

**ANALYSIS 7**  
ECONOMY RIDDLED  
WITH CORRUPTION

**MONEY 8**  
INDIA WEARABLES MARKET GROWS  
144 PC TO 36 MN UNITS IN 2020

**SPORTS 12**  
AXAR, ASHWIN UNDO  
POMS BATTING GRAFT

VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY MARCH 5, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



# the pioneer



NAVDEEP  
CONFIDENT OF  
GOOD SECOND  
INNINGS

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## DEEPIKA PADUKONE'S LEVI'S AD CAUGHT IN A PLAGIARISM ROW

A new Levi's ad featuring Deepika Padukone has been accused of plagiarism by the director of Yeh Ballet, Sooni Taraporevala. The filmmaker took to Instagram on Wednesday to call out the makers of the ad film for lifting the set design "to the very last detail" from her film Yeh Ballet. "I was shocked to see our Yeh Ballet dance studio set in this ad, because it was conceptualized & created out of a derelict space by Shailaja Sharma (our PD) from scratch," Sooni Taraporevala wrote on Instagram. "No such dance studio exists in Mumbai which is why we built it." The ad has garnered over 5 million views on YouTube.



## SPACEX STARSHIP ROCKET PROTOTYPE NAILS LANDING... THEN BLOWS UP

The third time appeared to be the charm for Elon Musk's Starship rocket - until it wasn't. The latest heavy-duty launch vehicle prototype from SpaceX soared flawlessly into the sky in a high-altitude test blast-off on Wednesday from Boca Chica, Texas, then flew itself back to Earth to achieve the first upright landing for a Starship model. But the triumph was short-lived. Listing slightly to one side as an automated fire-suppression system trained a stream of water on flames still burning at the base of the rocket, the spacecraft blew itself to pieces about eight minutes after touchdown.



## INDIA DOWNGRADED TO 'PARTLY FREE' IN REPORT BY US THINK TANK

India was downgraded to "partly free" for the first time since 1997 in an annual ranking of democracies by the U.S.-government funded research group Freedom House, which cited worsening civil rights under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The world's largest democracy slipped in rankings this year because of continuing discrimination against its Muslim citizens and increased harassment of government critics and journalists, according to the "Freedom in the World" report released by the Washington-based organization. The report cited "a multi-year pattern in which the Hindu nationalist government and its allies have presided over rising violence and discriminatory policies."



## SURGE IN DAILY COVID CASES, INDIA RECORDS OVER 17,000 INFECTIONS

The daily new Covid cases in India were recorded above 17,000 after a little over a month taking the total tally of cases to 1,11,56,923, while recoveries surged to 1,08,26,075, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday. A total of 17,407 infections were reported in a day. The death toll increased to 1,57,435 with 89 daily new fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed. 18,855 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours on January 29. The active caseload has increased to 1,73,413 which comprises 1.55 per cent of the total infections.



Without sight, but  
sightless not in my  
path: Big B

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# Vizag, Vja go missing from top 10 liveable cities' list

Kakinada No 4 in 'below 1 mn' category, Tirupati slips to No. 46

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The two major cities in Andhra Pradesh - Vizag and Vijayawada - have failed to find a place in top 10 of the Union Government's 'Ease of Living Index' (EoLI).

According to the index released by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday, while Vizag has been ranked 15 with an overall score of 57.28, Vijayawada was ranked 41 with a score of 50.35 under assessment done for cities with population of more than 1 million.

The only saving grace for the state was the fact that Kakinada has been ranked No 4 with a score of 56.84 under the category of cities with less than 1 million population. Under the same category,



A view of the Beach Road in Vizag city at night

Tirupati has been ranked 46 with a score of 50.33.

It may be remembered that Tirupati was at the fourth position in 2018, and has slipped a shocking 42 places to 46th position but in the 2020 'Ease of Living Index'.

Under municipal performance in the cities with more than 1 million population, Vizag was ranked No 9 with a score of 52.77 and Vijayawada stood at 27th place with overall score of 46.04.

## Rankings hazy, a shocker: Official

Vijayawada: As expected, reactions to the latest 'Ease of Living Index' rankings released by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Thursday were of bafflement, incredulity and shock. "Totally baffled... we have been #1 in Mercer's Quality of Living Index in India since 2015 till date (5 years in a row) and Not finding ourselves in not even the top 10 is weird... would have understood if we were in top 3 or 5," said a senior Telangana Government official, preferring anonymity.



Distribute teaching  
aids to kids by April 5,  
orders CM

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# Government readies gifts galore for Women's Day

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Government will celebrate the International Women's Day on a grand note and has taken key decisions for the safety, welfare and empowerment of women.

During the review meeting at CM's camp office here, it was decided that on March 7, the eve of International Women's Day, the AP Government will organise a candle light rally across the state and felicitate two women constables from each wing.

The State government also decided to announce a special day off for all women working in the police department

marking International Women's Day on March 8.

The Government will also set up 2,000 stands with QR code for easy download of Disha app and would conduct short film competitions on women's safety and empowerment.

Also, it will provide a 10 per cent discount on purchase of mobile phones at select shopping malls on IWD to women who download the Disha app. The State Government will organise annual health check up for Anganwadi employees.

The Chief Minister also agreed to give additional five casual leaves to female employees and also announced Rs 5 lakh on behalf of the Govern-

ment to the Non-Gazetted Women Employees Union.

An MOU will be made among SERP, MEPMA and Hindustan Lever to ensure sanitary pads are made available in YSR Cheyutha shops at more affordable price compared to open market.

The State Government will lay special focus on training of girls of Plus-1 and Plus-2 to prepare for competitive exams. The Chief Minister directed the officials to set up hoardings with details of Disha initiatives for publicity in junior colleges and other higher educational institutions and said that Disha initiatives should be publicised vigorously.



YSRCP to counter  
false propaganda  
legally: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Condemning news reports in a section of media that YSRCP leaders have threatened candidates to withdraw in civic polls, Government Advisor Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on Thursday said that the ruling party would not tolerate such false propaganda and would proceed legally by filing defamation cases against those responsible.

Addressing the media at the party's central office here, Sajjala said it was not possible to threaten someone to withdraw in elections at present times where technology is put to good use.

## IT'S PARTY TIME



The six YSRCP candidates for elections to the State Legislative Council pose with Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy after he handed over the party's requisite authorisation in Form-B to them on Thursday. REPORT ON PAGE 3.

# Govt backs bandh against sale of VSP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP government has expressed solidarity with the state-wide bandh called on March 5 to protest against the Union Government's decision to privatise the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP).

Addressing a press conference here on Wednesday, Minister for Information and Public Relations Perni Venkataramaiah said that the State Government is against privatisation of the steel plant and in regard to this, Chief

Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had already written to the Centre suggesting alternatives to retain the organisation.

The Minister said that in response to the bandh call, APSRTC services will be halted until 1 pm, and the staff will be wearing black badges and resume their duties after 1 pm.

In wake of the bandh, public life will not be completely obstructed and all the emergency health services will run as usual, he said.

# 3,000 kg ganja seized in Andhra

PNS ■ CHODAWARAM

Police seized more than 3,000 kg marijuana worth Rs 80 lakh at Chodawaram in Visakhapatnam district.

"The marijuana came from the agency area in Visakhapatnam district bordering Malkangiri and Khoraput," said Visakhapatnam Rural SP B. Krishna Rao.

A truck driver, acting as a courier has been arrested while shifting the banned substance in a truck on Wednesday.



Sensex tumbles  
599 points in line  
with global melt-  
down

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# Naidu targets Jagan by supporting sister

TDP chief says CM didn't give Sharmila rightful share of assets

PNS ■ KURNOOL

Former Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday tried to drive a wedge between YS Jaganmohan Reddy and his sister by saying that YS Sharmila Reddy was forced to hit the streets and announce plans to float her own party as she was cheated by the YSRCP chief who did not give her the due share of family property nor a suitable position in his party.

Campaigning in favour of TDP candidates in Kurnool Municipal Corporation polls here, the TDP supremo minced no words in his criticism of Jaganmohan Reddy, going to the extent of calling his bitter rival a "coward".

The TDP national president dared Jagan to reply to



his criticism against the government.

"People know who the culprit in the murder case of former minister Vivekananda Reddy is. Why should people cast their vote for Jagan?" Naidu said, questioning the achievements of the YSRCP chief.

He also dared Jagan to face elections in a "democratic manner".

## AP police dept to instal 12 CCTV cams in each PS

Report on  
page-2

SNV SUDHIR  
■ VIJAYAWADA

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones (APSEZ) Ltd - India's largest private ports and logistics company and a key subsidiary of the diversified Adani Group, is poised to gain total control over Gangavaram port on the east coast, located close to Vizag city.

Once it has control over Gangavaram port, the group will have more or less total control over strategically located private ports across the country except in West Bengal and Puducherry, and also some minor ports.

APSEZ on Wednesday announced acquisition of 31.5 per cent stake earlier held by Windy Lakeside Investment Limited, an affiliate of New



York-based private equity firm Warburg Pincus, in Gangavaram Port Limited (GPL). The acquisition is valued at Rs 1,954 crore and is subject to regulatory approvals. Such approvals appear to be a

formality. APSEZ is also in talks with DVS Raju and Family to acquire their majority 58.1 per cent stake in GPL. Notably, it was only last year that APSEZ had acquired a controlling

stake of 75 per cent valued at Rs 12,000 crore in India's second largest private sector port at Krishnapatnam near Nellore.

Both Gangavaram located in northern, and Krishnapatnam, in southern Andhra Pradesh, are considered strategically important to tap the vast hinterland the state offers. Though APSEZ had evinced interest in developing Bhavanapadu port in Srikakulam and signed an agreement with the State Government, the conglomerate later backed off citing land acquisition issues.

Besides the latest acquisitions, APSEZ operates a terminal in Vizag port in Andhra Pradesh. The other ports that APSEZ has acquired or is operating on the east coast other than Andhra Pradesh are at Dhamra in Odisha,

Kattupalli and Ennore in Tamil Nadu.

APSEZ is touted as one of the largest port developer and operator in India operates ports at Mundra, Dahej, Tutu and Hazira in Gujarat, Mormugao in Goa on the west coast. APSEZ's total 12 ports and terminals represent 24 per cent of India's total port capacity, handling vast amounts of cargo from both coastal areas and the vast hinterland.

APSEZ had only last month completed the acquisition of 100 per cent Dighi Port Limited (DPL) in Maharashtra for Rs 70 crore on February 15.

The company is also developing a transhipment port at Vizhinjam in Kerala.

## TODAY

### ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:  
Magha & Shukla Paksha  
Panchangam  
Tithi : Saptami: 07:53 pm  
Nakshatram: Anuradha: 10:37 pm  
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)  
Rahukalam: 10:59 am - 12:27 pm  
Yamagandam: 03:23 pm - 04:51 pm  
Varjyam: 03:59 am - 05:31 am  
Gulika: 08:03 am - 09:31 am  
Good Time: (to start any important work)  
Amritkalam: 12:48 pm - 02:19 pm  
Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:04 pm - 12:51 pm

### VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy  
Temp: 37/19  
Humidity: 41%  
Sunrise: 06:32 am  
Sunset: 06:23 pm  
Current Weather Conditions  
Updated: march 3, 2021 5:00 PM



# AP police dept to instal 12 CCTV cams in each PS on SC orders

SUMIT ONKA  
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

To comply with the Supreme Court order within the deadline, the AP Police has prepared a plan with a budget outlay of Rs 80 crore to bring all the police stations in the state under CCTV surveillance and recording equipment.

The Supreme Court had on Tuesday slammed Governments of various states for their lax approach towards implementing its direction to instal CCTV cameras in all the police stations.

The apex court stressed that CCTV systems that had to be installed would need to be equipped with night vision and necessarily consist of audio as well as video footage. Importantly, the recording system should be such that the data stored therein is preserved for 12 to 18 months.

Speaking to The Pioneer, AP Police Technical Services wing chief, G Pala Raju (DIG), said even before the Supreme Court order, AP police had begun installing two CCTV cameras at two lock-ups (male and female) in the 534 crime-prone police stations in the state.

"As Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy directed the police department to ensure speedy justice, transparency in policing and protect human rights, two CCTV cameras were installed under the guidance of the DGP Gautam Sawang," Pala Raju said.

"Following the SC order, we will instal 10 more CCTVs in each police station besides server and recording equipment. The 12 cameras will bring the entire premise, except the washrooms, of police stations under surveillance," he said.



## Fact-check team, social media labs to come up in AP soon

**Visakhapatnam:** To arm itself to tackle crime, law and order situation and other challenges emerging from cyber and social media platforms, AP police will train 12,000 of its personnel as part of its capacity building initiatives.

All the police personnel will be given the basic knowledge to handle cyber and online crimes. The 12,000 personnel who will get training and undergo certificate courses will be Investigating Officers.

Briefing the media about the new technologies, G Pala Raju, DIG, who heads the AP Police Technical Services, said in a bid to check the fake news, misinformation and rumours, the police personnel will study social media trends and analytics. "For that, we will have social media labs that will not only help to keep an eye on the mischief-mongers but also help in fact-check," he said. Besides the training, the police officers will be allowed to undergo certificate courses from National Institute of Forensic Science.

The personnel can learn the mobile, disc, audio-video forensics; call data record and



IP analysis. When asked how the AP police is adapting to new technologies, Pala Raju attributed it to the education background of the police personnel.

"We have personnel from diverse backgrounds. About 40 percent of the total staff will be either from Engineering or Science backgrounds," he said. "Having technical resources will be of no use if the police personnel are unable to use those. But, now the strength of the staff to adapt to the emerging technology has also increased. Skilled human resources come very handy," said the IPS officer.

It may be noted that AP police grabbed the highest number of national-level SKOCH awards this year for implementing new technologies in policing.

## Highest number of cases against police in AP, cops say 'wrong input'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In Volume-III of the NCRB data for 2019, the number of cases registered against police personnel in the State was reported as 1,681, the highest in the country.

However, the AP police claimed that the actual number of such cases was just 111. There were mistakes committed by three police units of the State while giving the statistics to the NCRB, the Department has claimed.

