



## sunday pioneer

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**FARMERS BLOCK HIGHWAY, MARK  
'BLACK DAY' ON 100-DAY MILESTONE**

Flapping and swaying tents have made way for more permanent structures. Air conditioners and coolers being set up indicate the approaching summer has been accounted for. At the many makeshift townships that have sprung up along Delhi's border points in the past three months or more, the crowd may be thinning, but not the resolve by the looks of it. In any case, the farmers neutralised lingering doubts by marking 'Black Day' today - the 100th day of their protest. As part of the proceedings, the Kundli-Manesar Palwal Expressway will be blocked for five hours between 11 am and 4 pm.

**RAPED 27 YEARS AGO, WOMAN FILES  
CASE AFTER SON ASKS DAD'S NAME**

Raped on several occasions by two men at the age of 12 about 27 years ago, the victim, who had become a mother, has now lodged a case against the accused on court orders after her son enquired about his father's name. About 27 years ago, the victim was living in the city with her sister and brother-in-law. One Naki Hasan of her locality had entered the house when she was alone and allegedly raped her. Superintendent of Police (City) Sanjay Kumar told PTI on Saturday. Referring to the police report lodged on the basis of the woman's complaint, Mr Kumar said after the accused, his younger brother Guddu also raped her.

**ARVIND KEJRIWAL SAYS DELHI TO HAVE  
ITS OWN SCHOOL EDUCATION BOARD**

Delhi will have its own school education board like other states, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced today. The state government approved the formation of the Delhi Board of School Education during a cabinet meet. The capital has 1,000 government schools and 1,700 private schools. All government schools and most private schools are affiliated to the CBSE, the Chief Minister said. 20 to 25 government schools will be made part of the new state education board in the coming academic year and their CBSE affiliation will be scrapped, he said. The schools that will be brought under the state board will be decided after discussions with school principals, teachers and parents.

**GUJARAT MAN INFECTED WITH COVID  
AFTER TAKING 2ND DOSE OF VACCINE**

A health official in Gujarat has tested positive for coronavirus days after taking the second dose of the vaccine against the infection, officials said Saturday. The man, a health officer in Gandhinagar's Dehgam taluka, had taken the first dose on January 16 and the second one on February 15. He had fever and his samples were examined, which detected the COVID-19 infection on February 20 said Gandhinagar's Chief Health Officer Dr MH Solanki. "He is in home isolation as his symptoms are mild. He has told me that he is fit to join work from Monday," Solanki added.

**Centre's survey  
should serve as  
eye-opener for  
Hyderabad**

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# Govt ready to amend new agri laws: Narendra Tomar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Saturday said the government is ready to amend three new farm laws to respect the sentiments of protesting farmers, even as he attacked opposition parties for doing politics on this issue at the cost of agriculture economy and by hurting farmers' interest.

Addressing the 5th national convention of Agrivision here, the Union minister said the government has held 11 rounds of talks with farmer unions and has even offered to amend these laws.

Thousands of farmers, mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Western Uttar Pradesh, are protesting at Delhi borders for over three months, seeking a repeal of these three legislations and a legal guarantee of the minimum support price (MSP).

**Farmer leaders firm on the repeal  
as agitation completes 100 days**

Farmer leaders on Saturday said the protesting unions stand firm on their demand of a complete repeal of the three agri laws and asserted that they are ready for talks with the government, but that should be held without any condition. Earlier in the day, thousands of farmers blocked the Kundli Manesar Palwal (KMP) Expressway at some places in Haryana to mark the completion of 100 days of their agitation at the Delhi borders. Darshan Pal, a senior member of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha which is spearheading the going protest, said farmer unions stand firm on the demand of repeal of three agri laws. "Since the beginning of our agitation, our demand remains the same which is the repeal of three new agricultural laws."

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rejected.

Tomar said the government has passed these three laws to boost investment in the farm sector and give freedom to farmers to sell their produce wherever they want and at price determined by them.

The laws, which were passed by Parliament in

September last year, would also enable to grow those crops that can fetch more prices in the market, he added.

Referring to the ongoing farmers' agitation, Tomar wondered how this agitation was going to benefit farmers.

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**Opted for  
continuity in tax  
devolution:  
NK Singh**

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**Centre warns  
8 States, UTs  
on Covid surge**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The effective strategy of "test, track and treat" has yielded results at the height of the novel coronavirus pandemic, the centre said today in a reminder to the states that are witnessing a high active caseload. Eight states and union territories - Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and union territories of Delhi and Chandigarh - have been told to increase testing, contact tracing and accelerate vaccination for priority groups in the worst-hit districts.

Sixty-three districts in the eight states and union territories "continue to be of concern as these districts are seeing a decrease in total tests being conducted, low share of RT-PCR tests,



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# Conspiracy to do away with reservations: Harish Rao

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



TS Finance Minister T Harish Rao has expressed his apprehensions over attempts being made to amend the Constitution, saying the changes contemplated are intended to trample upon people's rights and take the country backward by at least a 100 years.

He was addressing graduates here on Saturday in connection

with the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar districts Graduates' constituency polls to the Legislative Council. He appealed to voters to think and decide before they exercise their right to vote.

Referring to the Centre's move to privatise PSUs, Harish pointed out that a ministry had been created to wind up many PSUs.

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**Ex-Ranji cricketer posing as  
KTR's PA cheats firms, held**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Police on Saturday arrested an ex-Ranji cricketer in Andhra Pradesh, who allegedly impersonated as a personal secretary to Telangana IT Minister K T Rama Rao and cheated nine establishments, including corporate firms. B Nagaraju, who played in Ranji matches for AP during 2014-16, allegedly called companies, corporate hospitals, educational institutions and realtors and introduced himself as PS to Rama Rao, a police release said.

Claiming that Rama Rao would be taking oath as CM, he demanded money from them

for erecting hoardings at the LB Stadium here and issuing advertisements in media in connection with the swearing-in ceremony, it said.

Using this modus operandi, he cheated firms and collected an amount of Rs 39,22,400, the release said. Sleuths of Commissioner's Task Force, North Zone Team apprehended him on Saturday.

He was arrested in 10 cases earlier and was released on bail, but he did not change his attitude after coming out of prison, it added. Rama Rao, son of Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, is the working president of the ruling TRS.

# Modi's 'baath karodon ke... kaam pakodon ke': KTR

**'None should mistake TRS leaders' silence as weakness'****K VENKATESHWARLU  
■ HYDERABAD**

TRS working president KT Rama Rao, giving measure for measure in response to TS BJP leaders' ridicule of TRS supremo and Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, suggested on Saturday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi talked much but did little, saying Modi "ka baath karodonke, kaam pakodonke".

None should mistake the silence of TRS leaders as weak-

ness, he warned cryptically, while addressing a meeting of the pink party's student wing at Telangana Bhavan here on Saturday.

Some persons had been making derogatory remarks against KCR without giving respect even to his position as Chief Minister of the State. KCR, who began his political journey alone for the state of Telangana had built a strong cadre-based party involving lakhs of people, he pointed out.

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(2021-26) has looked at devastating floods in various States, including Telangana.

The report has pinpointed construction over lake beds and encroachments on drainage channels as problems that had exacerbated flooding and inundation in Hyderabad. States have to move from the current paradigm of post-disaster response

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# India fix Lord's date: Kohli and co thrash England

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin once again made a mockery of an eternally confused English batting line-up as India cantered into the inaugural World Test Championship final with a resounding innings and 25 run victory on the third afternoon of the fourth and final

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# Slapped by Balayya, fan says he is 'honoured'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Known for his short temper, Hindupur MLA and Telugu actor Nandamuri Balakrishna was again in the news for the wrong reason on Saturday.

Earlier, the actor had slapped a fan simply because he insisted for a selfie with the MLA. On Saturday, Balakrishna, or Balayya as he is also known, slapped his fan twice for recording his video without his permission.

In a video that has gone viral, Balakrishna is seen hitting a man asking him to delete his pictures. It appears that the Hindupur MLA just cannot keep his temper in check.

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# AP, TS report most forest fires in last 7 days

**SUMIT ONKA  
■ VISAKHAPATNAM**

In the last seven days, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have reported the second most and fourth highest number of forest fires respectively in the country after neighbouring Odisha and Madhya Pradesh.

While Telangana reported 5,060 forest fires, AP recorded 3,548 from February 27 to March 6, according to the near real-time forest fire reports captured by a satellite

and monitored by the Forest Survey of India (FSI).

In 2020-21, Telangana was among the top five states in the number of fire alerts. As many as 7,500 fire points were spotted in the state.

Forest fire is among the major causes of degradation of forests in the country. Precious forest resources and carbon is lost and this has an impact on the flow of goods and services from the forest areas.

FSI has been alerting State Forest Departments and other



registered uses of forest fire locations detected by the

MODIS sensor onboard Aqua and Terra Satellites of NASA

since 2004.

Man-made incidents coupled with prolonged dry spells, wind and the heat-waves have upped the risk of forest fires over the years in AP. Also, March happens to be the month in which the highest numbers of fire incidents are reported.

Andhra Pradesh has mostly dry deciduous forests and trees start drying up from January - February.

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OBTUSE ANGLE





# Centre's survey should serve as eye-opener for Hyderabad

The 'Ease of living' survey for 2020 released by the Centre has come as quite an embarrassment for the Telangana Rashtra Samithi government as it has busted the myth that Hyderabad is the most liveable city in India. Every citizen of the twin cities would wish this were true, but the perception expressed by 92,000 respondents in the survey does not fully bear this out. Barely three years ago, another survey by JLL ranked Hyderabad first, followed by Bangalore (2nd) and Pune (4th) out of the top 30 global short-term growth cities; in other words, cities with short-term momentum relating to urban economies and real estate markets. A more recent survey by the same agency described Hyderabad's formal economy as one of the 'most

resilient' in urban India and its real estate growth in 2019 among the strongest. The survey by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has ranked Hyderabad 24th on the Ease of Living Index among 49 cities with one million-plus population triggering angry reactions from the State Government that the survey was subjective and not transparent. On the economic front, over which there was a lot of song and dance earlier, Hyderabad has been ranked 11th by this survey. Expectedly, doubts arise about the fairness of both these surveys because of the wide disparity in their outcomes. Those familiar with the working of rating agencies say JLL's niche area is real estate services, whereas Mercer, whose survey is being quoted to counter the Centre's, is an HR-related consulting compa-

**Much of the outrage by politicians against Hyderabad's poor ranking stems from the hype that TRS leaders created around the city through unkept promises of developing it on par with other modern cities. Not only has it not happened, but haphazard growth has attracted the ire of the High Court**

ny. They have rated Hyderabad on other parameters that are being touted by others as a certificate for Hyderabad as being the most liveable city. The Centre's survey is distinct from them because of its comprehensiveness. It evaluates the performance of a whopping 111 cities that volunteered and the report runs into 234 pages. It is based on diverse sources, particularly surveys by Karvy Insights and is authored by a team from the Institute of Competitiveness led by Amit Kapoor. It is not just a certificate of merit. It is

meant to be a report on which action needs to be taken by the agencies concerned to achieve the Centre's Sustainable Development Goals unlike the Mercer report, which focuses on issues like the availability of consumables, clean drinking water, and traffic congestion. Much of the outrage by politicians against Hyderabad's poor ranking stems from the hype that TRS leaders had created around the city through unkept promises of developing it on par with other modern cities across the globe. Not only has it not happened, but



S NAGESH KUMAR  
Former Resident Editor,  
The Hindu

haphazard growth and mushrooming of illegal buildings have attracted the ire of the High Court of Telangana. The last drop of publicity was milked from the Durgam Cheruvu hanging bridge ahead of the GHMC elections last November, but it yielded limited political dividends. Such projects do not add much to the quality of life when viewed

in the backdrop of poor mobility (public transport) and road infrastructure besides high rate of accidents. These factors pulled down Hyderabad to 34th rank in the quality of living against Bangalore's 3rd rank. Also, Hyderabad is not ranked by the fame of Charminar, the beauty of its pearls or the mouth-watering biryani however much some may wish. These are good for marketing Hyderabad as a tourist destination. Rankings are based on lived reality as in the case of Chennai (4th rank), a city of aspirations for almost every Tamilian. Broadly, the survey gives weightage of 35% to quality of life, 30 percent to citizen perception, 20% to sustainability and 15% to economic ability. Quality of life is broken down into categories like education, water, sanitation and Swachh Bharat but Hyderabad, one of

the most prosperous municipal corporations, does not do well here either with a rank of 34. The city was ranked 41st in the Citizen Perception Survey, despite people being far more generous that the actual performance of the metropolis. Overall, 32 lakh citizens were surveyed across the country, of whom 92,000, almost 89,000 through online, answered questions about Hyderabad. In the category of sustainability, it fared poorly in environment protection, though it scored high in greenery. A controversy is raging over the Centre shelving the Information Technology Investment Region (ITIR) project in Hyderabad with IT Minister K. T. Rama Rao targeting the Centre for turning a Nelson's eye towards development of the city, which has emerged as an international hub for software, warehousing and retail. But the survey

ranks Hyderabad 31st in economic development, though at a healthy third when it comes to economic opportunities. The criticism of the survey by KTR and the new Mayor of Hyderabad Gadwal Vijayalakshmi, is nothing new. Other State governments did the same in 2019 and 2020 when their cities were ranked poorly. But, a deeper study would show that Hyderabad fell behind due to its poor scores on quality of life and citizen perception, areas in which these leaders might have to work harder. Hyderabad must brace for worse in the Ease of Living report for 2021 when a lot of new factors, principally the devastating floods in October will kick in and may spoil the copybook further due to poor handling of rescue and relief operations. It will reveal the extent to which the quality of life has suffered.

# CM hints at optimistic budgetary allocations

ML MELLY MAITREYI  
■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao hinted that the budget outlay forecast for the next financial year 2021-22 will be optimistic and priority for welfare and development schemes will continue in the next fiscal given the turnaround in revenue generation from December onwards. The 10-day budget session is likely to commence on March 15 after the MLC elections. The Chief Minister convened a high-level meeting on the budget proposals and estimates at Pragathi Bhavan here on Saturday and examined the financial reports submitted by officials and the department-wise budget estimates. He reportedly sought details about the department-wise revenue, recovery in the State's economy, the

GSDP growth and felt that the scenario seemed reasonably optimistic with improvement in revenue month on month. He said that along with the several welfare and development schemes, the sheep distribution scheme would also be continued and proposals for another three lakh units of sheep would be included in the next budget as it was helping Yadav and Kurma communities earn good income. The sheep distribution scheme would be continued as it also won praise from the Centre and the State was in the forefront with a high sheep population in the country. Similarly, the fisheries scheme that was also giving good results would be continued, he said. He said that due to the Covid pandemic, there was a shortfall of about Rs 50,000 crore to the State exchequer

- Expresses satisfaction over improvement in revenue since December
- Priority to continue for welfare and development schemes

and the year may close with a shortfall of Rs 40,000 crore to Rs 45,000 crore. However post Covid, economic activities in the State have recovered and improving every month and there was a rise in revenue in various sectors. "Thus the allocations in the next budget are likely to be higher," he said. He, however, expressed concern that in the light of Covid, Centre withdrawing allocations to some of its schemes, particularly to SHG groups, and asked officials how to mobilise resources for them. The Saturday's meeting finalised the guidelines for budget estimates and alloca-

tions. From Sunday onwards, Finance Minister Harish Rao would hold meetings with R&B, Panchayat Raj, Municipal Administration, Education, Irrigation and other departments in coordination with the Finance Department, he said in the meeting. Once the budget preparatory exercise was completed with all the departments, the final meeting would be held under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister with all the departments to give finishing touches to the budget for 2021-22 soon. Finance Minister Harish Rao, Chief Advisor to Government Rajiv Sharma, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar, Principal Secretary S Narsing Rao, Finance Department Principal Secretary Ramakrishna Rao, Advisor GR Reddy, CMO officials and others attended the meeting.

