

NATION 5
'PRIYANKA CONG'S 'CAPTAIN' IN UP, PARTY WILL
EMERGE AS PRINCIPAL CHALLENGER SOON'

MONEY 8
TRAVEL INDUSTRY LIKELY
TO REACH 35-40 PC REVENUE

SPORTS 12
KIWIS INCH CLOSER
TOWARDS WTC TITLE

VIJAYAWADA, THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



'I AM TRAINED
IN INDIAN
CLASSICAL
MUSIC'
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BJP GOT RS 276.45CR FROM ELECTORAL TRUSTS IN 2019-20, CONGRESS RS 58CR

The BJP received Rs 276.45 crore or 76.17 per cent of total donations given to all political parties from electoral trusts in 2019-20, according to a report by ADR (Association for Democratic Reforms). The BJP was followed by the Congress which received Rs 58 crore or 15.98 percent of total donations received by all parties. The report that analysed contribution reports of electoral trusts for financial year 2019-20 said top donors included JSW, Apollo Tyres, Indiabulls, Delhi International Airport and DLF groups.



CABINET APPROVES EXTENSION OF PMGKAY FOR 5 MONTHS TILL NOV

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved a proposal to extend the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana to provide free ration to over 80 crore people, mostly poor, for five more months till November-end. The PMGKAY was reintroduced for two months till June this year in order to minimise the economic hardships being faced by the poor PDS beneficiaries during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Early this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that the Centre's free food programme PMGKAY will be extended for five months till Diwali.



MOODY'S SLASHES INDIA GROWTH FORECAST FOR 2021 TO 9.6 PERCENT

Moody's Investors Service on Wednesday slashed India's growth projection to 9.6 per cent for 2021 calendar year, from its earlier estimate of 13.9 per cent, and said faster vaccination progress will be paramount in restricting economic losses to June quarter. In its report titled 'Macroeconomics - India: Economic shocks from second COVID wave will not be as severe as last year's', Moody's said high-frequency economic indicators show that the second wave of COVID-19 infections hit India's economy in April and May.



CCI PROBES GOOGLE FOR 'UNFAIR BIZ' WAYS IN SMART TV OP SYSTEMS MKT

The Competition Commission has ordered a detailed probe against Google for alleged anti-competitive practices in the smart television operating systems market in the country. After assessing a complaint, the watchdog has reached the prima-facie view that Google is dominant in the relevant market for licensable smart TV device operating systems in India. In a 24-page order, the CCI said that prima-facie mandatory pre-installation of all the Google applications under TADA amounts to imposition of unfair conditions on the smart TV device manufacturers.



HC registers cases for 'clean chit' to Jagan

CPRADEEP KUMAR
VIJAYAWADA

In an unprecedented step, the Andhra Pradesh High Court on Wednesday registered 11 suo motu criminal revision cases against the withdrawal of criminal cases against Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy by the YSRCP Government.

The decision to register cases suo motu was taken by the High Court on the administrative side after it received complaints regarding the withdrawal of cases against the Chief Minister on the orders of different magistrates.

The unprecedented step was strongly objected to by Advocate General Subrahmanyam Sriram. The A-G argued that the cases



registered in purported exercise of powers under Sections 397, 401, 482 and 483 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, could not have been initiated by the High Court on its administrative side. He said the government lawyers were told that the cases were registered

suo motu on the basis of a report of the administrative committee of the High Court, but were not given the copies of the reports of the committee.

Sriram said that it was unprecedented that the High Court in its administrative committee had decided to take suo motu cognisance before placing it before the bench for judicial consideration. That is impermissible, he argued.

Through the suo motu action, the A-G said, the High Court has stepped into the shoes of the complainant, who was otherwise entitled to challenge the magistrate's orders. Complainant is not barred otherwise from approaching this court," Sriram said.

SEC challenges Parishad polls cancellation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Election Commissioner Nilam Sawhney on Wednesday filed a petition in the Andhra Pradesh High Court challenging the cancellation of MPTC and ZPTC elections in the state.

The SEC filed a petition before a division bench challenging the single bench directions. The petition is likely to be taken up on Thursday. Earlier, the High Court quashed the notification issued by the State Election Commission on April 1 in connection with the conducting of ZPTC and MPTC elections on April 8.

The notification issued by the SEC was contrary to the directions given by the Supreme Court to impose the Election Code four weeks before the polling date.

Will successfully conduct Class 12 board exams, AP govt assures SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Andhra Pradesh government on Wednesday told the Supreme Court that it will be able to conduct Class 12 exams successfully as there are no reliable alternatives to assess the state board students.

The State government said it will tentatively hold the Class 12 examination in the last week of July and the time table would be issued shortly. In its affidavit, filed through Standing Counsel for the State Mahfooz A Nazki, the AP government said that Covid-19 cases are fast declining in the state.

It gave figures of Covid cases for June 20 — 5,646, June 21 — 5,541 and June 22 — 4,169 cases and compared them with last month's corresponding dates May 20 — 22,610, May 21 — 20,937 cases and



May 22 — 19,981 cases.

"Experts have been consulted and they are of the view that it will be feasible to hold the examination. The State accordingly shall endeavour to conduct the examination tentatively in the last week of July 2021. The actual time table shall be

issued shortly and intimated to the students and parents 15 days in advance," the affidavit said.

Practical exams have already been conducted from March 31 to April 24, 2021, it said.



Govt appoints specified authority for TTD

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government on Wednesday appointed a specified authority, putting to rest all speculation that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's uncle YV Subba Reddy will be allowed to continue as chairman of TTD.

A few days after YSRCP came to power in 2019, the then Government appointed the chairman and members of TTD Trust Board. The term of the Trust Board was completed on June 21.

The Government, in exercise of the powers conferred under Section 137 of AP Charitable and Hindu Religious Institutions and Endowments Act, 1987 appointed the Specified Authority with the Executive Officer as chairman and Additional Executive Officer as Convener.

The Specified Authority will exercise all the powers and perform all the functions of the Board of Trustees of TTD, until further orders.

LS Speaker's 'clerical' response to petition on Raju angers YSRCP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 'clerical reply' from the office of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on the disqualification petition against Narasapuram MP K Raghunath Ramakrishna Raju has left YSRCP MPs seething.

The rebel MP's regular potshots at the YSRCP government is believed to have added fuel to their anger.

Nearly 11 months after the petition seeking disqualification of Raju on charges of anti-party activities was submitted, the office of the Lok Sabha Speaker recently replied, advising the YSRCP to further amend the petition in accordance with the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908.

"After more than 11 months of us filing the petition, we have got a reply

from your esteemed office. Far from acting on our petition, the reply asks us to further amend it in accordance with the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908. This is as far as prudent logic is considered, a clerical reply and should have been brought to our notice much earlier and not after successful completion of two parliament sessions," wrote YSRCP Parliamentary Party leader V Vijayasai Reddy to Om Birla.

40 cases of virulent Delta plus variant found in Maha, Kerala

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There are over 40 cases in the country of the new Delta Plus strain, which has been tagged as a "Variant of Concern" by the government.

Yesterday, the government sent a warning to Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh on Delta Plus cases found there and urged "immediate containment measures". According to the letter, Delta Plus cases have been found in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri and Jalgaon; in Palakkad and Pathanamthitta in Kerala; and in Bhopal and Shivpuri in Madhya Pradesh.

A four-year-old is among those infected in Kerala. "As of now among the samples

sequenced (45,000+) in India, Delta plus variant -- AY.1 -- has been observed sporadically in Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh, with around 40 cases identified so far and no significant increase in prevalence," the ministry said in its statement. Sources say that cases of the new strain, a mutation of the Delta strain or B.1.617.2 variant first detected in India, are not confined to these states.

There are 21 cases in Maharashtra, six in Madhya Pradesh, three in Kerala, three in Tamil Nadu, two in Karnataka and one each in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Jammu, according to sources.

what is Delta plus

The Delta Plus or AY.1 strain has been found mainly in Maharashtra, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh and these states have been urged by the Centre to take "immediate containment steps". Cases have been found in Madhya Pradesh's Bhopal and Shivpuri, Maharashtra's Ratnagiri and Jalgaon and Kerala's Palakkad and Pathanamthitta. The Health Ministry says the role of Delta Plus in immune escape, disease severity or increased transmissibility "is under continued surveillance".

AP to collect seigniorage fee on granite industry

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The cash-strapped AP government, which has been looking at every possible avenue to mop up resources to fund its welfare agenda, has now set its sights on possible revenue leakages from the thriving granite industry.

The government has now decided to collect seigniorage fee on granite on tonnage basis instead of the existing volumetric basis. It was also decided to have a Centralised Command Control System that tracks granite-laden vehicles.

CC cameras will also be installed in all the existing leases and integrate them to the nearest weigh bridges. All these weigh bridges will be integrated with the Centralised Command Control System.

Not just this — every granite-laden vehicle will be fitted with a GPS instrument and will be monitored through the Command Control System.

The Mines Department has already decided to outsource the



collection of seigniorage fee of all minor minerals in the state. The government is of the view that collection of seigniorage fee through the third party agencies would increase revenue by 35 percent to 40 percent.

Mines Department officials are finding it difficult to effectively monitor mineral transportation, identify potential leakage areas and collect taxes and penalties, which is leading to loss of revenue to the state exchequer.

Telangana govt 'concerned' about AP's 'illegal' projects

ML MELLY MAITREYI
HYDERABAD

The opposition parties in TS may be skeptical about the strong statements being issued by Telangana Ministers and underplaying the seriousness of the water theft charges made by the TRS government. Yet, government sources are indeed aghast at the blatant manner in which the AP government has been 'flouting rules' to tap Krishna water.

Even as Telangana State has been seeking rightful general allocation of the Krishna waters post bifurcation, the AP government has been going ahead with its own projects that would necessitate drawing water over and above the allocations made under the Krishna Water Tribunal, according to sources.

Irrigation Special Chief Secretary Rajat Kumar briefed the State Cabinet on Saturday about the illegal constructions relating to the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme and the Rajolibanda Diversion Scheme right canal.

No lens on deposits up to Rs 2.5L

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Cash deposits of up to Rs 2.5 lakh by housewives post demonetisation will not come under I-T scrutiny as the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) has held that such deposits cannot be treated as income of the assessee.

Ruling on an appeal filed by an individual, the Agra bench of ITAT said the order would act as a precedent for all similar cases.

The appellant, a housewife Uma Agrawal of Gwalior, had declared total income of Rs 1,30,810 in her income tax return filed for fiscal 2016-17. However, post demoneti-

sation, the assessee deposited the Rs 2,11,500 cash in her bank account.

The case was selected for scrutiny assessment, during which the assessee was asked to explain the cash deposit of over Rs 2.11 lakh.

TODAY
ALMANAC
Month & Paksham: Jyeshtha & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi : Purnima 24:08
Nakshatram : Jyeshtha 09:10
Time to Avoid : Time to Avoid (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam : 1:56 pm - 3:34 pm
Yamagandam : 5:47 am - 7:25 am
Varjyam : 4:20 pm - 5:46 pm, 7:45 am - 9:10 am
Gulika : 9:03 am - 10:40 am
Good Time : (to start any important work)
Amritkalam : 12:56 am - 2:22 am
Abhijit Muhurtham : 11:52 am - 12:44 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER
Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 37
Humidity: 53%
Sunrise: 05:43 am
Sunset: 06:54 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated JUNE 23, 2021 5:00 PM

Govt backs Vizag to become major IT hub

SNV SUDHIR
VIJAYAWADA

Pointing out that the infrastructure being developed by the YSRCP government and the upcoming international airport will increase the stature of the city, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Wednesday said that Vizag would become a major hub for the IT sector in the future.

Chairing a review meeting on IT policy, electronic manufacturing clusters and digital libraries at his camp office here, the Chief Minister said that the main objective of the IT policy should be to generate good jobs for the youth. "Vizag will become a hub for the



IT sector in the future. The city will become an attractive destination for IT companies over a period of time. Vizag should be made the centre for quality education so that talented human resources will be avail-

able," he stated. The Chief Minister said a "best" IT university should be set up in Vizag and it should become a destination for modern technology learning. He said the state govern-

All tourist places open for visitors from today

ment will give incentives every year to the companies that come up in the state.

MAA ELECTIONS Prakash Raj pushes the envelope in Kamma-Kapu rivalry

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

The upcoming elections to the Movie Artists' Association (MAA), though traditionally seen as a battle for supremacy between Kammass and Kapus, could be vastly different this time, with actor Prakash Raj, who belongs to neither community and who is known for his staunch support for freedom of expression, being the front-runner for the president's post. In a parallel move aimed at splitting women's votes, candi-



dates backed respectively by camps of the 'Dialogue King' and 'Mega Star', rivals in real life, are also in the fray on either side of the Kamma-Kapu divide.

KCR STYLE

Saha Pankthi Bhojanam to bond with people

If one observes keenly the speeches and interactions of Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao during his recent tours of Siddipet, Kamareddy, Warangal and Yadadri Bhuvanagiri districts, one would understand that he has now embarked upon a lofty mission of bringing about a qualitative change in contemporary politics. He is trying to bring in awareness among people to sift through divisive politics and development.

During his visit to Siddipet and Kamareddy, KCR's emphasis was on the slew of administrative reforms and how they had brought a transformation in the lives of people. During his visit to Warangal to perform Bhoomi Pujya for a super speciality hospital, open administrative block of Kaloji Health University, and inaugurate the new Collectorate building, KCR spoke eloquently as is his wont.

In his Warangal speech, which was something like a Warangal Declaration, the emphasis was on health and the need to develop other cities on par with, or even more than, Hyderabad, the need for media to act responsibly when we are facing turbulent times due to the Covid-19 epidemic. He repeatedly told people not to do politics, except at the time of elections. He asked them to rise above the differences of caste, creed and community and work unitedly for the development of their village, town and city. He advised public representatives to be always among people and understand their day-to-day problems and find immediate solutions to them.

While instructing the officials concerned to develop the super speciality hospital coming up on the lines of major hospitals in Canada, he asked them to complete the complex -- with more than 30 floors as well as a helipad on its terrace -- in 18 months' time.

Some of the people watching this were reminded of how Bhagwan Satya Saibaba, in the late 80s, had asked the L&T representative who was entrusted with the construction of a super speciality hospital in Puttaparthi, how much time he needed. The L&T Chief then replied that they need two years to complete the construction. To

KCR did not mince words while criticising the media, especially the electronic media, for creating panic and fear among people on the spread of Corona virus. But he was polite and in his inimitable style gave a piece of his mind to media not to indulge in creating fear.



VANAM JWALA NARASIMHA RAO
CHIEF PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER OF CHIEF MINISTER OF TELANGANA

which, Sri Satya Saibaba said, "No. It should be completed in a year. Exactly from the day I lay foundation stone, I should open the hospital one year from the same day." It happened exactly the way Sri Satya Saibaba wanted. Similarly, KCR said the entire hospital should be ready for the inauguration in 18 months. No doubt, it would be ready.

KCR did not mince words while criticising the media, especially the electronic media, for creating panic and fear among people on the spread of Corona virus. But he was polite and in his inimitable style gave a piece of his mind to media not to indulge in creating fear. While doctors, scientists, epidemiologists in the world have not yet finalized the treatment protocol for Corona as on date, running 24x7 programmes on the possible reasons for the spread and treatment was not correct and the media should not play with public health, he suggested. He said many died due to the fear of Corona rather than from the virus per se.

At the Gram Sabha in Vasalamarri village, which he has adopted, the Chief Minister, as an excellent teacher and a father figure, in simple words explained to the people about Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi social entrepreneur, banker, econo-

mist and civil society leader who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for founding the Grameen Bank and pioneering the concepts of microcredit and microfinance. The Grameen Bank is an institution that provides microcredit (small loans to poor people possessing no collateral) to help its clients establish credit worthiness and financial self-sufficiency. KCR wanted people, especially women to form such groups, become economically self-reliant, and contribute to the overall development of their village in particular and society in general. He desired that Vasalamarri village should develop and prosper in such way that people all over the globe should visit the village to undertake a hands-on study to replicate.

The Vedas equated food with Brahman. It also compared Saha Pankthi Bhojanam to collective meditation. The Saha Pankthi Bhojanam creates brotherhood, a feeling of unity, and belongingness and it leads to bonding among the participants. KCR used this practice to bond with people.

It is said that eloquence is the power to translate a truth into language perfectly intelligible to the person to whom you speak and the finest example of eloquence is that which gets things done. This is exactly what KCR does when he addresses people.

Be it law and order, medical and health, education, development, agriculture, women or any subject, his total grip and understanding of the subject he talks about is amazing. Statistics and data are on his fingertips or the tip of his tongue; he does not require any teleprompter or bureaucrat's passion chits of information. His words come from his heart and the subject from his brain. No other leader in contemporary society has the gift of gab that KCR has and none can beat him in that.

(With VJM Divakar)

NBFC emerge as a life-saver for some during Covid crisis

C PRADEEP KUMAR
VIJAYAWADA

With Covid first and the second waves shattering the lives of the common man and most businesses wrecked, the 'gold loan' business saw unprecedented patronage. A majority of the people worst hit by Covid hypothesized their gold ornaments for instant cash at various banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) during the pandemic.

In fact, a huge number of people who lost their various sources of income due to Covid lockdown depended mostly on gold loans to survive needs. This was more true of many who had to pay hospital bills and treatment expenses.

Also, many companies, at short notice, laid off employees during both the first and second waves, pushing them into a financial crisis during lockdown and forcing them to depend on alternative revenue sources. A few people relied on short term loans, others withdrew their fixed deposits and others relied upon gold loans by hypothecating ornaments for their basic needs.

Gold loans were taken to pay house rent and for other essential needs like education expenses of children. "There was an unprecedented footfall of people seeking gold loans at all our branches," V Rajesh, manager of an NBFC. He said that during the second quarter of 2021 right

from March a sizable number of customers visited the NBFC. Rajesh said that people prefer to take loans at his company as the process is simple and fast. "During the Covid second wave, we saw business double. A few branches that do business of Rs 2 lakh to Rs 8 lakh did business of Rs 20 to Rs 25 lakh per day," Rajesh said, adding that even the recoveries are good.

M Sambasiva Rao, a software engineer said that to pay hospital bills for Covid treatment, his family had to hypothecate gold at an NBFC.

He said that they preferred an NBFC as the process was simple compared to a time-consuming banking transaction. "One should have a bank account in that particular bank from where he or she

wants to take a loan. This is not the criteria in the case of an NBFC. It took barely two hours to get a loan of Rs 2 lakh as there were too many customers waiting to take loan," Sambasiva Rao said.

SBI NRI branch manager S Venkateswara Rao said that a new product 'Kavach' was introduced by the State Bank of India for Covid patients.

The new product enables the Covid victims to avail Rs 5 loan at lower interest in the case of a salaried person, that too without any security. The scheme offers Rs 3 lakh loan for non-salaried people.

Venkateswara Rao said there was a good response from the customers seeking gold loans which is slightly on the higher side compared to earlier times.

