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Rashmika on **Pushpa**

Stay orders halt developmental works

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Asian stocks follow wall st lows

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In brief

Govt extends validity of motor vehicle documents to Sept 30

The government on Thursday extended the validity of motor vehicle documents like driving licence (DL), registration certificate (RC) and permits till September 30, 2021, in view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) said it has advised the enforcement authorities that the validity of fitness, permit (all types), licence, registration or any other concerned document(s) may be treated to be valid till September 30, 2021. "This covers all documents whose validity has expired since Feb 1, 2020, or would expire by September 30, 2021," it said.

Sonia has taken both shots of Covid vaccine: Congress

Sonia Gandhi has taken both doses of the Covishield vaccine, the Congress said on Thursday following questions from the BJP and asked the government to follow the 'raj dharna' of vaccinating all Indians instead of creating non-issues. The Congress president's daughter Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has taken her first dose of the vaccine and her son and Rahul Gandhi will take his shot post Covid recovery as advised by doctors, party chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said while hitting out at the BJP for raising doubts on whether the Gandhis had got their jabs. Some BJP leaders have accused the Gandhis of creating 'vax hesitancy'.

Govt makes PUC certificate for all vehicles uniform

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a notification to make the PUC (Pollution Under Control) certificate for all vehicles uniform across the country and also to link the PUC database with the National Register. After the changes in the Central Motor Vehicles Rules 1989, the QR code shall be printed on the PUC form and will have details of the vehicle, owner and the status of the emission. The Ministry issued a notification dated 14th June, 2021, for a common format of the PUC Certificate to be issued across the country," an official statement said.

Twitter India MD was questioned on May 31 in 'toolkit' case

Twitter India MD Manish Maheshwari was questioned by the Delhi Police last month in connection with its probe into the 'COVID toolkit' case, officials said Thursday. They did not divulge further details, but said he was also questioned about the company's policy behind flagging tweets by users as 'manipulated media'. This came after Twitter labelled as 'manipulated media' a tweet by BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra on a 'Covid toolkit', attributed to the Congress, on how to target the Modi government over its handling of Covid crisis. A senior police officer said a Delhi Police's Special Cell team was sent to Bengaluru on May 31 where Maheshwari was questioned.

YSRCP era set to begin in Legislative Council

SNCN ACHARYULU
■ HYDERABAD

The YSR Congress Party era will begin in the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council from Friday, when eight MLCs complete their term and retire.

Among these eight, seven are from the Telugu Desam Party and one from YSRCP. These retirements will hand majority in the Council to the YSRCP as the TDP strength will be reduced. Not only a majority, the YSRCP will also bag the Council Chairman and Deputy Chairman posts, which were held by TDP MLCs.

The retirement of eight Members will reduce the TDP strength in the Council to 15 and the YSRCP strength to 19.

The AP Legislative Council has a strength of 58 Members strength — 50 elected and eight nominated. From the local bodies, 20 MLCs are elected. Three seats in the local bodies quota are vacant at present and of the remaining 17 seats, 15 Members are from TDP and one each from YSRCP and BJP. The retirement of eight Members on Friday will leave the TDP with just eight Members in the Council. The elections necessitated by the retirements will see almost all seats going to the YSRCP, going by its strength in the local bodies.

From the Assembly quota, 20 MLCs will be elected. At present YSR Congress has 11 and TDP six Members while three seats are vacant.



Jagan to benefit from PM's 'patience' advice

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's advice not to press for the dissolution of the Legislative Council has proved to be beneficial to YSRCP president and Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

It may be recalled that the AP Legislative Assembly had passed a resolution seeking abolition of the Legislative Council and sent it to Central government for further action.

This was after the TDP-dominated Council sent the

three-capitals Bill, passed overwhelmingly by the Assembly, to a Select Committee.

An angry Chief Minister then decided to abolish the Council, like former chief minister NT Rama Rao had done in the past. When Jagan requested Modi to take further action in Parliament over abolition of the Council, the Prime Minister advised him to wait for some time and not to press with his demand.

Decision on Class 10 exams at appropriate time: Suresh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Thursday said it would take a right decision on conducting the year-end examinations for Class 10 and Intermediate students at the appropriate time.

"We are keenly observing the situation. We will take an appropriate decision at the appropriate time," Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh told reporters.

Asked about the Supreme Court notice, the minister said he was not aware of it.

He, however, said the government would spell out its stand after the notice was received. "We will tell the Supreme Court why conducting the examinations is necessary," Suresh said. "Our stand has been the same from the beginning."



Jagan discusses Pedalandariki Illu with J-Cs (Housing)

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday interacted with the newly appointed Joint Collectors (Housing) across the state for the effective implementation of Pedalandariki Illu scheme.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister said that the 'Pedalandariki Illu' initiative was a massive housing project never before done by any government or any state in the country.

Over 28 lakh houses are being constructed in 17,000 layouts — layouts so massive that some are of the size of municipalities. The Chief Minister directed the officials to complete the houses within the time frame.

Besides, the Chief Minister told the officials to focus on providing house sites to all the eligible people within 90 days of their filing an application on saturation basis while taking care to maintain complete transparency and zero corruption.

He said that there shouldn't be



a situation where only 10 of 100 eligible people get benefitted. "Officials should take the responsibility of constructing houses for all those receiving house sites," Jagan stated.

He said that the government was very much determined to provide welfare to every eligible person on a saturation basis. "With the help of village secretariats and volunteers, we are able to take governance to the doorstep of the beneficiary," said the Chief Minister.

He said that the colonies should not become slums under any circumstances but must be equipped with good infrastructure facilities.

Suspended judge Ramakrishna gets bail

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Suspended Judge Ramakrishna was on Thursday released on bail from Pileru sub-jail.

Judge Ramakrishna was arrested on sedition charges in April and lodged at Pileru sub-jail for allegedly making threatening and objectionable comments against Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy.

The single judge bench of Justice R Raghunandan Rao heard the bail petition filed by Judge Ramakrishna. His bail petition



was earlier rejected by the lower court.

FIR against Ramdev for spreading 'false info' on allopathy

PNS ■ RAIPUR

Police in Chhattisgarh's Raipur have registered an FIR against yoga guru Ramdev for allegedly spreading "false" information about the medicines being used by the medical fraternity for the treatment of COVID-19, police official said on Thursday.

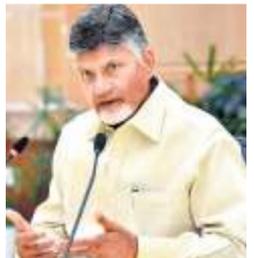
Naidu asks CM to clear Rs 4,000cr paddy bills

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national president and former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday expressed concern that the farmers were facing extreme problems because of inordinate delay in payment of paddy dues even as the Government was failing to ensure remunerative prices for different crops.

Naidu wrote a letter to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, demanding immediate payment of the paddy dues and to take further steps for making timely payments to the farmers. "This was very necessary considering how the farmers have been badly hit financially in successive cyclones and natural calamities. It was alarming that the food grain dues to be paid by the Government were mounting day by day," the former chief minister wrote.

The TDP chief told the Chief Minister that the paddy dues have accumulated and reached over Rs 4,000 crore as of now. Payments were not being made to the farmers in East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam districts. The farmers



were being forced to make rounds to the respective offices. During the TDP regime, the procurement related cash used to be deposited in the respective accounts of the farmers within 48 hours, he stated.

Naidu strongly objected to the new practice introduced by the YSRCP Government to make payments in 21 days, which was causing many problems for the farmers. "Even this deadline was not being met by the government. Nearly two months were over since the paddy was procured from the farmers but their cash was not deposited."

Naidu's claim of pending arrears of farmers untrue, rebuts Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Rubbishing the letter written by TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Thursday said that its contents were full of false allegations against the State government.

He said that opposition TDP leaders lacked the moral right to speak on farmers' issues, as they left a debt of Rs 960 crore towards crop procurement.



I'm elected, four-five people can't remove me as HCA chief: Azhar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former India skipper Mohammad Azharuddin, who was removed from the post of Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) President, has said he is being targeted for doing good things for the association.

HCA Apex Council issued a showcause notice to Azharuddin. HCA said Azharuddin is a mentor

of Cricket Club in Dubai, by name Northern Warriors, which is unrecognised by the BCCI.

"Therefore, you being a mentor of an unrecognized Cricket Tournament comes under the ambit of conflict of interest as envisaged under Rule 38(1)(iii) of the Memorandum of Association and Rules and Regulations-2018 of the Hyderabad Cricket

Association," read a statement from the showcause notice.

The showcause notice from HCA also alleged that Azharuddin had "brazenly changed the official password" of the HCA e-mail so that no other office bearer could have access to the e-mails received from the BCCI and reply to the same.

AP dumps rare mineral Shungite as 'waste'

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh has been dumping millions of tonnes of Shungite, a rare mineral which is found only in two other countries across the globe — Russia and Kazakhstan as 'waste'. Finding no use for it presently, the fullerene-bearing shungite, otherwise called 'black tuff' is being thrown in mine dumps along with white shale.

While mining barytes, it becomes necessary to extract carbonaceous shale, otherwise called 'shungite' which is about three times the volume of barytes mined. Shungite has a specific gravity of around 2.2 and hardness of around 4 in the Mohs scale. This material is presently dumped in an area of 65 hectares around the mines.

The reserves of shungite in Kadapa are estimated at around 200 million tonnes.

Geologists point out that in light of new uses for shungite in other parts of the world, there is a need



to convert this material, presently discarded as waste, into value-added products and market them in a big way. This has the potential to fetch sizable revenue to cash-starved Andhra Pradesh which is looking at all possible alternatives to fund the government's welfare agenda.

Koksu Mining Co of Kazakhstan

and Carbon-Shungit Ltd of Russia are two private companies, which virtually monopolise mining, processing, research, and development and marketing of processed shungite for internal consumption as well as for export to European and Asian countries.

"The sale value of shungite marketed is much more than the

income obtained by the APMDC from Mangampet barytes. By finding use to the fullerene-bearing shungite, there can be a phenomenal increase in the income of the Corporation," retired principal and professor of geology at Sri Venkateswara University in Tirupati, Dr Jagadiswar Rao Ramayanan told The Pioneer.

Dr Rao said processed shungite is used for a variety of purposes, including filler in tyres, rubbers and plastics, paints, ferro-alloys, oil spills and rocket fuels, water treatment, enhancement of soil moisture and fertility, increased plant growth and enhancement of crop yields.

"There is an urgent need to take up research and development on a major scale for the effective utilisation of millions of tonnes of shungite obtained and being obtained during mining of Mangampet mud-grade barytes and presently thrown as waste in the mine dumps," Dr Rao said.

Govt alienates 2 acres for Sindhu academy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Ace badminton player PV Sindhu will set up a badminton academy along with a sports school in Chinagadili in Vizag.

The Academy will come up in two acres of land in two phases. Sindhu had recently informed the government that around Rs 5 crore will be spent in each phase on establishing the academy.

On Thursday, the government issued orders for alienation of two acres of land in Survey No 72/11, 83/5 and 6 of Chinagadili village, Visakhapatnam Rural Mandal in favour of the PV Sindhu Badminton Academy.

Earlier, orders had issued transferring the land from Animal Husbandry Department to Department of Youth Services and Sports for allocation of land for establishment of PV Sindhu Badminton Academy and Sports School.

Sindhu had represented to the government to alienate the land free of cost in view of public good involved in the project.

Sindhu informed the government that she was in the process of registering the trust and it will be registered soon.

She also assured that DPR will



be submitted. She had said that the Academy will be constructed in two phases with an expenditure of Rs 5 crore in each phase and that she would abide by all the rules of Government and the land will only be used for development of Badminton Academy and Sports School.

As per the government order, "duly considering the highly valuable nature of the land, the department concerned shall place adequate safeguards to ensure that the land is put to use only for "Badminton Academy and Sports School" prohibiting use of the land for any other alternative purpose or any commercial purpose in perpetuity. The academy shall also serve talented but poor without commercial outlook, the order stated.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Jyeshtha & Shukla Paksha Panchangam
Tithi : Ashlami: 08:38 pm
Nakshatram : Uttara Phalguni: 09:37 pm
Time to Avoid : (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam : 10:39 am – 12:17 pm
Yamagandam : 03:32 pm – 05:10 pm
Varjyam : 05:37 am – 07:08 am
Gulika : 07:23 am – 09:01 am
Good Time : (to start any important work)
Amritakalam : 02:36 pm – 04:09 pm
Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:51 am – 12:43 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Mostly cloudy
Temp: 34/27
Humidity: 59%
Sunrise: 05:42 am
Sunset: 06:52 pm
Current Weather Conditions Updated JUNE 17, 2021 5:00 PM

Decision on Class 10...

Continued from Page 1

We want to conduct the examinations only in the interest of the students' future," Suresh maintained.

There had been anticipation that the government would take a call on the vexatious issue at a high-level review meeting on education chaired by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, in the backdrop of growing demand for cancellation of the annual examinations for Class X and Intermediate.

The government had only been postponing the exams as the Covid-19 curfew in the state continued to be extended in spells.

"We have not discussed the exams issue at the meeting with the Chief Minister today," the Education Minister said, in reply to another question.

CJI seeks Singapore's help for Arbitration Centre in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Justice of India NV Ramana on Thursday said he has sought the help of his counterpart in Singapore for establishing an International Arbitration Centre here to adjudicate commercial disputes, as the city is well connected to the world geographically.

Chief Justice Ramana, who is camping in Raj Bhavan, in an informal chat said he also suggested that Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababhu Naidu provide support in terms of necessary infrastructure for the proposed facility initially.

"I spoke to the Chief Justice of Singapore... He wants some assistance from India about the



artificial intelligence... He wants to know how the Supreme Court is using Artificial intelligence... And I requested him to help us establish the International Arbitration Centre because the world's best arbitration centre is in Singapore. For that he agreed," Ramana said.

The CJI pointed out that most companies go to either London or Singapore to settle their disputes while Hyderabad is centrally located and well connected to the Gulf, European and Asian countries.

Established in 1991 as an independent, not-for-profit organisation, Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) has a proven track record in providing neutral arbitration services to the global business community.

SIAC arbitration awards have been enforced by the courts of Australia, China, Hong Kong SAR, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Thailand, UK, USA, and Vietnam, amongst other New York

Convention signatories, according to its website.

Chief Justice Ramana said there would be a conference on Arbitration in August and he would personally talk to the Chief Justice of Singapore on the issue.

"Sometime in August there is a conference on arbitration. I don't know the location. It is subject to the pandemic conditions whether it is physical or virtual. We both are participating. If we physically meet we can explain better, otherwise I can interact with him. He promised that he would extend all his support," Ramana said.

He stated that Hyderabad is the best place for IAC, as the city boasts of great infrastructure.

Active cases drop below 70k in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Active Covid cases dropped below the 70,000 mark to reach 69,831 on Thursday in Andhra Pradesh, even as 6,151 new Covid infections were reported.

With the new cases, Andhra Pradesh's Covid tally crossed 18.3 lakh.

On a positive note, 7,728 more people recovered from the disease in the past 24 hours, increasing the total number of recoveries over 17.5 lakh.

Bucking the daily trend of an average 10,000 recoveries, the southern state witnessed fewer recoveries on Thursday.

East Godavari district reported the highest number

of cases at 1,244, followed by Chittoor (937), West Godavari (647), Prakasam (554), Kadapa (478), Krishna (424), Anantapur (359), Guntur (331), Nellore (274), Srikakulam (264), Visakhapatnam (237), Kurnool (203) and Vizianagaram (199).

Except for Krishna and Vizianagaram, all other districts in Andhra Pradesh have now reported more than 1 lakh Covid cases, however, Krishna district is also inching towards the 1 lakh mark, with just shy of 3,000 cases.

With 1.02 lakh more tests conducted in the past 24 hours, the total number of tests carried out in Andhra Pradesh has crossed the 2.08 crore-mark.

Suspended judge Ramakrishna...

Continued from Page 1

Dammalapati Sridhar, counsel for Judge Ramakrishna, told the court that the police arrested his client on April 15 and he has been in jail for the last 60 days, while faulting the police for not filing a charge-sheet till date.

The court, noting that the accused has been in jail for the last 60 days and there was no chance of influencing witnesses, issued bail on the condition that Judge Ramakrishna should not speak on this particular case with the media.

The court also directed him to submit two sureties and Rs 50,000 as guarantee.

YSRCP era set to begin in Legislative...

Continued from Page 1

If elections were to be conducted, all these three seats would be won by the YSRCP, as per its strength in the Assembly.

Of the eight nominated Members, seven are from the YSRCP and one from the TDP. From the Graduates constituency YSRCP has one Member.

After Friday, the YSRCP will have 19 Members (11 from Assembly quota, seven nominated members and one Graduates constituency) and TDP will have 14 (8 from local

bodies quota and six nominated members) while BJP will have two Members. If elections would be conducted for the vacant seats, the strength of YSRCP in the Council will increase to 30 and the TDP's will remain at 14.

Meanwhile, well-placed sources said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has finalised the name of YSRCP MLC Moshe Raju as the Council Chairman and Janga Krishna Murthy as Deputy Chairman. Elections will be held for these two posts whenever the Council meets.

Jagan to benefit from PM's 'patience' advice

Continued from Page 1

Modi told Jagan if he waited patiently for about a year, the YSRCP would get a majority in the Council

and it would be politically beneficial for the ruling party.

Modi's words have proved true, and now Jagan will not only get control of the Council, but will also have more posts with which he could reward his party's leaders.

Naidu asks CM to clear Rs 4,000cr...

Continued from Page 1

As a result, the farmers were not able to repay loans brought and spent on cultivation," he wrote.

The TDP chief asked how the farmers could pay interest on loans if the government would not make timely payments. They would also face more problems due to lack of money to begin crops in kharif season. "The debts incurred during rabi season already became a huge burden. If the loans were not paid in time, the interest rates would go up multiple times. The YSRCP

government was pushing the farmers into a severe debt crisis," the TDP chief stated.

Naidu said that there were pending dues of Rs 2,500 crore only in the Godavari districts as per the farmers. The procurement was also being ignored. Till now, only 27.87 lakh metric tonnes of paddy was procured as against the promised 45 lakh tonnes. The groundnut crop was totally damaged in Rayalaseema during natural calamities in kharif-2020. No input subsidy was paid till now and there was no assurance from the government so far, he wrote.

I'm elected, four-five people can't...

Continued from Page 1

Meanwhile, Azharuddin said four or five people can remove him from the post of HCA President since he an elected person. "I want to tell you something, I am an elected person. Four-five people cannot remove me as a president as I'm elected by the general body. This is all bogus news. This is all illegal things," Azharuddin told ANI.

Reacting to charges of misconduct, Azharuddin said: "When they are already charged and under the scanner, how could they charge me? They are going to court every day not me. I didn't do any misconduct, they are doing misconduct. As they say, empty vessels make more noise that's the case with them, the vessels have become empty. I am being targeted for doing good things for the association. I don't want to do any illegal things and I just want to do what's good for the game of cricket."

The former Indian skipper also said he was going to start a T20 tournament to nurture future stars.

"I am going to start the T20 tournament for all 200 plus clubs, and from those who will play the tournament, they might play for India in the future. Those people are only interested in clubs and not in cricket," he said.

Azharuddin also called for

an inquiry from Enforcement Directorate and CBI to find out the alleged corrupt practices being held in HCA.

"ED, CBI should do an inquiry to find out the corruption in the association. They are trying blackmailing activity but it will not work on me," he said.

The former batsman also termed his suspension from the post of HCA president as a "false narrative".

"I call this a false narrative because it is indeed false and slanderous. I did not stoop down to such low levels because I always strived to maintain the dignity of the office," Azharuddin said in a press conference.

