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## Resolution eludes India-China talks

But both sides agree to meet soon to find mutually acceptable agreement to disengage, de-escalate

PI NS ■ NEW DELHI

India and China held the 11th round of military-level talks on Sunday to defuse tension at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh and reaffirmed their commitment to resolve the issue through dialogue. There was no breakthrough but both sides agreed to meet soon to find mutually acceptable agreement to disengage and de-escalate.

the LAC in Ladakh. The Indian side was led by 14 Corps chief Lt General PK Menon and the delegation also included a Joint Secretary from the Ministry of External Affairs.

Incidentally, at least six rounds of the diplomatic level talks under the aegis of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) were also held since the face-offs began between the two armies in May last year. However, these interventions also failed to end the impasse. The last WMCC talks were held on December 18.

The latest round of Corps Commander talks came more than two months after the eighth round was held on November 6 between the two Commanders. While no positive result came out from the latest episode, both sides focused on thrashing out a mutually acceptable timeline



for disengagement from friction points and ultimate de-escalation, sources said here on Sunday.

In a joint statement issued after the last round of talks, the two countries agreed to implement the "important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, ensure their frontline troops exercise restraint and avoid misunderstanding and miscalculation." The two Commanders on Sunday took stock of this agree-

ment and decided to sustain it till an amicable solution was found, officials said.

Though reiterating its stand on finding a way out through dialogue, India is not taking any chances. Against this backdrop, it had so far turned down the Chinese insistence on withdrawing its troops from strategic heights on the south and north banks of the Pangong Tso (lake).

Instead, India in all the rounds held so far stuck to its

stand that China had to first withdraw its troops from all the friction points, including "Finger 4 to 8" at the same time. The Chinese have intruded more than four km in this region near the Pangong Lake. India was of the firm view that China had to reduce its troop strength in depth areas besides tanks and artillery guns.

At present, more than one lakh troops from both the sides were facing each other at the 1,700 km long LAC in Ladakh. Moreover, the entire LAC from west in Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh in the east was on heightened alert. The Indian Army and IAF have deployed its frontline troops and fighter jets at all the important forward bases all along the 4,000 km LAC.

Given China's blatant attempt to unilaterally change the status quo at the LAC, Army Chief General MM

Naravane said here on January 12 the Indian troops will hold their ground as long as it takes to achieve the "national goals and objectives." He, however, underlined the need for finding an amicable resolution of the standoff through talks. IAF chief RKS Bhaduria on Saturday had said if China opted for an aggressive stance in eastern Ladakh, "we can also be aggressive."

## Certified health report must to attend Kumbh

People above 65, kids below 10 yrs, pregnant women not allowed to visit Haridwar

PI NS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior citizens above 65 years of age, pregnant women, and children below the age of 10 will not be permitted to visit Haridwar during Kumbh Mela at Haridwar in Uttarakhand. Patients with health conditions and comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiac disease, chronic lung disease, cerebrovascular disease, chronic kidney disease, immune-suppression, and cancer will be "discouraged" to visit.



These are part of the guidelines (SOP) issued by the Centre on Sunday for Kumbh Mela amid Covid-19, asking all devotees desirous of attending the "mela" to register with the Uttarakhand Government.

They will also have to obtain a compulsory medical certificate from Community Health Centre/District hospital/ Medical college in their State. According to the Centre's guidelines, RT-PCR test should be taken not more

than 72 hours prior to their visit to Haridwar during the Kumbh Mela. The reports will also be required to be uploaded on the Uttarakhand Government's official web portal.

Considered to be the biggest Hindu religious festival, the "Maha Kumbh" is celebrated every 12 years and draws a huge crowd. This year, the Kumbh would continue for two months — from February 27 to April 27 due to Covid-19 crisis.

The Central Government has also acknowledged that since the Maha Kumbh receives devotees from various States of the country as well as from abroad, it is necessary to take precautions.

Moreover, the State Governments have been directed to deploy only those healthcare personnel on duty who have been provided the Covid-19 vaccine shot.

### CAPSULE

**'SKIN TO SKIN' CONTACT MUST FOR PCOS: HC**  
Mumbai: Grouping a minor's breast without "skin to skin contact" cannot be termed as sexual assault as defined under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the Bombay High Court has said.

**E-VOTER CARD TO BE LAUNCHED TODAY**  
New Delhi: Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad will on Monday launch the electronic version of the voter identity card which can be downloaded on a mobile phone or a personal computer. The e-selector photo identity card is non-editable digital version of the elector photo identity card and it can be saved in facilities such as digital locker and can be printed in the PDF format, EC officials said.

## 308 Pak Twitter handles trying to disrupt tractor rally: Police

Delhi Police gives routes to farmer unions for march after the conclusion of Republic Day celebrations

PI NS ■ NEW DELHI

After several rounds of talks and the Delhi Police and farmers' unions, the police on Sunday allowed their proposed tractor rally inside the national Capital on January 26. Police said the proposed tractor rally of farmers on Tuesday will begin amid tight security after Republic Day celebrations conclude.

Police also said there are intelligence inputs suggesting that there are elements, which pose threats to the proposed rally and they may disrupt it. "After analysis of Twitter handles revealed that there are 308 such accounts created in Pakistan which are attempting

to create confusion and thus disturbances during farmers rally," said police.

According to sources, the Delhi Police Cyber teams are keeping eyes on social media to track miscreants who may try to create panic. Meanwhile, Delhi Police Commissioner SN Shrivastava issued a circular and directed all officers and men, as well as Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) and other forces to be deployed for Republic Day Parade security and should remain in a ready position to move at short notice for law and order arrangement.

Police said the rally will be conducted in three parts — first from Singhu border

which have 62 km route, then from Tikri border with around 60 km route and Ghazipur Border with 46 km route. "There are approximately 12,000 to 13,000 tractors at various borders — around 7,000 to 8,000 at Tikri, around 5,000 at Singhu and around 1,000 at Ghazipur border which is expected to go up in coming days," said police.

As the farmers wanted to do a tractor rally on January 26, police have come to a conclusion that the rally will be conducted after the timing of the Republic Day Celebration ends. Police has given them around 170 kilometres of distance in three routes," said the Special CP.



Farmers sit on tractors during their ongoing agitation against the Centre's farm reform laws at Ghazipur border in New Delhi on Sunday.

## Sea of farmers marches along Maha's Kasara Ghat

PI NS ■ MUMBAI

Setting the stage for a massive show of strength in Mumbai on Monday in support of the farmers agitating on the outskirts of the national Capital to demand the repeal of three farm laws, more than 15,000 farmers — marching through the stretch of Kasara Ghat by foot — congregated at the historic Azad Maidan in south Mumbai on Sunday.



Farmers from Nashik district walk along the Nashik-Mumbai highway to participate in the protest march organised by Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha, scheduled to take place on January 25, in Mumbai on Sunday.

homes, covered by foot the 7-km long stretch of the Kasara Ghat which joins Nashik and Thane districts.

The marching farmers

were followed along the Kasara Ghat by hundreds and thousands in their vehicles.

The Kasara Ghat march and the vehicle jatha were

spearheaded by the national president of All India Kisan Sabha (AKIS) Dr Ashok Dhawale, State president Kisan Gujar and State general secretary Dr Ajit Nawale.

After the jatha entered Mumbai at the Mulund Check Naka, the farmers were accorded a rousing reception at the Kannamwar Nagar at Vikhroli in north-east Mumbai by hundreds of activists of the CPI(M), CITU, D Y F I and AIDWA in Mumbai, led by party CCM Mahendra Singh.

## Nepal PM Oli ousted from NCP by faction led by Prachanda

PI ■ KATHMANDU

The ruling Nepal Communist Party's splinter faction led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" on Sunday expelled Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli from the party's general membership.

The decision to remove Oli from the party's general membership was taken at the Standing Committee meeting of the faction led by former prime ministers Prachanda and Madhav Kumar Nepal after Oli failed to produce explanation to his recent moves as sought by party leadership, sources said.

Earlier in December, the splinter group had removed Oli, one of the two chairmen of the ruling party, as the party chair. Madhav Nepal was named as the party's second chairman. Prachanda is the first chairman of the party. The Prachanda-led faction on January 15 sought clarification from Oli alleging that he was carrying out activities that



go against the party's policies. The faction decided to strip Oli off even from the ordinary membership of the party after he chose not to furnish any clarification, party sources said.

Oli had been accused of violating party statute by the splinter group. The latest political development in Nepal came after the NCP's splinter faction led a massive anti-Government rally, saying the "unconstitutional" dissolution of the Parliament by Prime Minister Oli has posed serious threats to the country's hard-earned federal democratic republic system.

## New induction won't belittle importance of old-timers: Bengal BJP

But need to induct leaders from other parties to expand base, says Ghosh

PI ■ KOLKATA

Amid a spate of defections from the ruling TMC to the saffron camp in Bengal ahead of the Assembly polls, State BJP president Dilip Ghosh on Sunday allayed apprehensions of the turn-coats getting more importance than the old timers, saying switching political allegiance doesn't always guarantee leadership positions.

Ghosh, however, insisted that the party, in order to expand its base for coming to power in Bengal, needs to induct people from other political outfits. In an interview to PTI, he also clarified that everybody has to abide by the rules and regulations of the party, be it the old-timers or the newcomers.



"The BJP is a growing force in West Bengal. Our coats getting more importance than the old timers, saying switching political allegiance doesn't always guarantee leadership positions. Ghosh, however, insisted that the party, in order to expand its base for coming to power in Bengal, needs to induct people from other political outfits. In an interview to PTI, he also clarified that everybody has to abide by the rules and regulations of the party, be it the old-timers or the newcomers.

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Har Pal Apke Saath

# Farm Laws: War of words continue between Cong, AAP in Punjab

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Even as the farmers' agitation against the controversial farm laws at the Delhi borders completed two months on Sunday, Punjab's ruling Congress party and the principal opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are engaged in war of words over the State Government and Chief Minister Capt Amrinder Singh's involvement in paving way for the controversial legislations.

With allegations and counter-allegation continuing ever since the farm bills were passed by the Parliament some four years back, both Congress and AAP on Sunday came out with documentary evidences to support their claims.

Hours after AAP's Delhi MLA and Punjab co-in-charge Raghu Chadha alleged that Punjab Chief Minister knew about the farm laws and was privy to the terms of reference of the high-powered committee constituted to make and discuss the laws in August 2019, Capt Amrinder ridiculed it as "AAP's brazen lies".

In fact, his Finance Minister Manpreet Badal, who had attended one of the meet-

ings of the high-powered committee on farm ordinances, released the "minutes of the meeting" to claim that "three contentious farm bills were never brought up or discussed in any meeting with the Government of Punjab or with any Punjab Minister".

**AAP'S ALLEGATIONS**  
AAP's Punjab unit co-in-charge Raghu Chadha on Sunday alleged that the Punjab Chief Minister knew about the farm laws, but he chose to remain silent for a year and did not share the information with the state's farmers.

"The Chief Minister knew about the terms of reference clearly mentioned in the office memorandum, which would mean large scale privatization and corporatization of agriculture in the country," said Chadha, who was sharing information received by AAP through an RTI.

Chadha, who was addressing the media in Jalandhar, said that the Punjab Chief Minister didn't oppose the farm laws well in time, when they could have been withdrawn.

Capt Amrinder said he did not have any information regarding the laws and he or

the State was not a member of the committee.

He also said that Finance Minister was sent to the formal meeting because it was a financial issue. But the RTI makes it clear that as per an office memorandum dated August 7, 2019, that the Chief Minister was the seventh member of the high powered committee of CMs constituted by the Prime Minister.

He was privy to what the laws entailed since August 2019," said Chadha.

Reading out from the RTI, Chadha said that the Prime Minister approved the revised constitution of a High-Powered Committee of Chief Ministers for the 'Transformation of Indian Agriculture' on August 25, 2019.

"In the agenda of the committee, the terms of reference included key three points — Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (Promotion and Facilitation Act, 2017; Agricultural Produce and Livestock, Contract Farming Services (Promotion and Facilitation Act), 2018; and "to examine various provisions of the Essential Commodity Act and situations that require essential com-

modity act," he added.

Underlining that the 'terms of reference' also detailed the privatization of agriculture, Chadha said: "This means Capt Amrinder was aware that the laws would lead to breaking of mandis, weakening of finishing of the MSP law and largely the privatization of agriculture.

He was aware that the laws would lead to hoarding and

## Capt terms AAP's allegations as brazen lies

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Capt Amrinder, ridiculing AAP's "brazen lies," said that the non-evidence shared by the party to support their baseless allegations against him had shown the extent of their desperation and had exposed the shocking levels of deceit to which they had stooped in the pursuit of their politically motivated agenda.

From sharing a selectively edited video of his (Chief Minister's statements) to the release of a list of final committee members, AAP's spokesperson had made yet another desperate attempt to

modesty act," he added.

Underlining that the 'terms of reference' also detailed the privatization of agriculture, Chadha said: "This means Capt Amrinder was aware that the laws would lead to breaking of mandis, weakening of finishing of the MSP law and largely the privatization of agriculture.

He was aware that the laws would lead to hoarding and

sell his party's pack of lies to the people of Punjab, said Capt Amrinder, adding that these actions showed that Arvind Kejriwal's AAP had hit rock bottom in its desperation to promote its political agenda in the State, where they had been unceremoniously rejected by voters in 2017 Assembly polls and in every election thereafter.

"If they think that by sharing a doctored video they can fool the people of Punjab, then AAP leaders are even more ignorant about this State than I had believed them to be," said the Chief Minister. The fact that they needed to

resort to such cheap tactics to find a footing in Punjab goes to show that they have no concrete agenda for the state, he added.

Capt questioned AAP spokesperson, "a nobody in Punjab's political arena", on what he was seeking to prove by sharing a copy of the final list of high-powered committee members, dated August 7, 2019, when the original committee (minus Punjab) was actually set up on June 15, 2019. These dates are clearly mentioned on the documents shared by their spokesperson himself, he pointed out.

"Don't you understand the

difference between Punjab not originally being included in the Committee and being named a member after I personally wrote to the Centre on the issue? How does flaunting the final list, in which Punjab was included after my intervention prove me wrong?" asked the Chief Minister, adding that he had never once claimed that Punjab was not in the "reconstituted" committee.

"Had AAP bothered to share the complete videos of my statements, the truth of what I have been saying would have been endorsed, which is obviously why they have carefully doctored my recorded

any Punjab minister.

"The minutes of the meeting with the Union Government have already been released in the public domain. Anyone who reads the minutes will note that the farm bills were never brought up nor discussed, nor were they in the meeting agenda," said Manpreet.

He said that he had already

released the eight-page minutes of the meeting in the public domain on September 18, 2020. Further, to clarify any questions, "I have addressed the entire issue in detail on September 24, 2020.

The video of the press conference is available in the public domain," said Manpreet while sharing links for the same.

## Modi Govt should have also invited farmers for R-Day parade: Jakhar

**Chandigarh:** Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar on Sunday said that the Centre, by failing to invite the farmers at Republic Day parade, has lost a golden opportunity to break the stalemate with them over the contentious agri laws.

At the same time, Jakhar also noted that the farm bills were never brought up nor discussed, nor were they in the meeting agenda," said Manpreet.

He said that he had already

"Because of its arrogance, the Central Government is disrespecting the collective voice of farmers and of the nation. The celebration of our Republic is complete only when the government listens to the will of the people," said Jakhar.

He added it would have been better had the Central Government invited farmers as part of the government Republic Day ceremony. "I agree with suggestion of Admiral (retired) Ramdas that after the annual ceremony, farmers should be allowed to take out their tractor parade at the same venue," he added.

PNS



Full dress rehearsal ahead of 72nd Republic Day celebrations was held at Parade Ground in Sector 17, Chandigarh on Sunday amidst foggy conditions



Pioneer Photo

## Haryana reports one fatality, 128 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

With 128 fresh Covid-19 cases, Haryana's caseload surged to 2,67,203 on Sunday while one more person succumbed to the virus taking the toll to 3,010 in the State.

One death was reported in Karnal district due to Covid-19, the state's Health Department's bulletin stated.

As per the bulletin, a maximum of 39 fresh cases were reported from Gurugram, followed by 22 in Faridabad.

There were 1511 active cases in the state till the evening.

175 people recovered from the virus in the last 24 hours taking the total recoveries in the state to 262,682.

## Punjab continues to receive poor response in Covid-19 vaccination drive

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab continues to receive a tepid response to the Covid-19 vaccination drive. Till date, only 38 per cent of the targeted 80,337 registered healthcare workers have been vaccinated across 22 districts of the State.

A total of 31,326 healthcare workers have received the Covid-19 vaccines till date, ever since the drive was launched a week back.

Maximum 7,248 healthcare workers have been vaccinated in Ludhiana district till date followed by 4,931 in Jalandhar and 2,775 in Amritsar.

The State Government had rolled out the COVID-19 vaccination drive on January 16, with an aim to immunize 1.74

lakh healthcare and frontline workers in the first phase.

The state evoked a poor response with just 22.67 per cent — 1,327 beneficiaries, including doctors and other frontline healthcare workers — turned up to receive their first dose of vaccine, as against the target of 5,853 in 22 districts of the State on the first day, followed by 33.1 per cent on the second day, and 38 per cent on the third day.

However, the state showed the signs of improvement on Sunday as about 46 per cent of its targeted 2,160 registered healthcare workers in five districts come forward to receive the jabs. A total of 1,007 registered health care workers turning up for vaccination on Sunday.

## STATEHOOD DAY — HP to celebrate golden jubilee yr

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president Jagat Prakash Nadda will attend the state-level golden jubilee function of Himachal Pradesh Statehood Day at the Ridge ground here on January 25.

Himachal Governor Bandaru Dattatreya will preside over the function that will also be attended by Union Minister Anurag Thakur.

The Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur on Sunday visited the Ridge here to review the preparedness of arrangements regarding celebration of golden jubilee function of Statehood.

Besides the necessary directions to the officers for making foolproof and elaborate arrangements to make the event a success and memorable one.

He asked them to ensure that minimum inconvenience is caused to the general public and tourists during the celebrations.



