

ANALYSIS 7
A LESS TALKED ABOUT
CRIME AGAINST WOMEN**MONEY 8**
INDIA'S 'RECOVERY FASTER
THAN EXPECTED'**SPORTS 11**
PITCH WILL BE SIMILAR TO
LAST 2 TESTS: RAHANE

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY MARCH 3, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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KRITHI SHETTY
TO SPEAK IN
TELANGANA
DIALECT

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HARYANA TO RESERVE 75% JOBS IN PVT SECTOR FOR LOCALS: MINISTER

The Haryana governor has approved the bill that reserves 75 percent private jobs for the people of the state, Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala has informed. The legislation was passed by the state assembly last year. "This is the day of great happiness for the youths of the state. The youths now will get 75 per cent reservation in private jobs. They will get reservation in every company, society and trust," he said. Reservation in the private sector jobs for locals was the main election promise of Chautala's Jannayak Janta Party, which had formed a government in alliance with the BJP after winning 10 of the 90 seats in 2019.

**G-23 "EXTRACTED POUND OF FLESH", WANT TO JOIN BJP: CONGRESS BENGAL CHIEF**

Congressmen who are accusing the party of breaching secularism are those who "have already extracted their own pound of flesh," said the party's angry Bengal chief in an interview to media. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, retaliated by describing him and his G-23 cohort as "leaders, who over the decades, have enjoyed the power of the Congress party." Now that the Congress is reduced to a far more modest standing, he professed, "they think the Congress does not have resources to offer them...so that is why they are castigating the Congress."

**UK'S PRINCE PHILIP REMAINS IN HOSPITAL AFTER TWO WEEKS**

Britain's Prince Philip was receiving treatment and undergoing heart tests on Tuesday, two weeks after the 99-year-old husband of Queen Elizabeth was admitted to hospital in London as a precaution after he felt unwell. Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, was transferred from the private King Edward VII hospital to St Bartholomew's Hospital, which is a centre of excellence for cardiac care, for tests for a pre-existing heart condition and treatment for an unspecified infection which is not Covid-related. His stay in hospital is the longest he has needed treatment, although Buckingham Palace has said he is comfortable and responding to treatment.

**PFIZER, OXFORD VACCINES REDUCE SEVERE COVID IN ELDERLY, UK STUDY FINDS**

The Pfizer and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines for Covid are highly effective in reducing coronavirus infection among people aged 70 years and above, according to a study. The research estimated the effect of both the Covid vaccines on laboratory confirmed symptomatic disease in individuals aged 70 years or older. The researchers compared the rate of hospitalisation and deaths in confirmed Covid patients aged over 80 who were vaccinated more than 14 days before testing positive, with unvaccinated cases.



AP building Greenfield ports for private sector, says CM

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Government has decided to develop three Greenfield sea-ports along the state's coastline on its own, by opting for an innovative model that mitigates all risks associated with Greenfield ports and hand them over to the private sector, making port operation a risk-free proposition for the latter.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy disclosed this during the Maritime India Summit-2021 that was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The Chief Minister virtually participated in the Summit from his camp office here.

As per the innovative model, after development of the port by the government, the operator of the port would be selected on a competitive bidding basis ensuring maximum revenue realisation for the Government.

Assuring the best environment for operations and total support in making their endeavours successful, Jagan



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the Maritime India Summit-2021 after inaugurating it virtually, on Tuesday

invited representatives from various companies from India and abroad attending the summit to invest in AP.

"In recent times, several industrial nodes have come up in the State, with ports as the focal point for development. To further unlock this potential offered by the lengthy coastline of the State, the Government of Andhra Pradesh has undertaken development of three Greenfield ports at Ramayapatnam, Machilipatnam and Bhavanapadu," he said.

"These all-weather, deep-

drafted ports are all set to be operational by 2023, creating an additional capacity of at least 100 million tonnes of cargo per annum in the short term, with the potential to grow leaps and bounds in the long-term," Jagan said.

He added that in order to ensure that the ports operate at their full capacities, the state government has consciously taken steps to attract large investments in the sectors ranging from manufacturing, petrochemicals, food processing, pharmaceuticals etc. which

'Blue Economy' value unlocked only when allied sectors mature

Vijayawada: Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy told the Maritime India Summit-2021 that 95 percent of India's trading by volume and 70 percent by value is through maritime transport. "Indian ports handled approximately 1.2 billion metric tonnes of traffic in 2019-2020 and much required policy reforms like 100 percent FDI, Make-in-India, Sagar Mala and Bharat Mala have been introduced to ensure exponential growth in this sector. I am sure that the Maritime India Vision-2030 document would stand testimony to our commitment in this regard," he said.

are port-dependent.

Make state-run hospitals the best, Jagan tells health wing

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that there was no need to compromise on Nadu-Nedu funds, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday directed officials to ensure that services in Government-run hospitals are on par with corporate hospitals. He also directed the officials to complete the Nadu-Nedu initiative within the specified timeline.

Chairing a review meeting on Nadu-Nedu (Health) here, the Chief Minister instructed officials to focus on maintenance of existing, newly-constructed and teaching hospitals. "If there are any issues related to land acquisition or any other problem regarding Nadu-Nedu works, bring it to



my notice for immediate solution," Jagan told the officials.

He directed them to ensure that all government hospitals meet the standards of corporate hospitals in terms of infrastructure, maintenance, and cleanliness and said that strict standards must be adhered to, to ensure quality services are

available in State-run hospitals.

With regard to this, officials were asked to prepare a Standard Operating Procedure for better execution, to provide the best medicine, the best management, the best standards to the poor in government hospitals.

**Modi, a brand ambassador of 'good governance': Naqvi**

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**Leaders lack steely resolve to stop VSP disinvestment**

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**Sensex rises for second day; reclaims 50K-level**

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Manmohan blames note ban for high unemployment

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Attacking the Centre, former Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh on Tuesday said unemployment is high in the country and its informal sector is in shambles following the "ill considered demonetisation decision" taken by the BJP-led government in 2016.



AP girl conquers Mt. Kilimanjaro

C PRADEEP KUMAR
■ VIJAYAWADA

A nine-year old Ritvika Sree from Anantapur district in Andhra Pradesh has done what many would consider impossible - conquer Mount Kilimanjaro, the world's second highest peak.

While the world was caught in the pandemic, Ritvika had her own plans and went ahead to set a world record by conquered Mount Kilimanjaro.

In doing so, she has become the second youngest in the world, and youngest in Asia, to scale Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak, located in Tanzania.

Ritvika began her climb on January 16, 2021. She has also climbed to Gilman's point at 5,681 meters above sea level.

Gandham Chandrudu, Collector and District



Magistrate of Anantapur, congratulated and praised Ritvika for achieving the recognition on Twitter.

He wrote, "Congratulations to Ritvika Sree of Anantapur for becoming the world's second youngest girl to scale Mt Kilimanjaro. You have grabbed the opportunities despite many odds. Keep inspiring."

Chandrudu released Rs 2.98 lakh from SC Corporation funds to achieve the feat.

Ritvika's father is a cricket coach and sports coordinator.

Mudragada in court for Tuni case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Kapunadu leader Mudragada Padmanabham, along with 36 of the 41 others summoned in connection with the Ratnachal Express burning incident, deposed before the Railway Court in Vijayawada on Tuesday.

The burning of the train that took place at the height of the Kapu reservation movement during the previous TDP regime was a turning point, handing over the advantage to the government. The police filed cases against 41 persons, of whom 37 attended the court of the VII Metropolitan Magistrate K Suresh Babu.

Defense counsel V Uma Maheswari said that of the 41 accused, summons were served on only 40.

Covid-19 made India's rich, richer

PNS ■ DELHI/HYDERABAD

The wealth of Indian billionaires rose by over a third during the COVID-19 lockdown, according to a study, which suggests that the pandemic, while devastating most homes and almost the whole of the economy, made India's rich richer.

According to the Billionaires Insights Report 2020 published by UBS and PwC, the net worth of Indian billionaires between April and July increased by 35% to \$ 423 billion.

India's billionaires reported a rise in their combined net worth by more than a third during the first four months of the coronavirus-induced

nationwide lockdown, i.e., between April and July, defying the impact of the global economic fallout of the pandemic.

India reportedly added more than three dollar billionaires every month in 2019, taking the tally to 138 that has helped the country to feature at the third position globally.

According to the Forbes' India Rich List 2020 released earlier this month, the net worth of India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, rose 73% over the past year to nearly \$89 billion (Rs 6.52 lakh crore). This is over three times more wealth than the second richest person on the list, Gautam Adani, at \$25.2 billion.

Rs 7.9 cr in fake notes seized

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Even as smuggling of ganja has kept cops mauling the Andhra-Odisha border on edge, the seizure of counterfeit currency with the face value of Rs 7.9 crore will give sleepless nights to the police.

At the Sunki outpost on the AOB, close to Salur Ghat Road in Vizianagaram, the Odisha police in Koraput arrested three persons for possession of coun-



terfeit Indian currency of Rs 500 denomination, worth Rs 7.9 crore.

Prima facie, the gang is part of an inter-state counterfeit racket as the fake notes were being

Centre allows all private hospitals to give Covid vaccine

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Tuesday permitted all private hospitals to give Covid vaccine, provided they adhere to the norms laid down. The Centre also asked States and UTs to utilise the optimum capacity of private medical facilities empanelled under three categories.

States and UTs were also urged not to store, reserve, conserve or create a buffer stock of the Covid-19 vaccines, the Union Health ministry said in a statement, a day after the start of the second phase of India's inoculation drive began.

Toddy emerges top choice this election season

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

With liquor prices remaining high in Andhra Pradesh, toddy consumption has seen an exception increase in the rural pockets of urban local bodies across the State.

While it's common knowledge that toddy consumption picks up in summer, the demand this season has been unprecedented, and the civic body elections are being blamed.

According to sources, some candidates for the Urban Local Bodies are said to be supplying toddy to voters in their area instead of liquor to lure them. Toddy outlets dot some stretches in the Bheemili area of GVMC limits. The demand



for toddy is high from February to May every year as many people prefer it due to its relatively lower alcohol content. The cost of the toddy is also very less when compared to beer and liquor, said K Lakshmi, who sells it on the Beach Road stretch near

Bheemili in Vizag city. When asked the reason for higher sales this season, she pointed to the civic body election campaign.

Over 30 to 40 toddy outlets have sprang up along the Beach Road in Vizag city and a few other parts along NH-16. The

outlets may increase in the coming days as and when the mercury levels rise.

"I have developed the habit of consuming fresh and sweet toddy. The taste is really good and it brings much relief from the summer heat," said 32-year-old T Ganesh, a resident of Vizag city. "We pay just Rs 30 per 300 ml of fresh toddy," he added.

Toddy tappers also expect an increase in consumption this year. "We are hoping that the demand for toddy will increase in the coming days as the many tappers find it unwise to pay a hefty amount for liquor or beer."

"Traditionally toddy tapping requires a lot of skills as the tapper has to climb the palm tree thrice a day and collect the

brew from the top of the tree," said P Chandrayya, a toddy tapper in Bheemili area. On average, each toddy tapper sells around 60 to 70 litres in the city, Chandrayya said.

Around four lakh people have been involved in the trade of toddy tapping and selling in Andhra Pradesh.

The production and consumption of the toddy is high in West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur and Krishna districts in the state. "During the summer, we can collect 10 to 15 litres of toddy from a palm tree in one day. Consumption of toddy is increasing in towns and cities as youngsters prefer to drink it whereas in rural pockets in the state, consumption has declined," the toddy tappers said.

Molestor shoots dead victim's father in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 50-year-old man was allegedly shot dead in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras district by an accused on bail in a case of molestation lodged in 2018 against the victim's daughter, police said on Tuesday.

"The incident took place in Nozarpur village of Sausani area in Hathras on Monday afternoon when the daughters of Ambrish Sharma (50) had gone to a temple, where the wife and aunt of accused Gaurav Sharma were present. The women had heated arguments with each other after which both Gaurav and Ambrish also reached there,"

Hathras SP Vineet Jaiswal said. According to an FIR lodged by the victim's daughter, however, the incident took place in their family potato field.

Both Gaurav and Ambrish also had an argument after which the accused called some members of his family and shot Ambrish in a fit of rage, the SP said.

Ambrish was rushed to the hospital where he was declared brought dead, the SP added.

The Hathras SP said the FIR had been registered against Gaurav Sharma, Lalit Sharma, Rahitash Sharma, Nikhil Sharma and two others.

Leaders lack steely resolve to stop VSP disinvestment

“The Government has no business to do business”... these words, uttered recently by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speak volumes about how the Government perceives the public sector, and its future role in nation building! Successive governments downplayed the public sector, and by the time NDA-I came to power, it acquired a fancy name – disinvestment. Privatisation sounds harsh with negative connotations, but “disinvestment” does have a nice ring to it.

The fact that its exact meaning is not known to a vast majority is beside the point. In fact, AB Vajpayee who led the NDA-I Government set up a separate portfolio to implement this “disinvestment” process, leaving millions befuddled and wondering in what way it would make an

impact in their lives. It is perhaps this bewilderment that encouraged the Government to put another public sector giant with thousands of workers – the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) – on the list of PSUs for disinvestment and effectively propose handing over a major stake of it to the Korean company POSCO.

VSP is considered the jewel in the crown of Telugu pride that was achieved with the supreme sacrifice of 32 persons and many others who gave away their valuable lands. It is also the only steel plant in the country to be set up on the coastline.

The slogan of the people who spearheaded the movement for achieving steel project – Visakha vukku – Andhrula hakku (Visakha steel is the right of Andhraithe)

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is considered the jewel in the crown of Telugu pride that was achieved with the supreme sacrifice of 32 persons and many others who gave away their valuable lands. It is also the only steel plant in the country to be set up on the coastline.

gained such widespread acceptance that it became a mantra chanted by one and all five decades ago.

The agitation for the steel plant peaked with the resignation of 65 legislators of undivided Andhra Pradesh.

In contrast, claims of the so-called people's representatives nowadays that resignation won't solve the problem and that their 'official position' is necessary to exert pressure to save the steel plant are unfortunate. They probably are unaware of the historic truth that that resignations by those 65 MLAs finally led to the achievement of VSP. If they are aware, perhaps it's their egos that may be stopping them from admitting this openly.

Unpardonable callousness has been shown towards the VSP by governments by not allotting 'captive' mines, which are the lifeline for any steel plant, to it.

Abundant raw material can



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

ting captive mines that can often be misused for minting money in the name of setting up the steel industry. Absence of a dedicated source of raw material impacted VSP's earnings, leaving it open for the Government to propose “disinvestment”.

Now that “disinvestment” is being bandied about, leaders from the ruling dispensation are gradually putting forth the arguments that privatisation would be beneficial for the plant.

Some of those who had been staunchly against privatisation have overnight changed their tune; perhaps the words of the Prime Minister “inspired” them.

Earlier, Brahmani Steels Limited owned by prominent BJP leader Gali Janardhan Reddy proposed a steel industry in AP and the Government allotted captive mines in Anantapur to his firm. Gali's

clout was on full display in this entire episode.

Captive mining means that the raw material should only be used in the plant to which it has been allotted and not for any other purpose. Interestingly, the GO allotting the captive mines to Brahmani Steels was altered and the word 'captive' was deleted, allowing the owner to resort to excessive mining.

Even before its steel plant was functional, Brahmani resorted to so much excessive mining that the ecology on the AP-Karnataka border was destroyed. Governments of the two states had to appoint officials, including from their survey departments, to redraw the border.

It's most unfortunate that a steel plant that realised the dreams of lakhs of people after a fierce movement has not been allotted captive mines to sustain itself, where-

as a private firm was, and misused the opportunity.

The shocking part of the entire episode was that the word 'captive' very much figured in the draft GO, but magically disappeared from the final order. The minister and officials concerned could do little, since the “magic” was performed at the very top.

The lethargic attitude of governments has pushed VSP to the brink of privatisation; and now demands that RINL be merged with SAIL so that it can survive with the help of mines available with SAIL. This way, the problem of non-allotment of captive mines will be solved.

However, it must be remembered that even if viable alternatives are available, it is the Government that appears to be least bothered about implementing them, making disinvestment inevitable.

Guv, wife get vaccinated, ask people to follow suit

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan and First Lady Suprava Harichandan on Tuesday received the first dose of Covid-19 vaccine at the New Government Hospital in Gunadala, Vijayawada.

Speaking after taking the vaccine, the Governor stated he did not feel any inconvenience. He urged every eligible person to come forward and take the Covid-19 vaccine as it was safe and helps in curtailing the spread of Covid-19.

Harichandan said that he and the First Lady were administered 'Covaxin', which is fully developed and manufactured in India.



"Indian scientists have demonstrated to the world the country's capability in the field of vaccine research and development," the

ing lives of countless people.

Doctors informed the Governor and First Lady that the second dose of the vaccine would be administered to them after March 30.

Jhansi, nurse of the New Government Hospital administered the vaccine to the Governor and the First Lady under the supervision of Hospital Superintendent Dr K Shiva Shankar.

Mukesh Kumar Meena, Secretary to Governor, Krishna District Collector A Md Imtiaz, Dr Shyam Prasad, Vice-Chancellor of Dr NTR Health University, District Medical and Health Officer, Joint Director (Immunisation), Dr Rajesh and Dr Fatima, personal doctors of the Governor were present.

HC reserves orders on volunteers' role

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court on Tuesday reserved orders on a Lunch Motion petition filed by the government challenging the directions of State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar against the involvement of village and ward volunteers in Urban Local Body elections.

Arguments concluded on Tuesday, during which, counsel for the SEC told the court that there was no problem with distribution of pensions by the volunteers.

