

**ANALYSIS 7**  
TIME FOR AN ECO-FRIENDLY  
DEVELOPMENT MODEL**MONEY 8**  
HOME AFFORDABILITY TO  
IMPROVE FURTHER IN 2021: JLL**SPORTS 11**  
I BECAME A CRICKETER  
ACCIDENTALLY: ASHWIN

VIJAYAWADA, SATURDAY FEBRUARY 27, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



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VAISHNAV TO  
COLLABORATE WITH  
MANAM  
ENTERTAINMENTS

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**AP PITCHES FOR NATIONAL ACADEMY  
OF CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

AP is pitching for the establishment of the National Academy of Correctional Administration (NACA) in the state. The state government will put forth this proposal to Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the Southern Zonal Council meeting, scheduled on March 4 in Tirupati, sources said. As the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy is located in Hyderabad, the AP government wants NACA established in the state. Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who reviewed the preparedness for the Southern Zonal Council meeting, asked officials to prepare a detailed proposal to present to the Centre.

**POLL OFFICIALS FRONTLINE WORKERS,  
WILL BE VACCINATED: ELECTION BODY**

Election officials will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination, the Election Commission said on Friday as it announced dates for assembly polls in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, Assam and Puducherry. Election officials are frontline workers and they will be vaccinated, Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora said in the news conference in Delhi. Voting time has been increased by 1 hour because of the pandemic, he added. During filing of nominations, only two people will be allowed to accompany the candidate, he said. This is the first major set of elections to be held in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic after the Bihar election.

**SMRITI IRANI RIDES A SCOOTER IN  
BENGAL, DAY AFTER MAMATA BANERJEE**

Union Minister Smriti Irani was seen negotiating the narrow lanes of suburban Kolkata on a scooter as part of a BJP motorcycle rally on Friday, just a day after Trinamool Congress boss Mamata Banerjee was seen riding pillion to work. On a day the Election Commission is expected to announce dates for the Bengal elections, due in April-May, along with other states across the country, the BJP's big guns Rajnath Singh and Smriti Irani are campaigning on Mamata Banerjee's turf. Rajnath Singh will be in Balurghat along with state BJP president Dilip Ghosh while Irani took part in the rally in the Baruipur-Sonarpur area, a TMC stronghold.

**MUMBAI'S HIGH-SECURITY ARTHUR  
ROAD JAIL AWAITS NIRAV MODI**

With a UK court ruling in favour of extradition of fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India on charges of fraud and money laundering in Punjab National Bank scam case, Mumbai's Arthur Road jail has kept a special cell ready to lodge him, an official said today. The jail official said that once Nirav Modi is brought to Mumbai, he will be kept in one of the three cells of barrack No. 12, which is a high-security barrack. "Preparations for lodging Nirav Modi in the jail have been completed and a cell is ready for him, whenever he is extradited," he said.

**B'desh High  
Commissioner meets  
Assam CM Sonowal**

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**The way forward  
for the Insolvency  
Code**

2

**PM asks banks to  
come out with  
innovative prod-  
ucts for startups**

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# Poll panel reveals dates for nation's next battle royale

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Voting for five Assemblies will begin on March 27, with West Bengal conducting the maximum eight phases continuing till April 29, and votes for the polls in the four states and one union territory will be counted on May 2, the Election Commission said on Friday.

As many as 18.68 crore voters will be eligible to cast their votes at 2.7 lakh polling stations for 824 assembly seats across Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.

The elections are expected to witness a determined attempt by the BJP to put a strong show, including in Assam where it is already in power, as well as in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry where the saffron party has been pushing hard in recent years.

Elections in Assam will be conducted in three phases on March 27, April 1 and April 6, while polling in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry will take place in a single phase on April 6.

Elections in West Bengal will be held in eight phases, up from seven last time, from March 27, CEC Sunil Arora said while announcing the poll schedule.

2



BJP AP president Somu Veerajulu campaigns for the alliance candidate ahead of the municipal elections in Guntur on Friday.

**BJP-Jana Sena teamwork on  
display during campaigning**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A coordination meeting of BJP - Jana Sena leaders ahead of the upcoming municipal polls in Guntur district was held at former BJP state president Kanna Lakshminarayana's residence here on Friday.

Those present discussed how the two parties should move forward in the upcoming municipal elections.

Speaking to media persons later, Lakshminarayana said that development of cities and towns in the state was possible only with the victory of the BJP-JS combine and said that the alliance will bring a cor-

ruption-free rule. He said that the BJP-JSP alliance would ensure that there would not be any extra taxes for house construction, land conversion and for tap connections. He assured "real development of cities and towns".

Lakshminarayana accused the ruling party of extorting from the public.

"Earlier, this was done during the TDP regime through Janmabhooni committees and now, in the YSRCP government through volunteers. In Palnadu region, the ruling party MLA has created anarchy," he said, demanding re-nomination.

2

**ECI skips mention  
of by-polls in AP, TS**

Vijayawada: Curiously, the Election Commission of India failed to mention by-polls for the Tirupati Lok Sabha seat in Andhra Pradesh and Nagarjunasagar Assembly constituency in Telangana while releasing the schedule for elections in four States and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

It was largely expected that the ECI would also announce the dates for the by-polls in the two Telugu states, but going by the absence of any mention in the poll panel briefing, it appears that such a schedule would be announced separately, perhaps in the next few days.

**HC clears the  
way for polls  
to ULBs**

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Friday cleared the way for elections to Urban Local Bodies across the State, dismissing the 16 petitions challenging the State Election Commission notification.

2

# Indian economy enters positive territory, records 0.4 pc growth

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After contracting for two quarters in a row, the Indian economy entered the positive territory with a growth of 0.4 per cent in the October-December quarter, mainly due to good performance by farm, services and construction sectors, official data showed on Friday.

Trade and hotel industry registered a contraction of 7.7 per cent during the third quarter this fiscal, as the sectors continued to suffer on account of coronavirus pandemic.

According to the data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the farm sector recorded a growth of 3.9 per cent, and the manufacturing sector output grew by 1.6 per cent in the quarter under review.

The construction sector advanced by 6.2 per cent, while electricity, gas, water supply and other utility services clocked a 7.3 per cent growth.

The NSO said, "GDP at Constant (2011-12) Prices in Q3 of 2020-21 is estimated at Rs 36.22 lakh crore, as against Rs 36.08 lakh crore in Q3 of 2019-20, showing a growth of 0.4 per cent".

The gross domestic product

**Sensex posts worst day in 10 mths,  
sinks 1,940 pts amid global meltdown**

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The BSE Sensex crashed about 1,940 points to post its biggest single-day fall in nearly 10 months and the NSE Nifty plunged over 568 points to crack below the psychological 15,000-mark on Friday, tracking global selloffs triggered by a panic in bond markets overseas.

Investors also turned cautious ahead of the third quarter GDP data release, besides keeping an eye on simmering geopolitical tensions between the US and Syria.

At the day's close, the 30-share BSE Sensex settled 1,939.32 points or 3.80 per cent lower at 49,099.99 its worst one-day fall since May 4 last year.

(GDP) had expanded by 3.3 per cent in the corresponding period of 2019-20.

In its second advance estimates of national accounts, the NSO has projected 8 per cent contraction in 2020-21, showing the pandemic impact. In its

Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty plunged 568.20 points or 3.76 per cent to close the session at 14,529.15 the biggest single-day drop since March 23 last year.

On the Sensex chart, all 30 constituents ended in the red, with eight scrips logging over 5 per cent drop.

Sectorally, banking index suffered the maximum loss with over 4.8 per cent drop. Financial and telecom indices too fell sharply by 4.9 per cent and 3.85 per cent, respectively.

"Equity markets opened gap down following spike in global bond yields and extended its weakness further as the session progressed.

2

first advance estimates released in January, it had projected a contraction of 7.7 per cent for the current fiscal as against a growth of four per cent in 2019-20.

2

# Bhimavaram MLA a budding rowdy: PK

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a rather harsh tone, Jana Sena president Pawan Kalyan on Friday described Bhimavaram Grandhi Srinivas as "the sort of person who would loot banks" and said that the legislator was

nothing but a "budding rowdy". Refuting the MLA's allegations against him, Pawan Kalyan said: "What more can be expected from a person like this?"

2

**Guv Dattatreya  
'manhandled'  
in HP Assembly**

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Governor Bandaru Dattatreya was allegedly manhandled by some Congress members in the Assembly complex on Friday, following which five MLAs were suspended for the remainder of the Budget Session.

The incident took place outside the Speaker's office when the Governor was leaving for the Raj Bhavan after he cut short his address in the House following a ruckus create by the Congress on the opening day of the Budget session.

Speaker Vipin Parmar said the Opposition members tried to stop the Governor when he was going towards his cavalcade.

2

# CM urges town planners to come up with solutions, meet UN set goals

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday called upon Town Planners to come up with solutions to meet emerging challenges with a futuristic outlook on the goals set by the United Nations for sustainable development.

Virtually inaugurating the 69th National Town and Country Planners Conference at Visakhapatnam on Friday, the Chief Minister expressed confidence that the three-day Meet will come up with solutions that are pertinent to the



State and country vis-a-vis the 17 sustainable goals for 2030 set by the United Nations.

"The Conference, being organised by the Institute of Town Planners of India (ITPT)

and attended by town planners, academics, researchers, directors and others from across the country, would deliberate on the emerging challenges in the changing scenario, and I hope the Summit will come up with useful recommendations," the Chief Minister said in his inaugural address.

Some of the interesting topics the Summit would be discussing include the impact of Covid in work culture and the requirements besides environment and climate change.

2

# VPT, Maritime Board seal Rs 58,831 cr deals

SUMIT ONKA  
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Visakhapatnam Port Trust (VPT) has signed MoUs worth Rs 58,831 crores with various stakeholders ahead of the Maritime India Summit-2021 to be held from March 2 in virtual mode.

The signing of MoUs with Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd, ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India Ltd., Dredging Corporation of India, Department of Fisheries of Andhra Pradesh and Integral Logistics worth Rs 30,443.91 crore.

Apart from these, the AP Maritime Board signed MoUs with various business units to a tune of Rs 28,388 crore in coordination with the VPT.

Addressing the curtain-raiser event, Prime Minister Narendra



Modi consented to inaugurate the Summit. He further informed that a special session for investment opportunities in Andhra Pradesh is scheduled on March 3.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy confirmed his participation in the Special Session.

Meanwhile, the VPT chairman said that the main aim of MIS-

2021 was to position Indian Maritime Sector on par with international standards by attracting domestic as well as international investments and stated that various investment opportunities available for development of ports. Maritime-related activities in the State are likely to be showcased in the special session as well as in the digital pavilion.

The chairman stated that stakeholders in the maritime sector such as policy planners, Government agencies, domestic and international investors, sector experts, shipping lines, and representatives of ports across the globe, state maritime boards and others will participate in the summit. Various themes such as development of port infrastructure, shipbuilding, recycling and repair, hinterland connectivity, multi-modal logistics, coastal shipping, inland water transport, bulk cargo transportation, port led industrialisation, green technologies, skill development and maritime financing will be on the agenda.

The chairman added that eminent personalities from the maritime sector across the globe will share their experiences to bring out important takeaways

for the development of Indian maritime sector and industry.

The chairman informed that Major Ports, DG Shipping, Shipping Corporation of India, Shipyards, Dredging Corporation of India, Maritime Boards and other maritime agencies will sign MoUs for investments in the maritime sector including development of port-led industries and that Port of Visakhapatnam is signing about 45 MoUs with investors with an estimated investment of Rs 45,000 crore in port-led industries.

He has appealed to all stakeholder students to get registered for the upcoming MIS-2021 and to gain knowledge being shared by the stalwarts in the maritime sector, which would be of immense use to their future prospects.

# Anganwadi wall falls, crushes 4-year-old

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a shocking incident, a four-year-old boy died after the boundary wall of an Anganwadi centre collapsed, burying him under the debris at N Kotturu village under Rolugunta Police station limits in Vizag district on Friday.

The victim was identified as D Sai Dixit. The building was being used as a Rural Child Care Centre.

The police said that the incident took place when the boy was playing near the retaining wall of the Anganwadi centre. At the time of the incident, there were no other children at the spot.

The wall, which was constructed around five years ago, suddenly collapsed on the boy on Friday. The boy died on the spot as there was no time to rescue him.

Meanwhile, parents of the boy alleged that negligence of the Anganwadi staff led to the death of their son.

"We have registered a case against the teacher and worker of the Anganwadi centre under Section 304 (A) of IPC (causing death by negligence) and the investigation is on. We have shifted the body to government hospital for post mortem," said Sub-Inspector of Rolugunta, G Umamaheswara Rao.

**TODAY****ALMANAC****Month & Paksham:**

Magha &amp; Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

**Tithi :** Purnima: 01:46 pm**Nakshatram:** Magha: 11:18 am**Time to Avoid:** (Bad time to start any important work)**Rahukalam:** 09:34 am - 11:01 am**Yamagandam:** 01:56 pm - 03:23 pm**Varjyam:** 06:44 pm - 08:13 pm**Gulika:** 06:39 am - 08:06 am**Good Time:** (to start any important work)**Amritkalam:** 09:02 am - 10:32 am**Abhijit Muhurtham:** 12:05 pm - 12:52 pm**VIJAYAWADA  
WEATHER**

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 38/21

Humidity: 40%

Sunrise: 06:35 am

Sunset: 06:21 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated February 26, 2021 5:00 PM



One of the main reasons for the success of the insolvency code (IBC) is its design. Earlier, the insolvency legal regime was tilted in favor of debtors who retained control over management and operations of the company during the bankruptcy process. In contrast, the new insolvency code shifts the control over day-to-day working of the company towards creditors and professionals.

During insolvency proceedings, this has reduced the freedom available to company managements to decide on what evidence to present before the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT). Now, the NCLT and the professional have near complete control over evidence and conduct of the case from start to judgment.

Another distinct feature of the new insolvency regime is the way the proceedings are conducted. Earlier insolven-

# The way forward for the Insolvency Code

**The process under the present insolvency regime has substantial characteristics of the inquisitorial system. Some of the noteworthy features of the process followed in the new insolvency code and their resemblance to the inquisitorial system are discussed here**

and their resemblance to the inquisitorial system are discussed below.

First, the trial is in the hands of the NCLT. The NCLT plays an active role assisted by the Insolvency Professionals (IPs) and the Insolvency Professional Agencies (IPAs). The trigger for starting the IBC is a petition to the NCLT. This petition is called an insolvency petition. When an insolvency petition is filed, the role of the NCLT is to identify whether the debtor has com-

mitted a default in repayment of an undisputed debt to the petitioning creditor. If the NCLT finds that the debtor has defaulted to the creditor; and has not disputed the claim of default by the creditor beforehand, the NCLT must allow the petition to go through, or else it must dismiss the petition.

Second, case management in the insolvency code depends upon the NCLT members, so their contribution is very high for the disposal of any case. Case man-



DR. SAMEER SHARMA

agement is effective as members of the NCLT sit with the debtors and creditors and exchange views in making decisions for the speedy disposal of any case. This is in contrast to the adversarial legal system, where representatives from each party take opposing positions to debate

and argue their case, whilst the Judge's role is to uphold principles of fairness and equality and to remain neutral until the very end when she gives judgment.

Less reliance on judicial precedents is the third similarity to the inquisitorial system. Conventionally, judicial precedent is set by "case law" which helps flesh out the statutory laws and in some cases new substantive law comes from pronouncements where statutes and precedents are silent. There is little use of judicial precedent in inquisitorial systems. This means Judges are free to decide each case independently of previous decisions by applying the relevant statutes. As the current insolvency regime is of recent origin, there are hardly any

judicial precedents available. This gives a great degree of leeway to the NCLT while deciding in insolvency proceedings.

The insolvency code confers partial executive powers on the NCLTs and it is this expansion of the range of functions that has transmuted the NCLT from a pure judicial forum to a hybrid one with judicial plus executive powers. However, appeals are made to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) and the Supreme Court; thus, there is a clear separation of judiciary from the executive at upper levels.

This fusion of judicial and executive powers in one entity/person is not new. Prior to the amendments made in the Criminal Procedure Code

in 1973, judicial and executive powers were combined in executive magistrates in India.

In short, there are two distinct design features of the insolvency code. First, there is a changeover from a debtor in control to a creditor-driven insolvency process. Second, in practice the NCLTs follow an inquisitorial system, even though tacitly.

Therefore, the way forward is to build on these unique features of the insolvency code. Efforts should be made to include more and more ingredients of the inquisitorial system in the insolvency process and discourage any move to bring about "equality of arms" between the debtors and creditors.

(Author has a PhD from the USA and a DLitt from Kanchi University. The article is based on his research and practice and views are personal)

## AP reports 96 new Covid cases, one death

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The cumulative Covid-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh rose to 8,89,681 as 96 were added afresh even as the state reported 71 recoveries and one death in 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday.

The latest bulletin said the active cases now stood at 635 after a total of 8,81,877 recoveries and 7,169 deaths.

In 24 hours, Chittoor district reported 22 new cases while Guntur also added 17. The remaining 11 districts added less than 10 fresh cases each. Chittoor district also reported one fresh Covid-19 fatality in a day.

## BJP-JS teamwork on display during...

Continued from Page 1

BJP AP president Somu Veeraj and women leaders of the party campaigned in Division 18 in Guntur for the alliance candidate V Narendra Kumar. He said that the Central government has provided Rs 1,250 crore for the development of Guntur city and Rs 1,000 crore for the development of Krishna and Guntur districts. He said that the BJP-JS alliance was working for the development of infrastructure in cities and towns and supply of drinking water and establishment of parks and gyms through Amrut scheme. The

"BJP is moving ahead with the goal of developing Andhra Pradesh and the people are noticing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's corruption-free rule in the country and similarly, the BJP-JSP will work together for a corruption-free society," said Veeraj.



### VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES

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### EGG RATES ₹/100

VIJAYAWADA	414
HYDERABAD	405
VISAKHAPATNAM	472
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.14

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# Cmdre Raju takes over as Officer-In-Charge for AP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Commodore M Goverdhan Raju, took over as Naval Officer-in-Charge (Andhra Pradesh) from Commodore Sanjiv Issar at an impressive ceremonial parade held in the Naval Base at Visakhapatnam on Friday.

Commodore Raju is an alumnus of Sainik School, Korukonda and National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla.

He was commissioned into the Indian Navy on July 1, 1989 and is a specialist in navigation and direction.

He held a spectrum of highly challenging operational, staff and training appointments viz - the commissioning crew of INS Sagardhwani, specialist and executive officer appoint-



ments on frontline warships, joint director staff requirements at Naval Headquarters, director (training and policy) at HQ Integrated Defence Staff, principal director (Training) at the premier training establishment, Indian Naval Academy (Ezhimala) and director, Maritime Warfare Centre (Vizag).

Commodore Raju has also carried out the duties of fleet operations officer of Eastern Fleet during Dec 2014-May 2016, and he concurrently carried out the duties as the chief coordinator for static review, operational demonstration, passage exercise etc. during the prestigious International Fleet Review-2016 and contributed

to its grand success.

He is also a graduate of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Army War College, Mhow and National Defence College, Mirpur (Bangladesh).

Commodore Raju has the distinction of commanding four INS Torpedo Recovery Vessel-71, ocean going minesweeper Ratnagiri, Dhanush OPV Suvarna and Destroyer Ranvijay, as well as two shore units; the premier training establishment INS Chilka with concurrent charge as Naval Officer-in-Charge (Odisha), and the Forward Operating Base INS Sardar Patel with concurrent charge as Naval Officer-in-Charge (Gujarat).

He is a proud recipient of Nao Sena Medal (devotion to duty), 2014.

## Bhimavaram..

Continued from Page 1

In a video statement issued on Friday, the actor-politician said that he was aware of how to face such attacks. Moreover, he said that the Jana Sena would not remain silent if attacked by its rivals.

He asked DGP Gautam Sawang to take steps to rein in the MLA and said that "otherwise, the law and order atmosphere in the state would be vitiated".

He has no patience to preach peace to his attackers. "If the SC and ST Atrocities Prevention Act is invoked against Dalits instead of using it to protect them, I will approach the Human Rights Commission," he said.

He asked Jana Sena cadres to pay no attention to the words of Grandhi Srivinas. "Some dogs bark, while some mad dogs bite. But, humans do not bite dogs. We only call up the municipality dog squad and wait for it to arrive," he said referring to the MLA.

"The party workers should exercise restraint till the arrival of the dog van," Pawan Kalyan said.

# Poll panel reveals dates for..

Continued from Page 1

The second phase of West Bengal's assembly elections has been scheduled for April 1 and will cover 30 constituencies, followed by the third phase on April 6 for 31 seats, the fourth on April 10 for 44 constituencies, the fifth on April 17 for 45 seats, sixth for 43 seats on April 22, seventh phase on April 26 for 36 seats and last and eighth phase on April 29 for 35 seats, Arora said.

The Election Commission will appoint two special observers for West Bengal and a third can also be sent if required, Arora said in

response to queries on whether enough arrangements are in place for the polls in the state, where many have been raising questions about political violence.

Arora also said everyone on election duty for the upcoming polls will be vaccinated against COVID-19 before polling day. Voting will take place for 126 seats in Assam, 234 in Tamil Nadu, 294 in West Bengal, 140 in Kerala and 30 in Puducherry.

Arrangements will be put in place for candidates to file their nominations online. Voting will be allowed for an additional hour, keeping in mind COVID-19 safety guidelines, he said.

Also, webcasting arrangements will be in place at polling stations in critical and vulnerable areas, while adequate CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) deployment will be ensured, Arora said.

All critical and vulnerable areas have been identified and advance teams have been already deployed across the four states and one union territory, the Election Commission added.

He said door-to-door campaigning will be restricted to five persons, including the candidate, while roadshows will be allowed with a maximum of five vehicles.

# CM urges town planners to come up with...

Continued from Page 1

"The issue of growing greenhouse gases is a serious concern," Jagan said, and expressed hope that the Meet will discuss the issue with concern.

The Chief Minister said that he was looking forward to the

recommendations on affordable housing for lower income groups and reducing the financial burden on the government in wake of the rising cost of land and high rents in urban areas making land acquisition a difficult task.

"Water management is

another issue of major concern and it needs comprehensive planning as cities are growing from multiple directions and there will be a need to extend the water facilities to all areas," he said.

Jagan stated that the Government was looking for-

ward to developing the coastal region utilising the vast stretch of 974 km coastline in the State, where Visakhapatnam city is one of the beneficiaries of an integrated coastal development plan.

The Chief Minister reiterated that the purpose of this

summit is to deliberate various issues on sustainable development goals by 2030 as recommended by the UN and looking forward to the solutions that would emerge in the summit for a remarkable change in current situations to lead better.

"With a growth re-emerging in both GDP and GVA in Q3 FY2021, the pandemic-induced technical recession in India has ended, in line with our expectations," Icra Principal Economist Aditi Nayar said.

The NSO has pegged the pace of growth in Q3 FY2021 at 0.4 per cent for GDP, and a higher 1.0 per cent for the GVA, whereas Icra had projected both at 0.7 per cent, she added. "The YoY (year-on-year) performance of the components of GDP indicates a welcome growth of 2.6 per cent in gross fixed capital formation, juxtaposed with mild degrowth of 1.1 per cent in government consumption expenditure and 2.4 per cent in private consumption expenditure," Nayar said.

# Sensex posts worst...

Continued from Page 1

Panic in global bond markets led to sharp rise in yields which spooked investors amid fears of interest rate cycle reversal," said Hemang Jani, Head of Equity Strategy, Broking & Distribution, Motilal Oswal. Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said, "Domestic markets tumbled in line with global trend triggered by a sharp rise in bond yields. Increasing geopolitical tension between the US and Syria aggravated the selling, Q3 GDP data which is to be released today also added volatility in the Indian market."

Although negative, mid and small caps outperformed their

larger indices showing investor confidence, he said, adding the market will gain momentum as the global market is expected to stabilise supported by maintaining accommodative monetary policy and a growing economy.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses closed with heavy losses due to a rout in global bond markets. Stock exchanges in Europe were also trading with losses in mid-session deals.

Most global markets traded lower after Wall Street's main indexes tumbled, following a steep rise in benchmark US Treasury yields.

Meanwhile, the global oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 1.16 per cent lower at USD 65.34 per barrel.





AP High Court Chief Justice, Justice Arup Kumar Goswami shows that he is equally adept in court and on the pitch, during the inauguration of the first South Indian Advocates Cricket Tournament at the Moolapadu Cricket Stadium on Friday.

## AP CJ inaugurates cricket tournament for advocates

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP High Court Chief Justice, Justice Arup Kumar Goswami on Friday inaugurated the first South Indian Advocates Cricket Tournament at the Moolapadu Cricket Stadium.

Justice Arup Kumar played a few shots to formally start the tourney and his batting skills were greeted with cheers and enthusiasm by the participants.

The tournament, being held under the auspices of Andhra Pradesh Advocates Cricket Association got off to a good

start with advocates from AP, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka participating.

Addressing the gathering, Justice Arup Kumar said that sports bring mental well-being as well as good health. "There is a need for everyone to have proficiency in some or the other sport. Lawyers are always stressed at work and games and sports can help them stay calm and fit with good health," he said.

Later, the High Court judges were felicitated and mementoes given to Justices P Praveen Kumar, DVSS Somayajulu and

K Lalitha Kumari. Advocate-General S Sriram was also felicitated by Krishna District Vijaya Dairy chairman Chalasani Anjaneyulu and organising committee secretary P Suresh Kumar.

The event was graced by AP Bar Council chairman Ghanta Rama Rao and AP Cricket Association president PS Sarath Chandra Reddy, AACT Organising Committee chairman Ch Ajay Kumar, vice-chairpersons G Srinivas Reddy, P Venkata Reddy, P Baji and Sharifa Khan and others were present.

## 3 categories of volunteers for felicitation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The government has decided to split village and ward volunteers into three categories, as per their qualifications, for their felicitation.

Officials briefed Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on felicitating the volunteers across the state. Volunteers who have served continuously for one year will be considered in Level 1, five volunteers from every mandal or town will be considered in level 2 and five volunteers in every constituency will be considered in level 3 for felicitation.

For Level 1 volunteers, a cash incentive of Rs 10,000, badge along with Seva Mitra Award, for level 2, a cash incentive of Rs 20,000, special badge along with Seva Ratna award, for level 3 volunteers, a cash incentive of Rs 30,000, special badge, medal along with Seva Vajra award will be given, the officials said.

Officials have considered modesty, distribution of pensions within three days, attendance, use of apps, participation in implementation of Navaratnalu, Covid-19 survey etc as the criteria for selection of volunteers for the Awards. The felicitation programme will start from Ugadi and the Chief Minister will be attending events at three places of the state.

# TDP's ULB polls manifesto promises a better city life

■ Lokesh assures Anna Canteens, tax cuts, clean towns, housing, and more

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP National General Secretary Nara Lokesh on Friday asserted that the ruling YSRCP leaders have no moral right to ask for votes in the municipal elections as the Jaganmohan Reddy Government has ignored upkeep of roads, drains, drinking water, health and housing needs of the people in the towns and cities across the State.

Lokesh released the TDP manifesto for the upcoming Urban Local Body polls at the party Central office here and listed out its main features.

He appealed to people to realise the "damage the YSRCP has done" to the State, after it was given just one chance in the 2019 elections. "Jaganmohan Reddy does not deserve another chance as his government did not lay or construct a single drain, park, pucca house nor replace a single LED street bulb anywhere in the State," the TDP MLC charged.

Addressing a press conference on the occasion, Lokesh asserted that the TDP think-tank has framed the manifesto



based on a survey carried over three-month duration with the specific aim of understanding the expectations of the urban people. The manifesto contains 10 promises beginning with the TDP commitment to reopening Anna Canteens to provide food to the poor workers at just Rs 5 in all towns and cities.

Lokesh asserted that his party would cut taxes by 50

percent in order to provide relief to the people from the rising burdens in the wake of price rise. The other promises included clean towns and clean drinking water. The TDP manifesto also includes promises like job melas for the unemployed youth, beautification, pothole-free roads, permanent auto stands with toilets and drinking water, MEPMA meeting halls,

TIDCO houses, salary hike for sanitation staff and free water connections.

"Has the Chief Minister finally ended up being a gun without bullets since he has abjectly failed to exert pressure on the Central Government for the promised Special Category Status to AP, protection of Visakha Steel Plant and funds for Polavaram project?" the MLC asked.

## Mudragada summoned in Ratnachal Express torching case

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The Railway Court on Friday issued summons to Kapunadu leader Mudragada Padmanabham and the other accused in the Ratnachal Express torching case, directing them to appear before it on March 3.

Those who were served the summons include Manchala Sai and Sudhakar Naidu.

It may be recalled that on January 31, 2016, during the course of the Kapunadu agitation, the Ratnachal Express was set on fire.

A mammoth meeting was held in Tuni on that day under the aegis of the Kapu Aikya Garjana. After the conclusion of the public meeting, Ratnachal Express was set on fire near the venue of the meeting.

An FIR was registered against the Kapu leaders and others then under Sections 146, 147, 153 and 174 of the Indian Railways Act.

## SEC to chair region-wise conferences on ULB polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar will hold region-wise meetings aimed at conducting peaceful municipal elections, for three days starting February 27.

Ramesh Kumar will meet district collectors, SPs, municipal commissioners and other officials and give directions on the steps to be taken for the conduct of the forthcoming elections.

Opinions of representatives of political parties will be sought for the smooth conduct of the elections.

The SEC will hold regional conferences at Tirupati, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam on February 27, 28 and on March 1 respectively to review the preparedness of district administrations for conduct of Urban Local Body elections. He will interact with the Collectors and district election authorities, DIGs, Superintendents of Police, Commissioners of Police, regional directors of

**Representatives of recognised and registered political parties will participate through video conferences from their respective district HQs**

Municipal Administration, Commissioners of ULBs and Excise enforcement officials.

The local RDO and DSP (of respective conference venues) will participate in the regional conference. However, all other RDOs and DSPs and officials below the rank of RDOs and DSP, who are entrusted with the election related work, will participate through video conference from their district headquarters to get a sense of the meeting.

The conference will focus on implementation of Model Code of Conduct – Prevention of money and liquor, distribution of voting slips with authentication, measures to

achieve high voter turnout and free and fair polls.

Recognised and registered political parties with a reserved symbol, belonging to the District will participate in the political party meetings at the conference. However, representatives of recognised and registered political parties of other districts will participate through video conferences from their respective district headquarters.

General Observers (13 IAS Officers) and Expenditure Observers (13 IFS Officers) appointed by the Commission, Commissioner and Director of Municipal Administration will also participate in the regional conferences.

On February 27, the regional conference will be held for Chittoor, Anantapur, Kadapa, Kurnool and Nellore. On February 28, the conference will be at West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam and on March 1 Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari districts.

## TDP manifesto a farce, unimplementable: Ambati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Terming the TDP manifesto for the Urban Local Body polls 'a farce and impracticable', YSRCP spokesperson Ambati Rambabu on Friday said that TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu was frustrated after the Kuppam debate in recently concluded gram panchayat polls.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday, he stated that in Kuppam, TDP had won only 14 of the 89 seats as people were fed up after dealing with Naidu for four long decades. "Since TDP lost in the polls, Naidu came running to town ahead of municipal polls. Otherwise he would have never visited Kuppam even for filing nomination," Rambabu said.

He went on to say that the TDP manifesto for municipal polls was a farce as he could never implement it being in the Opposition.

"Naidu failed to implement his promises while in power, leaving people and welfare to the winds. Naidu failed to even recognise the services of



his party workers, including Jr NTR," he said.

The YSRCP spokesperson said that Naidu, "who had earlier taken Junior NTR for an election campaign, sidelined him after the defeat".

"Naidu should be ashamed to demand water for Kuppam in spite of serving as a Chief Minister for 14 years," Rambabu said.

He also hit out at Nara Lokesh for his abusive comments against Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, saying that people have faith in the Chief Minister and reminded him of the defeat in Mangalagiri.

## Naidu vows to lead public revolt against Jagan rule

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday vowed to lead a state-wide revolt against the "oppressive rowdism" of the Jaganmohan Reddy regime from Kuppam Assembly segment itself.

Naidu told the people that "there was no other solution for them except to come onto the roads and protest against the atrocities being committed by the Chief Minister and his MLAs".

If the people are afraid and remain indoors for fear of false cases and arrests, then the Jagan's gangs would create greater chaos and do harm to the State as a whole," the former chief minister said.

The TDP chief held road shows and addressed a series of meetings in the Kuppam segment when he appealed to the local residents about the need to hit back at the oppressors. Stating that the Jagan regime destroyed AP in all respects, Naidu stated that he was ready to take any risk and go to jail for the cause of preventing this destruction.

He termed as unfortunate that the Jagan rule has brought in such a hapless situation where the people were avoiding AP liquor at all costs. "The people of Kuppam now prefer liquor from either Karnataka or Tamil Nadu. Andhra people buy liquor at a shop opened on the state's border with Karnataka," he said.

Even the YSRCP gangs supplied the Karnataka liquor in the panchayat elections as the voters did not accept AP bottles, the TDP chief said.

He warned that AP was not a "jagir" of Jagan's father or grandfather to do whatever he would liked. "The people would not tolerate long if the faction-based Raja Reddy constitution was continued in order to deprive the people of all their rights. The CM has no right to kill the people by supplying unhealthy J-liquor brands. Jagan is looting Rs 5,000 crore per year from the liquor mafia and thereby drinking the blood of the AP people," Naidu alleged.

He expressed concern over U-turn by the YSRCP regime on the Special Category Status.



## Bizman donates Rs 10 cr to TTD

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Donations poured in to the TTD Trusts, with Friday registering a single day collection of Rs 10 crore. Sanjay Passi, CEO of New Delhi-based PASCO industries donated Rs 10 crore, of which Rs 9 crore was given to the SVBC Trust and Rs 1 crore to SV Sarvaswreayas (Balamandir) Trust.

He handed over the DDs for

the donations to TTD Additional EO and SVBC MD AV Dharma Reddy on Friday at Ranganayakula Mandapam in Tirumala.

Later, speaking to the media along with his wife Shalini Passi, Sanjay Passi said he has been visiting Tirumala since 2004 and has darshan twice a year. He said, he was elated to see the various charitable activities taken up by the TTD.

## Maoists now back agitation against privatisation of VSP

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The ongoing agitation against the Union government's decision to privatise the RINL-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant on Friday got a shot in the arm from unexpected quarters – Maoists. Andhra-Odisha Border special zonal committee secretary Kailasam, in a letter, extended 'complete' support to the protest against privatisation of the VSP.

He said that many agitations erupted in the past for setting up the steel plant and 32 people had lost their lives. "It would be a true tribute to the sacrifice of 32 people if the steel plant is now stopped from being sold," Kailasam



**"It would be a true tribute to the sacrifice of 32 people if the steel plant is now stopped from being sold"**

wrote, adding that though the BJP and YSRCP flags were different, they were implementing the same policies.

Besides all political parties, people from different spectrum across the state of Andhra Pradesh have been raising their voice against the sale of VSP.

Opposition parties are accusing the Central government of doing injustice to the Telugu people and accusing the State government too of being unmoved.

The Centre had set up a special committee with Ministers and officials to go into the details of privatisation of the steel plant.

Meanwhile on Friday, CITU members staged protests in Vizag city against the spiralling fuel prices and VSP privatisation.

## Treated sewage water, commercial buildings to boost GVMC revenues

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In a bid to shore up its revenue sources, GVMC would allow new commercial buildings and supply treated sewage water.

Municipal Administration and Urban Development Secretary Y Sri Lakshmi held a review meeting with the GVMC and VMRDA officials with regards to the progress of the various development projects. She directed the officials concerned to expedite the projects and meet the deadline.