AP logs 4,684 new cases, 36 deaths

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported 4,684 fresh cases of coronavirus, 7,324 recoveries and 36 deaths in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday.

Consequently, the total positive cases increased to 18,62,036, recoveries to 17,98,380 and deaths to 12,452, the latest bulletin said. The number of active cases declined further to 51,204, it said.

East Godavari district once again reported new cases in excess of 1,000, logging 1,171 in 24 hours while West Godavari added 660. Chittoor registered 493 fresh cases.

Three districts reported between 300 and 360 cases each, three districts between 200 and 300 each, while four others logged less than 200 each, with Kurnool adding only 73.

HC registers cases for...

Continued from Page 1

The A-G also mentioned that certain media channels conducted channel debates about the matter on Tuesday night, soon after the cause list was published, which amounted to a "media trial." Since the channel discussions were full-fledged and detailed discussions, it means that the TV channels got all necessary documents relating to the case, although the state was not given copies of the

same. The copies given to the state do not have the information being played out in the media, he said. "Further, the media reports suggested that disciplinary actions were taken against some of the judicial officers," Sriram said.

The A-G alleged that it means that the administrative committee has already prejudged the issue, even before a judicial determination. The case was posted on June 25 for hearing further arguments.

MAA elections...

Continued from Page 1

A lot of heat has already been generated, though the main fight in the elections, scheduled for September, is confined largely to candidates supported by Kamma and Kapu communities.

Although Tollywood scripts sing paens to a society that is beyond class and caste barriers, and top heroes claim that they are above partisan politics or caste/class feelings, it is an open secret that the industry has strong roots in casteism.

The Kapus of the industry have projected Prakash Raj, a Tollywood star of Kannada origin, while the Kammals have rallied behind Manchu Vishnu, son of Mohan Babu, for the MAA president's post.

The surprising element in the whole episode is the fact that the Kaapu section of the industry has propped Prakash Raj, who does not belong to either Kaapu or Kamma community. This prompted the rival group to back Manchu Vishnu.

On Monday morning, Mohan Babu and Manchu Vishnu reportedly had consultations with Super Star Krishna. By evening Manchu Vishnu claimed that he was very much in the race for the top post, indicating he also has blessings of those following Krishna.

The MAA elections are fought without any manifestoes. Prakash Raj has assured members that, if elected as president of MAA, he would ensure that MAA has its own building and also promised to resolve all problems of workers. But Prakash Raj has no broad sup-

port among the association members. For the first time, an actor who does not belong to either Kapu or Kamma community is contesting for the MAA president post.

What weighs strongly in favour of Prakash Raj is that he mingles with Tollywood actors. In sharp contrast, Manchu Vishnu does not mingle with industry people and is relatively young. Industry sources described both of them as 'inaccessible.' While Prakash Raj lives in Chennai, Vishnu resides mostly in Tirupati. However, many members are inclined towards Prakash Raj as he is deemed mature politically.

That Mega Star Chiranjeevi wields considerable influence in the 1,600-member body is an open secret. In fact, whoever has the blessings of the 'Chiranjeevi compound' is likely to become the MAA president. Recently, Naga Babu, brother of Chiranjeevi, pledged his support to Prakash Raj. This gives clear indications that Chiranjeevi's compound has extended full support to Prakash Raj.

Immediately, Vishnu, along with father Mohan Babu, called on Super Star Krishna and apparently cemented his support. Besides, the current MAA president, Naresh, has pledged his support to Vishnu, indicating that Vishnu has backing of Kamma bigwigs.

Some time back, sparks flew between Chiranjeevi and Mohan Babu while sharing the dais at an industry function. The belligerent mood continued for many years. However, two years ago the two apparently patched up

and even posed before camera claiming to be brothers and thereby bringing down curtain on the controversy.

As Prakash Raj and Vishnu compete for the top honours of the industry body, the MAA elections have once triggered politics between Kamma and Kaapu groups in the industry.

As Naga Babu went on record pledging his support to Prakash Raj, Jeevita Rajasekhar has offered to contest the MAA president's post.

It is open secret that Chiranjeevi and Rajasekhar do not see eye to eye. Jeevita Rajasekhar's claim has lent an interesting twist to the MAA election episode. The declaration has made Chiranjeevi plan a counter strategy by roping in lady comedian Hema, who has declared that she is also in the fray. The objective is to split the women's vote to marginalise Jeevita Rajasekhar, according to word doing rounds in Tollywood circles.

To what extent the non-local factor benefits the rivals of Prakash Raj, who has the blessings of Chiranjeevi, and to what extent remains to be seen.

All top heroes of Tollywood, in spite of groupism on caste lines, are moving close to the TRS. Mohan Babu family has good rapport with KTR. Prakash Raj supported the TRS prior to the last elections. Chiranjeevi's son Ramcharan and his daughter-in-law Upasana maintain close ties with KTR. In fact, the Tollywood industry maintains good rapport with KTR and Minister for Cinematography Talasani Srinivas Yadav.

40 cases of virulent...

Continued from Page 1

Delta Plus cases, still low in numbers, are emerging as large parts of India are ending severe lockdowns and restrictions with Covid cases on the decline after a fierce second wave ambushed the nation's health infrastructure in April-May.

INSACOG (Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia), a consortium of 28 labs tasked with genome sequencing of the virus causing Covid, says properties of the Delta Plus are still being investigated. It is characterized by a mutation in the spike protein, which helps the virus gain entry into human cells.

"Currently the number of such Delta plus variants in India are only few but the distribution/detection in various states during past two months

What is Delta plus

Continued from Page 1

Which means very little is known about how severely it can hit and how treatment and vaccines work on the strain. It has "increased transmissibility, stronger binding to receptors of lung cells and potential reduction in monoclonal antibody response," according to INSACOG, a consortium of 28 labs tasked with genome sequencing of the virus.

indicate that it is already present in some states and states may need to enhance their public health response by focusing on surveillance, enhanced testing, quick contact-tracing and priority vaccination," it says.

Will successfully conduct Class 12 ...

Continued from Page 1

The Andhra government said there does not appear to be a reliable alternative to assess Class 12 of the state board Class 10 students are awarded grades instead of marks.

The board does not have any check or visibility on the internal examinations conducted by various schools. Thus, any assessment based on internal examination in the State of Andhra Pradesh may not yield accurate results, the state government said.

The state's affidavit, which will be taken up for hearing before a special bench of Justices A M Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari on Thursday, said that in the common entrance exam (Engineering, Agriculture and Pharmacy Common Entrance Test), 25 per cent weight is given to the marks obtained in Class 12.

The top court is hearing a plea seeking directions to state governments to not hold board examinations in view of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thus, Class 12 results play a crucial role in determining the future of the Students, the AP government said, adding that in view of the difficulties coupled with the improving Covid situation, the authorities are of the view that it will be in the best interest of Students if examination is conducted.

It said a total of 5,19,510 students are scheduled to appear for Class 12 exams and 5,12,959 students are eligible for Class 11 exams.

It said that several precautionary measures will be put in place if the state government is permitted to conduct examinations -- like, Class 12 and Class 11 will be held on alternative days.

It added that Class 11 and Class 12 students are required to appear for 5-6 subjects only, hence each student will be required to attend examination for 5-6 days.

Only 15 to 18 students will be allotted to each examination Centre, the state government said while giving details of several precautionary measures it will be taking keeping in mind the Covid pandemic.

The state is conscious of the difficult situation that it is in. However, under the given circumstances, the State is of the considered view that conduct of examination shall not only be in the best interest of the Students but shall also be conducted safely, it said.

The state government sought permission of the top court to conduct the Intermediate Public Examination 2021 adhering to the precautions.

Telangana govt 'concerned' about...

Continued from Page 1

As both the projects were taken up against the orders of the National Green Tribunal and the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, the Special Chief Secretary wrote a letter again on Monday as directed by the Cabinet to the KWMB chairman J Chandrasekar Aiyar and sent a copy to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry complaining about the illegal drawal of Krishna waters.

Official sources said that so far 10 letters had been written to the KWMB and AP has been told not to go ahead with its projects. In the latest letter, the Telangana government once again requested the Krishna Board to give instructions to the AP government to follow the order of NGT.

The NGT-South Zone on October 29, 2020 gave orders that the Rayalaseema Lift Irrigation Scheme works

should not be taken up without environmental clearance. But ignoring those orders, the AP government has expedited the work on the LI scheme.

The Telangana government filed a miscellaneous petition on December 14, 2020 against the construction work and the NGT, while issuing orders on December 24, 2020, directed the KRMB to take up an independent investigation on the basis of complaint by the Telangana Government. It said the Board has legal power and freedom to take action against the AP government.

The Chief Secretary of AP submitted to the NGT that they were only doing 'preliminary survey' for preparing the DPR for the Rayalaseema LI scheme. Yet, NGT gave clear orders to KRMB to form a fact-finding committee and send it to Andhra to ascertain the truth.

LS Speaker's 'clerical' response...

Continued from Page 1

Vijayasai said that any defects in the petition could have been brought to the notice of the filing party much earlier and it could take less than 10 months as was not the case.

According to sources, the YSRCP is now getting ready to file a fresh petition with all the requirements as mentioned in the reply from the office of the Speaker.

"It is very unfortunate that we have to bring up this issue of action on our disqualification petition several times when the office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha is considered to be a model for other government offices in terms of compliance with the rules and efficiency," Vijayasai wrote.

NOTICE

I, the undersigned, have to inform that, while I was travelling to photocopy shop at Kurichedu to obtain Xerox copies, I lost registered sale deed in the name of Mondaddu Venkata Subbulu w/o Ramana Reddy. Date 11/07/2018, DDC-4855/2018 and the same has still not been found till date in spite of my best efforts. Hence, I request the general public, please intimate to my below-mentioned address, if anybody finds it. A.V. Lakshmi, w/o Srinivasa Rao, Teachers' Colony, Darsi Prakasam Dist. Ph: 7093728987

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG

Dressed/With Skin	₹190
Without Skin	₹216
Broiler at Farm	₹131

EGG RATES ₹/100

VIJAYAWADA	550
HYDERABAD	519
VISAKHAPATNAM	557
RETAIL PRICE	₹5.50

Govt backs Vizag to ...

Continued from Page 1

Jagan said that an employee should work in the same company for at least one year and the company will receive incentives after the completion of the first year. This will ensure that employees will get guaranteed employment for at least a year and also they can develop their skills, he said.

The Chief Minister said that

high-end skills should be taught to students. He asked officials to give priority to the companies and institutions that teach high end skills in the policy.

He also directed the officials to give incentives to those companies so that experience in work at international level and skills is inculcated among students and they get better jobs.

The Chief Minister also asked officials to take measures to strengthen the 'Work from Home' concept.

The government is taking steps to provide high speed Internet in villages and setting up digital libraries in every village panchayat. Jagan pointed out. He said the officials are moving forward to provide Internet connectivity to 4,000 villages by December.

No lens on deposits up to Rs 2.5L

Continued from Page 1

The assessee had explained that she had collected/saved the above sum from her previous saving, given by her husband, son, relatives for herself and her family.

The CIT (Appeals) did not accept the explanation and confirmed the Assessing officer's order treating the cash deposit of Rs 2,11,500 as unexplained money. Following this, the

appellant approached the ITAT.

The Tribunal, after going through all the facts and arguments, said "we are of the opinion that the amount deposited by the assessee during the demonetisation cannot be treated as income of the assessee. Hence the appeal of the assessee is allowed."

Observing that housewife's contribution in the family is "immeasurable", the Tribunal

said quoting an order by the Supreme Court, which mentioned that, in India, nearly 159.85 million women stated that 'household work' was their main occupation compared to only 5.79 million men, as per 2011 Census.

Usually, ITAT ruling is binding on the appellant and the jurisdiction tax officer and is used as reference in similar matters.

Cash-strapped AP goes all out to tap tourism potential of the State

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
AMARAVATI

The State government is going all out to make Andhra Pradesh a global tourist destination.

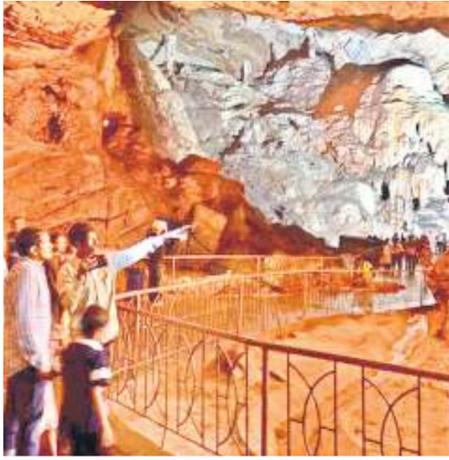
As part of this plan, Rs 61.74 crore will be utilised to modernise the infrastructure in Shilparamams across the state on PPP mode to make them of international standards. A master plan prepared for the purpose.

Once this is done, the Shilparamams will host cultural events throughout the year to attract at least 6 lakh tourists per annum.

Another Rs 6 crore would be spent to turn Vijayawada into a 3D entertainment zone while '5D' theatres would come up on Bhavani Island. Rushikonda Beach is being developed and will get jetties on the coast as part of the Sagarmala project.

The Tourism Department is taking the help of the Forest Department — exploring opportunities to develop ecotourism in at least 12 areas. Along with the construction of beautiful cottages in forest areas, facilities like safari and trekking would be provided.

Visakhapatnam and Tirupati, which attract the highest number of tourists in the state, are on the radar of Tourism Department officials



to tap the immense potential they offer.

As part of the Meetings, Incentives, Conference & Exhibitions (MICE) Tourism attraction, plans are afoot to make Visakhapatnam and Tirupati the venues for international exhibitions and conferences. The Tourism Department is of the view that MICE can generate huge revenue. India is currently ranked 27th in MICE Tourism with about Rs 6,000 crore in revenue. However, the sector has

been rapidly expanding, witnessing a growth of at least 20 percent per year.

While the Adani Group is planning to build a convention centre of its own, the Department of Tourism has been planning to develop a huge convention centre in Bhemili on 35 acres in Visakhapatnam district.

About 1.70 crore domestic and foreign tourists visit the state every year. Of this, 15 percent or 25 lakh people make their way to Visakhapatnam.

ALL TOURIST PLACES OPEN FOR VISITORS FROM TODAY

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Tourism Minister Muttamsetti Srinivasa Rao on Wednesday said that visitors will be allowed at all the tourist places across the state from Thursday onwards. Talking to reporters here, Srinivasa Rao said as the number of Covid cases are on the decline, the State government has decided to allow visitors at all the tourist places. He also said that the Haritha resort in Vizag's Rushikonda will be redeveloped as a 'Blue Bay' hotel at a cost of Rs 164 crore. The Minister said that road shows will be conducted in major cities across the country to attract tourists to Andhra Pradesh.

He also said that the tourism department has been drawing plans to improve revenue. Talking about the proposed floating restaurant at Tenneti Park beach in Vizag in a Bangladeshi ship that had run aground, the Minister said all the required permissions have been obtained and works will begin soon. The Oberoi Group of Hotels has come forward to establish five and seven star hotels in Vizag and Tirupati, the Minister added. By supplying food to Covid care centres, the hotels run by APTDC had earned Rs 58 crore in the first wave and Rs 28 crore until now in the second wave, Srinivasa Rao said.

Visakha Beach, Borra Caves, Araku and Simhachalam Temple are some of the popular tourist destinations in the district. Hence, the state government has prepared a master plan to make Visakhapatnam an international tourist destination.

The state Cabinet has already approved Rs 1,200 crore for the development of international tourism hubs as part of the Bhimili-Bhogapuram beach corridor. Large hotels and resorts are

being built on 200 acres, especially at Bhemili mandal, Annavaram. Two luxury resorts, one on 30 acres and the other on 35 acres, a luxury hotel on 15 acres, a mini golf course on 5 acres and a beach on 60 acres will be developed.

A huge tunnel aquarium would be developed on a PPP basis at Thotlakonda beach. A number of projects would be undertaken at Kailasagiri, such as the 120-meter-high Sky Tower and RK Beach develop-

Disha app key weapon in women's safety arsenal: CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Wednesday conducted a high-level review meeting on women's safety during which he directed officials to pay special attention to creating awareness about Disha app.

The Chief Minister emphasised on going door-to-door to ensure the app is downloaded by all women.

Upon getting any alarm through the app, Disha police stations and local police stations are alerted and a quick action is initiated.

Jagan instructed officials to create awareness about the app through village and women police in village/wards secretariats. Jagan said that volunteers and women cops should be trained on the awareness campaign, as they should explain to the women how to use the app in dire situations. Further, the Chief Minister made it clear that the initiative should be taken up as a drive.

He also directed officials to similarly educate students in colleges and institutions on using the app. "By creating proper awareness, the usage of Disha App will be increased," Jagan said.

The Chief Minister also directed officials to ensure all police stations are equipped with the required number of patrolling vehicles.



Create awareness about the app through volunteers and women police in village/wards secretariats. Jagan said that volunteers and women cops should be trained on the awareness campaign, as they should explain to the women how to use the app in dire situations.

Naidu decries bind-over cases on Atchannaidu family

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday warned the ruling YSRCP leaders and "erring police officers" of consequences if they continued with their suppressive and oppressive agenda against TDP leaders.

Naidu strongly condemned and termed as 'politically motivated' the bind-over cases filed against the family members of former Minister and TDP leader K Atchannaidu in Srikakulam district by the Kotabommali police.

In a statement here, the TDP chief demanded the YSRCP Government to drop the 'rowdy sheets' opened illegally by the police against Harivara Prasad, Suresh and Krishna Murthy. "It was unfortunate that though Covid-19 cases were coming down all over the country, there was no relief from the



rising fake cases against the TDP leaders in AP. The country's laws and the Constitution are being violated at every step under the Jaganmohan Reddy regime," Naidu said.

He warned that the "atrocious YSRCP leaders" and their erring officials would have to pay back three-fold for the oppression they were perpetrating on the TDP leaders now.

"The laws of the land would not spare their atrocities and chaotic policies eventually. Everybody who was misusing their authority blatantly would have to pay a heavy penalty in future. The TDP would pay back with compound interest to all of them," the former chief minister promised.

The TDP chief accused the Chief Minister of throwing all democratic rules and laws to the winds in his blind, crazy pursuit of ill gotten wealth. "Instead of providing good governance to the people, Jaganmohan Reddy was wreaking havoc with his regime's non-stop harassment of the opposition leaders with fabricated cases and false arrests. However, the TDP leaders and activists would not be terrified of the YSRCP regime's arm twisting tactics. They would continue their democratic struggle," Naidu vowed.

Lokesh goads Govt, sets 36-hr deadline to cancel exams

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national general secretary Nara Lokesh on Wednesday issued a 36-hour deadline to the Jaganmohan Reddy Government to take a "sane decision" to cancel the Class X and Intermediate examinations and save the lives of lakhs of students, parents and teachers in the State.

Lokesh demanded the YSRCP Government to relent on its adamant stand and express in its affidavit before the Supreme Court of India its willingness to cancel the exams. "Otherwise, the TDP would further step up its agitation as well as its legal struggle," the MLC warned.