DIG, Technical Services, G Pala Raju said input from three police units, Chittoor, Visakhapatnam City and Visakhapatnam Rural was given without verification. Hence, AP topped the list of States in terms of cases against police, he said.

The department has set up an automatic mechanism to share the data inputs regarding crimes. Earlier, the data was fed manually which had led to mistakes, he said.

**Custodial deaths**  
The last NCRB report-2019 says, the highest number of custodial deaths was reported from Andhra Pradesh in 2017

where 27 people lost their lives. This was followed by the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra where 15 custodial deaths each were reported.

The reasons of deaths cited by NCRB, most deaths were reported due to 'suicide'. Suicide was followed by deaths due to illnesses/deaths in hospitals during treatment. Injuries sustained during interrogation by police were listed in only 5 percent of the cases.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), over 1,000 persons have died in police custody in the last 10 years.

More than one-fifth (21.5 percent) of these deaths were reported in Maharashtra, followed by Andhra Pradesh (13 percent) and Gujarat (11 percent). These three states together accounted for nearly half-460 of 1,004 - of all police custody deaths reported in the past decade.

Of the five states reporting most deaths in police custody, Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Maharashtra showed a sharp decline in the latter half of the decade.

## Cyber crime police stations to come up in every district HQ

**Vijayawada:** As cyber crimes are surging in the state, every district headquarters will have one cyber crime unit in AP. All of them will be equipped with the latest tools. Presently, there are only two cyber crime units, based in

Vizag and Vijayawada. "The staff trained to deal with cyber and online crimes will make it easy to set up the cyber units. We are also procuring the advanced tools for forensics and other purposes," G Pala Raju, DIG, said.

## AP logs 102 new Covid cases

Continued from Page 1

Andhra Pradesh reported 102 new cases of Coronavirus in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Thursday, taking the caseload to 8,90,317, while recoveries mounted to 8,82,275 with 56 people getting cured. More than 45,000 tests were conducted during the period and one more person succumbed to the disease, pushing the toll to 7,171. The active caseload increased to 871, the bulletin said.

Chittoor continued to report the highest number of fresh cases, 25 in a day, followed by Visakhapatnam 22 and East Godavari 13.

The remaining 10 districts reported less than eight new cases each. Chittoor, which now has 198 active cases, also reported one fresh Covid-19 fatality.



# Rankings hazy, a shocker: Official

Continued from Page 1

While Bengaluru was adjudged the most liveable among 111 cities in India in the government's 'Ease of Living Index' on Thursday, followed by Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Surat, Navi Mumbai, Coimbatore, Vadodra, Indore and Greater Mumbai. Of the 49 cities ranked on livability index in the 'million-plus population' category, Delhi figures at the 13th spot and Srinagar at the bottom.

Shimla topped the category of cities with 'population less than million'. In this category, Bhubaneswar was ranked second, Silvassa came third, and they were followed by Kakinada, Salem, Vellore, Gandhinagar, Gurgaon, Davangere and Tiruchirappalli.

"Looking at cities which are above us, it's almost bordering on being ridiculous ranking. We were #1 among all the metros in last year's Swachh ranking and it comes as a rude shock... there's more

to it than meets the eye," the senior officer said.

He said that it is very unfortunate that such rankings aren't based on transparent criteria and are done always in a subjective manner.

Performance of the cities have been measured on four broad parameters: governance and social, physical and economic infrastructure.

The government said the 'Ease of Living Index' is an assessment tool that evaluates

the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.

Visakhapatnam was the top city from AP and ranked 15th with a score of 57.28 score in EoLI. Indore emerged as the highest-ranked municipality in the Municipal Performance Index, followed by Surat and Bhopal. In the less than one million population category of the same index, New Delhi Municipal Council emerged as the leader, followed by Tirupati and Gandhinagar.

# 3,000 kg ganja seized in AP

Continued from Page 1

"He is not the key person, only a driver acting as a courier. Another person was supposed to be at Tuni highway but he escaped as the courier got arrested," he said. Aimed at hoodwinking the police, the courier was carrying husk to camouflage the

ganja or marijuana. Police arrested the courier under Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

Following the key persons escape, the Indian Police Service Officer (IPS) said they are working towards establishing the front and back end of this illegal net-

work to zero in on the persons involved in this illegal trade.

According to Rao, the entire agency area, mostly inhabited by tribals, has the habit of growing illegal marijuana.

There were many cases of ganja from these parts of AP being ferried all the way to Bengaluru.



# Adani poised to take control of Gangavaram port

Continued from Page 1

The AP Government has plans to develop three more Greenfield ports at Bhavanapadu, Machilipatnam and Ramayapatnam and is making preparations to float tenders.

"The acquisition of GPL is a part of our continued strategy to build a port and logistics network that is unmatched in its ability to serve customers across the nation. The location of GPL in the north of AP is a strategic complement to our recent acquisition of the Port of Krishnapatnam that serves south AP.

"We believe that GPL holds great potential to complement its bulk cargo terminals with new cargo categories that we intend to develop," said APSEZ CEO and director Karan Adani.

He said that the port provides the Group access to an

## Q3 FY2021 (YoY) results

- APSEZ's Market share in cargo volume up by 6pc to 28pc
- Port Revenue and EBITDA registers a growth of 35pc and 38pc respectively
- Port EBITDA Margin at 71.7pc
- PBT at Rs 2,013cr up by 16pc and PAT at Rs 1,577 cr up by 16 pc
- Overall cargo volume handled by APSEZ excluding Krishnapatnam Port which was acquired in October 2020 was 67 MMT, a growth of 20pc on a Y o Y basis.

adjacent hinterland that was largely untapped by APSEZ thereby placing it in a position

to serve a broader set of port customers as well as expand our overall hinterland logistics footprint. "We are grateful to the leaders of the AP Government for their support and are committed to doing our part to support their vision of accelerating the industrialization of AP. The Raju family must be complimented for having built an absolute world class asset that we are proud to invest in," said Karan Adani.

Warburg Pincus India managing director Vishal Mahadevia said from a Greenfield project at the time of investment, Gangavaram Port has developed into a world class port.

"We have been very pleased with our partnership with the Raju family and the Gangavaram Port team, and look forward to the port's continued success in partnership with the Adani Group," said Vishal Mahadevia.

## Gangavaram port generated revenue of Rs 1,082 cr

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Gangavaram port is the second largest non-major port in Andhra Pradesh with a 64 MMT capacity established under concession from the State Government that extends till 2059.

It's an all-weather, deep water, multi-purpose port capable of handling fully laden super cape size vessels of up to 200,000 DWT. Currently, Gangavaram Port Ltd (GPL) operates nine berths and has freehold land of 1,800 acres. With a master plan capacity for 250 MMTPA with 31 berths, GPL has sufficient headroom to support future growth.

# Raids on Tapsee, anurag others; I-T dept claims Rs 650 cr discrepancies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Income Tax Department has detected financial irregularities of over Rs 650 crore after it raided two film production companies, two talent management companies and a leading actress, the Central Board of Direct Taxes claimed on Thursday but did not take any names.

The statement from the CBDT came as raids on the homes and offices of Bollywood actor Tapsee Pannu, director Anurag Kashyap and his partners who launched the now shuttered Phantom Films continued in Mumbai, Pune and Hyderabad for the second day. The searches also covered some executives of celebrity and talent management companies KWAN and Exceed, officials said.

A day later, without naming the people or companies searched, the CBDT said the entities searched were mainly engaged in the business of production of motion pic-

tures, web series, acting, direction and talent management of celebrities and other artists.

Official sources identified the entities raided as Pannu and the four former promoters of Phantom Films -- Kashyap, director-producer Vikramaditya Motwane, producer Vikas Bahl and producer-distributor Madhu Mantena. They also identified the celebrity and talent management companies as Kwan and Exceed.

The second film production company that was raided belongs to Kashyap, the sources said. Evidence of huge suppression of income by the leading film production house compared to the actual box office collections has been unearthed," the statement from CBDT, the administrative body of the IT Department, claimed.

"The company officials have not been able to explain discrepancy of around Rs 300 crore," it said.

Evidence related to "manipulation and under-valuation" of share transactions of the

production house amongst the film directors and shareholders, with a tax implication of about Rs 350 crore has also been found and is being further investigated, it alleged. "Evidence of cash receipts by the leading actress amounting to Rs 5 crore has been recovered and further investigation is going on," the CBDT claimed.

Also, "non-genuine or bogus expenditure" to related concerns by the leading producers and directors having tax implication of about Rs 20 crore has been detected, the statement said.

"Similar findings have been made in the case of the leading actress also," it alleged.

The statement added that "huge amount" of digital data has been seized in the form of emails, WhatsApp chats, hard disk from the offices of the two talent management companies.

A total of seven bank lockers were found and placed under restraint, the CBDT statement said.

# Vizag, Vja go missing from top 10 liveable...

Continued from Page 1

under the "below 1 million population category" Tirupati put up a better performance and has been ranked No 2 with an overall score of 51.69. Kakinada scored 46.85 and is ranked 11.

Performance of the cities has been measured on four broad parameters - governance and social, physical and economic infrastructure.

The government said the 'Ease of Living Index' is an assessment tool that evaluates the quality of life and the impact of various initiatives for urban development.

A total of 32.2 lakh people residing across 111 cities participated in a 'Citizen Perception Survey' holding a weightage of 30 per cent. The assessment was conducted

from January 16 2020 till March 20, 2020.

The Centre said that the EoLI report aims to measure the well-being of Indian citizens in 111 cities, across the pillars of Quality of Life, Economic-ability, and Sustainability, with 49 indicators under 13 categories.

The EoLI primarily sought to accelerate India's urban development outcomes, including the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The findings from the index can help guide evidence-based policymaking. It also promotes healthy competition among cities, encouraging them to learn from their peers and advance their development trajectory, said the Union Minister while releasing the rankings.

# YSRCP to counter...

Continued from Page 1

He said the candidate should go in person or send his authorised agent for withdrawal and they can proceed legally following due procedures if any threats were made.

Sajjala asserted that the results of the panchayat elections will be repeated in the forthcoming municipal elections and said the urban body elections will be held for 12 corporations and 75 municipalities of which three corporations and twelve municipalities are unanimous and YSRCP would sweep in civic polls are they are being held on party symbol.

He said TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu was habituated to uttering lies

and this was proven once again through the party's manifesto for the municipal elections.

The YSRCP senior leader released a pamphlet with details of the schemes implemented since YSRCP came to power and said it should be widely publicised in towns and cities.

He said YSRCP is going for civic polls with the slogan "Support the good governance in forthcoming municipal elections". Sajjala said YSRCP government has been planning to build townships and supply safe drinking water in towns and cities.

He explained the welfare schemes implemented and spoke in detail of the developmental activities initiated by the government.

# Govt orders return of 2,180 acres to Kakinada...

Continued from Page 1

On the committee's recommendation, the government ordered payment of a total compensation of Rs 10 lakh per acre for 657 acres of assigned lands that were taken for the KSEZ in Kona village.

The committee also recommended payment of the same amount of compensation for assigned lands taken for the Divis Lab unit in the region.

The patta lands in these villages would also be removed from the list of prohibited properties that would enable sale and purchase.

The Special Chief Secretary said the AP Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries and Factories Act, 2019 has to be implemented providing 75 percent of jobs (in KSEZ) to the local unemployed youth.

The KSEZ would also have to establish a skill development centre for the locals to acquire necessary skills fit for the employment.

The government also directed that industries proposed to be set up in KSEZ or in the vicinity, including the Divis Labs unit, take all necessary precautions for proper treatment of effluents and shift the marine outfall to a farther point so as not to adversely affect the local hatcheries.



# Govt backs bandh...

Continued from Page 1

The Minister made it clear that the State government opposes the Centre's decision to privatise YSR, which is the right of Andhraites and aspirations of millions of Telugu people. "There is great history and sacrifice of the Telugu people for establishment of the steel plant in the state," he said.

The Minister stated that

the credit for merging the RTC into the government and turning it into public property goes to the YSR Congress Party government, which was done with the sole aim of reviving the organisation, curbing the exploitation of private individuals despite having the burden of Rs 3,600 crore. "We also demand that Vishakha Steel remain in the public sector," he said.

**GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT**  
e-procurement Tender Notice  
D1.03.03.2021  
Name of Work : Formation of Balancing Reservoirs 3 Nos. 1.Mudivedu Balancing Reservoir near Mudivedu Village in Kurabalakota Mandal 2.Nethiguntapalli Balancing Reservoir near Nethiguntapalli Village in punganur Mandal 3. Avulapalli Balancing Reservoir near Avulapalli Village in Somala Mandal of Chittoor district under EPC Turnkey system ( IBM Rs.1554,21,60,649/-), for complete details please visit Website s6i SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER IRRIGATION CIRCLE, CHITTOOR  
GPR No. : 206-CLAD/VI/2020-21





# TD spreading false propaganda on property tax, alleges Botsa

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Municipal Administration Botsa Satyanarayana on Thursday said that TDP leaders have launched false propaganda against the state government alleging a hike in property tax.

Addressing the media here, Botsa said that although the TDP manifesto makes it clear that it would scrap property tax in municipalities and municipal corporations, the fact remained that the party would not have the authority to do so even if it wins the elections.

Botsa emphasised that there is no such thing as hike or burdening people with taxes, as the YSRCP government primarily focuses on public welfare.

He expressed confidence that YSRCP will sweep the municipal elections as indicated by the wave of unanimous



elections by YSRCP candidates in many municipalities.

The Minister said that so far, 578 wards across the State have been elected unanimously. Of these, YSRCP candidates have won uncontested in 571 wards, securing 98.8 percent. He stated that the municipal

elections are being held in 75 municipalities and 12 corporations - a total of 2,794 wards. "Unlike Panchayat polls, as Municipal elections are being held on party symbol, the YSRCP will sweep the polls without much fuss," Botsa said. He said that it was natural

for YSRCP to win these elections, as people are very much satisfied with the good governance of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and have faith in the government. "While the state government has been providing welfare schemes to all the eligible people irrespective of caste, religion, or the party they are affiliated with, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu abjectly failed to implement even a single promise made during 2014 polls but is still trying to cheat people again with his false promises," Botsa said.

