

ANALYSIS 7
INDIA BADLY NEEDS A
UNIFORM LAW ON BAIL**MONEY 8**
SUGAR OUTPUT UP 20%
TILL FEB 2020-21**SPORTS 11**
MATCH OF
HIGH-STAKES

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



the pioneer

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MUSKAAN
KHUBCHANDANI IN
RAJASEKHAR'S
SEKHAR

Page 12

**CHINESE HACKERS STILL ACTIVELY
TARGETING INDIAN PORT: U.S. FIRM**

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

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

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

**DEBT WORTH \$84 BN AT RISK AT TOP
BANKS DUE TO EXTREME WEATHER**

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

**'FAMILIES SCREAMING FOR JUSTICE':
PRIYANKA GANDHI SLAMS UP GOVT**

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



Many TDP candidates quit, give YSRCP the upper hand

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

The ruling YSRCP appears to have won round one in the latest electoral battle for the Urban Local Bodies over its bitter rival, the TDP.

Even before voting for 75 municipalities and 12 municipal corporations - to be held on March 10 - could take place, the YSRCP has bagged many wards and a few municipalities across the state uncontested.

While the YSRCP had recently bagged more than 80 percent of the gram panchayats in polls held on non-party basis, all eyes are on elections for Urban Local Bodies that are held on party basis.

On Wednesday, the last day to withdraw nominations, TDP candidates withdrew their papers in many wards in municipalities and divisions in municipal corporations, and joined the YSRCP thus leaving the field open for the ruling party's victory.

Most of these unanimous victories were reported from municipalities in Rayalaseema region. Pulivendula municipality that comes under Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's home constituency is among them, and so is Punganur municipality that comes under Panchayati Raj minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy's home constituency. Done and Atmakur municipalities in Kurnool district, Tuni in East Godavari and Macherla in Guntur district, Palamaner in Chittoor district have been bagged by YSRCP.

In some places to save their candidates from being 'lured' by YSRCP, the TDP leaders had to set up 'camps' by shifting them to other places.



We will sweep ULB elections: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Stating that the YS Jaganmohan Reddy Government is getting an overwhelming mandate as evident in the gram panchayat polls, Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Wednesday said that the ruling party would sweep the Municipal polls as well.

Speaking to the media here, Sajjala said that the TDP has no candidates to field, although the State Election Commission has given one more chance to file nominations.

"YSRCP candidates will sweep the municipal elections, as people have witnessed the good governance of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy for the past 20 months," he said, adding that elections have always proved that YSRCP is the clear winner with people's blessings.

Sajjala slammed TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu for releasing a manifesto for municipal polls and making false promises to cheat the public.

Forgery, impersonation behind YSRCP's unanimous wins, Naidu tells poll panel

VIJAYAWADA: Alleging that YSRCP leaders forged signatures and in some cases impersonated his party's candidates to withdraw nominations and thus win fraudulently, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday wrote to the State Election Commission, seeking action against the culprits behind what he claimed was a massive election fraud in Chittoor district.

In his letter to the SEC, Naidu said: "It has come to our notice that in Chittoor municipal corporation, the YSRCP leaders openly claim that the nominations of the TDP candidates will be withdrawn



either through forgery or impersonation in order to obtain unanimous wins."

Naidu said that all the TDP candidates submitted the required B-Forms before stipulated time of 3 PM on Wednesday.

"However, YSRCP henchmen in connivance with a section of officials/police are forging signatures of TDP candidates and filed/filing withdrawals with the returning officers concerned," he said.

On Wednesday, Goyal said that AP was one of the leading states in generating renewable energy both solar and wind.

"Our government is working to ensure that the entire rail network will be fully electrified by

Goyal: AP to play key role in Railway sector

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Union Minister for Railways Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said that Andhra Pradesh would play a key role when the entire Indian rail network will run on renewable energy by 2030.

Addressing a virtual session on 'Investment Opportunities in Andhra Pradesh', during the 'Maritime India Summit-2021', organised by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, jointly with FICCI

on Wednesday, Goyal said that AP was one of the leading states in generating renewable energy both solar and wind.

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December 2023 and the entire rail network will run on renewable energy by 2030. When this happens, AP will also have a major share of contribution to the renewable energy required," he said.

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Why ex-babus in BJP turned silent?

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ VIJAYAWADA

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

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

With Somu Veerajulu serving as the party's state president, there is none to use the services of these leaders, who have been relegated to the background.

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

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

No one knows what happened to former DGP V



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

Dinesh Reddy, who joined the BJP after retirement. Former Chief Secretary IYR Krishna Rao, who belongs to Brahmin community, makes

his presence felt now and then through his twitter messages and meetings held outside the purview of the party. There is no evidence of the

AP Govt alienates 3,148.68 acres for Kadapa steel plant

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government on Wednesday issued orders alienating 3,148.68 acres in Peddandluru and Sunnapu Rallapalli villages of Jammalamadugu mandal in Kadapa district in favour of M/s AP High Grade Steels Limited for establishment of an Integrated Steel Plant.

The land has been alienated to the state government entity at a cost of Rs 1,65,000 per acre.

It may be worth mentioning here that the State Cabinet had recently given its nod to M/s AP High Grade Steels Limited to pick London-based Liberty Group as Joint Venture partner to develop the integrated steel plant at Kadapa.

Alienation of the land has



been done after the Kadapa collector's proposal in this regard was cleared by Andhra Pradesh Land Management Authority (APLMA) in its meeting held on December 14, last year.

The government had also set certain conditions regarding the alienation. Accordingly, the land should not be alien-

ated, leased or transferred in any other manner by AP High Grade Steels Limited to any other organisation or entity or department without the explicit prior approval of the Government in Revenue Department and it should only be utilised for the purpose intended.

Nod for AP police command centre in Vizag

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

With the Andhra Pradesh government preparing ground to soon shift the administration to Visakhapatnam, which it wants to be the Executive Capital, sanction has been accorded on Wednesday to build the Police Command and Control Centre (CCC) in the port city.

There is intense speculation that the Chief Minister will first start functioning from Visakhapatnam "anytime after Ugadi" (the Telugu New Year's Day in April).

The original plan was to establish the Command and Control Centre in Vijayawada city, which formed part of the present capital region Amaravati.

AP may go slow on division of districts

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The proposed reorganisation of districts in Andhra Pradesh may not happen by the March 31 deadline due to a variety of reasons.

A high-level official committee headed by the Chief Secretary, set up for the purpose, could not yet trash out various contentious issues, particularly that related to drawing the borders of the new districts, officials said.

Besides, creation of required infrastructure like new office buildings for the newly carved out districts is also seen as a handful task, given the precarious financial position of the state.

In respect of staffing, the panel is said to have noted that no new posts need to be created as the existing ranks could be distributed and re-assigned. "The major problem is with regard to demarcation of the boundaries as there are several geographical disparities. Distribution of resources is also proving ticklish," a top official

cial involved in the exercise said.

The state currently has 13 districts.

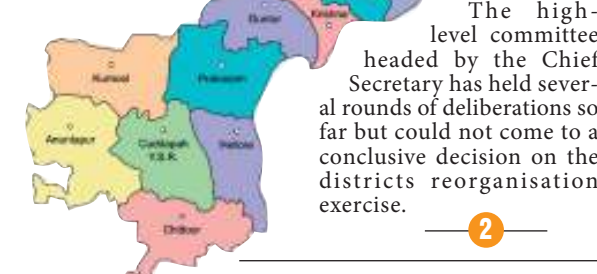
On the eve of the 2019 general elections, the YSR Congress Party promised to carve out new districts with each Lok Sabha constituency as the base, thus taking the number to 25.