Thakur also visited exhibition stalls and gave necessary directions to the officers for making foolproof and elaborate arrangements to make the event a success and memorable one.

The journey of the state's 50 years would be depicted in an exhibition where various departments of the State

Government would showcase their achievements.

The state level function would be held on the Ridge in the presence of 2,000 people amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A special postal stamp would be released to mark the occasion. A total of 51 events would be organised round the year to commemorate the golden jubilee of Himachal's statehood.

Apart from the state level function, district level programmes in all buildings would be organized on the theme of golden jubilee celebration. All the SDMs have been directed to organize such functions at sub-division headquarters.

Notably, it was on January 25, 1971 when Himachal Pradesh was carved out as the 18th state of the country.

## Fresh snowfall in Himachal; thick fog in Punjab, Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH/SHIMLA

Himachal's tourist hotspot of Kufri received fresh snowfall while some other parts of the state witnessed rainfall in the last 24 hours.

Kufri in Shimla district received 2 cm snowfall. Keylong recorded 15 cm snowfall and Kalpa 14.8 mm. Manali 10 mm and Bhuntar 3.8 mm. The tribal district of Lahaul and Spiti's administrative centre Keylong was recorded as the coldest place in the state at minus 9.2 degrees Celsius.

Kalpa recorded a low of minus 4.1 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperatures in Dalhousie and Kufri were recorded at minus 1.8 and 0.5

degrees Celsius respectively.

Meanwhile, a 42-year-old man was killed in a lightning strike in Kangra district. The incident occurred on Saturday evening and the deceased was identified as Parvinder Rana, a resident of Saunkni Da Kot in Dharanashala sub-division. The body has been sent for post-mortem and further reports are awaited.

Shimla Meteorological Centre Director Manmohan Singh said that no western disturbance would affect north-west India till February 1, therefore, weather will be dry over the state of Himachal Pradesh till February 1.

Thereafter, a fresh western disturbance may affect Western Himalayan Region from February 2 and it may cause precipitation at isolated places over the state and it may increase in intensity and distribution thereafter, he said.

The dry northwesterly winds would prevail over northwest India from January 25 onwards, as a result, minimum temperatures are very likely to fall by 2-4 degree Celsius during the next 3 days over most parts of Himachal

while day temperature will rise by 3-5 degree Celsius in coming days on account of clear sky and sunny days, Singh added.

**THICK BLANKET OF FOG IN PUNJAB AND HARYANA**

The minimum temperatures hovered above normal limits in parts of Punjab and Haryana places, including Chandigarh, Ambala, Hisar, Karnal, Sonapat, Bhiwani, Ludhiana, Patiala, Bathinda, Faridkot and Gurdaspur in the morning.

According to Meteorological Department officials here, fog engulfed various places, including Chandigarh, Ambala, Hisar, Karnal, Sonapat, Bhiwani, Ludhiana, Patiala, Bathinda, Faridkot and Gurdaspur in the morning.

Chandigarh, the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana recorded a minimum temperature of 11.2 degrees Celsius, six notches above normal.

## Punjab Cultural Council urges Centre to extend benefits to all 162 martyr farmers

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Urging the Central Government to consider all martyred 162 farmers for ex-gratia benefits, the Punjab Cultural Council (PCC) on Sunday written to the Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar to repeal "black" farm laws forthwith thereby according due honour to the "martyrs who have given their prime for ensuring food security for the nation."

Besides, the Council has also asked the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to give personal intervention, thereby helping the farmers at the Delhi borders with proactive support.

Council chairman Harjeet Singh Grewal and vice-chairman Tejinderpal Singh Nalwa, in the letter, said that Punjab, Haryana,

Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have already lost 149 precious lives during protests at Delhi borders since November 25 against the Centre's shameful arrogance and callousness attitude.

# C'garh procures record 86 lakh tonnes of paddy

STAFF REPORTER ■ DURG

Chhattisgarh has procured a record 86 lakh tonnes of paddy and one week of procurement is still left, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel announced on Sunday.

This has been possible due to the government's farmer friendly policies due to which farmers have returned to the fields, he said. Baghel was addressing the 75th annual convention of Manva Karmi Kshatriya Samaj (Durg) in village Chetuva in Dhamdha block, an official communication said.

Baghel said the record procurement was achieved despite a shortage of gunny sacks to store the paddy.



He threw light on other government schemes which brought economic benefits to women and

farmers. The farmers, he said, were now satisfied. They received money under the Rajiv Gandhi

Kisan Nyay Yojana in instalments which helped them to carry out farming and other work.

# C'garh buys 73 percent of country's minor forest produce

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh has become the top state in the country in collection of minor forest produce and the state has established a new record by purchasing 73 percent of it.

Chhattisgarh is also the only state where 52 types of minor forest produce are being bought at a support price, benefitting forest dwellers and forest produce collectors, an official statement said on Sunday.

Minor forest produce, which was earlier sold cheap, has now become a valuable product.

The Chhattisgarh government has started a Vanachal project to provide direct and indirect employment opportunities by establishing small forest produce based industries in forest areas.



The government has given many types of discounts and attractive packages to promote small forest produce based industries.

So far, 15 entrepreneurs have given application to the government with a proposal to invest ₹75 crores to set up various types of forest produce based industries in Vananchal areas.

The rate of tendu leaf collection has been hiked from ₹2,500 per standard bag to ₹4,000. As a result, about 12 lakh tendu leaf collector families got an additional ₹225 crores of wages per year as well as extra incentive remuneration bonus of ₹232 crores.

Due to the increase in the minimum support price of

forest produce and arranging for their purchase, the villagers now get additional benefits of about ₹300 crores.

At present, only five percent of the forest produce stored in the state is processed in Chhattisgarh. It is to change this situation that the government has started the Vanachal project.

# Sahu is observer for Gujarat civic body elections



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Home and Public Works Department Minister Samaj Tamradhwaj Sahu was appointed as Senior Observer for the Gujarat civic body elections on Sunday and immediately vowed to defeat the BJP.

Congress President Sonia Gandhi appointed Sahu to coordinate with the Congress state president, a communique from Congress General Secretary K.C. Venugopal said. Sahu tweeted: "I have full faith that we will give a tough fight to the BJP and win the Gujarat local body elections."

# CECB says industrial water discharge in Kharun river 'safe'

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

No industry in Durg or Raipur is discharging contaminated water into Kharun river, the Chhattisgarh Environment Conservation Board (CECB) said on Sunday.

A joint team of CECB and the Beergaon Municipal Corporation (BMC) inspected industrial houses in the industrial area of Gondwara, Sondongri, Beergaon, Ural, Sarora, Urkura, Rawabhata and Bhanpuri.

The inspection found that a limited section of domestic sewage was discharged into the river but not from any industry, a press release said.

To stop the flow of



domestic sewage, the Municipal Corporation is going to build sewage treatment plants which will be ready before July 1.

CECB is ensuring that polluting industries function

with water treatment plants. Any violation of the norms leads to power cuts or shutting down of the industry.

Most industries in industrial regions cause air pollution, it was found.

The board said it is monitoring water quality in the main rivers of the state including Mahanadi, Shivnadi, Kharun, Arpa, Hasdeo, Kelo, Shankhini Dankini, Maad and Indravati.

# Man held for cheating woman of ₹16 crores



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Sunday arrested the 49-year-old director of a Noida (Uttar Pradesh) firm for cheating a woman of ₹16 crores by promising her zone-level distributorship of TV channels for Chhattisgarh in March 2019.

Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Kumar Yadav told The Pioneer that Vivek Prakash,

director of Pentel Technologies Pvt Ltd, has been taken into custody.

In March 2019, Preeti Singhal Mundra, a resident of Raipur, told the police that Atul Mishra, Vivek Prakash, Ajay Rathore and others duped her of ₹16 crores by promising her distributorship of transmission of 500 channels in Chhattisgarh.

After getting the money from the woman in various bank accounts, she was not given the promised distributorship, the officer added.

Based on technical analysis of bank account numbers and mobile call records, one of the accused was arrested from Noida and brought to Raipur on transit remand, Yadav said.

The police have launched a manhunt for the others involved in the crime.

# Landless tribal families to get land in Scheduled Areas: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Landless tribal families will be provided land in Scheduled Areas of Chhattisgarh, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said on Saturday, adding that no family will be left without ownership of land.

Baghel was addressing the oath taking ceremony of the newly elected body of Chhattisgarh Scheduled Tribe Government Development Service Association organized at the Pt Deendayal Upadhyaya Auditorium here.

Recalling the contribu-



tion of tribal community in the freedom movement, he said Gaidind Singh Nayak, Shahid Veeramaray Singh, Gundadhar and other leaders had a role to play.

Baghel said the state government is making all efforts to ensure irrigation facilities in tribal areas by reviving streams and rivulets and other water bodies.

The Bodghat irrigation project is being revived. It will ensure drinking water to wild animals, he said.

Baghel administered the oath to newly elected president B.N. Dhruv and other officers.

# Man held for trying to sell tiger skin

STAFF REPORTER ■ DHAMTARI

Chhattisgarh Police on Sunday arrested a 28-year-old man for possessing and trying to sell a tiger skin valued at ₹40 lakh in Dhamtari district.

Speaking to The Pioneer, Dhamtari Additional Superintendent of Police Manisha Thakur Rawate said the man, Jayram Kawde, hails from Kanker and presently resides in Narayanpur district.

He was caught on a tip when he was heading towards Mukundpur village on a bike without registration number in the Sihawa police station limits.

A tiger skin was found in a plastic bag valued at ₹40 lakh, Rawate added. Police seized the skin and



the motorcycle. The police are investigating where the man got the skin.

A case under the Wildlife Protection Act has been lodged against Kawde.

# 73rd 'Sanyas Diwas' of Jagatguru celebrated

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The 73rd 'Sanyas Diwas' of Jagatguru Shankracharya Swami Swaroopnand Saraswati was celebrated by holding religious rituals and functions at the Jagatguru Shankracharya Ashram Boriyakala in Raipur on Sunday.

Dr Brahmachari Indubhavanand said in a statement that special rituals were held at the ashram to mark the 73rd 'Sanyas Diwas' of Jagatguru Shankracharya Swami Swaroopnand Saraswati. In Indian spiritual



tradition, there are four 'ashrams' in life: Brahmacharya, Grahastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyas. Swamiji has completed 73 years of Sanyas during which a person renounces the world.

Due to Paus month, rituals were organized by offering prayers to Lord Suryanarayan. Red Lotus was used for the offerings. Sanskrit teacher Deepak Pandey and students organized all the rituals.

# CM's consent for Road Safety World Series Cricket

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel has given his consent for organizing a Road Safety World Series cricket tournament from March 2 to 21 in Raipur, it was announced on Sunday.

The tournament's Commissioner and eminent cricketer Sunil Gavaskar on Sunday urged Baghel over telephone in Raipur and the Chief Minister 'gladly approved it', a press release said.

The tournament will see players from India, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Australia and the West Indies including Sachin Tendulkar, Jonty

Rhodes, Brett Lee, Brian Lara and Muttiah Muralitharan.

The main objective behind the tournament is to make the masses aware of the importance of road safety in India.

The tournament has been approved by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and supported by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, with Sunil Gavaskar's company organizing it.

The tournament will accelerate Chhattisgarh's economic and boost up people's morale amid the Corona pandemic, the release said.

# Trying to revive Raigarh-based jute mill: Baghel

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIGARH

Initiatives are being taken to revive the Raigarh-based jute mill in Chhattisgarh so that supply of gunny sacks is not affected in future, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said on Sunday.

He was addressing the 'Bade Bhajan Mela' organized by the Akhil Bharatiya Rammami Mahasabha in village Nandeli in Saranghar block in Raigarh district.

Baghel also announced construction of a 50-bed hospital at Saranghar, upgrading Kosir to Sub-Tehsil and construction of water



reservoir at Bhisdar, an official communication said. Addressing the gathering, he said till date 86 lakh tonnes of paddy have been procured. The supply of gunny sacks for the procurement was affected due to Covid. The jute mill, if revived, will generate

employment too. Going by the teachings of Sant Kabir, he said members of the Rammami Samaj instead of searching God here and there etch the name of Lord Ram on their body and even wear clothes with the Lord's name. And they meditate too.

# Rangdum monastery gets national importance tag

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The 18th-Century Rangdum monastery, a Buddhist shrine that lies in the Kargil district of the newly formed Union Territory of Ladakh housing several artifacts like conches and scriptures from Tibet, has got the tag of 'national importance'.

This is the first monument to be accorded the ASI tag after Ladakh was given the UT status in October 2019 when Jammu and Kashmir was officially divided into two UTs — J&K and Ladakh.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recently issued a notification in which it is bringing it under its fold which would enable it to get central funds for its upkeep.

Situated more than 130 km away from Kargil, the monastery is a tourist's delight. It is a small white building with a red roof and a stupa in front. It is looking like a citadel that overlooks and guards the serene Rangdum valley.

A section of historians says that the gumpa was established in the 8th century while many believe it to be of the 13th Century. This shrine has a central prayer hall, which is equivalent to a museum due to the rich assortment of Tibetan antiques and other precious artefacts.

It is also the residence of about 40 Buddhist monks.



Belonging to the Gelugpa sect, the imposing monastery is a tourists' delight for being abandoned by colourful hills on the one side and glacier-coated Rocky Mountains on the other. It is next to the Julidok valley, and about 25 km from the 14,436 ft (4,400 m) Pensi la (pass) which leads into Zaskar in the head of the Suru Valley in Ladakh in J&K.

ASI officials say that this is the only living monastery in Suru Valley except a few, indicating that the Buddhist flourished in this part of Ladakh. Currently, the monastery is being looked after by Rangdum Gumpa Culture and Welfare Society, Rangdum, Zaskar.

"The monastery has two courtyards giving the visitors a clear view of the artifacts and other collections of Tibetan paintings. The available wall space of the portico is embellished with paintings of cardi-

nal kings, wheel of life, Buddhist mystic monogram Namchu Wangdan.

"Also, there are images of thousand armed Dular and mummified statues of vulnerable blo-bZang dG-legs Yshes Grags Pa is of exceptional sacred value for pilgrimage visiting this monastery. Also a giant thangka of lord Buddha kept in Tszazin Khang is unfurled once every year during the fifth day of the sixth month of the calendar," as per the details available on the websites.

A few other ASI historical monuments of national importance in Ladakh region are Sculpture at Dress, Rock Cut Sculpture at Mulbekh, lamayuru Monastery, likir Monastery, Alchi Monastery, Phyang Monastery, Hemis Monastery, Hill Palace, Old Castle Tsemo Hill, Stupa at T-Suru and Shey Palace.

# Voter identity cards to go digital with e-EPIC launch today

7 officials, NGO from Delhi get 'Best Electoral Practices Awards-2020'

National Voters Day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Voter identity cards are all set to go digital as the Election Commission (EC) will launch the e-EPIC (Electronic Electoral Photo Identity Card) on January 25, which is the National Voters Day. The digital version of voter identity card can be downloaded on a mobile phone or a personal computer and can be digitally stored.

The digital version e-EPIC is a non-editable secure portable document format (PDF) version of the EPIC and will have a secured QR code with image and demographics like serial number, part number, etc. This is in addition to physical IDs being issued for fresh registration. The digitalisation of voter-ID card will have a special significance in the upcoming five-star year—Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

In a statement, the EC said that a function will be organized at Ashok hotel where Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad will launch the e-EPIC programme, and distribute e-EPICs to five new voters. President Ram Nath Kovind will be the Chief Guest at the national function.

Under the e-EPIC programme, new voters will get the facility after downloading the



Dr Eish Singhal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission of India has selected seven officials and an NGO from Delhi for the "Best Electoral Practices Awards-2020". They will be honoured here on the occasion of National Voters Day on January 25.

The officials who have bagged the awards are State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Dr Ranbir Singh and DEO (South East) Harleen Kaur for best election management while Special CP (Crime and



Dr Ranbir Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

card on a registered mobile connection. Once the approval by competent authorities for a new application for a voter card is provided, the applicant can get it in digital format.

The digital version of EPIC can be accessed through the Voter Helpline App and website. The website is https://voterportal.eci.gov.in/ and https://vps.in/. The e-EPIC would be a non-editable PDF of the EPIC that can be downloaded on the phone and



Harleen Kaur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

stored on the DigiLocker app or self-printed from a computer. According to the EC, the

digital version of voter identity card will be launched in two phases. In the first phase (January 25-31), new voters who have applied for the voter-ID card and registered their mobile numbers in Form 6 will be able to download the e-EPIC by simply authenticating their mobile number. In the second phase that will begin from February 1, general voters can apply for e-EPIC. "All those who have given their mobile numbers (linked one) they can



Praveer Ranjan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

also download their e-EPIC. According to the plan, on the digital format of the EPIC there will be two different QR codes consisting of information about the voter. One QR code will have the voter's name and other specific details while the second code will have the voter's other information. On the basis of the data stored in the QR codes in the downloaded version of the EPIC, voting rights can be availed.

Action for Ability Development and Inclusion (AADI), have been chosen for helping carrying out accessible elections during the Delhi polls.

**The digital version of e-EPIC is a non-editable secure portable document format (PDF) version of the EPIC and will have a secured QR code with image**

stored on the DigiLocker app or self-printed from a computer. According to the EC, the

# Shah seeks another term for BJP to make Assam free from flood

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday urged the people of Assam to give five more years to the BJP to make the State free from flood too, just as it had done from bullets and agitations.

While addressing 'Vijay Sankalp Samara' in Guwahati, Assam, Shah also attacked the Congress and its ally All India United Democratic Front-AIUDF led by Badruddin Ajmal.

"A flood of development came here. Hospitals, new roads, colleges are being constructed. Industries are being set-up here. In the coming days, only BJP can solve the biggest problem of Assam — floods. We have made Assam free from bullets and agitations. Give five more years to BJP and we will make Assam free from flood too," he said.

Attacking the Congress, Shah said Congress cannot stop infiltrators in Assam as they are its voters and agents. He said Congress rule in the state gave only bloodshed, in which thousands of youths lost their lives.

"Can Congress and Badruddin Ajmal stop infiltrators in Assam? They will allow infiltrators to open their vote bank. Only the Narendra Modi-led BJP government can free Assam from infiltrators," he said.



