



the pioneer



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FOR HIS NEXT

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FASTAG MUST FROM TODAY; TWICE THE TOLL FEE IF YOU DON'T HAVE IT

The automatic toll plaza payment system FASTag will become mandatory from tomorrow midnight, the centre said today in a statement. Those who don't install FASTag in their vehicles or have a tag that does not work will have to pay a fee equal to twice the fee for the category of the vehicle they are driving. To ensure smooth transition to the FASTag system, the government said all fee lanes in toll plazas on National Highways will be able to read the tags. "Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has decided that all lanes in fee plazas on National Highways shall be declared as FASTag lane," an order said.



ACTIVIST DISHA RAVI, 22, ARRESTED OVER TOOLKIT, FACES CONSPIRACY CHARGE

A 22-year-old student and climate activist from Bengaluru, Disha Ravi, has been arrested by the Delhi Police in the case involving "Toolkit" tweeted earlier this month by Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg to show support for protesting farmers. The police - which earlier said "Toolkit" was a Khalistani conspiracy to wage war against India - have accused her of being a key conspirator in the document's formulation and dissemination and alleged that she is trying to revive a Khalistani group. "I did not make Toolkit. We wanted to support the farmers. I edited two lines on February 3," Disha Ravi told the Delhi court where she was produced earlier Sunday.



OMAR ABDULLAH SAYS HIS WHOLE FAMILY 'LOCKED UP AT HOME'

Former J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah tweeted to say he and his family have been kept locked up in their home. "It is bad enough they've locked my father & me in our home, they've locked my sister & her kids in their home as well," his post read. "This is the 'naya /new J&K' after Aug 2019. We get locked up in our homes with no explanation. It's bad enough they've locked my father & me in our home, they've locked my sister & her kids in their home as well," he tweeted. "Chalo, your new model of democracy means that we are kept in our homes without explanation but on top of that the staff aren't being allowed in..." a second tweet said.



BIDEN ADMINISTRATION APPOINTS TWO PIO EXPERTS TO KEY POSITIONS

Two Indian-origin experts in public service have been appointed by the Biden administration to key positions at AmeriCorps, the federal agency for volunteering and service. Sonali Nijhawan has been named Director of AmeriCorps State and National, and Sri Preston Kulkarni, 42, was appointed the new Chief of External Affairs. Despite having run for Congress twice unsuccessfully from Texas, Mr Kulkarni was noticed by the leadership in Washington. His appointment, along with Ms Nijhawan and Dan Kohl's, reflects "the Biden administration's commitment to diverse leadership", a release said.



Did not forgive, will not forget: CRPF on Pulwama terror attack



Naidu hails people for turnout, claims victory in Phase-II



J&K simplifies norms for setting up industries

As parties claim victory, confusion prevails in AP

CPRADEEP KUMAR
VIJAYAWADA

Both the ruling YSRCP and the main opposition TDP claim that the majority of candidates that won the first and the second phases of gram panchayat elections are their supporters.



Leela Kanakadurga relaxes after giving birth to her baby girl late on Saturday.

The claims by both the YSRCP and the TDP have created confusion among the people as to which political party has won more seats during the two phases of polls in the state. The opposition TDP failed to show good results in the elections; the yellow party failed to build confidence among the cadres though it has been claiming that its supporters have won more than 30 percent of seats. The rationale behind this claim is that it would be useful for keeping the party of the party up in the next two phases of the polls while creating a good image among the masses.

Candidate gives birth to baby girl, wins Sarpanch seat on same day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Saturday was a day full of good news for Leela Kanakadurga, who contested for the post of sarpanch from the Korukallu gram panchayat in Kalidindi mandal of Krishna district. Not only Kanakadurga won the election, (results of the second phase of polling declaring her the winner came late in the night), she also gave birth to a girl child. Kanakadurga had earlier in the day reached the polling booth and cast her vote and soon after, developed labour pains.

'Poor' TDP leaders being blamed for party's dismal show

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
VIJAYAWADA

The debacle of TDP-supported candidates in the local body polls is attributed to financial woes of local TDP leaders, according to an internal analysis of the first and second phase panchayat poll results. While the ruling YSRCP spent Rs 15 to 25 lakh per village panchayat, TDP top

leaders washed their hands off, giving Rs 20 lakh to contestants in each Assembly constituency to meet the nomination costs, procession expenses and clear their tax dues. This was limited to some constituencies. Seniors blame the previous Naidu regime for clearing the bills of major players like Shapoorji and MEGA while withholding the TDP leaders' bills. They are surprised at TDP leadership showing an empty hand to the contestants. In constituencies, once represented by TDP ministers, and in faction-ridden constituencies, the contestants received some financial assistance, while none was provided in other constituencies.



Botsa claims Phase-II poll sweep for YSRCP supporters

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Municipal Administration Minister Botsa Satyanarayana on Sunday said the victory march of first phase Gram Panchayat polls has continued in the second phase with YSRCP backed candidates sweeping the polls by winning most of the seats. Addressing the media at the YSRCP office in Vizag on Sunday, the Minister said the party's supporters have won 2,639 of the 3,328 panchayats in second phase elections, while the TDP was at a distant second with 536 panchayats, the BJP won six, the Jana Sena 36 and 108 seats going to others.

Petrol breaks psychological Rs 100/litre barrier in Maha

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

The rate of petrol with additives has crossed the Rs 100 mark for a litre in Maharashtra's Parbhani district on Sunday morning, an office bearer of a petrol dealers' association said, even as prices crossed Rs 99/litre in Rajasthan, while diesel was sold at Rs 91 per litre after rates were increased for the sixth day in a row. After a 28 paise rise on Sunday morning, the per-litre

rate of petrol with additives for retail sale crossed Rs 100. Parbhani District Petrol Dealers' Association President Amol Bhedtsurkar told PTI, "The rates of petrol with additives in Parbhani has reached to 100.16 rupees for one litre. The cost of unleaded petrol is 97.38 here." The cost of petrol in Parbhani is one of the costliest in Maharashtra. The cost is higher due to longer distance of transportation. Fuel in Parbhani comes

from Manmad in the Nashik district, which is at a distance of 340 km. "We need Rs 3,000 extra for every tanker if prices go up by 10 paise. Hence, the investment in buying fuel has also gone up," Bhedtsurkar said. "The transportation cost for fuel stands at nearly 21 paise a litre now, he added. Petrol price was increased by 29 paise per litre and diesel by 32 paise, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.



US Senate acquits Trump of Jan 6 violence

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

The US Senate has acquitted a defendant Donald Trump in his second impeachment trial in just over a year, after the Democrats failed once again to muster enough votes to convict the former president on a charge of inciting the deadly insurrection at the Capitol on January 6. The Senate voted 57-43 on Saturday to convict Trump on a single impeachment count incitement of insurrection. But that majority of all 50 Democrats in the upper chamber of the US Congress, joined by seven Republicans, fell 10 votes short of the 67 needed for a conviction, two-thirds of the 100-member Senate.

Disengagement is surrender: Antony

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader and former defence minister A K Antony on Sunday alleged that disengagement in both the Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso Lake areas and the creation of a buffer zone was a "surrender" of India's rights. Addressing a press conference, he also said that at a time when India was facing multiple challenges at the border and was facing a two-front war-like situation, the increase in defence budget this year is meagre and insignificant and was a "betrayal" of the country. The government had on Friday emphatically stated that

India has not "conceded" any territory following the disengagement agreement with China in Pangong lake areas in eastern Ladakh. Antony said he was sad that the Narendra Modi government was not giving proper priority to national security at a time when China was getting belligerent and Pakistan continued to promote terrorism. He said disengagement was good as it reduced tension but it should not be done at the cost of national security.



Pradhan cautions Odisha over AP holding polls in 'its territory'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A day after neighbouring Andhra Pradesh conducted rural polls in some villages "under Odisha territory", Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan Sunday expressed concern over the matter and cautioned the state government that situation may

aggravate if required pre-emptive measures were not taken to resolve the inter-state dispute. Pradhan in a statement said that though the Odisha government has taken legal recourse to resolve the border discord, it should be taken to a conclusive end. "We may encounter worse situations if timely measures are not taken at proper time," he said, adding the AP holding panchayat polls in the border villages by including people of Koraput, Ganjam and Gajapati, has certainly created bitterness between the two states.

PM dedicates to nation petro-chem complex

PNS ■ KOCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated to the nation a Rs 6,000 crore petrochemical complex of oil major Bharat Petroleum here and Ro-Ro vessels of Inland Waterways at Willingdon Islands, asserting these projects would energise India's growth trajectory. Modi also inaugurated the

Cochin Port Trust's International Cruise Terminal and Cochin Shipyard's Vigyan Sagar, a campus for Marine Engineering Training Institute. He also laid the foundation stone of Cochin Port Trust's South Coal Berth and said these projects covered a wide range of sectors and will energise India's growth trajectory.



Police officers examine the mangled remains of the ill-fated minibus in Kurnool on Sunday.

14 dead as minibus collides with truck

PNS ■ KURNPOOL

Tragedy struck a group of pilgrims on their way to Ajmer dargah as 14 of them, including eight women and a child, were killed and four injured in a road mishap in Kurnool district in Andhra Pradesh early on Sunday, police said. The accident occurred when a minibus in which the victims, all relatives and hailing from Madanapalle in Chittoor district of the state, were travelling collided with a lorry at Madapuram around 4 am, Kurnool District Superintendent of Police K. Fakirappa said. The passengers were on their way to the Ajmer Sharif dargah in Rajasthan, he said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy were among those who expressed grief over the loss of lives.

The Chief Minister announced ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh each to the kin of the deceased and Rs 1 lakh to the injured. Preliminary investigation suggested the driver apparently lost control and the bus first crashed into the road median, rolled to the other side and hit the lorry, the SP said. Only four children survived the crash and all had been admitted to a hospital where the condition of one of them was stated to be critical, he said. "The accident might have been due to over speeding of the minibus or its driver might have been drowsy. Fourteen people died on the spot and another four (injured) were shifted to hospital. One of the children is said to be in a critical condition," Fakirappa added.

11% of global road accident deaths in India: WB

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With just 1 per cent of the world's vehicles, India accounts for 11 per cent of the global death in road accidents, the highest in the world, according to a report by the World Bank. The country accounts for about 4.5 lakh road crashes per annum, in which 1.5 lakh people die. "India tops the world in road crash deaths and injuries. It has 1 per cent of the world's vehicles but accounts for 11 per cent of all road crash deaths, witnessing 53 road crashes every hour; killing 1 person every 4 minutes," the report said.



In the last decade, 13 lakh people died and another 50 lakh got injured on Indian roads, it said.

India tops the world in road crash deaths and injuries. It has 1% of the world's vehicles but accounts for 11% of all road crash deaths, witnessing 53 road crashes every hour; killing 1 person every 4 minutes

"Considering the under reporting phenomenon and using the crash ratios for the

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Magha & Shukla Paksha Panchangam

Tithi: Chaturthi: 03:36 am (Next Day)

Nakshatram: Uttara Bhadrapada: 06:28 pm

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

Rahukalam: 08:12 am - 09:38 am

Yamagandam: 11:04 am - 12:30 pm

Variyam: NIL

Gulika: 01:56 pm - 03:22 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 01:17 pm - 03:01 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:07 pm - 12:53 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 34/19

Humidity: 51%

Sunrise: 06:42 am

Sunset: 06:17 pm

Current Weather Conditions
Updated February 14, 2021 5:00 PM

Monday Mirchi

Shaken govt to shake up administration in TS?

One unavoidable pitfall for administrators, regardless of their individual capabilities and accomplishments, is that some day or the other they will be sacrificed at the altar of efficiency. This is done under the mistaken impression that their political bosses are infallible. So, babus do become bakras willy-nilly when things go wrong or do not yield expected results, with courts/tribunals passing strictures against the government. Following lacunae in the implementation of several initiatives, the Telangana State government, shaken by the High Court's adverse comments, is seriously thinking of shaking up the administration. The High Court's rebukes in land registration, regularization, building permissions and the like have forced the government to step back. Some of the 'bright' ideas that babus occasionally get are at times green-lighted by the state government at jet speed; and, when others down the line do not take it as seriously as the blue-eyed babu or the enthusiastic political boss who finds the idea great and implementable; the so-called initiative may become a millstone around the government's neck. In TS too, some of the 'bright' ideas of beloved babus have caused major embarrassment to the government, denting the image of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, who, believing in the transformative power of the idea, started battling for them prematurely. For instances, issues concerning Pay Revision and the related backlash from government employees; Dharani portal and the bite-back (instead of feedback) from property owners have unnerved the government. In several key aspects, the government was found to be on the wrong track, resulting in widespread criticism from the opposition parties and also the general public. Following introspection at the top level, the wreckers-in-chief behind some of the failed initiatives were identified. The powers that be are now convinced that 'thokkalo ideas' given by a couple of officers have pushed the government into a tight spot. Basing on this, an exercise has been launched to change the composition of the 'team' by bringing in new faces. A little bird told us that 'major changes' will take place after the Nagarjuna Sagar by-poll and hinted that heads may roll at top echelons of the administration.

Buzz about return of the Mishras

Some couples in the civil services hit it off at both central and state levels. Their chemistry on- and off-site become the stuff of legends in administrative circles. IAS circles in Telangana are abuzz with the indications that Rajiv Ranjan Mishra and Vasudha Mishra, currently on central deputation, are returning to Hyderabad. The two officers are currently enjoying 'very good' positions in New Delhi. Yet, top sources hinted, an 'irresistible' offer has been made to one of them and so both are seriously considering the location switch. In fact, only a few months back Vasudha Mishra was made Secretary to the Union Public Service Commission and the government upgraded her post to the secretary cadre. Rajiv Ranjan Mishra is holding a crucial post in the Jal Shakti or Union Water Resources Ministry. Both are having wonderful time in their present assignments. Still, there is a felt need in administrative circles and concurrence among their political bosses that

the Mishras' services should be utilized for the development of Telangana. Both of them have been in New Delhi for more than seven years and have plenty of time for changing things in TS before their superannuation. Close friends of Mishras told us that, given the 'irresistible' offer made to them; they are weighing the pros and cons of relocating to Telangana once again.

Dashing Das gets well-deserved pat

Given the scale and length of adversarial relations between the SEC and the AP government, babus sandwiched between the two have had a tough time for very long. Their longing to be in the good books of the Chief Minister as well as their anxiety not to rub SEC on the wrong side have kept them edgy all these days. Those days seem to be over now. For, Chief Secretary Adityanath Das has deftly handled the situation, with visible results. Administrative circles aver that he definitely deserves a pat on his back for almost defusing the Govt vs SEC crisis. The meeting between senior colleagues and the Chief Minister that he had recently organised to boost the downbeat babus' confidence levels was the icing on the cake. The ice-breaking get-together came in for praise at all levels. The very fact that CM had lunch with the babus suggested that the jittery babus need not stomach any more insults henceforth. Babus are on cloud nine and they can't stop singing peans to CS. To cap it all, the CM too appreciated dashing Das for organising the meeting. For poor Das, the meeting was a small breather. For, ever since he took over as CS, he has been preoccupied with the polls for panchayats and got embroiled in the controversy surrounding it. Now that SEC is ready to hold polls for urban local bodies as well, Das has his plate full for the next few months.

'T 20' in AP

If all goes well, one can expect a thrilling 'T 20 match' involving Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy and his team, which got a pep talk from the boss who is now in form. Team captain Jagan recently used the metaphor of the nail-biting pace of a T 20 match to drive home his point succinctly. Senior bureaucrats who recently got from Jagan tips and parallels drawn from the cricketing field are still in awe of the captain's sagacity. During a review with secretaries of all the government departments, Jagan emphasized the importance of teamwork. He appreciated them for putting in their best, which he asserted was behind his success in the last 20 months. He compared the past 20 months with the opening overs. The team had played an excellent innings in the opening overs, he placed on record. But the team should not relax, he cautioned, pointing to middle overs, which he underlined, were as important as the opening ones. He conceded that the captain alone could not win matches and that teamwork counted. That said, he said he was fortunate to have the 'best' team. After the meeting, babus realized that the captain has tasks cut out for them. In the coming days, the Chief Minister will monitor the babus' performance against the ambitious targets he had set keeping in mind the next polls. Polls are more than three years away; yet, the captain has sounded the bugle early. The match is on!

