

ANALYSIS 7
INDIA BADLY NEEDS A
UNIFORM LAW ON BAIL**MONEY 8**
SUGAR OUTPUT UP 20%
TILL FEB 2020-21**SPORTS 12**
MATCH OF
HIGH-STAKES

HYDERABAD, THURSDAY MARCH 4, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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MUSKAAN
KHUBCHANDANI
IN RAJASEKHAR'S
SEKHAR

Page 11

**CHINESE HACKERS STILL ACTIVELY
TARGETING INDIAN PORT: US FIRM**

At least one connection opened by Chinese state-sponsored hackers into the network system of an Indian port is still active, even as authorities block attempts to penetrate the nation's electrical sector, according to the US firm that alerted officials. As of Tuesday, Recorded Future could see a 'handshake' — indicating an exchange of traffic — between a China-linked group and an Indian maritime port, said Stuart Solomon, the firm's chief operating officer. Recorded Future calls the group RedEcho and says it had targeted as many as 10 entities under India's power grid as well as two maritime ports when the company first notified the Computer Emergency Response Team on February 10.

**'I HAVE BOUGHT ALL SEATS': BILLIONAIRE
INVITES 8 FOR VOYAGE AROUND MOON**

It's the sort of chance that comes along just once in a blue Moon: a Japanese billionaire is throwing open a private lunar expedition to eight people from around the world. Yusaku Maezawa, an online fashion tycoon, was announced in 2018 as the first man to book a spot aboard the lunar spaceship being developed by SpaceX. Maezawa, who paid an undisclosed sum for the trip expected to launch in 2023 at the earliest, originally said he planned to invite six to eight artists to join him on the voyage around the Moon. But on Wednesday, in a video posted on his Twitter account, he revealed a broader application process.

**EXTREME WEATHER PUTS DEBT
AT RISK AT INDIA'S TOP BANKS**

An increase in extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and cyclones risk souring debt worth more than 6.19 trillion rupees (\$84 billion) at India's biggest financial institutions. That's according to leading nonprofit environmental disclosure platform CDP. State Bank of India, the country's largest lender, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank Ltd. and Axis Bank Ltd. are among the institutions that reported climate risks to CDP in 2020, it said in its annual report released Wednesday. The banks flagged exposure to environmentally sensitive businesses including cement, coal, oil and power.

**'FAMILIES SCREAMING FOR JUSTICE':
PRIYANKA SLAMS UP GOVERNMENT**

One family or the other can be heard 'screaming for justice' every single day in Uttar Pradesh, contrary to the Yogi Adityanath government's propaganda, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said on Wednesday. Her attack on the BJP dispensation came over the incident of a 50-year-old man being shot dead in Hathras district by an accused out on bail in a case of molestation lodged in 2018 against the victim's daughter and the body of a 12-year-old girl exhumed from a pit in a man's house in Bulandshahr.

**Victory in civic bypolls
reflects people's faith
in AAP, claims Kejriwal**

5

**KTR dares BJP to
bring ITIR to state**K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

Nailing the subterfuge of the BJP-led government at the Centre, which had kept on hold the Information Technology Investment Region projects sanctioned to various states, TRS working president and IT Minister KT Ramarao on Wednesday demanded that the BJP's state unit must tender an apology to the people of Telangana for its crass failure to help bring the project to the state.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, KTR said that the letter addressed to the state government by BJP leader Bandi Sanjay in this regard was "full of lies". The letter was another instance of BJP showing its true colors by spreading falsehood shamelessly, he said. Bandi Sanjay ought to have addressed such a letter to the Central government, which had dropped the Telangana ITIR projects at the cost of development of the IT industry. KTR pointed out that the BJP-led central government had kept aside ITIRs in various states and that Union Minister



for Communications, Electronics & Information Technology and Law & Justice Ravi Shankar Prasad had made a clear statement in this regard. Bandi Sanjay, by not having information about the statement in question, made by a minister belonging to his own party, had shown his dismal ignorance.

The ITIR project did not move a step forward in Bengaluru, though the BJP was in power at the Centre and in Karnataka.

2

**Electoral reforms:
Changing the face of
democracy in India**

2

**Agriculture sector:
Cabinet gives nod
to pact between
India & Fiji**

8

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:
Magha & Shukla Paksha
Panchangam
Tithi : Shashthi: 09:58 pm
Nakshatram: Vishakha: 11:57 pm
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 01:55 pm – 03:23 pm
Yamagandam: 06:35 am – 08:03 am
Variyam: 06:48 am – 08:18 am,
12:00 am – 05:14 am
Gulika: 09:31 am – 10:59 am
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Anuraktalam: 03:45 pm – 05:15 pm
Ahijit Muhurtham: 12:04 pm – 12:51 pm

**HYDERABAD
WEATHER**

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 34/17
Humidity: 24%
Sunrise: 06:32 am
Sunset: 06:23 pm
Current Weather Conditions
Updated march 3, 2021 5:00 PM

**KCR axes close aide, sends
strong message against graft**CM lets go his trusted official after intelligence sleuths
prepare dossier to nail PRO's illegal activities

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In a significant development that has shaken up official and other circles, Telangana Rashtra Samithi president and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao on Wednesday axed his trusted, high-profile public relations officer (PRO) Gatika Vijay Kumar, sending a strong signal against corruption at any level.

The summary dismissal of Vijay Kumar follows intelligence reports on his alleged involvement in what is turning out to be another 'scam' relating to land dealings on the outskirts of Hyderabad as well as certain financial and other irregularities including extra-legal 'settlements'.

KCR reportedly called Vijay Kumar to Pragathi Bhavan late in the night on Tuesday and asked him to put in his papers.

**Infact, Vijay Kumar
recently submitted a
request to promote
him as chief general
manager of TS Transco
and it is almost
cleared but orders
awaited.**

Vijay Kumar was divested of his additional post of General Manager (Corporate Communications) of Telangana Transco as well, though he had repeatedly pleaded with the Chief Minister to allow him to retain at least that job. The worst part is that he was asked not to come "anywhere near Pragathi Bhavan".

The dismissal marks a precipitous fall from grace for

Vijay Kumar, whose rise from being a contributor to a Telugu daily in Warangal to the Chief Minister's Office as a PRO in 2014 was phenomenal. As PRO, he had wormed his way into KCR's heart so much so that it was his writ that always ran in CMO, though it has a designated Chief Public Relations Officer.

2

**'Devil quoting
scriptures'**

Telangana BJP unit chief Bandi Sanjay, who has been harping that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao "will go to jail" once charges of graft against the CM are proved, on Wednesday characterized the sacking of PRO Vijay Kumar by KCR as 'Devil quoting scriptures'. Sanjay then observed: 'Is the CM sincere? Perhaps his PRO did more corruption than him. Will the PRO do corruption without the knowledge of KCR? I don't know what exactly happened.'

2

**IT dept raids
Taapsee,
Anurag**

PNS ■ MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department on Wednesday raided premises linked to the film-makers, including Anurag Kashyap, who launched the now dissolved production house Phantom Films, Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shibhashish Sarkar and Bollywood actor Taapsee Pannu, officials said.

The searches are being carried out in over 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune, officials said. Some executives of celebrity and talent management company KWAN are also being raided.

2

**'People can get vaccinated 24x7'**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has lifted the time restriction on receiving COVID-19 vaccine jabs so as to increase the pace of immunisation, Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said on Wednesday.

People can now get vaccinated round-the-clock according to their convenience, he said in a tweet, adding that Prime Minister Narendra Modi values the health as well as the time of the citizens of the country.

"The government has lifted the time restriction to increase the speed of vaccination.



People can now get vaccinated 24x7 according to their convenience. Prime Minister Narendra Modi understands the value of health as well as the time of citizens," Vardhan tweeted in Hindi.

2

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan told a press conference on Tuesday that the timeline of vaccinating the beneficiaries from 9 am to 5 pm has been done away with and it is up to the hospitals to decide whether they want to continue administering the vaccines even after that.

"Co-WIN 2.0 does not provide 9 am-5 pm vaccination sessions. It has done away with that timeline. If a hospital has the capacity, the system permits it to do vaccination even after 5 pm in consultation with the state government.

2

**Kar Min quits
amid row over
sex tapes**

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi resigned today on "moral grounds" after an alleged sex tape was aired by local news channels. "Allegations against me are far from the truth. Clear investigation is needed.

2

Graduates fume over unemploymentANUSHA PUPPALA
■ HYDERABAD

With just over 10 days to go for the Graduate MLC elections scheduled, *The Pioneer* spoke to some of the graduate voters to know voters' expectations from Graduate MLC elections. Majority of the graduate voters contacted expressed their concerns over growing unemployment in the state and lack of visible steps to fill vacant government jobs.

One of the voters said that there were many graduates and postgraduates who were



waiting for the government notification for the exams, especially Group 1 services. They alleged that the Telangana government had

failed to provide Group-1 job notification since the state's formation.

Umesh Kumar, one of the voters, said, "Lakhs of people

**Graduates
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provide
Group-1
notification
since the
formation
of the state**

2

**Graduate MLC candidates bombarding
voters with voice and text messages**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Political parties and contestants of Graduate MLC elections are reportedly bombarding graduate voters with voice and text messages seeking votes.

According to voters in several areas, they have been receiving non-stop requests for votes from contestants.

Some candidates are even sharing web links through text messages, which directly take the one clicking them to a dedicated page or profile or YouTube video about the candidate, according to voters.

One of the text messages from Graduate MLC TRS candidate reads,



Screenshot of messages from MLC contestants

**Gold worth Rs 75
lakh seized from
woman at RGIA**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Gold weighing more than 1.5 kg and valued at Rs 74.87 lakh was seized from a woman passenger at the international airport here, Customs officials said on Wednesday.

2

Why ex-babus in BJP turned silent?MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ VIJAYAWADA

Many BJP leaders, including bureaucrat-turned-politicians, who wielded considerable influence in the saffron party, especially during the regime of Kanna Lakshminarayana, have faded into oblivion apparently due to the change of guards in the party.

Their existence in the party seems to be doubtful, if the present scenario in the party is any indication. They are presently neither here nor there.

With Somu Veeraj serving

as the party's state president, there is none to use the services of these leaders, who have been relegated to the back-ground.

Those who were active in the party during Kanna Lakshminarayana's term are not to be seen anywhere in the political spectrum of the state.

The fate of former Union minister Kavuri Sambasiva Rao, who wielded considerable influence when in Congress, is not known as also of Kamineni Srinivas, who served as a Minister in the TDP-BJP coalition government.

**The fate of former Union
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coalition government**

No one knows what happened to former DGP V Dinesh Reddy, who joined the

BJP after retirement. Former Chief Secretary IYR Krishna Rao, who belongs to Brahmin

community, makes his presence felt now and then through his twitter messages and meetings held outside the purview of the party. There is no evidence of the party utilising his services in any way.

KV Rao, a former bureaucrat who belongs to Kapu community, was appointed party coordinator in Delhi during Kanna Lakshminarayana's term. He is not to be seen anywhere in the party circles these days. It's an altogether different matter that he had failed in his job.

2

Electoral reforms: Changing the face of democracy in India

Election is the process through which 'the people' elect their representatives for all three tiers namely, Parliament, the respective State Legislatures and local bodies (urban and rural) in India. The Constitution prescribes both direct and indirect elections. While the President, the Vice President, Rajya Sabha Members, members of Legislative Councils, Mayors, chairpersons and occupants of various other offices are elected indirectly or by a select electorate; Lok Sabha members, MLAs and counsellors/ward members of local bodies etc., are elected directly on the basis of universal suffrage in the earmarked territorial constituencies.

Different political parties

and candidates deploy fair and foul means to attract the electorates towards them. Several measures had been taken to control foul means but with the limited success.

The purity and robustness of electoral process determine the true will of the people. Aberrations, sometimes openly or tacitly supported by the establishment, especially in the case of closely contested ones, can influence the result.

During different stages of the election process interventions at the time of voters' registration, preparation of electoral rolls, selection of polling stations, allocation of voters to different polling stations, arrangements made at the polling stations, smooth con-

The purity and robustness of electoral process determine the true will of the people. Aberrations, sometimes openly or tacitly supported by the establishment, especially in the case of closely contested ones, can influence the result

duct of polling process, and counting of votes etc., may vitiate the outcome.

In the case of serious infringements, the election is either countermanded or repoll is ordered by the Election Commission.

After completion of election, a competent court can only set aside the election after examining the election peti-

tion, and arriving at a conclusion whether the entire process has been vitiated or not.

Remaining major or minor infringements, by and large, go unpunished thus emboldening the violators.

In the long list of violations, registration of a voter at more than one place is very common. Such cases can be



DR SHAILENDRA JOSHI,
Advisor of Telangana govt and former chief secretary of Telangana

detected and cleaned up within the state, but is difficult outside the state.

As the debate on 'One country, one election' is grad-

ually picking up; the phrase should also include 'One voter list'. The present system of any time election in different parts of country is a big distraction for governance.

Enforcement of Model Code of Conduct and conjectures on the outcome of the election is mainly responsible for policy slowdown.

Simultaneous elections and/or a fixed window for elections throughout the country could be a game-changer in so far as democracy in India is concerned. An elector should be at liberty to get her name enrolled at any constituency in the country.

Electoral data base should also include educational qualifications and professional

information etc., as this would be useful to prepare the voter list for graduates, teachers and other special constituencies.

Conduct of local bodies' elections is very important as it throws open the floor to many grass-roots-level leaders. The election to local bodies should also be done under the aegis of the Election Commission of India.

If need be, ECI could be further strengthened. At the state level, it means merger of offices of Chief Electoral Officer and the State Election Commissioner.

Conduct of local body elections by ECI will free them from the avoidable political machinations and lead to bet-

ter credibility.

Another area of concern widely known is the use of money, liquor and other gifts items by the political parties/candidates to influence voters.

Despite having expenditure observers in every election, hardly any action seems to have been taken against the violators of election expenditure ceiling. One can think several other electoral reforms.

While admitting partial/limited success in controlling the evil influence of money, muscle power and other electoral malpractices, it is the opportune time to purify the election process by initiating comprehensive electoral reforms in the country.

IT dept raids Taapsee...

Continued from page 1

The action is part of a tax evasion probe against Phantom Films, which was dissolved in 2018, and its then promoters Kashyap, director-producer Vikramaditya Motwane, producer Vikas Bahl and producer-distributor Madhu Mantena, they said.

Sources said some inter-linked transactions between the entities searched are under the scanner of the department and the raids are aimed at gathering more evidence to further probe tax evasion allegations.

Founded in 2011, Phantom Films produced films such as "Lootera", "Queen", "Ugly", "NH 10", "Masaan" and "Udta Punjab".

Kashyap later launched a new production company called Good Bad Films while Motwane launched Andolan Films. The searches against Mantena are also being carried out in context of his links with KWAN, of which he was a co-promoter.

Urban parks turn out to be major lung spaces in state

PNS ■ NIRMAL

Forest Minister Allola Indrakaran Reddy said that forest blocks being developed in urban areas will turn out to be major lung spaces.

Speaking after laying the foundation stone for an urban forest park at Khanapur on Wednesday, Indrakaran Reddy said the urban parks would provide recreation to citizens. It will be equipped with a playground for children, walking and cycling tracks, canopy walk, lotus pond, watch tower and pagodas for amusement of visitors. He stated that visitors could also organise community lunches at the park.

MLA Ajmeera Rekha Naik thanked the Minister for sanctioning funds to create the park in Khanapur town, a lesser known town and one of the backward Assembly con-



stituencies. She said that the facility would be a boon to locals who are lacking parks

and recreational spots and forced to visit Nirmal and other towns for recreation.

The legislator stated that the government has been laying special focus on protecting forest covers and raising green cover of the State through Telanganaku Harita Haram initiative. She stated that conservation of the wild would ensure a safe future to coming generations and help maintain ecological balance. Forests play a vital role in registering adequate rainfall and reduce global warming, she added.

The urban park is being created in 200 hectares at an estimated cost of Rs 8.5 crore. It is the sixth facility to come up in the erstwhile Adilabad district. Similar parks have been developed in Mancherial, Mavala of Adilabad, and at Gandhi Ramanna on the outskirts of Nirmal town while one such park is under construction in Boath and in Asifabad mandals.

Gold worth Rs 75 lakh seized...

Continued from page 1

The gold concealed in the form of paste and weighing 1593 grams was seized from the passenger, who arrived from Dubai on Tuesday, they said. The passenger is detained and further investigation is on, they added.

Graduate MLC candidates bombarding...

Continued from page 1

"Kindly cast your first (1) preferential vote to Smt Surabhi Vani Devi, TRS party MLC candidate against S.No 4 in ballot paper".

Another text from Graduate MLC BJP candidate reads, "Kindly cast your first (1) preferential vote to N Ramchander Rao, BJP MLC candidate against S.No 3 in

ballot paper".

"Ever since technology has become the cornerstone, it has both pros and cons. However, political parties are taking full advantage of it, especially during electioneering. It is quite annoying to receive numerous calls and SMS asking to vote. However, this has started right from the enrollment. It would be appreciated if every candidate/party

send their objectives/manifestos, instead of advertising their own party", said Shashidhar Vuppala, a first-time graduate MLC voter.