"So that you are aware, the APEX Council of HCA has 9 members on it. Apart from myself, K. John, Manoj, R. Vijayanand, Naresh Sharma, Surender Agarwal, Smt. Anuradha are elected members while Parth Satwalkar, Smt. Subhadra Suri represents the men's players council and women's players council respectively and Santosh Daware represents the CAG.

"If 5 members -- John Manoj, Vijayanand, Naresh Sharma, Surender Agarwal and Smt. Anuradha gang up and call themselves 'APEX Council', by what sense of interpretation is it justified? I call it belligerent posturing with scant regard for the rule of law," he added.

Naidu's claim of pending arrears of farmers untrue...

Continued from Page 1

Addressing a press conference here on Thursday, Sajjala said that the letter written by Naidu about pending arrears to farmers was part of a false propaganda by TDP leaders.

He said that the opposition has been showing false concern on farmers and the agriculture sector, but in reality, the same TDP government had left a pending due of Rs 960 crore which has to be paid for crop procurement.

"It was Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who took the initiative of clearing all those pending arrears left by Naidu," Sajjala said. "Naidu should be ashamed for writing a letter saying that the farmers were not paid within 48 hours of procurement of their crops," he said.

Sajjala said that people have not yet forgotten the dark days of TDP rule, and stated that Jaganmohan Reddy's governance had instilled confidence among farmers.

Drawing comparison between TDP and YSRCP government's crop procurement, he said that hardly 18 lakh tonnes were procured during 2014-15 and by the end of TDP term, in 2018-19

Sajjala said that people have not yet forgotten the dark days of TDP rule and stated that Jagan's rule had instilled confidence among farmers.

20.5 lakh tonnes of crop was procured at a cost of Rs 4,800 crore and leaving arrears of Rs 1,000 crore.

"In the current government, under the direction of the Chief Minister in 2019-20 nearly 34.74 lakh tonnes of crop was procured by paying Rs 6,331 crore and in 20-21, so far over 25 lakh tonnes were procured by paying Rs 4,728 crore to the farmers. The authorities will complete the targeted procurement of 45 lakh tonnes this year," said Sajjala. He added that this was clear evidence that the YSRCP government was committed to farmer welfare.

Speaking on Minimum Support Price (MSP), he said that the main concern behind bringing MSP was to safeguard the farmers from falling into losses by selling their produce at non-remunerative prices. "It is not mandatory for the farmers to sell their crops to the government, they can sell their

crops to whoever is paying a higher price and the government's job is to oversee that farmers are getting paid enough," Sajjala said.

He stated that the Chief Minister included tenant farmers who were left out during the TDP regime with no support, under e-cropping. "Currently, procurement is taking place at village level right at the farmer's doorstep," Sajjala said, adding that the YSRCP government's goal was to stand by the farmers from "seed to sale".

Regarding property tax, he said that TDP is unnecessarily criticising the government with no clear reason except sheer jealousy. Under the FRBM Act, the state is implementing the recommendations of the Central Government as per 15th Finance Commission, which is already being implemented in BJP ruled states, he said.

The additional revenue to the government due to the upgraded property tax policy is only Rs 186 crore, said Sajjala. He added that none of the property owners were making a fuss, except TDP and BJP leaders.

Speaking on the pending arrears by Centre, he said that BJP can take that credit by giving Rs 3,300 crore arrears.

Shungite has potential to be costlier than gold

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The barytes deposit mined by the state-run Andhra Pradesh Mineral Development Corporation Ltd (APMDC) is the single largest deposit of barytes in the world with estimated reserves of 74 million tonnes of barytes and 200 million tonnes of fullerene bearing shungite in Mangampet and Govindapalli villages in Obulavaripalli Mandal, Kadapa District.

While mining 3 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of lump barytes and 0.10 MTPA of barytes powder for use as weighting mud in oil-well drilling both in India and abroad, an estimated 50 million tonnes of fullerene-shungite mined along with barytes has been so far mined and thrown as waste in a 65-hectare dump area.

Work carried out by the Department of Geology in Sri Venkateswara University has helped to know that the chemical composition of Mangampet shungite is comparable with that of the non-carbonate shungite occurring in the Almaty region in

AP dumps rare...

Continued from Page 1

Even Koku Mining Co established under the private sector in Kazakhstan had to spend over six million USD between 2003-2008 to make mining, processing, and marketing of various shungite products viable and productive. "Similar efforts should be made for the effective use

of Mangampet fullerene-bearing shungite in the way Russia and Kazakhstan have been using their shungite deposits for a variety of uses and in the way certain American companies have been synthesising fullerene derivatives from carbon soot for use in the emerging fields of nano chemistry, astro chemistry, etc." he said.

Kazakhstan. An analysis done on Mangampet shungite in 2007 by Dr Y Sreedhar Murthy, former Professor of Applied Geochemistry at Osmania University, both Stanford University and a Boston-based company-Nano-C revealed that fullerene in Mangampet shungite fetches a value higher than that of gold if only techniques could be evolved to isolate fullerene derivatives in the purest form.

This prompted APMDC to issue a global notification in 2009 seeking expression of interest from bidders to separate and market high-value fullerenes from the shungite dumps around the mines.

As technology to isolate various fullerene types from shungite in pure form has not been attempted by anybody so far, no agency could come forward to take up the work assigned by the APMDC. After this, the APMDC has been simply dumping shungite as waste around the mine.

Jagan discusses Pedalankariki...

Continued from Page 1

"This is the top priority as the government is spending over Rs 84,000 crore on the scheme," Jagan said.

For infrastructure alone Rs 34,000 crore is being spent. The Chief Minister instructed the officials to maintain transparency and ensure quality in every work, without resorting to any corruption.

"If quality is compromised, problems will arise. Quality is very much needed to proceed with an effective plan," he added.



Student activists released on bail

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Student activists Natasha Narwal, Devangana Kalita and Asif Iqbal Tanha walked out of Tihar Jail here on Thursday evening after they were granted bail in the northeast Delhi riots conspiracy case, and vowed to continue their struggle.

The release of the trio, arrested in May last year under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), came after a lower court order.

Their friends and family members had gathered outside the jail before their release. JNU students Narwal and Kalita thanked their friends and well-wishers, many of whom gathered outside the jail, for supporting them during their year-long stay behind bars.

As soon as the Pinjra Tod activist-duo walked out of Tihar, they were greeted with slogans of 'Lal Salaam', 'Natasha Zindabad', 'Devangana Zindabad'.

Slogans were also raised in memory of Natasha's father, Mahavir Narwal, who succumbed to the coronavirus last month.

Tanha walked out of a separate jail gate. The Jamia Millia Islamia student was wearing a mask, which read 'No CAA, No NRC, No NPR'.

Walking out of Tihar Jail, Tanha said he had kept hope that he would be released one

day and asserted that the fight against the CAA, NRC and the NPR would continue.

Students were carrying banners demanding the release of other political prisoners, including former JNU student leader Umar Khalid, and the scrapping of the UAPA, under which the trio was arrested.

"We have received tremendous support inside jail and we will continue our struggle," Narwal told reporters.

Welcoming the Delhi High Court order granting them bail, Narwal, an activist of women collective Pinjra Tod, said that when they were arrested, it took them many months to believe that they were in jail under such stringent charges.

While stating that the matter is still sub-judice, Kalita said, "... we would like to thank the Delhi High Court for upholding what we believe in. Any such protest that we have done is not terrorism. It was a democratic protest, led by women."

Hitting out at the government, Kalita said people are in jail for raising their voice.

"It shows the desperation of the government... We are women who are not scared of them. They are trying to suppress the voice of people and dissent. We got a lot of support from people which helped us survive inside (jail)," she told reporters.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES

GOLD	
₹ 48, 930 (10 gm)	
₹ 540	↓
SILVER	
₹ 75, 100 (1kg)	
₹ 1100	↓

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG

Dressed/With Skin	₹187
Without Skin	₹213
Broiler at Farm	₹129

EGG RATES ₹/100

VIJAYAWADA	505
HYDERABAD	519
VISAKHAPATNAM	557
RETAIL PRICE	₹5.05

FIR against Ramdev for spreading 'false info' on...

Continued from Page 1

The case was filed on Wednesday night against Ramkrishna Yadav alias Baba Ramdev based on a complaint filed by the Chhattisgarh's unit of the Indian Medical Association (IMA), Raipur's Senior Superintendent of Police Ajay Yadav said.

Ramdev has been booked under sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) and others of the IPC and provisions of Disaster Management Act, 2005, he said.

Further investigation into



the matter is underway, he added.

Chairman of Hospital Board IMA (CG) Dr Rakesh Gupta, IMA's Raipur President and Vikas Agrawal

and his threatening statements on social media against medicines being used by medical fraternity, Government of India, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and other frontline organisations in treatment of coronavirus infection.

There are several videos of him on social media in which he had allegedly made such misleading remarks, it said.

At a time when doctors, paramedical staff and all branches of government and administration have been together battling COVID-19, Ramdev has been allegedly misleading people about established and approved treatment methods, the complaint said.

modern medical facilities and allopathy medicines, which have been curing over 90 percent of the patients, would put the lives of people in danger, it alleged.

"During the investigation of the complaint, it was found that his statements amount to violation of the notification of the Chhattisgarh government dated March 13 last year," the official said.

The notification states that no person/institution/organisation will use any print or electronic media for information regarding COVID-19 without prior permission of the state's Health Department. This is to avoid spread of any rumour or unauthenticated information regarding COVID-19.

tion and his threatening statements on social media against medicines being used by medical fraternity, Government of India, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and other frontline organisations in treatment of coronavirus infection.

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Ramdev's remarks on

Jagan wants officials to focus on implementation of education policy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday directed officials to prepare an action plan for the implementation of New Education Policy.

Chairing a review meeting at his camp office on the progress of Nadu Nedu works in schools and Anganwadi centres, the Chief Minister said not even a single employee will be laid off from schools and Anganwadi centres. He emphasised that no centre is being closed and that changes were being made in the education system after taking these two factors into consideration.

The Chief Minister said there should be two types of schools — one school consisting of PP1, PP2, Preparatory Class, Class-1 and Class-2 and the other from Class-3 to Class-10. The first type should be within one km distance to



students and the other within three km.

He said that the main purpose of the policy was to keep the teacher-student ratio rational and that it's not appropriate to have one teacher for four students or a single teacher for a large number of students. The approach of a single teacher

teaching all subjects is also incorrect, Jagan said.

The Chief Minister said it was important to maintain student-teacher ratio in foundation courses as mental development was essential for children below eight years of age and their skills need to be improved. He also said that it

was not appropriate to set up all classrooms at one place and that no one should find fault in the programme of bringing schools within three km distance of students.

The Chief Minister said that the aim of the government was to provide quality education, quality teaching and quality infrastructure according to the national education policy. He added that the state education policy should be in tune with the NEP.

The Chief Minister said the government was looking forward to teaching in English medium, striving to provide quality education to the children and spending huge money for the same. He said to create awareness among teachers, public representatives and others on the new education policy and directed the officials to clarify their doubts.

Reviewing Nadu Nedu, the

Chief Minister told officials to prepare an action plan to complete Nadu Nedu works in Anganwadi centres within two years.

He pointed out that the concept of foundation schools was introduced by the Central Government and everyone should follow it. Jagan said that there are 18 subjects till Class 5 and the SGT teacher can't handle them and that a separate teacher was needed for each subject.

He directed officials to acquire lands under Nadu Nedu scheme for schools that do not have a playground and to prepare an action plan to provide sports dress and shoes additionally under Vidya Kanuka scheme.

Jagan also asked officials to strengthen laboratories and libraries in schools and to provide better Internet facilities in school libraries.

New property tax regime as per Central norms: AP Govt

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government on Thursday said that the new property tax system has been formulated as per certain norms stipulated by the Union government.

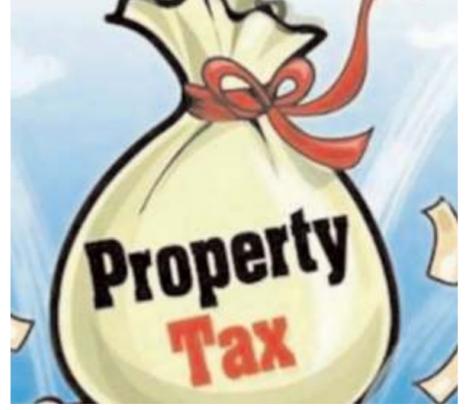
Opposition parties and civil societies have been demanding the roll back of the new property tax regime under which the tax will be fixed on the capital value of the property instead of the existing system of levying tax on the rental value.

The State government on Thursday reminded that property tax constitutes the single largest source of revenue for the urban local bodies (ULBs) in India.

"The Government has, in line with the recommendations of the Union government and the 15th Finance Commission, brought about some changes in the manner in which property tax is levied. The reform would also contribute in reducing complexity and enhancing transparency," an official said.

As per some conditions requiring reforms in the property tax regime stipulated by Government of India, the State shall notify floor rates of property tax in ULBs which are in consonance with the prevailing circles rates which is guideline rates for property transactions and floor rates of user charges in respect of the provision of water-supply, drainage sewerage which reflect current costs / past inflation.

The State shall put in place



a system of periodic increase in floor rates of property tax /user charges in line with price increase.

Also, the 15th Central Finance Commission has stipulated that states should notify such floor rates for Property Tax and should show improvement in collections in states own GSDP Growth rates.

"In pursuance of the directions of the Union government, the State government took up the said reforms in line with the guidelines of the GoI from time to time and virtual conferences had with the concerned officials at GoI. To comply with the above conditions, some reforms were taken up by AP," said a statement from the State government.

The State government also said that to ensure that there

will not be any abnormal increase in property tax on the taxpayers due to the proposed reforms, certain transitional rules are also prescribed in the rules while transitioning from the existing Annual Rental Value System to Capital Value System smoothly.

State Level Committee and Subcommittees have been formed by the government with some of the Municipal Commissioners, Additional Commissioners, Revenue Officers etc., to study the existing Capital Value Systems in the ULBs of other States such as Karnataka and Maharashtra.

The teams have visited the selected ULBs of other States and compiled relevant data to arrive at the model to be adopted in Andhra Pradesh.

Jagan drove away Franklin Templeton, alleges TDP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP state general secretary Panchumarty Anuradha on Thursday demanded Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to explain to the people of AP why he bought shares worth Rs 9 crore in the US-based Franklin Templeton company if it had a dubious and questionable track record.

Anuradha held the Chief Minister and his party leaders responsible for Franklin Templeton shutting down its activities in Andhra Pradesh. "Jagan and Co are hell bent on driving away all such world-class companies and industries with an ulterior motive to plunder all resources in the state. In his 63-page affidavit dated March 21, 2019, Jagan stated that he got shares worth Rs 9 crore in Templeton," Anuradha alleged.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP leader said that contrary to the Chief Minister's affidavit, his party MP Peddiredy Mithun Reddy said in the Parliament on February 6, 2020, that Franklin Templeton was involved in a scam. "Way back on January 11, 2018, the then Chandrababu Naidu Government gave 40 acres to Templeton in Madhurawada in Visakhapatnam. That was



done with the noble objective of bringing Shanghai-like development in AP's commercial capital," she said.

Anuradha said that Franklin Templeton had such trust in the Naidu's leadership that it set up its office in the Tech Mahindra building in 2019 prior to launch of its building activities in the allotted land in Madhurawada. Now, the Jagan regime gave all sorts of trouble and launched a vicious propaganda eventually leading to Franklin Templeton's exit from the state, she alleged.

The TDP leader deplored that the YSRCP created hurdles despite the fact that Franklin Templeton was a company handling Rs 10 lakh-

crore investments and established in the US in 1947 itself. The US company would have created thousands of jobs and contributed hugely to Vizag development, she stated.

Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath and MP Mithun Reddy should clarify why the Chief Minister held shares in this company, she demanded.

Anuradha asserted that the Chandrababu Naidu regime extended 61 services within 21 days through a single port desk and created 12 lakh jobs by attracting Rs 15 lakh-crore investments. "If Naidu came to power, he would have created another 3 lakh jobs by attracting investments worth Rs 5 lakh-crore in the past two years," she claimed.

MP denies reports of joining BJP

PNS ■ SANGAREDDY

Zaheerabad MP BB Patil on Thursday seriously condemned the reports that he was joining BJP.

He came down heavily against his rivals and some media channels which were making a malicious campaign against him.

He said he would take legal

action against the individuals and the channels which were doing the false campaign against him.

The MP said he was receiving complete cooperation from the ministers including Chief Minister KCR and MLAs and made it clear that he has no thoughts of quitting the TRS Party under any given circumstances.

CBSE notifies policy for Class 12 evaluation, results by July 31

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Thursday notified its policy for evaluation of Class 12 students which will be based on a combination of marks scored in classes 10, 11 and pre-board exams and informed the results will be declared by July 31.

The policy was notified after the approval from the Supreme Court. The exams for Class 12 were cancelled earlier this month in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the policy decided by a 13-member panel set up by the board, the theory paper evaluation formula is 30 percent weightage will be given to Class 10 marks, 30 percent weightage to Class 11 marks and 40 percent weightage to Class 12 marks

obtained in unit test/mid-term/pre-board exams.

The CBSE scheme further elaborated that for Class 10, the 30 percent marks based on average theory component of best three performing subjects out of main five subjects will be taken.

For Class 11, the 30 percent marks based on the theory component of the final exam will be taken and for Class 12, the 40 percent marks based on unit test/mid-term/pre-board exams will be taken.

"The marks of practical/internal assessment of Class XII will be on actual basis as uploaded by the school on the CBSE portal," the CBSE said, adding that the total marks awarded should be in consonance with the past performance of the school in class-XII board examinations.



Kids unlikely to get disproportionately hit by any possible third wave: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The SARS-CoV-2 sero-positivity rate among children is high and comparable to the adult population and hence, it is unlikely that any future third wave of the prevailing Covid-19 variant would disproportionately affect children aged two years and above, according to the interim findings of an ongoing study conducted in the country.

The interim findings that have appeared on medRxiv, a preprint server, are based on a mid-term analysis of the data of the 4,509 participants — 700 children in the 2-17 years age group and 3,809 aged 18 years and above — from five states.

The data collection period was from March 15 to June 10 from five sites — Delhi Urban Resettlement Colony, Delhi Rural (villages in Faridabad



district of Haryana under Delhi-NCR), Bhubaneswar Rural, Gorakhpur rural and Agartala rural.

The findings are part of an ongoing multi-centric, population-based, age-stratified prospective Covid-19 seroprevalence study under WHO (World Health Organisation) Unity studies conducted by experts, including doctors from the AIIMS — Director Randeep Guleria and Professors from the

Department of Centre for Community Medicine Puneet Misra, Shashi Kant and Sanjay K Rai — in the five selected states with a proposed total sample size of 10,000.

The seroprevalence was 55.7 percent in the below 18 years age group and 63.5 percent in the above 18 years age group. There was no statistically significant difference in prevalence between adult and children," the findings stated.

The site-wise numbers of available data among the 2-17 age group were 92, 189, 165, 146 and 108 for Delhi Urban Resettlement Colony, Delhi Rural, Bhubaneswar Rural, Gorakhpur Rural and Agartala Rural respectively.

The total serum antibody against the SARS-CoV-2 virus was assessed qualitatively by using a standard ELISA kit. The study findings come

amid concerns raised in the country regarding a probable third wave of Covid-19 where children and youngsters are likely to get affected the most.

Irrespective of the age group, rural sites had a lower seropositivity rate compared to the urban site (in Delhi). Within the rural sites, children had a slightly lower seropositivity rate compared to adults. However, this differential prevalence was not observed in the urban site, according to the findings.

"There was a slightly higher sero-positivity rate observed among female children. This finding was in contrast to the meta-analysis where it was shown that the prevalence is higher in men. This may be a chance finding due to small number of data available at the time of mid-term analysis," the study stated.