## Centre warns 8 States, UTs on Covid surge

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Increase in weekly positivity and low number of contact tracing of the COVID positive cases," the Union Health Ministry said in a statement. "These together can pose high risk of transmission to the neighbouring states and union territories," the Health Ministry said. Of those identified by the government, nine districts are in Delhi, 15 are in Haryana, 10 in Andhra Pradesh, 10 in Odisha, nine in Himachal Pradesh, seven in Uttarakhand, two in Goa, and one in Chandigarh. An average close contact tracing "of minimum of 20 persons per positive case," should be conducted, the government has said in a suggested action plan that also stresses on improved overall testing and an active monitoring of "super-spreader events". "Make optimal use of the vaccine doses and collaborate with the private hospitals to open up vaccination time-table for a minimum of 15 days, the states were told.

# Govt ready to amend new agri laws: Narendra Tomar

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"Main ye manta hoon, loktantra mein asahmati ka apna sthan hai, virodh ka bhi apna sthan hai, matbhed ke bhi apne mahatva hai. Lekin kya virodh is keemat par kiya jaana chahiye, jo desh ka nuksan kare (There is a place for disagreement in democracy and so is for opposition and difference of opinion, but should there be any opposition that can harm the nation)," he said. No one is ready to talk on how these protests can be in the interest of farmers, the minister said. Tomar regretted that farmer unions as well as the Opposition parties have failed to point out faults in provisions of these laws. "Loktantra hai toh rajneeti karne ki swatantra sabko hai. Lekin kya kisan ko markar rajneeti ki jayegi, kisan ka ahit karke rajneeti ki jaayegi, desh ke krishi ki arthvybastha ko tilanjali dekar apne mansoobon ko pura kiya jayega, is par nischit roop se naye phidi ko vichar

## Farmer leaders firm on the repeal as agitation...

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We are ready to resume talks with the government, but it should be held without any precondition," Pal told PTI. In January, the government had proposed to suspend the three contentious farm laws for 1-1.5 years and set up a joint committee to find an amicable solution in the interest of the farming community, which the protesting unions had then rejected it. Another senior farmer leader Kulwant Singh Sandhu said farm unions have never said "no" to talks with the central government, adding that their stand on talks as well as demands have been the same from the beginning. He said the Samikyukta Kisan Morcha has called a meeting on March 9 to decide the next course of action to intensify their ongoing agitation. "Everyday, more people are joining the farmers' protest. There are over 1.25 lakh people at the four border points here in the capital itself," Sandhu claimed. Tomar stressed that the gov-

ernment's proposal to amend laws does not mean that there were any deficiencies in these reform laws. He said the government has made a proposal to amend these laws as farmers continue to be the face of this ongoing protest.

# TS must fix encroachments...

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Citing the analysis of the Centre for Science and Environment in 2016, the report revealed that 3,245 hectares of water bodies were lost in Hyderabad between 1989 and 2001. Of an estimated one lakh water bodies in the Greater Hyderabad Capital Region, the number dwindled to 185 lakes; and out of 185, for 75 lakes the surplus weirs and courses were completely closed. These lakes used to work as flood sink of the city. As a result, the city is more vulnerable to any natural disaster. What is worse, the report noted, neither the GHMC nor the Telangana State has disaster management plans. "They are also not utilizing the doppler radar which can give advance and precise warnings. The focus is on disaster response even while allowing

unplanned growth," it said. Interestingly in the current election campaign, particularly in Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy and Mahbubnagar Graduate constituencies, neither the ruling nor the opposition parties raised the issue of illegal encroachments on lakes, nalas, storm water drains so far. The loss of 33 lives in October, 2020 floods in the city and huge economic loss estimated at over Rs.650 crore by the State Government was apparently put on the backburner after the elections to the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation in which the ruling party paid a price with lesser tally of seats. Congress leader Shrawan Dasoju said even after TRS came to power in the newly formed Telangana State in 2014, on one of the key promises; that is, to protect water bodies in the city and State, nothing had been done.

In fact, many new encroachments came up in lakes like Salkum, Bathukamma kunta etc. The extent of lakes like Durgam cheruvu further shrank with heavy concretization and Durgam Cheruvu now looks like a mere pond, he said. Many TRS leaders themselves and their supporters from AIMIM had been encroaching on lake beds with impunity. The Suram lake has been encroached by a private school, he alleged. The Telangana government had been allowing new malls and huge complexes in Banjara Hills, Jubilee Hills, Gachibowli and Financial Districts areas even when there was no drainage and civic infrastructure to support new complexes. The High Court also made serious observations recently about rampant illegal constructions coming up every where in the city, he said.

# Conspiracy to do...

Continued from Page 1

"The credit for creating the ministry goes to the BJP," he said sarcastically. Injustice would be done to SCs and STs should the PSUs and LIC be privatised. There were many PSUs which could be called heritage structures; yet, the BJP Government at the Centre was bent on disposing them, he said, while reasoning that it could be a conspiracy to wind up quota for various categories of people. The spirit of Dr BR Ambedkar was being dealt a blow, he said and appealed to graduates to think about it once. He claimed credit for passing GO Ms No 59 in Telangana on the directions of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao. The GO deals with allotment of work on the basis of population to the working

agencies. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao always gave priority to education. The TRS government had launched Overseas Education Scheme meant for SCs and STs, and extended financial assistance to the tune of Rs 20 lakh to each student pursuing education overseas. Nowhere else such a scheme was being implemented, he asserted. Harish asked graduates to think about the Centre's policies and work as per Ambedkar's philosophy of 'being educated, be organised and being agitated'. He asked them not to be misled by the provocative statements of BJP. The TRS government was instrumental in implementing quota for the SCs and STs. Two women went on to become chairpersons of market committees in Telangana, he added.

# India fix Lord's date: Kohli and co thrash England

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ensuring that the Anthony De Mello Trophy will stay at the Cricket Centre in Mumbai. It was another two and half days finish but even the most partisan England experts like their former skipper Michael Vaughan have admitted that the 22-yard strip had almost nothing to do with their side's abject surrender. A case in point could be India's first innings score of 365 and a lead of 160 on the same track where England could cumulatively manage only 340 runs across two innings. "The comeback in Chennai pleased me the most. The first game was an aberration and England outplayed us," said India skipper Virat Kohli at the post-match presentation. "Every team in international cricket is a quality side and we need to work hard to beat them, even at home. Keeping that intensity going is most important and is the hallmark of our team." Atrocious application and unbelievably poor mindset

while playing spinners cost the Englishmen dearly during the last three Tests and skipper Joe Root had little to offer in terms of explanation. "We haven't matched India in the last three, and we need to keep learning and keep getting better for this experience and this series, and we need to keep evolving and move forward," admitted Root. This was one Test match where Indians, even before a ball being bowled, created an illusion of a turning track. It was a play of playing with the minds of a team that was already in a negative zone. There wasn't much turn but enough to ensure that the visitors wilted under pressure as Patel's series tally stood at highest for a newcomer (27) while man of the series Ashwin was peerless as ever with 32 scalps in his kitty. A lot of credit for this victory should go to the indomitable Rishabh Pant, who played the enforcer on the second day with a magnificent hundred, and Washington Sundar, who notched up a chiselled 96.

# Slapped by Balayya, fan says he is 'honoured'

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Soon after the video went viral, the man, whom the TDP leader slapped at least twice, has 'clarified' by releasing a video of his own, in which he says that he is a 'die-hard Balakrishna fan' and is "honoured" to have been "touched" by the actor. Balakrishna has a history of making physical and verbal abuses against fans and supporters. Saturday's incident occurred when he had visited a house in his Assembly constituency, campaigning for the upcoming municipal elections. There he noticed his fan recording his video without permission and could not control himself. As soon as Balakrishna slapped the fan, people requested him to stop recording. However, Balakrishna went ahead and slapped him again, insisting that the video footage recorded thus far be deleted.

| HYDERABAD BULLION RATES     |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| <b>GOLD</b>                 |       |
| ₹ 45,490 (10 gm)            |       |
| <b>SILVER</b>               |       |
| ₹ 70,100 (1kg)              |       |
| ₹ 2400                      |       |
| CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg          |       |
| Dressed/With Skin           | ₹191  |
| Without Skin                | ₹218  |
| Broiler at Farm             | ₹132  |
| EGG RATES ₹/100             |       |
| HYDERABAD                   | 388   |
| VIJAYAWADA                  | 393   |
| VISAKHAPATNAM               | 505   |
| RETAIL PRICE (IN HYDERABAD) | ₹3.88 |

# Modi's 'baath karodonke...

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"A weapon hung on the wall does not make any noise, but one would know its power at the right time," KTR said, while charting the impressive journey of TRS party. The TRS working president said the party would complete two decades of its existence on April 27. KCR started the party in his mid-forties when the Grand Old Party was a formidable force and the Telugu Desam Party was a powerful organization under the leadership of N.Chandrababu Naidu. Several movements waged previously for separate Telangana had failed. KCR had no money or muscle power or media backing and he was known only to the people of Medak district. Yet, despite the challenging cir-

cumstances, KCR launched his political journey with unwavering determination to achieve Telangana State to fulfil people's aspirations. Today, the TRS had taken shape of a strong and powerful army with lakhs of committed party cadre, he told the party's students' wing. KTR recalled that at a time when many had heckled the very idea of separate Telangana, KCR did not feel discouraged and went ahead with his mission, sacrificing his posts at the Centre several times to give confidence to people. While students were studying in Osmania, Kakatiya universities, BJP leaders were learning the art of telling lies in 'Whats App' university, he remarked, taking a dig at the saffron party. KCR had created several

opportunities for Telangana students and youth in education as well as employment and increased residential schools and colleges manifold, while the BJP did nothing to strengthen the education sector and did not even sanction Navodaya Vidyalayas to the State, KTR said. Although the Centre sanctioned medical colleges, IIMs, IITs, IIITs and universities across the nation, it failed to allot a single one of them to Telangana State. The Centre did not allot even Navodaya Schools, he pointed out. On what basis should one vote for BJP, he questioned. The Centre, which was bent on privatizing Vizag Steel Plant, could not be expected to sanction Bayaram Steel Plant, though it was an assurance in

the State Reorganisation Act, 2014. Modi would not flinch to show a roadside snack seller to claim that his government created livelihood for people. Students should go to graduate voters and explain the achievements of TRS, while shedding light on empty words of BJP leaders "to teach that party a lesson", KTR told the students. Modi announced Rs.20 lakh crore AtmaNirbhar package, but did anyone get anything from it, he asked. KTR warned TS BJP leaders, saying the TRS would pay back the saffron party's leaders chiding TRS leaders with interest. He warned them not to underestimate the silence of the Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao. "We will see the end of 'bafoons when need arises", he warned.

# AP, TS report most...

Continued from Page 1

The most severely forest-fire affected areas in the State are Visakhapatnam, and Rajahmundry circles and parts of Srisailem Project Tiger reserve forest, says the department analysis. Forest officials say they are mobilising village communities, VSS members and farmer associations to keep tabs on the forest fires. Awareness pro-

grammes are also being conducted on forest fires for the ignorant and unaware tribal youths. From 2017, FSI has also started disseminating alerts obtained from SNPP-VIIRS sensor, which has a better resolution (375 m X 375 m) compared to MODIS (1 km X 1 km). Alerts are disseminated up to beat-level in the case of 10 states including Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

## TS budget session...

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KCR invited Harish Rao to the review on Saturday. KCR indicated at the meeting that the Budget outlay forecast for the next financial year would be optimistic and priority for welfare and developmental schemes would continue in the next fiscal, given the turnaround in revenue generation from December 2020 onwards.



# Rural engg college campuses turn into real estate ventures

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Engineering colleges set up on the outskirts of twin cities long ago with sprawling campuses measuring over 20 to 30 acres have been indulging in real estate business selling the vacant site as many of the colleges have been closed due to lack of demand for seats from students.

The Hi-Point Engineering College at one point was abuzz with academic activity with over 5,000 students pursuing education. However, there have been no takers for the college seats over a period of time. The admissions dropped to nil five years ago. The college management has been selling plots developing the college campus into a real estate layout.

Currently, the demand for house sites has increased many folds. Some colleges turned their campuses into realty ventures, while some others have rented out their buildings to run hostels.

In Moinabad and Ghatkesar areas, the buildings of colleges with zero admissions have been pulled down and the campuses are converted into real estate ventures. In



Ibrahimpattanam and Keesara areas, six engineering colleges have been closed down. The buildings are rented out to some other organisations to run hostels.

During the past five years, at least 72 engineering college on the outskirts of twin cities faced closure. In Chevella mandal alone, 12 engineering colleges have been closed. Most of the colleges that were closed belong to the minority educational institutions category.

Under the purview of the JNTU, at least 16 engineering colleges have been closed down last year.

On the city outskirts, especially in Moinabad, Chevella, A b d u l l a h p u r m e t, Ibrahimpattanam, Ghatkesar, Medchal, Keesara, Narsingi and Patancheru, engineering colleges have been set up 15 to 20 years ago in large numbers.

Then there were many takers for seats in the engineering colleges. Over a period of time, the number of seats in almost all colleges had increased. Those who wish to take seats in the colleges which are not so reputed have come down gradually over a period of time.

Some political leaders have set up engineering colleges in

the name of their relatives with an eye to derive benefit under the tuition fee reimbursement programme. Afterwards, the situation turned for the worse as the dues of fees reimbursement payable by the government to colleges increased. Therefore, the colleges were not able to pay salaries to the teaching staff. The teachers have left these colleges for greener pastures. Ultimately, the colleges have no option to but to shut shop.

According to Telangana Engineering and Professional Colleges Association chairman N Gautam Rao, the successive governments in the past allowed establishment of engineering colleges in rural areas. Therefore, many colleges have been set up. Subsequently, students showed interest to pursue education in the colleges located in the city, leading to diminishing of admissions in rural colleges.

Delay in government reimbursing the tuition fees to the colleges, teaching staff deserted these colleges. Finding the colleges economically unviable, the managements are not able to run them forcing the closure of the colleges.

## TS Vidyut workers' president suspended

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana State Southern Power Distribution Company Limited on Saturday placed Telangana Vidyut Workers' Union state president Gambo Nagaraju under suspension on the charges of spreading rumours. Nagaraju served notices to the management demanding that the Electricity Service Board rules be applied to the artisans, besides resolving the problems of electricity employees.

It is pertinent to note that Nagaraju formed the first of the trade unions to unite the Telangana employees and played active role in Telangana statehood movement. During Telangana movement, he worked shoulder to shoulder with Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao and Minister T Harish Rao.

# Cyberabad police busts MLM network; 24 arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW), Cyberabad Commissionerate, have busted multi level marketing scheme (money circulation scheme) by the Indus viva Health Sciences Private Limited who cheated 10 lakh people to the tune of Rs 1,500 crore. Police arrested 24 persons in this connection including company CEO and COO and also frozen the bank accounts of Rs 20 crore.

Based on a complaint, Cyberabad EOW arrested Abhilash Thomas, 40, CEO of Indus Viva Health Sciences Private Limited, Shobha City, Tannirendra main Road, Bengaluru, Prem Kumar, 39, Chief Operating Officer (COO) Indus viva, Oakyard Apartments, East End, D Main Road, IX Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore and 22 others for the offence, a police release here said on Saturday.

The complainant lodged a complaint in Gachibowli Police Station against Indus Viva Company on February 20, 2021 stating that he was cheated by the company inducing to promote the company products offering attractive income etc and introduced about four to five products like coffee, juice etc.

The complainant attracted



towards the schemes and invested Rs12,500 in Indus Viva company through his promoters Hari Prasad, Rajabanoth. After investment, the complainant didn't receive any commission on his investment as promised by promoters.

Then the complainant contacted the promoters for his commission but he did not receive any response from them. Thereafter, he enquired and came to know that this business is multilevel marketing business and the income will be earned by joining the members in a chain system or binary method. Then the complainant requested for necessary action as per law against the above company and its directors.

The investigation revealed that Indus Viva Health Sciences Private Limited func-

tioning from Bangalore. The scheme of the company is to earn money by enrolling members in Indus Viva Plan and Compensation Plan. To become a member has to pay Rs 12,500 and buy their products then they will get 100 Point Value.

Then he/she will be issued a user ID and password for continuing the scheme. Thus the member has to enroll/join others in down line to him by joining one person to the left and one person to the right by paying Rs.12500 each then he would earn Rs woo as bonus.

In order to get these benefits the member (who already joined the company scheme/business) has to enroll two other members in the scheme within a week he can get Rswoo as additional bonus. Thus the member has to enroll more members to earn money.

