the security of the State, against friendly relations with foreign States, content aimed at disturbing public order, disturbing communal harmony and child sex abuse material.

A spokesperson of Jammu and Kashmir police said that any Indian citizen can get associated with this programme by registering in any of three categories of cyber volunteers -- Cyber Volunteer Unlawful Content Flagger, Cyber Awareness Promoter and Cyber Expert. While the



first category will help identify illegal and unlawful online content like child pornography, rape, gang rape, terrorism, radicalisation, anti-

national activities etc, the second category will help create awareness about cyber crime among citizens, including vulnerable groups like women,

children, the elderly, rural population etc. Cyber Expert category volunteer will help deal with specific domains of cybercrime, forensics, network forensics, malware analysis, memory analysis and cryptography.

While there is no prior verification required for the first category, a background verification of volunteers of other two categories will be done as per the norms of Know Your Customers (KYC) by the respective state governments and union territories.

The volunteers are required to furnish personal particulars like full name, father's name, mobile number, email address, residential address.

## Fatal fall for Haryana farmer

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A 28-year-old farmer from Haryana's Rohtak district, who was providing voluntary services at Tikri border protest site, died after sustaining serious head injuries when he fell off a tractor-trolley, police said on Tuesday. Deepak was hospitalised at PGIMS, Rohtak where he died during treatment on Monday, Kuldeep Singh, SHO, Aasoda Police Station in Jhajjar district, said over the phone.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Serious business

With Trump gone, it is in India's interest now to modify its approach towards the US

There was nothing unusual in Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeting about his interaction with US President Joe Biden but POTUS choosing to remain silent on the micro-blogging site entails a message. Gone are the days of "Howdy, Modi" and "Namaste, Trump" when Modi and the former American President hugged each other, walked hand in hand and their informal bonding was the bedrock of Indo-American relations. India will now have to deal with a seasoned and astute politician in Biden and not someone as unpredictable as his predecessor who was nothing more than a "butt of a joke" because of his posturing and scattershot policies. New Delhi should keep in mind that in his first diplomatic address, Biden did not mention India even once though he hinted that he would turn the heat on arch-rivals China and Russia. India must not consider his aggressive posturing towards Beijing as something that will favour its interests in the region as Biden, at the same time, asserted that Washington is ready to work with China if that is in its own interest. In his first official interaction with Biden, Modi discussed at length a host of issues including the COVID-19 pandemic, regional matters, climate change, global economy, terrorism and so on. The leaders agreed to continue the close cooperation between the nations to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific. Modi even invited Biden and the First Lady to visit India at their earliest convenience. All of this points towards the soft diplomacy that is being undertaken at this stage by both the countries.



But instead of Biden tweeting like Modi, the White House released an official statement detailing the interaction. The message it carries is that the days of "tall talk" on social media are now over with Trump's era and Indian policymakers should not expect Biden to behave and act in the manner his predecessor did. It also seems likely that the world will no longer witness the US President and the Indian Prime Minister seconding each other's statements and praising each other on Twitter. During the interaction, the two leaders resolved that the democratic process must be upheld in Myanmar. It simply implies that POTUS wants to see New Delhi playing a pivotal role in restoring the democratic regime in erstwhile Burma. The US well understands that Myanmar's junta may join hands with communist China for currying favour in the United Nations Security Council and, if that happens, the continuation of the military regime in Burma will only strengthen Beijing in the region. The growing influence of China, which pursues an expansionist policy both on land and in sea, will be against the interests of both New Delhi and Washington. As per the White House note, the "leaders agreed to stay in close touch on a range of global challenges"; however, we should not take it without a pinch of salt and this "closeness" would certainly be a bit different from what it was with Trump. Now India needs to make some smart moves as dealing with the American President looks like serious business.

# Time to set our house in order

The Government has missed a legitimate opportunity to repair the frail Defence Budget which is unfit to meet the Pakistan-China dual threat



ASHOK K MEHTA

China's pithy, almost dismissive, response to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's connect between the border and bilateral ties has escaped notice. In reply to Jaishankar's multiple complaints about China's erratic behaviour in altering the *status quo* along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in breach of existing protocols and violations of peace and tranquility, Beijing simply repeated its mantra that Indo-China relations have to be de-coupled from the border dispute. At the all-India conference on China Studies in New Delhi last month, Jaishankar summarised his various comments across eight months on the border issue into three "mutuals": Recognition of mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interest; and eight broad principles as key to mending Indo-China relations. He emphasised that a peaceful border was the pre-requisite for stable relations. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said: "We have noted Minister Jaishankar's remarks and appreciate the importance India attaches to ties with China. But we stress the boundary issue shall not be linked with overall bilateral relations."

At one stroke, China segregated its aggression along the LAC from bilateral relations and bracketed its territorial encroachments to outstanding claims to all of Ladakh, not just the 300 km spread of intrusions. China's claim to Ladakh was articulated in 2008 through its denial of its western border covering Jammu and Kashmir with China and excising 1,597 km of the 3488-km LAC. When this was pointed out to an MEA mandarin at the time, he responded: "They can do what they like but we have troops on the LAC." What happened in mid-May last year was a failure of the institutional memory of Chinese intent. If the way forward, as noted by Jaishankar, is the Sumdorong Chu route, it will cost India dearly both operationally and financially.

Last week, India missed a legitimate opportunity to repair the frail defence budget unfit to meet the Pakistan-China dual threat despite aggression in Ladakh. Few point out the anomalies in defence spending probably because it is anti-national to question it, especially when the BJP Government — very vocal on defence and national security — makes hollow fund allocations. On Budget day, the armed forces would attract thunderous applause from the lawmakers for their sacrifices when the Finance Minister, after announcing the defence allocation, would predictably add: "More funds would be provided, if needed." Since 2019, there is deafening silence on defence on Budget day. Surprisingly, the oversight was questioned this year by many. The aggregate defence budget, revenue and capital heads; all three reflected a decline in the allocation as compared to the previous year's revised estimates (RE). The allocation for defence modernisation, which is at the heart of deterrence and capacity building and which was acclaimed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh as the highest increase of 19 per cent in 15 years, was actually ₹2,700 crore less than in the RE of 2020-21. Even as GDP percentage, defence has declined to 1.5 per cent from 1.6 per cent the previous year.



What we do not know is committed liabilities under the modernisation head of the three services though we do know that last year, the Air Force, the highest recipient this year, was allotted nearly ₹3,000 crore less than committed liabilities, leaving no money for new projects. Other negatives this year in the Budget are lower GDP, higher rupee to dollar rate, higher fuel costs, higher internal and external inflation and substantial additional costs for maintaining the additional 50,000 troops in Ladakh along with costs for rebalancing of forces following the belated recognition of China, which spends thrice more than India on defence, as the primary threat. It is mystifying that even after yielding ground on the LAC, now convoluted by Gen VK Singh's not-so-useful admission on transgressions, Singh has made lofty claims to India's deterrent actions, CDS Gen Bipin Rawat waved the military option, Army chief Gen MM Naravane warned (the PLA) not to test India's patience and the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhaduria, noted that the Rafale had unnerved the Chinese. These are undoubtedly signs of resolve but without capability backup to restore the adverse situation created by the PLA. Equally intriguing



THE GOVERNMENT SAYS THAT INDIA WOULD INVEST \$130 BN IN DEFENCE MODERNISATION OVER THE NEXT EIGHT YEARS WHICH, IN REAL TERMS, WILL AMOUNT TO A FLAT TRAJECTORY FOR DEFENCE MODERNISATION.

It is mystifying that even after yielding ground on the LAC, now convoluted by Gen VK Singh's not-so-useful admission on transgressions, Singh has made lofty claims to India's deterrent actions, CDS Gen Bipin Rawat waved the military option, Army chief Gen MM Naravane warned (the PLA) not to test India's patience and the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhaduria, noted that the Rafale had unnerved the Chinese. These are undoubtedly signs of resolve but without capability backup to restore the adverse situation created by the PLA. Equally intriguing

Taken together, China separating the border issues from bilateral relations and India's failure to accelerate Defence modernisation amount to Beijing's continued bullying of India and its rapidly-expanding PLA Navy posing a second front in the Indian Ocean. Zhao's blunt response to Jaishankar's missive of interdependence of border and bilateral relations indicates China's hardline posture will stay till at least July next year, the completion of 100 years of the Chinese Communist Party. Without boosting combat capacities dovetailed in a Defence strategy factoring the primacy of China threat, New Delhi will keep shadow-boxing. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal.)

### PIC TALK



Police use water cannons to disperse protesters in Mandalay, Myanmar

AP

## Warm winter

We just had the warmest January in 62 years. Isn't it time to show more responsibility towards nature?

If the temperatures in January are anything to go by, the nation should brace itself for a sizzling summer ahead. Because, despite a few cold days that left India shivering, the minimum temperature recorded in the country last month was the warmest January in 62 years. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) says that South India experienced the warmest January in 121 years, with temperatures touching 22.33°C. Earlier, the South had experienced 22.14°C in 1919 and 21.93°C in 2020, making these the second and third warmest months. Central India was the warmest at 14.82°C in the last 38 years after 1982 saw the mercury touching 14.92°C, while 1958 with 15.06°C was the warmest between 1901 and 2021. However, the maximum temperatures in January were below normal, the IMD said, and this January could not break the record of 1919 because, at 15°C, it remains the warmest January recorded. But this is hardly any reason to rejoice as, slowly and surely, we are beginning to feel the effects of climate change. For instance, the summers have been hotter than ever before because the country's average temperature rose by around 0.7°C between 1901 and 2018.