The Congress has formed Grand Alliance with AIUDF, CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) and Anchalik Gana Morcha (AGM) to fight the upcoming Assembly election, likely to be held in March-April.

"Many times, the Congress has accused the BJP of being communal, while the Congress is with the Muslim League in Kerala and is in alliance with Badruddin Ajmal in Assam. In which direction will the Congress take Assam? I want to ask the people who were in power for years, what you did for Assam's people? What did you do for the development of Assam?" he added.

Attacking the Congress, Shah said, "Congress continued the British policy of divide and rule. They created a divide between Assamese and non-Assamese Assamese people and hill peoples, Bodos and non-Bodos."

"In 20 years there was only bloodshed and 10,000

Assamese youths were killed by bullets fired by the Congress," he said.

Listing out some of the developments in Assam by the BJP government, Shah said that in the 13th Finance Commission, the state was given only ₹79,000 crore.

"In the 14th Finance Commission, the BJP government gave ₹1,55 lakh crore to the State. We opened bank accounts of about 7.20 lakh people in the tea garden area. BJP has done the work of giving ₹5,000 to about 60.20 lakh people in 26 districts of Assam," he added.

Shah is in Assam as part of a two-day visit to the region. Earlier in the day, he addressed a public rally to mark the first anniversary of signing the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Accord at Kokrajhar in Assam.

The term of the 126-member Assam Assembly is ending on 31 May 2021.

# CBi arrests Regional Labour Commissioner for ₹30,000 bribery



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Sunday arrested a Regional Labour Commissioner (Central) Madurai and a private person in an alleged bribery case of ₹30,000.

A case was registered against the Regional Labour Commissioner (Central), Madurai.

P. Sivarajan and private person N. Murali, resident of Triplicane, Chennai.

The duo was arrested on the allegations that the said public servant was demanding undue advantage from the private person, representing a private company for issuing labour licence.

The CBI laid a trap and both the accused were inter-casted in the exchanging the undue advantage/bribe amount of Rs 30,000.

Searches were conducted at five places in Chennai and Madurai (Tamil Nadu), the CBI said in a statement here.

Both the accused were produced in the court of Principal Special Judge for CBI Cases, Chennai and remanded to judicial custody till February 4, it added.

# Not sexual assault under POCSO if there is no 'skin to skin' contact: Bombay HC

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Gripping a minor's breast without sexual intercourse, "skin to skin contact" cannot be termed as sexual assault as defined under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, the Bombay High Court has said.

Justice Puthpa Ganadevala of the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court, in a judgement passed on January 19, the detailed copy of which was made available now, held that there must be "skin to skin contact" for sexual intercourse for an act to be considered sexual assault.

She said in her verdict that mere groping will not fall under the definition of sexual assault. Justice Ganadevala said that in a sessions court, which had sentenced a 39-year-old man to three years of imprisonment for sexually assaulting a 12-year-old girl. As per the prosecution and the minor victim's testimony, the court, in December 2016, the accused, a man Satish, had taken the girl to his house in Nagpur on the pretext of giving her something to eat.

Once there, he gripped her breast and attempted to remove her clothes. Justice Ganadevala recorded in her verdict. However, since he groped her without removing her clothes, the offence cannot

be termed as sexual assault and, instead, constitutes the offence of outraging a woman's modesty under section 354, the high court held.

While section 354 entails a minimum sentence of imprisonment for one year, sexual assault under the POCSO Act entails a minimum imprisonment of three years.

The sessions court had sentenced him to three years of imprisonment for the offences under the POCSO Act and under IPC section 354. The sentences were to run concurrently. The high court, however, acquitted him under the POCSO Act while upholding his conviction under IPC section 354.

"Considering the stringent nature of punishment provided for the offence under POCSO, in the opinion of this court, stricter proof and serious allegations are required," HC said.

"The act of pressing of breast of the child aged 12 years, in the absence of any top or undergarment, whether the top was removed or whether he inserted his hand inside the top and pressed her breast, would not fall in the definition of sexual assault," it said. Justice Ganadevala further said in the verdict that the act of pressing breast can be a criminal force to a woman/ girl with the intention to outrage her modesty.

# Left parties seek repeal of farm laws



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The five Left parties on Sunday issued a joint statement reiterating the demand for repealing the controversial farm laws in the forthcoming budget session of Parliament and urging the Government to hold discussions with all stakeholders for agrarian reforms.

"We demand that the central government must stop being obstinate and immediately convey to the farmers unions that these agrarian laws will be repealed in the forthcoming budget session of parliament," the statement said.

Already the Government has conveyed its willingness to suspend these laws for eighteen months. Acts that are legislated by parliament, signed by the

**Already the Government has conveyed its willingness to suspend these laws for eighteen months**

President of India and notified by the Gazette are law of the land.

"They cannot be suspended. Unless they are repealed, they are enforceable. Hence, the Government must be reasonable, repeal these laws, hold discussions regarding agrarian reforms with the farmers and other stakeholders including State Governments and then bring proposals before parliament, if any, for their consideration and due deliberations" said the statement issued by Sitaram Yechury, D.Raja, Dipankar Bhattacharya, Debabrata Biswas, and Manoj Bhattacharya.

# Govt eyes seaweed cultivation in a big way to boost fishermen's income

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Though bestowed with more than 8,000 km coastline enriched with seaweeds (macro algae) which has huge potential as a sustainable food source and provide livelihood to coastal communities hit by climate change vagaries, India's share in global production is negligible at 0.1 per cent when compared to China and Indonesia which have grabbed 80 per cent of the market pie.

Now, keen to be not left behind, the Modi Government is leaving no stone unturned and taking a series of measures like providing subsidy, capacity building and awareness through webinars and interaction among others with the interested cooperatives and entrepreneurs to take up seaweed cultivation in a big way, business of which is projected to hit USD 26 billion by 2026.

India's present seaweed value is estimated to be around just USD 500 million i.e 50 crore and the officials feel that there is a huge opportunity to exploit the potential of the seaweed business.

Government has already allocated ₹ 637 crore for the cultivation of these nutrition-rich marine plants, as part of the ₹20,050-crore central scheme Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMSY)—to be spent over the next five years, mainly as subsidy support.

In fact, seaweed cultivation has been the pet project of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who since his days as Chief Minister of Gujarat, had been stressing on its promotion for the fishermen and coastal communities looking to double their income by 2022 and boost the rural economy.

In this direction, to create awareness and deliberate on the strengths, opportunities and challenges, an international webinar is being jointly organized by the Department of Fisheries, Union Ministry of Animal Husbandry, LINCAC-National Cooperatives Development Corporation (NCDC), and NEDAC, Bangkok next week i.e January 28, 2021.

At the webinar, the stakeholders including scientists, government officials and entrepreneurs from India and countries like Canada, Thailand,



Philippines and Vietnam will share their views, brought on one platform and steps will be taken towards forging alliances for promotion of entrepreneurship in the sector through cooperatives. At the same time, the webinar will identify bottlenecks at various levels and will aim at evolving options.

"Much of India's coast is ideal for seaweed cultivation with suitable tropical weather, shallow waters and a rich supply of nutrients. In total, as many as 841 species of seaweed thrive along the region, though only a few are cultivated. The seaweed is not only destined to be a food source, but also a source of bio-fuels, bio-fertilisers and other products like in pharma and cos-

metics," said Sundeep Kumar Joshi, Additional Secretary from Union Ministry of Food Processing will dwell on his Ministry's support for seaweed based food and Dr. Thierry Chopin, Prof of Marine Biology, University of New Brunswick, Canada will talk about 'Seaweeds, a key component of Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) providing important ecosystem services,

which should be valued."

The other topics that would be taken up during the webinar will be seaweed farming for farmers by Dr. US Awasthi, MD IFFCO, India, Dr. Blossom Kochhar, Chair, Blossom Kochhar Group, India will touch upon 'Seaweeds in the cosmetics industry in India'.

Others who will participate include Kavita Nehemiah, Snap Natural & Alginate, India, Dr. Nguyen Van Nguyen, Dy Dir, Rest Inst for Marine Fish, Vietnam, Dr. Anicia Q Hurtado, University of the Philippines Visayas, Philippines, Prof. Krishna R. Salin, Director, NEDAC Bangkok and Dr. Atul Patne, Commissioner Fisheries, Govt of Maharashtra, India among others.

The key beneficiaries of this webinar will be seaweed farmers, budding entrepreneurs, youth, women and vulnerable communities. The webinar also aims at augmenting awareness about seaweed farming as a business and to come up with an actionable time bound plan which will contribute towards attaining 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', said Nayak.

It has been estimated that

India can produce one million tonnes of dry seaweed providing employment to nearly 2 lakh fishers with an annual income of ₹1 lakh per individual.

Nayak further said that seaweed farming is one of the few sectors in developing countries that allow a certain level of flexibility besides tackling climate change threats. As a result, women can work in this business and gain an independent income without neglecting their traditional household work. For instance, Tanzania has seen women emerge as leaders in the seaweed world, and they have even moved out producing seaweed flour in addition to farming, he added.

As per the PMSY guidelines, seaweed farming will be promoted in a mission mode and supported through financial, marketing and logistical support to ensure income and welfare gains to small fisher population especially women and fisherwomen headed households.

# Over 16L healthcare workers receive Covid-19 vaccine jabs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over 16 lakh healthcare workers across the country have received Covid-19 vaccine jabs till the evening of the ninth day of the nationwide immunisation drive, as per provisional reports, the Union health ministry said on Sunday.

The ministry said that 31,466 beneficiaries were vaccinated on Sunday till 7:30 pm in five states — Haryana (907), Karnataka (2,472), Punjab (1,007), Rajasthan (24,586) and Tamil Nadu (2,494) — through 693 sessions.

The cumulative number of healthcare workers vaccinated against COVID-19 has crossed 16 lakh (16,13,667) till 7.30 pm today through 28,613 sessions, as per the provisional report," the ministry said, adding that the final report will be completed by late in the night.

"Only 10 adverse events



following immunisation have been reported till 7.30 pm on the ninth day of the vaccination drive," it stated.

The inoculation drive was launched on January 16 with over three crore healthcare and frontline workers prioritised to get the jabs initially. The total number of beneficiaries, who were vaccinated till 7.30 pm on Sunday since the launch of the drive, include 1,47,030 in Andhra Pradesh, 76,125 in Bihar, 55,529 in Kerala, 1,91,443 in Karnataka, 61,720 in Tamil Nadu, 25,811 in Delhi, 78,466 in Gujarat and 84,505 in West Bengal, according to provisional reports.

# ASHA worker's death after Covid jab triggers protest

**Amaravati:** A woman public health worker, who had taken Covid vaccine on January 19, died at a government-run hospital in Guntur in the early hours of Sunday while undergoing treatment for alleged reactions.

While family members of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker Vijaya Lakshmi (44) alleged that she died due to the adverse effect following vaccination, the officials said the cause of the death was under investigation.

Health officials said the cause of the health worker's death would be known only after receipt of her autopsy report.

The officials said the death does not appear to be related to vaccination. They pointed out that over 10,000 people were given the vaccine in Guntur district so far and not a single Adverse Event

Following Immunisation (AEFI) was reported.

ASHA worker's death sparked protest by the family members and ASHA workers at Government General Hospital, Guntur. They demanded Rs 50 lakh compensation. Guntur district collector Samuel Anand announced that the government job will be provided to the son of the deceased. "If the family is eligible to get a house under the government scheme, the same will be allotted to them," he told reporters at the hospital.

The collector, who faced angry protests by the deceased's relatives and others, said he would send a proposal to the government for compensation to Vijaya Lakshmi's family.

However, not satisfied by the collector's response, the ASHA worker's family members supported by the leaders of opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) began a sit-in at the hospital.

Raising slogans of 'we want justice' the protesters squatted at the main entrance of the hospital. Police forcibly lifted the protesters and arrested them, leading to tension. The TDP leaders alleged that the police resorted to excessive use of force to suppress the protest.

According to Vijaya Lakshmi's family members, she took the vaccine on January 19. She developed high fever on January 21. They alleged that a private hospital in Guntur refused to admit her, forcing them to take her to the government hospital.

They said the doctors told them that she suffered brain stroke but they alleged that the death was the result of adverse effect of Covid vaccine. **IANS**

# I'm innocent, husband fixed me, says mother charged with sexually assault on minor son

**Thiruvananthapuram:** The 35-year-old woman, who has been accused of 'sexually abusing her minor son, on Sunday said she was innocent and framed by her estranged husband and his second wife.

Appearing before the media with her face covered, the woman said, "the truth should come out. My son was threatened by his father to give the statements against me. The case is fabricated."

The woman, who was arrested under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act was granted bail by the Kerala High court.

The court had observed that the gravity of offences alleged against the woman was serious in nature and quite unheard of, and had directed the state police chief to constitute a special team, preferably headed by a woman IPS officer, to proceed with the investigation.

The woman from nearby Kadakkavoor was arrested on December 28 on charges of sexually abusing her son since the age of 10 till he shifted to Sharjah with his father in December 2019.

The case was registered based on a report filed by the Child Welfare Committee officials who had conducted counselling of the child.

The woman alleged that the POCSO case was filed by her husband in retaliation for the case she had moved before a family court seeking custody of her four children and alimony.

"I am innocent. The truth should come out. My son will never make such a complaint," she said. She said she was not aware about the details of the case and came to know about it only at the police station. **PTI**

# Jawan succumbs to injuries caused by Pak firing in J&K

**PNS | JAMMU**



**A**n Army jawan, undergoing treatment at Udampur based command hospital, succumbed to his fatal injuries early Sunday morning.

The Army jawan, identified as Naik Nishant Sharma, had received serious injuries during 'unprovoked' ceasefire violation by the Pakistan Army along the line of control in Sunderbani sector of Rajouri.

According to Defence PRO in Jammu, Naik Nishant Sharma of 10 JAK Rifles was undergoing treatment at command hospital where he succumbed to his injuries on Sunday.

Meanwhile, tension prevailed along the line of control following repeated incidents of ceasefire violations in the region.

The Pakistan Army is desperately attempting to push small groups of heavily armed terrorists inside the Indian territory to execute a terror plot.

On the other hand, Indian soldiers are maintaining a tight vigil to prevent enemy infiltration bias from across the LOC.

High alert has been sounded in the run up to the Republic day celebrations along the International border with Pakistan across the Jammu frontier after another cross border tunnel was detected by the BSF in Pansar area of Kathua district.

In Kashmir valley, the venues of Republic Day celebrations including Sher-e-Kashmir stadium in Srinagar have been fortified with multi tier security ring to prevent any terror attack aimed at disrupting the celebrations. **IANS**

# Tamil Nadu manages to bring down Covid-19 cases

**KUMAR CHELLAPPAN | CHENNAI**

**T**amil Nadu has managed to bring the Covid-19 pandemic under control, if the government details are any indication. A state which was about to top the table with the maximum number of positive cases, has brought down the number of new persons diagnosed with the pandemic to 386 as on Saturday evening. The 24 hours ending Saturday night saw the fatalities coming down to just two.

"This is a marked change from the weeks when Tamil Nadu used to test 6000 to 7000

new Covid-19 cases daily and the death tally per day hovered around 200 to 300 for many weeks. Till Saturday the State had not have reached this level," said Vijayabaskar.

But DMK president M K Stalin alleged that the Palaniswamy Government was a total failure in handling the Covid-19 at Ground Zero. "The fight against Covid-19 success is the State's credit on condition of anonymity."

Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy and Health Minister Vijayabaskar attributed the success to the dedication shown by the doctors, nurses, paramedical staff and

workers in the departments of health, revenue, police and the general public. "But for their sacrifices and cooperation, we would not have reached this level," said Vijayabaskar.

But DMK president M K Stalin alleged that the Palaniswamy Government was a total failure in handling the Covid-19 at Ground Zero. "The fight against Covid-19 success is the State's credit on condition of anonymity."

Chief Minister Edappadi Palaniswamy and Health Minister Vijayabaskar attributed the success to the dedication shown by the doctors, nurses, paramedical staff and

hopeless Chief Minister who has no concern for the people," said Stalin while speaking to a pro-left newspaper.

The fever, clinched by the State Government across the State, the awareness programme carried out by various departments of the Government and the medical fraternity who worked round the clock with the twin objective of preventing the spread of the pandemic and managing the patients contributed a lot in bringing down the cases and fatalities, said the Government physician, Veteran physician Dr C V Krishnaswamy, who was monitoring the situation in

Tamil Nadu from day one, agreed there has been a change in the course of the pandemic.

"No doubt, it is a positive development. But I would like to be cautious because you have to take into account what is happening in Kerala," he said.

Kerala, which by May 2020 had claimed that it was free of Covid-19 is reeling under yet another onslaught of the pandemic, which experts describe as a third wave of attack. By Saturday evening, the State diagnosed 6,960 new cases. There are more than 72,000 patients under treatment in the State, according to the Department of Health release.

# 7 injured as bus collides with truck in Chitrakoot: Police

**PTI | CHITRAKOOT (UP)**

**S**even persons were injured, two of them seriously, when a bus of the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPRTC) collided head on with a truck here on Sunday morning, police said.

Senior sub-inspector at the Raipura police station

Shivkumar Yadav said the accident occurred near the Raipura police station area at around 7.30 am, when the bus heading towards Karvi from Prayagraj collided head on with the truck.

Seven persons were injured in the incident, Yadav said, adding that the condition of the

truck driver and the bus conductor was critical.

A man, who was making cow dung cakes on the roadside, was also among the injured, he said.

The police said prima facie it seems that the accident occurred due to dense fog, adding that investigations are going on.

# Will sack guilty officials in question paper leak: BSY

**Bengaluru:** Expressing outrage over the leak of the first division assistant examination question paper, for which 14 persons have been arrested, Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on Sunday warned any official of the Karnataka Public Service Commission found guilty would be sacked.

"I am not only ready to suspend the officials involved in the leak of question papers, but also dismiss them from service if found guilty," he said in a tweet on Sunday.

The KPSB on Saturday cancelled the twin exams, which were to be held on Sunday across the state for 1,114 FDA posts.