## CITY LIGHTS

### Centre for Sight holds webinars on World Glaucoma Week

World Glaucoma Week begins with the theme 'The world is bright, save your sight' Centre for Sight launches state-of-the patient friendly treatment for Glaucoma - 'Endoscopic laser



cyclophoto-coagulation surgery', at Banjara Hills Center. Hyderabad. Centre for Sight, Hyderabad, is organising various awareness initiatives for ophthalmologists, medical community and public to sensitise them on this permanently blinding eye disease on the occasion of World Glaucoma Week scheduled for March 7. On World Glaucoma Day, Centre for Sight hosted a webinar with international with the topic 'Indian dilemmas: Global Perspectives'. Centre for Sight has also launched a state-of-the-art patient-friendly treatment for Glaucoma, the endoscopic laser cyclophotocoagulation surgery, the only such facility in this part of the country at Banjara Hills.

### Yashoda Hospitals announce special package for women

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Yashoda Hospital's announced a special offer 'Free Women Wellness Health Package' as a complementary exclusively for Covid frontline warriors - women police and women doctors in Hyderabad. Director of Yashoda Hospitals Group Dr Pavan Gurukanti said: 'This year, the theme for International Women's Day is 'Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a Covid world'. We are celebrating the efforts put in by women and girls around the world today in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the pandemic. We have to always remember women's full and effective participation, leadership and sacrifices in all areas of life that will drive progress for everyone in the world.' In this modern and challenging world, women are mostly busy in their respective fields leading the most stressful lives. Women take complete responsibility of their families and other's health also. But, unfortunately women always ignore their own health, he observed.



### SLG Hospitals launch 'Sakhi' for wellbeing of women

SLG Hospitals on Saturday launched 'Sakhi', an empowerment initiative for health and wellbeing of women as part of the celebrations of International Women's Day. The initiative will focus on helping women in the city to perform self-assessment to evaluate health conditions like breast cancer, anemia, menstrual problems and any other complications. Nizampet Mayor Kolan Neela Gopal Reddy launched the initiative in the presence of Dandu Siva Rama Raju, CMD and DVS Soma Raju, Executive Director of SLG Hospitals. The training to be provided under this initiative will help women in residential societies in the region will be able to conduct much-needed self-analysis before reaching out to a doctor for further evaluation. The Mayor said, 'I personally consider this as a brilliant programme which will help women who find it difficult to seek timely medical advice to their health problems.'



### LTMRLH bags PRSI national award

L & T Metro Rail (Hyderabad) Limited (LTMRLH) won the first prize under the category 'Social Media for PR and Branding' in prestigious Public Relations Society of India (PRSI) National Award - 2020. The award ceremony was hosted virtually in presence of the Governor of Uttarakhnad, Srimati Baby Rani Maurya, Union Education Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal and Dr. Ajit Pathak, President, PRSI on February 21, 2021. The esteemed jury of the awards appreciated the diligent efforts of Hyderabad Metro Rail towards upholding a strong brand presence through Social Media. KVB Reddy, MD & CEO, LTMRLH, stated, 'We are really delighted to receive prestigious PRSI National Award. I would like to congratulate our Corporate Communications team for their innovative and unique campaigns to connect with the commuters using our social media platforms and also the entire LTMRLH team to build, as well as strengthen our commuters' faith in Hyderabad Metro Rail. I would thank the jury members for recognising our efforts.'



### CELEBRATING WOMEN'S DAY

MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha poses for a selfie with students while participating in International Women's Day celebrations held at Telangana Social Welfare Residential Institution in Ghatkesar on Saturday.

# Covid: TS records 170 new cases, one fatality

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The total number of Coronavirus cumulative cases in Telangana rose to 2,99,742 till date with 170 new Covid cases registered on Saturday.

The state reported one fresh fatality due to Covid in the last 24 hours taking the death toll to 1,640 so far translating a case fatality rate of 0.54 per cent as against the country-wide mortality of 1.4 per cent, according to a state health department bulletin here on Saturday.

A total of 196 people have recovered from Coronavirus state-wide in a span of 24 hours pushing the cumulative number of recoveries thus far to 2,96,166 constituting a recovery rate of 98.80 per cent while the National recovery rate was 97 per cent.

The state now has 1,936



active cases including 812 individuals in home or institutional isolation.

About 40,712 swab samples have been tested in the state to detect the contagious virus and out of which the reports of 568 swab samples are awaited. Cumulatively, more than 89.24 lakh Covid tests have been carried out in the state so far since the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The worst-hit GHMC continued to be the main contributor of the infection by reporting 28 fresh Coronavirus cases.

# Transgenders' help desk at Gachibowli PS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Cyberabad Commissioner VC Sajjanar on Saturday launched a help desk for transgenders in Gachibowli Police Station to solve their problems

Speaking on the occasion, he said: "Today is a historic day. For the first time a transgender desk has been set up in a police station in the history of the world."

The help desk would kick off change in the perception of the people of the country towards the transgenders. He expressed concern over transgenders not availing of the benefits under government schemes. The help desk will provide many facilities to the community, he added.

He assured them of allotting 2BHK houses and extended support to transgenders taking part in job melas. The police would be at the forefront to support them, but the law would take its own course of action,



if transgenders resort to anti-social activities, he warned.

The transgenders should initiate change in their community. He advocated making a documentary on the transgenders in the state to educate people on their plight.

The discrimination against them would not go in a single day, he said. Prajjwala founder Dr Sunita Krishnan was also present on the occasion.

Sajjanar said that many changes have been effected in the community and assured them of protection and job placements and many more facilities.

# Double whammy for corrugated box industry

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Corrugated box industry is reeling under the twin blows of sharp cost increases in a short span of a few months and raw material supply disruptions.

The total cost increase for box makers has already crossed 70 per cent cumulatively on account of paper alone and the increase is unrelenting. The industry is bleeding on account of unprecedented hikes in the cost of its main raw material kraft paper.

Kraft paper mills attribute the rising prices of imported and domestic waste paper to Covid lockdowns and international logistics disruptions for the reduced availability.

On the demand side, they are taking advantage of the lucrative opportunity to export kraft paper in the form of recycled kraft paper pulp rolls to China to fill the supply gap as mills in China face the impact of an import ban of all solid waste including waste paper



with effect from January 1, 2021 onwards.

Sandeep Wadhwa, president, Indian Corrugated Case Manufacturers' Association (ICCMMA), a pan India body, stated that the demand gap and attractive pricing in China is diverting the output of Indian kraft paper from the domestic market and driving up the prices of finished paper and recycled fibre.

Exports of recycled kraft paper pulp rolls by Indian kraft paper

mills would touch about 2 million tonnes this year, roughly 20 per cent of total domestic kraft paper production in India. This development, on the base of zero export prior to 2018, is a game-changer in supply-side dynamics going forward.

In addition to the increase in the costs of kraft paper, all other inputs namely manpower costs, starch, freight & other overheads have also witnessed a huge increase in the range of 60 to 70 per cent over last few years. The

**Sharp rise in prices of raw materials within a short span and disruptions in supply pushes industry to the brink of closure**

Corrugated Box Industry in the country with 350+ automatic corrugators and more than 10,000 semi-automatic units, mostly in MSME sector, is facing immense stress on account of these unprecedented cost increases.

Harish Madan, vice-president of ICCMA said that this is an eco-friendly industry that consumes about 7.5 million MT per year of recycled kraft paper and produces 100 per cent recyclable corrugated boxes to constitute a market of Rs 27,000 crore.

| GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
|--|------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|--|
| REVENUE (LA) DEPARTMENT  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| FORM VII   |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| DECLARATION  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| (See Sub-rule (1) of rule-25 and Section-19(1) of the Act-30/2013)   |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam, Land Acquisition Officer, Seshamma Nagar  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Muzungu Project, No. 6/118/2020-2  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| No. 6/4209/2020  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Dt: 26/02/2021   |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| District Gazette No. 83/30/2021  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Whereas it appears to the District Collector, Bhadrachalam that a total extent of Acdt.13 Gls. land is required in the Tegada(2) Village, Cheta Mandal of Bhadrachalam District for public purpose, namely for the Construction of Seshamma Nagar Multi Purpose Project; Therefore, declaration is made that a piece of land measuring, more or less Acdt.13 Gls (Gls of standard measurement under Land Acquisition for the above said project in the Tegada(2) Village, Cheta Mandal of Bhadrachalam District whose land detailed description is as following. |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| SCHEDULE   |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Sl. No.  | Area in Gls. and Cents | Sub-Division  | Area in Gls. and Cents      | Type of Land | Area in Gls. and Cents | Name of the Person           | Name of the Employer            | Verity & No.                | Notes |  |
| 1  | 2                      | 3             | 4                           | 5            | 6                      | 7                            | 8                               | 9                           | 10    |  |
| 1  | 1                      | 1             | 1                           | Govt         | 75.00                  | Talpuru River                | Talpuru River                   | -                           | -     |  |
| 2  | 2                      | 2/2           | 2/2                         | partly       | 1.17                   | Erakonda Nagarajam S/O Seshu | Erakonda Nagarajam S/O Seshu    | He is not a landless person | -     |  |
| 3  | 3                      | 3/2           | 3/1                         | Govt         | 0.35                   | Gowdanna of Land             | Kodirakkala Nagarajam S/O Seshu | He is not a landless person | -     |  |
| 4  | 4                      | 4/2a          | 4/3                         | partly       | 1.02                   | Lampalli Venkatesh S/O Seshu | Lampalli Venkatesh S/O Seshu    | He is not a landless person | -     |  |
| 5  | 5                      | 4/2b          | 4/2                         | partly       | 1.01                   | Koppa S/O Seshu              | Koppa S/O Seshu                 | He is not a landless person | -     |  |
| 6  | 6                      | 6/2           | 6/2                         | Govt         | 0.32                   | Government Land              | Gannakants m                    | -                           | -     |  |
| 7  | 7                      | 7/2           | 7                           | Govt         | 1.06                   | Government Land              | Road                            | -                           | -     |  |
| TOTAL EXTENT   |                        |               |                             |              | 81.13                  |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| DETAILS  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Sl. No   | Type of Land           | Extent (Gls.) |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 1  | petty land             | 3.20          |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 2  | Govt Land              | 77.93         |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| TOTAL  |                        | 81.13         |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| DETAILS  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Sl. No   | Trees and Shrubs       | Number        |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 1  | Pipe Line              | 6             |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 2  | Neem Tree              | 2             |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 3  | peacock Tree           | 4             |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 4  | Telu                   | 12            |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 5  | Tamarind Tree          | 2             |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| 6  | Palm Tree              | 5             |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| TOTAL  |                        | 31            |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| This declaration is made after hearing of objections of persons interested and due enquiry as provided U/s 15 of the Act No. 2013. The number of families likely to be resettled due to land acquisition is Nil. The Form-VII (See-sub-rule(1) of rule-25 and section 19(1) of the Act-30/2013) notification is made under the provision of Section 11(1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (Act No.30/2013) of the Government of India, New Delhi.                              |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Sate or other minerals lying under the said land or any particulars a portion of the said land, except such parts of the mines and minerals which may be required to be dug or removed or used during the construction phase of the project for the purpose of which the land is being acquired are not needed. A plan of the land may be inspected in the office of the Land Acquisition Officer & Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam on any working day.  |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam  |                        |               | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam |              |                        | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam  |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Land Acquisition Officer, Seshamma Nagar Multi Purpose Project & Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam   |                        |               | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam |              |                        | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam  |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Land Acquisition Officer, Seshamma Nagar Multi Purpose Project & Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam   |                        |               | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam |              |                        | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam  |                                 |                             |       |  |
| Land Acquisition Officer, Seshamma Nagar Multi Purpose Project & Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam   |                        |               | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam |              |                        | Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam  |                                 |                             |       |  |
| DIPR R.O. No: 1310/LA/PR/Adm/Pub/2020-21   |                        |               |                             |              |                        |                              |                                 |                             |       |  |



**BALLOT IN BOOKLET FORM IN GRADUATE MLC POLLS**

# Problem of plenty worries party leaders

**K VENKATESHWARLU**  
■ HYDERABAD

The contestants of the two Graduate MLC constituencies -- Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar and Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal -- have been reduced to numbers now. This, because of the presence of many independent candidates, who do not have a party symbol. While 93 candidates are in the fray in Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency and 71 candidates are contesting in Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal constituency.

With the presence of a huge number of contestants, the ballot paper is likely to be in a booklet form and the serial number has become more important than the names of the contesting candidates. Some of the independent candidates' followers, who are participating in the election campaign, are seeking votes stressing the serial number. The Graduate MLC elections ballot papers would have candidates' photos instead of party symbols. Some campaigners are seeking votes in the name of the serial number



■ With the presence of a huge number of contestants, the ballot paper is likely to be in a booklet format and the serial number has become more important than the names of the contesting candidates

■ The Graduate MLC elections ballot papers would have candidates' photos instead of party symbols. Some campaigners are seeking votes in the name of a serial number instead of the names of the candidates

instead of the names of the candidates.

The campaigners (read activists of Left parties) are seeking votes for an indepen-

dent candidate in the fray in the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar Graduate MLC constituency, Prof K Nageshwar, laying emphasis on his serial number 53 again and again. One of the campaigners for Nageshwar from the CPI informed The Pioneer that the voters were surprisingly hooked on to '53'. Both the Left parties—CPM and CPI are extending their support to Nageshwar, who won from this constituency two times consecutively in the past by contesting as an independent candidate. Analysts state that Nageshwar is giving a tough fight to the candidates of main political parties—the TRS, BJP and Congress.

The doubt is whether the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar graduate voters would cast their vote searching for the numbers. For the record, Dharma Biksham of the CPI had won the Nalgonda Lok Sabha constituency in the past when he was allotted a serial number, 384, in the election ballot because the Jala Sadhana Samithi candidates were in the fray in huge numbers then. One has to wait to find out what will happen in the number game this time.



## Mend your ways, Bandi Sanjay warns Ministers

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

BJP State unit chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar warned the Ministers stating that the BJP will not keep mum if they threaten employees, graduates, pensioners and others for votes. He alleged that the TRS leaders are encroaching lands in Nagar Kurnool district.

Addressing the Graduate MLC election campaign in Nagar Kurnool district on Saturday, Bandi Sanjay said that the government is displaying the photos of KCR while taking every paisa from the Centre. He said that the State government has no guts to release the white paper on the schemes it is implementing without taking Centre's funds. He termed the BJP as the

party, which wages a fight for the rights of employees and PRC, however, the TRS is the party that encroaches the lands of tribals. The BJP activists are not scared of illegal cases filed by the police as they are waging a fight for a cause.

He said that the TRS fielded former Prime Minister late PV Narasimha Rao's daughter S Vani Devi in the constituency where TRS will not win. He asked Vani Devi to tell as to why she was contesting the elections from the TRS, which is in alliance with the MIM, which stated that it will destroy the PV Ghat. He said that the PRC will be out if the TRS wins the election. What is the need to cast their votes to the TRS where KCR is not urging for votes, he questioned?

# TRS intensifies campaign for Graduate MLC polls

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

The TRS has intensified the Graduate MLC election campaign in two constituencies. Party working president and IT Minister KT Rama Rao has been conducting back to back meetings with various wings like lawyers, students, doctors, journalists and others seeking their support to the TRS candidates Palla Rajeshwar Reddy and Surabhi Vani Devi, who are in the fray from the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal and Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituencies.

Already, KTR had meetings with lawyers, students, doctors and will meet journalists on Sunday. Besides these meetings, the in-charges are conducting several meetings in their allotted constituencies and districts every day.

The in-charge ministers are busy with their campaigning in their allotted districts. On the other hand, the party activists are meeting the graduate voters directly and stressing the need of voting to TRS candidates.

The party activists are meeting in Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency. Each in-charge



■ KTR had meetings with lawyers, students, doctors and will meet journalists on Sunday. Besides these meetings, the in-charges are conducting several meetings in their allotted constituencies and districts every day

Khammam-Warangal constituency.

According to party sources, the victory in Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal constituency is a cakewalk for the party as they are no strong opponents. The party leaders are assessing the voters' pulse through the field-level in-charges in the constituency.

Based on this, the party will further change the strategies in the constituency. The party is hoping that it will win in this constituency through first priority votes as the party has enrolled the new voters.