He said that the SEC had taken action following complaints from political parties that the volunteers were getting directly in touch with the beneficiaries and threatening them. Counsel pointed out that nearly 600 such complaints were received.

Counsel told the court that

Covid-19 made...

Continued from Page 1

With this, Ambani remains the wealthiest Indian for the 13th year in a row.

Others in this list include HCL founder Shiv Nadar, Serum Institute of India's Cyrus Poonawalla, Biocon chairman and managing director Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, among others.

Since 2009, the net worth of India's billionaires surged 90% as on July 31, 2020 - to rank sixth in the world, after the US, China, Germany, Russia and France, respectively.

The wealth of India's billionaires grew only faster than their Russian counterparts - whose wealth surged 80% since 2009 to \$467.6 billion - among the top 10 countries, the UBS-PwC report showed.

As India heads for its worst recession, it is ironic how "fewer billionaires saw their wealth erode this year than they did in last year", Forbes said in its report. Therefore, it is also important to note that India's richest 1% of the pop-

ulation holds 42.5% of national wealth, while the bottom 50% - the majority of the population, owns a mere 2.8%, showed an Oxfam report.

India's top 10% of the population holds 74.3% of the total national wealth, while the bottom 90% holds 25.7% of national wealth, the report said.

"Ambani's companies (particularly the telecom giant Jio) have prospered, and his personal wealth has increased substantially," Jayati Ghosh, chair of the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, told a daily.

The Hurun India list named the richest individuals in India having a wealth of Rs 1,000 crore or more as on August 31, 2020. The names included Ambani, Hinduja brothers (SP Hinduja, along with his three brothers) with a joint wealth of Rs 1.43 lakh crore, HCL founder Shiv Nadar with a wealth of Rs 1.41 lakh crore, among the 828 rich Indians.

AP clocks 106 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh logged 106 new Covid-19 cases in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Tuesday, pushing the infection count to 8,90,080.

A government bulletin said 57 patients recovered during the period, taking the cumulative recoveries to 8,82,137. No fresh deaths were reported and the toll remained at 7,169.

Over 35,800 tests were conducted. The number of active cases stood at 774, the bulletin said.

After 1.40 crore samples were tested, at the rate of 2.62 lakh per million population, the overall infection positivity rate in the state touched 6.35 per cent.

In 24 hours, Chittoor district added 33 fresh cases, East Godavari 11 and Anantapur 10. The remaining 10 districts reported less than 10 new cases each.

‘Blue Economy’...

Continued from Page 1

Jagan said that he believed that the importance of "Blue Economy" in a nation's growth story extends much beyond the maritime trade and the Export-Import statistics. "The true value of "Blue Economy" is unlocked only when all the allied sectors which are directly and indirectly dependent on the ocean such as aquaculture, maritime and coastal tourism, chemical and bio-technological exploration, ship building and other port led industries also mature enough to provide sustainable employment and growth opportunities," the Chief Minister said.

"The draft of the first-ever National Fishing Policy released by Government of India in September 2020 is an example of several such solid steps taken in that direction. Drawing inspiration from the Prime Minister's focussed agenda to take India's maritime economy to the next level, the Andhra Pradesh Government has taken up a lot of transformative steps to leverage its coastal line of 974

AP is ranked No 1 in the country in EoDB rankings-2020, and one of the factors that contributed to this is the Govt's efforts in developing port infrastructure

AP building Greenfield ports...

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"The State Government, with the support of Centre, while promoting skillling by establishing an aqua university, has also undertaken the development of eight fishing harbours, establishment of testing labs and cold chain facilities to provide better ecosystem for aquaculture thereby increasing the share of aqua-related cargo from the ports. All such well-calibrated interventions are designed to promote port-based industries and develop new economic cities driven by the ports all along the coastline of Andhra Pradesh," the Chief Minister said.

Andhra Pradesh has one major port in Visakhapatnam, five functional state ports and 10 other notified state ports with world class facilities that handle more than 170 million tonnes of cargo per annum, second only to Gujarat.

"Andhra Pradesh shares 4 percent of the total Indian exports and aims to increase this to 10 percent by 2030," the Chief Minister said.

Make state-run hospitals...

Continued from Page 1

Additionally, the Chief Minister emphasised on proper sanitation and a clean environment in hospitals, right from changing bed sheets to the food being provided. He told the authorities to prepare SOPs on action to be taken and procedures to be followed for maintaining proper sanitation in hospitals.

Similarly, in regard to the hospital infrastructure and staff, the Chief Minister instructed the officials to recruit the staff needed and maintain the equipment in a proper way. Also, every hospital should have the best management arrangements with an effective mechanism that manages each hospital.

The Chief Minister asked the authorities to bring in experienced professionals in hospital management and said hospital administration and medical services are two different things. He added that this should be implemented from

pleted by September.

The Chief Minister also reviewed works related to construction of medical colleges and multi-specialty hospitals and new medical colleges including at Paderu, Pulivendula, Piduguralla and Machilipatnam, and multi-specialty hospitals in tribal areas, etc. The Chief Minister directed the officials to complete the land acquisition and payment for construction of medical colleges and hospitals by March end.

The officials said the tender process for construction of new medical colleges would be completed by May 15 and the tender process for the development works in existing medical colleges would be completed by April end.

Reviewing Covid-19, the officials briefed the Chief Minister on the prevailing situation across the state. The officials said a total of 9,625 beds are still available in 69 hospitals and they are on high alert.

Molestor shoots dead victim's...

Continued from Page 1

Out of them, Lalit has been arrested while the main accused Gaurav is absconding.

In the FIR, it was alleged that the girl was there in her family potato field with her father Ambrish when Gaurav came in a white car with his accomplice and asked Ambrish to take back the case lodged against him.

"Before my father could say anything, he opened fire on him. We rushed him to the hospital, where he died," the girl said in the FIR.

The victim had lodged a case of molestation of his daughter two and a half years ago against Gaurav, who was jailed. Gaurav, then, came out on bail after a month and he had animosity with Ambrish since then, the SP added.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has ordered strict action to be taken against the accused.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ 45, 930 (10 gm)	
₹ 650	
SILVER	
₹ 72, 000 (1kg)	
₹ 500	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
Dressed/With Skin	₹173
Without Skin	₹196
Broiler at Farm	₹119
EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	395
HYDERABAD	393
VISAKHAPATNAM	505
RETAIL PRICE	₹3. 95

Manmohan blames...

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He also criticised the central government for not holding regular consultations with the states.

Inaugurating a development summit virtually organised by the Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Development Studies, an economic think tank aligned to the Congress ideology, Singh said temporary measures by the central government and the RBI to paper over the credit problem cannot blind us to the looming credit crisis ahead that could affect the small and medium sector.

"Unemployment is high and the informal sector is in shambles, a crisis precipitated by the ill considered demonetisation decision taken in 2016", he

said at "Pratheeksha 2030."

The summit was organised to launch a Vision Document, a framework of ideas for development of Kerala well in advance of the state elections.

He observed that in many states, public finances were in disarray with states having to resort to excessive borrowing, which creates an intolerable burden on future budgets.

"Federalism and regular consultation with states, which was the cornerstone of India's economic and political philosophy as enshrined in the Constitution, no longer finds favour with the present Central government," he said.

Singh said while Kerala's social standards are high, there are other sectors that need strong attention in the future.

Centre allows all private...

Continued from Page 1

At an official review meeting with the states, the Centre reiterated there is no shortage of the vaccines and hence, adequate vaccine doses should be allocated to the Covid Vaccination Centres (CVCs).

"The Central government has adequate stock and will provide the required vaccine doses to the states and UTs," it said.

The Centre urged the states and the UTs to ensure adequate allocation of Covid-19 vaccines to all hospitals, government as well as private, for the entire duration for which vaccination sessions have been planned.

It asked them to utilise the optimum capacity of all private hospitals empanelled under

the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the Central Government Health Scheme and the state health insurance schemes to enable them to effectively function as CVCs.

The states and UTs were asked to regularly collaborate with the private hospitals to ensure that their optimum capacity for vaccination is utilised.

"Private hospitals not empanelled under the above-mentioned three categories have also been permitted to operate as CVCs if they have adequate number of vaccinators, adequate space for Observation of the vaccinated, adequate cold chain arrangement and adequate arrangement for management of

Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI)," the statement said.

In addition to all the government health facilities, all private hospitals empanelled under the CGHS, the AB-PMJAY and the state health insurance schemes can function as CVCs, subject to them mandatorily adhering to certain norms, the statement said.

All private vaccination centres should have effective crowd management protocols in place, along with facilities for seating, water, proper signage etc. They should also ensure adherence to Covid-appropriate behaviour among the beneficiaries. The state and district administrations would proactively facilitate this, the health ministry said.

Mudragada in court for Tuni...

Continued from Page 1

online.

The three accused who did not depose before the court were Tuni MLA D Raja, GV Sudhakar Naidu and Mudragada Kumar. The court asked the three who missed the hearing to attend



A few of the accused who spoke to the media after the hearing said that there were ten Kapu leaders while the remaining 31 were innocent and not associated with the incident.

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH
PANCHAYAT RAJ ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

e-procurement Tender Notice

MT No.115/16/2020-21

From the office of Panchayat Raj Engineering Department, tenders are invited by the e-procurement platform. Tender dated: 22.02.2021, works/2020-21, R&R 2019-20 grants from the registered contractors for 50 works comes under Jammalamadugu Panchayat Raj Division, YSAR Kadapa district. Estimated value Rs.1231.00 Lakhs, MT No. 115/16/2020-21. Last day for opening tenders 15.03.2021, 3.00PM. Opening of Technical Bid 16.03.2021, 4.00PM. Opening of Financial Bid 17.03.2021, 4.00PM. For further information login to e-procurement market place www.Procurement.gov.in or visit Executive Engineer, Panchayat Raj Division, jammalamadugu on all working days. Office phone number 8333908225, 9441794263. Email id: <esp@ndr@gmail.com>

Executive Engineer Panchayat Raj Division, Jammalamadugu

DPRA R.O. No. -3275-GUAD/17/VI/2020-21

TDP to reduce property tax by 50% if it wins municipal polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP senior leader Yanamala Ramakrishnudu on Tuesday reassured that the TDP would reduce the property and water taxes in urban areas by 50 per cent if voted to power in the ensuing elections to civic bodies. The party has already announced reducing property tax by 50 per cent in its manifesto.

In a statement, he said that the YSRCP government hiked property and water taxes imposing a heavy financial burden on the common man.

The Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy government through the GO 198 issued by the Municipal Administration and Urban Development (MA&UD) department changed the system of property tax assessment from Annual Rental Value (ARV) to Capital Value (CV), he added. "It implies that the government is imposing taxes based on the market value of the properties," alleged the TDP leader.

It is pertinent to mention that the capital value of the buildings will be increased based on the discretion of the Stamps and Registration Department because of which there is hike in the taxes annu-



Naidu to campaign in five districts for civic polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu will campaign for five days in support of TDP nominees in Kurnool, Chittoor, Visakhapatnam, Krishna and Guntur districts, according to his tour schedule prepared by TDP

leaders. Encouraged by the electoral success of TDP in the recent panchayat elections, the TDP wants to win more seats in the forthcoming municipal polls too. Naidu is reported to have taken municipal polls as a matter of prestige since the by-election to Tirupati LS constituency is around the corner.

ally. Compared to the old structure, there would be a 10 to 15 per cent increase in the property tax with the revised tax structure, he explained.

The TDP leader further said the water tariff was suggested to be between Rs 100 and Rs 350 per month for households (domestic), while for bulk, commercial and industrial users, it should be between Rs 40 and Rs 140 per kilolitre.

It is an additional burden on the consumers imposed by the Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy. The TDP announced in its manifesto that drinking water will be provided to the urban voters free of cost. Under the current government rule, the people are paying more money for the water supply, he alleged.

Ramakrishnudu recalled that in September 2020, the state government introduced 'Road Development Cess' for developing the roads in the state. A total of Rs 5 will be levied on the purchase of one litre of petrol and diesel.

"This move dealt a big blow to the vehicle owners who are currently facing problems due to hike in fuel prices. The commuters facing problems as the roads in urban areas are not in a good condition," he said.

Police yet to get clues on girl found unconscious

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Vizianagaram cops are yet to get any clue in the incident wherein a 20-year-old-girl student was found unconscious with her limbs tied on the outskirts of Gurla in Vizianagaram district on Monday. The police said that they were still investigating the incident to ascertain whether it was a case of kidnap or not. The police said they have nabbed one person in connection with the incident. However, the victim girl is yet to reveal what has happened exactly on that day.

The victim is pursuing third-year in a degree college in Vizianagaram town.

The girl is a native of Terlam mandal in the district and had been staying in a hostel. She often visits her home. The girl might have taken permission from the hostel on Saturday to visit home for the weekend and left the hostel on Sunday. However, the girl is yet to recall the events that took place since then.

The police said that there were no superficial signs of any disturbance on her clothes, however, the police are waiting for medical reports to ascertain if the girl had been abused.

Drunk driving: Four die as car rams truck from rear

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Drunk driving has led to the death of four persons, including two women, at Yerramanchi village of Penugonda Mandal in Ananthapur district in the early hours of Tuesday. The incident happened when the car in which they were travelling rammed into a truck from behind on National Highway (NH-44) in front of Kia Motors India Ltd factory at Yerramanchi village.

The deceased were identified as Rekha, 21, from North Delhi, Manoj Mittal, 38, from North Bangalore, Anchal Singh, 21, and Mahaboob Alam, 31, both from Bangalore.

According to the Penukonda Inspector Srihari, they were travelling



to Hyderabad from Yashwanthpur in Bengaluru. The police recovered a few liquor bottles from the car indicating that the deceased were drunk.

He said: "The driver of the car was found with a liquor bottle in his hand giving suspicion that the accident might have occurred due to

drunk driving. However, details would be known only after post-mortem."

He said that the victims were travelling in Hyundai Santro car at a high speed.

"The truck in front of their car suddenly slowed down at a speed-breaker in front of the Kia Motors factory. The driver of the car might have lost control and rammed into the truck from behind. On receiving information from the locals, the police rushed to the spot to rescue the victims. They removed the car from the wheels of the truck using a crane and restored the traffic."

The bodies were shifted to the government hospital at Penukonda for post-mortem. Police registered a case and an investigation is on.

YSRCP, TDP spreading falsehood, claims GVL

BJP MP seeks vote for the BJP-Jana Sena candidates in civic polls

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSRCP and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) are pitting the people of Andhra Pradesh against the Centre in a bid to create a void only for their political gain, alleged BJP MP GVL Narasimha Rao.

Speaking to the media here on Tuesday, he said that the BJP-led Union government has sanctioned various development works since the last six years, but there has been a wrong notion among the public due to the lies spread by the regional political parties.

BJP leaders released a book that contains the development works taken up by the Union government in Visakhapatnam



Jana Sena front in the coming municipal elections. People should compare the YSRCP, TDP candidates with the BJP candidates before casting their votes. Please elect people who have really developed their localities," he said.

He said that among the 28 states, Narendra Modi-led BJP Government has sanctioned more to Andhra Pradesh than any other state. But still, the regional parties are not communicating about it properly to the people, he added.

BJP MLC PVN Madhav said that the roads, streetlights, beautification of Vizag city, everything was taken up under Smart City initiative introduced by the BJP government.

Use water judiciously to tide over scarcity, Collector tells people

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

East Godavari Collector D Muralidhara Reddy has advised the people to make judicious use of available water both for drinking and irrigation needs keeping in view the closure of Godavari canals from this month end owing to Polavaram project coffer dam works.

He was reviewing the water supply situation with the officials of irrigation, rural water supply, agriculture departments along with the city corporation commissioner Swapnil Dinakar Pundkar at a meeting held at the collectorate here on Tuesday.

Addressing the meeting, he said that efforts were being made to ensure that entire Rabi ayacut get water for irrigation besides meeting the drinking water requirement.

Stating that during the Rabi season paddy was being cultivated in an area of 1,61,632 hectares and already areas under pressure for water for irrigation were identified, he said water was being pumped out from drains into canals using oil engines extending assistance to the farmers by way of supplying oil required for engines.

He advised the farmers to utilise the oil engines facility contacting the village agriculture assistants.

Currently, 24 agencies in eastern delta and eight agencies in central delta are working for supplying oil. Some more also would be available soon, he added.

The farmers should be advised to go for cultivation of ID varieties of paddy that gives more yield with little water, he added.

JC inspects facilities at welfare residential school

PNS ■ KAKINADA

East Godavari Joint Collector welfare wing G Rajakumari on Tuesday visited the social welfare residential school in Pithapuram town and interacted with the students and officials on the available facilities.

She enquired whether the stipulated menu is being followed and students were served nutritious food in hygienic conditions. In order to have a personal check up, she sat along with the students and had lunch taking everyone by surprise. She advised the officials to strictly adhere to the prescribed menu.

School principal and other revenue officials also had their

lunch along with the Joint Collector. Earlier, the Joint Collector visited the three secretariats in Vetlapalem village of Samalkot Mandal and inspected the registers.

She made certain suggestions to the staff on observing the pendency in implementation of schemes such as YSR Bhima, Aasaraa and Cheyutha. Later, she attended the awareness programme to the beneficiaries of goats, sheep, cow and buffalo units.

Pointing out that as against 253 units sanctioned only 60 units were grounded so far, she asked the bank manager to expedite the grounding of the remaining units by early sanctioning of loans.

Archer Jyothi Surekha sets new record, selected for WC tourney

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Arjuna Awardee from Vijayawada Vennam Jyothi Surekha representing Petroleum Sports Promotion Board has been selected for Indian team in compound women's category for the World Cup which is scheduled to commence from April. The senior World Cup Stage 1 will be held from April 19 to 25 in Guatemala.

