

ANALYSIS 7

TIME FOR GOVT TO MAKE
A CLEAR-CUT CHOICE

MONEY 8

GLOBAL SHARES MOSTLY LOWER AS
INVESTORS WARY OVER STIMULUS

SPORTS 11

WTC WIN WILL BE SAME AS
WORLD CUP: ISHANT

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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FILM WITH RAVI GARU
WILL BE A HILARIOUS
ENTERTAINER:
WRITER PRASANNA
KUMAR
Page 12AYODHYA AIRPORT TO BE NAMED
AFTER LORD RAM

The under construction airport in Ayodhya will be named Maryada Purushottam Sri Ram Airport, Ayodhya after Lord Ram and a provision of Rs 101 crore has been made in the budget presented in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly on Monday. Besides the provision for the Ayodhya airport which will subsequently be made an international airport, the budget also provides for Rs 2,000 crore for increasing the number of airstrips at Jewar Airport from 2 to 6. Cities like Aligarh, Moradabad, Meerut will also be linked through air service soon, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath told reporters after the presentation of the budget by Finance Minister Suresh Khanna.

TOP DOCTOR BODY CRITICISES HEALTH
MINISTER PRESENCE AT CORONIL LAUNCH

Yoga teacher Ramdev's claims on Patanjali's Coronil as the "first evidence-based medicine for COVID-19", made in the presence of Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan, has drawn blistering criticism from the IMA. The medical body has questioned how the Health Minister could promote a "falsely fabricated, unscientific product" before the country. On Friday, Ramdev launched the Patanjali product in the presence of Harsh Vardhan and Nitin Gadkari. On a poster behind the trio were claims that the "medicine" was CoPP and WHO GMP certified - meaning it holds a certificate of pharmaceutical product.

DADRA AND NAGAR HAVELI MP MOHAN
DELKAR FOUND DEAD IN MUMBAI HOTEL

Mohan Delkar, seven-term Lok Sabha member from Dadra and Nagar Haveli, was found dead in a Mumbai hotel on Monday, police said. The body of Delkar (58), Independent MP from Dadra and Nagar Haveli Union Territory, was found at the sea-facing hotel in south Mumbai's Marine Drive area, a police official said. The official said a suicide note in Gujarati was also found along with the body. The cause of death will be known after autopsy, he added. An accidental death report was registered, the official said. Delkar was in May 2019 elected to the 17th Lok Sabha, his seventh term in the House.

INDIA SEES SHARPEST INCREASE IN
ACTIVE COVID CASES SINCE NOV-END

Active Coronavirus cases in India shot up by 4,421 in 24 hours - a spike of 3 percent - to go back over the 1.5 lakh mark for the first time in 17 days and register the steepest increase since end-November. On November 27, the active caseload was 4,55,555 - an increase of 3.85 percent from the 4,38,667 recorded on November 24. Monday was the fifth consecutive day in which active cases have increased; 13,506 new cases have been added in this period.

Final tally has TDP on very distant
horizon; YSRCP the clear winner

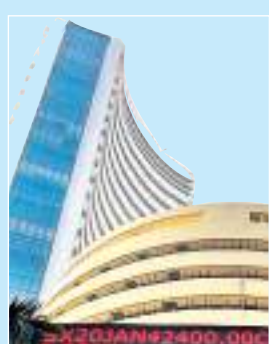
■ Ruling party supporters 10,098 panchayats, including those on Amaravati periphery

PM opens treasure
chest for Assam
ahead of polls

5

VSP privatisation
decision is conscien-
tious, beneficial

2

Sensex sinks 1,145
points;
Nifty drops below
14,700

8

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Magha & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Bhadrapad: 06:04 pm

Nakshatram: Ardra: 12:31 pm

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start

any important work)

Rahukalam: 03:23 pm - 04:50 pm

Yamagandam: 09:35 am - 11:02 am

Varjyam: 12:54 am - 02:33 am

Gulika: 12:29 pm - 01:56 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: NIL

Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:06 pm - 12:52 pm

VIJAYAWADA

WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 35/21

Humidity: 52%

Sunrise: 06:38 am

Sunset: 06:20 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated february 22, 2021 5:00 PM

SNV SUDHIR

■ VIJAYAWADA

With the final results after the fourth phase of gram panchayat polls that ended on Sunday came in on Monday afternoon, the ruling YSRCP has emerged the clear victor with candidates backed by it bagging around 80.51 percent of the panchayats that went for polls in four phases.

The opposition TDP came a distant second, with the party backed candidates bagging a mere 16.05 percent of the panchayats. Despite this, the TDP insists that its supporters have won more than 40 pc of the panchayats in all the four phases.

After a high drama that had dragged on for months, the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government wilted under the Supreme Court directions and finally agreed to cooperate with State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar on holding gram panchayat polls.

This factor alone made it a high stakes battle and the fact that the Jagan government is just a few months away from complete two years in office was being seen in some quarters as an indication of its popularity.

The polls sprang a surprise in the form of a record turnout of voters in all the four phases held on February 9, 13, 17 and 21. The polling percentage in all these phases was 81.67 per cent, 81.67 per cent, 80.71 per cent and 81.78 per cent respectively.

Efficiency of Govt machinery
on display: Ramesh Kumar

VIJAYAWADA: State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar on Monday said that the government machinery has discharged its duties with commitment during the four phases of gram panchayat elections that were completed peacefully and successfully on Sunday. Addressing the media here, the SEC said that about 90,000 government employees from all departments were involved directly and indirectly in the election process. He said that 50,000 police personnel discharged their duties, putting off aside their Covid vaccination shot.

No major incidents were reported during the four phases and the SP level officers intervened and took control after a few minor skirmishes came to light.

"Over 80 per cent polling reported which is a good development that reflects the confidence among voters to come out and cast



their vote since a peaceful atmosphere was maintained," the SEC said.

Arrangements were being made despite Covid pandemic by officials of the Medical and Health department and there was no major change in Covid positive cases, which is a good sign, he said.

The Chief Secretary, the DGP, Collectors, SPs and other officials were coordinating with officials for the smooth conduct of the polls as it was not a one-man show, said the SEC.

2

TDP supporters win made it a
'people's victory', says Naidu

VIJAYAWADA: Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday termed the just-concluded gram panchayat elections in the State as a 'people's victory' thanks to the candidates who stood up against the atrocities ruling YCP atrocities and poll violations with courage and confidence and contested the polls.

Naidu warned the Chief Minister and his MLAs that their "midnight murder of democracy" perpetrated during the gram panchayat polls would not succeed in the coming municipal elections. "The urban voter, young people, traders and educated sections were all well prepared to oppose the YSRCP for its J-tax collections, increased municipal taxes and unabashed sale of unhealthy J-liquor brands," he said.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP chief asserted that candidates



backed by his party won 41.7 percent of the vote in the fourth phase "despite the multifarious threats and election violations" by YSRCP leaders.

The TDP would have got 10 percent more votes if YSRCP leaders were prevented from committing irregularities, he said.

Naidu said that the YSRCP would have been wiped out in the panchayat polls itself if the State Election Commission (SEC) did not fail to ensure a peaceful election.

2

YSRCP supporters hold sway around Amaravati

Vijayawada : As per reports emerging on Monday, the ruling YSRCP candidates also bagged a majority of the panchayats that come under various mandals around the Amaravati capital region in Guntur district.

Polls to these panchayats were keenly watched as the farmers from the 29 villages of Amaravati have been staging protests demanding the

Jaganmohan Reddy government to roll back its three capital formula, which they say would jeopardise their fortunes.

It's been more than a year that they launched a sit-in and have been organising protests daily. However, polls to the panchayats of these Amaravati villages were not held as the government wrote to SEC not to conduct polls as

these villages were merged into either Tadepalli or Mangalagiri municipalities.

Around 28 village panchayats of the capital region cover 24 revenue villages or 31 habitations in three mandals - Thullur, Tadepalle, and Mangalagiri - of Guntur district. Of them, 19 are from Thullur, two from Tadepalli and six from Mangalagiri mandals.

The State government last year, when the first notification was issued, requested the SEC secretary not to conduct elections in certain village panchayats in the State including those in the capital region, as they are either included or in the process of being included into nearby municipalities/nagar panchayats or being declared as new urban local bodies (ULBs).

HC summons Sawhney,
Dwivedi over SEC's plea

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A divisional bench of the AP High Court on Monday summoned former Chief Secretary Nilam Sawhney and Panchayat Raj Principal Secretary Gopala Krishna Dwivedi to appear before it on March 22.

In its petition, the SEC accused the Government of not following its orders given on December 18, 2020 to cooperate with him.

2

State Cabinet
to meet today

Vijayawada: The Cabinet will meet here on Tuesday at 11 am where it is expected to finalise the dates for the Budget session and also discuss the Bills to be introduced.

The southern zonal council meeting of the states to be held at Tirupati in March and the VSP protest are also likely to come up for discussion.

Varavara Rao gets
6-month medical bail

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Monday granted interim bail for six months on medical grounds to ailing poet and activist Varavara Rao, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case.

The court said it could not be a "mute spectator" and permit 82-year-old Rao's health condition to deteriorate in custody.

A bench of Justices SS Shinde and Manish Pitale said there existed no doubt that given his current medical con-

dition, Rao would face "acceleration and intensification of ailments" if he continued to remain in custody.

It noted that medical facilities at the Taloja prison's hospital in neighbouring Navi Mumbai were inadequate. Rao is currently admitted in Nanavati Hospital, a private medical facility in Mumbai.

He has been in custody since August 28, 2018, awaiting trial in the case, which is being probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

2

Sleuths of the Anti Corruption Bureau on Monday submitted a detailed report to the government on the checks they had conducted at the Kanakadurga temple atop Indrakeeladri over the past three days.

According to sources, the ACB officials found irregularities in administrative activities of the temple during their searches. During the three day search, the ACB officials had inspected the Executive Officer's peshi, the sarees section, stores, administrative section, engineering and accounts sections and collected



hard disks and records.

The ACB officials recorded the statement of the temple Executive Officer MV Suresh Babu.

The officials submitted the report on the searches conducted and documents, hard disks

they collected from the temple to Endowments Commissioner P Arjuna Rao.

According to sources, the ACB officials noticed 'recycling' of Darshan tickets during Dasara festival. They also found some

irregularities in some works taken up by the engineering section after the Krishna pushkaralu.

The ACB officials collected the details of the works during the last five years and payments made to contractors. They noticed that sarees that some devotees had offered to the presiding deity and stored in the sarees section had been replaced.

Similarly, the officials also noticed that records were not maintained properly in the stores section related to Prasadam and free meals. The ACB officials noticed that the excess payment was made for the sanitation and

security contract works.

Many allegations were levelled about the internal transfers in the temple last year. The officials noticed some officials were working in the temple for an extended duration.

Meanwhile, Opposition parties like the TDP, Jana Sena and BJP came down heavily on Endowments Minister Velampalli Srinivas and Suresh Babu for the irregularities.

It's expected that the government may take action against the temple Suresh Babu as he is responsible for the administrative activities and the maintenance of the temple.

Benami deals in
Amaravati: Transcript
of conversation not
enough, says SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Monday said it cannot hold an inquiry as to what was there in the phone conversation between former Andhra Pradesh High Court judge Justice V Eswaraiah and a suspended trial court magistrate with regard to various issues including alleged 'benami' transactions related to the Amaravati land scam case.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and RS Reddy also reserved its order on the plea of Justice Eswaraiah seeking a stay on the AP High Court order directing a probe into his conversation with suspended District Munsif Magistrate.

The High Court had said that their phone conversation had allegedly disclosed a serious conspiracy against the judiciary.

"This court cannot hold an inquiry as to what is there in the transcript of the conversation and what is missed out. Let the HC take a call," the bench said in the proceedings held through video conferencing.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the former HC judge, said that the High Court order needed to be stayed as allegations have been made without hearing the former judge.

Justice Eswaraiah had moved the Supreme Court against a High Court order directing a probe into the phone conversation between him and a suspended trial court magistrate on the ground that it allegedly disclosed a serious conspiracy against the judiciary.

2

LeT planned hit
on Hyd, says NIA

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The NIA filed a supplementary chargesheet before a special court here on Monday against two terrorists of Pakistan-based terror group LeT for their alleged involvement in a conspiracy to commit subversive activities and wage a war against India, besides killing key personalities of the Hindu community in the country, an official said.

The chargesheet was filed against Dr Sabeel Ahmed of Bengaluru and Asadulla Khan of Hyderabad under Sections of the IPC and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), a spokesperson of the country's premier investigation agency said.

The case, initially registered in August 2012 in Bengaluru, pertains to a conspiracy hatched by members of proscribed terror organisations Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI) to commit subversive activities and wage a war against the government of India, the NIA official said.

As per the chargesheet, the duo had procured illegal arms and ammunition for targeted killings of important personalities of the Hindu community in Karnataka's Bengaluru and Hubli, Maharashtra's Nanded and Telangana's Hyderabad to disturb communal harmony and strike terror in the society, the official said.

2

VSP privatisation decision is conscientious, beneficial

It's ironic that some leaders who have been giving emotional 'Save Visakhapatnam Steel Plant' speeches are the ones who have looted Vizag city in one way or the other.

Some of these leaders treated the steel plant as their personal property and amassed crores of rupees. Some even eyed lands of the steel plant, while others have built huge buildings on the Beach Road violating rules.

Those who indulged in nefarious deals left, right and centre have been undertaking padayatrass for the steel plant and shedding crocodile tears.

None of them will talk about who pushed VSP into losses, or who drove people displaced by it onto the streets despite promising a job to each household. Who looted public funds by escalating the tender value indiscriminately? Who forced VSP

workers to fight at every step to protect their rights?

Though the foundation stone for the steel plant was laid in 1971, why were suitable funds not allotted to it for the next seven years?

Under whose regime, was construction of the steel plant stalled in 1985? Who wanted to dispose of the Steel Plant as scrap after Rs 1,500 crore was spent to build it? Why did TDP and Congress governments fail to allot captive iron ore mines to the steel plant?

Who caused a loss of Rs 1,100 crore to the steel plant to satisfy Congress chairperson Sonia Gandhi in the name of Raebareli Wheel Plant?

So-called leaders were silent when iron ore worth lakhs of crores was being exported instead of being allotted to domestic steel plants; they have now

The Modi government contemplates equal partnership for both private and public sectors. What did the country achieve by giving management of the PSUs to IAS officials alone? Youth should be provided with opportunities, Modi told the Niti Aayog Governing Council.

launched the 'Save VSP' agitation.

Those who paved the way for privatisation of many PSUs are now questioning the Modi Government.

It is not true that though the Centre gave the nod for the steel factory in Kadapa district, the then state government failed to allot suitable iron ore mines to it?

The Minister for Major Industries told Parliament that 70 PSUs were in losses as of March 2019. The Modi Government took a policy decision on the PSUs. It

decided to implement measures like reorganisation of the business, promotion of joint investments, modernisation of the PSU, implementing better marketing strategies, corporate style of management, appointing experts on the board and so on.

It is not limited to the steel plant alone, but to many PSUs in the country.

The Modi government contemplates equal partnership for both private and public sectors. What did the country achieve by giving management of the PSUs to



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

IAS officials alone? Youth should be provided with a majority of the opportunities and the private sector should be respected as it is creating wealth in the country, Modi told the Niti Aayog Governing Council.

Is it not true that Governments failed to use the economic and industrial capacity fully ever since

license raj was done away with in PV Narsimha Rao's rule?

Is it right to take recourse to public funds without mobilising internal resources of the PSUs, without modernising amenities and without augmenting the production capacity?

We should question ourselves whether it is proper to shut doors on foreign investments ready to come to the country on a large scale?

Modi felt that tough decisions should be taken to create world-class basic amenities in the country, to improve living standards of common man, to inject momentum into our economy and took such decisions. He favoured encouraging MSMEs and start-ups.

Like previous regimes,

Modi does not want to practise vote bank politics. It's not Modi's policy to hoodwink people, make false promises and discard them once the purpose is served.

The Modi government has set itself a policy objective to give the private sector a chance since the public sector alone is not able to attract more investments into the country.

Maruti Udyog Corporation chairman RC Bhargava, in an interview, said that the car company sold 1.20 lakh units in 1993 upon its privatisation in 1992. It reached the stage of selling 18 lakh car units by 2019-20 and achieved cash surplus of Rs 38,000 crore. Irrespective of the tough competition from other players, Maruti cars constitute 50 per cent of the total cars sold in the country.

Why PSUs, including the VSP, are not able to attract private investments and earn huge profits like the Maruti Udyog?

Why should the government invest in production business and service sectors instead of lodging its funds in the public welfare sector, infrastructural development, medical and education, housing sectors or to provide drinking water and other basic amenities?

Disinvestment of public sector investments and pumping funds by private sectors does not mean the government shirking its responsibility. The Government is saddled with the responsibility of coming to the rescue of downtrodden sections and ensuring fruits of development reach them.

This is the objective of the Modi's government of minimum governance and maximum administration.

Vizag city contributes over 30% of AP's municipal tax

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vizag city's urban local body, the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation, generates a staggering 30 percent of the total revenue collected by 110 local bodies in Andhra Pradesh.

With the executive capital tag, GVMC would be sitting on a pretty large cash pile, enhancing its contribution to the state municipality tax collection. The other major contributing ULBs are from Krishna and Guntur with over Rs 100 crore.