However, the party is facing a tough fight from the BJP, Congress and an independent in Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency. The party concentrated on Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency as it took the election as prestigious. The party activists are meeting voters directly and seeking their votes for the TRS candidate S Vani Devi besides conducting meetings with lawyers, students, doctors and others. The party leaders opine that the candidate's clean image and party leaders' hard work will ensure the victory of Vani Devi in this constituency.

has to meet 50 voters in their allotted area. More than 10,000 party activists are meeting the 5,17,883 voters in Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar constituency one after the other. However, the process is somewhat slow in Nalgonda-

# KCR weakened universities: Kishan Reddy

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

Expressing his displeasure over the sorry state of affairs in the State, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy on Saturday alleged that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao weakened the universities, which are focal points for movements.

KCR also weakened the Arogyasri scheme and did nothing to the unemployed youth, he alleged. TRS leaders have no right to criticise Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he said.

He alleged that sand and land mafia are ruling the roost in the State, but the TRS government

had failed to initiate action against them. He reminded the BJP's resounding victory in the Dubbak bypoll and the GHMC. He said that the people of Telangana were against the KCR family and they want a change and it is possible with the BJP.

Addressing the Graduate MLC election campaign at Hanmakonda on behalf of their party candidate Gujjula Premender Reddy contesting from Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal constituency, Kishan Reddy said that the Centre granted railway overhauling industry in 2016, however, the project was stalled as the State government had failed to allot



160 acres of land. He alleged that the State government failed to allot land for the Bibi Nagar Medical College. Even the State government had failed to pay its share of Rs 30 crore to the super specialty hospital in Warangal.

■ TRS leaders have no right to flay PM  
■ Telangana betrayers at Pragathi Bhavan whereas protagonists are on roads, alleged Union Minister of State for Home Affairs

He said that the BJP led Central government gave a fertilizer factory in Ramagundam with Rs 6,000 crore and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate it very soon.

He alleged that KCR didn't construct a single super special-

ty hospital in any district and he obstructed the implementation of the Ayushman Bharath Scheme assuming that the BJP will get name and fame.

He called upon the graduate voters not to believe in TRS leaders' words. KCR assured that he will construct double bedroom houses in Warangal, but where were those houses, he asked. He alleged that the Telangana betrayers are at Pragathi Bhavan whereas protagonists are on roads. KCR is the Chief Minister, who didn't come to the Secretariat. He alleged that the Chief Minister is not giving priority to other places except his native place.

# Chalk out action plan to buy grains from farmers: Collector

**PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR**

District Collector K Shashanka ordered officials to chalk out an action plan for buying grains from farmers during the Rabi season.

He convened a review meeting at the Collectorate here on Saturday for the works to be taken up at Grain Purchasing Centres.

"Last year, the government has collected 360 metric tonnes of grains through the Grain Purchasing Centres in Karimnagar district and this year we are expecting 420 metric tonnes of grains out of 5,930 metric tonnes cultivated in 2,55,153 acres," he said.

With the increase in grain production in the State compared to last year, officials planning to increase the Grain Purchasing Centres at market yards in the district.

In all, eight market yards are located in the district and the



Collector K Shashanka addressing a review meeting in Karimnagar on Saturday

Collector ordered officials to appoint a special officer, centre in-charge and other staff at every yard to maintain records and other activities.

He asked the AEOs to allot a date for all farmers and inform them before coming to the centres and asked officials

to utilise 1,200 lorries present in the district for disbursing collected grains to the mills.

Additional Collector Shyam Prasaddal, district agriculture officer Sridhar, marketing deputy director Padmavathi, rice millers and others were present.

## Bhatti, Jeevan to campaign on bicycle for MLC polls

**PNS ■ HYDERABAD**

CLP leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka will campaign for the Graduate MLC elections on a bicycle from March 7. He has decided to campaign in a novel way in protest against the hike in petrol and diesel prices. Congress MLC T Jeevan Reddy, too, will join Bhatti Vikramarka in the campaign in Khammam and Mahabubabad constituencies.

Speaking to the media on Saturday at the Assembly Media Point, Bhatti alleged that both the BJP and TRS left the ITIR project to the wind. He urged the graduate voters to teach a lesson to the TRS and BJP in the MLC elections.

He alleged that the Centre was destroying the backbone of the middle class by hiking the prices of petrol and diesel. He

demanding that the election officials initiate action against the Ministers for violating the election code.

Jeevan Reddy alleged that both the BJP and TRS has an equal share in water downing the ITIR project given by the then UPA government. The TRS became a B-Team to the BJP. Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao had supported Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his selfish ends. KCR has been extending support to Modi to shield his corruption, he alleged.

He said that the Congress made PV as the Prime Minister, however, it is painful that PV's daughter S Vani Devi is contesting on the TRS ticket, which criticised PV. He urged the Election Commission to initiate action against the Minister for violating the election code.



# NTPC CGM underlines importance of effective of communication

**PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI**

Sunil Kumar, CGM-NTPC, underlined the importance of effective communication, which is the building block of a successful organisation, while delivering the keynote address at the communication workshop organised by the NTPC-Ramagundam for senior executives through virtual mode on Saturday.

Echoing a similar view, head of HR Vijaya Lakshmi M in her welcome address said that in a competitive world, with the explosion of information and changing media scenario, the importance of communication has further multiplied. PK Laad, GM (TS) and



Sunil Kumar, CGM-NTPC, addressing a workshop on effective communication in Ramagundam on Saturday

Prasenjit Pal, GM (project) were present in the opening session.

During the morning session, TS Sudhir, an independent columnist and political analyst,

spoke on media relations in changing world, M Gopalakrishna, IAS (ret'd), ex-chairman of REC and SCOPE delivered the lecture on 'Leadership communication'.

In the afternoon session, Dr Anjuman Borah, assistant professor, Journalism Department, Tezpur University, spoke on the significance of effective communication in organizations, followed by the lecture on media relations in printing the world with thrust on print and social media by Joe A Scaria, a senior journalist.

Earlier, C Elbert, DGM (corporate communication), SRHQ stressed the importance of internal and external communication with a major thrust on media engagement. Senior employees from Ramagundam and Telangana Project attended the programme in large numbers.

# Provide medical services at corporate level in govt hospitals: Collector

**PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR BHUPALAPALLY**

District Collector Krishna Aditya directed the medical health officials to make arrangements for corporate level medical services at the district hospital. The Collector inspected the district hospital building on Saturday.

He said immediate arrangements should be made to provide government medical services at the corporate level to the people of the district through the newly constructed district hospital at Bhupalapally.

Steps should be taken to recruit general physician, general surgeon, gynecologist, staff



Collector Krishna Aditya going around the hospital building in Jayashankar Bhupalapally district on Saturday

nurse, pharmacist, lab technician and other medical personnel in the district hospital, he said.

The hospital is currently pro-

viding medical services on a trial basis and will soon take steps for a full-scale inauguration. They want to buy and keep all kinds

of medicines ready so that there is no shortage of medicines. He said sanitation should be carried out at the corporate hospital level and 24-hour security should be provided. He also said that Bhupalapally and Kataram PHCs should be equipped with digital X-Ray machines at Mahadevur Chy and OP and diagnostic tests should be available in all hospitals.

District Medical Health Officer Dr Sudhar Singh, DCHS Dr Tirupati, programme officers Dr Umadevi, Dr Mamata Devi, DPO Chiranjeevi, epidemiologist Dr Bhashya Nayak, senior staff nurse Rani and drugs stores in-charge Bhaskara Rao were present.



# Six BJP activists injured in bomb attack in Bengal

**PNS ■ KOLKATA**

Six BJP activists were injured, two of them critically, in an alleged bomb attack by the rival TMC workers in West Bengals South 24 Parganas district, police said on Saturday.

Family members of those injured alleged that a few members of the local Trinamool Congress hurled bombs at them while they were returning home in Gosaba area of the district from a marriage ceremony late Friday night.

Police, however, claimed that the accident happened inside the house of a BJP activist where the crude bombs



matter and talking to the locals," the officer said when contacted over the phone.

Unconfirmed reports said that on Friday night, Gosaba witnessed clashes between TMC-BJP activists when bombs were hurled at each other, leaving six injured.

Nobody has been arrested in connection with the blast, the police officer added. The injured are undergoing treatment at Canning Sub-Divisional Hospital, he said.

A huge number of policemen have been deployed there as sleuths of the bomb squad and forensic department reached the spot, the officer said.

which were being manufactured went off accidentally. "We have listened to the claims of the family members of those injured but it seems that they were manufacturing bombs when it exploded. "We are investigating the

## TMC's Shibpur MLA quits party for denying ticket

**Howrah :** Upset over not being nominated this time, TMC's Shibpur MLA Jatu Lahiri announced on Saturday that he has resigned from the party.

Talking to reporters, Lahiri said that despite being a "loyal soldier" of the TMC he was

ignored by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

"More than not getting the nomination, I am hurt that an outsider having no links with the electorate has got the nomination just days after being inducted into the party. It seems we are not required by

## TMC, Left begin campaigning for West Bengal elections

**PNS/Kolkata :** Trinamool Congress and Left candidates kick-started their campaigns for the West Bengal elections on Saturday.

While the TMC announced the list of candidates for 291 seats on Friday, the Left named nominees for 39 seats that are going to polls in the first phase.

TMC's Ashokenagar candidate Dhiman Roy began door-to-door campaigning in the morning. The party's Jadavpur candidate Debabrata Majumdar also visited the voters in the area. CPI(M)'s Jhargram nominee Madhuja Sen Roy also campaigned in her constituency.

In Behala, TMC supporters were seen busy painting

wallgraffitis in the support of the party's two candidates from the area -- Partha Chatterjee (Behala West) and Ratha Chatterjee (Behala East).

Ratna, who has been fielded by the TMC from the constituency of her estranged husband and BJP leader Sovan Chatterjee, began her campaigning by offering puja at her Parnasree home.

"I will give my best efforts to win this seat. We all are working to make Mamata Banerjee our chief minister for the third time," she said.

Exuding confidence, TMC's Labhpur candidate Abhijit Singha said it appeared that there was no opponent against him.



## DOLLAR SMUGGLING CASE

# LDF takes out rally to Customs offices in Kerala

**PNS ■ KOCHI**

Declaring a war against the BJP-led central government over the Customs investigation against its top leaders in connection with dollar smuggling in poll-bound Kerala, the ruling LDF on Saturday organised protest marches towards the offices of the central agency in the state.

Taking a serious note of the CPI(M)-led alliance's move to target it politically, the Customs alleged that a political party was trying to intimidate the investigation agency but made it clear that it will not work. "A political

party trying intimidation, will not work," Customs (Preventive) Commissioner Sumit Kumar wrote on his Facebook page.

He also shared the notices of the LDF announcing march towards Customs offices in the state.

A political battle erupted in the state a day after the Customs, probing the gold smuggling case, claimed primeV accused Swapna Suresh has made 'shocking revelations' against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan and some ministers on dollar 'smuggling' involving UAE consulate officials.

## Uncover truth behind Mansukh's death: Sena

**PNS ■ MUMBAI**

Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut on Saturday said it was important for the "image" and "prestige" of the Maharashtra government to uncover the truth behind the mysterious death of Hiren Mansukh, who was said to be the owner of the vehicle with explosives found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's residence.

Mansukh, around 45 years old, was found dead on the banks of a creek along the Mumbra-Reti Bunder road in neighboring Thane on Friday morning, police had said.

Talking to reporters, Raut said the mysterious death of Mansukh, whose Scorpio vehicle was used to keep explosives near Ambani's residence, was "shocking and unfortunate".

"It is wrong to politicise his death and put the government in the dock. There are doubts whether Mansukh's death was a suicide or murder. He was an important witness in the case," he said. "The home department



should unearth the truth at the earliest. It is important for the prestige and image of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government," he said.

On Friday, state Home Minister Anil Deshmukh had announced that the probe into the case has been handed over from Mumbai Crime Branch to the state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS).

Talking about it, Raut said that the opposition BJP's demand is to hand over the case to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

"But it (giving the investigation to NIA) does not mean the case would be solved immediately.



## Train staff for quick disposal of cases: Prez

**PNS ■ JABALPUR**

President Ram Nath Kovind on Saturday appealed to judicial academies in states to provide training to quasi-judicial staff along with judges in district courts for the speedy disposal of cases.

"The academies should set up a permanent platform for the exchange of legal knowledge and information to discuss on simplifying court legal procedures for the speedy disposal of cases," he said.

## 15 lakh vaccinated on March 5, highest in a day

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Nearly 15 lakh people were inoculated against coronavirus on March 5, the highest in a day so far, taking the total number of vaccine doses administered in the country to over 1.94 crore, official sources said on Saturday.

The countrywide COVID-19 vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16 with health-care workers (HCWs) getting inoculated. The vaccination of frontline workers (FLWs) had started from February 2.

Administering of second dose of COVID-19 vaccine started on February 13 for those beneficiaries who had completed 28 days after receipt of the first dose.

The next phase of COVID-19 vaccination drive commenced from March 1 for those above 60 years of age and for people aged 45 years and above with specified comorbid conditions. As on Day 49 (March 5) of the vaccination drive, a total of 14,92,201 COVID-19 vaccine doses were given. Out of which, 11,99,848 beneficiaries were vaccinated across 18,333 sessions for the first dose (HCWs and FLWs), and 2,92,353 HCWs and FLWs received the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine, health ministry said.

These beneficiaries (11,99,848) include 1,10,857 individuals, aged between 45-60 years, having specified comorbidities, and 7,61,355 people aged above 60 years.



More than 1.94 crore (1,94,97,704) vaccine doses have been administered through 3,57,478 sessions, as per the provisional report till Saturday 7 am.

These include 69,15,661 HCWs (first dose), 33,56,830 HCWs (second dose), 63,55,989 FLWs (first dose) and 1,44,191 FLWs (second dose), 3,46,758 beneficiaries aged more than 45 years with specific co-morbidities (first dose) and 23,78,275 beneficiaries aged more than 60 years, it said.

## Approached court to prevent smear campaign: K'taka Ministers

**PNS ■ BENGALURU**

sions judge seeking injunction, and the order is likely today.

The Ministers are Labour Minister Shivaram Hebbar, Agriculture Minister B C Patil, Cooperation Minister S T Somashekar, Health and Family Welfare, and Medical Education minister K Sudhakar, Youth Empowerment and Sports Minister K C Narayana Gowda and Urban Development Minister Bhadrathi Basavaraj.

Health Minister Sudhakar alleged that there seems to be a big political conspiracy to defame them by misusing the media, and that they have approached court to prevent this hit-and-run smear campaign.



Pointing to the conspiracy to tarnish the image of individuals and destroy the goodwill gained from years of good work, he told reporters here that it was necessary to put an end to it and the government is also mulling bringing a law to check this kind of mischief.

Both mainstream media and social media platforms are being misused to broadcast misinformation and fake news.

He further said if there is truth in the allegations, none

## Govt sends health teams to Maha, Punjab

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The Centre has rushed high-level multi-disciplinary public health teams to Maharashtra and Punjab in view of the increase in number of daily Covid cases being reported by these states. The teams are being deployed to assist State Health Departments in Coronavirus surveillance, control and containment measures, the Union health ministry said. The high-level team to Maharashtra will be led by P Ravindran, Sr CMO, Disaster Management Cell. While the public health team to Punjab will be led by SK Singh, Director, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), New Delhi.

## India records 18,327 new Covid infections, active cases rise again

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

India's COVID-19 tally rose to 1,11,92,088 with over 18,000 fresh cases being reported in a span of 24 hours in the country after 36 days, while active cases registered an increase for the fourth consecutive day on Saturday and were recorded at 1,80,304, according to the Union Health Ministry.

The death toll reached 1,57,656 with 108 more fatalities, while a total of 18,327 new cases were registered in a day, the ministry's data showed. On January 29, 18,855 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours after which the daily rise in fresh cases remained below 18,000.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,08,54,128 which translates to a national Covid recovery rate of 96.98 per



cent, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.41 per cent. The Covid active caseload has increased to 1,80,304 which now comprises 1.61 per cent of the total infections. Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have reported a high number of Covid daily new cases, cumulatively accounting for 82 per cent of the new cases reported in a span of 24 hours, the ministry said.

According to the ICMR, 22,06,92,677 samples have been tested up to March 5 with 7,51,935 samples being tested on Friday.