"Stringent action will be taken against the guilty involved in the case, as leaking questions papers is an unpardonable act and a crime," the Chief Minister said.

According to KPSB Secretary G. Satyavathi, a whooping 3,74,000 candidates applied for the posts and 2,82,000 downloaded their hall tickets to appear for the exams in two sessions -- general knowledge in the morning and language proficiency in the afternoon. **IANS**

On a tip-off, Central Crime Branch sleuths first arrested six accused, including kinglyns Rachappa and Chandru in the city on Saturday and filed a case against them. They also seized question papers for Rs 50 lakhs to Rs 1 crore to more of the job aspirants.

Chandru is reported to be an inspector in the state Commercial Tax Department.

The CCB arrested eight more persons, including some KPSB officials, on Sunday under various sections of the Indian Penal Code for the paper leakage.

Joint Commissioner of Police, Crime, Sandeep Patil said in a statement that eight more were arrested after their names were revealed by the kinglyns during preliminary investigation earlier in the week.

The CCB sleuths also recovered copies of the question papers, Rs 24 lakh in cash and three vehicles from the two kinglyns in a raid conducted on their premises on Saturday night. The KPSB informed the candidates through SMS that the exams on Sunday were cancelled and would be held at a later date. **IANS**

# Two found dead in stranded vehicle on Jammu-Srinagar Highway

**PNS | JAMMU**

**T**wo stranded passengers were found dead inside a local carrier parked on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway near Banihal in Ramban district on Sunday.

The duo, hailing from Kralpora district, were stranded in the area after traffic was suspended due to accumulation of snow on both sides of the Jawahar tunnel since Saturday morning.

The passengers were identified as Shabir Ahmad Mir (22) and Majid Gulzar Mir (30).

According to official sources, the passengers were rushed to the nearby hospital in Banihal where doctors declared them brought dead. Angry drivers of local carriers and others also staged a protest demonstration near Railway Chowk in Banihal to highlight their plight and pathetic state of affairs of the highway.

Alleging that the government responsible for the death of the duo, the protesters also demanded adequate compensation from the government in support of the families of the deceased passengers.

Meanwhile, routine traffic remained suspended on the national highway on Sunday while some of the stranded vehicles were cleared after completing the snow clearing operations. **PTI**

**Holding the Government responsible for the death of the duo, the protesters alleged that the government should have allowed the stranded vehicles through the recently-completed Banihal-Qazigund tunnel**

# Puducherry adds 30 fresh Covid cases, overall tally rises to 38,860

**Puducherry:** The Union Territory of Puducherry logged 30 new coronavirus cases during the last 24 hours, taking the overall tally to 38,860, a top Health department official said on Sunday.

Of the 37 new old patient succumbed to the infection pushing up the toll to 645, Director of Health and Family Welfare S Mohan Kumar said in a release.

The patient who passed away at the government hospital here had severe Covid pneumonia and ARDS, he added.

Of the 37 new cases were identified at the end of the examination of 3,046 samples.

The Puducherry region accounted for 15 of the 30 new cases followed by Mahe (9) and Karaikal (6), Mohan Kumar said, adding that Yanam did not report any fresh infections.

The number of active cases stood at 288 while 37,927 patients had recovered and had been discharged so far.

The Health department Director said as many as 43 patients were discharged during the last 24 hours after recovery. The fatality and recovery rates were 1.66 per cent and 97.60 per cent respectively, the Health department Director said.

Of the 5.57 lakh samples tested so far 5.13 lakh samples turned out to be negative, he added. **PTI**

# Excited tourists react as tiger walks along their vehicle

**IANS | JAIPUR**

**A** video has gone viral of a tiger climbing over the wall of Rajasthan's Ranthambore National Park and walking silently on the road, as tourists seated in their vehicle gaze on in excitement and fear.

The incident, as per wildlife officials, was reported on Thursday.

While some of the tourists were panicked, others were seated on the wall of excitement as they clicked the big cat right in front of them.

The vehicle was parked in close proximity to the wall nearly 7 feet high, which prevented the big cat, as well as the people, from seeing what was on the other side.

When the tiger scaled the wall all of a sudden, the people were left in a shock.

However, the majestic beast did not display any signs of aggression and walked along silently as the tourists watched in awe.

Petrieved and excited tourists yelled as a tiger walks along their Gypsy in Rajasthan. **IANS**

# Gujarat custodial death: 4 cops suspended, search on for 3 accused

**Bhu (Guj):** A police inspector and three constables have been suspended following the death of a theft suspect in the custody of Mundra police in Gujarat's Kutch district a few days back, an official said on Sunday. The three constables, who have been accused of murder, are absconding and efforts are on to nab them, he said.

The victim, Arjan Gadvi (30), died on January 19 while undergoing treatment at a government hospital, after allegedly

remaining in the illegal custody of the three constables at Mundra police station for six days, according to a police complaint filed by a relative of the deceased.

Superintendent of Police, Kutch-West, Saurabh Singh on Sunday said inspector J A Padhiyar has been suspended for dereliction of duty, while the three constables were suspended after a case was registered against them on charges of murder.

The three accused constables

are - Shaktisinh Gohil, Ashok Kannad and Jaydevsinh Zala.

"I have suspended the three accused constables and a police inspector of Mundra. The three accused constables are at large and efforts are on to nab them," Singh said. The constables are absconding ever since the case of murder and wrongful confinement was registered against them on January 21 following the death of Gadvi in their custody allegedly due to torture. **PTI**

# Badaun: Man arrested for raping 20-yr-old woman

**Budaun (UP):** A man was arrested here on Sunday for allegedly raping a 20-year-old woman, police said.

According to police, the woman dragged the man to the fields on late Friday night and allegedly raped her.

After reaching her home, the woman narrated the incident to her family members, who lodged a police complaint against him, they said.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Budaun, Sankalp Sharma on Sunday said that based on the complaint lodged by the family members of the woman, a case has been registered against the man, who is in his 20s.

The woman has been sent for a medical examination, while the accused has been arrested and sent to jail, the SSP said. **PTI**

# Mission Shakti: UP woman seeks road repair before wedding

**Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh):** A 24-year-old woman, who is preparing for her marriage next month, has approached the district magistrate with an unusual request.

The woman, who lives in Igla area, met the district magistrate with a request to repair the road leading to her house in the Naglachura village so that her 'baraat' does not face problems in reaching her home.

Karishma Kumari, the bride-to-be, said her marriage had been fixed for February 27 and the road, in question, was filled with potholes and mud.

"It will be difficult for the 'baraat' to move on the road at night," she told the district magistrate.

Aligarh District Magistrate Chandra Bhushan Singh said, "I have directed the official concerned to take immediate action and commence work for the construction of the road."

He said that this initiative is the best example of the Mission Shakti campaign, launched by the state government to empower women. **IANS**

# Youth poses with gun at his mother's head, arrested in UP

**IANS | SHAMLI (UP)**

**A** youth posing for a selfie, with a pistol pointed at his mother's head, has been arrested by the Shamli police.

The weapon has also been seized from the youth, identified as Deepak Kumar, 20.

The cyber cell of the police traced the youth from the Sunheti village under Kairana police station in Uttar Pradesh. Kumar had uploaded the picture on social media. Superintendent of Police, Shamli, Sukirti Madhav, has ordered an inquiry into the matter. **IANS**

# 167 fresh Covid cases reported in Rajasthan

**Jaipur:** Rajasthan's Covid-19 tally increased to 3,16,652 on Sunday with 167 fresh cases, according to a health department bulletin.

No death due to the coronavirus was reported on Sunday, it said. The highest number of fresh cases were reported from Jaipur and Kota with 26 persons testing positive for the infection in each of the districts, the bulletin said.

The rest of the cases were reported from Ajmer, Alwar, Banswara, Baran, Barmer, Bharatpur, Bhilwara, Bikaner, Bundi, Chittorgarh, Dausa, Dangarpur, Ganganagar, Hanumangar, Jhalawar, Jodhpur, Nagaur, Pali, Pratapgarh, Rajasamand and Udaipur districts, it said. **PTI**

# Kerala sees over 6,000 daily coronavirus cases; test positivity touches 12.48 %

**Thiruvananthapuram:** Kerala posted 6,026 COVID-19 cases and 5,173 recoveries on Sunday with over 72,000 presently undergoing treatment for the infection, the government said. While the total COVID-19 caseload soared to 8,89,576, the recoveries have touched 8,13,550, state Health minister FK Shalaja, said in a press release here.

In the last 24 hours, 83,378 samples have been tested and the test positivity rate has touched 12.48 per cent.

So far, 92.58 lakh samples have been sent for testing. While Ernakulam accounted for 822 cases, Kozhikode 763, Kottayam 622 and Kollam 543, Kasaragod reported 124 new cases.

None of the UK returnees have tested positive in the last 24 hours. The virus toll has gone up to 3,607

with 20 more fatalities being added to the tally.

Of the positive cases, 42 are health workers, 74 had come from outside the state and 5,451 have been infected through contact. Presently, 2.14 lakh people are under observation in various districts, including 12,226 in hospitals.

The active case load in the state is 72,891. **PTI**

# Gujarat: 4 dead in 2 accidents in Devbhumi Dwarka, Ahmedabad

**Ahmedabad:** Four persons were killed in two separate accidents on Sunday in Devbhumi Dwarka district and on Bhavnagar-Ahmedabad Highway in Gujarat, police said.

In the first incident, two unidentified men were killed on the spot when their SUV, heading towards Bhavnagar, was hit by a truck near Moti Baru village in Ahmedabad's Dholka taluka, said Koth police station sub-inspector HR Patel.

Three people in the SUV were injured in the incident and the driver of the truck, which overturned on impact, has been detained, he added.

In the second accident, which took place later in the day in Devbhumi Dwarka, a couple from Bhanwad traveling on a scooter was hit by a speeding pick-up truck near Manja village, an official said.

Ketan Parmar (39) and his wife Jyoti (37) died on the spot and the pick-up driver fled from the spot, the Khamhalba police station official said. **PTI**



Crowd of visitors at the Taj Mahal during foggy day in Agra on Sunday

**PTI**



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Missing cohesion

The latest attempts by the Congress to paper over differences raise more questions than these answer

One cannot help wondering what ails India's 'grand old party'? Why is it that over four months after the Congress set into motion the process of holding elections for the appointment of a new president, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Friday unanimously put off the exercise until June? Does the Congress not realise that it is rapidly losing political relevance in the country by losing State after State? So now, with the Assembly elections to five States slated for May or earlier, is it not the time for the party to elect a leader who will be able to effectively lead the party into the polls and work out a strategy to reverse its dwindling fortunes? It is very obvious that Rahul is not interested in being at the helm of affairs despite his mother Sonia Gandhi's fervent desire to see her son lead it. Though Rahul is rapidly shaping into a politician who frequently raises uncomfortable and relevant questions for the Government and even takes on the Prime Minister, he is a "reluctant politician" who would rather be away from it all instead of right in the middle of a fight at the hustings. So isn't it time that the Congress began looking at someone outside the "dynasty" to lead it into the poll battles? However, given that the schedule announced by the party's working committee will ensure that the new president escapes responsibility for the outcomes of the five Assembly elections, one cannot be blamed for thinking that the mantle might again fall on the Gandhi scion.

Is it that the party does not have faith in the bevy of veteran leaders who are more than capable of steering it on the path of victory and, by extension, political relevance? Or is it that the loyalists would rather run the party into the ground than change guard? Is there so much rivalry in the 'grand old party' that the members can't rise above it and do what is best for the future of the Congress and, by extension, the country? Everyone knows that for democracy to be relevant, alive and kicking in a country, a strong Opposition is a must to keep the Government on its toes. But all attempts at forging Opposition unity have come to naught till now as senior leaders — like Chandrababu Naidu, Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar and so on — refuse to kowtow to a young and inexperienced leader who has never even been a Chief Minister? Plus, each of them is more than capable and harbours prime ministerial ambitions. So why would the stalwarts step down for a dynast? The result is a country with a weak and scattered Opposition and no leader tall enough to give an alternative Government at the Centre and occupy the Prime Minister's chair. It is a shame that at a time when the Congress should be finalising its strategy for the looming Assembly elections, there is infighting over the internal elections and the CWC polls which were last held when Sonia took over as Congress president in 1998. The Congress obviously needs to put its house in order, both for its sake and for that of the country.

### PICTALK



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and MoS (Finance & Corporate Affairs) Anurag Thakur participate in the traditional ceremony at North Block in New Delhi.

## Brrr, & yet hot!

The mercury may keep dipping but the political temperature is likely to soar ahead of the 72nd Republic Day

With the Weatherman's forecast that the mercury may dip to 4°C Celsius on the Republic Day this year, probably the politically soaring temperature in the Capital due to the planned tractor rally by the farmers' unions is the only thing that might get our blood thawed and running. The Indian Meteorological Department data shows the intense fluctuation in the minimum temperatures this month due to factors like a lesser number of western disturbances influencing the plains, rapid change in wind direction and its speed. Delhi's chilly weather may have troubled the residents a lot but what sends a chill down the Government's spine is the scheduled tractor rally by the peasants, wherever it finally takes place, and if at all. The Republic Day parade is the showcase of India's might and grandeur, its military prowess, rich cultural heritage, its research and development, its values, ethics and whatnot. However, a simultaneous protest rally by the cultivators, when marching contingents of our Armed Forces and paramilitary will showcase the nation's strength on the Rajpath, would definitely not be a feather in India's hat globally. In fact, it'll be considered a blot on Indian democracy.

Delhi has become a political hotbed since the past two months, when the farmers angry with the three Central farm laws have been camping at its borders. However, it's not only the farmer's rally that is expected to mar R-Day celebrations. In the absence of any chief guest at the parade this year, in over 50 years now, the R-Day celebrations would be a bit insipid. After British Prime Minister Boris Johnson expressed his inability to attend the celebration due to the emergence of the mutant COVID-19 strain at home, India would not be showcasing its military might and prowess to the world leaders, to their person. Also, the celebrations will be low-key due to the COVID-19 pandemic as the number of invitees has been drastically cut short to make sure that all the protocols are followed. The weather forecaster has predicted foggy weather in Delhi for the next three days, including that on the Republic Day. The mercury may dip further but the political temperature is soaring each passing day; is expected to leave a mark on the 72nd R-Day and then reaching a climax during the Budget Session.

# Professions versus self-employment

Since only about half the employable people globally have jobs, it's time to start training youngsters for self-employment



PRAFULL GORADIA

For a living, there is nothing more pleasurable than owning and running one's own enterprise. True, lately, even in India, some companies offer a hefty pay and perks which exceed the profits of a small-to-medium industry or business. Nevertheless, the satisfaction of owning an enterprise is greater as well offsets the income of a top job. Mind you, a chief executive of a large corporation has several advantages other than merely pay and perks. To be able to operate on a large scale as well the potential of further expansion on commensurate scale is itself a substantial compensation.

The larger the enterprise, the greater the market and, perhaps, influence and the more the number of people reporting to the CEO. Some chief executives experience, and rightly so, a sense of power which a medium self-owned enterprise can't provide. Until 1980, I headed a company, with no questions ever asked, which employed 25,000 people. That pleasure is yet to be replicated in my own business-cum-industry which has been successful for its size. For a musician, the pleasure of playing on a grand piano far outweighs the satisfaction that a harmonium provides, although the former belongs to someone else while the latter is one's own. The pain and humiliation of the piano being taken away would be greater than the pleasure it ever gave you.

Nevertheless, if I were born again, I would get into my own business earlier than I did in this business. But I must not forget to mention that a certain discipline and method of work that a large organisation provides, a small one seldom gives. It is not widely known that management science or business management as a subject was started by what an officer observed of the German Army's functioning during World War I: How best to develop an effective organisation economically and then run it optimally. An example that readily comes to mind is the famous "tooth to tail ratio". Given, say, a division of soldiers, maximise the number of fighting/firing men and keep the deployment for servicing/sup-



porting the frontline men with rifles and machine guns at the bare minimum. It was subsequently discovered that the British Army had a 1:10 ratio, while the German ratio was 1:4. On this criterion, the Germans were two-and-a-half times more efficient than the British at the fundamental function of fighting and killing the enemy.

Do not get the impression that I favour the Army set-up as an ideal example for organising a large company. One, I have quoted an example of over a century ago. Two, in today's context, the Army's fighting soldiers and officers are divided into many layers. A better focused training would require fewer layers of supervision or leadership. In contrast, small businesses require versatile men and women, persons who know how to perform multiple functions for the simple reason that the smaller the company, the fewer number of persons it can afford to employ.

Looking at the world scenario, only about half the employable people have jobs. The other half is self-employed, which includes the wealthiest entrepreneur to the humblest hawk. The message is that of the two youngsters coming into the employment market, one must look for self-employment. If one's education



TRUE, SOME FIRMS OFFER A HEFTY PAY AND PERKS WHICH EXCEED THE PROFITS OF A SMALL-TO-MEDIUM INDUSTRY OR BUSINESS BUT THE SATISFACTION OF OWNING AN ENTERPRISE IS GREATER AND WELL OFFSETS THE INCOME OF A TOP JOB

has been law, medicine, accountancy or suchlike, she knows what to do. Else, one may try one's hand at business. This is where youngsters who do not belong to families with a business tradition can feel lost. Business management studies enumerate theories on commerce-related subjects. But they seldom lay out advice on how to set up a business if one has no experience. Few successful entrepreneurs write their life stories for the beginners to learn from. Nor have the publishers of educational books apparently persuaded enough entrepreneurs to fill this knowledge gap.

A word of caution: Neither an inheritor of business nor an academician is quite the appropriate author of a truly useful book. Only someone who happens to have started his/her enterprise from scratch and succeeded, is such an author.

My plea is urgent because in the employment market right now women in significant numbers are seeking jobs, which was earlier a men's monopoly. We had not heard of women fighter pilots in the Air Force; now they are a reality. On the other hand, the COVID-19 affliction has caused a loss in jobs. Will all the shops survive or will home deliveries replace some of them? What are like-

ly to be the effects of work-from-home on employment? With no family tradition of business, I worked as an executive in big companies for 23 years. By pursuing acquaintances in multi-national corporations, I got started with contract manufacturing. That line helped me set up small factories manufacturing and selling similar goods. This is one example of how a novice can enter his/her own enterprise. But one factor is certain: The person concerned has to lose his/her fear of insecurity. The security of a steady job can sometime be as bad as a disease.