Visakhapatnam is the biggest city in the state after bifurcation of undivided Andhra Pradesh and is also the most populous. Urban local bodies mostly generate revenue from property tax, water cess and other heads.

While the proportional demand for 2020-21 was Rs 2,704.41 crore, the contribution of Vizag was pegged at Rs



880.36 crore, a share of 32.5 percent.

Till February 22 this year, Rs 1,025 crore was already collected from property tax and water cess sources of which Vizag contributed Rs 261 crore, about 25.6 percent.

Visakhapatnam prepares an annual Budget of around Rs 4,000 crore. The state government is planning to make the Urban Local Bodies self-suffi-

cient with slew of revenue increasing measures.

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit the municipality tax collection across the state. It fell far short of the target set in the financial year.

The civic authorities also did not levy two per cent interest per month on late payment of property tax in order to encourage payment.

The department had taken

up an awareness campaign among property owners about the series of incentives being offered by the government to taxpayers. They were also entrusted with the task of door-to-door visits to collect tax and this enabled some people who were unable to visit municipal offices for the same. Online payment of taxes also boosted collections.

Under the new property tax reform, the property tax would be 0.1 per cent to 0.5 per cent of the Capital Value for residential structures, and 0.2 per cent to 2 per cent for non-residential structures. The new tax hike would be limited between 10 per cent and 15 percent of the existing rate.

According to the new property tax reform, only Rs 50 is levied as property tax for every house with a plinth area below 375 sq. ft. because the property rights will be given only if taxes are paid.

Efficiency of Govt machinery on display...

Continued from Page 1

Elections were held for 13,097 sarpanches of which 2,197 (16.77 percent) were declared elected without contest.

Elections were held for 1,31,023 Ward Members of which 47,459 (36.22 percent) were elected unanimously. This in view of the Commission is reasonable as compared to the unanimous elections of 1,980 out of 12,740 Sarpanches (15.54 percent) and 44,448 out of 1,29,316 Ward Members (34.37 percent) respectively during the elections held in 2013. A total of 2,26,67,604 voters of the 2,77,17,784 registered took part in the gram panchayat polls.

Holding of elections had also paved the way for release of funds through the Finance Commission, which is a prerequisite. The elections have witnessed an overall polling percentage of 81.78 percent under difficult and challenging circumstances such as the Covid pandemic, he said.

Benami deals in Amaravati:...

Continued from Page 1

In an affidavit filed in the top court, Justice (retd) Eswaraiah said he had sought information from a suspended judicial officer regarding the benami transactions in a phone conversation, which purportedly pertained to corruption allegations related to land deals in the state's new capital region.

The affidavit was filed in pursuance to the apex court's January 11 direction asking Justice (retd) Eswaraiah to clarify his stand with regard to his conversation with the suspended district munsif.

The Special Leave Petition was filed against the August 13 order of the High Court ordering an investigation into a private phone conversation between the petitioner and a suspended District Munsif Magistrate of Andhra Pradesh, by terming the contents of the conversation to disclose a 'serious conspiracy' against the Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh, a senior sitting judge of the Supreme Court and thereby to destabilise the judiciary, said the appeal.

The former judge said the High Court's order was made



on the basis of an application for reopening and intervention filed by the suspended District Munsif Magistrate (S Ramakrishna) in an unrelated PIL pending there for seeking implementation of the Covid guidelines in the court building and premises.

The order for the enquiry into the conversation was made by the High Court on the basis of the intervention and without even issuing notice to the former judge, the appeal said.

The plea sought a stay of the High Court's order for the enquiry on the ground that it was unwarranted and illegal and has been passed without

a notice to Justice Eswaraiah and has caused undue harassment to him.

The High Court, in its order, had requested former Supreme Court judge Justice RV Raveendran to inquire into the matter. The plea said the former HC judge, in the phone conversation, had merely mentioned his knowledge about allegations of misconduct and terming such a conversation to be a kind of conspiracy.

The plea alleged that the transcript of the conversation, provided by Ramakrishna, was inaccurate and hence, misleading with respect to various aspects of the talk.

National positivity rate at 5.2 %

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has registered a record in the number of Covid-19 cumulative tests, with over 21.15 crore samples tested, the Union Health Ministry said on Monday. The country's national positivity rate is pegged at 5.20 per cent.

Progressive countrywide expansion in testing infrastructure has played a crucial role in the steep rise of testing numbers, the ministry said.

With 2393 testing labs in the country including 1,220 government laboratories and 1,173 private laboratories, the daily testing capacity has got a substantial boost.

"India's cumulative national positivity rate is presently pegged at 5.20 per cent," the ministry said. A total of 6,20,216 tests were conducted

in a span of 24 hours.

"The number of beneficiaries being tested per million every day has shown a consistent and progressive increase. India's tests per million stand at 1,53,298.4 as on date," the ministry highlighted.

Till February 22, the Covid-19 vaccination coverage was 1,11,16,854 through 2,32,317 sessions, as per the provisional report. These include 63,97,849 healthcare workers (HCWs 1st dose), 9,67,852 HCWs (2nd dose) and 37,51,153 frontline workers (FLW 1st dose).

The second dose of Covid-19 vaccination started on February 13 for those beneficiaries who have completed 28 days of the receipt of the first dose. Vaccination of the FLWs started on February 2.

As on day-37 of the vaccina-

tion drive (February 21), 31,681 vaccine doses were given. Of these, 24,471 beneficiaries were vaccinated across 1,429 sessions for the first dose (HCWs and FLWs) and 7,210 HCWs received the second dose of the vaccine.

Out of total 1,11,16,854 vaccine doses, 1,01,49,002 (HCWs and FLWs) received the first dose of vaccine and total 9,67,852 HCWs received the second dose of vaccine, the ministry said. It said 60.17 per cent of the total vaccine doses are concentrated in seven states. Karnataka alone accounts for 11.8 per cent (1,14,043 doses).

India's cumulative recoveries surged to 1.06 crore (1,06,99,410) and exceeded the active cases by 1,05,49,355 (71.3 times), the ministry underscored.

TDP supporters win made it a...

Continued from Page 1

"It was due to the fear and terror by YSRCP leaders and total failure of the Election Commission that there was 6 percent lower turnout compared to the previous gram panchayat polls," he said.

The TDP chief said that his party would stage demonstrations in front of all collectorates and then submit memoranda demanding action against the election violations resorted to by the officials, police and ruling party leaders in the panchayat polls.

Naidu asked the Election Commission why it could not take any action against the police

officer who threatened to encounter a TDP leader if he did not stop demanding justice in Kuppm segment. He asked why the SEC was not able to take action against the officials who disconnected power at the counting centres.

Indirectly referring to Saradapeetham's seer Swaroopananda, Naidu said, "A Vizag fake Swamiji would be able to use the black magic to kill the TDP leaders.

It was unfortunate that the Chief Minister was making frequent visits to such a false Swami. Since the CM was visiting him, the DGP and the IPS officers were also surrendering to the fake Swami".

HC summons Sawhney, Dwivedi over SEC's plea

Continued from Page 1

The contempt petition said the government was not implementing the HC orders passed on November 3, 2020. Later the SEC filed an additional affidavit to make incumbent Chief Secretary Adityanath Das a respondent since Sawhney has retired.



LeT planned hit...

Continued from Page 1

The NIA re-registered the case in November 2012 and has filed chargesheets against 17 accused.

LeT members Ahmed and Khan were involved in a criminal conspiracy, along with other accused, in supporting and furthering the cause of the terror outfit in Saudi Arabia's Dammam and Riyadh, the NIA spokesperson said.

They actively participated in meetings, where terrorist activities like targeted killings of important personalities of the

Hindu community in Bengaluru, Hubli and Nanded were planned, the NIA added.

The special NIA court in Bengaluru convicted 13 accused in the case in September 2016 and sentenced them to five years of imprisonment for their involvement in offences under the UAPA, IPC, Arms Act and Official Secrets Act.

A trial is continuing against three accused who were named in an earlier chargesheet, the NIA official said, adding that further investigation against six absconding accused is underway.

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Results reflect CM's good governance, says YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Attributing the overwhelming victory in panchayat polls to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's good governance, YSRCP has said the party-backed candidates have won 80.51 per cent of seats and pushed opposition TDP to just 16.05 per cent.

Speaking to the media here on Monday, Minister for Panchayat Raj Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy said that YSRCP-supported candidates had swept all four phases of the polls which indicates increasing support base of the party while opposition TDP has further slipped into ignominy.

Minister for Water Resources P Anil Kumar Yadav said that TDP would have been confined to single-digit seats had the YSRCP rebel candidates refrained from contesting.

Criticising TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu for celebrating the victory in just 16 per cent seats, he derided that Naidu will celebrate even booth-level victory in 2024 polls.

He derided Chandrababu Naidu to step down and prove his statement of winning 41 per cent seats in panchayat polls. He said that TDP was rejected by people of Chandrababu Naidu's native place where only eight TDP-backed candidates recoded victory. "The same scenario was found even in Kuppam as they are fed up with Naidu's politics. He must be ashamed



Focus on targeted goals, CM tells planning staff

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday instructed the Planning Department officials to focus on targeted goals.

Reviewing the functioning of Planning Department, the Chief Minister said that the responsibility of data coding should be given to digital assistants at village and ward secretariats and it should be supervised by a mandal level employee. He asked the officials to consider codifying the e-cropping data of RBKs which helps in understanding crops

of distorting facts," he said. The Minister criticised Naidu for citing police atrocities as a reason for their defeat and termed polls conducted during TDP regime as Ravana

patterns and ground reality of crops across the state. He said the data regarding the functioning of internet services at government offices like Village, Ward Secretariats, RBKs, etc in villages should be recorded on regular basis for effective functioning. When officials apprised the Chief Minister that state government was supposed to meet the seventeen goals set by the United Nations for sustainable development, he directed them to partner with United Nations, its allied departments and global organisations to achieve those goals. Stating that the state

government should work in tandem with organisations such as World Bank, IMF, and UNESCO, he asked the officials to focus not only on collecting data, but also on taking measures after analysing the data. The Chief Minister asked them to regularly track the progress of works in achieving the desired goals and also to identify the mistakes and correct them on regular basis. He asked them to prepare an action plan to felicitate the volunteers on the eve of Ugadi. They should be felicitated with awards like Seva Ratna, Seva Mitra and good incentives.

kashtam.

The present elections were conducted in a peaceful way and it was announced by none other than the State Election Commissioner N

Ramesh Kumar, he added.

The winning streak of YSRCP will continue in the ensuing municipal, MPTC and ZPTC polls as well, he said.



State Selection Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar met AP Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan here at Raj Bhavan on Monday. The SEC explained the Governor about the recently concluded gram panchayat elections in the state. He also informed the Governor about the ensuing polls for urban local bodies scheduled to be held on March 10.

Civic polls crucial for all parties

DHARWADA RAMA MOHAN RAO ■ HYDERABAD

Municipal and municipal corporation elections scheduled for March 10 will be the acid test for the TDP, the Jana Sena, the BJP and the Congress. In all, 75 municipalities and 12 municipal corporations are going to polls on March 10.

Unlike the panchayat polls, the municipal polls will be fought on parties' symbols.

They will conclusively establish the urban voters' mood and highlights whether they are happy or not with the government.

The polls will decide the fate of the ruling YSRCP and the opposition parties of TDP, Jana Sena and the BJP.

The YSRCP claimed that its supporters bagged 9772 seats in 13,097 panchayats, while the TDP claimed that its supporters won 1,850 seats. The Jana

Sena-BJP claimed its supporters winning 138 seats.

The TDP claimed getting 50 per cent vote share. Surprisingly, both TDP and YSRCP celebrated victory at their party headquarters.

The YSRCP leaders feel that victory in the ensuing elections to urban local bodies was a matter of prestige as they are regarded as real test for Jagan Government. Also, these polls reflect the performance of MLAs. If the YSRCP resorts to hurling out threats, it will become counterproductive.

True popularity of the YSRCP will be reflected in the municipal polls. The future of the YSRCP is dependent on winning these polls because of high media influence in urban areas.

Whether the corruption of YSRCP MLAs would have any impact or not would be known only after the elections.

These polls also decide the

TDP's future. They are going to be a do-or-die battle for the TDP, which fared miserably in panchayat polls. The TDP is required to mobilise resources for municipal polls. Because of its poor finances, the TDP is visible more in media than among the people.

During the NTR regime, the TDP held sway in villages. But, under the Chandrababu's regime, the TDP lost its grip over villages. In the last Assembly polls, the TDP lost its grip over urban voters.

The TDP will find facing the financially-strong YSRCP a Herculean task.

The municipal polls are going to pose a problem to the BJP, which contested here and there in panchayat polls, forcing it to contest in all wards.

The Jana Sena would have no option except to sever ties with the BJP if it were to poll less number of votes than the NOTA option received.

Naidu's 3-day visit to Kuppam from Feb 25 to boost morale of cadre

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Following the massive defeat tasted by TDP-supported candidates in the recently concluded panchayat elections in Kuppam Assembly constituency, TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu is likely to visit his home constituency on February 25, 26 and 27 to boost the morale of the party cadre ahead of the urban polls.

Earlier, Naidu conducted a teleconference with party leaders in the constituency to take note of the factors that led to the setback in the Kuppam constituency which he has been representing for the seventh consecutive time.

However, the party managed to win just 14 out of 89 panchayats while the ruling YSRCP bagged a whopping 75 panchayats. The party leaders say the party suffered defeat due to the 'muscle and money power' exercised and the "misuse" of official machinery by the YSRCP leaders.

He is said to have expressed ire over the local leaders' failure to counter the acts of the ruling party. Naidu told cadre in Kuppam assured them that he will visit Kuppam at the earliest as the leaders underscored the need for the same as the notification for MPTC and ZPTC elections will be released at any time.

The TDP leader feel that Naidu's visit will inject a fresh dose of adrenaline to the cadre and help the party gain good dividends in the coming MPTC and ZPTC elections which will be held based on party symbols.

File nominations only in lieu of deceased candidates: SEC

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar said that notices were issued to six recognised/registered parties to nominate candidates in place of deceased candidates by 3 pm on February 28 for elections to urban local bodies slated for March 10.

The SEC, along with the Chief Secretary Adityanath Das and DGP Gautam D Sawang, interacted via video-conference with the Collectors and SPs on arrangements for elections to urban local bodies on Monday.

As many as 56 candidates nominated by six registered political parties for urban local bodies' polls have passed away, said the SEC. Withdrawal of nominations is allowed till March 3 till 3:00 pm.

The authorised party functionary can issue fresh Form-B in favour of another candidate by withdrawing the previous Form-B issued in March 2020.

Ward-wise photo electoral rolls of 12 Municipal Corporations and 75 Municipalities/Nagar Panchayats were published with reference to January 1, 2019 and no inclusions, deletions or modifications shall be done to the rolls already published.

During the voting process, no voter shall be allowed into polling station for casting vote unless he/she wears a face mask. Polling personnel / police personnel deployed at polling stations shall be pro-

vided with face masks and sanitisers/hand gloves. Social distancing shall be strictly observed, he said.

Model Code of Conduct came into force in the urban areas from February 15, 2021 and will remain in force till completion of election process, said the SEC. He said that flying squads and static surveillance teams would be constituted to implement MCC.

Magisterial powers will be conferred on the officers heading teams as per the proposals sent by the Collectors and DEAs directly to the Government in Law (Home-Courts-B) Department to ensure strict enforcement of MCC, he said.

Vulnerability mapping and identification of sensitive, hypersensitive and critical polling stations must have been done by team of local officials (Tahsildar, Municipal Commissioner and SHO).

SEC said that measures like CCTV Cameras / videography / webcasting shall be taken up in select sensitive/hypersensitive / troublesome polling stations to build confidence among voters, particularly in vulnerable areas and to curtail scope for electoral malpractices.

A call centre was set up in the Commission's office with telephone No. 0866-2466877. Complaints received in the call centre are referred to the nodal officers / district administration for redressal. This will be continued in the ensuing ULB elections.



Six arrested for illegally transporting liquor worth ₹18.32L

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Special Enforcement Bureau (SEB) sleuths on Monday arrested six persons for illegally transporting liquor. They seized liquor bottles worth Rs 18.32 lakh, a mini truck, a car and a motorcycle.

Arif Hafeez, Joint Director, SEB, Guntur said that on a tip-off, they intercepted a mini truck at Cheekateegalapalem

Cross Road in Vinukonda mandal of Guntur district.

The truck was loaded with Bislari water bottles and underneath them about 3,780 non-duty paid liquor bottles were loaded. The liquor bottles were being transported from Goa state.

The accused were identified as Y Ramakoteswara Rao (Ramu) involved in four cases earlier, M Venkat Rao, N

Krishna Reddy, T Suresh, B Veeraiah and Shaik Abdul Razzak, all from Guntur district. The kingpin, B Nageswar Rao, who was involved in two such cases and an I&O case earlier, is at large.

The seized material is estimated to be worth Rs 18.32.

A case was registered and the accused were handed over to the Vinukonda police, said the JD SEB Arif Hafeez.

Sarpanch candidate men allege biased counting, seek repoll

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

As many as 700 supporters of a sarpanch candidate staged a protest in front of the Vizag District collector's office alleging rigging in the vote counting process. Elections were held for 130 gram panchayats in Vizag on Sunday. However, the supporters of a sarpanch candidate in Gandigundam in Anandpuram mandal in

Vizag district alleged that vote counting was biased and despite having the support of many voters, their candidate lost the election.