It is projected to rise further by approximately 4.4°C by the end of this century, if a 2020 report by researchers from the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune, is to be believed. Worryingly, this increase in surface temperatures will reportedly result in droughts for some regions and intense rainfall and severe cyclones in others, causing floods in large parts of India. Experts are of the opinion that these changes in climate will have a long term socio-economic impact on the lives of citizens and also affect the country's relations with its neighbours. Given all these warnings, one would expect that the Government and the people would be a lot more aware of their responsibility towards the environment but that hardly seems to be the case. So we must then be prepared to bear the consequences, like the one we had to face recently in Chamoli, where the impact on the environment in a sensitive zone was ignored at our own peril. If we continue to pinch environmental pennies, we will continue to incur the wrath of nature, which has the power to eventually rid itself of one of the most destructive yet vulnerable species to walk the Earth.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### IS THE PM AFRAID OF PROTESTS?

Sir— It is very unfortunate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has used the word "andolan-jivi" for protesters. The question why is our Prime Minister so afraid of protests and demonstrations? The PM must understand that these are indispensable rights and a healthy democracy cannot survive without these. However, Modi described a group of people who tend to hijack every protest or movement that has taken place in the country in the recent past. Even if he referred to those who hijack every protest and not every protester, doubts arise over whether he really meant what he said. It is strange that Modi who began his political journey through "Navnirman Andolan" or Navnirman movement from Gujarat is now targeting the protesters. Even in America, the United Kingdom, Germany and other democracies, protests are very common and help keep rolling the wheels of democracy. These are like checks and balances and remind the Government of any unpopular or wrong policy decision. The protest acquires more importance when there is a weak Opposition, like in India, which is not capable of pushing the popular viewpoint or public opinion contrary to the wish of those who are in power. Instead of blaming the protesters, the Government must strive to resolve the problem.

N Nagarajan | Secunderabad

### INDIA MUST INTERVENE IN MYANMAR

Sir—The coup by the military in Myanmar is dangerous for democracy and a threat to civilians, who voted Aung San Suu Kyi's party to power in the November polls. The international community, especially India being its next-door neighbour, needs to step up and engage with all stakeholders so as to restore normalcy and democracy in the erstwhile Burma before it gets too late. American President Joe Biden has also expressed concern with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue. It's high time for India to take some concrete measures and mature diplomatic steps and put pressure on Myanmar's Junta, or military

## Corrupt politicians and babus



The exact reason or cause for the Uttarakhand tragedy will only come after a detailed investigation by scientists and Government agencies. However, one thing is clear that we must stop interfering with the environment and the fragile Himalayan ecology. Several studies that have been conducted in the past point to human interference in the Himalayan region leading to loss

of biodiversity and balance of the ecosystem. However, nothing concrete has been done by either the State Governments or the Centre to deal with it. It is very sad that common people — like mining workers, power plant employees and poor villagers — are the victims of such calamities while the bureaucrats and politicians remain unaffected. A huge amount of money is wasted every year in organising conferences, holding seminars and workshops on environment conservation. All these efforts are useless unless these are executed or realised on the ground. When it comes to implementation, the Government machinery shows utmost passiveness and appears to suffer from paralysis. Merely giving monetary compensation to the kith and kin of those who die in such catastrophes is like adding salt to the injury. The politicians who spare no time in announcing the compensation are the ones who are first-hand responsible for not taking the required steps to prevent it.

Ramesh G Jethwani | Bengaluru

regime, to vacate the power corridors. Merely issuing statements by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) won't suffice or serve any purpose. The coup has given a great opportunity to China and the West to enter the South Eastern nation. The former is already calling it merely a "Cabinet reshuffle". Bridging the rift between Suu Kyi and military may not be an option for Myanmar's civilians, who appear to resist the coup. India, America and other global powers should work together to ensure that the tenets of democracy are protected and strengthened in countries like erstwhile Burma.

Nischai Vats | Sultanpur

### INDIA WILL LEAD THE WORLD SOON

Sir — It's good news that the number of people who have recuperated from the Coronavirus surged to 1,05,34,505 pushing the national COVID-19 recovery rate to 97.20 per cent, while the fatality rate stands at 1.43 per cent. The Health Ministry

stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities. With the vaccination process in full swing, we can flatten the curve and there will be a remarkable recovery rate, which augurs well for a huge country like ours. Even though there were adverse comments from the Opposition about handling COVID-19 cases, both State and Central Governments did their best to keep people safe by imposing strict rules and protocols. All were made to follow precautions like wearing face masks and sanitising hands.

The inoculation has already started and we are also supplying vaccines to nations across the globe. India is emerging as a global leader and will soon play a lead role in world economy, defence and other sectors.

CK Ramani | Chennai

Send your feedback to: [letterstopioneer@gmail.com](mailto:letterstopioneer@gmail.com)

## SOUND BITE

Party MPs from Punjab have decided to bring private members' Bill in Parliament to seek the repeal of three new central farm laws opposed by the farmers.

Congress leader — Manish Tewari

When it works well, the UN Human Rights Council shines a spotlight on countries with the worst human rights records and can serve as a beacon for those fighting against injustice and tyranny.

US Secretary of State — Antony Blinken

I realised it's inconceivable for us to understand how one can so vehemently claim the largest protest ever, in history, is all paid actors.

Adult star — Mia Khalifa

There was a bit of reverse swing and we managed to get a bit of bounce and we got a good start. It was huge for us. It helps you get that sort of movement in the air.

Cricketer — James Anderson

CM Kejriwal had promised hundreds of subsidised canteens for the poor. But it was only for advertisements. Nothing is there on the ground.

BJP MP — Gautam Gambhir



## FIRST COLUMN

## NEED FOR SYSTEMIC INNOVATION

India must strengthen R&D for leveraging the fruits of innovation-led endogenous economic growth



OMKAR RAI

The *Economic Survey* projects that India's real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would register a growth of 11 per cent in 2021-22. It reflects a faster recovery for the economy which has been crippled by the pandemic. Driven by the visible dynamism of economic activities with the roll out of the Corona vaccines, the survey highlights that the growth will further be reinforced by various reforms and easing of regulations, rising infrastructural investments, spur in manufacturing sector through the productivity linked incentive schemes.

The survey also underlines how India's rapid surge on the Global Innovation Index (GI) from 81 in 2015 to 48 in 2020 among 131 countries was realised during the last five years. It also reflects the correlation between high-income economies and the high innovation index, which corroborates the Solow model on endogenous economic growth. Drawing reference to the GI 2020 report, the survey further drills down on sub-parameters of the overall innovation index, capturing how India fares on the seven parameters of innovation like 61st in institutions, 60th in human capital and research, 75th in infrastructure, 31st in market sophistication, 55th in business sophistication, 27th in knowledge and technology outputs and 64th in creative outputs.



This indicates that barring knowledge and technology outputs, we are lagging across other parameters. We must invest more and work in a synergistic mode to enhance our global positioning in institutions, human capital and research, infrastructure and business sophistication. Moreover, India's spending in Research and Development (R&D) has been low at around 0.7 per cent of the GDP, which is noticeably lower than the top five R&D spenders globally in 2017. Like 4.3 per cent for the Republic of Korea, 4.2 per cent for Israel, 3.3 per cent for Japan and 3.2 per cent for both Switzerland and Finland and even lower than the R&D spend by other BRIC countries. This must be raised to a reasonable level of two per cent to rev up innovation momentum in the country.

The more contrasting factor according to the survey is that the Government spends 56 per cent of the gross expenditure on R&D, which is three times the average contributed by governments in the top ten economies, while the private sector contributes much less (about 37 per cent) in comparison to their counterparts in the top ten economies (68 per cent). In terms of the share of total R&D personnel, public sector contributes 36 per cent, the highest among top 10 economies, while the private sector's contribution to the total R&D personnel is 30 per cent, which is far less than the average 50 per cent of the top 10 economies. The hallmark of India, according to the GI 2020 survey, is the knowledge diffusion sub-pillar, which ranks 10, of knowledge and technology outputs. And the most prominent dimension under this sub-pillar is the ICT services exports where India ranks first in the world.

While the Indian IT industry has displayed a tremendous performance among global counterparts, the other industries are falling back on scores. The other industry verticals should focus on research and innovation, adopt emerging technologies, infuse process and business sophistication. It's imperative now to empower startups to co-create innovations in collaboration with the industry in a more synergistic manner. The Indian startup ecosystem has defied the pandemic and created a record number of 12 unicorns in 2020. This is a testimony to the innovation mettle of Indian startups. What's critical for India now is to bring in synergy between the Government and the private sector to collaborate and build a systemic innovation culture across the board to foster translational R&D by increasing investment, connecting academia and industry to address real-life industrial challenges.

(The writer is Director General, Software Technology Parks of India. The views expressed are personal)

## Is the delivery of justice a myth or reality?

This question warrants the attention of all citizens of India. Losing hope in the judiciary isn't a solution to all that plagues our justice delivery system



ANURAG TIWARY



VIKRAMADITYA DEWANGAN

The Chief Justice of India (CJI) recently said that January 28 must be celebrated as the Supreme Court Day to mark the occasion when the highest court of Independent India first assembled in chambers, then situated in the Parliament complex in 1950. The Supreme Court was established on January 26, under Article 124 of the Constitution, however, its first sitting was held on January 28. Several media reports from that day show how this institution was remarked upon as the "guardian of liberty" and one that would exercise its powers without any influence, bias, fear or favour.

The apex court, which is often regarded as the most powerful top court in the world, took up this role of the "sentinel of human rights" in a new democratic India and it exercised its powers to deliver several landmark judgments upholding the basic fundamental rights of citizens against the State's arbitrary, unfair and unjust actions. The court also ushered in an era of "constitutional dynamism" which helped the Constitution evolve with society and its changing circumstances.

Whether it was the ruling in the Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India case, where the apex court held that not just procedural due process but also substantive due process had to be followed by the State and that its actions must pass the "just, fair and reasonable test", or the ruling in the Keshavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala case, wherein the top court restricted the power of the Parliament to amend the Constitution and held that the "basic structure of the Constitution" could not be abrogated even by a constitutional amendment.