The Minister said that the TDP has no candidates to field, as its own cadre has lost faith in Naidu's leadership. He said that the panchayat elections have proven that YSRCP is the clear winner, with people's blessings and its success story will continue in the coming municipal polls and other elections.

# Distribute teaching aids to kids by April 5, orders CM

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Thursday inspected the books and teaching aids designed for pre-primary children, which were displayed by officials of the Women and Child Welfare department during a review meeting.

The Chief Minister also reviewed the progress of Nadu-Nedu works in Anganwadis. Construction of new buildings and revamping of existing buildings is being done in 44,119 Anganwadi centers.

Jagan said that work on Anganwadi buildings should be started simultaneously in urban and rural areas.

"The Government will provide 4,17,508 books for children of PP-1 class and 4,17,508 books for PP-2 children. Distribution of these books will start on March 20 and the target was to complete it by April 5," Jagan said. He said that the Government has



already distributed 16 of the 26 teaching aids to Anganwadis and the remaining 10 teaching aids will be distributed within a month.

He directed officials to provide English-Telugu dictionary in schools and ensure the students learn the meaning of a new word every day and said to implement a similar program in Anganwadi centers. The officials gave Jagan the

details of YSR Poshana and YSR Sampurna Poshana-plus.

Information about these schemes is being provided through posters being set up in village, ward secretariat and Anganwadi centres. They said an SOP book is being provided with the prescribed rules on providing good food and hygiene to children and videos regarding the same are being shared with the students.

# ISRO eyes new opportunities with Italy

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Close on the heels of the launch of a Brazilian satellite by ISRO, India and Italy have decided to explore opportunities in the field of earth observation, space science and robotic and human exploration.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) held a bilateral meeting with Italian Space Agency (ASI) on virtual mode on Wednesday, as part of its strategy to strengthen international partnerships.

ISRO Chairman and Secretary in the Department of Space (DoS) K Sivan and ASI President Giorgio Saccoccia led their respective delegations.

"Both sides reviewed the on-going cooperation and agreed to form more thematic working groups to explore cooperation opportunities in earth observation, space science, robotic exploration and human exploration," the Bengaluru-headquartered ISRO said in a statement.

On February 28, ISRO successfully launched the 637-kg Brazilian satellite Amazonia-1 on board PSLV-C51 rocket from Sriharikota spaceport.

Brazil's Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation,



Marcos Pontes visited ISRO's Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SDSC), Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district, about 100 km from Chennai, and witnessed the launch.

The Minister and his delegation later had a meeting with an ISRO team led by Sivan, and both sides agreed to work together to enhance the bilateral space cooperation and take it to the higher level.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh, who heads the DoS, also had a virtual interaction with Pontes and officials of the

Brazilian space agency. "Brazil has requested India's support in procurement of material and systems for its launch vehicle programme," a DoS statement said.

"Cooperation possibilities in future space science missions, utilising ISRO's PS4-orbital platform (PS4-OP), space weather studies etc. were discussed", the official statement said.

PS4-OP refers to a novel idea formulated by ISRO to use the spent PS4 stage (fourth stage of PSLV) to carry out in-orbit sci-

entific experiments for an extended duration of one to six months.

Sivan also had a virtual meeting with the Head of Australian Space Agency, Enrico Palermo, on February 17. "Both leaders reviewed the status of on-going cooperation activities in earth observation, satellite navigation, space situational awareness and establishment of transportable terminal in Australia to support India's 'Gaganyaan' programme", ISRO had said at the time.

# 42 crude bombs seized in Srikakulam

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Srikakulam police on Thursday seized 42 crude bombs from a couple of houses during a search at Golla Kanchili village under Kanchili Mandal in Srikakulam district.

According to the police, the crude bombs were stored for a possible clash between two political groups in the village.

DSP (Palasa) Sivarami Reddy said Duvva Lokanadham and Dokkari Dhalayya have been at loggerheads over political and property issues for years in the village. There was a clash between groups led by them last year.

Acting on a tip-off that there could be a clash between the groups with bombs, sticks and stones, the police conducted

the search operation in the village and found the crude bombs along with sticks, and stones in some houses in the village, the DSP added.

The police suspect that the locals procured the crude bombs from the neighbouring Odisha a few months ago and some were made locally. The police registered cases against some members of both the

groups under the Explosive Substances Act and the crude bombs have been defused.

Rioting cases were reported against the duo in the past few years but they never used crude bombs. There were reports that the clashes between the two groups took place with crude bombs around two decades ago but it was not repeated again.

# Jawan Vanjarapu Rama Rao accorded state funeral

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

A State funeral was accorded to Naik Vanjarapu Rama Rao at his native place at Srikakulam with full military honours and a Guard of Honour from the Police Department on Thursday.

Representatives from Indian Army, Indian Navy, State Administration, Police Department and NCC paid floral tributes to the mortal remains of Naik Rama Rao of 3 Engineers Regiment during the funeral.

Earlier, the mortal remains of Naik Vanjarapu Rama Rao arrived at Visakhapatnam from New Delhi by Air India Flight on



Wednesday night. A wreath laying ceremony with Military Honours was conducted at the airport by the representatives from East-

# Anganwadi aid accuses J-C's clerk of harassment

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

An Anganwadi worker filed a complaint with the police on Thursday against the clerk and some residential staff of Nellore Joint-Collector, accusing them of harassing and seeking bribe from her.

The complainant alleged that she was recruited as an Anganwadi helper two months ago, but was later asked to work at the residence of Joint-Collector as house help. The staff of J-C also demanded from her Rs 3 lakh to regularise her job, she alleged.

The clerk has denied the allegations.

# 6 Council hopefuls file nominations

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Five candidates of the ruling YSR Congress Party on Thursday filed their nominations for the biennial election to the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Council.

The sixth candidate filed his papers for the by-election to the Council.

Accompanied by Ministers Botsa Satyanarayana and Buggana Rajendranath and Government Advisor (Public Affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, the six candidates completed the formality on the last day of the nomination process.

Earlier, YSRCP supremo and Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy handed the candidates the party's requisite authorisation in Form-B. The YSRCP has re-nominated sitting MLC Shaik Mohammed Iqbal of Kurnool district, besides bringing back political heavyweight C Ramachandraiah of Kadapa to the Council.

It also nominated Balli Kalyan Chakravarthy, son of deceased Tirupati MP Durga Prasada Rao, and leaders Mohammed Karimunnisa from Vijayawada and Duvvada

Srinivas from Srikakulam for three other seats.

Five Council seats will fall vacant on March 29, at the end of the six-year term of the sitting members, three of whom belong to the main opposition Telugu Desam Party.

The YSRCP fielded Challa Bhageerath Reddy (Kurnool) for the by-election to the Council, to fill the vacancy caused due to the death of his father Ramakrishna Reddy, who succumbed to Coronavirus in January.

He will fill the slot till March 29, 2023. Election of these six candidates is now a mere formality as no other nominations have been filed. It will be a gain of three seats for the YSRCP, whose overall strength in the 58-member House will increase to 14, including two nominated members. Iqbal, a retired IPS officer, was first elected to the Council on August 19, 2019.

Since he had a short tenure in the first term, Iqbal got re-nominated for a fuller term of six years. Ramachandraiah's re-entry will be a major boost for the YSRCP in the Council, given his vast legislative experience and political acumen.

## SHORT TAKES

### VROS SEEK TRANSPARENCY IN PROMOTION PROCESS

VIJAYAWADA : AP VROs Joint Action Committee chairman Vasa Samuel Divakar on Thursday objected to the intervention of Amaravati JAC chairman Bopparaju Venkateswarlu in the promotion process of Village Revenue Officers to Senior Assistants. During a meeting of APVROs JAC that was held at Vijayawada, Divakar warned Bopparaju not to obstruct the promotion process. Leaders of the Association from all 13 districts participated in the meeting and urged the government to conduct a promotion process transparently. Divakar said that promotion is the right of VROs but Bopparaju was trying to deny this right to employees by proposing promotions to fewer employees as senior assistants from VROs. He said that the Association was opposed to the attempts of mediation by Bopparaju and warned him about stern action if he tries to deprive VROs of their rights. AP Government Employees Association president KR Suryanarayana, secretary G Askar Rao and other leaders decided to bring their issues to the notice of the government.

### MAN HELD FOR KILLING WIFE, SETTING HER BODY ON FIRE

Visakhapatnam : Cracking the murder case of a woman whose burnt body was found in a mango orchard, Peddapuram police in East Godavari arrested her husband and his mother. Speaking to the media, Peddapuram DSP Aritakula Srinivasa Rao, said Chintapalli Satyanarayana had married his elder sister's daughter named Adilakshmi in 2004. The couple has two sons, Ramesh who was studying in the 10th grade and another son who was studying fourth grade. The family lived in Markandruj Peta at Tuni. According to police, the accused revealed that in a fit of rage following an argument on February 28, he hit her wife suspecting extra-marital relations and not refraining from it despite several warnings. Afraid of being caught, Satyanarayana stuffed her body into a bag and put it on his two-wheeler and went to the mango orchard in Kottavelampeta suburb. He poured petrol on the body and set it on fire. He returned home immediately to ensure no one saw him. However, the body was partially burnt. Police were called in after locals noticed the partially-burnt body. After conducting investigation and examining the CCTV footage on the highway the police zeroed in Satyanarayana.

### INTERNATIONAL CALL DIVERSION RACKET BUSTED

Hyderabad : A three member gang involved in call termination racket was arrested by the Rajendranagar police. The gang was organising the racket from a flat and diverting international call through mobile networks, the police said. Those arrested are identified as Mohammed Ashraf, 23, who has an IT background, Syed Mohammed Nasir, 30 and Shaik Akbar, 25. On information the police raided a house near Pillar No 181 of PVNR Expressway and busted the racket following information. "The gang were using Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) to operate the racket and diverting international call as locals using technology," said R Sanjay, ACP Rajendranagar. The gang had arranged a Jio SIP truck device of 500 channels and each channel could accommodate three SIM cards. "At a time, 1,500 calls could be diverted to using the device," the ACP said.

# 50th national safety week at NTPC-Simhadri concludes

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The 50th National Safety Week at NTPC Simhadri concluded on Thursday with a glittering function held at the plant premises.

Diwakar Kaushik, group general manager, NTPC, J Siva Shankar Reddy, Joint Chief Inspector of Factories, GC Choukse, general manager (O&M), RK Jha, general manager (OPN), Subash Garg, general manager (maintenance) and MNVS Bhaskar, general manager (FM) graced the concluding function.

The programme started with 'Safety Pledge'.

Guest of honor J Shiva Shankar Reddy, praised the efforts of Simhadri Project in the area of occupational health and safety management. He stressed upon the employees the need for



togetherness and participatory approach to achieve best safety culture. He emphasised that under the changing societal

perceptions on industries, managements need to focus more on safety, health and environmental issues right from the incep-



tion.

Diwakar Kaushik, in his address, said that the management was committed and

explore all possible ways and means for the enhancement of accident-free working atmosphere at Simhadri Station.



# ITIR central for voters' choice in Hyd-RR-M'nagar Graduate constituency

ML MELLY MAITREVI  
HYDERABAD

Central to the campaign for the two MLC seats from the Graduates' constituencies is the issue of who botched the proposal to set up an Information Technology Investment Region (ITIR) project in Telangana. With the campaign reaching a feverish pitch, leaders of BJP and TRS now are trading charges and apportioning blame on each other for the project not seeing the light of the day.

The IT Investment Region project has been long shelved by the NDA government and the Union Minister for IT&C was on record to state that the project proposed by the previous UPA government did not justify the huge land acquisition.

To be fair to the TRS government, it had been representing to the Centre right from the formation of the state to implement the project because of its huge employment potential. It has substantiated its claim by the number of representations



**"The ITIR project was sanctioned not only to Telangana but also to Karnataka, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Why the project failed to take off in Karnataka even when the BJP government was in power in the State and Centre," was the counter from the TRS**

it had made to the Centre.

BJP state unit president Bandi Sanjay Kumar's allegation through an open letter that it was because of the failure of the Telangana government to pursue on the ITIR project that the state lost the project was well utilised by TRS working president and IT&C Minister K.T.Rama Rao, who demanded an apology for spreading deliberate lies and misleading the youth in the run-up to the MLC elections. The issue became important

in the Hyderabad-Ranga Reddy and Mahbubnagar Graduate constituency as the ITIR project was proposed in and around Hyderabad. "The ITIR project was sanctioned not only to Telangana but also to Karnataka, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Why the project failed to take off in Karnataka even when the BJP government was in power in the state and the Centre," was the counter from the TRS.

The TRS which was on backfoot about the opposition

criticism on slow recruitment process to fill vacant posts in the government did release data on over 1.3 lakh posts that were filled and stated the recruitment process would begin soon for another 50,000 posts.

It is an established fact that it was the IT and ITES sector that brought lakhs of direct jobs to the state much more than the government sector and every IT job generated at least four indirect jobs in the service sector. The number of jobs generated in the IT and ITES sector in Hyderabad and surroundings and indirect

employment in the last five years are being showcased by the ruling party well to its advantage and so with the units set up under the TS iPASS. Meanwhile, Ministers Vemula Prashanth Reddy, Gangula Kamalakara and Harish Rao, who were made in-charges for the three districts to ensure victory of TRS candidate and late Prime Minister P.V.Narasimha Rao's daughter Surabi Vani Devi, exuded confidence that graduates had now understood who had made efforts to generate employment opportunities for the youth.

# Uttam exhorts people to question TRS, BJP on polls promises

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee President N Uttam Kumar Reddy on Thursday exhorted people to question leaders of TRS and BJP for not fulfilling poll promises.

Addressing a series of meetings as part of MLC election campaign for S Ramulu Naik, the Congress candidate from Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Graduates constituency, Uttam Kumar Reddy said that the TRS government in Telangana and BJP government at the Centre did not deliver the promises they had made to people.