They alleged that the sarpanch candidate, Ramesh, was announced winner first. However, post recounting, his opponent was declared the winner. The protestors demanded that the election be conducted again.

Miscreants rob visitors at gunpoint again in Agency, take away vehicle

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Armed dacoits robbing the visitors travelling in cars of their valuables continue on the ghat road of Vizag Agency.

A gang of dacoits looted the passengers travelling in a car and even took away their

vehicle on the ghat road near Darakonda in GK Veedhi mandal in Vizag Agency in the early hours on Monday.

It is the fourth such incident on the ghat road in Vizag Agency in recent times.

The police said that four people were travelling in a

four-wheeler from Darakonda village to Vizag city in the early hours on Monday. A gang of six armed dacoits stopped the vehicle by placing boulders on the road and took away cash worth around Rs 32,000. For the first time in the last four cases, the dacoits disembarked

the passengers and also took away the vehicle.

The victims said that the dacoits were equipped with sharp-edged weapons and pistols. The passengers were travelling to Vizag city with a medical emergency case in a hired vehicle.



murdered. At some other places, TDP-supported candidates were not even allowed to file their nominations. Even if they filed their nominations, they were threatened and attacked physically. They were forced to withdraw the nominations. In some places, the nomination papers of the TDP-supported candidates were snatched away and torn. The police officials joined hands with the YSRCP and terrorised the rival candidates," he alleged.

"When they felt defeat was certain, the YSRCP leaders disconnected power supply to the counting centres. Then, they played vicious games like threatening and sending out the TDP candidates and agents. This kind of electoral excesses and extremities had never been witnessed in electoral history in the past," he said.

Peddireddy to represent state at southern zonal council meeting

PNS ■ KAKINADA

State Government on Monday issued orders nominating Panchayat Raj Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy as the member of the Zonal Council for the Southern Zone.

The southern zonal council meeting will be held in Tirupati in March and Ramachandra Reddy is expected to represent Andhra Pradesh at the meeting. Government also issued orders appointing Ex-Officio Principal Secretary to Government, General Administration (SR)



Department, L Premachandra Reddy as Adviser to assist the Zonal Council for the Southern Zone in the performance of its duties.

Tirupati will host the 29th meeting of the Southern Zonal

Southern zonal council meeting will be held in Tirupati in March and Ramachandra Reddy is expected to represent AP at the meeting

Council of states on March 4.

The Southern Zonal Council comprises states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Puducherry as members and UTs of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep as special invitees.

Bhoomi pooja performed for Srivari temple in TN

PNS ■ TIRUMALA

The ceremonious Bhoomi Pooja was performed on Monday for the construction of Srivari Temple in Ulundurpet of Tamil Nadu. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Palani Swamy and TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy attended the ceremony.

After Sankalpam, Punyahavachanam, Ganapathi Pooja and Vishwakshana Pooja, the Bhoomi Pooja was performed amidst chanting of vedic hymns by pundits who placed four bricks and performed special pooja. Local MLA and TTD Trust Board member Kumaraguru, who donated the land for the construction of Srivari temple in Ulundurpet, made elaborate arrangements



for the ceremony.

TTD Board member Sekhar Reddy, CE Ramesh Reddy, some MLAs and devo-

tees participated in the pooja.

Meanwhile, Kumaraguru donated 3.98 acres of land and Rs 3.16 crore for the construc-

Sports competitions for TTD employees commence

The annual sports and games 2021 for TTD employees commenced at the Parade Grounds behind TTD Administrative Building on Sunday. In the above 45-years category of tug of war competition, Shanti team stood victorious and the Kalpana team bagged the second position. In the below 45-years category,



Padmaja team emerged winner, while Gangadevi team stood at the second place.

tion of the Srivari temple along with sub-shrines for Sri Padmavathi Ammavaru and Sri Andal Godai.

Apart from these temples, office, potu, storeroom, walls and parking area will also be constructed for the temple.

IIT-Hyderabad researchers predict lifetime of SARS-CoV-2 droplets

ANUSHA PUPPALA
■ HYDERABAD

An interdisciplinary research group of faculty at Indian Institute of Technology-Hyderabad (IIT-H) has predicted the lifetime of SARS-CoV-2 droplets on surfaces in different environmental conditions, such as ambient temperature, relative humidity, and volume and composition of droplets.

Under the same environmental conditions, the drying time for droplets on a smartphone screen is three times longer than that on a normal glass surface.

Respiratory infections such as the SARS-CoV-2 virus spreads primarily by respiratory droplets (size > 10µm) of saliva or discharge from the nose of an infected person during coughing/sneezing. Fluid dynamics plays an important role in the study of the life of these droplets migrating in the air or deposited on surfaces. Spread of virus is minimal after drying of droplets containing virus.

The study focuses on various factors affecting the drying time of saliva droplets whereas earlier studies were based on water droplets.

Saliva droplets consist of salt, protein (mucin), and surfactant in addition to water. These ingredients delay the evaporation of respiratory droplets significant-



ly as compared to pure water droplets.

Increase in humidity will make the droplet to take longer than an hour compared to a droplet under a lower humid environment that will dry-up in minutes. Lower ambient temperature also increases the drying time of the droplet.

The angle made by a droplet on the surface (which is known as "contact angle") plays an important role in the drying time of the droplet and hence highly hydrophilic surfaces may be less susceptible to prolonged contamination.

Saliva droplets consist of salt, protein (mucin), and surfactant in addition to water as reported in the earlier study published in

the Journal of Royal Society Interface.

By conducting a theoretical and numerical study, Dr Saravanan Balusamy, Dr Sayak Banerjee of the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering and Prof Kirti Chandra Sahu from Department of Chemical Engineering of IIT-H showed that these ingredients delay the evaporation of respiratory droplets significantly as compared to pure water droplets. The work appears in the International Communications in Heat and Mass Transfer, a leading journal in this field.

Dr Balusamy said "A simple classical theoretical model developed in this study that takes into account the dynamic contact

angle and the insoluble surfactants is capable of accurately predicting the evaporation time under different conditions."

"The time taken by saliva droplets to dry also depends on the nature of the surface material on which it falls as it dictates how far the droplet spreads out", said Dr Banerjee.

Speaking about the findings of their study, Prof Sahu said, "While the lifetime of a small saliva droplet of size 1 nanolitre is less than a 1 minute, a normal size saliva droplet of 10 nanolitres takes more than 15 minutes to evaporate at room temperature and relative humidity of 50 per cent. For high relative humidity, say of greater than 90 per cent, the droplet stays live on the sur-

face for significantly longer, about an hour. Of course, viruses could still be alive in dried droplets. This requires further research involving biologists."

The longest drying times are observed with the combination of low ambient temperature and high relative humidity, while the drying time progressively reduces as the humidity falls and the temperature rises. Researchers also found that for a fixed initial volume of the droplet, increasing the initial contact angle increases the drying time.

This follows physical intuition, as a droplet with a smaller contact angle has a greater wetting radius and surface area for the same volume resulting in a larger interface area over which the diffusion-driven evaporation can occur. Thus, highly hydrophilic surfaces may be less susceptible to prolonged contamination in comparison to less hydrophilic surfaces, which is somewhat a counter-intuitive result.

The study conducted by IIT-H faculty shows the importance of properly sanitising the contact prone surfaces in different seasons and air-conditioned indoor areas and advises following World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines, such as wearing face masks and maintaining social distance as the preventive measures for air transmission of Covid-19.

Kishan urges Gadkari to expedite RRR works

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy on Monday urged Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari to expedite the work on the proposed Regional Ring Road (RRR) around Hyderabad by notifying its southern part as a national highway.

The Union Minister, along with BJP vice-president DK Aruna and the party's OBC Morcha president L Laxman met Gadkari in New Delhi to submit a memorandum. Kishan Reddy, who is a Member of Parliament from Secunderabad, urged Gadkari to consider sanctioning of two PIUs (Project Implementation Units) for RRR.

According to him, Gadkari assured the delegation that the work will be expedited on the project subject to the land acquisition process is completed on a fast track by the state government. The proposed RRR will traverse around Hyderabad at an average distance of 40 km to 50 km and it will have a length of about 340 km. The overall cost of the project will be Rs 16,003 crore.

The northern and southern parts of the proposed project will connect Sangareddy-Narsapur-Toopran-Gajwel-Jagdevpur-Choutuppal-Shadnagar-Sangareddy. Important national and state



Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan Reddy addresses the media in New Delhi on Monday. BJP vice-president DK Aruna and BJP OBC Morcha president Laxman are also seen

■ The Union Minister, along with BJP vice-president DK Aruna and the party's OBC Morcha president L Laxman met Gadkari in New Delhi to submit a memorandum. Kishan Reddy, who is a Member of Parliament from Secunderabad, urged Gadkari to consider sanctioning of two PIUs (Project Implementation Units) for RRR.

highways like NH-65 (Pune-Machilipatnam), NH-161 (Sangareddy-Nanded-Akola), NH-765D (Hyderabad-Medak), NH-44 (Srinagar-Kanyakumari), SH-1 (Hyderabad-Ramagundam) and NH-163 (Hyderabad-Bhopalpatnam) will also be connected through this RRR.

The project is expected to cater to about 40 per cent of the population of the state. The RRR will also provide connectivity to tourist places such as Yadadri.

Once this project is constructed as an Access Controlled Expressway, the travel time and the vehicle operating costs for the commercial and non-commercial vehicles will be reduced by a great extent. Several industrial clusters, IT centres, logistic parks, pharma industries and recreational facilities are expected to be established around the project road, which would provide a big boost to the economy of Telangana.

The construction of the project road will also improve the condition of the arterial roads and other link roads connected with the project which will reduce the travel distance and time.

CAPSULE

Bada Pahad Urs in Varni from Tuesday

Nizamabad : The three-day Urs celebrations of the famous Bada Pahad Syed Shadulla Hussaini Dargah will be held from Tuesday in Varni mandal of Nizamabad district. Thousands of devotees from Telangana, Maharashtra and Karnataka will be participating in these celebrations. Due to Covid-19, celebrations were held in a simple manner last year, devotees were not allowed to participate in the celebrations. Officials are expecting a huge turnout this year. Revenue department and Wakf Board officials have made elaborate arrangements for conduct of celebrations. Banswada RDO Rajeshwar Goud and Varni tahsildar Vittal supervised the arrangements.

Aggigundalau at Cheruvugattu

Nalgonda : Aggigundalu (Firewalking), a ritual in which devotees walk on coal fire, during Sri Parvathi Jadalā Ramalingeshwara Swamy Jatara celebrations at Cheruvugattu of Narketpally mandal in Nalgonda district, attracted thousands of devotees on Monday. Amid chanting of Vedic hymns by the temple priests, the ritual was conducted at the hill shrine in the early hours of Monday. Aggigundalu would be considered as one of the key rituals of annual jatara. As per the tradition, the farmers also offered castor seeds and millets cultivated by them to the fire ignited for Aggigundalu. The devotees competed to walk on the coal fire with bare foot by bearing the palanguin of presiding deities of Goddess Parvathi and Lord Jadalā Ramalingeshwara Swamy on their shoulders.

GRADUATE MLC POLLS

CM ridiculed for picking up PV's daughter

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Leaders belonging to all the political parties launched a tirade against TRS Chief and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao for picking up the daughter of former Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao to gain political mileage.

Congress, BJP and CPI have lashed out at the Chief Minister for picking up S Vani Devi as the TRS nominee for Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar Graduate MLC constituency elections. They alleged that KCR picked up Vani Devi for the election where the TRS definitely loses.

Congress working presidents A Revanth Reddy and Ponnamm Prabhakar have



alleged that the Chief Minister gave the MLC ticket where TRS will not win.

Revanth Reddy asked KCR to field his family member if he feels that the party would win Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar Graduate MLC constituency polls. He asked Vani Devi to not be part of the KCR's conspiracy.

Ponnamm Prabhakar asked the TRS to give the Rajya

■ PV's grandson and BJP leader Subhash alleges KCR deceived their family

■ TRS won't win Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar even it fields KTR, says N Ramchander Rao

Sabha ticket or Governor's post instead of MLC to Vani Devi if KCR has real love towards the PV's family. He asked the TRS not to use the PV's family for their political benefits. He asked Vani Devi to think twice before contesting the elections on the TRS ticket. On the other hand, PV's grandson and BJP leader NV Subash alleged that the TRS gave the ticket to his

aunt of losing constituency. He alleged that KCR deceived the PV's family with conspicuous politics. "It is nothing but an effort of dividing the votes of Brahmins", he alleged.

Sitting MLC and BJP candidate for Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar N Ramchander Rao alleged that KCR is going to make PV's daughter a scapegoat. He exuded confidence that BJP will win even if TRS working president KT Rama Rao contests from the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency.

CPI national secretary K Narayana stated that KCR has given the ticket to PV's daughter to get an edge over the BJP after facing a drubbing in the recent elections.

National Science Day to be celebrated at GITAM

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

National Science Day (NSD) was celebrated every year on the February 28 to commemorate the discovery of the Raman Effect by Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman. He went on to receive the Nobel Prize for this discovery in 1930. The day is celebrated to mark the importance of contributions made by scientists towards the development of the nation and the world as a whole. The theme for National Science Day 2021 is 'Future of STI: Impact on Education Skills and Work'.

Schools of Science and Technology, Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management (GITAM), Hyderabad, have been organising 'All India Essay Contest



on Science and Technology' ahead of National Science Day. The topics -- 'Life during Covid-19', 'Online Teaching: Benefits and limitations and Social Ethics, Morals and Values'.

In all, 121 students across the country responded to this contest and 88 manuscripts were accepted for consideration. A team of faculty evaluated the manuscripts and they had shortlisted 38 students from 14 states for online oral

presentation on February 13 and 14.

Meera Venkatesh, former Director, Physical and Chemical Sciences, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and former head, Radio Pharmaceuticals Division, BARC, will deliver the guest lecture on 'Science and its progress in India' on March 1, followed by online oral presentation by contest winners. Later, prizes will be distributed to them.



Cong leader Feroz Khan to join BJP?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Another Congress leader Feroz Khan, too, will join the BJP, according to sources. He had contested from the Nampally Assembly constituency on the Congress ticket. Feroz Khan has reportedly held discussions with Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar, it is learnt. According to BJP sources, Feroz Khan may join the BJP in a couple of days.

BJP, Cong candidates file nominations for MLC polls

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Several candidates filed their nominations on a penultimate day Monday of filing of nominations for the Graduate MLC elections to be held for two constituencies--Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal and Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar --on March 14. BJP candidate N Ramchander Rao filed his nomination for Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency at the GHMC head office. Party leaders--Perala Sekhar Rao and Anthony Reddy participated. Earlier, Ramchander Rao went to the GHMC office in a massive rally from Barkathpura party office.

However, Telangana BJP general secretary Gujjula



Premender Reddy filed his nomination for Nalgonda-Khammam-Mahabubnagar constituency at Nalgonda town. Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar, former minister and Telangana BJP Core Committee member Mothukupally Narsimhulu and others were present. Speaking on the occasion, Bandi Sanjay said that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao confined to a farmhouse instead of solving the problems of the people. TPCC working president A Revanth Reddy, TPCC vice-

president Mallu Ravi, former MP Anjan Kumar Yadav accompanied Congress candidate Chinnna Reddy while filing nomination at the GHMC office for Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency. Revanth Reddy after filing nomination asked the graduate voters to ensure the victory of Chinnna Reddy.

On the other hand, Telangana Jana Samithi (TJS) chief Prof Kodandaram filed his nomination for Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal constituency at Nalgonda collectorate office. New Democracy State secretary Potu Ranga Rao, TJS leaders Badrudin, Gopal Reddy, P Srisail Reddy, Ratan Rao, Dharmaraju, Bairi Ramesh, Gopagani Shankar Rao, Sridhar and others participated.

This trust helps in performing marriages of poor girls

TADURU KARUNAKAR
■ KARIMNAGAR

Moved at the plight of poor families in performing marriages of girls in the families, youth of a village floated a trust called Maa Voori Mahalakshmi on Sri Rama Navami day in 2018 to assist the families financially in celebrating girl child's weddings.

The trust was floated in Kondayyapalli village of Gangadhara mandal of Karimnagar district. There are 300 families in the village, whose population is put at 1300. The majority of the villagers migrated to either Bhiwandi or Mumbai or Gulf countries in search of livelihood.

Spurred some unsavoury incidents that had taken place

in the village, the youth of the village floated the trust with the objective that the girl child in the family should not be a burden. The decision is helping the save girl child movement in a big way. Rendla Srinivas was the founder of the trust while Anganwadi activist Madupu Govindamma officiated as the chairperson of the trust. The trust has I Aruna, M Sunita, P Madhu, Gopu Raju as members. The trust has been functioning with the financial support of the villagers settled in Bhiwandi, Mumbai and Gulf countries. The trust was floated to mitigate the plight of the families having girl children.

A weaver from the family with two girl children went to Bhiwandi in Maharashtra for greener pastures. The eldest daughter was aged 10 when the



breadwinner in the family left for Bhiwandi. The father did not even visit the village at least once as the girl turned 18 years and did not support the family financially. Therefore, the villagers pooled money and performed the marriage of the girl fulfilling the responsibility of

the father. Another family from the village has two daughters in it. The bread winner in the family has debt-ridden having celebrated two weddings in the family. He took the extreme step of committing suicide caught in debts on one hand and unable to face the miserable

conditions on the other.

In another incident, a person from the village who was in the dire straits could not perform the wedding of the daughter, who married someone from a different caste. Feeling ashamed, he took the extreme step of committing suicide.