When the 39th Constitutional Amendment sought to place the election of the President, the Prime Minister, the Vice-President and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha beyond the scrutiny of constitutional courts, it was the Supreme Court that struck down the law, thereby upholding the basic structure doctrine. In cases like *Olga Tellis, Bandhua Mukti Morcha, Vishaka vs State of Rajasthan, Common Cause vs Union of India, NALSA vs Union of India, Navtej Singh Johar, Joseph Shine and the Sabarimala judgment* among others, the Supreme Court time and again reiterated its commitment to the goal of building a "just society", one where every individual irrespective of their caste, creed, sex, religion or place of birth has the right to live with dignity and freedom. The court has had a glorious history of making positive interventions and initiating revolutionary changes in India's democratic culture. Celebrating its foundation day is indeed a step in the right direction.

But right when you thought that all is good with the courts in India, there's a caveat. First, delivering justice isn't a duty solely entrusted to the judiciary and second, it cannot be conducted in isolation. The justice delivery mechanism is dependent on several factors and cooperation among the three major organs of the State: the executive, legislatures and the judiciary along with certain non-State actors as well. Unless all these institutions collaborate to achieve a common goal, delivering justice will remain a distant dream.

The *India Justice Report*, an initiative of Tata Trusts and several others does a commendable job in highlighting the gaps and areas that need reform within our justice delivery system. The report assesses the performance of our institutions based on four pillars i.e., police, judiciary, legal aid soci-



DELIVERING JUSTICE ISN'T A DUTY SOLELY ENTRUSTED TO THE JUDICIARY AND IT CANNOT BE CONDUCTED IN ISOLATION. THE JUSTICE DELIVERY MECHANISM IS DEPENDENT ON SEVERAL FACTORS AND COOPERATION AMONG THE THREE MAJOR ORGANS OF THE STATE: THE EXECUTIVE, LEGISLATURES AND THE JUDICIARY ALONG WITH CERTAIN NON-STATE ACTORS AS WELL. UNLESS ALL THESE INSTITUTIONS COLLABORATE TO ACHIEVE A COMMON GOAL, DELIVERING JUSTICE WILL REMAIN A DISTANT DREAM

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eties and the prison system. It *inter alia* highlights several glaring problems in these institutions. It states that women make up just 29 per cent of sitting judges in India, whilst in High Courts (HCs) their strength is just 11 per cent on the Bench. Moreover, at least five HCs are functioning without a single woman judge. Sadly, vacancies of judges in our HCs stand at 33 per cent. Even though 80 per cent of our population is entitled to receive legal aid, only 1.5 crore people have received it since 1995. Our prison occupancy is at 119 per cent and two-thirds of our prison inmates are undertrial prisoners and over four crore cases are pending in several courts across the country.

Access to institutions of justice remains skewed for the entirety of our rural population even today. The report also shows how the judiciary has not been able to efficiently utilise funds that were allocated to it by the 13th and 14th Finance Commissions. The 13th Finance Commission, for instance, allocated ₹5,000 crore to the judiciary, out of which only 20 per cent was utilised.

These data point at uncomfortable trends in our justice administration and towards intersectional issues of institutional failure and perpetration of oppression for every stakeholder. We all remember when the 43rd CJI, TS Thakur, cried before Prime Minister Modi in 2016, during a public conference, while highlighting several issues plaguing the judiciary. He had said that judges are forced to work in pitiful circum-

stances and stressful conditions with minimum infrastructure.

The Attorney-General of India also recently called for setting up of a "Court of Appeals" to reduce the workload of the apex court. The *India Justice Report* also makes several suggestions to interrupt the *status quo*. Ensuring doorstep delivery of justice by making it an essential service, enforcing a planned budgeting mechanism, upskilling legal aid and *Nyaya* panchayats, prioritising cases based on their urgency and impact and measuring public satisfaction are few of the suggestions. Justice Madan Lokur, a former Supreme Court judge, during the release of the report said that a cost-benefit analysis and continuous social auditing is key to ensuring institutional and administrative efficiency.

However, there is a silver lining too. According to the report, Chhattisgarh has emerged as a trendsetter. It began with a notification released by the Chhattisgarh HC in 2017 which required the lower courts to dispose cases pending for more than five years on a priority basis. A monitoring committee headed by a sitting judge was set up at the HC level. For district-wise monitoring, respective District Courts were asked to form their monitoring committees and a weekly review of the progress was mandated. All compoundable cases where parties were willing to compromise in Lok Adalats were disposed-off. For this purpose, Lok Adalats were organised daily after regular court hours. The monitoring

committee at the District Court-level would conduct meetings with the district and police administration regularly to ensure timely enforcement of summons and warrants issued by them. New Magistrates were assisted and trained by senior judges to ensure fair trial and adherence to laws and procedures. To incentivise judges, appropriate units were awarded to them for disposing off cases before five years. Bail petitions were dealt with within a week and cases of undertrial prisoners were decided in a time-bound manner. Infrastructural development was ensured by building new court-rooms in major districts like Raipur and Durg. All this cumulatively led to a decline in the percentage of pending cases, from 10 per cent in 2019 to four per cent in 2020.

The apex court might certainly have a past worth glorifying, but its credibility isn't going to remain for long if it sells its history as a soothing balm for the damages done by it and other organisations in current times. India ranks 69th in the Rule of Law Index, 139th in the Global Peace Index, 112 in Global Gender Gap Report, 51 in Democracy and 142 in World Press Freedom Report.

We are forced to ask: Has justice been delivered or is it a myth in the times we live in? This question warrants the attention of all citizens of India. Losing hope in the judiciary isn't a solution, as in the words of Rabindranath Tagore: "Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when dawn is still dark."

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

A NEW TYPE OF PEOPLE HAVE PROPPED UP. THEY ARE 'ANDOLAN JIVI.' PROTEST IS THEIR LIFE SOURCE AND THEY CAN BE SPOTTED AT EACH PROTEST SITE.

—PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



THEN WHAT SHOULD I CALL THE PEOPLE WHO GO OUT TO COLLECT DONATIONS? ARE THEY NOT MEMBERS OF 'CHANDA JIVI SANGATHAN' THEN?

—SAMAJWADI PARTY MP AKHILESH YADAV

## Allocations to education sector need V-shaped recovery too

While the NEP had strongly advocated expenditure on the sector to be at least six per cent of the GDP, the same has been three-four per cent

Given the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, all eyes were on the Finance Minister (FM) and her handling of the twin challenges of stimulating demand and supply, amid falling revenues. Since monetary stimulus has not been effective in boosting investment demand, the onus of recovery is now more on fiscal measures and supply-inducing reforms. A V-shaped economic recovery requires promoting demand in sectors such as infrastructure and the rural economy. While agriculture and rural development have understandably been given a big push in the Union Budget, rather regrettably education has not received the same priority.

This is despite the fact that the education sector was severely impacted by the pandemic, too. The contagion hampered the teaching-learning process-



SIMRIT KAUR



KAMALDEEP SARNA

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es across all age groups as pedagogy went online. As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2020, though the percentage of rural children owning a smartphone went up from 36.5 per cent in 2018 to 61.8 per cent in 2020, nonetheless it indicates that a large digital divide still exists.

Similarly, schools and colleges remain deficient in Information Technology (IT)-enabled infrastructure. With hybrid teaching-learning expected to be the new normal, undoubtedly enormous expansion in digital technology is envisaged. Additionally, to avert the possibility of India's demographic dividend becoming a devastating catastrophe, imparting quality education remains important. The new National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, reinforces the viewpoint.

With the evolving future of

work, human potential for life-long learning has assumed greater importance. Skilling, reskilling and upskilling has become mandatory for the existing workforce. Undoubtedly, investment in education is crucial for human capital formation. Despite being a merit good, necessitating Government provision and active intervention, the education sector has been largely neglected. For the financial year (FY) 2021-2022, there has been a 6.13 per cent decline in allocation of funds towards it as compared to the Budgeted Estimates (BE) of 2020-21. However, compared to the Revised Estimate (RE) of 2020-21, there has been a 9.5 per cent increase in allocation for 2021-22. Of the total allocation of ₹93,224 crore to the sector, ₹54,874 crore is allocated to the Department of School Education and Literacy (a drop



of 8.31 per cent) and the remaining ₹38,350 crore to higher education (a drop of 2.83 per cent in comparison to the BE of the previous year). Further, the RE for expenditure on education for 2020-21 witnessed a decline of 14.32 per cent *vis-à-vis* the BE.

Additionally, while the NEP had strongly propagated expenditure on the sector to be at least six per cent of the GDP, the same has been between three-four per cent in India. For comparison, expenditure on educa-

tion relative to the GDP is six per cent or more in Australia, Chile, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, the UK and the US. It lies between three-four per cent in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan and the Russian Federation. The average for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries is 4.9 per cent. For OECD countries, it is about 11 per cent. For Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Switzerland, New Zealand, Korea, and Denmark, it is as high as 17 per cent.

With hybrid education set to become the new normal even in a post-Corona world, simply investing in technology is not sufficient. A technology road map needs to be designed for planned action to enable institutions to evolve from the stage of "doing digital" to "being digital." Despite its

importance, the Budget does not promote digitalisation *per se*. In fact, allocation to IT and the telecom sector declined as a proportion of the total expenditure from 1.95 per cent (2020-21 BE) to 0.93 per cent (2020-21 RE). However, for Digital India e-learning, the funds earmarked have gone up by over 100 per cent and stand at ₹645 crore. Further, under this scheme, 'National Mission on Education Through ICT' as well as Massive Open Online Courses envisaged an overwhelming rise of over 200 per cent and 167 per cent respectively and stand at ₹150 crore and ₹200 crore each. Nonetheless, a greater thrust would be required in the years ahead. In addition to allocations, both total and compositional, what matters for productivity is governance. In terms of policy reforms, the proposal to amend the Apprenticeship Act is com-

mendable and can generate opportunities for employability and financing of higher education. The Government's focus on increasing collaboration with foreign institutions in Japan and the UAE for skill training partnerships is also praiseworthy. Additionally, setting up of a single higher education regulator to streamline governance structures in higher education is commendable. Also, the allocation of ₹50,000 crore over five years will encourage research, development and innovation.