The Archery Association of India has been conducting the selection trials at SAL, Sonepat, Haryana, for the last three days.

Surekha set a new national record in the ranking round by scoring 710/720 by breaking her own national record of 709/720 which she set last year.



Jyothi Surekha secured the first rank in the ranking round by scoring total points of 2808/2880. She won all the

seven matches in round-robin round held for the top eight archers and got selected in the first place.

INDIAN MARITIME SUMMIT

Spl session on investment opportunities in AP today

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh may draw major investments during the Indian Maritime Summit as a special session for 'Investment opportunities in AP' will be conducted on March 3.

Andhra Pradesh Maritime Board has already signed MoU with the Visakhapatnam Port Trust worth Rs 28,388 crore. Shrimp processing plant, LPG Gas bottling unit, pharma hub, LNG terminal, Phase 3, multi-purpose deep water commercial port, chemical tank farm are some of the major industries that will flourish in AP if the MoUs are grounded.

VPT has already allotted lands to HPCL and AM/NS India for expansion of their projects. Themes such as development of port infrastructure, shipbuilding, recy-

AP Maritime Board has already signed MoU with the VPT worth Rs 28,388 crore. Shrimp processing units, LPG Gas bottling unit, pharma hub, LNG terminal, multi-purpose deep water commercial port, chemical tank farm are some of the major industries that will flourish in AP if the MoUs are grounded.

cling and repair, hinterland connectivity, multimodal logistics, coastal shipping, inland water transport, bulk cargo transportation, port-led industrialisation will be discussed at the summit.

About 45 MoUs with an estimated investment of Rs 45,000 crore in the port-led industries are likely to be signed at the summit.

VPT staff, stakeholders take

part in virtual meet K. Rama Mohana Rao, Chairman, VPT, Durgesh Kumar Dubey, Deputy Chairman, HoDs of VPT participated in the Summit virtually. A giant screen was arranged in the Sambamurthy Auditorium of VPT for the employees/officers, stevedores, PPP operators and other port users to witness and participate in the ongoing Summit.

AP Chambers wants Integrated Mega Textile Park in state

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation on Tuesday urged the Union Government to set up an Integrated Mega Textile Park in Andhra Pradesh.

Referring to the Union Government's announcement on setting up seven mega textile parks in the country in the Union Budget 2021-22, the AP Chambers said that AP ranked seventh in terms of cotton production in India and sought the Union Government to set up a mega

textile park in the State.

AP Chambers' president KVS Prakash Rao and general secretary P Bhaskara Rao said that AP Chambers submitted a representation to the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman requesting the Centre to allot an Integrated Mega Textile Park for Andhra Pradesh.

They recalled that the Finance Minister announced that the Central Government would set up seven Integrated Mega Textile Parks in the country and hence AP Chambers requested the Central government to set



up one such park in AP.

The leaders highlighted the advantages the State offers being one of the top 10 cotton producers in India, the presence of a large number of

AP Chambers highlights the advantages the State offers being one of the top 10 cotton producers in India, presence of a large number of spinning mills and availability skilled manpower.

spinning mills, availability of raw material and skilled manpower.

As per current estimates, there are about 150 spinning mills in the state with a capac-

ity of approximately 4 million spindles producing 2 million kg of cotton yarn per day.

They explained that further, there are about 18,000 power looms of which about 9,000 are shuttle looms and 1,300 high-speed air jet looms.

They further explained that the state has well-developed ginning and spinning segments in the textile industry and is one of the leading producers of cotton in the country.

The leaders said that West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam and Chittoor dis-

tricts of Andhra Pradesh have many textile-based industries such as modern textile weaving, cloth weaving, hosiery and spinning mills.

They said that as most of the yarn produced in the state is being exported due to the lack of value-addition, there is a need to set up an Integrated Mega Textile Park in the State in order to convert the major portion of the yarn produced in the state into fabric and garments within the state and to promote the state as a destination for global textile majors.

SHORT TAKES

Two officials suspended for dereliction of duties

VIJAYAWADA: Two officials were suspended in Guntur district for dereliction of election duties on Tuesday. Guntur district collector and district election officer Vivek Yadav issued suspension orders against panchayat raj assistant engineer K Rama Mohan Singh and village revenue officer J Venkateswarlu. Rama Mohan Singh was appointed as zonal officer for Vatticherukuru Mandal during gram panchayat elections but he showed negligence to inform about the law and order conditions to the higher officials during the election on February 21. The Vatticherukuru Mandal Tahsildar submitted a report hence suspension order was issued against Singh. In the second incident, J Venkateswarlu was appointed as Mutluru village route officer of Vatticherukuru Mandal but he failed to convey the law and order conditions to the higher officials. He was suspended on the basis of Tahsildar's report.

Tenant beats house owner to death in Palakollu

ELURU: In a shocking incident, a tenant killed his house owner by crushing his head with a boulder in Palakollu town of West Godavari district on Tuesday. The deceased was identified as Vanga Prasad, 50. According to police, Prasad asked his tenant to pay the rent which led to a heated altercation between them. In a fit of rage, the accused China Kondaiah attacked him and crushed his head with a boulder due to which, Prasad died on the spot. The accused surrendered himself before the police. Police shifted the body to the government hospital for post-mortem. Police registered a case and an investigation is on.

Buddha Venkanna dares Jagan to dissolve Assembly

VIJAYAWADA: TDP state general secretary and MLC Buddha Venkanna on Tuesday dared the Chief Minister, YS Jaganmohan Reddy, to call for out of turn elections to the state assembly duly dissolving it if he really enjoyed public support. He offered to close down the TDP in case TDP fared miserably in the out of turn elections and dared the YSRCP to do vice-versa. Addressing the media here, he said that Naidu would not backtrack on fighting against evil forces. He termed police obstructing Naidu at Renigunta airport an act of cowardice and felt that Jaganmohan Reddy was afraid of Naidu becoming CM again.

Smile NGO to back free cleft lip and palate surgeries

VIJAYAWADA: NGO Smile Train India, announced its partnership with Siddhartha Academy of General and Technical Education, Vijayawada, to support free cleft lip and palate surgeries in Vijayawada. Free cleft treatment will be available to patients throughout the year at the new cleft centre at Drs Sudha & Nageswara Rao Siddhartha Institute of Dental Sciences. The cleft surgeries will be performed by renowned maxillofacial surgeon Dr G Srikanth. Talking about the partnership, Leela Imam, Program Manager, Smile Train India, said: "A cleft is one of the most common birth differences and its consequences are huge. There are millions of children born with cleft lip and palate around the world who need help but do not receive timely care due to monetary constraints and lack of awareness about its treatment. Our sustainable health care model has empowered 300+ medical professionals and 150+ hospitals across India with funding, training and resources to provide 100 per cent free cleft treatment in their communities. We are very happy to partner with Drs Sudha & Nageswara Rao Siddhartha Institute of Dental Sciences in Vijayawada to help children with clefts and create a long-lasting impact in cleft care."

Fire breaks out in Nallamala

PNS ■ NAGAR KURNOOL

In what is believed to be yet another made-made tragedy, a major fire broke out in the Nallamalla forest during the early hours of Tuesday, with thick smoke blanketing the Nallamala Tiger Reserve and contiguous areas. Thick flames, which had spread to about 10 km in the range, swept through the forest areas from the Octopus viewpoint on the Srisailem-Hyderabad National Highway to the Neelam Rock Point in Amrabad Tiger Reserve Forest.

According to residents in nearby areas, tongues of the flames were first noticed in the early hours; and within no time, they transformed into blazes. Forest officials tried hard to douse the raging fire, but in vain.

Representatives of the local Chenchu tribe decried that the government had failed to protect the forests, though crores of rupees had supposedly been earmarked for protection and upkeep of reserve forests. From February till date, four fire incidents had occurred in the forest, they pointed out.



Due to these frequent fires, a large number of wild animals, birds, medicinal plants, herbs were also perishing, harming the entire ecosystem. Along with this loss, people residing in that area -- Chenchus -- were also losing their huts, household goods, provisions, livestock and almost everything due to the negligence of the government in preventing forest fires.

According to the Chenchus, the main cause of fires in the forest area was the insensitive behavior of tourists and pilgrims, who tend to dump all kinds of waste, including unquenched cigarette butts everywhere. Hence, fires broke out often in the forests, they said. Because of the acts of fellow human beings and natural disasters, Chenchus were living constantly in a state of terror, they stated.

Asaduddin rules out BJP calling shots in Old City

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

MIM president Asaduddin Owaisi has created a sensation by stating that the BJP will not be able to gain a foothold in the Old City as long as the MIM is in politics. Making the sensational statement at the MIM Foundation Day celebrations here on Tuesday, he dared the BJP to conduct surgical strikes in the state where the BJP is in power. He was referring to the BJP leaders remarks of making surgical strikes in the Old City provided it wins the GHMC polls.

He pointed out that the people have been suffering for want of basic amenities in places like Ahmedabad and Uttar Pradesh. To defeat the MIM in the GHMC polls, the whole BJP team, including the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, was deployed in the Old City, he said and added that the MIM is an undisputed political outfit in the Old City whoever is the challenger. The BJP would not be able to call the shots in the Old City, he said adding that he is not the one to be cowed down by BJP threats.

Uttam accuses TRS govt of neglecting Old City

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President and MP N Uttam Kumar Reddy has accused the TRS government in the State and BJP government at the Centre of neglecting Hyderabad, especially the Old City, during the past seven years.

"Chief Minister K Chandrababhan Naidu never visited the Old City in the last seven years. He did not hold a single review meeting since 2014 to understand, or resolve the problems being faced by the residents of Old City though he had promised to develop this region as the next Istanbul. Graduates from the Old City have no job opportunities and they often face discrimination at their places of works due to their area of residence," he said.

He was addressing a series of meetings in the Old City on Tuesday as part of a campaign for the MLC candidate G Chinna Reddy of Hyderabad-



Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President and MP N Uttam Kumar Reddy addressing party workers in the Old City of Hyderabad on Tuesday

Rangareddy-Mahabubnagar Graduates constituency. The TPCC chief, along with Congress candidate Chinna Reddy and other leaders, performed puja at Mahankali temple in Lal Darwaza. Later, he addressed a meeting with Congress cadre of Charminar, Chandrayangutta, Bahadurpura and Yakutpura constituencies near Charminar. They also had a meeting with the leaders of the Shia community.

Uttam Kumar Reddy, Chinna Reddy and other leaders visited Dargah Yousufaini at

Nampally. Later, they also addressed a meeting at Musheerabad constituency. The TPCC chief alleged that the TRS government behaved as if the Old City of Hyderabad did not exist in the state. He said not a single new project was launched in the Old City in 2014. Furthermore, he said the projects like Charminar pedestrianisation and Musi river rejuvenation remained incomplete due to paucity of funds and lethargy.

He condemned the TRS government for not bringing the

The Old City has a huge potential for tourism. But no efforts were made to improve roads and other facilities, said TPCC President N Uttam Kumar Reddy

Metro Rail to the Old City. He said the Hyderabad Metro Rail, the biggest metro rail in the country, was started by the previous Congress government and it had a clear plan to connect the Old City with Metro Rail services.

However, he alleged that the TRS and MIM parties have altered the routes and did not allow the Metro Rail in the Old City. Consequently, he said that the people of the Old City were forced to spend huge time and money on transportation.



Strange bird spotted at Tripuranthakam Swamy temple

PNS ■ ONGOLE

A strange bird was spotted on the premises of Sri Tripuranthakeshwara Swamy temple, a famous shrine in Tripuranthakam village in Prakasam district on Tuesday.

A bird was spotted while the temple employees were cleaning the temple. The shape of this bird is strange to look at.

The bird was identified as a 'milk bird'. Vishwansharma, the chief priest of the temple, explained that it appeared in the temple ahead of Mahashivaratri every year.

‘Encourage ryots to raise crops in demand’

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

Minister for Welfare Koppula Eswar has called upon Rythu Vedikas to work in the direction of getting the MSP for farmers by coordination with the agriculture department officials on crops in demand and encouraging the farmers to raise only those crops.

He was addressing a gathering after inaugurating Rythu Vedikas at Mallapur, Katikenapalli, Botlavanaparti and Dongaturti villages of Dharmaram mandal of the district on Tuesday. He appealed to the farmers to make good use of the Rythu Vedikas built for them. Earlier, District Collector Satyanarayana welcomed the minister. In all, 2,601 Rythu Vedikas have been built in the state spending Rs 600 crore. This is unique in Telangana.

The total area under paddy in the state is put at 1.30 crore acres as against 30 lakh acres in 2014. Even at the height of Covid-19, the government did not impose cut in the Rythu Bandhu scheme and deposited Rs 15,000 crore in the bank accounts of farmers.

The TRS government has been procuring paddy from

farmers for the past six years, while the Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh states would not procure paddy from farmers. He accused the Centre of creating confusion among the farmers with its new agrarian laws. The TRS has been executing irrigation projects at a fast pace and quoted the example of the Kaleswaram project. He assured the gathering to provide a lift irrigation facility on Mallapur tank. He said the CM released Rs 19 crore to execute an irrigation canal fulfilling the long-cherished dream of the people of Pratiapaka and Bommarreddypalli regions. He spoke about the government building faring yards and other government schemes like Shaadi Mubarak, Kalyana Lakshmi, Aasara pensions, Rytu Bandhu, Rytu Beema and other schemes.

He predicted that the state would emerge as a fish hub in the future with plenty of availability of water in the state. Additional Collector (local bodies) Kumar Deepak, Peddapalli RDO Sankar Kumar, agriculture officer Tirumal Prasad, Tahsildar Sampath and others were present.

S Kumar is national secy of BJP SC Morcha

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

Senior member of BJP state unit Sogala Kumar has been appointed as the national secretary of the BJP SC Morcha by national president Lal Singh Arya on Tuesday.

A journalist-turned-politician from the Godavari region, Kumar joined the BJP two decades ago and worked as a member of the State Executive Committee and official spokesperson of the state unit.

He represented the BJP at the Dharmapuri Assembly segment during the 2009 Assembly elections and in the 2019 general elections, he contested in the Peddapalli Parliament constituency.

Born to a coal miner, Kumar started his career as a reporter from the coal belt region. He crusaded for the cause of those who had been ousted from their lands by the Singareni Collieries and the NTPC Ramagundam.

He won the KK Birla Award for journalism for his portrayal of the people in the coal belt region and the problems they faced. He played a crucial role during the movement demanding the statehood for Telangana and strengthened the BJP's presence in the coal belt region. Known to be a tough fighter for the protection of the miners' rights and the revival of the Singareni Collieries, He remains in the forefront in the protection of Dalits' rights in the coal belt region and other parts of Karimnagar district.



MUDRA LOANS REVAMP

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

B Vinod Kumar, former MP and State Planning Board chairman in a letter addressed to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman, said, "The Pradhana Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) was started with an ambition of providing self-employment to poor small businessmen and unemployed.

To serve the very purpose of providing security free loan to the eligible poor and needy in Telangana State and to fulfil the shortage of sanctioning PMMY loans when compared to the national average, it is requested that Finance Minister may kindly instruct banks in the State to achieve the revised target of sanctioning of 28 lakh PMMY loans in a time-bound manner."

Petty traders like vegetable vendors, fruit vendors, small

Govt striving for development of temples, says Harish Rao

PNS ■ ZAHEERABAD

The government was striving for the development of temples across the state, said Minister for Finance T Harish Rao.

He visited Siddivinayaka temple at Renjithal in Zaheerabad constituency on the occasion of Angaraka Chaturthi dedicated to Lord Ganesh on Tuesday. Priests accorded him a warm welcome with 'Purnakumbam' upon his arrival at the temple.

On the occasion, he performed pujas and abhishekham and offered prayers to the God and stated that the grant of Rs 2 crore, which was announced by the government for the development of the temple earlier, will be released in the budget session.

The Mission Bhagiratha water will be supplied to all the tem-



Minister for Finance T Harish Rao offers prayers at Siddivinayaka temple in Renjithal of Zaheerabad constituency on the occasion of Angaraka Chaturthi on Tuesday

ples across the state, including this temple, he said. "We are striving for the development of all temples by utilising the funds, but earlier in the united Andhra Pradesh, the government had diverted all the temple funds for other purposes", he alleged.

"I offered prayers to the Lord for the well-being of Telangana people," he said. Zaheerabad MP BB Patil, Zilla Parishad chairperson Majularsi Jaipal reddy, MLA K Manik Rao and others were present.



Urban Park is getting ready in forest, which is 10 km from Siricilla town

COPING WITH COVID

IIT rolls out precautionary measures in handling pandemic

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Even as engineering colleges across the country await a governmental nod for resuming normality in academic sessions, International Institute of Information Technology (IIT) is quietly rolling out a slew of measures as part of a pilot project that will help other technical institutes reopen their campuses with a Covid-19 readiness plan in hand.

When the institute provided researchers the option of coming back to campus, protocols related to handling the pandemic were swiftly put in place. Undergraduate students, who demonstrated an inability to cope with online academic rigour for a variety of reasons, were also welcomed back.

"It is important to realise that this is the new normal. From what we've been hearing internationally with regards to various variants of the virus cropping up all over the world, the worst-case scenario is that it will continue for another 1 or 2 years. So we have to learn how to get to do our normal business and be as productive as possible while maintaining medical precautions to keep our families and communities safe," said Dr Prabhakar Bhalapally, chairperson, Campus Health and Medical Committee.

"The in-campus Quarantine and Isolation Facility (QIF) is available and open even to those who are not residing on campus," says Dr Prabhakar

With the number of returning students set to nearly double over the immediate two months, the primary guideline for infection control remains unchanged. Before being allowed access to hostels and labs, all such students are mandated to quarantine themselves for a period of 14 days, at the end of which they are tested for the Coronavirus. Three building blocks are used for quarantining purposes while another block is used for isolating those Covid-19 positive individuals.