Addressing a press conference here, Lokesh said that Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh should also think like a father and should introspect whether it would be correct to apply different moral standards for his own



children and those of the rest of parents in the State.

Lokesh urged the Chief Minister to pay attention to the problems faced by students. "The government should immediately promote all the students to higher classes to facilitate the beginning of the next academic year in time. No exams should be conducted and marking systems should be followed on the lines of the CBSE," he demanded.

The TDP leader said that it was high time for Jaganmohan

Reddy to decide whether he would want to continue to be a 'Mental Mama' (crazy uncle) or change to become a 'Manchi Mama' (good uncle) for the children.

The TDP MLC expressed surprise over the YSRCP Government's outright adamant attitude despite large scale appeals from the students and also suggestions from the courts. The Supreme Court bench has clearly said that the AP Government would be held responsible if any student or parent succumbs to Covid because of its decision on exams. "The TDP would say that Jaganmohan Reddy and his Ministers should be held responsible," he said.

Lokesh asserted that all those Covid deaths after the exams were held would be considered "Government murders." The YSRCP regime has been acting belatedly on crucial issues like Coronavirus, students exams, etc, he said.

ISO certification for Mylavaram PS

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Mylavaram police station has received the prestigious International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) certificate for its meritorious performance.

The police station maintained international standards in maintenance, administration, providing facilities to the visitors, staff and doing services to the people.

ISO Hyderabad managing director Sivaiah on Tuesday presented the ISO certificate to additional superintendent of police Malika Garg in the presence of local MLA K Rakshana Nidhi, Nuzvid DSP Srinivasulu and others.

Besides Mylavaram police station, other stations in Reddiggudem and Tiruvuru stations also received ISO certification.

Speaking on the occasion, Malika Garg said the police station achieved the certificate

The success of Mylavaram police station was a proud moment for the district police

- MALIKA GARG

under the supervision of district SP M Ravindranath Babu.

She said that she was delighted to receive the prestigious award. Malika Garg said the success of Mylavaram police station was a proud moment for the district police. She said the award is presented for meritorious functioning of the police station, resolving the petitions, friendly policing and other services. Malika Garg said earlier, Disha police station in Machilipatnam and district police officer received the ISO certificate. Tiruvuru MLA K Rakshana Nidhi congratulated the police on the honour.

Govt to support entrepreneurs set up food processing units

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State government is taking measures to encourage food processing industries for the benefit of the farmers, said Dr Poonam Malakondaiah, Chief Secretary, Agriculture and Cooperation department.

She visited a popcorn processing unit in Nuzvid on Wednesday and said that the government was working for the welfare of the farmers in the state.

Malakondaiah said that if the food processing industry was developed so that the farmer gets his crop processed and sells it at a better price. "Many industrialists are coming forward to set up food processing units in the state and sign MoUs as they feel it is viable. Farmers can get a better price for corn, mango, lime, banana, tomato, chilli, coconut and others," she said.

Malakondaiah said that the state government has established 10,700 Rythu Barosa Kendras across the state to provide quality seeds and to ensure better price to their crop. "The RBKs will provide quality seeds, pesticides, fertilisers and better price for their harvest and enable farmers to store the crop produced by them as about 2,000 godowns are being constructed where sorting and grading can be done," she said.

Malakondaiah further said that the farmers' produce should be processed twice at the food processing units and the state government was encouraging interested entrepreneurs to set up their units. Agriculture department joint directors Krupadas, Mohan Rao, deputy director Ravi Kumar, Nuzvid agriculture officer Chamundeswari and others were present.

'YES to POSHAN' programme launched in Krishna district

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Malnutrition is a complex public health problem according to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019); several states reported a significant rise in children below 5 years being underweight, severely wasted (low weight-for-height), and stunted (short for their age).

Women have also been adversely affected by nutritional issues in India, with as high as 58.8 percent of the women surveyed found to be anaemic and 14.8 percent with low Body Mass Index in Andhra Pradesh alone.

Addressing these gaps, the multinational company Procter & Gamble Health Limited announced a 3-year collabora-

tion with Tata Trusts for their 'YES to POSHAN' programme, aiming to advance the nutritional status of women and children in five villages across the Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh, under P&G Health's flagship corporate social responsibility initiative, SEHAT.

The grassroots level programme will encompass interventions including surveys, growth monitoring, and a holistic behaviour change campaign to encourage diet diversity. The programme will also facilitate the capacity building of Anganwadi workers and POSHAN Sakhis, who will support frontline workers in identifying children with Severe Acute Malnutrition to enable timely referral and treatment.

Women's panel chief urges Jagan to move court against Sanchaitha ouster

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

AP Women's Commission chairperson Vasireddy Padma on Wednesday urged Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy to appeal against the order removing Sanchaitha Gajapathi Raju as chairperson of the MANSAS Trust and Simhachalam Temple Trust Board.

She said it's shameful that the TDP is celebrating the "retrograde and entrenched patriarchal mindset that removed Sanchaitha from the two posts."

"She was the first woman in India appointed as chairper-



son of a major Hindu Temple Trust. Despite numerous previous judgments by various courts in India and the landmark judgments by the Supreme Court which gives women equal rights not just in

inheritance of properties also in positions, job opportunities, and to head Temple Trusts and Charitable Institutions, the present situation is a temporary setback due to archaic customs and whims prevalent in ancient India being used to justify an anti-women, gender insensitive move," Padma said.

"We, the women of Andhra Pradesh stand by the government and request the Chief Minister to appeal against this order immediately to a higher court," she said.

Padma said that this would be a landmark case to prove that women of Andhra

Pradesh are equal to men and deserve to be both empowered and encouraged and would show even the laws of the Indian Constitution wholeheartedly support this move.

"We cannot allow a small minority of privileged persons using the ancient titles of Rajas and Maharajas, long abolished by the Government of India, to perpetuate a male-dominated, patriarchal social order in this 21st century, where women fly planes across continents, join the Armed Forces and fight for the Nation on land sea and air," Padma said.

Strength AHTUs to stop human trafficking, say NGOs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

As per 2019 National Crime Records Bureau Data report, as many as 2,260 cases of human trafficking have been reported across the country as compared to 2,278 in 2018.

This is despite the government enhancing the functioning of Anti Human Trafficking Units (AHTU), increasing rescue operations, including decoy operations, and more convictions.

As per the NCRB data, Andhra Pradesh had a total of 399 trafficked victims in 2019, showing an 8.7 percent increase compared to 2018.

However, human trafficking cases under IPC decreased by 2 percent in 2019 compared to previous year

with only 245 cases being reported.

According to the reports, the conviction rate for trafficking cases is only 21.8 percent in 2019 within the state. On the other hand, the State government has notified 13 AHTUs across all districts, highlighting compliance with the directives of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

N Ram Mohan, secretary HELP and convener Network Against Trafficking and Sexual exploitation in AP (NATSAP) said that Andhra Pradesh is a destination state for trafficked men and women and acts as a source state for persons trafficked for sexual exploitation.

He stated that the majority of the victims of trafficking come in the 15-



22 age group and are from a rural, economically poor background, having an average education of below Class 10.

Ram Mohan said that there was no designated staff for AHTU as the present staff have other multiple roles such as district crime record bureau, and special jurisdiction police unit due to which they cannot work dedicatedly for AHTU work.

He said that lack of government prioritisation and lacklustre police response and absence of funding to AHTU are functional barriers.

Vimukthi state convener Meharunnisa said that the victim compensation scheme has failed in Andhra Pradesh as of 1,115 girls rescued, only 2 received compensation.

Ram Mohan and Meharunnisa said that AHTUs must develop database and mapping, identification and tracking traffickers who operate

in the rural and Urban areas, establish regular review mechanisms at District and State level for the status of AHTU cases and ensure 100 percent convictions.

All police stations must register all missing cases and booked sections under trafficking.

NGOs and survivors of trafficking to be included in all AHTUs State and District level committees. "Ensure 100 percent of victims getting victim compensations and victim and witness protection services are done through AHTUs," they said.

They sought investigations of trafficking cases mandatorily to be done by AHTUs and not by local police stations.

AIIMS-M fails to woo patients despite good infra, specialists

VASIREDDY RAVICHANDRA
■ GUNTUR

Despite good infrastructure and specialists in various departments, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) - Mangalagiri has failed to attract patients due to lack of proper publicity.

Meanwhile, it is widely believed that private and corporate hospitals in and around Guntur and Vijayawada cities are suspected to be behind poor publicity to the premier health institute.

Though the AIIMS has been offering treatment for only Rs 10, it has not yet reached out to the public from Prakasam to East Godavari districts. Hence, patients are being admitted to private and corporate hospitals during the pandemic.

Sanctioning of AIIMS at Mangalagiri by the Centre is a boon to Andhra Pradesh. It is a golden opportunity for the people of Guntur, Krishna, Prakasam and the Godavari districts. The AIIMS, sanctioned under the Andhra Pradesh Bifurcation Act, is the 15th in the country. The then State government allotted 183 acres of land belonging to the former TB Sanatorium in Mangalagiri located between the cities of Vijayawada and Guntur.

The Centre has also sanctioned Rs 1,618 crore for it immediately. It is a place where

Charges collected at AIIMS	
Out-patient ₹ 10	Ultra-sonography Test ₹ 323
Bed for inpatients ₹ 35 per day	Thyroid Test ₹ 200
Random Blood Sugar Test ₹ 56	Urine Test ₹ 35
Lipid Profile Test ₹ 225	Chest X-Ray ₹ 60
Kidney Functioning ₹ 225	Mammography Test ₹ 630

patients can relax and unwind amidst two hills lush with greenery. The College hospital

was built with all modern amenities. The work of the medical institute is progressing

at a rapid pace with 80 per cent of it already being completed.

It has been three years since outpatient services have been started in 12 departments in the completed outpatient block. The teaching hospital has a total capacity of 960 beds. With over 120 reputable physicians and 130 nursing staff, OP medical services currently offer ENT, Orthopedic, Diabetic, Psychiatric and Paediatric care at a consultation fee of just Rs 10.

Besides, the most common breast cancer screening test for women is performed every Wednesday afternoon for a nominal fee. The hospital is being set up with modern medical equipment at a cost of about Rs 250 crore. 'Amrita' medical shop has been set up for poor patients. In the early days of the hospital, about 700 people used to come from around the two cities for medical services every day. Currently, the number is limited to a maximum of 400 due to the pandemic.

For inpatients, the hospital is charging bed charges of only Rs 35 per day. It does not charge any fees for nursing. When it comes to diagnostic tests, all the tests at AIIMS are very cheap compared to private diagnostic laboratory charges. These rates are said to be 50 to 60 per cent lower than the charges collected by private diagnostic centres.

4 directors of NRI Hospital in police custody

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Four directors of the NRI Hospital in Mangalagiri of Guntur district were taken into custody on Wednesday over alleged misappropriation of funds. The directors of NRI Society have split into two groups and lodged police complaints against each other.

The Mangalagiri police registered a case against all the four directors following a recent complaint lodged by Dr Kondragunta Buchayya. The arrested directors were named as Nimmagadda Uppendranath, Akkineni Mani, Uppalapu Srinivasa Rao and Nalini Mohan.

ASI, HC suspended

PNS ■ ELURU

Two police officials, including an ASI and a Head Constable, have been using the cell phones which were seized in a case of theft without handing over to the complainants.

Following complaints received from victims and after an inquiry, the two police officials were found using them personally.

Eluru DIG KV Mohan Rao ordered suspension of ASI Satyanarayana Rao and Head Constable Kumar of Rangampeta police station in East Godavari district.

2 MLCs from same community in W. Godavari trigger debate

K BALA SHOWRY
■ ELURU

Two MLCs from the same community in West Godavari have become a hot topic in the political circles of the district. Earlier, Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy had allocated an MLC seat to Pandula Ravindra belonging to the Mala community. Meanwhile, in the Governor quota, Moshen Raju, also from the same community and the district, has been recommended for the MLC post. This has triggered a debate among the YSRCP leaders.

Pandula Ravindra represented TDP from SC reserved

Amalapuram constituency earlier and later he jumped into the YSRCP just before general elections held in 2019. He had been honoured with the MLC seat as per the promise made by Jagan Mohan at the time of his entry into the party.

An IRS officer who worked in Karnataka for most part of his career, Ravindra hails from Kovvali village of Dendalur mandal of the district. He made political entry through TDP. He then contested as MP from the Amalapuram constituency and won. He also participated in several agitations organised by the Mala Mahanadu.

Meanwhile, the current MLC who was recommended under Governor's quota Koyee Moshen Raju belongs to Bhimavaram of the district. He served the Congress party during YS Rajashekhar Reddy's tenure as the DCC president. He served Bhimavaram town as a councillor, floor leader and the contestant from Kovvur SC constituency as a Congress representative and lost. He has been in YSRCP since its inception. He served the party as the district's first president and worked hard for the party and for the development of the Mala community from the initial days of his political career.



Scribe injured in attack

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Four persons working for an electronic channel in Kakinada were brutally attacked by a group of fake journalists.

Journalist Veera Kumar, who had earlier complained about the fake journalists to the officials, was severely injured in the incident.

According to police, four

people came to Karapa and attacked Veera Kumar with blades and sticks and tried to kidnap him.

SP (Admin) Karanam Kumar, Kakinada Rural CI Akula Muralikrishna and DSP K Bhima Rao promised to do justice to the victim.

Meanwhile, journalist unions staged protests across the district demanding justice for their colleague.



Steps apace to take welfare programmes closer to people, says Prakasam Collector

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector Praveen Kumar has said that the government will initiate steps to take welfare and development programmes closer to the people through village secretariats.

The Collector on Wednesday inspected the construction work of a village secretariat taken up at a cost of Rs 40 lakh at Thalamalla village in Podili mandal as part of the building construction fortnight celebrations. He then inspected the Secretariat building at Madalavaripalem, which was completed at a cost of Rs 40 lakh, and the Rythu Bharosa Kendram building at a cost of Rs 21.8 lakh. He also inspected the construction work of the YSR Health Clinic building, which was undertaken at a cost



of Rs 17.59 lakh.

The Collector said that the secretariats had become a platform for transparent delivery of welfare schemes to the poor. He said the government secretariat buildings were being constructed in the district

through the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Buildings for Rythu Bharosa Kendras and bulk milk units were also under construction.

The district collector said mandal level authorities should pay special attention to the pre-

vention of Covid. Prakasam district was currently registering 7 per cent Covid cases and they were expected to come down completely. "The beneficiaries of YSR Cheyutha are ready to make the Jagananna Pala Velluva programme a success. The savings group members of the self-help groups that run the dairy units want to see milk being pumped into the milk collection centres set up by Amul," he added.

Former sarpanch Srinivasa Rao appealed to the Collector to set up a milk collection centre at Goginivaripalem village.

DWMA PD Sheena Reddy, PRSE Kondaiah, Tahsildar AV Hanumanta Rao, MPDO P Srikrishna, local sarpanch Subbamma, officials of various departments and others were present on the occasion.

Officials told to work assiduously to reach Pala Velluva targets

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Joint Collector G Rajakumari has directed the officials to take steps to meet the targets of Jagananna Jeeva Kranthi and Pala Velluva schemes taken up as part of the YSR Cheyutha programme.

She held a virtual review on Wednesday with the DRDA, District Animal Husbandry Department officials on the progress of implementation of the schemes Pala Velluva and Jeeva Kranthi.

Speaking on the occasion, the Joint Collector said that under the YSR Cheyutha programme, 2,25,789 women had benefited and

the State was able to provide them with sustainable livelihoods.

The Joint Collector further said that a total of 15,825 cow / buffalo units and 3,911 sheep / goat units were targeted and the distribution process should be worked out with the support of the bankers.

She directed all the APMs, Area Coordinators, Animal Husbandry Officers and others to hold regular meetings and work hard to make the programme a success.

The meeting was attended by DRDA PD Y Hariharanath, Animal Husbandry Department JD S Suryaprakash and other officials.

Ministers lay stone for temple reconstruction

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharitha has said that the Etukuru Seetharamanjaneya Swamy Temple has a history of nearly 300 years and it is a good augury that all the villagers have come together for the reconstruction of the temple.

She was participating in the foundation-laying ceremony of Sri Seetharamanjaneya Temple at Etukuru village in Guntur suburbs along with Tourism Minister Avanti Srinivasa Rao on Wednesday.

Temple committee members said the temple was being rebuilt

Reconstruction of the temple with stone is a great initiative. The Amma Charitable Trust's Gnana Prasanna Baba will play an important role in it. - Mekathoti

at a cost of about Rs 7 crore. They said that along with the Sri Sitaramanjaneya Swamy temple, the construction of the Siva tem-

ple was also underway.

Addressing the media, the Home Minister said reconstruction of the temple with stone was a great initiative and disclosed that the Amma Charitable Trust's Gnana Prasanna Baba would play an important role in it.

Tourism Minister Avanti Srinivasa Rao said his family had a long association with Etukuru village. He said he was happy to participate in the Sri Sitaramanjaneya Swamy Temple foundation-laying event. He said he would also attend the inauguration of the temple.

He recalled his association with the village on the occasion.



4 arrested for stealing vehicles

PNS ■ GUNTUR

The Chebrole police on Wednesday recovered Rs 20,600,000 worth of seven auto-rickshaws and nine two-wheelers from the limits of various police stations.

A case was registered under the directions of Guntur Urban SP Arif Hafeez, South DSP JC Prashanti, CI Chabrole M. Madhusudana Rao and Chabrole SI formed three teams and arrested the accused at Narakoduru village.



Facelift to school with sarpanch's own funds at Gummileru in EG



PNS ■ KAKINADA

Although the government today provides facilities for the development of schools in rural areas through various schemes, the lack of infrastructure has plagued many institutes.

A village sarpanch Gunnam Rambabu provided an assistance of Rs 2.50 lakh from his own funds for the development of Mandal Praja Parishad Special Primary School at an SC Colony in Gummileru village of Alampur mandal.

With the assistance, the school has been beautified. The entire school was painted and the school premises were concreted with cement. A pump set, water tank and a compound wall were installed for drinking water facility.

The entire school was painted and the school premises were concreted with cement.

Fans and tables for students to sit on in the classrooms were also set up. In collaboration with the sarpanch, the school has taken steps to create a pleasant atmosphere to compete with the corporate schools.

MEO K Ramachandra Rao, UTF members Y V V Ramana, teachers and parents of the students lauded Rambabu for his support to the development of the school.

Marine delicacy 'Jeela' crab hot cake in Uppada

PNS ■ KAKINADA

One might have tasted many marine products. But this one is unique. Blue crab, locally known as 'Jeela' crab, is the most sought-after marine delicacy. They are often called the 'Maharaja' of crabs.

The crabs were found by fishermen who went hunting on Wednesday at Uppada, Aminabod port in East Godavari district.

Fisherman K Shanthi Kumar says that these crabs have medicinal properties and are also excellent in taste, so their prices range from Rs 300 to Rs 500. He also said that the weight of each crab would be in the range of from 200 grams to 300 grams, he added.

The buyers would compete to get this crab in bidding, no matter how expensive they are. Currently, fishermen in the Aminabod port have exported some of the crabs to other States.