While touching upon the cleanliness programmes, Sri Lakshmi said that special attention should be given to the solid waste management. "Sanitation vehicles would



be tracked to ensure better collection and disposal of the wastes. Kappulapada dump yard should be constructed with all the smart features and be an ideal example for other civic bodies," she said.

On increasing the revenue sources of the civic body, Sri Lakshmi spoke of the scope of treated sewage water from

STPs, and commercial buildings. She said new commercial buildings and selling of filtered water to industries and other establishments would generate additional revenues.

GVMC commissioner, S Nagalakshmi also briefed the Secretary about the progress of various projects being carried out in the city.

## Jagan asks bankers, officials to streamline delivery of sops

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Reviewing the implementation of livelihood programmes opted by women beneficiaries under YSR Cheyutha and Asara schemes, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Friday asked bankers and officials to work in tandem and support the eligible.

Chairing a review meeting on the progress of YSR Cheyutha, YSR Aasara, Jagananna Thodu, MGNREGA and volunteers' felicitation at his camp office here, the Chief

Minister directed officials to appoint an agency for proper implementation of livelihood programmes opted.

The officials said options were received to set up 66,702 retail outlets under Cheyutha and Asara schemes of which 98 percent of the outlets were established. They added that they also have set up a call centre to provide immediate help.

The officials said 16.25 lakh people have opted for small businesses, textiles, handicrafts, food products, jewellery and chemicals apart from retail



outlets and added that they have also prepared plans to support them in their business. They said they will provide employment opportunities in these fields with partnership of reputed companies.

Reviewing Jagananna Jeevakranti, the officials said goats and sheep will be distributed to another 70,719 beneficiaries by December 2021. They said that goats and sheep are being distributed to around 5,000 people every month.

Referring to the Jagananna Palavelluva, the officials said

another 1,06,376 units of goats and sheep will be delivered by December 2021.

The Chief Minister said the distribution of sheep, goats and dairy cattle should be expedited and completed before the implementation of the second phase of YSR Cheyutha and Aasara schemes. He directed bankers to ensure immediate disbursement of loans against pending applications under Jagananna Thodu.

The bankers said steps were being taken to sanction loans to remaining people through a

special drive and added that Andhra Pradesh is far ahead compared to other states in the implementation of schemes.

Reviewing MGNREGA implementation, the officials said the State Government has logged 2,328 lakh workdays in 2020-21, which was highest since the programme was started. They said that the highest number of workdays was in June at 798 lakh workdays. The Chief Minister directed the officials to expedite the construction works of RBKs, Village clinics and RBK centres.

## Returning SEZ lands is a historic decision: Minister

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Agriculture Minister Kursala Kannababu on Friday said that returning of Kakinada SEZ lands to farmers was a historic decision, the first such decision taken by any government in the country.

Speaking to the media here, he said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had taken the decision on returning the SEZ lands as per the promise given to farmers at Pithapuram during his padayatra.

Recalling the chaos that rocked Nandigram of West Bengal, where farmers staged protests opposing automobile SEZ, he said that such a situation did not prevail in AP as the Chief Minister has respected the farmers' sentiment and promised to return their lands.

The Minister criticised TDP supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu for his "evil idea" of including forbidden land without giving any prior notification of acquiring it and putting farmers in turmoil.





BJP OBC Morcha national president K Laxman addressing a gathering at the Collectorate in Medak on Friday (Right) A massive rally being taken out by BJP workers

# Police resort to lathicharge, arrest BJP leaders in Medak

PNS ■ MEDAK

Tension prevailed at the Collectorate when the police denied entry to the BJP leaders to submit a memorandum to the District Collector on demands of Golla and Kuruma community members. The police had to resort to mild lathi-charge and whisk them to the police station.

Taking part in Chalo Collectorate Ranabheri stir by Golla and Kuruma community here on Friday, BJP OBC Morcha national president K Laxman said that injustice is being meted out to SCs and STs and other downtrodden sections of the state.

■ BJP OBC Morcha national president K Laxman charged with the government collecting demand drafts for Rs 31,250 from each of 28,500 families and rendering them injustice to them by not allotting sheep units

■ He called upon all castes in the state, especially the BCs, to unite and wrest power from the TRS

He charged the government collecting demand drafts for Rs 31,250 from each of 28,500 families and rendering them injustice to them by not allotting sheep units. He called upon all castes in the state, especially the BCs, to unite and wrest power from the TRS.

Dubbaka MLA Raghunandan said that the state is applying the principle

divide and rule while dealing with people of 33 castes and predicted that they would soon spell doom for KCR. He desired that the Bahujans should grow politically and should capture power in the state.

He accused the government of denying educational opportunities to BC students, while the Centre took BC students under its wings by setting up of

Central and Sainik Universities. He blamed the State government for reducing the local bodies from 33 per cent to 18 per cent.

Tension prevailed as part of the BJP protest programme as the police denied entry to the BJP leaders entering the collectorate to submit a memorandum to the District Collector on demands of Golla and Kuruma community members. The police had to resort to mild lathi-charge and whisk them to the police station.

BJP OBC Morcha state president Ale Bhaskar Raju, former MLA Sasidhar Reddy and others took part in the programme.

## Rare snake found in Nallamala forest

PNS ■ NAGAR KURNOOL

Rare snake was found in the Nallamala forest on Friday. There are about 53 species of snakes in the forest, of which only 11 are venomous and four are highly venomous. This is a special one and the reptile is said to be a 25-30 cm long that inhabits in burrows and rooms for food during the night. According to forest officials, rare animals such as Honey Badger has been found in the forest. Although it has been established for many years, the climate here is favorable for them, and migratory birds and animals are flocking here, giving the forest area a new lease of life, officials said.



## ADVOCATE COUPLE MURDER

# Cong leaders submit memo to Guv, seek CBI investigation

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A delegation of Congress leaders led by TPCC President and MP N Uttam Kumar Reddy met Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan at the Raj Bhavan on Friday and requested her to order a court-monitored CBI investigation into the brutal murder of lawyer couple Gattu Vaman Rao and Nagamani.

Uttam Kumar Reddy told the Governor that the brutal and horrific murder of the advocate couple in broad daylight and in full public view proved that there was a total collapse of law and order in Telangana. "We or the general public do not believe that the local police would carry out a fair or neutral investigation into the double murder," he said while urging the Governor to order a court-monitored CBI investigation into the matter.

Later, speaking to the media, Uttam Kumar Reddy alleged that the local police were trying to shield the TRS leaders, who were involved in the brutal murders. He said there was a conspiracy behind the murders, which needed to be exposed. "The lawyer couple murder is directly linked to the Manthani



TPCC President and MP N Uttam Kumar Reddy submits a memorandum to Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan at the Raj Bhavan in Hyderabad on Friday

**"We or the general public do not believe that the local police would carry out a fair or neutral investigation into the double murder," said TPCC President**

custodial death, which is again linked to sand mafia backed by top TRS leaders. However, local

police are trying to suppress the facts to protect the TRS leaders, who are involved in the murders," he alleged.

Uttam Kumar Reddy said that though the High Court had directed the Telangana Police to submit a report on March 1, yet the local police could not be trusted as they were being pressured by the ruling party to hush up the case. "CM KCR did not issue (even) a single-line statement condemning the brutal murders. This clearly shows that the Chief Minister is giving a free hand to 'sand, land and mines mafia' to establish their control using murder as a tool to instil fear among common people," he said.

## 'Wearing masks mandatory in Medaram'

PNS ■ MULUGU

Mulugu district Collector Krishna Aditya reiterated that the devotees, who would like to have darshan of the Medaram deities must wear masks during the darshan. The district collector has reacted to the rumours that have been doing the rounds that Bhupalpally MLA Gandra Venkataramana Reddy and his wife Jyothi, have been tested Covid positive following their visit to Medaram. They had darshan of the deities a couple of days ago, sources said. The doctor on duty in Medaram, ChYamuna, said that no Covid case had been detected.

# Aruna lauds Gudur for his gesture

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP senior leader Gudur Narayana Reddy celebrated his 59th birthday at Bhoodan Pochampally in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district a novel way by distributing weaving machines to the poor weavers in the presence of BJP national vice-president DK Aruna and former minister M Narasimhulu.

Speaking on the occasion, DK Aruna appreciated Gudur Narayana Reddy for not being pompous and instead choosing the path of helping the weaker sections i.e; weaving community.

She lauded Gudur for helping the 30 poor families by distributing 'Aasu Yantram' (weaving machines). She also commended the party cadre for



BJP national vice-president DK Aruna hands over the 'Aasu Yantram' gift certificate to a woman weaver at Bhoodan Pochampally in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri on Friday. Former Minister M. Narsimhulu and Gudur Narayana Reddy look on

attending the programme and making the function a grand success and appealed to the cadre to work for the victory of MLC candidate G Premendar Reddy.

She exuded confidence that Gudur Narayana Reddy would

strengthen the party in Bhuvanagiri Assembly constituency. M Narsimhulu said that KCR has no value for the people of Telangana though they have elected him for the top post.

Gudur Narayana Reddy stat-

■ BJP senior leader Gudur Narayana Reddy distributed weaving machines to poor weavers to mark his birthday

ed that he was lucky to take birth in this area, which has given him a chance to serve the poor.

Leaders and workers of RSS, BJP, Yuva Morcha, ABVP, VHP and Hindu Vahini have attended in big numbers and felicitated Gudur Narayana Reddy.

Leaders of the weaving community of Pochampalli and surrounding villages have appreciated Narayana Reddy for his gesture of distributing the 'Aasu Yantrams' to the weavers.

# 'TS govt claims on creating 1.32 lakh jobs 'fake and fabricated'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AICC spokesperson Sravan Dasoju took a dig at KT Rama Rao, Minister for Industries, IT and Municipal Administration, on Friday for avoiding an invitation to attend the open debate organised by the Congress at the Telangana Martyrs Memorial, Gun Park, to discuss the issues of 'employment' in Telangana. The Congress spokesperson did not spare the CM as well. Sravan Dasoju not only categorically stated that KTR's statement on the recruitment numbers given during a meeting at Telangana Bhavan was wrong, but also pointed out that during the tenure of TRS



AICC spokesperson Sravan Dasoju gestures while addressing the media at Telangana Martyrs' memorial at Gun Park in Hyderabad on Friday

jobs were actually lost than getting created.

While ridiculing KTR's statements on job offers, he explained that while there were 4.19 lakh sanctioned jobs in 2014, 3.12 lakh employees used

to work in the government sector and there were 1.07 lakh vacant jobs at that time.

He asked KTR if he was right, how could the current vacancies had gone up to 1.91 lakh and why the total number of existing government employees reduced to 2.28 lakh? With the formation of new districts and gram panchayats, the number of sanctioned jobs should have been increased to 5.19 lakh. As per the Biswal Commission, the state had only 2.28 lakh employees, while 4.19 lakh sanctioned jobs were available, which meant 47 per cent of sanctioned jobs were currently vacant in Telangana, he said.

## SANGAMESHWARA TEMPLE

# Harish reviews arrangements for Shivaratri

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Minister for Finance T Harish Rao on Friday asked the Sangareddy District Collector Hanumantha Rao and other officials to take steps to conduct Mahashivaratri celebrations at the famous Ketaki Sangameshwara temple in Sangareddy district from March 8 to 16.

In a meeting to review the arrangements held at Aranya Bhavan in Hyderabad on Friday, officials told the minister that over five lakh devotees from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and Karnataka is expected to take part in the festival.

The minister asked officials to conduct all rituals as per the tradition on all nine days and take all precautions to rule out any inconvenience to the devotees. He asked them to provide all amenities to the devotees and also provide annadanam and presentation of art forms to entertain the public.

He asked officials to use four mobile toilets in the district. He advised officials to ensure that the drinking water and temple pond water not get polluted. He asked them to set up labs then and there to test the water quality.

He asked officials to ensure that round-the-clock sanitation programme should continue deploying workers in three shifts. He enquired about transportation amenities for the festival. Electricity department personnel were asked to ensure that there are no hiccups in the power supply. Furthermore, he asked officials to make arrangements for providing toilets, bathing ghats, dress changing sheds and so on. He also asked them to provide medical camps, besides keeping ambulances and fire tenders ready.

The minister asked officials to speed up temple development master plan works at a cost of Rs 13 crore.



Minister for Finance T Harish Rao reviewing the arrangements for Mahashivaratri celebrations in Sangareddy with officials on Friday at the famous Ketaki Sangameshwara temple in Sangareddy

## Collector inspects amenities for Army recruitment rally

PNS ■ MEDCHEL

Medchal-Malkajgiri District Collector Shwetha Mohanty instructed officials to provide adequate facilities for the Army recruitment rally in Hakimpet Sports School from March 5 to 24.

She paid a visit to the Sports School at Hakimpet in Shamirpet mandal in the district here on Friday, along with the recruitment director Colonel Manoj. She inspected the school and arrangements for the walking track and rally.

She asked officials concerned to ensure better facilities and accommodation. In all, 4,000 will be allowed a day for the recruitment rally and arrangements have to be made accordingly avoiding any inconvenience, she said.

She further stated that the government is conducting the rally in a prestigious manner as thousands of youths come for the selections. Effective coordination with other wings like police and others for traffic regulation, parking and sanitation will give better results, she said.

Asking them to plan out in advance for smooth conduct of the event she instructed for better arrangements for the rally. The Collector planted saplings on the school premises. Additional collector Vidyasagar and other officials were present.

# Officials propose two LI schemes on Manjira

PNS ■ ZAHEERABAD

Construction of two major lift irrigation schemes on the Manjira River-- Sangameshwara and Basaweswara LI schemes--will irrigate 2.30 lakh acres in Zaheerabad and Narayanakhed Assembly constituencies.

The LI schemes will irrigate one lakh acres in Zaheerabad and 80,000 in Narayanakhed and the rest of the 50,000 would be irrigated in other backward areas of Andole and Sangareddy Assembly constituencies.

According to reports, irrigation department officials have drawn up plans in this regard. They are preparing the detailed project reports on the schemes as per the orders of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao.

As inflows into Singur dried up from the upper reaches of the project, the State govern-



ment has decided to divert the Kaleshwaram project water through Mallanna Sagar reservoir and related works are underway. The government asked the contractors to complete the works in a year.

Officials are drawing up LI scheme plans to draw eight tmc feet of water from Singur to irrigate 80,000 acres in Narayanakhed. The construction of a LI scheme to lift water to a height of 55 metres would cost up to Rs 800 crore, while the LI scheme to irrigate 1.50

lakh acres in Zaheerabad constituency lifting water to a height of 125 metres would cost Rs 1,300 crore. The objective is to draw 15 tmc feet of water from the Singur reservoir.

The total cost of the two LI schemes would be over Rs 2,000 crore. To execute the projects, what is essential is land acquisition, canal alignment, construction of pump houses. A field-level survey is necessary to map all these facilities.

## DENYING NATIONAL FEST STATUS TO MEDARAM JATARA

# Former MP Sitaram Naik alleges discrimination

ML MELLY MAITREYI ■ HYDERABAD

Even as pilgrims thronged the ongoing four-day Mini-Medaram fair in Mulugu district to worship tribal deities Sammakka and Saralamma there is disappointment among people's representatives from the scheduled tribes about the indifference of the Centre to their long pending demand to declare it as the national festival.

Telangana government officially organises the biennial Medaram fair while the temple priests conduct the mini-jatara a year prior to the official event to satisfy the sentiments of devotees. This year the mini-festival

conducted as per the aboriginal traditions commenced on February 24 with the temple cleaning, worship rituals. The devotees from various villages across the state made a beeline to the mini-jatara to offer worship on February 26 and 27 reflecting the popularity of the festival.

A Sitaram Naik, former Lok Sabha MP, who attended the Mini-Medaram Jatara said on Friday that as per government statistics over one crore tribals and non-tribal devotees come to the biennial festival and offer jagery to the presiding deities.

Sammakka and Saralamma, who fought for the protection of tribals, are worshipped as deities

from the days of Kakatiya kings. The Telangana government had been organising the biennial festival in a befitting manner by sanctioning Rs 100 crore for providing facilities for lakhs of devotees, who came to the Mega Medaram festival.

"When Gods were being used as a sentiment to run national politics, why can't Medaram festival that became world-famous as tribals' festival be accorded the status of the national festival," he sought to know. It made one wonder if it had anything to do with discrimination between regions and communities, he said.

The Union government agreed to organise National

Tribal Festival 'Vanaj' every year in February in Delhi for the tribals of north India while it continued to ignore the request from tribals of south India, he pointed out.

The Central government should at least initiate measures to declare the Medaram festival to be celebrated next year as a national festival, he demanded.

The biennial Medaram festival is compared to Kumbh Mela in terms of the congregation of pilgrims. "I spoke several times as an ST MP representing the region in Parliament explaining the prominence of the tribal festival and requested it be declared as national festival, but in vain," he said.





# Odisha Assembly adjourned after BJP lawmaker threatens suicide

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Assembly was Friday adjourned till post-lunch session after a BJP lawmaker threatened suicide and the Congress Legislature party leader sat on dharna in the well of the House demanding immediate procurement of paddy from farmers in different mandis of the state.

The issue was raised during the question hour when BJP MLA from Deogarh, Subash Chandra Panigrahi announced that he will not hesitate to immolate himself to protest against the sufferings of the farmers who are not able to sell their paddy in the mandis following the introduction of the centralised token system.

Farmers are given tokens to sell their paddy before it is harvested. By the time the paddy is ready for sale, the tenure of the tokens are found to have elapsed causing harassment to them.

This has led to hundreds of farmers to protest and put up



road blockades in the state, he said.

Sitting on a dharna in the well of the House, Panigrahi said: I will immolate myself if the procurement process is not streamlined and the produce of the farmers are procured at the earliest.

He said, "The farmers in my

constituency are threatening to commit suicide as they are not being able to sell their paddy. Therefore, when the farmers are getting prepared to go for self-immolation, I as their representative have no choice but to adopt the same procedure to protest against the governments inability to

procure paddy.