"The in-campus Quarantine and Isolation Facility (QIF) is available and open even to those who are not residing on campus," says Dr Bhalapally. The current infrastructure with bed and bath facilities can cater to 75 quarantined and 24 isolated individuals respectively. For those mildly symptomatic and

under isolation, a care package is in place under an agreement with Continental Hospitals.

It was when the initial proposal of allowing researchers to come back was mooted that a simultaneous decision was taken to allow for contact tracing of infected individuals. "At that time, in addition to a few researchers, we had house-keeping and security staff too coming in from outside. So we decided that if one of them tested positive, in order to break the transmission chain, we need to trace all those, who came in contact with the infected person," explains Dr. Bhalapally.

After a due vetting process that was kicked off by Dr. Anil Kumar Vuppala, the Ethics Committee approved the usage of the GoCoronaGo app for contact tracing. Designed and built at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, the app uses Bluetooth technology to detect other GoCoronaGo app users and creates a contact network. This way it helps identify primary, secondary and tertiary contacts of users who are later diagnosed as Covid-positive.

"Our Engineering wing along with CCMB is engaged in talks so that we can monitor the presence of Covid-19 at the campus community level," says Dr. Bhalapally.

Metro Rail to the Old City. He said the Hyderabad Metro Rail, the biggest metro rail in the country, was started by the previous Congress government and it had a clear plan to connect the Old City with Metro Rail services.

However, he alleged that the TRS and MIM parties have altered the routes and did not allow the Metro Rail in the Old City. Consequently, he said that the people of the Old City were forced to spend huge time and money on transportation.

Teach a lesson to TRS, BJP in MLC polls, says Bhatti

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CLP leader Bhatti Vikramarka appealed to the youth to teach a lesson to the BJP and TRS nominees in the Graduate MLC elections.

Addressing the media here on Tuesday, he said that the Central government has been disposing of the public assets created by the Congress. Let alone creating new jobs, these governments have been rendered employed into unemployment.

Statehood to Telangana is achieved with an aim to get jobs for locals, but the TRS is not taking steps to fill 1.92 lakh vacancies in various government departments. It also failed to create policy guidelines to provide unemployment allowance for the jobless.

The omissions and commissions of the BJP government at the Centre and the TRS government in the state have been pushing the youth into despair and exhorted them to teach a lesson to the nominees of these parties in MLC elections.

Expedite land acquisition for Singareni, Genco: Collector

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR BHUPALAPALLY

District Collector Krishna Aditya directed the revenue officials to complete the land acquisition required for the Singareni and Genco as soon as possible. On Tuesday, he held a meeting with the tahsildars of the respective zones to review the land acquisition process for Singareni and Genco at the Collectorate.

He urged officials to identify the displaced and pay compensation to them and complete the land acquisition at a brisk pace. Similarly, the land required to set up a conveyor belt to move coal from Tadicharla OCP to Genco for the Genco power company should be acquired from the lands located in Malhar Rao and Bhupalapally mandals. Revenue officials said that they are according top priority for the land acquisition.

The meeting was attended by Bhupalpally RDO Srinivas, Bhupalapally, Ghanpur and Malhar Rao mandal tahsildars Mohammad Iqbal, Madhavi, Srinivas, Singareni, Genco officials and land acquisition section officer Srikanth and others.

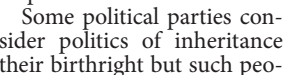


PNS ■ MALDA (WB)

Parents of the two minors have challenged fixing of a maximum compensation of Rs five lakh for the death of a child in riots while the maximum compensation for death of an adult has been fixed at Rs 10 lakh. Justice Prathiba M Singh issued notice to Delhi government and sub-divisional magistrate of Seelampur on the petition, which has also been filed on behalf of CPI (M) leader Brinda Karat, who has also been instrumental in securing scholarships for some of such victims of the North East Delhi violence.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Modi has made a successful attempt to ensure that the light of development reaches every



Prime Minister Modi has given a strong message to politicians over their ways of

To be held till April '29 amid the coronavirus pandemic, the elections are expected to witness a determined attempt by the BJP to put a strong show, including in Assam where it is already in power, as well as in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry where the saffron party has been pushing hard in recent years.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As many as 30 vaccines are at different stages of development in India. Covaxin, developed indigenously by Biotech, and



"The stories of development of vaccines are amazing examples of how time can be compressed and scientific mobilisation can be initiated. The intent to have a global footprint in the manufacturing sector when it came to COVID-19 vaccine was path-breaking and something to be proud of."

, saying the state government
BJP's IT cell and not by
Mangeshkar. On February 8,
department will conduct a probe
are pressurised recently to issue
farmers' protest. Deshmukh had
after the Congress, a ruling
an investigation into the BJP's
celebrities and whether the
ber of prominent personalities,
d rallied around the central
tags #IndiaTogether and

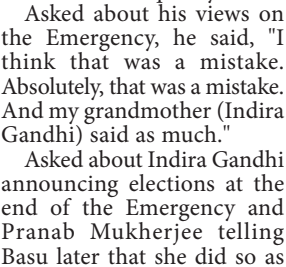
first shot on Monday. "I took the amachandra Hospital. Those who care not for others should get vaccinated," Haasan accompanied with a picture of him getting the body immediately (and) vaccination th. Get ready," he said in an apparent mbly elections. Haasan has often hit out at ruption allegations. His party will contest the

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Wagh has been at the forefront of the BJP's attack on the MVA government over the past few days, demanding the resignation of a state minister being linked to the death of a woman in Pune. Wagh (46) lodged a complaint with Cyber police station in Bandra Kurla Complex, after which an offence under IPC sections 354D, 509, 506 as well as section 67 of the IT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a conversation with Kaushik Basu, professor in the Cornell University in the US and India's former chief economic advisor, Gandhi said he is all for internal democracy in the Congress, which fought for India's independence, gave

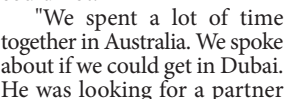


Gandhi alleged that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is doing something "fundamentally different" and filling up the institutions of the country with its people.

PNS ■ CHENNAI

"Elections are nearing. Our only aim is to prevent the DMK from coming to power. I am taking efforts for that. It is not that this party should come or not .. we are ready to include (in AMMK-led alliance) all parties opposed to the DMK and willing to accept our leadership and face the polls," he told reporters here.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Bopanna and Aisam had begun the 'Stop War, Start Tennis' campaign to spread the peace message.

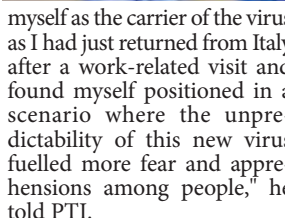
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

"Prashant has also left didi (Banerjee). Even before the poll results are announced, her biggest adviser has joined someone else. This speaks a lot," BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra told

reporters here. Kishor is working as a key strategist for the TMC with the state set to witness an eight-phase Assembly election starting March 27. He has worked for a number of anti-BJP parties in different Assembly polls over the last few years. Noting that senior BJP leaders such as Amit Shah and JP Nadda have often asserted that the saffron party will win over 200 seats in the 294-seat Bengal Assembly, Patra claimed that everyone is now accepting this and that the "so-called political adviser has also realised this".

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

"As I was the first case, initially there was lot of fear and guilt too. I would consider



"I then decided to go to RMI.

"My test report had come positive on March 1, but I was told about it by doctors the next day, March 2. Initially, the plan was to keep me in isolation there for 28 days, but then it was revised to 14 days at the isolation facility and then 14 days of home isolation, where I fully recovered," he said.

Scorcher ahead!

Climate change is real; not acknowledging it is not going to protect us from the inevitable

If the rising temperatures in the last few days of February and an unusually hot March are bothering you, it is because most of the northern, western and eastern parts of India breached the 30°C-mark nearly two to three weeks before they usually do. In fact, the country needs to brace for a hotter-than-usual summer this year as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast that day temperatures are likely to be 0.86°C higher than normal in the north, northeast, parts of east and west India between March and May. The worst impact is likely in Odisha and Chhattisgarh, where the maximum temperatures will deviate 0.86°C from their usual averages. Last week, Bhubaneswar was the first region to record 40°C anywhere in the country this year and Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh should brace for summer temperatures anywhere from 0.46°C to 0.71°C above normal. The IMD last month had said the minimum temperature recorded in the country in January was the warmest for the month in 62 years, with South India being particularly warm. It is not surprising that we experienced a shorter winter and are getting warnings of a sizzling summer ahead as, according to a Government report on current climate change impacts and future scenarios till the end of the century, India needs to control greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on a war footing. The failure to do so will mean major heat-waves, droughts, cloudbursts, floods and a more



degraded coastline, says a report by the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM).

Worryingly, India's average temperature rose by around 0.7°C during 1901–2018 and, unless urgent steps are taken to control GHG emissions between 2070 and 2099 average, the temperature will rise by approximately 4.4°C relative to the recent past (1976–2005 average). The high GHG emissions would increase the heat on Earth's surface by 8.5 watts per square metre. Called RCP8.5, this is the worst-case scenario used by climate modellers worldwide. In a medium GHG emissions scenario, called RCP4.5, the average temperature in India would rise by 2.7°C in the last 30 years of this century. Before that, during 2040-2069, India's average temperature would rise by 2°C in a medium emissions scenario, and by 2.4°C in a high emissions scenario. Despite all nations making pledges under the 2015 Paris climate agreement, current emissions are taking the world to the worst-case scenario, though other development pathways are not only available but economically more attractive in the medium and long term. So, the only option before us is to go green, else we will perish because we are already feeling the effects of a planet that has been pushed to breaking point. The most recent examples of this are the Chamoli tragedy in Uttarakhand and the "Big freeze" in Texas. It is the collective responsibility of the peoples, every business and every industry on the planet to fight climate change so that we leave a greener, cleaner world for our children and not a dying planet.

PICTALK



Mount Sinabung spews volcanic material during an eruption in Karo, North Sumatra, Indonesia, on Tuesday

The right path

Modi's plans and policies speak volumes about his intention to empower the 'real' farmers at the grassroots

Thousands of farmers in India die by suicide every year as they see no option to get out of the debt trap. The poor and marginal farmers depend upon loans for purchasing seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation and even harvesting. Most of these growers find it more convenient to borrow at heavy interest rates from moneylenders or big cultivators rather than from banks, thanks to the cumbersome paperwork and the broker-bank officials' nexus. However, these deaths, as recorded by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), fail to shake the collective conscience of society and are just another figure for most of us. Ironically, there is no outcry, no borders are sealed, no tractor rallies organised, no national monuments sieged, no violence. This is because these deaths don't affect the interests of the politically connected and powerful "arhatiya" community that drives the Agricultural Produce Marketing Community (APMC) in Punjab, Haryana and parts of Western Uttar Pradesh. This strong community is at loggerheads with the Government over three new agri laws for shielding its own interests. Prime Minister Narendra

Modi recently endorsed the provisions made for the agriculture sector in Budget 2021-22 and reiterated that the Government is working for small and medium-level farmers.

One might argue that Modi is not concerned about the farmers camping at Delhi's borders and project him as "anti-farmer" and "pro-corporate", but his plans and policies speak volumes about his intention to empower the "real" farmers at the grassroots. The Prime Minister has said that India needs to expand its agriculture sector to the global market for processed food. He also emphasised that the number of agro-industry clusters near villages should be increased so that the rural populace gets farm-related employment in the vicinity. It is indeed a plan that will likely empower the marginal and small farmers. If the Government succeeds in providing market access to these farmers (small and marginal) beyond *mandis*, it would prove to be a milestone. Further, the Government has increased the agriculture credit target to ₹16.50 lakh crore and infrastructure fund to ₹40,000 crore, besides doubling the micro-irrigation fund. All this proves that the Government is striving to bring systemic changes in the agriculture sector with the focus on empowering the "have-nots" among the farmers. We also would like to see the real farmers get empowered and not the ones with enough resources and money to camp at Delhi's borders for months and hold the Government to ransom.

The Internationale: Kumbh of protests

The agrarian issue is being politicised by media magicians but, for the farmers, it's a question of livelihood and existence

Green mango flowers are now bursting and kites dance in the sky while bright yellow, purple flowers bloom one last time and farmers in Bihar, New Delhi, welcome a silent spring. The warm air rustles the yellow plastic tents at the Ghazipur Border, flowing from AH2 to the Tikri Border, announcing a new season and the next phase of the Farmers' Revolution begins.

It's been over a month since farmer leader Rakesh Tikait's tears galvanised the farmers from Uttar Pradesh (UP) to Rajasthan and much has happened over the spring — *Basant Ritu* — since then. Lakhs of devotees have cleansed themselves taking dips in the holy Ganga from Haridwar to Prayagraj, Prime Minister Narendra Modi may have shed expiatory tears as he reassured his followers that the three farm laws are good for farmers and for business. But the farmers of the world are not convinced.

Recently, major US-based farmer groups like Agrarian Trust, National Farmers Union and 87 other organisations have started an international movement expressing solidarity with the farmers' revolution. Over 50 Canadian organisations have also extended support. They have been exerting pressure on their public representatives too to end this "injustice". Their criticism comes from having suffered due to the market-led agricultural policies since the 1960s in the US. This is no longer an "international conspiracy" or "attack on India's sovereignty" or "sedition" perpetrated by "international media celebrities like Rihanna or Greta" but a moment of true global solidarity beyond race and religion.

Foreclosures and debt have destroyed millions of US farm families. Suicides and despondency plague rural America while Big Ag grows. It's not only the older generation but young farmer leaders like Severine Fleming who have supported the farmers' revolution. All, save for the corporate media, see the invisible hand behind these



reforms — Big Ag. Modi has led the Big Ag to India's doors and sacrificed Indian farmers for agri-dollars.

India farmers are jubilant about the US support but, as the harvest season nears, some of them are now returning with the stories of their struggles and indignation to their villages to work the fields, while others farmers are on the road to Delhi's borders. In Haryana, media reports indicate, hundreds of villages have pledged to send one person from each house to join the revolution. The farmers' revolution is getting ready for the hot summer. Although the Modi Government's version occupies the media discourse, the farmers may have outwitted the Government once again.

How? With the help of the returning farmers, their unions and leaders have now expanded their base far beyond Delhi's borders. *YouTube* videos and independent vernacular citizen journalists have spread each update across the country. The tune of Farmer Revolution's Haryanavi anthem — "Modi ji hum Dilli aage" — now sways young and old farmers from Bengal to Rajasthan.

From Ganganagar to Kerala, the farmer unions have



THE FARMERS' REVOLUTION IS GETTING READY FOR THE HOT SUMMER. ALTHOUGH THE MODI GOVERNMENT'S VERSION OCCUPIES THE MEDIA DISCOURSE, THE FARMERS MAY HAVE OUTWITTED THE GOVERNMENT ONCE AGAIN

addressed millions of people in a short span of 30 days. Now that the movement has reached a mature stage, it will spread even faster. Even the Government is finding it hard to call them "a handful of farmers" as it did in early January. Now the discourse has become "crowds don't get the work done". The movement today represents not just farmers but all those who work the land — migrant workers, labourers, urban *mandi* workers and the traders. This is a united rural India resisting a corporate auction. Meanwhile, the Government has unleashed the biggest round of privatisation of public assets since Yeltsin's Russia.

No one knows why fuel prices have skyrocketed. Why taxes and cess keep increasing, squeezing the middle class, and yet arterial roads of Delhi have potholes? The fuel prices directly impact farmers' input costs and offset the MSP calculations. India is being rigged for food inflation. Indian agri produce vastly outperforms against the highly subsidised imports from countries like the US.

The agricultural bubble is soon going to burst; the collateral will be rural India and millions of lives. History

will repeat itself as from its ashes shall emerge a new class of *neo-zamindars* that shall profit from each morsel. The US is a fine example of this, where four corporations control over 80 per cent of the food and about 50 per cent of all produce is wasted!

The Modi Government needs to correct course by abandoning the laws and making a fresh start with farmers, for their movement is no longer an Indian affair or internal matter as the External Affairs Ministry is already involved in this diplomatic issue.

We as a nation should remember that India loses face in the world only because democracy dies at home. This is an agrarian issue that is being politicised by media magicians, swaying public opinion inciting more hate in society. But for the farmers, at home and abroad, it's a question of livelihood and existence. We need to stand in solidarity because it's a fight for the survival of our soul and *roti*, together.

(The author writes on agriculture and environment, and is a former Director — Policy and Outreach, National Seed Association of India. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONGRESS MUST BOUNCE BACK FAST

Sir — It is said that the BJP is afraid of losing a State and the Congress is shy of winning one. It does not matter for the BJP how big or small the State is, it just wants to form a Government there.

Though it had a minuscule presence in Puducherry, the astute power game of the BJP ensured its indirect control over the Union Territory (UT). Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and Puducherry are going to polls shortly, and the party has a stake in each State. But what about the Congress? The Congress' grip over the States is loosening each passing day.

For the Congress, the intention to go all the way and the determination to win appears to be missing. That the Congress is enjoying power in only three States is an unmistakable sign of decay and degeneration in the party. Of the three, the wind may change direction in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh anytime. So, what's the party left with? When a party is reluctant to learn even after repeated drubbings, nothing can infuse hope among the people in the party's future.

Despite top leaders saying "enough is enough", nothing has been done to revive the party. The flip-flops over Rahul Gandhi assuming the party presidency should end. Either he should assume party presidency or leave politics. Even at the cost of some leaders leaving the party, the Congress must resolve its issues soon.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

FULL SPEED AHEAD WITH INOCULATION

Sir — This refers to the editorial 'Taming the virus' (March 2). By taking the job, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a promising impetus to the pace of vaccination in the second phase. This phase of vaccination for senior citizens and those above 45 with comorbidities is expected to witness a good foothold or inoculation rate.