Sai Teja, a voter from Hyderabad, said, "I am pissed off with the advertisements and calls from parties. I am also surprised; even though my mobile number is on 'Full DND', I have got such messages".

Kar Min quits...

I'll come out innocent and I'm confident about it. I'm resigning on moral grounds and I request you to accept this," Ramesh Jarkiholi said in his resignation letter that was promptly accepted by Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa.

Ramesh Jarkiholi, 60, who was Water Resources Minister, was asked to quit by his party leadership, news agency PTI reported. BJP national general secretary in-charge of Karnataka, Arun Singh, is said to have communicated the party's decision to the state leadership, keeping in mind upcoming assembly elections in five states including neighbouring Tamil Nadu and panchayat polls in Karnataka, PTI reported.

Graduates fume over unemployment

Continued from page 1

As a country today we're witnessing unemployment rate at an all-time high. So, it is very important and crucial for every candidate to come up with an action plan about how are they going to accommodate and help the unemployed youth, either by creating more jobs, or giving self employment assistance; any specific objectives on this will be my expectations", said Shashidhar Vuppala, IT professional and first-time voter in the Graduate MLC election.

"Since my graduation, the

cause of separate statehood movement has inspired me and led me to actively participate in the Telangana movement believing that we could get decent jobs, opportunities. I am saying that I am a postgraduate student, but could not find a decent job related to my education in these seven years of governance.

Without support from the government, I am still continuing my livelihood as a self-employed person. In this situation, how could you expect me to vote for you?" Surender Thallapally, a self-employed

Bhavabhuthi, an IT employee said, the candidates should work to get the government fill up vacancies, which are already identified

youth from Hyderabad, asked the graduate MLC TRS candidates.

Bhavabhuthi, an IT employee, said, "The candidates should work to get the government fill up vacancies,

which are already identified. They should also work for creating more jobs and public skill development centres".

Vinay Vangala, an activist from Hyderabad, said, "MLCs are empowered to take quick decisions in the interests of the public since they are educated and qualified. Unfortunately there are no such decisions taken so far. There are lots of expectations from MLCs because they are intellectuals. Wish we see they influence the large number of citizens with their skill set and make a better society in future".

KTR dares BJP to bring ITIR to state...

Continued from page 1

Given this, KTR questioned whether the TRS government was the reason for the ITIR project not coming to fruition in Bengaluru.

KTR finally threw a challenge at Bandi Sanjay, asking him whether he had the 'guts' to bring ITIR project if he was given copies of the letters addressed to the Centre since 2014 and the detailed project report (DPR). He asked the BJP to apologize to unemployed youth as the Centre had gone back on the ITIR project. He asked the Telangana BJP to get the Centre to make an announcement regarding ITIR

project in the state if the BJP state unit had sincerity. If that was not possible, Bandi should at least bring another project in lieu of ITIR project if he had the guts, KTR stated.

KTR advised Bandi Sanjay to learn facts by addressing a letter to Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, who declared in Parliament several times that the Centre had been withdrawing the ITIR project. He said that the TRS government had been trying to get the ITIR project since the formation of a separate Telangana State. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had addressed a letter in the first month after the formation of Telangana State to Prime

Minister Narendra Modi on ITIR project, he mentioned.

The IT Minister reminded BJP leaders that KCR had submitted a memorandum in September 2014 with full details. Besides sending letters, several requests were made to the PM and IT Minister and memorandums were submitted; yet, there was no response from the Centre, KTR said. It was a big lie to say that the TRS government's negligence was the reason for the non-implementation of ITIR, he said.

Is KCR to blame for the non-implementation of the ITIR projects, despite sanction, in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa states too? KTR asked.

TS thwarts China-based hacker's...

Continued from page 1

State Load Dispatch Centre (SLDC), TS Transco (Transmission Corporation of Telangana Ltd)) and advised taking suitable precautionary measures to ensure security of the power system, official sources said.

The TS Transco has taken

various measures like blocking server IPs communicated by CERT-In and temporarily disabling control function for remote operation of circuit breakers from SLDC, they said.

User credentials for all those accessing TSSLD website were changed and suspected equipment within the perimeter of the SCADA (process

control system) control centre were isolated to ensure safety of the grid and satisfactory power supply to all consumers of the state, they said.

The increased state of alertness would continue for some days, the official said, adding, "not only Telangana, for that matter, every state has to be careful."

Why ex-babus in...

Continued from page 1

As an official spokesperson during the term of Kanna Lakshminarayana, he was seen at media conferences. He is not to be seen anywhere these days.

Former IAS officer Dasari Srinivasulu, a Dalit, was made in-charge of Samata Seva Foundation, and is busy with building temples in tribal areas. His services are also not being utilised in the party.

Ravela Kishore Babu, OSD to former Speaker GMC Balayogi, who has a considerable grip in Madiga community, was appointed BJP state vice-president, but his services are apparently not used.

Cheruvu Ramakotaiah of Brahmin community contested as party MLC candidate and spent up to Rs 1 crore. He also has faded into oblivion. Pyda Krishnamohan of Kakinada, a senior BJP leader, was once financier for the BJP and worked as treasurer and financially supported the party when in trouble. He was a contemporary of Somu Veerajulu. But, his existence in the party is doubtful.

Parthasarathy, a Vysya leader from Anantapur and follower of Vice-President M

Venkaiah Naidu and also that of former president of the party Haribabu, was sidelined because of his association with these leaders.

Former MLC Annam Satish of Kapu community stepped down, in spite of warning against resigning by JP Nadda. He had earlier resigned from the TDP two years ahead of his tenure and joined the BJP. His role in the party is said to be null and void. The BJP fielded Ramakotaiah of Eluru as an MP candidate unsuccessfully. He gets no respect in the party.

Former official spokesman of the party Lakshmiipati Raja and Guntur Lakshmiipati and former MLA Ambika Krishna and senior leader from West Godavari C Chiranjeevi enjoy no recognition at all in the party. The fate of lawyer Jupudi Rangaraju, son of BJP founding leader and former MLC Jupudi Yagna Narayana, is also more or less the same.

Former Union Minister Satyanarayana Chowdary and former MP CM Ramesh, formerly with TDP, have been reduced to mere spectators in the party. As Somu Veerajulu failed to use their services, they kept themselves aloof from the party.

‘People can get vaccinated...

Continued from page 1

This has been briefed both to the state governments as well as the private and government hospitals," he said.

The second dose of the vaccine against COVID-19 started being administered from February 13 for those who have completed 28 days since the receipt of the first dose. The vaccination of frontline workers (FLWs) started on February 2.

The next phase of the COVID-19 vaccination commenced from March 1 for people over 60 years of age and

those aged 45 and above with specified co-morbid conditions.

More than 1.56 crore (1,56,20,749) vaccine doses were administered in the country through 3,12,188 sessions, according to a provisional report till Wednesday 7 am.

The beneficiaries include 67,42,187 healthcare workers (first dose), 27,13,144 HCWs (second dose), 55,70,230 FLWs (first dose), 834 FLWs (second dose), 71,896 beneficiaries aged more than 45 years with specific co-morbidities (first dose) and 5,22,458 beneficiaries aged above 60 years.

GREATER HYDERABAD MUNICIPAL CORPORATION

NT No. 72/ECR-18/182, GHMC 2020-21, Dt: 02-03-2021

Name of Work: Desilting of nala pre-monsoon and annual maintenance of major storm water drain etc works. Estimate Amount (in lakhs): Rs. 226.85 Lakhs Start Date/ Last date & time for receipts of Bids: 04-03-2021 & 4:00 PM/ Last Date : 10-03-2021 upto : 4:00 PM/ Office Name, Address and Cell No. EE, Of - 18 , (KZ) GHMC, 2nd floor Khairatabad, Hyderabad No. 9569500414 - HD No. 7337367277 Computer operator No. 93464574190

R.O. No. : 0637-PPVCL/NDVT/1/2020-21 EXECUTIVE ENGINEER CIR 18 (KZ) GHMC.

SOUTHERN POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY OF TELANGANA LTD.

TENDER NOTICE NO: 07/2020-21 of T.S.No. 54/20-21 to 63/20-21, 3rd Ext of T.S.No. 32, 33 & 35/20-21 & 1st Ext of T.S.No. 42, 43 & 49/20-21

Sealed tenders are invited from the registered and GST Registered vendors for 3rd Ext T.S.No.32, 33 & 35, RAH of Kachanur, 100% A, Laxmipuri, Town Mandal and RA Mandal SS, 1st Ext T.S.No. 42 & 49 (Replic of rates in Non-sprag section (Reserved for SC), 1st Ext T.S.No.46, Replic of rates in Non-sprag section (Reserved for ST), T.S.No. 54, Ext. 10 Nos. 11 KV AB switches in Madhwal Town section, T.S.No.56, Hiring of crane to ADE/OP/Chaper Nagar (Reserved for SC), T.S.No.56, Hiring of crane to ADE/OP/Jandhola, T.S.No.57, Non-spragging & Maintenance of Sub-Station Jandhola office, T.S.No.58, Reinforcing of section 11 KV Feeders in Pragathi Nagar Section, T.S.No.59, Replic of 5000A.M, 5-9 Non-R Meter in Gubbi Nagar section, T.S.No.62, Canal, Compound Wall at Vemana Colony, T.S.No.64, Elec. of DTR in Pragathi Nagar Section, T.S.No.62, Replic, AB Cable on 11KV HWT Society feeder (Reserved for SC) T.S.No.62, Replic: AB Cable on 11KV Shegar Nagar feeder. Further Details Please Visit: www.spcotplaw.com

R.O. No. 158-PPVCL-AB/NDVT/1/2020-21 Sd/- Superintending Engineer, Operation, Madhal Circle

TRS to intensify campaign in N Sagar, appoints MLAs as mandal in-charges

K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

TRS party has announced names of mandal in-charges for the Nagarjuna Sagar Assembly constituency, where a by-election is going to take place. This, to speed up the campaign activities, as the opposition parties - Congress and BJP - are busy with their campaign, though the election commission is yet to announce the poll date for the by-election. The Congress party has already announced the name of its senior leader and former CLP leader K Jana Reddy as the candidate and Jana Reddy is busy campaigning in his own way. BJP leaders are also campaigning though the party has not yet announced the name of its candidate. The BJP leaders - Kankanala Niveditha Reddy, Kadari Anjaiah and others are campaigning in the area, expecting a ticket for the seat in the ensuing election.

The ruling TRS party has only held the Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's public meeting here. However, there has been no serious campaign



on behalf of the TRS party as the party is yet to announce the name of its candidate. The party leaders, who are expecting the ticket, are campaigning in a scattered manner. However, the party leadership is seriously working to ensure that the Dubbak election result is not repeated in the Nagarjuna Sagar by-election. That is why the party has announced mandal-wise in-charges to spruce up its electoral fortune. Those who have

been made in-charges are - Balka Suman for Peddavura Mandal, Korukanti Chander for Haliya Mandal, Koneru Konappa for Anumula Mandal, A Jeevan Reddy for Madugulapally Mandal, Shankar Naik for Tripuraram mandal, Ravindra Kumar for Thirumalgi Mandal, and Bhaskar Rao for Nidumanuru mandal.

The party has given responsibilities of two mandals to ST MLAs as the constituency has

- TRS appoints in-charges to seven mandals of the constituency to speed up election campaign
- Appoints two ST MLAs to attract huge ST voters
- Party leadership is seriously working to ensure that the Dubbak by-election result is not repeated in the Nagarjuna Sagar by-election.
- TRS is targeting Jana Reddy as its main rival, thereby taking the BJP lightly.

hugely ST voters. The party has given responsibility of Tripuraram mandal to Mahabubabad MLA Shankar Naik and Thirumalgi mandal responsibilities to neighboring Devarakonda MLA Ravindra Kumar. Rumors also spread that the BJP may field an ST candidate to win the election with the votes of STs.

The seven TRS MLAs would start their campaign from March 4 onwards. Already a

few MLAs have entered the constituency on Wednesday itself. The remaining MLAs would reach on Thursday. The TRS is targeting the Congress candidate K Jana Reddy as its main rival, thereby taking the BJP lightly.

This time Jana Reddy, who lost elections in the hands of TRS candidate late Nomula Narsimhaiah, had been working seriously to regain his lost grip on the constituency by winning the by-election at any cost. Jana Reddy had won seven times from this constituency and wanted to win for the eighth time to create a record. The BJP was considering the Nagarjuna Sagar by-election as a prestigious one as its in-charge general secretary Tarun Chug stated that the party would come to power if it won the Nagarjuna Sagar by-election. However, the BJP was yet to find a candidate for the seat. According to TRS party sources, the party appointed MLAs as in-charges to the mandals of the constituency only after finalisation of its strategy to be implemented through them.

KCR threw welfare to the wind, alleges Komatireddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



Though patients are facing many troubles in rainy season at Osmania General Hospital, KCR is least worried about their plight, says Komatireddy

Congress leader and Bhongir MP Komatireddy Venkat Reddy on Wednesday alleged that there was no cheater and broker like Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao in the entire Indian political system.

"KCR has been insulting employees and unemployed. He is only interested in making his son Chief Minister and let the welfare of people to the wind," he alleged.

He questioned as to why the Chief Minister failed to fill the 1.91 lakh jobs vacancies in all these years in the state.

He asked the Congress activists not to be disheartened by saying that Congress would have bounce back in the state.

The MP exuded confidence that the Congress would emerge victorious in graduate MLC elections.

Speaking to the media at Bhongir Yadadri district, Komatireddy alleged KCR deceived employees by promising 7 per cent PRC.

Calling upon youths to teach a fitting lesson to the TRS in the MLC elections as the TRS government was extending unemployment allowance and

issuing job notifications, he alleged that the TRS party was prepared to purchase the votes of graduate by offering

any amount as it is not confident of victory. He advised the educated people and intellectuals to cast their vote for Congress candidates.

The MP sounded confident that the Congress will regain its lost sheen in the coming days and that the party would form the government with a huge majority in next elections.

Alleging that KCR was doing the works only for commissions ignoring people's welfare, he said that KCR demolished the secretariat with a blind faith in vaasthu.

"The CM is wasting public money for constructing new secretariat worth around Rs1,000 crore," he alleged.



Annual credit plan for Karimnagar released

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Karimnagar District Collector Shashanka has put the annual credit plan of the district for 2021-22 at Rs 3,538.61 crore.

Releasing the credit plan along with bankers here on Wednesday at the Collectorate, he said that the credit plan allocated Rs 2,659.62 crore to agriculture and allied sectors and Rs 720.37 crore to micro, small and medium scale industries.

The allocations to various sectors are as follows: education -Rs 21.60 crore, housing -Rs 119.70 crore and non-priority sector- Rs 19 crore.

He appealed to the bankers and officials to strive hard to achieve targets of the credit

plan. The size of the credit plan for the last year was Rs 3,436.3 crore, he said adding that 99.07 per cent of the targets of the credit plan were achieved.

Loans were given to agriculture and allied sector to the tune of Rs 1,527 crore as against the targeted Rs 2,271.9 crore to micro, small, and medium scale industries were of the order of Rs 654 crore as against Rs 781 crore.

Trainee collector Ankit, Additional Collector Yenu Narsimha Reddy, District Lead Bank Manager Lakshman, District Agriculture Officer Sridhar, DIC manager Naveen, Horticulture DD Srinivas and others were present at the meeting

Collector reviews nutrition drive at Anganwadis

PNS ■ MAHBUBNAGAR

Mahbubnagar district Collector S Venkata Rao on Wednesday asked the officials concerned to concentrate on children suffering from malnutrition.

He made a surprise visit to a Anganwadi centre at Bandameedipally to inspect the facilities at the centre. The Collector personally monitored the growth of children in the wake of special Growth Monitoring Drive being held from February 22 to March 5. He instructed the officials to personally monitor the growth of the children and upload the detail online.

Stating that details of only 60 to 70 per cent children have been uploaded, he directed the officials to expedite the uploading of details within next two to three days.

He advised them to take special care of children suffering from malnutrition.

Patancheru MLA inaugurates RO water plant to help students quench their thirst

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

To provide safe drinking water to all students from KG to PG, Patancheru MLA Gudem Mahipal Reddy on Wednesday inaugurated the RO water plant on the campus of Patancheru Degree College with his own funds to the tune of Rs 5 lakh.

Speaking on the occasion, the MLA said that public schools were being strengthened to provide quality education to every student in the constituency.

Stating that the government had allocated funds for the creating infrastructure in every school, he said that the dilapidated school buildings would be razed to construct new buildings.

The state government is offering free education from KG to PG in Patancheru constituency, he added.

Mahipal Reddy said the water plant was launched with the aim to provide safe drink-



ing water to about 3,000 students.

"Patancheru constituency, an industrial area, is home to a large number of poor middle class families. The government is keen on strengthening public education to ensure

that their children pursue higher education," he added.

The MLA urged all students to make best use of the facility. Corporator Mettu Kumar Yadav, Market Committee Director Ashok, Degree College Principal

Rajendra Prasad, Junior College Principal Murali, TRS party town president Afzal, party senior leaders Vijay Kumar, college faculty, officials, TRS party leaders, activists and students were present at the meeting.