To impart holistic development, new models of engagement such as learning consortiums and coalitions comprising of diverse stakeholders need to be established for scalable, sustainable and inclusive blended education. Hopefully, an enabling policy environment shall make this a reality in the years to come.



## Govt to soon bring Bill on crypto currencies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government will soon bring a bill on crypto currencies as existing laws are inadequate to deal with issues concerning them, Minister of State For Finance Anurag Thakur told Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

Replying to a question in the Upper House, Thakur said regulatory bodies like RBI and Sebi do not have any legal framework to directly regulate crypto currencies as they are not currencies, assets, securities or commodities issued by identifiable users.

"The existing laws are inadequate to deal with the subject," he said.

The government had formed an Inter-Ministerial Committee which has given its report on issues related to virtual currencies. There was also a meeting of the Empowered Technology Group. The Committee of Secretaries chaired by the Cabinet Secretary has also given its report.

"A bill (on crypto currencies) is being finalised and it will soon be sent to the Cabinet. We will soon be bringing a bill," Thakur said.

In view of the risks associated with Virtual Currencies (VCs), including Bitcoins, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) through a circular in April 2018, had advised all the entities regulated by it not to deal in VCs or provide services for facilitating any person or entity in dealing with or settling VCs.

However, Supreme Court, vide judgement dated March 4, 2020, had set aside the RBI's circular.

To another question regarding Chinese companies in the country, the minister said as of now, there are around 92 companies registered in the country. Out of them, 80 Chinese companies are actively working in India.

# Rupee remained among better performing currencies in 2020

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Minister for State for Finance Anurag Singh Thakur on Tuesday said the Indian rupee was one of the better performing Asian currencies in 2020.

"In the financial year 2020-21, the Indian rupee (INR) has appreciated by 3.53 per cent till February 2, 2021, as per the information provided by Reserve Bank of India," Thakur said in a written reply to Rajya Sabha. He also said India enforced one of the most stringent lockdowns during April-June, 2020, compared to other key Asian countries and the contraction in GDP is consistent with the effect of the stringent lockdown.

"Owing to stringent lockdown measures, India was able to significantly contain the death rate from Covid. With gradual unlocking of the country, the economy made a significant V-shaped recovery," he said. Sharing various steps taken by the government during 2020-21 to revive growth hit by COVID-19 pandemic, the minister said the govern-



ment announced a special economic and comprehensive package under AatmaNirbhar Bharat including measures taken by RBI amounting to about Rs 27.1 lakh crores - more than 13 per cent of India's GDP - to combat the impact of the Covid and to revive economic growth.

The package included, among others, in-kind and cash transfer relief measures for households, employment provision measures under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan and increased allocation under MGNREGS, credit guarantee and equity infusion-based relief measures for MSMEs and NBFCs and regulatory and compliance measures, he said.

## 'Gross NPAs of PSBs decline to Rs 6.09 lakh crore in Sep 2020'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gross non-performing assets (NPAs) of public sector banks (PSBs) declined from Rs 8.96 lakh crore in March 2018 to Rs 6.09 lakh crore in September 2020 due to various measures taken by the government, Minister of State for Finance Anurag Singh Thakur informed Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. There was record recovery of Rs 2.54 lakh crore during March 2018 and September 2020 and 11 out of 12 PSBs reported profit in the first half of 2020-21 amounting to Rs 14,688 crore, he said in a written reply to Rajya Sabha. Provision coverage ratio of PSBs is at over 8 years high at 85.06 per cent at the end of September 2020. Asset quality review (AQR) initiated in 2015 for cleaning up banks' balance sheets revealed high incidence NPAs, he said. As a result of AQR and subsequent

transparent recognition by banks, he said, stressed accounts were reclassified as NPAs and expected losses on stressed loans, not provided for earlier under flexibility given to restructured loans, were provided for. Further, all such schemes for restructuring stressed loans were withdrawn in 2017-18. "Primarily as a result of transparent recognition of stressed assets as NPAs as per RBI data on global operations, gross NPAs of PSBs rose from Rs 2,79,016 crore as on March 31, 2015, to Rs 8,95,601 crore as on March 31, 2018, and as a result of government's strategy of recognition, resolution, recapitalisation and reforms, have declined to Rs 6,09,129 crore as on September 30, 2020," he said. Replying to another question, Thakur said PSBs have raised Rs 50,982 crore in the form of both equity and bonds during 2020-21.

# Snapping six-session winning run, Sensex, Nifty end marginally lower

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Snapping their six-session winning streak, equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower on Tuesday amid profit-taking in IT, FMCG and auto stocks.

After rallying 487 points to touch its lifetime intra-day high of 51,835.86, the 30-share BSE Sensex pared all gains to end 19.69 points or 0.04 per cent lower at 51,329.08.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty slipped 6.50 points or 0.04 per cent to 15,109.30. It

touched a record peak of 15,257.10 during the day.

M&M was the top laggard in the Sensex pack, shedding around 4 per cent, followed by Bajaj Finance, ITC, Sun Pharma, Bajaj Auto, Bajaj Finserv and TCS. On the other hand, Asian Paints, ONGC, Titan, L&T and Axis Bank were among the gainers.

Domestic equities remained buoyant for most of the session with benchmark indices making fresh highs. However, high volatility was seen towards the end of the session and profit-taking was witnessed in a

large number of stocks, experts said.

Broad-based rally was not seen and only select large cap counters supported market, said Binod Modi, Head - Strategy at Reliance Securities. Midcap and smallcap indices underperformed sharply and barring financials most of the key sectoral indices were in red. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Tokyo ended with gains, while Seoul closed lower.

Stock exchanges in Europe were trading on a negative note in mid-session deals.

## Max Financial net profit jumps 54 pc to ₹227 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Max Financial Services Ltd (MFSL) on Tuesday reported 54 per cent jump in its consolidated net profit to Rs 227 crore in the third quarter ended December 2020. The company's net profit stood at Rs 147 crore in the year-ago period. The

consolidated revenues soared to Rs 8,990 crore, growing 68 per cent year-on-year due to higher investment income, MFSL said in a release. During Q3 FY21, MFSL's sole subsidiary Max Life reported gross written premium of Rs 4,629 crore, up 19 per cent over the previous year, it added. "MFSL has had a solid quarter

with our subsidiary Max Life registering impressive VNB (value of new business) and individual adjusted sales. This has been a consequence of a consciously diverse product mix wherein Non-Par and Protection products continue to lead in sales growth and margin expansion.

# PV sales dip as semiconductor shortage impacts vertical

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Automobile dealers' body FADA on Tuesday said passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales in January witnessed a year-on-year decline of 4.46 per cent to 2,81,666 units, as semiconductor shortage impacted the segment.

According to the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA), which collected vehicle registration data from 1,273 out of the 1,480 regional transport offices (RTOs), PV sales stood at 2,94,817 units in January 2020.

Two-wheeler sales declined 8.78 per cent to 11,63,322 units last month, as compared to 12,75,308 units in January 2020.

Commercial vehicle sales

declined 8.78 per cent to 11,63,322 units last month, as compared to 12,75,308 units in January 2020

also slipped 24.99 per cent to 55,835 units, as against 74,439 units a year ago.

Similarly, three-wheeler sales fell 51.31 per cent to 31,059 units last month, from 63,785 units in the year-ago period.

Tractor sales, however, grew by 11.14 per cent to 60,754 units last month, against 54,662 units in the same month the previous year. Total sales across categories declined 9.66 per cent to 15,92,636 units last

month compared to 17,63,011 units in the year-ago period.

Commenting on the sales data, FADA President Vinay Kumar Gulati said after witnessing a one-off growth in December, January registrations fell once again by 10 per cent year-on-year.

"Auto industry clearly misjudged the demand which returned post lockdown. Industry's underestimation of post-lockdown rebound along with chipmakers prioritising higher-volume and more lucrative consumer electronics market has created a vacuum for semiconductor," he noted.

This has resulted in a shortage in supply for all categories of vehicles, especially passenger vehicles, even though enquiry levels and bookings remained high, Gulati said.

# Expert panel report soon on priority individual for COVID vax

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An expert committee set up to develop the criteria for identifying significant comorbidities present in a person, which would make that person priority individual for COVID-19 vaccination, will finalise its report in the next few days, Niti Aayog Member (Health) V K Paul said on Tuesday.

Apart from Oxford-AstraZeneca's Covishield vaccine and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin vaccine, there are other vaccines that are in the pipeline, Paul stated.

"The criteria (to identify people with comorbidities) has been developed by a committee. We are expecting the final report in the next few days," he told PTI.

Paul, who is also the chairman of the National Expert Group On Vaccine Administration for COVID-19



(NEGVAC) said this committee has gone deeply into it and looked at which comorbidities -- the presence of two or more diseases or medical conditions in a patient -- should be kept in mind.

"They are also looking at how to ascertain this, who will certify it, where will the person has go to get the priority vaccine," he said, adding that so the procedural and process issues have also been discussed.

# 'Rhizen's cancer drug Umbralisib gets USFDA nod'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Alembic Pharma on Tuesday said its associate company Rhizen Pharmaceuticals AG's novel drug Umbralisib has received accelerated approval from the US health regulator for treatment of cancer of the lymphatic system.

In a regulatory filing, Alembic Pharma said, Rhizen Pharmaceuticals AG's, "...Umbralisib, which was licensed to TG Therapeutics has secured United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) accelerated approval for the treatment of adult patients, with relapsed or refractory marginal zone lymphoma (MZL) and follicular lymphoma (FL)".