India is proud of its business management schools which have turned out first-rate executives. But it will be interesting to see a survey of their alumni: What percentage has developed their own enterprises? I feel there is a need for similar schools for small enterprises. A laundry, a restaurant, even a grocer or *panwallah* is a business worth learning and pursuing. Everyone need not learn how to run a large company. In fact, there is a greater scope for smaller enterprises but I doubt if there are schools teaching about them.

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

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### FARMERS SPOILING INDIA'S IMAGE

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'The farm divide' (January 23). Consequent upon the failure of the 11th round of talks between the farmers' unions and the Central Government, the wrong message is being transmitted. For the first time in the history of independent India, there is a possibility that farmers will take out a tractor rally parallel to the Republic Day parade, which is a big shame for us, as a nation. The image of the Government is going to get tarnished in front of the whole world. The Republic Day, being a red letter day, is of utmost importance for maintaining a clean image of India's sovereign process. Celebrating and enjoying the Republic Day parade is of great importance for every Indian.

We may have internal differences due to different opinions, non-consensus on any other issue but that doesn't mean that we have the right to eclipse India's global image. The farmers are doing exactly that. Therefore, the farmers' organisations must abort their plan in the larger interest of the entire nation. Patriotism runs through the veins of every true Indian. On the Republic Day, the countrymen are least interested in farmers' tractor rally and want to witness the peaceful R-Day parade at Rajpath.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

#### EDUCATION HOLDS THE KEY

Sir — Gender inequality has affected the socio-economic development of India for decades, but now the situation is changing and we are moving towards gender equality in all spheres. The Ministry of Women and Child Development has started observing January 24 as 'National Girl Child Day' to create awareness on the inequalities and problems faced by girls in the Indian society.

Our Constitution grants equality to both genders, ensures equality before the law and prohibits discrimination against any citizen on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Indian women are multi-talented and have the unique

## Better late than never



The adage 'better late than never' seems to have come in handy for the grand old party given that the much-longed-for yet belated decision to hold the party's organisational elections towards June-end came from the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the highest decision-making body of the party, that met on Friday amidst the clash between members belonging to the old and the new guard.

The June 30 deadline for holding the party elections met with strong opposition from a group of dissenters. It resulted in a heated exchange between two sections of party veterans.

But they unanimously entrusted the interim party chief Sonia Gandhi with the responsibility of having the final call on the recommendations it made vis-a-vis the election for the party's full-time president.

The decision has been taken on mature reflection so that the results of the upcoming Assembly polls due in May in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry and West Bengal may not be attributed to the new chief's performance, if these are not up to the expectations. Interestingly, as many as 23 members from both the groups demanded in an open letter to Sonia Gandhi a couple of months back, the conduct of the organisational elections. Now, political circles are avidly waiting to see what way this Congress cookie crumbles!

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

quality of patience. They are the ambassadors of our culture and heritage.

Gender inequality is mainly because of poverty, disability, early marriages and pregnancy, gender-based violence and orthodox local traditions and cultures. But now the situation is changing slowly and gradually.

Education is the only solution to many of our socio-economic problems. Access to quality education is the key to ensuring that women have access to work opportunities, decent healthcare and representation in political and economic fields. In India, initiatives by successive Governments since two decades have done a lot in uplifting women who are now on a par with their male counterparts. India cannot be empowered unless its women are.

BVS Kumar | Krishna

#### WE MUST TAKE PRIDE

Sir — We should be proud that global community is applauding India for its role

### SOUNDBITE

The honour is ours, President @jairbolsonaro to be a trusted partner of Brazil in fighting the Covid-19 pandemic together.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Narasimha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Brazil is honoured to have a great partner to overcome a global obstacle.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro

D COMPANY is going to be the mother of all gangster films. It will tell the story of the father of gangsterism whose name is Dawood Ibrahim.

Bollywood Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma

Virat Kohli bats better when he is the captain. I think if you change it, it would destroy the culture of the Indian team.

Former Australia cricketer Brad Hogg

Despite the adverse situation caused by the pandemic, export from Odisha in the current financial year up to November has registered 55 per cent increase.

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik

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



## FIRST COLUMN

### THE NEXT STAGE IN WORLD HISTORY

The US and China will be embroiled in conflict and India will join the ranks of developed countries



MARKANDEO KATJU

In my opinion the next stage in world history will be marked by two main events: The conflict between the US and China and India joining the ranks of developed countries. Regarding the first, there are two superpowers in the world today, the US and China. The difference between the two is that China is aggressive and expanding, while the US is on the defensive. Hence, the Chinese can be compared to Nazi imperialists in the 1930s and early 1940s, while the US can be compared to the British and French, who were on the defensive. At that time the real danger to the world was Nazi Germany, not the British or French. Today the Chinese, with their huge \$3.2 trillion foreign exchange reserve hungrily looking for new markets, raw materials and avenues for investment worldwide, are the real danger to world peace, like Hitler's imperialism. The main check to the Chinese is the US. Therefore, they are bound to clash. However, for now, the conflict will not take the form of an open war between the two in view of the fact that both have nuclear weapons. But limited conflicts may take place, in various forms like tariff wars and in different places like the South China Sea incidents. As regards the second, in today's age there are really two worlds, one of the developed countries (like North America, Europe, Japan, Australia and China) and the world of the underdeveloped nations (like India and the other countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America). India is on the verge of smashing its way into the ranks of the developed countries.

Before the Industrial Revolution, which began in England in the beginning of the 18th century and then spread everywhere, there were feudal agricultural societies everywhere. The feudal mode of production was so backward that very little wealth could be generated by it. Consequently only a handful of people (kings and aristocrats) could be rich while the rest (over 95 per cent) had to remain poor.



This situation changed drastically after the Industrial Revolution. Now modern industry is so powerful and so big that enough wealth can be generated by it to give a decent life to everyone. Yet, over 75 per cent of the people of the world are poor, particularly in underdeveloped countries. The objective of the underdeveloped countries must be to become developed nations and, therefore, the 21st century and the next stage of history will be characterised as a period of struggle by the people of underdeveloped countries to make this historical transformation. Otherwise they can never escape poverty, unemployment, hunger, lack of healthcare and other evils. There are powerful forces which, for their own vested interests, oppose this historical transformation, so it will not be easy but it must be done by patriots.

India will lead the underdeveloped countries in this process, because it is the most developed of all of them and is on the verge of smashing its way into the ranks of developed nations. India has a huge pool of technical talent with thousands of bright engineers, technicians and scientists (Indians are largely manning Silicon Valley in California and are professors in the science, engineering and mathematics departments in many American universities) and immense natural resources.

However, Indians lacked a genuinely patriotic and modern political leadership and were till now divided on the basis of feudal concepts like caste and religion. This was blocking their advance. The ongoing farmers' agitation has changed this to a large extent. Indians are shunning divisive politics and politicians and are united like never before. This stir has come as the spark that will transform India into a developed country.

(The writer is a former judge of the Supreme Court of India. The views expressed are personal.)

# Make AI evolution inclusive in India

The disproportionately dominant role played by men in the development of this technology, which leads to gender stereotypes and biases, is concerning



TRISHA PANDE & SHRUTI SHREYA

The last few years have witnessed the evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into a powerful tool that enables machines to think and act like humans. Considering the ability of this technology to transform economies, the AI revolution holds unparalleled significance for a developing country like India, which has the second-largest population in the world. While recognising the tremendous potential that this technology holds, it is also important to understand and question the biases involved in the making and functioning of AI. The disproportionately dominant role played by men in the development of this technology which leads to gender stereotypes and biases, is concerning.

**The growth of AI technologies:** India being the fastest-growing economy in the world has a significant stake in the development of AI. Recognising this potential, the Government had in 2018 instructed the NITI Aayog to establish a national AI programme. Thereafter, the establishment of a national AI stack, the proposal for a National Mission on AI and the launch of a global AI summit in 2020 by the Prime Minister, are all evidence of the Government's commitment to creating a robust AI infrastructure in the country.

With machine learning (ML) finding its application across sectors including healthcare, digital finance and education, and the opportunities for job seekers are also abundant in this field. The robust Information Technology (IT) ecosystem coupled with talented human resource has the ability to convert India into an AI hub very soon. However, like any other man-made technology, AI artifacts too reflect the challenge of being cluttered with existing sociological biases. Such concerns need a strategic and tactical response to obviate the said technology from reinforcing the existing stereotypes and discriminatory social norms.

**Feminist challenges to the proliferation of AI in Indian Society:** It has been 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, that envisioned a peaceful and equitable world for all women. A significant gender bias still exists in our society. For instance, as late as in February 2020 the Supreme Court had to remind the Government that it's arguments for denying women a position of command in the Army were based on stereotypes. Moreover, as per a recent report of UNDP titled 'Tackling Social Norms', gender bias is not a male problem as the findings of the report reveal that almost 90 per cent of the people (both men and women) hold some kind of biases against women and people from other marginalised communities. The challenges of social bias and other forms of discrimination against women and members of the trans community pervade all spheres of life. While the existing digital divide and under-representation of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) continue to pose significant concerns, AI and automation are throwing newer challenges for attaining substantive equality in the age of the fourth industrial revolution.

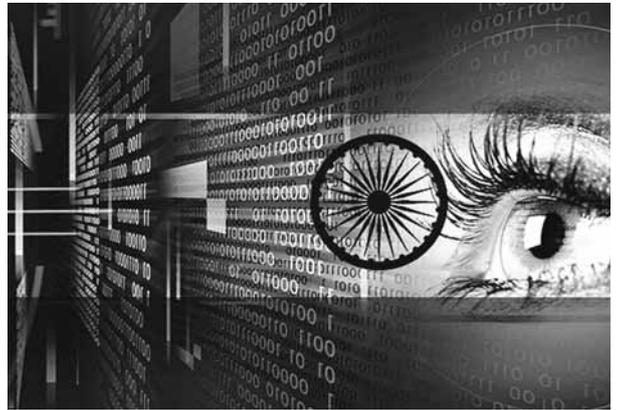
With 78 per cent of AI professional being men, it is certain that male experiences inform and dominate all AI algorithms with negligible representation from the other communities. This power imbalance has severe adverse implications for the other sexes like affecting their access to jobs and loans by automatically vetting out their applications.

Even companies leading the drive of automation are unintentionally contributing to the existing social biases getting embedded in the AI systems. As highlighted in a 2019 report by UNESCO, it is not a coincidence that virtual personal assistants like Alexa and Siri have female names and they come with a default female voice. These features reinforce the existing social realities where a



AI/ML SOLUTIONS ARE VAST AND FAR-REACHING — WITH THE POTENTIAL TO REVOLUTIONISE SECTORS SUCH AS BUSINESS AND GOVERNANCE, BUT THEIR IMPACT CAN BE DIVISIVE, SEXIST AND EXCLUSIONARY IF NOT IMPLEMENTED CORRECTLY

Pande is Policy Manager and Shreya is Policy Research Assistant, The Dialogue. The views expressed are personal.



majority of personal assistants in the public and private sector are women. **The way forward:** Some of the solutions that concern an overall better uptake of AI among women and minorities for India lie in designing these systems inclusively. This may seem fairly obvious on the face of it, but effectively it means using more inclusive training data wherever possible. For instance, women who have never formally learnt to read or write can use their smartphones to communicate. Such digital literacy — and India's increasing digital penetration — can open up a world of opportunities. Voice assistants built into mobile devices allow women to access a range of tools — however, manufacturers need to ensure that the training data used by the voice assistant is inclusive. Indian accents can vary incredibly based on region, according to the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. India has 22 regional languages. These can vary further — based on geography and community. If the voice assistant is unable to help a woman due to dialect — then there exists a missed opportunity to include those who are non-literate, but willing and able to use their smartphones for a range of purposes.

The solution is straightforward but the challenge lies in its implementation — there has to be emphasis on ensuring that voice assistants can recognise a range of Indian dialects. This is not a particular issue to women — and is a much broader issue of regional inclusivity — but it can benefit women more due to the gender divide in accessing formal education. Manufacturers can pre-empt the digital divide from worsening in this manner — and such a solution benefits society at large. Conversational

AI can increase the number of customers on an e-commerce platform, help with information and knowledge access and enhance internet experience overall. There are many women who are older and often have not used devices as early on in life as their male counterparts. This leads to a stereotype that mothers are often not as adept at using their mobile phones, and some part of it can be rooted in reality — however, that can be changed with leveraging the power of conversational AI.

Another important element to consider with AI and disruptive technology is the nature of job loss — which will be borne unequally by women across the world. Gender justice in the workforce is a concern of immense importance which must be addressed when it comes to the future of work. Women have the highest participation rates in the informal sector. This is reflected across major sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and services, where employment of the female labour force is mainly informal. Their jobs are more routine and less abstract than their male counterparts. Research in developing countries shows patterns of job-loss due to digital automation affect women-dominated jobs more than male-dominated ones. This indicates that there is an urgency to skill women so that they can take on jobs which require handling of the AI-based tools.

A majority of the female labour force should be skilled to handle such jobs across sectors. Empowering women technologically will enable them to benefit from emerging technology such as 5G, blockchain, robotics, digital communications and so forth — instead of being the reason for an economic landslide.

COVID-19 has affected women unequally — with women being on the receiving end of job loss, domestic violence and increased household responsibilities. When the post-COVID recovery for the economy begins, India must remember to focus on these gendered issues in order to leverage the potential of its working women — across formal and informal sectors.

In the truest sense of intersectional inclusivity, it is important to remember that inclusivity does not include only women in the strict social sense of the term — but also sexual minorities. The LGBTQIA+ community in India isn't well-represented on forms which collect data for larger AI/ML analyses. Many Government forms only offer the 'M/F' categories to indicate gender and occasionally, 'other'. This leaves out an entire category of people who might identify elsewhere on the gender spectrum — or non-binary people, who do not identify as M/F.

It is vital to work towards weeding out the bias which exists while hiring from the general pool of applicants — by anonymising the profiles of candidates in terms of removing gender identifiers, limiting the skill sets to only those that are required for the job (and not inadvertently including skills which might be typically masculine) and locating non-traditional applicants.

These are some of the social disparities which must be kept in mind while designing and deploying AI systems in India. AI/ML solutions are vast and far-reaching — with the potential to revolutionise sectors such as business and governance, but their impact can be divisive, sexist and exclusionary if not implemented correctly.

## POINTCOUNTERPOINT

I TAKE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ENSURING THE VICTORY OF WHOEVER CONTESTS FROM NANDIGRAM ON A BJP TICKET.

—BJP LEADER

SUVENDU ADHIKARI



I WILL CONTEST FROM NANDIGRAM. IT IS MY LUCKY PLACE. NANDIGRAM IS MY OLDER SISTER, BHABANIPUR IS MY YOUNGER SISTER.

—WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER

MAMATA BANERJEE

## FOREIGNEYE



TRUMP MUST NOT RETURN

American President Joe Biden is certainly well cast as the steady presence come to clean up the mess. But the fear persists that the villain who created it will return. Donald Trump threatened as much in his last public statement as President, uttering the chilling words: 'We will be back in some form.' Democrats can vote to ban Trump (The Guardian editorial)

# Navalny is a thorn in Putin's side but he's no Lenin

What he is doing to great effect is mobilising the tech-savvy youth whose attitude to the regime now verges on contempt

When the Russian Opposition leader Alexei Navalny returned to Moscow after convalescing in Germany following a failed poisoning attempt by the FSB domestic spy agency, the regime-friendly media loyally failed to mention his arrival. With one striking exception: *Vremya*, the flagship news show of Russian State television. Presumably somebody there was hoping to win favour with the Kremlin, because they briefly mentioned Navalny three-quarters of the way through the two-hour programme. In fact, they compared Navalny's trip home to Vladimir Lenin's famous return to Russia in 1917 and suggested that he



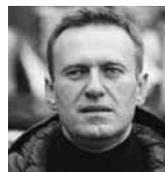
GWYNNE DYER

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

was as great a danger to Russia as Lenin had been. The Germans plucked Lenin from exile in Switzerland in the middle of World War I. He was sent across Germany in a "sealed train" (so he wouldn't spread the infection of communism there) to St Petersburg, then in the throes of Russia's first democratic revolution — and he did just what the Germans had hoped he would.

Lenin overthrew the fumbling democratic provisional Government in a military coup, took Russia out of the war and launched a 73-year totalitarian communist regime that cost at least 20 million Russian lives in purges, famines and lesser acts of repression. Is Navalny really

that great a danger? The ambitious presenter at *Vremya* probably won't get the job he wanted, because President Vladimir Putin really won't have liked seeing his noisiest critic compared to Lenin, a genuine world historical figure. Putin himself never mentions Navalny's name at all. Russians cannot even put a name to the system they live under, as the poor presenter's confusion illustrates. It's certainly not a democracy, although there are regular elections. It's definitely not communist, although most of the regime's senior figures were communists before they discovered a better route to power and wealth. It's not a monarchy, although Putin



has been in power for 20 years and is surrounded by a court of extremely rich allies and cronies. (He missed two parole appointments for a suspended sentence on trumped-up embezzlement charges because he was in Germany recovering from the FSB assassination attempt.) But his role in Russian politics so far had been more gaffly than revolutionary. However, his sup-

porters do their homework and make witty videos detailing the scandalous financial abuses of the regime. The latest is a virtual tour of Putin's new \$1 billion seaside palace on the Black Sea, but he is probably not the man who will take Putin down. The younger generation of Russians is getting restless and bored. Navalny is a brave man who has gone home voluntarily to face a spell in Putin's jails. (He missed two parole appointments for a suspended sentence on trumped-up embezzlement charges because he was in Germany recovering from the FSB assassination attempt.) But his role in Russian politics so far had been more gaffly than revolutionary. However, his sup-

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Biden talks up transatlantic ties, Covid and climate with Boris

PTI ■ WASHINGTON/LONDON

Joe Biden conveyed his intention to strengthen the "special relationship" with the UK in his first call with US President Boris Johnson...

evening. I look forward to deepening the longstanding alliance between our two countries as we drive a green and sustainable recovery from Covid-19...