Starguru starts free online learning platform

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Starguru has launched a free online learning platform with an aim to provide immersive and comprehensive lessons to students that combine the convenience of video lessons with the rigor of curriculum-driven learning and seeks to create a world where high-quality learning is available to all-regardless of where they live and what they do.

Starguru app currently contains lessons for students in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh state boards, with lessons for CBSE and several other state boards getting ready. Students can watch immersive lessons delivered in English and Telugu that are aligned to the official curriculum.

Starguru app offers video lectures on all subjects with our initial focus being on Mathematics for primary and secondary school students.

Collector visits diagnostics centre at GGH

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Karimnagar district Collector K Shashank said that the government has set up Telangana diagnostics centre at Government General Hospital in Karimnagar to diagnose 57 kinds of ailments free of cost for the benefit of poor. Dry run is being conducted at the centre currently and it is likely to be fully operation very soon.

The Collector inspected the newly-set up diagnostics centre on Wednesday. However, presently only 42 kinds of ailments are being diagnosed at the centre that houses sophisticated medical equipment worth 2.4 crore.

Indira Shobhan quits Cong; keen to work with Sharmila

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC official spokesperson Indira Shobhan tendered resignation to her position and to primary membership of the Congress party on Wednesday. Later, she met YS Sharmila at Lotus Pond.

Speaking to the media after meeting, Indira Shobhan said that Sharmila has been working for the sake of Rajanna Rajyam.

Sharmila assured that she will wage a fight to protect the rights of Telangana people, she added.

Indira asserted that the interests of 4 crore Telangana people were more important



for her and added that she would fight to protect their rights. People are important, but not regionalism, she added.

She said that it was her responsibility to extend support to a woman being a woman.

Stating that she had been waging relentless fight on pub-

lic issues and worked for the sake of people since Telangana movement to till date, Indira lamented that there was no recognition to her in the Congress despite working hard.

She opined that there was no wrong in expecting positions after working hard for a cause.

Congress party gives opportunities to the leaders who lose elections again and again, she said adding that injustice was meted out her in Congress.

She alleged that the Congress was not recognising the needs of the people. The people expect something, however, Congress leaders do others, she said.

Scale new heights with a well defined plan, CBI former JD advises youths

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CBI former joint director VV Laxmi Narayana said that everyone must have a definite goal which would eventually bring a positive transformation in the society. He visited the newly-launched head office of Youth for Anti Corruption (YAC) at Hyderabad on Wednesday.

Interacting with the youths, Laxmi Narayana said: "People who don't indulge in corrupt practices must be given special attention because they are considered to be weak and incompetent by the society. Also, people must be educated about the negative impact of corruption. They should be made aware that



corruption hinders the growth and overall development of villages."

Citing an example of corruption he said, "Imagine a flyover is built and its quality is compromised. It will eventually collapse one day and people may come underneath it. Hence, we should

spread awareness on such issues from the grassroots level."

He further added, "In order to eliminate corruption, people should be encouraged to ask questions. The habit of questioning should be inculcated among people in the society."

In order to eradicate corrup-

tion in villages, villagers should be educated on usage of RTI. We must also help them in filling the RTI application forms and guide them accordingly. Technology should also be used to fight the corrupt practices, he suggested.

Laxmi Narayana also said, "Families of people who lead an honest life should be given special care and attention. The stories of courage, truth and ethics should be conveyed to the present generation using social media. Also, people from various domains of life should be invited to join Youth for Anti Corruption. The organisation should strive to achieve success in both the states of AP and Telangana."

TRS, BJP lead MLC poll campaign in Mulug

PNS ■ MULUG

The politics of Mulug has indeed warmed up to the graduate MLC election as the main parties - the ruling TRS and the principal opposition, the BJP - are stopping just short of waging a war to influence the graduate voters of the district. 10,325 graduates have the right to vote in Mulugu district.

Mainly the TRS party, led by Mulug Zilla Parishad Chairman Kusuma Jagadeeshwar, has reached the pinnacle of campaigning in the last few months. The campaign is really underway. Meanwhile, Lakshman Babu Eturunagaram, a close relative of former CBI director Kakula

Vijaya Rama Rao, is making strategies in his own style to influence the MLC voters to become activists in the areas of Thaduvai, Mangapeta, Kannaigudem etc..

Meanwhile, the BJP state leadership is going to hold a massive public meeting at the Mulug district headquarters on Friday, to beat the victory drum following their good show in the GHMC elections and Dubbak by-election. Along with state BJP president Bandi Sanjay, former Rajya Sabha member Garikapati Mohan Rao, who has been the kingmaker for the last three decades in Mulugu district, will interact with the voters with an eye to winning the district over.

‘Murderers have no right to seek votes from advocates’

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AICC national spokesperson Dr Sravan Dasoju on Wednesday lambasted IT Minister KT Rama Rao by saying that he was shedding crocodile tears on the murder of advocate couple Gattu Vaman Rao and his wife PV Nagamani.

Addressing the media at Gandhi Bhavan, "It is a murder by the government which has filed a case in the Supreme Court against the deceased lawyer Vamana Rao and suffered a setback."

"Neither KCR nor KTR visited or mourned the death of the advocate couple. Neither the Home Minister visited the crime scene. Police and the government have colluded in this entire episode. By resorting to such heinous acts, the state government is turning Telangana into UP and Bihar with regard to violence," he alleged.

He criticised that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and KTR



shamelessly met advocates at Telangana Bhavan to seek their votes for MLC elections.

"None of the sincere advocates, who fought for Telangana, was appointed as a Public Prosecutor or a Government Pleader (GP), including Chandrasekhar Reddy who was severely beaten up by present TRS

- Sravan suspects government's role in the murder of advocate couple
- Slams KCR, KTR for making Telangana like UP and Bihar in violence
- Why government can't fill vacancies, formulate a comprehensive employment policy, asks Sravan

leaders Talasani, Teegala and their supporters," he added.

TRS broke all the promise it made during elections. The government has given 53,000 non-functioning health insurance cards to the advocates with a meager amount of Rs 100 crore, he said.

The government is not granting Rs 1 to 2 crore of mandatory funds to the Bar Council every year, he added.

No monthly stipend to the Junior

Lawyers for sustenance.

TRS government is not giving matching grant of Rs 4 lakh towards ex-gratia in addition to what is being paid by the Bar Council of Telangana to the deceased advocates, as practiced in Andhra Pradesh. Almost 56 families of deceased advocates were deprived of support from the Govt of Telangana.

Dr Sravan lamented that the Telangana agitators were ignored and anti-Telangana leaders were being given top positions in the TRS Party and also in the government.

"Talasani Srinivas Yadav and Teegala Krishna Reddy are the frontline leaders in the TRS party. They had attacked the ardent advocates who fought for separate Telangana state. So, you have no moral right to seek votes from advocates and graduates in election," Sravan said.

Welcoming KTR's remarks for admitting the shortfall of recruitment in Telangana during a meeting with advocates, Sravan asked the

Minister that he should explain why he did not fill up the vacant 1.9 lakh of government jobs and regularise more than one lakh of contract employees.

Reiterating that the Congress party filled lakhs of government jobs in the past by issuing notifications, he said: "CM late YS Rajashekhar Reddy had filled 50,000 teacher posts. Kiran Kumar Reddy provided skill development and training for 5,00,000 unemployed youth by spending over Rs 770 crore. Eminent personalities like Rama Dorai, GMR, GVK, MyHome Rameshwar Rao were roped in as advisors to this skilling programme later becoming role models to the entire India.

Why can't you take the experiences from KC Reddy or Shantha Kumari, IAS, on this to implement the same to benefit lakhs of unemployed to get jobs in various private sector companies? This can immensely benefit them during the adverse times of Covid-19", he said.



TMC dares PM to see himself growth in WB

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Wednesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is free to visit the state for BJP's election campaign "20 times or more" to see for himself the spree of development under the TMC dispensation and compare it to that of states ruled by the saffron party.

West Bengal minister Bratya Basu told that Modi is welcome to attend as many meetings, say 20 or more, he wishes to and come to the state as many times he wants to see for himself how Bengal has left behind states like UP and MP on development parameters.

Basu was replying to a query whether eight-phase assembly polls in the state, beginning on March 27, would enable BJP heavy-

weights to address multiple meetings in different parts of the state.

"We don't bother. May be they want to see for themselves how much Bengal has progressed after TMC came to power in 2011... how roads look like, how power cut has become a rarity, how people in rural areas are getting better amenities and how states like UP and MP are lagging behind," Basu said.

BJP sources said Modi is slated to address multiple rallies during the eight-phase polls in the state stretching a little over a month. Leaders like Shah and J P Nadda will also address several meetings as well as other BJP heavyweights like Yogi Adityanath. Asked about two-time TMC MLA from Pandabeswar and former Asansol mayor Jitendra

Tiwari joining the BJP on March 2, Basu said, "It is the culture of the saffron party to admit people having tarnished reputation with open arms".

"Previously the local MP had protested publicly, but perhaps after being reprimanded by his higher-ups he will be mum this time despite having bitter memories," Basu said referring to Union minister Babul Supriyo voicing reservations about plans of inducting Tiwari into the BJP from the TMC in December last.

Basu said "People in Bengal know that nothing could be further from the truth. While Durga puja was celebrated with great fervour across West Bengal even last October, in Uttar Pradesh the BJP government stopped its celebrations while allowing some other religious festivals."

Another bizman interrogated by CBI in coal pilferage case

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Wednesday interrogated a businessman in connection with its probe into the multi-crore coal pilferagescam, sources said.

The anti-corruption branch of the central agencyquizzed Manoj Agarwal at its office here, they said.

The CBI had on February 27 questioned Randhir Kumar Barnwal, a city-based businessman, in connection with the alleged illegal coal mining in the Asansol-Raniganj belt of West Bengal.

Sources in the agency said the CBI is interrogating persons who are close associates of Anup Majee alias Lala, the prime accused in the case.

The anti-corruption branch of the CBI on Tuesday raided premises of people in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, who it suspected have links with Majee.

The agency sources said it is keeping a close watch on busi-



nessmen who have a close connection with the main accused of the coal scam.

Majee, the director of a company engaged in the purchase and sale of the dry fuel, has been evading arrest. The CBI has also issued a look-out notice against him.

The investigating agency on November 28 last year carried out a massive search operation in several locations in four states -- West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh - after registering a case against Majee.

The CBI had acted on infor-

mation from "reliable sources" indicating illegal excavation and theft of coal in the leasehold area of Eastern Coalfields Limited in

"connivance" with the officials of the miner, CISP and Railways.

A CBI team had on February 23 visited the residence of Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee and examined his wife Rujira in connection with the case. The agency also examined Rujira's sister Menaka Gambhir on the previous day on the same matter.

INDIA CORNER

Victory in civic bypolls reflects people faith in AAP, claims Kejriwal

The AAP's victory in Delhi municipal bypolls shows people have faith in the work done by the party-run government in the city, which includes improvements in schools, hospitals, power and water supply, and roads, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Wednesday. Of the five civic wards where bypolls were held on February 28, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) won four and the Congress one. "The results are indication of what kind of outcome is expected next year in the civic body polls. We are waiting for it and will make the city neat and clean," Kejriwal said in an address at the AAP office on DDU Marg, where he reached to celebrate the victory with party workers. He took a dig at the BJP for failing to open its account in the bypolls, saying, "The zero obtained by the BJP showed people rejected corruption and theft at the MCDs ruled by it and the politics of violence they practised by vandalism at Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's residence and the DJB office." The AAP convener said people wanted a change in the three municipal corporations in Delhi and advised the newly elected councilors to work honestly and with humility.



PIL seeking action against Farooq Abdullah dismissed

Observing that expression of views that are different from the opinion of the government cannot be termed as seditious, the Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a PIL seeking action against National Conference president Farooq Abdullah over his comments on abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution. A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta rejected the plea and also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the petitioners for making such claims. "Expression of views which are different from the opinion of the government cannot be termed as seditious," the bench observed. The top court was hearing a plea which referred to his statement on restoring Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and contended it clearly amounts to a seditious act and therefore he is liable to be punished under section 124-A of the IPC. The petition filed by Rajat Sharma and Dr Neh Srivastava, both belonging to an organisation Vishwa Guru India Vision of Sardar Patel, alleged that the former chief minister is trying to "hand over" Kashmir to China and thus, he should be prosecuted for Sedition. "Mr Farooq Abdullah has committed an offence punishable under section 124-A of Indian Penal Code. As he has made the live statement that for restoring Article 370 he would take help of China which clearly amount to seditious act and therefore he is liable to be punished under section 124-A of the IPC," the plea said. The petitioners also referred to a statement made by BJP Spokesperson Sambit Patra to claim that Abdullah is misleading the people of Jammu and Kashmir to join China for the restoration of Article 370 of the Constitution.



TN Assembly poll: Congress seeks fair deal from DMK

The Congress has convened a meeting of the state executive committee in Tamil Nadu on Friday amid indications that seat-sharing talks with the DMK are yet to make headway. AICC in-charge of Tamil Nadu, Dinesh Gundu Rao told PTI on Wednesday the party had one round of talks on Tuesday but there was no progress on seat-sharing. Rao, former President of Karnataka Pradesh CongressCommittee, said he is reaching Chennai on Wednesday and further meetings on seat-sharing are slated on Thursday and Friday. "We have state executive committee meeting on Friday. So, hopefully by then, we should have some decision on all those things," he said. Rao, a former Karnataka Minister, declined to say howmany seats the Congress has sought but insisted that the seat sharing deal has to be fair and based on mutual respect. Obviously, everything has to be fair.Nothing unfair. (and unfair deal) is neither good for us (Congress) nor for them (DMK)," Rao, son of former Karnataka Chief Minister late R Gundu Rao, said. Asked if he expected seat-sharing talks to be smoother to face problems, he said they are still under negotiations, adding, "I cannot say exactly anything as it's still in the process."



BJP must regret Guj riots: NCP

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Sharad Pawar-led NCP on Wednesday sought an apology from the BJP over the two decade- old Gujarat riots, like Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had done over the Emergency imposed by his late grandmother over four decades ago.

Termining the Emergency that was imposed by former prime minister Indira Gandhi a mistake, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said what happened during that period was wrong.

"Now it is the turn of the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to accept that the Gujarat riots were wrong," Maharashtra minister and NCP spokesperson Nawab Malik said.

‘Creating a single authority for Mumbai a top priority’

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra minister and Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray on Wednesday said creating a single authority for the financial capital is the top priority for the state government which will help "settle better accountability".

Sixteen agencies, including the city civic body, agencies under the state government like MMRDA and Mhada for housing, and also some under the Central government like Airports Authority of India and Ports, run the financial capital at present, he said.

Explaining the rationale behind such proposition, Aaditya Thackeray, who is son of Sena president and Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, said a single authority will help set better accountability by fixing responsibility on a single entity for all of the city's requirements.



"What we are looking at now is to have a single authority in Mumbai, a single parent body that will run Mumbai," Aaditya Thackeray said during a session with industry body CII, when asked about what is the top priority for the state government at present.

In the remarks, which come amid reports that Shiv Sena's alliance partners in the state government are unhappy with such a move, Aaditya Thackeray said having such an authority is the "first thing" of focus.

The NCP and the Congress are ruling constituents in the Sena-led Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government.

The Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) currently controlled by the Shiv Sena had first made the suggestion of appointing itself as a single authority for the city. The Congress and NCP are reportedly peeved at the same.

"So, when we have a single point authority, you also have a single point responsibility. You can hold us to more accountability than ever before," the tourism minister said, without mentioning MCGM as the chosen agency.

Meanwhile, Aaditya Thackeray said it will take a lot of efforts to de-reserve the status granted to the over 800-acre green patch at Aarey Colony in suburban Goregaon, and stressed that such a status is essential to protect the flora and fauna endemic to the site.

HC seeks edu ministry's reply on contempt plea for not extending RTE

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court Wednesday sought response of Ministry of Education on a plea seeking contempt action against the authorities for not taking decision on extension of free education under the Right To Education (RTE) Act to children of EWS even after attaining 14 years of age in the same school.

Justice Najmi Waziri questioned the Central government as to why decision has not been taken to extend RTE Act beyond 8th class and upto 12th class, despite court's directions passed in 2019.

The court issued notice to Secretary of Ministry of Education seeking reply on the contempt petition filed by NGO Social Jurist and listed the matter for further hearing on March 17.

Advocates Ashok Agarwal and Kumar Utkarsh, representing the NGO, said due to



inaction on the part of the Central government, private schools across the country are throwing thousand of Economically Weaker Section (EWS) students out of school every year after they pass class 8th.

"The very objective and purpose of fundamental right to education is defeated if any EWS student is not allowed to continue his studies in private school beyond class 8th and upto class 12," the counsel said. In December 2019, the high court had asked the Centre to take a decision on

the extension of free education to disadvantaged children even after attaining the age of 14 years or beyond.

The plea sought initiation of contempt proceedings against the authorities for their alleged deliberate and intentional disobedience of December 9, 2019 judgement of the high court.