The trust was floated in Kondayyapalli village of Gangadhara mandal of Karimnagar district

Beware of Corona, cautions Collector

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

District Collector M Hanumantha Rao urged the people of the district to be vigilant following the rise in the number of Corona cases in some states, though the number of cases has come down in Telangana.

People should not neglect taking precautions assuming that they are out of Corona threat. It is suggested that people should undergo tests if they find Corona symptoms. Beneficiaries, who registered for the vaccine, were told that the vaccine was safe and that they should be vaccinated at the hospital that was allotted to them. The Collector clarified



that even after taking the vaccine, wearing a mask, sanitising and keeping physical distance should be followed. He urged the people to take all precautions to keep Corona at bay and cooperate with the government to prevent the spread of the virus.



Smriti Irani buys land in Amethi

PNS ■ AMETHI

Union Minister Smriti Irani on Monday bought a plot of land in Amethi to make a house for herself and, in an apparent dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, said no MP from here ever made the constituency his home.

Without taking names, she said the history is witness to the fact that no Amethi MP ever built his house and stayed here.

"The people of Amethi always wondered if their MP would ever reside here after building his house," she claimed while talking to reporters. Irani had won the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Amethi after defeating the then MP, Rahul Gandhi.

"During the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, I had promised that I would make my house here and do all my work from here. For this I have got a plot of land registered," she added.

PM opens treasure chest for Assam ahead of polls

PNS ■ DHEMAJI

Opening the coffers of his government for election-bound Assam, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Monday slammed the successive Congress dispensations that ruled the country since Independence for the "neglect" of the state and the northeast for decades.

On his third visit to Assam in a month, Modi, who dedicated to the nation three major projects in the petroleum sector worth over Rs 3,222 crore, enumerated steps taken by the state government led by Sarbananda Sonowal and the centre over the past few years for its balanced growth.

He also inaugurated Dhemaji Engineering College and laid the foundation stone for Sualkuchi Engineering College with initial project cost of Rs 45 crore and Rs 55 crore respectively in this town on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra.

He had unleashed a major development offensive in



therun up to the state polls on February 7 when he laid the foundation of and dedicated to the nation infrastructure projects involving Rs 9,310 crore.

Again, on February 18, he

had gifted a bouquet of development projects worth about Rs 10,000 crore to the state.

"Those who ruled for decades since Independence believed Dispur was too distant from Delhi. 'Dilli ab

door nahi aapke darwaze par hai' (Delhi is not far now, it stands at your doorstep)," he told a massive gathering.

The previous governments adopted "step-motherly" approach to the north bank

region and neglected connectivity, health, education and industry, he alleged.

"I had come earlier to Gogamukh in the state's north bank and said that Assam and the northeast will become the new growth engine of the country and now we see this belief bear fruit," he said.

The prime minister said due to sustained efforts by the Assam government more than 20 engineering colleges have been set up.

Referring to the new National Education Policy (NEP), he said its emphasis on teaching in local languages will help children from even poor families become doctors and engineers.

Modi said hardly 40 per cent families in Assam had cooking gas connections till 2014 despite the state being rich in oil and natural gas and refineries. Almost entire population of the state has now been covered under the Ujjwala Yojana and one crore women have benefited, he said.



CRPF DEPLOYMENT

West Bengal not singled out, says EC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Monday said that central police forces are being sent to all poll-bound states and not specifically to West Bengal, stressing that it is a routine practice for several decades.

In a statement, the poll panel said the CPFs are routinely sent to all the states and UTs where Lok Sabha or assembly elections are to take place, for advance area domination, especially in the critical and vulnerable sectors.

It said these sectors are identified by meticulous advance reviews and concrete feedback from various sources, including political parties and

entities. This practice is going on since the late 1980s, it observed.

The Commission was responding to certain reports claiming that central forces were being specifically sent to West Bengal.

During the 2019 Lok Sabha elections also, central forces were sent to all states and UTs, and the same has been done in all assembly polls.

"In the instant case also, the CPFs have been sent to all the four states namely Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and the UT of Puducherry where assembly elections are to take place," the statement said.

It also said that the or

INDIA CORNER

CBI visits Abhishek's sister-in-law in coal theft case

A team of CBI visited the residence of TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee's sister-in-law Menaka Gambhir in Kolkata on Monday to examine her in connection with the coal pilferage case, officials said. Two women officers of the CBI examined Gambhir for nearly three hours at her residence off Eastern Metropolitan Bypass after a notice was served to her on Sunday, they said. The officers of the CBI's anti-corruption branch sought to ascertain her financial accounts, sources said. Gambhir is the sister of Abhishek's wife Rujira Banerjee who told the CBI earlier in the day that she will be available for examination in connection with the case at her residence in Harish Mukherjee Road between 11 am to 3 pm on February 23, they added. Abhishek, the Trinamool Congress's Diamond Harbour MP, is the nephew of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. The CBI had registered an FIR in November last year against the alleged kingpin of the pilferage racket Manjhi alias Lala, Eastern Coalfield Ltd General Managers Amit Kumar Dhar (of then Kunustoria area now Pandaveswar area) and Jayesh Chandra Rai (Kajora area), besides ECL Chief of security Tanmay Das, Area Security Inspector, Kunustoria Dhananjay Rai and SSI and security in-charge Kajora area Debashish Mukherjee. It is alleged that accused Lala is involved in the illegal mining and theft of coal from leasehold mines of ECL in Kunustoria and Kajora areas, sources said.



Rs 335-cr black money found during raid on Pune firm

The Income Tax Department has detected about Rs 335 crore undisclosed income after it raided a Pune-based business group engaged in packaging and sale of tobacco products and related items, the Central Board of Direct Taxes said on Monday. The searches, which were launched at 34 locations across Maharashtra on February 17, led to the seizure of "unaccounted" cash of Rs 1 crore, it said. "Profit on un-recorded transactions of sale of real estate amounting to Rs 9 crore has been accepted by the assessee," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), the body that frames policy for the Income Tax Department, said in a statement. "Total undisclosed income amounting to Rs 335 crore has been detected so far," it said. The group is based in Pune's Sangamner area and its entities are largely engaged in packaging and sale of tobacco and related products, generation and distribution of power, sale of FMCGs, and real estate development, the CBDT added.



Surge of Corona cases in Kerala: TN steps up vigil

With neighbouring Kerala and four other states in the country witnessing a surge in daily Coronavirus cases, the Tamil Nadu government on Monday said surveillance in districts bordering Kerala has been intensified and it has been made mandatory for all returnees by flight to compulsorily undergo RT-PCR test. The state health department continues to aggressively test for the virus and is involved in tracing the contacts, as it is determined to further bring down the cases, Health Secretary Dr J Radhakrishnan said. Expressing concern over non-compliance by people, including those who gather for political rallies, he appealed to the people not to lower the guard as five states in India have recorded an increase in cases. "Wearing of masks and maintaining social distancing should strictly be followed. It was noticed during certain political meetings that the cadres did not wear face masks or follow social distancing. Such an offhand attitude could lead to unpleasant consequences," he said and pointed out to an incident in Amaravathy district in Maharashtra where a family has been infected by the virus. Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, apart from Kerala have recorded a surge in daily new cases of COVID-19.



Mayawati terms UP budget 'disappointing'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

BSP president and former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mayawati Monday termed the state government's budget "extremely disappointing", saying it just has promises for people but nothing to address unemployment. The Adityanath-led BJP government presented a Rs 5.5-lakh crore budget for 2021-22 in the Assembly with a target of making Uttar Pradesh self-reliant.

India will enhance capabilities in defence manufacturing: PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is working hard to enhance its capabilities and capacities in the defence manufacturing sector at a fast pace, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday, noting that there were hundreds of ordinance factories before independence with large-scale weapons export from the country in both world wars but this system was not strengthened.

Addressing a webinar on

the effective implementation of the Union Budget's provisions in the defence sector, the prime minister listed a series of measures taken by his government to boost self-reliance in the defence sector and rued the fact that the country is amongst the biggest defence importers in the world.

"An India that has the capacity to reach Mars could have made modern weapons also, but it became an easy way to import weapons from

abroad," he said. But now, the country is working hard to change the situation and also to enhance its capacities and capabilities at a fast pace, the prime minister asserted.

"Before independence, we used to have hundreds of ordinance factories. In both the world wars, weapons at large scale were exported from India. But for various reasons, this system was not strengthened as much as it should have been after independence," he said.

UP govt presents Rs 5,50,270-cr budget



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With a target of making Uttar Pradesh 'atmanirbhar', the Yogi Adityanath government on Monday presented a Rs 5,50,270.78 crore budget for financial year 2021-22 in the state Assembly.

With Assembly elections in the state less than a year away, the budget includes new schemes of Rs 27,598.40 crore, with infrastructure development bagging the lion's share.

The budget presented by Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna, in the presence of the chief minister, is over Rs 37,410 crore more than the previous year's budget size, making it the largest fund allocation in the state. Reading out the bud-

get speech from a laptop, Khanna said the target was to make Uttar Pradesh "atmanirbhar" and ensure all round development of the state.

This is the Adityanath government's first paperless budget. The budget for 2021-22, is also the last budget of the present Adityanath government before the next UP Assembly polls.

The budget makes a provision of Rs 101 crore for the under-construction airport in Ayodhya which will be named 'Maryada Purushottam Sriram Airport, Ayodhya' after Lord Ram and also earmarks Rs 2,000 crore for increasing the number of airstrips at the Jewar Airport in Noida to six from two.

'Kerala govt had sent letter to Centre on deep sea fishing'

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

In what could spell fresh trouble to the Left government in Kerala, opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala on Monday released a copy of the state's letter to the Centre regarding a US-based firm, with whom he alleged that it had earlier entered into a pact for deep sea fishing.

In the purported letter sent in December, 2019, state Principal Secretary K R Jyothilal wanted the Centre to verify the credentials of the EMCC International, the US-based firm.

The official, in the letter,



had specifically mentioned that the company was interested in innovative technology development for the upgradation and promotion of deep sea fishing in the state of Kerala.

In the letter, addressing Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, he also said

that the firm had submitted a concept note to the state government regarding this.

Chennithala, at a press meet here, said the government was well aware that the project submitted by the company was for deep sea fishing, which had been denied by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Fisheries Minister J Mercykutty Amma for the last two days.

"They have been saying that the Chief Minister and other ministers concerned were not aware about the firm and its project. Then, how did the government send such a letter to the Centre?" he asked.

Fuel prices: PIL in MP HC claims discrepancy in ethanol tax

PNS ■ JABALPUR

A Public Interest Litigation was filed in the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Monday seeking reduction in fuel prices, with the petitioner claiming that consumers have to pay high levies for mixing of ethanol in petrol and diesel. Petitioner Manish Sharma, coordinator of NGO Nagrik Upbhokta Margdarshak Manch, told tax on ethanol was

5 to 7 per cent but the levy charged from consumers is as high as 25 to 35 per cent per litre of petrol and diesel, which means the buyer ends up paying Rs 4 to Rs 5 extra as tax.

Oil companies blend 6 to 7 percent of ethanol in petrol and diesel per litre under the National Policy on Biofuels, he said, adding that fuel pumps do not mention the ethanol details in the purchase bill.

Puducherry development unfortunate, says Gehlot

PNS ■ JAIPUR

With the Narayanasamy government losing power in Puducherry, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Monday accused the BJP of grabbing power by destabilising Congress governments.

The Congress government in Puducherry fell on Monday after Chief Minister V Narayanasamy resigned ahead of the confidence vote sought by him in the Assembly after his government was reduced to a minority due to a spate of resignations of party MLAs and a DMK legislator over the past few days.

In a tweet, Gehlot said, "What has happened in Puducherry is most unfortunate and yet another case of how BJP is destabilising Congress governments to grab power through unethical means. First, they created problems in running the administration through the Lieutenant Governor and now this has happened."

"Luring Congress MLAs



has been their modus operandi in all Congress ruled states. We saw this in Karnataka, MP and now in Puducherry. They tried it in Rajasthan but people of Rajasthan taught them a lesson," he said.

Gehlot accused the BJP of undermining democracy in the country.

"The people are watching what tactics BJP is adopting and the party will be taught a lesson by electorates in the next elections in Puducherry," the chief minister added.

COVID returns?

Contrary to expectations, active cases are on the rise, especially in Kerala and Maharashtra

The new year had brought relief to India from the pandemic and, as late as February 11, the country had been consistently following a declining slope of COVID-19 active cases with the load dropping to 1.41 lakh and 33 States and Union Territories reporting less than 5,000 active cases. This, combined with the world's largest vaccination drive in the country, had given people the hope that we would soon be seeing the end of the outbreak that had crippled our ailing economy and resulted in major salary cuts, job and business losses and long periods of isolation and mental distress for millions of Indians. However, last week seems to have dashed all hopes of recovery from the contagion as we are seeing a surge in Coronavirus cases again.



India has reported close to 87,000 infections in the last seven days, with the highest addition on Sunday when the country saw 14,264 fresh cases within a span of 24 hours. More worryingly, India now has all three Coronavirus variants that have caused a massive resurgence of cases globally, i.e. B.1.1.7 that was first discovered in the UK, B.1.351 which is dominant in South Africa and P.1 from Brazil. These have a unique collection of mutations, which make them spread more readily or cheat vaccine immunity. Even though there has been a spike in daily cases in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala and

Maharashtra are the major worrying factors as they are bearing the brunt of the new strains, with over 74 per cent of the nation's active cases in the two States.

While in the last month, the average weekly cases in Kerala have fluctuated between 34,800 and 42,000, weekly positivity in the State has ranged from 13.9 per cent to 8.9 per cent. In Maharashtra, too, in the last four weeks the cases have increased from 18,200 to 21,300 and weekly positivity has increased from 4.7 per cent to eight per cent. The areas of concern are mainly in suburban Mumbai where the weekly cases have risen by 19 per cent. In Nagpur, Amravati, Nashik, Akola and Yavatmal, the weekly cases have increased by 33 per cent, 47 per cent, 23 per cent, 55 per cent and 48 per cent, respectively. This has led to experts warning that the new strains could be highly transmissible and dangerous and could even cause re-infections in people who have developed antibodies to the virus. In fact, AIIMS Director Randeep Guleria has warned that herd immunity is a "myth" in the country because at least 80 per cent people need to have antibodies for the whole of the population to be protected. So what it effectively means for a poor country like ours, which is highly populated and where a large part of the populace does not have medical insurance, is that we cannot let our guard down till we have seen the last of this pandemic. Either we follow the rules or suffer yet another surge of the dreaded pandemic. The choice is ours.

PICTALK



A fisherman fishes through a hole in frozen Walden Pond in Massachusetts

AP

Harvesting votes

The BJP and the AAP, besides other satraps, are wooing Jat farmers in western UP

It's obvious for a party that has its origins in a mass movement to use a similar opportunity for expanding its base. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which rules the roost in Delhi, is now envisaging prop roots in the heartland of western Uttar Pradesh (UP), also called Jatland, riding on its support for the farmers' agitation. However, the road to power in the politically sensitive State is no cakewalk as, unlike in Delhi, here religion, regional, caste and traditional loyalties matter in elections. These factors play a decisive role at the hustings. Besides, if the anti-incumbency factor comes



into play in next year's Assembly elections, regional parties rather than the AAP are more likely to harvest it. Furthermore, any possible expansion of the party will be at the cost of satraps like the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), SP and BSP who count on their traditional vote banks. These regional players will never allow an "outsider" to dent their vote banks. Even if the AAP forges an alliance with these parties, they will most likely not offer it the "winnable" seats, certainly not at the expense of their vote bank.

Meanwhile, what leaves the BJP concerned after the Red Fort siege on Republic Day is that the agitation focus has shifted from Punjab's growers to

the Jat cultivators of western UP and Haryana. The BJP well understands that if the strong Jat community decides not to favour the party in the UP Assembly polls, its chances of retaining power would be next to impossible. It is for this reason that the BJP leaders, including Union Minister Sanjeev Balyan and many Ministers in the Yogi Adityanath Government, are wooing influential *khap* leaders. They will definitely leave no stone unturned to make the situation favourable for the party. On the other hand, AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal recently met farm leaders over lunch to discuss the ongoing protest against the Centre's farm laws. He will also address a Kisan *Mahapanchayat* in Meerut on February 28 to show solidarity with the farmers. The AAP has already revealed its ambition by announcing that in the next two years, it will contest elections in six States including UP and Uttarakhand. Well, there is no harm in trying one's luck but whether the party is able to leave any real imprint or would end up as an "also-ran", only time will tell. As of now, its prospects don't seem too promising, at least not in UP.

Questioning pullback from Afghanistan

Personal experience should guide Biden while deciding on US troop withdrawal commitments and imperatives in Afghanistan

On January 3, 1973, 30-year-old Joe Biden got elected for the first time to the United States (US) Senate. On January 27, 1973, just 24 days later, a face-saving "Agreement on Ending the War and restoring Peace in Vietnam" was signed with full knowledge among the belligerent parties of what was inevitable. This sham "peace accord" enabled the battle-weary US troops to withdraw and the last troops were airlifted on April 30, 1975 — later that day, the US ally in southern Vietnam capitulated and its leader Thieu was left fuming: "The US did not keep its promise to help us fight for freedom. It was in the same fight that the US lost 50,000 of its young men." Then US President Gerald Ford argued about opening the doors to South Vietnamese who had fought on the US side. However, the young Biden insisted that the US had 'no obligation, moral or otherwise, to evacuate foreign nationals'. Biden's youthful bravado aside, the US troops' withdrawal from the unpopular war did not end as scripted in the purported "peace accord".