US President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson during their first video call on Saturday.



President Biden noted the importance of cooperation, including through multilateral organisations, on shared challenges such as combating climate change...

strengthening the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) also high on the agenda - in contrast with former President Donald Trump's hardball with the alliance.

COVAX programme to ensure equitable access for vaccines, the Downing Street spokesperson said.

incumbent is famously anti-Brexit but all early indications are that his views on the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) are unlikely to overshadow US-UK relations in future.

Vaccinated people may still transmit Covid, warns England's chief medic

PTI ■ LONDON

One of England's leading medical officers on Sunday urged the public to continue to follow the strict lockdown rules because any vaccinated immunity from Covid-19 takes at least three weeks to kick in.

National Health Service (NHS) has been delivering 140 jobs a minute, taking the vaccinated total to over 5.8 million.

and the most vulnerable people in society," said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

US condemns Russia's use of harsh tactics against protesters, journalists

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The United States has strongly condemned Russia's use of harsh tactics against protesters and journalists demanding the release of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny.

organisers, threatening social media platforms, and preemptively arresting potential participants," he said.

Chinese military pressure on Taiwan threatens regional peace, stability: US

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Expressing concern over Chinese military pressure on Taiwan, the United States has said that such intimidating tactics threaten regional peace and stability.

In a statement, he urged Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure on Taiwan and instead engage in meaningful dialogue with Taiwan's democratically elected representatives.

GLOBE TROTTER 19 BURNED BODIES FOUND NEAR MEXICO-US BORDER Ciudad Victoria (Mexico) Mexican authorities say they have found 19 shot and burned bodies near a town across the Rio Grande from Texas...

ESTONIA TO GET 1ST FEMALE PRIME MINISTER Tallinn Estonia's two biggest political parties say they have clinched a deal to form a new Government to be led by the female Prime Minister for the first time in the Baltic country's history...

FBI: Texan charged in Capitol riot tweeted 'Assassinate AOC'

AP ■ DALLAS

A 34-year-old Texas man has been arrested for allegedly taking part in the storming of the US Capitol this month and posting violent threats, including a call to assassinate Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York.

posted: "They are right next time we bring the guns," an FBI agent wrote in an affidavit.

Dutch police clash with protesters in Amsterdam, Eindhoven

AP ■ URK (NETHERLANDS)

Dutch police clashed with protesters demonstrating against the country's lockdown in the capital, Amsterdam and the southern city of Eindhoven on Sunday, a day after rioting youths protesting the country's curfew torched a coronavirus testing facility in a Dutch fishing village.

Eindhoven police said they were alerted by late afternoon and warned people to stay away from the city center amid the clashes.

11 trapped miners rescued from gold mine in China

PTI ■ BEIJING

Eleven miners, trapped underground for two weeks following a gas leak, were rescued from a partially built gold mine in east China's Shandong Province, where has been rescued, the state media reported on Sunday.



In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, rescuers carry a miner who was trapped in a mine in an ambulance in Qixia City in east China's Shandong Province on Sunday.

PIRATES ATTACK TURKISH SHIP OFF WEST AFRICA Ankara: Armed pirates attacked a Turkish cargo ship off the West African coast, kidnapping 15 sailors and killing one of them, officials said Sunday as Turkey sought to recover the captured crew.

US NSA TALKS TO ISRAELI COUNTERPART Washington Reaffirming Biden Administration's unwavering commitment to Israel's security, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in a call with his Israeli counterpart Meir Ben Shabbat extended an invitation for strategic dialogue in the near term, the White House said on Sunday.

Palestinians ask Europe to send monitors for elections

AP ■ GAZA CITY (PALESTINE)

Palestinian election officials on Sunday invited the European Union to send observers to monitor upcoming elections planned for the Palestinian legislature and presidency.

about holding what will be their first elections in 15 years.

South African Hindu priests accused of 'overcharging' for funerals of Covid-19 victims

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Some Hindu priests in South Africa have come under fire for allegedly charging high rates to conduct funerals of Covid-19 victims.

in the city which is home to more than a third of South Africa's Indian-origin population of about 1.4 million.

Scotland's leader vows to push for second independence vote

AP ■ LONDON

Scotland's leader said on Sunday that she intends to hold a "legal referendum" on independence from the UK if she wins Scottish elections scheduled for May.

Opposition parties in Scotland say Sturgeon should be focusing on defeating the coronavirus and supporting the economy, rather than planning for independence.

rightly stand in the way of that? Scotland's leader just clearly has the verdict and the will of the Scottish people," Sturgeon told the BBC.

The SNP says that if it wins a majority in the Scottish Parliament in May it will pass legislation allowing for a new referendum once the coronavirus pandemic is over.

# Markets may witness profit-taking after 50K peak

## All eyes on Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian stock market which added another feather to its cap by scaling the 50,000-mount for the first time ever may witness some profit-taking ahead but for now, all eyes are on the upcoming Union Budget that will influence the onward journey of the bluechip index, according to analysts.

From witnessing gigantic losses to record-shattering gains, investors witnessed a wide array of emotions in 2020. Markets showed volatile trends last year, with the benchmark crashing to its one-year low of 25,638.99 on March 24, only to roger back to reach record highs in the later part of the year.

The record-breaking run has been continuing, with the benchmark reaching the momentous 50,000-mark on January 21. The 30-day index jumped to its record high of 50,184.01 during the trade on Thursday.

"Expect markets to go into consolidation phase in the sec-

ond half of this calendar year and again resume the upward trajectory from CY22 onwards," Rusmik Oza, Executive Vice President, Head of Fundamental Research at Kotak Securities, said.

The entire plot changed for the markets in just ten months from massive losses to record-breaking peaks and this came at a time when the world is facing a health crisis.

Market analysts have attributed the sharp rebound in the market following the March crash to a host of factors such as abundant liquidity injected into the global financial system by leading central banks of the world, unprecedented retail investor participation and in recent months, on hopes of successful vaccines.

Driven by the improved investor sentiment, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies crossed the 30 lakh crore mark and is currently at ₹194 lakh crore. The BSE-listed companies market cap had crossed the landmark ₹100 lakh crore on November 28,



2014. In 2020, investors grew richer by ₹32.49 lakh crore helped by massive returns in the equity market which had a roller coaster ride during the year hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

From March 23, 2020 when the benchmark indices posted their worst ever one-day drop of 19.4 per cent, the index has risen by a whopping ₹92,48,51.09 crore.

During the entire 2020, the 30-share BSE Sensex made monthly gains in seven while

closing with losses in five of them. The Sensex, the country's first equity index, was launched in 1986. On July 25, 1990, it had closed above 1,000 mark. In another milestone, the benchmark closed above 10,000 mark on February 7, 2006.

"Indian markets have been witnessing strong momentum over the last few months on hopes of a faster economic recovery after the pandemic lockdown. Also positive global cues, sustained FII inflows and strong corporate earnings

kept the sentiments high. Buzz around the upcoming Budget has also added strength to the markets. The Budget could potentially lay the foundation for a long term economic growth path.

"Overall, we expect the market to continue its upward journey on the back of healthy corporate earnings, stability, positive developments on the vaccine front, broad-based economic recovery and low interest rates," Hemang Jani, Head Equity Strategist at

Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said.

Jani also noted that unlocking of the economy since June 2020 led to a significant recovery in various macro, micro data points, resulting in equity markets surpassing its previous lifetime highs once again.

"The three big factors that have driven markets are smart recovery in the economy, FPI flows and earnings revision," Oza said.

Apart from being driven by FII investments, the rally was also led by direct investments from domestic investors. The sharp fall in Indian markets in March opened up opportunities for stock picking which saw a clear shift in the way retail investors participated in stock markets, Jani added.

Quality growth with which central banks across the globe infused liquidity was the single most reason for the equity markets to recover," S Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities, said. On the growth front, K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said markets are likely to turn highly volatile reacting to events and news.

## IN BRIEF

### ANNUAL ATHLETICS MEET-2021 STARTED IN CLW



Chittaranjan: Annual Athletics Meet-2021 inaugurated by RS Chitra, PCMAI & president, CLW Sports Association. 23rd Jan 2021 at Oval ground accompanied by senior officers, staff, supervisors of different shops of CLW took part in this mega event. Athletes participated in track events like, flat race, long jump, high jump, relay, discuss throw, shot-put etc. Finals of main events and prize distribution ceremony will be held on 26th January at oval ground.

## Govt likely to announce formulation of policy for toys sector in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government may in the Budget next week announce formulation of a dedicated policy for the toys sector to boost domestic manufacturing, sources said.

They said the policy will help in creating a strong ecosystem for the industry in the country and also attract startups.

The commerce and industry ministry is already taking steps to promote domestic manufacturing of toys. It has come out with a quality control order for the sector and had also increased import duty last year on toys.

India's toy exports are limited to about USD 100 million. The toys industry in India is primarily in the unorganised sector, comprising about 4,000 small and medium enterprises.

About 85 per cent of toys are imported from the country, with maximum coming from China. It is followed by Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Germany, Hong Kong and the US.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that India has talent and ability to become a toy hub for the entire world and called upon startups to work towards realising this potential while being "vocal about local toys".

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The other areas which could be considered for the sector include promotion of research and development and design centres for toys.

"Boosting manufacturing would also help increase exports of toys from India. Countries like China and Vietnam are major players in the sector," they added.

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## Covid underlined need for higher Budget allocation for healthcare sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the key role of healthcare in the lives of people, underlining the importance of higher budget allocation for improving the healthcare infrastructure in the country, sectoral players said.

The Pharma sector which has played a leading role as the "pharmacy of the world" said it expects support and incentives especially for research & development and innovation in the coming Budget.

The pandemic has completely changed the dynamics of the Indian healthcare ecosystem. NATHHEALTH President and Apollo Hospitals Executive Vice-Chairperson Preetha Reddy told PTI.

"It has reiterated the need for increased investment in healthcare infrastructure, national level programmes for skill development and training of healthcare staff, increase in number of medical colleges, effective PPP models and further boost for local manufacturing," she added.

These should be the key priorities for the government this time, Reddy said.

"Private healthcare providers are hopeful that there will be additional incentives to aid the sector in business

recovery and also enable expansion across tier 2-3 cities - through provision of land at subsidised rates to set up hospitals, tax relief for new infrastructure creation, import duty relief for life-saving equipment and GST regulations for healthcare services," she added.

Reddy said that public spending in healthcare should increase to deal with future pandemics and for sustained preventive care.

Digital Health services found their rightful place during the pandemic and there is a need to expand and support the essential backup services to enable digital healthcare to function efficiently in all primary and tertiary health centres, she added.

In a similar vein, Fortis Healthcare MD and CEO Ashutosh Raghuvanshi said the Covid pandemic has underlined the importance of higher budget allocation for healthcare.

"The current situation demands increased budgetary impetus for improving healthcare infrastructure at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and also ensuring the healthcare sector's speedy recovery," he added.

It is important to note that the healthcare sector is not only a potential foreign exchange

earner but also a significant employment generator, Raghuvanshi said.

"Our overall strategy must integrate preventive and curative services and make healthcare more affordable and accessible for the people of India," he added.

Highlighting the need for increasing the budget allocation for healthcare, Aster DM Healthcare Founder Chairman and MD Azad Moopen said the Covid-19 pandemic hit home the fact that a strong healthcare infrastructure is absolutely essential to ensure a sustainable economy.

"It is important to at least double the healthcare budget from last year's meagre allocation. This would help improve access to affordable care for the masses," he added.

Emphasising expectations from the budget for the pharmaceutical sector, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) Secretary General Sudarshan Jain said: "The overall policy ecosystem should help increase trust on healthcare and build healthcare infrastructure to cater to the societal needs as health is the key to growth."

The Pharma industry is looking for support and incentives in research & development, and innovation, he added.

## Real estate sector seeks sops in upcoming Budget

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The real estate sector wants stimulus in the form of sops in the upcoming Union Budget to boost housing demand, a top Creadi Bengal official said.

The demands include personal tax relief, tax rebate on housing, extension of interest subvention, GST waiver, infrastructure status for the realty and easing liquidity for the sector, the official said.

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"There is a need to bolster the real estate sector that contributes 8 per cent of the country's economy as it gears for a big leap in the next 10 years," he said.

Global real estate consultant Knight Frank India chairman and managing director Shishir Bajaj in a pre-budget demand list to the government annual deduction of ₹1,50,000 that will provide the much-needed fillip to opt for house purchase. On the aspect of housing demand, Section 80 C

"The year 2020 has been an unprecedented period in human history that disrupted the normal course of life. Since the outbreak of the pandemic in India earlier this year, the real estate sector reeling under the differential from a flurry of challenges, Creadi, West Bengal, president Sushil Mohta told PTI.

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tax deduction on home loan principal repayment does not provide for a focused benefit on housing, he said.

"Hike the ₹2 lakh tax rebate on housing loan interest rates to at least ₹5 lakh to generate housing demand, most notably in affordable and mid-segment housing. The last increase in the deduction limit under Section 80C (to ₹1.5 lakh a year) was in 2014 and an upward revision is long overdue," Mohta who is also the Merlin group chairman said.

He also demanded GST waiver for under-construction homes and extension of the interest subvention by another three years. Bajaj said the government should use this budget session to refer to recommendations on restoration of GST input tax credit to the upcoming GST council meet.

## Finance Ministry allocates ₹660 cr additional funds to Madhya Pradesh for capex

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Finance Ministry on Sunday said it has allocated ₹660 crore to Madhya Pradesh for capital expenditure to undertake citizen-centric reforms.

"A list of capital projects with an estimated cost of ₹660 crore was approved by the Department of Expenditure. Fifty per cent of the approved amount (ie, ₹330 crore) has also been released to the state (Madhya Pradesh) as first instalment for the approved projects," it said in a statement.

The Ministry has allocated this additional funds to the state for capital expenditure for undertaking the "One Nation, One Ration Card" reforms, Ease of Doing Business

reforms, and urban local bodies reforms.

The State has also completed part of the fourth reform - the power sector reforms. The "Special Assistance to States for capital expenditure" scheme was announced by the Centre in October last year as part of Aatmanirbhar Bharat package. The scheme is aimed at boosting capital expenditure of the state governments that are facing difficult financial environment due to a shortfall in tax revenue arising from the Covid 19 pandemic.

"So far, capital expenditure proposals of ₹10,657 crore of 27 states have been approved by the Ministry of Finance. An amount of ₹5,328 crore has already been released to the states as the first instalment under the scheme.

## Country's economy is gradually recovering, says Montek

PTI ■ PUNE

The country's economy, which contracted in the first two quarters of the current fiscal, has started recovering at a gradual pace, former deputy chairman of erstwhile Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia said on Sunday.

The economy contracted by a massive 23.9 per cent in the first quarter and 7.5 per cent in the second quarter on account of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We had jumped off a cliff in the first quarter of this financial year because of the lockdown, which was necessitated by the pandemic. The economy is now climbing back," he said.

"The state of the economy is not as bleak as it is a clear recovery," Ahluwalia said at a virtual event.

According to the first advance estimates of national

income released by the Central Statistical Office (NSO), the country's GDP is estimated to contract by a record 7.7 per cent during the current financial year (2020-21).

An article published in the Reserve Bank of India's January Bulletin has stated that the country's GDP is within the striking distance of attaining positive growth.

Ahluwalia said the manufacturing sector is recovering and has got back to where it was in 2019-20. However, the contact industries which include hotels, restaurants, travel, tourism and retail shopping in malls are badly hit and will take some time to return to normalcy, he said.

"The state of the economy is not as bleak as it is a clear recovery," Ahluwalia said at a virtual event.

According to the first advance estimates of national

## FPIs net investors at ₹18,456 crore in January so far

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign portfolio investors (FPI) remained net buyers to the tune of ₹18,456 crore so far in January as global liquidity led to continued investment in emerging markets.

The total net investment during the period under review stood at ₹18,456 crore.

"The inflow into the Indian markets continue as global liquidity leads to more investments in emerging markets like India," said Harsh Jain, co-founder and COO at Growth.

Besides, he said there are indications which suggest that the economic recovery post lockdowns have been better than expected.

## Hold back imposition of BCD on solar equipment in Budget, demand developers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Solar power developers in the country have demanded that the government should hold back the imposition of basic customs duty (BCD) on solar equipment in the upcoming Budget. They fear that this could derail the Government's ambitious target of having 175GW renewables by 2022, requiring an investment flow of ₹1.75 lakh crore.

According to industry estimates, as much as ₹1.75 lakh crore investment is required to bid out 35GW of renewable energy capacity in the country. About 50 GW of clean energy is under implementation, while India has already installed over 90GW renewables, including 37GW of solar and 38GW of wind energy. India has an ambitious target of having 175GW of renewable energy capacity by 2022, including 100GW of solar and 60GW of wind energy.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman would propose the General Budget on February 1. Earlier in June last year, Power Minister RK Singh had clearly indicated about the Government's intent to impose basic customs duty on solar equipment and also reiterated that again.

## India sees 19 IPOs worth \$1.84 bn in 2020 Q4: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Accounting Advisory Services (FAAS) at EY India, said during the 2020 December quarter, India witnessed 19 IPOs compared to 5 in the same period a year ago.

Real estate, hospitality and construction and diversified industrial products were the most active sectors (in terms of the number of IPOs) with three IPOs launched in each sector (including main and SME markets), the report said.

The report said that in 2020, global IPO volumes continued to accelerate, increasing during the 2020 December quarter by 180 per cent over proceeds increased 29 per cent year-on-year to a total of \$268 billion.

Last year, IPO activity proved resilient to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic supported by low interest rates and expansionary monetary policies, it said.

"It is a case of daylight robbery of e-commerce entities in India and therefore demand immediate action against the erring e-commerce portals and online mechanism providers," CAIT said.

CAIT has accused Amazon, Flipkart, Zomato, Swiggy and various other e-commerce entities for violation of mandatory display of Country of Origin and Manufacturer, seller details on products sold through their respective E-Commerce Portals as required under the

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Real estate, hospitality and construction and diversified industrial products were the most active sectors (in terms of the number of IPOs) with three IPOs launched in each sector (including main and SME markets), the report said.