The plea alleged that that a period of more than a year has since elapsed and authorities have not taken any decision in this matter till date and that the parents of EWS category students are not in financial position to pay hefty school fee to unaided private schools in classes 9th and onwards.

It submitted that if a student has studied from nursery to class 8th in an english medium unaided private school and is asked to go to government school in class 9th and onwards, great prejudice would be caused to such student for more than one reasons.

‘Blatant violation of code of conduct’

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Finance Minister T M Thomas Isaac on Wednesday accused the BJP-NDA government at the Centre of trying to destroy the Kerala Infra structure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB) and thus scuttle the state's development using the nforcement Directorate (ED) as assembly elections were round the corner.

Targeting Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who recently criticised the KIIFB, he alleged the union minister was "misusing" her subordinates for political motives.

Isaac's attack against the Centre and Sitharaman came a day after the ED summoned two top officials of the KIIFB to appear before it in connection with a probe into its external borrowings through 'Masala Bonds'.

Stating that summoning



KIIFB officials at the time ofpolls was a violation of the code of conduct, he said through the move, a large political conspiracy against the Board, led by people including union finance minister, has emerged.

"The ED's move is a violation of rules during the time-of polls. Union Finance Minister herself is leading the blatant violation of the code of conduct," Isaac alleged at a press meet here.

Any attempt to derail the state's development would be resisted with the support of people, he said.



ANGANA'S PLEA SEEKING TRANSFER

Javed Akhtar files Caveat in SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Writer-lyricist Javed Akhtar has filed a caveat in the Supreme Court saying that he be heard in connection with Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut and her sister Rangoli Chandel's plea seeking transfer of cases pending against them in Mumbai to a court in Shimla.

A caveat is filed by a litigant in high courts and in the Supreme Court to ensure that no adverse order is passed against the party without it being heard.

Alleging there would be a threat to their lives if the trial proceeds in Mumbai, the actress and her sister had said they apprehend that if trial in these cases are conducted in Mumbai, there would be a "material threat" to their life and property as the Shiv Sena-

led Maharashtra government has been "harassing" them.

Akhtar had filed a criminal complaint against Ranaut before the Andheri Metropolitan Magistrate, for allegedly making defamatory and baseless comments against him in television interviews.

He had sought action against the actor under relevant sections of the IPC.

The complaint said that Ranaut had made baseless comments against Akhtar, which caused damage to his reputation.



‘Why SP’s name figures in every crime’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

UP CM Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday wondered why the name of Samajwadi Party (SP) gets entangled with "every" incident of crime in the state.

Speaking in the Assembly on the state budget, he took the opportunity to flay the opposition party, a day after allegations were levelled that the accused in a shootout in Hathras was an SP worker, who was out on bail.

"Why is it so that the SP's name gets dragged into every incident of crime? Why?" he asked.

MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING

India, Norway to work together

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Norway will work jointly in the area of marine spatial planning for the next five years, the Ministry of Earth Sciences said on Wednesday.

They have identified Lakshadweep and Puducherry as pilot sites for the project.

The first project steering committee meeting with representatives from both the countries was conducted virtually recently after which the two countries have charted out a plan to ensure that human activities at sea take place in an efficient, safe, and sustainable manner in areas



such as energy, transportation, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism across multiple sectors. This is a part of the Indo-Norway Integrated Ocean Initiative under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two countries in 2019.

The two countries have decided to extend support for sustainable ocean resources utilisation to advance econom-

ic and social development in coastal areas, it said.

The initiative, known as Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), will be implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) through the National Centre for Coastal Research (NCCR) for India.

"In its primary phase, NCCR will develop a marine spatial planning framework for Puducherry and Lakshadweep," the MoES said.

These sites have been chosen for the pilot project in view of their setups with unique opportunities for multiple sectors (such as industries, fisheries, and tourism) to flourish. India's initial investments for

undertaking the studies and planning are estimated to be around Rs 8-10 crore per year.

In the future, marine spatial planning framework of these two environmentally critical areas can be replicated to other coastal regions of the country.

The World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have expressed interest in supporting MoES in conducting MSP, a societal-beneficial initiative for India's coastal regions, it said.

The MSP initiative will be implemented by MoES and the Norwegian Environment Agency through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway.

Split house

The Congress rift, already out in the open, is only widening ahead of the crucial Assembly polls

At a time when leaders belonging to other political parties are upping the ante against their opponents in a bid to be successful at the hustings and form the Government in the five States/Union Territory going to polls soon, the Congress biggies are busy sparring among themselves. The fault lines run deep and, in all likelihood if one goes by its current state of inertia, the 'Grand Old Party' is heading towards yet another poll drubbing. The G23 (Group of dissenters) is clearly pitted against the "loyalists" on the issue of the Congress tying up with the Indian Secular Front (ISF) of Pirzada Abbas Siddiqui for the battle royal in politically-sensitive West Bengal. Deputy leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Anand Sharma, who is part of the G23, objected to the party aligning with the Islamic outfit and asserted that the tie-up "militates against the core ideology" of the Congress and that the alliance needed to be endorsed by the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's highest decision-making body. Recently, Ghulam Nabi Azad — who is a prominent leader of the dissenting group — heaped praises on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These senior leaders are making all-out efforts to stay relevant and they don't want to lose their hold on the party. On the other hand, the Congress joining hands with a fundamentalist group in West Bengal ought to raise the question whether the party has compromised on its secular credentials?

The "soft Hindutva" card played by Congress leaders, including the Gandhi scion, has failed to elicit the desired outcome in a series of elections. Further, the Congress has been selectively applying the policy of minority appeasement but, apart from a few stray successes, it has failed to make any major breakthrough. The BJP has proved to be too formidable for the Congress and the regional parties have expanded their base at the cost of the 'Grand Old Party'. This time, too, the Congress seems to have selectively played the appeasement card by aligning with Pirzada, who wields considerable influence among Muslims in South Bengal. Despite the fact that Pirzada has a dubious record of making controversial remarks, the Congress leaders shared the stage with him at a joint rally on Sunday. The Congress aligning with a fundamental party will either increase its vote percentage or it will prove counterproductive to its image in the long run; we'll know in due course. Moreover, Rahul Gandhi's foot-in-mouth disease has only added to the party's miseries. The differences within the party point to the fact that Rahul's leadership is not strong enough to bind the members together and settle their disputes. West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has accused Sharma and Azad of playing to the BJP's gallery, saying that they are serving the polarising agenda of the saffron party. Well, whether these "dissenters" are pushing for reforms or only serving the BJP's agenda, the Congress' internal fight only weakens it and further damages its prospects in the forthcoming Assembly elections. It is time for the Congress leaders to resolve the internal feud and steer the party out of the ongoing crisis.

PICTALK



Workers at the Bhagatnawala dumpsite in Amritsar clear out waste on Wednesday

PTI

Mea culpa

Rahul is not responsible for the actions of his forebears, but he cannot escape his legacy for better or for worse

Political legacies and succession are not a uniquely Indian thing. The success of leaders like Justin Trudeau, Shinzo Abe and even Xi Jinping for that matter are demonstrable proof that even today, family political legacies are a giant step up the political ladder. A name, a family name in politics and the subsequent recognition is a powerful tool. But it can also be a huge burden, a cross to carry. And the prime example of someone who carries both the blessing and the curse of political recognition is Rahul Gandhi. The past and, in all likelihood, future president of the Indian National Congress, India's only national Opposition party of relevance, is led by this scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family whose history every Indian knows. No matter where he goes, Rahul's rallies and road shows are well-attended. But it is the curse, that means that many of the millions who might attend his rallies in a year, will not vote for the Congress in elections; such is the legacy of that party and its dominant family.

There is no insinuation here that Rahul is responsible for the actions of his great-grandfather, grandmother or father. Jawaharlal Nehru, a convenient whipping boy for some these days, died even before Rahul was born. He was five years old when his grandmother, Indira Gandhi, declared the Emergency and a teenager when his father, Rajiv Gandhi, was caught up in the Bofors scandal. He has also suffered more than most, to suffer two violent deaths in the family in full public gaze is not something any of us will endure. The scale of that suffering is something we will never comprehend and, thus, never truly empathise with. Yet, because he, and even his sister Priyanka, ask for votes in the name of the positive aspects of that legacy, they cannot escape the ills and mistakes. Yes, Rahul should attack the Narendra Modi Government on the engagements with China in Ladakh, but he must acknowledge the mistakes of 1962 as well. He cannot proclaim that democracy is under threat without admitting that he senses this because of the Emergency his grandmother declared. Acknowledging this fact now is a huge step by the Congress leader. He was not responsible for the mistakes of the past and admitting that fact is something that should mark an improvement in the way he is perceived among the electoral public.

The missing culture of strategic thinking

India's restive relationships in the neighbourhood and its own internal governance parameters remain worryingly underleveraged and skittish



BHOPINDER SINGH

In the early 1990s, American thinker George Tanham had set the cat among the pigeons by mentioning "India's relative lack of strategic thinking". His observations suggested minimal preparedness in terms of an "active" vision or pre-emptive doctrines, as opposed to an inherently "reactive" instinct, that rattled Indian apologists who pointed to the civilisational literature on statecraft, strategy and philosophy of governance.

However, "nonalignment" (not "neutrality", as commonly misinterpreted) was a definitive and unique aspect of Independent India's foreign, commercial and military thinking. The admixture of "morality" into its strategic decision-making process differentiated India from the co-timed trajectory and outcomes of China, which also played a similar game of balance of power, albeit with hard-nosed realpolitik. The metamorphoses of a bipolar world to a polycentric order further blurred India's strategic choices, as it continued sounding preachy, platitudinous and verbose. On the other hand, the conjoined nature of the "military-industrial" establishment under a single-party rule in China afforded it to chisel a seamless national vision and an uninterrupted strategic process to fructify the same.

Further, India's obsessive passion for electoral politics, combined with structural silos of bureaucracy, diplomacy and the military ensured a sub-optimal and fractured approach towards possible self-realisation. Ironically, India's restless democracy, regional parties with narrow agendas and increasingly disinterested politicians who mistook "India's arrival on the world stage" to equal strategic thinking, continued to let it down. Even now, political brouhaha and grandstanding aside, India's restive relationships in the neighbourhood and its own internal governance parameters remain worryingly underleveraged, incoherent and skittish.

The Indian system has failed to allow nonpartisan and "heeded-to" platforms of specialists who could formulate and advocate strategic outcomes beyond petty partisan comeuppance.



The recent Indo-Sino dissonances on the Line of Actual Control have yet again exposed the "reactive" nature of Indian governance and politics, irrespective of the dispensation in power. Rote insistence of Chinese "deceit", while true, should not have been unexpected. Getting tripped by the Chinese is an inadvertent admission of the absence of strategic foresight that cannot be contextualised to the past only. An unbudgeted ₹20,775 crore was spent to buy emergency hardware in the recent standoff!

Strategic thinking necessitates lateral thinking and specialist angularities but the recent events suggest the clear under-appreciation of the security sensitivities. Unlike other participative democracies like the US, the UK and so on, the direct "voice" of Indian security must navigate through the labyrinth of filters, priorities and disinterested politico-bureaucrats. Though countries like Pakistan, where the military is considered a "State within a State", are reflective of the other side of extremity, which has even more debilitating consequences. Simplistic arguments of the "guns over

“SIMPLISTIC ARGUMENTS OF THE 'GUNS OVER BUTTER' NATURE HAVE LED TO THE MISPLACED NOTION THAT SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGRESS, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND STABILITY CAN BE MANAGED ONLY AT THE COST OF OPTIMUM INVESTMENTS IN SECURITY

butter" nature have led to the misplaced notion that socio-economic progress, national development and stability can be managed only at the cost of optimum investments in security. Not so, because all national considerations should go together in an "and" approach, and not as a facile "either-or" choice. With China breathing down its neck and Pakistan persisting with the "bleed with a thousand cuts" thinking — protecting territorial integrity with a budget allocation of 1.63 per cent of the GDP is reflective of the failures to put the dangers to security in over-arching context.

Recent pooh-poohing of independent opinions that call the bluff of the powers-that-be does not help build a culture of intellectual deliberations. This tendency is particularly severe on divergent opinions on the matters of security. However, the media circus following the recent induction of five Rafale fighters typifies the poor alternative to the more serious task of strategic discussions. India has an executive agency in the National Security Council (NSC) to oversee the political, economic, energy and security issues but its contribution towards the sensitive decision-making

process remains unknown. There is no direct participation of the Armed Forces in its decision-making process. Routine media reporting of the "hand" of the National Security Advisor in resolving security situations notwithstanding, it belies the moot question as to why such a situation evolved in the first place?

The national "shaper" of strategic thinking is usually the political leadership of the day — today, the assertive and challenging voices within the ruling party, like a Jaswant, Shourie or Yashwant (who were given a free rein in the earlier NDA Governments), are clearly missing. The impact of domestic politics is supreme even in our international relations: Trump-backing, for example, exposed the predominance of partisanship. Institutions need to be strengthened, not diluted; specialists need to be empowered and not controlled, and only then will the latent potential of India truly fructify. The know-all attitude does incalculable harm to the culture of strategic thinking.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BRACE FOR A GRUELING SUMMER

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Scorching ahead!' (March 3). Going by the India Meteorological Department's (IMD) forecast, we have to brace for temperatures several notches higher than usual this summer. It is really disheartening as many people, including the homeless, don't have the resources to beat the heat. Gadgets like electric fans, coolers, fridges, air-conditioners (ACs) and water coolers, besides power generators or inverters are not available to the poor.

Further, power cuts will add to the woes of the common man. We have not been able to generate electricity from solar and wind power for large-scale public distribution. Ironically, climate change and atmospheric imbalance have caused natural calamities like drought, floods, storms and inclement weather causing huge loss to flora, fauna and human lives. It is incumbent upon us to fight climate change so that we may have a greener and cleaner planet for future generations.

However, the Government must take adequate measures to provide relief to the homeless in the summer. Shelter homes should be provided with water coolers, if not ACs, and fridge for cold drinking water. It is also the responsibility of all of us to make arrangements for drinking water for birds and stray animals. An earthen pot or utensil full of water outside the door or window will help the avian and animal species in quenching their thirst. We must also not forget to water the plants regularly.

Azhhar A Khan | Rampur

WE CANNOT LOSE BATTLE AGAINST COVID

Sir — We should be really thankful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for taking the job as it will inspire millions of others to get themselves inoculated. It is important that more private hospitals and even small private dispensaries be allowed to vaccinate, as these will be closer to homes and allow the elders to get vaccinated without the trouble of covering long distances.

In the next phase, vaccination should be carried out in remote villages and tribal areas inside forests. Further, it has come to light that the provisional certificates

Plight of mohajirs in Pakistan



The plight of mohajirs in Pakistan is hard to explain in words. The mohajirs are Muslim immigrants of multi-ethnic origin and their descendants, who migrated from various regions of India to settle in Pakistan following the Partition. However, Prafull Goradia's lucid article 'Beware of Pak's softening stand' (March 2) mentions their plight and states that they "find themselves not only unwelcome but also targets of eth-

nic hostility in the newly-created country". Successive Pakistani Governments have remained indifferent to the woes of the mohajirs and even the courts in Pakistan are of no help. The author has lamented that he was personally witness to this discrimination when he visited Pakistan to conduct a two-week international course on short-wave radio broadcasting for countries of the sub-Asian region, extending from China to Iran. The enthusiasm for the creation of Pakistan in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar was noted by the then Viceroy Lord Wavell in 1945 and communicated to the Secretary of State for India in England, saying: "The idea of Pakistan was stronger in the Muslim minority provinces than in Pakistan's provinces". The fate of the mohajirs is, therefore, a lesson for all those who wish to divide any country on religious or any other basis. Further, the Governments of both the countries and the United Nations must take steps to change the situation on the ground and help those who are discriminated.

BP Srivastava | Noida

issued to the people who got vaccinated carry the PM's image and that, too, without a mask, which is unethical. If at all any image is necessary, it should be that of Corona warriors or of the scientific community who the PM has been appreciating. India's vaccination programme has brought laurels to itself. We have supplied indigenously-developed vaccines to the world when other countries needed it the most. India's reputation has increased manifold. We cannot afford to lose this battle at this juncture and we all must wear masks and sanitise our hands regularly.

N Nagarajan | Secunderabad

PRONOUNCE THE NAME CORRECTLY

Sir — A parent has complained that her child's teacher does not pronounce the child's name correctly. The teacher shortened the name as the full name was apparently difficult to say. I have myself faced this problem a number of times over my 35 years of teaching. Some names, when pronounced

correctly, sounded the same as English swear words, so roll call could be challenging. Some were just too long or contained too many consonants for me to pronounce easily and I always prefaced any roll call with the statement that I would do my best.

I know that a mispronounced name can be annoying although not offensive if they try to do their best, but many students found 'Fitzgerald' difficult to pronounce. Apparently the 'tz' sound is difficult in many languages. Some of the mispronunciations were actually funny but I tried not to laugh at my own name. The main consideration is that people should do their best and that we should be willing to accept these efforts. Teachers already find the job challenging and most find that the parent feedback/complaints only add to the stress. The world as a whole needs to relax in these times of difficulty.

Dennis Fitzgerald | Melbourne

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Nirmala Sitharaman is leading from the front and using her officials for political needs. What's happening is a clear violation of the election norms.