Your's truly

'Poor' TDP leaders blamed for party's dismal showing

Continued from Page 1

As the seniors were not in a position to repay the loans, the lenders are not coming forward to give them fresh loans.

Therefore, they had to confine themselves to making statements on the media. According to sources, they had borrowed between Rs 3 crore and Rs 5 crore and the BJP government at the Centre closed all other avenues of mobilising funds.

This forced the party to ask contestants to raise funds locally, with the promise that they would be reimbursed later.

What is surprising to many in the party is the fact that the TDP is not even able to pay for

advertisements in the run-up to the polls.

Inaccessibility of the TDP leadership or putting the matter of finances on the back-burner has led the seniors to conclude that they wouldn't get any funds from the leadership.

But as a matter of prestige, they were forced to field contestants in panchayat polls. The seniors are not able to give more than Rs 2 lakh to party supported contestants per constituency.

In faction-ridden Kurnool, Anantapur and Kadapa districts, the party seniors have been providing up to Rs 20 lakh to panchayat poll contestants in a constituency.

The seniors criticise the

administration of Naidu, who was known to spend money like water in elections. He never compromised on elections for want of money, they observed.

They recall the instances of Naidu chiding the party leaders who tried to save on election expenses contributed to them by the leadership.

They also recalled how YS Rajasekhara Reddy raised an eyebrow over the TDP spending on panchayat poll when it was in opposition.

They party circles feel that fiscal management is now not in the hands of Naidu and this is why the party supreme is forced to take decisions after weighing the pros and cons.

leadership for not clearing the bills of village-level works when in power and for introducing grandiose schemes. This weakened the rural leaders, they feel.

The YSRCP has been blackmailing contestants to withdraw from the race to clear their pending bills, they said. Given the fact that the TDP held sway over national and state politics, the seniors are not ready to buy the argument that the party's coffers are empty.

They demand the leadership to clear the poll expenses dues of last Assembly elections.

Seniors point out that the TDP never faced such a miserable condition under the

As parties...

Continued from Page 1

In the first phase of elections, the TDP lagged behind the ruling YSRCP, though it claimed it has emerged as the winner in 38 per cent seats. It continued with this strategy in the second phase also claiming that it has won 39.52 per cent of the seats.

On its part, the ruling party has come up with facts and figures, claiming that a majority of seats have been won by YSRCP backed candidates.

These claims and counter-claims are now resembling a political war between the YSRCP and TDP and contributing to the confusion is the absence of party symbol.

While the YSRCP has started a website that provides details of the results to stake claim to victory (it even displays the candidate's photograph and other details), the TDP has nothing of this sort.

Botsa claims Phase-II...

Continued from Page 1

He reminded that YSRCP supporters had won 2,637 out of 3,244 panchayats in the first phase of elections in which TDP won 508 and 99 seats went to others.

To show authenticity of the claim, the party has displayed photos of first phase winners on its official website and would do the same with the second phase results thereby negating the false claims by the opposition, Botsa said.

He added that results of first and second phase of polls favoured the YSRCP as Chief

Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has fulfilled every promise and reached more than twice the people's expectations through various welfare schemes.

"In spite of TDP's political conspiracies and atrocities, the state government has supported SEC in conducting elections smoothly and peacefully," the Minister said, emphasising that the YSRCP has asked to postpone the elections earlier in the wake of pandemic and not for any other reasons.

He thanked the people for their support to YSRCP.

Candidate gives birth to...

Continued from Page 1

The election staff and the police personnel at the polling booth rushed her to the Kaikaluru Government Hospital, where she gave birth to a healthy baby girl. The doctors declared both mother and daughter safe. Her family members rushed to the hospital and congratulated her.

Later in the night, Kanakadurga was declared to have defeated her nearest candidate by a margin of 689 votes.

Petrol breaks...

Continued from Page 1

This pushed retail rates, which differ from state to state depending on incidence of local sales tax or VAT and freight charges, to their highest level.

In the national capital, petrol climbed to Rs 88.73 a litre and diesel soared to Rs 79.06, the notification showed.

Rajasthan, which levies the highest VAT on fuel in the country, had the highest petrol and diesel prices.

In Sriranganganagar town of the state, petrol soared to Rs 99.29 and diesel jumped to Rs 91.17

per litre. The Rajasthan government had late last month cut VAT on petrol and diesel by 2 per cent. Despite this, the state has the highest VAT at 36 per cent plus Rs 1,500 per kilolitre road cess on petrol. On diesel, the state levies 26 per cent and Rs 1,750 per kl road cess. Branded or premium petrol at Sriranganganagar was priced at Rs 102.07 a litre and similar grade diesel at Rs 94.83.

The main difference between regular and premium fuel grades is the octane number. Regular fuel has a lower octane number -- 87, while premium fuel generally gets a 91 octane rating or higher.

Disengagement is surrender: Antony

Continued from Page 1

"Both disengagements in Galwan and Pangong Tso are a surrender," he alleged, adding that it amounted to surrendering of areas traditionally controlled by India.

"We are surrendering our rights," he alleged, noting that Galwan Valley as Indian territory was never a disputed land even in 1962.

"Disengagement and buffer zone means surrender of our land at the moment," he

alleged, while warning that the government is not understanding the importance of this disengagement and creation of the buffer zone.

He warned that China can play mischief anytime by helping Pakistan in Siachen.

Govt. readies blueprint for gold monetization scheme

With the continued improvement in the geo-political situation all over the world, the precious metals looked up during the week ended Saturday. However, buoyancy also returned to other segments of market. Consequently, New York gold appreciated and closed at US \$ 1824.30 (per ounce), while silver followed the suit and closed at \$ 27.35 (per ounce). Platinum and palladium closed at \$ 1,246 (per ounce) and \$ 2,318 (per ounce) respectively. Other economic parameters remained moderate. Brent closed at US \$ 62.43 (per barrel) and Crude MCX oil was quoted at Rs.4,331 (per barrel). While Gold MCX stood at Rs.47,345 (per 10 gms), MCX

Silver closed at Rs.69,184 (per kg), Copper MCX closed at Rs. 640.35 (per kg). Sensex and Nifty 50 closed at 51,544.30 and 15,163.30 points. Leading foreign currencies' exchange rates were, US \$: Rs.72.59, British Pound: Rs.100.48, Euro: Rs.87.98, Singapore \$: Rs.54.79, Swiss Franc: Rs.81.43, Australian \$: Rs.56.32, Saudi Riyal: Rs.19.35, New Zealand Dollar: Rs.52.54, Kuwaiti Dinar: Rs.239.99, Omani Rial: Rs.188.56, UAE Dirham: Rs.19.76, Japanese Yen: Rs.0.69 and Hong Kong Dollar: Rs.9.36.

According to reliable sources, the government has prepared a blue print to provide boost to the gold monetization scheme. Under the new plan banks including the public sector banks will be required to encourage the investors to avail this scheme. Jewelers will be associated to promote the new plan wherein an investment of as little as 10 gms of gold also will be accepted. According to an estimate India has over 13,000 tons of gold held by private entities, including trusts. In local markets, standard gold (24 carats) appreciated by Rs.240 and closed at Rs.48,300 (per 10 gms). Ornamental gold

too, followed the suit and was quoted in the range of Rs.44,160 - Rs 44,260 on the closing day. Silver (0.999) declined by Rs.100 and closed at Rs.73,300 (per kg).

Commodities: The sentiment in principal wholesale commodity markets in twin cities remained moderate despite the ongoing farmers' protests in the North. Rythu Bazaars and the various commodity markets located in Begum Bazaar, Kishangunj, Mukthiyargunj, Risala Abdullah, Mir Alam Mandi, Dilukhnagar, Kukatpally, Bowenpally, General Bazaar recorded brisk trading. During the week, common pulses such as tur dal, masoor

dal, moong dal and urad dal and commodities like chillies and garlic remained unchanged at their respective last week's closing levels, while staple food-grains and common edible oils recorded a marginal increase. Common vegetables such as cabbage, cauliflower, ribbed guard, snake guard, lady fingers, cucumber, potatoes, onions, tomatoes and French beans, along with other leafy vegetables ruled at the higher levels. The NECC wholesale egg-price in Hyderabad appreciated by Rs.41 and closed at Rs.416 (per 100). The highest price of Rs.483 was recorded at Kolkata, while Ludhiana recorded the lowest of Rs.405.

14 dead as minibus collides with truck

Continued from Page 1

Kurnool Collector G Veerapandian said the administration would also examine if there was any defect in the vehicle.

A tweet posted on PMO India handle said: "The road accident in Andhra Pradesh's Kurnool district is saddening. In this hour of

sadness, my thoughts are with those who lost their loved ones. I hope that the injured recover at the earliest. PM."

Expressing sorrow over the loss of lives, the Chief Minister instructed the officials to provide necessary medical help to the injured as he wished them a speedy recovery. He conveyed his condolences

to the bereaved families, an official release said.

Veldurthi police station sub-inspector Peddaiiah Naidu said they received information about the accident from a local person and the personnel immediately rushed to the spot.

"Only four children survived and all of them are being treated in hospital," he said.

Tug of war between BCI and Universities will lead us nowhere

HC UPADHYAY
HYDERABAD

The ongoing tussle between the Bar Council of India (BCI) and the consortium of law universities over regulation of LL.M course is, to say the least, unwarranted. The statutory regulatory body BCI has been empowered by the Advocates Act, 1961, not only to regulate the legal profession, but also to see that the law education in the country reaches new heights. On the other hand, the consortium comprising 22 law schools and universities also have been concerned with the promotion and excellence of legal education in the country.

It is unfortunate that august bodies, entrusted with the common task of achieving higher standards of legal education have locked horns over LL.M course. In fact, the dispute if any, stemmed from the ego of the respecting law organisations rather than from any substantial or serious matter of dispute. The real

issue seems to be establishing the supremacy and this will decide that in future who will call the shots.

Going by the statute, the Advocates Act 1961, which gives teeth to the BCI is abundantly clear that section 7(h) gives an apprehend to the BCI. Section 7(h) reads as follows. "To promote legal education and to lay down standards of such education in consultation with the universities in India imparting such education and the State Bar Councils". Thus, the BCI is fully empowered to embark upon a course for achieving excellence in higher education, particularly the legal education. The position of the universities is of consultative nature. Therefore, there is no question of monopolising higher education imparted by the universities.

This legal position has been further clarified by the fact that the BCI has jurisdiction

over the universities to 'inspect the colleges imparting legal education and recognise' the degrees awarded by them. This position further reinforces the mandate given to the BCI for recognising foreign qualifications and organising events in the field of law.

Therefore in the interest of legal profession and future of judiciary it is desirable that both the statutory bodies namely BCI and the universities should cooperate with each other and supplement each other's efforts rather than indulging in unnecessary acrimony.

Dismissing the review petition against the Shaheen Bagh judgment, the Supreme Court has stated that right to protest is not absolute and unlimited and there is no right to protest anytime and everywhere.

A three judge bench com-

prising Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaur, Justice Niruddha Bose and Justice Krishna Murari held, "We have considered the earlier judicial pronouncement and recorded our opinion that the constitutional scheme come with a right to protest and express dissent, but with an obligation to have certain duties...there may be some spontaneous protests but in case of long dissent or protest, there cannot be continued occupation of public place affecting rights of others."

Hike in alimony if husband's income increases. In a judgment delivered on February 9, the Punjab and Haryana High Court hailed that the wife is entitled to an increase in alimony if the husband's salary increases even after the divorce.

Dismissing a petition filed by a husband, Varun Jagota, Justice H.S.Madan upheld the order of the family court increasing wife's interim allowance from Rs.20,000 to Rs.28,000 consequent upon an increase in the salary of husband from Rs.95,000 to

Rs.1,14,000.

Action against AP MP demanded

The Rajya Sabha member Kanakamedala Ravindra Kumar in a letter addressed to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha has expressed anguish over the allegations made by V.Vijaya Sai Reddy, another MP against the Chairman of the House on February 8;

"This came as a shocker to all those who respect our parliamentary democracy and hold the presiding officers in the higher esteem," said Mr.Kumar. In his five page letter, Mr.Kumar came down heavily on the arm-twisting tactics allegedly adopted by the present government in Andhra Pradesh. Stating that the Judges of the High Court of AP were being subjected to insult and abuse as several unsustainable orders of the state government have been overturned by the Court, the Member of Parliament added that the state government had brazenly removed the State Election Commissioner, a constitutional functionary after he

called off the elections to local bodies. It was only after the intervention of the High Court that the SEC was reinstated.

Mr.Kumar vehemently demanded immediate action for the misconduct against and termination of membership of V.Vijaya Sai Reddy in the House on February 8, resulting in the denigration of the august office of the Chairman.

MP High court rejects stay plea against 'Tandav'

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on February 8 disposed off a plea seeking direction to stop streaming of the web series, entitled "Tandav" from the Amazon's OTT platform, Prime Video, hearing the plea of one Aditya Tiwari, by the Division Bench comprising Chief Justice Mohammad Rafiq.

SC on injunction

In a significant affirmation of Madras High Court judgement, the Supreme Court recently held that even a trespasser, who is in established possession of the property could obtain injunction.

PM dedicates to nation...

Continued from Page 1

Referring to the Propylene Derivative Petrochemical Project (PDDP) located close to its Kochi Refinery that will produce Acrylic Acid, Oxo-Alcohol and Acrylates, which are predominantly imported, at present, he said it would save considerable foreign exchange every year.

Besides, a wide range of industries would gain, and employment opportunities will be generated, he noted.

According to BPCL, these products have applications in paints and coatings, solvents, adhesives, water treatment chemicals, construction industry and super absorbent polymer among others.

Speaking on the two new Roll-on/Roll-off vessels, deployed between Bolgatty and Willingdon Island on National Waterway-3, Modi said a distance of almost 30 km on road would become 3.5 km through waterways, leading to less congestion and more convenience, commerce and capacity-building. Asserting that the

Centre was undertaking many efforts to improve tourism related infrastructure in Kerala, Modi said the inauguration of Sagarika, the International Cruise Terminal in Kochi is one example of this.

Sagarika Cruise Terminal will cater to over one lakh cruise guests, he said.

The Prime Minister noted the rise in local tourism due to pandemic related restrictions on international travel.

"This is a great opportunity for added livelihood to those in the local tourism industry and deepening of connection between our culture and our youth", he said.

Modi exhorted start-ups to think about innovative tourism related products. Noting that the tourism sector in India has been growing well in the last five years, the Prime Minister said India has risen from 65th to 34th position in the World Tourism Index ranking.

He said capacity building and future ready infrastructure are two important factors for national development.

Naidu hails people for turnout, claims victory in Phase-II

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday hailed the recorded voting percentage of 81.67 in the phase-II of gram panchayat polls as against 81.66 percent in the first phase as a victory for democracy in villages of Andhra Pradesh.

Naidu asserted that the rural people have fought back against the flagrant poll code violations by the ruling YSRCP and thereby have shown their unflinching trust in the right to self-rule for the local bodies. "The voters should display the same enthusiasm in the remaining phases in order to save their villages from slipping into the hands of the ruling party goondas and criminals," the former chief minister said.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP chief said that in the just-concluded counting of voters for phase-II, his party has won 1,033 of the 2,778 panchayats, which came to 37.67 percent. Others have won 65 panchayats, which came to 2.37 percent. Overall, the TDP supported candidates won 1,098 seats



"YSRCP leaders, in collusion with counting officials and the police, were committing murder of democracy at midnight by adopting a new modus operandi. They deliberately delayed counting of sarpanch votes at Polukonda till midnight. Then, they sent out the TDP candidate's agent by force and manipulated the result."

that came to 39.52 percent, Naidu said. The TDP would have shown far better performance if the YSRCP and the official machinery did not commit poll irregularities, he said.

The TDP chief said that the YSRCP leaders, in collusion with counting officials and the police, were committing murder of democracy at midnight by adopting a new modus operandi. "They deliberately delayed counting of

sarpanch votes at Polukonda till midnight. Then, they sent out the TDP candidate's agent by force and manipulated the result. Though the TDP won the seat, the counting officials declared it as having been won by the YSRCP. The erring officials would be dragged to court," he said.