Instead of coming up with a progress report for the last seven years, TRS and BJP leaders are now coming up with a list of new promises and blaming each other for the failures, he reminded.

During a meeting at Kakatiya University, Uttam Kumar Reddy, along with Congress candidate Ramulu Naik, had an interaction with students. The TPCC chief recalled the role played by



Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee President N Uttam Kumar Reddy addressing a gathering of advocates in Warangal on Thursday

TPCC accuses the TRS govt of neglecting education sector

students of Kakatiya University during the Telangana movement. However, he said none of the students, who made sacrifices and risked their careers, benefitted from the formation of Telangana. Only the KCR family grabbed all the benefits and encroached upon the resources. He said that the TRS government delayed the

withdrawal of cases registered during the Telangana agitation, which prevented thousands of students from applying for government jobs.

Furthermore, he said no special exemption was given in recruitment drives for those who participated in the statehood movement.

He said that the TRS government has reduced the overall budget for the education sector and did not appoint a single teacher or non-teaching staff in the last seven years.

# Rs 24-K cr excise revenue for TS in 11 months

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The excise revenue during the past 11 months is put Rs 24,814 crore helping the excise department to earn revenue of over Rs 15,000 crore after deduction of the VAT. Since there is still one month for the fiscal year to close, the department is set to earn another Rs 1,000 crore, enabling it to reach the target set for the department in the budget for 2020-21.

The excise department officials say that there was no sale of liquor in the State for about 46 days from March 22 to May 6 denying the department

revenue of at least Rs 1,000 crore. Had liquor was sold during this period, too, the revenue would have gone up further.

On an average, 5.6 lakh litres of beer was sold per day, while 8.22 lakh liquor was sold a day. The daily consumption of beer and liquor was put at 14 lakh litres per day.

Barring the excise department, no other government could meet the targets fixed for them in the budget for 2020-21. The revenue due to GST, registration of properties and some other crucial sectors has nosedived, but the excise revenue remained steady.



Jayashankar Bhupalpally district YSRCP president Appam Kishan and YSRCP youth wing district president Kusuma Ramakrishna called on YS Sharmila at Lotus Pond in Hyderabad on Thursday. Scores of former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy's followers and sympathisers are meeting his daughter after the latter announced that she would float a party soon. Speculations are rife that they may switch over their loyalties to her party

# HC angry over delay in filling PP posts

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana High Court on Thursday expressed dissatisfaction over the delay in appointment of public prosecutors (PP) and attributed the delay in trial of various cases to the delay in appointing the public prosecutors.

The government pleader told the court that discussions are under way to appoint the public prosecutors. Out of the 414 posts, 212 have been filled, he added. The Court passed remarks saying that it insists on results but not on discussions. If 50 per cent of the PP posts remained vacant, how can justice be delivered speedily, it questioned the government pleader.

The HC posted the matter to April 1.

# 'Govt strove for Kurumas' uplift'

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

MLC Kalvakuntla Kavita, highlighting the role of Golla-Kurumas in the TRS victory, has said that Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Rao implemented several schemes, which any Yadava Chief Minister could not have done.

Addressing the media here on Thursday, she dubbed the TRS as the party, which will do good to the Golla-Kurumas. She desired that the members of the community should get benefits under all government schemes. He said that KCR has been implementing several schemes for them which no previous government had hitherto

implemented. Moreover, the members of the community have been supporting the party always.

She said that she would urge the CM to allocate funds to ZPTCs and MPTCs in the budget. She made it clear to the mem-

bers of the community, who called on her on Thursday, the government would resume soon the sheep units distribution programme, which was stalled due to the pandemic.

She said that a meeting would be held at the Kuruma Association building once its execution is completed in Kamareddy.

# Teachers will teach a lesson to KCR: Bandi

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The pen is mightier than the sword, reminding the adage, BJP State unit chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar said that KCR is assuming that teachers have pens in their hands, however, the same pens would blast like guns on March 14 in Graduate MLC elections.

Addressing the Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal Graduate MLC elections campaign in Bhongir town on Thursday, Bandi Sanjay asked KCR whether the latter got to know his PRO Vijay Kumar is corrupt after many days as the government suspended him now. He questioned KCR to tell as to where the unemployment allowance was. There is no law and order in the state and TRS leaders' hands were behind the murder of the advocate couple, he alleged.

# Centre's nod for Rabi paddy procurement

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has received the much-awaited written communication from the Food Corporation of India paving the way for procurement of paddy from the farmers for the Rabi season. But, the FCI's decision came with the rider that it will procure mainly 'raw' rice this season.

Taken aback by this last-minute decision of the FCI, the State government has written back that it should respect the Memorandum of Understanding to procure the variety of paddy that is grown during a season. Normally during the Rabi, the majority of paddy cultivated is suitable for boiled rice because of the high percentage of moisture present in it, sources explained.

As FCI wanted to procure 80 per cent of raw rice this time, fresh doubts arose over paddy procurement again. If the FCI



failed to procure boiled rice, then farmers may not be able to sell their produce at the Minimum Support Price and will be left at the mercy of the market forces.

However, Civil Supplies Corporation authorities clarified that it would be mandatory on the part of the FCI to purchase the variety of paddy that was cultivated during a season. "We are confident that FCI would see reason and respond positively as it will not be possible for the State to procure 'raw' rice in this season," they said. The paddy procurement will begin from the first week of April, sources added.

# DCCB striving for rural prosperity

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

The Karimnagar District Cooperative Central Bank (DCCB) had gone a step ahead and announced the financial assistance (loans for agriculture and non-agricultural activities) at only 5.5 per cent annual interest rate.

The watershed programme was taken up in Shatraipalli, Vattemula, Namiligundipalli, Fazulnagar villages and Reddypalem hamlet in Vemulawada rural mandal by the Self-employed Welfare Society (SEWS), a voluntary organisation, with the financial assistance of Rs 1.8 crore, provided by the NABARD. The watershed had completely transformed the barren lands in these villages and made over 3,500 hectares of land cultivable following the recharging of the groundwater table. The dry villages are turning green and lands have become

Providing loans at 5.5 per cent interest for watershed project in villages

fertile and the farmers could see water at check-dams, contour trenches, rock-fill dams, farm ponds and open wells. Before the watershed project, there was the migration of rural folk to the Gulf nations in search of employment. Now, it is another way round. The Gulf immigrants are coming back to their villages to take up farm activities with the availability of water.

To give a fillip to the agricultural activities and strive for rural prosperity, the NABARD and DCCB authorities have launched awareness programmes in the watershed villages about the importance of availing loans at cheaper rates and strive for their economic activities on the farm and other sectors.

# Conservator of forests all praise for K'nagar Police Commissionerate

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

Karimnagar conservator of forests B Saidulu was all praise for the efforts taken by the Karimnagar police commissionerate in its afforestation initiative at the Commissionerate Police Training Centre (CTC) on the outskirts of the town by using the Miyawaki method.

B Saidulu was in awe of the swift and thick growth of vegetation at the CTC during his visit on Thursday to inspect the afforestation activities carried out at the training centre. He inspected the developed red sanders, tulasi, nagagraha, raasi, guava and a rock garden. He commended the police for setting up bird-baths (clay pots filled with water) to quench the thirst of birds during the summer.

Accompanying B Saidulu on his tour of the CTC, Commissioner of Police VB Kamalasan Reddy said that they had planted over 50,000 saplings with the support of various



Karimnagar conservator of forests B Saidulu going around Commissionerate Police Training Centre in Karimnagar on Thursday

**B Saidulu was in awe of the swift and thick growth of vegetation at the CTC during his visit on Thursday**

afforested areas were thrown open to the general public on the weekends.

The Karimnagar conservator of forests also provided suggestions for the plantation of saplings across the remaining open areas of the CTC premises and assured all assistance from the forest department. He lauded the efforts of the police for their initiative to boost afforestation in urban areas for the benefit of not only those who lived in the surrounding areas, but also for future generations.

# Arrangements for Shivaratri at Vemulawada reviewed

PNS ■ RAJANNA SIRGILLA

District Collector Krishna Bhaskar directed the authorities concerned to work for the success of the Maha Shivaratri Jataara, which will be conducted at the Vemulawada shrine, on March 11.

On Thursday, the Collector, along with District Superintendent of Police Rahul Hegde, inspected the arrangements in Vemulawada like the parking lots, the place where the Shivachana will be performed, the place where temporary showers will be set up.

Later, he held a review meeting with officials of the concerned departments at the guest house of the temple and enquired about the arrangements being made for the Jataara. On the occasion, the Collector said that all the offi-



District Collector Krishna Bhaskar and District Superintendent of Police Rahul Hegde going around the Vemulawada temple on Thursday to review arrangements for Mahashivaratri, which falls on March 11

cers of the departments concerned should go ahead with a special plan and work hard to make the Maha Shivaratri a success. The Municipal Commissioner was directed to pay special attention to sanitation by giving top priority to cleanliness in the town as there is a possibility of more devotees

coming. The Collector vented his ire at the Municipal Commissioner for not removing the garbage on the suburbs of Moolawagu.

The Collector directed RTC manager Bhupathi Reddy to take appropriate steps to ensure that 793 buses from all depots will run to the Vemulawada depot this year as well as 14 mini-buses for the convenience of devotees. "We have made arrangements for parking lots in 10 sectors and will see that devotees do not face any difficulties while parking their vehicles." The Collector enquired about the progress of construction of Kodurupakam-Karimnagar road, which was being laid under the supervision of the Department of Roads and Buildings. Indicators that were ordered will be installed.

# ZP chairperson distributes sports apparel

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR BHUPALAPALLY

Playing sports will reduce stress and in turn, students, who will play sports, will be able to concentrate more on students, which will lead to good results, said Zilla Parishad chairperson Jakkuri Sri Harshini Rakesh.

She distributed sports apparel to students at the Tribal Boys Gurukul School (Tribal Welfare School) in Kataram zone on Thursday. In all, 22 students from the Karimnagar district were selected for the state-level Kho Kho tournament from the school. She said that students should play sports and games not only for physical fitness but also for improving their concentration levels.

# Ramchander Rao has no regard for graduates: Harish Rao

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Finance Minister T Harish Rao has suspected the sincerity of the BJP candidate Ramchander Rao, who is in the fray for the Hyderabad-Rangareddy-Mahbubnagar districts graduates' constituency MLC polls/

Addressing the media in Malkajgiri here on Thursday, Harish Rao said that all sections of society supports Vani Devi's candidature.

Quoting others as saying, he alleged that Ramchander Rao had not met graduates in Parigi, Tandur, Mahbubnagar in the last MLC polls and charged him with having no respect for voters of his constituency. Being an MLC, Ramchander Rao, unsuccessfully contested as an MLA in 2018 and MP in 2019, he said

adding that he would have quit the MLC post had he been successful. If he really wants to serve the graduates, why should he contest for MLA and MP seats, he said concluding that Ramchander Rao has no respect for graduates of his constituency.

Where is the guarantee that he would not quit the MLC post if he gets a better position, he wondered. Surabhi Vani Devi is not the only daughter of former PM PV Narasimha Rao, but hails from a traditional family and an eminent educationist. She served the education sector as a lecturer, professor and correspondent of an educational institution. He said that she produced more than one lakh graduates. Therefore, he appealed to voters to give their vote to her.

In fact, two lakh voters belong to TRS activists' families, he said adding that women are looking to Vani Devi to support her. As there is antagonism towards Ramachander Rao, he predicted Vani Devi's victory in the polls.

Why should anyone vote for the BJP and on what basis, he questioned.

In an emotional speech, he appealed to the people saying that should we vote for the BJP for having hike the petrol and diesel prices, hiking the LPG cylinder prices by Rs 225 in a year, not fulfilling the promises made at the state of division of the state, not materialising Bayyaram steel factory, not honouring the promise on tribal university, integral rail coach factory, withdrawing ITIR for Telangana and

duplicating the unemployed. Continuing his tirade against the BJP, he said should we vote for the BJP for privatising the PSUs and thereby denying quota for SC, ST and BCs, for privatising the LIC, railways and privatising part of the BSNL.

He appealed to PSU employees to defeat the BJP to save the PSUs. He pointed out that the BPCL, Visakha Steel Plant and LIC are put up for sale by the Centre.

He appealed to them to give their vote to Vani Devi for the TRS to resist the privatisation of the PSU on the floor of parliament. Today is the turn of privatising the Visakha Steel, tomorrow what would be the fate of PSUs like BDL, BHEL and ordnance factory, he questioned.