Umbralisib was earlier granted Breakthrough Therapy Designation (BTD) for the treatment of MZL and

orphan drug designation (ODD) for the treatment of MZL and FL, the company added. In 2014, Rhizen Pharmaceuticals and TG Therapeutics entered into a licensing agreement as a part of which TG Therapeutics obtained worldwide rights and Rhizen has retained commercialisation rights for India while also being the manufacturing and supply partner for Umbralisib.

"Umbralisib is a product invented by Rhizen Pharmaceuticals and then we out-licensed it to TG Therapeutics..." Rhizen Pharmaceuticals President and CEO Swaroop Vakkalanka said in a virtual media conference.

Umbralisib's approval offers MZL and FL patients a new treatment option and is a huge validation of Rhizen's drug discovery and development capabilities, he added.

# KIAL achieves closure of new realty fund

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Kotak Investment Advisors on Tuesday said it has successfully achieved closure of its new USD 380 million-real estate fund, which will target a range of real estate financing opportunities across key cities in the country.

The fund is anchored by a clutch of leading global financial investors and is one of the leading real estate financing funds closed in recent times in India, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

# APSEZ consolidated profit up 16%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Limited (APSEZ) on Tuesday reported a 16.22 per cent increase in its consolidated profit to Rs 1,576.53 crore for the third quarter ended on December 31, 2020. The country's largest integrated logistics player had clocked a consolidated profit of Rs 1,356.43 crore in the corresponding period a year earlier, the company said in a regulatory filing to the BSE.

Its total consolidated income increased to Rs 4,274.79 crore for the third quarter, as against Rs 3,830.43 crore in the year-ago period.

The new fund will target both early stage and late stage real estate projects in residential, commercial, retail, warehousing and hospitality sectors, Kotak Investment Advisors Ltd (KIAL) said in a statement.

"Our new real estate fund has been closed at an opportune time. We have a flexible investment mandate enabling us to provide much-needed capital to address the short-term financial dislocation in the real estate financing market as well as long-term capi-

tal to address the liquidity issue," KIAL Managing Director Srinivasan said.

Vikas Chimakurthy, CEO, Kotak Realty Fund said the new USD 380 million fund is the 11th fund in the company's real estate fund series, since the first fund raised in 2005.

"With this fund, we cross total raise of USD 2.2 billion. This demonstrates strong confidence of global investors in our longstanding track record and our ability to source, underwrite and manage real estate investments," he added.

# Equity MFs see outflow for 7th straight month in January

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Equity mutual funds witnessed an outflow of Rs 9,253 crore in January, making it the seventh consecutive monthly withdrawal, primarily due to massive pullout from the newly created flexi fund category. Also, investors pulled out Rs 33,409 crore from debt mutual funds last month after investing Rs 13,863 crore in December, data from the Association of Mutual Funds in India.

Overall, the mutual fund industry witnessed a net outflow of Rs 35,586 crore across all segments during the period under review, compared to Rs 2,968 crore inflow seen in December on investment from hybrid and other schemes.

As per the data, the outflow from equity and equity-linked open-ended schemes was at Rs 9,253 crore in January compared to Rs 10,147 crore in December.

# 'India's Union Budget creates buzz among global investors'

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

India's Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has generated a buzz among international investors, especially among American companies, according to the head of an India-centric American business advocacy group.

Finance Minister Sitharaman on February 1 proposed a sharp increase in expenditure on infrastructure, doubling of healthcare spending and raising the cap on foreign investment in insurance in her Budget for the next fiscal in a bid to pull India's pandemic-hit economy out of the woods.

"Overall, I thought it was a great budget. Markets have reacted," Mukesh Aghi, president of US-India Strategic and

Partnership Forum (USISPF), told PTI in an interview.

"I think they (US companies) are excited. They feel that for the first time in many, many years you have a budget which provides less government fine-tuning... It is a clearly defined budget which attracts a lot of International Investment," Aghi said, reflecting on the feedback the USISPF has been receiving from its member companies.

American companies, he said, see an opportunity for them in India's healthcare sector, as there has been a substantial increase in the budget. Same is the case in investment in the infrastructure sector, which has generated a large interest among the US companies, Aghi said.

The government has pro-



posed a budget outlay of Rs 2,23,846 crore for health and wellbeing in 2021-2022, an increase of 137 per cent from the previous year, with Rs 35,000 crore earmarked for COVID-19 vaccine in the upcoming fiscal.

The US companies have been buying assets in India, now they can be more aggressive, he said.

"So overall there are tremendous opportunities for the US companies to participate both on a short-term and long-term

investment perspective," Aghi added.

Aghi said the farsighted budget will put India on a trajectory of double-digit growth in the next few years.

Responding to a question, he said that earlier budgets of the Modi government were fiscally very conservative in the sense that they did not want the deficit to go beyond three per cent. "So right there the government was trying to handicap itself by not being able to expand the pie. If you are going to revive the economy which contracted 20-30 per cent, you need to spend and create demand. You need to bring in capital to create supply," Aghi said. As such, there is a massive shift in approach of the Modi government from the previous budgets to the lat-

est one, which is much more focused on reviving the demand and attracting investment to create the supply.

"Also, I would say this is less of a micromanagement," Aghi said, adding that this fits into Prime Minister Narendra Modi's slogan of basically minimum government and maximum governance.

The budget reflects the "dramatic shift in the philosophy" of the Modi government when one compares this with the previous annual budgets, he said, adding that policy changes in sectors like insurance would attract large institutional investors. Noting that increasing the fiscal deficit lets the government borrow USD 164 billion, he said the focus on spending a lot on infrastructure will create jobs, create demand.

## MONEY MATTERS

### Massive drop in LIC's individual biz caps growth in Jan at 8 pc



A massive 45 per cent plunge in LIC's individual annual premium equivalent (APE) in January capped the industry growth at 8 per cent for the month, according to a report. Industry leader LIC saw its

individual APE growth plummet to 45 per cent, due to a massively high base of 99 per cent growth in January 2020. Yet, at 8 per cent, individual APE for the life insurance industry in January is higher than the 3 per cent it had managed to grow in December and 7 per cent decline in November 2020, according to the report by Kotak Securities. However, this pick-up in individual business indicates a gradual increase in demand for Uliips, which has been the bane of the industry for quite some time, said the report. Moderation in growth of protection business from peak levels seems to have been arrested, as individual non-single sum assured to individual non-single premium for private players was 25 times in January. It was 23 times in December but stood lower at 31 times in January 2020 and 35 times in the second quarter 2020-21.

### Triumph drives in Tiger 850 Sport in India priced at ₹11L



British premium motorcycle maker Triumph Motorcycles on Tuesday said it has launched Tiger 850 Sport in India priced at Rs 11.95 lakh (ex-showroom). The 888-cc bike is the latest addition to the company's

premium adventure motorcycle line-up, taking the overall number to four. It already sells Tiger 900 Rally Pro, Rally and GT in the country. The Tiger 850 Sport is aimed towards urban adventure enthusiasts, apt for daily commuting, long rides as well as for weekend adventure runs, the company said. "Triumph Motorcycles have been dominating the premium adventure segment in the country since the first Tiger made its way to the Indian shores and now with the launch of the new Tiger 850 sport, we extend the Tiger portfolio to four purposefully different motorcycles, at the same time strengthening our commitment to catering to premium adventure motorcyclists in the country," Triumph said.

### Housing.com tiesup with Propdial to strengthen rental services



Realty portal Housing.com on Tuesday said it has tied up with Gurugram-based property and rental management technology firm Propdial to strengthen its rental services business. The tie-up will help the company to provide property management services such as

renting/leasing, tenant background verification, rental agreement and rent collection/bill payment, Housing.com said in a statement. The company would also offer support like quarterly property inspection with pictures and regular maintenance needed for the house to keep it running smoothly, without the landlord having to intervene. "All of this will enable Housing.com to act as a one-stop shop for its landlord customers, seeking dedicated property managers and related services," the statement said. While most of the services are available in Delhi, Bengaluru, Gurugram, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and Pune, plans are underway to offer these services in several other cities.

### Central Bank of India net profit up 6.5pc at ₹165 cr in Q3 FY21



State-owned Central Bank of India on Tuesday reported a 6.5 per cent rise in its net profit to Rs 165.41 crore in the third quarter ended December. The bank had posted a net profit of Rs 155.32 crore in the corresponding year-ago period.

Total income, however, fell to Rs 6,556.98 crore in October-December period of 2020-21 as against Rs 7,278.29 crore in same period of 2019-20, the bank said in a regulatory filing. Interest income for the quarter under review was down to Rs 5,782.61 crore from Rs 6,028.88 crore in the year-ago quarter. The bank's asset quality improved with gross non-performing assets (NPAs) falling to 16.30 per cent of the gross advances as of December 31, 2020, from 19.99 per cent by end of December 2019. In value terms, gross NPAs or bad loans stood at Rs 29,486.07 crore as against Rs 33,259.59 crore.

# Hyderabad

the pioneer

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Wednesday  
February 10, 2021

**B**orn with twinkling toes and always ready to bust a move with his famous signature styles, Punit J. Pathak had dreamt of being a cricketer but destiny had something else in his kitty. From being an ace choreographer to now stepping into another performing arts showground with major screen-space, it's very rare that we see a dancer transitioning into the world of acting. The newly married groom is immensely talented and with this he's all set to enter in!

He seems excited to adapt to the changing times of entertainment platforms as the country moves along. When asked about his show, he said, "LSD — Love, Scandal & Doctors talks about five medical interns in the KMRC medical college in Delhi, a premier medical institute. The story starts when they suddenly find themselves in the middle of a murder investigation struggling between right and wrong and fact versus fiction. They are tested on both personal and professional aspects. I am playing the instrumental role of inspector Tavish Singh. I love it because no one knows what he feels since he always filters his emotions. Sometimes smiling, sometimes smoking, sometimes serious, sometimes sarcastic, so it is multi-layered. Usually, characters are just two or three-faced but this man has many faces. He has a personal equation and reaction with every doctor, so that is the best part and I loved playing this character with the equipped team of great writers and directors. I am looking forward to the audiences' reaction to the same."