The report said that in 2020, global IPO volumes continued to accelerate, increasing during the 2020 December quarter by 180 per cent over proceeds increased 29 per cent year-on-year to a total of \$268 billion.

Last year, IPO activity proved resilient to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic supported by low interest rates and expansionary monetary policies, it said.

"It is a case of daylight robbery of e-commerce entities in India and therefore demand immediate action against the erring e-commerce portals and online mechanism providers," CAIT said.

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**Trend**  
*Slazer*

**'Actors can bring societal change'**

Actor **RANI MUKERJI** believes that cinema has the power to impact societal change.

Says she, "Actors have the power to talk to people and seed the thought of positive change through their choice of films. I have been fortunate as an artist to get projects that had strong female protagonists, and to be honest, I have also consciously tried to seek out such projects."

The actor reveals that she had a specific plan in mind while choosing such roles and films. "I wanted my work to portray my intent. I'm happy that I chose well," adds she.



**'January 26 is not just a holiday. People just think of it as a dry day and probably get upset too because of this. I don't drink but a lot of my friends are like, '26th January is coming and we won't get liquor!' It's a day that is just considered a holiday now, which is sad. It is so upsetting to see that you are an Indian and you totally ignore such an important day.'**



—**Sharad Malhotra**

Actor **KAREENA KAPOOR KHAN** has shared what would be the only situation when one could find her lowering her head.



Kareena posted a video from a shoot on Instagram. In the clip, she is seen sporting a black dress with a thigh high slit.

"If I ever let my head down, it'll be to admire my heels #FeelItReelit," she wrote as the caption.

She is all set to welcome her second child with actor-husband Saif Ali Khan.

**Safety is priority: Halsey**

Singer **HALSEY** has cancelled her tour, which was originally scheduled to take place in 2020.

"Safety is the priority. I wish things were different. I love you," she tweeted.

"Despite our absolute best efforts, there is no guarantee I'll be able to tour the currently scheduled dates. I miss seeing all of you in the crowd every night more than anything, but I need to prioritise your health and safety. That being said, the Manic tour is now officially cancelled. As much as we wanted to hold out hope that this tour could eventually happen, our priority is now getting your ticket money back to you immediately," she added.



# REGAIN THE LOST GLORY

Traditional handloom tapped into the potential of modern e-commerce sites during the pandemic. By **SANJAY DESAI**

India's handlooms and handicrafts, unique to various communities within the country, represent its rich cultural heritage. Handloom products, from Pashmina Shawls of Jammu and Kashmir, Ikkat of Odisha, Kanchipuram Saris of Tamilnadu, Lucknow's Chikan and Zardozi to Assam's Eri and Muga Silks, have been preserving the colour and vibrant culture for over 2000 years.

M N Upadhyay in his book *Handicrafts of India* wrote the most fitting description of Indian handmade craft and textile: "To write about Indian handicrafts is almost like writing about the country itself. So vast, complex, colourful yet simple and charm, difficult to attain under comparable conditions."

The social and economic importance of the handloom industry is enormous as well. It creates 95 per cent of the world's handmade textiles, making a hefty contribution to the economy. It also remains the second-largest employment provider for the rural population after agriculture. According to the Handloom Export Promotion Council, a statutory body constituted under the Ministry of Textiles, about 4.3 million people directly derive their livelihood from the handloom industry.

Despite its cultural, social, and economic significance, handlooms have been on a decline. In the last few decades, economic liberalisation, globalisation, rapidly increasing industrialisation have affected the handloom and handicrafts industry. There is a substantial difference between the time consumed in the production of cloth by the handloom industry and the powerloom industry. It takes months to design and weave a beautiful Chanderi silk sari while machine-made saris are woven within days. Thus, cheaper powerloom products dominate the market.

The traditional industry also suffers due to supply chain inefficiencies, lack of branding and marketing. The wholesale and retailer of handloom products receive three to 10 times the price paid to weavers and artisans. The craftsmen, renowned for their hand-spinning, weaving and printing elegance, struggle to get their products to the market. E-commerce has been helping artisans regain their footing for the



ring the younger generation from working in this industry. The unorganised and informal nature of the craft heritage has left it on the verge of dying.

**The pandemic effect**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people, wary of contracting the virus, rarely stepped out of their homes and started shopping online. This dealt a heavy blow to local weavers, who earn their living by selling to tourists in fairs and exhibitions. Export earnings also fell drastically during the prolonged lockdown. India has been the second-largest exporter of handloom products in the world. It exported US\$ 353.9 million worth of handloom products, but between April to August 2020 slid to US\$ 66.26 million.

**Online platforms to the rescue**

Today, building an online presence is essential for both traditional and modern players. And, during the pandemic, it became more apparent than ever before. E-commerce has been helping artisans regain their footing for the

past few years. The Department of Handlooms and Textiles, Government of India, engaged nine e-commerce players and 70 retailers to increase the reach of handlooms products. These online platforms together generated handloom sales of ₹ 1.06 crore in 2015-16 and ₹ 7.07 crore in 2016-17, increasing to ₹ 9.54 crore in 2017-18.

E-commerce giant Amazon expanded its footprint in India's handloom industry, adding pure handloom and handicraft items of Weavemart, an online handloom store supported by the Government of India on its app and website. It made more than 20,000 handloom products available to millions of customers. "We have been engaging with cooperatives (like Khadi Nation). Consumers from cities as far as Port Blair (Andaman and Nicobar Islands), Kullu (Himachal Pradesh), Guwahati (Assam) and Chhatrapur (Madhya Pradesh) are shopping for products such as Ikkat saris. There is still plenty of potentials that can be unlocked from artisans and craftsmen across the country," said an Amazon spokesperson. Flipkart's art house or social marketplace GoGoop has been beneficial for local craftsmen and weavers.

**The road ahead**

The future of the Indian handloom and handicrafts industry looks promising. The global demand for handmade products is growing rapidly, owing to an increase in tourism and the propensity of gifting unique products and interest in using eco-friendly, sustainable clothing and accessories.

The current generation of artisans has grasped this opportunity to gain more traction in both domestic and international markets. Their focus is on curation and product development, meeting quality standards, branding and marketing to grow through online channels. They are also bringing a modern twist to traditional handloom garments and handicrafts, making them more appealing to Gen Y and Z.

With e-commerce uniting the fragmented population of artisans and weavers, eliminating middlemen and making a wide variety of well-made handloom products at fair prices directly from weavers, the Indian handloom and handicrafts industry is expected to see an upward growth trajectory. It's expected to reach US\$ 60 billion by 2024.

The pandemic brought the significance of e-commerce in India, shifting consumer taste and preferences. And the shift has been permanent. Online shopping platforms continue to see a growing number of shoppers every day. With e-commerce boosting sales in the forthcoming years, the craft-heritage is set to regain its former glory.

(The writer is the director of an e-commerce site.)

**WEBBED**



**THE GREAT ESCAPISTS**

In this season Richard Hammond and Tory Belleci use what's left of their shipwreck to survive and thrive. Will their inventions help them escape or keep them stuck forever in paradise? It releases on January 29 on Amazon Prime Video.



**SQUARED LOVE**

A celebrity journalist and renowned womanizer starts to rethink his life choices after he falls for a mysterious model who leads a double life. Starring, Adriana Chlebicka, Mateusz Banasiuk and Agnieszka Zulewska, it releases on February 11 on Netflix.



**THE BIG DAY**

For six engaged couples, happily ever after begins on a spectacular note in this eye-popping look at India's multibillion-dollar wedding industry. It releases on February 14 on Netflix.

Sanchi is a 'blink and you'll miss it' sort of town, much like thousands of other small towns on India's highways. Located on the Bhopal to Vidisha state highway, you'd never quite believe one of India's most famous historical sites is located on a hill on the edge of the town if it weren't for the tens of boards that the state tourism board has stuck at various places, all but the same turn. On the way to the site from Bhopal, you do cross a little curiosity, a marking for the 'Tropic of Cancer', an imaginary line which if you remember your middle-school geography is the northernmost declination of the sun relative to earth, a point reached at the summer solstice. Odd that there are remarkably few markings of this line in India and this was a pleasant surprise to find it out here.

If you take a look inside your wallet and find a ₹ 200 note, you'll see the image of the Great Stupa at Sanchi. To observe, and its importance in Indian history is mainly because of the fact that it is one of the largest archaeological remains from Mauryan times. The Great Stupa, or 'Stupa Number 1' as it is called dates back to the reign of Ashoka and construction was begun by him. This stupa is a part of a major complex of Buddhist sites across the region. Ashoka considered the region dear to him as his first wife Devi hailed from the nearby town of Vidisha. She was the mother of Ashoka's son, Mahinda and daughter, Sanghamitra, who spread the tenets of Buddhism to Sri Lanka from where other monks spread it far and wide.

As you turn off the highway to drive to the Stupa, you first pass the Archaeological Museum. Though small, it is a place that you must stop and visit. The 'Lion Capital' from the Ashokan pillar found at the Stupa has pride of place at this museum. This capital which is extremely similar to the one found at Sarnath that most Indians today know as our national symbol is remarkably well-preserved as are many other relics mainly from the site and other nearby Buddhist and Hindu sites. It recalls the stellar work of Sir John Marshall in restoring the site and saving it from his fellow colonialists.

The story of saving the Stupa is one that does deserve to be told and the Sanchi Museum has a treasure trove of photographs dating back to 1881 when the British finally put an end to the ravaging of the site by military treasure



# The Stupas at Sanchi

**KUSHAN MITRA** explores one of the few remaining sites in Central India with a direct connection to ancient India's greatest emperor



hunters and amateur archaeologists. Sir Marshall, more famous for his work in excavating the sites at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, played a vital role in saving Indian historical sites as the Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). His stellar role in shepherding the ASI for a quarter-century till 1928 is a major reason that so many sites across India survive to this day. Marshall's role at Sanchi is so venerated by the ASI that they've kept his worktable and some notes at the museum and, rather curiously, his silver cutlery as well. The stupas and the old Buddhist monasteries and schools at Sanchi had been ravaged by time and treasure hunters, the worst of which were the final colonialists who broke into

the great stupa in the hope of finding a buried treasure. India owes a great debt to Sir John Marshall.

A winding drive up the hillside takes you to the site where on the way is a

small levelled out field where the local children have an ongoing tennis-ball cricket match while the town elders sit on the roadside wall drinking tea. Once you get to the rather empty parking lot, the ancient of the town has suffered. Sanchi is the most important site in the central Indian 'Buddhist Circuit' and is particularly popular with Sri Lankans, so much so that many signs inside the complex are written in Sinhala. Once you get to the rather empty parking lot, the Giant Stupa looms large in front of you. And you also get a sense of the vastness of the complex, Sanchi was a major site of Buddhist learning for centuries and several additions to the complex were made even after Mauryan times. Indeed, there is a belief by some scholars that the post-Mauryan Shunga dynasty destroyed the original stupa and rebuilt it later.

At its peak, there were probably thousands of monks, scholars and students at the site, the ruins of the monastery and smaller stupas under which prominent monks had been buried.

You enter the site walking to the northern gateway and its

impressive Toran, these gateways have rich sculptures where stories of the Buddha and great kings, including Ashoka have in relief. The remains of the polished sandstone Ashokan pillar are located near the southern gateway from where a staircase leads up to the deambulatory walkway. Scholars believe that the Great Stupa as we see it today was built by the Shunga dynasty that followed the Mauryan empire, the covering of stone, the balustrades and even the intricate sculptures on the gateways are from that period. What you see on the 200-rupee note is the Western gateway.

Much like the 100-rupee note that features Rani Ki Vav, the famous stepwell near Patan in Gujarat, the image on the note does not do justice to the site. The sculptures on the gateways are tremendous and the different gateways all have different stories. Some depict tales from the life of Gautam Buddha and others tell the story of Ashoka the Great. You also see the vastness of the site that you never really learn about in your history textbooks in school. This again comes back to the fact that India has the richest amount of history of any nation. A site like Sanchi could be as prominent as the Taj Mahal in other nations, in India, while undoubtedly a popular site, primarily due to its importance as a site of Buddhist pilgrimage, but it should also be remembered, much like Sarnath outside Benaras as one of the few remaining sites with a direct connection to ancient India's greatest emperor.

# A LONG WALK

The slow pace of construction work has deprived remote villages in Uttarakhand of basic infrastructure, especially transport facilities. By MAHANAND SINGH BISHT

Uttarakhand, which has been separated from Uttar Pradesh with the expectations of better roads, health, education, employment and livelihood, is still craving for the basic needs. Even after 20 years of establishing the state, the residents of this mountainous state are struggling for the basic necessities of life. During the outbreak of COVID, thousands of migrated youths came back to their villages for employment. They had expectations that the government would help them make a living. Due to the lack of proper counseling and complicated procedures for obtaining government schemes, youngsters couldn't benefit and are now back to cities in search of employment.



However, the state government is claiming to provide roads to the villages.

After frequent agitation by villagers, under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, approval of the Dthingharan-Syun-Vemru-Dumak Kalgoth roads was announced by the government. Along with this, road construction in several other areas was also promised. But due to the arbitrariness of the construction agencies, in the last 17 years, the work has either stopped or is on due.

more severe when someone in the village is ill. In such a situation, people take the sick person with the help of a doli. Sometimes s/he dies on the way. During rain and snowfall, it is not even possible to take the patient to the hospital!

Rajma, ramdana, potato, mainly cash crops are grown in this region. But without proper transportation the products do not reach the market. The cost of transporting products to mandis (farmer's market) like Dehradun increases manifold. Tanuj Kamboj, Assistant Engineer, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Chamouli, says, "At present, the construction work is in progress. A new tender process has been issued after the contractor left the construction work in the middle some time ago. The work is in progress and the construction of the road is likely to be completed soon."

In this regard, the local MLA Mahendra Bhat says, "Along with the development of roads, necessary instructions have been given to the departmental officers for the development of

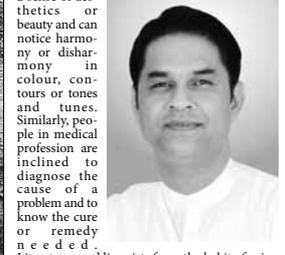


## KNOW YOUR ART

In order to build a better world, spiritualists tend to imbibe good qualities from every profession, says RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

Almost every profession has some special personality traits because of the nature and demand of their profession. This fact makes people different from each other in various respects.

For example, scientists and technologists have the tendency to believe things only if they can be demonstrated or proved correct by application of certain laws or through precise mathematical theories. Artists, on the other hand, have a sense of aesthetics or beauty and can notice harmony or disharmony in colour, contours or tones and tunes.



Similarly, people in medical profession are inclined to diagnose the cause of a problem and to know the cure or remedy needed. Literateurs and linguists form the habit of using words in their precise sense and very much keep in mind the need of being clear in their expression. Religious teachers/preachers always look towards the moral side of things and see to what a karma will lead us to. Psychologists have their attention on the complexes and syndromes of the person whom they meet and talk to, and they analyse their behaviour in those terms. Administrators have their focus on doing things in an organised manner. They fix their goals, time-limits and strategy well in advance. Businessmen tend to invest time and money in things which bring them more profits. They know their customers well and the art of selling things. Industrialists and technologists are practical people who want to put their plans into practical act. Judges develop their sense of judgement and the art of arriving at truth. Advocates plead their cases forcefully and with clarity, putting the needed emphasis on certain facts and incidents. Teachers know the art of teaching and making their point clear.

Lastly, there are spiritualists whose goal is perfection. They have to have all the specialities in their life. They inculcate the ability of investing their time and energy in result giving activities like a good businessman does. They have to do things in an organised and systematic manner as an able administrator does. They have to be precise in their thinking and in the use of language as a literateur or a linguist would be. They have to know the art of educating, convincing and persuading others so that they take the spiritual knowledge for their enlightenment and release themselves from sufferings. They also have to be more practical in their life like an industrialist and have the vigour of a youth, the tender feeling of a mother, the maturity of an aged person, the simple-heartedness of a small baby and so on. It is only after they inculcate these traits or values, can they reach the stage of perfection. In order to build a 'better world', spiritualists have to do the service of all and while doing so, they get an opportunity to imbibe good qualities of every profession. Hence, they have a double duty to perform i.e. towards self and others.



Parenting is a task no one prepares you for and is perhaps the best example of learning on the job as there is no prior training or benchmark to follow. In a nutshell, it is a rollercoaster ride. However, regardless of the absence of a set standard to be a good parent, every parent, especially new parents have the urge to be the best parents their child can have.

There are several things you can do to make this journey more effective and have a positive impact on your child. One such crucial thing is your child's early learning and development. Every parent wishes for their child to grow into a smart, successful and happy individual. If you are a new parent, here are eight simple yet effective parenting tips that will put your mind at ease and help you nurture your child's learning abilities.

Countless opportunities/experiences Each child is born with infinite potential. Did you know that in the first few years of life, more than one million neural connections form every second in our brains? After this period of fast-tracked proliferation, the connections become reduced through a process called synaptic pruning where the brain then works on making the existing connections more efficient.

Since early childhood is a time of tremendous brain development, it is important to expose your baby to as many experiences and opportunities as possible. This will not only help them learn more at an early age but also enable them to discover their passion and interests.

Believe in your child's potential Research confirms that the first three years of childhood play a pivotal

## Embrace the journey

Here are a few simple yet effective parenting tips that will put your mind at ease and help to nurture your child's learning abilities



role in shaping the brain's architecture. It is necessary to expose your child to various experiences but most parents unconsciously underestimate their baby's ability to learn, which sets limitations on their phenomenal capabilities. Believing in your child's potential and encouraging them to learn will produce miraculous results and unearth their hidden abilities.

Teach something new every day Every single day in our life presents

an opportunity for us to learn something new. For babies, this is maximised infinitely. Furthermore, children naturally tend to be curious and are always keen on discovering new things to learn about. With most parents now working from home, this may be the perfect time to spend quality time with your baby to teach them something new each day — be it a physical activity or a creative one like art, music or dance. It will go a long way in preserving their capabilities and

enable them to continue learning quickly even as adults.