Kerala Finance Minister — Thomas Issac

Active vigilance is pivotal to thwart any attempt to disrupt the efforts by the armed forces in rooting out terrorism from the troubled tribal regions of North and South Waziristan.

Pakistan Army chief — Qamar Javed Bajwa

Sholay is a cult movie but I must add that it was one of the toughest roles I have done because of various conditions. I was shooting barefoot, and that too in Bangalore, in the month of May.

Actor — Hema Malini

I don't understand why a cricket ball or cricket pitch is brought into focus. Why don't we just focus on the fact that the batsmen were just not skilled enough to play on the pitch.

India cricket captain — Virat Kohli

A new tradition of 'Hackathons' for start-ups has been created in the country, which is becoming a huge force for both the youth and industry of the country.

Prime Minister — Narendra Modi

FIRST COLUMN

THE CROWN PRINCE OF AMATEURS

MBS is frightening but a Saudi leader that the US President won't even talk to does not have a great future



GWYNNE DYER

If Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the *de facto* ruler of Saudi Arabia, were a burglar, he wouldn't be George Clooney in 'Ocean's Eleven'. He'd be a cartoon burglar in a carnival mask and a top with black-and-white horizontal stripes, carrying a sack labelled 'SWAG.' He's not a burglar, of course. And 'MBS', as he is universally known, was back in the news when the US Government released a declassified assessment by US Intelligence agencies confirming his responsibility for the murder of dissident Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018. Donald Trump sat on the report, defended MBS, and said his own experts were wrong. "I saved his ass!" Trump boasted to *Fox News*. But Khashoggi was working for the *Washington Post* when he was killed and Joe Biden takes a dim view of foreign leaders murdering American journalists even if they aren't citizens. It must be bewildering for MBS as two months ago the US President was his best buddy, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu was his second-best buddy and Russia's President Vladimir Putin had honorary buddy status too. Now Biden has replaced Trump, Netanyahu may also be out after this month's elections and Putin isn't answering his texts.

Biden didn't just publish the report on Khashoggi's murder. He ended US support for MBS' foolish, futile war in Yemen, put US arms sales on hold and refused to speak to MBS. Biden finally called Saudi Arabia, but would only talk to MBS' 85-year-old father, King Salman. So there's been much speculation about what Biden can or should do next about the Mad Killer of Riyadh, and the answer is — nothing at all. Just give him enough rope and he'll hang himself. He's ruthless but he is also ignorant about how the rest of the world works and certainly not smart.

If my pipes burst, I call the plumber. If my car breaks down, I take it to the garage. If I'm very rich and I want somebody killed, I find a hit-man and have the job done professionally. I don't get a few of my mates to do it; I hire an expert. MBS sent a team of 15 men — 15 — to Turkey on a private plane, bringing the tools to kill and dismember Khashoggi with them. It was one of Istanbul's smaller airports, but the Turks were certainly going to record when they landed and when they left. Then they lured Khashoggi to the Saudi consulate to pick up some papers so he could marry his Turkish fiancée. Wait a minute. MBS thought it would be a cool idea to kill Khashoggi inside the Saudi consulate in a country that is hostile to the Saudi regime? He sent seven members of his own personal security force as part of the team. And they didn't even sweep the consulate for Turkish bugs in the room where they killed and dismembered Khashoggi? It was an amateur night for slow learners. The hit team even sent a Khashoggi body double dressed in his clothes out the back door to be seen leaving the consulate by the security cameras. The Turks had the whole story in 24 hours, with the Saudi regime retreating from one lie to another before blaming it on "rogue operators" three weeks later. By then you'd think MBS would have seen the error of his ways. But not our boy. Two weeks later, MBS sends another Saudi hit team to Canada to kill another self-exiled critic of the regime, Saad al-Jabri. Amateur night again. The novice assassins deny knowing one another and are refused entry to Canada by immigration officials. This attempted hit has never been officially confirmed but a document published by *Public Safety Canada* in August 2020 comes very close indeed. The fact that Prime Minister Trudeau was the first leader who received the Turkish recordings of the Khashoggi murder to go public with them just around that time adds weight to the allegation. MBS is frightening but he's really not very bright. And a Saudi leader that the US President won't even talk to does not have a brilliant future.

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

India badly needs a uniform law on bail

The country cannot continue to rely on the conscience of its judges without going into the root of the problem

Disha Ravi, an Indian youth climate change activist, was granted bail recently by a Delhi court in connection with a case where it was alleged that she was involved in the making of an online toolkit related to the ongoing farmers' protest last month. Additional Sessions Judge Dharmendra Rana granted her bail, holding that "citizens are conscience keepers of a Government in any democratic nation and they cannot be put behind bars simply because they chose to disagree with the State's policies." In a landmark order on bail, Judge Rana went on to state that "the offence of sedition cannot be invoked to minister to the wounded vanity of the Government" and that "difference of opinion, disagreement, divergence and dissent are signs of a healthy democracy." He added, "An aware and assertive citizenry, in contradistinction to an indifferent or docile citizenry, is indisputably a sign of a healthy and vibrant democracy."

This is, without doubt, a brave verdict. Little did anyone expect that a judge from the lower judiciary in Delhi would red flag the police and stand up to the State, thereby upholding basic constitutional values of liberty and freedom.

But, here's the catch! Not everyone in the judiciary is Judge Rana and neither is everyone as lucky as Disha. Munawar Faruqui, a stand-up comedian, was arrested on January 1 this year in a case where he was alleged to have insulted and outraged the religious feelings of a particular community. The Supreme Court granted him bail after more than five weeks of imprisonment noting that the evidence against him was "vague." The court also said that none of the procedural requirements of arrest, as laid down by the Supreme Court in the 2014 landmark judgment of Armesh Kumar vs the State of Bihar case, was followed by the police.

These are, however, only a few examples. The likes of Safoora Zargar, Siddique Kappan, Meeran Haider, Shifa Ur Rehman, Gautam Navlakha, Stan Swamy, Akhil Gogoi and many other common citizens have suffered the uncertainties that involve bail petitions. They were either denied bail for months (in some cases years) or were not granted one at all. This is a big problem! If citizens in this country can be easily put behind bars without a trial, only to be released months later with the help of a delayed intervention by the courts, then constitutional principles will easily turn to dust. Such a situation is even more dangerous when the courts have, in a majority of these cases, eventually ruled that the arrests were either illegal, unwarranted or not necessary. It is, therefore, significant for us to understand that the law on bail in India is highly oppressive. In fact, so much so that it manifests itself in the form of three-tier layered oppression.

Advocate Abhinav Sekhri who happened to argue Disha's bail plea states that the age-old saying "Bail, not Jail" is in fact a myth. Let us see how. At the bottom of this layer is the State or the executive that has the power to categorise and classify crimes as bailable and non-bailable. So, if tomorrow the State decides that begging is a non-bailable offence — resultantly, all beggars on the streets will be immediately arrested with-



ONCE WE HAVE REVIEWED AND RECLASSIFIED OUR LAWS INTO BAILABLE AND NON-BAILABLE OFFENCES, FIXED THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF INDIVIDUAL POLICE OFFICERS, LET THE COURTS BE GUIDED BY OBJECTIVE STATUTORY CRITERIA AND NOT BY THEIR SUBJECTIVE CONSCIENCE

Tiwary and Singh are from the National Law University, Visakhapatnam. The views expressed are personal.



out a warrant and put behind bars. The trial will go on at its own pace and the accused will spend years in prison without being proven guilty. It isn't shocking, therefore, that India is the only country where 70 per cent of prisoners are undertrials, most of whom are poor and are languishing in jails for years.

In the middle of this layer is the police that has the power to invoke a non-bailable offence against an accused. Even though the law grants certain procedural safeguards, the police has to work at the whims and fancies of its political masters.

Lastly, at the top of the layer is the judiciary, which, in bail petitions, is completely guided by the conscience of the respective judges. There are no statutory objective criteria and individual judges are required to judge each case on its own merits. Such a situation poses itself as an irony as well as a set of contradictions. On the one hand where the Constitution grants essential rights such as "equality before the law" and "equal protection of the law", procedural due process, liberty and right to life to every citizen of this country, bail petitions, on the other hand, are heard with no objectivity or set criteria. Cases of identical nature are dealt with differently by different courts and different judges.

Therefore, a solution lies in getting to the root of the problem. If we have to reduce the arbitrary power of the State, we need to review our antiquated laws on arrest and custody that were enacted by an oppressive British regime to control Indians and curb dissent during the freedom movement. An 1861 Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) cannot continue to decide the fate of millions of Indians in Independent India. Laws of sedition that give unbridled rights to the executive to act arbitrarily need to be done away with. At his sedition trial, even Mahatma Gandhi had unequivocally pointed out that Section 124-A was a "prince among the political sections of the Indian Penal Code designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen." Countries like New Zealand, the UK and Australia have already gotten rid of their sedition laws and it is time India follows suit.

At the second level, we need to fix individual responsibility of police officers who, under the CrPC have been given the powers of arrest and detention. An analogy can be drawn with International Humanitarian Law. During the war crimes trials that took place after World War-II, many defendants invoked superior orders as a defence, claiming that they could not be held accountable for the crimes committed because they were only following the orders of their superiors.

The case law of these trials eventually resulted in the development of a customary rule applicable in all armed conflicts, whereby obeying a superior order does not relieve a subordinate of criminal responsibility, if the subordinate knew that the act ordered was unlawful, or if he should have known so because of its manifestly unlawful nature. Where an order is manifestly unlawful, all combatants have a customary duty to disobey. Similarly, in domestic laws, the police officer carrying out an illegal arrest without following due process of law needs to be held accountable even if he was following the orders.

Once we have reviewed and reclassified our laws into bailable and non-bailable offences, fixed the accountability of individual police officers, let the courts be guided by objective statutory criteria and not by their subjective conscience. The reason why we have to thank the conscience of judges like Rana is because of the subjectivity that pervades our bail laws.

The optimism that our judiciary has and will continue to have the likes of Judge Rana is a hope and hope alone cannot be our saviour in times of extreme distress. We have to act. As Benjamin Franklin rightly said, "Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."



ANURAG TIWARY

PRIYANKA SINGH

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

DEMOCRACIES FUNCTION BECAUSE INSTITUTIONS OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY. THAT IS BEING ATTACKED IN INDIA (BY) ONE BIG INSTITUTION CALLED THE RSS. —CONGRESS LEADER RAHUL GANDHI



IT WILL TAKE RAHUL GANDHI A LOT OF TIME TO UNDERSTAND THE RSS. THE RSS IS THE BIGGEST SCHOOL OF PATRIOTISM IN THE WORLD. —UNION MINISTER PRAKASH JAVADEKAR

A move towards self-reliance in the education system

Integrated academic programmes are needed to provide supplemental support to teaching and learning in various disciplines, making it relevant in current circumstances

Globally, the post-modernisation phase has been marked by a period of substantial change in the contents and nature of education and examination processes. Therefore, it is required that the focus should be on demonstrating how new models of reform and education can be used in real life experiments with democracy, the environment, globalisation and governance. There's a need to show how new ways of higher education will drive change and instill confidence among the masses and explain how latest research and happenings in the field of education across the globe can be disseminated so as to upgrade research and teaching accordingly.

Plus, we have to find ways to do away with manipulation and nepotism; ensure policy brings good change and frame ways to reform the examination



SUDHIR HINDWAN

The writer is a professor and expert on strategic affairs. The views expressed are personal.

system to ensure that only talent gets selected.

The higher education system's recent attempt to ensure a high level of partnership among institutions through equity and access to all, shows the level of insight in empowering and motivating students and faculty members across the board. Besides, the pursuit of the National Education Policy (NEP) to cover school, adult, higher education and efforts towards promotion of Indian languages and online education exhibit tremendous effort towards enhancement of the overall educational scenario. The sum and substance of the argument is to ensure that the new educational changes have brought in clean governance and accountability in education through a fresh perspective and a framework for key demands of higher education, while maintaining a synergy



among various stakeholders, particularly the youth. The provision to lay norms for designing new required structures is to ensure affordability to social justice. It goes without saying that many positive changes have been ensured through positive perspectives.

Another welcome regulation is to monitor institutes mainly on the basis of research, academic excellence, its linkages and employability. There appears to be a clear framework of defining how the process of segregation of monitoring and financial powers in opening and shutting down of an institute would ensure transparency in the decision-making process. There have been lots of arguments among academicians about selection in higher education; and in this regard perhaps the main challenge is the pattern of selection in the contemporary context of increasing

comprehending their level of social responsibility. The strength of the higher education system lies in creating its internal dynamism by ensuring inclusive growth. Even an excellent system is influenced by the people who make a difference. Human and financial relations and dealings are not as simple as they appear to be and require constant monitoring by competent authorities.

The provisions of Multidisciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERUs) on par with the IITs, IIMs, the National Research Foundation, the National Educational Technology Forum and Indian Institutes of Translation and Interpretation would create an environment for students to reach their potential by encouraging academic excellence of a global level, embracing new information on the one hand and

opening new areas of job-oriented courses on the other.

Besides, it would help in understanding social responsibility. In addition to this, a new approach can also provide a clear way forward for students in multidisciplinary studies. Tremendous efforts have been made for making the entire apparatus of higher education foolproof, yet there are always a few takeaways to new vistas of aggrandisement and making the entire process low cost and more people-intensive.

There is always scope to improve course contents through academic discourse by bringing about changes through cognitive discourse, plus seeking multiple options and viewpoints in order to help in forming an integrated team consisting of only meritorious members for holistic development of social sciences.

Plus, there is a need for

introducing new innovative mechanisms in social sciences designed to help students identify career goals available in the field of social sciences.

More integrated academic programmes and services are needed that provide supplemental support to both teaching and learning in numerous and diverse disciplines making it more relevant in the current circumstances.

Growth and enrichment of students and the community, both inside and outside of the classroom through community development exercise; more research centres to ensure academic excellence in many disciplines; exclusive intellectual skills designed to prepare students to engage in nuances of socio-economic and political issues related to the global order are the way forward to help our students carve out a niche for themselves.

World shares gain ahead of jobs data

PNS ■ BANGKOK

Stocks are higher in Europe and Asia after a wobbly day on Wall Street, when the S&P 500 gave back most of its gains from a day earlier.

Benchmarks rose Wednesday in Paris, London, Tokyo and Shanghai. US futures also advanced.

Investors have taken heart from an easing in bond yields that has alleviated worries over possible interest rate hikes. The yield on the 10-year Treasury inched down to 1.40 per cent early Wednesday.

But expectations for stronger economic growth in coming months continue to fuel worries that interest rates will head higher.

"It feels like we are in the eye of the storm," Stephen Innes of Axi said in a commentary. Investors have recently focused on selling high-priced technology shares but are also watching for policy changes as President Joe Biden's USD 1.9 billion stimulus package heads into the Senate after narrowly passing in the House.

"How much overheating and inflation will the Biden fiscal stimulus generate remains at the top of virtually every market conversation," Innes said.



Germany's DAX surged 0.9 per cent to 14,169.37 and the CAC 40 in Paris added 0.8 per cent to 5,857.

Britain's FTSE 100 picked up 1.2 per cent to 6,690.55. The future for the S&P 500 climbed 0.7 per cent and that for the Dow industrials was 0.7 per cent higher.

In Asian trading, Hong Kong's Hang Seng rose 2.7 per cent to 29,792.81. In Tokyo, the Nikkei 225 added 0.5 per cent to 29,559.10, while the Kospi in Seoul picked up 1.3 per cent to

3,082.99. The Shanghai Composite index advanced 2 per cent to 3,576.90.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 gained 0.8 per cent to 6,818.00 after the government reported the economy grew at a 3.1 per cent quarterly rate, but a minus 1.1 per cent annual rate, in the fourth quarter of last year. The better than expected result was helped by consumer demand and public spending, analysts said.

India's Sensex surged 1.5 per cent to 51,036.24.

On Tuesday, the S&P 500 fell 0.8 per cent to 3,870.29 after earlier flipping between small gains and losses. A day before, the benchmark index had leaped 2.4 per cent for its best performance since June. Technology and internet stocks accounted for much of the selling, a reversal from a day earlier.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost 0.5 per cent to 31,391.52.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite dropped 1.7 per

cent, to 13,358.79, while the Russell 2000 small-cap index gave up 1.9 per cent, to 2,231.51.

Higher interest rates make each USD 1 of profit that companies earn a little less valuable. That's making Wall Street reconsider the value of technology stocks, in large part because their recent dominance left them looking even pricier than the rest of the market.

Treasury yields have risen above 1.50 per cent recently with expectations for economic growth and inflation, up from about 0.9 per cent at the beginning of the year.

Such a rise makes borrowing more expensive for homebuyers, companies taking out loans and virtually everyone else. That can slow economic growth.

On Tuesday, Federal Reserve Governor Lael Brainard sought to calm financial markets by emphasizing that the Fed, while generally optimistic about the economy, is still far from raising interest rates or reducing its USD 120 billion a month in asset purchases.

"We've got some distance to go to meet our goals," of higher inflation and lower unemployment, Brainard said.