In 1995, the US troops escorted out the final remnant of the UN peacekeeping force from Somalia even as local militiamen were firing upon the withdrawing force. Banalities from the UN Secretary General, that efforts to bring peace and aid to Somalia would continue, flew in the face of the ground reality of advancing militias. Over 100 UN peacekeepers and 42 US troops had died before the final withdrawal. Importantly, the nemesis of the UN/US force i.e. ruthless warlord General Aidid was still alive, and gaining ground. Expectedly, General Aidid soon declared himself the President of Somalia and a full-fledged civil war broke out. By now, Biden was no longer a wet-behind-the-ears Senator and had already run for the 1988 Democratic presidential nomination. Also, as a longtime member of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the immediate impact of troop withdrawal from Somalia would not have been lost on Biden.

Cut to 2011. By now the Vice-



President, Biden was personally entrusted the task of yet another troop pullout, this time from Iraq (Biden had earlier voted for authorising military force in 2002, then as the Chairman of Senate Committee on Foreign Relations). This withdrawal of 1,50,000 troops when the "enemy" was clearly not defeated, was to prove fatal. It created a sudden vacuum and the Al-Qaida metastasized into ISIS and, within a couple of months, the "caliphate" had emerged over most of the Syrian-Iraqi swathes. A new dimension of global terror, regional upheaval and religious extremism was born — all fingers pointed towards a premature withdrawal of US troops, among other factors. Importantly, Biden had then personally punted on one of the most controversial, sectarian and irresponsible locals, Nouri al-Maliki, to manage the show in the absence of US troops. The troops had to return to Iraq in 2014 to undo the damage of what was clearly a wrong decision to withdraw. Around the same time, Biden was pushing hard for a similar scale-down of the US troops in Afghanistan with a limited mandate of counterterrorism, like proposed in Iraq — however, President



BIDEN MUST BE GUIDED BY HIS MEMORY AND EXPERIENCES OF THE EARLIER WITHDRAWALS AND THE SUBSEQUENT COSTS TO THE US. ITS GLOBAL INTERVENTIONS HAVE RARELY SUCCEEDED, AND LEAVING MID-COURSE HAS WORSENED SITUATIONS

Barack Obama heeded the counsel of his Generals, who suggested otherwise.

In 2021, President Biden has inherited Donald Trump's decisions for complete withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and Somalia where, yet again, the "enemy" in the form of Taliban (and affiliates) and Al-Shabab, respectively, is waiting menacingly. Somalia withdrawal has already happened and the ravaged territory is again left precariously poised. Afghanistan as the hub of regional/global terror has an altogether different portent at stake. Clearly the deadline for complete withdrawal of the troops by May 1, 2021, is starting in the face for the force of about 2,500 troops (down from 1,00,000 in 2011) and the conflated "peace agreement" with the Taliban that underwrites such a withdrawal, remains routinely and supremely violated. The surge of marauding Taliban towards an embattled Kabul continues and herein to assume that 2,500 US troops would be able to withstand pressures that a one-time composition of 1,00,000 could not — let alone the situation when even this minuscule element departs as planned — is disastrous.

The practical logic of "counterterrorism level" pres-

ence does not hold good, as vetted by history. Blind adherence to commitments without assuming inevitabilities will deligitimise the cost in terms of lives lost, resources and rationales invested in the last 20 years, besides affording a terror-based sovereign. A recent bipartisan US Congress-appointed Afghan Study Group has concluded a damning assessment of the Taliban's own commitments towards conditionality so far, and forewarned of impending bloody civil war, therefore suggesting the abandonment/extension of the May 1 timeline. Biden must be guided by his memory and experiences of the earlier US withdrawals and the subsequent costs to the US. Its global interventions have rarely succeeded, however, leaving mid-course has always made situations worse. Timing is everything and, as things stand in Afghanistan, currently it looks ominous. Biden must rethink withdrawal commitments and imperatives in Afghanistan — personal experience should advise him so.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands & Puducherry. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INVOLVE PRIVATE PLAYERS IN VACCINATION

Sir—It is worrying that the number of COVID-19 infection cases is again on the rise and States like Maharashtra and Kerala are the worst affected. With new mutants of the deadly virus invading India, it seems that our vaccination programme will fall flat as against these new strains there are no vaccines developed yet and if it starts to rapidly spread, then we will be facing a crisis more devastating than the first wave of infection.

For rapid vaccination, the Government must involve private players, else the spread of infection will supersede the rate of vaccination and recoveries. The Government should ask the private companies to divert their funds under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the cause. Rapid and mass vaccination is not possible without private participation.

Further, instead of developing different vaccines for different mutations, the scientists must try to develop a single vaccine which should work against all the present strains and also future possible mutants. Also, all States must cooperate in terms of logistics and resource sharing in fighting the pandemic. All the States who are failing to control the spread of the pandemic must be penalised heavily and, if required, the Centre should impose President's Rule citing extraordinary situation or health emergency. On the other hand, people must take all necessary precautions like wearing of masks, sanitising their hands, maintaining social distancing to keep the infection at bay. We cannot act carelessly at this juncture, it's a question of life and death.

M Raghuraman | Mumbai

SHAME ON CHINA AND THE PLA

Sir —This refers to the editorial 'Chinese checkers' (February 20). Finally, the Xi Jinping-led Chinese administration admitted the loss of four soldiers during the Galwan Valley faceoff with India in June last year. It is a matter of shame for China that it took the PLA eight months to recognise the demise of its soldiers and that must have sent an indication down to its

Govt has failed to control fuel prices



The sky-rocketing prices of petrol and diesel are also driving up the prices of essential commodities — as a consequential effect. The common man, already battered by the adverse effects of COVID-19 pandemic and stringent lockdown, has been put into unprecedented hardships by this price rise. The rising prices of commodities on the one hand and loss of income on the other, is a double whammy that

the common man is unable to cope with.

Even if we consider the previous Governments' failure to reduce the dependence on the import of crude oil, what's about the huge tax imposed by both Centre and State Governments at present? While the Centre claims the fuel prices are deregulated, but it is only in theory.

The oil price decontrol is a one-way street in India — when global prices go up, it is passed on to the consumer, who has to cough up more for every litre of fuel consumed. But when the reverse happens and prices go down, the Government — almost by default — slaps fresh taxes to ensure that it rakes in extra revenues, even as the consumer, who should have ideally benefited by way of lower pump prices, is short-changed and forced to either pay what he's already paying, or even more. The key beneficiary in this subversion of price decontrol is the Government. The consumer is a clear loser.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

ranks that the Chinese Army does not care for the martyrdom of its soldiers, unlike India which honours its martyrs.

These exchanges and clashes at the friction points are more of a perception battle rather than being a stage for "war", and it is more prudent to accept and lead swiftly with changing scenarios instead of hiding the facts, ignoring the truths and bearing the brunt later.

Such instances by the Army and administration might lower the morale of soldiers, which is evident on the Chinese side, but India is leading with high emotional quotient and the morale of our Army personnel is high as ever. It was also evident during the recent disengagement dialogue. The morale of our soldiers is much higher than that of their Chinese counterparts.

Nischai Vats | Sultanpur

ALL MUST WALK FOR HEALTH

Sir —It is not only for the elders to jog and walk but even youngsters and people of

middle age should walk. It helps in maintaining the cholesterol level and burning extra body fat. However, it is seen that many people even take doctors' advice for granted and do nothing to control their blood pressure and sugar levels except taking medicines.

Lifestyle diseases are very common these days and lakhs of people die because of it. The urban lifestyle and extreme work pressure has given us a convenient life but has taken a toll on our health.

The cause of concern is that lifestyle diseases are irreversible and if a person falls prey to these, s/he can lead a healthy life only by taking precaution and medicines. While COVID-19 has devastated our lives, it was witnessed that those having co-morbidities were more vulnerable. Lifestyle diseases coupled with COVID are dangerous.

N Soumik | Bhubaneswar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

We are correcting the faults of the previous regimes. If the policy is accurate, destiny would be perfect. Connectivity, health, education and infrastructure developments were ignored by the previous Governments.

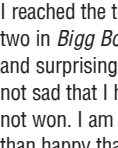


Prime Minister — Narendra Modi



On February 26, 117,000 doses of Pfizer vaccines will arrive in the country and the vaccines will be administered to medical staff treating Coronavirus patients starting February 27.

South Korea PM — Chung Sye-kyun



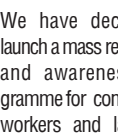
I reached the top two in *Bigg Boss* and surprisingly I am not sad that I have not won. I am more than happy that I have played the game gracefully.

Singer — Rahul Vaidya



Life has always thrown challenges. Haryana has three spinners who have already played for India. I always knew that if I get an opportunity, I must make it count.

Cricketer — Rahul Tewatia




We have decided to launch a mass registration and awareness programme for construction workers and labourers so that they can avail welfare schemes.

Delhi Deputy CM — Manish Sisodia

FIRST COLUMN

MUST REDUCE MONEY POWER IN POLITICS


What is needed is political will and a consensus on reforms in the electoral system



KALYANI SHANKAR

Funding is vital for a political party and more so for one that is not in power. The Congress Party is going through a severe financial crunch and has sought help from its Chief Ministers and office-bearers. The forthcoming Assembly elections in Kerala, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have increased pressure on the party, which is in power only in Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Puducherry. The cash crunch in the 'Grand Old Party', which was in power for 56 years, is because of various reasons. It has been receiving fewer funds for the last six years because of a perception that the Congress is unlikely to resume its primacy. Second, the BJP has overtaken the Congress since 2014. Third, it is facing a leadership crisis and fourth, regional parties are also vying for donations. Fifth, any party's funding from private donors depends on public trust. Earlier the Congress had fund managers in each State, but this system has collapsed now due to central control.

The party is in need of funds to run State units, headquarters, pay salaries to the staff, for election campaigns, for building a new party office and so on. In 2018, it touched rock bottom and launched a 40-day booth committee fundraising programme in October appealing for funds. In fact, the Congress had to resort to crowdfunding.



Some of the most popular fundraising methods for political parties are individual and corporate funding. The BJP's phenomenal ability to capture a massive chunk of corporate donations is closely connected to the Congress' sharp deceleration and financial woes. The BJP has been occupying the pole position for long in tapping corporate contributions, even when the Congress was in power, with the saffron party allegedly cornering 90 per cent of the funding.

In recent years, the Modi Government has introduced three significant changes in political funding and parties can now receive foreign donations. Any company can give any amount of money to a political party and third, any individual, group of people or firm can donate money anonymously to a party through electoral bonds. These bonds have been available since January 2018 and the gap in corporate donations between the BJP and the Congress is growing wider. Whatever be the reason, such a major gap in political contributions between the ruling and the main Opposition party is not good for democracy.

The Congress received ₹139 crore as donations during 2019-2020, according to an Election Commission (EC) report. It is still the second most prosperous party but far behind the BJP. According to the Congress' constitution, the lawmakers and workers are supposed to pay one per cent of their income to the party but this does not happen. It needs to encourage its members to donate more and emulate Congress leader Kapil Sibal, who, in 2020 was the highest individual donor and had given ₹3 crore to the party fund. A political party may acquire funds through donations during rallies, relief funds, the sale of coupons and other miscellaneous allocations. However, if poll expenses are cut there is no need for a party to collect huge funds.

The EC has a long list of suggestions including reforms of political parties, auditing of accounts, checking black money and capping of anonymous donations to 20 per cent. Several panels have recommended poll reforms. This included the Goswami Committee (1990), the Vohra Committee (1993) and the Law Commission. One of the suggestions was State funding. The need of the hour is electoral reforms and it is time to push through these reforms to cleanse the electoral system so that money power becomes less. What is needed is political will and a consensus on reforms.

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

Time for Govt to make a clear-cut choice

If the Centre allows gas producers to charge what they want, one shudders to even think of where the fertiliser and power subsidy bill will reach

The State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is forming a new wholly-owned subsidiary company with the objective of sourcing, marketing and trading natural gas. The company is already into exploration and production of gas (besides crude oil) which it sells to a variety of industries manufacturing fertilisers, power, chemicals, petrochemicals, CNG, gas for household consumption and so on.

So what has prompted it to set up a separate company solely for the purpose of trading and marketing of gas? It is not a simple case of business restructuring, but an attempt to circumvent control on the price of gas imposed by the Union Government. To understand how it seeks to do so, let us have a look at the extant pricing structure.

Under the pricing guidelines effective since November 2014, for all domestic supplies from fields given under the New Exploration and Licensing Policy (NELP), as also blocks given on nomination to ONGC and Oil India Limited (OIL) before the NELP, the price — call it normal price — is a weighted average of prices at four international locations in the US, the UK, Canada and Russia. It is revised every six months in a financial year and the current price, from October 1, 2020, is \$1.79 per million Btu (British thermal unit).

Also, under a special package for deep/ultra-deep, high-pressure/high-temperature (HP/HT) fields announced in March 2016, the supplies are allowed a market-based price, subject to a ceiling which is linked to the prices of alternate fuels, including fuel oil, naphtha and LNG. The current ceiling price is \$4.06 per million Btu, known as the "premium" price, the applicable price is arrived at based on competitive bidding — in which earlier, affiliates of gas producers were not allowed to participate. If the discovered price exceeds the ceiling, then the buyer pays only the ceiling price. From October 2020, the bar on participation of affiliates of the gas producing firm was removed. This means that the producer can buy its own gas (albeit through its affiliate) and sell it to third parties at a higher rate thereby circumventing the ceiling price. Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), which produces gas from the KG-D6 field in the Krishna Godavari basin, did precisely this. In an auction on February 5, offering 7.5 mmscmd (million standard cubic meter per day) of new gas from this field, its subsidiary Reliance O2C Limited bought 4.8 mmscmd at a price of \$4.06 per million Btu and sold it for \$6-7 per million Btu to GAIL India Limited (Ltd), Shell and others.

The ONGC wants to do a repeat of what Reliance has done by forming a wholly-owned subsidiary which will buy any new gas coming from the former's deep/ultra-deep fields such as KG-D5 also in the KG basin (projected at about 15 mmscmd) and in turn, sell it to firms such as Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) at a price much higher than \$4.06 per million Btu. Being a company whose majority is owned by the Centre, any decision by the ONGC Board could not have been taken without its prior approval. In other words, the Centre is amenable to the gas producer breaking the ceil-



IF THE CENTRE FEELS THAT A HIGH PRICE TO GAS PRODUCERS IS THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE THEM DELIVER MORE SUPPLIES, THEN IT SHOULD REMOVE ALL CONTROLS ON FERTILISERS, POWER AND SO ON AND LET THEM ADJUST AS PER MARKET FORCES. IF IT CAN'T, IT SHOULD REGULATE GAS PRICES AND STRICTLY ADHERE TO THE NOVEMBER 2014 GUIDELINES

The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.



ing (set by none other than the Centre itself) and selling at a higher market discovered price. Put simply, the Government's initial decision to put a cap on the price gets nullified by its subsequent action of allowing an affiliate of the gas producer to bid.

The supplies from fields given under the Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP) (introduced in July 2017) are already eligible for market-based pricing. This also applies to unconventional hydrocarbons such as shale gas, coal bed methane (CBM) from the fields awarded under the NELP. Further, supplies from the so-called marginal fields (a total of 149) previously with the ONGC and OIL and recently auctioned to private entities, also qualify for complete freedom of pricing. Now, gas companies are building pressure on the Government to alter the mechanism of fixing even the normal price applicable to supplies from fields given under NELP and nomination blocks to the ONGC and OIL before the NELP. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas had agreed to look into this and even set up a committee. That was in October, 2020 when an idea was mooted to fix a floor price linked to the Japan-Korea Marker (JKM) — a benchmark index used to determine LNG tariff in North Asia — with a discount. This would have yielded a floor of \$4 million Btu.

Putting all the pieces together, one gets a sense that gas firms will

receive price on an escalating scale with a minimum of \$4 per million Btu and maximum, hitting any level depending on the demand-supply scenario. Is this what the Modi Government had planned for?

It may be worthwhile to go back to 2014 when it had undertaken a review of the gas pricing formula finalised by the then UPA Government (January 2014) which could not be implemented in view of impending general elections. Then Team Modi had categorically rejected market-based pricing, arguing that domestic supply of gas being far short of demand, this would result in high price, which users, particularly the fertiliser industry, power and city gas — they account for nearly three-fourth of total gas use — can't afford. In fertilisers, bulk of the gas is used for producing urea, whose maximum retail price (MRP) is controlled at a low level to make it affordable to farmers. The excess cost of supply is reimbursed as subsidy to manufacturers. If gas is priced high, with the MRP remaining unchanged, this will result in higher subsidy, which the Government wants to avoid.

Likewise, States want to pay less on power subsidy even as they order a big slice of it to be supplied at low tariff or even free to farmers and poor households, unrelated to cost.

These overarching considerations weighed heavily on the ruling dispensation when it decided

to stick to price regulation. For the same reason, it exercises control over the allocation of gas. Of the total supply, 31 per cent is given to power, 24 per cent to fertilisers and 22 per cent is allotted for city gas. Since then, nothing has changed as to warrant a move towards market-based pricing. Neither has the Government done away with control on urea's MRP nor do States have any plans to shed supply of free power to key constituents.