Naidu said that the SEC has ordered setting up of CCTV cameras or videography at all the counting centres. "But, the district Collectors, Joint

Collectors and Returning Officers were not strictly following the SEC orders," the TDP chief said, slamming the poll panel for not using its powers to ensure a free and fair poll as per the orders of the High Court.

The court has clearly said that the SEC has got extensive powers to ensure a transparent poll but the Election Commission was still keeping silent on many violations, he said.

Sajjala credits Jagan for YSRCP streak

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Government Advisor and YSRCP general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Sunday said that results of the second phase of gram panchayat are on expected lines since they maintained the streak of 80 percent of sarpanch seats going to YSRCP supporters like in the first phase.

This, he said, reflects the overwhelming response to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's governance. Sajjala added that the trend will continue the next two phases while coming down heavily on TDP for its false claims and fudging of figures only to prove its existence and relevance.

Speaking to the media here, Sajjala said that the governance of Jaganmohan Reddy which is carried out in saturation mode has sunk in deep and people have been acknowledging it, going by the mandate in gram panchayat polls. "This is while the TDP has been resorting to all its old tricks with the support of its friendly media to put up a brave face, distorting the facts and manipulating the results to show that it is still relevant in the polity, though the reality is otherwise," he said.

Sajjala said: "We have proven the authenticity of first phase figures by posting the photos of the victorious candidates who

No differences in YSR family, reiterates Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Government Advisor Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Sunday reiterated that there are no personal differences between Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and his sister YS Sharmila Reddy, who has decided to take a plunge into active politics in Telangana. Sajjala, a top aide of Jaganmohan Reddy and also ruling YSRCP's General Secretary told reporters

that he planned to take legal recourse against a media house which has been peddling false news about the deceased YS Rajasekhara Reddy's family. Sajjala had on February 9, the day when Sharmila made her intentions clear in Hyderabad, told the media that there were no personal differences between the brother-sister and it was only a difference of opinion on launching a political party in Telangana. He had added that

YSRCP has nothing to do with Sharmila's political ambitions and in fact Jagan had persuaded her not to start any new political entity in Telangana which may jeopardise the relations between the two states and also the interests of people in Andhra Pradesh. Sajjala found fault with a story published in a section of media stating that it was objectionable and also hurt the sentiments of fans and followers of YS Rajasekhara Reddy.



are our party supporters. Yet, the TDP's false claims continue even in the second phase that it has won 39 per cent seats with no substantial evidence or proof." "We will be uplinking the

names and photos of our supporters who won in the second phase in a couple of days. TDP has brought out a fake website with common key words and has been posting its own version of the results with no

authentication. We have complained about the issue and action will be taken," he said.

TDP is only showing its bravado in tandem with its friendly media that has been propagating false stories with no basis and N Chandrababu Naidu has been resorting to his cheap tricks of spreading lies like the YSRCP supporter in Civil Supplies Minister Kodali Nani's home town has lost.

"In reality the Minister hails from Gudivada and he had to give clarification that the village mentioned by TDP is not his native place. In the constituencies of Paritala Sunita and many others, our supporters have won with good margins but we do not want to go into the micro details," he said.

Lokesh doubts CM's sincerity on privatisation of steel plant

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MLC Nara Lokesh on Sunday slammed YSRCP MPs and Ministers, accusing them of not making genuine efforts to stop privatisation of the Visakha Steel Plant.

Lokesh doubted the sincerity of YS Jaganmohan Reddy and wondered whether the Chief Minister really sent a letter to the Prime Minister seeking withdrawal of the privatisation plan as there has been no response from the Centre till now.

Lokesh visited Visakhapatnam and expressed solidarity to TDP former MLA Pala Srinivasa Rao who has begun a fast unto death at Gajuwaka Junction.

Later, addressing the media, Lokesh said that it was



only with the support of the Jaganmohan Reddy government that the Centre was going ahead with the privatisation of VSP. "Fifteen years ago, the zinc factory was also privatised and then it was closed in the port city limits. There were doubts that the Visakha Steel Factory

would also meet with the same fate. Over 30,000 employees would suffer greatly if the steel plant was allowed to be neglected now," the MLC said.

Stating that there was ample scope for the steel plant recovery, Lokesh said that the VSP was in fact making profits in the past five years. "There were some investments made in the factory modernisation because of which some losses were reflected on the balance sheet," he said.

"In the past, former CM Chandrababu Naidu and former MP K Yerranna had stopped VSP privatisation plans. Now Jagan and his 28 MPs should not do injustice to the State with their secret deals on the VSP privatisation," Lokesh demanded.

HC to hear Nani's House Motion petition today

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Hearing of Minister Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao's (Nani) House Motion petition against the orders or the State Election Commission to register a case against him has been adjourned to Monday.

On Saturday, the Minister had filed the House Motion petition, with his lawyer arguing that the poll panel had imposed restrictions on him without proper reason.

Counsel for the SEC informed the court that an order may be passed after watching video footage of the Minister's press conference.

The court questioned whether video tapes were attached to the petition, to which counsel replied that they were not. The court adjourned the hearing till 2:15 pm on Monday on the ground that there were no tapes. The



High Court directed both the lawyers to submit the tapes.

Earlier, the State Election Commission had taken the alleged derogatory remarks against State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, and sent the Minister a show-cause notice. Not satisfied with the Minister's response, the poll panel ordered a gag on him. Not satisfied with the reply by the minister on the derogatory remarks, the SEC ordered the SP, Krishna (Rural) to register cases against the Minister.

Results reflect efficacy of YSRCP rule: Mekapati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Industries Minister Mekapati Gautham Reddy on Sunday said that the results from the first and second phase of gram panchayat polls is proof of the efficacy of the YSRCP's two-year rule and also a guide for the remaining three years of this term.

It was a celebration time for Gautham Reddy who arrived in Nellore on Sunday. The Minister invited all the YSRCP backed sarpanch candidates who won the panchayat election and congratulated them on their victory and offered the party scarf on the occasion.

From 11 am onwards, the Minister met all the 112 sarpanch candidates who won the polls. He was joined at the celebrations by senior leader Mekapati Rajamohan Reddy.



The Minister described the performance in the gram panchayat elections as a collective victory and expressed satisfaction over the results.

The party office was flooded with leaders and activists to celebrate the victory. Gautham Reddy said that the victory reflects the good governance of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

The Minister described the performance in the gram panchayat elections as a collective victory and expressed satisfaction over the results. In a few panchayats like Marripada, Anantagaram and Attmakuru Rural mandals in the constituency it was a landslide victory for the YSRCP supported candidates. The YSRCP backed candidates won with a huge majority in the Minister's hometown and also a few key villages where the opposition party has a stronghold.

Power interruptions drop significantly

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The number of interruptions in the 24x7 power supply in the state have dropped significantly in the 2020-21 fiscal when compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year 2019-20.

According to the data accessed from the state power utilities, the number of interruptions in 24x7 power supply reduced by 1.37 lakh in 2020-21. The interruptions in 2019-20 were around 3.91 lakh which decreased to 2.54 lakh in 2020-21 in the purview of APSPDCL, APCPDCL and APEPDCL.

The drop in the interruptions has been attributed to the continuous measures taken by power utilities as per directions of the state government which had accorded highest priority to quality 24x7 power supply.

As part of this, the utilities have laid special focus on strengthening of power infrastructure to avoid interruptions in supply. Up-gradation of electricity substations, strengthening of distribution networks, especially in rural areas and providing additional infrastructure for agriculture supply during day time are some of the measures taken by the government to strengthen 24x7 power supply.

Similarly, AP Transco developed and deployed the country's first day-ahead Electricity Demand Forecasting model that would help to take the right decisions on electricity demand and will immensely help to provide 24x7 power supply.

The objective of the government is to supply high quality power without interruptions to every household in the state. Consumer satisfaction is the ultimate for the government.

2 held, gutkha worth Rs 13 lakh seized

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Special Enforcement Bureau sleuths on Sunday arrested two persons at Naidupet and seized gutkha packets worth Rs 13 lakh.

The SEB and the police personnel were conducting checks on the NH-16 at Rajupalem village of Ozili mandal and while checking a mini truck they found the banned gutkha packets packed in gunny bags.

Additional SP K Sriakashmi said that while conducting vehicle checks, they detected a mini truck carrying banned gutkha packets and chewing tobacco products.

The two accused, namely Sk

Ameer Firoz (driver) and Syed Ashfaq Ali, both from Telangana State were taken into custody. The banned gutkha sachets, packed in 50 gunny bags were seized worth Rs 13 lakh as per MRP. The market value of the seized material is approximately Rs 25 lakh.

A mini lorry bearing number TS 15 UE 0647 was seized, said the Additional SP.

She further said that the material was loaded at Tumkur industrial area, Tumkur district, Karnataka and was being transported to Tara Tarani Agencies, Kakinada, East Godavari district AP. A case was registered and an investigation has been started.



Sleuths of the Special Enforcement Bureau pose with the arrested accused and seized gutkha packets worth Rs 13 lakh at Naidupet on Sunday.

Asad remarks on Hyd as UT stir a hornet's nest

- TS BJP leaders irked; Centre has no such idea, says Kishan Reddy
- Congress says it will fight any such move

K VENKATESHWARLU ■ HYDERABAD

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen chief Asaduddin Owaisi's tendentious remarks in the Lok Sabha on Friday that the BJP-led NDA government would convert Hyderabad, Chennai, Bengaluru and Lucknow cities into Union Territories created a flutter among political circles, apart from stoking fears among some sections of people.

Asad's comments irked Telangana BJP leaders in particular. Member of Parliament from Secunderabad and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy condemned the comments of Asaduddin and made it clear the Centre had no such plans. Both MIM and TRS leaders had the habit of spreading lies and distorting facts, he said and immediately left the House after con-



Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy addresses a Graduate's Constituency MLC Election Preparatory Meeting in which Khairatabad Assembly booth in-charges and karyakartas participated.

cluding his speech. BJP legislator from Goshamahala Raja Singh vented his ire at Asaduddin for his "baseless allegations against the Central government". Asad was making provocative statements, instead of speaking on development, he decried. He asserted that the Centre had no plans for

making Hyderabad a Union Territory. He reasoned that Asaduddin was making such controversial statements to benefit TRS in upcoming MLC Graduates constituency elections. Senior Congress leader V Hanumantha Rao declared that his party would fight against the BJP should it try to make

Hyderabad a UT. It may be recalled that Asaduddin Owaisi had submitted, before bifurcation, a memorandum to the Sri Krishna Committee suggesting that Hyderabad could be made a Union Territory should TS get statehood. Surprisingly, he seems to be opposing the idea of making Hyderabad a Union Territory now.

According to political analysts, there is more to it than meets the eye in the MIM MP's statement. In fact, his statement has become a hot topic of discussions among the general public. They feel that Hyderabad, with its heritage monuments galore and Ganga-Jamuni tetheeb, has always been in the spotlight for the right reasons. It was only during the peak of the Telangana movement that people from Andhra Pradesh wanted the Centre to make Hyderabad a Union Territory.

DPIIT WORKSHOP

Centre keen on amending archaic laws of 7 depts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In an attempt to do away with the existing archaic laws to meet the present day requirements, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has directed the State Governments to review the various laws pertaining to seven departments - labour, legal metrology, factories, boilers, electricity, municipality and commercial taxes and submit a report.

The Central Government officials have directed the state officials to conduct the by March 31 and upload the concerned reports on DPIIT website.

As the Prime Minister Narendra Modi is keen on making changes to the existing laws, DPIIT has asked the states to conduct a comprehensive study of the existing laws.

Taking cue from the Centre, Chief Minister K Chandrsekhar Rao has instructed the officials to study the laws of all departments involving civic services and not to confine the study to just seven departments.

As per the instructions of KCR, officials of 25 departments of the state government, participated in the workshop organised by the DPIIT on Friday and Saturday in Hyderabad to chalk out the modalities for simplifying and amending the existing laws.

The officials of industries department said that the workshop shed light on removing the red-tapism in delivering services to the customers, besides identifying the flaws in the laws.

CITY LIGHTS

Brightcom Group's third quarter net profit drops



Hyderabad-based digital marketing company Brightcom Group reported a net profit of Rs 138.60 crore for Q3 FY 2020-21, a decrease of 3.64 per cent year-on-year. The company's revenue for the third quarter of FY 2020-21 amounted to Rs 878.55 crore, an increase of 2.21 per cent per year. Revenue from digital marketing segment for third quarter of FY 2020-21 was Rs 796.13 crore, an increase of 6.24 per cent while the revenue from software development segment for the same quarter was Rs 82.42 crore. The company's EBITDA for third quarter of FY 2020-21 stood at Rs 250.78 crore, an increase of 4.24 per cent on annual basis. The company said that it has set up a new European office in Berlin during the quarter.

Irdai asks insurers to issue Digilocker to policyholders



The insurance sector regulator, Irdai, has asked the insurers to issue digital policies to their policyholders and also tell them how to use these documents. The regulator has reasoned that the step will not only bring down the cost but also help speed up claim settlement process. In its circular issued to all insurers excluding GIC Re, Lloyd's (India) and FRBs (foreign re-insurance branches), Irdai said that Digilocker will drive reduction in costs, elimination of customer complaints relating to non-delivery of policy copy, improved turnaround time of insurance services, faster claims processing and settlement, reduction in disputes, reduction in fraud and improvement in customer contactability.

AP reports 55 fresh Covid cases

VIJAYAWADA : Andhra Pradesh reported fresh 55 Covid-19 cases, taking the tally to over 8.88 lakh, the government said on Sunday. No death was reported and the toll remained at 7162. The state also reported 117 more recoveries in 24 hours ending 9 am on Sunday, a health department bulletin said. With 28,788 clinical examinations, the total number of tests conducted so far in the state stood at over 1.35 crore. The total confirmed positive Covid-19 cases were 8,88,869 while the recoveries stood at 8,80,972, it said. The active cases stood at 735. Visakhapatnam district and West Godavari accounted for the most number of cases with nine each.

CAPSULE

Challa pays tributes to Communist leader

WARANGAL RURAL: Routhu Manohar (90), former secretary of the CPM Parakala division died at his residence in Parakala on Saturday night. He was born on June 5, 1930 at Issipeta village in the Mugullapelli zone. He served as the CPM taluka secretary, CPM taluka committee member for five years and Mugullapelli zonal secretary for two terms, led land struggles in several villages in the zone, actively participated in the peasant labour movement and worked to increase the wages of agricultural labourers in 1996. He is survived by three sons and a daughter. TRS MLA Challa Dharma Reddy, Library chairman Bochu Vinay, CPM leaders Rangaya, CPI leaders Nedururi Rajamouli, TRSKV district leaders Nakka Chiranjeevi and others paid tributes to the departed leader.

13 injured as bus overturns

KAMAREDDY: In all, 13 people were injured, four of them seriously when Telangana State Road Transport Corporation (TSRTC) bus in which they were travelling lost control and overturned at Tekrial in the district on Sunday, said police. The TSRTC bus with 36 passengers was proceeding to Hyderabad from Nanded, Maharashtra when the accident occurred. The injured were shifted to the Government Hospital here for treatment. Four people who injured seriously were shifted to Hyderabad for better treatment. A case has been registered and an investigation is underway, police added.

‘Cong leaders embark on padayatras to grab power’



The people of Telangana would not believe the national party leaders, who subvert the interests of the rulers, said Minister for Finance T Harish Rao

He asked the party leaders to compete with one another in enrolling members. He asked them to ensure that people from all sections of society are registered as members of the party

PNS ■ MEDAK

Minister for Finance T Harish Rao has exhorted the party leaders to compete with one another to enrol new members as the TRS upon voted to power is competing with other States to develop the State. He was addressing an extended meeting of the TRS activists at Venkateswara Gardens here on party membership drive on Sunday. Undivided Medak district in-charge and MLC and Chief Whip Venkateswarlu presided over the meeting.

He handed over the party active membership to MLAs Padma Devender Reddy, Madan Reddy, MLC Seri Subhash Reddy, IFFCO director Devender Reddy and Municipal chairman Chandrapal Yadav. Addressing the gathering on the occasion, he asked the party leaders to compete with one another in enrolling members. He asked them to ensure that people from all sections of society are registered as members of the party. TRS activists, who agitated for Telangana, would salute the people. The people of Telangana

would not believe the national party leaders, who subvert the interests of the rulers, he said.