However, the government later decided to split Araku Parliamentary constituency, spread over four districts now, into two new tribal districts, thereby increasing the overall number to 26.

The YS Jaganmohan Reddy government said creation of new districts was a measure aimed at ensuring ease of administration and accessibility to people as the present districts are large in size and have become

"unwieldy to administer".

The high-level committee headed by the Chief Secretary has held several rounds of deliberations so far but could not come to a conclusive decision on the districts reorganisation exercise.



AP to buy 10 bulletproof vehicles @ Rs 65 lakh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP government on Wednesday accorded administrative sanction to procure 10 bulletproof vehicles to provide foolproof security to the Chief Minister and his Cabinet colleagues.

The Government will be procuring five Scorpio-make bulletproof vehicles at a cost of Rs 65 lakh each and five Tata Hexa XR 4X4 vehicles at the rate of Rs 70 lakh each.



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

5



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

2



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

8

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksam:

Magha & Shukla Paksha

Panchangam

Tithi : Shashthi: 09:58 pm

Nakshatram: Vishakha: 11:57 pm

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)

Rahukalam: 01:55 pm - 03:23 pm

Yamagandam: 06:35 am - 08:03 am

Varyyam: 06:48 am - 08:18 am,

12:00 am - 05:14 am

Gulika: 09:31 am - 10:59 am

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 03:45 pm - 05:15 pm

Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:04 pm - 12:51 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy

Temp: 36/20

Humidity: 49%

Sunrise: 06:32 am

Sunset: 06:23 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated march 3, 2021 5:00 PM

Electoral reforms: Changing the face of democracy in India

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

and candidates deploy fair and foul means to attract the electorates towards them. Several measures had been taken to control foul means but with the limited success. The purity and robustness of electoral process determine the true will of the people. Aberrations, sometimes openly or tacitly supported by the establishment, especially in the case of closely contested ones, can influence the result. During different stages of the election process interventions at the time of voters' registration, preparation of electoral rolls, selection of polling stations, allocation of voters to different polling stations, arrangements made at the polling stations, smooth con-

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

duct of polling process, and counting of votes etc., may vitiate the outcome. In the case of serious infringements, the election is either countermanded or repoll is ordered by the Election Commission. After completion of election, a competent court can only set aside the election after examining the election petition, and arriving at a conclusion whether the entire process has been vitiated or not. Remaining major or minor infringements, by and large, go unpunished thus emboldening the violators. In the long list of violations, registration of a voter at more than one place is very common. Such cases can be



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

detected and cleaned up within the state, but is difficult outside the state. As the debate on 'One country, one election' is grad-

ually picking up; the phrase should also include 'One voter list'. The present system of any time election in different parts of country is a big distraction for governance. Enforcement of Model Code of Conduct and conjectures on the outcome of the election is mainly responsible for policy slowdown. Simultaneous elections and/or a fixed window for elections throughout the country could be a game-changer in so far as democracy in India is concerned. An elector should be at liberty to get her name enrolled at any constituency in the country. Electoral data base should also include educational qualifications and professional

information etc., as this would be useful to prepare the voter list for graduates, teachers and other special constituencies. Conduct of local bodies' elections is very important as it throws open the floor to many grass-roots-level leaders. The election to local bodies should also be done under the aegis of the Election Commission of India. If need be, ECI could be further strengthened. At the state level, it means merger of offices of Chief Electoral Officer and the State Election Commissioner. Conduct of local body elections by ECI will free them from the avoidable political machinations and lead to better credibility. Another area of concern widely known is the use of money, liquor and other gifts items by the political parties/candidates to influence voters. Despite having expenditure observers in every election, hardly any action seems to have been taken against the violators of election expenditure ceiling. One can think several other electoral reforms. While admitting partial/limited success in controlling the evil influence of money, muscle power and other electoral malpractices, it is the opportune time to purify the election process by initiating comprehensive electoral reforms in the country.

HC quashes SEC orders on renominations, mobiles

Continued from Page 1

A Lunch Motion petition was filed on March 1 and the High Court after hearing the petitions quashed both the orders of the SEC. The Election Commissioner had directed all district Collectors to keep the ward volunteers away from the municipal election process scheduled for March 10 saying that their role could either directly or indirectly support a candidate or a political party which would be treated as a violation of the Model Code of Conduct. He also directed the district Collectors to closely monitor the movements of the volunteers and keep their phones in safe custody.

The High Court bench reviewed the matter and dismissed the SEC's directive to seize the mobile phones of the volunteers. The bench said it was unilateral, unconstitutional and against the provisions of the Panchayati Raj Act.

Many TDP candidates quit, give YSRCP the upper hand

Continued from Page 1

Of the approximately 18,000 panchayats, YSRCP had bagged close to 2,500 uncontested. "There is nothing unusual about unanimous elections. It happened in gram panchayat polls, and it is happening in ULB polls also. This only shows the performance of the YSRCP government. The same thing would have happened even if the polls were held last year. TDP is unnecessarily making noise," said YSRCP general secretary and government advisor, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy. TDP had accused YSRCP of indulging in unethical practices by either luring its candidates by cash or kind or threatening them with dire consequences.

Polling for 12 panchayats, 725 wards on March 15

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Election Commission on Wednesday issued notification for conduct of ordinary elections to gram panchayats in the State where elections were not conducted in the four phases. Accordingly, elections will be held on March 15 for sarpanches and wards members in 12 gram panchayats and 725 wards where elections could not be held due relating to invalid nominations during scrutiny, withdrawal of nominations, legal /administrative impediments and due to



other technical reasons. The elections for sarpanch posts will be held in Srikakulam, Prakasam,

Kurnool, YSR Kadapa, Kurnool and Anantapur districts. The voter list will be displayed by March 4 and the deadline for filing of nominations is till 5 pm of March 6. Polling will be held March 15 from 6.30 am to 3.30 pm and counting of votes will start from 4 pm. The fourth phase of the gram panchayat elections concluded on February 21, where more than 80 per cent polling was recorded on each of the four phases as per the State Election Commission release.

We will sweep ULB elections: Sajjala

Continued from Page 1

"The 40-year-old TDP has lost its shine and is now fighting it difficult to even find candidates to contest. Even though the SEC has given another chance to file nominations, no one believes in TDP and is coming forward to contest," he said. Sajjala stated that the false argument that the government is threatening TDP leaders has no takers. Taking a dig at TDP's manifesto, he questioned Naidu whether he had given 20 litres of drinking water for just Rs 2, or a job in each family as promised in the 2014 TDP manifesto? "The 600 promises made in the TDP manifesto in the 2014 general election have no

authenticity, and the manifesto was even removed from the party website before 2019," Sajjala reminded. He said that YSRCP would complain to the Election Commission about cheating the people by putting unfulfilled promises in the TDP manifesto. Speaking on TDPs allegations regarding increase of property taxes, Sajjala said that it is Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy who has raised the living standards of the people through welfare administration, and would anyone believe that taxes will be increased and burden the public? "No matter how many lies Naidu utters, people will not believe that taxes are being levied on them," he said.

AP Govt alienates...

Continued from Page 1

In case any environmentally sensitive and fragile areas like water bodies exist, they should not be disturbed under any circumstances. The land shall be utilized for the purpose for which it is allotted within three years of the orders of alienation.