TS Police writes to Twitter again

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana Police has sent notices to social media platform Twitter on Thursday, in the case related to actress Meera Chopra.

The Cyber Crime Police has asked Twitter to share the details of accounts of persons who had posted obscene comments against the actress on the platform last year.

The trouble for the actress started following her Q&A session with her fans on Twitter in June last year. To a question from a netizen about Jr NTR, the actress replied that she is not a fan of NTR.

Enraged by her response, fans of Jr NTR targeted her on social media, trolling her to the hilt, prompting the actress to approach the Hyderabad police.

MEERA CHOPRA CASE



The miscreants, who used fake identities issued death and rape threats to the actress.

The actress had made an online complaint to the Hyderabad police. Following her complaint, the Cyber Crime ACP Prasad said that cases have been registered against the fans of Jr NTR.

After a case was registered, the Telangana Police sent a letter to Twitter asking them to share the IP address and other

technical details of the Twitter accounts for identifying and nabbing the culprits.

As Twitter appointed a grievance office in accordance with new IT rules, the TS Police have again sent a fresh letter seeking the information.

It may be mentioned here that, on June 5, 2020 IT Minister KT Rama Rao has responded to actress Meera Chopra's police complaint against fans of Junior NTR, who she alleged had abused her online besides threatening with gang rape and acid attacks.

In a tweet response to the actress, the minister said that he had requested the Telangana DGP and the Hyderabad City Police Commissioner to take stern action as per law against those responsible, based on her complaint.



32,000 MT LMO delivered so far

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Railway ministry on Thursday said Oxygen Express' trains have delivered 32,017 tonnes of liquid medical oxygen (LMO) in more than 1,830 tankers across the country in the last 54 days. While 443 Oxygen Expresses have completed their journey so far and brought relief to various states, one more is on the run with more than 78 tonnes of LMO in four tankers, it said in a statement.

Oxygen Expresses delivered more than 17,600 tonnes of LMO to the southern states of the country with more than 5,600 tonnes being offloaded in Tamil Nadu. The special trains delivered more than 3,200 tonnes, 4,000 tonnes and 4,100 tonnes of LMO in the state of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka respectively.

The Oxygen Expresses started their deliveries 54 days back on April 24 in Maharashtra with a load of 126 tonnes.

Oxygen relief by Oxygen Expresses reached 39 cities in 15 states namely Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Assam in complex operational route planning scenarios.

Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and Assam.

So far, 614 tonnes of oxygen has been offloaded in Maharashtra, nearly 3,797 tonnes in Uttar Pradesh, 656 tonnes in Madhya Pradesh, 5,722 tonnes in Delhi, 2,354 tonnes in Haryana, 98 tonnes in Rajasthan, 4,149 tonnes in Karnataka, 320 tonnes in Uttarakhand, 5,674 tonnes in Tamil Nadu, 4,036 tonnes in Andhra Pradesh, 225 tonnes in Punjab, 513 tonnes in Kerala, 3,255 tonnes in Telangana, 38 tonnes in Jharkhand and 560 tonnes in Assam.

Indian Railways has mapped different routes with oxygen supply locations and keeps itself ready with any emerging need of the states. The states provide tankers to the Indian Railways for bringing the LMO.

Criss crossing the country, Indian Railways is picking up oxygen from places like Hapa, Baroda, Mundra in the west and Rourkela, Durgapur, Tatanagar, Angul in the east and then delivering it to states of Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Telangana, Punjab, Kerala, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Assam in complex operational route planning scenarios.

Telangana Minister's brother held for gambling, violating Covid norms

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Labour and Woman and Child Development Minister Ch. Malla Reddy's younger brother was booked by the Hyderabad police on Wednesday night for organising card games and a liquor party at a private property in Bowenpally in violation of Covid safety guidelines. Any sort of gambling, card games

are banned in Telangana. Acting on a tip-off, the Commissioner's Task Force (north zone) team raided the premises located near Malla Reddy Gardens around 2.15 pm and were shocked to see the Minister's brother Chamakuru Narasimha Reddy.

Later, they found that ChamakuruNarasimha Reddy was the organiser of the 'makeshift gambling club'

which was running for months now. The police team found cards, a huge quantity of liquor, cooked mutton and other material provided to the 'players' by the organiser. They seized 1.40 lakh in cash from 13 persons.

"We were shocked to see the ambience there. It is like a makeshift gaming club with food and liquor for the players," an officer said.

Corona-hit BJP veteran looks towards party for help

A CHANDRA SEKHAR ■ ONGOLE

Senior BJP leader Ramishetti Rama Koteswara Rao, well known as 'BJP RK', who once defended the party with his unflinching support in Chirala of Prakasam district, is now in a pitiable condition. He is now ailing and is looking for financial support from the party.

Koteswara Rao was the first in Prakasam district to walk the streets carrying the BJP flag on his shoulder. Once he was

closely associated with leaders like Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu, Himachal Pradesh Governor Bandaru Dattatreya, Ch Vidyaasagar Rao and Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy.

Now, 'BJP RK' is confined to his residence due to advanced age and Covid. He never sought any economic benefits while remaining loyal to the party.

Subscribing to the ideology of the Sangh Parivar, 'BJP RK' worked for the Jana Sangh, and served the BJP from the day it

was founded at the Maha Sabha held at Mumbai.

Koteswara Rao did his part to solve public problems and in the process neglected his personal life. Of late, he has been beset by financial problems.

He lost his wife and now he finds himself lonely in old age. Covid-19 has hastened his financial ruin. He runs a Killi (Pan) business, and faces severe financial trouble now as weddings and other activities have stalled due to Corona. 'BJP RK' is now appealing to

the party leaders to do justice in these hard days.

Chirala BJP Assembly in-charge Aravapalli Kumar admitted that Koteswara Rao had worked selflessly for the party, and he should be helped.

Meanwhile, speaking to The Pioneer, BJP Bapatla Lok Sabha constituency in-charge Kancharla Hariprasad said that he brought to the notice of the state-level BJP leaders the pitiable condition of 'BJP RK' and hoped the party would take a proper decision soon to help him.



B'day bash by sword-wielding youths right under cops' nose creates panic

PNS ■ KAKINADA

A group of young boys wielding swords came out into the streets lustily cheering their leader and shattering peace in the village on Wednesday night. The occasion was the birthday of their beloved leader. If you thought it was a scene straight out of the lawless terrains of Bihar, you are mistaken. It happened in the otherwise serene environs of Konaseema and right under the nose of the Mummidivaram police.



Fans and friends of Ellamilli Durga Prasad, son of YSRCP leader from Ward No. 19, parked his car in front of the Mummidivaram police station in the district for his birthday celebrations, cut a cake on the car and distributed it to friends. All of them waved the swords brought with them and raised slogans. All this was done throwing Covid protocols to the wind during curfew in the

village on Wednesday night. The Konaseema area of the East Godavari district, usually lush with green countryside and steep slopes as in Kerala, is now turning into faction villages. Concerns were raised in the district as YSRCP youths marched with knives in front of the police station.

What was more surprising is that the police neither dis-

persed the partying youths nor did they bother to know from where they brought the swords and why they chose to celebrate the birthday in front of the police station. The fact that the police have so far not detained any of them is a testament to the irresponsibility of the police in Konaseema.

For a while, the Konaseema area was changing to be a haven for crime. In the past, the atmosphere in Amalapuram, Mummidivaram, P Gannavaram, Kottapeta, Razole and other constituencies in the district was calm. But today conditions there have changed. Clashes were going on between YSRCP and the Jana Sena party regularly. In addition, oil thefts. Elsewhere oil and gas leaks. With this, peo-

ple were living with their lives in the palm of their hands. No one asked though. Opposition parties have stated that the irresponsibility of police causes all these crimes.

Noticing the indifference of the police, some are resorting to theft from the pipeline. It is suspected that an interstate gang is behind this. But the police are watering down the case by arresting locals.

During holidays, cock fights and 'recording' dances are performed in Konaseema and the police are largely responsible for allowing this to happen. Locals claim that the district has been hit by Corona due to the failure of the police to curb illegal activities.

Locals say that despite Amalapuram MLA Pinipe Viswaroop holding the key post of Social Welfare Minister in the State Cabinet, the area is not getting any benefit from the government.



AP Govt told to convey stance on new tribunal

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

The Andhra Pradesh Government should convey its stance immediately over requesting the Central Government to appoint a new tribunal under Section 3 of the Interstate River Disputes Act, 1956 or to delegate powers to the Brajesh Kumar Tribunal under that Act, demanding redistribution of Krishna River waters, according to T Lakshminarayana, coordinator, Andhra Pradesh Integrated Development Studies Forum. He said here on Thursday that

the State government had the responsibility to clarify over the issue.

Lakshminarayana further said that under Section 89 of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, the Central Government had already extended the term of the Krishna River Water Dispute Resolution Tribunal-2 and Brajesh Kumar Tribunal to resolve the water issue between the two States. The investigation is ongoing.

On the other hand, the Supreme Court is litigating the

Tribunal's verdict on the distribution of Krishna river waters among the states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and the unified Andhra Pradesh, he said.

The Telangana State government has written a letter to the Central government in this regard. He said the onus was on the Jagan Mohan Reddy government to safeguard the interests of Andhra Pradesh and appealed to the Central government to respond immediately and convey Andhra Pradesh's stance.

Faction feud claims 2 lives in Kurnool dist

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Factionalism has once again raised its ugly head in Kurnool district. Two TDP leaders Nageswar Reddy, a former sarpanch and his brother Pratap Reddy, former president of a co-operative society, were killed when they were deliberately run over with the help of a Bolero vehicle by their opponents, at Pesiravai in Gadivemula mandal of Kurnool district on Thursday. Three others, who were injured in the incident, were shifted to Nandyal Government Hospital.



carried out the attack while they were returning home from a cemetery.

Locals say that rivalry existed between a group led by the deceased brothers and another led by Srikanth Reddy. However, the police did not



confirm the motive for the killing.

The police have beefed up security in the village to prevent any further clashes. Nandyal DSP Chidananda Reddy inspected the scene of offence.

Gold shop burgled

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Unidentified persons robbed 596 grams of gold jewellery worth Rs 12 lakh from a shop in Tanguturu, Prakasam District, on Wednesday night. According to the police, the miscreants made a hole on the back side of the shop to gain entry into it and made away with gold jewellery. ASP Ravichandra, Ongole DSP KVVNV Prasad and CCS DSP Durga Prasad inspected the spot. Details were collected from the shop owner. The dog squad inspected the spot and the Forensic department collected fingerprint evidence. CC footage of the shop was also examined. SI Nayab Rasool said that a case was registered.

TDP man cheats people promising better Corona care

PNS ■ KAKINADA

A TDP activist, who managed to get an outsourcing job at Kakinada General Hospital during the previous Chandrababu Naidu rule, allegedly cheated innocent people promising better treatment for Corona patients and then disappeared with the money collected from them.

Undavalli Veerajulu from Jaggampet was a member of Telugu Yuvatha in East Godavari district. He posed for photos with ministers and MLAs in power at that time, along with party national general secretary Nara Lokesh. He got a job in Kakinada General Hospital through an



Accused Undavalli Veerajulu (in black shirt) with Nara Lokesh, TDP national general secretary

outsourcing agency. From then onwards, he started collecting money from a number of peo-

ple promising better treatment for the patients. Later, upon coming to know

that they had been cheated by Veerajulu, the victims complained to General Hospital Superintendent R Mahalakshmi.

Veerajulu fled the scene on Thursday when he learned that an online complaint was filed by an NRI. Evidence showed that he had collected Rs 75,000 from an NRI's mother through Phone Pay app to make arrangements for advanced treatment.

The superintendent then lodged a complaint with Kakinada One Town CI R Rammohan Reddy.

CI Rammohan Reddy said investigation revealed that 20 families were cheated by Veerajulu and an investigation into the issue is under progress.

Plea in HC for removal of Neelam as SEC

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

The AP High Court on Wednesday heard a petition seeking annulment of the appointment of Neelam Sahney as the Andhra Pradesh Election Commissioner (SEC). The petition was filed by Ramakrishna from Vijayawada. He appealed to the court to revoke GO 20 issued by the Panchayat Raj Department on March 28 this year. The petition sought to declare the panel prepared by the government with three names for the appointment of the State Election Commissioner as unconstitutional.

Balineni lauds services of Lions Club

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister of State for Power, Forests and Science and Technology Balineni Srinivasa Reddy has said that the services of Lions Club International, which have been helping the people during the Covid crisis, are appreciable.

The Lions Club International members handed over 12 oxygen concentrators worth Rs 15 lakh through the hands of the Minister to GGH on Thursday at the minister's residence in Ongole.

Lions Club chairman Vijaya Kumar Reddy, Granite Business Representatives Maram Venka Reddy, Ravi Pudi Lakshminarayana,



Ongole Mayor Gangada Sujatha, Deputy Mayor Vemur Suryanarayana and others were present on the occasion.

Later, Minister Balineni inaugurated the Bapuji Market Internal BT Road, built at a cost of Rs 29 lakh.

Left leaders call Modi a corporate PM

PNS ■ ELURU

Leftist leaders at the all-party meeting here on Thursday termed Narendra Modi a corporate prime minister and alleged that he is in favour of big industrialists.

The left party leaders criticised the Central government for increasing the prices of petrol, diesel, gas and essential commodities during the Corona crisis and placing an unbearable burden on the people.

In Kerala, the cess on petrol was reduced by Rs 16, making it ideal for other states. They demanded that the Central government take steps to control Covid. Financial assistance of Rs 7,500 should be given to each family for the next six months, they said and demanded rollback of hiked fuel prices.

The meeting was chaired by CPI district assistant secretary Bandi Venkateswara Rao. CPI district secretary Dega Prabhakar, CPI Eluru area convenor, CPM district leader GVL Narasimha Rao, MCP leader Nagraj attended the meeting.

Ankurarpana off to a grand start

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The Ankurarpana ritual for the annual Pushpayaga Mahotsavam taken up by the TTD in the ancient temple of Lord Govindaraja Swamy in Tirupati began on a grand note here on Thursday.

The processional idols of Lord Govindaraja Swamy, accompanied by His Consorts Sridevi and Bhudevi, will be offered a special floral bath "Pushpa Yagam" which will commence on Friday. Earlier during the day, Snapana Tirumanjanam will be rendered to the deities. In the afternoon, Pushpa Yagam will be per-



formed. In this traditional seed sowing religious event, Dy EO

Rajendrudu, Temple priest Srinivas Dixitulu and other office staff members were present.



Ongole GGH Nodal Officer Joint Collector K Krishnaveni said the services rendered by Sarath Chandra Chowdhury Chava Osho to doctors, police personnel, nurses and sanitation workers during the Corona crisis are commendable. She said they took the services rendered by Sarath Chandra to the notice of the District Collector. She further said his services would be used more extensively. She said a certificate of appreciation from RIMS would be given to Sarath Chandra.

Head constable caught taking bribe

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A head constable Venkataiah, attached to the Giddaluru police station, was caught taking a bribe of Rs 5,000 by Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) sleuths on Thursday.

ACB DSP M Suryanarayana Reddy said that the head constable had accepted a bribe of Rs 5,000 for registering a complaint related to a High Court advocate Maddi Rangasai Reddy. The DSP also said that head constable Venkataiah was arrested and an investigation was started.

Mentally unsound minor girl gang-raped, 4 held

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Four persons were arrested in connection with the gang-rape of a 17-year-old mentally unsound girl at Vetapalem in Prakasam district on Wednesday night, said Chirala DSP Srikanth on Thursday.

According to the DSP, four young men went to the girl's house when her parents were away at work. Then the girl was raped by two of them - Nagraj and Lakshmaiah. The other two were on guard outside the house, and they fled the place after the rape. The girl came out crying and told



her neighbors about the incident, Srikanth explained.

Based on the complaint lodged by the girl's parents, the accused were taken into custody within three hours.

The DSP said that Nagraj and Lakshmaiah, the main accused in the rape, were arrested along with two other accused in the case.

With dad in hosp, lady doc performs last rites for mom

PNS ■ GUNTUR

In a heart-rending incident, a lady doctor working in Bangalore has performed the last rites for her mother and sister with her father battling for life in hospital. According to reports, Jana Sena District Legal Cell president Chodiseti Chandrasekhar's sister Singaluri Veera Dhanalakshmi from Chemudulanka (Gandhinagar) in East Godavari District, along with her husband Srinivas and daughter Kavya were travelling from Chemudulanka to Visakhapatnam district in a car. Kavya and Dhanalakshmi were killed when their car collided with a lorry parked near Visakhapatnam. Srinivas, who sustained grievous injuries, was admitted to a hospital. Supraja, one of the daughters of Srinivas and Dhanalakshmi, is a doctor based in Bangalore. As soon as the news of the death of her mother and sister reached Supraja, she moved the bodies to Chemudulanka and from there to Gautami Godavari in Baduguvani to perform their last rites. A pall of gloom descended on the village.

PDS rice seized, 1 held

PNS ■ ELURU

Vigilance officials have registered a case against one S Chakradhara Rao for illegally storing PDS rice in Somavarappadu of Eluru city and Nuzvid in Krishna district.

A total of 25 tonnes of PDS rice was seized from him.

The authorities found the rice loaded in two lorries and questioned the lorry driver who informed them about Charadhara Rao. Vigilance CI U J Wilson raided the lorries.

Botsa inspects waste-to-energy plant works

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Municipal Minister Botsa Satyanarayana has said that the Jindal company is constructing a waste management power plant to generate electricity from waste in municipalities.

He inspected the construction work of the plant at Obul Naidu Palem in Guntur suburbs on Thursday.

Later, the Minister held a review meeting with higher officials and discussed with them progress in construction work, grid connection and water supply. Representatives of the company were also present.

Botsa Satyanarayana directed the authorities to resolve all the issues and said that the



plant being constructed by Jindal would generate 15 MW of electricity. Construction of

the plant, which started in 2016, has been delayed. He clarified that the plant would

be commissioned next month. Guntur and Vijayawada corporations along with five

other municipalities in the district would move the waste to the plant. He said that the problem of garbage can be solved by generating electricity from waste. He said steps were being taken to supply water from Vengalayapalem to the plant.

The Minister also assured that the underground drainage works in Guntur city would also be completed.

Special Chief Secretary, Municipal Department, YS Sri Lakshmi, District Collector Vivek Yadav, Mayor Kavati Manohar Naidu, Commissioner Anuradha, MLAs Ambati Rambabu, Gopireddy Srinivas Reddy, Maddali Giri and Municipal Department officials were present.



India 'priest' of world peace, but can reply to aggression: Rajnath

PNS ■ KIMIN (ARUNACHAL)

In a statement seen as an implicit message to Beijing, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said that though India is a peace loving country, it has the capability to reply to aggression.

Dedicating 12 strategic roads constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to the nation here, Singh described India as a priest of world peace but added any serious disturbance to peace and tranquility in border areas would have adverse implications.

"We seek world peace (but) if someone shows us an aggressive attitude, we will respond," Singh said, adding the "new roads will help secure international borders."

Singh's statement comes in the backdrop of China continuing to hold on to positions in Hot Springs and Gogra Post on the border, after clashes between the armies of the two Asian giants in the bleak Galwan valley in Ladakh a year ago.

The defence minister said "last year in Galwan Valley, our soldiers displayed exemplary courage and valour in line of duty. I salute all brave soldiers who laid down their lives fighting for the nation." China also claims most of Arunachal Pradesh as its territory and has



dubbed it 'South Tibet in internal maps.

The northern neighbour which fought a bloody border war with India in 1962 when it invaded parts of Arunachal Pradesh including Tawang, often sends border patrols into areas controlled by India.

In September last year, five young Arunachali hunters were allegedly kidnaped by Chinese troops from Sera-7, in Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. The youth were later released in Anjaw district, around 800 km from the state capital, after several days in Chinese custody.