Panigrahi, however, returned to his seat after Speaker S N Patro assured him that he will be given opportunity to raise the issue during the zero hour. As soon as the zero hour began, Congress Legislature Party leader Narasingha Mishra sat on

dharna under the Speakers podium in the well and made the same demand. He said that the government must give justice to farmers and should refrain from cheating them.

"We want specific reply from the government. Let the Speaker convene an all party meeting and resolve the issue immediately," Mishra said.

Unable to run the House due to the ruckus, Speaker S N Patro adjourned the proceeding till 4 pm.

The House also witnessed members cutting across party lines expressing concern over sand smuggling across the state during the question hour. The opposition BJP and Congress members created ruckus demanding formulation of a policy to curb illegal sand mining across the state.

The speaker too expressed concern and asked the Revenue and Disaster Minister Sudam Marandi why the government has no specific policy for lifting sand from different rivers.

# BJP's double-engine analogy will be non-starter in Bengal: TMC

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Taking a dig at the BJP for pitching that governments formed by the same party both at the Centre and the state will accelerate development in West Bengal, the Trinamool Congress Friday said the double-engine analogy by the saffron party will be a non-starter in the state.

Senior party leader and minister Bratya Basu told reporters at a press meet here here that while campaigning for the upcoming assembly polls in the state, BJP leaders are highlighting the need for same party's government both at the Centre and the state.

"This double-engine train will not have bogies for the common man to ride. These engines must be driven at a very slow pace on chord lines, if you take into account the number of killings, attacks on dalits and women in BJP-ruled states," he said.

"...they are not saying how their government(BJP) is working on the agenda to hand over railways to private parties. The saffron party wants to do something similar for Bengal. They only work to fulfill the interest of big corporate," the minister said.



## On scooter, Smriti Irani leads BJP rally for Bengal polls

PNS ■ SONARPUR (WB)

Riding a scooter, Union minister Smriti Irani led a rally of the BJP on Friday as she campaigned for the upcoming West Bengal elections in the South 24 Parganas district. Taking part in the BJP's state-wide 'Poriborton Yatra', Irani along with BJP MP Roopa Ganguly and Agnimitra Paul began the campaign in Gangajora near Garia on the party's 'rathi' - a bus decked up with slogans and photos of the leaders. After covering a short distance, the minister got down from the 'rathi'

and took to a scooter, wearing a black helmet and a mask. "When we began the 'rathi yatra' today, the administration deliberately tried to delay it. We will ride two-wheelers, walk on foot because West Bengal is on the march towards change," Irani said. Enthusied by the minister's spontaneity, scores of BJP workers followed Irani on two-wheelers, chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Khela Hobey', meaning 'game on' - a slogan first raised by the Trinamool Congress, which has now become the catchphrase of this election season.

## INDIA CORNER

### Bomb attack on Bengal minister: Two arrested by CID

The West Bengal CID has arrested two persons in connection with the blast in Murshidabad's Nimtita Railway Station in which state minister Jakir Hossain and over 20 others were injured, a senior official said on Friday. Both have been booked under Section 3 of the Explosive Substances Act, 1908, and other sections of the IPC, including attempt to murder, he said. "The two will be produced in court for further legal action," the official said. Sleuths of the CID have been conducting raids at different places in the state as part of the probe. Hossain, Trinamool Congress MLA and the minister of state for labour, was waiting at platform number 2 to catch a train to Kolkata around 10 pm on February 17 when the blast occurred, seriously injuring him and the others. The senior TMC leader and the other injured persons are undergoing treatment at a state-run hospital in the city.



### B'desh High Commissioner meets Assam Chief Minister Sonowal

Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Muhammad Imran called on Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal here on Friday and discussed a wide range of issues of bilateral interest. The chief minister highlighted issues concerning bilateral trade and commerce of mutual interest of both Bangladesh and Assam, an official release said. Sonowal said that both Assam and Bangladesh should work to explore markets in their respective territories for mutual benefit, particularly in areas of agriculture, agricultural products, information technology and textiles. Since Assam is an immediate neighbour of Bangladesh, there should be frequent exchange programmes between both the geographical entities, he said. The chief minister also called for improvement of connectivity between Assam and Bangladesh through waterways, airways and roadways.



### ISRO lining up launch of India's geo imaging satellite GISAT-1

The Indian Space Research Organisation is lining up the launch of its geo imaging satellite GISAT-1 close on the heels of the February 28 PSLV-C51 mission. The launch of GISAT-1 onboard GSLV-F10 rocket was originally planned for March five last year, but was postponed a day before the blast-off due to technical reasons. Secretary in the Department of Space and ISRO Chairman K Sivan told PTI that the technical issues have been resolved and the delay in the launch was due to COVID-19-induced lockdown which affected normal work. Sources in the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency said ISRO is now looking at March-end-to-April timeframe for the mission from Sriharikota spaceport, about 100 km from Chennai. According to ISRO, GISAT-1 will facilitate near real-time observation of the Indian sub-continent, under cloud-free condition, at frequent intervals. Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-F10) will launch GISAT-1 from the Second Launch Pad of Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC) SHAR, Sriharikota.



### Will not allow smooth session unless Rathod quits, says BJP

BJP MLA Atul Bhatkalkar on Friday said the party will not allow the Budget session of the Maharashtra legislature to run smoothly unless Forest Minister Sanjay Rathod stepped down. The opposition party has been demanding the resignation of Rathod, a Shiv Sena leader from Yavatmal, since his name was linked to the death of a 23-year-old woman in Pune. Rathod has denied that he had anything to do with the case. In a video message, Bhatkalkar alleged that Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray was "planting" stories of Rathod likely to resign before the session begins on March 1. "It is a shameless attempt to maintain image. Unless Rathod steps down or is removed from his post, the BJP will not allow the budget session to run smoothly," the MLA said. "The chief minister can remove Rathod from the cabinet any time, but he is trying to protect the minister by delaying it," Bhatkalkar further said.



### Bail granted to labour rights activist

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

The Punjab and Haryana High Court granted bail to labour rights activist Naudeep Kaur on Friday in a case filed under attempt to murder and some other charges, more than six weeks after she was arrested in Haryana's Sonapat for allegedly gheraoing an industrial unit and demanding money from the company. "The court accepted the bail application of Naudeep Kaur. She has been granted bail by the high court," her counsel Arshdeep Singh Cheema said.

## SUV found near Ambani's house was stolen last week

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The vehicle with explosives, which was found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence here in south Mumbai on Thursday, had been stolen last week and its owner had even lodged a complaint about it, police said on Friday.

The vehicle with gelatin sticks and apparently a fake number plate was found parked on Carmichael Road near 'Antilia', the multi-storey residence of Ambani, the chairman of Reliance Industries, on Thursday evening.

"The owner of the vehicle, Hiren Mansukh, visited the



police commissioner office in south Mumbai this afternoon after he saw visuals of the SUV found near Ambani's house,

which was similar to his vehicle," an official said.

"His statement will be recorded by the Crime

Intelligence Unit (CIU) of the Mumbai crime branch," he said.

Mansukh, who is a resident of Thane, later told reporters that he had parked his SUV near Airoli Mulund bridge on February 17 after its steering got jammed while he was on his way to attend a family function. "The next day, when I went to get my car, it could not be found at the spot. After a search of about four hours, I realised that it had been stolen, following which I lodged a complaint at Vikhroli police station and an offence was registered in that connection," he said.

## Many assns 'support' Bharat bandh but keep shops open

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Various markets in the national capital remained open on Friday during the 'Bharat Vyapar Bandh' called by traders' union with many saying that despite supporting the cause, they did not want to suffer another day of losses.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) on Thursday had said all commercial markets across the country will remain closed on February 26 in view of its 'Bharat Bandh' call demanding a review of the provisions of the goods and services tax (GST) regime.

The CAIT said dharnas (protests) will be held nationwide at 1,500 places to urge the Centre, state governments and the GST Council to keep in abeyance the 'draconian' provisions of GST.

Brijesh Goyal, president of Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI), said most of the markets in Delhi have opened but the associations have extended their support to the 'bandh'.

"Around 98 per cent markets, hotels, restaurants and industrial areas were open except in some parts of Chawri Bazaar and Karol Bagh. However, they have extended their support. We also held a protest at Kashmiri Gate around 12.30 pm," Goyal said.



Although various market bodies said they support the cause for which the 'bandh' was called, they however, could not shut down their shops or outlets due to multiple reasons. The bandh was not enforced at Connaught Place market.

"We are completely in support of the cause. However, it was not practically feasible to enforce the 'bandh' in the market this time.

The traders are already reeling under the losses they incurred during the lockdown and they have heavy burden of rents. We completely support the cause and feel the demands are right," said Atul Bhargava, president, New Delhi Traders Association.

Echoing his views, Sanjeev Mehra, president, Khan Market Association, said, the issue is very genuine but the traders are already suffering and we did not want to add another day of losses so we did not participate in the 'bandh'.

## Shah to address meetings in TN, Puducherry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah will address public meetings in poll-bound Tamil Nadu and Puducherry on Sunday morning, followed by a Vijay Sankalp Rally in Janakipuram in Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu,

Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. Shah will leave for Tamil Nadu on Saturday and is scheduled to hold a public meeting in Karaikal in Puducherry on Sunday morning, followed by a Vijay Sankalp Rally in Janakipuram in Villupuram district in Tamil Nadu,

according to the schedule released by his office. Besides this, Shah will also hold organisational meetings of the party's units of the state and the Union Territory.

The BJP is contesting assembly elections in Tamil Nadu in alliance with ruling AIADMK.

# NIA files charge sheet against 11 terrorists in al-Qaeda conspiracy case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The NIA on Friday filed a charge sheet against 11 members of the banned terrorist group al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent for allegedly planning to carry out attacks in India on the instructions of their Pakistan- and Bangladesh-based handlers, an official said.

Murshid Hasan, Mosaraf Hosen, Mainul Mandal, Lea Yean Ahmed, Najmus Sakib, Iyakub Biswas, Samim Ansari, Abu Sufian, Atiur Rahman, Al Mamun Kamal and Abdul Momin Mandal have been named in the charge sheet under sections of the IPC, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Arms Act, the NIA official said.



The case was registered by the NIA based on information about an al-Qaeda-inspired module sprouting and operating in West Bengal and Kerala under the leadership of Hasan, the spokesperson of the premier investigation agency said.

The members of this module

were in advanced stage of conspiracy to execute terrorist attacks in different parts of the country, the NIA official said.

In raids conducted on September 19 last year in West Bengal and Kerala, nine terrorists were arrested. Subsequently, two more terror operatives

were arrested from West Bengal on August 26 and November 1 last year.

Hasan was in touch with al-Qaeda handlers based in Pakistan and Bangladesh and had received instructions along with radical propaganda material through encrypted social media platforms from them, the NIA official said.

Hasan along with his other associates conspired to radicalise and recruit more individuals into al-Qaeda, he said.

They disseminated radical material through social media and encrypted chat platforms with an intention to radicalise and recruit others for establishing an Islamic State by waging a violent jihad in India, the NIA spokesperson said.

# India-Pak pace on ceasefire rekindles hope for peace

PNS ■ JAMMU

The announcement by India and Pakistan to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) and other sectors has rekindled hope for a peaceful future among border residents in Jammu and Kashmir who have been living under constant fear of firing and shelling.

"We are joyous over the news of a fresh agreement between the two countries to observe complete ceasefire along the borderline. It has rekindled hope among us," Kalal-resident Mohammad Isaq said.

Isaac hoped that Pakistan would keep its promise of complete observance of the ceasefire agreement.

"We hope Pakistan keeps



the promise of not firing on us. We do not feel that they will religiously observe ceasefire. They have made such promises in the past as well, only to violate them," he said.

For the past few years,

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

due Pakistani firing and shelling.... Education of kids was affected. Houses were damaged. There were casualties. The fresh agreement of maintaining complete ceasefire is a happy news for us. Hope it stays," Sarpanch Bhawani in Rajouri district Sunil Kumar said.

Subash Chander, a Panch, said although they are very happy over the news, but it is difficult to trust Pakistan. Similar apprehension was raised by Kerni-resident

Mohammad Ashraf who welcomed the fresh agreement but raised question over the intention of Pakistan.

Kiran Kumar, a Kathua District Development Council (DDC) member, says that it is a happy news for border residents. "We thank the central government for this decision. We want Pakistan to behave as a good neighbour by ensuring zero firing from their side. Farmers will fearlessly cultivate their lands on border.

Life will be better," he said.

India and Pakistan on Thursday announced that they have agreed to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir and other sectors.

A joint statement issued in Islamabad and New Delhi said the Director Generals of Military Operations of the two countries held discussions over the established mechanism of hotline contact and reviewed the situation along the LoC and all other sectors in a "free, frank and cordial" atmosphere.

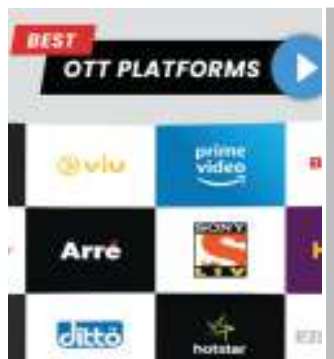
India and Pakistan signed a ceasefire agreement in 2003, but it has hardly been followed in letter and spirit over past several years with more violations than observance of the pact.



## Censorship?

The Government's guidelines regulating OTT platforms and social media raise a few questions

The first-phase lockdown of last year's pandemic outbreak spawned newfound attention and increased popularity for a number of web series as cinema halls had been ordered shut and people were forced to remain closeted inside their residences. Several big-budget and multi-starrer movies, which had been slated for theatrical release in the last week of March 2020 and beyond, fell to the Government's social distancing order and, to make up for the imminent financial losses in light of the prevailing uncertain conditions, chose the new fad of releasing the films online. As days gave way to weeks and months wore on, the average Indian family — already reeling under fear psychosis and bored to death by now — rediscovered the panacea of entertainment in various web



series streaming on Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms. So far, so good. *Mirzapur* aired, made a splash, but there was no hue and cry. Along came Saif Ali Khan-starrer *Tandav*, focusing on how politics affects collegial environment, and all hell broke loose. Everybody seems to have conveniently forgotten *Haasil* (released in 2003, starring Jimmy Sheirgill, Irrfan Khan and Ashutosh Rana, directed by Tigmanshu Dhulia) which was a gripping narrative based on the same subject. As avid watchers of the series among the OTT viewers point out, the ostensible objection — "hurting religious sentiments" by taking umbrage to the Shiva scene in the first episode — was just a ruse to express

anger against the way the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019, and the National Register of Citizens issues had been projected in the series.

The "religious sentiments" angle, coupled with allegations of the earlier series brimming with sexually explicit scenes and foul language, brought the spotlight back on *Mirzapur*, too, though there had been no protests during its run earlier. The tepid response of Twitter officials to the Centre's recent earnest entreaty to suspend the handles of certain "rumour-mongering members" during the ongoing farmers' agitation, especially in the wake of the January 26 violence at Red Fort, seems to have added fuel to the authorities' displeasure and, therefore, today we find both the OTT platforms and social media facing a barrage of directives. The question now arises: Are the Government guidelines regulating the two media correct, or could it lead to pressure or censorship on them? Experts opine that the 29 pages of rules raise concerns over several factors, including the privacy of users and censorship of digital news media, which will ultimately affect citizens' rights. It seems the Government just does not like us to have fun and make personal choices. It had better heed common sense and allow its adult population, those who are eligible to vote and can take learned decisions in all other spheres of life, to decide for itself whether it wants to watch a particular show or series. Of course, cracking down on the creators and propagators of fake news is a different ball game altogether.

### PICTALK



Sam Bennet celebrates after winning the sixth stage of the UAE tour cycling race in Dubai on Friday

AP

## Dark secrets

Who is giving patronage to Mukhtar Ansari?  
Who is gunning for him, and why?

Arguing in the Supreme Court, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi termed him "a small fry". However, anyone who knows even a little about don-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari and his deadly gang war in the badlands of Uttar Pradesh (UP), is aware that the name is enough to send a chill down the spine of many politicians, bureaucrats, police officers and, especially, businessmen. Ansari, an MLA from UP's Mau Sadar, is currently lodged in the Ropar Jail of Punjab in connection with an extortion case. The Punjab and UP Governments are at loggerheads for his custody, with the former trying every trick up its sleeve to keep him from the UP Police's hands on health grounds. A natural question to ask would be as to what makes a dreaded criminal so important that UP's BJP-led Government and Punjab's Congress Government are fighting over his custody in the Supreme Court. Well, there is nothing new in Ansari's name being associated with heinous crimes like murder, extortion and kidnapping, but what actually has pitted him against the

saffron party is the chilling murder of then BJP MLA Krishnanand Rai in 2005, who and six associates were gunned down by assailants armed with AK-47 rifles. The murder was more than sensational as 400 rounds were fired. Ansari, the main accused, was acquitted by the CBI court in 2019.

Recently, the BJP's Mohammadabad MLA Alka Rai, the slain MLA's widow, wrote to Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra accusing the party Governments in Punjab and Rajasthan of shielding Ansari. However, the story is not as simple as it appears. The UP Police has of late become "trigger-happy" and several criminals have been gunned down in encounters that the Opposition terms "extra-judicial killings". Last year, wanted criminal Vikas Dubey was shot by the State police after the vehicle carrying him "overturned" on a highway and Dubey "tried to escape after snatching a gun" from a policeman. There is no denying that Ansari must be fearful of meeting the same fate if Punjab jail authorities hand him over to the UP Police. But there is another side to the story: The criminal-politician-bureaucrat-police nexus is nothing new and Ansari must have been part of many such connections at the interstate and intrastate level, and it is only in the interest of such corrupt elements to exterminate the voices that can reveal their dark secrets. Now, who is giving patronage to Ansari and who is out to get him, and why, is the moot question.