On the padayatra being undertaken by Congress leaders, he said that the objective of the yatra was to grab power, but not to protect the interests of the farmers. The party leaders, who heckled the farmers suicides as the ones done with an eye on compensation, are now undertaking padayatra for farmers, he commented. He accused the Congress of



Minister for Finance T Harish Rao hands over membership form to MLA Padma Devender Reddy in Medak on Sunday

shedding crocodile tears on woes of farmers. He pointed out how the TRS government has been providing 24x7 quality power to the agriculture sector.

He accused the Congress and BJP as the parties who subvert the interests of the Delhi leadership.

On the occasion of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's birthday on February 17, he exhorted the party workers to plant saplings as a mark of birthday gift.

Earlier, MLAs Padma Devender Reddy and Madan Reddy spoke. They exuded confidence of surpassing the membership in undivided Medak district enrolling more members this time compared to those enrolled in the last drive.

Medak MP Kotta Prabhakar Reddy, ZP chairperson Hemalata, vice-chairman Lavanya Reddy, Municipal chairman Chandrapal and others were present on the occasion.

Local bodies constituencies MLCs to meet CM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The local body MLCs have met at Nizamabad MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha's residence here on Sunday. They have decided to meet Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and Minister for Panchayat Raj Errabelli Dayakar Rao to submit a memorandum after one, or two meetings to request the latter to allocate funds to the ZPTCs and MPTCs in the coming budget. The local body MLCs—Patnam Mahender Reddy, Bhanu Prasad,

Naradasu Laxman Rao, Damodar Reddy, Pochampally Srinivas Reddy, Sathesh Kumar, Thera Chinnappa Reddy, Kasireddy Narayana Reddy, Shambipur Raju, Balasani Laxmi Narayana—attended the meeting. It is learnt that the MLCs have discussed the problems of the ZPTCs and MPTCs and also solutions. The ZPTCs appealed to the government to allocate a room in the mandal offices. The MLCs also discussed the construction of mandal offices and Zilla

Parishad offices in the newly created mandals across the State. According to sources, the MLCs would invite Zilla Parishad chairpersons to participate in the next meeting to know their problems further. After the final meeting, the MLCs would meet the Chief Minister and Panchayat Raj Minister to submit a memorandum. It may be recalled that the Chief Minister had a meeting with the ZP chairpersons after the TRS State executive committee meeting held on February 7.

TRS deceived all sections, alleges Uttam Kumar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC chief N Uttam Kumar Reddy alleged that the TRS government has deceived all sections in the State. The BJP was indulging in politics in the name of religion, but not caring for the unemployed youth. He alleged that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and Prime Minister Narendra Modi the deceived unemployed youth as the former had assured one lakh jobs while the latter two crore jobs.

Both the State and Central governments have failed in providing jobs to the youth. He alleged that the BJP, which is stating that it will construct Ram temple at Ayodhya, is not doing anything for the development of the Bhadrachalam temple.

While participating in the Graduate MLC elections



preparatory meeting held at Gandhi Bhavan on Sunday, Uttam alleged that the State government in the PRC report stated to reduce the house rent allowance where house rents are increasing across the State.

Advising the Congress social media activists to take up an extensive campaign strategically, Uttam said that the youth will get jobs only if they defeat the TRS and the BJP candi-

dates in Graduate MLC elections.

He said that the party has given a ticket to Ramulu Naik is based on social justice. He asked the party leaders to work actively in the two constituencies. The TRS government deceived the unemployed assuring that it will give an unemployed allowance. The BJP has never spoken for Telangana and not fulfilled the promise of establishing the Bayyaram Steel Plant, Kazipet Coach Factory and Tribal University.

He alleged that TRS MLC candidate Palla Rajeshwar Reddy is trying to buy the votes. Congress MLC candidates Ramulu Naik and G Chinnna Reddy, important leaders from two Graduate MLC constituencies, DCC presidents and others participated in the meeting.



CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka pays a visit to a farm in Kamalapur village in Nizamabad district on Sunday as part of his face-to-face with farmers

Injustice meted out to Dalits: Bhatti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka alleged that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has brought Zamindar's rule in the State in the name of 'Bangaru Telangana'.

Unfortunately, vultures are grabbing the lands of Dalits in the State, he lamented.

It is painful that Dalits are subjected to fears, insults and murders in separate Telangana state, he alleged. Addressing the gathering at Kamalapur in Nizamabad dis-

trict on Sunday as part of his face-to-face with farmers, Bhatti alleged that once again Doras have been suppressing the democracy in the State. Instead of giving three-acre to Dalits, the TRS leaders are grabbing the lands of Dalits, he alleged.

Kishan Reddy exudes confidence of BJP winning Graduate MLC polls

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy has exuded confidence that the BJP will win two Graduate MLCs. The government has announced filling up of vacancies keeping graduate MLC elections in view, he alleged questioning the Chief Minister

to tell as to why the latter had failed to fill the vacant teacher posts in the last seven years.

While participating in the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar Graduate MLC elections preparatory meeting held at Khairathabad constituency on Sunday, along with party MLC N Ramchander Rao, Kishan

Reddy said that the TRS has won the Mayor post with the support of MIM.

Later participating in former Union Minister late Sushma Swaraj birth anniversary celebrations at State BJP office, Kishan Reddy said that Sushma Swaraj had strived for the formation of separate Telangana.



Renowned writer Vasala Narsaiah passes away

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Renowned writer and Kendra Sahitya Akademi awardee Vasala Narsaiah passed away here on Sunday. He was 80. He breathed his last in the early hours of Sunday due to prolonged illness. Born on January 26, 1942 at Chavulamaddi village in erstwhile Karimnagar district, Narsaiah won the prestigious Bal Sahitya Puraskar in 2017. The Kendra Sahitya Akademi announced the award recognising his contribution to children's literature in Telugu. Narsaiah won several awards, including the State Bala Sahitya Puraskar in 2009, constituted by Potti Sri Ramulu Telugu University. He was drawn to literature at a younger age and started his literary work at the age of 12. Besides continuing his literary journey, Narsaiah also felicitated children's authors through 'Vasala Narsaiah Bala Sahiti Puraskar' since 2009, in a bid to encourage more writers to take up children's literature. He retired as postal superintendent in 2002.



Minister for Welfare Koppula Eswar addressing the 11th membership drive in Peddapalli in on Sunday

Take part in membership drive, Koppula tells workers

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

Minister for Welfare Koppula Eswar has said that TRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao took the membership drive programme so that the party leaders at various levels approach the people and take part in the activity vigorously.

He was the chief guest at the party 11th membership drive here on Sunday on the occasion of the TRS 20th anniversary. MLC Baswaraj Saraiah, membership drive in-charge, was also present on the occasion.

Koppula Eswar said that the party activists are the strength of the TRS and the

Koppula Eswar said that the party activists are the strength of the TRS and the onus of protecting the party rested entirely on the shoulders of the activists

drive, a party programme launched after 11 months, with more enthusiasm.

He said that the party would support the committed party workers. During the past six years, unprecedented development and welfare schemes were implemented in Telangana, he said. The State is marching ahead in all sectors of activity under the leadership of KCR. He warned the Opposition parties to consider the goodness of the TRS leaders as a sign of weakness.

He appealed to all party leaders and activists to remain united under the umbrella of the TRS. He told the gathering that all committees would be constituted by March.

Revanth demands enumeration of pensioners

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC working president and Malkajigiri MP A Revanth Reddy has shot another letter to Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao urging him to conduct enumeration to identify the eligible for the pensions as lakhs of persons were not getting pensions for the past two years though the government has decreased the age limit from 60 years to 57 years. He alleged that the Chief Minister assured in this regard in 2018 Assembly elections, but in vain.

Revanth Reddy, who is on Rajeev Raitu Bharosa Yatra in Mahabubnagar district, alleged that elderly persons and lonely women are not getting pensions though they are eligible. On the other hand, the government is granting old-age pension only to one member of a family though two are eligible. The government is not extending the pension to the eligible second one even after the death of the pensioner.

He demanded that the Chief Minister initiate steps and ensure the eligible get pension. He urged the government to grant a pension to two persons in a family if they are eligible.

MAYOR GREETSS GOVERNOR



Mayor Gadwal Vijayalakshmi giving a bouquet to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan in Hyderabad on Sunday

Elaborate arrangements for Edupayala Jatara

PNS ■ MEDAK

Minister for T Harish Rao on Sunday directed the authorities of Sri Vana Durga Bhavani temple at Edupayala to install 50 CCTV cameras for increased surveillance during the annual Jatara, which is slated from March 9.

The Minister, who held a review meeting with officials and elected representatives at the temple, said devotees were expected from Nagasanpally and Kulcharam this year, and these areas, too, needed to be put under surveillance. He gave a fiat to the officials to complete all the development works undertaken in and around the temple at a brisk pace.

Stating that the influx of

devotees has been increasing every year, Harish Rao said the turnout of devotees this year was expected to touch 10 lakhs during the seven day utsavams commencing on March 9, two days ahead of the auspicious Mahashivarathri. He asked them to complete the 100-foot road works on the precincts of the temple on a war-footing besides completing the works of four sheds.

Advising the irrigation officials to release water from Singur to Ghanpur anicut during the Jatara, Harish Rao directed the temple officials to install barricades along the Ghanpur anicut to prevent any untoward incident.

Asking them to provide all the facilities to those coming to

Harish Rao said the turnout of devotees this year was expected to touch 10 lakhs during the seven day utsavams commencing on March 9, two days ahead of the auspicious Mahashivarathri

the temple, the minister instructed them to place temporary toilets besides providing drinking water available at all corners. He suggested the panchayat officials to depute workers from neighbouring panchayats at the temple to keep the premises clean.

He asked the health department officials to place five health camps to attend to the sick devo-

He asked them to complete the 100-foot road works on the precincts of the temple on a war-footing besides completing the works of four sheds

tees besides spraying the bleaching powder all over the place. Asking them to carry out fogging to control the mosquito menace, he has suggested the health department to keep three ambulances ready at the temple during the Jatara.

He has also instructed the RTC authorities to operate five shuttle services from Medak bus station to temple located at

Nagasanpally in Papannapet mandal to provide safe transportation. The Minister suggested the Police, Fire, Endowment officials and other wings of the district administration to keep tabs on the movement of the devotees to avoid any untoward incident. He has also suggested that they take all precautionary measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

MP Medak Kotha Prabhakar Reddy, Collector Medak S Harish, Superintendent of Police Chandana Deepthi, MLC Sheri Subhash Reddy, MLAs Medak M Padmadevendar Reddy, Narasapur C Madan Reddy, Deputy Commissioner Endowments Ramakrishna Rao, Temple Executive Officer Sara Srinivas and others were present.

Private hospitals promote C-section deliveries in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Out of the 98.3 per cent deliveries that take place in government and private hospitals across the city, 59.7 per cent of the deliveries are conducted through Caesarean. Furthermore, a majority of the deliveries conducted through C-section are being done in Hyderabad.

The private hospitals, on technical grounds, have been 'threatening' expectant mothers and their relatives of adverse consequences unless deliveries are conducted immediately through surgery. These hospitals have been accused of discouraging the

expectant mothers to undergo natural delivery and promoting C-section deliveries for money.

There were instances of women frequently suffering from stomach pain, over weight, menstrual cycle-related problems after the delivery through surgical means.

Majority of women, who have health insurance, are inclining towards delivering babies through caesarean section. As women consider Mondays and Fridays as auspicious to deliver babies through surgery, majority of C-section deliveries are conducted on these days. The number of such deliveries con-

ducted on Sundays is meagre since doctors would avail their day off.

As the delivery date nears, expectant mothers would undergo anxiety neurosis. There were instances of them suffering from high blood pressure and diabetes. They are reportedly giving priority to delivering through C-section for the second time also.

Gynaecologist Dr Sangita says that the delivering babies through C-section leads to women suffering from long-term health problems in spite of delivery through surgical means provides temporary relief to them.

Did not forgive, will not forget: CRPF on Pulwama terror attack

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) that lost 40 troopers in the 2019 Pulwama terror attack said on Sunday that the country "did not forgive" and "will not forget" the supreme sacrifice made by the personnel.

A wreath-laying ceremony was held at CRPF camp in Lethpora in Jammu and Kashmir to mark the second anniversary of the deadly attack.

Senior officers of the paramilitary based at its headquarters in Delhi participated in the event in the virtual mode, CRPF spokesperson deputy inspector general (DIG) Moses Dhinakaran said. "Did not Forgive, will not Forget: Salute to our brothers who made the supreme sacrifice for the nation in #PulwamaAttack. 'Indebted, we stand with the families of our valiant Bravehearts,' the force said in a Twitter post. Soon after the Pulwama attack, the Indian Air Force had carried out an airstrike in Pakistan's Balakot on February



26, 2019, targeting terrorist camps. CRPF Director General A P Maheshwari also unveiled a video book dedicated to the 40 personnel killed in the line of duty. "We have inherited bravery which flows like blood in our veins," he was quoted as saying by the spokesperson. "The video book has a con-

tent of 80 episodes and 300 minutes. A copy of the book will also be sent to the families of each of the personnel killed in the Pulwama suicide bombing attack," Dhinakaran said. A CRPF bus in the fifth position of a 78-vehicle convoy was targeted by a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) suicide bomber who

detonated his explosives-laden SUV near it on the Jammu-Srinagar highway in Pulwama on February 14, 2019. The convoy was ferrying over 2,500 personnel and all 39 in the ill-fated bus and a sub-officer stationed on the ground, as part of a road sanitisation party, were killed in the blast.

TERROR PLAN AVERTED IN JAMMU ON PULWAMA ATTACK ANNIVERSARY

PNS ■ JAMMU

A major terrorist plan to set off an explosion at a crowded place here on the second anniversary of the Pulwama attack was scuttled with the recovery of a powerful IED from a nursing student who was arrested along with three others, a top police officer said on Sunday. Inspector General of Police, Jammu Range, Mukesh Singh also said six pistols and 15 small Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) were seized from Samba district in a separate operation.

"Over the past four days we were on high alert because there was general intelligence that terror groups want to trigger a major blast in Jammu city on the second anniversary of the Pulwama attack. The security around all important locations were strengthened and checking intensified," he told reporters here. Singh, who was also flanked by Director General of Police Dilbag Singh, said a youth was found moving in suspicious manner along with a bag in the general bus stand area and it led to the recovery of nearly seven kg of IED which was, however, not activated as yet. The IGP identified him as Suhail Bashir Shah, a resident of Nawa village of Pulwama, who was pursuing nursing course in a college in Chandigarh and was assigned the task to plant the IED in Jammu by his Pakistan-based handler affiliated with Al-Badr terror outfit.

Eight bodies recovered from Tapovan, Raini hydel project sites

PNS ■ DEHARADUN/TAPOVAN

Eight bodies were recovered on Sunday from the flash flood-ravaged hydel project sites in Tapovan and Raini of Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, taking the toll in the calamity to 46, even as search and rescue operations were intensified.

Five bodies were recovered from the intake adit tunnel of the NTPC's 520 MW Tapovan-Vishnugad project. These are the first bodies to be recovered from the site where muck-clearing and drilling operations have been underway on a war-footing since last Sunday. Three others were recovered from Raini, where a 13.2 MW hydel project along the Rishiganga was destroyed in the calamity.

The recoveries take the toll in the disaster to 46, while 158 people remain missing, officials said.

The bodies have been kept at a temporary mortuary built in Tapovan, they added.

Two of the bodies have been



identified. One hails from Narendra Nagar in Tehri district and another from Kalsi in Dehradun district, Chamoli District Magistrate Swati S Bhadauria said.

She said a helicopter has been kept ready at the site to provide medical help to survivors, if any.

The NTPC's Tapovan-

Vishnugad hydel project had suffered extensive damage in the flashflood, which also demolished the Rishiganga hydel project.

Rescue teams continued widening a hole into the Silt Flushing Tunnel at the project site in Tapovan where around 30 people are believed to be trapped.

Over 100 liquor bottles sent via courier seized in 'dry' Gujarat

PNS ■ JUNAGADH

Ahead of local body polls in Gujarat, police have seized 107 bottles of liquor worth around Rs 62,000 sent to Junagadh from Uttar Pradesh through a courier service, an official said on Sunday.