With no let up in India-China border tension, the Modi government is now looking to expedite work on border infrastructure, especially on roads leading to forward areas

in the frontier state.

Singh said, the 12 strategic roads including 10 in Arunachal Pradesh and one each in Ladakh and Jammu & Kashmir, inaugurated during the day, would not only give a boost in connectivity but would facilitate faster movement of troops along the international border.

"The capability of BRO in constructing world class roads despite challenges, in tough and hilly terrain, (underlines) the mantra of Atma Nirbhar Bharat," Singh said while lauding the road construction unit for its dedicated work.

He said the road projects are part of the Act East Policy, envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The budget for BRO has increased manifold since 2013

and today stands at Rs 11,000 crore. The BRO since 2014 had developed a record 4,800 kilometers of border roads in the country," the Defence Minister said.

He added that the country's defence sector in the last few years had witnessed major changes including appointment of a Chief of Defence Staff for the first time.

"Our vision is to produce our own weapons and if necessary export them to other countries," he said.

The defence minister also claimed that development work in Northeast India had picked up pace under the Narendra Modi Government.

The development of the region remained stagnant after independence. However, after NDA came to power in 2014, the region witnessed accelerated development. There are many challenges due to its close proximity with foreign countries, Singh said.

NE is the right hand of the country and its development will make India strong. Our government is committed to its development, he added.

According to BRO officials, out of the 12 roads inaugurated on the occasion, ten road projects of total 285.32 kilometers, are in Arunachal Pradesh being constructed by the BRO

at an estimated cost of Rs 1,228.34 crore.

Of the ten road projects, three each are under Project Arunank, Vartak and Udayak while one is being executed by Project Brahmanak, officials added. Union Minister of State (Independent) for Sports and Youth Affairs Kiren Rijiju, who was also present on the occasion, lauded the BRO for completing work in rough terrain within timeline constraints.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma speaking on the occasion added that though the roads were constructed in Arunachal Pradesh, they would benefit the entire northeast and the country.

Arunachal Chief Minister Pema Khandu termed the occasion as a proud moment for the state as world class roads have been constructed up to the border.

Khandu exuded confidence that in the coming days, the north east region would witness more development with the blessings of the Centre.

Chief of Defence Staff Gen Vipin Rawat, Director General of Border Roads Lt General Rajeev Chaudhry, state Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar were among others who were present on the occasion.

Gadkari: Stay orders hamper developmental works

PNS ■ NAGPUR



Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday expressed disappointment over delays in developmental works due to stay orders issued by courts and said timely interventions can help bring such matters to the notice of courts.

Speaking at the inauguration programme of Butibori flyover in Maharashtra's Nagpur, Gadkari said the work on the flyover had been stalled for some time, as the Bombay High Court had ordered a stay on the construction, and the delay resulted in several accidents at the spot.

The senior BJP leader said he had asked the concerned

BJP MLA to intervene in the matter and bring the issue to the notice of the court, following which the stay was lifted.

"I feel sad that very often work at accident-prone spots gets stalled due to stay orders from courts. If such things are brought to the notice of courts, then definitely such stay orders

will get lifted. Many a times, work gets delayed, people have to face troubles and innocent people lose their lives because of such stay orders," he said.

Gadkari praised MLA Sameer Meghe, who intervened in the matter in the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court, and the stay order was vacated, paving way for the flyover to be completed.

The Union minister also spoke about other developmental projects in Butibori, including the six-lane Nagpur-Butibori road and a metro train from Nagpur to Butibori.

The senior BJP leader also informed that he would be adopting the Butibori municipal council.

Mukul Roy's security cover withdrawn: MHA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The Z-category VIP security cover of West Bengal politician and MLA Mukul Roy, who recently returned to the Trinamool Congress (TMC) from the BJP, has been withdrawn on his request, official sources said Thursday.

They said the Union Home Ministry has directed the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to recall its detachment deployed with him. The 67-year-old Roy and his son Subhrangshu, a former MLA, are now being provided security by the state police.

Roy, who was suspended from the TMC in 2017 for alleged anti-party activities, had joined the BJP and was appointed its national vice president ahead of the West Bengal elections.

He and his son returned to the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC last week after the BJP's drubbing in the polls even though the senior Roy won his Krishnanagar Uttar constituency as a saffron party candidate.

A home ministry source said that Roy had written to the Centre to withdraw the

security cover.

After he had joined the BJP, he was accorded a low category Y+ central security cover of the central paramilitary CRPF which was upgraded to the second top level of 'Z' just before the state assembly polls in March-April this year.

He had a contingent of about 22-24 armed CRPF commandos who used to move with him every time he travelled in West Bengal.

The security of his son, which was provided by a small contingent of the CISF, has also been withdrawn.

Roy, once the second-in-command of the TMC, was removed from the post of the party's national general secretary in February, 2015 after being charged in the Narada tape sting. He had joined the BJP in November, 2017.

AAP fresh bid to get L-G's nod for doorstep delivery of ration

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP government has sent a file on doorstep delivery of ration to Delhi Lt Governor Anil Bajaj, making a fresh bid to get his approval for the scheme, official sources said on Thursday.

Earlier this month, the Arvind Kejriwal government had claimed that the scheme was rejected by L-G contending that the Centre's approval was not sought for it and there was a pending case in the court.

According to sources, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has again sent the file to the LG and said that it was according to the law and the objections raised by the Centre earlier have been addressed.

Kejriwal has stressed that the Centre's directions have been followed and claimed that it was wrong to "stop" the scheme during the coronavirus pandemic, sources added.

Another charge sheet against Sidhu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Delhi Police on Thursday filed a supplementary charge sheet against actor-activist Deep Sidhu and others in the Republic Day violence case.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gajendra Singh Nagar will pass the order on the point of cognisance of the fresh charge sheet on June 19 at 2 pm.

"The investigating officer of the case pointed out the names of the witnesses who were severely injured or from whom the weapon was snatched," the court noted.

On January 26, protesting farmers clashed with the police during the tractor rally against three farm laws and stormed into the Red Fort injuring

scores of policemen.

The Crime Branch is tasked with investigating the case. On May 17, it filed a 3,224-page charge sheet and sought prosecution of 16 accused including Sidhu.

Sidhu, who was accused of being the key conspirator of the violence, was arrested on February 9. The police had also accused him of fuelling the chaos at the Red fort.

IAS officer gets notice over sharing his conversation

PNS ■ BHOPAL



A show-cause notice has been issued against an IAS officer in Madhya Pradesh after he shared on a social messaging platform the audio recording of his conversation with a senior woman official of the General Administration Department, in which he had expressed displeasure over his transfer.

On May 31, Lokesh Kumar Jangid, who was then additional collector of Barwani district in the state, was transferred as mission director of Bhopal-based Rajya Siksha Kendra.

According to Jangid, this is his ninth transfer in 54 months. Talking to PTI, MP General Administration Department's Principal Secretary Deepti Gaur

Mukherjee said, "He (Jangid) was served a notice on Wednesday, in which he has been asked to reply in seven days."

"The matter pertains to a conversation he had with me. My job is to telephone them (officers) to let them know that they have been transferred. But he tapped the conversation, which amounted to invasion

into my privacy...His act was unbecoming of a government officer," she said.

Jangid, 35, said he had shared with his four IAS colleagues the recorded conversation of 30-odd seconds between him and Mukherjee over his transfer.

"I shared this audio with four of my IAS colleagues on personal chats. It was done after the (transfer) order was issued in writing by the GAD and updated in the department's website. I had shared it in good faith and in personal capacity when they asked me about the reason for my sudden transfer...I told them that I was not informed about the reason. So I shared the audio with them saying this is what the GAD principal secretary told me...I did not share it in any group," Jangid said.

Cong's talk of going solo in 2024 irks Sena

PNS ■ MUMBAI

With the Congress in Maharashtra expressing a wish to contest the next Assembly elections in the state on its own, its ruling ally Shiv Sena on Thursday said the 2024 polls are still far away, and also sought to know if there were any plans to have mid-term polls.

In an editorial in party mouthpiece 'Saamana', it also said that since all the major political parties have started talking about going solo, the Sena and the NCP will have to contest the next polls together

in the interest of Maharashtra. The party said that although the Congress is an important constituent of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government, it is on the third position.

The Shiv Sena, which was one of the oldest allies of the BJP, had forged an unlikely alliance with the NCP and the Congress after the 2019 state polls to form the MVA government, after parting ways with the BJP over the issue of sharing the chief minister's post.

"Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole has announced that his party would fight the next Assembly elections on its own

and install a chief minister of the Congress. He has also said that if the party allows, he himself would be the next chief ministerial face. Hence, it is clear that until Patole installs a Congress chief minister in Maharashtra in 2024, he won't sit quiet," the Sena said.

"However, Deputy Chief Minister (and NCP leader) Ajit Pawar has said that those who get the support of 145 legislators (in the 288-member Assembly), will form the next government and the CM will be decided by them. His statement is also valid. Parliamentary democracy is all about majority figures. Those

who succeed in it, will be able to occupy the throne," it said.

There is nothing wrong in harbouring political ambitions, but numbers are required for their fulfilment. Ahead of the last Assembly elections, BJP leader Devendra Fadnis had said he would return to power. But he could not do so. Despite BJP winning 105 seats, three other parties (Shiv Sena, NCP and Congress) formed a coalition government, the Uddhav Thackeray-led party added.

Patole has spoken about going solo to boost the morale of the party workers. Soon after Patole's statement, senior BJP

leader Raosaheb Danve announced that his party would also contest the next polls on its own, stating that BJP-Shiv Sena alliance is impossible, it said.

The Sena also said that there is no party in Maharashtra that will align with the BJP and hence it is evident that it will have to contest the elections alone.

"The 2024 Lok Sabha and Assembly polls are still far away, but the major political parties (BJP and Congress) are suddenly talking of contesting the elections independently. Are there any plans to have mid-term polls?" it asked.

NIA arrests Mumbai ex-cop Pradeep Sharma

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday arrested former 'encounter specialist' police officer Pradeep Sharma in Mumbai for his alleged involvement in the 'Antilia' bomb scare case and the murder of businessman Mansukh Hiran, an official said.

An NIA team had picked up Sharma from Lonavla near Mumbai late on Wednesday night, after which he was brought to the central agency's office in south Mumbai for questioning, he said.

The NIA also conducted a raid at his residence located in J B Nagar in Mumbai's Andheri (west) around 6 am, and the operation continued for several hours. The officials recovered some incriminating documents from his

house," the official said. After questioning him for a few hours, the NIA placed him under arrest on Thursday, he said, adding that Sharma will be produced before a local court once a medical examination is conducted on him.

Sharma is the fifth person from the police department to be arrested in the case by the NIA. This is the eighth over arrest in the case.

Earlier, the agency had arrested police officers Sachin Waze, Riyazuddin Kazi, Sunil Mane. After their arrest, they

were dismissed from service. The agency had also arrested former police constable Vinayak Shinde in this connection along with cricket bookie Naresh Gor.

On June 11, the NIA held Santosh Shelar and Anand Jadhav from suburban Malad, saying that both of them were involved in the conspiracy to plant the explosives-laden SUV near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence.

The SUV was found abandoned near Ambani's south Mumbai residence 'Antilia' on February 25 this year. Thane-based businessman Mansukh Hiran, who had claimed that he was in possession of the vehicle, was found dead at a Mumbra creek on March 5.

Nobody dare cast evil eye on Sena Bhavan, says Raut

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday said the Shiv Sena Bhavan in Mumbai is not just a headquarter of a political party, but a symbol of Maharashtra's identity and no one should dare cast an evil eye on it.

His statement comes a day after Shiv Sena and BJP workers clashed outside the Shiv Sena Bhavan at Dadar in central Mumbai on Wednesday after the youth wing of the BJP took out a protest march against the "offensive" remarks in the Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana' about the land deal controversy in Ayodhya. Sena MLA Sada Sarvankar had said his partymen had got information that the BJP workers were coming to vandalise the Sena Bhavan.

Talking to reporters over the clash, Raut said the Shiv Sena

Bhavan is a symbol of Marathi and Maharashtra.

"If some one tries to attack the premises, will Marathi 'manoos' (person) and Shiv sainik keep quiet?" he asked.

"Why did the BJP get so agitated? What did the Sena editorial say? It just sought clarification on the allegations and demanded that if the charges are proved false, those who levelled them should be punished. Is asking for a clarification a crime in this country? The editorial nowhere mentions that the BJP is involved in it. Can't you read and write? First understand what the allegations are and what the Shiv Sena spokespersons have said. Are you educated or not?" he said.

The Shriram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust is an autonomous body. What is the BJP's role in this? he

said. "The matter is over from our end. They have got 'Shiv prasad' yesterday. Don't bring the situation to such a level that we will have to give Shiv Bhojan thali to them," he said.

Whenever people try to attack the Sena Bhavan, which is a symbol of our pride, whether we are in power or not, we will respond in the same manner, Raut said.

AAP's Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh and a former minister in the Samajwadi Party government Pawan Pandey have earlier alleged that the land worth Rs 2 crore was bought at an inflated price of Rs 18.5 crore by Shriram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai for the Ram temple premises was made by. The allegation was strongly refuted by Rai.

Cattle smuggling to B'desh stopped: BSF report

PNS ■ KOLKATA



There have been zero cattle smuggling incidents to Bangladesh this year from one of the country's most notorious fronts in West Bengal, a first since the Modi government declared in 2014 that the crime has to stop at any cost.

The Kolkata-based south Bengal frontier of the Border Security Force (BSF) is tasked to guard 913.32 kms of the India-Bangladesh international border (IB) out of the total 4,096 kms, running across five states and it has recorded official figures to claim that no cattle was smuggled from its side till May, 2021.

Former Union home minister and current defence minister Rajnath Singh, while officiating as the chief guest of the 49th BSF raising day on December 1, 2014 in Delhi, had first told the force that it "should stop the smuggling of cows and cattle at this border at any cost."

He reiterated this stand at

various other public events even as similar assertions were made by other ministers and BJP chief ministers.

The data shared with the BSF headquarters in Delhi and the Union home ministry has been accessed by PTI and it says that there has been a "significant" curb on this crime under this front, that used to have a 75 per cent share out of the total cattle smuggling prevalent along this border.

This frontier has jurisdiction over five border districts of

West Bengal: North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad and Malda, and only 405 kms or 44.34 per cent of the boundary is fenced as a large part is riverine, has charlands and at certain places villages are right on the IB.

The data said while 710 cattle heads were seized by BSF personnel till May this year, a consistent decline was noticed with 51,443 seizures in 2017, 38,657 in 2018, 29,720 during 2019 and 5,445 cattle seized last

year. It adds that zero number of cattle reached Bangladesh from this front this year till May and a similar decline in these numbers was noticed beginning with 8.69 lakh in 2017, 5.22 lakh in 2018, 1.23 lakh in 2019 and 3,628 last year.

The data report said as no cattle was smuggled, no government auction of cattle could take place this year in Bangladesh corridors opposite this frontier like Jessore, Kushtia and Rajshahi.

Frontier chief Inspector General (IG) Ashwini Kumar Singh said the figures are believable when asked about the authenticity of the data.

"This data is almost reliable...it is such a long front (under our jurisdiction) and may be 2-4 cattle may have gone un-noticed (to Bangladesh) but I can guarantee that none of the cross-border cattle smugglers has succeeded this year."

"We have brought cattle smuggling down to zero as

compared to handling 75 pc of the total trans-border cattle smuggling to Bangladesh over the last few years," Singh said.

The data added that due to declining cattle smuggling, leather, beef and porcelain items making industry in Bangladesh has suffered "a lot of loss" and the government there has promoted local animal husbandry in order to make farmers and other cattle rearers self-reliant.

IG Singh said the "achievement" has been the effort of a three-pronged strategy adopted by the force that included motivating field personnel, checking their connivance with smugglers and drawing new operational strategies.

"I told my men that we are here to stop this crime and we need to stop it totally. They worked hard," he said. While the IG refused to say as to how many BSF personnel were caught and punished for being hand-in-glove with the smugglers, official sources said the numbers were "substantial."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

India-Pak thaw?

Both countries would prefer to keep taking small steps that would not alter the *status quo* on their core stands

India and Pakistan have taken another tentative step away from the precipice of a bilateral freeze with both sides clearing the assignment visas of diplomats and High Commission staff pending because of a two-year stand-off. This will help staff on both sides to resume work and both Missions will get back to their sanctioned strength. The numbers were reduced after relations soured, with Pakistan demanding the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K's) special status by India in August, 2019. Pakistan even recalled its High Commission and India asked the neighbour to reduce its Mission strength by half. This is the latest in a series of measures taken in recent months to reach a point from where a bilateral thaw could be achieved if both sides so wished. The year began with speculation about the mediation of the United Arab Emirates between the two countries. It acquired the halo of truth in late February when both armies agreed to adhere to the 2003 ceasefire pact at the Line of Control. The Emirati Foreign Minister has separately met his counterparts in India and Pakistan as well. A sense of calm simultaneously entered the bilateral space. For instance, India allowed Pakistan Prime Minister's plane to fly through its airspace while on its way to Sri Lanka. The Pakistani Army chief suggested in March that both sides should bury the hatchet and move ahead. The Indian Prime Minister greeted his Pakistani counterpart on Pakistan Day. A Covid-infected Prime Minister Imran Khan received speedy recovery wishes from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Khan offered anti-Covid medical equipment to India.



It is much too early to read any long-term messaging from these developments. The basic issues remain where they are, both stands as frozen as ever. India will not revoke its decision on J&K and Pakistan has shown no inclination to withdraw its demand either. India continues to insist on Pakistan discouraging cross-border terrorism even though Islamabad blatantly denies involvement in spite of concrete evidence. Both sides, however, need respite from their individual sources of stress. Pakistan faces the blacklist threat from the Financial Action Task Force because of relentless pressure from the US and India. With the US leaving Afghanistan and much of the Taliban leadership living in Pakistan, it has its hands full on that front. The least it wants at this juncture is further escalation of tension with India. New Delhi, on the other hand, has been engaged in a stand-off with China in Ladakh for over a year and would not want the other border with Pakistan to become a hotspot. For their own reasons, both countries would prefer to keep taking harmless steps that would not alter the *status quo* on their core stands but ease day-to-day tensions and extend the fragile peace. These measures will at best test the flexibility of both sides to create conditions in the future to discuss the broader bilateral issues.

from Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Khan offered anti-Covid medical equipment to India. It is much too early to read any long-term messaging from these developments. The basic issues remain where they are, both stands as frozen as ever. India will not revoke its decision on J&K and Pakistan has shown no inclination to withdraw its demand either. India continues to insist on Pakistan discouraging cross-border terrorism even though Islamabad blatantly denies involvement in spite of concrete evidence. Both sides, however, need respite from their individual sources of stress. Pakistan faces the blacklist threat from the Financial Action Task Force because of relentless pressure from the US and India. With the US leaving Afghanistan and much of the Taliban leadership living in Pakistan, it has its hands full on that front. The least it wants at this juncture is further escalation of tension with India. New Delhi, on the other hand, has been engaged in a stand-off with China in Ladakh for over a year and would not want the other border with Pakistan to become a hotspot. For their own reasons, both countries would prefer to keep taking harmless steps that would not alter the *status quo* on their core stands but ease day-to-day tensions and extend the fragile peace. These measures will at best test the flexibility of both sides to create conditions in the future to discuss the broader bilateral issues.