# A flight and travel after one year

As an air trip to Goa for an event after a year-long hiatus revealed, being constantly stressed about the virus is clearly not the way to be

It is not good form to write columns in the first person but since this column talks of a personal experience, I will be writing it as such. The experience in question was catching a flight for the first time in 350 days. Part of my work involves evaluating and reviewing motor vehicles and that invariably involves a lot of travel, although the COVID-19 pandemic ensured that the few drives we did in 2020 all occurred in the Delhi-NCR and were fairly well-managed. Car companies don't do events in places like Goa because of the sun and sand or because folks like me enjoy flying, there are hundreds of decent hotel properties in Goa and the State is connected by flight to almost every major city in India. So, to do a media drive in Goa makes immense sense; in fact it is probably cheaper than organising individual drives in different cities and is definitely logistically easier.

I had promised myself that I would not fly in 2020, even after flights resumed and a few isolated automotive events took place. But as the new year rolled around and the first events began to be planned, one could not put off travel much longer. After all, working in a newspaper, I had been reading firsthand how the Government has more or less brought the pandemic in check. Of course, by the time I did eventually fly that had actually changed a bit with the new strain emerging in Maharashtra. However, my tickets were booked and I was taking a flight after 350 days.

A drive that once seemed like a weekly commute to Terminal 3 from my house appeared strange, not least because this was my first time in a taxi after almost a year. Traffic to and from the airport seemed normal and the few jams were more to do with the construction of the new flyover taxiways. Since my flight was in the afternoon, there was less chaos at the drop-off area. Airlines are running at a restricted domestic schedule at about three-quarters capacity and with very few international flights, India's largest airport terminal did not feel crowded.

We have all heard the term, the "new normal", things like people commuting and the need for hygiene. But other than everyone wearing face masks and the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) staff wearing shields and attaching a handle to their metal detector "wands", flying in 2021 was not very different from flying in 2019 and before. Though I did sanitise my hands after going through security which I feel is the biggest congregation point of the entire flying process, it felt the same as before. I must state, at no point did I feel unsafe and while I would not go as far as to claim that there was a *laissez faire* attitude, you really would not have guessed that there was a pandemic going on.

Now part of this can be explained by India's caseload, something that was well explained by oncologist and award-winning medical writer Siddhartha Mukherjee in *The New Yorker* recently. It elucidated on the concept that because we live in India and have been exposed to so many pathogens before, maybe we had been exposed to a "relative" of the COVID-19 virus and that gave our bodies the B-cells and the T-cells needed



THAT SAID, WE SHOULD STILL BE CAREFUL, PARTICULARLY SINCE THERE IS IN ALL LIKELIHOOD A MORE VIRULENT STRAIN DOING THE ROUNDS. IT MAY (OR MAY NOT) BE MORE DEADLY, BUT IT WOULD BE STUPID TO FIND THAT OUT THE HARD WAY



to deal with the virus. What else could explain the low death toll in India, many parts of sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia? One could argue that the "true" death toll has been suppressed but there is no way to hide hundreds of thousands of deaths; people would be talking about it, and that clearly isn't the case.

That said, we should still be careful, particularly since there is in all likelihood a more virulent strain doing the rounds. It may (or may not) be more deadly, but it would be stupid to find that out the hard way. I was flying on Vistara and while mask compliance was followed, the flight was packed with families travelling to Goa to get away from the boredom, one presumes. Some passengers stuck in the middle seats were covered in their woven-fibre protective suits and most people kept their face-shields on during the flight.

But it was not so much the flying experience, but what I saw in Goa which was scary. My hosts had organised dinner at a popular nightspot and it was crowded. There were few precautions being taken and while the bouncers were taking temperatures using an infra-red scanner, it was quite evident that the public at large

had travelled to the party State to leave their Coronavirus worries behind. 'Thalassa' on Vagator beach was packed to the rafters and nobody appeared to care.

With the Goa airport seeing flights from every corner of the country even if some States ask for the returnees to be tested, the crowds at restaurants and bars were back to pre-COVID levels, just that they were almost completely Indian with very few foreigners. That said, there were some expats around; those who had business and diplomatic visas and they were praising the Government and Indians for taking such a "Zen" attitude to the pandemic.

It was really incredible. Either people were not worried or they had reverted to their usual "*dekha jayega*" (we will see) attitude. Or maybe this was another example of Goan "*susegad*", the chilled-out laid-back attitude. I still don't know whether it is the attitude to adopt, but being constantly stressed about the virus is clearly not the way to be. But the "new normal" doesn't really seem very different from the "old normal".

(The author is Managing Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal.)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BJP SCARED OF RAHUL GANDHI

Sir — This refers to the editorial '*Slip of the tongue?*' (February 26). Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has yet again proved that he is suitable for politics and can make the BJP and its leaders uncomfortable. The BJP leaders, including the top brass, fear the popularity that Rahul enjoys among people and miss no opportunity to project the Gandhi scion in bad light or poke fun at him.

They know that only he can change political equations and has the ability to lead the country. On the other hand, knowingly or otherwise, Rahul makes such statements or speeches which give good fodder to the BJP to keep attacking him, his family and also the Congress. Attacking Rahul gives the ruling party an opportunity to cover up its own failures. All the BJP leaders talk about 70 years of Congress rule alleging that the 'Grand Old Party' did nothing for the nation but rather looted it. However, they fail to count the achievements of the Congress against which the seven years of the BJP's rule stand nowhere.

Fuel prices are at an all-time high, the economy is at all-time low, unemployment rates are high and there are no jobs in the Government sector. The Modi Government is doing rampant privatisation to benefit its corporate friends and is least concerned about the plight of the poor and the have-nots. Only a Government under Rahul's leadership can save the nation and put the economy back on tracks.

N Nagarajan | Secunderabad

### EXTRADITE ALL FUGITIVE INDIANS

Sir — There is finally the good news that fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi, wanted in India on charges of fraud and money laundering in Punjab National Bank (PNB) scam case, will be extradited from the UK. Mumbai's Arthur Road jail has kept a special cell ready to lodge him. It is like a win-win situation for the Indian Government and authorities. Further, the UK judge ruled that there is no evidence to suggest that Nirav would

## Nothing wrong with renaming stadium



An unnecessary controversy is being created for having the Motera stadium named after Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Those making the hue and cry must understand that Modi isn't the first living person to have a stadium named after him. Many stadiums in India have been named after leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and so on. Even airports and railway stations have been named after great leaders and personalities. Narendra Modi, during his tenure as the Chief Minister of Gujarat,

had developed the State quite a lot. After all, it was Modi's dream to create a stadium meeting the global standards with state-of-the-art facilities and he played an instrumental role in the redevelopment of the sports facility.

We must understand that renaming the stadium after Modi in no way belittles or insults other leaders. In the past, Mumbai's Brabourne and Wankhede stadiums were named after individuals who were then alive. Similar is the case with Navi Mumbai's DY Patil Stadium, Bengaluru's M Chinnaswamy Stadium and Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium. Mohali's PCA Stadium was renamed after former BCCI and Punjab Cricket Association president IS Bindra. However, this outcry reeks of dirty politics and a section of people who have developed a sort of phobia against the name of the Prime Minister. However, we should not lend our ears to such people who criticise him for the sake of criticism only.

M Pradyu | Kannur

not receive a fair trial in India. With this, Nirav lost his nearly two-year-long legal battle against extradition on all grounds. The 49-year-old fugitive businessman has been repeatedly denied bail due to the seriousness of the allegations against him and remains behind bars in a London prison since his arrest in March 2019. It will also set an example for other criminals who flee the country after committing financial and other crimes and think they can get away with it. Such criminals and fugitives can afford big lawyers, but they must remember that law is above all and it's not easy to hide or escape its long hands. All fugitives should be extradited and punished as per the law of India.

CK Ramani | Chennai

### SHAMEFUL ACT BY POLICE OFFICER

Sir — It is really shocking that Rajesh Das, the Special Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu, has turned out to be a black sheep as he is accused of misbehaving with a female IPS officer on duty and sex-

ually harassing her. This is what happens when officers are promoted to senior positions, particularly in the police department, without taking into account their past records but rather on various other considerations. It is also unwarranted that posts such as Special DGP are created with the intention of accommodating blue-eyed officers.

Suspension would not be sufficient in his case and he should be summarily dismissed from service as the female IPS officer has come forward to lodge a complaint against him.

It is expected that the panel to probe the harassment charge would do a fair job and submit its final report in record time. If women police officers are not safe and are vulnerable to such crimes at the hands of their own colleagues, the plight of common women is not hard to understand.

Tharcus S Fernando | Chennai

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## SOUND BITE

One after the other steps have been taken to pull the country out of the non-transparent credit culture. Now NPAs cannot be swept under the carpet, even an NPA for one day needs to be reported.



Prime Minister  
— Narendra Modi



Russia is confronted with a highly aggressive policy aimed at disrupting its development and creating problems along our perimeter.

Russian President  
— Vladimir Putin

An actor can only choose what is offered to him. There is nothing by intent but I am just fortunate that I get parts which most actors will be envious of.



Actor  
— Avinash Tiwari



I officially announce retirement from all forms of the game. I thank my family, friends, fans, teams, coaches and the whole country wholeheartedly for all the support and love.

Cricketer  
— Yusuf Pathan

Today in 2019, the Indian Air Force (IAF) had responded to the Pulwama terror attack and reiterated the country's policy against terrorism in "New India".



Union Home Minister  
— Amit Shah



FIRST COLUMN


ADULT EDUCATION SET TO TURN A PAGE

Free access to adult learning through online mode backed by extensive usage of ICT has been emphasised



VIPIN KUMAR

American industrialist Henry Ford famously said: “Anyone who stops learning is old - whether this happens at 20 or at 80. Anyone who keeps on learning not only remains young but becomes constantly more valuable - regardless of physical capacity.” This is true even today, particularly for illiterate adults. Adult Education (AE) extends schooling options to those who are 15 years of age or above and have missed the opportunity of formal tutoring earlier but now want to pursue education. Though the literacy rate in India has increased from 12 per cent in 1947 to 73 per cent in 2011, however, adult illiteracy is still a challenge for the Government because the absolute number of illiterates in India was 25.76 crore, the largest in the world, as per the 2011 census. Successive Central governments took major initiatives to improve the adult literacy rate in the country. For instance, under the National Education Policy (NEP), 1986, the National Literacy Mission Authority (NLMA) was founded to impart functional literacy to non-literates in the age group of 15-35 years in a time-bound manner. Subsequently, the Saakshar Bharat Programme continued till March 2018.



A major paradigm shift in the programme could help in imparting functional literacy to 7.63 crore non-literates, including 5.38 crore women, with four broader objectives namely: Basic literacy and numeracy, basic education, vocational education and continuing education. In this programme, the Government introduced new components of literacy and under the financial literacy component, one crore bank accounts of adult illiterates or neo-literates were opened under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. With regard to legal literacy, a new curriculum was designed and developed for neo-literates to create awareness of their rights and duties. These components have been included in the critical life section of AE and the lifelong learning chapter of the NEP 2020. The new curriculum will be developed by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and includes five components: Foundational literacy and numeracy; critical life skills (including financial literacy, digital literacy, commercial skills, healthcare and awareness, child care and education, and family welfare); vocational skills development; basic education and continuing education (including holistic adult education courses in arts, science, technology, culture, sports, recreation and more advanced material on critical life skills).

The NEP-2020 recommends a strong and innovative Government initiative for AE to facilitate community involvement and the smooth and beneficial integration of technology to expedite the aim of achieving 100 per cent literacy. These resources are a must to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.6 of the United Nations. Giving impetus to adult literacy, the Union Budget 2021-22, states that “to enable increased access of resources, online modules covering the entire gamut of adult education will be introduced.” Hence, for the improvement of the AE programme, free access to adult learning in States and Union Territories (UTs) through online mode backed by extensive usage of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has been emphasised. An online teaching and learning system will be developed in which a learner may register with essential information like name, date of birth, gender, Aadhaar number (not mandatory), mobile number and so on and attend the class through online mode by using a mobile or any Common Service Centre (CSC) or digital booth or cybercafé. At the national level the NCERT, NIOS, National Informatics Centre and the DAE will facilitate ICT support in designing and developing central modules, portal, apps, while States and UTs may explore partnerships with stakeholders for a vibrant adult education programme. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “Mass illiteracy is India’s sin and shame and must be liquidated.”

(The writer is Joint Secretary, Ministry of Education. The views expressed are personal.)

# Time for an eco-friendly development model



GURINDER KAUR



ARJUN KUMAR

## The people living in hilly regions and the country at large demand that the Govt adopt a pro-people and pro-nature development model instead of a pro-corporate one

The recent havoc in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand — where a large part of the Nanda Devi glacier fell into the Alaknanda stream near Joshimath and caused severe flooding that resulted in the hydropower projects of Rishi Ganga and NTPC Tapovan Vishnugad plus many buildings being destroyed and scores of people being killed — has raised the pertinent question: Is this development or the destruction of the environment and people? The Chamoli incident has brought back the traumatic memories of the June 2013 tragedy when the Mandakini river was suddenly flooded after a cloudburst and the flow of water killed more than 5,000 people and left millions stranded in floodwater for days. The fact remains that though Uttarakhand is blessed with natural beauty and invaluable resources such as dense forests, rivers and mountains, it has a very fragile ecosystem. Hence, the State is prone to natural disasters. An earthquake of the magnitude 6.8 on the Richter scale hit the district of Uttarkashi in 1991, killing hundreds of people and destroying thousands of houses. Another earthquake in 1999 in Chamoli killed hundreds, too. The entire Malpa village of Pithoragarh was devastated by a massive landslide in 1999 and 250 people lost their lives.

Though earthquakes, cloudbursts, landslides, massive avalanches and other natural disasters have been a part of natural processes in Uttarakhand for centuries, the increase in their frequency and depth of intensity is due to human activities. The natives of Uttarakhand are acutely aware and have widespread knowledge about the fragility and eco-sensitivity of their environment. For centuries they have lived in harmony with the environment, but now, this stability is being threatened by indiscriminate development and flagrant violation of environmental rules. They have been trying to save their State for a long time.

As early as June 1950, Mira Behn, an environmental activist of Garhwal, published an article titled ‘*Something is wrong in the Himalayas*’ documenting that the flash floods in Uttarakhand are bound to wreak havoc as the sensitivity of the environment is being overlooked during the economic development process. Later, she also wrote to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the issue. It is pertinent to note that the site of the recent mishap is the cradle of the Chipko Movement that was initiated to save trees from commercial lumber firms. The first protest occurred near the village of Mandal in the upper Alaknanda valley in April 1973. Alas, governments past and present have neither listened to the cries of locals and environmental activists nor learnt any lessons from the tragedy of 2013. Still, more than 50 hydroelectric projects are underway on the Alaknanda and Bhagirathi rivers, even though a committee of experts warned that such projects were a threat to the State and its frail ecology.

In fact, Uma Bharti, a senior BJP leader and former Water Resources Minister, in her time had requested the Centre not to build power projects on the Ganga river and its major tributaries since the Himalayas are a fragile area. Following the recent catastrophe in Uttarakhand, the Government needs to seriously reconsider its stance on building hydroelectric dams in the region. It should no longer ignore the advice and warnings



EVEN IF THE GOVERNMENT CUTS GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT, ONE-THIRD OF THE GLACIERS OF THE HIMALAYAN AND HINDU KUSH MOUNTAIN RANGES WILL MELT BY THE END OF THE 21ST CENTURY. HENCE, URGENT ACTION NEEDS TO BE TAKEN SOONER AS NATURAL DISASTERS ARE LIKELY TO INCREASE WITH TEMPERATURE RISE

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of experts. Magsaysay Award winner Chandi Prasad said that he had written a letter to the then Environment Minister in 2010 warning about the adverse effects of hydropower project on Rishi Ganga. His worst fears were realised in 2021. He claimed that if his warning had been heeded in 2010, the catastrophe would have been prevented. Rising temperatures are melting the glaciers rapidly and, according to a report by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), this melting doubled between 1980-2005. Even if the Government cuts greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in accordance with the Paris Climate Agreement, one-third of the glaciers of the Himalayan and Hindu Kush mountain ranges will melt by the end of the 21st century. Hence, urgent action needs to be taken sooner as natural disasters are likely to increase with temperature rise.

An increase in natural disasters in India is a result of climate change, but an increase in their impact is due to overexploitation of natural resources. The Centre and State Governments have been pursuing pro-corporate development by ignoring environmental norms.

Uttarakhand is inviting climatic tragedies and destroying its beauty by regularly flouting the Environmental Impact Assessment Laws to build a 900-km-long stretch of the Char Dham route. Shockingly,

these roads pass through an environmentally-sensitive zone. The construction of this 900 km stretch was done by dividing it into 53 small sections.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Department’s permission has to be sought to construct more than 100 km of a road that is passing through environmentally sensitive areas. This road’s width is being kept at 12 metres, for which land with a width of 24 metres would be required. Significantly, most European countries have kept the width of their roads in the mountains to eight metres.

In the aftermath of the February 7 catastrophe, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that the country stands by Uttarakhand. He also announced financial assistance to the families of the victims. But such promises and financial aid are of no use for Uttarakhandis as continuous negligence of environmental regulations by successive governments has led to repeated natural disasters. A few lakhs in assistance from the Centre and State won’t help people rebuild their houses or bring back their loved ones. To prevent such emotional and financial losses to the people, the Government should mend its pro-corporate economic development methods.

The massive loss of life and property resulting from natural disasters should serve as a warning signal to the Central Government and make it realise that it must strictly

abide by environmental norms. However, the Government seems to be in no mood to hear the alarm bells as the Central Government is planning to relax environmental standards for Mopa Airport in Goa, sand mining in Uttar Pradesh, Sterlite Copper in Tamil Nadu and construction activities in and around Delhi, which have been blocked by the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal. Meanwhile, the NITI Aayog — the Government’s apex think tank — has commissioned a study that seeks to examine the “unintended economic consequences” of judicial decisions that have hindered and stalled big projects on environmental pretexts.

If mountainous areas of the country, including Uttarakhand and their people, are to be saved, then it is incumbent upon the Central Government not to carry out development work in these areas without seeking the opinions of geologists and the locals.