So far, the drive hasn't matched up to India's immense population challenge but the opening of centres at private hospitals and flexible options for registration can give it a big boost. All Chief Ministers,

Make the cyber system robust



The Maharashtra cyber department has submitted a provisional report to the State Government on the recent massive grid failure. If the massive power outage in Mumbai in October last year is the result of a Chinese cyber campaign against India, it should be a cause of concern for the Indian Government. If it is true, it means none of our establishments, including the Defence Research and Development Organisation and other institutions

related to national security, are safe from malware attacks by foreign forces.

A cyber threat is looming large on India's security and the Government needs to counter it effectively. According to unverified sources, the 100-page report confirms that a malware attack was behind the blackout and about 14 Trojan Horses and eight GB of unaccounted data was found in the system installed at the Maharashtra State Electricity Board.

An American firm has said that the Chinese could have introduced the malware. The State Government, however, did not want to confirm which country was behind the possible malware in the system as it felt there could be far-reaching international ramifications. However, it's time for the Centre and State Governments to think about and act upon it. Our Government must devise a robust system which is not to be breached by the hostile foreign nations. India must be prepared for cyber war.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Union and State Ministers and Opposition leaders must follow suit so as to encourage others for inoculation. Not only politicians but also bureaucrats and celebrities must take the job.

Since February 13, India's seven-day rolling average of daily COVID infections has shown a steady surge, signalling a fresh need to ramp up the campaign. India's vaccination strategy is closely intertwined to its economic fortunes. A GDP contraction of eight per cent in 2020-21 requires a big bounce-back in the new year. But the restrictions on interstate movement in response to February's COVID surge are symptomatic of persisting jitters.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

STOP HARASSING WOMEN FOR DOWRY

Sir — India has an alarming trend of dowry deaths, harassment and domestic violence, and yet society is indifferent towards it. It was heart-wrenching to watch a video on the social media in which a girl in Gujarat

committed suicide. She recorded a video message and then jumped into a river. She was allegedly facing harassment from her husband since their marriage in 2018.

A case of abetment to suicide has been lodged against the husband. Her story is similar to the plight of lakhs of women who face harassment on a daily basis either in office spaces or inside their homes.

Despite several NGOs championing the cause of women rights, strict laws for crime against women, special courts and women-only branches in police, nothing seems to have changed on the ground. Women are still vulnerable and are subjected to various sorts of atrocities by their relatives. Even the religious organisations, which keep crying foul over one or the other issue, keep silent over women's issues until it is related to religious tenets.

Asim Sohail | Bihar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

The Budget that the Madhya Pradesh Government presented today is a pack of lies. It is directionless, hopeless and just a maze of data.

Congress leader

— Kamal Nath

I think it's time to make efforts to adopt a new Constitution in October of this year by a national referendum, and transition to a semi-presidential system should be one of the possible options.

Armenian Prime Minister

— Nikol Pashinyan

Another day another FIR, yesterday Javed *chacha* with help of Maharashtra Government got a warrant issued for me and now another FIR for supporting farmers' Act.

Actress

— Kangana Ranaut

I want to play for West Indies'. That's where my heart is. I'm never going to turn down anything pertaining to West Indies cricket at this particular time.

Cricketer

— Chris Gayle

Close to 40 lakh people have registered themselves to receive the COVID vaccines on the CoWIN portal till Tuesday morning.


Union Health Minister

— Harsh Vardhan

FIRST COLUMN


CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

We still have a narrow window for vaccinating most people amid the falling number of new infections



RAJINDER DHAMIJA

A year ago the Coronavirus made its entry into the country. Since then, we have come a long way from the hard lockdown beginning in March-end to the second phase of the vaccine rollout which started from Monday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi taking a shot. By opting for the ICMR vaccine, he sent a clear signal that our indigenous vaccines are safe. Right now we are at a crucial stage of the pandemic's trajectory as we still have a narrow window for vaccinating the maximum number of people amid the falling number of new infections in most parts of India. This is the time to focus on mitigation with no scope for complacency. The pandemic is not over until it is actually over in all States and the virus does not have an adequate number of susceptible individuals to infect and survive. We need to chase the virus aggressively rather than the contagion chasing us.



It has been a sort of partial success so far as we have managed to keep infections as well as mortality rates low as compared to many countries in the West with a better infrastructure and capacity to contain and mitigate the virus. However, still more needs to be done as we enter into the next stage of the trajectory with an upsurge in cases in Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Gujarat and looming signs of increasing numbers in Delhi. Vaccine hesitancy remains an issue, with half of the eligible people coming forward for the inoculation. This is a universal phenomenon seen across the globe. Much of this is due to misinformation on social media and the tendency of many individuals to wait and watch. This needs to be aggressively countered and the State has made all efforts to quell this phenomenon. This all-out effort by the Government needs to continue in order to accelerate the vaccination drive which can gain momentum if more vaccines are made available to the public and in the open market so that everyone can get the job on demand both through the public as well as private healthcare system.

The second strategy should be to continue mass-scale RT-PCR testing. There is no reason to scale down testing as we have seen lately in many States because that can be disastrous, especially with new mutant variants of the virus making entry into our cities. These variants will be seen in India as it is difficult to stop the transmission in view of relaxation of movement in an era of necessary international travel. More genomic sequencing would perhaps help us in early detection of these new variants arriving in the country and within India. We need to prepare for the inevitable and the focus should remain on both COVID-appropriate behaviour as well as vaccinating the masses.

Third, we need to create resilient district health systems. A weak link in most States is the poor status of district hospitals. In contrast to the prevailing political and bureaucratic response with focus on hardware (beds, ventilators, oxygen, and so on) in healthcare facilities, we should also focus on software development (capacity building and better-quality health workers) which is more important. The current pandemic provides us opportunity and finances to influence politicians and bureaucrats to build resilient and responsive health systems at both primary and secondary healthcare centres in States. Since health is a State subject, a collaborative and collective effort both by States and the Centre should be made to augment these district hospitals. Excellence in secondary healthcare is crucial and well-placed, well-funded, well-staffed and well-equipped district hospitals should be developed as the most important component of the healthcare chain to respond to future outbreaks. We have the opportunity to create a resilient secondary district healthcare system that is responsive to the needs of the public with focus on preventive, promotive, curative and restorative patient care.

(The writer is Head of Neurology Department, Lady Hardinge Medical College and SSK Hospital, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal.)

A less talked about crime against women

Witch-hunting is used as a tool to subjugate women and there will always be a new reason to brand a woman a witch in the hinterlands of India

I can never forget the night when the entire village, including women, armed with weapons came to attack a helpless woman on the suspicion of being a witch. I would also have been killed with her had I not called the police", recalls 72-year-old Birubala Rabha, a victim-turned-crusader from Assam's Goalpara district, referring to a ghastly incident that took place in a small village on the Assam-Meghalaya border in 2007.

This year the primary school-educated Rabha was the recipient of the Padma Shri, India's highest civilian award for her crusade against witch-hunting. The award was a much-deserved pan-India recognition of her work. Rabha, ostracised and branded as a witch, devoted her life for the cause of other women like her, and, through her organisation Mission Birubala, has been the force behind the State's law to check the practice of witch-hunting in Assam.

There is no dearth of women like Rabha in Assam, who came close to death or got killed, as more than two-thirds of its districts reported incidents of witch-hunting. As per the State Government's records, 107 people, mostly women, got killed between 2011-2019. Locally, even a village on the Assam-Meghalaya border, is called "dainigaon (village of the witches)", where many ostracised women live in isolation.

"In rural hinterlands, a *Deodhani*, *Bez* or an *Ojha* (people who allegedly specialise in healing, casting out unclean spirits and telling fortunes) wields tremendous influence. They often target a widow, a single or a guardian-less woman.with little or no formal education and label her a witch, when they are clueless about a malaise. Many poor people fall into their clutches, not solely out of superstitious belief, but also because of their inability to pay for a qualified doctor", says a 2014 field report from the districts of Goalpara and Sonitpur, conducted by the Partners for Law in Development (PLD), a Delhi-based legal resource group.

Rightly, Rabha in her '*Manuhe Manuhor Babe*' campaign, cautions gullible villagers against falling prey to such quacks who are nothing but "money-making racketeers exploiting people's ignorance."

The PLD's field study in Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh, also reveals that "women are more often targeted for material motives." Dibyajyoti Saikia, a human rights activist, who leads a Guwahati-based organisation, Brothers, feels that "individual factors like personal rivalry, jealousy, conspiracy come into play in such targeting in semi-urban and rural areas." Mamani Saikia, district co-ordinator, Goalpara, further explains that "in calculated attacks, gender relationship determines the selection of targets, often driven by ulterior interests like grabbing a property or for sexual exploitation, whereas, in surprise attacks, which are more violent in nature, the goal is supposedly to eliminate an evil."

Dalit and marginalised women are doubly prone to such attacks because of systemic patriarchy and also because of their social identity. However, Natyabir Das, a medical practitioner and a co-ordinator of Mission Birubala, says: "Though women as victims are more in number but in recent times, men are also facing such accusations."

Now, as per the National Crime Records



AS INCIDENTS OF WOMEN BEARING THE BRUNT OF PERSONAL VENDETTA AND UNFOUNDED SMEAR CAMPAIGNS CONTINUE TO POUR IN FROM MANY PARTS OF INDIA, THE ISSUE OF WITCH-HUNTING DESERVES GREATER ATTENTION NOT ONLY FROM THE LEGAL POINT OF VIEW BUT FROM A WIDER SOCIO-ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

The writer is a retired Indian Information Service officer and a media educator. The views expressed are personal.



Bureau, more than 2,500 people, mostly women, got killed in such incidents between 2000-2016, while many believe that the number is much higher, as most States don't list witchcraft as a motive for murder.

Nevertheless, some States like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Rajasthan, Assam, Maharashtra and Karnataka have framed anti-witchcraft Acts. Commenting on the existing Tonahi Pratadna Nivaran Act, 2005, Chhattisgarh, Dinesh Sharma, a doctor-turned-activist and founder of Andhshraddha, Nirmoolan Samitee, rues that "hundreds of cases are pending under the Act. Many victims have died and without fast-track courts, the purpose of the Act is somewhat defeated.

Moreover, in such incidents of organised community violence, the law cannot overlook the complicity and accountability of a village sarpanch or a kotwal."

Ajay Agarwal, Secretary, Association for Social and Human Awareness, Ranchi, Jharkhand, echoes similar sentiments. He says: "Though more than 1,300 women were killed since 2000 in the State, there's no official data available under the Prevention of Witch (DAAIN) Practices Act, 2001. Some cases get registered under the IPC and only one or two get convicted, while almost the entire village is responsible for such killings."

Assam's new Act, notified in 2018, has been feted as India's toughest anti-witch-hunting law, which makes any offence under it non-bailable, cognisable and non-compoundable.

However, the State's ADGP, LR Bishnoi, highlighted that the wider scope of legal protection included in the Act with the setting up of special courts and addition of new offences related to targeting, humiliation and ostracism, and so on are hitherto not part of the IPC.

Dibyajyoti Saikia opines that "the Act is yet to make any visible impact.... and the police still have a tendency to settle cases through a compromise." Natyabir Das says that agencies like the ASTEC (Assam Science Technology and Environment Council) have been chipping in through awareness drives, but admits that "a thorough training of police officials is required." Executive Director, PLD, Madhu Mehra, states that the Assam Act is definitely an improvement, more like the Rajasthan Act. But, unlike Rajasthan, the State is yet to frame rules regarding compensation and rehabilitation.

Manisha Behal, Executive Director, North East Network, a Guwahati-based women's rights organisation, also laments that the menace could have been better tackled on the ground by the frontline workers had the rules been in place.

Many activists point out that the existing legal regime, be it the IPC or special Acts, vests enormous

power with the police, who are often found to be wanting in their preventive and protective role, particularly when the victim is poor or a woman.

Thus such Acts remain merely as pieces of paper failing to make any dent in the impunity attached to the practice. The legal vacuum for compensation of losses due to social ostracisation, forced displacement, or deprivation in livelihood opportunities is another drawback. Mehra, however, is sceptical about the actual realisation of compensation even if such a provision gets legal backing as the process of conviction is a long-drawn affair, with the accused mostly being as poor as the victim.

Many activists vouch for socio-legal measures like dialogue and awareness creation to help people distinguish between what is a socially permissible act and a crime. Some also voice the need for a central legislation reviving the Prevention of Witch-Hunting Bill, introduced in the Lok Sabha in 2016.

Witch-hunting is used as a tool to subjugate women and there will always be a new reason to brand a woman as a witch. As incidents of women bearing the brunt of personal vendetta and unfounded smear campaigns continue to pour in from many parts of India, the issue of witch-hunting deserves greater attention not only from the legal point of view but from a wider socio-economic perspective.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

TIE-UP WITH THE ISF MILITATES AGAINST THE CORE IDEOLOGY AND GANDHIAN SECULARISM, WHICH FORMS THE SOUL OF THE CONGRESS. —CONGRESS LEADER ANAND SHARMA



WE ARE IN CHARGE OF A STATE AND DON'T TAKE ANY DECISION ON OUR OWN WITHOUT ANY PERMISSION. —BENGAL CONGRESS CHIEF ADHIR RANJAN CHOWDHURY



Don't treat Puducherry differently from the rest of India

Do nominated members in other State legislatures, Union Territories and in Parliament, too, enjoy voting rights during a trust vote?

Expressio unius est exclusio alterius (expression of one subject, object or idea is the exclusion of other subjects, objects or ideas)", is a maxim in Latin, which is heard quite frequently in law classes as well as in courtrooms. It finds application in the construction of Constitutions, statutes and similar instruments. This phrase came to mind after watching the proceedings in Puducherry that led to the fall of the V Narayanasamy-led Congress Government last week.

The resignation of Narayanasamy as the Chief Minister (CM) has not surprised any of the political observers. The only question being asked by them is why did it take four years for Narayanasamy to quit his post.

Though the BJP is accused of political manipulation, encouraging defections from

the ruling party to topple the Government and MK Stalin, the president of the DMK, is accused of murdering democracy, the fact is that the fall of the Congress Government was bound to happen from the day Narayanasamy was sworn in in 2016.

"Why did the Congress high command appoint Narayanasamy, who had not contested the 2016 Assembly election as CM, superseding many party heavyweights in the Union Territory?" wonders Kolahala Srenivasan, political chronicler of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. "There were seasoned leaders like former CM Vaithilingam and A Namasivayam who were in the running for the top post," says Srenivasan.

Narayanasamy, the all-powerful Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) during the United

Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime under Manmohan Singh, had been defeated in the Lok Sabha election held in 2014. Sources say that the interests of other Congress leaders were overlooked by the party high command while appointing him. Apparently, there was strong discontentment among the Congress MLAs when he was hand-picked by the party president. The appointment of Kiran Bedi, the former super cop of Delhi as the Lieutenant Governor (L-G) of the Union Territory (UT), was like opening another war front by the BJP. Consequently, the running battle between the CM and the L-G hogged the limelight in the last four years. This style of functioning of the L-G was a new experience for the population of the UT and naturally, Narayanasamy got annoyed!

The nomination of three

complainings since 2016 that the party was not recognising his seniority and experience. He was hurt when he was overlooked by Narayanasamy when Speaker Vaithilingam resigned to contest the 2019 Lok Sabha poll and appointed first-time MLA Sivakozhundu as the presiding officer of the House.

The resignation of John Kumar from the House, too, speaks about the discontentment that had set in. John Kumar was elected as an MLA in 2016 but resigned his seat to facilitate the election of Narayanasamy to the House. Though John Kumar was elected subsequently to the House in 2019, he too fell out with Narayanasamy eventually.

Though Venkatesan, the DMK MLA, announced his resignation from the House well in advance, the party leadership in Tamil Nadu kept silent over the issue. Despite the

declaration by Venkatesan that he quit from the House with the concurrence of his party leader (MK Stalin), the DMK did not do anything till Tuesday to buy peace with him. It was on Tuesday that the party's general secretary Durai Murugan announced the removal of Venkatesan from all official posts in the party.

Last month saw Stalin deputing party MP and moneybags Jagathrakshakan to rejuvenate the DMK in the UT. "This gave rise to many doubts in the minds of the Congress and DMK leaders in Puducherry. What we saw during the last two days was the impact of this decision," said Srenivasan.

The question why Jagathrakshakan was sent to Puducherry at this juncture remains unanswered. Narayanasamy did not include his alliance partner, the DMK,

in the Government and this resulted in a lot of heartburn.

Though the Congress and the DMK challenged the L-G's nomination of three BJP leaders to the Assembly, the apex court upheld her act. But how the nominated members were allowed to cast their votes in the Assembly reminds one of the Latin maxim "*expressio unius...*"

Do nominated members in State legislatures, other UTs and in Parliament, too, enjoy voting rights. There cannot be one rule for Puducherry and another for the rest of the country. Let's have the same rules for the whole country.

This was what Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared when Parliament abrogated Article 370: "Now people in Jammu and Kashmir enjoy the same status as that of the rest of the Indians." People of Puducherry, too, should get the same status. Shouldn't they?



KUMAR CHELAPPAN

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



Sensex rises for second day; reclaims 50K-level

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex spurted by 447 points to close above the psychological 50,000-mark on Tuesday following hectic buying in auto and IT counters amid positive domestic and global cues.

The 30-share index swung nearly 633 points during the session before ending at 50,296.89, showing a rise of 447.05 points or 0.90 per cent.