PICTALK



Women work in a paddy field, in the absence of their family members who are staging a protest in Delhi against the new farm laws, during the monsoon season at Daun Kalan village in Patiala

Battle lines drawn

UP is going to witness a multi-cornered fight in the Assembly poll, where Yogi and Akhilesh will be the main contenders

The BSP chief Mayawati's decision to join hands with the Akali Dal in Punjab and her description of the SP as an expert in "narrow politics" — whatever it may mean — is full of portent for Uttar Pradesh (UP) politics ahead of the Assembly poll next year. By aligning with the Badals, Mayawati has shown that she may not be game for any alliance in UP with the Congress. Similarly, by unleashing a vituperative attack on the SP, and calling it an expert in despicable manipulations, malice, and casteism, she has virtually shut the door on any SP-led broad-based anti-BJP tie-up. This has not come as a surprise to anyone. Except for making occasional noises on Covid mismanagement and the law and order situation under the Yogi Adityanath Government, the BSP supremo never indicated that she was eager to be part of the Opposition game plan to dislodge the BJP-led Government. With Mayawati out of the way, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav has limited options. Already there are talks that the SP can join hands with the AAP and also rope in the RLD and farmer leader Rakesh Tikait as well as Dalit leader Chandrashekhar Azad. So far there is no clarity if the Congress could be part of any such alliance. If that happens, then the Congress will have to swallow its pride and accept a smattering of seats and sacrifice its mission to revive the party in India's most politically-important State.



While the BSP and the Congress seem to be preparing to ferry their own boats, Asaduddin Owaisi is all but ready to join the battle for UP after grabbing five seats in the Bihar Assembly elections last year and sabotaging the prospects of the RJD on at least 11 seats, much to the delight of the BJP. In December, Owaisi announced that the AIMIM would contest the Assembly elections in UP. Owaisi is trying to go to the polls with Om Prakash Rajbhar, whose SBSP has considerable following among the Rajbhar, Pal and several backward castes in the politically-significant Bundelkhand region. A former BJP ally, Rajbhar is the sitting MLA from Zahoorabad constituency in UP's Ghazipur district. By every indication, UP is going to witness a multi-cornered contest where Yogi and Akhilesh will be the main contenders. In addition to the caste factors, the ongoing farmers' agitation will also play a key role in the polls, and Tikait will be a key player in Western UP. If the Centre does not concede the demand of the farmers, then the region could see major political churning and bring together the Jats and Muslim voters on one plank. This could be deadly for the BJP. The Government has already started making the right noises and resumed offers for dialogues with the growers. But more than anything, the pandemic will be the key factor that could decide the outcome of UP polls. If the third wave of the outbreak hits UP before the polls, Yogi will face an unenviable task in managing the electoral challenge.

Can Israel be led by a fragile coalition?



PRIYADARSHI DUTTA

Will Bennett be able to stay afloat or go down the quicksand of a hopelessly divided Knesset? His ousted rival Netanyahu has not thrown in the towel yet

Israel has got a new Prime Minister after 12 years, an exceptionally long period in the history of the Zionist country with splintered politics. Not even David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, had served so long continuously in any of his two stints i.e. 1948-54 and 1955-63 as did Benjamin Netanyahu in his second innings before being ousted by Naftali Bennett recently. Interestingly, both Netanyahu and Bennett came from the prestigious Israeli commando unit Sayeret Matkal also called Unit 269. Its motto — "Who dares, wins" is likely to play out in Israeli politics in the days ahead. The fragile coalition of Yamina, Yesh Atid, New Hope, Blue and White, Yisrael Beiteinu, Meretz and Labour parties forming the 36th Government is an audacity of hope that might go down the quicksands of a divided Knesset anytime. With Likud still the single-largest party, only one vote (60-59) differentiates the ruling "Parliamentary Grouping" from the Opposition.



Way back on May 17, 1999 Netanyahu was dislodged from the prime ministerial post for the first time. His then rival was an Israeli Defence Forces' General whose moving elegy on Netanyahu's late brother Yonatan Netanyahu (1946-76) formed a part of the school curriculum in Israel. Yonatan was martyred in Operation Thunderbolt, or Israel's daring commando mission to rescue Israeli passengers from the hijacked Air France flight from Entebbe Airport in Uganda on July 4, 1976. The author of the elegy was Ehud Barak, the man who became the 10th Prime Minister of Israel, by defeating Netanyahu convincingly.

For a brief period between 1996 and 2001, Israel had experimented with direct prime ministerial elections in a bid to arrest political instability. It was, however, soon junked after Ehud Barak's incumbency lasted less than two years, due to vicissitudes of Israeli politics, despite the fact that the Knesset completed its normal four-year term. Exactly 20 years later, it was interesting to find Netanyahu pitching for a revival of the system. He argued it could bring political stability in Israel by shielding the Government from the Knesset's longevity. However, the failed idea, found little favour with Knesset committees mostly in the hands of Netanyahu's opponents.

Despite Netanyahu's best efforts a motley "Parliamentary grouping" has been able to dislodge him from the Prime Minister's post. His 12 years in the august office from March 31, 2009 have finally come to an end. Will this be a political requiem of 71-year-old Netanyahu, as many people feel and want? The man himself disagrees. Son of a centenarian and historian father, the late Bentzion Netanyahu, he perhaps feels life and history will both be on his side. Naftali Bennett, the new Prime Minister of Israel, has impressive credentials. A commando by training, he served in reserve duty of the Sayeret Matkal. In 1999, he founded a high-tech company Cyota, specialising in information security. He also served as CEO, of Soluto, which he later sold for around \$100 million. In 2005, destiny brought him close to Netanyahu, when the latter was Leader of Opposition in the Knesset. He became the head of

WITH BENNETT BEING PRO-SETTLEMENT, HE IS LIKELY TO FOLLOW A HAWKISH POLICY VIS-À-VIS WEST BANK. THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION, DEFUNCT ANYWAY SINCE 2007, AFTER FATAH AND HAMAS IRRETRIEVABLY SPLIT, WILL ELUDE THE LIBERALS AGAIN

Netanyahu's general staff, and helped him formulate the education reform plan. Soon after Netanyahu came to power in 2009, Bennett was appointed as Director-General of the Yesha Council, an umbrella organisation of municipal councils of the Jewish settlement in West Bank. He led a fight to lift the freeze on fresh settlement activity of Jews in West Bank. The Jews view the West Bank (or river Jordan) as Judea-Samaria of the Old Testament. The same year he co-founded the 'My Israel Movement' which fought campaigns to boycott Israel, post-Zionist movements, and the boycott of Israel. His entrepreneurial achievements catapulted his name to the pages of Forbes magazine in 2012. In November, 2012 he was appointed as the chairman of the HaBayit HaYehudi, the national religious party. In 2013-14 in the elections to the 19th Knesset, he led his party to a historic tally of 12 seats. This time Netanyahu appointed him as the Minister of Economy, Minister of Religious Services and Minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs. In elections to the 20th Knesset (2015), Bennett's party won eight seats. He was made the Minister of Education and

Minister of Diaspora Affairs in the 34th Government. Did Bennett realise that he would come to lead the 36th Government? The credit greatly goes to the fissiparous politics of Israel, which can throw up impossible coalitions as the current one. The true credit goes to Yair Lapid, a former journalist and boxer, who leads the Yesh Atid party, who convinced Bennett to form an anti-Netanyahu coalition that can seize power. While Lapid is avowedly secular, Bennett is a demonstratively religious Jew. Contrary to speculation Mansour Abbas has not become a Deputy Prime Minister. His United Arab List itself is a divided house on joining the Government. This was apparently after the bad Press they got in the neighbouring Arab countries on their plans to join the Government. With Bennett being pro-settlement, he is likely to follow a hawkish policy vis-à-vis West Bank. The two-State solution, defunct anyway since 2007, after Fatah and Hamas irretrievably split, will elude the liberals again. (The writer is an author and independent researcher based in New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RIGHT TO PROTEST

Sir — There is a difference between the constitutionally-guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity, said the Delhi High Court, as it granted bail to three student activists arrested more than a year ago in connection with riots in northeast Delhi that followed protests against the controversial citizenship law. The three students from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), were arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and for this the court was sharp in its criticism of the Delhi Police. It noted that the UAPA, an anti-terror law, could not be casually applied to petty criminal acts or protests by citizens. In its anxiety to suppress dissent, in the mind of the State, the line between the constitutionally-guaranteed right to protest and terrorist activity seems to be getting blurred. The High Court remarked that the chargesheet lacked any specific, particularised, factual allegations that would make out the ingredients of offences under the UAPA. In the absence of an actual case against the offenders, the process then becomes the punishment. Scathing judgments by courts are notable, but unfortunately not a solution to the problem. It is time to uphold the right to protest else, India will no longer remain a true democracy. **CK Subramaniam | Navi Mumbai**

LOOK OUT FOR CHIRAG

Sir — Blood is thicker than water is a well-known saying. This aptly suits the country's political system. Both at the national and the regional level fathers, sons, daughters, uncles and nephews have influenced India's politics from a long time. Earlier, politics wasn't a profession; it was a passion. The decline in political discourse of the country began with the onset of dynastic politics. Not that the political families always prospered in the process as affection and amicability often gave way to bad blood, betrayal and belligerence. Chirag Paswan will know better because he is "shell shocked" by the action of his uncle Pashupati Kumar Paras who "rebelled" against his nephew for "disrespecting"

Let masking-up become a habit



The gradual recession of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic should not make us complacent and we must not let our guard down. Vaccination is a time-consuming process, a fact that should persuade us to continue to adhere to Covid-19 appropriate behaviour. As it is the experts are warning that there will be a third wave of the Coronavirus outbreak as has been in other countries like the UK. So if we have to prevent the third wave or at least delay it till the maximum number of citizens are inoculated we need to adhere to all Covid protocols in all seriousness. Wearing masks is a non-pharmaceutical intervention being made worldwide for the containment of the pandemic. It is a proven fact that it saves

lives. A naked face or a face without a mask is an open invitation to the virus. Masks should be of high quality and worn properly. All sorts of masks are now available in the market; they are bought and used for whatever they are worth which is not much. Only those masks that really serve the purpose of preventing the transmission of the virus should be allowed to be sold. The Government can incentivise the production of good quality masks and subsidise them. Better still would be the procurement and distribution of masks free of cost to citizens by the Government. However, the way many people still wear masks underlines the need for greater awareness of how to wear the masks properly. A mask below the nose, the mouth and the jaw is not a protective armour against the virus. The intended purpose is served only when a mask fully covers the nostrils and the mouth and fits tightly. Properly worn, good quality masks go a long way towards halting the spread of the disease. We must all make mask-wearing a habit till the pandemic comes to an end. **G David Milton | Maruthancode**

him. Disgruntlement with Chirag's style of functioning had come to the forefront when a couple of LJP's senior leaders switched sides some time ago. Instead of introspection, the young leader's detached look appeared to have surprised his supporters. Nothing succeeds like success, and failure is an orphan. The LJP's poor showing in the Assembly elections seem to have emboldened his rivals in the party. All this said, all is not lost for Chirag. He has a long political journey ahead. Bihar politics is most likely to open up sooner than later. Nitish Kumar cannot hold his own forever. Chinks in his armour have repeatedly been exposed. Lalu Prasad is still in the background. Undoubtedly, Tejashwi and Chirag are the men to look out for. **Ganapathi Bhat | Akola**

A GOOD DECISION
Sir — The Central Board of Secondary

SOUND BITE

We did our best to keep away the supporters who came to take part in the function. We even closed the gates of our party office. **Kerala Leader of Opposition** — VD Sathesan

Would like to see the cessation of hostilities be maintained in order to give space for the relevant parties to work out arrangements to stabilise the situation. **United Nations Secretary-General** — Antonio Guterres

Whatever my equity is today, is mainly due to the success of my social entertainers, which made me connect to the people of India. **Actor** — Ayushmann Khurrana

Both India and New Zealand have got very strong pace-bowling attacks. India has got a more balanced attack because they have better spinners. **Former Australia captain** — Ian Chappell

Met Dharmendra Pradhan and proposed a revival plan for the PCPIR project in AP. This plan will pave the way for all round industrial development coupled with employment in the region. **Andhra Pradesh Industries Minister** — Mekapati Goutham Reddy

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

FIND INDIA'S PLACE IN THE WEST

World leaders want to shift from a China-dictated supply chain and find new allies. This is our chance



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

A couple of high decibel global events in picturesque locales dominated headlines in the past few days while India grimly remembered one year of a brutal military ambush in the north-eastern frontiers by China. This sets the stage in more ways than one for a focused coalition of open dialogues between some of the richest and largest democracies in the world. One of the first few events in these series was the new US president meeting old allies and not-so-friendly regimes at various platforms like G7 and NATO besides holding bilaterals on crucial world issues. This also signifies US' rekindled interest in multilateral platforms and re-claiming its seat on the global stage. The world economies have undergone a significant change ever since the G7 started meeting formally in the 1970s. A couple in the G7 have lost their largest-economy status and new ones like India and China have moved in. China has galloped to being an extremely voracious market for many European luxury products, cars, etc., building significant interlocked linkages with these economies. It has also leapfrogged on the global technology arena with its gigantic manufacturing units cornering a significant share of the global supply chain for technology equipment. Heady with its recent wealth and technology prowess, China has



also moved its military units to strategic locations in its neighborhood while using its debt-trap diplomacy on weaker nations as the 'velvet glove on an iron fist'. The post-2008 financial crisis world, lulled by the need for large, addressable markets and money for spending, has been ignoring most of these strategic moves until 2020, when suddenly a microbe jolted everyone out of their dream. Citizens around the globe experienced their worst nightmares played out with the Covid pandemic raging and bringing nation after nation down. The only exception was China (from where the microbe originated), which in just two months was able to bring its economy back on track while continuing with its technology and military maneuvers on the global stage.

However, the world has perhaps learnt a lesson and despite ambivalence among some open democratic countries, the majority are willing to collaborate and work towards a new order. This is where India bruised by China in the middle of the pandemic has a huge opportunity. The key narrative emerging from the recent global meetings of world leaders has been to move away from a China-dictated supply chain and find new allies and friends. Strategically the Indo-Pacific region therefore gains prominence in all top leader's dialogues. India has a geographical advantage of being right in the middle of this theatre of global attention and action. The coming together of US, Japan, Australia and India aboard the Quad focusing on a peaceful Indo-Pacific is a challenge to China's aggressive military moves in that region. India has to move aggressively on QUAD, bringing the other three allies on same page on shared issues of concern. India currently is one of the largest vaccine makers in the world and what most leaders agree is the world is as weak today as the last unvaccinated person. The aim to put a job on every shoulder cannot be achieved without India playing a significant role in the process. This is also a huge money-making opportunity for the country while creating a specialisation in the emerging threat of biological hazards preventive care. India has to negotiate with the big pharma for manufacturing opportunities simplifying regulations for setting up global units in the country in order to ease the manner of doing business while working towards the dream of becoming the pharmacy to the world.

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)

Steering the boat safely amid Covid

India needs to prepare well for a competent and concerted response that can anticipate, avert or attenuate future public health emergencies



K SRINATH REDDY

Several States in India have started to open up, with their respective lists of permitted and restricted activities. While there is concern about the undercounting of cases and deaths in some States, the overall trend of a receding second wave is not being disputed. The frenetic rush and public anguish, which marked the frequently futile search for hospital beds that became the painful images of the second wave are no longer the dominant themes of Indian or international media reports. That, in itself, provides assurance that the second wave is ebbing.

However, it would be unwise to assume that the turbulent waters of the second wave have stilled and the boat is set on a safe course ahead. We still need to see whether there will be a rebound when the lockdown eases. There are already reports of people rushing to tourist spots and holiday resorts. Malls and restaurants are crowded. These represent the more affluent sections, but the signals they send can misguide the rest of the population. Desire to live life to the full is understandable after lockdowns but wisdom must caution against abandonment of safeguards against a virus which still poses an active threat. Common sense tells us that if some careless revellers start prancing around when the boat has just left the rough sea, it can still capsize, putting everybody in danger.

Even as we steady the boat, when it sails out of choppy waters, we must watch the charts and study the signals to see when it might be rocked again by a third wave. Considerable speculation has already commenced in the media about the timing and contours of such a wave. Predictions have been made, by mathematical modellers and some epidemiologists, that we may be rocked by the third wave in November this year. While the accuracy of such predictions is uncertain, since they are based on several assumptions, we do need to be well prepared to meet such a threat whenever it arises.

Several elements will determine the severity of a third wave: the nature of variants in circulation; the number of persons who have acquired immunity from vaccination or recent infection; the number of susceptible people who are available for the virus to infect and cause symptomatic illness; adherence of people to public health advisories on wearing masks and avoiding crowds; ability of public authorities to prevent super-spreader events and the preparedness of our health systems to ensure timely case detection, supportive home care or assured hospitalisation with competent service provision.

Our surveillance systems must be sharpened, to detect the levels of circulating variants and emergence of new forms. Case detection will need to be based on both testing and clinical features gathered by healthcare teams visiting homes. False negative results from tests can be compensated by adding clinical criteria (syndromic surveillance, as used for other infectious disease outbreaks). Genomic analysis of 5-10 per cent of all positive test samples would be needed, with higher levels of scrutiny for virus samples recovered from international travellers. Since testing would pose more challenges in rural areas, symptom-based surveillance and contact-based quarantine would have to be followed, along with the use of rapid antigen tests for spot diagnosis and mobile laboratories to carry samples for RT-PCR testing to authorised laboratories.

Home care would be appropriate and ade-



OUR SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS MUST BE SHARPENED, TO DETECT THE LEVELS OF CIRCULATING VARIANTS AND THE EMERGENCE OF NEW FORMS. CASE DETECTION WILL NEED TO BE BASED ON BOTH TESTING AND CLINICAL FEATURES GATHERED BY HEALTHCARE TEAMS VISITING HOMES

The writer, a cardiologist and epidemiologist, is president, Public Health Foundation of India. The views expressed are personal.



quate for 80-85 per cent of all symptomatically infected cases. Primary health care teams must be trained in providing supportive care and monitoring. Symptoms, pulse oximetry readings, temperature should be part of daily monitoring of such home-managed persons. If the person is a diabetic, blood sugar too should be monitored with a glucometer. Telemedicine facilities should be scaled up and standardised, to support home management. Prior planning should be done to ensure timely transfer of a person under home care to an intermediate or advanced care facility when the need arises.

Sub-district, district and medical college hospitals should be equipped to handle a possible surge of the third wave. It is difficult to predict how severe it would be, as it depends on the behaviour of the virus and its different variants, as well as the behaviour of people in adhering to public health advisories on masks, ventilation and avoidance of crowding. However, strengthening of the healthcare infrastructure and health workforce at various levels of care is long overdue. This is an opportunity to reduce the existing disparities of healthcare provisions between states and districts as well as between urban and rural areas.

There is speculation in the media that children will be more affected in a third wave. It is possible that more children will be exposed in an open society than during the first wave when they

were mostly sheltered or even during the second wave when they were still partly guarded. Numbers of susceptible adults may also decrease by that time as several of them would have been vaccinated or infected by then. Nevertheless, adults will still be far more likely to have severe infection than children where the vast majority will have asymptomatic or mild infections. Even so, expanding hospital services for children, including intensive care capacity, will still serve a useful purpose by strengthening paediatric care for many serious illnesses.

Vaccination must be speeded up, with accelerated domestic production and international procurement. The number of vaccination centres must be increased. Vaccination in rural areas will require careful planning of logistics, sensitive communication for confidence building, support for overcoming technology barriers to registration and availability of close-to-home vaccination centres. The Delta variant poses challenges with high infectivity and capacity for vaccine evasion, at higher levels than the wild virus or the Alpha variant. However, there is reassuring evidence that the variant responds well to two doses of all available vaccines. So, we need to provide both doses of vaccines to vulnerable persons, identified by age and co-morbidities. Even pregnant women now need to be regarded as candidates for priority vaccination.

The period of relative calm will also give us time to build partnerships between and among government services, local bodies, non-governmental organisations, school personnel, trade unions, industry representatives, community groups and citizen volunteers. Capacity-building for concerted action among these groups will give us the collective strength to respond more effectively to the third wave. Whether to promote Covid-appropriate behaviour or to reduce vaccine hesitancy, local networks in the community are vital. Community based surveillance systems can also give early alerts of rising cases.