Johny, a trader from Uppada, bought a single crab at the rate of Rs 400 each.

Many people flock to the Uppada coast to see these crabs entangled in fishermen's nets. Also, non-



vegetarians, especially those who love crabs, buy Jeela crabs, which are rarely available, no matter how expensive they are.

YSRCP leader kidnapped?

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Local YSRCP leader Doolam Chakravarthy was allegedly kidnapped in Mandapet of East Godavari district on Tuesday night. The news created a sensation in the district.

Locals said a dispute between the victim and Pulla Sriramulu of Kakinada over financial transactions was the reason behind the kidnapping.

SI Rajesh Kumar said a case was registered following a complaint lodged by Chakravarthy's wife stating that some people had kidnapped her husband. She said her husband had phoned her and told her that he had been kidnapped on Tuesday night.



'Priyanka Cong's 'captain' in UP, party will emerge as principal challenger soon'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader Salman Khurshid has said it is up to AICC general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra to decide the manner in which she will present herself to the voters in the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls, but asserted that she is a 'great face' and the 'captain' leading the party's charge in the state.

He also asserted that the Congress will emerge as the principal challenger to the BJP before the assembly elections and Priyanka Gandhi is determined to ensure that the party fights the polls with all its might.

In an interview with PTI, Khurshid said the Congress would not keep waiting for alliances but was determined to fight the polls hard with everything "we have got".

Asked if Priyanka Gandhi was the party's best bet to be the chief



ministerial face, the former Union minister said, "I am not going to answer that till such time as she does not give us an indication. But she is a wonderful, great face." "All you have to do is to put the picture of (UP Chief Minister)

Yogi (Adityanath) in front of you and Priyanka Gandhi's picture and you won't need to ask any more questions," said Khurshid, who is the chief of the party's manifesto committee for the state. But the manner in which

she will present herself, offer herself to the voters in UP will be her decision, he stressed.

"I hope that she will take a decision and let us know. As far as we are concerned she is the captain and she is leading us," Khurshid said of the Congress general secretary in-charge of Uttar Pradesh.

On the Congress still not being the principal challenger in UP despite efforts by Priyanka Gandhi, Khurshid admitted that the party was not the principal challenger as of now but expressed confidence that it would be before the polls in 2022. He asserted that the party is going to fight the assembly elections "real hard", highlighting that Priyanka Gandhi is determined to ensure that the party fights with all its might in the polls.

On whether the Congress has the capacity to go it alone, Khurshid asked if there is any alliance on the cards, and added

that "nobody has specifically talked to us about an alliance as I understand".

There is no point in hypotheticals being discussed, the 68-year-old leader said.

Pressed further on whether the party has the bandwidth to go it alone in the assembly polls, Khurshid said the party would have to fight on its own but added a caveat on alliances -- if something happens and leadership takes a call then it may be different.

"But let us not forget the last time we fought in an alliance we did not do well. I am not even sure if the two who got into the alliance -- the Congress and the Samajwadi Party -- have figured out why they did not do well. We did not spend any time on that at all," Khurshid said. He said that for any alliances to happen with anybody, its ground rules must be known as to what might or might not work.

Covid 'Delta Plus' variant: Goa steps up monitoring along Maha border

PNS ■ PANAJI

The Goa government has increased surveillance along the border adjoining Maharashtra in the wake of the neighbouring state reporting cases of the COVID-19 'Delta Plus' variant, which is considered highly infectious.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant told reporters on Wednesday that cases of 'Delta' variant of COVID-19 have been detected in Goa, but so far there is not a single case of the 'Delta Plus' variant in the coastal state.

Since the 'Delta Plus' variant has been found in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district adjoining Goa, "surveillance along the border has been stepped up", the CM said.

On Monday, Maharashtra Health Minister Rajesh Tope on Monday said 21 cases of the 'Delta Plus' variant have been found in the state so far, including nine in Ratnagiri, seven in Jalgaon, two in Mumbai, and one case each in Palghar, Thane and Sindhudurg



districts. Sawant said Goa has so far reported 26 cases of the COVID-19 'Delta' variant, which were detected in samples sent to a laboratory in Pune.

He said the Goa Medical College and Hospital (located near Panaji), North Goa District Hospital (Mapusa), South Goa District Hospital (Margao) and Victor Hospital (Margoa) have been collecting COVID-19 patients' samples which are sent to the Pune-based lab to check for variants of the virus.

Sawant also said his government has allowed private laboratories to set up their facilities along the Goa-Maharashtra border.

"If we find any suspect (entering Goa with the coronavirus infection), he is isolated and tested before being allowed to move around in the state," Sawant said.

On Tuesday, Goa reported 303 new COVID-19 cases that took its tally of infections to 1,64,957, while 11 fatalities pushed the death toll to 3,008, as per the state health department.

India pushing for full ceasefire in Afghanistan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India is pushing for a comprehensive ceasefire in Afghanistan amid a massive spike in violence in that country and reports of its contact with the Taliban for the first time in the backdrop of a renewed push for the Afghan peace process.

The reports of India reaching out to the Taliban emerged as the US looked to complete the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan by September 11, ending a nearly two-decade of its military presence in the war-ravaged country.

In the midst of fast-paced developments relating to the Afghan peace process, a senior Qatari diplomat said at a webinar organised by the Arab Center in Washington DC on Monday that he believed the Indian side was engaging with the Taliban as the group could be a key component in the future of Afghanistan.

The Taliban and the Afghan government are holding direct talks in the Qatari capital city Doha that has killed tens of thousands of people and ravaged



various parts of the country. Qatar has been playing a role in the Afghan peace process.

"I understand that there has been a quiet visit by Indian officials...to speak with the Taliban. Why? Because not everybody is believing that the Taliban will dominate and take over, because Taliban is a key component of, or should be or is going to be a key component of the future of Afghanistan," said Mutlaq bin Majed al-Qahtani, Qatar's envoy for counter-terrorism and conflict resolution.

He made the remarks while replying to a question during a discussion on the theme "Looking towards peace in Afghanistan after the US-NATO withdrawal."

"I see the reason behind having a dialogue or talks or reaching out to all parties in Afghanistan but it is important to keep in mind that we are in a critical stage at this time, and I think if any meeting is going to take place, it should be for a major or main reason, which is to encourage the parties to solve their differences by peaceful means," al-Qahtani said.

There was no official reaction to the comments by the senior Qatari diplomat. Indian officials said India is concerned over the spike in violence in Afghanistan and has been strongly pressing for a comprehensive ceasefire to take forward the peace process.

No vaccine, no salary: Ujjain collector tells govt staff

PNS ■ UJJAIN

In a bid to achieve the target of 100 per cent vaccination against COVID-19, the Ujjain district administration in Madhya Pradesh has issued an order saying government employees will not get their salaries from next month if they are not inoculated.

District Collector Ashish Singh issued an order to this effect on Tuesday. order said salaries of government employees will not be disbursed, if they fail to get vaccinated till July 31.

The salaries of employees for July will be disbursed only after producing the vaccination certificate, a district official said.

"We are making all possible efforts to achieve the target of cent per cent vaccination in the district. Several steps have been taken in this direction," Singh told PTI on Wednesday while confirming the order.

Oppn front without Cong will help BJP: Nana Patole

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Congress president Nana Patole on Wednesday said any attempt to form an 'anti-BJP front' without his party will indirectly help the BJP.

Talking to reporters at Faizpur in Jalgaon district, he also said elections were three years away and COVID-19 management was the priority of his party.

Amid speculations about formation of an 'anti-BJP front', Patole said such a front was not possible without the Congress.

"Any attempt to do so will indirectly help the BJP," he said.

In 2019, the Congress tied-up with the Shiv Sena and NCP to form government in Maharashtra under the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray.

Last week, Patole caused a flutter in the ruling alliance in Maharashtra by saying the Congress will contest future elections on its own.

All India Congress Committee's Maharashtra in-



charge H K Patil recently asked the state party unit to focus on strengthening the organisation and leave the decision on alliances or going solo in future polls to the party high command.

On Wednesday, Patole said the welfare of farmers and youth, who are facing the "crisis of unemployment", was the Congress's priority.

"I have already spoken about elections and the message has reached the party workers. Elections are three years away and I will not speak on it. We

will highlight misdeeds of the Narendra Modi government in handling the COVID-19 pandemic and the neglect of farmers," he said.

In a veiled jibe at the Congress, Chief Minister and Sena president Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday said people would "beat with footwear" those who only talk about contesting elections alone without offering solutions to people's problems.

An editorial in the Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana' recently said there is no harm in contesting polls independently, but everyone should check the ground beneath.

Patole said, "Today we symbolically buried three (controversial) farm laws of the Centre. A Congress meeting in Faizpur led by (former prime minister) Jawaharlal Nehru and other senior leaders of the freedom movement had deliberated on how farmers' policies should be framed, and the need of the hour is the revisit that."

5,240 vials of Amphotericin B allocated to Karnataka

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers D V Sadananda Gowda on Wednesday said additional 5,240 vials of Liposomal Amphotericin B, which is used in the treatment of black fungus, has been allocated to Karnataka.

"In Karnataka, additional 5,240 vials of Liposomal Amphotericin B have been allocated today," Gowda said in a tweet. The Minister, who is an MP from Bengaluru North said, a total of 60,350 vials have been allocated to the state till now ensuring its smooth supply to patients.

The government has been taking various steps to enhance the availability of Amphotericin B in the country to cater to the sudden increase in demand for the medication, including giving a boost to domestic manufacturing.

UP police to use drones to spot illegal liquor dens near Nepal border

PNS ■ BAHRAICH

Drone cameras will be used to find illicit liquor dens in forest areas near the Indo-Nepal border here, an official said on Wednesday.

Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the excise department will carry out a joint operation to check the smuggling and trade of spurious liquor, Bahraich District Magistrate Dinesh Chandra said.

Instructions have been issued to identify illegal liquor manufacturing and selling bases with the help of drone cameras, especially in the forests of Mihinpurwa area of the district, he said.

Police, excise and administrative machinery have been asked to develop an effective informer network in this direction, the DM said, adding the Gangsters Act will be invoked against those involved in the trade.

'Reports on homeless people barred from registering for Covid vaccination baseless'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The health ministry on Wednesday dismissed media reports alleging that homeless people have been "barred" from registering for COVID-19 vaccination due to unavailability of technical requirements as "baseless".

There have been some media reports alleging that homeless people have been "barred and conspicuously left out" from registering for COVID-19 vaccination due to unavailability of technical requirements, the ministry said in a statement.

The reports have further stated that the "requirement to register digitally", "knowledge of English and access to a computer or a smartphone connected to the internet" are some of the factors depriving people of vaccination, it added.

"These claims are baseless and not based on facts," the



ministry said while clarifying that the ownership of a mobile phone is not a prerequisite for Covid vaccination, production of address proof is also not compulsory and it is not mandatory to pre-register online on Co-WIN for availing vaccination.

It further said that for an easy understanding of the users, Co-Win is now available in 12 languages -- Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu,

Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati, Odia, Bengali, Assamese, Gurumukhi (Punjabi) and English.

The Co-WIN platform is an inclusive IT system that provides a flexible framework with all the necessary features to facilitate vaccination coverage in the remotest parts of the country as well as for those who are the most vulnerable, the statement said. While one of the nine iden-

tity cards, including Aadhar, voter ID card, ration card with photo, disability ID card, is required for vaccination, special provisions have been made by the government for organising vaccination sessions for those who may not have any of the nine specified identity cards or own a mobile phone, it added. Taking full benefit of such provisions, more than two lakh such beneficiaries have been vaccinated so far, the statement said.

It added that the government has issued an advisory on May 27 for near-to-home vaccination centre services for the elderly and differently-abled persons.

For those who may not have access to the internet or smartphones or even mobile phones, free of cost on-site registration (also popularly called walk-in) and vaccination is available at all government vaccination centres.



Odisha registers 3,456 new Covid cases, 46 deaths

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha's COVID-19 tally rose to 8,86,946 on Wednesday as 3,456 more people tested positive for the infection, while 46 fresh fatalities pushed the state's coronavirus death toll to 3,717, a health official said. As many as 1,973 new cases were reported in quarantine centres, while the remaining 1,483 new infections were detected during contract tracing. The daily positivity rate rose to 5.24 from 4.79 percent on Tuesday. Khurda district, of which Bhubaneswar is a part, recorded the highest number of new cases at 499, followed by Cuttack (480) and Puri (289), he said.

PM Modi, BJP leaders pay tributes to Mookerjee

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led BJP leaders on Wednesday in paying tributes to party ideologue Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who founded its progenitor Jana Sangh, on his 68th death anniversary.

"Remembering Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee on his Punya Tithi. His noble ideals, rich thoughts and commitment to serve people will continue to inspire us. His efforts towards national integration will never be forgotten," Modi tweeted.

Home Minister Amit Shah said Mookerjee sacrificed himself to safeguard India's identity and integrity, and saved the country from another division.

His sacrifice, dedication and ideals will guide the coming generations, he said, adding that Mookerjee was an architect of cultural nationalism who favoured making moth-



er tongue the medium of education. He founded Jana Sangh not due to greed for power but for national reconstruction, Shah said.

Paying tributes, BJP president J P Nadda said Mookerjee dedicated his life to the country's unity and integrity while living for cultural nationalism.

Mookerjee was a strident critic of the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 by the then Congress government and was arrested after he entered the state to protest the requirement for a permit to do so.

'Heartening to note 3 out of 5 people who got jabs were from rural areas'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu said it was heartening to note that three out of five people vaccinated as part of the COVID-19 inoculation drive on June 21 were from rural areas, where the majority of the country's population resides.

According to the government, of the record 88.09 lakh vaccine doses administered on June 21, when the revised guidelines for COVID-19 vaccination came into effect, nearly 64 per cent of the jabs were given in rural areas. "It is heartening to note that

3/5 persons vaccinated in the stepped up drive on Monday were from rural areas, where the majority of population resides. My compliments to the Centre and various states for working in a coordinated manner in a truly 'Team India' spirit," the Vice President Secretariat quoted Naidu as saying in a tweet on Wednesday.

States that have done extremely well must share their best practices with others to achieve optimal results, he said. "I also urge people to proactively come forward and get themselves vaccinated," he added.

10-unit rise in PM 2.5 causes 7 hospital admissions with respiratory disease a week in Delhi: Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A 10-unit increase in PM 2.5 leads to more than seven hospital admissions due to respiratory diseases in Delhi each week, said a study conducted by Maulana Azad Medical College.

The report of the 15-month study, which started in April 2019 to assess the impact of air pollution on health, was submitted to the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) around three months ago, an official said.

The Maulana Azad Medical College (MAMC) was asked by the DPCC to conduct the study.



A team led by Dr Nandini Sharma, former dean and the head of the Department of

Community Medicine, MAMC, collected data from Baba Saheb Ambedkar

Hospital, Lok Nayak Hospital, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital, Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital, Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital and Madan Mohan Malviya Hospital.

According to the report, the rate and trend of the cardio-respiratory morbidity in terms of hospital admissions were corroborated with the change in values of Air Quality Index (AQI), PM10 and PM2.5 levels.

It showed that "an increase of 10 units of PM 2.5 leads to 7.09 new cumulative respiratory admissions per week, keeping other factors constant".

"The increase in respiratory admissions (bronchitis,

bronchial asthma) is directly proportional to increase in AQI," the report read.

The study has been able to generate evidence that cardiopulmonary admissions in hospitals increase significantly with rising air pollution.

"An increase of 10 units of PM2.5 will increase 1.1 new cumulative cardiac admissions in these hospitals each week," it said.

The research team also collected community-based data on the restriction of activity, perceived stress, awareness about the cause and perceived interventions required for improving air quality from 1,879 people in all 11 districts

of Delhi. It was found that as educational status improves, awareness about air pollution increases.

A Majority of the respondents (96.5 per cent) perceived that automobiles were the major reason for air pollution, while 77 per cent said industries are responsible for worsening air quality in Delhi.

Sixty-five per cent of the respondents attributed poor air quality to the burning of waste, while 46 per cent said it was due to construction activities. Only 28 per cent of the respondents perceived stubble burning and firecrackers as the cause of air pollution.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

The plus?

The Government seems to be at a crossroads in its tackling of Delta+ variant despite best intentions

Three steps the Union Government has taken in the last couple of days attest to a change for the better in its COVID-19 management policy. The first is the accelerated pace of vaccinations in the country. Over 8.3 million doses were given on a single day on Monday, the highest so far, beating the April 1 record of 4.8 million. In the first week of May, when the second wave of the pandemic was at its peak, single-day vaccinations hovered around 1.6 million. On Tuesday, however, the pace slowed down with some States experiencing a massive fall in the numbers. While the intention of the Government is honourable, to set a scorching pace to reach herd immunity at the earliest, it needs to ensure that the exercise does not become an event but is part of an organised, consistent process. Two, the Government has declared the Delta+ mutation as a Variant of Concern (VoC). The announcement came within hours of the Union Health Secretary saying the variant is only a Variant of Interest (VoI). Such an open contradiction of its Ministry may be unique for this Government, but it shows the latter is proactive and moving ahead with caution, having drawn flak for failing to recognise the Delta variant earlier.



Three, the Government has cautioned the States against unchecked opening up of the lockdown, recommending a close watch on adherence to safety protocols. In perhaps its first, comprehensive advisory to the States concerning Delta+, the Government has asked them to step up monitoring in the six districts

in three States where cases of the new variant have been detected, increase testing, contact tracing, and vaccination. However, this is only a bit of the task done. Vaccinations continue to be problematic. The Government does give daily data about the number of doses at hand, but transparency is needed about the doses expected from the Indian and foreign manufacturers and the numbers apportioned to the states. This will enable to streamline the vaccination process. There is now an obvious rush to get free vaccinations leading to a fear of a reduced rush for paid vaccinations in private hospitals. Is it the right time for the Government to take over the procurement and supply of 100 per cent of the vaccinations to rationalise the process? India is yet to nail the vaccine efficacy issue. If it is a case of the more mutations the lesser the efficacy, then the Government has to come clear on a big-picture approach than reactive ones. There are reports of Bharat Biotech releasing data of its third phase trial to the Government regulator, but somehow the company shuns transparency. Also, the campaign to remove vaccine hesitancy is still to go national, presently restricted to the imagination of village-level teams. The unlock remains an issue of grave concern, with neither the States nor the Centre coming with tangible mechanisms to prevent safety violations without affecting economic activity.

Constitution, courts & a Prime Minister



RISHI GUPTA

Among a host of obstacles in the path, even with the President on his side, Nepal's Supreme Court has given Prime Minister Oli a rap on the knuckles

The ongoing political instability in Nepal has deteriorated with the Supreme Court's verdict on June 22. In a big blow to Prime Minister KP Oli, the apex court quashed the appointment of 20 new Ministers in the Oli Cabinet. These Ministers were appointed after Oli managed to crack a deal with a faction of the Janata Samajbadi Party led by Mahanta Thakur and Rajendra Mahto to support his minority Government. The acting Prime Minister, Oli, had appointed these Ministers, including two deputy Prime Ministers, on June 4 and 10. Meanwhile, these Ministers were appointed when the House of Representative stood dissolved, and the Supreme Court was examining a pile of petitions against the House dissolution on May 21. The Supreme Court has stoked the fanfare and enthusiasm among Oli's supporters for the second time in a row. On February 23, the court had quashed the unilateral move by President Bidya Bhandari to dissolve a functional Parliament and declaration of new elections in March and April. The first House was dissolved in December 2020 after Oli feared that his tussle with Maoist Party chief Prachanda would fall, which eventually happened in May.