Agriculture sector: Cabinet gives nod to pact between India & Fiji

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Wednesday approved a pact between India and Fiji for co-operation in the field of agriculture and allied sectors.

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Agriculture of Indian government and Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Fiji in this regard.

The MoU between India and Fiji provides for cooperation in various areas including promotion of joint ventures between private sectors of both countries.

The agreement also provides for exchange of research personnel, scientific experts, specialists, and technical trainees; technology transfer; development of infrastructure for agriculture development; development of human resources through training of officers and farmers by conducting seminars and workshops.

The two countries would also work together for promo-



tion of investment in marketing and value addition/downstream processing of agricultural commodities.

The agriculture ministries of India and Fiji will also promote capacity development in all areas of agriculture as well as direct trade of agriculture products through market access. They will also do joint planning and development of research proposals and execution of research projects and programmes.

The MoU also provides for establishment of Indo-Fiji Working Group for dealing

phytosanitary issues, and any other form of cooperation.

"Under the MoU, a Joint Working Group (JWG) will be constituted to set down procedures and plan and recommend programmes of cooperation towards achieving its aims through the executing agencies of the two countries," the statement said.

The working group will hold its meeting alternately in India and Fiji once in every two years. This MoU will come into effect on the date of its signing and will remain in force for a period of five years.

Power producers urge Odisha govt to reduce water charge

PNS ■ BHUBANESHWAR

Independent power producers, who are facing problems of rising cost and falling energy tariff, have urged the Odisha government to reduce water charge for their thermal plants in the state, an industry body official said on Wednesday.

The Association of Power Producers has written to Water Resources Minister Raghunandan Das and Energy Minister DS Mishra, alleging that the bills for water have been raised on the allocation basis, not on the actual consumption.

Water consumed by a thermal power plant in the states around 58 per cent of the allocated quantity, the association's director-general Ashok Khurana said.

"For a 1,050 MW power plant in Odisha, the allocated quantity of water is 22 million cubic metre a year, whereas the quantity consumed is only 58 per cent," he said.

Khurana also said the unit has to bear an annual cost of Rs 13.30 crore as water charge, though the consumption of the



resource in value term could be Rs 7.7 crore a year.

With the steady rise of renewable energy and falling tariff levels, IPPs have been witnessing a decline in the plant load factor (PLF) from 78 per cent in the 2009-10 fiscal to 51 per cent in 2020-21, the industry body said.

The association claimed that the power plants located in Maharashtra are paying water bills based on consumption, not on allocation, resulting in significant cost savings.

The annual increase in water charge by 10 per cent, as per

the provisions of the Odisha Irrigation (Amendment) Rules, 2015, has also led to a rise in cost from Rs 4.5 per cubic metre in FY17 to Rs 6.3 in FY21. "IPPs do not have any power to fix prices. They are locked into quoted tariffs under long term contracts," the industry body said.

The regular increase in water charge does not fall under the 'Change in Law' provision, and hence the cost has to be borne by the power producers, leading to a deterioration of their financial viability, it added.



Hafele entrances made easier with range of sliding systems

PNS ■ BANGALORE

A space with larger entrance often has doors that require some effort from an individual to enter. In such cases, the doors are either kept open or they give out noise every time when the doors open and close.

However, entries or exits can now be made effortless and seamless with the range of Sliding systems offered under the SLIDO range by Hafele.

Hafele houses a comprehensive range of Sliding Systems for every imaginable indoor and outdoor application. Specifically catering to your internal partitions and doors are the Classic and Design 80 Telescopic Progressive Sliding Systems from this range. They demonstrate the highest form of quality as the components

are completely fabricated in European manufacturing units and adhere to European standards. The doors in this system move in unison when one door is pushed or pulled hence reducing the amount of force required to open or close the doors.

The new Telescopic Progressive Systems by Hafele are available in two variants - Classic (for Wooden Door Sliding) and Design (for Glass Door Sliding) with an option of choosing from a 2 door or a 3 door version under each variant. The Classic 80 system enhances privacy and gives a clear distinction between different areas in your interiors while the Design 80 system gives way to open and bright spaces.

Exim Bank inks USD 10.40 mn soft loan pact with Eswatini

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Exim Bank on Wednesday said it has inked a USD 10.40 million (Rs 75.99 crore) loan deal with Eswatini (Swaziland) on behalf of the Indian government.

Exim Bank, on behalf of the Indian government, has extended a Line of Credit (LoC) of USD 10.40 million to the government of the Kingdom of Eswatini (Swaziland) for the construction of disaster recovery site, the bank said in a release.

With the signing of this agreement, Exim Bank, till date has extended three LoCs to Eswatini, taking the total value to USD 68.30 million. Exim Bank said the Indian government's soft loan to Eswatini covers projects in sectors including information technology, disaster management and agriculture.

MONEY MATTERS

Tata Motors drives in three axle truck for various applications



Tata Motors on Wednesday said it has launched Signa 3118.T - country's first three-axle (10 wheeler) rigid truck with 31 tonnes gross vehicle weight (GVW). With a 3,500kg higher certified payload than the corresponding

28-tonne GVW rigid truck and equivalent cost of operations with similar fuel, tyre and maintenance cost as a 28-tonne truck, this product is conceived to significantly enhance the net operating profit for its customers by 45 per cent over a 28-tonne truck, the auto major said in a statement. "The model is evidence of unmatched customer-focused engineering and unique value positioning by the company," Tata Motors Commercial Vehicle Business Unit Vice President (Sales & Marketing) Rajesh Kaul said.

Bank of Baroda raises Rs 4,500 cr through QIP



State-owned Bank of Baroda has raised Rs 4,500 crore equity capital through qualified institutional placement (QIP). The capital raising committee of the board on Wednesday approved the issue

and allotment of 55,07,95,593 equity shares to eligible qualified institutional buyers at issue price of Rs 81.70 per share against the floor price of Rs 85.98 apiece, aggregating to Rs 4499,99,99,948.10, the bank said in a regulatory filing. The issue had opened on February 25, 2021 and closed on Tuesday. The committee in its meeting last week had approved raising up to Rs 4,500 crore through an issue of equity shares through QIP. The lender said total seven buyers were allotted more than five per cent of the equity shares offered in the issue.

Tata Power arm to supply solar power to Tata Steel



Tata Power Ltd on Wednesday said its arm TP Saurya will provide solar power to Tata Steel Ltd at Jamshedpur, Jharkhand. Tata Power's wholly-owned subsidiary, TP Saurya Limited, has signed a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Tata Steel Ltd to develop a 15

MW solar project at Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, a company statement said. The energy will be supplied to Tata Steel Ltd under a PPA valid for a period of 25 years from scheduled commercial operation date. The project is required to be commissioned within six months from the date of execution of the PPA, the company said. The Plant is expected to generate an average of 32 MU (Million units) of energy per year and will annually offset approximately an average 25.8 Million Kg of CO2.

Renault begins sales of SUV Kiger; delivers over 1K units



The Indian arm of French automaker Renault has begun the commercial sales of its SUV Kiger with more than 1,100 units of the vehicle delivered to customers on the very first day, the company said on Wednesday. The all-new Renault Kiger is currently

available for bookings across the company's dealership network of over 500 outlets pan-India besides through its website, Renault India said. "Today (Wednesday), more than 1,100 Renault KIGER cars were delivered to the customers across India on the first day of commencement of sales," the company said. "With Kiger, Renault has successfully launched yet another breakthrough product, targeted at the core of India's automotive market," said Venkatram Mamillapalle, Country CEO & Managing Director, Renault India Operations.

Cabinet approves MoU with France on renewable energy coop

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday gave ex post facto approval to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and France on renewable energy cooperation.

"The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was apprised of the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and French Republic in the field of renewable energy cooperation. The MoU was signed in January 2021," a statement said.

Rupee zooms 65 ps to close at 72.72 against \$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The rupee strengthened by 65 paise to end at 72.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday on the back of weakness in the American dollar and rise in risk appetite in the global markets.

At the interbank forex market, the local unit opened at 73.26 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 72.71 and a low of 73.26.

It finally settled at 72.72 against the American currency, registering a rise of 65 paise over its previous closing. On Tuesday, the rupee had settled at 73.37 against the American currency.

"Market sentiments improved on hopes that massive stimulus packages from governments, easy monetary policies from central banks and progress in vaccination programmes would boost eco-



nomie growth," said Saif Mukadam, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.12 per cent to 90.67.

Meanwhile, Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.69 per cent to USD 63.76 per barrel.

"Furthermore, the rupee appreciated on softening of crude oil prices and consistent FII inflows. Additionally, improved macroeconomic data continued to support rupee."

Spectrum acquisitions to yield market share gains for Jio, Airtel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The strengthening of spectrum footprints by Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio in the just-concluded auctions is expected to yield market share gains for the two telcos, arming them with sustainable advantage in the long run and for 5G play, according to analysts.

With the auctions over, the key things to be monitored would be Vodafone Idea Ltd's (VIL) balance sheet and its potential capital raise, signals of price hike, launch of a Jio-Google smart phone, and 5G spectrum auctions, they noted.

Analysts across-the-board concurred with the government's view that at Rs 77,814 crore of total bids, the spectrum auction outcome and response had surpassed expectations.



Goldman Sachs noted that Bharti and Jio had "significantly" bolstered their spectrum footprints, and that strengthening of radiowave holdings "could aid their market shares while at the same time keeping capex under check".

In all service areas and bands, spectrum was sold at reserve prices, indicating that this higher-than-expected participation was a function of telcos looking to secure their medium-term spectrum needs rather than a result of a bidding war, it said.

With the spectrum auctions done, Goldman Sachs

said it believes that investor focus will now shift to VIL's balance sheet and its potential capital raise, signals of tariff hike, launch of a Jio-Google smartphone, and 5G spectrum auction. The more-than-expected participation from telcos in the auctions increases the probability of a price hike as a way to offset increase in leverage, market watchers said. "While the March '21 auction was largely a non-event for Vodafone Idea, the company's limited ability to participate in future 5G spectrum auctions could result in further erosion of its market share," Goldman Sachs said.

Moody's Investors Service said spectrum renewals will help incumbents protect their market positions while additional bandwidth purchases will drive improved network coverage.

Supertech to monetise land bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Supertech Ltd on Wednesday said it will expand plotted development business and targets to sell plots worth Rs 2,300 crore this year in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Uttarakhand, as part of its plan to monetise land bank for retiring debt and completion of existing projects.

Supertech Group will offer independent plots on land area of about 53 lakh sq ft, which is around 125 acres, in

various cities across three states, the company said in a statement.

The company will offer 2.43 lakh sq ft in Ghaziabad, 16.65 lakh sq ft in Gurugram, 8.73 lakh sq ft in Greater Noida, 8.1 lakh sq ft in Yamuna Expressway, 3.6 lakh sq ft in Meerut and 13.5 lakh sq ft in Rudrapur.

Supertech Chairman R K Arora said the demand for independent plots has surged after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sugar output up 20% till Feb 2020-21

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's sugar production rose by 20 per cent to 233.77 lakh tonnes in the first five months of 2020-21 marketing year ending September on higher cane production, industry body ISMA on Wednesday said, and demanded hike in MSP of the sweetener to boost mills' liquidity position.

The Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA) said the minimum selling price (MSP) of sugar should be raised to Rs 34.5 per kg from the present Rs 31 per kg to help mills in clearing cane arrears to sugarcane



farmers. Sugar production stood at 233.77 lakh tonnes till February of 2020-21 marketing year as compared to 194.82 lakh tonnes in the corresponding period of the previous year. Sugar marketing year runs from October to September. During October 2020 and February 2021 peri-

od, sugar production in Maharashtra rose to 84.85 lakh tonnes compared with 50.70 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period.

In Uttar Pradesh, sugar output is lower at 74.20 lakh tonnes till February of this marketing year compared with 76.86 lakh tonnes in the previous year. Sugar production in Karnataka has increased to 40.53 lakh tonnes from 32.60 lakh tonnes. "...the ex-mill prices in most of the states are under pressure and are showing downward trend as average prices in Tamil Nadu are hovering between Rs 3,200-3,225

per quintal, while in northern states the ex-mill prices are in the range of Rs 3,160-3,180 per quintal. Whereas, ex-mill prices in Maharashtra and Karnataka are seeing at MSP of sugar," ISMA said.

The current prices are almost Rs 80-100 per quintal less than what it was a year back during the corresponding period. "This is not a good sign as low sugar prices, much below the cost of production for last several months, have adversely affected the liquidity of mills and their ability to pay the FRP to cane farmers.

WOMEN HAVE THE CAKE AND EAT IT TOO



As a country, we're just getting used to the idea of youngsters taking the path of entrepreneurship. And for women, it's an even bumpier road. But taking it all in their stride and breaking stereotypes and boundaries are women from the city who are starting out pretty early on in life, writes RACHEL DAMMALA

cakes.

Shriya Puram and her sister started off as 21 and 18-year-olds, putting up stalls at various flea markets to now having a brand of their own - Cocoa Stop! "We once had a migrant from Delhi tell us that she finally found hot chocolate that reminds her of home. We received great reviews and push too and we kept going," Shriya tells us. Incidentally, she says, most people that she had to walk to, to talk business, were women themselves. "It's great to see women at the helm of affairs, paving way for many others to follow," she observes. Women's day is not far away and all we need is to be less fearful, more loving, and welcoming to ideas from either gender. Hyderabad as a city, thrives on ideas from the younger brigade, and women are all set to lead, inspire and impact!



Here are some of the women painting the town red with their novel ideas, passionate efforts, and extremely great work. They've seen a need, realised they could offer, honed their skills, and showed up! And for most of these women, it's more than just for monetary profits. Meet Meghana Rimmalapudi the founder of Bharathi Pickles. Her pickles are as simple and homely as her brand sounds, and the taste is sure to remind you of your mom! "My mom departed and not long ago, my dad passed away too. During the lockdown I tried my hand at the pickle recipes my mom taught me and gave some to my relatives who loved it,

and that is how Bharathi (her mom's name) Pickles started. "I did have a few of my relatives worry about the risks of being a businesswoman but I knew I had to do this and that I could, given my three years' experience in digital marketing. I want to be independent and this was my way of doing it," she says. Same is the case with Vaishnavi Bachala, a fresh graduate who had always wanted to start a brand of her own. An illustrator, the artist thanks the lockdown for blessing her with time to explore and pursue her passion. She balances her job as a researcher at the Indian School of Business by day and her project by night. "Get good sleep" is all my parents say to me, they were

very supportive," she tells us. But she did face bias in the industry, although minuscule. "I noticed some clients pay more attention or take male designers more seriously than me, when we both brought the same things to the table. Initially, that was bothersome, but I know things will change slowly," she says with an optimistic tone. Women are also exploring into the sensible market. They're thinking and working towards making the planet a better place to live in. Take a look at Vyshnavi Gudivada and Shruthi Chilamkuri who founded the sustainably vegan brand Satviknaturals whose toot-pastes, brushes, and deodorants too, are selling like hot



I did have a few of my relatives worry about the risks of being a businesswoman and I know they had my best interests at heart. What I also knew was that I badly wanted to do this. I believed I was capable, I knew what I was doing. My three years' experience in digital marketing came handy. I wanted to be independent and this was my way of doing it. Today, these very relatives are proud of me and how far I've come.



GENDER PAY PARITY, equal opportunity still distant dreams: Samantha

Art, throughout history, served a didactic purpose. For most people it was books earlier, it's visual medium today. While we do have numerous films about and by women, we're yet to see a palpable change in the industry itself. The gender pay gap has plagued every field and you would be wrong to think cinema, which showers us with morals, isn't one of them. And to have someone like actress Samantha Akkineni address it speaks volumes about the issue. Speaking about the difference in the pay of male and female actors, Samantha had said, "Even if you are one of the top 3 heroines, your pay is much lesser than that of a hero who's not even in the top 20. If a heroine asks for a pay hike, she's looked at as being problematic. But if a hero asks for a pay hike, he's seen as being cool."

The actress was speaking at a roundtable discussion conducted with five women working in different aspects of the Indian film industry: actress Samantha Akkineni, actress Taapsee Pannu, award-winning film director Anjali Menon, Netflix India's Director for Original Films Srishti Behl Arya, and Keiko Nakahara, who has been the cinematographer on several films, including *Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*. Film critic Anupama Chopra was the host of the discussion. All the women on the panel agreed that while there may have been some improvement in the representation of films in Indian cinema in recent years, a lot more needs to be done in an industry that is still predominantly male-centric. Speaking about her experiences in the early years of her film career, *Thappad* actress Taapsee Pannu said, "I was once asked to change my dialogues during the dubbing because the hero wanted them altered. I refused to do so, only to find out that after the release of the film, they

had used a dubbing artist's voice to change those dialogues." On the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8) this year, a report titled 'O Womaniya: 2021' is to be launched jointly by media consulting firm Ormax Media and leading entertainment journalism platform Film Companion. The report looks at facts related to the representation of women in Indian cinema from various perspectives. It aims to start a conversation in the film industry on how women need to have more participation in film-making, as well as have better roles being written for them. Speaking about why the film industry has so few female directors, Anjali Menon, known and lauded for films like *Bangalore Days* and *Kerala Cafe*, said: "We have very few women film directors in the Indian film industry because of lack of investor confidence. People tend to be judgmental and biased about female directors, that they can direct only a certain type of films, which is such a weird assumption to make. The first step is to highlight the disparity through the collection of data, which the O Womaniya! report is doing."