We should also utilise this opportunity to enhance health and nutrition literacy to increase immunity. Healthy diets and physical activity are vital for both innate and adaptive immunity to fight the virus and also for prevention and control of non-communicable diseases which are the predominant co-morbidities that predict poor outcomes in Covid infection. Promotion of healthy living habits using the Covid platform, will help foster future health and well-being.

We need to prepare well for a competent and concerted response that can anticipate, avert or attenuate future public health emergencies. By being forewarned and forearmed, we can restrict the third wave to a ripple rather than a tidal wave.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE AGREED TO TASK EXPERTS IN BOTH OUR COUNTRIES TO WORK ON SPECIFIC UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT WHAT IS OFF-LIMITS.

— US PRESIDENT

JOE BIDEN



WE NEED TO THROW OUT ALL INSINUATIONS, SIT DOWN AT THE EXPERT LEVEL AND START WORKING IN THE INTERESTS OF THE US AND RUSSIA.

— RUSSIAN PRESIDENT

VLADIMIR PUTIN

Covid orphans must be a priority care group

There is a need to remove bottlenecks and unburden the courts so that the process of providing permanent care facilities for orphans is speeded up

The period between April 1 and June 5 found 30,071 children in need of care of protection as 26,176 of them lost either parent, 3,621 children lost both parents and 274 children were abandoned. Many of them are 'Covid Orphans.' Of them 15,620 are boys, 14,447 girls and four transgenders; 11,815 are in the 8-13 age group and 5,107 in the 4-7 age group. Nearly all of them are in the care of a guardian, a family member or a surviving parent while the rest are in shelter homes, orphanages or with 'special adoption agencies.'

The number of out-of-home care children in need of care and protection in India is estimated to be about 2.4 crore and the number is continuous-



SUBHASH C PANDEY

The writer is former Special Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India. The views expressed are personal.

ly on the rise. Several financial support measures have been announced for orphaned children from the PM Cares Fund, Ministry of Women and Child Development and by States. However, the issue remains that these orphans' needs in terms of permanent homes and settlement have to be taken care of as a priority.

Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 is primary legislation for ensuring the safety, security, dignity and well-being of children. The orphans need to be produced before Children Welfare Committees (CWCs) which decide whether the child can be kept with the extended family, in foster care with support or at State-run centres. The Act also lays down procedures



for their adoption. However, in practice, it has been found that the courts are heavily clogged with arrears and the adoption proceedings take years. In 2015, the Government instituted a centralised online system CARINGS (Child Adoption Resource Information and Guidance System) to facilitate adoption primarily to check abuse of adoption proceedings by NGOs. Only prospective

parents registered on CARINGS portal managed by Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA) can adopt children. CARA prefers orphans under kinship care, with shelter homes being the last resort. A child under two years is considered 'legally free' to be adopted if no one approaches the shelter home for two months. The waiting period is four months for older children. As many as 5,693 children were adopted in 2010 and 5,964 in 2011. After the institution of CARA and CARINGS in 2015, the pace of adoption has distinctly slowed down to 1881 in 2015-16, 3,210 in 2016-17 and 2,160 in 2020-21. The pandemic has slowed down the adoption process further as it also affected functioning of courts.

There is a bias towards adoption of infants. Over 80 per cent of adoptions are of children below two years. Litigation and challenges end up delaying the adoption process. In the last three years, 174 cases ended in disruption — termination of adoption proceeding before finalisation — and five cases ended in dissolution — termination after finalisation.

Hundreds of adoption cases are still pending in courts. An amendment to the concerned Act to transfer powers vested in courts to District Magistrates in order to speed up adoptions process is awaiting Rajya Sabha approval. The amendment also seeks to give a prominent role to District Magistrates in superintendence of Child Care Institutions, mostly run by

NGOs supposedly under the oversight of the Social Welfare Department. It is found that the NGOs are interested in getting funding without properly providing even basic facilities of food, hygiene and sanitation. There have also been serious complaints of abuse of inmates in some of NGO-run facilities. The 2015 law had ushered in the concept of foster care in India in which the child is placed with a caregiver running a residential child care facility or in a private home of a foster parent. They receive financial support from Government.

The system provides personalized parental care in a family-like environment to a group of unrelated children in a community setting. It is considered suitable for street chil-

dren who pass through a weaning period prior to their placement in individual foster care or any other form of family-based care. In the broader interest of these children, there is a case for evolving newer, more flexible mechanisms that are less stringent than full-scale legal adoption or a formal foster-care arrangement. One mechanism is that of sponsorship charities run by NGOs, which can be adopted by the Government to connect a donor/sponsor with a particular child. It allows for financial and emotional support without the legal implications on succession. Not only the childless seeking adoption but persons of means with children can come forward under a Government-managed system to support children.

Asian stocks follow Wall St lower on Federal Reserve hints at hikes

PNS ■ BEIJING

Asian stock markets followed Wall Street lower Thursday after the Federal Reserve indicated it might ease off economic stimulus earlier than previously thought.

Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul fell while Shanghai gained after Fed policymakers, who previously forecast no interest rate hikes before 2024, estimated their benchmark rate would be raised twice by late 2023. The Fed also indicated it sees the US economy improving faster than expected. On Wall Street, the benchmark S&P 500 index fell 0.5 per cent on Wednesday after Fed projections showed some of its board members expect short-term interest rates to rise by half a percentage point by late 2023.

Ultra-low rates from the Fed and other central banks have propelled a global stock market rebound from last year's plunge amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"The Fed may have delivered a more hawkish message for markets than many would have expected," Yeap Jun Rong of IG said in a report. Still, Yeap said, differing views

among board members suggests "much will still depend on how the economic recovery will play out."

The Nikkei 225 in Tokyo lost 1.1 per cent to 28,965.07 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng was off less than 0.1 per cent at 28,434.62. The Shanghai Composite Index was up 0.2 per cent at mid-morning at 3,525.67.

The Kospi in Seoul sank 0.5 per cent to 3,261.05 and Australia's S&P-ASX 200 shed 0.4 per cent to 7,357.90. New Zealand, Singapore and Jakarta declined while Bangkok advanced.

The Fed's announcement Wednesday reflected growing confidence in the US economy as more people are vac-

nated against the coronavirus and business activity revives.

Investors have been worried the Fed and other central banks might feel pressure to withdraw stimulus to cool rising inflation. Fed officials have said they believe that inflation will be short-lived, a stance they repeated Wednesday.

Fed chairman Jerome Powell said any changes are some way off but conditions have improved enough to start discussing when to slow bond purchases.



Sensex drops 179 pts; Nifty ends below 15,700

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex tumbled 179 points on Thursday, weighed by losses in index heavyweights HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank amid a largely negative trend in global equities. The 30-share BSE index ended 178.65

points or 0.34 per cent lower at 52,323.33. The broader NSE Nifty declined 76.15 points or 0.48 per cent to 15,691.40. IndusInd Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding around 3 per cent, followed by Dr Reddy's, NTPC, Maruti, Axis Bank, Bajaj Auto, Bharti Airtel and HDFC. On the

other hand, UltraTech Cement, TCS, Asian Paints and Infosys were among the gainers. "Bulls stepped back a bit following the economic forecast by the US Federal Reserve as the street stayed cautious on the slow economic recovery in emerging markets unlike some of the developed markets," said S

Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities. The Fed's policymakers said they would raise their benchmark short-term rate, which influences many consumer and business loans, twice by late 2023. They had previously estimated that no rate hike would occur before 2024.

Panel on energy efficiency, low carbon tech to be set up: Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Power and Renewable Energy Minister R K Singh has said that a committee will be set up having members from all relevant Ministries for implementation of the Roadmap on Energy Efficiency and low carbon technologies.

Singh chaired a high-level meeting to review the progress of various energy efficiency programmes and the preparedness for Climate Change Actions in the country through video conferencing on Wednesday, a power ministry statement said. The purpose of this high-level meeting was to discuss activities in the field of energy efficiency across all sectors of the economy with the objective of reducing CO2 emissions.

The minister said a concerted push for renewables is already underway and a detailed action plan will be developed to identify potential areas.

He said that a committee/group will be set up having members from all relevant Ministries for implementation of the Roadmap on Energy Efficiency and low carbon technologies.

Singh directed to keep



focus on sectors with highest emissions intensity such as Transport, Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and Power plants.

He also discussed the activities defined under the Mission document - ROSHANE - which has been developed for implementing a series of Energy Conservation schemes across the country.

He advised the Ministries to take appropriate measures on the demand-side initiatives to ensure that the wastage of energy is minimized and said that the deployment of low carbon technologies need to be taken up on a massive scale, especially in the MSMEs, where it is highly essential.

He instructed all the departments that Electric Mobility also should be more aggressively pushed.

Singh, stressed that for better implementation of all energy efficiency schemes, the institutional mechanism in Bureau of Energy Efficiency, CPSU under Ministry of Power would be strengthened.

Secretary Ministry of Power, Alok Kumar highlighted that the cooling sector, cold storage and cooking are key areas to focus on for successfully achieving our targets for CO2 emission reduction.

IKEA enters Bengaluru

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Swedish home furnishing retailer IKEA announced on Thursday the launch of its e-commerce services and mobile shopping app in Bengaluru. There will be over 8,000 home furnishing products and solutions to choose from, it said in a statement.

The company opened its second IKEA India store in Navi Mumbai in December 2020. IKEA already has online presence in Hyderabad, Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Surat, and Vadodara.

The IKEA mobile shopping app features product recommendations, ratings, and reviews, along with "easier" searching and browsing experience, the statement said.

Customers can also find a built-in barcode scanner which will help them learn more details about the products, including materials and



dimensions, it was stated.

IKEA India CEO & CSO (Chief Sustainability Officer) Peter Betzel said Karnataka is a very important market for IKEA and Bengaluru is one of the largest home furnishing markets in India.

The company will also open a big IKEA store, close to 400,000 sq.ft. at Nagasandra here within a year, and this store will be connected to the Nagasandra metro station.

"Over time, we will also open a city centre store within Bengaluru to be even more accessible and connect with many more people," Betzel said.

Google announces Rs 113-cr grant to set up O2 plants, upskill rural health workers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tech giant Google on Thursday said Google.org - its philanthropic arm - has announced a grant of Rs 113 crore (USD 15.5 million) to support procurement and installation of about 80 oxygen generation plants and upskilling of healthcare workers in rural parts of the country in partnership with various organisations.

Google.org will support procurement and installation of about 80 oxygen generation plants in healthcare facilities in high-need and rural locations with new grants of about Rs 90 crore (USD 12.5 million) to GiveIndia and about Rs 18.5 crore (USD 2.5 million) to PATH.



It will also finance efforts of Apollo Medskills to help upskill 20,000 frontline health workers through specialised training in COVID-19 management and strengthen the stressed rural health workforce and rural health systems. Towards this, Google.org will make a Rs 3.6 crore (USD

500,000) grant to ARMMAN to run skilling programs for 180,000 Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and 40,000 Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) in 15 Indian states.

ARMMAN will also use the grant to set up a call centre to provide additional help and

advice for ASHAs and ANMs where required.

"As India slowly emerges from the crisis of the past few months, it's been humbling and inspiring to see individuals, communities, institutions, and governments work together to manage the impact on a scale we haven't experienced before.

"Our focus at Google has been on making sure people have the information and tools they need to stay informed, connected, and safe," Google India Country Head and Vice President Sanjay Gupta said.

The company is broadening its COVID-19 support efforts to help strengthen India's healthcare infrastructure and workforce -- especially in rural areas, he told reporters in a virtual briefing.

MONEY MATTERS

Kotak Insurance arm expects to incur up to Rs 275 cr loss in June

Private sector lender Kotak Mahindra Bank on Thursday said its life insurance arm expects to incur a loss of up to Rs 275 crore for the quarter ended June 2021 due to high fatalities in India during the second wave of COVID-19. "Due to increased claims and higher mortality related provisioning arising on account of the second wave, the company expects to incur a loss for the quarter ended June 2021 in the estimated range of Rs 225-275 crore on shareholder's account," Kotak Mahindra Life Insurance Company said in a regulatory filing. The company said the provisioning going forward will depend on the trends in mortality. "The company continues to have a strong capital and solvency position," the private insurer said. Kotak Mahindra Life Insurance Company said the foregoing extraordinary development and its potential impact were discussed at a meeting of its board on June 16, 2021.



Revolt Motors slashes price of electric bike RV400 by Rs 28k

Electric vehicle maker Revolt Motors on Thursday said it has reduced the price of its electric bike RV400 by Rs 28,201 to Rs 90,799 in the wake of the recent changes in the FAME II policy. The bike was tagged at Rs 1,19,000 in Delhi earlier. The RV400 comes with a 3KW motor powered by a 72V 3.24 KWh lithium-Ion battery that can churn out a top speed of 85km/hr. The bike comes with various features like three riding modes - Eco, Normal and Sport - each suiting to the riding style and needs of the driver. Last week, the government made a partial modification in Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles in India Phase II (FAME India Phase II), including increasing the demand incentive for electric two-wheelers to Rs 15,000 per kWh from the earlier uniform subsidy of Rs 10,000 per kWh for all EVs, including plug-in hybrids and strong hybrids except buses.



MSME: Khadi sales decline 16 pc to Rs 3,527 crore in 2020-21

Khadi sales contracted by 16 per cent year-on-year to Rs 3,527.71 crore in 2020-21, as spinning and weaving activities across the country impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MSME ministry said on Thursday. The overall production in the Khadi sector also declined to Rs 1,904.49 crore in 2020-21, as compared to Rs 2,292.44 crore in 2019-20, it added. The production and sales in the Khadi sector, however, slightly declined as spinning and weaving activities across the country took a major hit during the pandemic, the ministry said. "The overall production in the Khadi sector in 2020-21 was recorded at Rs 1,904.49 crore as compared to Rs 2,292.44 crore in 2019-20, while the overall Khadi sales stood at Rs 3,527.71 crore as compared to Rs 4,211.26 crore in the previous year," it added.



India extends \$ 100 million Line of Credit to Sri Lanka

PNS ■ COLOMBO

India has extended a USD 100 million Line of Credit to Sri Lanka to help the island nation finance various projects in the solar energy sector and ensure that the country's 70 per cent power requirements are fulfilled by renewable energy sources by 2030.

An agreement signed between the Sri Lankan government and the Export-Import Bank of India was exchanged by High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka Gopal Baglay and Secretary to the Treasury S R Attygalle in the presence of Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa on Wednesday.

"A glorious new chapter in the multi-faceted partnership between India and Sri Lanka! An agreement extending US\$ 100 million Line of Credit to #lka for solar energy projects



was exchanged today in the presence of Hon'ble President H E @GotabayaR @MFA_SriLanka @PresRajapaksa, Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka said in a tweet.

This USD 100 million LOC will help finance various projects in the solar energy sector in Sri Lanka, including those announced during the Founding Conference of the International Solar Alliance

(ISA) held in March 2018, such as rooftop solar photovoltaic systems for households and government buildings, the High Commissioner said in a statement.

President Rajapaksa and the High Commissioner of India discussed the striking similarity in the national objectives outlined by India and Sri Lanka in connection with solar energy, it said.

Sugar production up 13 per cent so far this market yr at 307 lakh tonne

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's sugar production rose 13 per cent till June 15 in 2020-21 marketing year at 306.65 lakh tonnes on higher sugarcane production, according to trade data.

"Sugar mills across the country have produced 306.65 lakh tonnes of sugar between 1st October 2020 and 15th June 2021. This is 35.54 lac tonnes higher than 271.11 lac tonnes produced at the same time last year," Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) said in a statement.

Only five mills are currently operating in the country. In Uttar Pradesh, sugar production stood at 110.61 lakh tonnes till June 15 of 2020-21 as against 126.30 lakh tonnes in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Rupee slumps 76 ps, settles below 74/USD

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Indian rupee continued its downward journey on Thursday, sliding another 76 paise to close below the 74 per US dollar level, tracking a strong greenback overseas after the US Federal Reserve surprised the market by signalling rate hike sooner than expected.

At the interbank forex market, the domestic unit opened weak at 73.65 against the American currency, then lost further ground and finally closed at 74.08, showing a fall of 76 paise over its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee had settled at 73.32.

The local unit witnessed an intra-day high of 73.57 and a low of 74.08 against the greenback. The domestic currency has lost 128 paise in the eight trading sessions to Thursday. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the green-



back's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.60 per cent to 91.67.

"Indian Rupee depreciated amid strong dollar. Further, risk aversion in the global markets and disappointing macroeconomic data added downside pressure," said Saif Mukadam, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

"Dollar gained strength as US Federal Reserve surprised market by signalling rate hike sooner than expected. Their median projection showed central bank lifting their benchmark rate to 0.6 per cent from near zero by the end of 2023," Mukadam said.

Economy likely contracted 12% in Q1: Report

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Lockdowns imposed by the states in April and May to contain the second wave of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic has likely led to the economy contracting 12 per cent in the June quarter as against 23.9 per cent contraction in the same quarter in 2020, says a brokerage report.

The economy had its worst contraction on record in FY21 at 7.3 per cent as the 2.5 months of unplanned lockdown announced by the centre with just a four-hour notice had crippled the economy in the first quarter with a massive 23.9 per cent contraction, which improved to -17.5 per cent in the second quarter.

But the economy showed a sharp V-shaped recovery from



the second half when it posted a 40 bps positive growth and in Q4 clipping at 1.6 per cent, containing the overall contraction at 7.3 per cent for the year.

This 12 percentage point contraction will have the econ-

omy missing a sharp V-shaped recovery this time around, unlike seen last year after the national lockdown was lifted, as consumer sentiment remains very weak this time around as people are more worried about the pandemic

than last year, says Swiss brokerage UBS Securities India.

Quoting in-house data from UBS-India activity indicator, Tanvee Gupta Jain, the economist at the Swiss brokerage, says the indicator suggests that economic activity has contracted an average of 12 per cent in the June 2021 quarter as against 23.9 per cent in June 2020 quarter.

This is despite the indicator rebounded to 88.7 in the week to June 13, up 3 per cent week-on-week after many states eased localised mobility restrictions from the last week of May.

Though the brokerage expects a sequential pick-up in economic activity from June, it believes that the economy may gain traction only from the second half.

CII pitches for Rs 3 L-crore fiscal stimulus to push economic growth

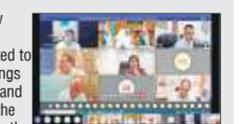
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian economy requires a Rs 3 lakh crore fiscal stimulus, including cash transfer to households through Jan Dhan accounts to spur economic growth amid the pandemic, industry chamber CII said on Thursday and pitched for appointment of a "Vaccine Czar" for speedy vaccination coverage. CII President T V Narendran also said the chamber expects GDP to grow at 9.5 per cent in 2021-22 as the strong growth in the second half of the fiscal year will be supported by robust external demand and large-scale coverage of vaccination,

allowing resumption of economic activity. He advocated for appointment of a "Vaccine Czar" for vaccination coverage. The new president said suitable fiscal measures to alleviate the stress of people impacted by the second wave of COVID-19 are the need of the hour. The Indian economy is a consumption-led economy and the pandemic has impacted the consumer demand and due to this, the chamber has called for measures such as cash transfer as a number of actions are needed to deal with this demand shock "Fiscal stimulus of Rs 3 lakh crore is required."

MCA eases rules for virtual meetings

Boards of companies can now approve annual financial statements and matters related to mergers, among others, at meetings held through video conferencing and other audio-visual means. Amid the coronavirus pandemic resulting in the shift from physical meetings to virtual ones, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has amended rules pertaining to meetings of board and its powers under the Companies Act, 2013. Nangia Andersen LLP Partner Sandeep Jhunjhunwala said the Companies Act always permitted conducting meetings through video conferencing but key matters such as approving the financial statements, board's report and prospectus required physical meetings. Acknowledging the difficulty always caused by the ongoing pandemic, the MCA has eliminated the list of matters that could be conducted through audio-visual means.