Likewise, the NSE Nifty climbed 157.55 points or 1.07 per cent to settle at 14,919.10, extending gains to a second day.

Among Sensex stocks, Mahindra & Mahindra was lead gainer rising by 4.98 per cent. NTPC rose by 3.83 per cent, Bajaj Auto by 3.53 per cent, and Tech Mahindra by 3.44 per cent. TCS, Maruti, Infosys, HCL Tech, Nestle and Bharti Airtel were among the gainers.

On the other hand, ONGC, HDFC, Dr Reddy's, PowerGrid and SBI suffered losses.

Of the Sensex constituents, 25 shares ended with gains.

Sectorally, BSE auto surged the most with 3.18 per cent gains, followed by IT (2.85 per cent), tech (2.84 per cent) and industrials (2.20 per cent). All the 19 sectoral indices closed in the green.

Broader smallcap, midcap and largecap indices too rallied 1.60 per cent, 1.55 per cent and 1.11 per cent, respectively - outperforming the benchmark. Analysts said investor sentiment remained upbeat

due to encouraging GDP numbers for the third quarter as well as returning of calmness in global bond markets after the last week's turmoil.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services said, "An improved outlook post-February auto sales numbers resulted in continued buying in auto stocks with IT sector also being a major contributor in the rally".

S Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities said that markets exhibited buoyancy today despite its share of volatility in afternoon trade. IT stocks and auto stocks led the rally while the broader market saw keen interest in paper stocks on rising product prices.

A strong buying was seen in midcap and smallcap packs and outperformed broader indices as visible earnings recovery is attracting investors in this space.

Notably, the volatility index contracted sharply for the second consecutive day by over 6 per cent, Binod Modi, Head-Strategy at Reliance Securities said.

"Concerns pertaining to rising bond yields appear to have softened a bit after central bankers across the world have begun to push back against higher rates.

"This should offer some comfort to Indian equities and INR as rising bond yields in the USA and declining spread between USA Treasury yields and India's GSec yields had started putting pressure on INR," Modi said.

India's 'recovery faster than expected'

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Indian economy is recovering faster than expected and the government will spend on building infrastructure rather than boosting consumer demand artificially, principal economic advisor to the finance ministry Sanjeev Sanyal said on Tuesday. Speaking at a webinar organised by the Bharat Chamber of Commerce, he said the country needs to keep the growth momentum and it is the only means to create employment and reduce poverty. "We are recovering much faster than expected and need to keep the growth momentum in the next two years. The government will make capital expenditure on infrastructure to create assets rather than boosting consumer demand artificially. "If we need to reduce poverty, the growth has to keep



going. Else, we will end up in redistributing poverty as had happened in West Bengal where I come from," Sanyal said. After contracting for two quarters in a row, the country's economy grew by 0.4 per cent in the October-

December quarter of the current fiscal amid the coronavirus pandemic. The gross domestic product (GDP) had expanded by 3.3 per cent in the corresponding period of 2019-20, the data released by the National Statistical Office

(NSO) showed. The economy had shrunk by an unprecedented 24.4 per cent in the first quarter this fiscal following the coronavirus pandemic and resultant lockdowns. In the second quarter, the GDP declined by 7.3 per cent amid a perk up in economic activities after the easing of the lockdown. Sanyal said the nominal GDP growth rate in the Union Budget for 2021-22 was projected at around 14 per cent, which is a "conservative estimate". The noted economist said the government is "unapologetic" about the privatisation of some public sector entities. "We are unapologetic about the privatisation of some areas. PSUs will exist where it is needed but not where the private sector can do a better job," he said. There is a need to unleash the spirit of the private sector, the principal economic advisor said.

India aspires at least 50 pc of global ship recycling business

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India aspires to raise its share in the global ship recycling business to at least 50 per cent, union minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Tuesday.

Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Mandaviya was addressing the 'Maritime India Summit 2021', inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"India aspires at least 50 per cent of global ship recycling business after passing of the Recycling of Ships Act," Mandaviya said in his welcome address. The country's share in the global ship recycling business is around 30 per cent at present. He said the maritime sector in India is being pro-



pelled in a bid to make this sector a key pillar of transport, trade and infrastructure.

Currently, India recycles 70 lakh gross tonnage of ships per annum. Mandaviya said that the Indian government is all geared up for facilitating and grounding the investments in the maritime

sector. Earlier the Prime Minister released an e-book of 'Maritime India Vision-2030'.

Maritime India Vision 2030 aims to make the Indian Maritime Industry at par with top global benchmarks in next 10 years.



Shipping Corp shares hit 52-week high on receiving bids

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Shipping Corporation of India Ltd on Tuesday jumped 20 per cent to touch its 52-week high after the government received multiple bids for its proposed stake sale in the company. On BSE, the shares were locked in upper circuit limit and 52-week high of Rs 124.4, up 19.96 per cent. Similarly, on NSE, the stock traded at the upper band limit of Rs 124.5 -- 52-week high -- by surging 20 per cent. Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey on Monday said that multiple Expressions of Interest (EoIs) have been received for privatisation of Shipping Corp. In December, the government invited EoIs for strategic disinvestment of its entire stake of 63.75 per cent in Shipping Corp along with the transfer of management.



Infra projects to boost tourism, says Gadkari

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Infrastructure projects in the pipeline will help boost tourism as well as create opportunities for MSMEs, according to Union Minister for MSME and Roads, Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari.

"The infrastructural projects in the pipeline as part of the central government's plans have laid the foundation of 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat' and will also boost domestic tourism in the country. Innovation is key to the revival of the travel and hospitality sector.

"Industry players such as FICCI, OYO Hotels and Homes and IATO should take advantage of the government schemes to come together and support MSMEs," Gadkari was quoted as saying in a statement.

The statement, on the basis of a webinar held on Monday, was issued by Ficci on Tuesday.

The minister said the government's initiatives such as collateral-free automatic loans for business, including MSMEs, and Rs 50,000 crore-equity infusion through MSME Fund of Funds, which benefits companies with higher credit ratings, will generate tremendous business opportunities. "The domestic tourist destinations, including hills, forests, and religious pilgrimage, will benefit from upcoming projects such as Char Dham Road, New Delhi-Dehradun Expressway, 22 Green Express Highways, and others. There's a huge potential for small hotel partners, agents to tap into this and look at expanding their offerings catering to the needs of tourists," he added.

MONEY MATTERS

HP CM presents Rs 9,125-cr supplementary demands



On the third day of the Budget session of the Assembly, he also said revenue receipts were affected in the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was necessary to ensure that committed obligations of the government are fully met. Relief was provided to every section of the society and now, the state is coming out of the economic recession, he added. Out of the total supplementary demands, Rs 8,448 crore is under non-plan schemes, Rs 281 crore under the plan and Rs 396 crore under the centrally sponsored schemes, he added. Under the non-plan expenditure, a sum of Rs 7,999 crore has been provided for ways and means advance.

Lupin launches generic drug to treat Wilson's disease



Drug major Lupin on Tuesday said it has launched Pencicillamine tablets, used to treat Wilson's disease, in the US market. The company has launched a generic product in the market after having received approval from the US and Drug Administration (U.S.FDA) earlier. The Mumbai-based drug firm's product is the generic equivalent of Mylan Specialty's Depen tablets, which are indicated for the treatment of Wilson's disease, Cystinuria, and in patients with severe, active rheumatoid arthritis who have failed to respond to an adequate trial of conventional therapy.

Hero MotoCorp shares rise nearly 4 pc as sales rise in Feb



Shares of Hero MotoCorp ended with nearly 4 per cent gains on Tuesday after the two-wheeler maker reported rise in total sales during February. On BSE, the scrip ended at Rs 3,474.8, rising 3.73 per cent over the previous close. Intra-day, it jumped to Rs 3,491.75. The scrip on NSE gained 3.91 per cent to end at Rs 3,481.2. During the trading session, it had touched Rs 3,490. On Monday, the company reported a 1.45 per cent increase in total sales at 5,05,467 units in February. The company had sold 4,98,242 units in the same month of the previous year, Hero MotoCorp said in a statement. Total motorcycle sales stood at 4,63,723 units last month as against 4,79,310 units in February 2020, down 3.25 per cent. Total scooter sales, however, increased over two fold to 41,744 units as compared with 18,932 units in the year-ago month, it added in a statement.

Jagran Prakashan to buy back shares worth Rs 118 cr



Jagran Prakashan, the publisher of leading Hindi daily *Dainik Jagran*, on Tuesday said its board has approved buying back shares worth up to Rs 118 crore. The board of directors of the company... approved the buyback of the company's fully paid-up equity shares of face value of Rs 2 each for an aggregate amount not exceeding Rs 118 crore... and at a price not exceeding Rs 60 per equity share payable in cash, from its shareholders/ beneficial owners (other than those who are promoters, members of the promoter group or persons in control), from the open market," it said in a regulatory filing. Jagran Prakashan said the public announcement setting out the process, timelines and other statutory details of the buy-back will be released in due course.



Airtel buys radiowaves worth Rs 18,699 crore

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bharti Airtel on Tuesday said it has picked up radiowaves worth Rs 18,699 crore in just-concluded auction, while rival Vodafone Idea said spectrum acquired by it in five circles will help boost 4G coverage and capacity.

The auction, which put on offer a total of 2308.80 MHz of spectrum worth Rs 4 lakh crore in seven bands, concluded on Tuesday, just a day after it commenced.

Market sources estimated that Reliance Jio had acquired spectrum valued at about Rs 55,000 crore, but there is no official confirmation so far.

Airtel, in a statement, said it has acquired radiowaves worth Rs 18,699 crore entailing 355.45 MHz spectrum across Sub GHz, mid band and 2300 MHz bands, arming it with "most formidable" spectrum holding in the country.

ER&D policy: K'taka aims to create 50K jobs

PNS ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka government on Tuesday launched the Engineering Research & Development (ER&D) policy-2021, claimed to be the first such in the country, that aims to enable the state to contribute about 45 per cent to India's Engineering R&D during the policy period and create an additional about 50,000 new jobs. Department of Electronics, IT, Bt and S&T, Karnataka Innovation and Technology Society (KITS), and NASSCOM were involved



in drafting this policy after wider consultations with all the other participating stakeholders including the representatives of the industry, an official release said.

The five priority sectors of the policy include Aerospace & Defence; Auto, Auto Components & EV; Bio technology, Pharma & Medical Devices; Semi conductors, Telecom, ESDM; and Software Products. "The ER&D sector in the country is the fastest growing industry with a CAGR of 12.8 per cent. Meanwhile, the global Engineering Research and Development industry is expected to reach a spend of USD 2 trillion by 2025." "Considering this scenario, this policy aims to prepare the state to make use of the future

opportunities emanating from this sector," Deputy Chief Minister C N Ashwath Narayan said.

Karnataka is currently the leading contributor to the Indian Engineering R&D industry revenue, and the state is home to over 400 leading R&D Centres/GCCs (global capability centres), according to the DCM, who also holds the IT/Bt and S&T portfolio.

The policy aims to retain its position, generation of intellectual property (IPs), and to make this as a skilled knowledge capital.

MYSUN plans to invest Rs 600 cr to develop 200MW solar portfolio

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rooftop solar firm MYSUN plans to invest Rs 600 crore in the next three years to develop a 200MW solar portfolio of the first phase of its recently launched asset vehicle.

This new venture will provide bespoke solar energy solutions to large corporate, industrial, and commercial establishments on a built, own, operate, and transfer (BOOT) or RESCO (Renewable Energy Service Company) model, Gagan Vermani, CEO and Founder, MYSUN told PTI.

"MYSUN is aiming to invest Rs 600 crore to develop a 200



MW solar portfolio of the first phase (of three years) of its recently launched asset vehicle MYSUN+. The new asset vehicle will provide on-site and off-site solar energy solutions to industrial and

commercial clients under the RESCO model," he said.

MYSUN+ has already gained traction with some of the large and renowned Indian as well as multinational companies becoming clients and has signed up and executed/executing projects in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry, Vermani added.

With this new venture, MYSUN becomes a complete 360-degree solar company meeting vastly different financing needs of its diversified client base of the large, medium and small industry as well as homes, all under one roof.



BPCL stocks rise over 3 per cent

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) on Tuesday rose over 3 per cent after the company said that it will exit Numaligarh refinery in Assam.

BPCL said it will exit Numaligarh refinery in Assam by selling its entire stake to a consortium of Oil India Ltd and Engineers India Ltd for Rs 9,876 crore.

The sale of Numaligarh Refinery Ltd clears the way for privatisation of India's second-largest fuel retailer.

On BSE, the scrip closed the counter at Rs 469, higher 3.1 per cent over the previous close. Intra-day, it touched 52-week high value of Rs 482.40, up 6.04 per cent.

Likewise, on NSE, the scrip closed at Rs 469.8, increasing 3.2 per cent. During the day,

it was trading at its 52-week high value of Rs 482.40 by rising 5.96 per cent.

In keeping with the Assam Peace Accord, the government had decided to keep Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) in the public sector. As part of this, BPCL was to sell its entire 61.65 per cent stake to state-owned firms.

A consortium of Oil India Ltd, Engineers India Ltd, and the government of Assam expressed interest in buying the stake and the BPCL board on Monday approved the sale.

"The board of directors of BPCL at the meeting held on March 1, 2021, has approved the proposal for sale of entire equity shares of 445.35 crore held by BPCL in NRL to a consortium of OIL and EIL and to government of Assam," the firm said in a filing to the stock exchanges.

Plastic industry: Streamline raw material supply

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Plastics processing sector have urged the government to streamline the supply of raw materials as the industry is grappling with raw material shortage which will lead to the closure of many units across the country.

"The industry is facing acute shortage of polymers, the main raw material for plastics goods production, which has varied application in nation-building including agriculture, health-care, food and toy sector," All India Plastics Manufacturers Association (AIPMA)



President Chandrakant Turakhia said in a statement.

The plastics processing sector has sought immediate government intervention to ensure raw material supply by Indian petrochemical companies and free imports of raw material that are not produced in the

country.

Around 50,000 units in the plastics processing sector, which offer employment to about 50 lakh workers in the country, are already operating below 50 per cent of their capacity, Turakhia said adding that if the crisis prolongs, then thousands of MSME's will have to close down. All India Plastic Industry Associations includes All India Plastics Manufacturers Association, Organization of Plastics Processors of India, Plastic Export Promotion Council, Gujarat State Plastics Manufacturers Association,

Indian Plastics Federation-Kolkata, Karnataka State Plastics Association, Maharashtra Plastics Manufacturers Association, Kerala Plastics Manufacturers Association, Telangana and Andhra Plastics Manufacturers Association and Canara Plastic Manufacturers and Traders Association.

"The increase in raw material costs and its acute shortage in market is leading to escalation in project costs and is adversely impacting the cost competitiveness of MSMEs," AIPMA Chairman, Governing Council, Arvind Mehta noted.

BOBBY DEOL: WAS A BIG STAR ONCE BUT THINGS DIDN'T WORK OUT

Bobby Deol says that it took him some time to accept the fact that he would have to settle for roles lesser than the lead. He said that it was when his kids wondered why he was at home, did he realise that it was time to get back to work.

He was dubbed the Italian Stallion when he entered Bollywood, long mane adding to his dashing loverboy charm. Although his debut film *Barsaat* fared way below expectations in 1995, he had a few top hits in the early decade of his career, notably *Gupt*, *Soldier*, *Baadal* and *Bichhoo*.

Yet, what followed didn't make for a happy picture. Dharmendra's younger son and Sunny Deol's younger brother Bobby suddenly witnessed a drop in his career graph in the new millennium. Films stopped doing well, the offers started slowing



down.

The actor says that it took him some time to accept the fact that he would have to settle for roles lesser than the lead. "I used to be a big star once upon a time but things didn't work out. My market value went down. I went through a phase where I couldn't understand why this happened and I started giving up," Bobby said.

The actor adds that it was when his kids won-

dered why he was at home, did he realise that it was time to get back to work. "When I saw my kids noticing me sitting at home, it dawned on me that I am an actor and my job is to perform and play characters, and not just the main lead. As an actor, I realised that I needed to prove myself and that's how I started looking at things," he said. "This is why I am getting so much work now. People have appreci-

ated my hard work and have seen that I have the capability of doing different roles," said the actor.

He seems to have made a good-enough comeback. His role as the vile *Baba Nirala* in Prakash Jha's web series last year *Aashram* has been appreciated, and he is set to return next year. He has lately been seeing a regular flow of releases, too.

Bobby has projects such as *Love Hostel* and *Aashram* season 2,

besides Bollywood deals such as *Apne 2* and *Animal* coming up.

Talking about the love that he has been receiving from fans, especially for *Ashram*, he says, "I don't know what to feel. It is the love of my fans plus the new fans that I have made who helped me receive this award. They appreciated my work and the web series was watched by so many people. Their appreciation has helped me get this award and I am so grateful for that."

Today, Bobby is on the lookout for roles that help him explore his acting abilities. "I put myself outside my comfort zone when I look for roles. I want to do roles that question the uncertainty and non belief that one has in oneself. I want to be the kind of roles that when people offer them to me and I also go like, 'I don't see myself doing this! Do they really want me to do that?,' he sums up.

Woody Allen autobiography publisher to sue HBO over Allen V Farrow?


Publishers of Woody Allens autobiography, *Apropos Of Nothing*, have reportedly threatened to sue the network HBO, and the makers of the documentary series *Allen V Farrow*, if they fail to furnish evidence for authorised use of audio from Allen in the documentary which has become a talking point ever since its first episode was aired recently.

Skyhorse Publishing have sent a "litigation hold document" (also known as a preservation notice) to the network and filmmakers Amy Ziering and Kirby Dick, as the publishing house feels that the creators of the documentary didn't gain proper clearance to use portions from Allen's audio book.