The Government should immediately ban unsustainable development projects in the hilly regions, be it the Char Dham route or hydropower projects. If this does not happen, the people of these areas will be forced to endure frequent natural disasters in the future. The people living in the hilly regions and the country at large demand that the Central Government adopt a pro-people and pro-nature development model instead of a pro-corporate economic development one.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

NICE OF THE ENGLAND BOYS TO GET THIS TEST MATCH FINISHED JUST BEFORE ENGLAND WOMEN PLAY TONIGHT. —ENGLAND CRICKETER ALEX HARTLEY



VERY DISAPPOINTING ATTITUDE CONSIDERING ALL THE BOYS DO TO SUPPORT THE WOMEN'S GAME. —ENGLAND CRICKETER RORY BURNS



# A bleak future without sustainable water resources

## India has an extremely low rainwater harvesting percentage, varying from three-six per cent of the annual rainfall. Hence, watershed management is imperative

The farmers’ protest reflects their approach towards securing their future, and soon there would be a solution to that. But there still looms a larger crisis for India and its people, including the farmers. One of the most fertile lands on Earth today stands as the most water challenged nations in the world. India has the highest number of people in the world without access to safe water. Over 80 million people — a majority from impoverished communities — living on less than \$4 a day, are forced to collect dirty water from open ponds and rivers or spend most of what they earn buying water from tankers.

A report by the NITI Aayog in 2018 revealed that 75 per cent of households do not have drinking water on the premises; 84 per cent of rural households do not have piped



SASHIDHAR VEMPALA

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water access; 70 per cent of the water is contaminated and wastewater treatment remains stuck at the national average of over 33 per cent, leading to the high burden of waterborne diseases.

More than 600 million people in India face high to extreme water stress and 21 cities, including New Delhi, Bengaluru and Chennai, will run out of groundwater soon, affecting 100 million people. Critical groundwater resources, which account for 40 per cent of our water supply, are being exploited at unsustainable rates. India is already plagued with groundwater contaminated with iron, nitrate, chlorine, along with the predominant arsenic and fluoride, both posing human health risks.

A study published by Duke University in 2018 found uranium contamination in aquifer-



drawn groundwater in 16 Indian States. Water Index scores vary widely, but most States have achieved a score below 50 per cent and could significantly improve their water resource management practices.

Because of this, food security is at a risk as the low performers on the Water Index are home to over 50 per cent of the country’s population and its agricultural baskets. The low performers, worryingly, comprise the populous northern States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana and others, and are home to over 600 million people. Given the combination of rapidly declining groundwater levels and limited policy action this is also likely to be a significant food security risk for the country going forward.

Critical groundwater resources, which account for 40

per cent of our water supply, are being depleted at unsustainable rates. Droughts are becoming more frequent, creating severe problems for India’s rain-dependent farmers (over 53 per cent of agriculture is rainfed). When water is available, it is likely to be contaminated, resulting in nearly 2,00,000 deaths each year. Interstate disagreements are on the rise, with seven major disputes currently raging, pointing to the fact that limited frameworks and institutions are in place for national water governance.

By 2030, the country’s water demand is projected to be twice than the available supply, implying severe water scarcity for hundreds of millions of people and an eventual over six per cent loss in the country’s GDP. As per the report of the National Commission for Integrated Water Resource Development of MoWR, water requirement by 2050 in a high use scenario is likely to be a milder 1,180 BCM, whereas the present-day availability is 695 BCM.

The total availability of water possible in country is still lower than this projected demand, at 1,137 BCM. Thus, there is an imminent need to deepen our understanding of water resources and usage and put in place interventions that make water use efficient and sustainable. Israel is the world leader in water governance.

And India has partnered with them to share methods and technology. There is a need for more such partnerships, knowledge transfer but more than that, it is awareness that is needed by common users about the impending water crisis.

With nearly 70 per cent of the water being contaminated, India ranks 120 out of 122 countries on the water quality index. Policymakers face a difficult situation because there is not enough data available on how households and industries use and manage water.

There is an urgent need to deepen understanding of our water resources and usage and put in place interventions that make water use efficient and sustainable. Consumers and industries need to look at the 4Rs with renewed rigour. “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recharge.” India has an

extremely low rainwater harvesting percentage, varying from three-six per cent of annual rainfall. Large-scale watershed management is imperative for holistic management of ecosystems. Coupled with stronger implementation policies and regulations, an ecosystem management approach will bring in adoption of newer conservation technologies.

The agriculture sector will evolve further to improve irrigation and water use efficiency. All this is not possible without investment in education and awareness. Community governance and partnerships, water pricing a strong wastewater recycling ecosystem and increasing rainwater, stormwater harvesting will make people realise the importance of every drop of water and promote sustainable use.



# PM asks banks to come out with innovative products for startups

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday stressed on increasing credit to businesses to meet the needs of a fast reflation economy and said financial products will have to be tailor-made for fintech and startups.

He said that although the government's endeavour is to promote the private sector, the public sector still needs to have their presence in banking and insurance to support the poor.

Speaking at a webinar on Budget announcements on Financial Services, Modi said to help medium and small businesses during the COVID pandemic, 90 lakh Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) were given credit worth Rs 2.4 trillion.

"Supporting MSME and startups and expanding credit flow to them is necessary. The government has undertaken reforms and opened up sectors like farm, coal and space. Now it's the responsibility of the financial sector to understand the aspirations



of rural and smaller cities and make them the strength of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

"As our economy is growing, and growing fast, credit flow has also become equally important. You have to see how credit reaches new sectors, new entrepreneurs. Now you will have to focus on creation of new and better financial products for Startups and Fintech," Modi said.

Stating that Kisan Credit has helped small farmers and those involved in animal husbandry to come out with the grasp of informal lending, Modi said the private sector now will have to think of innovative financial products for this section of the society.

He said the government has a clear vision for the financial services sector and is taking steps to make it vibrant, proac-

tive and strong.

"The pace at which we have to take the country forward in the 21st century, proactive participation of the private sector is important. The government's vision is clear about the financial sector, no place for ifs and buts. The government's highest priority is that every depositor and investor experience trust and transparency," he said.

The trust is based on safety and security of deposit and economic growth. There is a need to change the old policies relating to the banking and non-banking sector.

"The financial sector was hurt 10-12 years back due to aggressive lending. Steps have been taken to take the country out of non-transparent credit culture. Today instead of brushing NPAs under the carpet, we have made it mandatory to report even NPA of 1 day," he said.

He said the government is aware of the ups and downs faced by businesses and does not foster a thinking that all business decisions are taken in

bad intent.

"The government's responsibility is to stand with all such business decisions taken with good intent and I want to say this to all those in the financial sector that I will stand by you for all decisions taken with honest intent," Modi added.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the government has proposed privatisation of two public sector banks, allowed 74 per cent foreign direct investment in the insurance sector and announced the initial public offering of Life Insurance Corp of India.

Elaborating on the Budget proposal of setting up of an Asset Reconstruction Company (ARC), Modi said the ARC will address the bad loans in a "focussed manner" and this will help strengthen PSBs and increase their lending capability.

He said 130 crore people have Aadhaar cards and 41 crore have JanDhan Account holders, of which 55 per cent are women.

## PROTEIN DAY 2021

# Teach For India collaborates with Right to Protein

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's largest non-profit education network - Teach For India, which is also a part of the global Teach For All Network is collaborating with the Right To Protein initiative to commemorate the macronutrient protein on India's second annual Protein Day. In association with nutritionist Pooja Makhija, Right To Protein and Teach For India will educate children and their parents about the importance of consuming adequate protein in their daily diets for overall better health and nutrition.

The educational session will be conducted over an online webinar, where children from around the country, especially those that are a part of the Teach For India network in Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Bangalore will participate along with their parents in the online session. Led by Makhija, topics such as protein consumption for the development of the human body, common errors with



protein consumption, identification of easily affordable and accessible plant and animal protein sources, and methods of including all types of protein in daily diets, will be the focus on Protein Day 2021.

Abhik Bhattacharjee, National Director of Marketing & Communications at Teach For India said, "Teach For India has always believed that an excellent education is a balance

of academics, holistic development, strengthening values and mindsets and overall well-being of children. Through this collaboration with Right To Protein, we were presented with the opportunity to educate our students about the importance of nutrition in their development. Children and parents understanding the role of nutrition is a great step towards raising leaders with healthy bodies."

## Rupee tanks 104 paise to close at 73.47 against USD

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee dived 104 paise to settle at 73.47 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, following a heavy selloff in domestic equities and strong American currency in the overseas market. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 72.43 against the greenback, then lost further ground to touch an intra-day low of 73.51. It finally ended at 73.47 against the American currency, registering a massive fall of 104 paise over its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee had settled at 72.43 against the American currency. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, advanced 0.43 per cent to 90.52. "US bond yields have surged on worries about inflationary pressures due to unprecedented liquidity infusion in the system and a series of economic data, which is indicating that the economy is on the path to normalcy. This has in-turn led to a rebound in the dollar index and prompted a selloff in risk assets.



# US jobless claims at 730K, high but fewest in 3 months

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell sharply last week in a sign that layoffs may have eased, though applications for aid remain at a historically high level. Jobless claims declined by 111,000 from the previous week to a seasonally adjusted 730,000, the Labor Department said Thursday.

It is the lowest figure since late November and the sharpest one-week decline since August. Still, before the virus erupted in the United States last March, weekly applications for unemployment benefits had never topped 700,000.

The latest figures coincide with a weakened job market

that has made scant progress in the past three months. Hiring averaged just 29,000 a month from November through January. Though the unemployment rate was 6.3 per cent in January, a broader measure that includes people who have given up on their job search is closer to 10 per cent.

All told, 19 million people were receiving unemployment aid as of February 6, up from 18.3 million the previous week. About three-quarters of those recipients are receiving checks from federal benefit programs, including programs that provide jobless aid beyond the 26 weeks given by most states.

Last week's drop in applications was concentrated in two states, California and Ohio, where they fell by a combined

96,000. Ohio officials had said earlier this month that a surge in new applications was driven in part by a jump in potentially fraudulent claims. That now appears to have faded.

California's system operates on a biweekly bases, which can make its weekly data choppy.

This month's devastating winter storms and power outages in Texas and some neighbouring states might have also disrupted the filing or processing of some claims. Applications for jobless aid fell by one-sixth in Texas to about 35,000.

Yet last week's decline in applications was broad-based, with 36 states and the District of Columbia reporting fewer people seeking unemployment benefits.

# 'Question on GSP in India is very high on my radar'

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration has indicated that the issue of restoring the GSP status to India is on top of its radar, as several lawmakers have raised the issue of retaliatory tariffs imposed by New Delhi on American agricultural products after the previous Trump regime terminated it.

In 2019, former president Donald Trump terminated India's designation as a beneficiary developing nation under the Generalised System of Preference (GSP) trade programme after determining that New Delhi has not assured the US that it will provide "equitable and reasonable access" to its markets.

The GSP is the largest and oldest US trade preference programme and is designed to promote economic development by allowing duty-free entry for thousands of products from designated beneficiary countries. The issue was raised by several members of the Senate Finance Committee on Thursday during the confirmation hearing of Katherine C Tai or the position of United States Trade Representative.

"On your question on GSP in



India, let me just say that if confirmed, this is very high on my radar," Tai said, responding to a question from Senator Maria Cantwell who raised the issue of high retaliatory tariffs imposed by India on several American products after US terminated GSP privileges of India.

"What can we do to open up the Indian market to US apples and reduce the horrific tariffs that are on those apples, particularly with the Trump administration terminating the GSP programme? When would the Biden administration restore India's GSP status and help us with apple exports?" Senator Cantwell asked.

India was the largest beneficiary of the GSP programme in 2017 when it exported USD 5.7 billion worth of goods to the US under this scheme.

# Institutional investments in Indian real estate to increase by 14.6%

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

In their latest outlook report for 2021, Colliers estimates that institutional investments in Indian real estate will grow by 14.6% to INR 396 billion (USD 5.5 billion) from INR 346 billion (USD 4.8 billion) in 2020. For comparison, 2020 had witnessed a drop of 23% from 2019. Colliers believes that institutional investors continue to be bullish on Indian real estate asset classes such as offices, data centers and warehouses and they are looking to deploy their

"The investment climate in India is very buoyant with global investors' interest in real assets getting stronger"

existing dry powder.

"The investment climate in India is very buoyant with global investors' interest in real assets getting stronger. With global interest rates at historic

lows and positive net yields in India, the country has emerged among the preferred destinations for investments in real estate. Further, the resilience of the Indian market is also evident from continued good housing sales performance across various markets, the large institutional investments in commercial office and industrial parks, and the listing of two REITs in the past six months," says Piyush Gupta, Managing Director, Capital Markets & Investment Services (India) at Colliers.

# German firms find success at CIIE

PNS ■ SHANGHAI

China retained its position as the largest trade partner of Germany for the fifth consecutive year in 2020, according to a report recently released by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany. Statistics show that despite COVID-19, the bilateral trade volume between China and Germany rose by 3 percent year-on-year to about 212.1 billion euros (\$258 billion). China was the second largest export destination of German goods in 2020, with the value of exports from Germany to China hitting around 95.9 billion euros last year. China was also Germany's largest destination



for exports of electric and electrical products, according to a news release by the German Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association (ZVEI) on Feb 22. Industry experts have said that these achievements are partly due to the China International Import Expo.

Clas Neumann, Chairman of the Board of the German Chamber of Commerce in China, said that the CIIE is a good opportunity for German

enterprises to showcase their cutting-edge products in technology, innovation and life style. By participating in the CIIE, German enterprises can expand their brand influence and promote "Made in Germany", Neumann added. Germany, which has a number of large enterprises specialized in equipment manufacturing, automobiles and health care, has been an important participant of the annual expo. It was also the guest-of-honor country for the first CIIE. About 170 German firms attended the third edition of the expo last year, with their combined exhibition area surpassing 18,000 square meters, highest among European countries.

# Home affordability to improve further in 2021: JLL

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Despite the nationwide pandemic and the economic uncertainty and rising stock market volatility that came with it, there has been a sequential growth of 51% in the residential sales during the last quarter of 2020, according to the recent report 'India Real Estate Outlook - A new growth cycle' by JLL. While there is still a long way to go, the worst is behind for the residential sector.

The evolving COVID-19 pandemic has influenced short-term decision making with job security cited as the biggest concern when contemplating the purchase of a

home. "In the second quarter of FY 2020-21 when the GDP showed higher than expected recovery, the housing market showed some initial signs of recovery, with sales increasing by 34% on a sequential basis. In Q4 2020, uncertainties around the economy and jobs started reducing, which led to an increase in the pace of recovery in residential real estate. New launches and sales across the seven key markets under review witnessed a significant jump," Dr. Samantak Das, Chief Economist and Head Research & REIS, JLL.

## Expectations from 2021

The challenges faced by residential real estate in 2020



have become the catalyst in providing stimuli to the industry for sustained growth. With people spending an inordinate amount of time at home, the

lockdown re-established the importance of owning a house. Simultaneously, government initiatives to support the recovery by holding policy rates at

historically low levels to initiate a cycle of consumption led growth. This has resulted in extremely low mortgage rates. And, prices have also been stagnant for the past few years. This affordable synergy makes it a great time to purchase a home. Furthermore, the market is also witnessing renewed interest from Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) impacted by economic uncertainties in Europe and the Middle East.

## Changing homebuyer preferences and product metrics

A healthy lifestyle has become a key criterion for homebuyers, resultantly, preferences have tilted towards larger homes in self-contained

complexes with facilities like gym, green open spaces, and access to daily necessities. Moreover, with work from home becoming a reality, product metrics are likely to change.

Increased importance of study rooms, good network and broadband speed as well as acoustics. Also, remote working practices are expected to increase the attractiveness of suburban markets. Suburban markets offer lower density environments and more spacious apartments at affordable rates. Since, travel to office may no longer be an everyday activity, the importance of connectivity to office hubs will no longer dictate home purchases.

# Ansysis, TÜV SÜD sign MOU to augment learning experience



South Asia, a leading certification, testing, auditing, inspection and training company and the wholly owned subsidiary of TÜV SÜD Group, Germany, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Ansysis Software Pvt. Ltd. (Ansysis) in order to improve the overall learning experience of the participants of Automotive Functional Safety ISO 26262 training programme. The MOU was signed at a virtual event by Mr. Rafiq Somani, Area Vice President - India and South Asia Pacific, Ansysis and Mr. Vishal Nerurkar, Vice President of Business Assurance, TÜV SÜD South Asia. With this MOU signing, TÜV SÜD in India is poised to offer its participants of Automotive Functional Safety ISO 26262 training, access to Ansysis medini analyze, a world class simulation software tool.







For someone who hails from God’s own country — Kerala, to fall in love with any other place is next to impossible, but Hyderabad did sweep her off her feet, says actress Nitya Naresh. The Malayali beauty talks to *The Pioneer’s* SHIKHA DUGGAL about what she loves, cherishes and dislikes about the city.



## FROM A VACAY-SPOT TO A PERMANENT HAVEN

Coming from a state known for its palm-lined backwaters, Tollywood actress Nitya Naresh can’t stop gushing about this Nizami city she now calls home. “For me now, Hyderabad is my home. I believe in the saying about home not being a place but people who make you feel belonged, and it fits so well in my life too. Wherever my beautiful family is, that’s my home. Moreover, some of my best friends in my life today, who are so precious to me, have been living in this very city for more than a decade and have always been there with me through thick and thin,” the *Operation Gold Fish* actress tells us.

Nitya, who has made a name for herself in Hyderabad says that she has always lived by the ocean, and not getting to see blue waters as often is a drastic change for her. “Earlier, I had apprehensions about the air being dry and missing water bodies, but eventually, I fell in love with the city because of

its denizens and the experiences that I encountered. One of my favourite things that I always will have to say about Hyderabad is how one, despite the hustle and the bustle, can still find solitude here. Mumbai is so fast-paced and Kochi is so laid back but in this city, you have your own luxuries and choices to make,” she adds.

With a lot of commitment and hard work, Nitya stepped into the Tollywood industry adorning the craft as if she was born to be in it. She never knew a vacay spot will one day turn out to be a permanent haven for her! The *Soda Goli Soda* girl says, “I learnt driving here, what has always stayed with me are the moments of going for a ride with my friends on my vehicle. I felt so independent! Geographically too, this city always makes you feel at ease. If you’re driving from Paradise to Banjara Hills, nobody can ever get lost on their way. Hyderabad made me feel safe, I always knew my routes.”