The State government planned to set up an integrated steel plant in Kadapa district and Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had laid the foundation in December 2020. The Government envisaged setting up the steel plant with a capacity to produce 3 MTPA high-grade steel at a cost of Rs 16,500 crore.

Nod for AP police command centre...

Continued from Page 1

As the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government is bent on relocating the state capital to Visakhapatnam, Director General of Police Gautam Sawang proposed that the CCC be located there instead of Vijayawada. Accordingly, Principal Secretary (Home) Kumar Vishwajeet issued an order granting the required administrative sanction. The CCC would be built in the available government land

in Visakhapatnam at a cost of Rs 13.80 crore. The government, however, asked the DGP to follow/comply with the orders of the High Court and the Supreme Court, if any, "to avoid legal complications in future". The rider comes as the issue of relocating the state capital to Visakhapatnam is sub-judice, with several persons and organisations challenging the government move. The AP High Court and the apex court are currently seized of the matter.

AP may go slow on...

Continued from Page 1

The YS Jaganmohan Reddy government said creation of new districts was a measure aimed at ensuring ease of administration and accessibility to people as the present districts are large in size and have become "unwieldy to administer". The high-level committee headed by the Chief Secretary has held several rounds of deliberations so far but could not come to a conclusive decision on the districts reorganisation exercise. The committee was said to

have decided to leave the ultimate decision to the political bosses, given the many contentious issues involved, including the conflicting demands from various parties. Now that the ruling political dispensation has been completely engaged in the elections to panchayat raj institutions and urban local bodies, the districts reorganisation process has been kept on the back-burner, an official source told PTI. "It will happen but will take more time," a top bureaucrat said.

I-T sleuths raid Taapsee, Anurag

PNS ■ MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department on Wednesday raided premises linked to the filmmakers, including Anurag Kashyap, who launched the now dissolved production house Phantom Films, Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shishhashish Sarkar and Bollywood actor Taapsee Pannu, officials said. The searches are being carried out in over 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune, officials said. Some executives of celebrity and talent management company KWAN are also being raided. The action is part of a tax evasion probe against Phantom Films, which was dissolved in 2018, and its then promoters Kashyap, director-producer Vikramaditya Motwane, producer Vikas Bahl and produc-

er-distributor Madhu Mantena, they said. Sources said some inter-linked transactions between the entities searched are under the scanner of the department and the raids are aimed at gathering more evidence to further probe tax evasion allegations. Founded in 2011, Phantom Films produced films such as "Lootera", "Queen", "Ugly", "NH 10", "Masaan" and "Uda Punjab". Kashyap later launched a new production company called Good Bad Films while Motwane launched Andolan Films. The searches against Mantena are also being carried out in context of his links with KWAN, of which he was a co-promoter. Pannu, 33, has worked in numerous Hindi, Tamil and Telugu movies.

Goyal: AP to play...

Continued from Page 1

Highlighting the potential in AP, Goyal said that the Central government was working closely with the State government to further develop road, rail and port infrastructure and promote dedicated freight corridors as both for encouraging economic activities and bringing manufacturing activity and promote industrial parks in the State. "I would urge industry captains to let us build industry at sea. We on our part will ensure ease of doing business. We will work in partnership with States for enhancing ease of doing business at state and local level," he said. "If we re-invent with technology driven solutions like robotics, automation, artificial intelligence, big data analytics, our sector is SAFE-Sustainable, Agile, Futuristic, Efficient. I appeal to all stakeholders to utilise this opportunity to transform from being 'service provider' to 'knowledge provider'," Goyal asserted. "In the last 6 years, the capacity of our major ports

has almost doubled. We have developed smart cities and industrial parks and integrated ports with the coastal economic zones. Integration of Road, Rail and Waterways can truly make India 'One Nation, One Market, One Supply'," he added. AP has great scope for cruise tourism: Goyal Praising its pristine beaches, hills along the coast coupled with the robust infrastructure, Piyush Goyal said Andhra Pradesh has great scope to attract cruise tourism. He also mentioned about the delicious food and hospitality of the state. The ports being developed on the coast will make base for cruise tourism. R Karikal Valaven, Special Chief Secretary Industries, Investment and Commerce, AP said "AP is also planning to promote maritime tourism. "Tourism is an area of our interest. All sea ports and fishing harbours will be connected through cruise tourism. We are aiming at inclusive growth for the state," said Valaven.

AP adds 135 cases to its Covid tally

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported 135 fresh cases of coronavirus, 82 recoveries and one death in 24 hours ending 9 am on Wednesday. The latest bulletin said the gross positives climbed to 8,90,215 and the recoveries to 8,82,219. After 7,170 deaths, the number of active cases jumped over to 826. In 24 hours, Chittoor district reported the highest 31, Visakhapatnam 23, Krishna 15, Srikakulam 12, Anantapuram 11 and Kurnool 10 new cases. The remaining eight districts added less than 10 each, according to the bulletin. Chittoor district also reported one fresh Covid-19 fatality, according to the bulletin.

Forgery...

Continued from Page 1

"The YSRCP leaders are impersonating TDP candidates and are filed/filing for withdrawal of nominations with returning officers," Naidu wrote. He pointed out that the State Election Commission has issued directions to all election officials to video record withdrawal of nominations by the candidate concerned, which is in turn to be preserved as election record. "However, such video recording did not take place wherever the YSRCP supported candidates are attempting forced unanimous elections," Naidu wrote. He requested the State Election Commission (SEC) to act swiftly and take action against filing of such forced or impersonated withdrawals without the knowledge of the candidate. "We also demand that unanimous results in Chittoor Municipal Corporation shall be declared only after scrutiny of video recordings and thorough inquiry," the TDP supremo said.

People can get vaccinated against Covid 24x7: Vardhan

Continued from Page 1

"The government has lifted the time restriction to increase the speed of vaccination. People can now get vaccinated 24x7 according to their convenience. Prime Minister Narendra Modi understands the value of health as well as the time of citizens," Vardhan tweeted in Hindi. Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan told a press conference on Tuesday that the timeline of vaccinating the beneficiaries from 9 am to 5 pm has been done away with and it is up to the hospitals to decide whether they want to continue administering the vaccines even after that.

"Co-WIN 2.0 does not provide 9 am-5 pm vaccination sessions. It has done away with that timeline. If a hospital has the capacity, the system permits it to do vaccination even after 5 pm in consultation with the state government. This has been briefed both to the state governments as well as the private and government hospitals," he said. The second dose of the vaccine against COVID-19 started being administered from February 13 for those who have completed 28 days since the receipt of the first dose. The vaccination of frontline workers (FLWs) started on February 2. The next phase of the

COVID-19 vaccination commenced from March 1 for people over 60 years of age and those aged 45 and above with specified co-morbid conditions. More than 1.56 crore (1,56,20,749) vaccine doses were administered in the country through 3,12,188 sessions, according to a provisional report till Wednesday 7 am. The beneficiaries include 67,42,187 healthcare workers (first dose), 27,13,144 HCWs (second dose), 55,70,230 FLWs (first dose), 834 FLWs (second dose), 71,896 beneficiaries aged more than 45 years with specific co-morbidities (first dose) and 5,22,458 beneficiaries aged above 60 years.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
₹ 46,300 (10 gm)	
SILVER	
₹ 73,000 (1kg)	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
Dressed/With Skin	₹177
Without Skin	₹201
Broiler at Farm	₹122
EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	395
HYDERABAD	393
VISAKHAPATNAM	505
RETAIL PRICE	₹3.95