Gujarat is a 'dry' state where manufacture, sale and consumption of liquor is banned, and bootleggers are now using a new strategy of bringing in liquor through inter-state courier services, the police said. Acting on a tip-off, the local crime branch and B-division police conduct-



ed a raid on a courier service firm on Saturday and found 107 bottles of Indian-made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) worth around Rs 62,000 packed in eight parcels sent from Bahadurgarh in Uttar Pradesh, the official said. The parcels were to be delivered to

two persons - Firoz Baloch and Wahid Qureshi - in Junagadh, the official from B-division police station said.

An FIR has been registered against three persons under provisions of the Prohibition Act, he said. The police are keeping a close watch on cases of violation of the prohibition law ahead of the local body elections in the state as the model code of conduct is in force.

The local body elections are scheduled to be held in two phases on February 21 and 28 in Gujarat.

VENKAIAH NAIDU PAYS RESPECTS

New Delhi: Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on Sunday paid tributes to the martyrs of the Pulwama terror attack, saying he stood in solidarity with the families who lost their loved ones in the incident. Two years ago on this day, Pakistan-sponsored Jaish-e-Mohammed carried out the dastardly attack on a CRPF convoy of 70 vehicles resulting in the death of 40 jawans. "I join the nation in paying my humble tributes to the CRPF personnel who were martyred in the dastardly Pulwama terror attack. The grateful nation will always remember their patriotism & supreme sacrifice," the Vice President Secretariat tweeted quoting Naidu. "My solidarity with the families who lost their loved ones in the attack," the vice president said.

PM MODI PAYS TRIBUTES TO PULWAMA MARTYRS

CHENNAI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday paid tributes to the CRPF jawans who were killed in the terror attack in Pulwama district of south Kashmir in February, 2019. "No Indian can forget this day. Two years ago, the Pulwama attack happened. We pay homage to all the martyrs. We are proud of our security forces and their bravery will continue to inspire generations," he said at a function here. He said the country's armed forces had shown time and again they were fully capable of protecting "our motherland". Forty CRPF personnel were killed in the terrorist attack carried out by Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad in Pulwama on February 14, 2019.

FILM PERSONALITIES PAY TRIBUTES

Mumbai: Several Bollywood actors, including Akshay Kumar, Varun Dhawan and Rajkumar Rao on Sunday paid tributes to the martyrs of the Pulwama terror attack and said the country will forever remain indebted to the bravehearts. Forty CRPF personnel were killed in the terrorist attack carried out by Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad in Pulwama on February 14, 2019. Kumar took to Twitter and shared a picture of the martyrs. "Remembering our bravehearts of #PulwamaAttack, we will always remain indebted for your supreme sacrifice," the 53-year-old actor tweeted. Dhawan shared the same image on Instagram and captioned "Jai Hind". Actor Kartik Aaryan prayed for the families of those who were killed in the terrorist attack.

INDIA CORNER

Cong will never implement CAA if voted to power in Assam: Rahul

Accusing the BJP and RSS of dividing Assam, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday said that his party will protect every principle of the Assam Accord and will never implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act if voted to power in the state. Addressing his first public rally in Assam ahead of the assembly elections due in March-April, Gandhi said that the state needs its "own chief minister" who will listen to the voice of the people and not one who listens only to Nagpur and Delhi. "The Assam Accord has brought peace and it is the protector of the state. I and my party workers will protect each principle of the Accord. There will not be a single deviation from it," he said. Gandhi said illegal immigration is an issue in Assam and exuded confidence that the people of the state have the capability to resolve the issue through dialogue. Alleging that BJP and RSS are trying to divide the state on the issue of Assam Accord, he said, "If Assam is divided, then Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Union Home Minister Amit Shah will not be affected, but the people of Assam and the rest of India will be affected."



Farmer hangs himself over inflated power bill in Aligarh

A 50-year-old farmer here hanged himself after allegedly being slapped by Electricity Department officials and served an inflated power bill, according to the victim's family. The incident took place at Sunaira village in Atrauli tehsil on Saturday when the officials turned up at Ramji Lal's house and handed over a power bill of Rs 1,50,000. In protests against the incident, people placed the body in front of the local Electricity Department office and refused to proceed with the last rites until a case is filed against the SDO and junior engineer, who allegedly had gone to the victim's house. They had allegedly slapped the victim in front of his family members after he explained to them that he did not have the money to pay the inflated bill. Police assured the protesters that action will be taken after necessary procedures. The victim's nephew, Ramcharan, and other family members complained at the Bara police station that the amount of Rs 1,50,000 had erroneously been shown as Rs 1,50,000 in the bill. Since the past several days, Ramji Lal has been running from pillar to post to get the bill rectified but in vain, they said.



4 killed in van-truck collision

Four persons were killed and six others injured in a collision between a van and a truck here, police said on Sunday. The accident took place Saturday night near Baghidarh on the Gorakhpur-Azamgarh, they said. The van was carrying labourers from Gorakhpur to Varanasi, police said. Three persons died on the spot, while the fourth succumbed to injuries at the district hospital. Circle officer, Sagri, Ajay Yadav said. The six injured have been referred to Varanasi for treatment, he added. The deceased included truck driver Vipin Chauhan, a resident of Deoria, and three labourers. While the two labourers have been identified as Sukhav and Ramesh, the identity of the third is yet to be ascertained, Yadav said. The victims were in the age group of 40-45 years, police said.



AIMPLB moves SC on uniform grounds of maintenance, alimony

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

"The applicant would like to submit that the expression and 'Custom and Usage in Article 13 of the Constitution does not include faith of a religious denomination embedded in personal laws," the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) plea said. "The constituent assembly was aware of the distinction between personal law and the 'Custom and Usage' and chose to exclude personal law and include Custom and Usage in Article 13 of the Constitution," it said while seeking impleadment in the petition filed by Upadhyay.

The AIMPLB opposed Upadhyay's plea on the basis that personal laws cannot be tested on the anvil of Articles 14, 15, 21 and 44 of the Constitution. The top court on December 16 last year had issued notice to the Centre on the plea filed by



Upadhyay. Upadhyay's petition, filed through advocate Ashwini Kumar Dube, said that despite the eloquent provisions in the Constitution, the central government has totally failed to provide even gender-neutral, religion-neutral uniform grounds of maintenance and alimony for all citizens.

Maintenance and alimony is the only source of livelihood hence discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth is a direct attack on the right to life, liberty and dignity, guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution, it said.

"Even after 73 years of Independence and 70 years of India becoming a socialist secular democratic republic, laws relating to maintenance and alimony are not only complex and cumbersome but also against the constitutional mandate of being equal, rational and just," the plea said.

"Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains are governed by the Hindu Marriage Act 1955 and the

Hindu Adoption & Maintenance Act 1956.

Muslims are dealt as per status of valid marriage & prenuptial agreement and governed under the Muslim Women Act 1986. Christians are governed under the Indian Divorce Act 1869 and Parsis under the Parsi Marriage & Divorce Act 1936, but none of these laws are gender neutral," it said.

The PIL stated that discriminatory maintenance and alimony reinforce patriarchal and stereotypical notions about women and thus any provision that perpetuates or reinforces discriminatory stereotypes against women is manifestly arbitrary. The plea has sought directions to declare that the discriminatory grounds of maintenance and alimony are violative of Articles 14, 15, 21 of the Constitution.

It has also sought directions to the Law Commission to examine domestic and international laws and prepare a report on "uniform grounds of maintenance and alimony" within three months.

One held after gunfight with cops

PNS ■ GHAZIABAD

One person was arrested following a gunfight with police on Sunday for allegedly slaughtering cows in Masuri area of Ghaziabad district, a senior official said. The accused Shantu, 26, opened fire along with his accomplice on the police team and sustained a bullet injury in his right leg in retaliatory firing by the police personnel, Superintendent of Police (Rural), Ghaziabad, Iraj Raja said. He said that on Friday carcasses of cattle were noticed by residents of Kazipura industrial area of Masuri and Avantika colony in Kavi Nagar police station jurisdiction, following which some anti-cow slaughter outfits created a ruckus.

'Dinesh allowed to use House for his political ends'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Sunday alleged that Dinesh Trivedi, who resigned from Rajya Sabha on Friday, took the "House for a ride" and was "allowed" to use the floor of the House for his "devious political ends".

In a letter to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, party's chief whip in the House Sukhendu Sekhar Ray said the TMC had recommended only two names as speakers for the discussion on Union Budget 2021-22, but Trivedi was not among them. The TMC's allotted time

on the discussion was exhausted after both the speakers spoke on their designated days, Ray said as he questioned why Trivedi was allowed to speak despite this.

"At about 1.25 pm on 12 February 2021, when the Hon'ble Finance Minister was about to give reply to the Budget discussion, one member of AITC, Sri Dinesh Trivedi, since resigned, was allowed to speak for about four minutes from 1.25 pm to 1.29 pm, although his name was not recommended by the AITC as speaker in the Budget discussion and no time was left for the party," he said.

Drugs worth 21 lakh seized from man having 19 cases

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A 32-year-old man having 19 criminal cases against him has been arrested following seizure of mephedrone, a banned drug, worth Rs 21 lakh from his possession in Mumbai, a police official said on Sunday.

The accused, Abdul Aziz Abdul Hamid Shaikh, was nabbed on Saturday from 90 Feet Road in Dharavi area when he started running away after seeing officials of the police's anti-narcotics cell (ANC) patrolling there, he said.



Slueths of the ANC's Worli unit caught him and seized 210 gm of mephedrone worth around Rs 21 lakh from his possession, the official said. Mephedrone, also known as

MD, is a synthetic stimulant and banned under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. During a probe into the matter, the police came to know that Shaikh already had 19 cases registered against him in Mumbai, including for murder, robbery and under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the ANC official said.

The accused had also been extorted from Mumbai thrice, he said. A case has now been registered against him under the NDPS Act, he added.

Snapchat crosses 60 mn users milestone in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With over 150 per cent growth in daily active users (DAUs), photo-messaging app Snapchat has seen its user base cross the 60 million-mark in the country, a top company executive said.

Snap Inc Managing Director (International Markets) Nana Murugesan said the company aims to continue building on the growth momentum across product development, partnerships and the augmented reality experience. Snap is the parent company of Snapchat. The app allows users to share pho-

tos and videos with friends for a specific time period after which the content gets deleted.

It offers filters and lenses, many of which are augmented reality-enabled. Globally, Snapchat had 265 million daily active users in the December 2020 quarter. Over 5 billion 'snaps' were created daily on average by users on the platform. "2020 was a really strong year for us and we are thrilled with the momentum we're seeing. We reached more than 60 million users in India in Q4 20, with strengthening growth throughout the year, and see our commu-



nity engaging across all parts of Snapchat -- from chatting to Discover content, using our Camera and getting creative with Lens Studio," Murugesan said. He added that augmented reality (AR) is revolutionising how people

communicate, are entertained, learn and experience the world. "...we see this evolution accelerating. For example, our community played with Diwali-themed Lenses more than 500 million times. This year, we're

excited to keep on building on the variety of experiences available on Snapchat for people in India. From exclusive content to games, product development, partnerships and of course AR, we have lots in store," he said.

Murugesan noted that the company is focussed on making Snapchat feel local to its user community in India. Snap's team in India focuses on developing culturally relevant products, community engagement and partnerships. Citing examples of engagement in the country, Snap said more than 70 million people had watched Shows in India in

IMA announces petition movement

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The IMA on Sunday announced a mass petition movement from February 15-March 31 against a Central Council of Indian Medicine notification that authorises post-graduate practitioners in specified streams of ayurveda to perform general surgical procedures. The doctors' body also said that this notification will lead to "mixopathy" and demanded its immediate withdrawal. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) had held a pan-India relay hunger strike from February 1-14 on the issue.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Halfway through

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

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



Govt. Of N Office of M.B. R.

apart. This means that India needs 60 crore shots for the first phase. The Serum Institute of India (SII), which makes Covishield, has said it has a stockpile of five-seven crore doses and aims to produce 50 crore shots by July 2021. So, by the SII's own admission, there will be shortages in the first half of 2021. However, this shortage will ease when other vaccines are cleared for use. But other issues like inadequate cold storage facilities will continue to haunt the system in the second round too. The fact that more than 52 per cent of the country's 29,000 cold chain points and 40 per cent of the equipment are concentrated in just six States doesn't help. As the drive speeds up, the Government will have to increase the number of cold chain facilities, keeping in focus the States without an adequate infrastructure. Plus, Bharat Biotech's Covaxin, the other approved vaccine, can be kept at room temperature for at least a week. So the Government needs to ensure that going forward the campaign has a healthy mix of both the vaccines. But, for that to happen, the people's hesitation in using Covaxin needs to be overcome by releasing its efficacy data. Also, with the registration process being mostly electronic till now, the Government should ensure some amount of "on-the-spot" registration as not everyone has a mobile phone and internet connection in a poor country like ours. With Indians developing antibodies faster than the Government can get the jabs, there is hope for the country. But for a lot of people, as for the economy, it would have come a bit too late.

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PIC TALK



Wreckage at the scene of a bombing in Mogadishu, Somalia

Upper House: To be, or not to be?

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



PRAFULL GORADIA

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



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

The Upper House should be used to accommodate leaders who made competent Ministers and had to get elected within six months of their appointment by the Prime Minister or a Chief Minister. One recent example is that of Yogi Adityanath. He was in the Lok Sabha when the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections were held in 2017 and he had not contested from any constituency. Yet he was selected to be the Chief Minister and,

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

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



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

in Delhi and read up before speaking the following week.

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

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

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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA CANNOT BE A SURVEILLANCE STATE

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

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

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

Shovanlal Chakraborty | Kolkata

FUEL PRICE RISE WILL HIT POOR FARMERS

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

TMC is shaken to the core



The Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress is shaken to its core as many big leaders are leaving the party to join the BJP.

The recent jolt came on Friday when Rajya Sabha MP and former Railway Minister Dinesh Trivedi announced his resignation from the Rajya Sabha on the floor of the House. It is no secret that these defections are fanned by the BJP leaders who

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

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

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

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

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

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

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

DON'T IMPOSE MORALITY ON CHILDREN

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

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

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

Srinivas Reddy | Hyderabad

SOUND BITE

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



GOA CM —Pramod Sawant

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

South African President —Cyril Ramaphosa

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



Actor —Ayushmann Khurrana

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

Cricketer —Joshua Da Silva

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



Former J&K CM —Mehbooba Mufti

Foolhardy acts

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

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

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

Not only that, we have been quite an ignorant people with respect to the importance of knowledge as passed down by the local generations. The villagers and tribals have traditional wisdom to foresee any catastrophe by studying the signs of nature, changes in the behaviour of domestic and wild animals, insects, change in wind speed and direction and so on. This begs the question as to how many times have successive Governments made serious attempts to tap this traditional knowledge base as a means of forewarning against natural or man-made disasters? But, more importantly, what should be done for now? Should the authorities work on a contingency rehabilitation plan, or should a safety valve be drilled to drain out the water from this temporary lake? Are the authorities in a position to all to regulate the flow? Or will the Government leave the people to their fate, only to announce compensations later? These and other such questions will keep crossing our mind. According to a report by the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, an autonomous research institute under the Department of Science and Technology, the assessment of the actual magnitude of risks involved due to this impoundment of water requires a detailed survey. However, the scientists, NGOs and the Government must put their heads together and work out an action plan before it gets too late.



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FIRST COLUMN

UNDERSTANDING ENERGY CONCERNS

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



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

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

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



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

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

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

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

Need for affordable housing and microfinance for all

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



MOIN QAZI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



go in vain and conflict arises.

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

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

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

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

and shared-ownership housing. But the sector is still in need of more sustainable business models to get legitimacy in mainstream finance.

Housing micro-finance can include a range of financial services that support improving or upgrading housing such as home repair and expansions, additional cooking space, water and sanitation services, energy efficiency upgrades, the purchase of inhabitable land or permanent structures and the construction of new housing.

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

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

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

the balance between the rights of tenants and the owners.

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

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

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

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

POINT COUNTERPOINT

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



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

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

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

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

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



GWYNNE DYER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Education Ministry took the lead, with the pub-



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is probably no

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

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



DPIIT focuses on promoting quality, productivity

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce and industry ministry is organising as many as 45 sector-specific webinars to promote quality and productivity in the Indian industry. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade's (DPIITs) initiative, Udyog Manthan, began on January 4 and will continue till March 2 this year.

