

ANALYSIS 7 SHOULD THE GLOBAL DEBT PANDEMIC WORRY US? | **MONEY 8** INDIA TO CLOCK 13.7 PC GROWTH IN FY '22, CONTRACT 7 PC THIS FISCAL | **SPORTS 11** PITCH WAS GOOD, QUALITY OF BATTING WASN'T: KOHLI

VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY FEBRUARY 26, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



I DON'T DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN SMALL AND BIG ROLES: NANDITA

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CHINA DENIES US DIPLOMATS WERE ASKED TO TAKE ANAL SWAB TESTS

China's foreign ministry denied on Thursday that US diplomats in the country had been required to take anal swab tests for COVID-19, following media reports that some had complained about the procedure. US media outlet Vice on Wednesday cited a State Department official as saying the test was given in error and that China had said it would stop such tests on US diplomats. "To my knowledge...China has never required US diplomatic staff stationed in China to conduct anal swab tests," foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a daily news briefing in Beijing.



COVID NEGATIVE REPORT MUST FOR PASSENGERS FLYING TO INDIA: AIR INDIA

In the wake of a sudden rise of coronavirus cases, Air India Express on Thursday rolled out new guidelines for the passengers travelling to India making it mandatory for them to submit a valid negative COVID-19 RT-PCR test report on the website prior to their departure. It has also stated that the travellers are required to take coronavirus screening test "not more than 72 hours before departure". All passengers travelling to India must carry the original negative RT-PCR test report with the test conducted within 72 hours of the scheduled departure, the guidelines from the Air India Express read.



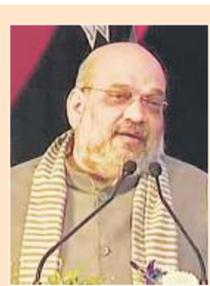
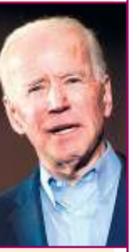
MURDER ACCUSED COOKED VICTIM'S HEART TO SERVE OTHER VICTIMS

A man accused of a triple murder in the US state of Oklahoma sliced one victim's heart from her body and cooked it with potatoes to serve to other victims before attacking them, US media reported Wednesday. The suspect, Lawrence Paul Anderson, allegedly removed the organ from the body of a neighbor he had stabbed to death, according to Oklahoma City News 4 TV and the Oklahoma newspaper. He allegedly then brought the heart to his uncle's home where he cooked it and tried to serve it to the uncle and his wife, investigators reportedly told the Grady County Court in Chickasha on Tuesday.



JOE BIDEN REVOKES TRUMP BAN ON MANY GREEN CARD APPLICANTS

US President Joe Biden on Wednesday revoked a proclamation from his predecessor that blocked many green card applicants from entering the United States. Former President Donald Trump issued the ban last year, saying it was needed to protect US workers amid high unemployment due to the coronavirus pandemic. Biden rejected that reasoning in a proclamation on Wednesday rescinding the visa ban. He said it prevented families from reuniting in the USA and harmed US businesses. Biden has pledged to reverse many of Trump's immigration policies.



Cong joined hands with Ajmal for 'lust for power': Amit

5

CBSE for Classes 1-7 in AP from 2021-22

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government has decided to implement CBSE system for classes 1 to 7 in all its schools from academic year 2021-22.

The system will be gradually increased year-wise from classes 8 to 10.

By the year 2024, all classes from 1 to 10 will be under CBSE, a release from the Chief Minister's Office said.

The move comes amid an ongoing litigation in the Supreme Court against the conversion of all government schools, from Classes 1 to 6, to English medium, a move that has caused widespread resentment.



The latest decision by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to switch over to the Central Board of Secondary Education is seen as a move on the sly to completely do away with the Telugu medium of education. Under CBSE, Telugu is only a subject taught

and the curriculum will be in Hindi or English medium.

The government did not specify whether it will do away with the state syllabus completely or introduce CBSE system parallel to it.

2



Budget marks directional change for economy: FM

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said this year's Budget has negated the notion that welfare state is a socialist prerogative, and added that it has given a directional change to the Indian economy, wherein the government trusts wealth creators and citizens.

She lauded the reform of faceless assessment for direct and indirect taxes, saying that tax terrorism will be a thing of the past, but also warned that "technology terrorism" will now gain ground.

"This is a Budget for the new decade. This Budget clearly says, 'private sector we trust you and you are welcome to participate in the development of the country. It's a Budget in which we are recognising what a government can do or how far it can do...So it's a Budget that gives directional change to the Indian economy," Sitharaman said, while addressing a meeting of intellectuals organised by the BJP.

"We inherited a system from the USSR, where glories of socialism were spoken about...That only socialism can take care of the welfare of the entire population. They say the welfare state is a socialist prerogative," she said.

New guidelines to curb 'misuse' of social media

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday announced sweeping regulations for social media firm like Facebook and Twitter as well as OTT players such as Netflix, requiring them to remove any content flagged by authorities within 36 hours and setting up a complaint redressal mechanism with an officer being based in the country.

The guidelines also make it mandatory for platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp to identify the originator of a message that authorities consider to be anti-national and against security and sovereignty of the country.

The rules about digital media and OTT focus more on in-house and self-regulation mechanism whereby a robust grievance redressal mechanism has been provided while upholding

Social media platforms must abide by Indian laws: Shah

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the government is committed to providing a level-playing field to all digital media and OTT platforms but they will have to abide by Indian laws.

journalistic and creative freedom. This is the first time such rules have been framed for digital and online media operating within the country's jurisdiction.

The norms on social media come weeks after a spat between the government and Twitter over certain messages around farmer protests that the government saw as inciting violence. The government sought removal of about 1,500 accounts and messages, a request that Twitter complied with, only after being warned of penal action. IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad on Thursday said concerns have been raised over rampant abuse of social media platforms and spread of fake news.

2



Kuppam will lead fightback against YSRCP, says Naidu

3

Balancing act seen in MLC candidate picks

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The YSRCP on Thursday announced its candidates for the six vacancies to the State Legislative Council under the MLA quota. YSRCP supremo and Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy picked Balli Kalyan Chakravarthy, Md Iqbal, Challa Bhagiradh Reddy, C Ramachandriah, Md. Karimunnisa and Duvvada Srinivas as its nominees.

2

Sajjala condemns diatribe against seer

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Reminding that TDP leaders, including N Chandrababu Naidu, had met Swami Swaroopanandendra of Sharda Peetham during their party's rule, YSRC general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Thursday condemned the remarks of the TDP supremo against the seer.

"How was he considered holy in Naidu's regime and the same seer is now a tantric?" Sajjala demanded to know.

He said that Naidu was showing his true colours after the Kuppam poll debacle and warned the TDP supremo to watch his words.



Sajjala also lashed out at TDP MLC Nara Lokesh for his abusive language in public meetings and told him to hold his tongue.

2



Auto component makers urged to up localisation

8

1/3 Vizag lives in slums, notice leaders

SUMIT ONKA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

With about one-third of the population in Vizag city residing in slums, the slum dwellers will play a crucial role in the urban local body elections to be held on March 10.

Vizag city has a population of over 24 lakh people. Of this, over 8 lakh people live in over 730 slums spread across the city.

Realising the value of their vote ahead of the civic body elections, YSRCP and TDP leaders have been trying to woo the slum

dwellers. YSRCP Parliamentary Party leader V Vijayasai Reddy has also been canvassing among the slum dwellers.

Even though basic amenities and infrastructure in the slums have improved over the years, civic issues have been plaguing their areas.

"Vizag has more slums than other cities in the state as per the 2011 Census," said CPM leader in Vizag, B Ganga Rao.

A large number of slum dwellers in Vizag are natives of neighbouring districts. Also, families head to Vizag

in search of a livelihood. Over 2 lakh slum dwellers are construction workers while 30,000 are auto-rickshaw drivers and the remaining are sanitation workers, domestic helps, transport workers, street

vendors. Over three lakh slum dwellers are living on the hill slopes and they have been facing a perennial threat of landslides. There is an urgent need to address the problems of slum-dwellers by creating infrastructure and amenities and also better employment to them.

YSRCP leaders say the slum dwellers will be voting for them in the GVMC elections because of the party's welfare and housing schemes.

2

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Magha & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi : Chaturdashi: 03:49 pm
Nakshatram: Ashlesha: 12:35 pm
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 11:01 am - 12:29 pm
Yamagandam: 03:23 pm - 04:50 pm
Varjyam: 11:56 pm - 01:27 am
Gulika: 08:07 am - 09:34 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritkalam: 11:02 am - 12:35 pm
Abhijit Muhurtam: 12:05 pm - 12:52 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 38/21
Humidity: 41%
Sunrise: 06:36 am
Sunset: 06:21 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated February 26, 2021 5:00 PM

Kale Mastan Shah Urs a harbinger of harmony

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 129th Urs celebrations of Hazrat Kale Mastan Shah Aulia would be held from March 1 to 5 at Guntur.

Releasing the posters and brochures for the event, Dargah hereditary trustee Ravi Rammohan Rao said that Hindus and Muslims in large numbers would attend the Urs celebration from AP, Telangana and other States.

Addressing a press meet here on Thursday, he said that

Mastan Baba is revered by Hindus and Muslims alike and the Urs is celebrated by members of all communities for the past 128 years at Dargah.

Rammohan Rao said that the Urs rituals would begin on March 1 with Gandha Mahotsavam on the Baba's tomb with Chandini decoration and sandal procession would be held at 11 pm the same day. Thousands of people are expected to participate in the procession.

He said that on the second day on March 2, Deeparadhana (lamp lighting), Gandham



Dargah hereditary trustee Ravi Rammohan Rao releases posters and brochures for the 129th Urs celebrations of Hazrat Kale Mastan Shah Aulia to be held from March 1 to 5 at Guntur. Hindus and Muslims in large numbers attend the Urs

prasadam and Annadanam would be organised. He stated

that on March 3, Gyarvi Sharif would be held as part of which Quran recitation and special prayers will be performed.

Rammohan Rao said that the Dargah committee will distribute the chadar of the saint on March 4 and Fakirs would be honoured. He said that the conclusion of Urs would be held on March 5 performing religious devotional rally with special prayers.

A free medical camp with medicines will be available and free food would be offered to one and all for five days.

2

Quid pro quo: CM offers swap of govt land to Railways in Vja

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday wrote to Union Minister for Railways Piyush Goyal regarding the transfer of land occupied by nearly 800 families within Vijayawada Municipal Corporation limits in exchange for government land.

In his letter, Jagan requested that the Railway lands in Rajarajeswari Peta be handed

over to the AP Government so that they are regularised. He stated that 25 acres of Railway land near Ajitsingh Nagar would be handed over to the Railways in exchange for Railway lands at Raja Rajeshwaripeta.

A joint team of officials from the Revenue Department and the Railways visited the encroached land and the proposed site for exchange, the Chief Minister said. Jagan also said that the Railway authorities

expressed satisfaction over the land near Ajitsingh Nagar. In Rajarajeswari Peta, nearly 800 families have been living on the site for over 30 years.

In his letter, Jagan mentioned that the land, which was not used by the Railways, should be transferred to the State government and sought the Union Minister's support in recommending the same to the Railway Board members for quick action.

2

Centre ready for talks with farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Thursday reiterated that the government is ready to resume talks with protesting farmers but first the unions should respond to its offer to put the three contentious farm laws on hold for 18 months and set up a panel to find solutions.

The government and unions have held 11 rounds of

talks to break the deadlock and end the farmers' protest. Talks have not resumed following widespread violence during a tractor rally on January 26.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh, have been camping at Delhi's borders for about three months in protest against the three laws that they say will end procurement at MSP.

2

State inks agreement with SIDBI to handhold MSMES

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), the principal financial institution engaged in the promotion, financing, and development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Andhra Pradesh to develop the MSME ecosystem in the State.

The MoU was signed by Industries Director JVN Subramanyam and SIDBI general manager and regional head Sanjay Jain in the presence of State Industries Minister Mekapati Gautham Reddy.

As part of the MoU, a Project Management Unit

(PMU) will be deployed by SIDBI with the Government of Andhra Pradesh. The role of the PMU will be to design schemes/programmes in the areas of equity support, interest subvention, resolution of stressed MSMEs, supporting MSME entrepreneurs and facilitate other need-based intervention based on evaluation of the existing status of MSMEs.

The PMU will study the existing framework of schemes, interventions, initiatives, projects etc. which are currently available for the benefit of / targeted towards MSMEs in the State and shall suggest modifications, if any, with the objective of enhancing efficacy and removal of bottlenecks.

On this occasion, SIDBI

Deputy Managing Director of V Satya Venkata Rao, said, "In line with our programmatic approach to foster closer cooperation with the State Government, we have started with cluster outreach programs with several States.

We have also proposed a cluster development fund for supporting the infrastructural aspects of cluster development in various States as preparation for Atma Nirbhar Bharat. The setting up of PMUs in 10 States so far is targeted at placing expert out-sourced teams for more focused engagement in various forms leading to a stronger MSME ecosystem. Imbibing good practices, rejuvenating existing programs and policies, and enabling a

more responsive ecosystem shall be the target of our joining of hands."

The PMU will also prepare the process for handholding MSMEs in the State for their boarding onto digital platforms such as PSB Loans In 59 Minutes, Stock Exchange listing, e-commerce platforms such as Government e-Marketplace etc.

Along with that, the PMU will also engage in mapping repositories of good practices and guidelines both within and outside the State and facilitate adoption of good practices. It will create a framework for evaluating the impact of interventions being made for the benefit of MSMEs and shall also provide inputs for policy advocacy.

AP records 82 new Covid cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh added 82 new Covid-19 cases in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Thursday, taking the caseload to 8,89,585.

According to the latest bulletin, the state saw 74 recoveries and no deaths in a day. The total recoveries now stood at 8,81,806, while the active caseload 611, the bulletin said.

The death toll remained at 7,168. Chittoor once again reported the highest 21 new cases in a day but the remaining 12 districts added less than 10 each.

With seven new cases added in 24 hours, Visakhapatnam crossed the 60,000 mark, becoming the ninth district in the state to do so.

VROs give nod to proposed changes to GO on promotions

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

The Andhra Pradesh Revenue Services Association and VROs' Associations on Thursday gave their joint approval to the proposed amendments to the GO Ms No 132 issued by the Government.

They sought senior assistant scale to the VROs from the government, without affecting the junior assistants/typists, and are preparing to urge the government to clear the imbroglion in awarding promotion to them.

It may be recalled that the

imbroglion over awarding promotions to VROs has been continuing for the past three years.

The APRSA never objected to awarding promotions to the VROs, said APRSA president Bopparaju Venkateswarlu. Earlier, the APRSA and VROs Associations communicated their 'no objection' to awarding promotions to VROs without affecting interests of the junior assistants and typists.

The YSRCP government on May 8 last year issued GO Ms No 132 to benefit the

VROs and others concerned. Not happy at the government issuing the GO, some association leaders approached the government on the issue. Leaders of other employees unions, promising promotions to VROs, used them for their selfish goals. But the government did not amend the earlier orders issued by it.

Realising this, the VROs, who attributed their sorry state of affairs to sidelining the APRSA, joined hands with APRSA again to foil the designs of selfish union leaders who drove a wedge between VROs and APRSA.

CBSE for Classes...

Continued from Page 1

While Principal Secretary (School Education) B Rajsekhar did not respond to queries on the issue, a senior official in the department told PTI that introduction of CBSE system was "only a proposal."

"This is only one of the proposals we discussed at a meeting with the Chief Minister on Wednesday. We have to study the pros and cons before going ahead, so no final decision has been taken in this regard," the official said.

But the CMO clearly said in its release that "the state government will implement CBSE system from 2021-22 academic year."

New guidelines to curb 'misuse' of...

Continued from Page 1

"Social media companies are welcome to do business in India, and empower Indians... We welcome criticism and dissent... but it is important that users of social media are given a proper forum for resolution of their grievances in a time-bound manner," Prasad said.

India is a large market for digital and social media companies and is witnessing strong growth on the back of booming smartphone sales and availability of dirt cheap data.

Prasad said intermediaries will fall into two categories -- social media intermediary and significant social media intermediary.

This distinction is based on the number of users on the

social media platform, and the government will soon notify the threshold of user base that will distinguish the two.

The rules require the significant social media intermediaries to follow additional due diligence including appointment of chief compliance officer, a nodal contact person and a resident grievance officer. All the three officials will have to resident in India.

Significant social media companies will also have to publish a monthly compliance report disclosing details of complaints received and action taken, as also details of contents removed proactively.

In a move that could have major ramifications for players like Twitter and WhatsApp, government said that significant social media intermediaries providing services primarily in the nature of messaging will have to enable identification of the "first originator" of the information that undermines sovereignty of India, security of the state, or public order.

The intermediary, however, will not be required to disclose the contents of any message.

The rules also state that users who voluntarily want to verify their accounts should be given an appropriate mechanism to do so, and be accorded a visible mark of verification.

Users will have to be provided with a prior intimation and explanation when significant social media intermediary removes content on its own. In such cases, users have to be provided an adequate and rea-

sonable opportunity to dispute the action taken by the intermediary.

Rules related to social media will be administered by Ministry of Electronics and IT, while those related Code of Ethics and procedure and safeguards in relation to digital media will be administered by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

On rules related to over-the-top (OTT) and digital media, the government said, guidelines have been framed keeping in mind the difference between viewership in a theatre and television, as compared to watching it on internet.

A Code of Ethics and three-tier grievance redressal mechanism would be applicable for news publishers, OTT platforms and digital media.

Social media platforms must abide by Indian...

Continued from Page 1

Shah's comments came hours after the government announced sweeping regulations for social media firms like Facebook and Twitter as well as OTT platforms such as Netflix, requiring them to remove any content flagged by authorities within 36 hours and set up a complaint redressal mechanism with an officer based in the country.

"All social media platforms have to abide by Indian laws. The new rules, announced today, will further empower social media users by institutionalising redressal mechanism and ensuring resolution of their grievances. I applaud @narendramodi ji and @rsprasad ji, the home minister said in a tweet.

Gayatri Pump House pumps a record 100 tmc ft in 1 year

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Gayatri pump house of Kaleswaram Project at Lakshmi Pur village in Ramadugu mandal of Karimnagar district on Wednesday set a record of sorts by pumping 100 tmc ft of Godavari water into Mid-Manair in one year.

The heavy-duty motors at the pump house on Wednesday reached the 100 tmc ft mark.