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Vijayasai emerges the nucleus for YSRCP in Vizag civic polls

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM
■ VIJAYAWADA

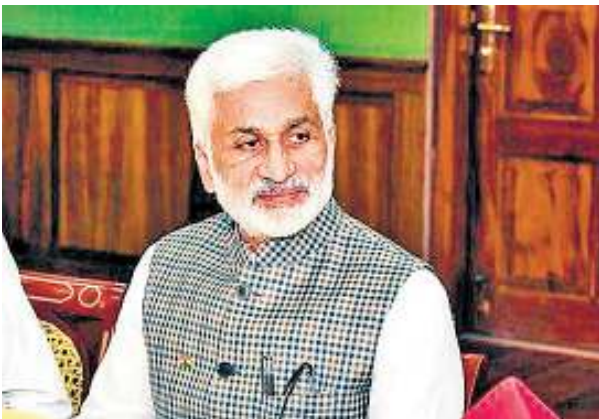
YSRCP MP V Vijaya Sai Reddy is leaving no stone unturned to steer the party ship safely to the shore in the forthcoming polls to the Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation.

By conducting YSRCP programmes extensively division wise in the city, he has taken the party closer to the people. Later, he succeeded in wooing TDP MLA into YSRCP to strengthen it in the steel city.

Barring a lone TDP MLA, the other two MLAs remaining dormant is going to work in favour of the YSRCP.

The Delhi-based MP has focussed his attention on Visakhapatnam and of late, has been staying put in the steel city. People have been approaching the MP instead of the district minister, MP and MLAs creating the impression among the people that he is the only problem solver.

His strength of giving a patient ear to what others have to say and responding im-



mediately depending on the gravity of the situation and calling up officials to suggest solutions to the problems have made Vijayasai Reddy, though not a mass leader, as the most sought-after politician.

He filtered the corporator ticket aspirants in all 92 divisions early and got surveys done to check their background and their prospects. He also gave tickets to some others succumbing to pressure from MLAs.

According to reports, Minister Avanti Srinivas has succeeded in getting tickets to majority of the tickets to Kapus.

In spite of it, lion's share of tickets has been issued to prospective candidates decided by the survey results. Those who have been tickets include those who have been accessible to people and those who have good grip over their respective communities.

The recent 25-km-long padayatra undertaken by him

became a plus for the party.

Generally, the anti-incumbency is perceptible in middle classes and upper middle classes. Because of the media influence, those who live in apartments and residential colonies are likely to be wary of the Government promises, but they would have remained undecided. Realising this, the MP is touring these areas and calling on opinion leaders. This, YSRCP leaders say, will help sway the undecided votes in favour of the ruling party.

As middle classes and the upper middle classes are happy with the government schemes, there is no need for them to back the Opposition.

The MP is toiling hard as an ordinary activist has become an additional attraction. He visited most of the 741 slums in the city. Women constitute the largest chunk of the vote bank for the ruling party.

Former minister and YSRCP general secretary Dadi Veerabhadra Rao remarked that the people of the steel city are highly satisfied when com-

pared to those of other cities.

The MP disciplined the second-rung leadership, appointed poll observers in all Assembly segments and collected a list of efficient leaders and finalised names of those who should shoulder party responsibilities in all divisions. He is also understood to have moved the pawns on the political chessboard carefully taking into consideration various caste equations, if the short-listing of candidates was any indication.

Yadavas are in an ebullient mood as Vamsi Krishna, YSRCP city president, of the community was declared the mayoral candidate. The MP took into consideration the injustice done to the Yadavas in the last two elections. The financially and politically strong Kapu community members have been given a good number of tickets.

Realising that 741 slums in 98 municipal divisions in the city are a deciding factor, the MP set his sights from the word go to capture votes of slum-dwellers.

After victory, TDP will reopen Anna Canteens: Atchannaidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP AP president K Atchannaidu on Wednesday promised the economically backward people across the State that his party will reopen all the closed Anna Canteens, if it wins the forthcoming elections to the Urban Local Bodies.

Describing the canteens as an instrument of self respect of the poor and common man, Atchannaidu, in a statement pointed out that their reopening was one of the primary promises made by the TDP in its manifesto for the elections.

He reminded that after coming to power, the YSRCP shut down all the 204 Anna Canteens that were opened during the TDP regime. Atchannaidu said that by shutting down the canteens, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy snatched away the possibility of the poor having a proper meal with dignity. "Now, the YSRCP Government is planning to hand over these canteens to private persons so that they could set up shopping malls," Atchannaidu alleged. He said that the TDP was



File image of an Anna Canteen soon after it was inaugurated during the TDP regime.

committed to feeding the poor for just Rs 5 per meal.

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu had started the Anna Canteens across municipalities and Municipal Corporations that provided food at Rs 5 per meal thrice in a day. "The introduction of Anna Canteens has been a notable contribution by the TDP to humankind," Atchannaidu said, adding that it was introduced with an objective to provide subsidised hygienic and affordable food for poor people. Around 6 lakh

poor people received three meals a day through the canteens until July 2019.

Atchannaidu added that the YSRCP government shut down all the 204 canteens alleging corruption, but failed to prove even a single allegation on TDP Govt.

"The shutting down of these canteens was a blow to lakhs of poor people during the months of lockdown, in the State," he said, adding that the TDP would win in the urban local bodies and will implement this promise.

SHORT TAKES MULTIPURPOSE CENTRES TO BE READY IN 1 YEAR, CM TOLD

VIJAYAWADA : Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was on Wednesday informed by officials that an action plan has been prepared for completion of construction of warehouses in a year for which the tenders will be finalised by April 15. At a review meeting on multipurpose facility centres which would bring revolutionary changes in agriculture and allied sectors, officials said that the Government will spend around Rs 12,000 crore on warehouses, drying yards, cold rooms, crop collection centres, other farm equipment and other machinery. Reviewing the Pala-velluva programme, the officials said the farmers are getting fair prices for their produce due to the implementation of various schemes by the Government. They said that the project has been extended to other districts also.

DOC BOOKED FOR HARASSING MARRIED WOMAN

VIJAYAWADA : A case of sexual harassment was registered against a government doctor by Kankipadu police in Krishna district late on Tuesday. According to the police, Dr S Sivarama Krishna, working in a government hospital in Movva village Community Health Centre, was accused of harassing a 22-year-old married woman. Dr Sivarama Krishna also runs a clinic in Edupugallu village in the evenings. According to Kankipadu police, the woman approached the doctor for treatment for pregnancy. She later alleged that he doctor took advantage and misbehaved with her. She produced a recording of her conversation with the doctor that she said was recorded on her mobile phone. The victim and her husband lodged a complaint against the doctor.

FOUR VOLUNTEERS GET NOTICES FOR CAMPAIGNING

Vijayawada :Guntur Municipal Corporation commissioner Ch Anuradha on Wednesday confirmed that notices have been issued to four volunteers for participating in the election campaign. She said that Durga Bhavani, Dasaripalli Victor, V Vinod and Sk Sirisha participated in the election campaign. "After we received complaints against the four, notices were issued to them seeking their explanation," the GMC commissioner said. She added that further action would be initiated based on the response by the four volunteers. "If they fail to explain their position satisfactorily, then their services would be terminated," Anuradha. She reminded volunteers, ward secretaries and government employees to follow election norms or face stern action.