## NIA charge sheets 3 Bodo militants

**PNS ■ GUWAHATI**

The NIA has filed a chargesheet before a special court here against three Bodo militants for their alleged involvement in carrying out an ambush in which two people, including an additional superintendent of police, were killed in 2014, an official said on Saturday.

Bishnu Narzary, Nitul Daimary and Runiluish Daimary have been charged under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Arms Act, he added.

The chargesheet was filed before the Special NIA Court in Guwahati on Friday.

The case relates to an ambush that resulted in the death of Gulzar Hussain, the then Additional Superintendent of Police, Sonitpur, and a civilian, Anlark Basumatary, and injuries to several police personnel in Assam's Sonitpur district.

The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which took over the probe in the case in August 2019, said members of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB-S) had laid the ambush.

## Kashyap resumes shooting of 'Dobara'

**PNS ■ MUMBAI**

"With all our love to all the haters", filmmaker Anurag Kashyap said on Saturday in a message on Instagram to announce that shooting of his film "Dobaaraa" with Taapsee Pannu had resumed.

This was Kashyap's first comment since March 3 when the Income Tax Department searched his properties as well as those of Pannu and his partners who launched the now shuttered production house Phantom Films.

The director took to the social media platform to share an on-set picture with Pannu and said they have restarted filming on their second project together. Both Pannu and Kashyap are



known for their outspoken views on a range of issues. "And we restart #DoBaaraa... with all our love to all the haters," he captioned the photograph, refraining from directly mentioning the I-T raids. Earlier in the day, Pannu posted a three-point statement on Twitter on an "alleged bungalow" in Paris, the "alleged receipt" of Rs 5 crore and her "memory of 2013 raid". The searches targeting Pannu and Kashyap are part of a tax evasion probe against Phantom Films.

Pannu also took a dig at Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement that the actor was raided in 2013 as well. Besides the actor-director duo,

the IT department conducted searches at Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shishir Sarkar and some executives of celebrity and talent management companies Kwan and Exceed, premises.

The others searched included some employees of Phantom Films, which was dissolved in 2018, and its then promoters Kashyap, director-producer Vikramaditya Motwane, producer Vikas Bahl and producer-distributor Madhu Mantena.

The Income Tax Department has detected financial irregularities of over Rs 650 crore after it raided two film production companies, two talent management companies and a leading actress, the Central Board of Direct Taxes has claimed.

## INDIA CORNER

### Former TMC MP Dinesh Trivedi joins BJP

Former Trinamool Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi joined the BJP on Saturday, weeks after he announced quitting his Rajya Sabha membership on the floor of the House deploring "violence" in poll-bound West Bengal.

He joined the BJP in the presence of its president J P Nadda, and Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and Dharmendra Pradhan besides other leaders. Lauding Trivedi as a principled politician, Nadda said he was earlier a right person in the wrong party and was now in the right party. Trivedi said he had been waiting for this "golden moment" and added that family is supreme in some parties but it is people who are supreme in the BJP.

He also praised the Modi government for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the issues involving neighbouring countries. A number of TMC leaders have quit the party in recent months to join the BJP as the saffron party mounts an aggressive all-out campaign to end Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's 10-year-old reign in the state. Trivedi (70) was once a close confidante of TMC president Banerjee and was her choice for holding the important railway ministry portfolio in the Union Cabinet during the UPA government.



### Cattle-smuggling: CBI issues lookout notice

The CBI has issued a lookout notice against Binay Mishra, brother of Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Binay Mishra and a close confidante of party MP Abhishek Banerjee, in a cattle-smuggling case, officials said on Saturday. The agency is also contemplating to approach the Interpol to get a Red Corner Notice issued against Binay Mishra, who has not joined the probe, they said. The agency has summoned two senior officers of the West Bengal police -- an inspector general and a superintendent of police -- on Monday for questioning in connection with the case, the officials said. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) named Binay Mishra as a co-accused in its supplementary chargesheet filed in the cattle-smuggling case last month. Binay Mishra is believed to be very close to West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, the officials said. In its chargesheet filed before a special CBI court in West Bengal's Asansol, the agency has already shown Binay Mishra as absconding. On February 18, the CBI filed a chargesheet in the case against Border Security Force (BSF) Commandant Satish Kumar and six others for their alleged involvement in a cattle-smuggling racket operating at the India-Bangladesh border.



### SC to commence hybrid physical hearing of cases from March 15

The Supreme Court, which is hearing cases through video-conferencing since March last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will commence hybrid physical hearing from March 15.

The apex court has issued the standard operating procedure (SOP) for the hybrid physical hearings. The top court has been hearing cases through video-conferencing since March last year due to the pandemic and several bar bodies and lawyers have been demanding that physical hearings should resume immediately. "On an experimental basis, and as a pilot scheme, the final hearings/regular matters listed on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays may be heard in the hybrid mode, as may be decided by the bench, considering the number of parties in a matter as well as the limited capacity of the courtrooms; all other matters, including those listed on Mondays and Fridays, shall continue to be heard through video/tele-conferencing mode," said the SOP issued by the apex court. "The hybrid physical hearings are to commence with effect from March 15, 2021," it added.

It said unless otherwise directed by a bench, the final hearings or regular matters where the number of lawyers for the parties is higher than the average working capacity of the courtrooms according to COVID-19 norms, that is 20 per courtroom at any given time, shall invariably be listed for hearing through the video or tele-conferencing mode.





**Covid: Speedy variant virus sweeps Europe**

PNS ■ MILAN

The virus swept through a nursery school and an adjacent elementary school in the Milan suburb of Bollate with amazing speed. In a matter of just days, 45 children and 14 staff members had tested positive.

Genetic analysis confirmed what officials already suspected: The highly contagious coronavirus variant first identified in England was racing through the community, a densely packed city of nearly 40,000 with a chemical plant and Pirelli bicycle tire factory a 15-minute drive from the heart of Milan.

"This is the demonstration that the virus has a sort of intelligence, even if it is a single-cell organism," lamented Bollate Mayor Francesco Vassallo.

Bollate was the first city in Lombardy, the northern region that has been the epicenter in each of Italy's three surges, to be sealed off from neighbours because of mutant versions that the WHO says are now powering another uptick in infections across Europe.

**15TH FINANCE COMMISSION**

# Opted for continuity in tax devolution: NK Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The 15th Finance Commission opted for continuity and predictability and hence retained the share of tax devolution to states at 41 per cent of the total pool, its chairman N K Singh said on Saturday.

Speaking at a webinar organised by the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), Singh said each Finance Commission in the past has somewhat increased the total amount of devolution to states, but the 15th Finance Commission weighed all the options considering that the fiscal space of both states and the Centre has shrunk on account of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rajya Sabha MP Sushil Kumar Modi highlighted that the share of divisible pool is slowly shrinking as the 'cess and surcharge' component in Gross Tax revenue is increasing.

The 15th Finance Commission has recommended that states be given 41 per cent of the divisible tax pool of



the Centre during the period 2021-22 to 2025-26, which is at the same level as was recommended by the 14th Finance Commission.

Finance Commission is a constitutional body that gives suggestions on Centre-state financial relations.

As per the Commission, the gross tax revenue (GTR) for the 5-year period is expected to be Rs 135.2 lakh crore. Out of that, divisible pool (after deducting cesses and surcharges and cost of collec-

tion) is estimated to be Rs 103 lakh crore.

States' share at 41 per cent of divisible pool comes to Rs 42.2 lakh crore for 2021-26 period.

The report of the 15th Finance Commission was tabled in Parliament on February 2.

Singh said each Finance Commission has somewhat increased the total amount of devolution as percentage of divisible pool.

"We had an option of contin-

uing this trajectory, we had an option of enhancing this devolution to somewhat higher figure. We had the option of somewhat recalibrating downwards looking at the constraints on the fiscal space of the central government.

"Finance Commission is not an encounter with shock and awe, Finance Commission has a legacy which believes in stability, continuity and predictability. We opted for continuity and predictability," he said.

Modi, in his speech, said cess and surcharge which was 10.4 per cent of GTR in 2011-12, has increased to 20.2 per cent. Even after deducting GST compensation cess, it is 15 per cent.

"The share of divisible pool is slowly shrinking... So one of the issues which states are raising (is) because under the Constitution, cess and surcharge is not under divisible pool... But slowly divisible pool size is shrinking and cess and surcharge increasing," said Modi, who is also the former deputy chief minister of Bihar.

# Biden urged not to accept India, SA's proposal at WTO

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Four top Republican senators have urged US President Joe Biden not to accept a proposal by India and South Africa to the WTO to waive anti-Covid vaccine patents, saying that waiving all rights to intellectual property would end the innovation pipeline and stop the development of new vaccines or boosters to address variants in the virus.

Mike Lee, Tom Cotton, Joni Ernst and Todd Young, in a letter to President Biden, urged him to reject the upcoming proposal at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

"India, South Africa and other countries are presenting a proposal at the World Trade Organisation to waive all intellectual property rights for any innovation related to COVID-19," the senators said.

"The proponents of this scheme argue that if we just destroy the intellectual property developed by American companies, we will suddenly have more manufacturers producing COVID-19 vaccines," they said.

"But the opposite is true. By destroying the intellectual property of every American



company that has worked on COVID-19 vaccines and treatments, we would be ending the progress -- started under Operation Warp Speed -- that led to the fastest development of life-saving vaccines in history," the senators wrote.

They alleged that some countries believe that they would benefit from seizing America's intellectual property, but this is a mistake.

The WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) requires countries to provide lengthy monopoly protections for medicines, tests and technologies used to produce them.

"Waiving all rights to intellectual property would end the innovation pipeline and stop the development of new vaccines or boosters to address

variants in the virus. It also wouldn't increase the supply of vaccines because of the tremendous time and resources needed to build new manufacturing plants and acquire the knowhow to produce these complex medicines.

"Even if the waiver may temporarily result in a few copycats attempting to produce what American companies developed, it would introduce major quality control problems," the senators said.

As a global leader and a force for good, the US could do a lot to help other countries overcome the virus, they said.

"But destroying our rights to intellectual property wouldn't advance our mission of fighting the virus -- it would make the problem worse, for America and for the world," they wrote.

"The end of this pandemic is in sight. More than 50 million Americans have been vaccinated, and cases have declined by more than 75 per cent from their recent high. We stand ready to work with you to bring an end to this deadly crisis and urge you to take a strong stand against this scheme that would halt our progress," the senators said.

**CORONAVIRUS**

# Mutations may help it evade T-killer cells

PNS ■ LONDON

Some mutations in the novel coronavirus may not only enable it to evade antibodies, but also make the virus unrecognisable to the immune system's T-killer cells, says a new study which could aid in the further development of vaccines.

While antibodies dock directly onto viruses to neutralise them, the scientists, including those from the Medical University of Vienna in Austria, said the T-killer cells recognise viral protein fragments on infected cells and subsequently kill them to stop virus production.

In the current study, published in the journal Cell Immunology, the researchers

sequenced 750 genomes of the novel coronavirus from infected individuals and analysed mutations for their potential to alter T cell epitopes.

These are regions on the virus recognised by the body's T cells.

"Our results show that many mutations in SARS-CoV-2 are indeed capable of doing this," said study co-author Andreas Bergthaler.

"With the help of bioinformatic and biochemical investigations as well as laboratory experiments with blood cells from COVID-19 patients, we were able to show that mutated viruses can no longer be recognized by T-killer cells in these regions," Bergthaler added.

# Will facilitate recovery of MSMEs, vows Odisha CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has said his government will engage with micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the state to facilitate recovery of the sector which was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The state government has been working closely with millions of small units in the form of 'Mission Shakti' groups and a five-day MSME trade fair, which commenced on Friday, will help entrepreneurs showcase their products, he said.

"Our government had announced a special package to support the MSME sector. We will continue to engage with the micro, small and medium enterprises and



ensure that the COVID impact on them gets minimised," the chief minister said.

The government has announced a package of Rs 289 crore to provide financial assistance to MSMEs which are facing challenges due to the coronavirus crisis, Industries Minister DS Mishra said.

In a bid to provide market access to entrepreneurs, the

Odisha MSME International Trade Fair has been organised every year since 2013.

This year's trade fair is going on at IDCO Exhibition Ground (Unit-III) in the city.

MSME Secretary Satyabrata Sahu said the event is an endeavour of the state government to bring potential buyers and sellers to a platform to boost trade and harness new technologies and products.

The government is committed to strengthen the start-up ecosystem in the state and is constructing an incubation centre, known as O-Hub, Patnaik said on Friday.

"My government will always go an extra mile to encourage MSMEs to participate in the efforts of making Odisha a vibrant state," he added.

# 100% duty on apple imports sought

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

An organization of fruit and vegetable growers from hilly states and union territories on Saturday demanded imposition of 100 per cent duty on apples imported from Iran and other countries via Afghanistan under the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA).

"To safeguard the interests of the domestic growers and associates, the import duty on apple should be levied 100% on realistic basis and import should be fixed. Otherwise, this undervaluation of duty will result in losses of revenue to the

## MONEY MATTERS

### TVS Motor Company to provide free Covid vaccination to all



Two-wheeler and three-wheeler RPT three-wheeler manufacturer TVS Motor Company on Saturday announced that it had extended free COVID-19 vaccination for all employees and their immediate family members. This vaccination drive is in line with the ongoing Government

guidelines and will cover 35,000 direct and indirect company employees across the country, the company said in a statement. Executive Vice President Human Resources, TVS Motor Company, R AnandaKrishnan said the company has strived to provide complete support to its employees and their extended family members through the pandemic, ranging from apps for emergency requirements, doctor-on-call, COVID-19 awareness communication and mental wellness programmes. "With this vaccination drive, we continue our endeavour to prioritise the health and safety of all our employees and their families," he said. In the initial phase, the vaccine will be made available to all employees and their families above the age of 60 and 45 years or older suffering from certain medical conditions, it was stated.

### Maha: Steel industry wants resumption of power subsidies



The Maharashtra steel industry has urged the state government to resume power subsidies for enterprises and provide a higher budgetary allocation of Rs 1,800 crore for this to support industries in backward regions such as Marathwada and Vidarbha. Steel Manufacturers Association of Maharashtra President Yogesh Mandhani said that the per-unit cost of electricity had come down to 5

from 8 earlier due to the subsidy provided by the government. To boost industry in backward regions in the state, the state government had introduced subsidy on power tariff for industries in Marathwada, Vidarbha and Khandesh regions in line with the recommendations of the Vijay Kelkar committee. Initially, no capping was done but later, the government budgeted this subsidy to 1,200 crore a year. The government had allocated Rs 1,200 crore for paying subsidy via Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Co Ltd (MSEDCL) but the amount was exhausted in December 2020. As a result of this, industries are now paying the power bill at full rate. The steel industry, among all others, used to get subsidies in the range of 5-7 per cent on electricity bill based on their performance but now, all these industries are paying more cost per unit.

The issue was raised by MLA Kailash Gorantyal, who demanded that the government should increase the annual subsidy from Rs 1,200 crore to Rs 1,800 crore from this current financial year itself.

### Indian-origin Naureen Hassan becomes first VP, COO of Fed



An Indian-origin veteran of the financial services industry has been appointed as the first vice president and chief operating officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Naureen Hassan has been appointed by the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York as the first vice president and chief operating officer, effective from March 15. The appointment was approved by the

Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York said in a statement. As the first vice president, Hassan will be the New York Fed's second ranking officer as well as an alternate voting member of the Federal Open Market Committee. Hassan, whose parents had immigrated from India, is a 25-year veteran of the financial services industry with expertise in strategy, digital transformation, cybersecurity and regulatory/risk management. She was, most recently, the Chief Digital Officer for Morgan Stanley Wealth Management (MSWM). President and Chief Executive Officer of the New York Fed John Williams said Hassan's leadership background, deep commitment to fostering diverse teams, and extensive technology and financial experience will be critical to her role as a Bank leader. Denise Scott, executive vice president of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and chair of the New York Fed's board of directors, said Hassan's leadership experience and operational expertise are "fully aligned" with what the search committee and he envisioned for this role. Scott said Hassan will be taking on the role that is critical to advancing the Bank's mission and strategic priorities. The statement added that Hassan has served in various capacities in the financial services industry, focusing primarily on digital and business process transformation.