The pump house has seven heavy-duty motors each with a capacity to pump 3300 cusecs, according to Kaleswaram Project executive engineer Noone Sridhar.

The water was discharged downstream the Sri Rajarajeswara Project.

For the past two years, 125 tmc ft water reached Mid-Manair project from SRSP and Gayatri Pump House via flood canal.

Kaleswaram Project superintending engineer Srikanth Rao said that 25 tmc ft has been stored in Mid-Manair while the remaining was discharged to Anantagiri project through LMD right canal.

Lift-irrigation of water is underway at Lakshmi pump house in Kannepalli which, with the help of six motors, pumped 21.5 tmc ft till Wednesday since January 17.



Sajjala...

Continued from Page 1

"The public has rejected Chandrababu Naidu in 2019 and even in the recent gram panchayat polls, they have shown him his place," the YSRCP senior leader said.

He said that there was no shortcut to success, and everyone has to be chosen by the people. "Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has taken public welfare to the village level benefiting every eligible person in the State without creating any hassles and leaving no scope for corruption. That is why he has been chosen by the people," Sajjala said.

The best governance provided by YSRCP had paved the way to sweep Panchayat polls and the same will continue in the coming Municipal, MPTC and ZPTC elections, he said.

Balancing act seen in MLC...

Continued from Page 1

Jagan selected these candidates after a series of meetings with the party senior leaders. It appears that the YSRCP supremo treaded cautiously by balancing regional and community representations, while upholding the assurances he had made in the past.

"Our party chief YS Jaganmohan Reddy selected the candidates after discussions with senior leaders. The candidates will file their nomination papers as per their convenience before the stipulated time," said YSRCP general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy.

He pointed out that the party gives importance to the minorities so two leaders from the Muslim community have been nominated. "A conscious decision has also been taken not to field candidates for the teachers' constituencies," said Sajjala.

The Election Commission of India had last Thursday issued the poll schedule for five members of the Legislative Council whose term will expire on March 20 and also to fill a vacancy that was caused due to the death of sitting member Challa Ramakrishna Reddy.

Members whose term will end are Gundumala Thippe Swamy, Gummididi Sandhya Rani, Vattikuti Veera

Venkanna Chowdary, Shaik Mohammed Iqbal and Subhaschandra Bose Pili's seat which was vacant from July 2020 due to his resignation.

The notification will be issued on February 25 and the last date to file nominations is March 4 and withdrawal of candidature is March 8.

While polling will be held on March 15 between 9 am and 4 pm, counting will be held after 5 pm and results will be declared thereafter.

Since the YSRCP has majority MLAs all its candidates are expected to be elected unopposed. Due to lack of strength, the TDP would not be able to field its candidate for even one vacancy.

Mamata rides an...

Continued from Page 1

On return, the CM, however, decided to drive the vehicle herself at a slow speed with Hakim and some security personnel following her on foot.

She drove the e-scooter till Rabindra Sadan-Exide Crossing when Hakim took it from her again. But, as the scooter entered Harish Mukherjee road, Banerjee was once again on the driving seat till reaching home.

During return she took a different route passing through Vidyaagar setu-A J C Bose Road-Harish Mukherjee Road-Hazra to her home. In the morning after reaching Nabanna following a 45-minute ride, Banerjee slammed the BJP-led government at the Centre saying, "We are protesting against the fuel price hike.

The Modi government only makes false promises. They have done nothing to bring down fuel prices."

"You can see the difference in petrol prices when the Modi government came to power and now."

She said the TMC will launch a stir against fuel price rise from Friday.

With the elections not too far, the TMC supremo is not missing any opportunity to score over her main rival BJP.

Nirav Modi loses extradition...

Continued from Page 1

He similarly concludes a prima facie case to have been established on all counts of charges brought by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) money laundering, intimidation of witnesses and disappearance of evidence.

"I am not required to exclude all Mr Modi's various alternative theoretical possibilities and narratives; nor exclude his personal interpretation of the evidence, in order to find a prima facie case has been established, the judge noted, referring to the extradition case of former Kingfisher Airlines boss Vijay Malia as precedent.

He accepted that while Nirav's mental health had deteriorated due to the lengthy incarceration in a London prison, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, his risk of suicide does not meet the high threshold to satisfy him that his mental state is such that it would be "unjust or oppressive" to extradite him.

Under the UK Extradition Act 2003, the judge will now send his findings to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Priti Patel. It is the UK Cabinet minister who is authorised to order an extradition under the India-UK Extradition Treaty and has two months within which to make that decision.

The Home Secretary's order rarely goes against the court's conclusions, as she has to consider only some very narrow bars to extradition which are unlikely to apply in this case, including the possible imposition of a death penalty. Whatever the ministerial decision, the losing side Nirav Modi has up to 14 days within which to approach the High Court and seek leave to appeal after the Home Secretary has made her decision known.

Nirav's legal team did not immediately confirm if he intends to appeal against Thursday's ruling. Any appeal, if granted, will be heard at the Administrative Division of the High Court in London.

Nirav Modi, meanwhile, remains on remand at Wandsworth Prison until the Home Secretary's decision to sign off on the extradition order.

The flashy diamond merchant was arrested on an extradition warrant on March 19, 2019, and has appeared via videolink from Wandsworth



Prison for a series of court hearings in the extradition case. His multiple attempts at seeking bail have been repeatedly turned down, both at the Magistrates' and High Court level, as he was deemed a flight risk.

Nirav is the subject of two sets of criminal proceedings, with the CBI case relating to a large-scale fraud upon PNB through the fraudulent obtaining of letters of undertaking (LoUs) or loan agreements, and the ED case relating to the laundering of the proceeds of that fraud. He also faces two additional charges of "causing the disappearance of evidence" and intimidating witnesses or criminal intimidation to cause death, which were added on to the CBI case.

In the judgment clearing the path to extradition, the judge accepted the arguments put forth by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) arguing in court on behalf of the Indian government that Nirav in collusion with bank officials oversaw a ponzi-like scheme structure where LoUs were used to repay earlier ones.

I do not accept the submissions that NDM was involved in legitimate business and using the LoUs in a permissible fashion I find there is no evidence of genuine import transactions and the applications for the LoUs was being done dishonestly, the ruling notes.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	₹ 47,350 (10 gm)
SILVER	₹ 380
SILVER	₹ 75,200 (1kg)
	₹ 500

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹168
Without Skin	₹191
Broiler at Farm	₹116

EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	412
HYDERABAD	405
VISAKHAPATNAM	472
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.12

CII Vja zone gets new office bearers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Andhra Pradesh, at its Annual Meeting held on Thursday, announced new office-bearers of CII, Vijayawada Zone for the year 2021-22.

Apex Solutions Ltd executive director S Narendra Kumar was appointed the chairman of CII, Vijayawada Zone, for the year 2021-22. Earlier, he was the vice-chairman of Vijayawada Zone.

Narendra Kumar established Apex Solutions Limited, an ITES / BPO / KPO providing content solutions and digitization ser-



Ms Neelima Challagulla- Vice Chairperson, CII Vijayawada Zone



Mr S Narendra Kumar-Chairman, CII Vijayawada Zone (1)

ices in 1998 as a subsidiary of the well-known 60-year-old family enterprise, Crane Betel Nut Powder Company, Crane Group.

Narendra Kumar holds an

Engineering degree and an MBA and was quick to learn the ropes, and began to achieve laurels as the Company grew under his leadership from strength to

strength. Today Apex has grown into a vibrant venture employing over 600 employees at its two facilities - Guntur and Vijayawada.

After being appointed the chairman of CII Vijayawada Zone, Narendra Kumar, in his introductory remarks, said that he would focus on programmes which will bring the latest technology and best practices to further improve the businesses opportunities for industry.

He also felt that there is a need to run skill-based programmes for the benefit of employees as this would help the companies and also the overall development of our

workforce. He emphasised that it is important to propel the Vijayawada zone with focus on infrastructure to attract investments.

Incap Ltd managing director Neelima Challagulla will be the vice-chairperson of CII, Vijayawada Zone for the year 2020-21. Neelima Challagulla has been working in Incap since 2011 joined as director and is currently the managing director of the company. Earlier, she took care of administration and business development activities in the company.

Prior to joining Incap Ltd she worked in the USA as business analyst for 6 years.

1/3 Vizag lives in slums, notice...

Continued from Page 1

TDP local leaders say the people are unhappy with the YSRCP government and they would teach a lesson in these elections. The Corporation will be going to polls after 14 years, with the last election being held in February

2007. With the YSR Congress Party going to Corporation polls for the first time, things are heating up in the city.

With the YSRCP outsmarting arch rival TDP in the gram panchayat elections, it is a do-or-die battle for the TDP in the GVMC polls.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH ROADS & BUILDINGS DEPARTMENT
e-procurement Tender Notice
 e-CTN No. 2 IEE (NH&CR)/DEE/2020-21. Dt:24.02.2021.
 Online tenders are invited through 'e' procurement platform for 7 works under Central Road Infrastructure Fund Scheme in Kumool - 1 work. Chittoor - 2 works. Anantapuram-4 works. Value of Works : Costing between Rs. 13.00 Crores to Rs. 46.00 Crores last date of receipt of tenders : 19.03.2021 to 09.30.00 PM Further Details can be seen at e-procurement market place @tenderapracprocurement.gov.in
 G.P.R.O. No. : 3164-GLAD/7/1/1/2021-21 SO- CHIEF ENGINEER, (R&B) NATIONAL HIGHWAYS & CRP

Kuppam will lead fightback against YSRCP, says Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Despite the poll setback, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu was accorded a resounding welcome in Kuppam as he started his whirlwind tour of his Assembly constituency on Thursday.

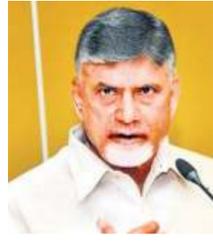
This was Naidu's first visit to Kuppam in the last 15 months. His three-day tour to Kuppam, considered his fortress, assumed significance as his party TD had put a disastrous show in the recently-concluded panchayat polls in his home constituency. Addressing a series of meetings and interactions with the party cadres, the TDP supremo said that he could not strike a proper balance in his term when he gave utmost priority to the development of the state.

"That was only for carving out a bright future for the young

generation," the TDP chief said. He alleged that YSRCP leaders have changed the game with their rowdiness, brutalities, lawlessness and undemocratic approach. "There was an increasing resentment among all sections of the people against this misrule," Naidu said.

He called upon the residents of Kuppam to resist the threats and attacks by YSRCP leaders and continue their "fearless struggle in order to save democracy and prevent slavery".

"Right now, there is no chance for the common man to vote fearlessly in Pulivendula, Punganur and such other Assembly segments. If our struggle is not stepped up, YSRCP leaders would push the entire state into servitude. In just 20 months, they have destroyed the state in all unimaginable ways," Naidu said.



He asserted that the Jagan regime would not survive for long and the TDP was sure to regain power whenever the elections were held. "In fact, the TDP Victory March would begin from Kuppam itself, thus defeating the ruling party leaders' ulterior plans," Naidu added. "It's painful to see that they could not even give water to Kuppam despite there being a

clear opportunity. If a canal was dug from the outskirts, water would have reached Kuppam by now," he continued.

The TDP chief told the people that unchecked rowdiness in public life was a first time experience for their party. "But, our party has shrugged off this scare and next time, it will give an effective counter to the YSRCP," he said.

"The ruling party's atrocities and attacks would be paid with a multiple interest. Kuppam has always been a peaceful place and its residents sincere and honest. Rowdies would be chased out of this area with unity and determination. Any party ruling the state should earn goodwill by doing good deeds but the YSRCP had no clue about this. It only knows how to destroy the livelihoods of the people," Naidu added.



CM discusses agenda for Zonal Council Meet

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday held a meeting with officials to finalise the agenda for the 29th Southern Zonal Council scheduled for March 4 at Tirupati.

The officials briefed the Chief Minister on the issues to be addressed at the Council regarding the State.

The Union Home Minister would chair the meeting to be attended by Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and special invitees from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep. The Chief Minister of Puducherry was scheduled to attend, but after the Congress government fell in the UT, it is still unclear who will take his place.

The officials said that 26 issues will be coming up for discussion during the meeting.

Chief Secretary Adityanath Das, Special Chief Secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, Health Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal, Women and Child welfare Secretary AR Anuradha, Energy Principal Secretary Nagulapalli Srikanth, Finance Secretary Natarajan Gulzar, Agriculture and Cooperation Secretary Madhusudan Reddy, Irrigation Secretary Syamala Rao, Disha Special Officer Deepika Patil and other senior officials were present.

AICTE chief advises varsities to explore funding options

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Indian higher education institutions should explore innovative funding options to meet the future challenges, suggested All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) Chairman Prof. Anil Dattatraya Sahasrabudde here on Thursday.

He participated as chief guest in South Zone Vice-Chancellor's Conference which was organised by Association of Indian Universities (AIU) hosted by GITAM Deemed to be University. The conference was organised through the online mode considering the current pandemic situation.

While addressing the Vice-Chancellors present, he stated that instead of depending entirely on government funding, universities must create new funding options to augment revenues. He also suggested that universities should strengthen the university-industry partnerships and effective utilisation of alumni networks to improve the financial status.

Prof Sahasrabudde spoke about AICTE's new initiative - multilingual translation of the learning resources of vari-

Instead of depending entirely on government funding, universities must create new funding options to augment revenues, the AICTE chairman told the gathering.

ous engineering subjects.

He stated that 42 per cent of our engineering and medical students were expressing interest in learning subjects in their mother tongue. "Presently Swayam courses are being machine translated to provide quality content to engineering students, especially from the underprivileged sections who may be bright but lack fluency in English and suffer from inferiority complex. The translated works will empower them and provide a more enabling environment to pursue higher edu-

cation," Prof Sahasrabudde stated.

He said that to encourage multidisciplinary approach AICTE is now permitting the education institutions for merging technical and non technical colleges running under the same Trust/Society at various locations in the city.

Association of Indian Universities (AIU) secretary general Pankaj Mittal said that the Association was actively engaged with online workshops, teacher training programs and online placement training activities. She informed that AIU is preparing a document based on the suggestions and recommendations of the Vice-Chancellors on NEP-2020 to submit the same to the government.

AIU vice-president Col G Thiruvassagam, GITAM Deemed to be University Vice-Chancellor Prof K Sivaramakrishna and others participated in the discussions. During the conference Vice-Chancellors suggested removal of GST on education institutions, funding support on par with central universities, research funding support to private deemed universities.

Six arrested for murder of rowdy in Vizag

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The MVP Colony police on Thursday arrested six persons in connection with the murder of rowdy sheeter Sanna Venkatesh alias Banda Reddy.

The police identified the arrested accused as Kothalanka Siva Santosh Raja (35) of P&T Colony in Visakhapatnam, Palla Anil Kumar (23), HB Colony, Sanapaka Durga Prasad (24), HB Colony, Teddu Raju (23), Peda Jalaripeta, Molliseti Mohan Rao (32), Old Dairy Farm and Betha Uma Mahesh (25), Old Dairy Farm. The police seized two iron rods, one button knife, one sword and a car from the accused.

Circle Inspector Palla Ramanaiah said the main accused Santosh Raja and the victim Sanna Venkatesh were friends in the past and allegedly involved in two murders. But due to differences, they fell out and became enemies.

YSRCP fan will not work in municipal polls: Lokesh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Thursday accused YSRCP leaders of getting increasingly worried at the fearless manner in which the TDP cadres fought the panchayat polls despite "false cases, attacks, threats and murders".

Lokesh said that the speed of the YSRCP fan in the panchayat polls was reduced to a great extent and the public mood was such that the fan would stop functioning altogether in the coming urban local body elections.

"Everybody should condemn the YSRCP attacks on former MLA Tangirala Sowmya in Nandigama and on the TDP leaders in Tiruvuru and other



places," he said. "The lawless Raja Reddy constitution was brought in to strike fear and suppress all sections of the people," the MLC said.

During the day, Lokesh called on the former MLA and expressed solidarity with her fight against the mafia involved in the illegal mining activities. He also visited families of victims who were TDP supporters in Tiruvuru assembly segment.

Lokesh told the Krishna Reddy family in Ramachandrapuram that the TDP would stand behind and extend all support to them in their struggle against the oppressive attacks by the ruling party leaders.

The MLC said that Jagan and his party leaders talked about the TDP finding no candidates in the panchayat elections and boasted that they had won 151 seats in the Assembly elections. "But after the panchayat polls started, the Chief Minister began to feel the real impact of the people's disapproval of his Government's policies. The CM and his MLAs are terrified at the manner in which the TDP cadres came forward to fight in the elections," he said.

State has clarity about Amaravati, Naidu misleading people: Botsa

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister Administration Minister Botsa Satyanarayana on Thursday said the state government has clarity vis-a-vis the development of Amaravati region as Legislative Capital and has taken steps in this direction.

Speaking to the media here, Botsa said that a bank guarantee of Rs 3,000 crore has been approved from the govern-

ment side which includes developing the seed access and Karakatta roads.

"The TDP is deliberately creating confusion among the people regarding Amaravati development even though Chandrababu Naidu failed to provide wide access roads to Amaravati region during his term," the Minister said.

He demanded to know from Naidu why the seed access roads could not be laid in the

five years of TDP rule and asked him if anyone had obstructed him from laying the roads.

The Minister stated that Naidu spent hundreds of crores on temporary structures during his tenure misusing public money but was unable to acquire land for a small connecting bridge.

He said that the State government has proposed Karakatta road at a cost of Rs



150 crore. In addition, the current seed access road will also be completed fully connecting to Kaza village on the National Highway.

Botsa said that the YSRCP government will take up work on all basic infrastructure like roads, drainage, electricity in the capital area of Amaravati as promised by the previous government.

He asked Naidu had done to Kuppam constituency and why

he didn't come up with the idea of urbanising Kuppam, at least making it a municipality, or a small city.

"While Naidu failed miserably in Kuppam, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has elevated Pulivendula to a model city by taking up developmental activities. People are furious with Naidu and felt betrayed and expressed their anger in the gram panchayat elections,"

Botsa said. He said that people have good faith in the YSRCP Government, where Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy does not encourage unnecessary graphics to deceive people and public welfare is the priority of the government. "Naidu was only concerned about the 29 villages in Amaravati rather than overall development of the State," he said.

Thousands of farmers who gave land for VSP were cheated: Prof Chalam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Former UPSC chairman and academician Prof KS Chalam on Thursday alleged that thousands of farmers who gave their farm lands for construction of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant were deprived of employment because of some vested interests.