WOMAN GUNNED DOWN OVER LAND DISPUTE IN VIZAG

VISAKHAPATNAM :A 45-year old woman was gunned down by one of her relatives at Rangalasingi village under Dumbriguda mandal in Visakhapatnam agency, reportedly over a land dispute, late on Tuesday. The victim was identified as Pangti Sita, a resident of Rangalasingi village. According to Araku Police Station Circle Inspector Pydaiah, the family of Pangti Sita and accused Pangti Damodar are relatives. Both the families have been fighting over a disputed parcel of land for a long time. Late on Tuesday, the two families flared up during which Damodar shot Sita using a country-made weapon. She succumbed to her injuries. After the incident, the accused has gone absconding. Police have launched a manhunt.

Will Ganta finally join YSRCP?

SNV SUDHIR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Decks finally appear to have been cleared for former minister and TDP MLA from Vizag North segment, Ganta Srinivasa Rao, to join the ruling YSRCP.

For well over the last year, speculations had been rife that the senior TDP leader is on the verge of a switch over to the YSRCP, and the only stumbling block was the stiff resistance put up by State tourism minister Muttamsetti Srinivas.

On Wednesday, a key aide of Ganta Srinivasa Rao, Vizag-based chartered accountant B Kasi Viswanath, joined the YSRCP from TDP in the presence of Rajya Sabha member V Vijaysai Reddy.

The YSRCP senior leader's remarks during the joining of Kasi Viswanath added fire to the speculations that induction of Ganta Srinivasa Rao into YSRCP is only a formality and matter of time.

Speculations were rife since sometimes over Ganta Srinivasa Rao's switching to YSRCP either by resigning as an MLA



or getting his son Ganta Raviteja admitted in YSRC and lend support to the ruling party by distancing himself from TDP.

TDP MLAs like Karanam Balam and Vasupalli Ganesh Kumar too adopted the same strategy by admitting their sons in YSRC and lending their support to the ruling party without resigning from the opposition party.

Interestingly, Ganta Srinivasa Rao had recently submitted his resignation as an MLA in the Speaker format in protest against Centre's decision to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

Two strong leaders from Vizag in YSRC said to be opposing Rao's entry into YSRC due to which his formal induction into the ruling party is being delayed. Meanwhile, highly placed sources in the BJP pointed out that the former

MLA is also in touch with the senior leaders of the saffron party of both Andhra Pradesh and its headquarters in Delhi. Ganta Srinivasa Rao, who is said to be feeling suffocated due to internal politics prevailing in TDP has been staying away from the opposition party activities in Vizag. He was not as active as he used to be in the TDP activities in north Andhra

region.

"It is true that Ganta Srinivasa Rao had put forth some proposals before the party leadership a year ago. However there has been no much progress on the proposals. Party leadership may take an appropriate decision at an appropriate time on his proposals. Everyone is showing interest to join YSRCP with the kind of governance our chief minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy has been delivering," said Vijaysai Reddy. Ganta Srinivasa Rao is seen as a strong Kapu leader and BJP is also aiming at the Kapu pie of the state's electorate.

"If I have plans to switch over to another party I will do it openly after consulting my followers and announce it. There is no room for secrecy in it. I don't know what he meant by the proposals by me. He should answer about that. I have been active in TDP. True that Kasi Viswanath is one of my main and important followers. He discussed it with me before joining YSRCP. It's his decision," said Ganta Srinivasa Rao, while responding to Vijaysai Reddy's Wednesday's remarks.

Promising Rs 4 crore loan, gang dupes farmer of Rs 5 lakh

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Promising a loan of Rs 4 crore to a young tenant farmer from a private bank at low interest rates, cheated defrauded him of Rs 5 lakh by way of processing fees, stamp duty and insurance charges and so on.

As the promised loan did not come by even after three months, the farmer urged the criminals to return his documents and the money paid by him to them towards processing and other fees. Responding to the request, the criminals told him that his loan application was kept on hold and that the processing fee was non-refundable. If the farmer wanted his documents back, he would have to pay them another Rs 2 lakh, the criminals demanded. The young

farmer was identified as Suresh Kumar who is keen to practise modern agriculture. Some farmers gave their land to Suresh Kumar on lease inspired by his motivation.

Some fraudsters, claiming to be representatives of HDFC bank, contacted him as he was trying to obtain agriculture loan. The glib-tongued criminals told him about the 'special programme' of the bank to give farmers loans at low rates of interest.

Suresh Kumar walked into the trap and applied for Rs 4 crore loan and paid the self-styled HDFC representatives Rs 5 lakh by way of processing fees. The fraudsters created hungama for some days in the name of property inspection and collecting signatures from guarantors. After three

months, they told him that he was sanctioned only Rs 1 crore as loan and demanded that he pay 5 percent of the loan amount as bribe. If he wanted only Rs 1 crore as loan, he should give his signature on a blank paper, they told him.

As Suresh Kumar curty told them he did not want any loan and asked them to repay the processing fees, he was shocked to learn that he was not going to get back not a penny of the processing fee and would have to pay Rs 2 lakh to the fraudsters to get back his property documents.

Suspecting something fishy, he approached the HDFC Bank's Bandar Road branch. He was shocked to know that those who approached him were not even employees of the bank.

SCR GM in Guntur for annual inspection

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

South Central Railway General Manager Gajanan Mallya on Wednesday visited Macherla-Nadikudi Guntur-Mangalagiri section of Guntur Division as part of the annual inspection.

Mallya was accompanied by Mohan Raja, Divisional Railway Manager, Additional Divisional Railway Managers of Guntur Division and Principal Head of the Departments (PHODs) and by Divisional Branch Officers. The team inspected various safety aspects related to major bridges, minor bridges, road under bridge (rub), curves and LC gates points and crossings.

Mallya inaugurated a chil-

dren's park, hamalis' and merchant's room, gym and staff quarters at Nadikude and inspected a running room and health unit at Nadikude. He also inspected Macherla, Nadikude, Bellamkonda, Sattenapalli and Mangalagiri stations and inspected various passenger amenities, safety-related aspects of assets and cleanliness of passenger amenities in those railway stations. Mallya participated in a plantation programme by planting a sapling at Bellamkonda station.

He observed all the extant protocols for preventing the spread of Covid-19 and directed the railway officials to follow Corona guidelines without fail according to the government orders.

VIT-AP inks pact with US-based research labs

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

VIT-AP School of Business has entered an MoU with Alphabeta and Topnight Research Labs held on the University campus on Wednesday.

Dr SV Kota Reddy Vice-Chancellor VIT-AP University after signing the MoU said that Alphabeta is a US company offering products and services to Banks and Financial Services organisations.

He said that FinTech is changing the business models and financial models in a way that was never seen before.

There is a huge demand for qualified FinTech professionals across the globe, Dr Reddy said.

Students celebrate World Wildlife Day at Vizag zoo

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Celebrating World Wildlife Day, an awareness programme was organized at the Indira Gandhi Zoo in Vizag on Wednesday.

About 80 students between the ages of 7 and 27 participated in this awareness programme and got the opportunity to know about the wildlife in the Vizag Zoo, biodiversity of butterflies, some of the common myths about snakes and the facts behind them.

"We have a responsibility to protect the wildlife around us," said zoo curator Nandani Salaria.

A tour of the zoo was also organised and the students explained about the inmates, their diet and other interesting



Students and visitors pose with banners, left, put up as part of the World Wildlife Day celebrations while some are given a tour of the Vizag zoo on Wednesday.



matters.