When asked about what brought him aboard this web-series, he says, "The excitement of this multilayered character, plus me wearing a uniform gave me a different feeling and attitude to play Tavish. I loved wearing a police uniform. The whole USP of this series is that it is a thriller and very well written, it leaves you in a cliff-hanger mode after every episode which makes the audience want to watch the consecutive episodes soon."

A country where talent is soaring high, Punit couldn't stay behind. In order to look fully altered for the role, he cut down a lot on his physical transformation. He was in a phase where he wanted to take care of himself and was already in the process and he knew the uniform would be tight-fitting so he did tone down. Currently, he is pretty much convinced with his look! Talking more about the preps for the character, he adds, "Tavish being the role of a dashing cop, I felt like I have a responsibility as an



You may know this celebrity for his dancing, choreography and a diminutive bit of acting in dance films. Nevertheless, at the moment, well-known figure Punit J. Pathak is all set to make his OTT debut as a lead in *LSD - Love, Scandal & Doctors*. He talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about his journey, current role, and more.

## 'Nepotism is overrated'

artist so I made sure I didn't mug up the lines, I said my own way, there is always a personal touch. Here I am interrogating 5 medical interns who are suspects of a murder, they are my juniors' age, and experience-wise I always pictured them as my students or assistants check-

ing if what they are doing is right or wrong. The lines and script and storyline are from the story writer as Tavish but the feeling is of Punit-the choreographer. I loved working with all of them; I had a different equation off camera with them. All are amazing, beautiful, and truly talented

and they will have bright futures and are yet to reach their maximum potential, they will definitely shine." With 2020 bringing large theatres to our living room, the couch epoch of entertainment has already been ushered in and even though audiences are returning to

cinema halls, viewers are also accustomed to the new cinematic wave. "OTT platforms are the future; the way things are going is very close to becoming the present. Our generation and people in metro cities are used to it. It just needs to reach rural areas a bit more, but it will

soon be there. How the show is going to be received is not in our hands and I am from the school of thought that you give your hundred percent and there is no point worrying about something that isn't in your hand. I do want the show to be fabulous, I want it to be trending. I want people to love it so much that a sequel is immediately done. Many shows are getting that love and respect and I want this to be one of them. We have given our hundred percent and that is all that we could've done since it was shooting the show with all the necessary precautions and limited units, it is a tremendous team effort," he adds.

Bollywood is going through a tough turf these days, having to manoeuvre for ranking outsiders and star kids, but what does Punit have to say about the whole 'having it relatively easy' debate? The champion choreographer steers that everyone is in a highly competitive world but "if my son wants to be a choreographer or dancer, he has the genes and I have the experience to do everything I can to do what would help him." He feels nepotism is overrated; "for example, a shop owner will hand over his business to his son only," he believes.

Bringing the conversation to a close about how the dancer-turned-actor spent his lockdown and what's life like after getting married, he tells, "Like everyone else during the lockdown, I was also trying everything the world did — Yoga, meditation, cooking, Dalgona coffee, work out, jhaadu pocha, trying to read, watch series, cleaning wardrobe, etc. I also got engaged, got some time to think for myself and give myself a reality check and realised it was time to take the next step. While this was happening, I got a call from the makers saying they are doing this show and this is the script where there is this character we want you to play. I gave the audition over the phone and actually, there was another show of theirs for which I got selected. I then spoke with the makers of the show and they convinced me it was necessary. I thought it will help me in my career so I liked that it was not one way. I enjoyed being a part of it because when the show came in, it was challenging, it was new, and this role had nothing related to dancing but being a cop, being in character so I loved every aspect of it. As far as my marriage is concerned, so far it's going very good, I honestly don't think it has sunk in. It is still me spending time with my best friend and that's the best part. The nice thing about us is that we both give each other space. It is beautiful to come back home and have your loved one next to you."



## Fashion for a cause

**W**ith the aim — fashion exhibition with a purpose, Fashion Yatra is all set to be held on February 13 at Taj Krishna, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. It will be one of the first few fashion and lifestyle exhibitions that will be held in the city post the pandemic. It raises a lot of curiosity among the fashion-conscious people and will shed some light on how the pandemic will shape the fashion world. The proceeds from the show will be contributed to 'Teach for

Change' — an initiative for educating the underprivileged.

Fashion trends during and post-pandemic; what is trending? The exhibition will answer these and many more questions. Over 60 top designer labels from across India and abroad will be showcasing their collection. Fashion entrepreneurs, social enterprises, start-ups and lifestyle brands, designer labels will showcase their products. Some of the exhibitors include Ghanasingh, The Blooming Lily, Sanam Tamanna, Dubai; Tasuvire by Sonal Saraf; Preevin Designs; Anshikaa Jain; Pink Polka; Kavari; Amazing Jewel; Alok Baid; Siddh Couture by Deepa Goel; Aida by Priyanka Jain; Soup by Sougat Paul; Ektaar; Renuka Fine Jewellery; Gaurika Mosi Jewellery; Shivani Tijori; White Jewel; Alankrit Weaves; Breeze Sarna; Medha; Love. P Organics; and Selcouth



by Richa Sha. Fashion Yatra is a brainchild of Kamini Saraf who said that the future of fashion will be natural, sustainable, durable and biodegradable. "Over the years, Fashion Yatra has a track record of successfully conducting shows in all major cities. At this exhibition, we are featuring designer garments, jewellery and lifestyle products from across India."



**V**alentine's Day marks the celebration of love. It is that time of the year when love and romance blossom in every heart and in every corner of the world. Couples explore new ways to express their emotions and make their partner feel special. There are many things that you can do to make someone feel special, yet there are some people who want to wear their hearts, literally, on their sleeves by getting a permanent tattoo on their skin! Couple tattoos have gained tremendous popularity in the last few years. Getting a beautiful piece of

art tattooed on your body to dedicate it to your spouse/partner is something thoughtful and cherishable. Both ink and love require lifelong commitments as they never fade, regardless of how much time passes. So if you want to show your partner that you're pretty serious about the relationship and it's a 'forever' kind of love, then matching tattoos are the new, modern way to reveal how much this bond matters to you! There are a variety of tattoo styles that are trending these days. People have become creative and are finding different ways of inking their love. Some

designs include, king and queen crowns, connecting puzzle tattoo, partner's name, name initials, zodiac symbols, infinity sign, or wedding date etc. Award-winning tattoo artist, Lokesh Verma, founder of Devil's Tattoo lists trends popular among couples: **Name or date** Many couples tend to get too romantic on this specific day and get each other's names inked to show how much they love each other. The most popular example of this was Saif Ali Khan's tattoo for his lady love, Kareena Kapoor Khan. One can also get special dates

Couple tattoos have gained tremendous popularity in the last few years. Here are some creative ideas to express your love by getting inked together this Valentine's Day. — PNS

## Heart on your sleeve

inked, such as wedding anniversary or the first time you met. These are special memories and moments to cherish.

### Identical ones

For an everlasting bond, a lot of people prefer to find that one common thing which both the partners can connect with such as word or phrase, musical notes or any symbol. Having the same tattoo links you together for life. Even, Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Nick Jonas marked their first anniversary of their engagement by getting matching tattoos to celebrate that.

### Connecting tattoos

Connecting or half and half tattoo is complete only when the couple is together. Thus, depicting that they are incomplete without each other. One example is the heartbeat tattoo that runs from one to the other. Couples who are in a long-distance relationship also get connecting tattoos to represent how you and your partner may be miles apart but still connected.

### Minimalistic designs

To make a big impact, go small! A lot of people like to keep things personal, super discreet, nothing to elaborate, visible, flashy or bold. For such private and simple



people, the minimalistic tattoos are the best options - small tattoos to define the large amount of love you feel.

### Ink the fingerprint

This is something quirky and unique — getting the fingerprint of your partner printed on yourself. It's like a signature of love inked on you, which is the ultimate seal of love.



# what's brewing?



Pravalika



Hani



Soni

**SHOW-STOPPING**  
Akruti Exhibition, a designer wear celebration, took place at the Taj Krishna hotel, Hyderabad from February 8-9. The event was attended by the city's top models and fashion enthusiasts looking for the best deals on jewellery, fashion, home decor, accessories and much more.



Hena



Kritika



Arekapudi Gandhi



Panisree



Prathusha



Mallikarjun Prasad and Himabindu

**PARTY**

Photos by SV Chary

**FRESH AND FLAVOURFUL**  
M LA Arekapudi Gandhi was spotted at the opening of Natural fruits and vegetables outlet in Mytri Nagar Arch, Madhinaguda. The founder Mallikarjun Prasad spoke about the increasing awareness on health among people, getting used to imported fruits and the variety of fruits, dairy products, eggs and dry fruits.