In this scenario, if the Government allows gas producers to charge what they want, one shudders to even think of where the fertiliser and power subsidy bill will reach (every one dollar per million Btu hike in gas price increases urea subsidy by about ₹4,000 crore annually). To accommodate the rising subsidy, it may have to further loosen the already relaxed fiscal deficit trajectory, outlined by the Finance Minister on February 1, for the next five years (6.8 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product in 2021-22 gliding down to 4.5 per cent in 2025-26).

The Government needs to make a clear-cut choice. If it feels that high price to gas producers is the only way to make them deliver more supplies, then it should remove all controls on fertilisers, power and so on and let them adjust as per market forces. If it can't, it should regulate gas prices and strictly adhere to the November 2014 guidelines — annulling all subsequent modifications.



UTTAM GUPTA

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO REFUSED TO DO ITEM NUMBERS AND BIG HERO FILMS WHICH MADE THE ENTIRE 'BULLYWOODIA' GANG TURN AGAINST ME.

—ACTOR

KANGANA RANAUT



LOVED YOUR DANCING IN THIS ITEM NUMBER IN THE FILM RAJJO. YOU ARE A GREAT PERFORMER AND A GREAT DANCER KANGANA.

—ACTOR

SWARA BHASKER



India must migrate to 'happy fuels' for a sustainable future

Energy independence needs to be a major focus area to shape the country as a DESH, i.e. having Development, Energy, Security and Harmony

Today, human societies have a wider array of options towards making lifestyle and economic choices. But it is becoming increasingly clear that all our choices need to remain within the 1.5° Celsius Paris Agreement goals, for shaping our pathways responsibly and leaving a cleaner environment as a legacy. All too often, investments in the environment are seen as costs but the reality is that spending on green initiatives now would be the biggest cost saving of all times. It is high time we realised that the economy is a subset of the environment and not vice versa and a green recovery will provide thriving economics and a safer planet for everyone.

World leaders have come together on the need to counter the challenges of climate change and the COP-26 International Climate Summit, scheduled to be held later this



ASHUTOSH KARNATAK

The writer is Member, Appellate Tribunal for Electricity. The views expressed are personal.

year, is going to be a pivotal moment for the world to agree on actionable steps to prevent the catastrophic warming of our planet. India, being the world's fourth-largest carbon emitter with a population of 1.3 billion people, requires significant strides in greening its energy ecosystem with more sustainable and benign technologies, including fast tracking the adoption of renewable resources for propelling socio-economic development.

Our country's transition to a fully sustainable energy system shall be enabled by the push for cleaner energy and decarbonisation of the energy sector, which accounts for a quarter of global emissions, will be vital for the same.

Fossil fuels make up 75 per cent of India's energy mix (with coal as the major contributor), while the spectrum of renewable power including hydro,



solar and wind energy with zero carbon emissions comprises just 10 per cent, the rest being biomass, urban and industrial waste power. A desired change in the energy mix will depend on innovative technologies, growing energy demand, strong wind and solar resources, policy support and growing investments to ensure smart, reliable, clean and affordable energy to over a billion people with an energy consumption rate growing faster than all major economies in the world.

One of the key success indicators of any country is positive balance of payments with exports in surplus to imports. Our economy is largely dependent upon the import of oil which is to the tune of ₹7.5 lakh crore annually (15 per cent of the total import bill). Reduction in this will go a long way in fostering India's energy

independence and a solid action plan is required to gradually migrate from the use of fossil fuels to renewable sources, including the usage of hydrogen in the energy sector. This will ultimately lead us to the basket of "Happy Fuels" i.e., a fuel bringing happiness to self, society and the nation by way of being economical, environment friendly, safer with more affordability and better reach.

To reduce petroleum use, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, air pollution, and con-

tribute to more diverse and efficient energy infrastructure, the Centre has focused on pioneering initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and new initiatives like 'One Sun, One World, One Grid', World Solar Bank and so on.

Technological progress is on the cusp of making decarbonisation economically viable. India's story on solar energy encapsulates the economic argument to switch to cleaner sources of power generation. The most recent auction for solar energy received bids of a record low of ₹2 per unit indicating that the transition to an economy with net-zero emissions can both be viable and sustainable. Green hydrogen as an energy resource is gaining momentum. Already major developed countries have forayed in this area, with Japan being the leader. Produced from renewable energy, green

hydrogen is a zero-emission multipurpose fuel used for long-term energy storage and helps decarbonise transport, heating and industrial processes such as steel and cement making. With huge renewable potential, India has a tremendous opportunity to explore the green hydrogen route to kick-off energy transition.

The Centre, in the recent Budget, announced the establishment of a Hydrogen Mission, which is a step in the right direction. Several initiatives to convert coal to gas are underway and migration to the hydrogen economy needs to be ramped up in the same way.

Significantly, businesses must maintain a balance to protect, sustain and enhance human and natural resources that will be needed in the future. Organisations are required to shift from wealth creation to value creation with



Rupee surges
16 paise to
close at 72.49
against USD



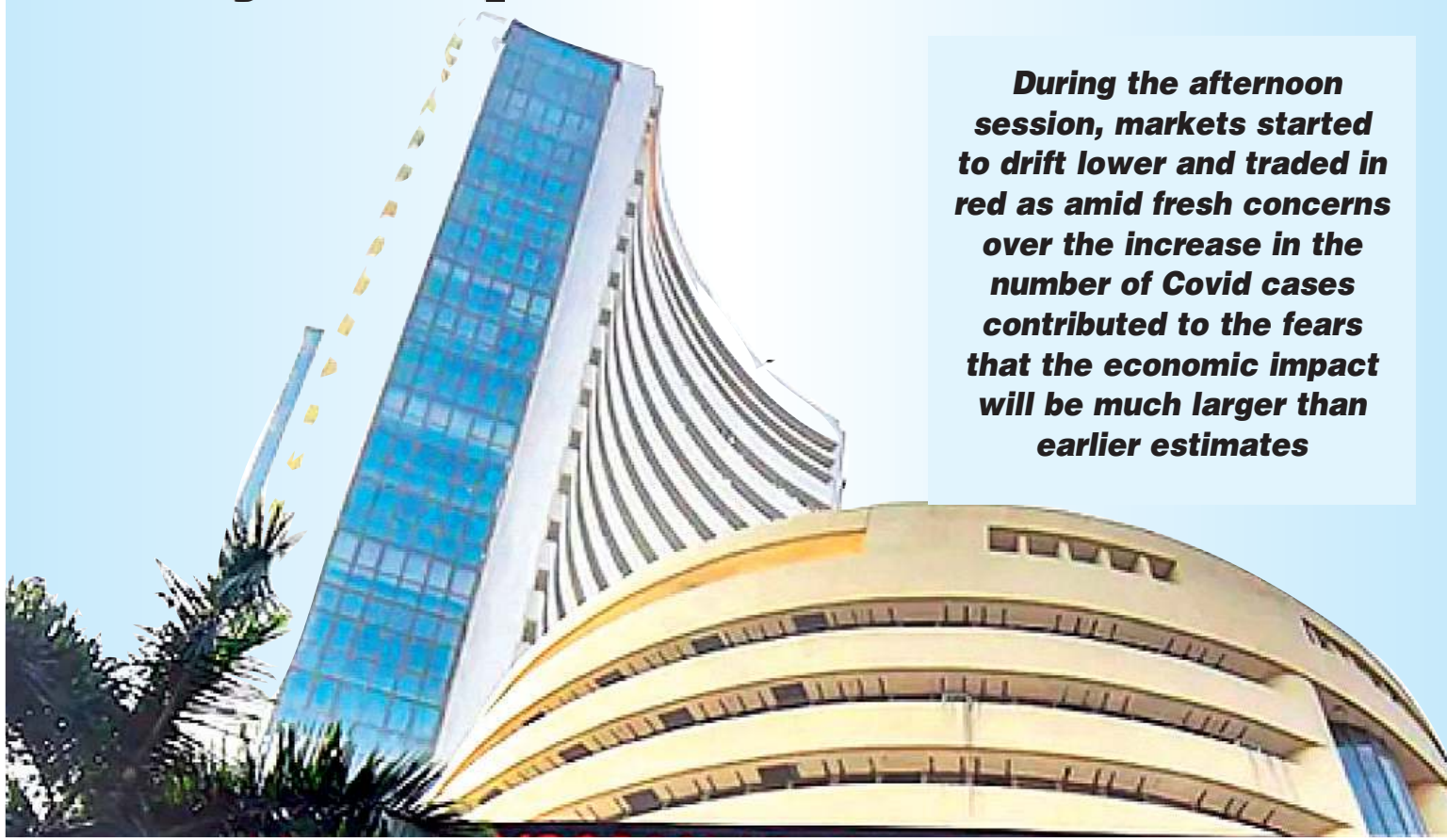
PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee gained 16 paise to settle at 72.49 against the US dollar on Monday supported by sustained foreign fund inflows and expectation of improved macro-economic data.

At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 72.58 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 72.29 and a low of 72.58. It finally ended at 72.49 against the American currency, registering a rise of 16 paise from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 72.65 against the American currency. The forex market was shut on Friday on account of Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, advanced 0.04 per cent to 90.40. "Rupee gained strength amid steady FII inflows and expectation of improved macro-economic data. India's GDP data is forecast to show that economy expanded in Q3 FY21 after 2 consecutive quarters of contraction," said Saif Mukadam, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Sensex sinks 1,145 points; Nifty drops below 14,700



During the afternoon session, markets started to drift lower and traded in red as amid fresh concerns over the increase in the number of Covid cases contributed to the fears that the economic impact will be much larger than earlier estimates

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Extending its losses for the fifth straight session, equity benchmark Sensex plummeted 1,145 points on Monday, tracking heavy losses in index majors Reliance Industries, HDFC and TCS amid negative cues from global markets.

The 30-share BSE index ended 1,145.44 points or 2.25 per cent

lower at 49,744.32. The broader NSE Nifty sank 306.05 points or 2.04 per cent to finish at 14,675.70.

Dr Reddy's was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding around 5 per cent, followed by M&M, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank and TCS.

On the other hand, ONGC, HDFC Bank and Kotak Bank were the gainers.

"India markets opened on a flatish note tracking mixed Asian market peers with China trading in losses as PBOC kept interest rates unchanged while Japan was trading with marginal gains," said Narendra Solanki, Head-Equity Research (Fundamental), Anand Rath.

During the afternoon session, markets started to drift lower and traded in red as amid fresh con-

cerns over the increase in the number of COVID-19 cases contributed to the fears that the economic impact will be much larger than earlier estimates, he noted.

"Also, the major western markets failed to provide any support as it opened to trade in red with equity investors growing concern about rising bond yields in recent weeks which could hurt high-

growth companies reliant on easy borrowing," Solanki added.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul ended on a negative note, while Tokyo traded with gains. Stock exchanges in Europe were also trading in the red in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, the global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.66 per cent higher at USD 62.55 per barrel.

L&T wins large contracts in power transmission segment

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Engineering and construction major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Monday said its power transmission and distribution business has bagged large domestic and overseas contracts across its spectrum of offerings.

Though the company did not specify the exact value of the contracts, as per its specification a large contract ranges between Rs 2,500 crore and Rs 5,000 crore.

The Power Transmission & Distribution (PT&D) Business of Larsen & Toubro has secured two engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) orders to establish more than 400 MW solar photo-



voltaic projects in Gujarat, the company said in a statement.

L&T is one of the leading EPC players globally in the renewables space with a track record of having built some of the largest solar plants.

The company said it has also received a 765kV double circuit transmission line package in Rajasthan through a project specific transmission company.

In West Bengal, orders have been received to supply and install high voltage distribution systems in certain districts on a turnkey mode, the company said adding that another order to construct 220kV and 132kV transmission lines has been won from the state transmission utility.

The business has won a 400 kV substation order in Tamil Nadu. This project is aimed to meet the future load growth of the Coimbatore region and to strengthen the evacuation system of an upcoming pumped storage power plant.

In Qatar, it said the business has won an order to install line connected current limiting reactors for the first time in the country's network.

Exim Bank extends LoC worth USD 50 mn to Maldives

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Export-Import Bank of India (Exim Bank) on Monday said it has extended a line of credit (LOC) worth USD 50 million to the Republic of Maldives for financing of defence projects in the country. An amendatory agreement for repurposing an existing LOC of USD 40 million to include road projects in Maldives was also signed between Exim Bank and Maldives government last week, a release said.

MEA to discuss socioeconomics

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) will be holding a three-day conference focused on geoeconomics during the coming weekend, which will have India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar among speakers, the organisers said on Monday.

The conference, being held along with the think-tank Pune International Centre, will also see senior representatives from the governments of Australia, Japan, Mauritius, Maldives and Bhutan speaking, they said.

It can be noted that the conference comes amid frosty



ties between India and northern neighbor China and attempts are on to reach agreements to contested border lines which became ugly last year resulting in face-offs at icy heights. Retired diplomat Gautam Bambawale, who has served as Indian Ambassador to China till 2018 and is also the event convener, told reporters that the event has representation from across the world and will steer clear of politics.



FAA orders United to inspect Boeing 777s

PNS ■ SAN FRANCISCO

Federal aviation regulators have ordered United Airlines to step up inspections of all Boeing 777s equipped with the type of engine that suffered a catastrophic failure over Denver on Saturday.

United said it is temporarily removing those aircraft from service, as meanwhile Boeing recommended grounding aircraft with that model engine until the Federal Aviation Administration sets an inspection regime.

Pratt and Whitney, maker of the engine, said it was sending a team to work with investigators while coordinating with airlines and regulators. The announcements came a day after United Airlines Flight 328 had to make an emergency landing at Denver International Airport after its right engine blew apart just after takeoff.

Pieces of the casing of the engine, a Pratt and Whitney PW4000, rained down on suburban neighbourhoods.

The plane with 231 passengers and 10 crew on board landed safely, and nobody aboard or on the ground was reported hurt, authorities said.

The Federal Aviation Administration FAA Administrator Steve Dickson said in a statement Sunday that based on an initial review of safety data, inspectors "concluded that the inspection interval should be stepped up for the hollow fan blades that are unique to this model of engine, used solely on Boeing 777 airplanes." Boeing said it supported decisions by the Japan Civil Aviation Bureau and FAA to suspend operations of all 777 aircraft powered by Pratt and Whitney 4000-112 engines.

It said there were 69 of the engines in service and another 59 in storage.

"We are working with these regulators as they take actions while these planes are on the ground and further inspections are conducted by Pratt and Whitney," it said.

CIL inks pact with CRIS for sharing of coal freight data

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned Coal India on Monday said it has signed a pact with the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS), a wing under the railways ministry, for monitoring the movement of rakes laden with fossil fuel and coal despatch activity.

The first-of-its-kind data sharing offers Coal India Ltd (CIL) a bouquet of benefits that help it in rationalising

the entire coal supply matrix through rail mode, according to the company. It will provide precise details of loading, weighing and unloading along with turnaround time of rakes, it added.

Primarily, it is a handshake of freight operation information between the networks of CIL and CRIS regarding Coal India's rail movement of coal, the company said, adding that it also includes other logistics

details. "For faster and customised automated access to data, through Freight Operations

Information System (FOIS) of Indian Railways, which would help Coal India ...monitor movement of coal laden rakes and coal despatch activity, the company on Monday entered a Memorandum of Understanding with Centre for Railway Information Systems," the PSU said in a statement.

Myshubhlife gets \$ 4mn from Patamar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Mobile app-based lender MyShubhLife (earlier Shubh Loans) has raised USD 4 million (about Rs 29 crore) in a funding round led by Singapore-based Patamar Capital and some of its existing investors.

Myshubhlife offers loans, savings products like insurance, SIPs, e-gold, and e-filing taxes.

After plunging to 16-yr low, yields soar 31 bps

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The massive spike in 2021-22 borrowing target at Rs 23 lakh crore, has led to a 31 basis points rally in benchmark bond yields to well over 6 per cent since the announcement of Budget, and RBI needs to contain the same by reining in the short-sellers, says a report.

The Reserve Bank's assiduous support to the Centre's debt management has ensured that in the first half of 2020-21 the borrowing cost for the Centre was the lowest in past 16 years as bond yields were below 5.75 per cent, the report by SBI Research said on Monday.

It primarily blames short-sellers, who are worried over the large borrowing plans, for the sudden

spike in the yields and urges the central bank to rein them in.

The report expects the Centre's gross borrowing in this fiscal year to touch Rs 13.9 lakh crore, higher than the revised estimate of Rs 12.8 lakh crore, and net borrowing at Rs 11.6

lakh crore, up from the revised estimate of Rs 10.5 lakh crore.

The combined gross borrowings of the Centre and states are seen at Rs 22.1 lakh crore this year, higher than the revised estimate of Rs 21.5 lakh crore, and net at Rs 18.4 lakh crore, up from Rs 17.8 lakh crore, according to the report.

The report also sees gross borrowings of the Centre inching down to Rs 12.1 lakh crore next fiscal year, and net at Rs 9.2 lakh

crore but the combined gross debt borrowing jumping to Rs 23 lakh crore and net inching down to Rs 18.1 lakh crore.

The current fiscal is an interesting year with the two halves having diametrically opposite narratives. During April-September(H1), bond yields were mostly below 6 per cent (the lowest borrowing cost in the past 16 years) on the back of effective yield management by RBI. However, all this changed after the Budget when the government upped its borrowing programme for the current fiscal and announced an aggressive one for 2021-22 and with just over a month left in 2020-21, the market is still expecting a consolidated borrowing amount of more than Rs 2.5 lakh crore, notes the report.