"Political leaders traded with the R Cards of the displaced, depriving employment to thousands of farmers," he alleged. While addressing the ongoing agitation against privatisation of

VSP which entered its 14th day on Thursday, Prof Chalam said many farmers in spite of having valid R Card, could not get employment in the steel plant. "Some cunning elements with the help of some selfish political leaders, who had migrated from other districts, took advantage of the situation, bought them off for a low price and provided them with menial jobs in unorganised sectors," he said.

He said according to the recent reports, these elements with the help of big corporate entities, have drawn a grandiose plan to grab most of

the public land, including unused RINL land, for their selfish gains.

"If these elements are not checked now, they will grab the agency hills," Prof Chalam said. Meanwhile, thousands of workers unions from different organisations converged at the dharna point to join the ongoing agitation. The relay hunger strike was launched on February 12 by all the major trade unions.

The CPM has announced rasta roko across the State on Friday and chalked out many other state-wide programmes for the ensuing days.

UPPING THE ANTE



YSRCP Rajya Sabha member Mopidevi Venkataramana, Anakapalli MP Beesetti Venkata Satyavath, along with MPs from Telangana hand over memorandum to Parliamentary Standing Committee chairperson Rakesh Singh, urging a rethink of the RINL-VSP privatisation decision on Thursday. The MPs also referred to the letter written by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the issue. Responding to the MPs' request, Rakesh Singh assured them that he would bring the matter to the notice of the Central Government.

CM honours two young achievers with cash awards

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday congratulated Jonnadula Lishitha and announced a cash incentive of Rs 1 lakh for her record feat in Fire Limbo Skating.

Lishitha, who created Vajra World Record in the 8-inch low and 20 metre length category, called on the Chief Minister at his camp office here.

The Chief Minister has congratulated her for her achievement and announced the cash incentive.

Lishitha, who hails from Tanuku in West Godavari district, was accompanied by Tanuku MLA Karmuri Nageswara Rao, her parents Anusha and Uma Maheswar

and coach Lavanya. Meanwhile, Kaivalya Reddy of Nidadavolu in West Godavari on Thursday called on Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy at his camp office here.

The Chief Minister congratulated her and announced a cash intensive of Rs 1 lakh for finding asteroids between Jupiter and Mars using the Prawn Stars telescope.

International Astronomical Search Collaboration, which is recognised by NASA has presented her an award in recognition of her work.

Kaivalya Reddy took her training from Space Port India Foundation. Her parents Srinivasula Reddy and Vijalayalakshmi accompanied her during the meeting.



Jonnadula Lishitha, who created Vajra World Record in the 8-inch low and 20 metre length category, with Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday.

HC summons AIDS control body secretary over contempt plea

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has directed the Additional Secretary and Director General of National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) Aarti Ahuja to appear before it on March 9 and explain why contempt of court proceeding should not be initiated against her. She can either appear before the court in person or through advocate.

Petitioners Sudartha Venu, P Venkatasubhai, M Jayakumar and employees of AP State AIDS Control (APSAC) had moved the High Court seeking contempt of court proceeding against the officials concerned of the NACO.

AP State Aids Control (APSAC) contractual employ-

ees had moved the High Court and filed a writ petition under the NACO department under Health and Family Welfare did not concede their basic demands.

The employees had given a representation to their higher ups on July 7 seeking enhancement of remuneration at par with the other employees working in the same project.

Instead of revising the remuneration of all, NACO revised the remuneration of only senior medical officers and medical officers, which met with strong opposition from the APSAC employees who termed it as divide and rule policy.

The NACO employees contended that disparity in the remuneration of the same peo-



ple was illegal, arbitrary and a violation of principles of natural justice and also Article 14, 16, 21 and 300A of the Constitution of India.

The employees prayed to the High Court to direct Ahuja to act on the representation of the petitioners and pass such

order that may deem fit and proper in the circumstance of the case.

The APSAC employees deployed at ART and ICTC centres (all are contract employees) have been roped in for Covid-19 duties to conduct Covid-19 tests.

They were getting exposed to the TB and AIDS patients early and now the Covid, but the concerned authorities are turning a blind eye to their plights and basic demands.

"We have been working as Contractual Employees on Contract Basis in ICTC/ART/STI/Blood Banks/SRL/DAPCU and OST at General Hospitals, District Headquarter Hospitals, Area Hospital, Community Health Centres and Primary Health Centres, in the all over India

on the contract basis more than 18 years on the basis of negligible / less honorarium only, more than 23000 employees are working under NACO through State AIDS Control Society (SACS)... are engaged to give quality facilities and

services like HIV testing, treatment, counselling, clinical investigations, drugs, maintenance of records, enhancing government schemes like pension, health schemes, subsidy loans etc pertaining to PLHIVs," said Venu Sudartha, state president and national coordinator of All India AIDS Control Employees Welfare Association.

"Most of the staff has been working since 2002 with very meagre honorarium, which is insufficient to get over minimum basic needs in day to day life. Maximum salary for paramedical staff is 24,450 with an experience of more than 18 years and minimum salary is Rs 13,000 only which is very less when comparing other sectors," he added.

50 sheep run over by lorry

PNS ■ NUZVID

Over 50 sheep were knocked down by a lorry at Mirzapuram village in Nuzvid mandal on Thursday causing a loss to the tune of Rs 5 lakh to the sheep-rearers. The mishap took place when Maganti Narayana and Arla Venkateswara Rao of Sunkollu village were taking them to Gudivada. A speeding lorry coming from Hanuman Junction killed over 50 sheep, however, the sheep-rearers tried to stop the lorry, but noting that there were no signs of the lorry coming to a halt, the sheep-rearers jumped to save their skin. In fact, the sheep belong to Maganti Srinivasa Rao. The sheep-rearers lodged a complaint with the Nuzvid rural police station. Rural SI Ch Ranjit Kumar is investigating the case.

Cong questions TRS on its failure to fill vacant posts in 7 yrs

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The intensity of allegations and counter allegations among the political parties are increasing day by day in view of graduate MLC elections as well as Nagarajuna Sagar by-election. The ruling party is stating that it has provided Mission Bhagiratha water and jobs, however, the opposition parties are criticizing the ruling party saying that they failed to do what is required.

On Thursday, former CLP leader K Jana Reddy questioned the TRS government as to why it failed to fulfill the vacant jobs in the last seven years. He said that the TRS government kept the recruitment process aside by not fulfilling its assurance of 'unemployment allowance' to the unemployed youth.

He alleged that the TRS party leaders were criticizing the Congress only to cover their failures. He said that the then Congress government had created 4.90 lakh jobs in the state at various levels in the Telangana State. He said that he had sold his residence in his village 30 years ago. He said that the water coming to the house was not Bhagiratha waters and they were regular water. He asked the media persons to go and check whether the villages were getting Mission Bhagiratha waters or not and said that he

Preparation of final DPR in linking of Godavari-Cauvery rivers approved

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Task Force deliberated upon many priority links under the interlinking of rivers programme and has taken decisions on how to proceed further on the implementation of these links.

The thirteenth meeting of Task Force for Inter Linking of Rivers (ILR) held on Thursday in Delhi and the meeting was chaired by Chairman of the Task Force on Interlinking of Rivers Sriram Vedire.

The draft DPR of this link project was prepared by the NWDA and circulated to all the Godavari, Krishna and Cauvery Basin states on March 30, 2019. Most of the states conveyed their observations on the draft DPR and same were discussed in a consultation meeting with States concerned convened on September 18, 2020. DPR is under finalisation based on comments/suggestions of states to the extent feasible. This link was discussed at length by the members of the Task Force. Chairman of the Task Force Sriram Vedire has opined that the below two points need to be taken into account before finalising this DPR. The water diversion from Godavari basin out of the allocated share of Andhra Pradesh or Telangana in Godavari basin to Krishna or Penner basin will belong to the respective state and the same may be utilised as per their planning. However, if such transfers/planning fit into the national perspective, the Centre would extend help in the implementation and integrating state proposals serving common objectives.

The water diversion from Godavari basin out of the allocated share of AP or Telangana in Godavari basin to Krishna or Penner basin will belong to the respective state

RSS chief advocates 'Akhand Bharat'

■ Says Pakistan in distress ever since partitioned from India

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Advocating the need for Akhand Bharat (undivided India), RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said countries such as Pakistan, which broke away from India, are now in distress. Speaking at a book launch here on Thursday, Bhagwat said 'Akhand Bharat' is possible through 'Hindu Dharma', but not through force.

"There is a need to make glorious 'Akhand Bharat' for the welfare of the universe. Hence, there is a need to awaken patriotism...as truncated India has a need to be united (once again), all the divided parts of India, which no longer call themselves as India, they need more," he said.

Stressing that the concept of 'Akhand Bharat' is possible, Bhagwat said some people had expressed serious doubts before the partition of the country whether it would be divided, but it happened. "If you ask six months before the partition of this country, nobody would have guessed. People asked Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru that there was a new topic coming up about the formation of Pakistan."

"What is it? (Replying to that) he said that it (the partition) was a dream of fools," the RSS chief said. According to him, Lord Wavell (during British rule) also said in British Parliament that God has made India one and who is going to divide it.



"Gandhar became Afghanistan. Is there peace and tranquillity in Afghanistan since then? Pakistan was formed. From that date till now is there peace and tranquillity?" the RSS chief asked

"But ultimately it (partition) happened. What seemed to be impossible happened, so it cannot be ruled out that 'Akhand Bharat',

which may seem to be impossible, will not happen...because there is a need for Akhand Bharat," he said. Bhagwat said separated regions of India, which don't call themselves as Bharat any longer, for them it is much more a necessity of reuniting with Bharat".

According to him, there is unhappiness in the terrains of 'Akhand Bharat, which now do not call themselves Bharat. "There is unhappiness. They did all they could but did not find any remedy. And the remedy is the only one which is reunification (with Bharat) and all their problems will get resolved."

"We talk of uniting them, not to suppress them. When we talk of 'Akhand Bharat' our intention is not with power (to achieve it), but to unite through dharma, which is 'Sanatan' (eternal), which is humanity's dharma and of the entire world and today it is called as Hindu dharma," the RSS chief said.

"Gandhar became Afghanistan. Is there peace and tranquillity in Afghanistan since then? Pakistan was formed. From that date till now is there peace and tranquillity?" he asked.

He said India has the endurance to overcome several challenges and the world looks towards it to overcome difficulties. With 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (world is one family) belief, India can again offer happiness and peace to the world, he added.

Jana fires a salvo against Congress leaders' fans

K VENKATESHWARLU ■ HYDERABAD

Indiscipline in the Congress party is taking a toll on the image of the party with supporters indulging in posting derogatory comments on social media, trying to malign the leaders of rival groups.

Former minister K Jana Reddy has come forward to rescue the sagging image of the party where rival leaders are often seen washing dirty linen in public. Firing a salvo against unruly supporters, who are going for questionable comments on social media, he said such activities cannot be tolerated as that damage the image of the party. He said that followers of some Congress leaders were spreading different types of unfounded news on social media. It was not good for the leaders and their followers, who were spreading such news, he said. It was no good on the part of the followers to challenge leaders of rival groups and say that their leader was great. The Congress party would be badly affected if the followers insulted party leaders by using harsh words against them, he said.

While speaking to the media at Gandhi Bhavan on Thursday, Jana Reddy warned the followers of those leaders. The leadership has to correct their fans, or else all will face trouble, he warned. The party



Former minister K Jana Reddy has come forward to rescue the sagging image of the party where rival leaders are often seen washing dirty linen in public.

He said that followers of some Congress leaders were spreading different types of unfounded news on social media

would have to take these things seriously, he said and went on to add that if the TPCC failed to pull up the unruly supporters and such acts of indiscipline continued he would go to the high command of the party and make sure that such things did not happen. "The TPCC has to initiate action against them or else I will take the issue to the notice of high command. Action will be initiated from top to bottom.

The TPCC leadership has to convene a meeting with all and see that the fans must be in control," he said.



Vijayashanthi welcomes Centre's decision

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP senior leader Vijayashanthi said in a statement on Thursday that she is welcoming the decision of the Central government on putting curbs on social media. "We welcome the rules and regulations imposed by the Centre for the regulation of OTT and social media content, which is going on without a proper approach," she said.

She lamented that content and videos inciting hatred in the name of freedom of expression. Many individuals and families have expressed concern that this could lead to depression, she lamented.

She said that in many cases the existence of the system was endangered due to uncontrolled social media and OTT content and was also becoming a threat to national unity. She reminded that the number of mobsters harassing women has increased, especially on social media platforms.

Bollineni Gandhi, Sudha Rani placed under suspension

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Central Board of Indirect taxes and Customs on Thursday placed GST assistant commissioner Bollineni Srinivasa Gandhi and deputy commissioner Chiluka Sudharani under suspension in disproportionate assets case for demanding and accepting Rs 5 crore for doing official favours. Also, there are many CBI cases are pending against Bollineni. The Board has asked them not to leave Hyderabad until further orders. It may be recalled that the CBI registered two cases against Bollineni within a span of one year. As a follower of former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, he was accused of harassing the political rivals of TDP.

He joined central excise as inspector in 1992. In 2002 he was promoted to the post of superintendent. He went to Directorate of Revenue Intelligence in 2003 on deputation basis. In 2004, he was transferred to Enforcement Directorate on transfer. He continued in the same post till 2017 continuously which is unprecedented. Normally, the maximum tenure of appointment for any official in such posts would be two years. If the official continuing in the post is necessary, the term of office would be extended by one year.

GRADUATE MLC POLLS

Accepted TRS' offer to serve people, says Vani Devi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The decision of the TRS to give an MLC ticket to the daughter of former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao has come as a surprise given the Congress roots of her father, but S Vani Devi asserted she has been apolitical and accepted the offer only to serve people.

While declining to dwell into Congress leadership not giving her father the due recognition especially after his demise, she, however, said it was TRS supremo and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, who took up birth centenary celebrations of him in a grand manner in June 2020. An educationist, the 69-year-old noted that she has been 'apolitical' and her career was focussed in the fields of education and art.

Vani Devi said she accepted the offer to contest the Legislative Council biennial election on TRS ticket to serve people through a bigger platform



though her father, who had credited with ushering in economic reforms in the 1990s were a life-long Congressman. The TRS has fielded Vani Devi as its candidate in the March 14 election to the Legislative Council from Mahabubnagar-Rangareddy-Hyderabad Graduates' constituency. Vani Devi worked as a lecturer and founded academic institutions, besides being an acclaimed artist. On the criticism against the Congress over the way it treated Narasimha Rao, Vani Devi, who used to accom-

pany her father during his overseas trips as the Prime Minister, said she was not interested in talking about politics and parties.

"We are not interested in criticising anybody, any party. But, the treatment, despite his commitment, dedication, service, loyalty, what answer should I give. The world knows. "Those who behaved like that, it is better if they are asked. They know the reason. I don't know. Because, I am not in the picture," she said.

Congress has often come under attack for not acknowledging Narasimha Rao's contributions publicly and allegedly not allowing his mortal remains to be placed in the AICC headquarters in New Delhi after his death. However, the Congress also launched its own year-long birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister in July 2020 when top leaders, including Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, paid rich tributes to him.



Minister for Panchayat Raj, Rural Development and Water Supply Errabelli Dayakar Rao speaking at a meeting at Maripeda in the Warangal district on Thursday. Graduate MLC nominee Palla Rajeshwar Reddy is also seen

Govt striving for all-round growth of state: Errabelli

PNS ■ WARANGAL

The TRS government has been striving for the uplift of all sections of society by not only launching many welfare schemes, but also for the all-round development of the State, said Minister for Panchayat Raj, Rural Development and Water Supply Errabelli Dayakar Rao. Do not be fooled by the loudness of the opposition those who do nothing for the people will continue to say whatever they want, he lamented.

He appealed to voters to for Palla Rajeshwar Reddy, a leader who knows the problems of the

region and has the ability to solve their problems.

Ministers Satyavathi Rathod, MP Kavitha, ZP chairperson Kumari Anagothu Bindu, Palla Rajeshwar Reddy and others spoke at a meeting with TRS leaders and graduates in Maripeda as part of the Nalgonda-Warangal-Khammam district Graduate MLC elections campaign.

Ministers Errabelli Dayakar Rao and Satyavathi Rathod said that people should see the change before and after the TRS coming to power. People belonging to all walks of life are being benefited from the schemes launched by the government.



Engineers discussing with Minister for Finance Harish Rao on irrigation facilities at a review meeting in Sangareddy on Thursday

LI schemes to provide water to 4 constituencies

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Minister for Finance Harish Rao directed the Irrigation Department officials to prepare a plan to provide water for Sangareddy, Andol, Narayanakhet and Zaheerabad through Sangameshwara and Basaveshwara lift irrigation schemes. On Thursday, he held a review meeting with the Sangareddy and Medak District Irrigation Department officials at Aranya Bhavan in Hyderabad.

He said plans should be chalked out to divert water from Komaravelli Mallanna Sagar to Singur project through canals to Sangareddy, Zaheerabad, Narayanakhet and Andol constituencies. About 2.5 lakh acres of strategic land will be irrigated, he said.

He said that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had directed that there should be plans to provide water to Sangareddy, Zaheerabad and

Narayanakhet constituencies without fail. As per his instructions, he wanted to ensure that the water was provided to those constituencies. He said he would soon hold a meeting with the Irrigation Department officials, Collectors, RDOs and constituency MLAs at the Collectorate to review the issue of providing irrigation water in the four constituencies.

Sangameshwara and Basaveshwara lift irrigation schemes are planned to provide irrigation water to more strategic areas in the four constituencies. He enquired about the progress of Package 17, Package 18 and Package 19 of the Kaleshwaram project works in the district. He ordered officials concerned to expedite the works.

It was suggested that tenders should be called to dispose of useless machines, which were lying as scrap. Medak MP Kothakota Prabhakar Reddy and officials were present.

'TRS has no right to use PV's name'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC working president and Malkajigiri MP A Revanth Reddy pointed out that TRS working president and IT Minister KT Rama Rao was in the US when the then Congress government gave jobs to the youth.

He alleged that the unemployed youth of Telangana didn't get jobs even after the

creation of a separate Telangana state, however, five members of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's family got jobs. Asking the TRS party to tell as to what relation it has with former Prime Minister late PV Narasimha Rao and said that the credit of making PV as the Prime Minister of the nation goes to Congress only. He said that the TRS

and PV's daughter S Vani Devi didn't have the right to campaign using PV's portrait. He said that Congress will meet the Election Commission to complain about the issue.