**FUN**

**ARCHIE**



**CALVIN AND HOBBS**



**GARFIELD**



**REALITY CHECK**



**SPEED BUMP**



**CROSSWORD**



**NANCY**



**SUDOKU**

Yesterday's solution

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

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

**ACROSS**  
6 An illness that gives you red spots that itch (7-3)  
8 Say  
10 Tongans live here  
13 Insects with large, often colourful wings  
14 Not together  
17 Worship  
19 A book with words and their meanings

**DOWN**  
1 Closed  
2 A skin mark from a wound  
3 Take a break from work or play  
4 Twirl  
5 Completely tired out

7 These have doors and you store things in here  
9 Go in  
11 Lubricated  
12 Remove moisture from  
15 A curved support under a bridge  
16 A small tree branch  
17 A female relation  
18 A rower uses these

SOLUTION:  
JOINED GREY  
UN WEE  
MOVE CANADA  
PI PUD R  
STRANGE R  
B E H A R  
R KITTERS  
I S E Y G A  
CLOWNS CHEW  
K U T O A  
SORT NEARLY

**GINGER MEGGS**



# Was in tears after listening to *Uppena* narration: Krithi

The debutante speaks to NAGARAJ GOUD on landing *Uppena* and why she was in two minds to accept it, learning Telugu, making the unit cry with her performance, and fan following



Unlike her co-star Vaishnav Tej in *Uppena*, Krithi Shetty always had interest towards acting but never thought she would make a career out of it. She had acted in a couple of commercials out of interest but always harboured dreams of becoming a surgeon.

try is very good." Shedding light about her part, she shares it has similarities to her real life personality in terms of being a livewire and the only child of her parents. "So essaying it came to me naturally," she maintains, crediting the director and cinematogra-

During his search for a leading lady, *Uppena* director Buchi Babu Sana *garu* saw some photographs of Krithi and felt that she was fitting for the role of Baby. "Initially, I was averse to the idea of making the transition to films as I was still studying. The makers kept talking to me through texts for three months before I finally came down to Hyderabad for the narration. I found the story to be real. I connected to it and even wept. I accepted to do the project later."

Smiling, she continues, "The unit treated me with a lot of respect when I first met them. It was something which was amiss in Mumbai when I shot ads there. So I was very surprised but liked it. I could feel the positive vibes of the industry as I was on my way to the narration. Turns out, the indus-

**“Uppena team treated me with a lot of respect when I first met them. It was something which was amiss in Mumbai when I shot ads there. So I was very surprised but liked it. I could feel the positive vibes of the industry as I was on my way to the narration”**

## 17th century Charminar set for Pawan's next

Before he began shooting for *Ayyappanum Koshiyum* remake last month, Pawan Kalyan shot briefly for Krish's period drama set in 17th century. And now it looks like the actor will be balancing both the films moving ahead. According to a source, Pawan will be shooting for Krish's film again after February 20, and it is for the first time in his career he is doing the juggling

act. "He has allotted 10 days for this schedule. A replica of 17th century Charminar is being erected for the shooting. After the Hyderabad leg of filming, Krish has considered locations in Rajasthan and Gujarat to shoot some other portions but those schedules are far away," said a source.

The as-yet-untitled film is believed to be the biggest budgeted affair of Pawan's career. Produced by AM Ratnam under Mega Surya Productions, it features Nidhi Agerwal, Jacqueline Fernandez and Arjun Rampal in other pivotal roles. MM Keeravani is rendering music.



## I'm picky about my directors: Damodar Prasad

look at their commitment to work and their experience in various crafts," the producer, who is looking forward to the release of his next production venture, *Father-Chitti-Uma-Karthik* (FCUK), a romantic-comedy, says.

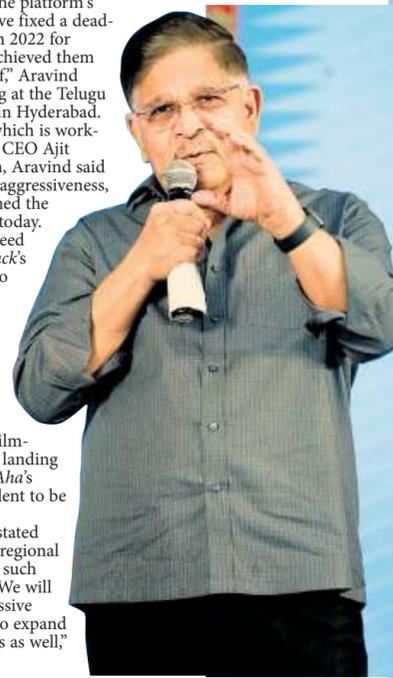
He is introducing Vidyasagar Raju as a director with the film. "He is a talented director but has been crushed in the industry. I found his script to be captivating and we worked on the detailing. I am very happy with the end product. I extend my thanks to Jagapathi Babu *garu* for introducing him to me," Damu, as

he is fondly called in the industry, notes. Didn't he feel the title FCUK will alienate family audiences from visiting the cinemas? He responds, "The story revolves around four main characters. It is the reason why we named it as *Father-Chitti-Uma-Karthik*. Since it's a lengthy name we are using its acronym FCUK. I understand that a small spelling change will change the entire meaning but the film is devoid of any form of vulgarity. It will only offer wholesome laughter."

Co-starring Ram Karthik, Tamil actress Ammu Abhirami (*Asuran* fame) and baby Sahasritha, the film will grace theatres this Friday. While there have been a handful of Telugu releases which chose to opt for a direct-to-web release during the lockdown, Damu chose to wait for theatres to reopen. Explaining his reason, he points out, "I love movies and I don't see movies just as business. FCUK was made for the audience to enjoy in the theatres. As a product, I want to take it to the maximum people. If the product is good, it will give a name and career to everyone associated with it."

## Aravind promises 'more exciting feature films' on Aha

Aha co-owner Allu Aravind on Monday evening said that they've achieved the target they've set out for themselves in just one year of the platform's launch. "We've fixed a deadline of March 2022 for some numbers but we achieved them in the first one year itself," Aravind exulted. He was speaking at the Telugu OTT's first anniversary in Hyderabad. Lauding the Aha team which is working round the clock and CEO Ajit Thakur for leading them, Aravind said that if it wasn't for Ajit's aggressiveness, they wouldn't have reached the position where they are today. "We will increase our speed in the next one year. *Krack*'s digital debut helped us to grow a lot," he noted. He further added that more exciting feature films will be making their digital debuts on Aha in the coming one year, so will be some big shows. He also appealed to aspiring writers and filmmakers who are close to landing film opportunities that Aha's door is open for their talent to be utilised. Ram Jupally, co-owner, stated that it's a big thing for a regional OTT platform to garner such reaction within a year. "We will march ahead with aggressive plans. We are planning to expand Aha into other languages as well," he said.



## Nandita's Instagram account hacked

Actress Nandita Swetha is the latest celebrity whose social media account has come under the scanner of hackers. On Tuesday, the actress, taking to Twitter, announced that her Instagram account has been compromised. "My @instagram account is hacked. Kindly beware if you getting any messages," the actress, who is a popular face on Instagram, posted.

Nandita is presently awaiting the release of her films like *Kapatadhaari* and *Akshara*. Both the films are releasing this month within a space of one week.



# SWING IT LIKE JIMMY

Anderson's reverse swing deflates India as England go 1-0 up with 227 run win

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Veteran James Anderson's artistic spell of reverse swing trumped Virat Kohli's show of grit as England decimated India in the opening Test by a comprehensive 227-run margin here on Tuesday.

A target of 420, with 381 left on a fifth day worn out Chepauk track, was always a tough ask going by cricketers' logic and Anderson's mid-morning burst blew away the Indian middle-order. In the end, the hosts could manage only 192 in 58.1 overs.

That spell ensured that there wasn't a Sydney-like heist or the magic of Brisbane final day which many had hoped for despite the world record target.

Kohli (72 off 104 balls) seemed like a lonely general standing on a burning deck as he showed his colleagues how to bat on a difficult track.

He covered the swing and shuffled towards the off-stump to counter Anderson, ran purposefully and scored his runs against spinners.

But there was that one ball that was always going to keep low and he got that from Ben Stokes.

## DOUBLE ALIKE BLOW

Courtesy Anderson (11-4-17-3), the match became a mismatch within an hour and India now need to win two out of the next three Tests to qualify for the World Test Championship final in June. The player of the match honours went to England skipper Joe Root for his match-defining double hundred in the first innings.

It was left-arm spinner Jack Leach (26-4-76-4), who after his first innings humiliation at the hands of Rishabh Pant, finished with the best figures but the effort paled in comparison to the effect that Anderson had on the psyche of the



Indian team. Anderson sowed doubts among rank and file of the home line-up, whether they had the technique to play the moving ball which swings the other way round. Kohli can but can his colleagues do it will be the big question going forward.

The man from Burnley, in his 19th Test match season, showed his artistry with a semi-new ball, on a fifth day track and sapping Chennai heat, far removed conditions from the grey skies and cool breeze that Old Trafford gives him.

But then Anderson is a devotee and best practitioner of Test match ethos and doesn't need to take refuge in conditions because of his supreme control over his craft.

## ANOTHER FIFTY FOR GILL

Gill (50, 83 balls) once again looked dazzling till the time he was

at the crease. The sinewy wrists were in play as he hit seven fours and a six, dealing with spinners comfortably.

Even Cheteshwar Pujara's (15 off 38 balls) dismissal off Jack Leach's "peach" didn't unfaze the young man from Punjab as he along with Kohli calmly went about their business.

It was the 27th over when Anderson first came into the attack and the second ball was a perfect reverse inswinger which had Gill in a daze as the off-stump went for a walk.

The way the shiny part on the inside tailed in was a sight to behold.

Rahane (0), for all the appreciation coming his way, was in very poor form for the better part of the Australia series, save a hundred at MCG where he was dropped thrice.

The first ball he faced on Tuesday was another one that came back a

# India slip to 4th spot

Dubai: India on Tuesday slipped to fourth position in the World Test Championship rankings after their 227-run defeat to England in the opening Test as the visitors kept alive their hopes of making the final of the inaugural event.

New Zealand have already qualified for the WTC final, to be held at Lord's later in the year, winning 70.0 per cent of their matches (with no other series scheduled).

The victory at Chepauk lifted England to first place and 70.2 percentage points on the table and they have improved their chances of

securing one of the three series results in their favour that could see them through to the final — 3-1, 3-0 or 4-0. India grabbed the top spot after their incredible series win Australia last month.

India, who have slipped to fourth position with 68.3 percentage points, will now be looking to win at least two of the remaining three matches to secure a 2-1 or 3-1 result and a place in the final.