# NMDC leaves iron ore rates unchanged

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Country's largest iron ore miner NMDC has left the price of lump ore unchanged at Rs 5,100 per tonne and Rs 4,210 per tonne for fines in its latest price revision announced on Saturday.

Iron ore is the key raw material used in steel making. Any change in its prices has a direct impact on the rates of steel. In a filing to the BSE, NMDC said it fixed the price of lumps or high-grade iron ore at Rs 5,100 per tonne, and that of iron ore fines or inferior grade ore at Rs 4,210 a tonne.

The revised prices are effective from March 6, 2021 and exclude royalty, District Mineral Fund, National Mineral Exploration Trust, cess, forest permit fee, and other taxes, the company said.

# Muthoot chief MG George dies at 71

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

M G George Muthoot, largely credited for making the Muthoot Finance a pan-India and the largest gold loan NBFC, passed away on Friday evening.

As a chairman of the company, he played a pivotal role in taking Muthoot Finance to new heights, expanding its reach across the country and even overseas especially to the Middle East.

The 71-year-old Muthoot was for long based in the National Capital even though his diversified group that runs over 20 businesses from gold loans to securities, realty estate to infrastructure, hospitals to hospitality and education, is headquartered in Kochi making it one of the largest business houses in the state.

"M G George Muthoot's sudden and unexpected demise will be an irreparable loss to the Company,



employees, all stakeholders, family, and friends. All directors and employees of the Company convey deep sympathy, sorrow and condolences to his family," the Muthoot Finance said in a regulatory filing on Saturday without giving reason for the cause of death.

He was responsible for scaling up the Muthoot Group's presence beyond the southern region by expanding its branch presence across north, east and west and thereby transforming the company into a pan India organization, it said.

He was instrumental in making the gold loan finance into an organised business.

# Royalty TV: UK monarchy and television have complex ties

PNS ■ LONDON

Britain's royal family and television have a complicated relationship.

The medium has helped define the modern monarchy: The 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II was Britain's first mass TV spectacle. Since then, rare interviews have given a glimpse behind palace curtains at the all-too-human family within.

The fictionalised take of Netflix hit "The Crown" has molded views of the monarchy for a new generation, though in ways the powerful, image-conscious royal family can't control.

"The story of the royal family is a constructed narrative, just like any other story," said Phil Harrison, author of "The Age of Static: How TV Explains Modern Britain."

And it's a story that has changed as Britain moved from an age of deference to an era of modern social mores and ubiquitous social media.

"The royals, particularly the younger royals, have moved from the realm of state appa-



ratus to the realm of celebrity culture in recent decades," Harrison said.

"That's worked well for them up to a point — but celebrity culture takes as well as gives and is notoriously fickle."

So anticipation and apprehension are both high ahead of Oprah Winfrey's interview with Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan — the Duke and Duchess of Sussex — a year after they walked away from official royal life, citing what they described as the intrusions and racist attitudes of the British media toward the duchess, who is biracial.

A clip released by CBS ahead of Sunday's broadcast shows Meghan, a former TV star, appearing to suggest the

royal family was "perpetuating falsehoods" about her and Harry.

A look at some other major royal television moments, and their impact: PRINCESS DIANA

The 1981 wedding of 32-year-old Prince Charles and 20-year-old Lady Diana Spencer at St. Paul's Cathedral was a fairy-tale spectacle watched by an estimated 750 million people around the world.

But the relationship soon soured. The couple separated in 1992, and in 1995 Diana gave a candid interview to the BBC's Martin Bashir, discussing the pressure of media scrutiny and the breakdown of her marriage.

# EU, US agree to suspend tariffs over Airbus-Boeing dispute

PNS ■ BRUSSELS

Brussels, Mar 5 (AP) In a sign of goodwill to rebuild trans-Atlantic relations, the European Union and the United States have decided to suspend tariffs used in the longstanding Airbus-Boeing dispute, the EU Commission president said Friday.

Ursula von der Leyen said after remote talks with U.S. President Joe Biden that both sides committed to focus on resolving our aircraft disputes, based on the work of our respective trade representatives.

The suspension will last for

an initial period of four months. Von der Leyen called it a very positive signal for our economic cooperation in the years to come.

"This is excellent news for businesses and industries on both sides of the Atlantic, she said.

The EU is using the early months of the Biden administration to reset relations with the U.S. after four years of trans-Atlantic acrimony under former President Donald Trump.

With the initiative to ease the aircraft fight that long weighed on trade relations, the 27-nation bloc is seeking to rekin-



dle the spirit of cooperation between Washington and Europe that has long defined global diplomacy.

Von der Leyen said she invited Biden to a global health summit in Rome on May 21 to

streamline the fight against COVID-19, the common enemy that has killed over a million people in the EU and U.S. combined.

Only last November, the EU imposed tariffs on up to 4 bil-

lion worth of U.S. goods and services over illegal aid for plane maker Boeing, even though the 27 EU nations already held out hope relations would improve under Biden.

The move came only a few

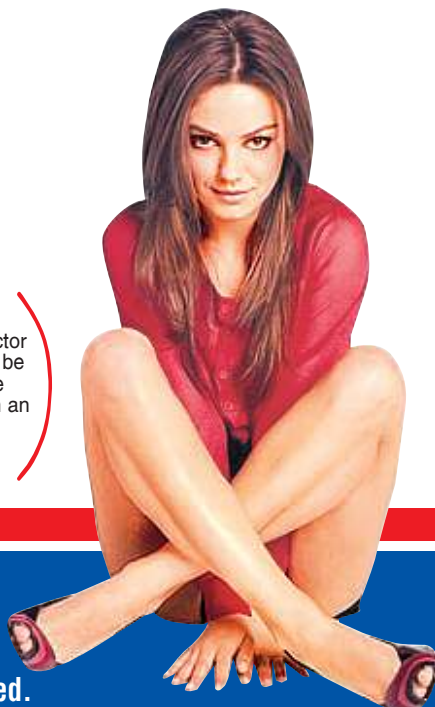
weeks after international arbitrators gave the EU the green light for such punitive action. The World Trade Organization had deemed illegal some U.S. support for Boeing which is a bitter rival to Europe's Airbus and said the EU could make up for that with a limited amount of penalties on U.S. trade.

The WTO had ruled that Boeing was given an unfair edge over Airbus by tax breaks from Washington state, where Boeing once had headquarters. But after the WTO decision, the state repealed the tax breaks, making the EU's complaint obsolete in the view of U.S. officials.





I think that an actor is more likely to be forgiven in the public's eye than an actress  
— Mila Kunis



# MAPPING THE SACRED DWELLINGS OF SHAKTI

Renowned writer and historian DR ALKA PANDE narrates that while the Shakti Peethas represent a single philosophical fold, they are a testament to the diverse legends of Shakti. An edited excerpt:

Originating from Sanskrit, the word 'Peetha' means 'seat, altar, shrine or dwelling'. In the case of the Shakti Peethas, it is very specific. It is the sacred space where the Supreme Goddess takes a strong, well-founded seat on Earth. Each of the Peethas have been turned into shrines for the Goddess by the very people who believe in the absolute power of the feminine. Each site where the 51 body parts of Sati fell, came to be known as a Shakti Peetha.

A *teertha* is a crossing. As with most Sanskrit words, there are multiple meanings of this too. *Teertha* is also the passing of the *atman* to the *paramatman* the crossing from the physical world to the metaphysical world. These 51 sacred sites are also linked by theologians and scholars to the 51 alphabets of the Sanskrit language. In each of the Peethas also resides *Kaalbhairava*, which is another name of Shiva. Most of the Shakti Peetha shrines contain a naturally appearing stone which becomes the object of worship around which the temple shrine is built.

Vindhyavasini is an additional Shakti Peetha, which I have deliberately not included in the 51 Peethas. While a powerful dwelling of Shakti, Vindhyavasini is not the abode of Shakti as Sati's body parts. It is, however, the preferred choice and home of Yogamaya, the sister of Krishna, who escaped from Kamsa's prison at Mathura.

*Kalika Purana* indicates that there are four Adi Shakti Peethas, which is further affirmed in the commentary and text of *Brihat Samhita*. It lists the names of the location at various places in India such as Vimla temple, Odisha, where her feet fell, Tara Tarini temple in Behrampur, Odisha, where her breasts fell, Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, Assam, where her *yoni* or vagina fell and lastly, the Kalighat temple in West Bengal, where her right toe fell.

## THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE DEVI

Since antiquity, Goddess worship has been part of the Indic tradition of India. In fact, the Goddess is even more popular than Shiva and Vishnu. All the manifestations, avatars or appearances of the many forms of Devi belong to the pantheon of the Shakti cult. The Supreme Goddess can be a gentle life-giver as in the case of Lakshmi, Saraswati or Parvati, or as the mistress of death in the form of Durga, Kali and Chamunda. She is a fascinating juxtaposition, both life-perpetuating and potentially destructive. In her life-giving form, Shakti can be represented as beautiful, benevolent, maternal, knowledgeable, compassionate and even desirable to the best. She invigorates, cheers and brightens the entire universe. She is represented and described as an idealized woman who is imbued with beauty, virtue and righteousness, and adorned with jewels. In fact, her iconography is drawn from the pre-modern depictions of the *salabanjikas*, *apsaras* and *surasundaris*. In this form, Shakti embraces and enlivens all aspects of reality. As the goddess of destruction and disease, she takes on rather unattractive and repulsive forms. As Sitala Devi Manasa, or Kali, the Devi is shown as haggard, ugly, unkempt and emaciated. However, whatever the form, it is always powerful.

I have dipped into both Puranic and Shakta texts to read the many interpretations and mythologies associated with the iconography, rituals of worship, devotion and representation of the Shakti Peetha as sites of immense power and energy. Each devotee enters the site of the Peetha through their own path of worship, through their respective understanding of the Great Goddess. The *wama panthis* or Shakt worshippers, for whom Shakti/Devi is supreme, enter through the tantric path, which is a sectarian movement.

The 51 Peethas have their own singular iconography and their own specific modes of rituals, worship and even prasada, with some standard common offerings like flowers, sweets and vermilion.

## RITUALS OF PRAYER AND DARSHAN

While the Shakti Peethas were specific to the body parts of Sati, the rituals of adoration, prayer and worship differed from region to



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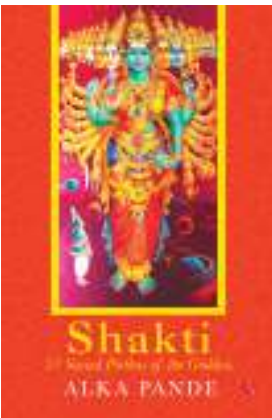
Kottari Devi (Hinglaj Mata) Temple, Pakistan

region, given the culture and history of the place. Over time, the Peethas became linked to their respective regions. The local people took ownership of them and started claiming rights over the *teerthas* and sites. Naturally, the local food and religious and cultural traditions started getting preference over the stated Puranic or standard Sanatan *dharma* *mashastras*.

In the temples, the daily rituals of worship were similar to the presiding deity, who was normally male, i.e. Vishnu or Shiva, and the feminine was worshipped in the form of their consorts. However, in the Shakti Peethas, the presiding deity was a body part, which while having its own specific service or prayer, was enfolded in the larger narrative of the worship of Shakti in the form of Devi.

The purpose of *puja* (prayer) is to appease, soothe and mollify the powerful Goddess and embrace the divine energy expressed as life force. The life force itself has many variations, from auspiciousness, health, desire for children, wealth and success, gaining power over intellectual and artistic skill, even victory over enemies. The ritual of *puja* is heavily invested in *darshan*. While doing *puja*, the concept of making eye contact with the deity is the key. *Darshan* is a two-way concept where the devotee sees the divinity and in turn, the divinity sees the devotee. The concept of *darshan* crosses all spaces, from intimate *puja* corners at home in domestic spaces to large public temples including the 51 Shakti Peethas.

The very act of *darshan*/view is the crucial key that creates the iconic moment where the devotee and the divine are in complete sync. This is the reason why 'Shakt' worshippers make long and arduous journeys to the Shakti



SINCE ANTIQUITY, GODDESS WORSHIP HAS BEEN PART OF THE INDIC TRADITION OF INDIA. IN FACT, THE GODDESS IS EVEN MORE POPULAR THAN SHIVA AND VISHNU. ALL THE MANIFESTATIONS, AVATARS OR APPEARANCES OF THE MANY FORMS OF DEVI BELONG TO THE PANTHEON OF THE SHAKTI CULT



Peethas. The idea is to take the energy of the Supreme Goddess while receiving her blessings. The religious rites have three distinct classifications: *Nitya*, which is daily, normally done at home; *Naimittika*, which are important days of the deity, and particular festivals (some special to the *ishta deva* at home or to the presiding deity of the temple); and finally *Karma*, which are optional, but a highly desired *teertha* being one of them.

The ritual of prayer to Shakti is also vested in the *panchbhootas*, where the five *ijnanaindriyas*, or senses, are included in the aspect of *puja*:

| Panchbhoota | Jnanindriya | Sense  | Puja   |            |
|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|------------|
| Akash       | Space       | Ear    | Hear   | Pushpam    |
| Vayu        | Air         | Skin   | Touch  | Dhoopam    |
| Agni        | Fire        | Eye    | Vision | Lamp       |
| Jal         | Water       | Tongue | Taste  | Water/Ghee |
| Bhoomi      | Earth       | Nose   | Smell  | Chandan    |

## PRASADA

Prasada is both an offering and a blessing. It is offered by the devotee when he/she begins the ritual of *puja*. In domestic spaces, the devotee performs the *puja* at an individual, intimate level, often making prasada or an offering of fruits, and a rice and milk pudding with saffron strands and sprinkled with mewa/ nuts, particularly almonds and raisins. What I have observed in the offerings by the devotees, is that for Shakti, it is a *bali*, or animal sacrifice, normally a lamb and sometimes even a buffalo. The very basic prasada for Shakti is meat, alcohol for Bhairava, and a sweet, normally a rice pudding. Since the Shakti Peethas have been appropriated

by the devotees of the region, naturally the prasada of the Peetha also acquires a local flavour. In Eastern India, it is primarily *kichdi* and *kheer* with *poori* and potato curry; in South India, it is a variation of the local rice, i.e. *pulihora*; in Andhra Pradesh, a *jaggery laddoo*; and in Western India, at the Amba temple in Banaskantha, a delicious sweet made of chick-pea flour, the *mohanthal*, is offered along with *sindoor*, and *makhanas*, or dried lotus seeds. In this way, almost every region brings in its regional flavour and speciality as part of the prasada offered at the Shakti Peethas.

Meat as prasada is served in the temple community kitchens only on special occasions when specific sacrifices are conducted. Holding water in the palm of their hands, or *achaman*, the devotee asks for forgiveness and blessings before beginning their prayer. In the large public temples, it is the priest who becomes the conduit of devotion and reverence. He is the intermediary who while performing the ritual acts, offers food and flowers to the presiding deity of the temple. Worship in a temple begins by circumambulating the temple and the *garbhagriha* where the deity lives.

The myth of Sati and the 51 Peethas is an important myth in the worship of the Supreme Goddess. It lays down the template for all those who believe in the Absolute Power of the Mother Goddess, crossing borders from Tantra to Mantra, from *Devi Bhagwat Purana* to *Yogini Hridaya Tantra*, right down to the popular Grama Devi in a village to the Kula Devi of a Rajput clan.





REALISE DEEPLY THAT THE  
PRESENT MOMENT IS ALL YOU  
EVER HAVE. MAKE THE NOW THE  
PRIMARY FOCUS OF YOUR LIFE  
— ECKHART TOLLE

# THE POWER OF ATTENTION

The connection to God is not hard to make. It is just a matter of making the choice that this is what we want to do, writes SANT RAJINDER SINGH



A soul is sent to a life in the human body for a certain period of time. When the soul inhabits a body, the soul is still a part of God and is still one with God. The soul, however, is now overpowered by powerful forces, such as the mind, the body and the outer world, which cause the soul, over time, to forget itself. The soul slowly begins to identify itself with the body and mind and world outside. It suddenly begins to think that it can only receive information from the outer world through the senses. Thus the soul has become attuned to only one channel — the channel of the world.