Dr Kanchan Sanyal lists the precautions one should take and things to keep in mind before going for the vaccine

GET READY FOR COVID JAB



With India beginning the COVID-19 vaccination phase 2 from March 1 adminis-

tering vaccines to those above the age of 60 and people with other medical diseases, it won't be too long when people above 50 and

less will also be able to receive the jab. Despite the fact that the virus is a new and a highly transmissible one, the med-

ical fraternity has learnt immensely from it in the last year. It has managed to fight the disease, analyse and lay down protocols for the treatments, and above all, have worked from all parts of the world together as one to produce reliable and safe vaccines in record time.

Therefore, as your much-awaited turn rolls in, here are some precautions you should remember to adhere to before you go to the health facility for your inoculation.

Some of these precautions apply to any vaccine you may have taken before this.

- Take normal diet the evening before the vaccine.
- Avoid alcohol before the injection (and for a few days after). This helps in reducing any mild side

effects you may have.

- Clarify with your physician about your underlying illnesses and medical history (the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, Govt. of India has issued clear guidelines and your physician will be aware of this).

Precautions specific to the COVID-19 vaccine:

- The three basics of COVID-19 preventive measures will have to be followed (i.e. wearing a mask, hand hygiene and social distancing) at the vaccination site and in public places.
- Cough/sneeze etiquette should be practised in all areas.
- Register yourself for the vaccine and go to the centre designated to you on

the date intimated.

- Do not worry about the side effects. Any vaccine can have side effects but they are minuscule compared to the good they do to the individual and to the society.

Vaccines are voluntary, so decide for yourself but remember that we already have a vast experience in vaccines, tried and tested in many diseases to make the world a healthy place for ourselves and our children.

With the COVID-19 vaccines, we have learnt to deal with this disease scientifically, clearly and with optimism.

(The writer is an Advisor for Health and Wellness, Columbia Pacific Communities.)



● Priya Murthy



● Tazalenath



● Jenny



● Aabha



● Kamudhi

SNEAK PEEK

It was pretty faces galore at the curtain raiser and fashion showcase announcing Fifth Avenue Lifestyle and Bridal Fashion Week on the occasion of Women's Day Eve! The elegant event attracted the city's fashion enthusiasts, models and influencers sporting the latest trends.



● Krithiya



● Vani Agarwal



● Chandana



● Liza

PARTY

Photos by SV Chary

FUN

ARCHIE



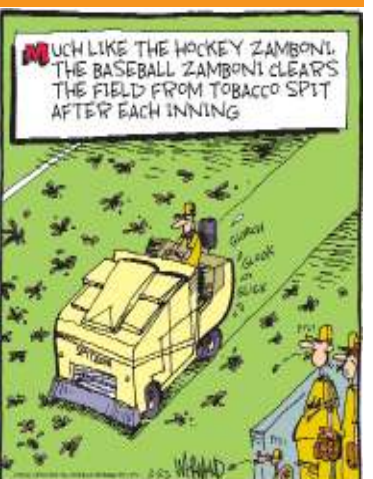
CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



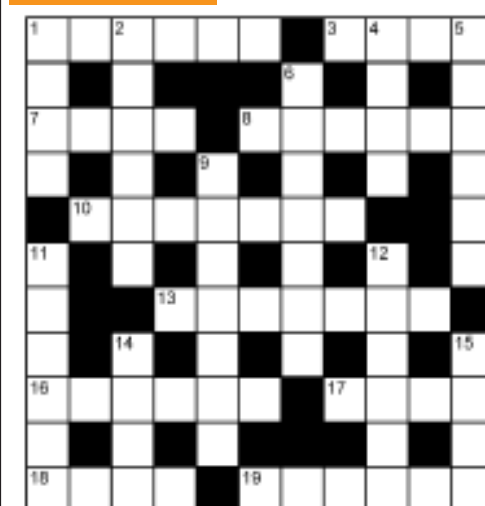
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Noon
- Costing nothing
- Contact by telephone
- Purchasing
- Rich
- Very sore
- A floor covering
- Large boat
- A red gemstone
- Selected

- Going very quickly
- Less dirty
- Cup and
- Small trees
- A nipping sea creature
- Twirl around

DOWN

- One of the planets
- A meal
- Water from the sky
- Ninety less ten



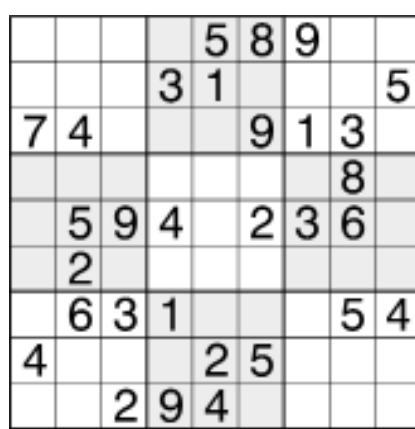
NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU



Yesterday's solution								
9	7	4	8	1	2	3	6	5
5	8	6	4	3	9	7	1	2
2	3	1	5	6	7	9	4	8
1	2	3	6	9	8	4	5	7
7	5	9	2	4	1	6	8	3
6	4	8	3	7	5	2	9	1
4	1	2	9	8	3	5	7	6
8	6	5	7	2	4	1	3	9
3	9	7	1	5	6	8	2	4

Rules

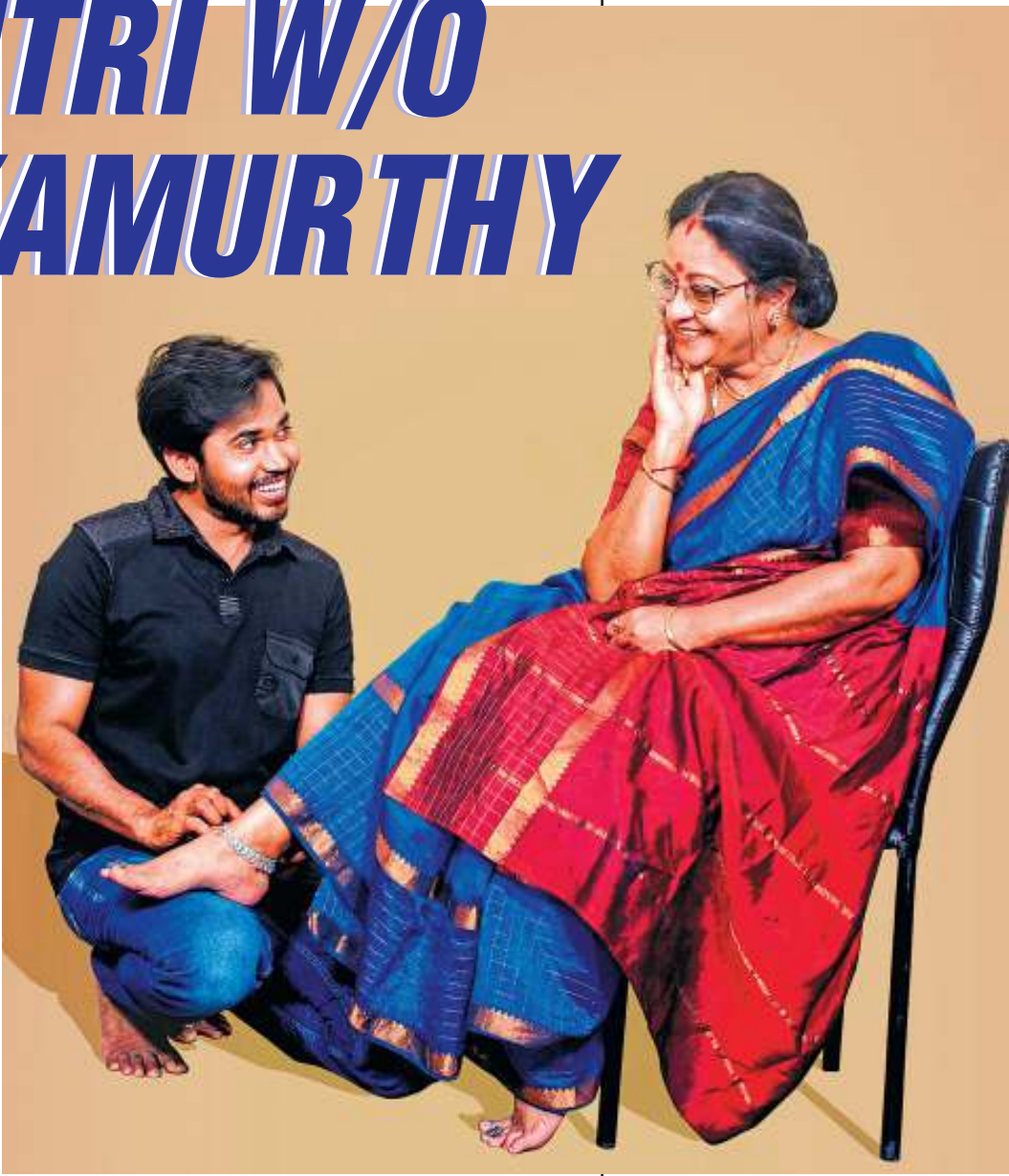
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
- The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

PARVATEESAM TO WOO FANS AGAIN WITH SAVITRI W/O SATYAMURTHY

Actor Parvateesam of *Kerantha* fame is all set to be seen in a new avatar in his next, interestingly titled *Savitri W/O Satyamurthy*. The film covers the story of a 60-year-old woman romancing and marrying a 25-year-old man. Senior artist Sri Lakshmi will be seen playing the female lead. The film's puja ceremony was held at Hyderabad's Ramanaidu Studios. Well-known director-producer Tammareddy Bharadwaj gave the clap for the muhurat shot. Shooting for the film began today. The film is being produced by Gogula Narendra on A1 Mahendra Creations. Chaithanya Konda, who has previously worked under Puri Jagannadh in the direction department, is making his directorial debut.

"I have known Narendra, a good friend of mine, for several years and had been planning to do a film together for two years. Before this, I had narrated to him a couple of stories. Since they are regular stories, we both were dissatisfied. This is when I came up with the story of *Savitri W/O Satyamurthy*, which immediately excited him. How a 25-something became the husband of a 60-something female is the crux of the story. It's a complete family entertainer that can be watched by everyone in the family. Parvateesam suited the role so well. I chose him because I loved him in *Kerantha*," director Chaithanya Konda said.

Actor Parvateesam, who also has



films like *Operation Gold Fish* and *Bale Manchi Chowka Beram* to his fame, said, "*Kerantha* made me popular. I am confident that *Savitri W/O Satyamurthy* will be even better. This is a hilarious entertainer. I

am confident about the story." Actress Sri Lakshmi who plays the female lead, said, "I have played a wide variety of characters over the years. And I am back to playing a new kind of character now.

Although I am late, I am back with the latest! I have never played such a character before. Parvateesam, who should be playing my son, is my husband in this film. It's funny!"



Seetimaarr title song takes over the internet

Actress Samantha Akkineni took to social media to unveil the title song for Gopichand and Tamannaah's upcoming film, *Seetimaarr*. Sharing the lyrical video of the song, Samantha was all praise for the team and wished them the best.

Seetimaarr, the Sampath Nandi directorial venture, has been in the making for more than a year now. In January, the makers announced that the film will hit the screens on April 2 this year. Samantha shared the song and wrote, "*#SeetimaarrTitleSong* Woo hoo.. first whistle for this awesome song .. wishing the team the very best @YoursGopichand @IamSampathNandi @tamannaahspeaks @SS_Screens @DiganganaS @adityamusic (sic)." The song, composed by Mani Sharma and sung by Anurag Kulkarne, has now become a rage on the internet. Within a few minutes, Aggressive star Gopichand's fans started trending *#Seetimaarr* on the internet.

Seetimaarr is touted to be a sports-drama actioner with a backdrop of the mass game Kabaddi.

It is said to be the highest budgeted film in Gopichand's career with high technical aspects.

Presented by Pavan Kumar and Produced by Srinivasaa Chhitturi under the Srinivasaa Silver Screen banner, the film also stars Digangana Suryavanshi and Bhumi Chawla in important roles.



Comedian Madhunandan debuts as hero with Gunde Katha Vintara

After gaining popularity, it's a usual practice for most comedians to turn heroes. The trend doesn't stop and the latest one to join the list is comedian Madhunandan who is popular for films like *Gunde Jaari Gallanthayinde*, *Oka Laila Kosam*, etc. The *Taxiwalla* actor is debuting as a male lead with a unique thriller titled *Gunde Katha Vintara*. Written and directed by Vamsidhar, the film is produced by Kranthi Mangalampally and Abhishek Chippa under Trinity Pictures. The first look of the film was unveiled by actor Adivi Sesh. Unlike most comedians, Madhunandan opted for a sus-

pense sort of genre as is evident from the first look. Seen with a beard and smoking a cigarette, he looks intense in the poster. The dark theme only adds to the mood of the poster.

The title as well as the poster has received a good response on Twitter. *Gunde Katha Vintara* co-stars Swathista and Shreya Navile as female leads.

Gunde Katha Vintara has completed its shoot and post-production works are on. Ravi Varman Neelimegham and Suresh Bhargav handled the cinematography, while music was scored by Masala Coffee. Krishna Chaithanya penned lyrics and Sai Kiran Muddam is the editor.

Muskaan Khubchandani in Rajasekhar's Sekhar

In the month of February, on the occasion of his birthday, Dr Rajasekhar revealed the title of his film *Sekhar* and also released the first look poster, that received decent response by the movie lovers.

According to the latest update, Muskaan Khubchandani who made her debut in Telugu film industry with the movie *George Reddy*, has been roped in for *Sekhar* and she will be seen sharing the screen space with Dr Rajasekhar.

Muskaan Khubchandani was recently seen in Bollywood star Akshay Kumar and Kiara Advani-starrer horror and comedy drama *Laxmmi*. And now Muskaan Khubchandani is going to feature in

Lalith's directorial venture. Apparently, the makers were particularly impressed by Muskaan Khubchandani's performance in the bullet song in *George Reddy*.

Jeevitha Rajasekhar said, "Muskaan is a great dancer and is very expressive too. I saw those traits in her in bullet song and approached her."

Muskaan Khubchandani will join the sets of *Sekhar* in mid March for the Araku schedule.

The film *Sekhar* is touted to be an edge of the seat thriller. The Rajasekhar starrer was supposed to go on floors last year. However, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus and the lockdown delayed the production of *Sekhar*.

KGF STAR YASH REINCARNATION DRAMA IN TOLLYWOOD

KGF fame Yash is busy with his upcoming action drama *KGF: Chapter 2*, which is helmed by Prashanth Neel. Though *KGF Chapter 2* is gearing up for the grand release soon, now, another movie of Yash starrer is coming up to entertain movie lovers.

Yash starrer *Gajakesari*, which was helmed by S Krishna, was released in 2014, and now is set to release on March 5 in Telugu. In this film Yash plays a dual role. The reincarnation drama *Gajakesari* has Yash is sure to keep fans glued

to the screen.

Yash is fondly known as the 'Rocking star' of the Kannada film industry and he enjoys massive fan followers. While Yash is a national star now, the journey to stardom was definitely not a cakewalk.

Gajakesari was a blockbuster at the box office and following its success at the domestic box-office, it was screened in the United States, Singapore, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Hong Kong and London. The movie marked Krishna's debut as a director. The highlight of the movie was Yash's hair extension, which was first of its kind in Sandalwood.



RRR: NICK POWELL joins the last leg of climax



Mega Power Star Ram Charan and young tiger Jr NTR are currently shooting for their upcoming film *RRR*'s climax scene in Hyderabad. According to the latest report, the makers of *RRR* brought Hollywood action director Nick Powell on the board who will choreograph the climax action sequence. The makers of *RRR* confirmed the same by sharing a video clip on Twitter, in which SS Rajamouli is seen discussing the climax scene with Nick Powell.

"Renowned Hollywood

Action Director, Nick Powell, joins the last leg of climax. Just when you thought the climax shoot couldn't get any hotter *#RRRDiaries...#RRR #RRRMovie*. (sic)," *RRR* team tweeted.

Nick Powell had worked on Hollywood biggies such as *Bourne Series*, *Braveheart*, *Gladiator*, *X-Men* and *Resident Evil*. He also choreographed some spectacular stunts in Indian big-budget films such as *2.0*, *Manikarnika* and *Radhe Shyam*.

RRR is based on the lives of two legendary freedom fighters Alluri Seetharama Raju



and Komaram Bheem, and it has actors Olivia Morris, Alia Bhatt, Ajay Devgn, Shriya Saran, Irish actors Ray Stevenson and Alison Dood playing crucial roles. Rajamouli's magnum opus is being produced by DUV Danayya with a lavish budget of Rs 400 crores. The film is slated to hit the theatres on October 13, 2021, worldwide in a very grand manner in multiple languages.