Punam Kalra highlights why partaking of the goods produced by local artisan communities is the need of the moment, both socially and ecologically



REVIVING ETHNIC PRIDE

In a world of stringently catalogued materials and well-documented sourced pieces, the beauty of what is produced locally would be easy to overlook. But the ethnic pride demands to be heard. The gentle strokes in hand-painted pieces, the intricate weaves in carpets and the well-proportioned carvings in furniture speak of artisanal glory that should be reason enough to go local. Amid the realisation of the artistic lure in such elements, the approach gives a first-hand engagement with the local art community that infuses sensibility to all the collaborative creations. Where there is a 'local' touch, there is more than what we see — craftsmanship, a small town priding over the origin of the style and a story that the patterns yearn to tell. The localised style is both beauty and lore, all in itself. Their aesthetic sparks a connection with the story in the creation of a piece. Handwoven fabrics carrying a cross weave come out as an Ikkat, while block-printed kalamkari or chintz go from one hand to another to complete the essential look. Different people from different locations, each possessing their flair, come together to make a single piece of fabric for a locally-sourced design. Variations in printed Jaipur cotton, plain Benaras silk and Kashmir Crewel Wool et al, become a great choice for carpets, bed linen and other interior accessories that echo their legacy. Breathable counterparts in chenille cotton or

plain linen befit the upholstery more than any other material. Chenille cotton looks exactly like what it means in French — a caterpillar! Contemporised design collections have a soft spot for quilted combinations that create a unique statement with the assorted character. A skillful play of the weaves, patterns and dyes articulate the theme of a space that embraces the local vibe. The native colour palettes are all about the extremes — they are either vivid or a simple neutral. A dash of artistry brings to the fore a kaleidoscopic mix with walls finished in the arish style from Rajasthan or red oxide floors prominently found in South India. Intricate works of Palitana or Athangudi tiles make a stunning native statement with a stimulative tactile finish that live up to the all-local standard of perfection. The hues also favour a regional theme — vibrant hues with

embroidery and fabrics possess a northern touch, while neutrals with metallic brass and brunette tints usher in the southern vibe. More elements such as pillars, window shades, decorative niches and other modes of ornamentation explore the cultural roots in a maximalist sense. When there is a call for extravagance, particular styles and time-honoured techniques come into play. Rich stone inlays in tables, symbolic motifs on its sides and mythical figurines which form a centrepiece, indoors, owe their chimaera to local craftsmanship. The authentic charm is overstated when marked by folk art or native murals in terracotta or brass that celebrate the silhouettes, the organic paints and the lovingly handcrafted make. Metal screens, latticed partitions and other scaled-up embellishments honour the local craftsmen's eye for detail, aestheticised accuracy and harmony.

The creations uphold the fact that metals, earth, and other naturally sourced materials are best left in the hands of our native artisans. On an eco-sensitive note, an interior boasting some handwoven rattan panels in the seaters, cushioned bamboo ottomans, cane sideboards or wicker showpieces stay light on the sustainability scale. Every element of the interior — luminaires, shelves, louveres and more can undergo an eco-friendly experiment at the hands of skilled karigars. The mark of authenticity and low-energy production make the line of décor enter a whole new dimension of design that is sensible, sensorial and sensational — all at the same time. Ethnic pride is all about bridging the gap between the old and the new, and exploring the in-between. Most local elements become the voice of a culture or a community or both. It is seen that restored

relics, antiquated accessories and pre-loved charms revive the life of the one-of-a-kind pieces of art and make a striking, conversation-worthy corner in space. Layering the interior with repurposed brass chains, upcycled tassel screens or any other piece of striking local statement completes the picture. There is a second chance for the culturally sound pieces to represent their rich past with a nostalgic touch. When reassured with ethical sourcing of materials, these pieces open an array of benefits that further go beyond the beaut factor. And not to limit the representation in its pure form, the local techniques can and should be explored to create works or pieces that have a worldwide appeal taking the craft from 'local' to 'global'. 'Going Local' ranks the domestic, all-natural line of making, over the market of synthetic chemicals, subtly encouraging conscious consumerism down the road. The reduced carbon footprint coupled with the support for local communities upstages the 'go local' trend in design fraternity much higher, compared to other fields. This conscious trend would mark the beginning of a socially, ecologically conscious future in the design world. (The writer is the Creative Director of I'm the Centre for Applied Arts, a design studio specialising in bespoke interiors, furniture and accessories.)

Add a touch of luxury to your home

Marble decor is a great way to add unusual drama and charm to any space. You can bring the opulent beauty of marble to your home, befitting any corner. As much as we admire this natural stone's appearance, marble's distinctive colour and meandering veins never go out of style. Its interpretation of colours and patterns in interiors add dynamism, glamour and a richness to the spaces. Ramesh Bhandari, Director, A Class Marble, shares how to tap into the elegant stone's chic vigor by using it in the following ways:

walls as well as sophisticated to the space. **Create a statement ceiling** The fifth wall is a blank canvas, just waiting to be put to good use. Take full advantage of the ceiling and create a bold statement. Add an artistic flourish to your living room by using marble to create a design that anchors your space. **Add artistic touch by accessories and artwork** Enhance the aesthetic spirit of your home with marble accessories and artworks, ranging from marble wall art to display items and sculptures. Go bold by adding bold colours that highlight your marble decor, accessories, and artwork which can befit in any space. **Make it pop** Each design and pattern of marble display enhances the beauty of the space offering a one-of-a-kind experience. A simple centre table or a sleek dining table and chairs having marble tops, coupled with black and bronze for the TV unit

and other furnishings, all contribute to the room's trendy appearance, improve the experience and bring an unexpected uniqueness to your home. **Redefine your Bathroom spaces** While we often consider bathroom spaces as the least important in the house in terms of styling them, the beauty of the marbles won't let you feel that again. Marble is a versatile material that also contributes to the appeal of the bathrooms. A tranquil space in itself, decorate the bathrooms with white marble having gold or black veins to create a serene atmosphere. Colour has the power to transform a space, whether it's a bold accent wall or an unexpected ceiling. With the world at large feeling like it's at a standstill, and nothing but bad news filling our newsfeeds, people are bringing some excitement and joy into their lives with bold colours and interior decoration. Now that you know where to use marble to lux up your space, go ahead and use it to create chic interiors.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



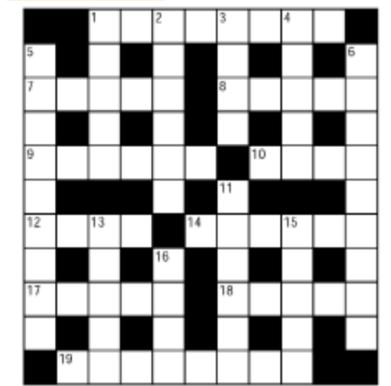
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Long pants
- Correct
- Untrue
- Someone who lives alone, keeping away from others
- Costing nothing
- Shortly
- Thief
- Lift up
- Think the same way
- Huge

DOWN

- A large wild cat
- Get
- Out of danger

- Draw a straight line with this
- A large group of musicians who play together
- Practised
- A root vegetable
- A smelly vegetable
- Destroys by fire
- Expensive



It is the 21st century and still divorce is looked down upon! *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL talks to experts on how we, as a society, can ensure two individuals' hard parting is less painful.



Divorce is not a bad word! If you've taken a divorce, it's no scandal. Why don't we look at it in the form of empowering someone? You are ending a toxic or loveless marriage! We are moving towards a very inclusive world, actress Minissha Lamba and Ryan Tham tied the knot in 2015. Things turned complicated when five years into the marriage she announced her divorce from the restaurateur in August last year. This came as a shock for her fans recently but Lamba added that it was an amicable separation and the idea of falling in love again is helping her heal!

In a way, the pandemic has acted not only as an agent of change for marriage but as an accelerant because inquiries with divorce lawyers heated up during the lockdown, while 58% of surveyed Indians said that the pandemic strengthened their marriage. Strong unions got stronger but the fractured, split wide open! Life strategist and transformational facilitator Arpita Bhandari feels we must address the discomfort around the idea of divorce and have more conversations about it — "Divorce is understood as a legal termination of marital bond. Come to understand the meaning of marriage and divorce in an Indian context, these are concepts that come with very deeply embedded beliefs,

'LOG TOH KEHTE HI RAHENG'

values and morals. It's no surprise that divorce is a taboo in Indian society and so much of it has to be done by its own people who experience a great deal of discomfort at the very idea of it. The concept is seen as foreign and is often ridiculed by those who see the bond of matrimony as a permanent one for several 'lifetimes'. I wanna know why!"

As if stigma and pride weren't enough, divorce was once legally impossible or impossibly burdensome. But the strategist enlightens us, little do they know that trapping people in unhappy marriages can have profound, negative consequences! Loosened restrictions on divorce are correlated with an 8% to 16% decrease in female suicides and a 30% decrease in domestic violence. "A



key reason we find ourselves where we were fifty years ago has to do with the deep conditioning that takes place as early as when an individual is in his foundational years, via family. The very popular saying 'log kya kahenge' is still very prevalent in our society despite the progress we've made as a country! Even 20 years back, in a large percentage of families, men were seen as the primary breadwinners of a family while women took over household chores and child-rearing responsibilities. This led women to be more and more dependent on their male counterparts, especially financially, leaving them with no choice but to become complacent even in times of adversity such as domestic vio-

lence, mental and sexual abuse. This culture further reinforced the idea of 'permanent bonds' between partners promoting the stigma attached to divorce," she adds.

"Infidelity, extramarital affairs, physical and psychological incompatibility, dissatisfied sexual life, financial insecurity and job losses, altercations with in-laws and harassment by them during prolonged stay at home are the main reasons for seeking of divorce during the pandemic," says city advocate Kupilli Muralidhar.

While there's another facet to this that we tend to overlook — the liberalisation of divorce laws free many couples from unhappiness, literally saving the lives of women shackled to abusive men or vice versa! What can we learn? Undoubtedly, we need better marriages.

News that billionaires Bill and Melinda Gates were ending their marriage has received widespread attention! However, our exceptional interest in celebrities as a facile fascination with the lives of the rich and famous misses the point. They have still maintained that both of them will continue to work together in their philanthropic activities even after divorce. So, divorce can be painful or stressful, but it isn't bad. Moving on from an unhealthy has its own set of diffi-

culties that no one can actually prepare you for. From taking your time to heal from this massive heartbreak to feeling there's no shame in getting divorced, you can take many correct steps in the right direction to heal from it. The transformation coach guides, "Individuals who chose to embark their journey into singlehood should accept the situation as is and mould themselves in such a way that their life remains theirs to live and not the society to dictate it for them. Transition to singlehood is not an easy process especially if there's a child involved! As a single parent myself, I've had to deal with numerous obstacles both on personal and professional fronts. Give yourself all the time that is required to come into an acceptance of situation, seek professional help, know your self worth, learn from mistakes, refuse a stagnant life, attract opportunities and lastly, equip yourself with skills and knowledge to feel empowered and independent. It's just you who's in charge of the steering the wheel of your life."

Divorce is a part of the journey that life takes you through. It is accompanied by bittersweet lessons that allow us to progress as humans.

So, ask yourself today, why, as a society, do we show so much resistance to growth and change?

Couture: All about expression



Evolving as a designer is all about juxtaposing various layers of your life over your craft. At times, it involves research and technique exploration, sometimes, it is about interaction with artisans and creative individuals, and other times, it is more instinctive and spontaneous. Celebrities from various fields such as cinema, theatre, dance, music and sports make interesting muses for designers all over the world. These muses lend their own personality to the creations and tend to bring the garments to life. They are trendsetters that people admire and emulate. We have always strived to make a statement with our muses from various fields, Bollywood being one of them.

As designers, our design philosophy has always been "more is less". We have never shied away from maximalism. RAH creations tend to have several colours, techniques, embroideries, cultural and historical references layered over each other. Recreating generic florals and Mughal motifs alone have never been a way of design for us. Our take on design and its process is holistic and intuitive. The same comes into play when we make costumes for our Bollywood projects. Our love for both travel as well as vintage textiles provide us with a wide array of inspiration to draw upon and that reflects in both our couture collections as well as the work we do for styling Bollywood projects. We feel that whenever the audience sees our film costumes either on celluloid or in real life, they should take back something new from it every time and keep revisiting it in their thoughts even after the end credits have rolled. That is the underlying effect we want to have on the audience through the clothes we make.

Working on Bollywood projects such as *Padmaavat* and *Housefull 4* is not just about creating stunning garments but also depicting the creative team's vision for the characters and the storyline as authentically as possible. The costumes have to evolve in the same way the look of every character evolves through the film. Working with celebrities such as Deepika Padukone, Ranveer

Singh, Shahid Kapur and Akshay Kumar means that we need to strike the right balance between the actors' reel and real personas when it comes to styling them. These power-houses of talent tend to dive in and wholly imbibe their characters. There are times, on set that, one feels that we are interacting with the character and not the actor; and the clothes have to be in sync with the characters' moods as well as the overall flow of the narrative, bringing out the character's arc, the underlying emotions as well the intricate nature of the plot. So the colour palette, fabrics, embroideries, prints and other surface ornamentations all have to be worked out accordingly. We do extensive research on the characters we are working on and always try to imbibe the cultural and historical influences into each character's look and garments.

For all the films, we have done in the past and are currently working on, our endeavour has always been to not just make costumes but clothes that have subliminal layers, that speak a language, express the various nuances of the plot and bring out the cinematic journeys the characters undertake as they make their way through the narrative. As designers, we tend to explore new dimensions of detailing through the entire exercise of designing costumes and styling them for a film project. The process of creating the costumes for Bollywood projects is always one of constant evolution, a new learning experience every day. It is interesting for us, as designers, how our perception of drama in clothes also undergoes a change while working on these projects.

Besides working on the films, we regularly work with a number of celebs for their personal appearances. The idea of collaborating with people from various fields of the arts is always an exciting prospect for a designer. Couture is all about expression, and the synergy created by working with a fellow creative individual helps in creating fashion that is art. Dressing Bollywood celebrities definitely help us to connect with our target audience who tend to look up to celebs for their sartorial style and get inspired by them.



You understand things and people better when you know and listen to more of them. Same goes with understanding and being an ally to the LGBTQIA+ community. So here's how it can start. With the onset of the 51st Pride month, Audible has come out with a special selection of stories from and about LGBTQIA+ creators. From tales of a gay man's experiences in war-torn Afghanistan, to a chronicle of growing up as a transgender woman in India, Audible brings you these must-listen titles for Pride Month:

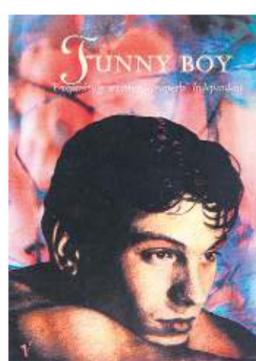
The Carpet Weaver



Written by Nemat Sadat and narrated by Abhishek Ajay

Sharma, *The Carpet Weaver* is a sweeping tale of a young gay man's struggle to come of age and find love in the face of brutal persecution. He is in the desperate search for a place to call home and the fervent hope of reuniting with his beloved Maihan.

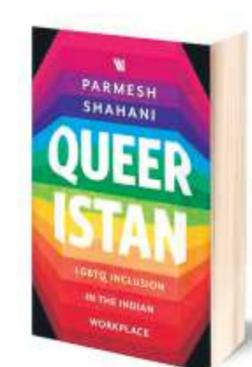
Funny Boy:



Novelist Shyam Selvadurai's coming of age novel is a story of Arjie Chelvaratnam, a Tamil boy growing up in an extended family in Colombo, non-conforming to gender norms. As Arjie falls in love with a queer Sinhalese class-

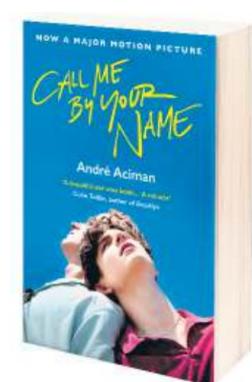
mate, he's forced to confront the hardening borders and violence of ethnic difference.

Queeristan:



In this genre-defying book, narrator and author Parmesh Shahani — vice president at Godrej Industries Ltd — draws from his decade-long journey in the corporate world as an out and proud gay man to make a cogent case for LGBTQ inclusion and lay down a step-by-step guide to reshaping office culture in today's India.

Call Me By Your Name:



The story, which has been adapted into a film, conjures a romance between two young men, Elio and Oliver, in an Italian seaside town. The book establishes Andre Aciman as a poet of the drunken senses and the audio-book will sway you away with the sheer depth of Hammer's voice.

So Now You Know:

This Vivek Teluja's memoir about growing up as a gay man in the 1990s. He realised at the age

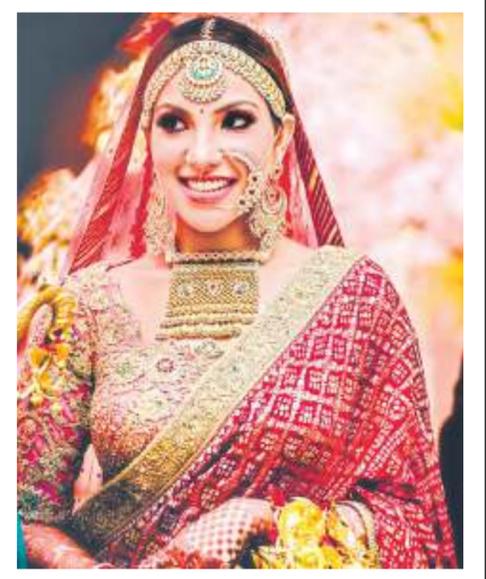
of eight that he was but Anupam Kher's stereotypical gay man's character in the movie *Mast Kalandar* made him shy away from his identity. The story is funny, poignant, heartwarming, and heart-breaking all at once.

Red Lipstick:

Red Lipstick is the story of Laxmi, born as a male, who quashes gender norms while experiencing the prejudices of femininity and masculinity. Racy, unapologetic, dark and exceptionally candid, her stories with men open a window to a brave new world.

Mae Martin's Guide to 21st Century Addiction and Sexuality:

Mae Martin is an award-winning Canadian comedian, writer and presenter of podcast *GrownUp Land*. In these two collected BBC Radio 4 series, she explores her generation's views on addiction and sexuality.





TWO IN 2 FOR AZZURRI

Mancini's men confirm Euro 2020 knockout berth with 3-0 win against Swiss

AFP ■ ROME

Italy became the first team to reach the knockout stage of Euro 2020 as midfielder Manuel Locatelli scored twice in a 3-0 win over Switzerland in Rome on Wednesday.

The Azzurri, now unbeaten in 29 matches and having won their last 10 games without



Italy's Manuel Locatelli, right, celebrates with his teammates after scoring his side's second goal during the Euro 2020 group A match between Italy and Switzerland at the Olympic stadium in Rome on Wednesday night. AP

conceding a goal, sit first in Group A and are guaranteed a top-two finish and last-16 berth. "We played well, we wanted to

win at all costs," Italy coach Roberto Mancini told RAI. "They started well, it was not easy to win a second game in

five days." Mancini's men, looking to win Italy a second European title after their sole success in

Eriksen to have heart defibrillator implanted

Copenhagen: Danish star Christian Eriksen, who suffered a cardiac arrest during his country's Euro 2020 opener last weekend, will have a heart defibrillator implanted, the Danish Football Union (DBU) announced on Thursday.

"After Christian has been through different heart examinations it has been decided that he should have an ICD (heart starter)," the Danish football body said in a statement on Twitter.

The device, which is an improved variant of a pacemaker, is "necessary after a cardiac attack due to rhythm disturbances," it added.