Global shares mostly lower as investors wary over stimulus

PNS ■ TOKYO

Global shares were mostly lower on Monday, with Japan's benchmark rising but most others slipping despite hopes for a recovery from the coronavirus pandemic with the global rollout of vaccines.

France's CAC 40 slipped 1.1 per cent in early trading to 5,708.39, while Germany's DAX dove 1.3 per cent to 13,816.87. Britain's FTSE 100 declined 1.1 per cent to 6,554.12. U.S. shares were to open lower, with the future contract for the Dow industrials sliding 0.7 per cent to 31,224. The S&P 500 future fell nearly 1 per cent to 3,865.12.

Benchmarks rose in Japan but fell in South Korea, Australia and China. Investors remain focused on the future of global economies badly hit by COVID-19 and when and whether there will be enough stimulus to fix it.

But the U.S. USD 1.9 trillion economic package proposed by President Joe Biden also

heralds hope for export-reliant regional economies.

Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 gained 0.5 per cent to finish at 30,156.03. South Korea's Kospi dipped 0.9 per cent to 3,079.75.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 edged 0.2 per cent lower to 6,780.90. Hong Kong's Hang Seng fell 1.1 per cent to 30,319.83, while the Shanghai Composite dropped 1.5 per cent to 3,642.44. Japan began administering vaccines for COVID-19 last week. It was the last of the Group of Seven industrial nations to get started, beginning with health workers. Prospects for further shipments of vaccine remain uncertain, according to Taro Kono, the Japanese minister tasked with overseeing the effort. Vaccination drives are set to start soon in other Asian nations, such as Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines. Investors remain focused on the future of global economies badly hit by COVID-19 and the potential for more stimulus to fix it.



MONEY MATTERS

CEAT opens all-women operated customer service centre



Tyre maker CEAT on Monday announced the opening of all-women operated customer service centre. Shoppes at Bhatinda in Punjab and said it plans to set up such outlets pan-India in the next few

months. The all-women CEAT Shoppes include women workforce for all service-related assistance to customers. This also includes manual jobs like wheel changing, balancing and operating various machinery to service a vehicle, the company said in a release. CEAT had earlier this month said that these service outlets will work as full-fledged customer service centres. At the time of the global crisis due to the pandemic, many people have lost their jobs but with this initiative, CEAT Tyres is opening avenues for women and creating more employment opportunities. The first of such Shoppes has been opened in Bhatinda, north India followed by introduction of 10 Shoppes in the next few months across India, it said.

Voda-Idea launches premium VOD service on Vi Movies



Vodafone Idea on Monday announced the launch of Premium Video On Demand (PVOD) service on Vi Movies and TV App, in partnership with Hungama, as

the telco looks to strengthen its OTT play. The PVOD market in India is "premature but promising" as the Indian audience continues to be price-conscious and choosy, Vodafone Idea (VIL) said in a statement adding such models are changing in the new post pandemic era as consumers explore alternate options of entertainment from comfort of their homes. The company said Vi Movies and TV Pay per view model a natural extension of its entertainment offerings. The current offerings allow users to watch content at no extra cost as per their recharge or post-paid plans.

Expect domestic PV industry growth in double digits in '22



Tata Motors expects domestic passenger vehicles industry to grow in double digits in 2021-22 on the back of continued robust demand momentum driven by shift towards personal mobility in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with a low base effect, according to a top company official. Despite uncertainties over increasing commodity prices and supply of semiconductors, Tata Motors expects its growth in the upcoming fiscal to be better than that of the industry. "There is a momentum which continues on the demand side because of the shift towards personal mobility. That will remain till everybody gets vaccinated. We don't know when everyone will get vaccinated," Tata Motors President - Passenger Vehicle Business Unit Shailesh Chandra told PTI. Still people will be cautious and therefore there is this gravity towards personal mobility, he said.

While he didn't name Shailene as he accepted an award from the league, he beamed as he shared his big news. "I got engaged," he

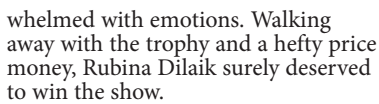
“He wants to make sure next season is intact and he wants Shailene to have the final say in plans. So they are working together to get to a wedding and it will likely happen before anyone thinks, they aren’t going to wait that long to get it done,” they also added. Back in 2018, Aaron signed a four-year, \$134 million contract extension with the Green Bay Packers, which also included a \$57.5 million signing bonus. While it’s unclear how the lovebirds first linked up, the distance isn’t stopping them from moving ahead with their relationship. “She brings out the best in him and is always

The actress has since been spotted on-set but sans an engagement ring. Previously, another insider said the couple have “kept things private and low key,” and despite the distance, “they continue to talk and see each other when they can.”

The line is a not-so-subtle dig at Justin Timberlake, who recently posted his own apology to his ex-girlfriend earlier this month after being called out in the New

his family. Upon being called out by the public, he said it was his daughters who wanted to take the trip, and that he was obliged in order to be a good father. Clearly comparing the situation to her own plight with the public, Britney told Ted, "As someone who was blamed for other people's problems from a young age, maybe leave your daughters out of it because it could really mess with their heads."

Towards the end of the show when Abhinav Shukla returned to celebrate Valentine's Day with her, he proposed to get married to her once again and the actress was clearly elated. After completing her journey of over four months in the house, Rubina Dilaik was declared as the winner of *Bigg Boss 14*, and the actress was over-



The film will also become the first film to arrive in theatres after the ministry of information and broadcasting allowed cinema halls

nationwide to operate at full capacity from February 1 with Covid-19 safety protocols put in place.

The film is based on the

lines of the 2018 hit film *Stree*, which featured Shraddha Kapoor and Rajkummar Rao in lead roles.

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.

1 A tank for live fish
6 Mix this with yellow to get green
7 Stopped doing something
9 A pale purple colour
11 A crown-wearing woman
12 A female relation
13 Workers sit at these in offices
16 Hot coals left after a fire
18 A list of restaurant meals
19 People who work in classrooms

1 An emergency vehicle
2 Normal

3 A feeling that makes
you want to scratch
4 Check the length of
5 A female sheep
8 Large extinct animals
10 Very old
14 A person from Sweden
15 The largest continent
17 Adult males

SOLUTION

	L	W	S	S	S	
G	O	V	E	R	N	M
B	N	S	A	W	R	
R	I	G	H	T	P	A
E	O	M	C	N		
A	P	P	R	O	A	C
K	N	Y	E			
F	I	R	S	T	O	D
A	S	T	R	A	B	E
S	T	R	A	B	E	R
T	E	N	N	S		

Seeking refuge in FASHION AND ART

Sustainable is the way to go this decade and when fashion labels take it up, it only pushes consumers to make more informed choices for the planet. *The Pioneer's Shikha Duggal* talks to Genes Lecoanet Hemant about their new green initiative.

We all love to look good, don't we? Highly coveted designer outfits, expensive ones, jewelry that we see in fashion magazines and more! Fashion, at times, becomes so self-consuming but for Genes Lecoanet Hemant, it is all about making the country a better place through their latest sustainability initiative in collaboration with the NGO — Silai Wali. Happiness takes a new form as the apparel joins hands with the NGO to make hand crafted dolls for a nostalgic trip back to our childhood days!

Titled 'The Joy Project'

it is aimed at creating circular solutions by utilising off cuts from past seasons and breathing new life into them, infusing them with the innocent quirks of growing up and the splendid creative spirit of childhood. "There is the blend of social enterprise here which brought us on board for this project. Going ecological and green is the new beckon. This was an inspiring move, we weren't aiming for a market competition but rather send a joint-message of empowerment with the addition of hand crafted dolls," shares Hemant Sagar, the co-founder of the apparel.

The dolls are made by such inspiring women through a longstanding social campaign. Talking

more about the 'silai-walis' who were successful in weaving fine hand-crafted dolls that one can't take their eyes off from, he tells, "They are so good at what they do, very wonderfully they used all the scrap without making use of any exterior material because then what's the point of going sustainable. Their hand-work along with the judgment of the quality of the efforts they added was so spectacular! When you take a look at those dolls, it's highly different from the traditional 'putlis', the finishing is so good. The 'silai-walis' managed to give them a contemporary-cum-fresh outlook for an individual to stop to definitely take a glance at it. Additionally, they operate so methodically while walking all the way to attend their workshops in morning, it's praiseworthy to witness such sheer hard-work."

Sustainability manifests in different forms and it pivots around taking responsibility to better the planet and the communities that share it at every step along the way. 'The Joy Project' is another step in Genes Lecoanet Hemant commitment towards sustainability through 'closing the loop' for their fabric waste. The donated post production fabric waste that is hand sewn by the artisans into dolls exemplifying the ethos of the GenesTribe.

The Joy Project rediscovered the joie de vivre, innately present in all of

us, a little bit of childhood that we always carry with ourselves! "There is zero-commercial sagacity prevailing here, it's a social act! The artisans are the pure master curators for it. An ideology is being pushed to the pinnacle to expose consumers to ecological integrity and social justice. We barely talk two cents about social evolution! Having said that, sustainable fashion is the sign of the times and an uprising is yet to take place. Moreover, this project is highlighting the unification of different nationalities as the one who is initiating this venture is an Indian while the person who works along is French and few of the artisans are Afghani refugees," the co-founder concludes.



For a safe and hygienic tomorrow

VIKAS BAGARIA, founder of Pee Safe, talks about how the pandemic has highlighted the need of maintaining hygiene and feels that it is high time that feminine hygiene is given equal importance

How many of us knew what a sanitiser really was before the pandemic? And even if we did, it goes without saying not many used it so frequently. In fact, for many, it was nothing but a medical luxury. However, COVID-19 taught us the importance and necessity of sanitation and hygiene. But long before this people like Vikas Bagaria have already been working towards improving the sanitary conditions with innovative products and campaigns such as Pee Safe.

"In 2013, my wife and now the co-founder of Pee Safe suffered from Urinary Tract Infection because of using dirty public toilets while travelling. It was then that we realised the importance of maintaining sanitary hygiene. That got us thinking and we decided that the need of that hour was for a toilet seat sanitiser spray which is easy to carry and cheap enough to buy. After a lot of research, it was in 2017 that we finally ventured into female hygiene and intimate hygiene for both men and women with an aim to improve the conditions in the country regarding this issue," says Bagaria.

Although feminine hygiene has been a taboo in the country for generations and not many people prefer to talk about it in open, the recent years has seen a change. With the youth talking and discussing such issues to raise awareness and create dialogue, the situation is definitely improving, if not more. "Since the youth has always been the drivers of change, our target audience is also Gen Z and the millennials. They don't beat around the bush, they are vocal, bold, upfront and social media friendly about issues like sex, menstruation and intimate hygiene. This is exactly what we need. It is to target these people

that we launch various campaigns including, Own the Red, in 2019, where for the first time we depicted the menstrual blood in advertisements as red and not the standard blue. It is absolutely imperative to acknowledge and work on these little things to make bigger changes," he says.

Not only this, but the growing demand of the youth insisted the husband-wife duo to launch their range of female condoms. "It was on the demand of the consumers that we launched our female condoms 'Domina'. They are the ones who encouraged us by saying that this is something they want to talk about, we worked purely on their demand," he says.

The credit of the success of the brand and its campaigns has to be given to the young and dynamic team that Bagaria has. "The very reason behind such different ideas, campaigns and products is that our team consists of extremely young and energetic people. Their average age is around 23-25 and if they are given the freedom to express themselves on social media, they make every post worth it. All our campaigns are in house and all the credit goes to the creativity of the team," Bagaria added.

The unfortunate part id that the high of sanitation has gone down again. "I believe we used to use more sanitiser sitting at home than we do now, but the good news is that the pandemic made people concerned about hygiene. I know although awareness regarding feminine hygiene has grown immensely, it will still be some time till it becomes a household topic. Even the budget has given a concession to health and wellness, and anything that emphasises awareness and increases access is a good thing. I am positive it will also boost the sector of feminine health because as long as our women are healthy, our nation will remain healthy," he says.



Explore the innate beauty of wilderness

There are more trees on our planet than there are stars in the galaxy," marvels Dame Judi Dench in her documentary series *My Passion for Trees*. That makes the forest nothing short of a vast universe where every orb is inexplicably linked to the other. It is this morphology of an ecosystem that underlines the essence of Genes Spring Summer 2021!

Titled 'A New Symbiosis', the collection explores the innate beauty of the wilderness. The forest is made of infinite elements, each interacting with the other in often mysterious ways. From embroideries that are inspired from the structure of lichens to layered prints resembling the cryptic patterns on wild mushrooms, the clothes tell the story of biological blueprints of these organisms.

As we delve deeper, the fabric and form reveal a nuanced slowness. A place of respite, where lichens and magnificent trees make space for each other, effortlessly. Co-existence takes on a new meaning and harmony prevails in its own natural pace. Nourishment is born out of that interdependence and a confluence

flourishes. Of the tangible form of nature and the intangible facet of its genesis.

For women, hues of eucalyptus green, amethyst, dandelion yellow and cinnamon are seen in quaint silhouettes. The approach is clean, also reflected in the campaign imagery. Think quiet details mimicking the shapes and forms of the botanical world of the forest ecosystem! Strappy dresses mirror the natural silhouette of wild crocus flowers. And signature poplin shirts are embroidered with motifs inspired from the morphology of wild mushrooms. Contoured darts and floral organza appliques add a new dimension to form and feel. Whereas for the men, Genes brings the spirit of wilderness to their summer wardrobes. Natural motifs play out in an unexpected mix of colours. Think warm peach, hazel yellows and lavender. Polo tees are diversified through fabric manipulation techniques while classic shirts and jackets are kissed by a light crocus flower print — a touch of sentimentality in a

changing world. Textured fabrics and a dexterous execution of darts and tucks are reminiscent of the structure of wild mushrooms. Lichens leave a graphic signature on the pieces in the form of intuitive typography. The clothes mark an innate exploration of the forest with a keen eye on the often overlooked. For Genes Spring Summer 2021, 'A New Symbiosis' celebrates morphosis and

interdependence. (The pricing of the collection starts from INR 2,000.)



Looking at bigger picture rotation policy has merit: Anderson



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Veteran fast bowler James Anderson is pretty sure that the newly laid track at the Motera Stadium will be devoid of any grass for the upcoming Day/Night Test against India even though there is a nice green cover on it at the moment.

The third Test under lights will start from Wednesday and for England's premier fast bowler, he doesn't expect it to behave much differently from the second Test track at the Chepauk which India won by 317 runs. "The pitch, it has got grass on it but I am pretty sure it's not going to be there when we turn up on the match day," Anderson said with a wry smile during a virtual conference with British media on Sunday.

"So we have to wait and watch. As seam bowlers, we have to be prepared to bowl as best we can in any given condition. If it swings, it's great and if it does not, we still have a job to do," Anderson said.

He felt that the pink SG Test ball that he bowled with during the net sessions, swung more than its red counterpart. "Look this is the second pink Test in India and first in February so we don't know how it would behave."

He urged critics of the much-debated rotation policy to look at the "bigger picture", considering the massive amount of cricket to be played by the England team in the coming days.

England did not play Jonny Bairstow and Mark Wood in the first two Tests but have brought them back for the final two games as part of a rotation policy while first-choice keeper Jos Buttler is back home after the opening Test. The idea is to help players cop up with life inside the bio-bubble.

"You have got to try and look at the bigger picture. The idea was if I missed that one, that would give me the best chance of being fit and firing for the pink-ball Test," Anderson said during virtual press conference.

Former players, especially Kevin Pietersen, have criticised ECB's thought process, saying the board must play its best players in a big series like this against India.

WTC win will be same as World Cup: Ishant



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

On the cusp of becoming only the second Indian pacer after the legendary Kapil Dev to play 100 Tests, Ishant Sharma on Monday attributed his remarkable longevity in the game to understanding what the "captain wants from him".

Ishant made his Test debut as a gangly 18-year-old in Bangladesh when Rahul Dravid was the captain and subsequently was led by Anil Kumble, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane during the last decade and half.

So which captain understood him the best in all these

years? "It is difficult to say who understood me the most as all of them understood me really well. But more than the captain understanding me, it was always important as to how I understood the captain," Ishant said during a virtual press conference ahead of the third Test against England, beginning here on Wednesday.

"That's very important. What does the captain want from me specifically. If those things are clear, communication becomes easier," said the man who has 302 wickets from 99 Tests so far.

Does he think that being dropped from white ball squads and also missing out on a cou-

HUNDRED IS JUST A NUMBER FOR ME. IT'S LIKE HOW I PLAYED MY 99TH MATCH, WITH THE SAME FEELING, SAME INTENSITY AND SAME AGGRESSIVENESS, I WILL GO INTO MY 100TH MATCH. I DON'T PLAY FOR NUMBERS, I PLAY TO WIN.

—ISHANT SHARMA
(ON HIS MOTIVATION AS HE GOES INTO HIS 100TH TEST)

ple of seasons of IPL helped him reach the milestone quicker than many others?

"I normally treat this as a blessing in disguise. It's not that I don't want to play white ball as that's what is the job of a sportsman but if he is not playing, what does he do? At best he can train."

For him, it was important that he forgets what's not there and be grateful for what he has.

"I didn't want my Test cricket to get affected because of my non-selection in ODIs. I should be grateful that I am at least playing one format," he said.