Salaria said that the zoos play a very important role in conserving wildlife. She said that students should take the lead in protecting the creatures around us from an early age. "All living beings need to be in balance

which means that wildlife needs many creatures around us, so the responsibility to protect them is also ours," Salaria said.

She said that not only the living beings on the earth but also the living beings in the sea

should be protected and plastic waste should be eliminated from the sea. Students enthusiastically participated in a quiz on wildlife after the seminar. Salaria presented prizes to the quiz winners. Participation certificates were

presented to all participants.

A signature campaign organised at the main entrance of the zoo park impressed the visitors. Students and visitors enthusiastically participated in this signature campaign event organised on the theme "I express my

support in protecting wildlife."

The programme started with the first signature by Salaria herself and then the visitors signed stating that they will also take the lead in wildlife conservation.

The event was followed by a webinar on wildlife conservation in Andhra Pradesh.

Senior scientists from the Wildlife Institute of India, Andhra Pradesh Forest Department officials, NGO representatives and aspiring researchers participated in the webinar. Panellists discussed what measures have been taken for wildlife conservation so far & what measure should be taken in future.

Students from INS Kalinga School were among those who visited the zoo.

Girl staged kidnap to mislead family: Cops

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The 20-year-old BCom girl student, who was found in an unconscious state with her hands tied in a garden near Gurla in Vizianagaram two days ago, orchestrated the entire drama to mislead her family members and hostel authorities. The girl confessed that she weaved the kidnap story out of panic after her family found that she had gone out with her boyfriend.

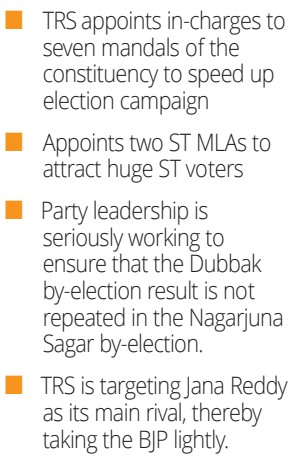
Vizianagaram police chief B Raja Kumari said there were no physical injuries on the girl's body and she was also not

sexually abused.

Investigation revealed that she left the hostel on February 27 informing that she would be visiting her uncle and return after two days. But she went to meet her boyfriend in Narsapur in West Godavari.

Meanwhile, she found out that her elder brother made enquiries in the hostel about her absence. She panicked and boarded the Palakollu-Palakonda bus the same day and reached Gurla late on February 28. From there she walked to bushes near the police station and tied her hands and legs herself with chunni and lay in wait, to be "rescued".

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



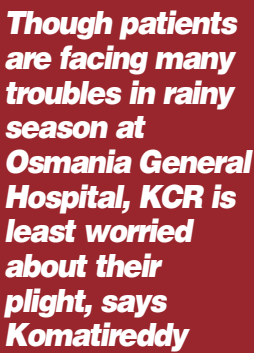
Nagarjuna Sagar by-election. That is why the party has announced mandal-wise in-charges to spruce up its electoral fortune. Those who have

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

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

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

PNS ■ HYDERABAD



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

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

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



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

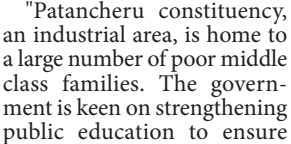
Trainee collector Ankit, Additional Collector Yenugu Narsimha Reddy, District Lead Bank Manager Lakshman, District Agriculture Officer Sridhar, DIC manager Naveen, Horticulture DD Srinivas and others were present at the meeting

PNS ■ MAHBUBNAGAR

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

PNS ■ PATANCHERU

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



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

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

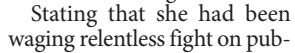
PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

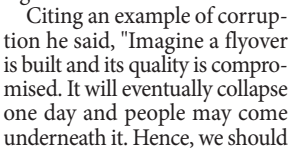
Indira asserted that the interests of 4 crore Telangana people were more important



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

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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



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

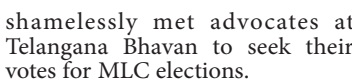
PNS **MULUG**

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

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

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

He criticised that Chief Minister K Chandrsekhar Rao and KTR



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

■ Why government can't fill vacancies, formulate a comprehensive employment policy, asks Sruvan

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

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

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



TMC dares PM to see himself growth in WB

PNS ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another bizman interrogated by CBI in coal pilferage case

PNS ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

The CBI had acted on infor-

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

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

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

INDIA CORNER

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

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



PIL seeking action against Farooq Abdullah dismissed

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



TN Assembly poll: Congress seeks fair deal from DMK

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



BJP must regret Guj riots: NCP

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

‘Creating a single authority for Mumbai a top priority’

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Blatant violation of code of conduct’

PNS ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

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

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

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

Stating that summoning



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

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

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



ANGANA'S PLEA SEEKING TRANSFER

Javed Akhtar files Caveat in SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

led Maharashtra government has been "harassing" them.

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

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

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



‘Why SP’s name figures in every crime’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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

MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING

India, Norway to work together

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



such as energy, transportation, fisheries, aquaculture, tourism across multiple sectors.

This is a part of the Indo-Norway Integrated Ocean Initiative under the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two countries in 2019.

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

ic and social development in coastal areas, it said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIRST COLUMN

THE CROWN PRINCE OF AMATEURS

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



GWYNNE DYER

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



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

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

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

India badly needs a uniform law on bail

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

Therefore, a solution lies in

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

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

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

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

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

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

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



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

A move towards self-reliance in the education system

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

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

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



SUDHIR HINDWAN

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

system to ensure that only talent gets selected.

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

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

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



international, inter-dependence and global change.

Recent developments have established a new basis for understanding the changing nature of polity and community. Perhaps there may be some modification in the examination system without which the process of reform may only remain a chimera. We ought to bring in changes to test the potential of students by testing the ability not only on academic excellence but also by judging their ability and knowledge about new information and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

World shares gain ahead of jobs data

PNS ■ BANGKOK

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The tech-heavy Nasdaq composite dropped 1.7 per

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

The two countries would also work together for promo-



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

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

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

phytosanitary issues, and any other form of cooperation.

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

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

Power producers urge Odisha govt to reduce water charge

PNS ■ BHUBANESHWAR

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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



Hafele entrances made easier with range of sliding systems

PNS ■ BANGALORE

A space with larger entrance often has doors that require some effort from an individual to enter. In such cases, the doors are either kept open or they give out noise every time when the doors open and close. However, entries or exits can now be made effortless and seamless with the range of Sliding systems offered under the SLIDO range by Hafele.