DBU provided no details on the potential consequences for the 29-year-old Inter Milan player's future career.

Eriksen "has accepted the solution" and it had also been "confirmed by specialists nationally and internationally who all recommend the same treatment," DBU said. AFP

Ukraine end 6-match losing run

AFP ■ BUCHAREST

Andriy Yarmolenko scored one goal and set up Roman Yaremchuk for another as Ukraine defeated North Macedonia 2-1 to boost their last-16 hopes at Euro 2020 on Thursday.

The West Ham forward grabbed the opener on 29 minutes in Bucharest and then teed up Yaremchuk with a brilliant first-time pass to double the lead five minutes later.

Ezgjani Alioski pulled a goal back for North Macedonia just before the hour as he converted the rebound from his missed penalty, while Ukraine midfielder Ruslan Malinovskyi also saw a late spot-kick saved.

Andriy Shevchenko's side are now level on three points with Austria and the Netherlands in Group C after Ukraine ended a six-match losing run in the competition.

Major tournament newcomers North Macedonia have lost their first two games and



Ukraine's Andriy Yarmolenko, left, reacts after scoring his team's first goal. AP

will be eliminated if the Dutch avoid defeat to Austria in Amsterdam, where victory for either side will secure a spot in the knockout phase.

Ukraine's 3-2 loss to the Netherlands last weekend saw them match the longest losing run in tournament history, a record shared with Yugoslavia, but they reignited their last-16 bid with a deserved victory over the Macedonians.

Yarmolenko edged closer to Shevchenko's all-time lead-

ing mark of 48 Ukraine goals, striking for the third game in a row as he slotted in from point-blank range after Oleksandr Karavaev's clever flick at a corner.

Yaremchuk had been guilty of wasting an excellent early chance when clean through on goal, but the Gent striker made no mistake when Yarmolenko's brilliant pass put him in the clear, squeezing the ball between Stole Dimitrievski and his near post.

1968, host Wales in their final group game on Sunday, with top spot up for grabs.

A new star shone for Italy at the Stadio Olimpico, where they had brushed aside Turkey 3-0 in the tournament's opening match last week, as Sassuolo's Locatelli scored twice before

Ciro Immobile's late third. Captain Giorgio Chiellini had an early effort ruled out by VAR for handball, before the 36-year-old defender was forced off with what appeared to be a thigh injury.

But the hosts always looked the more dangerous side and took the lead in the 26th minute.

Locatelli played a wonderful volleyed pass to his Sassuolo teammate Domenico Berardi on the wing, who powered to the byline and picked out Locatelli for a simple tap-in.

The three points and a place in the knockout phase for the fourth straight European Championship were all but secured less than seven minutes after the interval, when a flowing move ended with Locatelli driving a left-footed shot into the bottom corner from outside the box.

Immobile had wasted a couple of earlier chances but did grab his second goal of the tournament in the 89th minute, curling a low effort past Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer.

Switzerland will now likely have to beat Turkey in Baku on Sunday to reach the next round.



Outgoing Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos, right, poses with 4 UEFA Champions League and 5 La Liga trophies that he won as a player during his 16 year stay at Santiago Bernabeu. @realmadrid

Ramos says goodbye to Real Madrid

AFP ■ MADRID

Sergio Ramos broke down in tears, saying leaving Real Madrid was one of the most difficult moments of his life as he bid farewell on Thursday after 16 years at the club.

The defender played 671 games for Real Madrid and will be remembered as one of the club's greatest ever players, having won five La Liga titles and four Champions Leagues.

The 35-year-old, who struggled for fitness and form last season, was unable to agree an extension to his contract and will become a free agent on July 1.

Ramos and Real Madrid president Florentino Perez delivered short speeches in a presentation room at the club's training ground, with Ramos' family in the audience.

"The moment has come, one of the most difficult in my life, because you are never ready to leave Real Madrid," Ramos said. "The fans supported me in the good moments and the bad. I would have liked to say goodbye in the stadium.

"A wonderful stage is closing, one that has been unique in my life, but an exciting new chapter begins and I go into it with a lot of desire to show

my quality for many years to come."

Ramos said he wants to "add more titles" to his record and added "this is not a goodbye but a see you later because sooner or later I will return to Real Madrid."

Perez said it was "not an easy day", remembering how he signed Ramos, aged 19, from Sevilla for 27 million euros in 2005.

"He arrived wanting to take on the world," said Perez. "You are undoubtedly one of legends of Real Madrid. You have grown as a player here and been our iconic captain for years."

Buffon returns to Parma after 2 decades

Turin: Goalkeeping legend Gianluigi Buffon has returned to Parma two decades after leaving the Italian club who were relegated last season.

"He is back where he belongs, he is back home. Superman returns," the club said on Twitter along with a short video in which 43-year-old Buffon said: "OK Kyle (Krause) I'm in. I'm back."

Club owner Kyle Krause replied: "Great news, welcome home."

Buffon holds the record for Serie A matches played with 657, since his first with Parma in 1995 as a 17-year-old. Since then, Buffon has



Goalkeeping legend Gianluigi Buffon as a Parma player. @ParmaCalcio_en

played just one season in Serie B when Juventus were demoted in 2006-2007 for the 'Calciopoli' match-fixing scandal.

The former World Cup winner announced last month he was leaving Juventus, the club he had played for since moving from Parma in 2001, apart from one season with Paris Saint-Germain in 2018-2019.

Former Italy captain Buffon is an iconic figure in Italian football, one of the stars of the Azzurri's 2006 World Cup triumph who racked up a record 176 caps for his country.

Buffon won 10 Serie A

titles with Juventus, as well as five Italian Cups with the club and second-tier Serie B in 2007.

He also won Ligue 1 with PSG in 2018-2019 before returning to the Turin giants. He won the UEFA Cup back in 1999 with Parma.

However, he has never won the Champions League after losing finals with Juve in 2003, 2015 and 2017.

Buffon has reportedly signed a two-year deal with the Emilia-Romagna side with a guarantee of being captain and number one goalkeeper and having a role in the club when his career ends.

shortpasses

US OPEN TO ALLOW 100% CROWD

NEW YORK: The US Open tennis tournament will allow 100% spectator capacity throughout its entire two weeks in 2021.

RAFA OUT OF WIMBLEDON, OLY

MADRID: Rafael Nadal on Thursday said he's withdrawing from Wimbledon and the Tokyo Olympics in a bid "to prolong my career".

IOA ROPES IN MPL AS SPONSOR

NEW DELHI: The Indian Olympic Association on Thursday roped in mobile gaming platform, MPL Sports Foundation as the principal sponsor of the country's contingent for the upcoming Tokyo Olympics and next year's Birmingham Commonwealth Games.

8 DEBUTANTS IN WOMEN'S TEAM

NEW DELHI: India on Thursday named eight Olympic debutants and as many veterans in its 16-member women's hockey squad for the Tokyo Games.

AZHAR SUSPENDED

HYDERABAD: The Apex Council of Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) has 'suspended' its own president, former India captain Mohammed Azharuddin, for alleged violation of its constitution.

GATTUSO LEAVES FIORENTINA

FLORENCE: Gennaro Gattuso and Fiorentina have agreed to part ways, just over three weeks after the former Italy international was appointed as coach at the Serie A club.

JAPAN TO LIFT VIRUS EMERGENCY

TOKYO: Japan plans to lift Tokyo's virus emergency on June 20, a month before the Olympics, the Govt announced on Thursday.

MILKHA 'STABLE AND IMPROVING'

CHANDIGARH: Legendary Indian sprinter Milkha Singh is 'stable and improving' under the constant supervision of a medical team at the PGIMER after having recovered from Covid-19, which he contracted last month.

DOCTORS 'KILLED' MARADONA

SAN ISIDRO: A lawyer for a nurse under investigation in the death of football great Diego Maradona said that doctors killed him through negligence.

TOMORI COMPLETES MILAN MOVE

MILAN: Chelsea defender Fikayo Tomori has made his loan move to AC Milan permanent agreeing a four-year deal with the Serie A runners-up on Thursday.

WI RECALL BRAVO, GABRIEL

ST LUCIA: West Indies recall pacer Shannon Gabriel and batsman Darren Bravo for the second Test against South Africa. Agencies

India, NZ ready for ultimate Test

Kohli & Kane will fight for a taste of silverware after near misses in recent ICC campaigns



PTI ■ SOUTHAMPTON

WTC Final (Day 1)
Live from 3:00 pm IST
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

INDIA-NEW ZEALAND IN TESTS

Venue	Played	Ind won	NZ won	Drawn
In India	34	16	2	16
In NZ	25	5	10	10
Total	59	21	12	26
Last 5 matches	5	3	2	-

HIGHEST TOTAL

India	583-7 dec at Ahmedabad	1999-00
New Zealand	680-8 dec at Wellington	2013-14

TOP SCORE

India	231 Vinoo Mankad at Chennai	1955-56
New Zealand	302 Brendon McCullum at Wellington	2013-14

BEST BOWLING (I)

India	8-72 S Venkatraghavan at Delhi	1964-65
New Zealand	7-23 Richard Hadlee at Wellington	1975-76

FAISEL FEATURES

Virat Kohli carries the expectations of a billion while cricket romantics will pin their hopes on Kane Williamson when India and New Zealand engage in a battle to create a lasting legacy in pristine whites in the inaugural World Test Championship final starting here on Friday.

For the connoisseurs of the glorious game, Test cricket is the ultimate format and despite its aura, the 144-year-old history needed a facelift along with a context which the World Test Championship provided despite various bottlenecks, including the Covid-19 pandemic.

For Kohli, India's most successful Test captain, a trophy-less cabinet doesn't do justice to the champion performer that he has been for a decade.

Kohli needs a global triumph. Every captain needs it but perhaps the Indian captain wants it more.

It's how history will remember him just like it remembers Dhoni with a lot of respect and utmost fondness for those heroic World title wins.

Williamson stands in his way with a bunch of fine cricketers and the most amiable set of players that one would come across in International cricket.

They are India's rivals but when Williamson hits those cover drives, Devon Conway teases a Ravichandran Ashwin or Ravindra Jadeja, Trent Boult gets one banana inswinger aimed at Rohit Sharma's bootlaces, the crazy fans of a cricket-mad nation wouldn't possibly be able to hate them.

These are 'Gentlemen Cricketers' who have grown on the fans bit by bit with their cricket and their conduct. It's difficult not to love them, especially after their gut-wrenching World Cup defeat at the Lord's two summers back.

If Williamson happens to stand with the ICC Test Mace on the Hampshire Bowl balcony, one might just smile and think that perhaps "Nice guys don't always finish last".

But after two years and half a dozen series later, a battle-hardened Indian team will give its all in a match, from which the winning team will also walk away with a \$1.6 million wind-fall.

There are a number of cricketers, who wouldn't practically have a shot at any other global trophy and for them it's their 'World Cup' which they want

to lay their hands on.

Cheteshwar Pujara would be ready to take more bruises on his body if Neil Wagner starts bowling short. Ajinkya Rahane has grown in stature after a series for the ages and he will squeeze that extra ounce of energy to make it count.

Ravichandran Ashwin is unlikely to play a white ball World Cup again and wouldn't mind one bit if he can fool Williamson, Ross Taylor or the dogged Henry Nicholls with a carrom ball or a slider.

Ishant Sharma has grown 14 years older since that epic WACA spell to Ricky Ponting and India's senior-most player deserves to win a World Championship as much as anyone else.

Man to man, there is very little to choose between the two teams even

No surprises in India's playing XI

Southampton: India on Thursday went for tried and tested players, preferring veteran Ishant Sharma over Mohammed Siraj in the playing eleven for the World Test Championship final.

On expected lines, the team picked two specialist spinners in Ravindra Jadeja and R Ashwin, who are also more than handy with the bat.

The three pacers are Ishant, Mohammad Shami and Jasprit Bumrah, leaving no space for the impressive Siraj. Wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant will bat at number six.

though playing New Zealand in conditions that aid seam and swing isn't the easiest of tasks.

A final has its own set of pressures and no one would feel it more than Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill, who would have the hardest job currently in Test cricket.

They would face the most under-rated but perhaps the best new ball pair in the business in Boult and Southee, who would make the new ball jag around and the old ball talk.

Kyle Jamieson hasn't played against England in Edgbaston but Williamson knows what kind of a nightmare he was with his steep back-of-length bounce generated from his 6 feet 9 inch frame. If that's not enough, Wagner will pound it in with stuff aimed at rib-cage enticing the batters to go for the hook and pull shots or take it on the body.

TEAMS

India: Virat Kohli (C), Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Rishabh Pant (wk), Ravindra Jadeja, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Jasprit Bumrah.
New Zealand: Kane Williamson (C), Tom Blundell, Trent Boult, Devon Conway, Colin de Grandhomme, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Tom Latham, Henry Nicholls, Ajaz Patel, Tim Southee, Ross Taylor, Neil Wagner BJ Watling and Will Young.



Indian batswoman Smriti Mandhana plays shot against England during 2nd Day play of the one-off Test between the two sides in Bristol. @BCCIWomen

Indian openers start strong after England post 396-9

PTI ■ BRISTOL

Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana provided India Women a confident start but the visitors still have a mountain to climb after England Women posted a mammoth 396 for nine in their first innings in the one-off Test, here on Friday.

It was the highest-ever total scored by a team against India in Test cricket and the visitors are still trailing by 333 runs with Verma (35 not out) and Mandhana (27 not out) taking India to 63 for no loss at tea on the second day.

Verma was at her usual aggressive self as she cut and pulled in her own inimitable style. The 17-year-old not only presented the straight bat for defence with grace, she also hit a six off Nat Sciver with remarkable ease. It was only the second six hit by an Indian woman in Test cricket.

Mandhana was cautious yet fluent. She got her first boundary when she punched one off Sciver in the cover region. When she got the opportunity, Mandhana did not hesitate to pull. Her elegant drives were a

Eng vs India (Day 3)
Live from 3:30 pm IST
SONY TEN 1 NETWORK

delight to watch. She raised the team's fifty with one such well-timed shot off Kate Cross.

Cross missed a chance to dismiss Mandhana (when on 23) when she dropped the left-hander in her follow through.

This was after Indian bowlers were made to put in some hard yards for the second consecutive day.

Debutant Sophia Dunkley (74 not out) led the charge with a resolute unbeaten half-century and two crucial partnerships with tail-enders after England resumed at the overnight score of 269 for six.

Dunkley first added 56 runs for the eighth wicket with Sophie Ecclestone (17) and then forged a 70-run stand with Anya Shrubsole, who punished the Indian bowlers in her career-best 47.

England declared their innings when Shrubsole was bowled by Sneha Rana, who ended up as India's best bowler with a four-wicket haul.

MY CHARACTER HAS A LOT OF SCOPE FOR PERFORMANCE:

RASHMIKA ON *PUSHPA*



Kannada beauty Rashmika Mandanna who is currently busy shooting for Allu Arjun-starrer *Pushpa*, a pan India film, which is directed by Sukumar of *Rangasthalam* fame, is the most trending and sought-after actors of Telugu cinema who is also making her Bollywood debut very soon. The makers have already released the film teaser. The film's teaser offered a couple of glimpses of Rashmika Mandanna's village belle *avatar*. Recently during the interview, *Bheeshma* girl spoke about *Pushpa* and expressed her confidence.

Rashmika Mandanna said that her role would leave her fans pleasantly surprised. Her character in *Pushpa* would take everyone by surprise. Rashmika added, "It's a village girl character and it has a lot of scope for the performance."

The makers of *Pushpa* have already announced that the movie will be

released in two parts. Mollywood star Fahadh Faasil has been roped in to play the main antagonist.

Pushpa is being bankrolled by Mythri Movie Makers and Muttamsetty Media, and it has the music by Devi Sri Prasad.

Pushpa features Icon Star Allu Arjun in the role of a red sandalwood smuggler. Most of the film is being shot in the interiors of some forests in AP.

Meanwhile, Rashmika was last seen playing the female lead role in Tamil film *Sulthan*, in which she was paired with Karthi. The film was directed by Bakkiyaraj Kannan.



THAMAN TO ENTERTAIN WITH *ALA AMERICA PURAMULOO*

Thaman is known for his thumping and teasing music casting a magic spell on movie lovers. Movie lovers still cannot forget the magic he created with Allu Arjun's *Ala Vaikunthapuramlo*. He is currently scoring music for high-profile films like *Akhanda*, *Tuck Jagadish*, *Sarkaruvari Paata*, and *Agent*.

In the meantime, Thaman is set to entertain music lovers in the USA with the musical show *Ala Americapuramulo*. Hamsini

Entertainment which is known for organizing music shows across the world is organizing this biggest musical show in the US. Hamsini Entertainment earlier organized musical concerts with AR.Rahman and Anirudh Ravichander.

Thaman is now the most sought-after music director and he is also scoring BGM for a Bollywood film titled *Sooryavanshi*. Thaman will tour the US as a part of this program in August and September and perform live in Washington D.C, Chicago, New Jersey, San Jose, and Dallas.

Alia Bhatt hits gym for *RRR*



and reports have it that she even slashed her remuneration for the project. Alia who charges more than Rs 10 crore per project is now charging on a daily basis.

Apparently, she is getting Rs 50 lakh per day and for her 14 days schedule, she will get Rs 5-7 crore. Now reports are coming that Rajamouli asked Alia to shed weight for her role and Alia is working hard for the same in the gym.

Alia is playing the role of Seeta, Ram Charan playing the role of Alluri Seetha Rama Raju. NTR is seen in the role of

Komaram Bheem. The film also stars Ajay Devgn, Olivia Morris, Shriya Sharan, Samuthirakhani, Ray Stevenson, and Alison Doody in important roles.

Rajamouli's *RRR* is generating immense interest among movie lovers across the country. It is

coming out that Bollywood beauty Alia Bhatt is giving *RRR* utmost importance among her current projects. She already allotted dates on first preference to *RRR*

Sharwanand may team up with short film maker Deepak Reddy

Sharwanand who was last seen in romantic drama *Jaanu* alongside Samantha Akkineni, is currently working with *RX 100* fame Ajay Bhupathi for an action drama *Maha Samudram*. He has already won the hearts of his fans and the movie lovers with his performance in previous films. The critically acclaimed *Prasthanam*, *Malli Malli Idi Rani Roju* and other movies proved that he has the ability to portray mature characters. His rom-coms *Run Raja Run*, *Express Raja*, and *Mahanubhavudu* showed Sharwanand is equally comfortable in comic roles. Now according to the latest update, Sharwanand has signed an upcoming new Telugu film which will be helmed by a short film director Deepak Reddy. Deepak Reddy is known



for his short film *Manasa Namaha*, which won many International Awards and now he is planning to make his debut as a director in Telugu film industry with Sharwanand-starrer. The popular UV Creations banner which introduced many newcomers is going to bankroll Deepak Reddy's directorial

venture. The sources say that the producers of UV Creations are very impressed with the story which was narrated by Deepak Reddy, so they decided to produce the film.

Reports are coming that Sharwanand, who also liked his character, gave his green signal for the film.

Tamannaah, Vijay Sethupathi, Prithviraj, Sudeep to host 'Masterchef' South versions



Actress Tamannaah Bhatia has been roped in as the host of the debut season of the cooking reality show "Master Chef Telugu". Vijay Sethupathi will host the Tamil version, Prithviraj Sukumaran the Malayalam version and Kichcha Sudeep will host Kannada version of the show.

"I'm very excited about this development. I've always been extremely passionate about cooking and food as a subject matter.

Owing to my chaotic shooting schedule I've never been able to fully commit myself to the love for culinary creativity," Tamannaah said.

She added, "But yes I do enjoy cooking up a storm in the kitchen once in a while for my loved ones in my free time. I can't wait to treat myself to all the exotic culinary delights on set. It's going to be extremely exciting and gratifying."