# Indian scientists identify new mutations of Corona

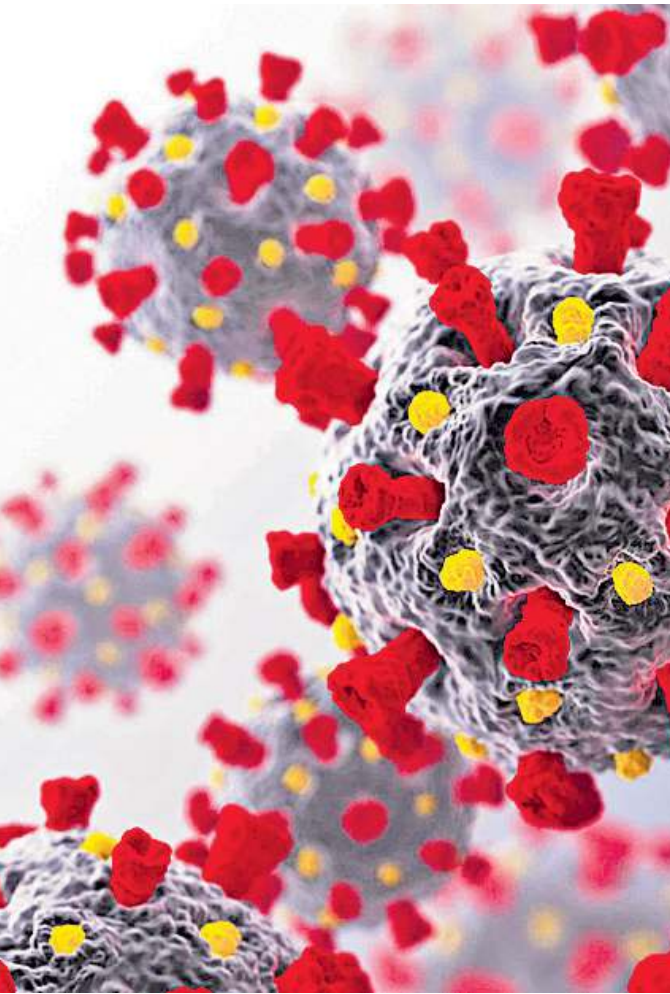
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A study from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has identified multiple mutations and unique proteins in isolates of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. The recent study, published in the Journal of Proteome Research, has also shown that the host produces several proteins of their own as their body launches an immunological defence in response to the viral attack, the Bengaluru-based IISc said in a statement on Thursday. To better understand how the virus is mutating and its protein biology (proteins are made using genetic information), an IISc team led by Utpal Tatu, Professor in the Department of Biochemistry, has carried out a comprehensive proteo-genomic investigation a

series of analyses of SARS-CoV-2 isolates. The isolates or viral samples were recovered from nasalsecretions of consenting COVID-19 positive individuals here. The genomic analysis was done using what molecular biologists like Tatu call next generation sequencing (NGS), a technology that allows for rapid sequencing of the entire genome. He says that sequencing the genomes of viral strains from around the world is important because it helps keep track of mutations that are arising constantly. His teams analysis suggests that the virus is now mutating faster than before the three Bengaluru isolates had 27 mutations in their genomes with over 11 mutations per sample, more than both the national average (8.4) and global average

(7.3). To understand the spread and evolutionary history of the virus, the team constructed a global phylogenetic tree, or tree of relatedness, of viral isolates using the sequence data. The phylogenetic analysis found that the Bengaluru isolates are most closely related to the one from Bangladesh. It also showed that the isolates in India have multiple origins rather than having evolved from a single ancestral variant, the statement said. The SARS-CoV-2 genome codes for more than 25 proteins, but only a handful of these proteins have been identified so far, it said. "Studying viral proteins provides functional information which is currently not well represented," says Tatu.

In the proteomic analysis, his team detected 13 different proteins most of them previously unidentified from clinical samples. "One such protein called Orf9b, which suppresses the hosts immune response, had been predicted, but the IISc team provided the first evidence of its expression", it said. "Just knowing how the virus functions will not be enough. We need to put it in the context of the host," Tatu says. Therefore, in the third analysis, his team explored how our bodies respond to the virus by examining host proteins. They discovered as many as 441 proteins unique to COVID-19 positive patients, many of which are speculated to play a key role in the body's immune response.



# Rift among leaders worries Bengal BJP

PNS ■ KOLKATA

With Assembly polls just three weeks away, the BJP, amid an all-out effort to oust Mamata Banerjee from power in Bengal, is also struggling to keep its house in order, as old-timers and new entrants engage in feuds over multiple issues, including ticket distribution. The saffron party, which had witnessed unprecedented growth in terms of vote share and mass base over the last few years, had opened its doors wide open for leaders from other parties, as part of its poll strategy, but that did not go down well with many senior leaders, who had once locked horns with the newbies from rival camps, sources in the BJP said. According to a senior BJP leader, the strategy had initially reaped dividends for the saffron camp, which labelled the TMC as a "sinking ship", but it eventually led to infighting within the organisation and diluted the party's "fight against corruption", as several new entrants were found to have graft charges against them.

The party recently did a course correction, and stopped the mass induction, but the damage by then was done, with the leadership now having to face the "herculean task" of identifying suitable candidates from 8,000 aspirants for the state's 294 constituencies, the senior leader said. "We never thought that induction of leaders from other parties could lead to such a situation. Every day we hear reports of infighting between the old-timers and newcomers. We apprehend that post announcement of names (of contenders), discontentment within the camp will grow further," the BJP leader noted. State BJP chief Dilip Ghosh, however, insisted that expanding the party's base was necessary at this juncture. "The BJP is a big family. When your family grows, such incidents do take place. If we don't take people from other outfits, how will we grow? That said, everyone has to abide by the rules and regulations of the party. No one is above the party," Ghosh said.

## INDIA CORNER

### OPPN MLAS SHOWED DISRESPECT TO NATIONAL FLAG, SAYS HP CM

Opposition Congress MLAs showed disrespect to the national flag while banging on the bonnet of the governor's car on the first day of the ongoing Budget Session, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur said on Thursday. Replying to the discussion on Governor Bandaru Dattatraya's address to the Assembly, Thakur said the tricolour was affixed to the governor's car and the Congress members showed disrespect to it. Leader of the Opposition Mukesh Agnihotri and four other Congress MLAs -- Harsh Vardhan Chauhan, Satpal Raizada, Sunder Singh and Vinay Kumar -- were on Friday suspended for the Budget Session after they allegedly manhandled the governor. The alleged incident had taken place outside the Speaker's office when the Governor was leaving for the Raj Bhavan after he cut short his address to the House following a ruckus. Speaker Vipin Parmar had also lodged a complaint with police in this regard. Members of the Congress did not attend the proceedings on Thursday as well to press their demand for revoking suspension of the five party legislators who continued their dharna outside the House.



### Sena extends support to TMC

PNS ■ KOLKATA

After the Rashtriya Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party (SP), the Shiv Sena on Thursday extended its support to TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, and said it would not contest assembly elections in Bengal. Hailing Banerjee as the "real Bengal tigress", the party, which had earlier said that it would join the electoral battle in the state, vowed to "stand in solidarity" with the TMC camp. Senior Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut, in a tweet, made the announcement and said that the decision was taken following discussions with party president and Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray.

### Azmi wants Maha Muslim ministers to quit over CM's Babri remark

PNS ■ MUMBAI

A day after Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray made a remark about Babri Masjid demolition in the Legislative Assembly, SP leader Abu Azmi on Thursday objected to it and asked Muslim ministers in the state to resign over the statement as well as two other issues. Former Congress MP Sanjay Nirupam also expressed his disapproval over Thackeray's statement. Addressing media persons outside the Vidhan Bhavan here, Azmi said Thackeray has forgotten that he is not just the president of the Shiv Sena, but also the state chief minister. Azmi also hit out at the Congress and the NCP, saying that these parties had earlier talked about giving five per cent



quota to Muslims in jobs and education, but it has not happened. He said that at least ministers from the Muslim community should feel ashamed and resign over Thackeray's remarks and the quota issue. The Samajwadi Party leader said that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government was formed to "stop the BJP" from attaining power and the Congress and the NCP had supported it based on the common minimum programme (CMP). "Uddhav ji forgot that he is a chief minister. When the Supreme Court wrote the judgement, it had said that installing idol inside the Babri Mosque and bringing down parts of the mosque were both criminal activities. "So, I think it is very disappoining that a chief minister accepts criminal activity in the House," Azmi said. The government was formed on the basis of CMP, but it is now talking about "temples and mosques", he said, asking the Congress and NCP leaders to think what is to be done now. "The chief minister had said that the CAA and the NRC will not be implemented in the state. The Congress and the NCP earlier said Muslims should get five per cent reservation.

### Woman gang-raped, accused detained

PNS ■ MAHOBHA

A 20-year-old woman was allegedly gang-raped by three youths in City area here, police said on Thursday. An FIR was registered on Wednesday by the victim against the three men, all residents of Gandhi Nagar locality. She has alleged that the three youths gang-raped her five months ago and also made a video of the act that was used to blackmail her, the police

said. Acting on the complaint, police has detained the youths. The FIR stated that the woman on October 8, 2020 had come to the city and the three youths dragged her into a house where she was raped. They also filmed the act on their mobile phone and had physical relationship with her several times, it stated. She also alleged that the trio took away Rs 1.5 lakh cash and a gold chain from her in this context. Police is probing the matter.

### Without sight, but sightless not in my path: Big B

Megastar Amitabh Bachchan on Thursday shared a poem about his eye surgery, saying that he is in the "sweet company" of those who care for him. The actor, who had revealed about the eye surgery on March 1, also expressed his gratitude to fans for their well wishes in the poem. In the poem, posted on his official blog on Thursday, Bachchan said that he is "without sight" but not "sightless". "I am without sight, but sightless not in my path, I am without convenience, but never inconvenienced," he began. "A gracious opulent heart, doth blossom with gratitude... For some time I am but time bound now. For the prayers I get I am folded hands bound, yes folded hands bound... Ever folded hands bound," he wrote. On Monday, the actor had said that the best is being done for him. "Eye surgeries at this age are delicate and need precision handling.



### DMK seals poll pact with VCK; Allots six seats

The DMK on Thursday allotted six constituencies to ally Viduthala iruthigal Katchi for the April 6 assembly elections in Tamil Nadu. An electoral pact was signed by DMK president M K Stalin and VCK chief Thol Thirumavalavan at the Dravidian party headquarters 'Anna Arivalayam' here. "We have decided to fight from six segments." Though there was dissatisfaction on the number of seats offered in the party, it was decided to accept the deal to drive out 'Sanathana forces' from Tamil Nadu and to consolidate secular votes, Thirumavalavan told reporters. In the absence of DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi and AIADMK patriarch J Jayalalithaa, the BJP was trying hard to weaken both the Dravidian parties and working towards destroying politics that was aimed at upholding social justice, he alleged.



### 'Membership of INSTC project will be expanded'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has proposed the inclusion of Chabahar port in the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) route, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, said on Thursday, and expressed hope that member states involved with the INSTC will agree on expanding membership of this project. In his address on 'Chabahar Day' at the Maritime India Summit 2021, Jaishankar said the shift in the fulcrum of global economic growth towards Asia is creating unprecedented opportunities for connectivity in the region. He asserted that the marking of Chabahar Day by India reflects its strong commitment to enhancing regional connectivity. Jaishankar said India has also proposed the inclusion of Chabahar in the INSTC route. The INSTC is an important trade corridor project, where in India is partnering with 12 countries to establish an economic corridor, he said. The International North South Transport Corridor is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving



freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe. "We also welcome the interest of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan to join the multilateral corridor project. Establishing an eastern corridor through Afghanistan would maximize its potential," he said. "I am hopeful that during the INSTC Coordination Council meeting, member states would agree to the expansion of the INSTC route to include the Chabahar Port and also agree on expanding the membership of this project," he said. Jaishankar also said that as the world goes through a fundamental re-balancing, correcting many distortions of the past, it is only natural that connectivity should be central to that exercise.

### 'Nothing to fear', Kejriwal on vaccine

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who along with his parents took their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine on Thursday, appealed to all eligible people to come forward and get vaccinated, asserting that there's "nothing to fear". The vaccine was first administered to Kejriwal's parents, Govind Ram Kejriwal and Gita Devi, and then to the chief minister at the government-run Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narayan hospital here. They all were given the Covishield vaccine. "I and my parents got our first dose of COVID-19 vaccine today. We had no problems and are perfectly healthy. There is nothing to fear. Doubts in people's mind (about the vaccine) no longer exist. I appeal to everyone eligible for the vaccine to come and get themselves vaccinated," Kejriwal told reporters after getting the jab.

### CBI interrogates 3 railway officials in coal pilferage case

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Thursday interrogated three railway officials of Asansol Division in connection with its probe into the multi-crore coal pilferage scam, sources said. The chief controller and senior divisional operations manager of Eastern Railway's Asansol Division, and the station manager of Barabani were questioned by the anti-corruption branch of the central agency, the sources said. The officials were asked to explain how 500 tonnes of "stolen" coal was kept at railway siding areas under their jurisdiction. The "stolen" coal had been subsequently seized by Eastern Coalfields Limited (ECL) in December 2019, the sources said. The CBI is also interrogating close associates of kingpin Anup Majee, alias Lala, the prime accused in the case. Majee, the director of a company engaged in the purchase and sale of the dry fuel, has been evading arrest. The investigating agency



has already interrogated two businessmen, Randhir Barnwal and Manoj Agarwal, in connection with the alleged illegal coal mining in the Asansol-Raniganj belt of West Bengal. The CBI on Tuesday had raided premises of people in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, who it suspected have links with Majee. The central agency on November 28 last year carried out a massive search operation in several locations in West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh after registering a case against Majee. The CBI had acted on information from "reliable sources" indicating illegal

excavation and theft of coal in the leasehold area of ECL 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. The MP is West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew. Apart from the CBI, the Enforcement Directorate, another central agency, is also probing the illegal coal mining case.

### Makers urged to disclose capacity to manufacture vax

The Delhi High Court Thursday directed Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech to disclose their capacities to manufacture Covaxin, Covishield vaccines. The high court also asked the Centre to explain in affidavit the rationale behind keeping strict control over class of persons who can be vaccinated against COVID-19 currently as under the present system those above the age of 60 years or between 45 to 60 years with comorbidities can receive vaccination. A bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli said the two institutes-- Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech -- have more capacity to provide the vaccines but it seems that they are not exploiting it fully. "We are not utilising it fully. We are either donating it to foreign countries or selling it to foreign countries and are not vaccinating our own people. So there has to be that sense of responsibility and urgency," the bench said. It also asked the Delhi government to carry out inspection of medical facilities available in court complexes here and to report if COVID-19 vaccination centres could be set up there.



### OTTs 'at times show porn, says SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said that few over-the-top (OTT) platforms show some kind of pornographic content at times and there should be a mechanism to screen such programmes. A bench headed by Justice Ashok Bhushan asked Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to place before it the recent guidelines of the government to regulate social media platforms on Friday, when it would hear the plea of Amazon Prime Video's India head Aparna Purohit challenging the Allahabad High Court order rejecting her anticipatory bail in connection with FIRs lodged against her over web series 'Tandav'.