The network had signed a deal with the divorced couple's son, Ronan Farrow, for the documentary last year.



"The document preservation notice could reveal if Ronan exerted any influence on HBO to green-light the series — or whether he had involvement with the filmmakers in presenting a very subjective view of the long-running feud between Woody and his ex-wife Mia," a source told *Radar Online*.



TAYLOR CALLS OUT NETFLIX SERIES FOR 'DEEPLY SEXIST JOKE'

Taylor Swift has lashed out at Netflix after the streaming platform's series *Ginny and Georgia* took a tasteless jibe at the pop singer's dating history.

On Monday, the Grammy winner shared a screenshot of the dialogue that reads, "What do you care? You go through men faster than Taylor Swift" on Twitter.

"Hey *Ginny & Georgia*, 2010 called and it wants its lazy, deeply sexist joke back. How about we stop degrading hard working women by defining this horse shit as FuNnY. (sic)," Ms Swift wrote in the caption.

The 31-year-old singer-songwriter, whose documentary *Miss Americana* premiered on the streamer last year, directly addressed Netflix for its apparent hypocrisy.

"Also, @netflix after Miss Americana this outfit doesn't look cute on you. Happy Women's History Month I guess," she added.

Ms Swift has been forthcoming about her dating life, with her songs often sharing an insight into her relationships.



JACKIE SHROFF ON SON TIGER: I ADMIRE HIS LASER FOCUS

It's Tiger Shroff's 31st birthday yesterday and dad Jackie Shroff is going all out to make his son feel special. Early in the morning, the yesteryear actor shared some adorable throw-back pictures to mark the day and here's what he had to say.

Tiger Shroff is admired by masses for his dancing talent, great physique, disciplined life and action chops. Jackie feels extremely proud to be his father.


"I am blessed to have a son like Tiger, who is an inspiration to many. He inspires young kids to stay fit, be

disciplined and give respect to all. I am very much proud of him," expresses the elated father. When asked about his rapport with Tiger, he shares, "He is more like a friend. We both trust and respect each other and give each other the needed space. One of Tiger's good qualities is his laser focus and I admire him for that."


Tiger Shroff rang in his 31st birthday with rumoured girlfriend, actress Disha Patani, mother Ayesha Shroff, and sister Krishna Shroff as they all were spotted dining at a restaurant in Bandra Kurla Complex last night.

FUN


ARCHIE




CALVIN AND HOBBS




GARFIELD



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5	
6			7		8
9			10		
12	13			14	15
17			16		
19					

ACROSS

- Saying again
- These brown fruit grow on a palm tree
- A clothing size
- A hard black fuel
- Beat in a battle
- A fire-breathing monster
- The number in a quartet
- Frown
- Played a part in a play
- Replaying

DOWN

- More than is needed
- A compass direction
- Had a conversation

SOLUTION

P	A	L	E	O	U		
A	L	I	E	S	P		
R	V	E	R	S	O		
A	N	S	E	R			
C	H	I	S				
U	P	P	A	S			
T	E	R	A	I			
S	A	G	I	N			
S	K	I	P	P	I	N	G

NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

Rules

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

SHUT OUTSIDE VOICES TO HEAR YOUR OWN: KIARA



The multifaceted Kiara Advani has starred in and headlined the women empowerment anthem titled *I'm a Rebel* that also stars Grammy-nominated multi-platinum rapper Raja Kumari and fitness model Bani J.

The song celebrates women who want to explore, encourage individuality, and pushes them to live life unrestrained! The idea was to create a progressive narrative around the spirit of new age women who don't live by conventional expectations.

Talking about *TRebel*, Kiara Advani, who will be making her non-film music video maiden

foray with this single tells us, "This collaboration resonated with my core persona. Being a rebel isn't a look or style. It is a way of life and I have always endorsed it. For me, it's always been about living your life on your own terms, being comfortable in your own skin and not caring about what the world thinks. If society calls me a rebel for me being myself and breaking walls down and the laws are written on them, then well, at least I know I stand for something. I want to inspire the next generation of women to believe in themselves and let go of the inhibitions and conditioning they have been raised with, and

ing judgment ever since my teenage years. I continue to get trolled for being the strong, independent, downright badass woman that I am. People ask me to be feminine, to behave like a woman, to stop getting tattooed and building muscles otherwise I'll soon be an outcast but I'm not here to cater to anyone's definition of what I should be."

Kiara Advani was chosen to star in the video for she had been breaking the girl-next-door mould with an array of diverse performances! Focussing more on women empowerment and gender equality, the empowering drop is pegged to be an anthem for the fourth-wave feminist

embrace living unrestrained. It's important to shut down the voices from outside, so you could listen to your own."

The hit song was composed and performed by Raja Kumari, and also features significant women achievers from diverse backgrounds including MMA professional Sanika Patil, gender-fluid artist and sculptor Durga Gawde, and television actress Ayesha Adlakha among others. Sharing her thoughts on bringing her fore 'you-get-what-you-see persona' once again for this campaign, Bani J adds, "Dealing with being misjudged and misunderstood doesn't ever get easier, especially if you are a woman with a voice. There are so many people who really don't get who I am, and they misjudge me which was quite bothersome initially, but not anymore. One gets used to it, but it never gets easier. I also think I am able to shrug off

movement.

Hip hop empress Kumari makes efficient use of incisive wit and irony to protest the society's opinionated contempt toward women and champion the unapologetic feminine tribe who endorse their avant-garde individuality and continue to defy convention and break the rules. The parodic takedown of misogynistic stereotypes casting women as passive, dependent and needy is an essential sonic centrepiece for this millennial creative and that opening riff is nothing short of iconic. With a tag line denoting 'rebellion is contagious', the glitzy video that was shot across Los Angeles and Mumbai, with its neon hues and fluid silhouettes capturing the contagious spirit of disengaging with the eternal voices and rewiring with the inner voices. From athletes to artists to activists, the video captures inspiring flag bearers who have walked the thin line between societal norms and expectations while being inimitable and fierce in their approach towards changing the fabric of societal standards.

Highlighting the recent trend of brands leveraging their new offerings via music videos, Universal Music and EMI Music, India and South Asia Managing Director and CEO and *The Stage* judge, Devraj Sanyal says, "A rapidly evolving Indian media landscape is changing the way people consume content and music is undoubtedly and inextricably woven into the fabric of this consumption economy.

Brands today can create an emotional imprint using music as a trigger and we're seeing some massive examples of these globally. Modern brands have huge cultural resonance just like music and for me, the audio player is the epitome of that. We create the most memorable and coolest partnerships to help amplify brand storytelling. 'I am a rebel' is a global coming together of counter culture, attitude, empowerment making this a category-defining moment for us."

The video came out just a week before International Women's Day. BoAt and Universal Music India have come together to celebrate women of today and tomorrow who live life on their own terms by unleashing the 'TRebel' campaign with the poignant all-woman collaborative song.



BEAUTY lies within

Good health and beauty are two sides of the same coin. A healthy woman is also better equipped to deal with the stresses of daily life. A body that is healthy is imperative for preserving beauty and building up immunity.

The right diet is absolutely essential to good looks. A diet for beauty should be high in vitamin-rich foods and low in carbohydrates and sugar. The answer is to choose from a variety of foods, to ensure a balanced diet. Fresh fruits, raw salads, sprouted grains and yoghurt should be included in the daily diet. Have whole-grain cereals. Reduce tea and coffee and have freshly extracted fruit and vegetable juices, lassi and clear soups. Avoid fried snacks, rich gravies and desserts, and confectionary items. Add the juice of a lemon to a glass of water and have it first thing in the morning. Drinking adequate water helps to eliminate toxins and wastes from the system.

Exercise, together with a balanced diet, can work wonders. Not only does it build up stamina and strength, but improves blood circulation to the skin and scalp. Every tissue of the body needs oxygen, so begin your exercises by doing deep breathing in front of an open window. Check with your doctor before beginning regular exercise. Walking is a good physical activity, as it exercises all the muscle groups. The



ancient Indian doctrine of Yoga has attained universal popularity today. In fact, it has become very relevant to the modern lifestyle, bringing about the harmony of body and mind.

Pay attention to cleansing and daily hygiene. Improper daily hygiene can undermine health in a number of ways. The skin is influenced by many external factors, like dirt, chemical pollutants, bacteria and virus. By daily washing, bathing and cleaning, we can remove impurities and keep ourselves free from infections.

A daily bath, or shower, is a must, especially on returning home. During ancient times, infusions were used to wash the body. Soak neem leaves in hot water and let them stand

For flawless skin, lustrous hair and a slim figure, good health is a prerequisite, says **SHAHNAZ HUSSAIN**

overnight. Use the water to bathe the next morning.

Adequate sleep is also essential for fitness. Sleep is a way of restoring energy to the body and is nature's best cure. It is a beauty treatment in itself.

A positive mental attitude is also important because the mind and body are closely related.

All of us encounter a certain amount of stress and anxiety in our daily life. It is a matter of learning how to cope with it. We have to train our minds towards positive thinking and relaxation. Regular patterns of rest and exercise, along with hobbies and interests certainly help. Some people are so aware of the world around them. They are always keen to learn new things. Hobbies, interests and new activities can actually be very relaxing to the mind. They also give another dimension to the personality.

Indeed, the finest foundation for beauty consists of some common factors, which we often overlook.

(The writer is the founder of The Shahnaz Husain Group.)

A wedding ceremony serves sacred and mundane purposes but what's extremely important is how the couple seizes the moment! Thanks to concepts of sustainable living, women empowerment and more, weddings sure have changed this 2021, writes **The Pioneer's SHIKHA DUGGAL.**



What's happening INSIDE A 2021 WEDDING?

For some, weddings are a public display of love and rituals and ceremonies and for others, it holds utmost significance, beyond just a display. With a love for each other, commitment values, etc., how are the wedding vows taking place? It is truly taking a different route as we enter 2021 to an extent that it's smashing stereotypes as well. Recently, when actress Dia Mirza shared a photo of a female priest, Sheela *atta* solemnising her wedding, it brought back the talks on gender equality and that was a spectacular gaze! While it just doesn't stop there, customs that have been passed on for decades

were opted out in 2021, for example, the *kanyadaan* ritual and the *vidaai* custom.

So, this year is definitely calling out for some tailored changes in the way bridal festivities are taking place!

Reducing ecological impact of your special event on the planet



Reducing all of the carbon footprints, weddings are solemnly swearing by a waste-less one. Without skipping any gorgeous details, the plans are to go full eco-friendly! Brand strategist Divya Khandelwal and software engineer Aman Kapur's recent wedding had certain grounds to be laid for the wedding vows to take place and that is the manifestation of memories in a truly sustainable fashion. So, by featuring tiny changes in weddings many couples are creating huge impacts though. Planning an environmental-friendly wedding doesn't seem like a huge task, what do you have to do? Just decrease

the ecological impact of your special event on the planet!

The insta-official wedding



While proclaiming vows and chanting mantras for the sake of never-ending love at the wedding venue, to make your nuptials Instagram-official is also catching on the trend! Social media plays a really mammoth-like part in wedding planning these days, so weds want to first seek ideas from it from all the aspects of celebrations to finally making it Instagram-official. That just sparks the followers' interest with an ambience full of happiness and pomp even on social media handles.

And oh, not to forget the cute hashtags with the couple's nicknames!

Where in the world do you want to wed?



Nowadays, couples have to take care of a lot of things before getting married! Deciding on a destination wedding is one of them. With Niharika Konidela and Chaitanya getting married in star-studded royal celebrations that took place at The Oberoi Udayvilas, Udaipur took many of us by a storm and one was hoping to gear up for a destination wedding too.

It's like creating an event that has a sense of place with many personal touches just as if you were getting married in your hometown. There will be local elements, great planning, design extravaganza and pretty décor to make an authentic experience for the guests as well as for the bride and bridegroom to cherish it forever.

Covid-struck wedding!

Aren't we pretty much used to the phrase 'the new normal' but that is likely to be fitted into the



weddings too, because couples have been gifting hand sanitisers to their guests, maintaining social-distancing even in the seating arrangements, the number of guests is restricted to 50-100 members only, etc. Instead of a spectacle, they are rather focused on safety these days! The year has been a little wild, so why shouldn't the celebrations be so too. Couples took many profound decisions while planning for their big day!

Actress Kajal Aggarwal's wedding designer recently opened up about the challenges they had to face due to a covid-struck wedding. The availability of flowers was a challenge, working with the rules and regulations and still getting things done in time leaving enough time to sanitise the venue was also a challenge as both Kajal and Gautam were very particular that everybody has to be tested, the venue has to be sanitised properly because there were too many elderly people present at the venue.

Innovative-invites!



As we bid farewell to big fat Indian weddings, a lot of new standards for a wedding was set including an animated-guest invitation card!

When Gauhar Khan and Zaid Darbar's wedding invite went viral with all the cute animated graphics, it made each and every netizen's heart melt. Going from one home to another for inviting your loved ones is long gone, these kinds of digital invitations are sparking some noise around the corner. Some take the help of parody, some try to trace their journey of how they met and some add their most heartfelt moments! With no high expenditures on the digital wedding cards, when one sees the digital card it certainly makes them laugh out loud with all the cartoonish stuff on it.

So what's your wedding going to look like?

Pitch will be similar to last 2 Tests: Rahane

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

India's Test vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane on Tuesday said there is no need to take criticism of the spin-friendly pitches in the country "seriously" as not a word is spoken about the "damp" tracks elsewhere and England can expect another turner in the fourth Test.

There has been a lot of talk about the spinning tracks in the second Test at Chepauk and the pink ball game at Motera which ended inside two days. The fourth and final Test starts on March 4.

"I think the wicket will be similar to the second Test match in Chennai, spinning track. Yes, pink ball made the difference and it came much quicker off the wicket compared to red ball and we had to make adjustments," Rahane said during a virtual media conference.

"Wicket will be a lot similar to last two Test matches," he added.

Rahane, for the first time in many years, shed his reticence when asked to respond to the criticism from former England players that the pitches have not been ideal. Some have even urged the ICC to act against India for preparing a turner.

"See, let people speak what they want to. The wickets, when we tour abroad, no one speaks about how seaming they are. They always speak about the technique of the Indian batsmen. I don't feel we need to take seriously what people say," Rahane was sharp in his response.

"...You see, when we tour abroad, the first day wicket is damp. When wicket becomes grassy and behaves up and down, then the pitch becomes dangerous but we haven't complained about it or we have never spoken about it."



'VERY SIMILAR PITCH'

Young England opener Zak Crawley too echoed Ajinkya Rahane's sentiments on the Motera strip which he believes will be "similar" in nature but red ball will make it "slightly easier" for the batsmen.

"Yeah, I think it will be a very similar pitch this week. It wasn't easy to score for sure, but it was the same for both sides, and they played very well compared to us. So, we had our chance to bat first and did well and unfortunately, we didn't play well as we needed to," Crawley said at a virtual conference.

Quizzed whether batting will be easier in the final Test as it will be a red ball game again,

he answered in affirmative.

"It depends on the pitch obviously, but I do think that it will be slightly easier. I felt that the pink ball was a bit harder (to play) and that ball skidded on quite quickly, which is why Axar got so many wickets through leg before and bowled."

Axar's arm ball will be a massive threat, conceded Crawley.

"I think he still has that ball in his armoury for sure and he'll still be a massive threat with that one (red ball). But I think it might not skid on with the same pace as the pink ball but it won't be completely different," explained Crawley.

Crawley was the only half century for England in the last

game.

"Yeah, it's nice to score some runs. I probably had the best (chance) to face seamers early, but still nice to score some runs, nonetheless," he said, adding that hopefully he will have the game-plan in the final match.

The 23-year-old, lavished praise on left-arm spinner Axar Patel, who has grabbed 18 wickets from two Tests.

"You know, he (Axar) is a very good bowler, especially in these conditions, he has been very accurate, he doesn't give you much to score, and he has got one that goes straight on, in these conditions, one (to) turn, so he is very good bowler," said Crawley.

'Ashwin constantly reinventing himself'

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Ravichandran Ashwin is a constantly reinventing himself, said former India batsman VVS Laxman, insisting that preparation is key to the veteran off-spinner's success.

Ashwin recently became the fourth Indian bowler to take 400 Test wickets, when he achieved the feat by dismissing Jofra Archer in the pink ball Test at Ahmedabad. He also became the second fastest bowler to reach the landmark after Sri Lanka spin wizard Muttiah Muralitharan.

"I think he's (Ashwin) a very intelligent person. When you're playing at the highest level, then it's not only about your skill, it's about your preparation, your planning and execution is so critical.

"So, he works out what are the weaknesses of the batsman. He plans those dismissals and that's why I think he is reinventing himself," Laxman, a veteran of 134 Tests, said on *Star Sports show Cricket Connected*.

To prove his point, Laxman cited the example of Steve Smith's trouble against Ashwin during India's recent tour Down Under.

"We saw recently in the Australia series how he (Ashwin) troubled someone as great as Steve Smith and that's another thing that makes Ashwin or any champion player special, that he wants to be the best and compete against the best," he said.

Former India opener Akash Chopra too lavished praise on Ashwin, saying he is one of the biggest match winners the country has ever produced.



Ash, Root in contention for ICC Player of Month

PTI ■ DUBAI

Seasoned India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin along with England captain Joe Root and West Indies' new batting sensation Kyle Mayers were on Tuesday nominated for the ICC Player of the Month for their exceptional performances in February.

Ashwin played three Tests against England and scored 106 in the second innings of India's second Test victory at Chennai and took his 400th Test wicket in the third Test victory at Ahmedabad.