Destiny played a very important

role in this artiste’s life! A pre-determined and unchanging event took shape in Nitya’s life while looking for a job in the city of dreams, also known as the Bollywood hub, Mumbai — she gets a call from the Telugu film industry! It made her feel something is calling her back to the city and she must go! “I wasn’t in the mindset of becoming an actress at first, the auditions were an experiment for me to tell my children someday: “hey, your mother also did a movie in her life!” I chose to pay heed to the calling and who would’ve known I’d come this far? Of course, my parents did believe in me. Today, I am not just an actor from Tollywood but also an artist, content creator and influencer, who is self-made. Currently, I am making my career in art-therapy too! So, Hyderabad gave me the chance to do more than just a single hat. I am exploring so many things here. I haven’t grown up idolising Telugu actors but the industry is getting better at what it does with talent, post-production,

cinematography, and concepts. This city’s cinema is evolving with better ideas, passionate actors, and focussed storytellers,” narrated the 31-year-old actress.

Describing her immense love for the cuisine here in the city, whenever somebody mentions Hyderabad food, it brightens up her face with glee! Mentioning the kind of food platter that the city has to offer, she also tells us that it took her years to get used to the kind of spice Hyderabadis eat every day. The variety that it offers including the royal cuisine, Telangana *bhojanam* and Andhra delicacies — all this fills her heart and tummy! Add to that, the different cuisines from across the globe that the city has managed to master! Whenever she goes out for a fine-dining, it’s always a burst of relishing flavours on her taste buds, shares the actress of *Nandini Nursing Home* fame.

Having talked about all the good things Hyderabad has, the one thing that she dislikes is the traffic. Although, when she visited

Mumbai recently, she says it made her feel that the traffic here in Hyderabad is much better and she’s never going to complain again.

“My great grandfather was the advisor to the Nizams in his days and then my grandfather joined the police force here. My dad was very clear that when he had to return to his roots, he’s going to choose Telangana and invest here. So whenever I was here in the city for a vacation, we would go to the Nehru Zoological Park, Ramoji Film City and Snow World. Though the city has transformed tremendously, there are so many things that still take one down the nostalgia trip and that’s just beautiful. My grandmother always narrates to me about how Banjara Hills was a deserted place once and today, when I drive through the lanes of Banjara Hills, it’s fully commercialised. Nevertheless, Hyderabad is a place where I feel encouraged and accepted by all means,” she concludes on a heart-warming note.

## Badass Devika wins hearts in *Dev DD 2*

**D**ev DD Season 1 set the stage but season 2 of its drama shattered the glass ceiling. It brought with it a never-before-seen version of Devika Dharam Dwivedi! Season 2 finds a chink in the armour of Devika Dharam Dwivedi opening up her vulnerable side, making her very relatable to audiences everywhere — a very beautiful, vulnerable, feminine version of Devika that captures hearts. There are switches between her reality and inner self filled with monologues from the protagonist describing her innermost thoughts but externally her agony doesn’t let her act on it.

This is part of the charm of *Dev DD 2*! Season 1 shows us how totally badass Devika Dharam Dwivedi is and how she makes a life for herself on her terms, setting herself up for epic love and heartbreak. Season 2 shows us Devika Dharam Dwivedi at a complete loss.

She is a jilted lover and forgotten friend, her hopelessness takes her home back into the arms of her parents. At home, she starts to build herself up once again against all odds and society’s cruel taunts. There are, of course, new twists and turns in the story, blasts from the past and new friendships, all adding to the attraction of the story. The best friend Chandni and her lover battling all odds to be together, Anurag and Aditi fighting a scam together and Devika’s humorous way of fending off society aunts and evil relatives all make for a very delightful watch.

Actress Asheema Vardaan who plays the role of Devika, spills some more beans about the role, she says, “The show focuses more on the major issues of LGBTQIA+ and female feticide. The concept revolves around queer marriage which equally needs relevant awareness in our surroundings as queer people don’t enjoy marriage rights as much as their straight counterparts do. It’s saddening to see that our law doesn’t see straight and queer couples as the same, which in turn leads to social stigma and ostracisation. One shouldn’t miss watching this show because it is a take on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s *Devdas* story but with a female perspective! As you progress through the show, you get to know how Devika comes across as a rebel yet is a simple girl at heart who only wants someone to love. My role in the new show challenges stereotypes and touches topics like feminism, sexism and homophobia - ones that are usually brushed under the carpet.”

The series is extremely empowering, not just for women but it champions people of every gender, race, religion and sexual orientation. The flawless acting, the clever lines, the screenplay, the dialogues, the story, the comic moments are just a few of the many reasons to watch the show.

The series is filled with magical moments that give you goosebumps and also ones that tickle you till you fall off your chair laughing, making the series both lovely and heartbreaking at the same time.



On World Protein Day today, nutrition expert Dr Jagmeet Madan shares that issues around this important nutrient need to be constantly discussed and propagated

**W**hile a number of socio-economic issues hound us today, our right to basic nutrition and health is one that should be demanded across the globe, especially in India. It is, therefore, not surprising that the second goal in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals is ‘Zero

Hunger’, which aims to reduce malnutrition in infants and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older people.

While India continues towards its commitment to becoming a malnutrition-free country, a number of hurdles, further exacerbated by the pandemic, continue to hinder and slowdown the progress. It is estimated that the pandemic will lead to a rise in hunger, with approximately 270 million people facing food insecurity as opposed to the 149 million during pre-COVID times. These findings are not only grave but a serious cause for alarm — India ranks 94 out of 107 countries on the Global Hunger Index 2020.

It is, therefore, important — nay critical — to tackle the pressing issue of malnutrition and protein deficiency in specific head-on by not only creating awareness of protein-rich food sources but also dispelling misconceptions around accessibility, affordability, cultural nuances, and inherent hyperlocal habits. And this Protein Day, celebrated on



## You are what you eat!

February 27, with its theme of Powering With Plant Protein, let’s delve into everything protein.

**Why plant protein?**

We are perhaps the country with the single largest

vegetarian population in the world with also a sizable population of flexitarians i.e. those who prefer a vegetarian diet while still enjoying meat (animal protein) in moderation. One of the key myths affecting the protein

deficiency debate in India is the perception that not only are protein-rich foods expensive but that there is limited variety for those who don’t eat meat — over 76 per cent recently surveyed shared this sentiment.

Moreover, when presented with a number of protein-rich sources, a large segment of Indian mothers could only identify three out of 11 protein-rich foods correctly; thereby eliminating several key protein-rich sources completely.

This lack of knowledge coupled with the misconceptions that plant-protein is nutritionally inferior is myth to dispel as we continue in our quest to educate Indians about the role of proteins, especially plant-based protein rich diets that will help bridge the protein based nutrition and affordability gap.

**Is it for everyone?**

The quantity, quality and timing of protein consumed throughout the day across one’s life span together play a role in determining the health benefits of dietary protein. While one needs different levels of protein across different phases of life, the underlying key fact remains — protein is a key micronutrient that is essential for one’s growth and development throughout life.

It begins with pregnant

women and lactating mothers. A woman’s diet during and immediately after pregnancy is pivotal for both, mother, and child, with proteins playing a key role in overall health and the baby’s development. The immunoglobulin of the breast milk derived from the colostrums adds to the benefits accrued from exclusive breast feeding of a baby for a minimum of six months which needs to be emphasised to all lactating mothers. The good quality protein based weaning foods with plant protein diversity should be an integral part of an infant’s weaning foods.

For growing children, the need for protein intake is even more augmented as it not only helps in muscle and bone growth but also adds significantly to strengthening their immunity. Be it the usual routine at school, extra-curricular activities and cognitive development, protein plays an important role.

For healthy adults, who go about their day-to-day life, it is much required to continue to build immunity, maintain a healthy gut and repair of muscle wear and tear. In

fact, it is believed that we may begin to naturally lose as much as eight per cent of overall muscle mass every decade after we turn 40, making it more important than ever to consume more protein as we age.

And while one may believe that protein’s role with age might diminish, it is quite the contrary: With reports suggesting that one in three adults over the age of 50 experiences advanced muscle and strength loss, and thus, adequate protein intake is recommended for aging adults to support muscle and strength requirements.

Even as we recognise and act this Protein Day, it is important to make note that this cannot be a one-time or one-day discourse. Protein-related issues are very much an ongoing concern that need constant discussion, dialogue and education to continue on India’s journey in becoming a healthy nation with sustainable well-being at its core.

(The writer is the National President of Indian Dietetic Association and supporter of the Right To Protein initiative.)



# It's all about confidence, Axar on Test outings

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

It was a long wait for Axar Patel and it didn't help that everyone around him had just one question for the past three years — “Why aren't you in the Indian team?”

But Patel was unfazed as he knew, his time would come.

“I think it's all about confidence,” said the 27-year-old from Anand in Gujarat who wanted to be a mechanical engineer growing up but was prodded into trying his hand at cricket by a school friend.

With his record 11 wickets in the Day-Night third Test against England, the left-arm spinner finally found his big moment in International cricket, seven years after he made his India debut in an ODI against Bangladesh.

Since that day, he has been in and out of the team with the spin all-rounder's spot firmly with Ravindra Jadeja.

In this series too, he made it because Jadeja was out injured. He hadn't been in the national team since 2018 and made his Test debut in the second game against England last week in Chennai.

“I have been out of the team for three years and at that time, I used to think about the areas of my game which need to be worked upon. So, I was working on my bowling and batting,” he told Hardik Pandya in a *bcci.Tv* interview, thoroughly enjoying his good time.

“When you are out of the



continue in the same manner in front of his home crowd in the fourth and final Test against England, starting here on March 4.

“(The Day-Night Test) was my second Test and first in Motera. It's a special feeling to play and perform before the home crowd. My efforts would be to do the same,” Patel said.

Towards the end of the light-hearted interview, India skipper Virat Kohli also made an appearance and appreciated Patel's performance in Gujarat.

“*Ae Bapu taari bowling kamaal chhe!* (Bapu, your bowling is wonderful!),” Kohli said.

## EXPECTED WICKET TO HOLD UP LITTLE LONGER

England head coach Chris Silverwood on Friday played down talks of lodging any formal complaint to the ICC regarding the Motera pitch but said he had expected the surface to hold up a little longer after his team lost the third Test against India inside two days.

“First and foremost, just to follow up from what Joe (Root) said yesterday, he got five for 8, but at the same time whatever the pitch did or didn't do, India ultimately played better than us on that surface, probably pushed us to the extremes of which our players haven't experienced before,” he said during a virtual press conference.

“We did expect the wicket to hold up a little longer than it did,” he added.

team, many people, friends keep asking you ‘why aren't you in the team despite doing well?’ These things keep coming in the mind,” said the bowler who has 152 wickets in 41 first-class game at an impressive average of 25.25.

“So, I told myself ‘just wait for the right time and whenever

I get an opportunity I will give my 100 per cent.”

Asked by Pandya if he finds Test cricket easy, Axar replied: “Everybody asked me that question. When it goes your way then you think it's easy but when you miss a full toss, you actually realise how easy it is,”

Patel said he would aim to

# Eng guilty of thinking too far ahead: Bell

PTI ■ LONDON

Former batsman Ian Bell has slammed England's much-debated rotation policy, saying they were guilty of thinking too far ahead and have gone wrong with the constant chopping and changing in a “big” Test series like India.

England fell to an embarrassing 10-wicket defeat in the third Test to go down 1-2 in the four-match series against India, while also getting knocked out of contention from the ICC World Test Championship



(WTC) final in June.

“I think England have been guilty of thinking too far ahead

of having a squad for the Ashes when actually this is bigger than the Ashes, this is probably as big as the Ashes,” Bell told *ESPNcricinfo*.

“Why are we rotating in the biggest Test series you are playing in? For me that's where England have gone a bit wrong,” he added.

The 38-year-old, who featured in 118 Tests for England, feels for the English players for whom the tours to India and Australia can make or break careers.

“These tours, certainly for

Englishmen coming to India or going to Australia are the pinnacle. They make your careers, you look back and if you win in those conditions they are remembered for a long long time,” Bell said.

“For me, India are going to come to England in the summer. If they are 2-0 or 1-0 up will they rotate? I know for a fact that when India come in the summer they won't be rotating their best bowlers or their best players or leave somebody out. They want to win.”

# Padikkal scores another ton in Karnataka's win



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Young opener Devdutt Padikkal continued his sensational form, smashing a second successive century to lead defending champions Karnataka to a nine-wicket win over Kerala in the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Friday.

Chasing Kerala's 278, Karnataka cantered home with 27 balls to spare with the Royal Challengers Bangalore opener hitting 13 fours and two sixes in an unbeaten knock of 126 from 138 balls.

He got a fine support from Krishnamurthy Siddharth (84-ball 86 not out; 5x4, 3x6) as they toyed with the Kerala

## Delhi to host Vijay Hazare knockout

**Mumbai:** The knockout matches of the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy will be held in Delhi from March 7.

The matches will be organised at the Arun Jaitley Stadium and the Palam Ground. “...Kindly note that the

knock-out stage of the Vijay Hazare Trophy 2020-21 will be played at New Delhi from March 7,” stated a mail sent from the BCCI secretary's office to all the affiliated state units on February 25.

As per the BCCI website, the pre-quarter final

(Eliminator) will be played on March 7, while the quarter-finals will be played on March 8 and March 9.

The two semi-finals will be staged on March 11 while the summit clash will be played on March 14.

## JHARKHAND LOSE

In Group B matches in Indore, Tamil Nadu ended Jharkhand's three-match winning streak with a convincing 67-run win.

At Holkar Stadium, Prabhsimran Singh hammered 167 (140 balls, 13 fours, 9 sixes) to power Punjab to a four-wicket win over Vidarbha. While Madhya Pradesh handed Andhra a 98-run defeat.

Jharkhand is on top of the standings with 12 points, followed by Punjab, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh with eight points. Vidarbha lies in last place with 4 points.

## BCCI considers 4-5 IPL venues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI is looking at four to five venues for conducting the next edition of the Indian Premier League with Mumbai as a single host not looking feasible anymore following a surge in Covid-19 cases in and around the city.

Earlier, there were discussions that Mumbai, with four stadiums — Wankhede, Brabourne, DY Patil and Reliance Stadium, will be a good option to create a single bio-secure bubble and hold the eight-week long tournament.

However, the Covid-19 situation in Maharashtra has worsened with a spike in cases.

“There is still a month left for the IPL to start but obviously some decisions need to be



taken. It will be risky to have a single city IPL in Mumbai if there is steady rise in cases that's happening right now,” a senior BCCI official said.

“So cities like Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kolkata will be ready to host matches. Ahmedabad, in all likelihood, will host the play-off and final match of the IPL,” he said.

The IPL is scheduled to start in the second week of April.



# I became a cricketer accidentally: Ashwin

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

**I am actually a cricket lover who went on to become a cricketer. I am living my dream here, I never imagined that I will wear the Indian jersey one day and I will play**

Called a modern day legend by his captain Virat Kohli, ace Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin says he is actually an accidental cricketer, who is living a dream with over 400 Test wickets under his belt.

Ashwin reached the milestone in the Day-Night third Test against England, which ended here on Thursday with India winning by 10 wickets inside two days. Ashwin picked up seven in the match to take his overall tally to 401.

“I accidentally became a cricketer. I am actually a cricket lover who went on to become a cricketer. I am living my dream here, I never imagined that I will wear the Indian jersey one day and I will play,” Ashwin told *bcci.Tv* in an interview but did not elaborate on the remark.

According to Ashwin, being in the Covid-19 lockdown made him realise just how lucky he was to play for India.

“And every time I finish playing a game and if I give that winning result for the team, I just feel I am being given a blessing, but the Covid times made me feel how lucky I am to actually play for India.

“Even when I came back after the IPL, I never thought I will play in Australia, so that is what I said, everything has been a gift, for the love with which I play the game, the game is giving me back enough and more laurels,” he added.

Ashwin, who also became the second fastest bowler to reach the 400 Test wicket-mark after Sri Lankan spin legend Muttiah Muralitharan, said that he watched a lot of old videos of great individ-

ual performances in the lock-down helped improve his understanding of the game.

“I used to watch a lot of footage even before, but the understanding of the game has gone one notch higher...During the lockdown, I was watching a lot of cricket from the past, especially Sachin's hundred in Chepauk, all sort of stuff on Youtube,” recalled the 34-year-old Chennai-born player.

Jofra Archer became Ashwin's 400th wicket during the second day of the third Test here, which India won by 10 wickets and he said it was only when the batsman had opted for DRS, he realised that he had reached the landmark.

“Initial feeling is quite empty to be honest, because we were under immense pressure...For me I was actually in the moment, only after he (Archer) had taken the DRS, I realised the 400th that happened,” he said.

“...After they flashed 400 Test wickets on the board, the entire stadium was up, everybody was clapping, I don't know, I cannot put a finger and say how I feel about it, the last three months have been a complete fairy-tale,” he added.

# Arsenal, Man Utd, Rangers in last 16

Leicester, Napoli, Germans exit Europa League after shock defeats in R32

AFF ■ BERLIN

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice including a late winner as Arsenal qualified for the last 16 of the Europa League on Thursday with a 3-2 victory over Benfica in Greece, while Manchester United and Rangers cruised through to the next round.

The Gabon striker put Arsenal ahead at the Karaiskakis stadium in Piraeus in their home leg of a tie relocated due to Covid-19 travel restrictions.

Diogo Goncalves levelled the contest with a magnificent free-kick and Rafa Silva gave Benfica a 2-1 lead on the night when he took advantage of an error from Dani Ceballos on the hour.

Kieran Tierney rifled in an equaliser and Aubameyang headed in the decisive goal from Bukayo Saka's cross on 87 minutes, earning the Gunners a 4-3 aggregate victory and saving them from an unusual away goals exit following a 1-1 draw in the first leg in Rome.