If we think about our life as watching a television programme, we have multiple choices as to what to watch. Just as there are a dozen network stations and then dozens if not hundreds of cable stations from which to choose, so, too, there are many activities in this world that we can engage in.

Now, let us take a look at the other choices available to us. This physical planet is not a separate offshoot from

all of creation and God. Most religions believe that there are higher regions or existence to which the soul goes after it dies. Scientists and doctors have tried to verify this by documenting accounts of people who were declared clinically dead but had near-death experiences and described something beyond this world. The question is, where are these realms? They are not zones in outer space delineated by borders. All these realms exist concurrently with this one. The reason we are not aware of them is because they operate on a different frequency or vibration.

The saints and mystics tell us that we have the choice to either stay tuned to this physical world, or to tune into the channels of God. God wants us to watch God's programming. God is available twenty-four hours of the day, three hundred sixty five days of a year. God's programming does not turn off at three a.m. like some networks do. It is a free station broadcasting all the time without any cable fees. We only need to know how to tune into God's station.

The connection to God is not hard. It is just a matter of making the

ONCE WE IDENTIFY  
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choice that this is what we want to do. The steps to do this are simple.

● Step one is to stop identifying with the body, mind, and world outside, and identify with the soul.

● Step two requires that when we identify with our soul that we shift our attention to the frequency or the higher realms and ultimately to God.

That is all we have to do. God did not make it hard for us to become aware of our true Home. It is we who have made it complicated.

So how do we accomplish step one and step two? To accomplish step one, we must withdraw our attention from our body, mind, and the world outside. We must decide to turn off the outer programming. When that programming is in the off mode, then in the silence we will experience ourselves as soul. That is the step that we call self-knowledge.

Once we identify with the soul, we will be able to pick up frequencies that the soul is capable of receiving. We can make a gradual shift in which we go from the consciousness of one region to consciousness of the spiritual realms.

In this process we are not going anywhere physically; we are merely shifting our attention from one state of consciousness to the other. The other state of consciousness does not exist in time or space. They are operating concurrently. We are simultaneously in the other realms and in God at the same time but we are not aware of it because our attention is only focused on one region—the physical.

So, for step one, if we meditate accurately we will experience ourselves as soul. Once we identify with the soul, then we will also be aware of the inner Light and Sound that is the radiance and vibratory sound of God within us. If we absorb ourselves in the Light and Sound within, we can then attain step two. We can shift our attention into the Light and Sound, which attracts our soul to higher levels of vibration.

It is simply a matter of choosing where we want to put our attention. This is the simplicity of spirituality. God did not make things complicated. It is simple, we just have to choose to transplant the flower of our attention from the world into God's garden.

The writer is a spiritual leader



**HIDDEN SOULS**  
PRAMOD PATHAK



## Best to mind your mind

We are at our wits end as no end to the pandemic appears to be in sight. Return to normalcy appears to be a shifting goal post something like a mirage on the highways in a hot summer afternoon. The society is witnessing all kinds of negative emotions reigning over human thinking. Depression is on the rise. Aggression is on the rise. Fear and anxiety are on the rise. Human response is completely clueless. With jobs disappearing, careers jeopardised and businesses vanishing, talks of positive thinking appear hollow. Rather a gimmick of a few who have the support system to hold the fort. But can something be done about it. No not about Corona. That will take its own course and hopefully it has covered most of its journey. In the times of distress, frustration can take many forms, from most undesirable behaviours too weird responses. However, the source of all this is not Corona. Coronavirus is what it is. The problem is how we perceive corona and its consequences. It is the perceived world that is the real world and the problem lies in how we perceive Corona. So tempering the perception is the answer. But the source of this perception is the mind which is giving all kinds of warning signals and anxious moments. We can take a cue from the definition of *Bhram* or illusion as described in Indian philosophy. The famous rope and snake illusion. If you see a snake and believe it's a rope your response will be as if it's a rope. On the other hand if you see a rope and believe it's a snake you will behave like you do when you see a snake. To sum it up then the perception of Corona is like that. For some it is like snake so they are over anxious and for some it is a rope, not to be bothered at all. Both these positions are erroneous and the truth is somewhere in between. The solution lies in mind management. But mind management is easier said than done. It is both a science and an art. In fact it is a practice and one needs a lot of training to do it. It is important to understand the science first. We must realise that mind generates thousands of thoughts everyday, more stressful than the pleasant ones. The way out is to control that. One of the most popular idioms explain the way to control the mind very simply. An empty mind is a devil's workshop. So the way out is engaging the mind constructively. That calls for the art. This has to be developed. By doing, by training. That is why practice is important. Experience of calmness or agitation depends on the mind. To train the mind there is a need to reorient the thought process. The greatest problem is in our assumption that we are entitled to a certain way of life. This is a conditioned state as we have taken many things for granted. So even the slightest disruption throws us out of gear. That way Corona has become a major disruption. Naturally we are completely off balance. The mind needs to be reassured. Our previous generations have gone through even more difficult times, and the world did not come to an end. This time also it won't. Just keep on counselling the mind to take things in its stride and think of ways to cope with the disruption. It works.

Pathak is a professor of management, writer, and an acclaimed public speaker. He can be reached at [ppathak.ism@gmail.com](mailto:ppathak.ism@gmail.com)

FROM PAGE 1

## MAPPING THE SACRED DWELLINGS OF SHAKTI

### SHAKTI AND HER BHAIRAVA

A typical feature in each Shakti Peetha is the presence of a manifestation of Shiva in the form of Bhairava. Sati, whose body parts create the Shakti Peethas, is married to the primordial god, Shiva. However, the Shakti Peethas are completed with a Bhairava shrine within the complex.

In each of the 51 Shakti Peethas, Shiva meditates as Bhairava. Each of the Bhairavas have their own unique iconography and indicators. To understand the cult of Bhairava and the different forms of Bhairavas, it is important to understand the origin, markers, manifestations, representations and expressions of the Bhairavas.

The fierce form of Shiva is Bhairava, who himself has many manifestations. He is even present in Buddhist and Jaina iconographies. In Vajrayana Buddhism, he is known as the Bodhisattva Majushri, Heruka, Vajrabhairava and Yamantaka.

Bhairava is also known as the wandering form who is the annihilator. As Mahakaal Bhairava, he is the keeper of time. As Dandapani, he holds a *danda*/rod to punish the sinners. And as Swaswas, he is one whose mount or vehicle is a dog.



Kamakhya Temple

Bhairava moves into the realm of the tantric and with his consort Bhairavi. In this, he is prayed to at midnight during which time, the couple give darshan to their faithful devotees. It is believed that there are 64 Bhairavas, who are divided into eight categories, known as Astabhairavas, the guardians of the eight directions. They are Asithaanga Bhairava, Ruru Bhairava, Chanda Bhairava, Krodha Bhairava, Unmattha Bhairava, Kapaala Bhairava,

Bheeshana Bhairava and Samhaara Bhairava.

The Bhairavas are ruled and controlled by the Maha Kaalbhairava, or Kaalbhairava, who as per the Shaivite tantric texts, is also the supreme ruler of the world. In the Trikha system, Bhairava as Para Brahman is also the supreme reality.

Along with Ganesha and Hanuman, the two most popular gods of the Hindu pantheon, the Mother Goddess or Maa is present in every home in the form of the domestic mother herself. I

would like to end with a *shloka* from Devi Upanishad where the complement of man and woman in the form of Shiv and Shakti is expressed, which is also the base of the Samkhya Philosophy:

*"It is only when Shiva unites with thee, O Shakti, that he becomes the all-powerful Lord. Left to himself, he lacks even the strength to raise his little finger."*

Excerpted with permission from Shakti: 51 Sacred Peethas of the Goddess by Alka Pande, Rupa, ₹295

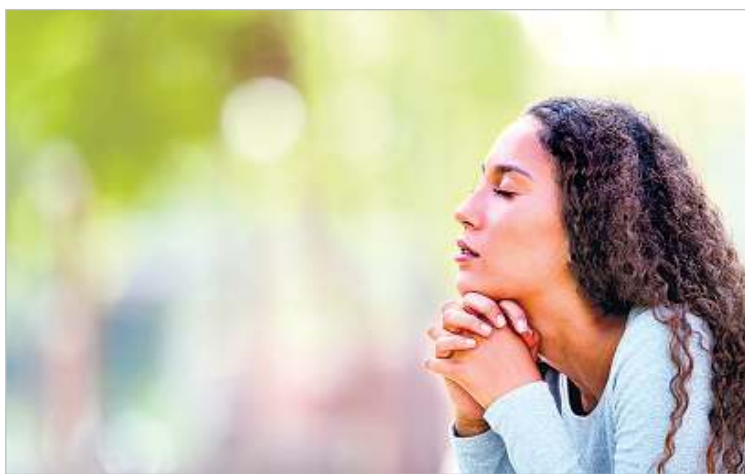
## Thank God, we have you

We all have divine qualities that help us protect ourselves from the demons within us and outside, writes AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

In the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna states that there are two types of persons in this world. These either possess divine qualities or demonic qualities. Every person will have predominance of either of the two. (16.6) We know what divine qualities are: these are non-violence, truthfulness, not given to anger, modesty, etc. (16.2) The demonic qualities are: deceitful behaviour, arrogance, anger, etc. (16.4) Demons, having little intelligence, take birth to cause harm to the world. (16.9)

So, we, having divine qualities, must protect ourselves from these demonic characters. Consider what happened during the *Mahabharat* era. Evil forces led by Duryodhan and company came to power. Pandavas — the rightful occupants of the throne were ousted. In the same period, Kansa — a demon was wrecking havoc on good people and there was no check on him. God incarnated as Lord Krishna and set the matter right. However, God does not incarnate so frequently. Then, what are we to do? In the present times, many despots have managed to take control of their nations. What should their citizens do? Good people in these countries must come together to protect themselves, and, if possible, bring change in the government as and when there is an opportune moment.

Let me explain this philosophy of coming together. I will cite my own example. I don't like many things which happen in the country, but that does not prevent me from protecting myself from evil forces. I try to associate with mostly good people. Fortunately for me, my family consists of really good souls; I couldn't have asked for better. As far as relatives go, I am very care-



ful in choosing with whom I associate. I try to maintain close relationships with only the really good ones. For others, my rule is to be strictly formal with them, i.e. what is the minimum required. Going further, I worship "*Shanideva*", as advised by my astrologer, and I do so quite seriously. Gaining favour of gods and goddesses is also important for me. I worship "*Durga Ma*" by chanting a particular mantra suggested by my spiritual friend. All these getting together with good people, "*grahas*" and gods and goddesses is very satisfactory. However, I still felt a lot of vacuum.

Over a period of many decades, I have realised that this vacuum can only be filled by God. Only He, the omnipotent, can help in certain circumstances; only He, the omniscient, can guide me in the most difficult situations; only He, the omnipresent, can be available to me at all times; and only He, the Master of the universe, can pro-

vide whatever I need, whenever I need.

Additionally, I have realised that God is forever watching all of us; hearing whatever we say; and being aware of what we are thinking. And the purpose is simply to help, guide and reward in order to encourage us good people; the task of punishing is with the divine authorities. It took me quite some time to fully realise the fact that God, who is everything (7.19) has taken this duty upon Himself. This is true as realised by many. Due to this fact, I can live peacefully; I feel secure in spite of presence of many negative forces. I am so gratified that I spend fifteen minutes daily prior to going to sleep thanking the Lord for various things. The underlying emotion is: God, we have you. Without your presence I or anyone cannot gain peace, bliss or sense of security. Thank God that you are very much with us.

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# HARVEST OF HOPE

There are some who believe in going with the flow and there are others who take the road less travelled. To mark the International Women’s Day, BISWAJEET BANERJEE brings you one such story of a rebel who brushed aside toughest of circumstances to eke out a living

It was October. Economic activities have started. The hum of the machines in factories is back all across the country. There was a sense of hope. Amid this euphoria many migrant labourers in a nondescript village of Nibi, in the rugged Banda district in Bundelkhand, decided not to go back to factories in Vapi in Gujarat. They were working in a cloth factory before lockdown was announced and had returned home during lockdown. Phula Devi, one of them, decided to stay back in her village. The agony and humiliation which she and her family faced during lockdown was fresh in her memory.

She communicated her decision to the women of the group who had returned with her to the village. “My resolve was to stay back and try to earn my living in my own village. I was not ready to face the humiliation yet again of being treated as an outsider. There was a fear that if anything ‘bad’ happens it will push the family to the brink of starvation yet again,” she told this reporter in her village compound which was surrounded by other women, men and small children.

She had no idea what she would do. She was a landless farmer. Majority of the villagers who had shifted to Vaapi with her were landless too and were forced to move out of the village to eke out their earning because of the deprivation they faced in the village.

The Covid pandemic and the subsequent lockdown announced to arrest the spread of Coronavirus pushed them to the same crossroads of deprivation. The factory was closed in March. Devi along with around two dozen village-mates including relatives, who were working as labourers, preferred to stay put with a hope that the situation will improve and they will find work in the city.

The situation deteriorated with every passing day. The owner of the factory refused to help them. He even did not pay ₹8000 as a salary which was due saying he does not have money. They were then forced to dig deep into their savings. When the Gujarat Government announced relief, they were treated as outsiders and were deprived of the Government benefits. Once they exhausted their savings they were left with no option but to return to their village.

It was last week of June. With no money in their pockets they decided to walk down over 1300 km distance on foot from Vaapi to Banda. They were a group of 19 people including five children. For a day and a half they walked braving scorching sun. They tried to hitch a ride but the truck drivers asked exorbitant fare of ₹3,000 per person. They preferred to walk. They survived on the food and water which some NGOs provided them en route.

They reached Nashik where they got a train that brought them to Jhansi and from there they came to Banda.

“It was a second life for us. We fought hunger, frustration and exhaustion to reach our village so that we can live again. And when people started talking about going back after the situation improved, old images started flashing in my mind and I decided not to leave the village again,” Devi tells you.

Her friend Kusuma too agreed to stay back. But the big question staring at their face was what will they do in the village as there are not enough employment opportunities there. The construction work in the village and adjoining Attarra block was limited. The work under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was not easily available. The villagers complained that the Pradhan of the Gram Sabha, who is from upper caste, ignored the residents of the Nibi village because majority of them were from the *dalit* community.

The social barriers which are well defined by caste, proved an impediment in Devi’s entrepreneurial dream. The majority of the farmers were landless and belonged to marginalised communities. The village is dominated by upper caste, followed by backward and intermediary caste people. They have the ownership of the majority of the land. The *dalits*, who like Hindu caste hierarchy, are at the bottom of the resources available in the village.

The *gram sabha* record shows that the village has around 400 households that share 1500 hectare of agricultural land between them. The ownership of land is very skewed. The record says that 15 per cent of the population (which is around 60 households) owns around 60 per cent (around 900 hectares) of land. These are all upper caste people.

There are 140 households of the Backward Community who own almost 600 hectare of land. The rest of the households are *dalits* and they are landless.

Interestingly, Jai Kumar Chaturvedi owns around 100 hectare of land in that village which they give to the landless farmers of the village on sharecropping. In rural India share cropping is a common practice where a landless villager takes the land for tillage for a year on an agreed term and after harvest both can share the crop.



Bimla, Koila, Bhuri and Phula, friends who gave new meaning to contract farming by sharing agri inputs as well as profits

## Lending a hand



Raja Bhaiya with women at Nibi village

The decision women took to stay back in the village after unlock was not easy. They needed support from the Government and the local society at every step. The local NGO Vidya Dham Samiti came to their rescue.

“We were there just as a support group. The Vidya Dham Samiti (VDS) extended all possible help including the technical know-how and sometimes we helped these women with money. But the credit goes to these women who showed a resolve to fight back adversities and turned the crisis into an opportunity,” Raja Bhaiya of VDS tells you.

The Samiti works with the marginalised section of the society in Banda and adjoining regions.

Raja Bhaiya tells you that he has seen the plight of migrant workers during lockdown. They came back to villages empty stomach and practically had nothing with them. “Condition of Phula and her relatives was no different. Our Samiti helped them initially and later supported them when they decided to stay back despite getting calls from the factory,” he says.

Regular meetings are held between Samiti members and villagers. “I saw the seeds of women empowerment sowing in the adverse condition of Covid pandemic. These women were coming out of the shadow of their husbands. We allowed these women to spread their wings and now the result is for everyone to see,” Raja Bhaiya tells you.