The department has said the webinar series, comprising 45 sessions, is covering various major sectors in manufacturing and services including pharmaceuticals, textiles, toys, tourism, furniture, renewable energy, automobiles and set-top box. Udyog Manthan is identifying challenges and opportunities; draw upon solutions and best practices, it added.

The exercise is enabling learning across industries and sectors for enhancing quality and productivity to promote 'Vocal for Local' and realising the vision of

'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', it said. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has stated that the Udyog Manthan would be a harbinger of change in the way

"we work, in our mindset and will truly be remembered for the base that it will set for India to engage as a global player with high productivity and high quality". The exercise is being organised in association with the Quality Council of India, the National Productivity Council, and industry bodies.

DPIIT Joint Secretary Vandana Singh said Udyog Manthan is the first of its kind comprehensive brain storming exercise led by industry and facilitated by government to discuss quality and productivity issues across all major sectors of Indian industry.

"Industry is enthusiastically coming forward for helping formulating standards and capacity building for productivity and quality improvement," she told PTI.

FinMin to infuse Rs 3k-cr in general insurance firms

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry will infuse Rs 3,000 crore capital into state-owned general insurance companies during the current quarter in a bid to improve their financial health.

Last year, the Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi cleared proposal to provide capital support to National Insurance, Oriental Insurance and United India Insurance. The cabinet had also decided to increase the authorised share capital of National Insurance Company Limited to Rs 7,500 crore and that of United India Insurance Company Limited (UIICL) and Oriental Insurance Company Limited (OICL) to Rs 5,000 crore each to give effect to the capital infusion decision.

Recently, the government sought Parliament nod for gross additional expenditure of Rs 6.28 lakh crore for 2020-21 as part of second and final batch of supplementary demands for grants.



This included Rs 3,000 crore for providing additional funds towards recapitalisation of insurance companies.

The infusion will be done after the supplementary demands for grants is passed by Parliament which will reconvene on March 8. The capital infusion will enable

the three public sector general insurance companies to improve their financial and solvency position, meet the insurance needs of the economy, absorb changes and enhance the capacity to raise resources and improve risk management.

Finance Minister Nirmala

Sitharaman in the Budget announced privatization of two public sector banks and one general insurance company in 2021-22 beginning April. In 2017, state-owned companies New India Assurance Company and General Insurance Corporation of India went public.

Non-life insurers' premium rises by 6.7 pc in Jan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Non-life insurance companies registered a 6.7 per cent increase in their gross direct premium collection in January at Rs 18,488.06 crore, according to the Irdai data.

Non-life insurance companies had underwritten direct premium of Rs 17,333.70 crore in the same month last year. Among these, 25 general

insurance companies witnessed 10.8 per cent increase in their collective premium in the first month of 2021 at Rs 16,247.24 crore as against Rs 14,663.40 crore in January 2020, according to Irdai data.

Five pure-play or standalone private sector health insurers, however, posted a marginal decline of 1.34 per cent in their premium underwriting at Rs 1,510.20 crore.

J&K simplifies norms for setting up industries



PNS ■ JAMMU

To revive the business sector and boost investor confidence with a business-friendly environment, the Jammu and Kashmir administration has approved a series of measures for simplifying business establishment process, an official spokesman said on Sunday.

As per the decision taken by the Administrative Council, which met under the chairmanship of Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha here on Saturday, the pre-requisite 'no objection certificates' or approvals have been relaxed for setting up of a business unit, the spokesman said.

He said the Udyog Aadhaar memorandum as per the condition of the GoI would be the only requirement for a business unit to be set up. Earlier, as many as 15 NoCs or clearances were required for a business unit to be established, which have now been reduced to a bare minimum. "These bare minimum NoCs

shall be required for which two sets of single-window committees have been established one for business units coming up within industrial estates and another committee for units outside the industrial estates," the spokesman said. He said these committees would ensure time-bound issuance of the NoCs or approvals pertaining to power connection, water connection and building plan as per specified timelines on a case-to-case basis.

Further, the spokesman said a divisional-level committee has been approved, which would periodically monitor the working of the committees and address issues, if any, related to issuance of NoCs or approvals. "No pre-requisite approvals shall be required as a general rule except for NoCs/ approvals from departments like pollution control board (CTE/CTO), NoC from fire and emergency department, change of land use from revenue department, etc, wherever applicable," he said.

Amazon starts seller registrations, account services in Marathi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce major Amazon on Sunday said sellers will be able to register on the Amazon.in marketplace and manage their online business in Marathi, a move aimed at enhancing the sellers' experience on the platform.

The development will benefit over 85,000 existing Amazon sellers and lakhs of new sellers from locations including Kolhapur, Nashik, Satara, Aurangabad, Solapur, Nagpur and Jalgaon among many other cities in Maharashtra.

This is a major step towards breaking the language barrier for lakhs of Indian entrepreneurs, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), local



shops and retailers and help them benefit from e-commerce, a statement said.

The launch in Marathi is followed by the recently launched seller registrations and account management services in Hindi, Kannada and Tamil, which saw over 50,000 new Amazon sellers sign up on the Amazon.in marketplace in a language of their convenience, it added. "Language is a prominent

FM to address RBI Board meeting on Tuesday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to address the post-Budget meeting of the RBI's central board on Tuesday and highlight key points of Union Budget 2021-22, including the fiscal consolidation roadmap. Fiscal deficit -- the excess of government expenditure over its revenues -- is estimated to hit a record high of 9.5 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the current fiscal ending March 31 due to the Covid pandemic.

Kerala Travel Mart meet to be virtual this year

PNS ■ KOCHI

Kerala Travel Mart (KTM), a popular B2B tourism meet in the country, has invited domestic and foreign buyers to interact with 700 sellers across the world during its five-day virtual event next month in a bid to stimulate the sector in the post-COVID scenario in the state.

Buyers, media, visitors can register online for the

virtual meet of the 11th edition of KTM to be held from March 1.

The event, which will showcase the excellence and alluring products of the sector, seeks to give a huge impetus to recovery of tourism from the throes of the pandemic that has considerably dulled the sector for a year now but now in a rebound mode, a KTM release said here on Sunday.

M-cap of 7 of top 10 valuable firms jump over Rs 1.40 lakh-cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Seven of the top-10 most valuable companies together added Rs 1,40,430.45 crore in market capitalisation last week, in line with a bullish broader market trend with Reliance Industries emerging as the biggest gainer. During the week, the BSE benchmark surged 812.67 points or 1.60 per cent.

The companies that witnessed gain in their valuation include Reliance Industries,

Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, HDFC, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India and Bajaj Finance, while HDFC Bank, Hindustan Unilever and Kotak Mahindra Bank's market capitalisation declined.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries jumped by Rs 74,329.95 crore to Rs 12,94,038.34 crore, the most among the top-10 companies.

ICICI Bank added Rs 22,943.86 crore to Rs 4,47,323.82 crore in its valuation

and Infosys witnessed a jump of Rs 15,888.27 crore to Rs 5,57,835.85 crore. The market valuation of HDFC rallied Rs 12,439.33 crore to Rs 5,02,316.66 crore and that of Tata Consultancy Services gained Rs 12,420.4 crore to Rs 11,97,442.25 crore.

Bajaj Finance added Rs 2,274.77 crore to take its valuation to Rs 3,36,032.83 crore and State Bank of India's market capitalisation gained Rs 133.87 crore to Rs 3,50,915.73 crore.

Registration to be suspended for anomalies in GST sales return

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

The CBITC has issued a SOP for suspension of registration of a person on observation of such discrepancies 'anomalies which indicate violation of the GST Act. The registration of specified taxpayers shall be suspended and notice for cancellation of registration in form GSTR-31, containing the reasons of suspension, shall be sent to such taxpayers on their registered e-mail address.

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

Hotels use tech to boost traveller confidence

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the hospitality industry fights for survival after suffering huge losses due to COVID-19 last year, hotels are incorporating a combination of cutting-edge technologies to improve customer confidence, and mitigate losses incurred during the pandemic. A study published in November by researchers at Stanford University and Northwestern University, US, stated that reopening of restaurants, gyms and hotels carries the highest risk of further spreading COVID-19.

While people who wish to visit hotels and restaurants are concerned about catching the virus, the hospitality industry is infusing new technologies into its operations to safeguard both

Hotels are incorporating a combination of cutting-edge technologies to improve customer confidence and mitigate losses incurred during the pandemic



According to the authors of a research article published in the journal Information Technology & Tourism, the pandemic will eventually come to an end, but the hospitality industry will never return to the "old normal". "Traditionally, many luxury hotels emphasise person-to-person contact at every point

in the guest journey. However, after COVID-19, all of these methods and procedures may have to change," the authors noted. Hotel guests, they said, expect much higher standards of hygiene, and show a significantly greater appreciation for contactless services. "During such a period of

uncertainty, hoteliers have a rare opportunity to invest in technology and process improvements to gain competitive advantage in the long run," said the authors. to the pandemic, India's hospitality and tourism sector suffered three quarters of economic wipe out estimated to be up to 15 lakh crore.

According to Vibhas Prasad, Director Leisure Hotels Group, COVID-19 has affected most sectors across the globe, and the hospitality industry is among the hardest hit. However, Prasad noted that the players are optimistic to regain the lost vibrancy in the latter half of 2021 and are banking on efforts to improve customer confidence and 'revenge travel' as the pandemic is controlled.



Indiabulls Housing to raise ₹5K cr from securitisation

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Mortgage lender Indiabulls Housing Finance is looking to raise Rs 5,000 crore through the securitisation route in fourth quarter of the current financial year, according to a senior company official.

In the three months ended December 31, 2020, it had raised around Rs 2,000 crore through the route. Securitisation is the process of pooling and repackaging of homogeneous illiquid financial assets into marketable securities that can be sold to investors.

"Our securitisation pipeline is strong. We should be able to raise almost Rs 3,000 crore from the wholesale book and another Rs 2,000 crore from

the retail in this (Q4 FY21) quarter," the company's Deputy Managing Director Ashwini Kumar Hooda told PTI.

He said already securitisation transactions worth Rs 2,000 crore have been done so far in Q4. "Fourth quarter is when most of the securitisation transactions get bunched up. We had a lot of transactions for December that got carried forward to January," he said.

Securitisation constitutes 25 per cent of the non-bank financier's overall borrowing and on an average, it raises around Rs 2,500 crore per quarter through the route. Overall, in 2020-21, it has raised a total of Rs 28,119 crore through equity, bank lines, bonds and loan sell-downs.

MONEY MATTERS

ONGC takes leaf out of RIL book, floats subsidiary to buy own gas

Taking a leaf out of Reliance Industries Ltd's playbook, state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is forming a new subsidiary for gas business that could be used to bid and buy gas



from the firm's own fields. The board of ONGC at its meeting on February 13 approved creation of a new wholly-owned subsidiary company for gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG) business value chain subject to necessary approvals, according to the firm's third quarter earnings announcement. "The company is being formed with the objective of sourcing, marketing and trading of natural gas, LNG business, Hydrogen enriched CNG (HCNG), gas to power business, bio-energy/ bio-gas/ bio methane/ other biofuels business, etc," it said. ONGC may use the new subsidiary to buy any new gas that the firm produces from fields such as KG-D5 in the Krishna Godavari basin, people with direct knowledge of the matter said. The government had in October 2020 allowed affiliates of gas producers to buy the fuel in open auction. This policy change allowed Reliance to buy two-thirds out of the additional 7.5 million standard cubic metres per day of gas it along with partner BP plc of UK plans to produce this year from the new fields in KG-D6 block.

Maruti monitors cost structure amid rising commodity prices



Maruti Suzuki India. The company, which had hiked prices of its vehicles in January, however is not planning to pass on the burden to consumers in the near future although it is keeping a close eye on its cost structure. With the supply of semiconductors becoming a challenge for the automotive industry, Maruti Suzuki is also watching the situation closely although it will have normal supply this month. In commodities, prices have gone up dramatically this year, especially that of steel, and rhodium and palladium, which are used in catalysers of BS-VI vehicles. "Demand across the world has gone up but its mining happens only in Russia and South Africa. There, the mining was much lesser because of the pandemic," Maruti Suzuki India Executive Director (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava told PTI.

ArcelorMittal SA records 37 million Rand profit for 2020

ArcelorMittal South Africa, a subsidiary of Lakshmi Mittal's global steel empire, has bounced back from the 632-million rand losses recorded in 2019, to post profit of 37 million rand for the year 2020, despite the coronavirus outbreak.

"Despite a difficult year in which businesses had to adjust to the impact of Covid in an already weak economy, ArcelorMittal South Africa was able to return to profitability in the second half of the year, as the benefits of substantial cost reduction initiatives and the implementation of an optimised asset footprint review over the past two years are showing positive results," CEO, AMSA, Kobus Verster said on Friday, after the company's financial results for the year ending December 31, 2020 were posted by the Johannesburg Securities Exchange. AMSA was struggling in the beginning of 2020 when the government appealed to Mittal to reconsider plans to shed 1,000 jobs as part of cost-cutting measures. "I believe the business is now well-positioned to participate in the improvements in manufacturing activity and the anticipated positive demand spin-offs from the economic recovery plans of both government and South African business, Verster said. While the company recorded a loss in the first half of 2020, when almost all its operations were stopped for the first time in the company's history due to the Covid national lockdown, gains were recorded in the second half of the year.



Salman to shoot for *Pathan* post *Bigg Boss 14*

Salman Khan has revealed that he will start shooting for *Pathan*, starring Shah Rukh Khan, once he wraps up the shoot for the reality TV show *Bigg Boss*, which is currently in its 14th season. Billed as an action-thriller and produced by Yash Raj Films (YRF), *Pathan* is being helmed by *War* director Siddharth Anand and marks Shah Rukh Khan's first film after 2018's *Zero*, in which Salman Khan also had a cameo. There were reports that *Pathan* will have an extended cameo of Salman Khan. On the *Weekend Ka Vaar* episode of *Bigg Boss*, which comes to an end next week, the *Bharat* star confirmed his line-up of upcoming films, including the third instalment of *Tiger* franchise and *Kabhi Eid Kabhi Diwali*. "Life goes on, show goes on. When this show ends, we will move to *Pathan*, then *Tiger 3* and later to *Kabhi Eid Kabhi Diwali*," Salman Khan said on Saturday night. The actor, who hosts *Bigg Boss*, also said the Colors TV show will return for another season. "After eight months, *Bigg Boss 15* will be back and you all will be back too, that's a guarantee," he added. While *Pathan* went on floors in November last year, the third instalment of *Tiger* franchise is gearing up to start production next month. Previously, Salman Khan also had a guest appearance in the 1998 blockbuster *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, in

which Shah Rukh Khan was the leading man. The film marked Karan Johar's directorial debut. He later appeared in Shah Rukh's last film, *Zero*. Shah Rukh Khan, too, has made special appearances in Salman Khan's films, including *Tubelight* (2017) and *Hir Dil Jo Pyar Karega* (2000). Meanwhile, the yet-to-be-titled *Tiger 3* is the next chapter in the action-thriller franchise, also backed by YRF, will see Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif reprise their roles as spy agents Tiger and Zoya. The film will also star Emraan Hashmi as the antagonist, a source close to the film's production told a news agency earlier this week.



what's brewing?

Disney still intending for *Black Widow* to be a theatrical release



Disney CEO Bob Chapek has said that the company still intends to release *Black Widow* in theatres. However, he added that the studio is also considering whether "that strategy needs to be revisited". The Hollywood

Reporter quoted Chapek as saying during an investors call, "We are still intending for it to be a theatrical release. We are going to be watching very carefully to see whether that strategy needs to be revisited." *Black Widow*, which features Scarlett Johansson in the lead role, is currently scheduled to be

released on May 7, 2021. This is more than a year later than its original release date, May 1, 2020. Like a large number of films intended for the big screen last year, *Black Widow* was delayed as well due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Cate Shortland directorial is based on the only female superhero in the old guard of the Avengers. Since, Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow is now dead after her sacrifice in *Avengers: Endgame* to acquire the Soul Stone, this film is set in the past. *Black Widow* takes place after the events of 2016's *Captain America: Civil War* in which she finds herself on the run from the law thanks to her aid to Steve Rogers and Bucky Barnes. The movie also stars Florence Pugh, Rachel Weisz, David Harbour, Ray Winstone and Olivier Richters.