"A balance has to be struck as some OTT platforms are also showing pornographic materials on their platforms," the bench, also comprising Justice R S Reddy, said. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Purohit, termed the case against her as "shocking" saying this woman is an employee of Amazon and she is neither a producer nor an actor but still she has been made an accused in around 10 cases relat-

ing to the web series across the country. Tandav, a nine-episode political thriller starring Bollywood A-listers Saif Ali Khan, Dimple Kapadia and Mohd Zeeshan Ayyub, started streaming recently. Purohit has been accused of inappropriate depiction of Uttar Pradesh police personnel, Hindu deities and an adverse portrayal of a character playing the prime minister in the web series. Earlier, the apex court, on January 27, had declined to grant interim protection from any coercive action to Ali Abbas Zafar, Director of the web series, Purohit, producer Himanshu Mehra, the show's writer Gaurav Solanki and actor Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub. It had said that they may seek bail from courts concerned in the FIRs lodged in connection with the web series. Now, Purohit has appealed to the top court against the Allahabad High Court's February 25 order declining anticipatory bail to her. A single judge bench of the High Court had said that Purohit had not been "vigilant and has acted irresponsibly making her open to criminal prosecution in permitting streaming of a movie which is against the fundamental rights of the majority of citizens of this country and therefore, her fundamental right of life and liberty cannot be protected by grant of anticipatory bail to her in the exercise of discretionary powers of this court."

### Kerala BJP pitches for making 'Metroman' NDA CM candidate

PNS ■ THIRUVALLA

BJP in Kerala on Thursday said it has requested the party's national leadership to declare "Metroman" E Sreedharan, who recently joined the party, as the NDA's chief ministerial candidate in Kerala in the coming assembly elections. If the NDA, "under the leadership of 'Metroman', gets an opportunity to rule the state, "we are confident we will be able to implement development works under Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a ten-fold force in Kerala", state unit

president K Surendran said. Addressing a party meeting here, he highlighted the achievements of Sreedharan, including the completion of the reconstruction of Palarivattom flyover here in five months, much ahead of the stipulated time. "He completed the project in five months without any corruption. That is why we requested Sreedharan and our party leadership that he should be projected as the (NDA's) Chief Minister candidate", he said at the meeting organised as part of the "Vijay Yatra" led by him.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Burmese Spring

The Army, unmoved by global appeals, is back to repressive tactics to quell pro-democracy protests

All hell has broken loose on the streets of Myanmar as the security forces resorted to unbridled violence to crush peaceful anti-coup protests, reminding one of the Chinese crackdown in Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989 and the bloodshed in Libya and Yemen in the Arab Spring of 2010. Though the official number of people killed in the “Burmese Spring” is being put at 38, the United Nations (UN) says the number is close to 50. However, the activists put the toll even higher as the armed forces continue to use lethal weapons on the protesters, resulting in unarmed teenagers, women and youth being killed for demanding what is rightfully theirs. No one is surprised at the recent show of brutality by the Tatmadaw, which had been in power in Myanmar since 1962 and had just about tolerated the quasi-democracy that began in 2011, even though the parliamentary elections and other reforms had been initiated by the military itself under global pressure. The February 1 coup, which returned the military to full power, had seen a major pushback from the repressed citizenry that obviously did not want to be living once more under the shadow of the ruthless Tatmadaw, which had gained notoriety for having crushed pro-democracy movements in 1988 and 2007 by shooting protesters. Though the forces had initially shown some restraint when the protests began, the Army became increasingly repressive each



passing day as the demonstrations showed no signs of abating.

In fact, the movement swelled as more people rallied together to protect their democracy and seek the release of their democratically-elected leaders. The military regime had to face global embarrassment and resort to firing the country's ambassador to the UN a day after he gave an impassioned speech to the UN General Assembly in New York, pleading for international help in restoring democracy in his nation. Rattled by the unwanted global attention, the Tatmadaw became increasingly aggressive, thus inviting global sanctions. Now, the military, which has long been documented to be engaged in human rights abuses in conflict zones, seems to be past caring if the revelations by the UN's Special Envoy Christine Schraner Burgener are to be believed. When Burgener warned the military that the UN Security Council and member States were likely to take strong measures against it, she was told: “We are used to sanctions, and we have survived those sanctions in the past.” Warned of global isolation, the Tatmadaw's answer was: “We have to learn to walk with only few friends.” This is a worrying line of thought because when a regime that has a history of brutality and repression becomes indifferent to the consequences of its actions, there is not much the global community can do. For the people of the beleaguered country it means double trouble: The wrath of the authoritarian regime on the one hand, and the economic hardship that the sanctions bring, on the other. Whatever the global community has to do for the beleaguered citizens of Myanmar it must do fast, because the people there are running out of time.

### PICTALK



People build barricades to block police in Mandalay, Myanmar

# Stop romanticising interfaith marriages



PRAFULL GORADIA

If a Muslim man and Hindu woman marry, it is recommended they do it under the Special Marriage Act, which doesn't have unequal rights

At my niece's wedding in a church, the officiating priest began by declaring: “Marriage is a union; divine and indivisible.” This is a succinct way of expressing that marriage is a sacrament; no breaking until death does the union part.

The *Dictionary of Islam* by Thomas Patrick Hughes (published by Rupa & Co) calls marriage a *nikah*, a word that in its literal sense means a conjunction. It is a contract till the husband wants it. He can divorce his wife at pleasure by giving a notice of three months. The wife does not have this privilege. If she wants to separate, she has to follow the procedure of *khul*, which entails finding a *qazi* and convincing him under the rules of *fiqh* or dogmatic theology of Muslims.

If a Muslim man and Hindu woman fall in love, it is recommended that they marry under the Special Marriage Act, which does not have unequal rights nor requires the woman to change her religion or name, whereas a *nikah* insists that both partners be of the same religion, i.e. Muslim. If the man does not wish to divorce, he can take another wife.

It is rare to find an interfaith marriage where the bride is a Muslim and the groom a Hindu. Perhaps the reason is that it is impermissible for a non-Muslim to marry a Muslim woman as he would have legal authority over her. The tenets of Islam say that God doesn't allow non-Muslims to have authority over Muslims. A Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman, but not vice versa.

This seems unfair, but the Islamic rationale is that a non-Muslim man will not respect his Muslim wife's faith. These tenets also hold that while Muslims believe in all previous religions and Prophets of God and respect them, a non-Muslim does not return the favour. A non-Muslim husband might not explicitly express this, but a Muslim wife cannot expect her husband to respect her faith. Muslims believe in only the



revealed religions of the Book, not other religions. A Muslim woman marrying a non-Muslim would eschew respect of the wife's religion.

Some time ago, celebrated IAS couple Tina Dabi and Athar Aamir Khan filed for divorce in Jaipur, two years after they had tied the nuptial knot. Their love story and marriage in 2018 had made national headlines. A video made by Tina, in which she alleged that her Muslim husband tortured her for wearing a *burqa*, converting to Islam, reading *namaz* and adopting ‘Khan’ in her name, went viral.

Even without divorce, a Muslim male can marry up to four wives at a time; with divorce, there is no limit on the number of wives he can have. Hinduism and Christianity insist on only one wife. For marrying a Muslim boy, girls must know the possibilities they face. If the boy is Muslim, his faith enjoins upon him to produce as many children as possible so that they achieve demographic preponderance. This is borne out by the *Hadith* (*The Traditions*, the second holy book after the *Quran*; *The Dictionary of Islam* by Hughes). Concerned Hindus

understandably use the word ‘jihad’ in this context.

It is time to stop romanticising interfaith marriages blindly. Marrying Muslim men does entail legal outcomes for non-Muslim women. Today's political discourse is less than open in that it tends to ignore arguments of those who have issues with such marriages. Selective quoting and presentation of only particular views as acceptable does not help the cause of any informed debate. The current secular outrage over interfaith marriages souring is focused on romanticising interfaith marriages as a virtue by itself and treating all such alliances as the same, which they regretably are not.

The rights of women under the Hindu Marriage Act or Special Marriage Act vary greatly from the rights of those who wed as per the *Sharia*. This has particular outcomes, as under *Sharia*, non-Muslim women have to first convert to Islam because this is a condition for marriage. Thus, any non-Muslim woman marrying a Muslim man instantly forfeits all her rights as she transits from a legal regime with more rights to one with fewer rights. This

is not reversible, as Islam does not permit apostasy. Many women who convert for the sake of getting married, believing they can continue to practice their faith, are quickly belied of this notion; the faith they marry into doesn't permit this either.

Moreover, Hindus hold marriage to be a sacrament where even divorce is considered an anathema (though allowed legally). Under *Sharia*, it is only as a contract where a man can divorce his wife orally and instantly by simply saying *talaaq* thrice (till it was banned). This is the chasm between the two worlds.

Non-Muslim women must be made aware of these consequences. The blind eulogy and advocacy of interfaith marriages and pretending that all such alliances are of the same nature is dishonesty. Rosy and romanticised pictures of interfaith marriages carry the serious propensity of harming non-Muslim women, who might make hasty and misinformed decisions only to repent and suffer later.

(The writer is a well-known columnist and an author. The views expressed are personal.)



ANY NON-MUSLIM WOMAN MARRYING A MUSLIM MAN INSTANTLY FORFEITS ALL HER RIGHTS AS SHE TRANSITS FROM A LEGAL REGIME WITH MORE RIGHTS TO ONE WITH FEWER RIGHTS. THIS IS NOT REVERSIBLE, AS ISLAM DOES NOT PERMIT APOSTASY

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### BE SENSITIVE TOWARDS HEARING LOSS

Sir — The World Hearing Day was on March 3 and, sadly, it went past like the problems of the hearing impaired go unheeded! It is really shocking to know that according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), one in four people will suffer from hearing problems by 2050. The world body has raised the alarm, stating that currently one in five people has hearing problems but most often it is just ignored. The same amount of care and attention that we give to other ailments is not given to problems related to hearing except when we have severe pain in the ear or similar such problems.

The WHO has called for global action and asked the nations to take immediate measures to check this ‘silent danger’. According to medical reports, almost 60 per cent of hearing loss in children is due to factors such as ear infections and birth complications that can be prevented through public health measures. According to the WHO, over one billion young adults are at risk of permanent, avoidable hearing loss due to unsafe listening practices, stressing the need to make people aware of this danger. Early identification of hearing loss and ear diseases are the key to the effective management.

Modern medicine with modern technology and implementation of certain safety norms can end such difficulties provided that the Governments, health organisations, NGOs and other agencies come forward to mitigate the problem.

M Pradyu | Kannur

### RAHUL IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PAST

Sir — This refers to the editorial ‘*Mea culpa*’ (March 4). Verily speaking, the Nehru-Gandhi family's contribution to the country is unmatched and cannot be questioned. The ‘Grand Old Party’ has a chequered performance sheet having caustic memories of the Emergency, communal riots and Bofors scandal. But Congress' former president Rahul Gandhi should not be held responsible for them, as he was just a child or minor when these incidents took place. Personally, Rahul is an man of stern rectitude and an honest political leader who possesses the grit

## Congress must correct its course



It refers to the editorial ‘*Split house*’ (March 4). The state of affairs within the Congress is gloomy, to say the least. The ‘Grand Old Party’ seems to be totally bereft of a centralised command which can control its affairs. Due to the lack of a powerful leadership, the Congress rank and file are working at their whims, fulfilling their vested interests and making whatever statements they feel like, without caring about the party. These

unfortunate things are happening at a time when the party faces elections in four States and a Union Territory. There has always been friction in the party but it seems to have blown out of proportion and is hurting the poll prospects of the Congress.

While cadres of other political parties in the poll fray are investing all their energy in campaigning, big leaders of the Congress are indulging in fights among themselves. It's high time Rahul Gandhi took note of it and took steps to ensure that the party stays united. It is also the duty of the old guard to show more responsibility and talk with other leaders in order to resolve their differences. Merely, making allegations and counter-allegations would serve no good. If this state of affairs continues, it will further shrink the party's vote bank as people would choose not to vote for the party which is divided because of internal feuds and has a weak leadership. The Congress must mull over this issue immediately or must ready itself for another poll drubbing.

Bal Govind | Noida

to contest even his party's decisions if he doesn't agree with these.

Moreover, he put in his papers as the party chief, taking moral responsibility for the Congress' drubbing in the last general elections. On the other hand, it was his personal charisma appealing to the masses that helped the ‘Grand Old Party’ make a comeback by wresting the States of Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh from the formidable BJP.

The realisation of the past mistakes of the Congress comes across as a welcome gesture from this young and charismatic political leader. As the saying goes, “The sins of the parents are visited on the children!”  
Azhar A Khan | Rampur

### MERGE CHANNELS TO INCREASE VIEWERSHIP

Sir — It is welcome that the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha TV channels have been officially merged into one single entity, Sansad TV. It will help curtail the expenditure that is incurred in running the two TV channels.

The direct telecast of the proceedings of the two Houses can be aired according to their importance. However, excerpts of proceedings of the two Houses can be shown not only on Sansad TV but also on various Doordarshan channels.

A somewhat similar merger can be considered for the Doordarshan channels according to the viewership statistics. There are several Doordarshan channels which do not have significant viewership; continuing with such channels is a waste of public money. They all must be merged as this will not only help increase the viewership but also save lot of public money that goes in running these channels.

Further, the Government must exercise real control over private news channels and ask them to compulsorily telecast proceedings of both the Houses.

Subhash Agarwal | Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Political gambit?

Sasikala's retirement comes as a boost for the AIADMK. But how long will she keep still?

In a stratagem that has left Tamil Nadu's political circles stunned, VK Sasikala — considered by many the closest aide of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa — has declared that she will “stay away from politics and public life” while also “praying” for the AIADMK to retain power in the April 6 election. She unequivocally spelled out the reasons for her decision, too: That the AIADMK cadres need to stay united rather than fighting among themselves, so that the party can continue to rule even after Jayalalithaa and keep the “evil DMK” out of power, “as was Amma's wish”. Chinnamma, as Sasikala is fondly called by her followers, had aired the same sentiment even on the day she came out of Bengaluru jail after serving a four-year sentence in a corruption case and undertook the road journey from Karnataka to Tamil Nadu. The latest surprise was delivered even as the central leadership of the BJP, which is allied with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, had been mounting pressure on the regional outfit to work with Sasikala and her nephew's party, the Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK). The move clearly translates into an unexpected advantage for the beleaguered party — already facing anti-incumbency and with the odds stacked against it as the State alternates between the AIADMK and DMK Governments — and a major setback to AMMK leader TTV Dhinakaran.