Party itself was based on new portfolios and one deputy premier-ship.

As a result, Oli had asked his Ministers and loyalists in the Cabinet to resign *en masse*. However, amidst two back-to-back defeats in the apex court, the moral question for Oli has to be his resignation as for the last one year, he has merely been interested in the PMO for his political survival rather than focusing on COVID-19 and acting upon corruption charges levied on his fellow Ministers.

However, Oli has been trying to play out the Constitution for months, using the President's Office. As a result, of this nexus between Oli and Bhandari, Nepal again stands at a crossroads similar to the days of the political transition from monarchy to democracy in 2006. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear hundreds of petitions filed against President Bhandari's decision to dissolve the House for a second time. While the hopes are high that the court may restore the House, it brings severe administrative challenges to the Government. At present, Oli is left with only five Ministers in his cabinet, including himself in charge of several portfolios. As per the Constitution, Oli should have continued with his previous Cabinet as no new appointment can be made under a dissolved House, or the Government in question has not faced the vote of confidence. However, the power-sharing between Janata Samajbadi

Unreliable Oli: Many in India believe that New Delhi facilitated the Janata Samajbadi Party's decision to support Oli. As a result, a long-term critic to India, Oli went on to record to say "differences with India have been resolved". If this is the case, India has taken the biggest strategic risk by trusting an untrustworthy Oli. For the last five years, Oli has been spitting venom against India's goodwill in Nepal. From raising the border issue to manipulating cultural and religious facts to suit his ultra-nationalistic outlook, he unilaterally included India's sovereign territory in a new political map of the country. However, even after everything seemed to be favouring



KP SHARMA OLI IS A PRODUCT OF POLITICAL EQUATIONS AND CALCULATIONS, AND HIS CORD FUNCTIONS AS PER THE POLITICAL SUITABILITY. THEREFORE, HOPING A FRIENDLY OLI WILL BE NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE TASK FOR INDIA

India in Nepal, Oli once again alleged his claim on yoga as a Nepali practice and "not Indian". While Oli may still hold the powerful office in Nepal, India needs to think beyond him to keep open borders safe and prevent cross-border activities from affecting India's national security.

Oli is a product of political equations and calculations, and his cord functions as per the political suitability. Therefore, hoping a friendly Oli will be next to impossible task for India. On the other hand, China continues to benefit from political instability in the Himalayan country.

Before the second wave of COVID-19 had hit, India had supplied more than two million doses to Nepal. On the other hand, China promised to supply the second consignment of vaccines with four million doses. Meanwhile, the dragon has shown its unhappiness over media reports on the procurement. It exposes China's commercial intent in supplying the vaccines at about \$10 per dose (₹1186 Nepal) than its desired humanitarian intent. Meanwhile, Oli does not seem bothered with Chinese micro-management of Nepalese political affairs, its territorial expansion on the

Nepalese soil, brutal policies on Tibetan refugees living in Nepal and artificial humanitarian acts. The two large photographs of Chinese President Xi Jinping continue to grace the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website in Nepal at the cost of deteriorating relations with India.

Conclusion: The political instability in Nepal is the least desired by the people of Nepal under the current circumstances. Before Nepal, there are immediate challenges in terms of medical infrastructure, employment, economic development, infrastructure and leadership, which are clearly not on Oli's agenda. Therefore, while the people of Nepal await the court's verdict on the fate of Oli as Prime Minister, the latter himself should pave the way for a stable Nepal by resigning on moral grounds. Also, Nepal needs to understand that China may be a "big brother", but it is ill prepared to deal with dragon's ill-intended expansionist outlook where India is an "elder brother" it always needs.

(The author is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at the JNU and Visiting Fellow at the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs, Kathmandu. The views expressed are personal.)

PIC TALK



People with motorcycles travel by boats to cross the flooded Ganga river, at Kachchi Dargah in Patna

PTI

Red ball

The new, World Test Championship, format has accorded competitiveness to all cricket games, even against lesser names

The World Test Championship was launched to bring excitement back into the longest format of the game, *vis-à-vis* the faster T20 matches, across the globe. The inaugural season, which started immediately after the end of ICC Cricket World Cup 2019 and concluded with the first ever WTC Final in Southampton between India and New Zealand on Wednesday, was the first ever multination ICC event which was played with the red ball. The idea to start the championship in the ultimate format was to give relevance to every bilateral series that is played as the points were awarded to each team after the end of every series and the top two teams with the maximum number of points by the end of a two-year cycle make it to the final and fight for the silverware. Ever since the WTC format came into act, the Test matches saw the rise in level of competitiveness. The teams now go for the kill in every game because a win would get them extra points as against a draw. Earlier, teams used to rest all format players for the red ball matches against the not-



so-fancy opponents but now, under the new format, even after winning the series before all the matches are played, team's don't rest their main players and would rather start with the strongest possible eleven in all the matches.

The competitiveness that was missing from the Test matches was installed back into the game by this WTC championship and it has certainly added an extra flair in the bilateral matches. Now the matches against teams like Bangladesh and Windies also have the same relevance as that of the matches against Australia or England. However, there are still a few things that needed to be sorted out to make it even more interesting and worthy, like the number of points awarded after every Test match win should be the same, irrespective of the number of matches in the series. Every game should be offering equal points and not like a five-match Test series will offer 24 points per Test win as compared to 60 per win in case of two match series. That is quite unfair. There were discussions about if one game is enough to determine the winner, like in case of this year's championship, or the ICC should consider having a proper Best of Three final to get the winner.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THEY'RE OUR KIDS, GO TO THEM!

Sir — With regard to 'Corona's orphans: Kids of a lesser god', June 23, it is extremely pitiful that thousands of children in India have lost one or both parents in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. And the prospect of a surge of abandoned minors worries many. Heart-rending stories in the media and desperate calls for help on social channels reveal a devastating truth of our times.

The intention is good, the schemes are fine but how will orphaned children avail of these benefits? Can we expect small or adolescent orphaned children going to the Government departments, filling up forms, submitting certificates and availing of this scheme? The direction has to be in reverse.

Instead of orphans seeking help from the Government, it is the State machinery which should send its officials to meet these orphaned children, prepare details and arrange a smooth transfer of stipends and educational loans. The entire task devolves upon the State Governments, who will have to provide data to the Centre.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD

Sir — According to UNICEF, India has over 30 million orphan and abandoned children. Unfortunately, the existing Corona crisis is adding unknown numbers of orphans to the list. In times of crisis of this magnitude, some miscreants try to derive undue benefit by resorting to human trafficking, which surely is a blot on society. These unscrupulous people tend to hoodwink gullible persons, who are easy targets. Their sentiments are exploited for exorbitant sums of money. The business of child trafficking and criminal trading is rampant and must be dealt with an iron hand.

The National and State Commissions for Protection of Child are empowered by law to take legal action against such criminal activities. Social activists, NGOs, newspapers and the aware citizens must report and publicise such incidents so that timely action can be taken against those engaged in illegal activities.

Caution ahead



Delta Plus variant, a mutated version of the more aggressive B.1.617.2 strain that drove the second wave of infections in India, is undergoing additional mutation called K417N which could become a "variant of concern" if unchecked as the variant is causing a surge in cases. India would see a faster surge if aggressive COVID-appropriate behaviour is not followed and insisted upon. The Delta plus is a variant which is of same lineage as the Delta variant, with a slight change as there is one more mutation found, which could be a cause of concern because this mutation, the K417N, is something which may change the virus to some extent

as far as its infectivity is concerned.

The B.1.617.2 variant is characterised as being highly infectious. The spike protein is what helps the virus enter and infect human cells, and the K417N mutation has been associated with immune escape, or evasion, that leaves it less susceptible, or more immune, to the vaccine or any form of drug therapy. India should not take this virus casually as this virus is changing and changing to survive and infect more people, therefore we have to be ahead of the virus.

The UK did a very good job by having an aggressive lockdown for many months and when they started opening up, the new variant caused the surge in number of cases. What it means is we are also in a vulnerable situation and if we are not careful right now then three or four months from now, we will have a similar situation and that is why we need to be very aggressive; it is mutating, changing, new variants are coming up. With this danger of Delta Plus variant looming heavily, we have to tackle it on war footing.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

People must be made aware about the due process of adoption by the Government. The Central Adoption Resource Authority regulates the adoption of the orphaned, abandoned children. In fact, the whole process must be streamlined to avoid delays.

Recently, the SC also came to the rescue of those orphaned by the crisis and gave instructions to the Government about their protection. This critical issue must be addressed and heeded so that they can get their rightful due a dignified life.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

A DAMP SQUIB

Sir — Despite much political excitement around an Opposition party, the Rashtra Manch meeting hosted by Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar in the Capital turned out to be a damp squib with a majority of the Opposition parties giving it a miss and many of them sending in sec-

ond-line leaders.

The NCP was subsequently at pains to explain that Pawar was only playing the host and did not organise the meeting. It also explained that there was no deliberate exclusion of the Congress. Other than the Congress, the DMK, the RJD and the BSP too did not send any representatives to the meeting.

It has been reported in the media that this meeting of Rashtra Manch was held by Sharad Pawar to unite anti-BJP parties is totally a showpiece rather than serving a desired purpose. Moreover, the meeting should not be misconstrued as a big political step taken by Pawar to exclude the Congress from any potential opposition grouping, pointing out that several Congress leaders were invited but they did not attend.

Chitra Krishnan | Vashi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Chiranjeevi garu, on behalf of the State Government, I thank you for your kind words of appreciation. The credit goes to team effort.



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister — YS Jagan Mohan Reddy

We will not raise interest rates preemptively because we think employment is too high, because we fear the possible onset of inflation.

US Federal Reserve Chair — Jerome Powell

It is totally in the hands of makers as to what role they offer. I am known as a comedian and people have enjoyed my comic avatar for the longest.



Actor — Sunil Grover

Read reports that England cricketers may not be able to have family members with them Down Under this winter.

Former England skipper — Michael Vaughan

The scheme shall come into force with the effect from the date of its publication in the Delhi gazette.



Delhi Lieutenant Governor — Anil Bajaj



FIRST COLUMN

BACKWARDS AS 'FORWARD' IN UP

Rajbhar or otherwise, the names don't matter, but the point is to let the 'backwards' take the lead



BISWAJEET BANERJEE

Is it a coincidence that the state presidents of all the major parties in Uttar Pradesh namely, Bharatiya Janata Party, Samajwadi Party, and Congress belong to the backward castes, or is it a compulsion that has pushed all the major players in UP to woo the backwards by projecting them as state presidents? It is a political reality that the party which will be able to garner the maximum support from the backwards will win Uttar Pradesh. The BJP state president, Swatantra Dev Singh, and the Samajwadi Party state president, Naresh Uttam, are Kurmi, an influential backward caste after Yadavs. The Congress state president, Ajay Kumar Lallu, is a Senthwar, another backward caste.

The results of the 2017 assembly elections and the 2019 general elections show the importance of the votes of the backwards in UP politics. "The BJP was able to win these elections only because it was able to stitch a social alliance between its core, upper caste, and middle-class base and the intermediary castes, constituting more than 50 per cent of the state's electorate," Nomita P Kumar of Giri Institute of Development Studies in Lucknow said. The forthcoming electoral battle in Uttar Pradesh represents a matter of survival for the four major players. After the BJP fared poorly in the West



Bengal assembly elections and got a drubbing in the state Panchayat polls, a message went down the political corridors that it is losing its sheen. A loss in UP would intensify the pressure on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and that could prove detrimental to the party in the 2024 elections.

Senior BJP leaders confirm that the RSS and the BJP leadership have asked senior leaders to contest the elections. The Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath, and Deputy Chief Minister, Dr Dinesh Sharma, who are members of the Upper House, will contest from Gorakhpur and Lucknow, respectively. For the Samajwadi Party it is a fight for its relevance. It secured only five seats in the 2014 general elections. It lost the 2017 assembly elections despite an alliance with Congress. In 2019, it lost again when it had an alliance with BSP. The party lost these elections under Akhilesh Yadav's leadership. There are reports that Akhilesh Yadav is not willing to forge an alliance with big parties but is ready to share seats with smaller caste-based parties. Samajwadi Party has almost finalized an alliance with the Mahan Dal, a small caste-based party that is popular among the backward Maurya, Kushwaha, and Saini castes. On the other hand, BJP too has started putting its house in order. Sanjay Nishad of Nishad Party and Anupriya Patel of Apna Dal (S) recently met Union Home Minister Amit Shah. The meeting is considered crucial in the backdrop of backward politics and BJP losing the Rajbhar support after Om Prakash Rajbhar of Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party walked out of the National Democratic Alliance.

Rajbhar has formed 'Bhagidari Sankalp Morcha' - a conglomeration of small parties and the front will field candidates in the 2022 assembly elections. The Morcha includes Babu Singh Kushwaha's Jan Adhikar Party, Krishna Patel's Apna Dal, Prem Chandra Prajapati's Bhagidari Andolan Manch, Baburam Pal's National Uday Party, Ram Sagar Bind's Bharat Mata Party, Ram Karan Kashyap's Bharatiya Vanchit Samaj Party, Anil Chauhan's Janata Kranti Party and All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen of Asaduddin Owaisi. Arun Rajbhar, son of Om Prakash Rajbhar, said that the Morcha will emerge as the king-maker. "We have the support of Backwards, MBCs, and Muslims. This is a very potent force which has the potential to topple the apple cart of big parties," he said.

(The writer is Executive Director (News), The Pioneer, Lucknow. The views expressed are personal.)

Fuel, healthcare, online businesses spur prices

The recovery process, the SBI says, needs a cut in fuel prices by tax rationalisation as otherwise non-discretionary spends will continue to get distorted and cause inflation



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The Indian economy may have started recovering with the pandemic unlock but galloping inflation, increasing healthcare expenses, and rising unemployment are major banes.

The global economy is to rise by four per cent and India would marginally benefit from it with some rise in exports. A World Bank report wants India to create 90 million jobs in non-agricultural organized sector - a Herculean task as most private sector offices are either closing down or slashing operations. Humanitarian crises, hunger deaths, and societal conflicts are growing.

Latest figures indicate 12.69 per cent inflation primarily on account of F2 - food and fuel. The fuel price rise is hitting every sector of the economy with nobody to correct it. The basic price of petrol remains still around ₹35.99 and over ₹65 are the central and state tax components. The edible oil prices have reached crisis points with a 62 per cent spike, Food Secretary Sudhansu Pande says. This follows withdrawal of edible oil from essential commodities list in September 2020

A State Bank of India report says that massive increase in healthcare, especially in the hinterland, steadily rising fuel prices, and online delivery of articles will increase inflationary pressure much higher on the one hand, while crowding out other consumer spending on the other, putting a big question mark on overall growth that is still being driven by consumption demand. Month-on-month increase in inflation on non-institutional medicines, x-ray, ECG, pathological and other clinical tests is taking a heavy toll not only in urban areas but even on the rural populace.

The SBI report has questioned the headline inflation figures announced by the ministry. It says that price movements convey important information about the scarcity of particular goods and services like health and medical care as of now. Health expenditure, which currently constitutes five per cent of overall inflation basket, may jump to at least 11 per cent. (It may be noted that health expenditure is around ₹6 lakh crore or five per cent of the private final consumption expenditure). This is likely to also result in a squeeze in expenditure on other items of discretionary consumption.

The daily increase of fuel prices is another bane. "And if we look at credit card spends since December, CPI computed inflation for the five-month ending April is higher than the CSO estimate on an average by 60 basis points and the higher oil prices had forced consumers to ration out discretionary spends in December," says SBI chief economist Soumya Kanti Ghosh. It means the actual inflation is 60 per cent more than the CSO figures.

The RBI has virtually given credence to the SBI finding as it estimates ₹2 lakh crore losses on economic output. It says that it may not reflect on GDP but there would be a considerable value loss across the economy. The SBI report clarifies it as the share of non-discretionary spend which has jumped to 59 per cent in April and 52 per cent in March and "this does not augur well".

The inflation is to further rise as the US has matched its interest rate rise. It would



THE RBI HAS ALREADY LOWERED ITS GDP PROJECTION TO 9.5 PER CENT FROM 10.5 PER CENT. IT HAD HOPED 18.5 PER CENT RECOVERY IN THE FIRST QUARTER, CONSIDERED LOW BASE GIVEN THE CONTRACTION LAST YEAR. IT IS NOW SCEPTICAL DUE TO THE SECOND WAVE OF LOCKDOWN THAT SEES DECLINE IN DEPOSITS, INDICATING HIGHER HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES, AND LOWER SAVINGS

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



impact India as well as there would be commodity price-rise globally. The RBI upon the government's suggestion has suppressed interest rates but it will not help keep prices low. It will make it difficult for the RBI to manage the conflicting targets of inflation, exchange rate, and adequate liquidity amidst weak growth.

The RBI has already lowered its GDP projection to 9.5 per cent from 10.5 per cent. It had hoped 18.5 per cent recovery in the first quarter, considered low base given the contraction last year. It is now sceptical due to the second wave of lockdown that sees decline in deposits, indicating higher household expenses, and lower savings. Additionally, currency holding - cash - with the people decelerated to 1.7 per cent during April against a growth of 3.5 per cent last year.

It substantiates what the SBI says that extra expenses on households have increased manifold. Also, there has been an increase in use of online delivery platforms which is not considered by the NSO and if the NSO considers online prices, there will be 10-15 basic points (bps) impact on CPI inflation. The SBI says

that the online delivery adds to inflation. The RBI says that the increased healthcare and other expenses have impacted domestic demand. That is the reason of delayed recovery of manufacturing, core sector and other activities.

The recovery process, the SBI says, needs a cut in fuel prices by tax rationalisation as otherwise non-discretionary spends will continue to get distorted and cause inflation.

The RBI has given another formula. It has gone a bit beyond and wants to partner with the private sector - in short a prescription for further denuding the PSUs. The recommendation should make the authorities rethink on privatisation.

Over the last few years, major PSUs have consistently increased payouts to the government despite a dip in their profitability. Since 2016, as per an official diktat they are paying a minimum 30 per cent of their profit after tax or five per cent of their net worth, whichever is higher, as dividend.

The 100 government companies declared a dividend of ₹71,857 crore during 2018-19, according to the CAG. In 2021,

the PSUs paid a dividend of ₹39,022 crore (against an estimated ₹34,717 crore), the RBI paid ₹99,000 crore dividend, and other banks paid ₹1,619 crore in 2020-21. In short, a major part of the government expenses are being funded by the PSUs. The government's efforts to sell PSUs are being stonewalled by a poor economy. It should rather change its policies to strengthen the PSUs.