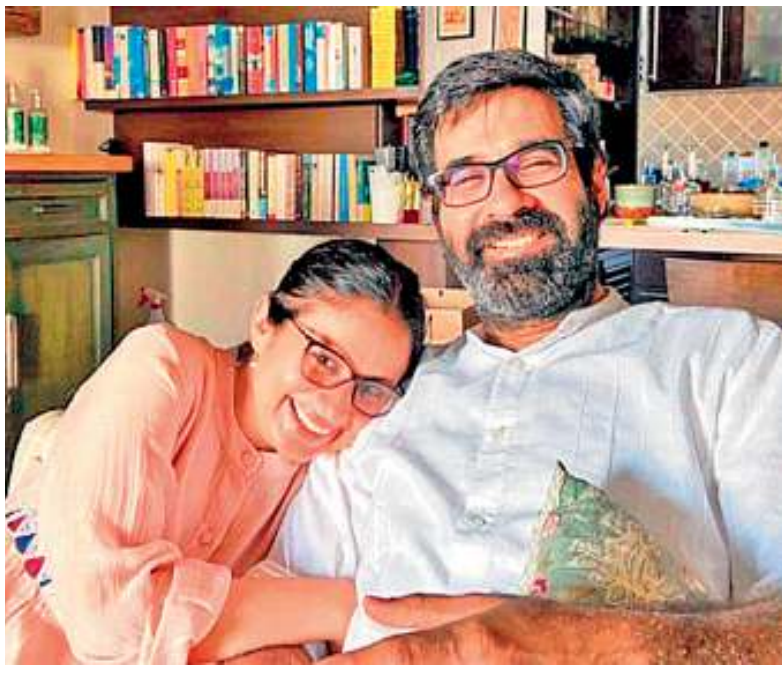
Captain Marvel 2 gets its villain in Zawe Ashton



Marvel Studios has cast actor Zawe Ashton to play the antagonist in Brie Larson-starrer *Captain Marvel 2*. The film, to be directed by Nia DaCosta, is a sequel to Larson's 2019 blockbuster *Captain Marvel*. Megan McDonnell, a story editor on the *Disney Plus* series *WandaVision* has penned the script, reported Deadline. The details of Ashton's character are not yet known but sources told the outlet that it will be the main villain. Iman Vellani, who headlines the

upcoming *Ms. Marvel* series, and Teyonah Parris, who currently star as Monica Rambeau in *WandaVision*, will be reprising characters in the movie. *Captain Marvel 2* is scheduled to be released in theatres worldwide in November 2022. Ashton is best known for featuring in Netflix's movie *Velvet Buzzsaw* and Tom Ford-directed *Nocturnal Animals*. The actor was recently seen on Broadway in the revival of *Betrayal* opposite Tom Hiddleston.

Rasika Dugal, Mukul Chadda talk about wasting food on V-Day



Hunger and food crisis have been longstanding issues that have plagued the world. Addressing the cause of food conservation, actor Rasika Dugal and Mukul Chadda headline a powerful video campaign for The Robin Hood Army, a zero-funds volunteer organisation that works to get surplus food from restaurants and communities to serve the less fortunate. This video releases on Valentine's Day, a day that witnessed a staggering amount of food wastage. For the special day of love, The Robin Hood Army has envisaged the cause of #SpreadLoveShareFood. Interestingly, the thought-provoking video has been conceptualised by Mukul's 14-year-old nephew, Neel Menon. The video was made by the young filmmaker as part of a school pro-

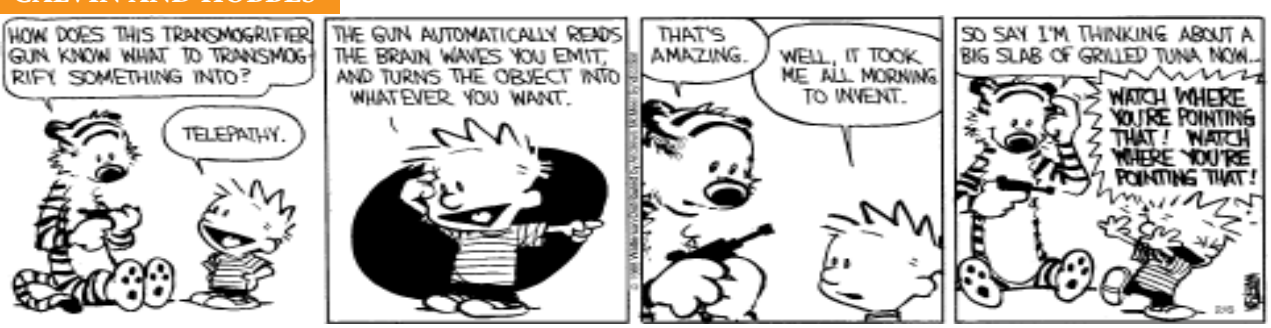
ject dealing with the United Nations' sustainable development goal of zero hunger. Featuring Rasika and Mukul, the video conveys that one-third of the food produced globally is wasted. Rasika and Mukul jointly say, "We live very privileged lives and it is, therefore, our responsibility to give back to society whenever we can. The underlying message of the video campaign is to spread the word about food conservation and the hunger crisis. It is commendable that Neel at his age ideated such a thought-provoking concept. Our best wishes to The Robin Hood Army for the work they are doing to eliminate the hunger crisis." On the work front, Rasika and Mukul have collaborated with each other for a short film entitled *Banana Bread*, and their upcoming feature film *Fairy Folk* is currently under production.

FUN

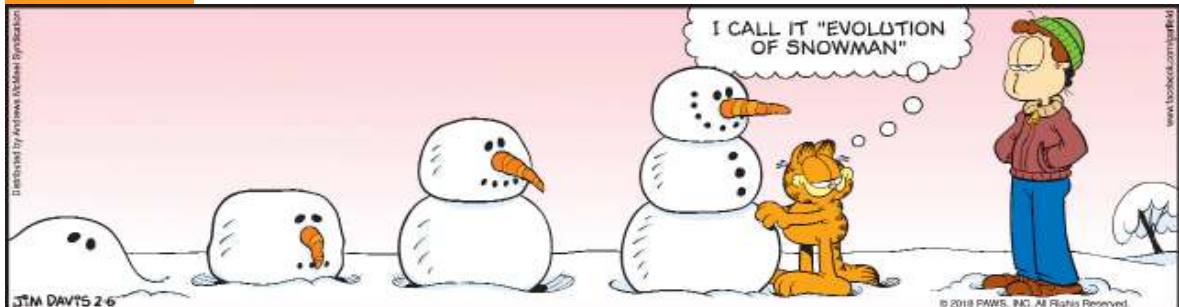
ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



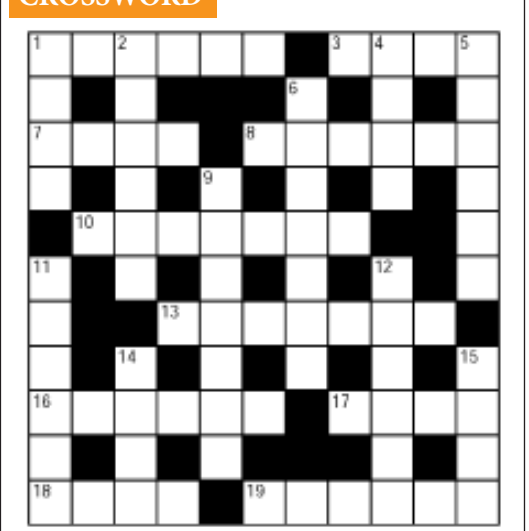
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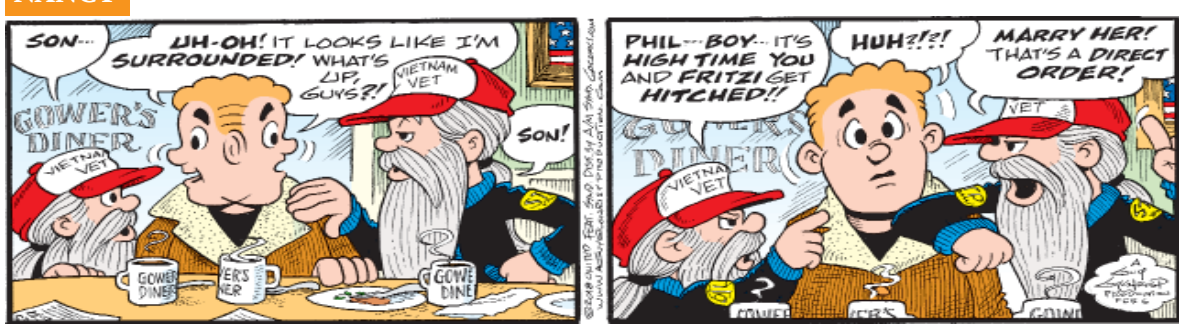
SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

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

- Sour-tasting
- A fruit with a stone
- Hit with your hand open
- Ran after trying to catch
- Assistants
- Went in
- Having a doze
- Very small
- Scramble, boil or fry these
- A light wind

DOWN

- Finest
- Go on a journey
- Mislead
- Noon
- Reduce the length of
- Loosen or tighten nuts with this tool
- Hit with your hand open
- Store a car in here
- Make up your mind
- A slimy creature that eats lettuce leaves
- A rubber cover on a wheel

SOLUTION

D	O	D	E	R	A	N	G	
R	U	N	G	S		G	E	A
L	E	T	H	E	C	O		
M	A	D	E	R	E	A	T	
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K	C	O	L	F	L	C	R	
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I	L	E	A	U				
A	N	C	E	S	T	O	R	S

GINGER MEGGS





Abhay Deol to continue backing the 'unconventional'

Critically acclaimed actor Abhay Deol has joined the Advisory Board of Bandra Film Festival (BFF 2021), a collaboration between 'Filmkaravan' and Youtube. Abhay Deol who along with Filmkaravan has produced the film *What Are The Odds?* on Netflix is elated to be on the Advisory Board of the Bandra Film Festival. Talking about it, Abhay said, "It has always been difficult for independent films and documentaries to reach out to the masses, even though things have evolved now in the content space with so many digital and OTT players entering the market. I think this festival will be a fabulous platform for independent filmmakers to showcase their work and reach out to a wide audience base. I am happy to be on board with Filmkaravan, who I believe have been pushing the envelope with a wide range of narratives. Their approach towards backing a good story and striving for inclusiveness is commendable. As for me, I have in my way too tried backing the underdogs and the unconventional."

A platform to showcase films made by prolific filmmakers in the past years, the film festival appreciates emerging talent and innovative content creators of the modern era. Furthermore, the festival has tied up with Milaap to extend financial support to films and filmmakers in these challenging times. Abhay went on to say, "BFF is striving towards an eco-system that enables growth not just in spirit but also in form. The platform is designed to bring together a wide array of subjects from around the world and allow filmmakers to showcase their work." The three broad categories in which the films will be slotted at the Bandra Film Festival are "Undiscovered Gems", a category that will showcase films which were made ahead of their time, which went unnoticed and eventually got buried, "Off The Beaten Path" that will enlist titles that are essentially experimental, unapologetic and non conforming and the third category is "New Discoveries" that attempts to find fresh films, concepts, makers and delve deep into unravelling these coming of age titles.

When the world shut down during the pandemic, many women faced a tough time managing work-life balance or finishing further higher education while handling increased domestic responsibilities. However, women in both, urban and rural areas are determined and willing to learn and work. Also, post-pandemic, many realised the importance of actively contributing to household finance, writes *The Pioneer's* K RAMYA SREE.

Why homemakers you ask, can we just say why not? Homemakers have a desire to be respected, to be financially independent and above all, to be recognised. From their previous experience of running a family and the household, they also are blessed with the ability to multitask, manage time, show tremendous resilience, grit, intelligence and 'jugaad'. To help such women and

Homepreneurships: homemakers' haven



guide them to become a collective force to reckon with, Nishtha Yogesh started 'Hunar', (meaning skill) an online learning platform based out of Hyderabad which aims at empowering women across the country by helping them learn new skills and become financially independent.

An entrepreneur with a dream to use technology and education to empower women across the country, Nishtha Yogesh, coming from a Chartered Accountancy and business background, was determined to utilise her skill set for what she had always believed in — Empowering Indian women

through education to earn recognition, respect and financial independence. She started interning pretty early on in life at local enterprises and started working in her late teens. That's when she understood what the sense of independence skills can bring to any Indian woman. They have a wide variety of fashion design courses such as garment making, fashion illustration, fashion styling, embroidery, fabric designing, bag making, home decor, jewellery designing and boutique management caters to the creative side of every individual and helps them grow. The startup has trained more

than 10,000 women (paid users) to further aid their students to become independent, after completing a course.

Speaking about what inspired her to start Hunar, Nishtha explains, "With funds from friends and family, the startup formally launched its operations in May 2018 and has trained more than 10,000 women, with more than 10 lakh users experimenting with the app through free trials. The inspiration for Hunar came from watching my mother educate numerous women with creative skills. When I was younger, I watched how these women changed the course of their lives with the help of these skills. With Hunar, we wanted to make learning creative courses accessible to the entire country."

"Being a creative educator for homemakers, our biggest challenge is helping our potential students overcome years of self-doubt and inertia to re-skill. Most of our students are Indian homemakers (some students and professionals), hailing from tier 2 and tier 3 cities of India. While they have a deep desire to be independent, build a home business or gain recognition, they have their fears of learning online and lack self-belief. But through our success stories, it encouraged, motivated and inspired women of all ages to believe in themselves more and turn their dreams into reality with simple and small steps. Today, with over 5 lakh app downloads and thousands of students who've learnt a certified skill, started their own home businesses and gained financial independence, we have learnt that with

our product and the right guidance have given a choice and chance to all of these women who have the potential and desire to learn and create. Our dream is to be able to provide re-skilling opportunities to every homemaker in our country and help them gain financial independence," says Nishtha.

For Hunar, the pandemic had a silver lining: women now had the time to take a step back and think about all that they've wanted to learn and achieve, just like so many other people who were caught up in the drudgery of daily life. "During the pandemic, we supported our students in learning the most out of their courses and encouraged other students to start building skills too. The outcome was amazing as a lot of our students learnt garment making, started creating their own supply of masks, for both commercial and charitable purposes. If you have staunch conviction in your vision and are ready to go the extra mile to make the difference in the world that you want to, everything else will fall into place."

Explaining to us the need to recognise and encourage homepreneurship, Nishtha says, "Homepreneurship has seen a surge in the last few years, especially in 2020, due to the pandemic. It's empowering and progressive in the way that it makes an individual feel confident enough to create an enterprise without excessive capital investment and more importantly, build it to scale with much more ease. In the age of social media and general public awareness, home businesses are thriving and aiding our country's economy."



Roz Roz, a melody about momentous love

Loving requires more than just those feelings, and demands efforts — to talk, listen, accept and be willing to work on things. Talking about this very important need for clear communication is the band Yellow Diary's new drop *Roz Roz* in collaboration with singer Shilpa Rao. They talk to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about their song, the collab, and the future.

Having a heartfelt conversation is the essence of a good relationship and with the same objective, the 'Yellow Diary' band is here with their new song, a collaboration with the popular Bollywood singer Shilpa Rao named *Roz Roz*. With love in the air given the Valentine mood, this latest song is going to set the doldrums for some harmony and affection around! Diving deep into the complexities, one of the band members, Rajan Batra explains that the

song is all about how imperative it is to hold a conversation in a growing relationship. "Roz Roz will lead you to a turnover wherein the couple has exploded and then looks to approach each other, but are hesitant to. This is a reality-check though, as it's the usual situation for a couple to act like this. While we were looking to give a female touch to it, we found singer Shilpa Rao and her voice did the rest of the magic," he adds. Talking more about the beautiful blend of two novel genres,

Himanshu Parikh says, "We loved Shilpa Rao's voice! She's blessed the project with such heavenly vocals that whatever the genre, she accommodates herself accordingly." *Roz Roz* describing the abstract longing to chatter with your loved one also has the right kind of background music which is aptly capturing the state of affairs that goes on into a relationship as per guitarist Vaibhav Pani. He also emphasises the entire lockdown situation about how the public needed a break from all of this and

with all the tensed moments between a couple, this song can be a relaxing minute for them. Incarcerating all the sanity and explaining the spirit of love, the Yellow Diary band is meticulous in decoding down the chemical code of love and has mapped it down well with the lyrics. Concluding it on a long-lasting note, instrumentalist Rajan says the song encompasses something beyond love, about how one can uphold a connection, and that's the crux of it!