Addressing the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar graduate MLC elections campaign, along with Congress party candidate G Chinna Reddy on Thursday, Revanth

Reddy questioned the TRS government to tell whether they solved any problems in the last seven years. He asked the Central government to tell whether it implemented the assurances mentioned in the State Re-organization Act. He asked KCR and Modi to tell what happened to their assurances—jobs to each house and 2 crore jobs per year respectively.

Cong leaders to meet Guv on advocate couple murder

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC leaders' team decided to meet Governor Tamilisai Sounderarajan on Friday for her intervention asking the government to conduct an inquiry into the High Court advocate couple murder. TPCC Chief and Nalgonda MP N Uttam Kumar Reddy, Manthani MLA D Sridhar Babu and other Congress leaders would meet Governor to complain with her on the brutal murder of advocate couple G Vaman Rao and Nagamani at Manthani in broad daylight recently.

1,600 MW thermal power project will be commissioned soon: NTPC CGM

PITTALA RAJENDER ■ RAMAGUNDAM

The first phase of 1,600 MW Telangana super thermal power project (TSTPP) taken up by the NTPC Ramagundam on its premises is all set to commission its two units of 2x800 MW in 2021-2022.

Disclosing this to newsmen at NTPC Ramagundam in Peddapalli district on Thursday, NTPC Chief General Manager Sunil Kumar said that the Telangana project works were progressing at a brisk pace after overcoming the hurdles due to the outbreak of deadly Coronavirus and lockdown. Stating that 85 per cent of the



NTPC Chief General Manager Sunil Kumar addresses the media at NTPC Ramagundam in Peddapalli district on Thursday

power generated at the Telangana power project would be utilised by the State government, he said that they were confident of commissioning both the units in 2021-2022.

Concerning the second phase 2,400 MW of Telangana power project, he said that the

project was at a discussion level and confident of executing it soon after completing all formalities. The coal for the Telangana project would be supplied from the Mandakini coal block in Odisha and tapering linkage from Singareni for 6.85 million tonnes per annum.

India, Pak agree to follow ceasefire pacts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Pakistan have agreed to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and other sectors, according to a joint statement on Thursday.

The decision on ceasefire, effective since Wednesday midnight, was taken at a meeting between the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs) of India and Pakistan.

India and Pakistan signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003, but it has hardly been followed in letter and spirit over past several years with more violations than observance of the pact.

The DGMOs held discussions over the established mechanism of hotline contact and reviewed the situation along the Line of Control and all other sectors in a "free, frank and cordial atmosphere".

"In the interest of achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders, the two DGMOs agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns which have propensity to



disturb peace and lead to violence.

"Both sides agreed for strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control and all other sectors with effect from midnight of February 24/25," the joint statement said.

They also reiterated that existing mechanisms of hotline contact and border flag meetings will be utilised to resolve any unforeseen situation or misunderstanding, it added.

In written response to a question in Lok Sabha earlier this month, Union Minister of State for Home G Kishan

weapons from north and south banks of Pangong Tso in the high-altitude region.

However, issues still remain. In the talks held between Indian and Chinese armies on Saturday which continued till the wee hours of Sunday, India is learnt to have insisted on a faster disengagement process in areas like Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang to bring down tension in the region.

The disengagement of armies of India and China from north and south banks of Pangong Tso is a "very good end result" and a win-win situation for both the sides, Army chief Gen M M Naravane said on Wednesday but stressed that there is a long way to go and the next steps towards it are de-escalation and de-induction of troops.

He also said there were no signs of an "overt collusion" between China and Pakistan during the Ladakh standoff but India caters to a long-term strategy for not a two, but a two-and-a-half front war. With the half front, he was referring to the internal security.

J-K parties welcome agreement

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) and the PDP on Thursday welcomed the agreement between armies of India and Pakistan on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and other sectors.

"We welcome it and hope that the statement will be followed in letter & spirit. JKNC has always been a strong supporter of the ceasefire along the LoC," the party said in a statement.

"This will allow people living along the LoC & IB (International Border) to go about their normal lives with minimal disruption & risk," the party said.

Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti in a tweet welcomed the ceasefire announcement and said dialogue was the only way forward.

"A big & welcome development that India & Pakistan have agreed to a

ceasefire along the LoC. Dialogue is the only way forward if both countries want to stop the unending cycle of violence & bloodshed across the borders and J&K," Mehbooba said.

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"In the interest of achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders, the two DGMOs agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns which have propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence," according to the joint statement.

Cong joined hands with Ajmal for 'lust for power': Amit

PNS ■ BORDUWA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday attacked the Congress for joining forces with Badruddin Ajmal's AIUDF in Assam because of its "lust for power".

The Congress' "greed" to capture power in the state will remain unfulfilled and the BJP along with its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), which symbolises Assamese identity, will win the assembly polls with a two-thirds majority, Shah told a public rally at Borduwa, the birthplace of Srimanta Sankardeva, the 15-16th century saint, scholar and religious reformer, in Nagaon district.

"The Congress talks about providing security when it is joining hands with Ajmal. It's only because of its lust for power that it has joined hands with Ajmal."

"The party did nothing to free Assam from violence and infiltration despite having a prime minister who was elected from the state," he said, referring to Manmohan Singh who is a Rajya Sabha member from Assam.

Lok Sabha MP Ajmal's All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) wield's considerable influence among Bengali speaking Assamese Muslims.

Enumerating various schemes that the Modi government has launched for Assam, Shah said people will weigh the measures undertaken by it in seven years against those by the Congress over 70 years in the upcoming polls.

Shah also accused the parties formed in the aftermath of the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act protests of "helping the Congress which used bullets to suppress the Assam agitation against foreigners". He said these parties were formed so they could chip away at BJP's votes and help the Congress but they will not succeed.



Congress leaders are sighted in the state only during elections and later get busy making rounds of the corridors of power in New Delhi to fulfil their vested interests, he alleged.

Prime Minister Modi will never turn his back on Assam and the North East, and will go to any extent to make the region a growth engine of the country, he said.

It is with this intention that Modi visited different states of the North East at least 35 times during the last five years, Shah said.

"The prime minister wants to take the region forward on the path of progress and make it free from corruption, violence and infiltration," he asserted.

The home minister extolled Srimanta Sankardeva for his role in unifying Assam with the rest of the country more than 500 years ago which prompted Mahatma Gandhi to remark that it was he who initiated 'Ram Rajya' in the state. "The spirit will be rekindled," he said.

Shah had, during an earlier visit to Guwahati on December 26 last year, remotely laid the foundation stone for the development and beautification of Batadrava Than at Borduwa, the birth place Sankardeva at an estimated cost of Rs 188 crore.

The Than, a Vaishnavite monastery, is being developed as a centre of art, culture, research and spirituality.

INDIA CORNER

PM Modi pays tributes to social reformer Mannathu Padmanabhan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday paid tributes to Mannathu Padmanabhan on his death anniversary, and recalled the social reformer's long lasting contributions towards social welfare and youth empowerment. "Tributes to Sri Mannathu Padmanabhan Ji on his Purnya Tithi. We recall his long lasting contributions towards social welfare and youth empowerment. His rich thoughts continue to motivate many," Modi tweeted. Mannathu Padmanabhan was a social reformer and freedom fighter from Kerala. He is recognised as the founder of the Nair Service Society (NSS).



Rajkumar Rao, Bhumi wrap up shoot for film 'Badhaai Do'

Actors Rajkumar Rao and Bhumi Pednekar have finished shooting for their schedule of the upcoming comedy 'Badhaai Do'. Backed by Junglee Pictures, the film is a sequel to the National Award-winning hit 'Badhaai Ho!'. It is directed by Harshvardhan Kulkarni, who helmed the Gulshan Devaiah-starrer comedy 'Huntarr' (2015). Rao and Pednekar were shooting the film for almost two months in Mussoorie and Dehradun. The official handle of Junglee Pictures posted a video on Instagram, featuring the cast and crew of 'Badhaai Do' announcing the completion of the schedule on the lines of the viral 'Pavri ho rahi hai' trend. "This is our team. This is their madness. And here we are having our schedule wrap up pavri," the post read. The upcoming film is written by Suman Adhikary and Akshat Ghildial, who had co-written 'Badhaai Ho!'. "Badhaai Do" marks the first collaboration between Rao and Pednekar. Rao, 36, features in the film as a cop, while 31-year-old Pednekar will be seen in the role of a PT Teacher. "Badhaai Ho!", the original movie, chronicled the story of a middle age couple, played by Neena Gupta and Gajraj Rao, facing unexpected pregnancy. The 2018 film, also featuring Ayushmann Khurrana, Surekha Sikri, and Sanya Malhotra, was directed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma. It won two National Awards for best popular film providing wholesome entertainment and best supporting actress for Sikri.



5 killed, 6 hurt in fireworks factory blast in Tamil Nadu

Five people were killed and six injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory near Sivakasi in the district on Thursday, police said. More than ten sheds where chemicals had been stored were razed to the ground in the mishap, the second such incident this month in a cracker manufacturing unit in this region, the country's fireworks hub. Fire and Rescue service teams battled the blaze in the unit at Kalayar Kurichi, police said, adding the injured were rushed to hospitals. The cause of the explosion was not known immediately. More than 20 people had died and around 30 injured in a major explosion in a fireworks unit at Acchankulam village near Sattur in this district on February 2.



Four killed in Chandrapur district after tempo overturns

Four persons were killed and 14 others were injured when a tempo carrying passengers overturned in Maharashtra's Chandrapur district on Thursday, police said. The victims were returning to Ekara from Ratanpur after a wedding. The tempo driver lost control of the vehicle near Kachepur village under Sindewahi police station limits and it turned turtle, said assistant police inspector Yogesh Ghare. Some 30 persons were traveling in the vehicle, he said, adding that four of them died on the spot. The deceased were identified as Raghunath Koram (41), Sahil Koram (14), both from Ekara; Kavita Borkar (30), resident of Sakoli and Rani Gane (27) from Chikur tehsil. The injured were shifted to a hospital in Chandrapur while a case of rash and negligent driving was registered against the tempo driver who fled from the spot, the police official said.



TN govt announces 'all pass' for Class 9, 10

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Students of class 9, 10 and Plus One in Tamil Nadu will not have to take the exams, Chief Minister K Palaniswami announced in the assembly on Thursday as he declared them "all pass" this academic year in view of the Coronavirus pandemic.

"Taking into consideration the unusual situation being faced by teachers and students, the views of parents besides the opinion of experts, the students of standards: 9, 10 and 11, facing the annual/board exams in 2020-21 education year, are announced as passed without writing the examinations," the chief minister said.

Throughout the year the students were taught through the state-run Kalvi Tholaiatchi (education TV channel).

"The syllabus was downsized by taking into account the practical difficulties of the teachers and students," Palaniswami added.

As the entire world battled against the pandemic, the Tamil Nadu government ordered the closure of schools to prevent the spread of the virus.

"The schools were ordered to close from March 25, 2020, to contain the spread of the pandemic and were reopened only for classes 10 and 12 on January 19, after Coronavirus was brought under control considerably," Palaniswami said.

Students who came to school were given vitamin and zinc tablets in order to enhance their immunity.

Cooperation of constitutional bodies vital, says Speaker

PNS ■ SHILLONG

It is important for all constitutional institutions to complement and cooperate with each other for a strong democracy, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said on Thursday.

He was addressing the members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. "Democracy can be strengthened only when all constitutional institutions work in tandem and cooperate with each other within their respective constitutional jurisdictions. All the institutions should complement each other," he said.

"There can be dissent during discussions but we should not reach an impasse. Our dis-



cussions should lead to the welfare of the people of the country," the Speaker added.

Birla, who is currently on a two-day visit to Meghalaya, said one of his foremost priorities in Parliament was to make women, young and newly-elected MPs aware of various parliamentary conventions and practices.

"I always promote and welcome their active participation in debates and discussions that take place in the

House. It is very important to ensure the capacity-building of the members to pave way for constructive debates in Parliament," he said.

The Speaker also talked about some of the new initiatives being taken in Lok Sabha to enhance the practical knowledge of the members, including briefing sessions on the bills being introduced in the lower house.

He advised that similar programmes should be organised in the legislative assemblies as well.

Birla also talked about PRISM, a new service that was introduced in Parliament during the Budget Session, to provide MPs with parliamentary research and information support.

Nadda visits Bankim's residence at Naihati

PNS ■ KOLKATA

BJP chief J P Nadda on Thursday visited the ancestral house of novelist and poet Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay at Naihati in North 24 Parganas district.

Accompanied by state BJP president Dilip Ghosh, national general secretary Kailash Vijayvargiya, and party MP Arjun Singh, Nadda went to the house, where Chattopadhyay was born and paid floral tributes to him.

Nadda said he was fortunate to visit the birthplace of the great novelist who inspired people through his works during India's quest for freedom.

"Vande Mataram", the national song of the country, was penned by Chattopadhyay.

"His work instilled self-esteem among the people of the country and also stirred the spirit of nationalism to take out India from the clutches of colonial rule," he



said. The BJP president said that the novelist's creations will inspire the saffron party to usher in 'Sonar Bangla' (golden Bengal).

He also visited the museum adjacent to the house and saw the archival documents. Nadda also said icons like Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Chattopadhyay and Syama Prasad Mukherjee, had all given a sense of direction to the country.

Later, he left for lunch at the residence of a jute mill worker.

Sena questions Centre over thaw in trade ties with China

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Shiv Sena on Thursday slammed the Centre saying that on the one hand it called for a boycott of Chinese products and banned some apps of that country after the border standoff, on the other hand the neighbouring country emerged as India's top trading partner in 2020.

The party also said that while the government is once again laying a red carpet for Chinese firms, it should not forget that China is an "untrustworthy and unreliable" neighbour.

"The border tension between India and China de-escalated last week. The tension in trade ties between the two countries also looks set to reduce. There is a possibility that 45 Chinese companies will be given permission to work in India. In short, the tough stand taken by the Modi government after the COVID-19 outbreak towards the Chinese companies and their investment seems to be easing," the Sena said in an editorial in party mouthpiece 'Saamana'.

Politics and diplomatic relations with other countries keep changing as per the circum-



stances, it said. "But is it a just coincidence that the Centre has softened its stand towards the Chinese trade after the de-escalation of tension on the border?" it asked.

Over the last eight months, the border conflict had turned severe. After the Chinese aggression, fierce conflict in the Galwan Valley, India and China reached an agreement on disengagement in eastern Ladakh last week. But soon after that it emerged that the trade ties between the two countries are thawing, it said.

The Uddhav Thackeray party said that China is the most "unreliable and untrustworthy" neighbour and though it has

taken a soft stand on the border for its trade, it can again start its troublesome actions on the border once its purpose is achieved.

Last year, India banned 59 Chinese apps including Tik-Tok. Some trade agreements with China were cancelled, curbs were imposed on the Chinese investment in India and 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' and nationalism were promoted, it said.

"The Modi government blew its trumpet about how they blocked China...So what exactly happened in the last eight months that red carpet is being laid for 45 Chinese firms now?" it asked.

CHHATTISGARH NAXAL MENACE

54 cops died in 2 yrs, 120 ultras killed

PNS ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh government on Thursday said Naxal violence claimed lives of 54 security personnel, including 18 from the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), in the state in last two years.

Besides, 120 Naxals were also killed in encounters with security forces, while 659 ultras surrendered during the same period, it said.

The details were given by state Home Minister Tamradhwaj Sahu in a written reply in the Assembly, while responding to a ques-



tion raised by Leader of the Opposition Dharamlal Kaushik.

"Fifty four security personnel, including 18 from the CAPF, were martyred in Naxal violence from 2019 till January 31 this year,"

Sahu said. The minister also informed that 79 Naxals were killed in encounters and 315 surrendered in 2019, while 41 ultras were killed and 344 surrendered in 2020. He said out of Rs 28.88 crore (collective) com-

ensation which was supposed to be given to the kin of these deceased personnel, Rs 26.63 crore has been disbursed while Rs 2.25 crore is yet to be given.

Of the 36 deceased personnel belonging to the state police, compensatory jobs have been given in 29 cases, the minister said in his reply.

"The above mentioned compensation includes the insurance money and gratia given by the state government to the kin of the central security forces personnel killed in the state in Naxal violence," he said.

Another plea in HC on same sex marriages

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Four more people belonging to the gay and lesbian community urged the Delhi High Court on Thursday to declare that marriages between any two persons irrespective of their sex be solemnised under the Special Marriage Act (SMA). The Delhi government in response to a similar petition filed earlier has said that there is no provision in the SMA under which two women can be married, and it would be willing to abide by the court's direction.

A bench of Justices Rajiv Sahai Endlaw and Amit

Bansal sought response of the Centre on the joint plea by three men and a woman, who have urged the court to also declare that the SMA applies, regardless of sex, to any two persons who wish to marry by reading down any gender or sexuality-based restrictions contained in the Act.

In their plea, filed through advocates Meghna Mishra and Tahira from Karanjawala and Co law firm, the petitioners have also sought that the provisions in the SMA which require a 'male' and a 'female' for solemnisation of a marriage be declared as unconstitutional.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Slip of the tongue?

Rahul's remarks in Kerala, if made off the cuff, should not lead to a 'divisive politics' slugfest

Whether it was the heat of the moment or well-considered action, only the Gandhi scion would know. But the bullet has been fired and now it is for Rahul and the Congress to bear the recoil. At a recent rally in Kerala, Rahul said: "For the first 15 years, I was a Member of Parliament from the North, so I had got used to a different type of politics. For me, coming to Kerala was very refreshing because suddenly I found that people (here) are interested in issues, and not just superficially but in detail." Whether it will reap dividends or prove counterproductive to the 'Grand Old Party' in the forthcoming Assembly elections is best left to the wisdom of voters but Rahul's latest statement has provided the BJP with fresh fodder to attack the Congress. To be fair, Rahul is not known for making statements that reek of divisive politics: He is straightforward, to the point and plain, and this is what makes him vulnerable. His statements often lend themselves to the creation of memes, courtesy Information Technology (IT) cells affiliated to other political parties who strive hard to prove that Rahul doesn't have the "potential" to be a leader, forget about becoming the Prime Minister in future. However, if the statement was made after due consideration, it's probably time for him to think about changing his advisors. What he said, could still have been conveyed without generating a controversy had he been a little more careful with his choice of words.