“Everyone is happy tonight. This is what gives me power every day, take errors from the past and transform to strength,” Aubameyang told *BT Sport*.

“The team showed a lot of character and we deserved the win. It was a hard game. What we showed tonight will be an example for the future.”

United cemented their place in Friday's draw with a 0-0 draw at home to Real Sociedad, having effectively clinched the tie last week with an emphatic 4-0 win on neutral ground in Italy.

Mikel Oyarzabal's awful penalty miss represented the best chance at Old Trafford for La Real, while Bruno Fernandes rattled the crossbar and Axel Tuanzebe's header was disallowed for a foul.

Leicester City, who are behind second-placed United in the Premier League only on



goal difference, were knocked out after sliding to a 2-0 loss at home to Czech champions Slavia Prague.

Lukas Provod fired Slavia in front just after half-time following a goalless draw in the first leg, and Senegalese teenager Abdallah Sima ensured the visitors extended their run in the competition.

## ‘OUTSTANDING’ RANGERS

Steven Gerrard's Rangers progressed following their 5-2 win over Belgian side Antwerp at Ibrox, with five different players on target for the Scottish league leaders.

After a dramatic 4-3 win in the first leg last week, goals from Alfredo Morelos, Nathan Patterson and Ryan Kent put Rangers in control before late penalties from Borna Barisic and Cedric Itten wrapped up the tie 9-5 on aggregate.

“I'm very satisfied, the performance was outstanding in a lot of areas,” said Gerrard.

AC Milan squeezed past Red Star Belgrade on away goals after a 1-1 draw in a clash of former European champions at the San Siro.

Franck Kessie's early penalty was enough to book Milan's place in the last 16 despite El Fardou Ben Nabouhane equalising as the tie finished 3-3 over the two legs.

Napoli's dismal run contin-

ued as they were knocked out 3-2 on aggregate by Granada despite winning 2-1 in the return fixture in Italy.

Ajax eliminated French Ligue 1 leaders Lille with a 2-1 victory in Amsterdam to complete a 4-2 overall win,

# Red Devils face AC Milan in last 16

AFF ■ NYON

Manchester United and AC Milan will face off in the last 16 of the Europa League after being paired together in Friday's draw in Nyon.

United, who beat Real Sociedad 4-0 in the previous round, will face the seven-time European champions in a two-legged encounter after they squeezed past Red Star Belgrade on away goals.

The tie will pit Zlatan Ibrahimovic against his former club in United, where he won the 2017 edition of the Europa League.

United will be considered favourites for the tie however as they sit second in the Premier League having lost just once in the English top flight since the start of November.

Milan meanwhile have

while Gerard Moreno netted both goals as Villarreal dumped out Salzburg 4-1 on aggregate.

Egyptian forward Ahmed Hassan's 88th-minute strike in Eindhoven sent Olympiakos through at the expense of PSV 5-4 on aggregate, while Roma and Young Boys brushed aside Braga and Bayer Leverkusen respectively.

Former winners Shakhtar Donetsk completed a 3-0 aggregate victory over Maccabi Tel-Aviv, while Norwegians Molde dumped out Hoffenheim 5-3 on aggregate following a 2-0 win in Germany.

Dinamo Zagreb and Dynamo Kiev complete the line-up for the last 16, with Tottenham Hotspur also in the mix after destroying Wolfsburg of Austria by an aggregate score of 8-1 on Wednesday.

# Red Devils face AC Milan in last 16

surrendered top spot in Serie A to neighbours Inter Milan after a run of three defeats in five league matches.

Ajax will fancy their chances against Switzerland's Young Boys after the four-time European champions eliminated Ligue 1 leaders Lille on Thursday.

Granada were rewarded for making the last 16 in their first ever European campaign with a tie against Norway's Molde, while Roma coach Paulo Fonseca will be reunited with his old team Shakhtar Donetsk.

United's fellow Premier League teams Tottenham Hotspur and Arsenal will face Dinamo Zagreb and Olympiakos respectively. Rangers take on Slavia Prague after dumping out Royal Antwerp 9-5 on aggregate.

## SINGLES

### WOMEN'S CRICKET SEASON FROM MARCH 11

**NEW DELHI:** The women's domestic cricket season will begin with a 50-over tourney from March 11, the BCCI has informed its affiliated units. The tourney will be held across six venues — Surat, Rajkot, Jaipur, Indore, Chennai and Bengaluru. The teams will have to assemble by March 4 and will need to have three Covid-19 negative before entering the respective bio-bubbles. Each of the five elite groups will have six teams each, while the plate group has seven. The quarter-finals will be held on March 29, and semi-finals on April 1. The final will be played on April 4.

### CAS REDUCE UMAR AKMAL BAN TO 12 MONTHS

**KARACHI:** Pakistan batsman Umar Akmal will be able to resume his cricket career after the Court of Arbitration for Sports (CAS) reduced his suspension to 12 months and imposed a fine of 42.50 lakh Pakistani Rupees on him for breaching the Anti-Corruption Code. The CAS announced its decision in a consolidated order on the appeals filed by Umar and the PCB. Umar was initially suspended from all cricket activities on February 20 last year for not reporting approaches made to him for spot-fixing in the PSL. On Friday, the PCB said that Umar will now be eligible to reintegrate into competitive cricket subject to deposits of fine, which adds up to ₹19.62 lakh in Indian currency, and undergoing the program of rehabilitation under the PCB Anti-Corruption Code.

### YUSUF DATHAN ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

**NEW DELHI:** Out-of-favour India all-rounder Yusuf Pathan, who made a name for himself as a power-hitter, on Friday announced retirement from all forms of cricket, saying time has come “to put a full stop to this innings of my life.” The 38-year-old Pathan was part of the inaugural T20 World Cup-winning Indian team in 2007 and also the one that triumphed in the 2011 ODI World Cup at home.

### PIETERSEN TO CAPTAIN ENGLAND LEGENDS

**MUMBAI:** Former England batsman Kevin Pietersen will lead the England Legends while Khaled Mahmud will captain the Bangladesh Legends in the Unacademy Road Safety World Series, starting in Raipur from March 5. Former cricketers Matthew Hoggard, Owais Shah, Monty Panesar, Nick Crompton are some of the other key members in the England side. The Bangladesh Legends squad comprises players like Nafees Iqbal, Abdur Razaq and Mohammed Rafique.

### HENDERSON SIDELINED AFTER SURGERY

**LIVERPOOL:** Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson faces a long spell on the sidelines after undergoing an operation on the groin injury he sustained in last weekend's Merseyside derby loss against Everton. Liverpool has not put a timescale on the midfielder's recovery but said he will be out until at least April in another blow to its fading Premier League title defense.

### SWIATEK VS BENCIC IN ADELAIDE FINAL

**ADELAIDE:** Second seed Belinda Bencic battled for almost three hours before seeing off 16-year-old Coco Gauff in three sets on Friday to reach the final of the Adelaide International. Bencic set up a final showdown against French Open champion Iga Swiatek with her 7-6 (7/2), 6-7 (4/7), 6-2 win. Swiatek had a much easier passage to the final, beating Jill Teichmann 6-3, 6-2.

### DISCOVERY BECOMES HOME OF GIRO D'ITALIA

**NEW DELHI:** Discovery has secured the exclusive global rights to show the Giro d'Italia until at least 2025. The long-term deal means Discovery retains its status as the Giro's multi-platform rights holder, providing Live and uninterrupted coverage of every stage from the year's first Grand Tour. For the Indian audience, Giro d'Italia can be viewed on Eurosport as well as on discovery+ app from 8th — 30th May 2021. AGENCIES



## Deepak upstages world champ Zoirov

**New Delhi:** Asian Silver-winner Deepak Kumar (52kg) on Friday stunned Olympic and world champion Shakhobiddin Zoirov of Uzbekistan to storm into the finals of the 72nd Strandja Memorial Boxing Tournament in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Deepak clinched one of the most memorable wins of his career with a 4-1 win over more

fancied Zoirov, who had claimed the 2019 world championship title beating India's Amit Panghal. Zoirov is also a Silver-medallist from the Asian Games and the championships.

However, former youth world champion Jyoti Gulia (51kg) and Bhagyabati Kachari (75kg) bowed out of the women's competition.

PNS





# Never thought I WOULD DO TELUGU MOVIES: **FARIA**



try Telugu industry before going to Bollywood. I started watching Telugu cinema a couple of years ago. I've been to Mumbai multiple times and gave auditions. To begin with, language barrier was an issue for me to think of Bollywood but I'm past that. The Telugu industry has been very welcoming. Now, I'm open to exploring other south languages as well. In the last two years, I've realised that our cinema is changing rapidly in tune with the audience's taste. I want to be a part of the new wave," she points out, adding that she learnt 80 percent of Telugu on the sets of *Jathi Ratnalu*.

While she is tight-lipped about her part despite some reports stating that she plays a lawyer in the film, she adds that it is integral to the narrative. A light-hearted drama, *Jathi Ratnalu*, directed by Pittagoda fame Anudeep KV, follows three good-for-nothing guys (played by Naveen, Priyadarshi and Rahul) who are trapped in a serious crime. It's set in Jogipet, Telangana. "It's a clean comedy and every role has its own essence and plays out in the story beautifully. It's a sarcastic take on society and is also about love and friendship," Faria informs.

Effusive in her praise for Ashwin, who is debuting as a producer with the film, which will have a theatrical bow on March 11, she says, "Every time I felt nervous or a little unsure, he would say, 'Hey you know what? You should try this' and it worked like magic for me. He is a simple, quiet and happy-go-lucky kind of person. Somehow, all of us — Naveen, Priyadarshi and Rahul — are like each other. So we got along well easily."

She admits to having been a touch nervous on the first day of her shoot. "I wanted to make sure that I got my lines right and didn't want to be a burden on anyone. I was keen on leaving a good

It's exciting to see so many people coming up with their own versions of *Chitti nee navvante*. In fact, people around me started addressing me as Chitti and I love it

**F**aria Abdullah was an alumnus of Loyola College, Hyderabad when Mahanati director Nag Ashwin graced it as a chief guest for a fest in early 2019.

"I wanted to listen to him and maybe if I get a chance, even ask some questions. He overheard me speaking to my juniors about my stint with the theatre. Then he said, 'Oh! You are an actor?' That's how

my association with him began. Sometime later, he spoke to me about the female lead slot opening in *Jathi Ratnalu*. I auditioned for the role and after a look test with Naveen Polishetty, I was picked for the project," the newbie tells us. Born and bred in Hyderabad, Faria never thought she would start her film career with the Telugu industry. "To be honest, I never thought I would do Telugu movies. In fact, many people advised me to

In a conversation with *The Pioneer*, the debutante, who is a Hyderabad, speaks on how she landed *Jathi Ratnalu*, why she wanted to debut in Hindi and how Nag Ashwin eased her nerves whenever she was a tad nervous on sets

impression on the first day, so I've rehearsed my lines thoroughly to get the accent and pronunciation right. I was a little worried about the language but I gave my first shot in a single take," she chortles, adding that she even dubbed for her role. "Nag Ashwin told me, 'If you don't dub for yourselves, it would only be half of a performance'. So I dubbed for the part."

Faria is ecstatic with the response *Chitti nee navvante* from the film's soundtrack has garnered. It crossed 10 million views of YouTube, and is still counting. Smiling, she observes, "I didn't expect it to go this viral. It's exciting to see so many people coming up with their own versions of it. In fact, people around me started addressing me as Chitti and I love it. (Singer) Ram got the pulse of the song so well and he took it to the next level with his rendition."

— NG

## Dil Raju: *Shaadi Mubarak* offers non-stop entertainment

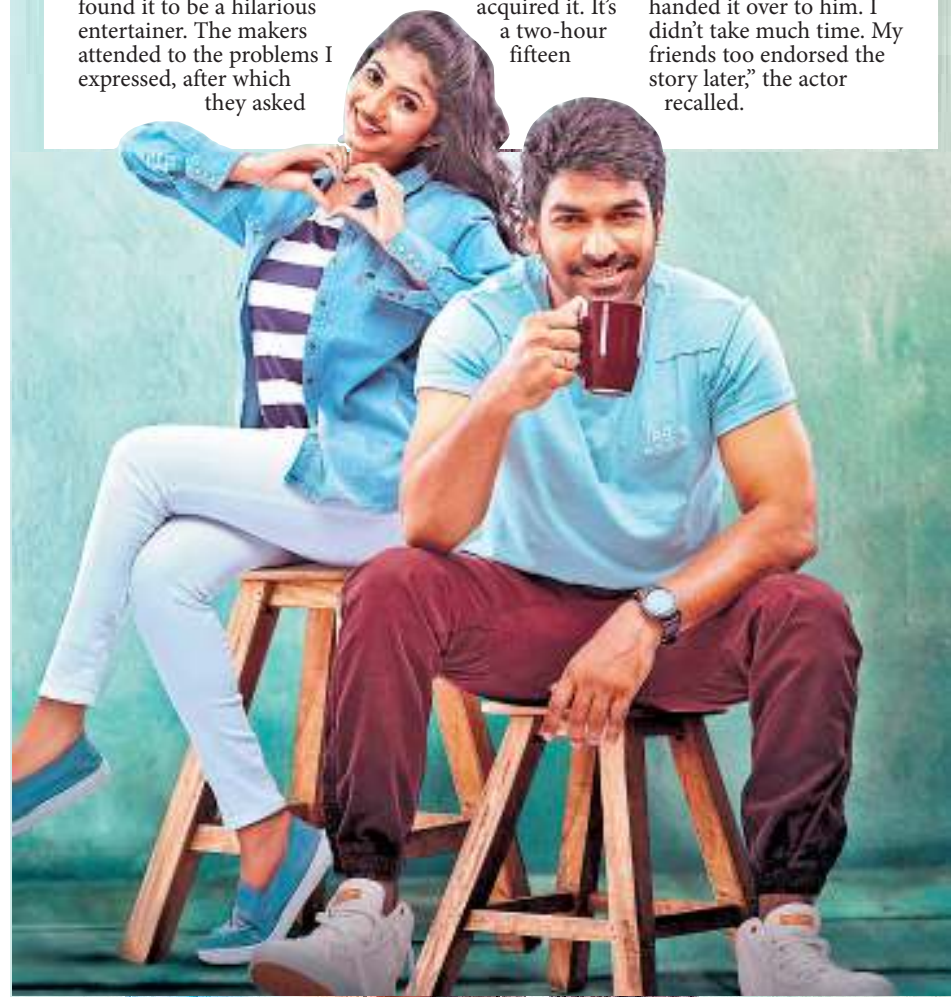
**L**eading producer Dil Raju promises that *Shaadi Mubarak*, featuring featuring Mogalirekulu fame Sagar and newbie Drishya Raghunath in the lead roles, will offer out-and-out entertainment when it graces the big screen on March 5th. "After the makers completed the film's shoot, Sagar showed me the trailer. I found it interesting and told him that I will watch the complete film. Except for some problems at places, I found it to be a hilarious entertainer. The makers attended to the problems I expressed, after which they asked



minutes film with non-stop entertainment," the producer said. He was speaking at the trailer launch of the film in Hyderabad on Thursday evening.

Sagar said it's been his eight-year dream to achieve success in the industry and Dil Raju's step to join the project as a producer was to encourage him. He pointed out that after listening to the first half of the narration from writer Srinivas Reddy, he wrote a cheque. "After the second half, I handed it over to him. I didn't take much time. My friends too endorsed the story later," the actor recalled.

me to release it as well. It's a good film so I wasn't in two minds to accept their proposal. I even acquired it. It's a two-hour fifteen



## VAISSHNAV TO COLLABORATE WITH MANAM ENTERTAINMENTS

**V**aishnav Tej, who is basking in the glory of *Uppena*, is understood to have signed his third film. While his second film, *Kondapalam* (tentative title), with Krish has been wrapped up last year itself, his third, according to reports, will be with Nagarjuna's Manam Entertainments.

Prudhvi, who is an alumnus of Annapurna College of Film and Media, is attached to the project as a director. The project is reportedly a love story laced with action and family emotions. Supriya, who looks after Annapurna Studios, will execute the project, it is being said.

Vaishnav has also agreed to do a film for BVS N Prasad, with whom his brother Sai Tej has already done *Solo Brathuke So Better* and will be collaborating again for a mystical thriller.

## Adah says she has signed 5 Telugu films



**A**ctress Adah Sharma took to Instagram to announce that she has signed five new Telugu films. In her post, the actress, whose film *Kshanam* completed five years on Friday, thanked the makers for encouraging her to experiment with projects.

The actress posted a clip from the film and wrote: "On 5 yrs of *Kshanam* I want to announce that I have signed 5 Telugu films! Everytime I've done something experimental in any language u guys have always given me sooo much love and support. The films I'm doing now are all stuff that's not done before. Thank you for Shweta @adivises @raviperepu @pvp cinemaoffl"

The 2016 thriller film *Kshanam* starred Adivi Sesh, Anasuya Bharadwaj, Vennela Kishore, Satyam Rajesh and Satyadev Kancharana. In fact, the film was also remade in Tamil and titled *Sathya*. Its Hindi version was called *Baaghi 2* and *Aadyaa* in Kannada.

Adah is presently awaiting the release of a mystery thriller titled *Question Mark* with director Vipra.

It features Sanjay, Bhanu Sree Mehra, Abhay, Hari Teja, Akshatha Srinivas and Ajay in other key roles.

## Middle Class Melodies director's next with Matinee Entertainment

**A**fter the enjoyable light-hearted drama *Middle Class Melodies*, which marked his directorial debut last year, Vinod Anantoju is set for his sophomore venture. Premier production house Matinee Entertainment signed him immediately after the release of his

maiden film and he is right now working on the story. Once again, he will be directing it from a script by dear friend Janardhan Pasumarthi.

Vinod tells us, "The project will be an adventure comedy. Portions of it will be shot in a fictional village. The writing will be completed in a month's time after which I

will initiate the casting process. The production house gave a complete free hand; they just want us to come up with a good story."

Vinod joins a long list of directors- Svaroop RSJ, Ravi Kiran Kola, Teja Marni and Uday Gurrala — who are making their second films for Matinee.