Australia will get to feature in a Trans-Tasman summit clash if the India-England series is drawn or if England win 1-0, 2-1 or 2-0. PTI

shade and it was hitting the middle of the middle stump with the Umpires' Call saving the vice-captain of what looked like a plumb leg before.

The wily Anderson realised that an out-of-form Rahane's feet are not moving.

The next time he just went a shade wide off the crease and delivered another reverse inswinger. Rahane knew that there was no comeback. Pant (11) has had three

great knocks but he was facing a bowler with supreme game awareness and immaculate understanding of conditions.

Against a left-hander, he predictably came around the wicket and angled a few in with a busy Pant hitting a boundary.

By then, Anderson had gauged that Pant could be hurried on the drive.

So the master changed his tactic and bowled a slower one enticing Pant to go for a drive.

Pant tried his best to check it but the bowler had asked his skipper Joe Root to specifically stand at short cover for that particular shot.

From 92 for 2, it was 110 for five and Kohli cut a lonely figure at the other end.

Washington Sundar (0) was then picked by Dom Bess with the one that turned away leaving India in complete tatters.

MOST TEST WINS BY ENGLAND SKIPPER					
Captain	Games	Win	Loss	Draw	Win%
Joe Root	47	26	15	6	55.31
Michael Vaughan	51	26	11	14	50.98
Andrew Strauss	50	24	11	15	48.00
Alastair Cook	59	24	22	13	40.67
Peter May	41	20	10	11	48.78

Faisal Features

# Kohli laments '1st innings difference'

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India's underwhelming batting performance in the first innings gave England the decisive advantage, skipper Virat Kohli said on Tuesday and defended the decision to play rookie left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem instead of a more experienced Kuldeep Yadav.

After losing the first Test, Kohli admitted that the team was always under the scoreboard pressure after England's mammoth first innings total of 578 but also said that he has no regrets about picking Nadeem over Kuldeep.



"I think, Test probably shifted in their favour when we batted in the first innings. We were looking to bat better but I don't

think there was enough application shown by us as a batting unit," Kohli said at the post-match press conference referring to India's 337 all out first essay score.

"Even if someone got a hundred in either innings, still we were pretty much behind in the game. There's not one way to play the game and we understand that quite well and our endeavour in the future games is going to be long partnerships," said Kohli.

Kuldeep's absence was a talking point through the Test but Kohli gave his reasons as to why he wouldn't like to revisit his decision. "...When you are playing two

off-spinners, Kuldeep more or less becomes a similar kind of spinner (bringing it into the right-handers). So, we needed variety. We were quite clear what combination we wanted to play, and there are no regrets whatsoever."

However he hinted that the management could rework the combination in the coming matches. The second Test is also scheduled to be held here from February 13.

"Moving forward, we will look at combinations, that bring us variety in the bowling attack and not (be) one-dimensional, where the ball is only turning away from the bat."

# We've set a benchmark now: Root

PTI ■ CHENNAI

England have set a benchmark for themselves with their monumental victory against India in the first Test, gushed captain Joe Root while admitting that competing on spin-friendly tracks in Sri Lanka prepared them nicely for this tour.

England inflicted on India a humiliating 227-run defeat to go 1-0 up in the four Test series but the visiting skipper has no doubt that the home team has the kind of players who can exact revenge.

"I'm very proud of the way we've played this week. We have set a benchmark now, we've got something to work for to compare ourselves. Still there are areas we can improve on. We can still get better," Root said at the post-match press conference.

"We know that India are an extremely good team, especially in these conditions. And they're a very proud nation as well. They've got some exceptional players so they'll come back hard."

The skipper, who made a brilliant 218 which was the cornerstone of England's massive first innings total, mentioned the role played by the Sri Lanka series ahead of India assignment.



England skipper Joe Root ECB/Twitter

England had won that series 2-0 with Root leading from the front with his big hundreds.

"It certainly served us well, coming out here, having faced the volume of spin that we have, having the confidence of winning. And playing on a similar kind of wicket, wasn't the same by any stretch, but the tempo of the cricket that you play in the sub-continent I think served us really well coming into this game."

"The pleasing thing for me

was to set a big first innings run, and we delivered it. We said we needed to be smart about how we're going to take 20 wickets, and we delivered it."

Root said the challenge before them now is to repeat the magnificent performance.

"Can we replicate that, can we go one better, can we keep looking to improve as a team and can we take it on individually that makes a difference?"

About not declaring and not accelerating the scoring during the second innings on day four which drew criticism from some quarters, Root said the idea was to not give the home team any chance of winning the game.

"I wanted to make sure that more than anything there were only two possible results. It would have been damaging had we lost this game."

"I knew that the way that it deteriorated the last three days in particular that coming into today it was gonna happen even quicker again. All we needed to do, be relentless with the areas we were bowling."

"Put the ball in good areas for a long period of time and the wicket will do the rest. It was just about holding on," Root added.

# Barty bagels, Rafa magic



AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Rafael Nadal's injured back didn't slow his bid for a record 21st Grand Slam title on Tuesday, as women's world number one Ashleigh Barty romped to a 6-0, 6-0 'double bagel' at the Australian Open.

On a day when women's champion Sofia Kenin also reached round two, but two-time winner Victoria Azarenka lost after breathing problems, Nadal and Barty were the headline acts at the coronavirus-delayed Slam.

Spanish great Nadal, who pulled out of last week's ATP Cup with back problems, beat Serbia's Laslo Djere 6-3, 6-4, 6-1 in one hour and 52 minutes on a sun-kissed Rod Laver Arena.

"It's been a tough 15 days for me," said the 2009 champion, whose back stiffness first flared during an exhibition match last month.

"I needed to survive today and that's what I did. I'm happy to be through and I think I did a good job today. Straight sets is what I needed."

Nadal, 34, is attempting to outstrip his old rival Roger Federer, who is out with injury, and take sole ownership of the all-time record for Grand Slam titles. After world number one Novak Djokovic eased through late on Monday, Russia's Daniil Medvedev extended his winning streak to 15 matches with an emphatic 6-2, 6-2, 6-4 victory over Canada's Vasek Pospisil.

The 2019 US Open finalist is raising hopes of a maiden Grand Slam title with his unbeaten run, which includes winning the Paris Masters, ATP Finals and last week's ATP Cup with Russia.

Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev also continued his winning start to the year with a straight-sets victory over German Yannick Hanfmann 6-3, 6-3, 6-4.

And Greek fifth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas made short work of French veteran Gilles Simon, winning 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 in 92 minutes.

## BARTY STARTED

Barty also outclassed Montenegro's Danka Kovinic, losing only 10 points as she raced into round two in just 44 minutes.

With the win Barty, last year's semi-finalist who sat out most of the 2020 season, ramped up hopes of a first Australian women's winner in 43 years.

Women's champion Kenin was less convincing and she audibly vented her frustrations during her 7-5, 6-4 win against Australian Maddison Inglis, who is ranked outside the top 100.

Two-time major-winner Garbine Muguruza, who was stunned by Kenin in last year's final, had little trouble beating Russia's Margarita Gasparyan 6-4, 6-0.

But there were distressing scenes as an ailing Azarenka, the 2012 and 2013 champion, went out to Jessica Pegula.

Elsewhere, fifth seed Elina Svitolina was pushed hard by Czech Marie Bouzkouva before coming through 6-3, 7-5 (7/5).

She will next play 16-year-old American Coco Gauff, who beat Venus Williams and Naomi Osaka last year and enjoyed a straightforward 6-3, 6-2 win over Switzerland's Jil Teichmann on Tuesday.

# Sumit Nagal blown away by Berankis



Melbourne: India's Sumit Nagal exited the Australian Open with a first-round defeat, struggling to cope with the power-packed game of Lithuanian Ricardas Berankis, here on Tuesday. Nagal's challenge deflated in a matter of minutes as Berankis's powerful ground strokes proved to be too good for the Indian, who lost 2-6, 5-7, 3-6 in two hours and 10 minutes.

Nagal had lost to the world number 72 in the last week's tune-up event too.

The 23-year-old Nagal reeled off four straight games in the second set in his bid to stage a comeback but the initial dominance by Berankis largely dictated the outcome of the match.

India's singles challenge is over and now all eyes will be on doubles players — Rohan Bopanna, Divij Sharan and Ankita Raina. PTI

# Lewa takes Bayern in final

AFP ■ DOHA

Bayern Munich advanced to the Club World Cup final after goals in each half by Robert Lewandowski sealed a 2-0 victory over African champions Al Ahly in Monday's semi-final.

The European champions face Tigres in the final on Thursday after the Mexican club saw off Brazilian giants Palmeiras in Sunday's other semi-final.

"It was a very good match and we're ready for the final," Lewandowski said.

He gave Bayern the lead with just 17 minutes gone at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, a host venue for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

The Poland star then headed home a pinpoint Leroy Sane cross four min-

utes before the whistle to book Bayern's place in the final. Lewandowski, the Bundesliga's top scorer, has now scored 29 goals in 27 club matches this season.

Bayern are bidding to become only the second team after Barcelona in 2009 to win all six domestic and international titles up for grabs in one season. The German giants lifted the Bundesliga, German Cup, Champions League, German Cup and UEFA Super Cup trophies in 2020.

"We want to claim another title — title number six during this season," Lewandowski added.

"This is a World Cup, which is always something special. I hope we can play even better in the final and that we will have more goalscoring chances."



# Atletico stumble against Celta

Madrid: Atletico Madrid slipped up in La Liga for the first time in nine games on Monday as Celta Vigo snatched a late equaliser to deliver a ray of hope to Barcelona and Real Madrid. Luis Suarez scored twice at the Wanda Metropolitano to overturn Santi Mina's opener for Celta, with Atletico on course to restore their 10-point lead at the top of the table. But Facundo Ferreyra slid in to score in the 89th minute to earn a deserved 2-2 draw for the visitors, meaning Atletico's advantage at the end of the weekend is reduced to eight, still with a game in hand. AFP