On the face of it, there is nothing inappropriate in the statement unless implied meanings are derived from it. But such derivations are common in politics and if Rahul is ignorant of it, it's his fault. Going by the adage that "politics is all about opportunity", senior BJP leaders jumped at the chance and accused the Congress leader of indulging in divisive politics for gains in the Kerala elections. In a country where leaders regularly stoop to new lows and then get away by claiming that they didn't actually mean what they said, Rahul's comment is nothing to make such a hullabaloo about. Our heads still drop in shame when we are reminded of remarks like "khaki underwear" by Azam Khan or when Mulayam Singh Yadav justified rape, saying "Boys err at times, wrong to hang rapists", or even Lalu Prasad's boastful remark that "Bihar's roads would be made like the cheeks of Hema Malini". Now, Rahul has cancelled his Left-Congress joint rally in Bengal, apparently to focus more on Kerala. It could be that the southern State seems more promising to him since the Congress' prospects are rather bleak in West Bengal where the fight is directly between the TMC and the BJP. Well, while Rahul is caught in a storm, the Congress old guard have come up with some sound advice, with Kapil Sibal saying the "wisdom of the electors" should be respected for they know "who to vote for and why". With leaders of such acumen, balance and maturity still serving the party, one wonders why Rahul doesn't seek their advice before making such foot-in-the-mouth remarks. Could it be something to do with the internal fault lines? Let's leave it for the Congress to decide.

West Bengal and Bangladesh

There has been a major change in people's thinking ahead of State poll; even the most secular of them fear that Bengal might become another Bangladesh



PRAFULL GORADIA

As lucidly brought out by Timur Kuran, a Turkish American economist who teaches at the Duke University, the practice of Islam inhibits business growth and, therefore, does not enable economic progress or development. The prohibition of usury is an example. This explains why Islamic societies have not been economically productive. Therefore, they had to become adept at the conquest of other lands in search of resources. Bangladesh has an added handicap. For centuries, the Bengali elite was more land-owning than business-running. The Bangladeshi culture took its cue from the Bengali elite. Islam is a comprehensive prescription for living, including politics, with the *Quran* as the ultimate reference point. No Muslim ruler could deviate from that path. Ideally, *jamhuriyat* (consensus) was the solution. Monarchy, autocracy and oligarchy were the only alternatives, which left democracy no space.

Sheikh Hasina Wazed somehow fights elections. She has won four terms in all, is relatively secular and grateful to India for the freedom of Bangladesh. Her predecessor, Begum Khaleda Zia, was not. Khaleda's husband Ziaur Rahman was almost pro-Pakistani, being a Muslim *ashraf* (a descendant of Prophet Muhammad). But what after Hasina Wazed retires or relinquishes power? Would not there be a change in the country's foreign policy, especially *vis-à-vis* India?

It is uncanny that the Bengali Hindu elite founded a Hindu political ideology. Raj Narain Bose is reputed to have coined the term "Hindutva", or at least used it for the first time in 1863. He was the grandfather of Yogi Aurobindo Ghosh. The Hindu Anushilan Samiti was founded and functioned only in Bengal, with even the great poet Rabindranath Tagore being its leading light. The movement against the partition of Bengal in 1905 was largely led by Yogi Aurobindo and actively supported by Tagore. The Bengal Renaissance was a Hindu phenomenon.



With the annulment of the partition of Bengal by Emperor George V in 1911 at the Delhi Durbar, the Hindu punch softened with the idea of having Hindu-Muslim cordiality. That was the inauguration of so-called secularism in Bengal. The Bengali elite began regretting their conduct towards Muslims. Say, inviting a Muslim co-villager to a wedding dinner, making him sit separately to eat and then expecting him to carry his *thali* to clean. This is just one example.

With the rise of Netaji Subhas, the Hindu-Muslim cordiality tended towards friendship. A moderate leader, Fazlur Rahman of the Krishak Party, became the Premier of Bengal; this secular trend continued. By early 1947, Netaji's elder brother Sarat Bose, Fazlur Rahman and Sir Abdul Rahim were discussing the prospects of a third dominion, namely, undivided Bengal in addition to Hindustan and Pakistan.

After Independence, the Nehruvian ethos and the appeasement of Muslims for their votes inflated this trend. The Partition, which displaced many Hindus, did not lead to any real antagonism against Muslims in Bengal in its immediate aftermath as well as later. So much so that being associ-



THE FIRST MAJOR SIGN OF WEST BENGAL'S CHANGING POLITICAL MOOD WAS THE 2019 LOK SABHA ELECTION IN WHICH THE BJP WON 18 OUT OF 42 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS. THE ASSEMBLY POLL IS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW CHAPTER IN WEST BENGAL'S POLITICAL JOURNEY

ated with the RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha or the Jana Sangh became infra dig. The Hindu political movement could not throw up a popular leader after Syama Prasad Mookerjee died mysteriously in Kashmir. Jana Sangh leader Haripada Bharati was respected but without mass appeal. The secular show persisted and infiltrators from Bangladesh were encouraged for their votes.

Yet, the Islamist penny dropped at last in the Bengali Hindu's mind. Clearly a revolutionary change is taking place that may well have a reaction across the border in Bangladesh. There has been a cataclysmic change in the thinking of people in West Bengal with the approaching Assembly elections. It is truly a metamorphosis because, for decades, West Bengal has both resisted the domination of what the *bhadralok* would call a "Hindi heartland party" and has prided itself on its avowedly secular outlook; the Bengali identity has been preponderant over the religious one.

However, the incessant molycoddling of the religious minority and even the most radical jihadist elements has slowly but surely brought on an about-turn in the Bengali mind. To the extent that even the most

secular among them have begun to fear that their State might become another Bangladesh. The first major sign of West Bengal's changing political mood was the 2019 Lok Sabha election in which the BJP won 18 out of 42 parliamentary seats. The rapidly shifting scenario with the approach of the 2021 Assembly election is the beginning of a new chapter in West Bengal's political journey, one that will have implications beyond the State.

West Bengal is very much in the news, especially because of the impending Assembly elections. The country is witnessing an acrimonious tussle where the ruling Trinamool Congress' incumbent Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is fighting to save her Government in the face of a determined assault by the BJP. The remarkable drama of the West Bengal elections is the by-now-discernible wave of discontent against Mamata — sitting Ministers and political heavyweights do not otherwise quit on poll eve to join the Opposition. But more significant is the change taking place in the Bengali psyche. There is growing willingness to be more integrally an arm of Bharat.

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

PICTALK



A gun store owner holds a rifle in Americana, Brazil

Blood on hands

Over 6,500 migrants, including 2,711 Indians, have died working on Qatar's World Cup-related projects

It's called "The beautiful game". The loftiest event of the sport, known as the World Cup, garners the maximum number of viewers in any discipline of any sporting contest across the globe. The "greatest spectacle on Earth" involves glamour, charisma, passion, super-human athleticism, national pride and, certainly not the least, zillions of dollars for the host country as well as for the Zurich-headquartered Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) in television broadcast and other rights. The FIFA World Cup taxes the host nation a lot in terms of manpower, infrastructure and other facilities, but the monetary returns far outweigh the cost input and the moolah raked in is a purse bigger than what you'd see from any other event, even the Olympics. And Qatar is the proud host of the next edition of the World Cup in November 2022. But behind all the glitz and razzmatazz of the shiny stadia and the spruced setup in the Persian Gulf nation, is a sordid tale of hardships, torture and human rights abuse, ending in death. According to *The Guardian*, thousands of migrant workers have died in Qatar since it was unexpectedly chosen as the host for the extravaganza in December 2010.



More than 6,500 migrant labourers from five South Asian countries — India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have died, on an average of 12 deaths each week, according to the British daily. While 2,711 of those who died hailed from India, Nepali workers accounted for 1,641 deaths, followed by Bangladesh at more than 1,000 and Pakistan 824. With inconsistent and imprecise records, it is difficult to assess the exact causes for the deaths but official records range from "blunt trauma" to "asphyxia" and "hanging", though the most common is "natural death". The actual toll is likely to be significantly higher given that the analysis did not include deaths from other countries known to send large numbers of workers to Qatar, such as Kenya and the Philippines. It is likely that a significant number of the total deaths occurred on projects related to the World Cup as Qatar has undertaken a massive construction programme to prepare for the tournament, including building seven stadiums, a new airport as well as broad additions to its public transportation network. It's time for the Indian Government, as well as the United Nations Human Rights Council, to finally take cognisance of the pitiable working and dwelling conditions of migrant workers in Qatar and censure it severely.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PROTECT COVID VACCINES FROM MAFIA

Sir — It is indeed great that the Government has decided to involve private hospitals in the vaccination drive. The step was much needed as it is almost impossible to vaccinate such a large population as ours through the Government machinery only.

The Government cares for the elderly population, that's why it took the decision that everyone above 60 years of age and those over 45 years with comorbidities will be able to get COVID-19 vaccines from March 1 for free in 10,000 Government medical facilities and for a charge at over 20,000 private hospitals. However, how much this charge will be is yet to be seen. The Government must ensure that private hospitals do not charge "too much" for the jobs.

It is often seen that corrupt employees of Government hospitals, often in collusion with private entities, create such a scenario that medicines are not available in hospital pharmacies or run out of stock while these are sold at exorbitant prices by private ones. If the COVID vaccine meets the same fate, it will be unfortunate and the ambitious programme will fall flat. Meanwhile, we must not be ready to dole out whatever cost the private hospitals quote for the job. The private hospitals often take undue advantage as we want to avoid long queues in Government hospitals just to save time. We must remember that they charge extra only because we are ready to pay it.

M Pradyu | Kannur

IT'S DO-OR-DIE SITUATION FOR INDIANS

Sir — It refers to the editorial "Continuing travails" (February 25). With several States reporting a surge in COVID-19 cases, it is high time that the RT-PCR test should be made mandatory for entry into all States. There should also be reasonable restrictions over interstate movement while unnecessary movement should not be allowed at all.

The increase in Coronavirus cases is because many people have stopped follow-

Beat the stress but not on driver's seat



It's unfortunate that world-renowned golfer Tiger Woods got injured in a dramatic rollover crash involving his SUV. However, the American golfer was lucky to get immediate help from the authorities present nearby. Accidents can be avoided if necessary precautions are taken. In any accident, first aid and timely help matters a lot.

In India, we see that people are largely indif-

ferent towards road accident victims. This is because they don't want to land in any sort of trouble or unnecessary questioning by the police. They are not completely wrong, for the police often misbehaves with those who help road accident victims. Instead of commending or boosting their morale, the cops usually look upon them as suspects.

Many personalities from the fields of sports and films must be used to driving at high speeds to cope with the tension and stress they face in their daily lives. But rather than driving madly and crazily, there are several other ways to chill out and beat stress. Playing indoor games, spending time with children, taking water therapy like a deep plunge into water bodies, visiting natural vistas and watering a garden are some of these ways. People from all walks of life must visit natural places like pristine forests for getting rejuvenated. We wish good health and recovery to Tiger Woods!

P Senthil | Mumbai

ing the precautions and are lackadaisical in their approach. People are seen wearing masks improperly and are not sanitising their hands. Further, the Government also relaxed the norms as we have seen in Maharashtra, where all categories of commuters were allowed to travel in the local trains. This added to the problem which is now assuming gigantic proportions.

The situation is worse in villages and small towns where people don't even care to wear a mask. They have developed a self-conceived notion that "Corona has gone" and vaccines have been developed, hence there is no need to worry. Its time that the Government spread more awareness and told people that there is no substitute to the precautions.

Bal Govind | Noida

WHY DO WE HAVE CASINOS?

Sir — Why do we have casinos and why do Governments want them? What ben-

efit are they? Is it because of the great amount of money the Government receives from them? The casinos are involved in crimes like money laundering.

I would like to make just a short comment on casinos. Several Australian casinos have been accused of money laundering and generally poor control. The new one in Sydney cannot yet get a licence to operate until it changes its processes.

I must admit that I personally don't like casinos and the fact that most people will lose money, as is obvious by the fact they are profitable. I don't mind the occasional bet on horses and a lottery ticket even though I don't expect to win every week. But casinos are a lucrative business for the Government and the profits are high.

Dennis Fitzgerald | Melbourne

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Since the last three months, the price of domestic LPG has increased by ₹200 while petrol and diesel are inching towards ₹100. The Modi Government is battling for its billionaire friends from both ends while the common man is suffering.

Congress leader — Priyanka Gandhi

Law enforcement forces have prevented 72 terrorist crimes in the country in 2020, up from 57 a year earlier.

Russian President — Vladimir Putin

Bollywood producers neither have the money nor talent to cater to audiences who want something beyond the popular and the mainstream.

Actor — Abhay Deol

The IOC Future Host Commission recommended that the executive committee initiate a targeted dialogue with Brisbane and the Australian Olympic Committee for the organisation of the 2032 Olympics.

IOC president — Thomas Bach

The Assembly proceedings will not be conducted on notified Government holidays during the upcoming Budget session of the Assembly.

Goa Chief Minister — Pramod Sawant



FIRST COLUMN

COVID LESSONS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

It's vital to be calm, think rationally and make decisions that affect your work environment positively



PRITIKA SINGH

The year 2020, and the Coronavirus outbreak that dominated it, set everyone back, whether it was work or life. However, the contagion's economic impact was felt more than the social one. The financial implications of the pandemic had everyone in a tizzy, confused and thinking, will I make it? Will I survive? It took a toll on the global economy, businesses, work, personal affairs at home and made everyone question and rethink their priorities and then put them in survival mode. One of the key takeaways from the outbreak, especially for entrepreneurs leading organisations was: Invest in your mental health. That is and should be a priority. If you have peace of mind, in spite of everything else falling, crumbling around you, half the battle is won. It's important to be calm, think rationally and make decisions that affect your health and your work environment in a positive way.

The healthcare sector was overwhelmed when the pandemic hit the country. Doctors and nurses were overworked as was the other hospital staff. People were in a state of panic. However, there is no overcoming something if you are in a constant state of flux. This is especially true of leaders tasked with guiding an organisation. They have to come to grips with the reality that the pandemic will stay for a long time and the only way to work and move forward is to be transparent with staff, hear them out, value their inputs and look after them.



The biggest change that the outbreak brought to our lives was the need to maintain social distancing, which gave birth to the culture of work from home (WFH). Hospitals were overflowing with Coronavirus patients and medical professionals were in constant contact with people, other than patients. It was important for most medical facilities to cut down on administrative staff and allow WFH in order to curb the spread of the contagion. This move gave doctors and nurses free movement, enabled quick decisions and resulted in quicker turnarounds.

As the CEO of a hospital, it was amazing to see people adapt to two roles and the extra workload more efficiently and quickly. It made one realise that the biggest learning from the pandemic was WFH. It changed the way we function as human beings and value the time and effort that someone else puts in. It also increased efficiency and kept employees and their families safe.

There was a lesson for leaders as well. If you take tough but benevolent decisions when you are the head of an organisation, people value you more, respect you and put in that extra bit to make sure that the company succeeds. Cutting down on manpower and cost-cutting is never the solution. The mental health of staff is very important, not just good salaries and, employees run a company based on the top leadership's vision.

Another lesson that the contagion taught us was the fact that women, who have always been a stabilising and calming factor in society, are equally adept at dealing with an emergency. During this pandemic, women COVID warriors, frontline workers, office-goers, homemakers and Government employees rose to the occasion and in some cases were leading from the front.

Lastly, technology has come to the rescue of mankind as we have been forced to change the way we work, handle documents, process information, hold meetings, seminars and even deliver healthcare. One also has to realise that even though we are in this situation right now, it will change and things will go back to normal. But for now, we need to learn and adapt to this so-called new normal. Entrepreneurs, especially women leaders, have to learn and grow from this.

(The writer is CEO, Prayag Hospital. The views expressed are personal.)

Should the global debt pandemic worry us?

As long as primary Budget deficits are not too large, the main problem is to stabilise public debt, independent of the size of the economy so that it may not go beyond control



GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

The previous decade saw the fastest increase in debt in emerging economies in the last 50 years. The IMF estimated that global public debt at the end of 2020 would touch 98 per cent of the GDP, and India's gross Government debt would be at 90 per cent of the GDP. According to the IMF's *Fiscal Monitor*, the debt-to-GDP ratio exceeds 100 per cent in most OECD countries and close to 100 per cent in emerging ones. Among the major economies, only China (66.5 per cent), Australia (70 per cent) and Germany (72 per cent) have fared better. The problem economies of Italy and Greece have seen debt levels rising to 158 per cent and 200 per cent of the GDP, respectively, while Japan's debt is 264 per cent. From 2021 onwards, global debt will rise higher than in the pre-COVID times. A credible medium-term fiscal framework is essential to combat rising debt, but with the pandemic still out of control, additional revenue mobilisation necessary for public spending on health and infrastructure is now more difficult than ever before in most developing countries. The saving grace is that borrowing is now cheap, thanks to the interest rates falling to exceptionally low levels and is expected to remain lower than the growth rates in most countries. According to S&P Global, in 2023, growth will outpace interest rates not only in all rich countries, but also in 53 out of 60 emerging economies. The "growth-corrected interest rate", the differential between interest and nominal growth rates, will be -3.6 per cent in India, -6.5 per cent in China and -33.8 per cent in Argentina.

This legitimately raises the question, should emerging economies also rethink their fiscal limits? *The Economist* quoted India's budgeted fiscal deficit of 9.5 per cent of the GDP this fiscal year with no road map to bring it below the three per cent limit prescribed by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act, while it noted that the latest *Economic Survey* had also highlighted that India's interest rate has been below its growth rate "by norm, not by exception", and its assertion that higher debt and fiscal spending during an economic crisis should not cause unnecessary worries. But Fitch Ratings, noted that in the last decade, the average interest rate had fallen from four per cent to two per cent in developed economies, while across emerging markets, it had increased from 4.3-5.1 per cent. Thus the benefits of lower rates are mostly available to rich nations.