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

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

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

Exim Bank inks USD 10.40 mn soft loan pact with Eswatini

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

MONEY MATTERS

Tata Motors drives in three axle truck for various applications



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

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

Bank of Baroda raises Rs 4,500 cr through QIP



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

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

Tata Power arm to supply solar power to Tata Steel



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

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

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



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

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

Cabinet approves MoU with France on renewable energy coop

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Rupee zooms 65 ps to close at 72.72 against \$

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Spectrum acquisitions to yield market share gains for Jio, Airtel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

With the spectrum auctions done, Goldman Sachs

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

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

Supertech to monetise land bank

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar output up 20% till Feb 2020-21

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

FILMMAKER ANURAG KASHYAP, ACTOR TAAPSEE PANNU FACE IT-RAIDS

Income Tax officials carried out searches today at properties linked to filmmaker Anurag Kashyap and actor Taapsee Pannu in Mumbai over alleged tax evasion, sources said. Searches took place at nearly 20 locations in Mumbai and Pune, including premises linked to a talent agency as well as Phantom Films, which was co-promoted by Anurag Kashyap and producers Vikas Bahl and Madhu Mantena. “The Income Tax department probes someone based on whatever information they get. The issue goes to court later,” Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar said during a BJP briefing. Anurag Kashyap and Taapsee Pannu are outspoken critics of the government and have lent their voice to various causes, including the ongoing farmer protests against central laws. Recently, Pannu had criticised the show



of solidarity by celebrities towards the government in response to pop star Rihanna's post drawing attention to the farmers' agitation. The actor took a jibe at the pushback and said it was better to focus on strengthening one's own value system if one tweet rattled one's belief. “If one tweet rattles your unity, one joke rattles your faith or one show rattles your religious belief, then it's you



who has to work on strengthening your value system not become propaganda teachers for others,” Pannu had said on social media last month. Several ministers in Maharashtra, meanwhile slammed the searches by the tax department on Kashyap and Pannu, saying the raids are because they are outspoken celebrities. “The way in which raids were conducted in the homes and offices of

Anurag Kashyap and Tapasee Pannu, this is definitely the usage of Enforcement Directorate or the Income Tax against those who take a stand against the government or its policies. Anurag Kashyap and Tapasee Pannu have raised their voice against the Modi government's policies. This action is an attempt to suppress their voices,” Maharashtra minister Nawab Malik said. Anurag Kashyap had been vocal about condemning the violence against anti-Citizenship Act protesters in 2019. Last year, he had expressed support for actor Rhea Chakraborty in the Sushant Singh Rajput case and had slammed Bollywood actors for not speaking up enough on the case. Phantom Films was dissolved in 2018 following Vikas Bahl being named in an incident of alleged sexual misconduct.



Priyanka: Received negativity from South Asians too

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas in an interview has said that there have been times when people from the South Asian community have picked on her and that she felt a lot of negativity come her way. “I do notice a sense of protectiveness from a lot of people but also a sense of cynicism from a lot of people and a sense of negativity from a lot of people,” the actress shared. “Picking on me for no reason. I was talking about this to Mindy [Kaling] a couple of months ago. We

were talking about, ‘why is it that you get so much negativity from your own community?’” Priyanka Chopra said on the BBC Asian Network's *Beyond Bollywood* podcast, according to daily-mail.co.uk. The actress, who has starred in the American TV show *Quantico*, and has been a part of Hollywood films such as *Baywatch*, *Isn't It Romantic* and *A Kid Like Jake* also emphasised on the need for people to acknowledge efforts of people who have pushed the bar for Bollywood. “Very few brown people

are in the entertainment business, you can count us on your fingers. We're trying to create more opportunity for people like us so why is there so much negativity for us? When I started working in Hollywood I realised it's not normal to people's consciousness that a leading man or woman can be Indian in a mainstream Hollywood show. I've started noticing the difference between fans who know me and are protective of me and they are the wind beneath my wings. I also feel disheartened and discouraged by the other side,” she said.

Eddie Murphy on Hollywood: White men run this business

Hollywood star Eddie Murphy said that there is no diversity in the film industry. The actor said that this disparity is not just race-based but gender based, too. “It's been this way for years and years, but it's not just African-Americans. It's also about women and other minorities, too. White men run this business. It's always

been this way,” the actor said in an interview to Radio Times, according to dailymail.co.uk. However, he went on to say that he has never been subjected to racism in his career. “In terms of my work and my career, race has never been an issue. I've been making movies for 40 years and never once could I not get a movie made because I was black. I transcended that stuff,” he said.



Murphy, 69, shot to superstardom with blockbuster roles in numerous films including 48 Hrs, The Beverly Hills Cop series, Trading Places (1983) and The Nutty Professor.

Meghan Markle, 39, is breaking her silence on the latest bullying claims made against her. The Duchess of Sussex has been accused of driving two senior members of the Kensington Palace staff away and causing them distressing reactions such as “shaking” and crying when she lived at the royal location, in a report from The Times of London. In a statement shared to Twitter shortly after the claims were made public, Meghan admitted to being “saddened” and revealed she’s “determined” to “work on building compassion.” “The Duchess is saddened by this latest attack on her character, particularly as someone who has been the

Meghan Markle ‘saddened’ after ‘royal aides’ accuse her of ‘bullying’

target of bullying herself and is deeply committed to supporting those who have experienced pain and trauma,” a statement tweeted by Omid Scobie read. “She is determined to continue her work building compassion around the world and will keep striving to set an example for doing what is right and doing what is good.” The statement comes after one of the former royal aides claimed she was anticipating a confrontation with Meghan, who is now pregnant with her second child,

and told her colleague, “I can't stop shaking,” the Times reported. The outlet also claimed that the Duchess occasionally reduced some aides to tears and allegedly bullied two of them into leaving their jobs. A third aide also said she was “humiliated” by the former actress. Meghan Markle, seen here with husband Prince Harry at a previous royal outing, is facing bullying claims by former aides. (MEGA) One former staffer told the outlet that the situation

felt “more like emotional cruelty and manipulation, which I guess could also be called bullying.” The bullying claims follow a report made about Meghan's behavior by her and Prince Harry's former communications assistant, Jason Knauf back in 2018, the Times reported. “I am very concerned that the Duchess was able to bully two PAs out of the household in the past year. The treatment of X* was totally unacceptable,” the HR complaint allegedly read.

“The Duchess seems intent on always having someone in her sights,” the complaint reportedly continued. “She is bullying Y and seeking to undermine her confidence. We have had report after report from people who have witnessed unacceptable behavior towards Y. I remain concerned that nothing will be done.” Sources told the outlet that at the time, Buckingham Palace was more concerned about making the situation go away rather than addressing it. “Senior people in the household... knew that they had a situation where members of staff, particularly young women, were being bullied to the point of tears,” one source said. “The institution

just protected Meghan constantly. All the men in grey suits who she hates have a lot to answer for, because they did absolutely nothing to protect people.” The shocking allegations came just five days before a highly anticipated interview with Meghan and Harry is set to air on CBS. The interview was conducted by Oprah Winfrey and will be the first one about their private lives that the couple has had since stepping down from their royal duties and moving out of England to Southern California last year. In a preview for the special, Oprah promises that “no subject is off limits.” Harry also hinted that one of the reasons they stepped away from the royal spotlight was because he was afraid that they would go



through what his mother, Princess Diana, who died in a car accident in 1997 after paparazzi was chasing her, went through. “By biggest concern was history repeating itself,” he said in the preview for the interview. “I’m

really relieved and happy to be sitting here, talking to you with my wife by my side because I can't begin to imagine what it must have been for her going through this process by herself all these years ago.”