Despite this the India remains an investment destination. A healthy flow of FDI into the country corroborates India's strength and attracts attention of global investors, the Confederation of Indian Industry says. Total equity, re-invested earnings, and capital rose 10 per cent to the highest ever \$81.72 billion during 2020-21.

The RBI expects recent government boost in capital expenditure to spur activity and investment. For all this, however, there has to be a major shift in policy thrust. While private investments must rise, the government must relook at strengthening PSUs to tide over the crisis that is beyond the capacity of the private sector. This would alone cut prices and boost demand.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

ON A DAY INDIA VACCINATED MORE THAN 84 LAKH PEOPLE, DELHI ADMINISTERED ONLY 76,259 OUT OF MORE THAN 11 LAKH DOSES AVAILABLE. WHY?
— UNION URBAN DEVELOPMENT MINISTER HARDEEP SINGH PURI



HARDEEP JI: PLS FOCUS ON PROVIDING ENOUGH VACCINES FOR THE YOUTH, RATHER THAN JUST ABUSING ARVIND KEJRIWAL ALL THE TIME.
— DELHI DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER MANISH SISODIA

Aviation industry: Pandemic-hit Phoenix waiting to rise

Indian aviation is expected to incur \$4 billion worth of losses in 2021 and it is not easy to even out the operational costs before 2023

The COVID-19 pandemic has clipped the wings of the aviation industry the world over. In India, the lockdown banning air travel has hit this industry the worst. As a ripple effect, the tour and travel and the hospitality industry have also been hit.

Downsizing has led to people in these industries losing their jobs and a lucky few are working on half, reduced or meagre salaries. International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) pegs the losses of the aviation industry at \$370 billion. Air travel is down 60 per cent. This has led to airlines shutting most of their operations. They continue to incur fixed costs without the grounded fleets not earning a dime. According to the Indian rating



GYANESHWAR DAYAL

(The writer is a columnist and a documentary film-maker. The views expressed are personal.)

agency ICRA, domestic passenger traffic between May and September 2020 was only 11 million in comparison to 70 million in 2019.

An aviation expert, PS Nair, says Indian aviation is expected to incur \$4 billion worth of losses in 2021. Nair says: "These losses are not easy to even out. A very careful and integrated approach is required to rejuvenate the aviation industry. Everything would depend upon the economic recovery of the country. But aviation stands a good chance, as it has no alternative. If you have to travel, you have to take a flight; virtual flight is not an option."

India is the seventh-largest civil aviation market in the world. It is the third-largest aviation market in terms of



domestic operations. The country has the potential to overtake the United Kingdom and become the world's third-largest aviation market in terms of handling air passengers within the next five years.

The best minds in the aviation industry recently had a brainstorming session under the aegis of the Air Travellers Association (ATA). GS Bawa, General Secretary, ATA, feels

that the recovery will take years, if not decades. The recovery is linked to Covid-19 vaccination programs and testing procedures worldwide. He feels operational costs would not breakeven before 2023.

PS Nair, the former CEO, Delhi Airport and founder-CEO of HIAL says that the industry has a good chance to bounce back as fundamentals of the country's economy are still favourable. For a few years before the pandemic, the aviation sector of India had registered a steady growth and India had overtaken Japan to become the third-biggest domestic market. Private investors were showing interest in developing the country's airports but Covid-19 struck and stalled everything.

Efforts are already on in the industry as well as in the government to make the turnaround possible. To encourage the development of the aviation industry, the government plans to invest up to \$1.83 billion and develop airport infrastructure and aviation navigation services by 2026. The Culture and Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel is hopeful of early revival, saying the tourism and aviation industries will be back with a bang because the government is linking its vaccination program with the drive to revive the tourism sector. The government is also working on a uniform policy for travel and protocols for vaccinated travellers. The Minister recently launched the Confederation of Hospitality, Technology and

Tourism Industry, an industry body of travel and hospitality tech players like Airbnb, EaseMyTrip, OYO, and Yatra. The idea is to help small operators in the tourism sector.

Nair, however, feels optimistic because the country aims to open 100 new airports by 2024 of which 30 projects are already in progress. Plans are on to have 200 more airports by 2040. The infrastructure boost coupled with a rise in demand should see the Indian aviation industry flying high. "The Government must support the industry. If you increase the airfares, the demand may further come down, if you don't losses would mount," says Bawa.

On its part, ATA has a few recommendations for helping out the aviation industry. It has

asked the government to compensate airlines and airports to the extent of their operating losses and give them some tax relief. It wants a government package for maintaining operations in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. This will improve passenger confidence. The traffic will improve bringing sustainability to the sector.

Bawa has also asked the government to relax the travel restrictions for those who have been vaccinated. "Restrictions like the RT-PCR tests and quarantines should not be mandatory for the travellers with both jabs," he says. The ATA has suggested that for inland travel, a pass with a fitness certificate can also be issued. 'Yatra Setu' on the lines of 'Arogya Setu' can be a good step in this direction.

Travel industry likely to reach 35-40 pc revenue

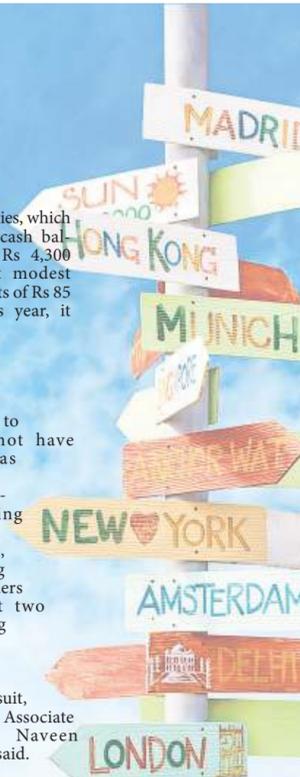
PNS ■ MUMBAI

The travel and tourism industry is likely to reach 35-40 per cent revenue of the pre-pandemic level in the current financial year, according to a report. "With states beginning to ease restrictions and vaccination rates expected to improve, we see domestic travel picking up slowly from the second quarter. "However, segments such as international holidays and inbound travel may see recovery only in the second half, and that too only if travel restrictions are eased in foreign countries," Crisil Ratings Senior Director Manish Gupta said. He also noted that with meetings and events shifting to the online mode, corporate travel is expected to remain under pressure. "Overall, therefore, revenue this fiscal year may reach only a little over a third of the pre-pandemic level, that is 35-40 per cent," he added.

The Crisil Ratings report further stated that while companies have raised capital last fiscal and will continue with cost-control measures to cut cash losses, therefore, a significant decline in travel and continued uncertainty about the pandemic will weigh negatively on their credit profiles. Tours and travel operators provide services such as air or bus ticketing, hotel packages for both leisure and corporate travel within India and overseas. These companies' revenues declined to Rs 2,300 crore last fiscal, which was only 20 per cent of FY20 levels, after the nationwide lockdown and other restrictions led to a sharp reduction in travel, it said. The industry was brought to a standstill in the first quarter of last fiscal – the peak travel season because of summer holidays – which eroded revenue 95 per cent year-on-year. However, there was a gradual turnaround thereafter, with

improving air traffic and demand for short domestic holidays lifting revenue to 55 per cent of the pre-pandemic level by the fourth quarter, the report said. Then the second wave set in and under its impact, the first quarter of this fiscal is expected to be almost a washout once again, this time because of state-level lockdowns, it added. In FY22, too, the industry is expected to post operating cash losses of around Rs 150-200 crore, which is significantly lower than last year, mainly on account of improved bookings and continued control of costs. Moreover, the report stated that the travel operators have limited dependence on debt as their working capital cycle is typically negative because of high customer advances and creditors compared to low receivables. Further, companies raised capital last fiscal amid near-

term uncertainties, which boosted their cash balance to over Rs 4,300 crore, against modest debt repayments of Rs 85 crore due this year, it pointed out. The silver lining for the industry is people's fundamental urge to travel may not have diminished as multiple European countries, including France, Italy and Spain, began opening up their borders over the last two months to bring back tourists and the US is expected to soon follow suit, Crisil Ratings Associate Director Naveen Vaidyanathan said.



Cabinet approves pact between India, St Vincent

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Cabinet on Wednesday approved an agreement between India and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the exchange of tax information and assistance in the collection. The agreement between India and St Vincent and the Grenadines, which is an island nation, will help in facilitating the exchange of information between the two countries, including sharing of information held by the banks and other financial institutions encompassing the information regarding the legal and beneficial ownership. It will also facilitate the assistance in the collection of the tax claims between the two countries. Thus, it will strengthen India's commitment to fight offshore tax evasion and tax avoidance practices, leading to the generation of unaccounted black money, an official statement said. The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra



Modi, has approved an agreement between the Republic of India and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the exchange of information and assistance in the collection with respect to taxes, it added. The agreement also contains tax examination abroad provisions, which provide that a country may allow the representatives of the other country to enter its territory to interview individuals and examine records for tax purposes.

There was no such agreement with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the past and India was negotiating this agreement for a long time. Finally, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines agreed to conclude this agreement with India, which will promote tax cooperation between the two countries through the exchange of information and assistance in the collection of outstanding tax claims between the two countries, the statement said.

MONEY MATTERS

Heineken acquires 14.98 per cent more stake in UBC

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Dutch brewing major Heineken on Wednesday said it has acquired an additional 14.98 per cent stake in United Breweries Ltd, taking its total shareholding to 61.50 per cent. "Heineken N.V. today (on Wednesday) announces that it has acquired an additional 39,644,346 ordinary shares in United Breweries Ltd (UBL) taking its shareholding in UBL from 46.5 per cent to 61.5 per cent," Heineken said in a statement. UBL, with its flagship brand 'Kingfisher', is the leading player in the beer market in India. The move comes a day after markets regulator Sebi had exempted Heineken International B.V. from the obligation of making an open offer following its proposed acquisition of shares in UBL. Sebi had on Tuesday granted waiver following an application from Heineken International seeking exemption from the applicability of SAST Regulations in its proposed acquisition of UBL's equity shares, from the recovery officer of the Bangalore Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) under whose custody the transfer shares owned by the Vijay Mallya Group are being held.



Sensex drops 283 points; Nifty ends below 15,700

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex gave up early gains and tumbled 283 points on Wednesday following losses in index heavyweights Reliance Industries, HDFC and ICICI Bank. The 30-share BSE index ended 282.63 points or 0.54 per cent lower at 52,306.08. Similarly, the broader NSE Nifty declined 85.80 points or 0.54 per cent to 15,686.95. Kotak Bank was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding over 1 per cent, followed by L&T, Tata Steel, HDFC, TCS, Reliance Industries, HCL Tech and ICICI Bank. On the other hand, Maruti, Titan, Bajaj Finserv and M&M were among the gainers. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong and



Tokyo ended with gains, while Seoul was in the red. Equities in Europe were largely trading with losses in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 0.84 per cent higher at USD 75.44 per barrel.



Former Infosys CEO to head task force to help govt in bringing major reforms in bureaucracy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Infosys CEO S D Shibulal was on Wednesday appointed chairperson of a three-member task force formed to help the government in bringing major bureaucratic reforms through its ambitious "Mission Karmayogi".

Besides Lal who is founder of ShikshaLokam and founder and ex-CEO of Infosys Limited, Govind Iyer, Consultant at global management consulting group Egon Zehnder, and Pankaj Bansal, Co-founder and Group CEO of HR tech company PeopleStrong, will be part of

the task force, according to a Personnel Ministry order. Adil Zainulbhai, chairman designate, Capacity Building Commission, Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) will be a special invitee to the discussions of the task force, it said.

Rupee snaps 2-day losing streak, closes up by 10 paise at 74.27

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee snapped its two-day losing streak to settle 10 paise higher at 74.27 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, following the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market. At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 74.26 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 74.07 and a low of 74.39. It finally ended at 74.27 against the American currency, registering a rise of 10 paise over its previous close. On Tuesday, rupee had settled at 74.37. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, dipped 0.01 per cent to 91.74.

Dabur commences Rs 550 cr manufacturing facility in MP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

MCG major Dabur India Ltd on Wednesday said it has commenced construction of its largest manufacturing facility near Indore in Madhya Pradesh. The company commenced construction of its largest manufacturing facility in Madhya Pradesh. Being set up with a phased investment of around Rs 550 crore, this new unit would manufacture a range of Dabur's food products, ayurvedic medicines, and health supplements. Dabur said in a regulatory filing. Dabur said the first phase of construction of this new facility – which has been planned under the Mega Projects Scheme of the Madhya Pradesh government as well as the Central Government's Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme – is scheduled for completion by the end of 2021-22 financial year. Located in the SMART Industrial Park near Indore, this unit will provide direct cum indirect employment to around 1,250 people initially and over 3,000 people at the end of the final phase.



Education important for youth to face challenges: Labour Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Labour Minister Santosh Gangwar on Wednesday acknowledged the importance of education system and the labour market to prepare our young generation to face the upcoming challenges of the world of work. Gangwar was addressing the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting on Joint Education and Labour & Employment Ministers' Declaration here on Wednesday, a labour ministry statement said. The meeting was held under the Italian presidency. While supporting the adoption of the Joint Ministerial Declaration, the Minister emphasised that such an initiative by the member countries shall be very helpful for the overall development and capacity building of the entire young generation, which is rapidly evolving and has now become more challenging due to the pandemic. "India is strengthening its educational and skilling efforts to ensure quality education



from pre-school to senior secondary stage. New National Education Policy, 2020 in India, also aims for reforms in school and higher education systems," he stated. He also informed that the government has taken several initiatives for capacity building and skilling of our youth and for employment generation. The National Skill Development Mission is resulting in convergence of skilling efforts across all sectors. The

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, enables the youth to take up industry related skill training to assist them in securing better opportunities. For employment generation in the country, the government is paying up to 24 per cent of wages towards EPF contributions under the Aatma-Nirbhar Bharat Rozgar Yojana for new employees as well as those who lost their jobs in the pandemic and are being re-employed.

Jet Airways shares continue to fly

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Jet Airways extended their rally to Wednesday, gaining 5 per cent, after the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) gave its nod to the Jalan Kalrock Consortium's bid for the airline. The stock jumped 4.98 per cent to Rs 104.40 – its upper circuit limit – for the day on both BSE and NSE. On Tuesday also, Jet



Airways shares jumped nearly 5 per cent. Two years after Jet Airways went bankrupt, the National Company Law Tribunal on Tuesday gave its nod to the Jalan Kalrock Consortium's

bid for the airline and the resolution professional is hopeful that the carrier will be back in the skies by the end of this year. While the detailed written order is awaited, the tribunal made it clear that it will not give any direction on the issue of airport slots for the airline, saying that the matter will be handled by the government or the appropriate authority concerned.

IndoSpace launches 2 parks in Tamil Nadu

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Grade A industrial real estate and logistics parks developer IndoSpace on Wednesday announced the launch of two parks in Tamil Nadu to cater to automotive and electronic sectors, among others. With a combined area of 118 acres, the two parks- Vallam II and Oragadam III- will provide smooth access to industrial hubs and micro-markets in the state and boost IndoSpace's footprint across strategically significant regions, the company said in a release.



It has a long-term goal of creating 120 million square feet of modern logistics infrastructure across the country and the setting of the two parks is a step in that direction, it said. The Everstone Group, GLP

and Realterm – promoted IndoSpace has a portfolio of 43 million square feet across developed and under-construction projects spanning 41 industrial and logistics parks in nine cities.

Wipro GE Healthcare to locally make Versana Ultrasound range

PNS ■ BANGALURU

Wipro GE Healthcare on Wednesday said it has commenced local production of its Versana Ultrasound range in the country. The initiative is part of the company's strategy to expand localisation and strengthen the supplier ecosystem. The Versana Ultrasound range is part of Wipro GE Healthcare's affordable product portfolio and will be manufactured at its manufacturing facility in Kadugodi, Bengaluru. "With this new local manufacturing we will cut down our imports of the Versana range by half," Wipro GE Healthcare South Asia Managing Director Shrawan Subramanyam said in a statement. With local manufacturing, the company can fast-track the availability of these critical care equipment, he added. "The price benefit will also be passed on to our customers. By the end of 2021, the plan is to locally manufacture seven ultrasound products catering to OB/GYN, radiology, cardiology, anaesthesia, emergency, and critical care segments," Subramanyam noted.



GoMechanic raises \$42 mn in funding led by Tiger Global

PNS ■ BANGALURU

Car servicing startup GoMechanic on Wednesday said it has raised USD 42 million (around Rs 311 crore) in a funding round led by Tiger Global Management. The Series C funding round also saw participation from existing investors Sequoia Capital India, Orios Venture Partners and Chiratae Ventures. It is the fourth round of institutional funding for the company which plans to utilise the proceeds to accelerate its growth in tier II and III towns, ramping up the technology team and launching operations in international markets. Prior to this round, GoMechanic had raised USD 21 million from Sequoia Capital India, Orios Venture Partners and Chiratae Ventures. Earlier in 2020, Pawan Munjal, Chairman, MD & CEO, Hero MotoCorp also invested in the company. "The current fund raise is further validation of the hard work put in by the GoMechanic team over the last five years and further cements our position as the undisputed market leader in the auto aftermarket ecosystem."



Gold gains Rs 110; silver climbs Rs 324

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Gold in the national capital on Wednesday gained Rs 110 to Rs 46,396 per 10 gram following recovery in global precious metal prices, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 46,286 per 10 gram. Silver also climbed Rs 324 to Rs 66,864 per kilogram from Rs 66,540 per kilogram in the previous trade. "Spot gold prices for 24 carat in Delhi were up by Rs 110 in-line with recovery in COMEX gold prices," according to HDFC Securities, Senior Analyst (Commodities), Tapan Patel.

Housing sales in Apr-Jun may rise 93%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Housing sales are estimated to rise 93 per cent year-on-year during April-June across seven major cities, but may fall 58 per cent compared to the previous quarter due to the adverse impact of the second wave of COVID-19, according to property consultant Anarock. Sales are likely to be around 24,570 units across seven major cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Pune, Anarock said. Sales of residential properties stood at 12,740 units in April-June 2020 and 58,290 units in March quarter 2021. Anarock released the data of housing sales and launches a week before the end of the cur-



rent quarter. When asked about the reason for release of data in advance, Anarock did not reply. PropTiger, Knight Frank India, PropEquity release their data after the end of every quarter. JLL India, of late, is

also releasing the data before quarter ends. "The second COVID-19 wave definitely impacted overall residential property market activity in the second quarter this year when juxtaposed against the preceding quarter. However, compared to the corresponding period of 2020, the sector displayed remarkable resilience," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said. Importantly, the localized lockdowns and restrictions did not dent activity as much as the complete nationwide lockdown last year, he added. "Restrictions are now easing across cities and the vaccination drive is gathering momentum. We, therefore, anticipate residential demand to see steady growth in the upcoming quarter," Puri said. The structural shift in housing demand continues – many current homeowners seek to upgrade to larger homes and the previously purchase-averse millennials remain very active property buyers, he said. According to the data, hous-

ing sales in MMR are likely to jump over two-fold at 7,400 units in April-June against 3,620 units in the year-ago period. However, sales may drop by 64 per cent from 20,350 units in March quarter of 2021 calendar year. Pune is likely to witness housing sales of around 3,790 units in April-June 2021 against 2,160 units in the corresponding quarter last year. Demand is likely to fall 64 per cent from 10,550 units sold in January-March 2021. Sales of residential properties in Delhi-NCR may rise by 65 per cent to 3,470 units in June quarter 2021 against 2,100 units in the corresponding period last year. On sequential basis, sales may drop by 61 per cent from 8,790 units in first quarter.