The classical Domar Model lays down two conditions for sustainability of Government debt: First, the nominal growth rate should exceed the interest rate on public debt and, second, the primary account of the Government, which means taking out the interest payment, should not have any deficit. If both conditions are satisfied, the debt stock in GDP will decrease fast, and even if the primary account has a deficit, it will ultimately converge to a sustainable level. But if the growth rate lags behind the interest rate, then public debt will increase indefinitely to be unsustainable. Thus public debt can stabilise at a higher level but this would render a country vulnerable to economic shocks. However, since this model does not consider the interdependencies existing between the interest rate, the structure of public spending, the degree of public indebtedness and the growth rate which influence each other, economists Hamilton and Flavin suggested another model. According to it, the inter-temporal Budget constraint must be satisfied to make the debt



AS THE PANDEMIC NOW TESTS THE RESILIENCE OF ECONOMIES, A GLOBAL RECESSION WHICH WAS ALREADY RAGING, IS NOW PUSHING THE WORLD INTO A DEEP DEBT CRISIS. WHICH MARKED THE END OF EACH PREVIOUS WAVE. LIKE IN THE CASE OF PREVIOUS WAVES, NOW ALSO DEEPER STRUCTURAL REFORMS ARE CALLED FOR

The writer is a former Director-General of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India and an academic. The views expressed are personal.



stock sustainable, which requires the present value of future primary surpluses to cover the size of the current public debt. The uncertainty of future values of projections, interest rates and inflation remains the weakness of this model, but whatever model is used, increasing public debt does not necessarily imply its unsustainability, especially when a country needs additional finance to carry out structural forms or for making capital investments on infrastructure.

As long as primary Budget deficits are not too large, the main problem is to stabilise public debt, independent of the size of the economy so that it may not go beyond control. This is simple budgetary arithmetic: If the debt was stable at 60 per cent of the GDP with a primary deficit of three per cent, to stabilise it at 80 per cent would require the primary deficit to be limited to four per cent. The *Economic Survey* points out that GDP growth in India has always exceeded interest rates in the last 25 years, though the primary account has often been in deficit, but less than the maximum limit defined by the debt sustainability equations. The survey concludes that even in the worst case scenario, with real growth being only four per cent for the next 10 years and high primary deficits 6.8 per cent of the GDP (Centre plus States), five per cent inflation and a nominal interest rate of six per cent, public debt will still be sustainable. This scenario is not peculiar to India. The IMF says that emerging economies have experienced growth rates exceeding interest rates 75 per cent of the time. Of course, there is an element of risk in

case of high prevalence of external debt in the overall debt portfolio because if the exchange rate weakens, the debt-to-GDP ratio will rise sharply even if the interest rate remains modest. But for India, this risk is minimal as external debt constitutes only about six per cent of our total liabilities (₹5.85 lakh crore in 2019-20).

Government debt amounted to 73.8 per cent of the GDP in 2019-20, before the pandemic pushed it much higher. As per the road map prescribed by the 15th Finance Commission, India's debt should decline marginally from 89.8 per cent to 85.7 per cent of the GDP over 2020-26, but the decline will practically take place in the last three years. Thus we need to stabilise our debt around that level provided these projections hold. This may not be the case as additional spending will be required on health and infrastructure.

But the moot question is whether the high debt level is desirable even if it is sustainable, as public borrowing generally crowds out private investment and hurts the economy. Perhaps the answer lies in how the borrowed funds are used. If the Government spends on investment, like the 26 per cent increase in capital spending budgeted for the next fiscal, this risk would be less, especially when the economy is operating below capacity as is the case now; public spending can then bring in additional private investment by improving incomes and profitability.

However, this is not the first time a debt pandemic has hit the world and there were three earlier waves of debt

accumulation during 1970-89, 1990-2001 and 2002-09, all of which began during periods of low real interest rates and easy access to borrowing from the financial markets. Each caused global recessions in 1982, 1991 and 2009 and economic downturns in 1998 and 2001, and were followed by structural reforms designed to lower vulnerabilities, with greater reserve accumulation and strengthening of policy frameworks. Controls like inflation targeting, fiscal rules and more robust financial sector supervision became the norm.

We are now riding the crest of the fourth wave that began in 2010 but peaked during the pandemic with the slowing of economic growth in most countries. The conditions were remarkably similar to those after the 2008 meltdown, when interest rates were low and access to financial markets for capital was easy due to the banks having extended their outreach remarkably. As the pandemic now tests the resilience of economies, a global recession which was already raging, is now pushing the world into a deep debt crisis, which marked the end of each previous wave. Like in the case of previous waves, now also deeper structural reforms are called for. In the Indian context, this will mean many more reforms of the factor markets, along with reform of agriculture and financial sectors while strengthening the overall regulatory mechanisms. Appropriate policy choices are crucial because once recovery gets underway, only reforms and the accompanying institutional mechanisms can help restore our fiscal and debt sustainability.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

FOR ME, COMING TO KERALA WAS REFRESHING AS I FOUND THAT PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN ISSUES. NOT SUPERFICIALLY BUT GOING INTO DETAILS.
—CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI



INSULTING INDIANS IS A FAVOURITE PASTIME OF RAHUL GANDHI. INDIANS ARE NOT SUPERFICIAL BUT YOU ARE, MR RAHUL GANDHI.
—UNION MINISTER PRAKASH JAVADEKAR

India needs a standard metric for the social cost of GHG

We must also develop a metric for quantifying the social cost of other components so that the impact of local air pollution, too, can be monetised for policy formulation

Actions on the climate change front are again in the news in the US after President Joe Biden took charge. One of his first executive orders pertained to reassembling a federal, cross-Government team to figure out the "social cost of carbon."

So, what is the social cost of carbon (SCC) or of Green House Gases (GHG)? SCC is the present value of future harm caused by an incremental ton of carbon dioxide emissions.

It is difficult to estimate SCC because carbon emissions, climate change, and economic harm are related through complex processes that are not fully understood. Additionally, the rate at which to discount future harm is contentious and critical to the magnitude of the present value.



AMIT KUMAR

The writer is Senior Director, Social Transformation, TERI. The views expressed are personal.

As per the Interagency Working Group on Social Cost of Carbon, the US Government's technical support document 2010: "The SCC is an estimate of the monetised damages associated with an incremental increase in carbon emissions in a given year. It is intended to include (but is not limited to) changes in net agricultural productivity, human health, property damages from increased flood risk and the value of ecosystem services due to climate change."

It is a well-established fact that consequent to climate change, countries face a slew of adverse impacts; damages that are not adequately quantified while assessing these impacts. Developing economies like India are going to bear an unduly larger share of such

impacts. An analysis of the *Climate Risk Index (CRI)*, 2021, shows India to be among the top 10 most affected countries in 2019 on account of climate change-induced extreme weather events.

India's annual monsoon season continued for a month longer than usual. From June to the end of September 2019, 110 per cent of the normal rainfall occurred, a record since 1994.

According to the CRI, the floods caused by the heavy rains were responsible for 1,800 deaths across 14 States and led to the displacement of 1.8 million people. Overall, 11.8 million people were affected by the intense monsoon season with the economic damage estimated to be \$10 billion.



Furthermore, with a total of eight tropical cyclones, 2019 was one of the most active Northern Indian Ocean cyclone seasons on record. Six of the eight cyclones intensified to become "very severe."

The worst was Cyclone Fani that occurred in May 2019 and impacted a total of 28 million people, killing nearly 90 people in India and

Bangladesh and causing economic losses of \$8.1 billion. Then, there are other consequences in terms of impacts on human health and on food security, to name a few.

The relation between fossil fuels and climate change, too, is now accepted beyond any doubt. However, while carrying out the cost-benefit analysis of different options to replace fossil fuels, these damages — also known as "externalities" — are either not taken into account or remain fuzzy. And that is where a tool like the SCC may help.

As per the Institute for Policy Integrity, the SCC is "a metric designed to quantify and monetise climate damages, representing the net economic cost of carbon dioxide emissions."

In a country like ours that is trying to transition to

clean energy through its ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in terms of emission-intensity reductions and quantum increase in non-fossil electricity; it is imperative that policymaking and regulatory frameworks are informed by scientific evidence.

This, in turn, demands a methodology to quantify the impacts that are based on verifiable numbers and are standardised across sectors.

But even more importantly, it is developed in an academically rigorous, transparent and peer-reviewed process so as to have universal acceptability.

And that is where an inter-agency or an inter-ministerial approach helps in forging a joint ownership. Given that this is not a one-time exercise, a formal mech-

anism needs to be put in place.

The Apex Committee for Implementation of Paris Agreement (AIPA) constituted by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEFCC) may very well provide such a unified platform. The mechanism must also provide for engaging with the public and other stakeholders in an ongoing fashion.

Going forward, we should aim at not only developing a metric for quantifying the social cost of GHG but also of other components so that the impact of local air pollution, too, can be holistically monetised from a policy formulation perspective.

It is time that such complex matters attract a more science-based approach, thereby obviating any kind of biases.



Commercial realty absorption to rise 18 pc

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Office space absorption will grow by up to 18 per cent in fiscal 2022 on a low base of fiscal 2021 courtesy a 45 per cent fall, return to offices and improvements in the macroeconomic conditions, a report said on Thursday.

The net leasing, which is overall absorption subtracted by the space vacated, will grow to 25-30 million square feet, the report by Crisil Ratings said, adding that despite the increase it will still be below the pre-pandemic levels as work from home will continue. Credit profiles of commercial real estate owners are expected to resist the hiccups due to pandemic, the agency, which rates 37 companies owning 86 assets with a debt of around Rs 30,000 crore and a total leasable area of around 100 million sq ft, said, pointing to healthy cushions in debt servicing which can withstand the marginal build-up of vacancy or pressure on rental rates.

India to clock 13.7 pc growth in FY '22, contract 7 pc this fiscal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian economy is expected to clock a growth of 13.7 per cent in FY'22, registering a strong rebound from a 7 per cent contraction this fiscal, on the back of normalisation of activity and growing confidence in the market with the rollout of COVID-19 vaccine, Moody's Investors Service said on Thursday.

Moody's had in November last year projected Indian economy to contract 10.6 per cent in the current fiscal and return to growth of 10.8 per cent in 2021-22 fiscal.

"Our expectations in current fiscal year ending March 2021 is for a contraction of 7 per cent significant improvement from our ... (earlier) forecast of contraction of over 10 per cent. We try to incorporate some of the unexpected pickup in activity that we have seen recently.

"For the year following that we expect a rebound of 13.7 per cent that reflects largely normalisation of activity, a pronounced base effect. Recovery of activity reinforced by some degree of rollout of vaccine, and growing confidence in market that things are getting more back to normal," Moody's Investors



Service Associate Managing Director (Sovereign Risk) Gene Fang said in an online conference organised by Moody's and its India affiliate ICRA on India Credit Outlook 2021.

Fang said reform implementation remains a chal-

lenge in India, and expressed uncertainty over revenue generation through CPSE privatisation announced in the Budget saying such "one-off monetisation policies are less durable in terms of supporting fiscal health for long term".

Stating that recession in India has ended, ICRA Principal Economist Aditi Nayar said Indian economy could clock a 0.3 per cent growth in the October-December quarter of the current fiscal.

Indian economy contract-

ICRA expects Indian economy to contract 7 per cent in current fiscal and growth to rebound to 10.5 per cent in the next fiscal beginning April 1

ed for two consecutive quarters of June and September this fiscal, thereby entering into recession. Contraction was 23.9 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively.

ICRA expects Indian economy to contract 7 per cent in current fiscal and growth to rebound to 10.5 per cent in the next fiscal beginning April 1.

Nayar said there could be upside to growth in FY'22 if government's capital expenditure increases, budget announcements are implemented and vaccination drives are carried out.

Auto component makers urged to up localisation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday asked automobile manufacturers to hike localisation of components to 100 per cent or else the government will think of increasing basic customs duty on imported items, but the auto industry wants support for localisation of electronic parts, specially semiconductors.

Speaking at an event organised by the Automotive Components Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA), Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, said the present level of localisation of parts in the Indian auto sector is around 70 per cent and "at any cost we need to stop imports of auto components".

"I urge both vehicle and auto component manufacturers to increase localisation of components to the maximum. Not maximum, my expectation is to make it 100 per cent. We are fully competent in all the things. Even, I am requesting automobile manufacturing companies to take it very seri-



ously otherwise for imports of components we will think in the direction to increase more customs duty on that," he said.

Stating that the Indian component manufacturers are fully competent and should be given chance to fully supply the required parts, Gadkari said, "So, presently my request to all of you is that at any cost we need to stop imports of auto components... This is the time for the Indian auto industry to support Make in India and Made in India movement." The minister said increase in basic customs duty on select auto components will encourage local manufacturing of such items.

Sensex jumps 258 points; Nifty reclaims 15,000 level

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex rallied 258 points and the Nifty reclaims the 15,000 mark on Thursday, tracking gains in Reliance Industries, Axis Bank and TCS amid a positive trend in global markets.

The 30-share BSE index ended 257.62 points or 0.51 per cent higher at 51,039.31.

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty rose 115.35 points or 0.77 per cent to 15,097.35.

ONGC was the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rallying around 5 per cent, followed by NTPC, Reliance Industries, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank and PowerGrid.

On the other hand, ICICI Bank, Nestle India, L&T, Kotak Bank and Titan were among the laggards.

Domestic equities rebounded for the third consecutive day with Nifty crossing 15,000 levels again. A



strong cue from global equities followed by favourable comments from Fed Chairman Powell in his second day testimony supported market rally," said Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities.

Barring FMCG, all key sectoral indices ended in green with metal index remaining an outlier. Financials, auto and pharma indices recorded gains to the tune of 1 per cent.

Notably, midcap and small-cap stocks outperformed broader indices sharply as improved visibility of earnings recovery attracted investors to this space, he said.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo ended with significant gains.

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

SIAM seeks govt support for localisation of semiconductors

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Auto industry body SIAM on Thursday sought government support for localisation of electronic components, specially semiconductors, which is currently facing a global shortage, stating it would need huge investments. Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) President Kenichi Ayukawa, while speaking at an event organised by the Automotive Components Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) said the two industry bodies are working together on a road map for self-reliance for more localisation of components.

Fintech players get \$2.7 billion from VCs

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Despite the pandemic-induced disruptions, venture capital funds pumped USD 2.7 billion into domestic fintech companies in 2020, the second-highest fund infusion into the sector since 2019 when it had peaked at USD 3.5 billion, according to a report.

The biggest investments were into Bengaluru-based payments firm Navi Technologies at USD 397.9 million from angel funds, Noida-based Pine Labs attracted USD 300 million from private equity players, and Razorpay received USD 100 million from GIC of Singapore, Sequoia and others, making it a unicorn.

As against this, global fintech investments stood at a whopping USD 105 billion across 2,861 deals in the year, the third-highest annual total ever, as per the data collated by KPMG India.



Despite pandemic challenges, domestic fintech players attracted USD 2.7 billion in 2020, the second-highest after the 2019 peak of USD 3.5 billion, the report said, adding the year also saw the creation of a unicorn in Razorpay.

Payments remained the hottest area of investment, followed by tech-driven insurance firms and tech-driven wealth managers, the report said. Competition in the insurance space started to heat up as incumbent insurers enhanced their digital focus due to the pandemic and niche payments players worked to expand into insurance, it added.



Nothing appoints Manu Sharma as VP, GM for India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

London-based technology firm Nothing has roped in former senior executive of Samsung Mobile Manu Sharma to oversee India operations as its vice-president and general manager, the company said on Thursday.

Sharma will be driving the growth, business development and operations for the company in India. "I am thrilled to welcome Manu as part of the growing Nothing team. He is an experienced business leader with a deep knowledge and understanding of the consumer technology industry in India. With his proven track record and experience, he will play a pivotal role for our growth in India." Pei, CEO and Co-Founder of Nothing said in a statement. OnePlus co-founder Carl Pei's new venture has started building a team for India operations with the hiring of Sharma.

He has worked for over two decades with Samsung Mobile and Hewlett-Packard in India.

'Security concerns need to be addressed in board meetings'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Sebi chairman Ajay Tyagi on Thursday said confidentiality and security concerns of virtual board meets need to be addressed before they become a norm in the post-pandemic world.

He said there has been widespread adoption of technological inputs at corporates in the face of the pandemic, with both board meets and also annual general meetings going virtual. "However, virtual meet-

ings have given rise to new concerns which were earlier not there in physical meetings," Tyagi said, addressing an event at the Sebi-promoted National Institute of Securities Markets virtually.

These include "whether confidentiality and security concerns are adequately addressed in virtual board meetings", Tyagi said, adding that such issues need greater study if such virtual meetings are to become a regular feature in the future.

Many organisations struggling to maintain integrity standards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Many organisations in emerging markets are struggling to maintain integrity standards as they transition from managing the COVID-19 crisis toward building economic resilience, with 82 per cent of respondents in India feeling more likely to be adversely impacted by the current disruption, according to a study by consultancy firm EY.

According to the 'EY Global Integrity Report — emerging



markets perspective, is this the moment for emerging markets to prioritise integrity?, 63 per cent of respondents in

emerging markets say it is difficult for organisations to maintain standards of integrity during difficult market conditions.

Stating that pandemic-induced remote working and regulatory scrutiny are aggravating these issues, EY said 32 per cent of respondents in emerging markets believe that bribery and corrupt practices present the greatest risk to the long-term success of their businesses, compared with 25 per cent in India.

Need coordination between Centre & states: RBI Guv

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said there is a need for coordinated action between the centre and state governments to reduce taxes on petrol and diesel prices.

"There is a need for coordinated action between the centre and the states because there are inherent taxes levied by both," the governor said, adding that calibrated reduction of taxes is important.

He, however, said both the centre and the state governments have their revenue pressures and they are required to spend high sums of money to enable the country and the people to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic stress.

"So the revenue requirement and the compulsion of the governments are fully understood. But having said that the impact on inflation



also is something, which comes in from the fact that petrol and diesel prices do have an impact on the cost of manufacturing, production..." the Governor said at an event organised by Bombay Chamber of Commerce.

On the central bank's digital currency, Das said a lot of work is going on internally in the RBI and some broad guidelines and approach papers will be released on it soon.

The governor said RBI has certain concerns on crypto

currencies and it has already been communicated to the government.

He said RBI is looking into strengthening the regulatory architecture for asset reconstruction companies (ARCs).

"(We are) refining and further upgrading the regulatory architecture in respect of the ARCs to ensure that they have a skin in the game, and they are very much in business is receiving a lot of attention from us," Das said.

On setting up of ARC for non-performing asset (NPA) management, as announced in the Budget 2021, he said, "(in) no way will it jeopardise the activity of the existing ARCs".

The governor said there is growing realisation and awareness among banks to dealing with bad assets and they are proactively making provision in their books for stressed assets.

Das: Proposed ARC will not 'jeopardise' existing players

Mumbai : The proposed asset reconstruction company (ARC) for management of non-performing assets (NPAs) announced in Budget 2021 will not 'jeopardise' the activities of existing players in the space, Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Thursday.

While presenting the Union Budget 2021, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to set up an asset reconstruction company and asset management company to consolidate and take over existing stressed debts and manage them.