Match of high-stakes

With WTC final place yet to be confirmed, India ready to cook England's goose

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

A ruthless India will not take their foot off the pedal while taking England for another "spin ride" in the high-stakes Test series finale starting Thursday, aiming to not just complete another dominant home performance but also realise their World Test Championship dreams.

Virat Kohli's men need at least a draw to maintain the current 2-1 scoreline to qualify for the Lord's final against New Zealand while England at best can heal Tim Paine's January scars by letting Australia a lucky passage to the summit clash with a win.

While a draw always seems a safe option in a game like this but Kohli and coach Ravi Shastri, with their attacking instincts, wouldn't like to play a defensive game which at times can be counter-productive.

India laid a venomous trap on the refurbished Motera and with the pink ball, demolished England inside two days, messing more with their minds than getting any tangible help from the track.

Axar Patel bowled ramrod straight and England had their heads "spinning" from the start. The play has worked well for the hosts since the second Test in Chennai.

Both Ajinkya Rahane and Zak Crawley felt that the track for the fourth Test looks "similar" to what they got in the previous two matches but the red ball which skids less off the surface compared to the pink one promises to make it a better contest between the two teams.

This is a Test match where England have little to gain save salvaging a bit of pride in a drawn series while India have everything to lose.

Despite being India's most prolific Test captain in terms of numbers, Kohli would be the first one to admit that he hasn't had the kind of success his illustrious predecessor Mahendra Singh Dhoni had with regards the ICC events.

While this is an ICC event of a different kind, no one more than Kohli would be itching for a course correction and build his own lasting legacy as a captain.



For that, he wouldn't pull back punches. And on another track that helps his 'snipers' Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin, Kohli would love to see an 'inflation' in their current cumulative tally of 42 wickets for the series.

With Indian spinners accounting for 49 of the 60 English wickets in the first three Tests, it was anybody's guess as how things will pan out in the final Test at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

Kohli wouldn't have any complaints with his spinners, who have delivered what was expected of them, but the batting has left a lot to be desired in the entire series. It's just that England have been worse in their last four innings.

But that is no sound explanation for Indian batsmen's failure to dominate the proceedings in their own backyard.

Rohit Sharma's 296 runs in three games is 120 runs more than second best Ashwin (176 runs), who got a hundred on a difficult Chepauk track.

Save Rohit, none of the Indian batsmen have felt too comfortable till now on the turners on offer.

Kohli, despite two fifties, hasn't

had the best of times while Ajinkya Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara and Shubman Gill have all had only one innings of note over three Test matches.

All Kohli would want is a steady, if not exceptional performance, in

games such as these where a failure can leave 'many a slip between the cup and lip'.

While there won't be any Jasprit Bumrah for the final Test, one of the finest exponents of bowling on sub-continental tracks, Umesh Yadav, is

4th Test, Day 1
Live from 9:30am IST
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

expected to be back in action.

It remains to be seen whether Ishant Sharma or Mohammed Siraj partner him.

For England, poor team selection has also contributed to their shoddy batting where Joe Root (333 runs), with his first Test double hundred, managed to maintain a fair gap (187 runs) between him and the second highest scorer Ben Stokes (146).

Not having a second specialist spinner in Motera, didn't exactly make the team management look too smart, especially after Joe Root scalped a career-best 5 for 8.

Jack Leach (16 wickets) has done his bit but he does have his own set of limitations and with his pace, which is on an average 10km less than Patel, he is unlikely to always trouble the batsman.

But he would again play a significant role on a similar sort of track and may expect Dom Bess for company. Bess was impressive in the opening Test in Chennai but since then, has cooled his heels.

Virat bats for rotation policy

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India skipper Virat Kohli feels rotation policy is the way forward in the age of bio-bubbles as mental fatigue caused by restrictive quarantines will make it extremely difficult for players to stay hungry.

England have been following a rotation policy in their ongoing tour of India, something that has drawn criticism from legends such as Kevin Pietersen.

Kohli, though, is convinced that as long as players are staying in bio-secure environments, taking intermittent breaks is not a bad idea.

"The kind of systems you have

to follow in the bubble, it can get very monotonous and it is very difficult to keep yourself excited about small things," Kohli said.

"I feel any format of the game is right place for rotation. No human being can possibly go on for that many number of games throughout of the year. Everyone needs to find windows of having some time off.

"These are the things that need to be considered for as long as you play in the bubble, outside of that it depends on where you stand physically more than mentally. But till the bubble exists, we need to keep the mental factor in the picture as well, because mental fatigue would be a huge, huge factor," he said.

Kohli said for such a policy to succeed, a solid bench strength is paramount. He was pleased that India do not lack in that aspect.

"Our bench strength becomes way more important because if you have guys hungry, ready, who understand where the game is heading and are brave enough to take on opportunities then you can rotate very easily.

"There are eleven more guys who are ready to win a Test match for India, or One-day or T20 and that is exactly what we are striving towards, we have a clear road-map as to where we need to go in the next four-five years, so that our transition is not difficult at all," he said.

Too much noise about spin-friendly tracks: Kohli

Ahmedabad: Stop the noise, tighten up that defence and get on with the game — a combative Indian skipper Virat Kohli said on Wednesday ahead of the fourth Test as he navigated persistent queries on the spin-friendly tracks in the country.

"There is always too much noise and too much conversation about spin tracks," Kohli said at the pre-match press conference.

"I am sure if our media is in a space to contradict those views or present views which say that it is unfair to criticise only spin tracks, then it will be a balanced conversation."

Kohli, at the end of the third Test, had blamed the batsmen's technique for their failure on the Motera track. "But the unfortunate bit is everyone plays along with that narrative (spinning tracks) and keeps making it news till the time it is relevant. And then a Test match happens, if you win on Day 4 or 5, no one says anything but if it finishes in two days, everyone pounces on the same issue," he said.

Kohli cited one of India's losses in New Zealand when the team struggled on a seaming pitch. He recalled how it was the batsmen's technique, and not the track, that came in for scrutiny.

"We lost in New Zealand on day three in 36 overs. I am sure none of our people wrote about the pitch. It was how India played badly in New Zealand.

"None of the pitches were criticised, no one came and saw how the pitch was a s

doing, how much the ball was moving and how much grass was there on the pitch," he said. Kohli said his team has been successful over a period of time for adapting to conditions instead of complaining about them.

"The reason for our success is that we have not cribbed about any pitch we have played on and we will continue to play like that.

"We all need to be honest with ourselves what is the idea behind continuing this narrative and what purpose it serves people who keep continuing the conversation which is one-sided," he said.

Now that the contest will be played with the red ball, he was asked if the pink ball made it tough for the batsmen, Kohli retorted with a firm no.

"I don't understand why a ball or a pitch, all these things are brought into focus why don't we focus on the fact that batsmen were not skilled enough to play on that pitch properly. It was bizarre display of batting by both the teams.

"...It's not (because) of change in ball-colour. If you make just a ball or a pitch helping the bowler, the focus, then you are not really reading the game properly in my opinion. I don't think the red ball is going to change that whatsoever."

Kohli was also asked if it is good for the game, from a global fans' perspective, to take undue advantage of home conditions.

"I would love if you ask this question to England, New Zealand and Australia. This question is irrelevant to me at this point of time."

Another question thrown at him was what he thought of a Test match finishing inside two days.

"We play to win. People should cherish India's win. Not every Test is finishing in two days. If team is playing bad only then it happens, we need to look at things objectively."



SINGLES

SANIA-ANDREJA ENTER QATAR SEMIS

Doha: Indian tennis star Sania Mirza and her Slovenian partner Andreja Klepac sailed into the women's doubles semifinals of the Qatar Open with a straight sets win over their rivals on Wednesday. Sania and Andreja made short work of fourth seeds Anna Blinkova and Gabriela Dabrowski 6-2, 6-0 to reach the last four round. The Indo-Slovenian pair will next play top seeds Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova.

MEDVEDEV, ZVEREV EXIT IN 1ST ROUND

Rotterdam: Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev's 12 aces weren't enough as the Australian Open runner-up was beaten 7-6 (4), 6-4 by Dusan Lajovic in the first round of the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament on Wednesday. It wasn't the day's only upset in Rotterdam, with third-seeded Alexander Zverev also losing. Alexander Bublik beat Zverev 7-5, 6-3 to set up a second-round meeting with Tommy Paul.

MARY ASSURES MEDAL IN SPANISH TOURNEY

New Delhi: Six-time world champion M C Mary Kom (51kg) was assured of a medal in her first competitive outing since qualifying for the Olympics when she entered the semifinal of the Boxam International Tournament in Castellon on Wednesday. The 37-year-old, who had not competed since her Tokyo qualification, defeated Italian Giordana Sorrentino with a split verdict in the quarterfinal stage of the event.

SHARATH OFF TO A FLYING START

Doha: Ace Indian paddler Achanta Sharath Kamal advanced to the second round of the WTT Contender series with a hard fought 3-2 win over Czech Republic's Pavel Sirucek here on Wednesday. Sharath toiled hard before defeating Sirucek 17-15, 9-11, 11-6, 8-11, 11-9 in the first round. However, Sathiyan Gnanasekaran, made a first round exit after going down to world No 20 Aruna Quadri 7-11, 4-11, 8-11.

STEYN APOLOGISES FOR IPL REMARK

New Delhi: South Africa pace great Dale Steyn on Wednesday apologised for his criticism of the IPL, saying he never intended to "degrade or insult". The 37-year-old pacer said his statement that cricket is sometimes forgotten amid all the money talk in the IPL was taken out of context. "IPL has been nothing short of amazing in my career, as well as other players too. My words were never intended to be degrading, insulting, or comparing of any leagues. Social media and words out of context can often do that," Steyn tweeted. "My apologies if this has upset anyone."

SONAM PULLS OUT OF ROME EVENT

New Delhi: A freak head injury while training with Sakshi Malik has forced young wrestler Sonam Malik out of the UWW ranking series event in Rome while Tokyo-bound Deepak Punia and Ravi Dahiya have also pulled out of the tournament for different reasons. The Indian squad left this morning for Rome, where the competition will begin on Thursday with Greco Roman wrestlers taking the mat first.

INDIA PLAY 1-1 DRAW AGAINST GERMANY

Krefeld: The Indian men's hockey team played out a 1-1 draw against Germany in the second game of its four-match tour of Europe. Jarmanpreet opened the scoring for India in the fourth minute, while Martin Haner scored the equaliser for Germany. "This match was a good experience for our players. It was a tough match and the team worked hard. Both teams created opportunities and I believe we will learn a lot from this game," said India's chief coach Graham Reid. India will next play Great Britain on Saturday.



Ashton Agar celebrates with Matthew Wade after he takes wicket ©ICC/Twitter

Agar's 6/30 keeps Oz alive

AFF ■ WELLINGTON

Spinner Ashton Agar produced the best bowling performance in Australia's T20I history in a 64-run win over New Zealand in Wellington on Wednesday.

Agar's match-turning six for 30, including three in one over, derailed a New Zealand fightback as Australia avoided a series loss in the third match.

Under-fire skipper Aaron Finch hit 69, his best T20I score for more than two years, and Glenn Maxwell smashed 70 from 31 balls.

The result leaves the five-match series at 2-1 in New Zealand's favour with two games to go.

Australia finished their 20 overs at 208/4 after losing the toss and being asked to bat. In reply, New Zealand were bundled out for 144 in 17.1 overs thanks to Agar's heroics.

"Once I started to have the courage to toss the ball up a little bit I got something out of it," he said. "That was a good lesson I can take out of today moving forward."

Only four players have taken six wickets in a men's T20I before, none of them from Australia.

"It was an all-round performance from them that was outstanding and it's important for us that we move on quickly," New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said.

Srikanth, Satwik-Ashwini start Swiss Open with win

PTI ■ BASEL

Top Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth staved off a spirited challenge from compatriot Sameer Verma to make a winning start to his campaign at the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament here on Wednesday.

The fourth seeded Indian, who had claimed the title in 2015, took little over an hour to see off 2018 winner Sameer 18-21, 21-18, 21-11 in a hard-fought men's singles opening round match.

Sourabh Verma also won his first round match against Switzerland's Christian Kirchmayr 21-19, 21-18. He faces eight seed Kunlavut Vitidsarn next.

However, H S Prannoy made an early exit after losing to France's Mark Calijouw 19-21, 21-9, 17-21 in first round.

On Tuesday night, Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponnappa notched up an upset 21-18, 21-10 win over the world No 8 and second-seeded Indonesian pair of Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja in the opening round.

The second seeded Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also won their first round men's doubles match against Christopher Grimley and Matthew Grimley of Scotland 21-18, 19-21, 21-16.

Another Indian shuttler, Pranaav Jerry Chopra, who was returning to action after a Covid-19 pandemic break, didn't have a good outing as he along with his mixed doubles partner N Sikki Reddy lost 18-21, 15-21 to the third-seeded English pair of Marcus Ellis and Lauren Smith in 39 minutes.

Man City equal unbeaten record

AFF ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester City equalled their club record of 28 games unbeaten on Tuesday, hammering Wolverhampton 4-1 to open up a gaping 15-point lead at the top of the Premier League.

Pepe Guardiola shuffled his pack at the Etihad against the team who did the league double against them last season as he maintained his club's assault on an

unprecedented quadruple.

The champions-elect were made to sweat after Conor Coady cancelled out an early own goal from Leander Dendoncker but two late goals from Gabriel Jesus and a Riyad Mahrez strike sealed the three points.

City's 28-match unbeaten run in all competitions equals their run from April to December 2017 and they are red-hot favourites to wrap up a third Premier League title in four years.

The victory was their 21st in a row and their 15th straight Premier League win.

City have not trailed for a single minute in any of their past 19 Premier League games — equalling Arsenal's record set in 1998/99. Guardiola hailed his "fantastic team" but said his only focus is on the next game, against



Juve stay in title race

AFF ■ TURIN

Juventus gave their hopes of a 10th straight Serie A title a timely boost as they beat struggling Spezia 3-0 on Tuesday to move within seven points of league leaders Inter Milan.

Andrea Pirlo's side were frustrated for long periods, but second-half goals from Alvaro Morata, Federico Chiesa and Cristiano Ronaldo clinched an important win.

Juve sit three points behind second-placed AC Milan, who

host Udinese on Wednesday, with Inter Milan four points further clear ahead of their match at Parma on Thursday.

The Turin giants have won the last nine Italian league titles, but have it all to do to deny either of the two Milan clubs from ending that remarkable run.

"We are working to win, if we don't win this season, then we'll congratulate the champions, but as long as there's a mathematical chance, we'll give our all on the pitch," Morata said.

cross-town rivals Manchester United, who are City's nearest challengers.

"After 1-1 we suffered but we created lots of chances in the end," he told BT Sport.

"Manchester United. That's all we care (about now)," he added. "The champions is Liverpool,

the crown belongs to them. We are in the best position right now to take them out and we are going to try but they are the champions.

"There is 33 points to play for. Tomorrow our opponents will play, we have one or two days off and prepare for Manchester United at home."

Pitch looks very similar to last Test: Root

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England skipper Joe Root on Wednesday said the pitch for the fourth Test looks very similar to the one on which his team was decimated in the third game but the visitors have learnt their lessons to be ready for the challenge starting Thursday.

"It's (the pitch) looking very similar...I think the most important thing is that we learn all the lessons from the last two Test matches and make sure we're back for it," Root said when asked about the raging debate over the pitch in the last Test and how this one was looking.

"It's important that if we get ourselves in a similar position in the first innings, we really make that count. And try and get some scoreboard pressure in the game, you know, early on," he said on the eve of the game.

Root said the English batsmen will look to build partnerships.

"I think that as batters if you don't score runs, you will always look at yourselves, you'll always try and find ways to improve and we've certainly done that.



England coach Chris Silverwood, center, and players Ben Foakes, Dom Bess, James Anderson and Stuart Broad chat during team's training session PTI

"We've looked at a couple of dismissals and how we're going to find ways of building big partnerships and getting some significant scores on it if it is a similar surface this time around," he added.

'EVERYONE TRAINED'

England skipper Joe Root also revealed that an illness hit the touring party earlier this week but all members of the squad trained ahead of the fourth Test and are available for selection. The English captain

did not specify the nature of the illness but said he has a full squad to choose from.

He also informed that the team has not finalised its 11 or 12 at this stage but made it clear that off-spinner Dom Bess was up for selection.

"...The guys are fit and available for the game tomorrow. That gives us a little more time to name the squad," Root said.

"So, everyone in that way is as prepared how they would have liked it for the Test match," he added.

Zim beat Afghans by 10 wickets

AFF ■ ABU DHABI

A century from skipper Sean Williams coupled with destructive pace bowling from Blessing Muzarabani and Victor Nyauchi led Zimbabwe to a rapid 10-wicket win over Afghanistan in the first Test in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

Williams hit 105 to guide Zimbabwe to 250 all out before Afghanistan — trailing by 119 — were bowled out for 135 in their second innings. That left Zimbabwe to score 17 runs which they got without any loss to end the match inside two days.

Afghanistan were bowled out for 131 in their first innings.

Lanky pacer Muzarabani finished with 2-14 — six wickets in the match — while his new ball partner Nyauchi took 3-30, also getting six in the match.

This becomes Afghanistan's third defeat in five Tests since gaining status to play the five-day format in 2017.