I AM ILLITERATE. I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT FARMING. INITIALLY, I WAS A LABOURER AND THEN WHEN I WAS SHIFTED TO VAAPI, MY WORK WAS TO SIFT SOILED CLOTH PIECES FROM FRESH ONES. SO, MY KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FARMING WAS ALMOST ZERO

— PHULA DEVI

looked at us with disbelief because previously we were not in talking terms. ‘*Hamara jhagda ho gaya tha*’ (we had quarreled),” she tells you sheepishly.

Chaturvedi was perplexed when he saw a group of women come one fine morning and ask land for sharecropping. “I was a bit surprised because it is generally men who come to us to discuss the terms and conditions of share cropping. But when I was told these women who are *pravasi mazdoor* want to stay back in the village, we decided to give a small portion of land to them,” he tells you.

Raman agreed to give six *bigha* of land on a 50-50 sharing basis, thus meaning that he will share the cost of agriculture input and will take 50 per cent of the grain produced.

The word spread in the village like fire that Devi was planning farming. Other women like Vimla, Koiri, Murri and Kusuma too joined her. Devi went around the village advising women of the migrant families, who were planning to go back to Vaapi, to stay back. “We had faith in Phula. We had seen the worst in Vaapi and were ready to give new resolve shown by Phula a try,” Murri Devi tells you.

Rajani nods her head in affirmation. “I and my husband had made up our minds to go back and work in a factory. We postponed our visit for a few days to see how things shape up in the village. It is three months since then and have decided to stay back,” she tells you with a smile.

The initial skepticism turned to self belief when villagers saw Devi and Kusuma working in fields. Devi sowed wheat and vegetables while Kusuma opted for vegetables. In between the words spread about the death of Ram Dayal, a villager from Nibi, in Vaapi and how the contractor forced his wife and son to work in the factory to repay a loan Dayal had taken from him.

Slowly the courtyard of Devi’s house became the meeting point for the villagers. Women used to come and sit with Phula discussing the nitty-gritty of farming. This all started with whisper but soon the women became vocal and the resolve to stay back started gathering momentum.

“I am illiterate. I don’t know anything about farming. Initially, I was a labourer and then when I was shifted to Vaapi my work was to sift soiled cloth pieces from fresh ones. So, my knowledge about farming was almost zero,” she says.

Her relative Raju came to her rescue. He provided all the basic information like which seed and fertilizer to use and when. Fortunately, the rains were normal and it came as a big relief.

The heads started turning when Kusuma had a good harvest of vegetables like cabbage, potato, cauliflower and other

seasonal vegetables. She opened a small makeshift shop inside her house and sold vegetables. “I earn anything between ₹125 and ₹150 per day. Some days, I even earned close to ₹250,” Kusuma tells you with a smile.

Kusuma, with her husband, Shiv Avtaar, have even repaired a defunct well near the field which they had taken for *batohi*. “Irrigation is not a big issue now for us as we get water from the well which has been neglected for many decades,” Avtaar says.

More and more women are now ready to take farming. “Phula motivated us. Kusuma showed us the way and now we have dropped the idea of going back to the factory,” Koili says. Many in the group nodded in unison as a mark of confirmation of what Koili said.

The women of this non-descript village have become entrepreneurial. When they realized individually they do not have enough money, they joined hands to do farming. Four friends — Phula, Bimla, Koili and Murri — have entered into their own contract farming where they will share the agricultural input as well as the profit.

All of them have chipped in with ₹3,000 each and the money collected is used for irrigation, seeds and fertilizers. They have grown varieties of vegetables, onion and wheat. “We will give half of the crop to the land owner and share the rest among ourselves. This will be enough for us,” Bimla tells you.

The words have spread around that women in Nibi village have brought a revolution. Around 20 families, all *pravasi mazdoor*, have not gone back despite a call from *thekedar* (contractor). Even people in a village Bhujyari purwan, around 20 kms from Nibi, narrate how some have brought a social change in the village. “We have heard that some women in nearby villages have opted for farming rather than going back to work in factories. People are talking about the revolution brewing in the villages of Attarra,” Vinod Singh, a resident of Bhujyari Purwan said.

Singh, in his early 20s, is also a land owner and gives their land on sharecropping. “Now in villages too women are coming forward and taking decisions themselves,” he says in a sarcastic tone.

“Generally, at this time of the year padlocks could be seen at doors and a deadly silence drapes the Nibi village. This year it is different. The sounds of laughter, cries and chatter emanates from all the houses because the villagers have stayed back. Thanks to the women, life is back in the villages,” Raja Bhaiya of Vidya Dham samiti, an NGO that works in the region, says.

## Fighting water woes



Kusuma at the well

The decision to opt for farming was not easy for the women. The primary reason being the region is water scarce. So, when Kusuma opted to grow vegetables the first thought that came to her mind was from where to get water for irrigation.

This time her caste came to her rescue. Being a *dalit* her house was at the corner of the village. There was a well at one corner of the field which was lying defunct for many years. The well was built by upper caste people of the village but they stopped using it after they installed pumps in their houses.

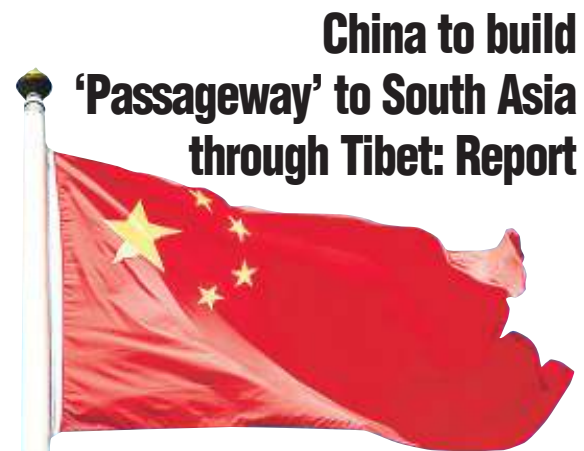
“This well was in very bad shape. One day sitting at the base of the well my husband and I discussed if we can install a pump then withdrawing water from the well would be easy. This way we will be able to solve the irrigation problem too,” Kusuma tells you.

Initially, the husband-wife duo had used a bucket to pull water and then irrigated the vegetable with a mug. This was a tedious and time consuming job.

Shiv Avtaar, husband of Kusuma, had a little bit of knowledge of machines as he had helped electricians in the factory in Vapi. They took a little loan from a private moneylender and installed a pump.

“The water problem is solved to a large extent. After success in the vegetable business I am looking for diversification. My husband is looking for avenues in fisheries and poultry,” she tells you.





## China to build ‘Passageway’ to South Asia through Tibet: Report

The draft outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan has been submitted to the NPC for formal approval.

China has included building of an important “passageway” connecting Tibet with South Asia in the 14th Five Year plan which is due to commence from this year, the official media reported on Friday. China will support Tibet in building the passageway to South Asia, state-run Xinhua news agency reported, quoting the 14th Plan document which was submitted to the National People’s Congress, (NPC), China’s Parliament. The annual session of the NPC began in Beijing on Friday. ‘China’s Tibet Autonomous Region will be supported to build an important passageway opening to South Asia,’ state-run Xinhua news agency reported briefly. The draft outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for national economic and social development and the long-range objectives through the year 2035, which were cleared by the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) have been submitted to the NPC for formal approval. Though the Xinhua report has not mentioned, China has been planning for a long time to build the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network through Tibet and Nepal. It was regarded as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) cooperation between China and Nepal.



## Great apes at San Diego zoo receive first Covid vaccines

Nine great apes at San Diego Zoo have become the first non-human primates given Covid-19 vaccinations, officials at the California zoo said Friday. Four orangutans and five bonobos were given two doses each of an experimental vaccine created specifically for animals by a veterinary pharmaceutical company. The inoculations were carried out after eight gorillas at the same world-famous zoo contracted the virus from human staff in January. ‘After a troop of eight western lowland gorillas got sick in January, San Diego Zoo staff received experimental COVID-19 vaccines to give to great apes in their care,’ tweeted Zoetis, the pharmaceutical company. San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance on Friday called it a “win for science.” Nadine Lamberski, a conservation and wildlife health officer at San Diego Zoo Global, told National Geographic that the use of an experimental vaccine on the zoo’s animals at this stage “isn’t the norm.” “In my career, I haven’t had access to an experimental vaccine this early in the process and haven’t had such an overwhelming desire to want to use one,” she said.

## Software icon John McAfee charged in cryptocurrency scam

The creator of McAfee computer security software was facing charges Friday that he cashed in on a “pump-and-dump” scheme, by promoting cryptocurrencies on Twitter to drive up their value. John McAfee, founder of the antivirus firm that bears his name, and Jimmy



Watson face charges of conspiracy, fraud, and money laundering in connection with schemes to trick cryptocurrency investors, according to an indictment unsealed by the US Department of Justice. ‘McAfee and Watson exploited a widely used social media platform and enthusiasm among

investors in the emerging cryptocurrency market to make millions through lies and deception,” US attorney Audrey Strauss said in a release. McAfee, Watson, and other members of their “cryptocurrency team” allegedly “raked in more than \$13 million from investors they victimized with their fraudulent schemes,” according to Strauss. Pump-and-dump schemes typically involve over-hyping the value of stocks or, in this case cryptocurrency, by holders so that they can be sold at artificially high prices. “McAfee and Watson used social media to perpetrate an age-old pump-and-dump scheme,” FBI assistant director William Sweeney said. “When engaging in illegal activity, simply finding new ways to carry out old tricks won’t produce different results.” McAfee and Watson also used Twitter to promote digital tokens on behalf of initial coin offerings without disclosing they were being paid for their efforts by the startups, according to the indictment.



## UK paper told to print front-page notice on Meghan Markle’s legal win

The Mail On Sunday, part of a UK newspaper group that lost a high-profile privacy case brought by Meghan Markle, must print a front-page statement acknowledging her legal victory, a judge ruled on Friday.

High Court judge Mark Warby also ordered Associated Newspapers, which owns the Mail On Sunday and MailOnline website, to publish a notice on page three of the paper stating that it had “infringed her copyright”.

Warby in February upheld Meghan’s claim that Associated Newspapers had breached her privacy and copyright by publishing parts of a 2018 letter she sent to her father Thomas Markle.

The letter to her estranged father was written a few months after she married Queen Elizabeth II’s grandson, Prince Harry, and asked him to stop talking to tabloids and making false claims about her in interviews.

Warby has already ordered Associated Newspapers to make an “interim payment” of GBP 450,000 (\$627,000) to cover legal costs for the Duchess of Sussex, as Meghan is formally known.

On Friday he also formally refused its appeal bid, saying the newspaper group had “no real prospect” of success.

In his written ruling, the judge said the front- and third-page statements about Meghan’s successful copyright claim would have “genuine utility”.

## 20,000 US organisations compromised through Microsoft flaw: Source

More than 20,000 U.S. organizations have been compromised through a back door installed via recently patched flaws in Microsoft Corp’s email software, a person familiar with the U.S. government’s response said on Friday. The hacking has already reached more places than all of the tainted code downloaded from SolarWinds Corp, the company at the heart of another massive hacking spree uncovered in December.

The latest hack has left channels for remote access spread among credit unions, town governments and small businesses, according to records from the U.S. investigation.

Tens of thousands of organizations in Asia and Europe are also affected, the records show.

The hacks are continuing despite emergency patches issued by Microsoft on Tuesday.

Microsoft, which had initially said the hacks consisted of “limited and targeted attacks,” declined to comment on the scale of the problem on Friday but said it was working with government agencies and security companies to provide help to customers.

It added,

“impacted customers should contact our support teams for additional help and resources.”

One scan of connected devices showed only 10% of those vulnerable had installed the patches by Friday, though the number was rising.

Because installing the patch does not get rid of the back doors, U.S. officials are racing to figure out how to notify all the victims and guide them in their hunt.

All of those affected appear to run Web versions of email client Outlook and host them on their own machines, instead of relying on cloud providers. That may have spared many of the biggest companies and federal government agencies, the records suggest.

The federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency did

not respond to a request for comment.

Earlier on Friday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters that the vulnerabilities found in Microsoft’s widely used Exchange servers were “significant,” and “could have far-reaching impacts.”

“We’re concerned that there are a large number of victims,” Psaki said.

Microsoft and the person working with the U.S. response blamed the initial wave of attacks on a Chinese government-backed actor. A Chinese government

spokesman said the country was not behind the intrusions.

What started as a controlled attack late last year against a few classic espionage targets grew last month to a widespread campaign.



## Jack Dorsey’s first tweet, 15-year-old, is up for sale

Just setting up my twttr” - the first ever tweet on the platform is up for sale after Twitter boss Jack Dorsey listed his famous post as a unique digital signature on a website for selling tweets as non-fungible tokens (NFTs).

The post, sent from Dorsey’s account in March of 2006, received offers on Friday that went as high as \$88,888.88 within minutes of the Twitter co-founder tweeting a link to the listing on ‘Valuables by Cent’ - a tweets marketplace.

Old offers for the tweet suggest that it was put for sale in December, but the listing gained more attention after Dorsey’s tweet on Friday.

NFTs are digital files that serve as digital signatures to certify who owns photos, videos and other online media.

Dorsey’s 15-year old tweet is one of the most famous tweets ever on the platform and could attract bidders to pay a high price for the digital memorabilia. The highest bid for the tweet stood at \$100,000 at 0125 GMT on Saturday.

Launched three months ago, Valuables compares the buying of tweets with buying an autographed baseball card. “There is only one unique signed version of the tweet, and if the creator agrees to sell, you can own it forever.”

A tweet’s buyer will get an autographed digital certificate, signed using cryptography, that will include metadata of the original tweet, according to the Valuables website. The tweet will continue to be available on the Twitter website.

## ‘First drive went incredibly well’: NASA on Mars Rover

The Mars rover Perseverance has successfully conducted its first test drive on the Red Planet, the US space agency NASA said Friday.

The six-wheeled rover travelled about 6.5 meters (21.3 feet) in 33 minutes on Thursday, NASA said.

It drove four meters forward, turned in place 150 degrees to the left, and then backed up 2.5 meters, leaving tire tracks in the Martian dust.

“This was our first chance to ‘kick the tires’ and take Perseverance out for a spin,” said Anais Zarifian, Perseverance mobility test bed engineer at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California.

Zarifian said the test drive went “incredibly well” and represented a “huge milestone for the mission and the mobility team.”

“We’re going to do some longer drives,” she added. “This is just the beginning.” NASA engineers said

they were studying possible routes for longer rover voyages on the surface of Mars.

A slightly longer trip was planned for Friday, and perhaps another Saturday if all goes well, NASA said.

The rover can cover 200 meters per Martian day, which is slightly longer than a day on Earth.

And it goes five times faster than Curiosity, its predecessor, which is still functioning eight years after landing on Mars.

Perseverance deputy mission manager Robert Hogg said engineers were also preparing for the first flight of a helicopter drone carried by the rover.

Hogg said the rover team was working out flight zones and hoped to conduct the first flight in late spring or early summer.



## DISNEYLAND, other California theme parks, stadiums could reopen April 1

California health officials set new rules on Friday that would allow Disneyland and other theme parks, stadiums and outdoor entertainment venues to reopen as early as April 1, after a closure of nearly a year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

But the return of Mickey Mouse to the “Happiest Place on Earth” and live spectators to the California ball parks of America’s favorite pastime still come with major caveats.

Theme and amusement parks would be permitted to restart on April

1 with severely limited capacity, but only if the counties where they operate are removed from the “purple” tier of California’s color-coded COVID-19 restrictions, the system’s most stringent classification.

Masks and other safety measures would still be required, and the parks initially would be open only to state residents. Attendance would range from 15% to 35% of normal capacity.

Outdoor stadiums, ball parks and performance arenas would also be allowed to welcome back live audiences starting April 1, though at a fraction of maximum seating and subject to the

same tiered system of constraints.

Opening day turnouts for Major League Baseball games would be muted affairs in Southern California, with no more than 100 spectators allowed in venues located in purple-zoned counties.

That would include the stadiums of the Los Angeles Dodgers, the San Diego Padres and the Anaheim Angels. San Francisco and Oakland, home of the Giants and the Athletics, respectively, are currently designated red, which would limit seating to 20% capacity.