"(In) no way will it (proposed ARC) jeopardise the activities of the existing

ARCs. I think there is scope to have one more strong ARC..." the governor said at an event organised by the Bombay Chamber of Commerce.

There are close to 28 asset reconstruction companies operating in the country at present. Das said the proposal for setting up an ARC was given by public sector lenders to the government, which accepted it and announced it in the Budget.

The proposed entity will take over stressed assets from the books of public sector banks, and try to resolve them like any other ARCs are doing, he noted.

MONEY MATTERS

L&T selected by Airbus for Skywise Partner Programme



L&T Technology Services (LTS) announced on Thursday it has been selected by Airbus to provide technology and digital engineering solutions for Airbus' Skywise platform as part of the 'Skywise Partner Programme'.

With more than 130 airlines around the world already connected to Skywise, the platform is playing a very important part in enabling and accelerating digital transformation of the aviation sector as a whole, according to an LTS statement. "LTS will support the airlines in the development of complex workflows, creation of new interfaces between their existing information systems and Skywise and also provide assistance in their digital transformation with Skywise," it said.

'Govt continuously working to improve ease of doing biz'



The government is continuously working to reduce regulatory compliance burden on the pharma industry in a bid to improve ease of doing business in the country, Union Minister for Chemicals & Fertilisers D V Sadananda Gowda said on Thursday.

Addressing the inaugural session of 'The India Pharma 2021 & India Medical Device 2021' event here, the minister also emphasised that the domestic pharma industry has the capability to achieve the target of USD 130 billion turnover by 2030. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government continues to strive to improve the ease of doing business in the country. Vigorous effort is on to reduce the regulatory compliance burden on the (pharma) industry," Gowda said.

HMSI crosses cumulative sales milestone of 70L units



Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India Pvt Ltd (HMSI) on Thursday said it has crossed the cumulative sales milestone of 70 lakh units in north India in its 20th year of operations in the country. The company, which hit the Indian market in 2001 with its scooter model Activa, said it took 15 years for it to touch the first 35 lakh

cumulative sales mark in north India -- comprising Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Chandigarh -- but doubled it in just 5 years. Commenting on the milestone, HMSI Director - Sales & Marketing Yadvinder Singh Guleria said the company's first factory became operational in north, in Haryana in 2001. With increasing demand, the second factory was also added in north region, in Rajasthan.

Global stocks follow Wall Street higher after Fed pledge



Global stock markets followed Wall Street higher Thursday after the Federal Reserve chairman said the US central bank is in no hurry to withdraw support for the economy. London and Frankfurt rose in early trading. Shanghai, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul closed higher. US futures were mixed.

Overnight, Wall Street hit a new high after chairman Jerome Powell said the Fed sees no sign inflation might rise out of control. That helped to dampen fears sparked by a rise in U.S. Treasury bond yields, an indicator of inflation sentiment, that rising price pressure might lead the Fed to raise interest rates. "Powell has again been pouring oil on troubled markets," said Robert Carnell of ING in a report. "But the Fed still has communication issues over its future policies which could emerge as a tantrum some way down the line."

POST-WORKOUT HYGIENE TIPS TO REFRESH YOUR BODY



You seem to have everything worked out well when it comes to exercising. You have a structured plan with the right exercises, progressions, and load listed for every day of the week. You are a stickler for pre and post-workout hydration and nutrition. You also get adequate sleep and are in the habit of monitoring your training status. But you seem to have skin problems and frequent colds?

It could be that you are unaware of some simple post-workout hygiene mistakes that you've been making. There are microscopic organisms lurking in workout areas that are potentially unhealthy. These germs and fungi cause painful skin conditions like athlete's foot, ringworm, jock itch etc. Besides, allergens and the cold virus have a larger presence in the closed quarters of workout spaces. Also, with sweat streaming down your body and drenching your clothes there are bacteria that feed on sweat, causing body odour. Here are five tips on how to safeguard against unhealthy environments in workout spaces:

- ❖ Use a towel to wipe off sweat from your face and hands instead of using the back of your hand. This reduces the probability of germs entering your nose, mouth or eyes. Also, use this towel to lay out on benches or seats before you lie down or sit to exercise.
- ❖ Your water bottle should be made from metal and not plastic since plastic holds on to bacteria. It should also have a screw-on lid so that the rim surface that touches your mouth is unexposed at all times. Don't forget to wash your water bottle with warm water and soap before you set it aside for the next day.
- ❖ When taking a shower use an anti-bacterial gel to ensure any bacteria that you may have picked up, get killed.

❖ On reaching home from your workout, I have found great benefit in using a Neti-Pot to do a nasal wash with warm water. It ensures that any allergens or viruses that you've picked up are cleaned out from the sinuses keeping you safe from colds.

❖ While strong fragrance deodorants may make you smell good initially; it is post-workout body odour that will overpower everything. I'd suggest you look for deodorants or preferable roll-ons with a formula that provides long-lasting body odour control. Use them directly on your underarms because that's the actual source of body odour. What I personally recommend are roll-ons that contain specially formulated Silver-Ions Technology that is known to effectively reduce up to 99% odour-causing bacteria. Your best bet against odour after a thrilling workout session is having a wash with an anti-bacterial shower gel that would also give instant freshness post-shower.

Sweat is the body's physiological response to heightened metabolic activity and the accompanying increase in its core temperature.



The downside is that it can inevitably result in body odour. It is one factor that can alienate you from inclusion in workout camaraderie with friends. When you work out with gym mates or fellow athletes, smelling good is something that can add to the 'feel good' factor during exercise. Don't let body odour stop you from doing what you love, incorporate some of these tips for a good post-workout experience.

(The writer, Daniel Vaz, is a marathon expert, NIVEA MEN)

BRINGING AUTHENTIC FLAVOURS TO YOUR PLATE

Don't you just hate it when you burn a hole in your pocket after having an exotic cuisine? But here's an idea many have taken to, recently: taking help from some not-so-expensive sauces to add that authentic international flavour to your dish, right in your *desi* kitchen! *The Pioneer's* K RAMYA SREE writes about Habanero's ready-to-cook sauces, salsas, dips, and more

Since the Covid-induced lockdown, many have taken to cooking. With restaurants shutting shop, and the cravings to enjoy from all corners of the world only growing, many chose the 'ready-to-cook' path and the wide range of sauces available helped whip up restaurant-grade international food in their kitchens! Be it Mexican, American, Italian or Chinese — sauces, salsas, and dips play a key role in a flavourous meal. One such home-grown company that is leading the market in serving packaged food is Habanero, which is full of

flavours, is vegan and gluten-free too.

"There's a misconception that packaged foods aren't healthy. While there is no substitute for fresh fruits, vegetables and foods, many a time, we need something that is quick, easy, convenient and healthy. That is where Habanero comes in. Our products are made from fresh and authentic ingredients. We source our ingredients locally, and manufacture the products in Bangalore," says Griffith David, founder of Habanero.

While the lockdown took a toll on many industries, David feels, it came as a blessing for them as it gave them an opportunity to explore the wide market. He says, "The lockdown was a tremendous opportunity for us. People started cooking more at home and craved authentic international flavoured food that wasn't available anywhere due to the lockdown. A lot of new customers discovered us during this time and have become loyal customers who kept returning. We saw a huge spike in countrywide



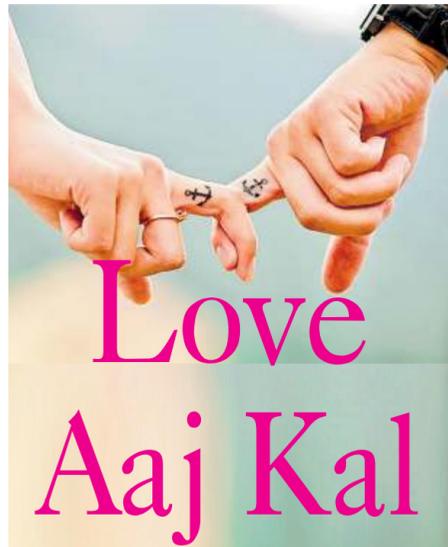
orders for our sauces, wraps, salsa on e-commerce and our website. It's only been an upward growth since then. Our customers have started appreciating our value proposition of 'Import-quality products at Indian prices' that are 40-50% per cent cheaper than international brands that deliver similar quality." Habanero started as an authentic Mexican restaurant chain and has won several awards for great food and service. It first started in Bengaluru and expanded to Chennai and Hyderabad in the next few years. The restaurants soon became popular and the customers loved the salsas and dips that

were made in-house. What's the secret behind their salsas and dips? David explains, "When we started off, I noticed a big gap in the market. The retail shelves were full of either expensive high-quality imports or cheap low-quality brands. I wasn't happy with either proposition. I felt we could deliver an import quality product at reasonable prices if we source all ingredients locally. India has the best varieties of chillies, garlic, tomatoes, onions, jalapenos and other spices that rival anything from anywhere around the world. And that's how Habanero took birth. Our value proposition is also to help people 'Cook like a

Chef' at home and our USP is to create authentic tasting but full flavoured products for the Indian palate." "For example, take a look at our Spicy Pasta Sauce — it has a distinct spice aspect to it that makes it different from anything else in the market. Our Sriracha Chilli Sauce, hot sauce, peri-peri, spicy barbecue — all of these have a unique flavour that the consumer is looking for but isn't finding elsewhere," he tells us.

So if you're one that loves to experiment in the kitchen and would enjoy adding authentic flavoured sauces and salsas to boost the taste of your dish, you know where to head!

A survey reveals that many Indians prefer old school dates and mushy romance, where similar taste in food is the most favoured common ground that people are looking for



per cent) were more cautious in this regard as against those from smaller cities (58 per cent) who are more enthusiastic about dating from far off cities as well.

But surprises don't stop just there. Known for their love for food, about 64 per cent of Indians feel that matching food taste matters as having similar food taste is a sign of great compatibility, with women (66 per cent) attaching higher importance to it compared to men (61 per cent). Dating is also a way to move on for many. More than 70 per cent of people from both top cities and smaller cities/towns would go ahead and meet new people to get over toxic relationships.

"Despite having spent the entire last year in gloom and doom, Indians are still keeping their hopes alive in the new year and haven't given up on the idea of finding love. It is heartening to see that people are open to traveling across cities and trying new experiences for the sake of companionship. Dating apps sure have been a blessing in disguise for many given the current circumstances," says Ravi Mittal, Founder, CEO, QuackQuack.

Dating apps have even proven to be a meaningful exercise for many. About 25 per cent of those aged 31 and above said that meeting new people online helped them overcome loneliness and 15 per cent got over depression in 2020. Looking at these trends, it can be said that the Indian dating scenario is definitely going to catch more steam in the times to come.

The search for beauty can often be ugly and diminishing! A recently conducted India's Beauty Test Report reveals some unsettling statistics about the pressures and anxieties around conforming to a narrow ideal of beauty in the run-up to an arranged marriage. An alarming 9/10 single women in India feel they're judged, rejected based on their looks during the marriage process. 68% claimed that rejections based on beauty during the arranged marriage process impacted their self-esteem and confidence.

Dove's #StopTheBeautyTest, an advertisement film born out of conversations with women from across the country, captures some raw situations where women are judged during the matchmaking process for not being beautiful enough. It goes on to emphasise the unspoken impact of these judgements on their self-esteem and body confidence. Through real stories enacted by real women, Dove sends out a powerful message — "We must stop putting women through this unjust beauty test."

Wanting to start and sustain this important conversation now and acting upon this, Priya Nair, Executive Director, HUL and VP - Beauty and Personal Care South Asia, opined, "In a country of 631 million women, it is unfortunate that there is such intense

Ushering in the 'beauty' of change

pressure to adhere to one definition of beauty. As owners of some of the largest beauty brands in the country, the onus to make beauty more positive and more inclusive is on us. Dove has always believed that beauty should be a source of confidence, not anxiety. With #StopTheBeautyTest, we want to go one step forward in that direction."

Dove and Shaadi.com have also come together to encourage users on

the platform to look beyond body type, complexion, scars on face or hair type and length, to see new sizes and shades of beauty. In an exclusive partnership with UNICEF, the self-esteem project aims to reach 6.25 million girls and boys in schools by 2024 to improve their knowledge and skills so that they enhance their body confidence and self-esteem through educational materials to realise their full potential in India.



Pitch was good, quality of batting wasn't: Kohli

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India captain Virat Kohli on Thursday said poor batting and not the pitch was responsible for the day-night third Test against England winding up inside two days and described the performance of batsmen on both sides as "bizarre".

Kohli insisted there were no demons in the pitch, which has been called "not ideal" by several former players like Michael Vaughan and Harbhajan Singh. Kohli said the track was absolutely fine at least in the first innings and only the odd ball was turning in the game which India won by 10 wickets on Thursday.

"To be honest, I don't think the quality of batting was up to standards. We were 100 for 3 and bowled out for less than 150. It was just that the odd ball turning and it was a good wicket to bat in the first innings," the India skipper said in his defence of the pitch.

Kohli said batsmen of both the sides did not apply themselves enough. Only Rohit Sharma (66 and 25 not out) and from England Zak Crawley (53 in first innings) managed to bat with ease.

"It was bizarre that 21 of the 30 wickets fell to straight balls. Test cricket is about trusting your defence. Lack of application ensured it was a quick finish," Kohli said.

Left-arm spinner Axar Patel stole the limelight in only his second Test along side veteran Ravichandran Ashwin by returning with match figures of 11 for 70 to earn the player-of-the-match award as India decimated England by 10 wickets to take an unassailable 2-1 lead in the four-match series.

Off-spinner Ashwin (15-3-48-4) also became the fourth Indian bowler and second fastest in the world to complete a commendable milestone of 400 Test wickets on Thursday.

Kohli showered praise on his two spinners for their match-winning efforts.

"A bizarre game which got over in 2 days. A lot of people were relieved when Jaddu (Ravindra Jadeja) got injured. But then this guy (Axar) comes in. Bowls it quicker and from a bigger height as well. If the wick-



et has something in it, Axar is very lethal. "I think we need to stand up and take notice of what Ashwin has done. In Tests, he is a modern day legend. As a captain, I am so pleased he is in my team," he said.

England skipper Joe Root was in no mood to give excuses for the heavy defeat, saying the tourists failed to capitalise on a decent start in the first innings after opting to bat.

"We were 70 for 2. But we didn't really capitalise on it. 250 on that wicket would have made it different. We will come back using this hurt and come back as a better team," he said.

Instead of blaming the pitch, Root said it was India's "high quality bowling" that made the difference.

"The plastic coating on the ball gathered

pace of the wicket. It was high quality bowling as well. Both sides struggled on that wicket. We don't define ourselves on a performance like this," he said.

"We shouldn't have any baggage from the previous games going into the last game. We have seen with the ball in hand, we can pick up wickets. I think it sums up the wicket, if I am getting a fiver."

He also congratulated Ishant Sharma for playing his landmark 100 Tests and Ashwin for his 400 Test wickets.

Man-of-the-match Axar said his focus would remain on bowling wicket-to-wicket, a plan which has reaped him rich dividends so far in his nascent Test career.

"When it happens, it feels so easy, not so much when it doesn't," he joked. "I am not thinking much. I want to con-

Kohli eclipses Dhoni's record

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Virat Kohli on Thursday surpassed Mahendra Singh Dhoni's record of winning maximum number of Test matches as captain on home soil after leading the side to a 10-wicket victory over England in the day-night third Test.

Kohli now has 22 victories at home in 29 Tests as captain which is one better than Dhoni, who had 21 wins in 30 Tests. Kohli already is India's most successful Test captain with 35 wins.

Sourav Ganguly and Mohammed Azharuddin have 21 and 14 victories to their credit as captains.

continue this form. I am happy that if I am not contributing with the bat, I am doing it with the ball.

"My strength is to bowl wicket-to-wicket and not give any room...I just want to bowl as many dot balls as possible and make life difficult for batsmen," he said.

It's for ICC to decide whether Motera pitch is fit for purpose: Root

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England skipper Joe Root on Thursday said it is up to the ICC, and not the players, to decide whether the "difficult" Motera pitch is suitable for Test cricket after his side was crushed inside two days by India in a low-scoring day-nighter here.

Root refused to blame the surface for England's batting woes after the team folded for 112 and 81 in its two innings. But he said it is the ICC that should consider the suitability of the pitch for Test cricket.

"I think that this surface, it's a very challenging one, is a very difficult one to play on. It is not for players to decide whether it is fit for purpose or not and that is up to the ICC," said Root, who took a career-best five-wicket haul during India's first innings.

"As players we are going to try and counter what is in front of us as best as we can," he added.

Root said his team missed the opportunity to get a big first innings total, which seemed possible when it was 70 odd for just two wickets.

"We are disappointed, I feel we have missed an opportunity, more so in the first innings than anything. The position we found ourselves in at 71/2, we had a real chance to (score big).

"In hindsight, if we would have got 200, that would have been a very good score on that wicket and the game would have looked completely different," Root said at the virtual post-match press conference.

Indian left-arm spinner Axar Patel (6/38 and 5/32) and Ravichandran Ashwin (3/26 and 4/48) wreaked havoc on the surface. "We have got to get better and we are going to keep looking to find a way to scoring runs on surfaces like this," Root said.

England out of WTC final race

Ahmedabad: India knocked England out of contention from the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) final in June with their 10-wicket triumph which propelled the hosts to the top of the standings.

India now have to either win or draw the final game here starting March 4 to claim the right to take on New Zealand at the Lords. The Black Caps have already qualified and are placed second in the latest list.

"England have dropped to 64.1 percentage points on the points table, which is now led by India with 71 percentage

points," the ICC stated.

"England are out of the race for a place in the final of the ICC World Test Championship after losing the third Test against India in Ahmedabad," it added.

England, who are now 2-1 down in the four-match series, needed to win the four-match series 3-1 to play the June 18-22 final. New Zealand are assured of a place in the final with 70 percentage points.

If India lose the final Test then Australia, who are in third place with 69.2 percentage points, will sneak in to make the final. PTI

Guptill finds form in run fest

AFP ■ DUNEDIN

Veteran batsman Martin Guptill returned to form with a blistering 97 as New Zealand held on for a nail-biting win over Australia in the second T20I in Dunedin on Thursday.

Guptill's Black Caps set Australia a challenging target of 220 after losing the toss but were made to sweat as Australia came within four runs of victory.

Both sides took advantage of University Oval's short boundaries in a thrilling match that featured 30 sixes and 434 runs at an average of 10.9 an over.

Marcus Stoinis starred for the Australians with 78 from 37 balls but Guptill's 97 from 50 laid the foundation for New Zealand's win.