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



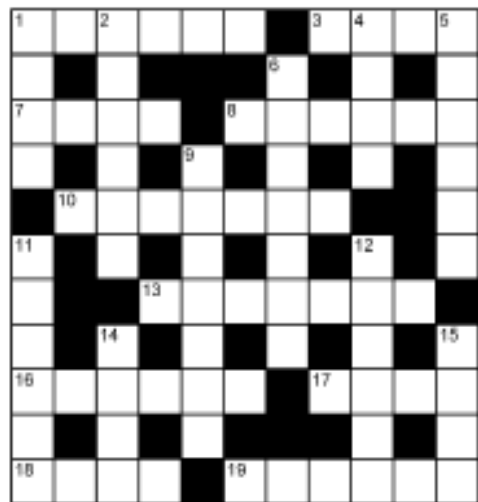
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Noon
- 3 Costing nothing
- 7 Contact by telephone
- 8 Purchasing
- 10 Rich
- 13 Very sore
- 16 A floor covering
- 17 Large boat
- 18 A red gemstone
- 19 Selected

DOWN

- 1 One of the planets
- 2 A meal
- 4 Water from the sky
- 5 Ninety less ten

- 6 Going very quickly
- 9 Less dirty
- 11 Cup and
- 12 Small trees
- 14 A nipping sea creature
- 15 Twirl around



SUDOKU

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

WOMEN HAVE THE CAKE AND EAT IT TOO



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

cakes.

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



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

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

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



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



GENDER PAY PARITY, equal opportunity still distant dreams: Samantha

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

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

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



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

GET READY FOR COVID JAB



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

effects you may have.

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

Precautions specific to the COVID-19 vaccine:

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

the date intimated.

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

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

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

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

Match of high-stakes

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

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Kohli, despite two fifties, hasn't

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

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

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

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

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

expected to be back in action.

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

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

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

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

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

Virat bats for rotation policy

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

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

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

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

"The kind of systems you have

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

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

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

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

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

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

Too much noise about spin-friendly tracks: Kohli

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



SINGLES

SANIA-ANDREJA ENTER QATAR SEMIS

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

MEDVEDEV, ZVEREV EXIT IN 1ST ROUND

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

MARY ASSURES MEDAL IN SPANISH TOURNEY

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

SHARATH OFF TO A FLYING START

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

STEYN APOLOGISES FOR IPL REMARK

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

SONAM PULLS OUT OF ROME EVENT

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

INDIA PLAY 1-1 DRAW AGAINST GERMANY

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



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

Agar's 6/30 keeps Oz alive

AFF ■ WELLINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Srikanth, Satwik-Ashwini start Swiss Open with win

PTI ■ BASEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Man City equal unbeaten record

AFF ■ MANCHESTER

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

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

unprecedented quadruple.

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

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

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

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



Juve stay in title race

AFF ■ TURIN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pitch looks very similar to last Test: Root

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

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

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

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

Root said the English batsmen will look to build partnerships.

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



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

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

'EVERYONE TRAINED'

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

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

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

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

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

Zim beat Afghans by 10 wickets

AFF ■ ABU DHABI

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

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

Afghanistan were bowled out for 131 in their first innings.

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

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

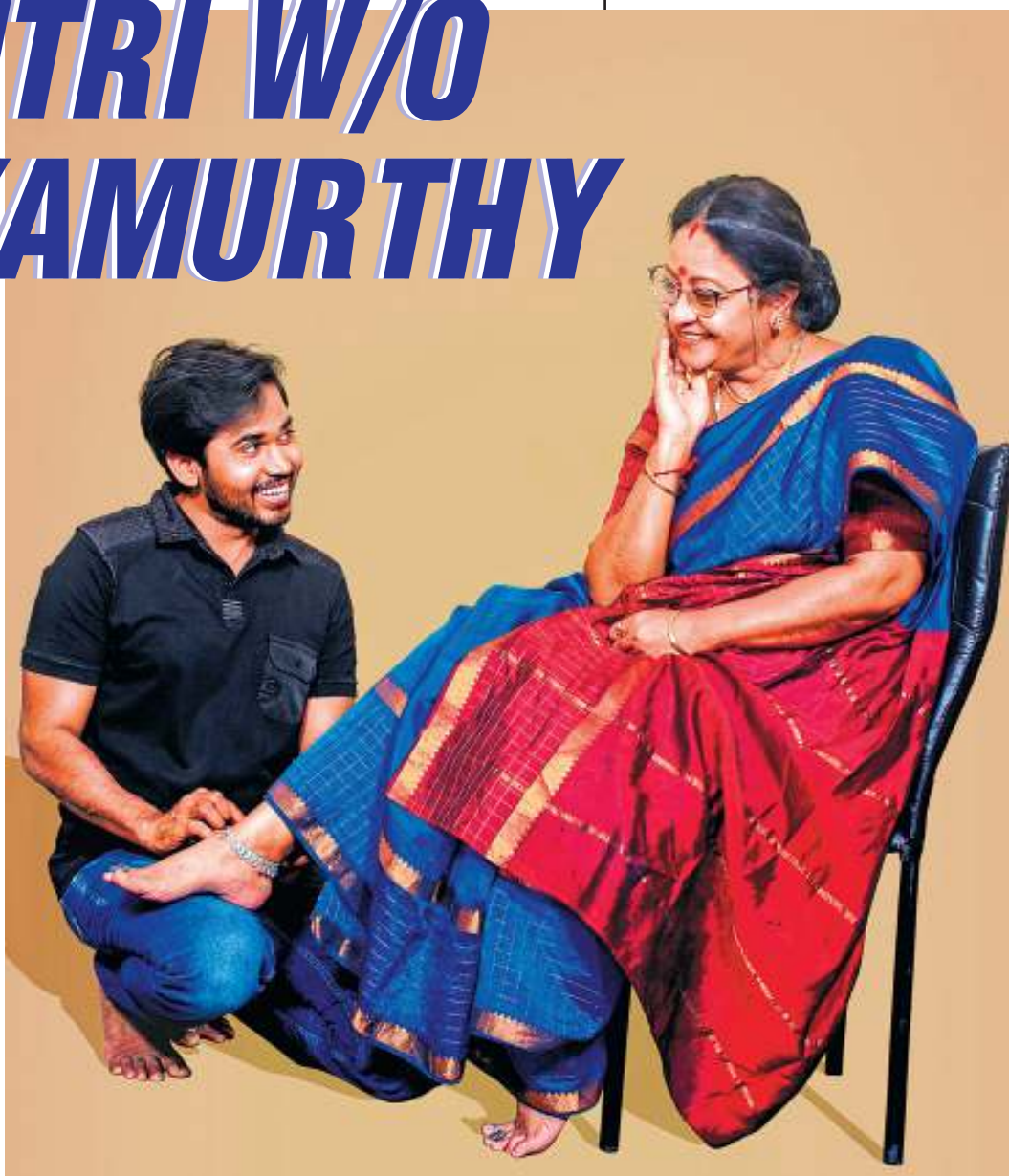
PARVATEESAM TO WOO FANS AGAIN WITH

SAVITRI W/O SATYAMURTHY

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

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

Actor Parvateesam, who also has



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

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

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



Seetimaarr title song takes over the internet

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

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

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

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

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



Muskaan Khubchandani in Rajasekhar's Sekhar

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KGF STAR YASH REINCARNATION DRAMA IN TOLLYWOOD

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

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

to the screen.

Yash is fondly known as the 'Rocking star' of the Kannada film industry and he enjoys massive fan followers. While Yash is a national star now, the journey to stardom was definitely not a cakewalk. *Gajakesari* was a blockbuster at the box office and following its success at the domestic box-office, it was screened in the United States, Singapore, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Hong Kong and London. The movie marked Krishna's debut as a director. The highlight of the movie was Yash's hair extension, which was first of its kind in Sandalwood.



Comedian Madhunandan debuts as hero with Gunde Katha Vintara

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

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

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

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

RRR: NICK POWELL joins the last leg of climax



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

"Renowned Hollywood

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

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

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



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