"Scoring a total of 176 runs across these games with taking a total of 24 wickets, Ashwin is the deserving candidate to be nominated in the men's category for

February," the ICC release stated.

"England Test captain Joe Root makes it to the list of nominations again this month for his outstanding performance with the bat and the ball. He scored a total of 333 runs and took 6 wickets overall in the 3 Tests that he played against India," it further stated.

From the West Indies, Test debutant Mayers played two matches against Bangladesh and had a match-winning knock of 210 to help his team successfully chase a target of 395 at Chittagong.

In the women's section, Tammy Beaumont and Nat Sciver of England along with Brooke Halliday of New Zealand have been nominated.

Gayle focused to win third T20 World Cup

AFP ■ ANTIGUA

Chris Gayle said on Monday he is focused on the "bigger picture" of winning a third T20 world title with the West Indies later this year, ahead of the veteran batsman's return to International cricket this week.

The 41-year-old was named in the Windies' 14-man squad for the three-game T20I series against Sri Lanka, which starts in Antigua on Wednesday.

Gayle, who was part of the World T20-winning sides in both 2012 and 2016, played the last of his 58 T20Is against England in March 2019.

The Windies will attempt to defend their title in India in October and November.

"I want to accomplish, starting off by winning the series, but the bigger picture is actually to get three T20 titles under my belt," Gayle told a press conference.

"That's actually the goal I'm setting in my head — winning the T20 World Cup. The World Cup is still a long way off but by the time you quint (blink), it's World Cup time."

Gayle has made 1,627 T20I runs with a highest score of 117 at an average of over 32.

"I want to win the series," Gayle added. "I want to get off to a good start. It's really good to be back. Hopefully I can perform, help the team, and put the



team in a winning position."

He is one of four openers in the West Indies squad, but said that he could be used lower down the order again.

"It seems like I'm the number three specialist now," he said. "It's not a problem. I'm good at playing spin, I'm as good at playing fast bowlers as anyone as I'm an opener."

"But with West Indies cricket, whatever role they want me to play, I'm willing to play that particular role. If it's opening, I'm ready, number three, number five — I'm pretty much flexible. I will still be the best number five in the world, best number three in the world."

Crowds can be avoided at least initially in IPL: Wadia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Punjab Kings co-owner Ness Wadia feels the IPL can avoid crowds initially in the tournament and also wants to know from the BCCI that why his team's base in Mohali has not been picked among the potential venues for the 2021 edition despite a low Covid-19 caseload.

Delhi, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Bengaluru and Chennai have been shortlisted as potential venues but the BCCI is yet to take a final call on the matter.

"We have written to the BCCI to find out under what criteria they have selected the venues and why they have not selected us. We were hoping to have games in Punjab," Wadia said.

"Some of the teams will not have a home advantage, those are the concerns. The cases in Chandigarh and Mohali are not that much, I don't know on what basis they have shortlisted the venues," he added, referring to Chandigarh's 69 new cases on Monday.

The 2020 edition of the IPL was held in the UAE in empty stadiums but there is a possibility that the upcoming edition at home will allow spectators with the Covid situation improving drastically since the last IPL.

The current India-England Test series too is being played in front of lim-



ited fans.

However, Wadia feels IPL is a much tougher challenge logistically compared to a bilateral series and crowds can be avoided at least initially due to safety concerns.

"I think it would better to have no crowd initially and then evaluate the Covid-19 situation as the event progresses. There is no question that the IPL is tougher to organise than a bilateral series. We want whatever is best and safe for the players and the bio-bubble.

Leach eager to learn from Ashwin, Axar

PTI ■ LONDON

By his own admission, England's Jack Leach is in awe of the exploits of Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel during the pink ball Test and he is eager to learn the nuances of spin bowling from the Indian duo in the fourth and final match, starting here on Thursday.

Ashwin and Axar used the spin-friendly Motera pitch to great effect and picked up 18 of the 20 English wickets in the match to demolish the visitors.

"When you see players having so much success, like Ravichandran Ashwin, who has just got to 400 Test wickets and has a lot of experience in India, and Axar Patel, who has had a great start to Test cricket, of course, you try to learn from them," Leach wrote



in a column for *Sky Sports*.

"It's important not to look at it too emotionally though and think I just want to bowl exactly like them!"

The 29-year-old left-arm spinner felt the experienced

Ashwin was very clever in the way he changed his seam position.

"He (Ashwin) will bowl to the same spot but the way it gets there and whether it hits the seam or hits the lacquer varies and the ball reacts very differently," Leach observed.

"Then Axar is someone who seems to present every ball the same, a squarish seam, then a few skid on and the odd one grips — that has been so effective on the wickets we've played on."

Leach is up for the challenge that awaits him in the final Test and sounded confident after picking up the wickets of top four Indian batsmen in the third Test.

"...We're all keen to learn and are excited by the challenge; you have to be because if it was all easy then it would-

n't be Test cricket and it wouldn't be as much fun when you have those good moments. It's something that I'm relishing," he said.

"I was really pleased with the way I got the wickets, lbw and they were all from straight balls, obviously the balls before spin and then you get the wicket with the straight one."

He said he will not get a better four-wicket than he grabbed in the last Test in the form of Rohit Sharma, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane.

"I'm pleased with the wickets that I've taken, bowling to some of the best players in the world in their own backyard. I don't think I'll get a better four-for and I feel like I've held my own really; that gives me a lot of confidence moving forward," he said.

Money gets more importance than cricket in IPL: Steyn

PTI ■ KARACHI

South Africa pace great Dale Steyn has claimed that Cricket takes a back seat at the Indian Premier League, insisting that money is given more importance than the game in the lucrative T20 tournament.

Justifying his on-and-off IPL career, Steyn said this was one of the reasons he had not featured regularly in the world's biggest franchise-based T20 tournament.

"I think when you go to the IPL, there are such big squads and so many big names and so much emphasis on maybe the amount of money players earn and everything like that, so sometimes, somewhere down the line, cricket gets forgotten," said Steyn, who was part of the Royal Challengers Bangalore squad in the last IPL.

In January this year, Steyn announced that he is opting out of the IPL 2021 but will play other leagues around the world.

Steyn's decision influenced RCB to release him ahead of the IPL 2021 auction.

Steyn has played 95 IPL matches, picking up 97 wickets with a best of 3 for 8.

But the South African's repeated injury breakdowns didn't help his cause as he just featured in 12 IPL matches in the last three seasons.

The South African pacer, who is representing Quetta Gladiators in the Pakistan Super League 6, said he took the break as he needed time off from the game and also because he found playing in other leagues around the world more rewarding as a player.

"When you come to like the PSL or the Sri Lankan Premier League, for that matter, there is an importance on cricket. I have only been here for a couple of days and I have had people in and out of my room, just wanting to know about where I have played and how I went about it," Steyn said.

"Whereas, when I go to something like the IPL that gets forgotten and the main topic is how much money did you go for in this IPL? That's just me being brutally honest. I wanted to stay away from that and really put more emphasis on playing and bringing good vibes to good cricket teams and tournaments I feel are worth it," he added.

Vinicius rescues point for Real



AFP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid's chances of chasing down La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid were dealt a blow on Monday as they needed a late Vinicius Junior equaliser to secure a 1-1 draw with Real Sociedad.

It could have been worse for Zinedine Zidane's side, with Vinicius' finish in the 89th minute preventing what would have been a damaging defeat after a weekend in which both Atletico and Barcelona had won.

Atletico's victory over Villarreal on Sunday put them six points clear of Real Madrid, an advantage that is now only cut to five ahead of next week's Madrid derby at the Wanda Metropolitano. Atletico also have a game in hand.

The result ends Real Madrid's run of five consecutive wins while Porto's brilliant header for Real Sociedad early in the second half was also the first goal conceded by the reigning champions in five games.

It represents an important shift in momentum. A few days ago Atletico might have hoped just to hold on to first place next weekend but now they could spy an opportunity to all but

knock their opponents out of the title race.

Madrid had 20 shots to Real Sociedad's six but lacked edge in the final third, with the injured Karim Benzema watching on from the stands.

"We've had games where we won and maybe we didn't deserve to win as well, we can't change anything," said Madrid coach Zidane. "We have to keep going. There is a long way to go."

Richarlison boosts Everton's top-4 bid



Liverpool: Everton boosted their bid to earn a top-four finish in the Premier League as Richarlison sealed a 1-0 win against struggling Southampton on Monday.

Carlo Ancelotti's side won for the first time in six home league games thanks to Richarlison's early goal.

Everton's last success at Goodison Park had come against Arsenal just before Christmas, but ending a run of three consecutive home league defeats lifted them to within two points of fourth-placed West Ham.

The seventh-placed Toffees have a game in hand on West Ham, as well as Liverpool and Chelsea, who occupy the places directly above them. AFP

SINGLES

'INDO-PAK EXPRESS' TO BE BACK ON TOUR
NEW DELHI: The much-popular Indo-Pak pairing of Rohan Bopanna and Aisam-ul-haq Qureshi will be back after six years when it competes at the Acapulco ATP 500 event but as of now it's an one-off arrangement since their combined ranking won't let them enter bigger tournaments together. It will be first time that Bopanna and Aisam, known as 'Indo-Pak Express' will play together since they last competed at the ATP 250 event in Shenzhen in 2014.

MANIKA, SREEJA ADVANCE INTO FINAL ROUND
DOHA: Star paddler Manika Batra and young Sreeja Akula moved to the final round of the women's singles qualifiers at the WTT Contender after winning their respective matches. The world number 150, Sreeja prevailed over world number 74 Vega Paulina before she sent packing 87th-ranked Orsavan Parananang 11-5, 11-5, 11-6 in the third round. While Manika got the better of Irina Ciobanu 11-7, 15-13, 11-8 comfortably in the third round of women's singles qualifiers and will face Ganna Gaponova in the last round.

HAT-TRICK OF DEFEATS FOR INDIA WOMEN
DUSSELDORF: The Indian women's hockey team's defence resisted well but formidable Germany walked away with a 2-0 win in the third game, taking an unassailable 3-0 lead in the four-match series, here. Sonja Zimmermann (26') and Franzisca Hauke (42') scored the goals for Germany, who won their third consecutive match on Monday. The fourth match of the series will be played on Thursday.

SMRITI SLIPS 2 PLACES IN ODI RANKINGS
DUBAI: Indian opener Smriti Mandhana slipped two places to sixth among batters but Jhulan Goswami retained her fifth spot among bowlers in the latest ICC women's ODI Players' rankings issued on Tuesday. England opener Tammy Beaumont has rocketed five places to grab the top position after an excellent display in the three-match series against New Zealand. She has overtaken the likes of Stafanie Taylor and Amy Satterthwaite to top the list and now leads Australia captain Meg Lanning by 16 points.

STIMAC NAMES 35 PROBABLES FOR FRIENDLIES
NEW DELHI: National football coach Igor Stimac on Tuesday named 10 new players in his 35-member list of probabilities for India's back-to-back international friendlies against Oman and the UAE to be played in Dubai on March 25 and 29 respectively. The final list of 28 players will be announced after the ISL final on March 13. The players will then assemble for a preparatory camp in Dubai from March 15.

MARY, PANGHAL AMONG 13 IN QUARTERS
NEW DELHI: Six-time world champion M C Mary Kom and Asian Games Gold-medallist Amit Panghal were among 13 Indian boxers who made the quarterfinals of Boxam International Tournament on Tuesday, leaving them just win away from securing medals at the event. While 12 of them either got byes or benefitted from the small size of their respective draws, Commonwealth Games Bronze-medallist Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) defeated local hope Joan Manuel Torres in his opening bout on Tuesday.

SANIA RETURNS WITH WIN IN DOHA
DOHA: Sania Mirza made a winning return to the WTA circuit as she and her Slovenian partner Andreja Klepac beat Ukrainians Nadiia Kichenok and Lyudmyla Kichenok to reach the doubles quarterfinals of the Qatar Total Open here. The Indo-Slovenian pair won 6-4, 6-7(5), 10-5 against the duo of Kichenok and Kichenok in the opening round of the WTA 500 tournament Monday night.

FEDERER OUT OF MIAMI OPEN
MIAMI: Roger Federer is withdrawing from this month's Miami Open so he can spend extra time preparing to "work his way back out on tour," his agent told AP. The 20-time Grand Slam champion has not competed in more than a year. He is scheduled to make his return to the tour next week in a hard-court tournament at Doha, Qatar.

Agencies



KRITHI SHETTY to speak in Telangana dialect

Bebamma aka Krithi Shetty scored full marks with her appearance in the debut movie *Uppena*. While the director and the hero Vaishnav Tej got applause from all over, Krithi Shetty got a bit more appreciation everywhere. It looks like the beautiful talent has signed a new role that would be in complete contrast to 'Bebamma' — she would be speaking in the Telangana accent for this role of hers. Krithi Shetty is playing a girl from Hyderabad in her next movie, *Aa Ammayi Gurinchi Meeku Cheppali*, alongside

Sudheer Babu in this love story. Beamma will be directed by Mohana Krishna Indraganti, and the movie is again expected to be a soothing love story like *Sammohanam* after his action-thriller *V* with Nani and Sudheer Babu. The actress says she strongly believes this is a story all of us will relate to and fall in love with. Krithi Shetty earlier acted as a student in Hrithik's *Super 30* and is playing a role in Nani's *Shyam Singha Roy*. Now, with *Aa Ammayi Gurinchi Meeku Cheppali*, Krithi Shetty is signing movies at a faster pace and is soon expected to sign in the star ticket films.



A1 Express all set to take audiences on a ride

Actor Sundeep Kishan-starrer *A1 Express*, a sport-based movie, has completed the censor formalities and received a 'U' certificate from the censor board. The film that stars Lavanya Tripathi opposite Sundeep Kishan, is all set to have a grand theatrical launch on March 5. Sundeep Kishan considers his maiden production *Ninu Veedni Needanu Nene*, which was released in 2019 as the beginning of a fresh phase in his career. When he chanced upon the Tamil sports drama *Natpe Thunai* starring Hip Hop Thamilzha, he wanted to tweak it and remake it in Telugu. The actor in a recent interview said that he is confident *A1 Express* will make for a collective theatrical viewing experience. According to Sundeep Kishan, the story of *A1 Express* is based on *Natpe Thunai*. "We retained the core emotions and as we had scope to improvise, we made an effort to put forth a visually and technically better film than the original," shares the *Venkatadri Express* actor. The actor trained with coaches of the Hyderabad Hockey Association as well as in Mohali.

DHRUVA SARJA'S *Bharjari* to have a telugu release soon

Kannada actor Dhruva Sarja, who has wowed fans and critics alike with his blockbuster hit *Pogaru* in Kannada, Telugu and Tamil languages, is all set to have his other hit *Bharjari* released in Telugu. Padmavati Pictures production house's V Shiva Subbarao, who bought the rights for the film, said, "Many producers wanted to buy the film's rights, we're glad we were

able to buy it for a fancy price. We're sure the audience will love Dhruva's *Bharjari* as much as they loved him in *Pogaru*." The film's promotion is on at a brisk pace and the novel ways are only set to grab more eyeballs. *Bharjari* is a 2017 action comedy film written and directed by Chethan Kumar. The film also stars Rachita Ram and Haripriya in the lead roles.



Allu Arjun's push to Karthikeya



RX 100 and 90ML fame Kartikeya Gummakonda-starrer *Chaavu Kaburu Challaga* is finally gearing up for a theatrical release on March 19. A grand pre-release event has been scheduled for March 9, in Hyderabad. The latest we hear is that Stylish star Allu Arjun will grace the pre-release event of the film co-produced by his father Allu Aravind along with Bunny Vas under GA2 Productions. Several other personalities from the industry will grace the event to support the actor. While Lavanya Tripathi is playing the female lead, Aamani Srikanth Iyyengar, Rajitha, Murali Sharma, Achanta Mahesh, Bhadrham and Prabhu will also be seen essaying some key roles. Directed by debutant Pegallapati Koushik, Karm Chawla is handling the



cinematography and G Satya roped in for the editing. Jakes Bejoy is scoring the music of this film.

DRUSHYAM 2 LAUNCHED



Venkatesh Daggubati's much-anticipated film, *Drushyam 2*, the Telugu remake of *Drishyam 2*, was officially launched in Hyderabad. The film's launch began with a pooja in the presence of the cast and crew. Mohanlal's *Drishyam 2* released on Amazon Prime Video on February 19 and it has been garnering great response from both audience as well as critics. Following the film's success, Jeethu Joseph announced that he will be directing the Telugu remake of the film that will go on floors on March 5. Jeethu took to Instagram to share a picture from the pooja ceremony saying, "Telugu *Drishyam 2* starts rolling on March 5th in Hyderabad (sic)."

KEERTHY TO PLAY SITA IN ADIPURUSH?



Young Rebel star Prabhas, who has a promising line-up of films, was recently spotted in Mumbai at the Bandra Kurla Complex. According to the latest report, Prabhas is all set to join the sets of *Adipurush*, which will be helmed by Om Raut of *Tanhaji* fame. The film that also stars Saif Ali Khan is a mythological film based on the epic Ramayana. Now, makers of *Adipurush* are yet to lock the heroine who will be playing the role of Goddess Sita in the Prabhas-starrer. After considering many names, the team is said to be tilting towards South star heroine Keerthy Suresh for the role of Sita in Prabhas and Om Raut's *Adipurush*, sources say. However, an official confirmation regarding the inclusion of the *Mahanadi* actress in this much-hyped big-budget project is awaited. Insiders say that Prabhas is hitting the gym twice a day to get a leaner look for his upcoming film, which is being shot in 3D. Prabhas will play Lord Ram while Saif Ali Khan will play Ravana-Lankesh. Apart from this, Prabhas' other movies include *Salaar* and *Radhe Shyam*.