Environment plays an important role in our lives. This has opened plenty of lucrative options in the field in India as well as abroad, says Dr Mukesh Kwatra

BE EVERGREEN

mining industry, plant food industry, textile and dying industry, food processing units and bio fuel industry. After holding a degree in this field you get a variability of careers to choose from and that could be from government, personal organisations or from plentiful of alternative industries.

One can also consider a teaching job in schools or universities. Several private organisations like food processing industries, refineries, distilleries and plant food industries are providing various job opportunities for the graduates in this field.

Aspirants doing various courses in environment field, can apply for a research degree in government organisations. MSC

degree holding candidates can find many lucrative career opportunities in India as well as abroad in Environmental Science.

Environmental Professor: The scope of environment studies is tremendously growing in recent years with cutting-edge research and continuous innovation in the field. Researchers find Environmental Professor as a lucrative career choice. If you want to be a part of this highly paid job in government and private sectors then pursue a desired degree to achieve success.

Environmental Engineering: It is a job type in which environmentalists utilise the knowledge of engineering thus acquired in soil science, hydraulics, chemistry etc to evolve answers for ecological issues. They are also better equipped to address global issues, such as ecological

disparity, water issues, climate change, and environmental sustainability. If you choose to start your career at the right place, you are bound to attain heights in your career. It offers you plenty of opportunities to work on broad range of fields.

Environmental Biologists: They are scientists who study how living organisms interact with each other, their environments and surroundings. In this field one can work as field technicians, laboratory technicians, researchers for private or government laboratories, or as independent contractors.

Environmental Scientists: They are the ones who use their knowledge of natural science to protect the environment and human health. Environment scientists are employed with mines, agencies involved in cleaning up of polluted areas, dying industry, fertiliser industry, as advisory to policymakers, or work with waste management concerns.

This sector provides plethora of highly paid job opportunities. You can be employed by various Government organisations like Pollution Control Board, Water Authority, Waste management and Urban Planning.

Environmental Journalist: With a lot of media attention off late to environment concerns, reporting on environmental problems is at the rise. People search for complete information associated with the surroundings, for this reason there is an increase in the demand for environmental journalists.

One may also opt for jobs in fertiliser plants and can also work in food processing companies as managers. Besides, regarding the environment issues many NGOs are coming up to take up and work upon to find solutions to the various Environment concerns. According to one's interests, one can also join these organisations.

There is plenty of opportunities, abundance of jobs and various paths a diploma holder in environment field can choose to take. In addition, the earning hereinafter offer a reasonable possibility to clear scholar mortgage debts if any and take care of their family in future.

(The writer is the founder of Smiling Tree.)

Nanotechnology boom in medical diagnostics

Medical diagnostics is more than a 50-billion-dollar industry worldwide with almost 20 billion dollars of it related to nanotechnology in medical diagnostics. Nanotechnology is an enabling diagnostics technology that can catapult the sensitivity sometimes by several orders of magnitude. An example is Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy (SERS) technology, which is three orders of magnitude, that means thousand times, more sensitive than conventional Raman technology. The sensitivity of nano-enabled devices is related to the very small size (about 10 - 200 nanometers in size) particles or fibers that can conduct electrons faster, sensitively and rapidly change color or electronic properties with their environment such as the presence of very minute (part per billion) amounts of chemical constituents. Sensitivity and speed are the biggest demands in the medical industry. Imagine having an instant Covid test done with absolute accuracy. Nanotechnology is by far the overwhelming solution for such rapid and sensitive diagnostics using such materials as gold nanoparticles, gold nanoclusters which are only 1 nm in size, carbon nanotubes and graphene, titania, etc. Furthermore, nanotech diagnostic devices have extremely low power consumption, are ultra-small and compact.

Optical diagnostics are also a wave of the future. Imagine shining a light on a suspected cancer and being able to say in minutes whether it is cancer or not. Mobile light devices can be taken to villages for non-invasive diagnostics that are extremely inexpensive. Such mobile devices are already under development. The advantage of light diagnostics is that it can evolve into therapeutics, that is diag-

nostics combined with therapy. Shine light on a cancer, and if the light detects cancer, the same light can remove the cancer painlessly. The future is almost here.

Medical Imaging technologies for diagnostics is another area that is exploding in size and driven by more and more accurate high-resolution imaging combined with artificial intelligence-based processing. Medical imaging resolution through nanotechnology is accomplished using suitable nanoparticles that can accumulate in target tissues and vastly enhance the contrast of those tissues. Nano contrast agents market is about 3 billion dollars with global companies such as Nanoscan imaging, Nanotherapeutics, GE, Bayer and so on. Contrast agents include nano iron oxide, minerals such as nano calcium phosphate, gold, quantum dots, etc. The hope is to image lesions much smaller than a millimeter so that appropriate steps can be taken long before it is too late. Advance warning is the holy grail of diagnostics and the earlier one can diagnose the more the number of lives that are saved.

Today personal use medical diagnostic devices are mobile integrated with wireless devices. Nano-enabled wireless devices have much higher bandwidth, use a wider RF range, are compact and low cost and can work at high frequencies increasing data speeds to 30-40 Mbps. With such mobile electronic device integration, the market for nanotech medical diagnostics can triple in the next ten years making it commonplace for the ordinary man to be wirelessly connected to analytical data centers that monitor and alert the person and communicate results automatically to medical centers for emergency help.

(The writer, Dr. Shantikumar Nair, is the Dean Research at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham.)



FUN

ARCHIE



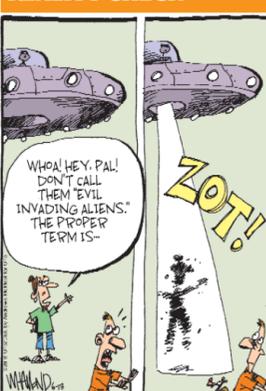
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



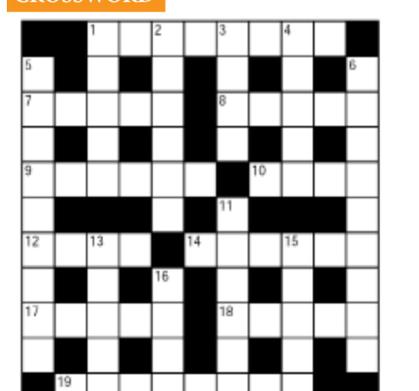
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

Yesterday's solution

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

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

- Fish tank
- Fewest
- Narrow shell
- Ottawa is the capital of this country
- Journey
- Slightly hot
- Thief
- Sweeten a drink with this
- A feeling of rage
- Obstinate

DOWN

- Once more
- Messy, disorganised
- Tumble over and over

SOLUTION:

P	L	E	A	S	A	N	T	I
U	N	G	O	T				
R	O	T	S	T	U	R	L	E
C	E	S	S	N	A			
H	U	R	I	E	M	A	G	I
A	H	D						
S	H	O	E	S	C	O	C	O
E	A	A	R	N				
D	O	C	T	O	R	L	O	N
G	E							
T	E	R	M	I	N	E	D	

GINGER MEGGS



COMING TOGETHER WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

When a GHMC garbage collector's life was in danger, residents of a colony he worked in came together to pool in lakhs of rupees to help his family pay the hospital bills. They tell *The Pioneer's* RACHEL DAMMALA that they're only giving back what he did to them as a dutiful worker.



Rachael Dawson with her brother David Dawson

Dokka Narasimha has been a garbage collector in the Banjara Hills area for close to 30 years. It was on June 12 that he took his vaccine shot against Covid. Like it happened to most people that took the job, he started showing side effects of high fever and took a Dolo 65 to treat it. Three days later, Narasimha had a series of epileptic attacks and as they kept progressively increasing, he was rushed to the hospital immediately. The doctors found that he was bleeding internally bleeding, and noticed that the blood collected in his lungs was clotting. They immediately, through surgery, removed this clot but Narasimha had remained unconscious for quite a few days and the doctors said he needs to be on life-support to recover.

41-year-old Narasimha is the sole breadwinner of his family. His wife Manga is a homemaker, he has three beautiful children, twin daughters who are 15, and a son, who is 11. Manga has been trying to make ends meet, to pay the hospital bills that cost close to half a-lakh per day! She took her husband's phone and left a message to members of the colony he worked for, with a picture of Narasimha receiving treatment.

And that's when things changed.

"Narsingh, as we fondly call him, has been our colony garbage collector for the past 25 years. He is a hard-working, genuine, helpful worker and has grown to be a



Narasimha with his son

friend to everyone in the colony. I remember him waving goodbye to me when I boarded my bus to school. When my older brother met with an accident in 2000, he brought him tender coconut water every day, and when my parents met with an accident in 2008, he did the same for us all. He is almost the same age as my brother, when my brother returned from Ahmedabad after his higher studies, Narsingh was so glad, they hugged and greeted each other, they were that close," Rachael Dawson, one of the residents of Aurora Colony in Banjara Hills, shares about the kind of relationship they share with Narasimha.

When residents of the colony learnt of his condition, they rushed to help in whatever ways they could think of. As soon as they saw the message, the Dawsons thought of multiple ways to help Narasimha's family. "We then thought of creating a fundraiser online, this was the first time we did something like this. We shared about the same in our colony's WhatsApp group and people responded promptly. We were able to collect close to 2.5 lakhs via the fundraiser for Narasimha's family," Rachael informs.

Members of the colony even

put up his G-pay number for people to send it directly to his wife, and she received close to 50,000 rupees.

Apart from this, the fundraiser reached the families of residents living outside of India, and they sent another 1.5 lakhs to help save Narasimha's life. "My mom's brother and my dad's relative sent us close to 1.5 lakhs and that's how we were able to collect close to 4.5L until now, and hope to receive the remaining money too, this will go a long way in giving back Narasimha what he gave us," the 26-year-old resident shares.

Manga says she's extremely grateful for what the residents of the colony are doing for her. "My own family couldn't help me so much. They have all now become my true family. They're regularly contacting me to check on us, and that support has kept me going, it has been keeping me strong through it all," Manga shares.

Right now, Narasimha, who was shifted out of ICU on Tuesday morning after he seemed to be recovering, was admitted back to the ICU after he had difficulty breathing and acute chest pain. In a day or two, the doctors are going to be running a series of tests to check what could possibly be the cause.

This story of a community coming together to help a worker in dire times is sure the kind we need to hear in times when most care little to even hold a decent conversation or smile back at those helping us every day.



Entrepreneur Aditya Gupta shares what he has learnt by scaling the highest peak on the planet through his book, *7 Lessons from Everest*, in an attempt to help others.



On top of the world

At the age of 50, on May 22, 2019, Aditya Gupta was coming to terms with the overwhelming joy of being at the summit of Mount Everest.

Just five days after being on top of the world, he was back home in Delhi and could not help but revisit the memories of the past few weeks. Replaying the dicey situations, he tells us that things could have gone south real quick.

"Climbing Mt Everest is a constant battle. You are walking past dead bodies which serve as landmarks for those who are alive. It teaches you that there is something deeply unexplainable which is helping you. It also serves the reminder that you are not alone while enforcing the power of good wishes of my family and friends. You know, it is not recommended for people to stay on the summit for more than 10-15 minutes, because getting there is only half

the job. The summit push can't be regarded as a successful one until you get back, but I was spell-bound, and could not help myself. Since I am an avid photographer I was constantly looking around, overcome by gratitude since we were treated with clear skies on side while the other half of the sky was cloudy. It was an extraordinary view and we ended up staying on the summit for over half an hour. We should not have overstayed, however, God was kind and we made it back without any untoward incident," Aditya

recounted.

Ace mountaineer, TEDx speaker and founder of a leading sustainable homegrown decor brand, Aditya was overwhelmed by the admiration and adulation that came his way after getting back, but he quickly got over it. He told us that he wanted to do a lot more with his experience than just acknowledging compliments.

"As someone who had a considerable reach on social media, I quickly got accustomed to people congratulating me. I had climbed Mt Everest and yes, it was no

mean feat, 'thank you very much' but I remember thinking that surely there was a lot more that I could do with my experience. Following up on this tough process, I accepted offers to give talks at schools and other organisations. After I came back and put up my story on social media, someone from Baroda reached out to me, seeking permission to use my experience in the formulation of a management based game. I eagerly agreed and they successfully developed that gamified experience, which is now used to train management folks. Such interactions happened to be very fulfilling and lent substance to the purpose of sharing my experience. Thinking back, even three months after coming back I could not get over my feat and kept thinking that I need to do more. That is when I decided that I should put together a book highlighting my journey," said Aditya thoughtfully.

In August 2019, he started piecing together his experience, bit by bit. And he tells us it was not as easy as it might have seemed. Shortlisting over 300 photographs from 3,500-4,000 was just one humongous task among many others but, behind the scenes, he felt that the book was about so much more than scaling Mt Everest.

"I was documenting almost every critical juncture on the way to the top. Revisiting those images rekindled my memories. Whole thing was playing in my mind. The weeks that led to the climax of the summit push, all those dicey situations. That is when I realised that the book couldn't simply be about climbing Everest. Okay, Everest is the content but the context is about life, in a larger sense. And when I went down this path, I did not realise the

effort it would take. It was like climbing another mountain altogether. It took me more than a year to finish the whole thing and the pandemic slowed the process down, but I am glad I took my time since it helped enhance my vision. It is just like that saying, 'all good things take time,'" Aditya shared with a smile.

On April 2021, amid the raging pandemic, he launched *7 Lessons from Everest*, as a colourised, coffee table book. While the book in itself was about so much more than scaling the highest peak on the planet, Aditya's appreciation for life was underlined by the fact that all proceeds from the sales of the book went to CRY (Child Rights and You), an NGO which has been helping vulnerable children survive and thrive in a post-Covid world. We ask him whether there is any one lesson that he would say is more prominent than the others. His response? "I cannot possibly explain how hard it is to pick, which is why I just elaborated on seven. I could have just as easily mentioned 25 lessons. You have to understand that the prominence of the lesson depends on the circumstances you are dealing with. Everest is just a metaphor. The book serves the notion that life need not be about climbing a mountain called Everest. It is about taking on large goals which others would not even consider pursuing. Bottomline is, if someone as ordinary as me could climb Everest with a body that was half a century old, anyone can do anything. You just need to apply yourself according to the need of the moment," Aditya wrapped up nonchalantly. That last statement piqued our curiosity and we can't wait to flip through his book to see what other pearls of wisdom he has in store for us.

Pandemic waste, Dr. Binish Desai's gain

Digital content creator duo Abhiraj and Niyati aka AbhiandNiyu who are known

for their impactful and inspirational videos recently released a video that documented the magnificent work done by Dr. Binish Desai (the Recycle Man of India) on his eco-friendly bricks 2.0. The video has gained close to 9 million views across Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. After the release of the video, Binish and his team have received 21 kgs of worn-out masks and PPE kits from houses and 125kg waste from mask manufacturers using their 'chindi' waste to make bricks.

Speaking about their video, the duo said, "We wanted to focus on a solution-based approach to everyday living. We highlighted the ever-increasing waste produced globally every month by masks, PPE kits, and gloves. Most of them are disposable face masks made from plastic microfibers so when we came across the amazing work Dr. Binish Desai was doing, we wanted to show that small things can make a difference."

Dr. Binish Desai found a way to convert masks and woven PPE waste into bricks. These bricks cost Rs. 2.8 per brick which is much cheaper than regular bricks and are made of 52% shredded PPE masks, 48% paper industry sludge +

Binish's patented binder. Based on this genius idea, Abhi and Niyu made a video around it to encourage people to donate their used or worn out masks and PPE kits to this cause. The video was also shared by actors Ayushmann Khurrana and Bhumi Pednekar.

Dr. Binish Desai shared "I have always seen waste as something that is useful. When Covid hit and a new type of pollution, i.e PPE waste, came into existence, it became more important than ever to find a solution to this problem. This initiative of collecting used PPE from households is one way of educating people and helping them form a habit of collecting waste. When they see a difference being made with their small efforts it turns into a larger change. I'm thankful to Abhi and Niyu for the video as it has made many people aware of waste and help create a difference one waste at a time. We have also started receiving materials from people and are happily recycling them into the bricks 2.0."

With over 3.5 million followers across all social media platforms, Abhiraj and Niyati, are popular content creators who are famous for their series *#100ReasonsToLoveIndia* where they travelled across India to find 100 heartwarming stories of change, positivity, and inspiration across India.



With just two goals scored, England are the lowest-scoring side to ever top a group at a Euros but their defence is yet to be breached

JOB DONE FOR ENGLAND

AFP ■ LONDON

Raheem Sterling scored the only goal as England found an attacking spark to beat the Czech Republic 1-0 at Wembley on Tuesday and clinch top spot in Group D at Euro 2020.

The Manchester City forward, who kept his place alongside Harry Kane in a rejigged attack also featuring Jack Grealish and Bukayo Saka, settled fans' nerves with an early headed goal, which ultimately proved decisive.

The result means Gareth Southgate's side finish top of their group with seven points while Croatia are second with



Raheem Sterling (10) scores England's opening goal against Czech Republic on Tuesday

@England

four points. The Czech Republic will join them in the last 16 as one of the best third-placed teams.

With just two goals scored, England are the lowest-scoring side to ever finish top of a group at a European Championship but their defence is yet to be breached.

England now have the dubious privilege of a potential match-up against world champions France, holders Portugal or Germany but will have home advantage on June 29.

"We are not fluent but we have moments where we look a good side," Southgate told *ITV*.

"Different sorts of tests. All of our next opponents will be different games. There is a lot of good things we are doing. We are getting minutes for a lot of the players. Ninety minutes for Harry Maguire was important tonight, Jordan Henderson getting 45 minutes is a step forward. A lot of positives."

GREALISH STARTS

There was clamour before the match for Aston Villa captain Grealish to start to shake up a blunt attack that produced an insipid display in the 0-0 draw against Scotland.

Southgate obliged, also

bringing in Saka among four changes to his side.

Chelsea midfielder Mason Mount was unavailable as he was isolating due to coronavirus protocols while Southgate opted to leave Phil Foden out to prevent the risk of a suspension.

Manchester United defender Maguire made his first appearance of Euro 2020 alongside John Stones in central defence.

England started brightly in the evening sunshine and Sterling went agonisingly close in just the second minute but could only watch as his deft chip over the goalkeeper come back

off the post after he collected a raking pass from Luke Shaw.

As chants of "Football's Coming Home" rang around the stadium, captain Kane — heavily criticised for his toothless performances in the tournament so far — shot from distance and Grealish let fly.