With one deft stone, she has killed two birds: Sasikala has taken the moral high road, projecting the image of a leader whom the masses want to see in an office of authority but who doesn't hanker after power; and, at the same time, she has shielded herself from any blame that might have come her way, should the AIADMK perform poorly in the elections. This possibility, however, is bleak as the Congress is already considering an exit from the DMK-led front since it's not being offered a “respectable number of seats”. Of course, Sasikala's current assertion keeps her safely away from the party's inner turmoil and political heat and dust in the State without compromising her chances of springing back on to the centre stage at an opportune moment later. There's nothing that could stop Sasikala from re-entering politics after assessing the poll results. For Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, it would be tough to keep his hold on the party when he is no longer in the top seat. That is when Sasikala would probably time her comeback.

## SOUNDBITE

My request for 27 per cent reservation for socially and economically backwards in Government jobs in Odisha has remained unaddressed till date.

Union Minister — Dharmendra Pradhan

China is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.

US President — Joe Biden

The issues of drug abuse and crime against women are somewhere interconnected, and the youth of the nation suffers the most owing to these transgressions.

Actor — Ravi Kishan

It was important to be positive and play your shots on that pitch, back yourselves to clear the boundary — just happy that I managed to contribute to the team's cause at that point of time

West Indies captain — Kieron Pollard

The Modi Government is using the economy's collapse since the pandemic to rush headlong into its mission of handing over large portions of India's wealth to its favourite crony capitalists.

Interim Congress President — Sonia Gandhi





## FIRST COLUMN

### VACCINE FIRST, POLITICS LATER

Netas getting into poll campaigning must get the jab, both for safety and for sending a message for public good



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India began one of the largest vaccination drives attempted globally on January 16 and opened it up for frontline workers in February. The second phase of the inoculation drive began on March 1, with the doors thrown open to citizens above a certain age and fulfilling specific criterion. At the launch of the second phase, the nation woke up to a visual of Prime Minister Narendra Modi getting vaccinated at a Government facility. It was a wide message, ranging from taking the India-developed vaccine, being conscious of the home State of healthcare staff administering the shot and the sartorial choice of a *gamcha* from Assam. However, there was another story unfolding mid-day onwards in many of the vaccination centres around the country as many senior citizens failed to get vaccinated on days one and two despite managing to register successfully on the CoWin website.

Despite the glitches, this is a remarkable feat for our country which, till the same time last year, was not aware of the horror waiting to unfold and, therefore, didn't even have basic toolkits of personal protective equipment handy. The reason it is vital to mention this is so that we keep learning every moment and improvising on the deliverable processes, like we did in 2020.



It is a welcome step that a sizeable chunk of private hospitals has been roped in for the second phase of the vaccination drive. However, it seems like they are being treated like lesser institutions when it comes to supply and execution logistics. Many private hospitals reported one queue for walk-in registrations and those registered with confirmed time slots through the CoWin website. This led to crowding, which is an in-your-face blunder to be avoided during these times. The private sector is equipped enough with stipulated processes for vaccination and with some guided information, could manage the drive with proper social distancing. Ideally, the authorities should have done a workshop with key hospitals and taught the staff to manage a demand-driven hybrid model vaccination exercise. At some stage the Government has to think about opening up the vaccination drive for corporates and the money spent should be treated as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Most of the corporates are willing to either take up a vaccination drive for their staff under the CSR head or allow staff to pay, provided the exercise like Aadhaar registrations moves to their premises. RS Sharma, the current chief of the National Health Authority, is aware of the private-public cooperative plumbing required to make India's vaccination pipeline a model worth emulating. He is also aware of the role technology is going to play in the exercise and the digital divide in the country over access and use of factual information. The confusion between the use of the CoWin app vs the CoWin website needs to be addressed. Also, vaccine hesitancy among certain sections of society is triggered by opinionated fake information on social media. It is time for all technocrats involved in the process to start tackling the barrage of misinformation and talk about the facts on all platforms available.

Another aspect of the inoculation programme is driven by politics. Already there have been some remarks regarding the Prime Minister's picture on the vaccine completion certificate, specially from States bound for elections. Universal vaccination against the dreaded virus is a shared project of all leaders at the Central and State level. Any attempt to subvert the process by creating barriers may not go down well with the electorate or be good for the leader's image. Of course, the optics need to be high for any candidate facing the electorate in a few days, however it would be good if they start showing their commitment. Most of the leaders getting into campaigning ahead of polls would do well to get vaccinated, both for safety and for sending a loud message for public good.

*(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal.)*

# Economy riddled with corruption

## Graft is a huge, insidious problem in our country that has eaten into every aspect of our lives, be it in rural or urban India



MOIN QAZI

A survey conducted by Transparency International (TI) last year found that India has the highest rate of bribery in the Asian region. The survey titled, 'Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), Asia' revealed that the nation also had the highest rate of people using personal connections to access public services. The country has a bribery rate of 39 per cent while 46 per cent people use "familiarity" to get access to services. The report noted that "slow and complicated bureaucratic process, unnecessary red tape and unclear regulatory frameworks force citizens to seek out other solutions to access basic services through networks of familiarity and petty corruption (in India)."

The nation's quest for economic dynamism has been severely stifled by chronic corruption. The country needs to urgently modernise its institutions and end the culture of rent-seeking and cutting corners if it wants the wheel of its economy to roll seamlessly. Corruption is both anti-national and anti-poor because the resources meant for poverty alleviation schemes get siphoned off by dishonest politicians and bureaucrats. It is among the most debilitating economic illnesses that afflict large parts of the world. India is now caught in a situation where many sectors are steeped in endemic corruption, including those charged with controlling it — from the legislators who write the laws, to the judiciary which makes them roadworthy and the police which is charged with enforcing them.

In the last four decades, despite several Government programmes for the welfare of the rural poor, poverty remains endemic. Either the nets were not cast wide or there were too many holes blown into them. The cruel reality is that much of the public spending does not reach the poor. It is either sponged off by the delivery mechanism consisting of consultants, advisors, their equipment and studies — or it gets pocketed. This has become a touchstone for all public-funded programmes and is now parroted in all Indian development literature. Low-level graft remains pervasive. Much of the Western world aid is running down the bureaucratic ratholes. Corruption is a huge, insidious problem in our country that has eaten into every aspect of life. It can lead to distrust in the Government, generating civil strife, violence, and conflict.

While the poor do not have the money to bribe public servant to avail services that are their right, they have a vote that the politician wants. The politician does a little bit to make life a little more tolerable for the poor — a seat in a good school for the lucky few, a Government job for the even luckier, on occasion the unexpected munificence of a loan waiver or, more commonly, a phone call that helps them get a police case registered. For all this, the politician gets the gratitude of his voters. However, he then also has little reason to improve the system by reforming it.

The state of affairs is grim, as every village official must be paid not just to expedite the application form for development schemes but specifically for not obstructing it. There is no easy solution to the problem. The corrupt police officials have a rollicking time at the expense of helpless citizens. In fact, there is no link between corruption and poverty. It is easier to convert a corrupt



IN THE LAST FOUR DECADES, DESPITE SEVERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES FOR THE WELFARE OF THE RURAL POOR, POVERTY REMAINS ENDEMIC. EITHER THE NETS WERE NOT CAST WIDE OR THERE WERE TOO MANY HOLES BLOWN INTO THEM. THE CRUEL REALITY IS THAT MUCH OF THE PUBLIC SPENDING DOES NOT REACH THE POOR. IT IS EITHER SPONGED OFF BY THE DELIVERY MECHANISM CONSISTING OF CONSULTANTS, ADVISORS, THEIR EQUIPMENT AND STUDIES — OR IT GETS POCKETED

*The writer is a well-known development professional. The views expressed are personal.*



constable rather than an officer into an honest person. Higher officials get so carried away by the glamour and competition evident among their peers, and the aspirations of their families, that malpractices and bribes become a part of their lives. Surely education is a failure here. Voters favour a familiar family pedigree, partly because of a cultural reverence for the family and because of feudal habits that go back centuries. These traditions are more important in politics than individual qualities or merits in India and they strike at the very core of democracy. Grassroots activists and student leaders with no patronage matter little, and given the huge money and muscle power involved in elections, outsiders can only dream of power. In fact, the impact of nepotism goes beyond politics, with the reign of dynasties extending to most businesses too.

Like the mythological hydra, corruption is a many-headed foe that insinuates itself into every part of the social fabric — weakening the body politic and jeopardising prospects for economic growth. It can wither only after the heads are lopped off.

It has been a long-standing problem that successive Governments have battled and mostly failed to quell. In his magnum opus 'Arthashastra', written nearly three centuries before the Christian era, Kautilya, the classical master of statecraft, observed:

"Just as it is impossible to know when a fish moving in water is drinking it, so it is impossible to find out when Government servants in charge of undertakings misappropriate money."

The phrase, "probity in public life" has become an oxymoron. The time to start popping the corks would be when corrupt officials are actually convicted and penalised. Unfortunately, our criminal justice system has a truly pathetic record on this front. As long as that remains true, much publicised arrests serve little or no purpose. They certainly do not act as effective deterrents to potential bribe-takers or bribe-givers. Corruption is too often seen as merely a moral issue. Not enough people realise just how crippling an economic factor it can be. The cost of the bribes clearly must be factored into the business model and hence into the costs.

The country's economic system is fused with many strands of corruption and organised systems of tax evasion. Cases of people greasing palms to get a college scholarship, tax refund or mortgage from a State-owned bank are now commonplace. Petty corruption includes slipping banknotes to the police and to officials to get paperwork done. Businessmen have to offer "seed money" to avoid red tape.

Writer and former diplomat Pavan Varma suggests that the persistence of corruption in India also

reflects a strain of amorality in our character: A willingness to tolerate corner-cutting and rule-breaking in the successful pursuit of wealth and power. "Corruption, of course, is not unique to India," he writes in 'Being Indian'. "What is unique is the level of its acceptance, and the creative ways in which it is sustained. Indians do not subscribe to antiseptic definitions of rectitude... Their understanding of right and wrong is related far more to efficacy than absolute notions of morality."

Most Indian businesses cannot survive or remain competitive without stashing away undeclared earnings. Almost everybody who has sold a house has taken one part of the payment in cash and evaded tax on it. Huge quantities of secret wealth are still a part of our system.

The solution lies in ensuring that the Central Bureau of Investigation remains free of Government interference and that whistle-blowers, witnesses and journalists working on corruption cases are protected. The Government must realise that increasing corruption can act as a speed breaker in the Indian growth story. There is a need for a strong political will to untangle it. Without a strong civil society or an independent judiciary to check Government power, the political class can become complacent. We have a long distance to cover to get rid of corruption and it may require longer sprints as time is running out.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

**YOU PUT NAILS ON ROADS AND PREVENTED FARMERS FROM ENTERING THE CAPITAL OF THE SOVEREIGN COUNTRY, BUT YOU BEAT A RETREAT AGAINST CHINA.**  
—MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER  
**UDDHAV THACKERAY**



**YOU ARE MAKING INSULTING STATEMENTS AGAINST OUR SOLDIERS WHO DEFENDED (THE COUNTRY FROM) CHINESE AGGRESSION.**  
—MAHARASHTRA FORMER CHIEF MINISTER  
**DEVENDRA FADNIS**

# Technology for pedagogy in music strikes the right note

## It helps to build highly effective differentiated learning experiences, which are rather challenging otherwise in a group setting with traditional teaching approaches

Technology has been one of the mainstays of music education, particularly contemporary music and its production and sound engineering since the late 2000s. However, the adoption rate was probably slower than anticipated due to the general resistance to change and the reluctance to shift to newer methods of learning and teaching. Interestingly, music technology, which we should clearly differentiate from the technology for pedagogical purposes, has been adopted widely and is frequently adapted by music educators in line with music industry practices.



NILESH THOMAS

The year 2020 presented many with a make-or-break situation due to the pandemic and music education providers, both institutions and teachers were swift to drop all inhibitions and embrace technology to aid pedagogy.

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Most interestingly, private tutors — who probably argued the most against technology-driven learning and teaching in place of the tried and tested traditional approach of in-person instruction — were the first to jump on the bandwagon. Consequently, they taught music using every possible technological means, from Skype to Zoom to Google Hangouts. In most of such cases, the technology integration started and ended with these video calling apps that allowed remote teaching and learning and did not extend to more immersive and interactive learning systems.

Increasingly, we are now seeing larger music schools tapping into comprehensive learning management systems (LMS), customised mobile apps and subscription-based music learning services such as music notation applications, ear train-

ing applications with content libraries, backing music tracks and practice tools for instruments, voice instruction and so on, that integrate into LMS or remote teaching using video calling apps.

LMS are excellent cloud-based tools to extend learning beyond face-to-face time, and more importantly to build a social learning ecosystem around the class. There are a number of such solutions available now, mostly on a per-user subscription model that is increasingly becoming affordable in markets like India and South Asia.

LMS allow teachers to administer independent learning content to a class or individual learners, provide feedback to students using text, audio or video, conduct online assessments that could be auto-graded and so on. More importantly, LMS allow students to inter-



act with each other, share and discuss topics of interest online, and learn from each other's works. This provides invaluable benefits over just focusing on instrumental or voice mastery.

Newer learning technologies that either work as stand-alone mobile or web-based apps or integrate into LMS help further enhance the music learning experience. Many schools employ music notation and ear training applications with preloaded content libraries for independent learning and practice.

For example, music teachers are able to assign an exercise with a predetermined difficulty level and a target practice score to student groups or individuals. The students can then practice the material on their own with the app giving highly specific feedback on how well they are doing, and the areas that need improvement. Once the student attains the target score, the teacher assigns a new difficulty level, much like a game.