"May be it helped me in completing 100 Tests. Having said that, I don't think had I

Stokes has ability to put bowlers on back foot: Thorpe

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England assistant coach Graham Thorpe on Monday said Ben Stokes should not forget that he has the ability to put bowlers on the back foot as he tried to play down the star all-rounder's apparent struggles against seasoned Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin.

Stokes was dismissed thrice by Ashwin in the first two Tests in Chennai. The power-hitter was, in fact, stifled quite remarkably by the local favourite in the second game.

When asked about Ashwin's command on Stokes, Thorpe said, "It is a challenge. Ben actually has at times different styles of playing. He can build into an innings as well."

"I think Ben also has that ability to put a bowler on the back foot as well, that is something which he certainly should not forget."



Thorpe also hinted that all players including Zak Crawley, who was ruled out of the first Two tests due to an injury, are available for selection.

"He (Crawley) is looking fit and I think we have probably got a full complement of players to pick from, so he (Crawley) will be certainly in the mix, and his injury seems to have healed for me, watching him in the nets," said Thorpe.

The assistant coach also said that the seamers could have more impact in the day-night Test despite the track being expected to favour slower bowlers.

"It is possible, I mean without looking into it, the crystal ball, but I would imagine that the ball generally does swing more under the lights," he reckoned.

"They (India) don't have a huge database of pink ball cricket in India, maybe the second one, so looking forward to it, it is a fantastic stadium. We have prepared as well as we can," he added.

'Game may change session wise in D/N Test'

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The game may change session wise in the third Test, reckoned Ishant Sharma on Monday, as India and England dive into an uncharted territory made up of pink balls, new stadium, newly laid strips and floodlights of different make.

India will take on England in a day-night Test at the Sardar Patel Stadium, the world's largest cricket venue with a seating capacity of 1,10,000, from Wednesday.

Asked whether the Indian bowlers would use the short-ball tactic during the twilight period, Ishant said, "That we get to know once we play at this ground, because it is renovated I can't really say anything now."



"We can't say what (will) trouble the batsmen and what will not, there will be a lot of things (that) we will have to see, we don't know how we will have to tackle all these things, there will be dew..."

Ishant, who is standing on the cusp of playing his 100 Tests, said each bowler will have to take responsibility session wise.

"How the wicket is here and how they (England) play, obviously under lights the ball swings, but you will have to see the dew factor, so there will be many things, and you cannot straightaway say that whether fast bowlers will remain in the game or the spinners."

"I feel the game will change session wise and each bowler will have to take responsibility

session wise, who knows the ball might turn in the beginning here."

"Who knows if the spinners come to play in first two sessions, but under lights, when there is dew, the ball does not swing, but skids and comes onto the bat."

"Then, spinners are not in the game and fast bowlers are, so it depends on the situation and how the ball and wicket is behaving at that time," he said.

The veteran pacer backed the team's batsmen to come good, saying they are capable of dealing with the conditions.

"I am sure our batsmen are really capable enough to tackle all those things, how they need to go and build their innings, to go on through the Test match," he added.

India-SA series likely from March 7

NEW DELHI: The planned eight-match series between India and South Africa women is likely to be held from March 7, which will mark the return of the home team to competitive cricket after almost 12 months.

The series, comprising five T20Is and three ODIs, is likely to be held in either Lucknow or Kanpur in a bio-bubble, a BCCI official said on Monday. A 22-member Indian team has been picked for the contest.

With the fixtures of the series yet to be announced, a Cricket South Africa (CSA) source confirmed that their team is set to travel to India this week. "The Covid tests have been done, the team is ready to leave anytime," the source said.

Both teams will have to undergo a six-day quarantine which means they will get a week of training before the series opener.

South Africa played recently but India have not played since the T20 World Cup in March last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. **PTI**

Deadly Devon

Conway's third nineties score in as many innings helps Black Caps beat Australia by 53 runs

AFP ■ CHRISTCHURCH

A Devon Conway batting masterclass inspired New Zealand to a 53-run win over Australia in the opening T20 International in Christchurch on Monday.

Conway smashed an unbeaten 99 off 59 balls as the Black Caps overcame a shaky start to finish on 184/5 after losing the toss and being put in to bat.

In reply, the tourists were all out for 131 after 17.3 overs, with Black Caps spinner Ish Sodhi taking 4/28 to give the hosts an early edge in the five-match series.

Johnson Richardson, fresh from signing a multi-million dollar Indian Premier League contract, was the pick of the Australian bowlers, taking 2/31.

But the tourists could not dislodge Conway, whose 59-ball knock included 10 fours and three sixes, helping the Black Caps bounce back.

Conway said he was "pretty chuffed" with his career-best effort, even though he was stranded just short of a century after failing to take two runs off the final ball.

The frustrated Australians then suffered a horror show early in their innings, as seamers Tim Southee and Trent Boult tore through the top order.

Luckless debutant Josh Philippe departed for two after sending a top-edge skyward.

But old campaigners such as skipper Aaron Finch and Glenn Maxwell also failed to deal with the swinging ball and the tourists were soon 19/4.

Mitch Marsh top-scored with 45 and Ashton Agar contributed 23 a string of batting failures gave New Zealand a comfortable win.

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Sreesanth's fifer keeps Kerala perfect



PTI ■ BENGALURU

On a comeback trail after the end of his spot-fixing ban, pacer S Sreesanth on Monday picked up his first five-wicket haul in List A cricket in almost 15 years to help Kerala pull-off a three-wicket win over Uttar Pradesh in the Vijay Hazare Trophy here.

The 37-year-old, who was not short-listed in IPL 2021 auction's final list, returned figures of five for 65 in his first List A game in more than eight years.

Sreesanth, who had returned to competitive cricket last month after his life ban was overturned, opened his account by dismissing opener Abhishek Sharma.

He then returned in the death overs to dismiss UP under 300 with wickets of skipper Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohsin Khan, Akshdeep Nath, and Shivam Sharma en route to his only the second five-for of his List-A career.

On his List-A return, the former India pacer, who has played 27 Tests, 53 ODIs

and 10 T20Is, picked up two for 41 against Odisha on Saturday.

In reply, Kerala sealed the chase in 48.5 overs. Robin Uthappa (81 from 55 balls; 8x4, 4x6) and Sachin Baby (76 from 83 balls; 6x4, 1x6) gave the start before Jalaj Saxena (31) and MD Nidheesh (13 not out from six balls; 1x4, 1x6) sealed the chase with seven balls to spare.

This was Kerala's second successive win in Group C but they remained second in table behind Railways who thrashed Odisha by eight wickets at the M Chinnaswamy to be ahead by net run-rate.

Defending champions Karnataka bounced back with a bang after their first-match loss with a 267-run rout of Bihar.

Skipper R Samarth led the charge with an unbeaten 158 from 144 balls (15x4, 1x6), while fellow opener Devdutt Padikkal smashed a 98-ball 97 (8x4, 2x6) in a com-

manding 153-run opening partnership after Bihar opted to bowl at the Just Cricket Academy.

The only blip was youngster Padikkal missing a century by just three runs after being castled by Rahul Kumar as he once again failed to convert his fifty.

After Padikkal's departure, Samarth took charge with Krishnamurthy Siddharth who chipped in with a quickfire 76 (55 balls; 5x4, 4x6) to propel them to a huge 354/3.

In reply, Karnataka dismantled Bihar for 87 runs in just 27.2 overs with opener Sakibul Gani being their top-scorer (37), while eight batsmen failed to reach double digits.

Prasidh Krishna was Karnataka's wrecker-in-chief (4/17) and had fine support from Abhimanyu Mithun and Shreyas Gopal who claimed two each.

Two in two for Gujarat

PTI ■ SURAT

Hosts Gujarat recorded their second successive win after they beat Goa by eight wickets in an Elite Group A game here.

Gujarat had started their campaign with a three-wicket win over Chhattisgarh.

Opting to bat at the Lalbhai Contractor Stadium, Goa were bundled out for 159 in 45.4 overs, with Gujarat's slow-left arm spinner Hardik Patel (3/34) doing the bulk of the damage.

Gujarat then chased the target in 27.4 overs with half centuries from Priyank Panchal (57 not out off) and Bhargav Merai (57 off 55 balls).

In the other two league games, Baroda rode on skipper Krunal Pandya's unbeaten 127 to beat Tripura by six wickets, while Hyderabad defeated Chhattisgarh by seven wickets.

HEBBAR'S TON UPSET TN

Indore: Ashwin Hebbar slammed an unbeaten 101 and powered Andhra to a

seven-wicket win over Tamil Nadu in Group B match at the Holkar stadium.

Andhra captain G Hanuma Vihari won the toss and sent Tamil Nadu in to bat and the bowlers did very well to dismiss the opponent for 176 in 41.3 overs.

Left-arm medium-pacer C Stephen (3/46), off-spinner Shoaib Mohammed Khan (3/24) and right-arm medium-pacer Girinath Reddy (2/33) struck at regular intervals to restrict a strong Tamil Nadu batting line-up, led by Dinesh Karthik.

In reply, Hebbar was in cracking form and toyed with the opposition to attack to fashion a comfortable win. He found an able partner in Ricky Bhui (52 not out, 41 balls, 6 fours, 2 sixes) and the duo added 114 runs for the fourth wicket to power Andhra.

In other matches, Jharkhand beat Punjab by 2 runs in a nail-biting encounter, while Madhya Pradesh lose second consecutive game in span on 48 hours after Vidarbha beat them by 4 wickets.

Solskjaer not giving up hope of catching Man City

MANCHESTER: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is not giving up hope that Manchester United can challenge Manchester City for the Premier League title, despite the scintillating form of the league leaders.

City have soared 10 points clear of their local rivals thanks to an 18-game winning streak in all competitions.

United's own inconsistent form has helped open up the gap, but the Red Devils beat Newcastle 3-1 on Sunday to win for just the second time in six league games.

"We've got to be there just in case," said Ole. "Every time we get three points we've done our job and that's what we've got to do and see what other teams do."

Bruno Fernandes and Marcus Rashford were again on target on a night United needed their star men to paper over the cracks of another unconvincing performance.

"We had to find a way to win it in the second-half. The first-half wasn't up to the standard that we wanted," added Ole. "Maybe because of Newcastle, maybe because of what we did in the week. We asked them to go again after a high-intensity game and it took us to half time to get our legs and energy."

A run of two wins in 14 games has left Newcastle just three points clear of the drop zone, but Steve Bruce remains confident his side will survive.

"Fulham have had a good week and won a couple of games, which at the bottom end of the table is big, but there are a few of us: Brighton, Burnley and maybe Crystal Palace looking over their shoulders," said Bruce. **AFP**

Check will break the barrier between mass cinema and class cinema: Rajamouli

Filmmaker SS Rajamouli, who is a big admirer of Chandra Sekhar Yeleti's body of work, believes that the latter's *Check* will breach the barrier between mass cinema and class cinema. "As soon as Check's teaser was dropped, I felt the urge to catch it in the theatres as and when it opens. It has an interesting theme of a prisoner playing chess in a prison."

The audiences have been exposed to world cinema due to coronavirus and they are hungry for different subjects now. *Check* is a subject on such lines. I'm confident that it will break the barrier between mass cinema and class cinema. I believe that different films from now on will attract the patronage equivalent to that of mass cinema," the leading director observed. He was speaking at

the pre-release event of the Nithiin-starrer in Hyderabad on Sunday evening. *Check*, co-starring Rakul Preet Singh and Priya Prakash Varrier, tells the story of a prisoner (played by Nithiin) who is serving capital punishment. During his time in the prison, he learns chess from an old prisoner and soon emerges as a player to beat while making a case for his mercy petition to be accepted by the president. Yeleti has directed it from his own script, while the likes of Posani Krishna Murali, Murali Sharma, Tripuraneni Sai Chand, Sampath Raj, Harshavardhan, Rohit Pathak and Simran Choudhary have played supporting roles. It debuts on the big screen this Friday.



In development for over a year, Ravi Teja's next with the successful writer-director duo of Prasanna Kumar Bezawada and Trinadha Rao Nakkinna was finally made official over the weekend. People Media Factory will jointly be producing it with Abhishek Agarwal Arts, with the filming set to commence after Ravi wraps up *Khiladi* with Ramesh Varma.

Speaking to us, Prasanna states that he initially worked on a period drama for the actor but as it couldn't be made due

to various reasons, he narrated another story, which the actor greenlit 20 minutes into the narration.

"The project got delayed because of COVID-19. It is an out-and-out entertainer and will see Ravi garu playing dual roles. People who've heard the script so far have told me that

it's tailor-made for the actor," the writer says, while dismissing claims that the actor will be seen as a lawyer in the film. The writer has been in touch with the actor for over a couple of years and cherishes his bond with him. "The story factor aside, he gives his nod to anyone who he believes is

The writer, whose bona fides include *Nenu Local* and *Hello Guru Premakosame*, tells us that Ravi Teja will be playing dual roles in the yet-untitled out-and-out entertainer which rolls after the actor wraps up *Khiladi*

passionate about his craft and realizes that he can deliver a super hit. He was supposed to do a film with Venu Sriram sometime back but it was shelved after the launch. He recommended my name to the film's unit as a dialogue writer. I remember after *Hello Guru Premakosame* went to floors, he invited me to his place and said that we should work together. Admirers of *Cinema Chupista Maava* (CCM) and *Nenu Local* kept telling me that my lead actors were an extension of characters Ravi Teja played. In fact, during CCM promotions I said that I like Ravi garu a lot and since I couldn't get him for my films, I saw him in the lead roles I've written. Now that I have him in this film, I will do what I need to," the writer declares with an air of confidence.

He goes on, "When I started writing this film, *Krack* didn't make it to the screens yet, and his previous films failed to light up the box-office.



So the idea was to not just smash a six but a monster one at it such that the ball deposits outside the stadium. The film is filled with some six to seven hilarious episodes and I'm pretty sure that the audiences will roll in the aisles watching them. Also, for the people who have been missing the Ravi Teja of *Venky* and *Kick*, this untitled film will be a treat," the writer promises, signing off.

- NG

Preeti Asrani to surprise with her performance in A: Makers

Despite featuring in a string of films like *Uu Kodathara Ulikki Padathara*, *Gundello Godari* and *Happy Wedding*, it was *Malli Raava* that helped Preeti Asrani to be noticed by one and all. The actress later played the lead in *Pressure Cooker*, receiving good acclaim. Now, she is playing a key role in a thriller titled *A*. Directed by Ugandhar Muni and produced by Geetha Minsala under the banner of Avanthika Productions, the film is scheduled to release on March 5. The makers said that Preeti, who has been paired opposite Nithin Prasanna, has got a meaty role and she will surprise the audience with her terrific performance. The film's trailer, released by Vijay Sethupathi recently, has garnered good response.



Brahmi and Rahul Vijay in an anthology drama

New production houses Ticket Factory and S Originals on Monday launched their maiden production venture with Brahmanandam, Rahul Vijay and Naresh Agastya in the lead roles. Suma Kanakala sounded the clapboard for the first shot while Venu Udugula directed it. Written and directed by debutant Harsha Pulipaka, the film, an anthology, also features Divya Sripada, Sri Vidya, Vikas, Uttej and Praanya P Rao in supporting roles.

Harsha Pulipaka said, "Every living creature needs the five senses of touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. The film's story is woven around them. The story and screenplay are honest and mirror the thought process of today's youngsters."

Sandeep Raj, who shot to fame



as a filmmaker with *Colour Photo*, is penning the dialogues, while Prashanth R Vihari has been tapped to compose music.

The film's first schedule of 13 days in Hyderabad-commenced on Monday. Later, the action will shift to Visakhapatnam and Puducherry.

Cashing in on the craze of Sam and Sethupathi

The Telugu dubbed version of acclaimed Tamil film *Super Deluxe*, a crime black comedy-drama film with elements of science fiction and fantasy, will be released in Telugu states this April. The Tamil drama, directed by Thiagarajan Kumararaja, features the likes of Vijay Sethupathi, Samantha Akkineni

and Ramya Krishna in lead roles.

While Ramya and Samantha are popular names here, Sethupathi has won plaudits for his turn in the recently released box-office smash *Uppena*, prompting P Madhu Babu of Siddeswara Vaishnavi Films to acquire the dubbing rights and give it a release.



Teja announces Chitram 1.1 on his b'day

As he celebrated his birthday on Monday, director Teja announced *Chitram 1.1*-sequel to his maiden directorial *Chitram* (2000). He will be introducing 45 new faces with the film, a musical love story. Speaking to us, he said, "It has a similar story to that of *Chitram*. RP Patnaik is scoring tunes right now and once he gives the six songs, I will proceed with the shoot. The film is set in Hyderabad and I will complete the shooting formalities in 40 days. The male face has been locked, while in another couple of days I will reveal the names of the leading ladies."

The director was flooded with fancy offers from various territories after the announcement. "All the area-wise distribution rights have been sold. When I asked the distribution parties why they are acquiring it at the mere announcement, they said since it is *Chitram 1.1* we are purchasing it. When I wanted to know what if the story is not good, they said I'm a master of the genre," the director, clearly

amused with the offers this early pointed out.

That leaves us with the question on the status of his proposed project *Alamelu Manga Venkata Ramana* with Gopichand. It was to go in front of the cameras this month. The director clarified that it is on but delayed.

"For a long time we couldn't get the right actress for the film. The film depends a lot on her performance and we tapped someone who even allotted dates from June. Once the paperwork regarding his participation is completed, an official announcement will be made," he noted.

As soon as he made the announcement, area-wise distribution rights of the film have been sold like hotcakes