Steer clear of screen time At a time when technology has been a game-changer, especially during a global pandemic where we spent majority of our time indoors, our screen time has surged dramatically. In addition to this, parents are now increasingly turning to technology to keep their babies occupied or teach them new things. According to studies, kids' screen time has increased by 50 per cent since the onset of the pandemic. It can have an adverse impact on your baby by hampering their creativity and thinking abilities. So, steer clear of screen time at all costs to safeguard and nurture your baby's abilities.

Keep lessons crisp While babies tend to be curious with a voracious appetite for learning, their attention span is no longer than two to three minutes. Even when they are playing, the maximum amount of time they tend to spend with any toy or activity is three minutes, after which they become bored and move on to the next activity. Unfortunately, various new parents believe that the child has lost interest in the activity, when in fact, they simply lack the attention span to continue an activity for a longer time. Hence, parents must keep lessons crisp and succinct to avoid

loss of focus while also enabling them to learn. This brings us to the next point — repetition.

Avoid repetition How often we, as adults become bored of repetitive things? Repetition makes an activity boring, resulting in a loss of engagement and interest. Given that babies have less attention span, parents must avoid repeating lessons and activities. It may even make the child dislike a certain activity. So, ensure that you keep it to a bare minimum.

Provide them space to learn and grow One of the most common mistakes that parents make is pushing their children to fulfill their unfulfilled dreams. For instance, if a parent wished to become a dancer but was unable to for any reason, they tend to push their baby into dancing, even if the child doesn't display passion or interest in it. However, children aren't born to be moulded into anyone's ideologies. Therefore, it is important to allow your child the space to grow without piling your expectations onto them. They should have the freedom to choose who they want to be.

Nurture and guide them There exists a surprisingly fine line between neglecting your child's needs, nurturing and guiding them, and burdening them with too many expectations. Offering the necessary handholding but also allowing them the freedom to choose who they want to be or what they want to do is vital to nurturing your baby into a smart individual who is capable of making their decisions.

(The writer Rajyogi Himatsingka is the founder of Raising Superstars.)

## Nurture your mind with great thoughts. To believe in the heroic makes heroes. —Benjamin Disraeli

### VEGAN KIDS MAY HAVE LOW VITAMIN D

If your child is fully vegan, then there are chances that they may have a lower level of vitamin D, a new study suggests. The findings indicate that children on a fully vegan diet were found to have significantly lower vitamin D levels compared to children without a special diet despite having regular vitamin D supplementation. Along with that, the study also suggested that their vitamin A status was lowered too. "Our results indicate that the health effects of strict diets on children cannot be extrapolated from studies on adults. In addition to vitamin D intake, attention must be paid to adequate intake of vitamin A and protein from various sources," said researcher Topi Hovinen from the University of Helsinki. Vegan diets gain popularity especially among young adults and through choices of a healthy vegan diet is becoming more common in young children, too.

### HYPERACTIVATION SIGN OF ALZHEIMER'S

Abnormal hyperactivation in the brain could be an early biomarker of Alzheimer's disease, a new study suggests. The study indicates that hyperactivation in certain brain areas in people not yet diagnosed with Alzheimer's but who were worried about their memory loss and who exhibited risk factors for the disease. "Alzheimer's disease is progressive and may emerge in the brain 20 to 30 years before diagnosis," said researcher Sylvie Belleville from the Université de Montreal in Canada. It is therefore, very important to pinpoint biomarkers — that is, physical and detectable signs of the disease — and to understand better the initial effects on the brain. Hyperactivation could therefore represent one of the first signs of Alzheimer's disease," Belleville added. For their study, the team used data from the Consortium for the Early Identification of Alzheimer's Disease to study brain activation in groups of individuals at a high risk of developing Alzheimer's disease who had performed a memory task while being scanned with MRI.

### PLANTS MAY UP POSITIVE MENTAL WELL-BEING

If you love having plants at home, then there is a good news for you as a new study suggests that plants at home can help you mentally healthy. The findings, published in the journal Urban Forestry and Urban Greening, indicated that having plants at home had a positive influence on the psychological well-being of the dwelling's inhabitants during COVID-19 lockdown. For the study, the researchers, including Katia Perini from the University of Genoa in Italy, evaluated the role played by the plants at home during the first COVID-19 lockdown and the study involved 4,200 respondents. The situation between the months of March and June deprived the public of the chance to enjoy open spaces and nature, and forced them to spend extended periods of time indoors. The team found 74 per cent of the respondents agreed that having plants at home had a positive influence on emotional well-being during lockdown, the researchers said.

### INACTIVE CANCER PATIENTS AT HIGH COVID RISK

Patients with inactive cancer and not currently undergoing treatments also face a significantly higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19, a new study suggests. The findings underscore the importance of COVID-19 mitigation, like social distancing and mask wearing, and vaccinations for all patients, not just those recently diagnosed or with active disease. "Patients who have cancer need to be careful not to become exposed during this time," said researcher Kara N. Maxwell, Assistant Professor at University of Pennsylvania in the US. "That message has been out there, but these latest findings show us it's not only for patients hospitalised or on treatment for their cancer. All oncology patients need to take significant precautions during the pandemic to protect themselves," Maxwell added.

### OBESITY IMPACTS COVID VACCINES' EFFICACY

COVID-19 vaccines may not be fully effective in people who are suffering from obesity, as experts on Tuesday suggested that the process of healing may be slower in obese people as compared to the healthy ones. According to a report on Nature, obesity correlates with a dulled immune response to COVID-19. And vaccines for a handful of other conditions often don't work as well in these people, suggesting that a shot for COVID-19 might not provide as much protection as researchers would like. "The severity of the virus is potentially high in obese or diabetic people. The fact is that the immunity and the process of healing may be slower in an obese person than a healthy person," Navneet Sood, Pulmonary Consultant, Dharamshila Narayana Superspecialty Hospital, said.

# Natarajan didn't expect to debut in Aus

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India's latest pace bowling find, T Natarajan, on Sunday said he was not sure of debuting in even one format, let alone all three and make history during the team's tour of Australia.

When he was picked for the fourth and final Test against Australia in Brisbane, Natarajan became the first Indian to debut in all three formats during the same tour.

"I was keen to do my job. But I didn't expect to get an opportunity in the ODIs, was not expecting to make my debut in Australia," Natarajan told reporters in Chinnampatti in Salem district.

"When I was told that I will be playing there was pressure. I wanted to make use of the opportunity. Playing and taking a wicket was like a dream."

Natarajan took three wickets in the series-deciding Test, playing a part in India's incredible win.

"I cannot express my happiness in words about playing for India. It was like a dream. I got a lot of support from the coaches, players. They supported and motivated me a lot. I was able to perform well because of their backing," he said in Tamil.

Natarajan said he enjoyed playing under the captaincy of both Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane, adding they both supported and encouraged him a lot.

"Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane handled me very well. They had positive things to say and encouraged me a lot. I enjoyed playing under both of them," he said.

He made his ODI debut in the third and final match of the three-match series and picked up two wickets with Marnus Labuschagne being his maiden international scalp.

Natarajan said he got emotional when Kohli handed the trophy to him after the team won the T20 series.



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## Used to be petrified of bouncers: Gill



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The promising Shubman Gill on Sunday revealed he used to be "petrified of bouncers" before eventually overcoming all his fears to get his Test career off to a rollicking start against some of the world's fastest bowlers.

Gill, 21, announced his arrival on the big stage with a classic knock of 91, which set the tone for India's incredible victory on the final day of the series-deciding fourth Test against Australia recently.

In the six innings that he batted against the likes of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc, Gill never looked in any sort of discomfort. But it wasn't so easy many years ago.

"When you get hit by a ball, your fear disappears. You are only scared until you get a blow but once you get hit, you feel like it was pretty normal. And then you lose the fear entirely," Gill was quoted as saying by his IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders on website www.Kkr.in.

"When I was young, I used to be petrified of bouncers. I used to be prepared for the chest-height balls way in advance. I used to practise diving with a straight bat."

"I also developed one more shot where I move aside a little to play the cut. I used to feel scared of short deliveries so I always wanted to get away from the line of the ball and play the cut shot."

"These two-three shots were my favourite as a kid and now they have become a part of me. Going back to his early days in Mohali, Gill spoke about how he was scared of facing a particular fast bowler at the academy and how he overcame his fears.

"I was nine years old when I was asked to play in a higher age group match. There was a bowler in the academy, just like you find in every other academy, who was really fast. I was batting against him and was scared that I would get a bouncer to start with."

"So I had pre-decided that I would just duck it. He bowled a bouncer but pitched way ahead. I still squatted and saw the ball hitting the edge of my bat and racing to the boundary. I realised he was not that fast after all. Soon I hit 2-3 more boundaries." I was quite young so everyone was surprised. This helped me raise my confidence level. This incident just eliminated all kinds of fear from my heart for leather balls and bouncers."

## Melbourne century was crucial for series victory: Rahane

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Taking over the team's reins after the Adelaide humiliation, Ajinkya Rahane had led from the front in the Boxing Day Test, producing a master-class hundred against Australia, and the Indian vice-captain says the century will remain special as it paved the way for the series victory.

After his 112 in the Boxing Day Test, Rahane had said his century at Lord's was his best.

However, the 32-year-old said he didn't quite realise the value of his Melbourne effort that eventually became a building block for India's



2-1 series win against Australia.

the priority for me rather than my own achievements," Rahane told Sports Today.

"But yes Melbourne Test hundred was really special. I said in Melbourne that my Lord's hundred was special but many people told me that I think Melbourne hundred was better than my Lord's hundred," Rahane added.

"I did not know how to react to that. But now I realised, given the circumstances after the Adelaide Test match, Melbourne Test was really crucial for the series and yes I thought Melbourne innings was really special," Rahane further said.

## Root's rich form cancels SL advantage

AP ■ GALLE

England captain Joe Root has smashed his 100th Test century in the touring side ever closer to Sri Lanka's first-innings total as they finished day three on 339 for nine, just 42 runs behind on Sunday.

Root's epic innings came to an end in the last over of the day when he was run out 14 short of another double hundred. Sri Lanka's bowlers had no answer for the Yorkshireman and it appeared inevitable that he was only going to be dismissed through a run out.

Root faced 309 deliveries and hit 18 fours in his monster innings.

Root attempted to flick Dilruwan Perera to mid-wicket but he was run out, grabbed by Oshada Fernando at short leg on the bounce.



Root had taken a few steps out of the crease and sensing an opportunity Fernando executed it to perfection, finding gaps frequently despite Sri Lanka having three fielders in the leg-side boundary.

The 30-year-old reached his 19th test hundred in the morning and during his knock went past the run tallies of three former England greats. David Gower (23), Kevin Pietersen (818) and Geoffrey Boycott (8,114).

determination in batting for more than eight hours. He had posted a double hundred in the first Test when England won by seven wickets.

Not since West Indian Brian Lara's exploits in Galle in 2001 when he scored 688 runs in six innings, had a batsman played spin bowlers so expertly. Root now has 415 runs in three innings.

The sweep shot was Root's bread and butter and he executed it to perfection, finding gaps frequently despite Sri Lanka having three fielders in the leg-side boundary.

The 30-year-old reached his 19th test hundred in the morning and during his knock went past the run tallies of three former England greats. David Gower (23), Kevin Pietersen (818) and Geoffrey Boycott (8,114).

Root, playing in his 99th test match, now has 8,238 test runs and is fourth among England batsmen.

Apart from Embuldeniya, the rest of Sri Lanka's bowling failed to impress, with off-spinner Dilruwan Perera failing to pick up a wicket despite the 38-year-old mowing 32 overs.

England resumed from the overnight score of 98 for two and lost Jonny Bairstow (28) and Daniel Lawrence (3) early. Vice-captain Jos Buttler (55) added 97 runs for the fifth wicket with Root.

## Leach's accuracy key to success in India: Swann

PTI ■ LONDON

Former off-spinner Graeme Swann wants England's tweekers to stay patient in the upcoming Test series in India and has picked Jack Leach to play a key role during the tour.



The spin duo of Leach and

Dom Bess had five-wicket hauls in England's win in the first Test against Sri Lanka, but returned wicket-less in the home team's first innings of the ongoing second Test in Galle.

Having picked up 60 of his 255 wickets in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at an average of

25, the 41-year-old Swann, a veteran of 60 Tests between 2008 and 2013, is aware of the skills required to succeed in sub-continent pitches.

"The main priority is to play cricket, to be out there doing what we love instead of being at home — so I think that still remains the most important thing. But I think there would definitely come a point where players would struggle with this (bubble)," du Plessis said.

"If you bow well enough, especially against India, they play you very respectfully. There is not a Virendra Sehwag in that current team; Virat Kohli is the bats against spin waits for the bad ball."

"India are very, very patient but if you are willing to be patient and bowl all day you will take wickets," he observed.

"You might have to work very hard for them and you'll lose some timber, which isn't a bad thing."

## PAK INCLUDE 6 UNCAPPED PLAYERS FOR 1ST SA TEST

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan selectors on Sunday retained six uncapped players in the primed 17-man squad, named for the first Test against South Africa.

The uncapped players include off-spinner Sajid Khan and left-arm spinner Nauman Ali, who are expected to partner the experienced Leggie Yasir Shah in the match, starting Tuesday in Karachi.

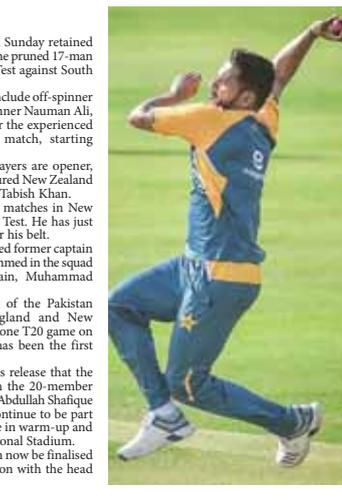
The other uncapped players are opener, Imran Butt, who recently toured New Zealand and pacers, Haris Rauf and Tabish Khan.

Rauf played in the T20 matches in New Zealand but is yet to play a Test. He has just three first class games under his belt.

The selectors also retained former captain and wicketkeeper, Sarfraz Ahmed in the squad as a standby to vice-captain, Muhammad Rizwan.

Sarfraz has been part of the Pakistan squads which toured England and New Zealand but has played just one T20 game on both tours where Rizwan has been the first choice keeper.

The PCB said in a press release that the three players dropped from the 20-member squad — Kamran Ghulam, Abdullah Shafique and Salman Agha — will continue to be part of the squad and will feature in warm-up and training sessions at the National Stadium.



## Playing while staying in bubble not sustainable for players: Du Plessis

PTI ■ KARACHI

South African veteran Faf du Plessis reckons playing cricket while staying in a bio-secure bubble for months could soon become a "major challenge" for players and is not sustainable in the long run.

Cricketers have to follow strict protocols while touring in their respective teams due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We understand that this is a very tough season and a tough challenge for a lot of people out there, but if it's back-to-back bubble life, things would become a big challenge," du Plessis said during a virtual press conference on Saturday.

Du Plessis is in Pakistan to represent South Africa in a two-match Test series and three T20 Internationals. The first Test will start here on January 26 while the second match will be played from February 4 in Rawalpindi.

The Test series will be followed by a three-match T20I series from February 11 to 14 in Lahore.

"The main priority is to play cricket, to be out there doing what we love instead of being at home — so I think that still remains the most important thing. But I think there would definitely come a point where players would struggle with this (bubble)," du Plessis said.

"Right now, I'm still in a good place. I'm still feeling really motivated and driven, but I can only speak for myself."

## It'll be disrespectful for India if Eng doesn't play best XI: KP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Lamenting Jonny Bairstow's omission from the England squad for Tests against India, former skipper Kevin Pietersen said that it will be disrespectful to the host team if visiting team does not put on field its best XI in the marquee series.

"Not only Bairstow but all rounder Sam Curran and pacer Mark Wood have also been left out of the squad."

Bairstow has been rested for the first two Tests as part of the England and Wales Cricket Board's (ECB) player management policy, which stresses on giving adequate rest to every English cricketer in a packed calendar year, which includes 17 Tests and the ICC T20 World Cup.

The 40-year-old said a win against India is similar to a victory against arch-rivals Australia and urged the selectors to play both Stuart Broad and James Anderson.

"Big debate on whether ECB have picked their best team to play India in the 1st Test. Winning IN India is as good a feeling as winning in Aus. It's disrespectful to ENG



fans & also @BCI to NOT play team at home, while suggesting players can be rested after the Indian Premier League.

"The BEST England players will want to play as many games as possible against India, in India. PICK THEM! Then they go to IPL & earn everything they deserve. Cash is king for every sportsman. They're a business! They can have a break after that!"



## Sundar wishes to open in Tests

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coach Ravi Shastri's dressing room stories of grit and determination work as a tonic for young Washington Sundar, who is ready for any challenge even if it means opening the batting for India in Test matches.

The 21-year-old Washington was a specialist top-order batsman during his India 19 days but then honed his off-spin to such an extent that he is now an automatic choice in India's T20 team.

One of the heroes of India's epic triumph in Brisbane, which gave them the four-match Test series against Australia, Washington spoke about the head coach's influence on him.

"I think it will be a blessing for me if I ever get an opportunity to open the batting for India in Tests. I think I will accept the challenge just like our coach Ravi sir did during his playing days," Washington told PTI during an interaction from his Chennai residence.

He scored 62 in the first innings at Gabbra to keep India in the match

and then a quick 22, including a hooked six off Pat Cummins, to play a part in the finishing act, apart from a match-haul of four wickets.

"Ravi tells us very inspiring stories from his playing days. Like how he made his debut as a specialist spinner, got four wickets and batted at number 10 against New Zealand on debut."

"And how from there, he became a Test opener and playing those great fast bowlers. I would love to open batting in Tests like him," said Washington, who enjoys a decent first-class batting average of 32 plus, which can only improve from hereon as he gets to play more games for India.

For a youngster coming into the Test side, he feels that there is no need to draw any inspiration from outside as there are so many role models in that India dressing room.

"As a youngster, when I look up for inspiration and motivation, I find so many role models in that dressing room. There is Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Ajinkya Rahane, R Ashwin who have been such great performers."