Black Caps spinner Mitchell Santner also shone amid the batting fireworks, taking four for 31, while Australian paceman Kane Richardson managed three for 43.

New Zealand allrounder Jimmy Neesham was another exceptional performer, taking two wickets in the final over when a rampant Australia needed 15 runs for victory. Neesham also scored an undefeated 45, including six sixes.

The result puts New Zealand 2-0 up in the five-match series, on the brink of a win over the world's second-ranked T20 team.

Guptill's innings gave him the record for the most sixes in T20 Internationals with 132, taking him past India's Rohit Sharma on 127.

The 34-year-old clubbed the ball over the boundary eight times, bludgeoning all comers in the Australian attack. He fell just short of his third Twenty20 century after

being caught trying to hit a Daniel Sams delivery out of the ground.

Guptill averaged only 17 in the recent series against the West Indies and Pakistan, then managed just 11.5 in the domestic competition before picking up a hamstring injury.

Pressure on the opener intensified when he made a duck in the first match against Australia on Monday, with calls for uncapped Finn Allen to join the squad. But he answered his critics with a return to his big-hitting best, bringing up 50 off 27 balls, with eight boundaries, including four sixes.

Guptill insisted he had not changed his approach during the game-turning innings. "The 21-year-old Shaw, who has played in five Tests and five ODIs, broke the earlier record of the highest individual score held by Sanju Samson (212 not out against Goa in 2019). This was the maiden List-A double hundred for Shaw, which he got in

Captain Shaw creates Vijay Hazare history

Prithvi slams unbeaten 227 as Mumbai make record 457-4 against Puducherry



PTI ■ JAIPUR

Mumbai captain Prithvi Shaw on Thursday became the highest individual scorer in Vijay Hazare Trophy national 50-over championships as he smashed an unbeaten 227 off just 152 balls to help Mumbai beat Puducherry by 233 runs in their Elite Group D game here.

The 21-year-old Shaw, who has played in five Tests and five ODIs, broke the earlier record of the highest individual score held by Sanju Samson (212 not out against Goa in 2019).

This was the maiden List-A double hundred for Shaw, which he got in

142 balls. Shaw hammered 31 fours and five sixes during his onslaught. He also became the eighth Indian to score a List A double hundred.

This was the fourth double hundred in the history of the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Also, this was Prithvi's second century of the tournament after his unbeaten 105 in the lung-opener against Delhi.

This was also the highest score by a captain in List A cricket in the world after the youngster surpassed the unbeaten 222 by Graeme Pollock versus Border in East London.

For the record, the existing high-

HIGHEST LIST-A TOTALS OF ALL TIME					
Team	Score	Opposition	Ground	Date	
Surrey	496/4	Gloucestershire	The Oval	29 Apr 2007	
England	481/6	Australia	Nottingham	19 Jun 2018	
India A	458/4	Leicestershire	Leicester	19 Jun 2018	
Mumbai	457/4	Pondicherry	Jaipur	25 Feb 2021	

HIGHEST INDIVIDUAL LIST A SCORES OF ALL TIME (MEN'S)					
Player	Runs	Team	Opposition	Ground	Date
Alistair Brown	268	Surrey	Glamorgan	The Oval	19 Jun 2002
Rohit Sharma	264	India	Sri Lanka	Kolkata	13 Nov 2014
D'Arcy Short	257	West Aust	Queensland	Sydney	28 Sep 2018
Shikhar Dhawan	248	India A	South Africa A	Pretoria	12 Aug 2013
Martin Guptill	237*	New Zealand	West Indies	Wellington	21 Mar 2015
Prithvi Shaw	227*	Mumbai	Pondicherry	Jaipur	25 Mar 2021

est individual List A score is 268 by Ali Brown.

Puducherry's decision to put Mumbai in to bat backfired badly as Shaw and Suryakumar Yadav (133 off 58 balls) toyed with their bowling attack at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium and post a mammoth 457/4.

Leg-spinner Prashant Solanki (5/48) then picked a five-for as Mumbai bundled out Puducherry for 224 to register their third win on the trot.

The diminutive right-handed Shaw

and Yashvi Jaiswal (10) added 58 runs for the first wicket to lay the foundation. After Jaiswal was dismissed, Shaw found an able partner in Aditya Tare (56, 7x4) as the duo stitched a 153-run stand for the second wicket. Tare played the perfect second fiddle to Shaw.

Suryakumar, who came in at No. 4, was in his elements, hitting 22 fours and four sixes. He and Shaw added 201 runs for the third wicket stand and helped Mumbai go past the 400-run mark.

SINGLES

BOORA IN STRANDJA MEDAL ROUNDS

NEW DELHI: Naveen Boora (69kg) assured himself of at least a Bronze by advancing to the semifinals while Manjeet Singh (+91kg) entered the quarters on an all-win day for Indian boxers at the 72nd Strandja Memorial Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria. Boora defeated Brazil's Eravio Edson in his quarterfinal bout, prevailing 5-0 in the contest. Manjeet, on the other hand, got the better of Ireland's Gytis Lisinskas in his last-16 stage bout.

INDIA SKEET SHOOTERS IN LINE FOR MEDALS

CAIRO: Indian skeet shooters, including Olympic quota holders Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, were in line for medals in the team events at the Shotgun World Cup. On Wednesday, both the men's and women's three-member teams ended the first three qualification rounds in medal winning positions, with two more qualification rounds to go before the finals.

HEWITT NAMED TO TENNIS HALL OF FAME

LONDON: Two-time Grand Slam winner Lleyton Hewitt was named to the International Tennis Hall of Fame class of 2021 on Wednesday, along with the Original 9 of the women's professional tour. The honor for former world number one Hewitt came on his 40th birthday. Hewitt, who amassed 30 tour-level singles titles in his 18-year career, will be inducted in the Player Category.

GAUFF ADVANCES TO ADELAIDE SEMIS

ADELAIDE: Coco Gauff and Jil Teichmann advanced to the Adelaide International semifinals on Thursday after three-set wins on the Memorial Drive hard courts. The 16-year-old Gauff beat Shelby Rogers 2-6, 6-4, 6-4, and Teichmann defeated Anastasiya Sevastova 6-4, 6-7 (8), 7-5. Gauff will next face second-seeded Belinda Bencic, who beat Storm Sanders 6-2, 6-4.

MASHAL SPORTS INVITE BIDS FOR MEDIA RIGHTS

NEW DELHI: Mashal Sports, the co-owners of the Pro Kabaddi League have issued a tender for the auction of the media rights for the next five editions of the league. The document can be purchased online at ₹2,50,000 plus taxes for entities incorporated in India and \$ 3,500 plus taxes for entities incorporated outside India. The shortlisted, eligible bidders can subsequently place bids for one or more of the following media rights packages, through an e-auction process. Star India was the broadcaster of the first seven editions of the league and were also the majority stakeholders in the league since the second edition of the competition. AGENCIES

Messi's brace helps Barca close gap on top



Barcelona: Lionel Messi soared past Luis Suarez to become La Liga's top scorer on Wednesday by adding his 17th and 18th goals of the season in a much-needed 3-0 victory for Barcelona over Elche.

Barca had followed up last week's crushing Champions League loss to PSG by drawing at home to Cadiz on Sunday but eased the strain with a comfortable win at the Camp Nou.

Messi's double owed much to a pair of superb assists, with a supreme dribble by Frankie de Jong coming after a sublime flick from Martin Braithwaite, who also set up Jordi Alba to score a third.

After failing to take full advantage of league leaders Atletico Madrid's defeat by Levante on Saturday, this victory puts Barcelona back in third, five points off the top, having played a game more than Atletico.

Just as importantly, it puts Ronald Koeman's side back on track after two disappointing results threatened to extinguish momentum gained in recent weeks.

Even if Atletico prove too far ahead to catch, a positive performance was important, especially with a semi-final second leg to come next week against Sevilla in the Copa del Rey, which may be their only chance of winning a trophy this term.

Messi's return to top form comes as a huge boost too. This was his fifth and sixth goal in his last four games while no player from the top five European leagues has scored more than his 13 this year in all competitions. Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski is closest on 12. AFP

Job done for Zizou

Late Mendy goal gives Madrid 1-0 win over 10-man Atalanta



AP ■ BERGAMO

Real Madrid struggled to break down 10-man Atalanta before Ferland Mendy netted an 86th-minute winner to give the Spanish giant a 1-0 win in the first leg of the round of 16.

Madrid entered the game as the big favorite despite a slew of injuries, and Atalanta's chances diminished further when midfielder Remo Freuler was sent off in the 17th minute after being adjudged to have denied a scoring opportunity.

"The match was ruined," Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini said. "I don't know what the result would have been, we might have still lost, but

it would have been a much different and better match."

Madrid — playing without Karim Benzema, Eden Hazard and captain Sergio Ramos — still found it difficult to test Atalanta goalkeeper Pierluigi Gollini until the end of the first half, when he pulled off a great reaction save to keep out Casemiro's header from Toni Kroos' free kick.

Just as it looked as if Atalanta would hold on for a draw, Mendy received the ball

outside the area after a corner and curled a shot into the right side of the net from 20 yards.

"Yes, we'd practiced that play, but it wasn't supposed to be Ferland who took the shot," said Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane with a smile. "We didn't have a great game tonight but what was most important was the result. Scoring away from home was important for us."

The second leg will be on March 16 in Madrid. Atalanta can take comfort from the fact it has won all its European matches away from home this season, including a 2-0 victory over Liverpool at Anfield.

"We just have to win in Madrid," Gasperini said. "It's easy, we just have one possibility. We must win."

Spurs through in Europa



London: Dele Alli scored with an overhead kick and set up two other goals as Tottenham beat Wolfsburg 4-0 in the Europa League to become the first team to qualify for the last 16.

Alli, handed a rare start by Jose Mourinho, flicked the ball up after meeting a right-wing cross by Matt Doherty then leapt with his back to goal and directed an acrobatic effort into the bottom corner in the 11th minute of the second-leg match in the round of 32.

The midfielder crossed for Carlos Vinicius to head in the second goal in the 50th then played in substitute Gareth Bale to curl a powerful 73rd-minute shot into the top corner.

Vinicius added a fourth for Tottenham, which completed an 8-1 victory on aggregate. AP

Man City take control of Gladbach tie

AFP ■ BUDAPEST

Premier League leaders Manchester City closed in on the Champions League quarter-finals after cruising past Borussia Moenchengladbach with a comfortable 2-0 win last 16, first leg tie in Budapest.

A first half header from Bernardo Silva and a Gabriel Jesus strike in the second extended a winning streak by Pep Guardiola's high-flying side to 19



games in all competitions.

With six chances from the side which started Sunday's win over

Arsenal City camped inside the Gladbach half for most of the game. Although clear favourites City took time to break down a stubborn German defence however, often foiled by the interceptions of Algeria left-back Ramy Bensebaini.

The loss in the Puskas Arena leaves Gladbach, who managed just one shot on target throughout the game, needing a near miracle in the return leg scheduled for March 16 in Manchester.

WISH I COULD LAND A ROLE LIKE PROFESSOR FROM MONEY HEIST: NITHIIN

The actor speaks to us on green-lighting a film like *Check*, taking a week's time to get a pulse of the role, exploring OTT platforms and more...

After delivering three flops — *Lie, Chal Mohan Ranga* and *Sreenivasa Kalyanam* — in a row, it was a conscious decision from Nithiin to do a different film. "I wanted to balance a different film with that of a commercial film. *Bheshma* falls in the latter category, while *Check* in the former. Two years ago doing a film like *Check* would've been a risky proposition but with the audience's taste evolving after consuming a lot of OTT content, I don't think it's risky anymore. Films like *Naandhi* and *Uppena* are different but they succeeded at the box-office. I believe films like *Check* will have an audience of their own now," the actor points out.

Check tells the story of a prisoner Aditya (played by Nithiin) who is serving capital punishment on terrorist charges. During his time in the prison, he learns chess from an old prisoner and becomes a grand master while making a case for his mercy petition to be accepted by the president. Initially, it wasn't the story that director Chandra Sekhar Yeleti narrated to the actor. "He worked on another idea but he wasn't completely convinced with it, so he dropped it. He took two more months to come up with *Check*. I instantly liked it. The last 15 minutes of the film will bear the stamp of Yeleti garu," the actor observes.

Yeleti is known to be a tough task master and Nithiin understood it in the first few days. "After *Jayam*, this is my first film where I gave over 10 takes for my

shots in the first one week. Yeleti's style of making is different. My previous films needed me to indulge in some over action in terms of body language and looks but Yeleti garu wanted me to be absolutely natural in *Check*. It took a week's time to get a pulse of the character, after which it was a smooth ride," the actor explains, stating that *Check* has an open ending, so there is a scope for sequel. "However, it hinges on how well *Check* performs."

The actor completed shooting for *Rang De* earlier this week and it looks like he had enough of love stories. "Hopefully, *Rang De* will be my last love story," he declares, adding that he wrapped up 50 percent shoot of *Andhadhun* remake, while he will commence Krishna Chaitanya's *Power Peta* from May. "My role in *Power Peta* is the most challenging one in my career as I would be seen in different age groups starting from 20 years. It will be made in two parts and we are looking at a December release for the first one. Chances are that it will be shot in Tamil too simultaneously."

Looking back at his career, he admits it's been a bumpy ride but credits god's blessings and the audience love for the comfortable position he is enjoying right now. "I don't want to repeat my past errors from now on," he maintains, adding that he is open to exploring long-format storytelling.

As far as his favourite character is concerned from a web series, he says it's Professor from *Money Heist*. "I wish I could get a role like it."



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TWO YEARS AGO DOING A FILM LIKE *CHECK* WOULD'VE BEEN A RISKY PROPOSITION BUT WITH THE AUDIENCE'S TASTE EVOLVING AFTER CONSUMING A LOT OF OTT CONTENT, I DON'T THINK IT'S RISKY ANYMORE

I don't differentiate between small and big roles: Nandita

Nandita Swetha believes it was a bold decision from her end to have agreed to spearhead Chinni Krishna's female-centric *Akshara*, taking into account that it's still early days for her in Telugu. "At the same time I was afraid to take it up because the character carried a lot of weight. I was worried if the audience would receive the underlying message the film had, with me playing the lead role. But overall I'm happy with the decision I've made," she says about the film which throws light on the errors in the education sector and the steps that need to be taken to address those issues.

For Nandita, who was seen in a supporting role in last week's release *Kapatadhaari*, the role's duration is of least importance. "I don't differentiate between a small and a big role. I always believe that the script is the hero. I'm a Kannada girl and I've watched the original *Kavuladaari*. It's a good script, so sometimes it would be a plus for you if you are a part of a good script even though the role is small," she observes.

Her roles after *Ekkadiki Pothavu Chinnavaada (EPC)* failed to make a significant impact in Telugu. Does she feel that Telugu makers are not utilising her potential? "I don't think on those lines. After *EPC*, I've been busy in Telugu, featuring in seven-eight projects. Directors who think that Nandita is a performer are approaching me. As an actor I was satisfied with *Akshara*. The success is not in my hands. I only believe in giving my best," she points out, adding that her next is opposite Ashwin in *Raju Gari Gadhi* fame. "It's a thriller and I'm playing an IPS officer in it."



Anand Sai stages a comeback with good friend Pawan's next

After dedicating the last five years of his life to Yadadri Sree Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy temple as the architect, prominent art director Anand Sai has decided to stage a comeback to movies. With the temple in the final leg of its completion right now, Anand has taken up the art work of his dear friend Pawan

Kalyan's next with Harish Shankar. The art director in the past worked on Pawan's films like *Tholi Prema*, *Thammudu*, *Khushi*, *Gudumba Shankar* and *Jalsa*. The art work on all these films received immense acclaim. Especially his Taj Mahal set in *Tholi Prema* made him a sought-after art director, after which there was no looking back.

"Magnificent Art Director Anand Sai garu is back to Cinema after dedicating his 5 years of craftsmanship for Yadadri Temple — The Pride of Telangana. Welcome on board Anand Sai garu for #PSPK28 (sic)," production house Mythri Movie Makers posted on Twitter on Thursday. The untitled film, a Devi Sri Prasad musical, will mostly roll from June-July.

Kriti Sanon: You can't be scared and cautious in career

Actress Kriti Sanon has a packed year ahead, with five films scheduled to release.

Her projects are at different stages of production, boast of either big production houses or new genre or high expectation from fans owing to commercial value.

Over the next few months, she will be seen in *Bachchan Pandey, Mimi, Adipurus, Bhediya* and *Ganpath*. The varied assortment, you would think, would weigh her down with pressure. The actress has no time for pressure, or be scared.

"I don't think you can be scared and cautious and still move ahead in your career. Fear pulls you back. Once I know why I am doing a project, there is no fear. You like the film, the storyline, the scene. You know you are doing something slightly different. Ok, it can be experimental but that's your reason for doing it then," said Kriti. "I believe in all the films I am doing right now. Beyond that, my job is to do my part really well and work hard for it. The rest is not really in my hands. I don't want to take the pressure of 'oh what if this goes wrong?' I would rather think 'what if all of them go right!'" shared the actress, who had made her debut into films with the Telugu psychological thriller *1: Nenokkadine*.

"Would I love to do more such films as *Mimi*? Yes I would. But would I be looking for only this? No. I feel for me it's not only about what I am doing, it is about a project that really excites you. I feel like you have to really go beyond how many scenes I have and go more into how good the character is. Is it doing something to the film and I feel like as an actor, I want to explore more and do



LAXMAN BAGS THEATRICAL RIGHTS OF KRISH'S NEXT



Former associate of Sri Venkateswara Creations, Laxman has snatched the Telugu states theatrical rights of Krish's *Kondapolam* (tentative title), featuring Rakul Preet Singh and Vaishnav Tej. According to reports doing the rounds, he bought the film for Rs 11 crore. The film's shooting has been wrapped up last year itself. With *Uppena* doing great

business at the box-office, there is obviously buzz around Vaishnav's next and with Krish directing it, the project will be a hot property once the promotions kick off.

Based on Sannapureddy Venkata Ramireddy's novel *Kondapolam*, the film will narrate the lifestyle of people of a hamlet who vacate their houses and reside on the hills along with their cattle and sheep when

famine hits them. Krish is believed to have given his own spin to the book and turned the story into a nail-biting adventure. It has been extensively shot in Vikarabad forests.

Made on a tight budget by First Frame Entertainments, Krish is likely to shift attention to the film's post-production after he wraps up his mega budget venture with Pawan Kalyan.