England broke the deadlock in the 12th minute, when Grealish, on the left side of the penalty area, lifted the ball to the back post, where Sterling headed in for his second goal of Euro 2020.

Grealish and Man-Of-The-Match Saka were inventive and direct on either side of Kane, showing a willingness to run at their opponents.

Kane went close midway through the first half, forcing a fine left-handed save from Tomas Vaclik and thumping the ground in frustration.

But the Czechs carried a threat of their own on their forays forward, growing in menace as the half wore on.

Tomas Holes forced a flying save from England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford just before the half-hour and Tomas Soucek fired wide of the left post.

Liverpool midfielder Henderson replaced Declan Rice at half-time and the Czechs made their own change, bringing on Petr Sevcik for Jakub Jankto.

The sides were evenly matched in the second half, with the reduced crowd making an impressive noise in the cavernous stadium.

Both sides made further changes as the match wore on and the intensity dipped, with fans having to wait until the 83rd minute for the first attempt at goal in the second half.

Henderson briefly thought he had scored his first England goal late on but it was ruled out for offside.



Croatia captain Luka Modric, center, celebrates after scoring his side's second goal against Scotland

AP

Modric breaks Scotland hearts

AFP ■ GLASGOW

Scotland's shot at reaching the knockout stage of a major tournament for the first time were ended in a 3-1 defeat to a Luka Modric-inspired Croatia at Hampden Park on Tuesday that took the World Cup runners-up into the last 16 of Euro 2020.

After ending a 23-year wait just to qualify for a major tournament, another historic feat was beyond Steve Clarke's men who were undone by a moment of magic from Modric.

Callum McGregor cancelled out Nikola Vlasic's early opener to give the hosts hope heading into half-time.

But Modric showed the class that made him the man to break Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo's grip on the Ballon d'Or in 2018, a stunning strike with the outside of his foot just after the hour mark restoring Croatia's lead.

"No one is sure how Luka manages that," Croatia boss

Zlatko Dalic said of the 35-year-old.

"We expect that Luka will go down, lose his strength, but he is the force that pulls the whole team. Anything I would say about Luka would not be sufficient. I'm very proud to have such a player as part of our team."

Ivan Perisic's header rubbed salt into Scottish wounds 13 minutes from time as Croatia pipped the Czech Republic to second place in Group D behind England.

Zlatko Dalic's side will face the runner-up from Group E, featuring Spain, Sweden, Slovakia and Poland, in Copenhagen next Monday.

Scotland's preparation had been blighted by the loss of Billy Gilmour to a positive test for coronavirus after the 20-year-old midfielder had shone on his first International start in 0-0 draw against England on Friday.

But Clarke's squad escaped without any other players being

forced to isolate as close contacts and, roared on by 12,000 fans inside Hampden, started on the front foot.

Che Adams was inches away from connecting with John McGinn's dangerous cross that Dominik Livakovic did well to turn behind for a corner.

Croatia had barely threatened before they went in front on 17 minutes.

Perisic headed down a lofted ball into the box and Vlasic found space between three Scotland defenders to fire low into the corner.

Croatia then had the hosts chasing shadows for 10 minutes as the midfield maestros of Modric, Marcelo Brozovic and Mateo Kovacic took control of the game.

"Modric was incredible," said Arsenal defender Kieran Tierney. "I think tonight was a big learning curve for us all. They've been there before, the quality they showed it was hard for us to get going."



Lahiri wasn't expecting to qualify for Olympics

Cromwell: Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri says he wasn't expecting to qualify for the Olympics given his below par performance this year but now wants to make it count by returning with a medal from the Tokyo Games.

Lahiri on Tuesday made the cut for the Olympics at the 60th spot, the last quota available as per the International Golf Federation rankings.

"It was a big surprise, I wasn't expecting it," said Lahiri, who is preparing for this week's PGA TOUR stop at the Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands, Connecticut.

"Even though I've earned it, I don't feel like I've really earned it as I know how far below my potential I've played this year. It's a gift and an opportunity, so why would I throw it away?"

India was eligible for one spot and Lahiri qualified being the highest-placed golfer from

the country at the 340th position.

"I know what it is to be an Olympian as I've done it before (in Rio) and I don't want to be just an Olympian. I want to win a medal, I want to do something that makes a difference," said the 33-year-old.

"I know winning a PGA TOUR event will do that but winning a medal would even do more. I do have a certain responsibility towards the game and my country."

The former Asian No 1 finished a lowly 57th in Rio while playing with an injury. But recently, there have been signs of some good form returning following a recent T-25 finish at the Palmetto Championship at Congaree.

That has made him optimistic of his chances at the Olympics to be held at the Kasumigasaki Country Club from July 29 to August 1. **PTI**

Jadeja becomes No 1 Test all-rounder



New Delhi: India's Ravindra Jadeja on Wednesday dislodged West Indian Jason Holder as the world's top all-rounder in the latest ICC Test rankings.

Jadeja is two points ahead of Holder (384) while England all-rounder Ben Stokes is third on 377 points. Another Indian, Ravichandran Ashwin is at fourth with 353 points, followed by Shakib Al Hasan of Bangladesh (338).

Ashwin remained at second spot in the bowlers' rankings on 850 points, below Pat Cummins (908) of Australia. Tim Southee (830) of New Zealand is third.

Among the batsmen, there was no change in top-five with Indian captain Virat Kohli static at fourth on 814. Steve Smith of Australia continued to be the top batsman on 891 points, followed by Kane Williamson (886) of New Zealand and Marnus Labuschagne (878) of Australia.

England captain Joe Root (797) is at number five, followed by the Indian pair of Rishabh Pant and Rohit Sharma at joint at sixth on 747 points. **PTI**

Kiwis inch closer towards WTC title

NZ need 139 runs to win the inaugural edition

PTI ■ SOUTHAMPTON

Rishabh Pant lived by the sword and died by it while his India seniors found it difficult to survive against a probing New Zealand attack, which left its batsmen with a gettable 139-run target to win the World Test Championship final.

By tea on the sixth and final day, India had another batting disaster with only 170 runs in their second innings leaving New Zealand with a target that they are expected to chase.

At tea, New Zealand were 19 for no loss with 120 runs to get in 45 overs in the final session.

If New Zealand manage to win it with a session left, they would certainly considered deserving winners, being able to force a result despite two full days being lost due to rain.

It was one of the worst batting performances on a good track with sun beating down and the Indian batsmen never found the going get easier.

Kane Williamson is proba-



India's Ajinkya Rahane walks back to pavilion after he gets out on Day 6

AP

bly one of the few captains who have now got Indian team out for less than 250 in six consecutive innings, a testimony to his brilliant cricketing acumen and near perfect execution by his bowlers.

Tim Southee (4/48) did the early damage with his swing bowling, Neil Wagner (1/44) bowled those hard 'rib cage' overs coming round the stumps and Trent Boult (3/44) with his ability to bring it back into the left-hander made it for a brilliant few hours of Test cricket.

And then, India's nemesis Kyle Jamieson (2/30), who again got his 'bunny' Virat Kohli, third time in three Tests and twice in one to make it an icing on the cake.

Rishabh Pant fought for two and half hours for his 41 but it was more intent and less content as a cavalier devil may care approach didn't get him too many runs.

The catch that Henry Nicholls took while running backwards was as good as one would witness at this level. Pant's dismissal did hamper India's chances but before that an inspirational piece of captaincy from Williamson left an indelible mark.

He got Wagner to come round that wicket to Jadeja and the left-arm 'pounder' went wide enough to nearly cut the side crease and angled one for

Jadeja to nick it behind the stumps.

Before that delivery, he had bowled short balls pegging the batsmen on backfoot and then ensured that his feet doesn't move to the pitch of the ball.

However Pant's approach of dealing with the New Zealand attack was better than being in the shell, something that did more harm than good for Cheteshwar Pujara (15 off 80 balls).

Before Pujara, the extra bounce outside the off-stump had the Indian skipper feeling for it and BJ Watling got the easiest of catches in his final game for Black Caps.

Pujara, whose abilities of grinding out bowlers has reached mythical proportions and once again he was never looking to score. The pressure was always there and Jamieson fired one in with the angle. Pujara wanted to remove his bat but it seemed the ball tailed him and Taylor got a easy catch.

Ajinkya Rahane (15 off 40 balls) also didn't last long and as it has happened with India often, their tail didn't wag save Mohammed Shami (13), who sashed three fours before Williamson cleverly deployed a 'fly third-man' (neither short third-man nor traditional third man) for a slash over slips which promptly landed in the fielder's palms.

Haryana to give ₹6 cr to Tokyo Gold winner

Chandigarh: Haryana government on Wednesday announced that sportspersons from the state who win Gold medal in the upcoming Tokyo Olympics would be given a cash amount of ₹6 crore.

The state Government will give the Silver winners ₹4 crore while the Bronze medalists will get ₹2.50 crore.

The state sports minister Sandeep Singh announced this while interacting with Olympic medallists on the occasion of International Olympic Day here, along with Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar.

Sandeep also said that 30 players taking part in the upcoming Tokyo Olympics have been provided ₹5 lakh each as preparation amount.

The Chief Minister said medal winners at the International events will be given Government jobs to encourage youngsters to take up to sports, a state Government statement said. **PTI**

Call off Ashes if families can't accompany players: Vaughan

PTI ■ LONDON

Former England skipper Michael Vaughan believes the iconic Ashes series should be cancelled if families are not allowed to travel with the players for the four-month long tour of Australia due to strict Covid-19 protocols.

According to a report in the UK media, there is still uncertainty whether families of the visiting England players will be permitted to stay with them during the Ashes, beginning on December 8.

"Read reports today that England cricketers may not be able to have family members with them under this winter .. Quite simply if they can't they should call the Ashes off .. 4 months away from your family is totally unacceptable .. #Ashes," Vaughan wrote on his Twitter handle.

The report also drew a sharp response from former England captain Kevin Pietersen, who feels players



shouldn't be criticised if they decide to pull out of the series due to such restrictions.

"Any ENG player that pulls out of this Ashes, if they seriously can't see their families for FOUR MONTHS, has my full backing. Families are the most important part of a players make up. And even more so in the current climate! FOUR MONTHS with no family on Ashes Tour?," he tweeted.

Cricket Australia, however, on Wednesday said that a solution can be worked out and the tournament is still many months away.

"It's only June and England are not due to arrive until November," a CA spokeswoman told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

"We'll be going through the same process we did with India last summer."

England cricketers will not have their families with them for the upcoming tours of Bangladesh and Pakistan starting in September, before they participate in the T20 World Cup campaign from October.

Morgan insists historic tweets 'taken out of context'

London: Dismissing accusations of racism against him, England's World Cup-winning captain Eoin Morgan said the historical tweets, allegedly mocking Indians, were "taken out of context."

The English cricket system was shaken earlier this month after pacer Ollie Robinson was suspended by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) for his racist and sexist tweets dating back to 2012-13.

Soon after, posts, in which Morgan and wicketkeeper batsman Jos Buttler used the word

'sir' to mock the Indians, started doing the rounds on social media.

"I don't really reflect on it a lot," Morgan told reporters ahead of England's white-ball series against Sri Lanka in Cardiff on Wednesday.

"If I call somebody 'sir' on social media, or anywhere around the world, it's a sign of admiration and respect."

"If that's taken out of context there's nothing I can control or do about it. So I haven't actually looked into it," he added. **PTI**

Pandemic Games will show 'true Olympic values': Tokyo 2020 chief

AFP ■ TOKYO

The stripped-back Tokyo Games, held despite the ongoing pandemic, will highlight the Olympics' 'true values', Tokyo 2020 chief Seiko Hashimoto said as organisers mark a month to go.

The Games will be unlike any other, with overseas fans banned and athletes kept away from the public. Competitors have had to leave their families behind and spectators will be capped at 10,000 people.

But former Olympian Hashimoto said the restrictions were a chance to look beyond the usual pomp and celebration that accompany the Games, and to focus on the sport.

"In recent years when I was participating as an athlete, there were concerns that this (event) has become so huge," she told reporters. "The Games tended to end with extreme excitement,



IOC Vice President John Coates, second right, and Tokyo 2020 Olympics Organizing Committee President Seiko Hashimoto, right, listen to a brief as they inspect one of the Olympics venues in Tokyo

AP

both summer and winter Games, in speed skating and as a sprint cyclist.

She came to office after her predecessor, former Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, resigned over a sexism row after he said women speak too much in meetings.

'I AM TRAINED IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC'

Actress Seerat Kapoor, who is known for her work in Telugu films, is also a trained classical singer. She hopes to someday get to work with music maestro AR Rahman.

"While I was preparing Ranbir Kapoor and Nargis Fakhri for *Rockstar* promotions as an assistant choreographer, I had the privilege to watch AR Rahman jam live. It was the most

surreal experience, I didn't blink! I remember, by the end of his performance, I had teary eyes. AR Rahman, through his music, can touch your soul. On the first line he sang, I was absorbed by his world. I hope I get to work with him someday," Seerat shares.

The actor, whose popularity soared after starring in the Telugu film *Krishna And His Leela* says learning dance and singing helped her

understand the field of performing arts better.

"I am trained in Indian classical and semi-classical music since the age of 12. At the time, my focus was on both dance and music. Educating myself in the field of performing arts through dance and music simultaneously helped me grow a deeper insight and understanding towards each of them individually, rather early," she says.



Allu Arjun to play a visually challenged role in *Icon*?

Styleish Star Allu Arjun is one of those actors who never shy away from experimenting with roles. The actor is known for accepting challenging roles in his filmy career. Now according to the latest buzz in the film industry, Allu Arjun will be seen playing the role of visually challenged man in *Icon* and the makers have already locked his solid look.

Earlier Mass Maharaja Ravi Teja had attempted the role of a blind man in *Raja The Great* and now the *Icon* star's turn. The *Naa Peru Surya* actor will sport a completely new look for this film. Sources say that Bunny is all set to shock fans and critics with his transformation. The actor is known for his solid looks in all his films and we have reports coming in that he has also locked a solid look which will be quite uber and posh.

The regular shoot of *Icon* is expected to commence from August and Allu Arjun is expected to work for his ongoing project *Pushpa* and *Icon* parallelly.

Allu Arjun starrer *Icon* is going to be helmed by Venu Sriram who recently delivered *Vakeel Saab* with Power Star Pawan Kalyan and Shruti Haasan.



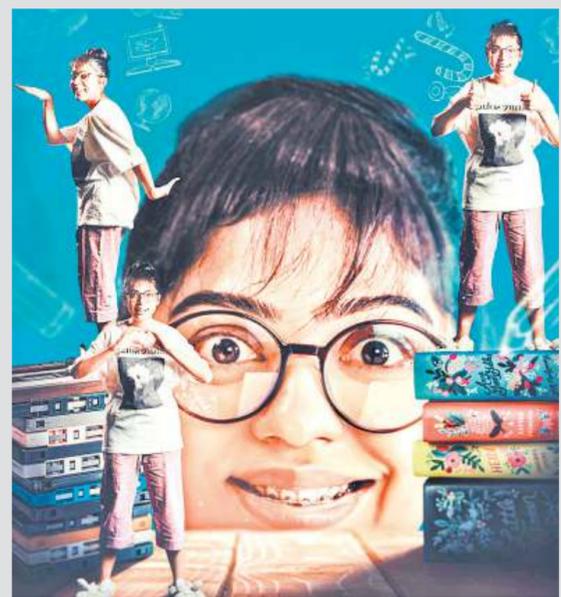
Varsha Bollamma's COMICAL LOOK

Raj Tarun and Varsha Bollamma are coming together with an upcoming romantic and comedy movie *Stand Up Rahul*.

On Wednesday, the makers of *Stand Up Rahul* launched the first look poster of Varsha Bollamma from this film, she looks comical in the poster, donning round spectacles with unusual hairdo and dental braces. The actress poses like a girl with a child-like mentality.

In the month of March this year, Samantha Akkineni had launched

the first look poster of Raj Tarun from this film where he was dressed in a blue tee-shirt and sat on the floor looking worried. *Stand Up Rahul* is jointly backed by Nandkumar Abbineni and Bharath Maguluri under the banner of Dream Town Productions and HighFive Pictures. According to the makers, the upcoming film is all about the story of a reluctant stand-up comedian who does not stand up for anything in real life. When he finds true love, he learns to stand up to his parents, for his love and passion for standup comedy. Raj Tarun and Varsha Bollamma-starrer film is helmed by Santo Mohan Veeranki and it has music by Sweekar Agasthi and cinematography is handled by Sreeraj Raveendran. The movie also has Murlu Sharma, Indrāja, Vennela Kishore, Devi Prasad and Madhurima in supporting roles.



'Confused' Hebah took every offer that came her way

Hebah Patel made a lasting impression with her bold role in *Kumari 21F* after making her debut with *Ala Ela*.

From then on, she was flooded with offers as movie lovers were bowled over by her acting chops, her stunning skills, and uninhibited glamour treat. But despite scoring hits like *Eedo Rakam Aado Rakam*, she failed to take off to the next level.

Opening up on why she couldn't sustain the fame she was launched with, Hebah Patel said, "I did not get many chances after *24 Kisses* which released in 2018. I made a mistake by taking all the offers that came my way after *Kumari 21F* as I started listening to numerous people and was confused in the process." Hebah said she realised her folly and has now decided to pick only the films and roles that suit her and give her satisfaction.

Adivi Sesh to b'day boy Rahul Ravindran: 'You truly have the best heart of anyone I know'

Actor Adivi Sesh took to Instagram to convey birthday wishes to his actor friend Rahul Ravindran on Wednesday. Sesh uploaded two pictures of himself with Rahul, along with two of their close friends — actor Vennela Kishore and *Saaho* director Sujeeth. The four of them often refer to themselves as *Musketeers*. Sesh captioned the pictures as: "@rahulr_23 Happy

birthday ra. Words fall a bit short so I can only say this. You truly have the best heart of anyone I know. My brother. @vennelakish @sujeeethsign #Musketeers Aeva." Rahul, who is married to singer Chinmayi Sripada, will next be seen in Telugu film *Shyam Singa Roy* and the Tamil untitled remake of Malayalam film *The Great Indian Kitchen*.

Adivi Sesh has *Major* coming up besides *Hit 2* and *Goodachari 2*



Mahesh launches nephew's debut film trailer



Another member of the Ghattamaneni family is going to take movie lovers on a ride. Ashok Galla, the nephew of

Superstar Mahesh Babu is going to make his debut in Tollywood as the lead actor. The teaser of the film *Hero* was launched by Superstar Mahesh Babu himself. The teaser opens in a deserted location where a train passes by and has Ashok enter in a cowboy-like costume. Following this scene, Ashok was shown in a 'Joker' avatar uttering the famed dialogue 'Why So Serious?' This impressive teaser is keeping the audience wondering what the film is going to be about.

The film titled *Hero* is the directorial venture of Sriram Aditya, known for his films like *Bhale Manchi Roju* and *Devadas*, and has Nidhi Agerwal is playing the female lead. Ghibran's music goes perfectly well with the visuals. *Hero* is presented by Superstar Krishna and Galla Aruna Kumari.