ASHWIN SPINS OUT ENG

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ishant provided the first



Sorry Bhajju pa: Ashwin after breaking Harbhajan's record

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

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

day of the second Test.

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

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

said at a post-day conference.

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

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

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

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

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

defensive push.

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

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

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

when the England captain's attempted sweep against the turn landed safely in the hands of Ashwin at short fine-leg.

Ashwin then struck at the stroke of lunch, having Dan Lawrence (9) caught at short-leg by Shubman Gill reducing England to 39 for four.

India claimed another four in the post-lunch session to leave England gasping at 106 for eight at tea.

Ashwin added two more scalps to his tally while Mohammed Siraj (1/5), who was introduced as late as in the 39th over, debutant Axar Patel (2/40) and Ishant Sharma (2/22) also did the damage.

Ashwin got the big wicket of Ben Stokes in the sixth over after lunch. The left-hander missed an attempted clip off a beauty that drifted in and lost his off-stump.

Ollie Pope (22), who looked assured against the spinners, was brilliantly caught by a diving Rishabh Pant when he tried to glide one down the leg-side, to give Mohammed Siraj a wicket off the first ball he bowled in Tests in India.

Foakes, who impressed with his keeping skills when India batted, showed his abilities in front of the wickets too. He batted with poise against the spinners, who were looking to make the most of a helping pitch.

Moeen Ali, coming in at number eight, fell when his edge hit Pant's thighs and rebounded to Ajinkya Rahane who took a fine catch diving forward.

Earlier resuming the day at 300 for six, India added 29 runs to their overnight score. The aggressive Pant scored 25 of those runs, hitting two fours and two sixes to remain unbeaten.

For England, pacer Olly Stone finished with 3 for 47 in his first game in India. Off-spinner Ali (4 for 128) picked up four wickets but proved expensive.

SINGLES

BYERN MUNICH SNAPS UP UPAMECANO

MUNICH: Bayern Munich is signing French defender Dayot Upamecano from Bundesliga rival Leipzig in its first transfer for next season. The Bavarian powerhouse said in a statement on Sunday that the 22-year-old Upamecano had agreed a five-year deal through June 2026 effective from July 1. Bayern is making use of a 42.5 million euro (\$51.5 million) buyout clause in Upamecano's current contract at Leipzig, which would otherwise have run to 2023.

ANKITA RALLIES TO WIN TOUR OPENER

MELBOURNE: Indian tennis player Ankit Raina recorded her first victory in the singles main draw of a WTA Tour event with a three-set win over Elisabetta Cocciaretto at the Phillip Island Trophy here on Sunday. Ankit came from behind to beat the Italian 5-7, 6-1, 6-2 in the opening round of the \$235,238 hard court tournament. The two-hour and 11 minutes win will take Ankit to her new career-high singles rank of 156 from 181. If she goes deep, then she will ensure her place in top-150.

ASIAN RECORDS FOR PRAVEEN, NISHAD

DUBAI: Teenaged high jumpers Praveen Kumar and Nishad Kumar produced their personal best efforts to take a Gold each and set new Asian records as the curtains came down on the 12th Faza International World Para Athletics Grand Prix here. Praveen's and Nishad's Gold medal-winning efforts were the high points for India who also had three Silver and a Bronze on Saturday, to end their campaign at the championships with 23 medals. At the end of the competition, India were among the top finishers in the medal tally with Thailand returning home with 34 medals, while Turkey, Kenya and India finished with 23 each.

SPEZIA STUNS SERIE A LEADER AC MILAN

SPEZIA: AC Milan missed the chance to extend its lead in Serie A when it lost 2-0 at Spezia, which was playing its first match under new American owners. Giulio Maggiore and Simone Bastoni scored their first Serie A goals as Spezia dominated and stunned Milan in the second half on Saturday. Milan did not even have a shot on target. The Rossoneri remained two points clear of second-placed Inter Milan, which could leapfrog its city rival on Sunday with a win at home to Lazio.

MAN UTD TITLE PUSH LOSES STEAM

WEST BROMWICH: Manchester United squandered a chance to put pressure on Premier League leaders Manchester City as Bruno Fernandes' equaliser spared their blushes in a 1-1 draw at struggling West Bromwich on Sunday. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side were rocked by Mbaye Diagne's second-minute opener for Albion at the Hawthorns. Portugal midfielder Fernandes levelled just before half-time with his 19th goal of the season in all competitions. But United were unable to take a break down second-bottom Albion again and had to settle for a third damaging draw in their last four league matches. They moved above Leicester into second place, but sit seven points behind City, who have a game in hand.

Agencies

Pant needs break from constant comparisons: Ash

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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

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



the name of the game is confidence right, he has been batting well, he has been working incredibly hard on his keeping as well...

"And sometimes, when you are constantly being com-

'Chennai pitch is incredibly challenging'

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

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

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

Decisions by the third

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

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

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

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

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

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

Caribbeans pull off another thrilling win

AFP ■ DHAKA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pak hand Proteas fourth straight T20 series loss

AFP ■ LAHORE

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Osaka, Serena prevail in three-setters

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

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

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

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

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

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



4, 6-2 in the fourth round.

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

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

SERENA SURVIVES ONSLAUGHT

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

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

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

A composed Williams, watched by older sister Venus in the stands, counter-attacked superbly in the early stages and broke Sabalenka's serve in the 10th game to win the

opening set.

Sabalenka, who was born four months after Williams made her Grand Slam debut in 1998, was unperturbed and stepped up her assault to dominate Williams' usually reliable serve.

The 22-year-old admonished herself before drawing level by pouncing on Williams's faltering first serve, which she landed just 36% of the time in the second set.

Williams regrouped and raced to a commanding 4-1 lead in the third set as a frustrated Sabalenka slammed her racquet to the ground as the match began to slip away.

Sabalenka won three straight games to get back on terms but Williams's experience saw her through as she maintained her unbeaten run since emerging from 14-day quarantine in Australia.

Halep exacted revenge on Swiatek with a comeback three-set victory, which set up a blockbuster quarter-final with Serena Williams.

The world No 2 was thrashed by the 19-year-old at Roland Garros, winning just three games, but turned the tide in Melbourne.

300th Slam win for Djoker

AFP ■ MELBOURNE

Tired-looking Dominic Thiem became the highest seed to fall at this year's Australian Open when the US Open champion was sent tumbling out in straight sets by Grigor Dimitrov in the fourth round on Sunday while ailing world No 1 Novak Djokovic battled past Milos Raonic to keep his title defence alive.

The night match's scheduling gave Djokovic the maximum amount of time to recover from a midriff muscle injury sustained in his five-set win over American Taylor Fritz late on Friday. And not operating at his best, Djokovic dropped a set but won 7-6(4), 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 in a bruising battle. It was the Serb's win No 300 in Grand Slam events.

Earlier, Thiem, the Austrian third seed and last year's losing finalist, appeared to lack energy after rallying to beat Nick Kyrgios over five gruelling sets on Friday in front of a raucous crowd. He struggled to match the intensity of the 18th-seed-



ed Bulgarian on a silent, fan-free Rod Laver Arena and slumped out 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 in 2hr 1min.

Former world No 3 Dimitrov will now play giant-killing Russian qualifier Aslan Karatsev in the quarter-finals after he stunned 20th seed Felix Auger-Aliassime over five sets. The power-hitting 27-year-old, a virtual unknown before the tournament started, battled back from two sets down to upset the Canadian

3-6, 1-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-4 on Margaret Court Arena.

Also, Alexander Zverev totted up his 50th Grand Slam win when he beat Serbia's Dusan Lajovic in straight sets to reach the quarter-finals.

The German sixth seed was tested in the first two sets but found it easier in the third, sealing his 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 victory with an ace.

Ram picks N Lingusamy for his next

Ram, who has been in a fix over his next for a long time, has finally chosen Tamil filmmaker Lingusamy for his next. *Seetimaarr* producer Srinivasaa Chitturi is attached to the project as a producer. It will roll in summer, finds NAGARAJ GOUD

With an eye on consolidating his mass image further and at the same time exploring the actor in him, Ram has been having talks with multiple filmmakers over the last six months for his next. Some of the directors with whom he held discussions include Venky Kudumula and RT Neeson. But it looks like the actor has finally picked his next

director. According to a well-placed source, he will be collaborating with Tamil director N Lingusamy next. The director is familiar to Telugu audiences as his films like *Pandem Kodi*, *Run* and *Awaara* — all dubbed from Tamil — have performed reasonably well here. While his last two Tamil films — *Sikander* and *Pandem Kodi 2* — might have failed to light up the box-office, his

cracker of an idea sealed the deal for Ram.

The source informs, "Ram's search for his next filmmaker ended with Lingusamy after the director shared an interesting story idea, as it ticks all the boxes the actor was looking for. He has asked the director to flesh it out further. Discussions are underway whether to make it as a Telugu-Tamil bilingual. With Ram

being a popular face in the north market, courtesy his Telugu dubbed movies into Hindi, it cannot be ruled out if the makers consider the project as a pan-India affair."

The source adds that *U Turn* and *Seetimaarr* producer Srinivasaa Chitturi will be shepherding the project under his Srinivasaa Silver



Screen. "The filming is likely to begin in March or April," the source concludes.

tollywood

Jakes Bejoy music for Maruthi-Gopichand film

As reported by us earlier, filmmaker Maruthi has chosen Pakka Commercial as the title for his next with Gopichand.

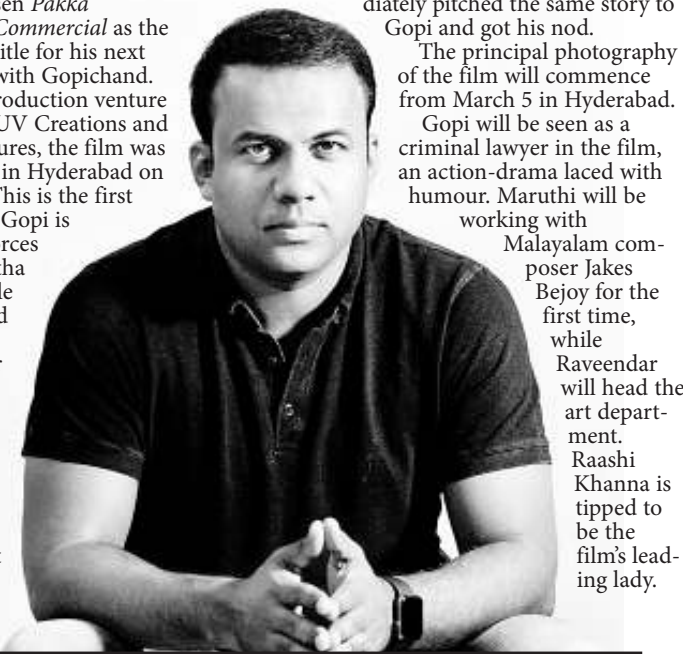
A joint production venture between UV Creations and GAZ Pictures, the film was launched in Hyderabad on Sunday. This is the first time that Gopi is joining forces with Geetha Arts, while he worked with UV earlier for *Jil*. Initially, Ravi Teja was attached to the project as a lead but with the produc-

tion houses not meeting his fee demands, he exited it. Maruthi immediately pitched the same story to Gopi and got his nod.

The principal photography of the film will commence from March 5 in Hyderabad.

Gopi will be seen as a criminal lawyer in the film, an action-drama laced with humour. Maruthi will be working with

Malayalam composer Jakes Bejoy for the first time, while Raveendar will head the art department. Raashi Khanna is tipped to be the film's lead lady.



Radhe Shyam in July-end

Pan-India star Prabhas on Sunday dropped the glimpse of his next, *Radhe Shyam*, giving a peek into the fairytale world that director Radha Krishna created for the period romantic drama. The teaser opens with Prabhas searching for his love interest in a crowded European railway station, trying to make an impression. When he is asked whether he considers himself as Romeo by Prerana who is played by Pooja Hegde, he replies, "I am unlike him. He died for love; I won't."

"Celebrate the day of

love with a Glimpse of #RadheShyam. #ValentinesWithRS Releasing in cinemas on 30th July 2021 (sic)," Prabhas wrote, while using the occasion to even reveal the film's anticipated release date simultaneously in Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam.

The date assumes significance as the same month witnesses other pan-India releases lined-up. While Adivi Sesh's *Major* (July 2), backed by superstar Mahesh Babu and Sony Pictures, will kick off the July competition, *KGF: Chapter 2*, with sky-high expectations around it, opens on July 16.

Two weeks after *Radhe Shyam* storms into the cinemas, Allu Arjun-starrer *Pushpa* is set to release.



Uppena clocks great numbers

Released amid great expectations, *Uppena* on Friday collected a share of Rs 9.3 crore, setting a positive precedent for the weekend. The impressive content aided by a super hit soundtrack meant that the film consolidated on his positive word-of-mouth on the second day as well, registering a share of 6.9 crore. Overall, the first two days collections stand at Rs 16.2 crore. The number is quite impressive for a feature starring debutants.

At this rate, most of the distributors will see profits from Monday, while the producers have already made profits before

release. With the industry going through a crisis for almost 10 months due to COVID-19, *Uppena's* revenue has proved that the audiences are ready to get back to the cinemas if they are delivered good content.

Directed by Sukumar's assistant Buchi Babu Sana, *Uppena* tells the story of a fisherman's son Aasi (played by Vaishnav Tej) falling in love with the daughter (Krithi Shetty) of an influential man Rayanam (Vijay Sethupathi) who comes from an upper caste. The price Aasi pays over it forms the crux. The film's climax, especially, received great plaudits from the people who've watched it so far.



Gantadi Krishna remixes Devudu Varamandithe for his directorial debut

As a composer, Gantadi Krishna's bonafides include *Sampangi*, *Six Teens* and *Sriramachandrudu* among others in the noughties and now he has gone behind the camera to direct and produce a film titled *Inka Edho Kavali*, featuring new faces Sandeep Ashwa, Tarun Sagar, Arjun Thakur, Vishwesh, Sanya Sinha, Zoya Zaverie in the lead roles.

Speaking to us, he informs us that the film falls under the genre of *Six Teens* but is not a sequel. "It's a beautiful story and as it was my brainchild, I decided to direct it. It's a musical-based film and tells the story of four guys and two girls. The male lead woos two girls simultaneously and how he realises the importance of love forms the crux," the director, who has also composed the soundtrack, shares. Krishna adds that he enjoyed the experience of directing the film and he will direct more if he comes across stories that resonate with him. However, he maintains that his primary love remains music. He has also remixed

the hugely popular *Devudu Varamandithe* number from *Six Teens* for *Inka Edho Kavali*, repeating original singer Kumar Sanu. "I've signed him on because I wanted to jog the audience's memory once again. Generally for a remix, the beats are added with an increase in the tempo. For this song though, I've changed the tune completely," he notes, adding that he has completed the talkie portions of the film and he intends to shoot a couple of numbers in Bangkok pretty soon.

Krishna is not busy as a composer right now as when he burst on to the scene two decades ago. He insists such fluctuations are common in the industry. "We don't be the way the industry wants us to be, and vice-versa with the industry as well. Success determines your next moves here," he signs off.



Sree Vishnu's next titled Arjuna Phalguna

Production house Matinee Entertainments on Sunday revealed the title of its next with Sree Vishnu and Amritha Aiyer as *Arjuna Phalguna*. Directed by Teja Marni of *Johaar* fame, the film is a rural comedy and has gone to floors in December. The makers announced that 75 percent of the film's shooting has been wrapped up.

Speaking about the East Godavari-set project, Teja told us that it is about five friends who stand for each other during their testing times.

"It is a caper comedy and there is a social issue we are trying to address sensitively. People who have taken crores of loans from banks are let go off easily while farmers who owe Rs 1-3 lakh bore the brunt of the banks. The film revolves around money. It is in contrast to my first film, in that it will be humorous," he had said.

Featuring Naresh, Sivaji Raja, Subba Raju, Devi Prasad, Rangasthalam Mahesh and Raj Kumar Chowdary in supporting roles, the film is a Priyadarshan Balasubramanian musical.