Similar gamified learning technologies also exist for instrument and voice learning. Many of these systems provide comprehensive content libraries organised in terms of progressive difficulty levels. Teachers are able to assign target goals for practice, and once a student achieves the desired proficiency, conduct an assessment within the app, using similar content to validate the learning and

progress to the next level. Some of these systems give detailed visual heatmaps of a student's performance, with granular feedback on areas that have met expectations and those needing improvement.

Technology-enabled pedagogy also helps to build highly effective differentiated learning experiences, which are rather challenging otherwise in a group setting with traditional teaching approaches. One of the biggest benefits of technology-enabled pedagogy is its focus on student-centred learning, taking the attention away from the teacher as the sole enabler of learning. With technology-enabled learning, the teacher has the flexibility to adopt a more efficient role of a learning facilitator, provide necessary personalised interventions and allow each learner to grow at their own pace while focusing on the core areas to be devel-

oped. Teachers can drop the one-size-fits-all approach that works rather poorly in creative arts education.

While this recent and swift adoption of technologies for pedagogical purposes is mainly driven by the pressure to enhance remote learning in light of the social distancing and lockdown conditions necessitated by the Coronavirus pandemic, they are more than likely to find a permanent place in music education since both students and teachers will find obvious enhancements to their learning and teaching experiences.

Institutions are likely to adopt and scale such technologies aggressively since they introduce efficiencies and help collect extremely valuable data that will help design newer and more effective curriculum, learning programmes and delivery methods.



# India wearables market grows 144 pc to 36 mn units in 2020

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The wearables market in India posted a 144.3 per cent year-on-year growth in 2020 with 36.4 million unit shipment, as per research firm IDC.

India was the only country in the top 20 to see triple-digit growth in wearables in the year 2020 and continues to be the third-largest wearables market globally, IDC said in a statement. "This growth was majorly driven by the increasing acceptance of earwear devices and upgrades to watches from wrist bands, both recording their highest annual shipments in 2020," it added.

The October-December 2020 period was the biggest quarter for the wearables category in the country, maintaining triple-digit growth. Overall, vendors shipped 15.2 million units in the said period, growing at 198.2 per cent year-on-year. "2020 was a year of transition in the audio segment from wired to wireless



devices. In 2021, this category will further migrate to more sophisticated devices with enhanced audio experience being the central theme for all vendors," IDC India Associate Research Manager

(Client Devices) Jaipal Singh said. The high cost associated with wearable watches is not much of a challenge anymore, he added.

Also, the watch form factor is now seen as more appealing

to the consumers, and vendors will leverage this shift by further expanding their watch portfolio in the coming quarters, Singh said.

Earwear device shipments grew more than three-fold in

2020 to 30.4 million units over the previous year, mainly driven by affordable launches, and expanding use cases beyond entertainment like virtual meetings and e-learning requirements, IDC said.

The earwear segment accounted for 83.6 per cent of the overall wearable market in 2020. Boat emerged as the biggest player in the category, accounting for one-third of the category shipments. Samsung with its portfolio - including JBL, Harman Kardon and Infinity - finished second with a 14.5 per cent share in 2020.

Earwear grew over 300 per cent to 12.9 million units in the December 2020 quarter.

"Hearables became one of the most sought-after electronic categories in 2020. The newer version of hearables are much better in managing the increased audio usages and improved aesthetic and design also made them the trendsetter," IDC India Market Analyst Anisha Dumbre said.

# Sensex tumbles 599 points in line with global meltdown

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Snapping its three-session winning run, the BSE Sensex plunged by around 599 points to crack below the key 51,000-level on Thursday amid a meltdown in global shares triggered by a surge in US bond yields.

Intra-day, the 30-share BSE index fell as much as 905 points before ending the session at 50,846.08, showing a decline of 598.57 points or 1.16 per cent.

The broader NSE Nifty too closed with a loss of 164.85 points or 1.08 per cent at 15,080.75.

On the Sensex chart, HDFC, L&T, SBI, Axis Bank, Bajaj FinServ and HDFC Bank were major laggards - dropping up to 2.62 per cent. Of 30 Sensex shares, 25 closed with losses.

"Domestic equities trad-

ed lower today mainly on weak global cues...Financials and Metals indices were key drags today, while FMCG, Pharma and IT indices were resilient. A sharp 6 bps rise in 10-Year USA treasury yield made investors jittery today," said Binod Modi, Head

Strategy at Reliance Securities.

Over the previous three sessions, the Sensex had risen by 2,344.66 points or 4.77 per cent, while the Nifty had added 716.45 points or 4.93 per cent.

Foreign investors had bought equities worth Rs 2,088.70 crore on a net basis in Indian capital markets on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

On Thursday, Asian shares too tumbled after an overnight surge in bond yields dragged Wall Street lower.

On the orex market front, the rupee ended 11 paise lower at 72.83 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, global crude oil benchmark Brent was trading 1.16 per cent higher at USD 64.73 per barrel.



# ABB ties up with Lila Poonawalla Foundation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Power and automation technology major ABB India on Thursday said it has joined hands with Lila Poonawalla Foundation to build future women leaders in technology.

"ABB India has partnered with Lila Poonawalla Foundation (LPF) on a holistic merit-cum-need based scholarship programme for meritorious girls from economically challenged backgrounds, to give them an opportunity to realise their dreams in the field of technology," an ABB India statement said.

Through this holistic programme, ABB will support



the higher education and skill development for 100 girls, selected by Lila Poonawalla Foundation, every year, it said. Lila Poonawalla Foundation is a non-governmental organisation promoting professional education among aspiring

girls through scholarships and guidance in India.

The selected candidates are provided the necessary support to pursue an engineering degree and develop core skills and competencies required to be future-ready, without having to worry about financial constraints.

This programme covers initiatives that go beyond academics in order to equip these girls with a well-rounded experience.

One such enriching initiative is the ABB Volunteering programme wherein ABB employees volunteer to impart industry knowledge through well structured, pre-planned sessions with these students.



# Asset growth at NBFCs, HFCs to jump in FY22

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After a growth moderation in FY21, Non-Bank Finance Companies (NBFCs) are estimated to witness a 9.5 per cent jump in their assets under management in FY22, a report said on Thursday.

Housing Finance Companies will post a higher growth at 10 per cent as home sales go up, India Ratings and Research said, maintaining its "stable" outlook on both NBFCs and HFCs for FY22.

It estimated the growth to slowdown to 4-5 per cent for NBFCs and 6.5 per cent for HFCs in FY21, driven largely by the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The system liquidity has improved considerably while the majority of large non-banks have strengthened their capital buffers and the sector

has started witnessing disbursement growth, the rating agency said.

The wide differential among NBFCs' funding costs is likely to push the sector to consolidate, especially in the sectors with a thin margin profile and limited product differentiation, it said, adding the strong regulatory support in FY21 ensured adequate liquidity.

From an asset quality perspective, wholesale NBFCs will face challenges in FY22, the agency said and maintained the negative outlook on such entities. Stress due to the pandemic has moderated due to government schemes which have led to lower softer delinquencies and moderate addition to Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPAs), it said, pointing out that the overall stressed assets will be higher than a recent RBI estimate of 8 per cent.

# AM/NS India inks pact with Odisha to set up steel plant

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Steelmaker Arcelor Mittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) on Thursday inked an agreement with the Odisha government for setting up a 12 mtpa integrated steel plant in Kendrapada district with an investment of Rs 50,000 crore, officials said.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik and steel tycoon Lakshmi N Mittal were present during the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) at Lokaseva Bhavan.

Mittal met Patnaik at his residence Naveen Niwas earlier in the day and discussed his company ArcelorMittal's projects in the state, an official said.

The industrialist had met Union Steel Minister Dharmendra Pradhan in New Delhi on Tuesday.

# MONEY MATTERS

## Maruti Suzuki Brezza crosses cumulative sales of 6 lakh units



The country's largest carmaker Maruti Suzuki (MSI) on Thursday said its compact SUV Vitara Brezza has crossed 6 lakh units cumulative sales mark since making its debut in the market five years ago.

The auto major had introduced the model in March 2016. "The country's best-selling compact SUV has further strengthened its position as the market leader with the sales of six lakh units. This is a testimony of our customers' elevated support and love for the brand, especially in a segment which is traditionally diesel driven," MSI Executive Director (Marketing & Sales) Shashank Srivastava said in a statement. The model comes with a 1.5 litre petrol engine mated with five-speed manual and four-speed automatic transmissions.

## Bajaj Auto drives in Platina 110 priced at Rs 65,920



Bajaj Auto on Thursday said it has launched 115-cc bike Platina 110 in the country priced at Rs 65,920 (ex-showroom). The bike comes with ABS (anti-lock braking system) and other features like Nitrox

spring-on-spring suspension as well as tubeless tyres. "The new Platina 110 ABS offers unmatched safety by offering riders complete control over unforeseen braking scenarios. "We hope that millions of Indians who ride across varying terrains and roads of the country would take cognisance of the need to keep themselves and their loved ones safe and upgrade to the best-in-segment braking technology," Bajaj Auto President - Domestic Motorcycles Business Unit Sarang Kanade said in a statement.

# Capgemini to cover vaccination cost for employees in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

French IT major Capgemini on Thursday said it will cover the cost of the COVID-19 vaccination for all eligible employees and their dependents.

In a statement, Capgemini said health and well-being of its colleagues is the highest priority for the company and that it will cover the cost of coronavirus vaccines of all eligible employees and their dependents in strict accordance with all government-approved protocols. "Adhering to the government protocols, Capgemini will cover the cost of the vaccination for all the eligible employees and their dependents who are part of our medical benefits programme," Ashwin Yardi, CEO said.

Capgemini India has also joined hands with competent wellness partners to assist its team members with any queries related to the vaccine including, do's and don'ts, and provide answers to any medical queries that the employee and their dependents may have.

People above 60 years of age



and those above 45 years with comorbidities are being immunised in the second phase of nationwide vaccination that started on March 1.

Vineet Agrawal, CEO of Wipro Consumer Care & Lighting and Executive Director of Wipro Enterprises, said as the vaccination gets rolled out to more people in the country, the company will either tie up with partners or reimburse employees.

"It depends on how it moves up - as of now its just over 60 and people with co-mobid conditions between 45-60 but since we don't have employees over 60, we haven't started but we will definitely start getting people vaccinated as soon as it opens to eligible people within India also," he said.

# Sitharaman takes first dose of vax

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday took the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

"Got my first dose of the vaccination against COVID-19 this morning," Sitharaman tweeted.

She also thanked sister Ramya PC for her "care and professionalism".

The government on Wednesday had announced that everyone above 60 years of age and those over 45 years with comorbidities will be able to get COVID-19 vaccine from March 1, for free at government facilities and for a charge at many private hospitals. Citizens can register and book an appointment for vaccination using the Co-WIN 2.0 portal or through the Aarogya Setu app. President Ram Nath Kovind, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Health Minister Harsh Vardhan and Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad have also got vaccinated against COVID so far.

# EPFO retains 8.5% interest on EPF deposits for '20-21

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Retirement fund body EPFO on Thursday decided to retain 8.5 per cent annual rate of interest on provident fund deposits for the current financial year for its more than five crore active subscribers.

The EPFO apex decision-making body Central Board of Trustees decided to fix 8.5 per cent rate of interest for 2020-21 at its meeting in Srinagar on Thursday. "The CBT recommended 8.50 per cent annual rate of interest to be credited on EPF accumulations in members' accounts for the financial year 2020-21," a labour ministry statement said.

According to the statement,



the 228th meeting of the CBT, EPFO was held on Thursday in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir under the chairmanship of Union Minister of State for Labour & Employment Santosh Kumar Gangwar.

As per the practice, the CBT decision on interest rate would

be sent to the finance ministry for concurrence. After getting the finance ministry's nod, the 8.5 per cent rate of interest for this fiscal would be credited into the EPFO subscribers' accounts.

The interest rate would be officially notified in the government gazette following which the EPFO would credit the rate of interest into the subscribers' accounts, the statement said.

"For FY2021, the EPFO decided to liquidate investment and the interest rate recommended is a result of combined income from interest received from debt investment as well as income realised from equity investment," it said.

# BMW drives in new MINI Countryman at Rs 39.5 L

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

German luxury carmaker BMW on Thursday launched an updated version of MINI Countryman in India with price starting at Rs 39.5 lakh (ex-showroom Delhi).

Locally produced at the company's Chennai plant, the new MINI Countryman is available in two petrol variants - MINI Countryman Cooper S and MINI Countryman Cooper S/CW Inspired, priced at Rs 39.5 lakh and Rs 43.4 lakh,

respectively. The new MINI Countryman inspires you to take the path to new experiences and new horizons of the mind.

This versatile sports activity vehicle (SAV) is just as home in an urban jungle as it is in the great outdoors," BMW Group India President Vikram Pawah said in a statement.

The model comes with a 2-litre petrol engine enabling the vehicle to sprint to 100 km/hr in 7.5 seconds with a top speed of 225 km/hr.

# 3 Republicans bring legislation in Cong to end 'allure of cheap foreign labour'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Three Republican US lawmakers have introduced a legislation in Congress to bar American employers from hiring H-1B workers, who are mostly highly-skilled Indian IT professionals, if they have recently, or plan to fire their local workers, seeking to put an end to the "allure of cheap foreign labour".

Introduced in the House of Representatives by Republican congressmen Mo Brooks, Matt Gaetz and Lance Gooden, the American Jobs First Act pro-



poses to overhaul the H-1B visa programme by making necessary changes in the Immigration and Nationality Act.

The H-1B visa, most-sought after among Indian IT professionals, is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in

speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China. According to its text released on Wednesday, a foreign guest worker may not be admitted or provided status as an H-1B non-immigrant in an occupational classification unless the petitioner employer has filed with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer is offering an annual wage to the H-1B non-immigrant that is the greater of

the annual wage paid to the US citizen or lawful permanent resident employee who did identical or similar work during the two years before the petitioner employer filed such application; or USD 110.

The petitioner employer also needs to file with the Secretary of Labour an application stating the employer will not require an H-1B non-immigrant to pay a penalty for ceasing employment with the petitioner employer before the date agreed to by the H-1B non-immigrant and the petitioner employer.

# Cos garner Rs 9K-cr through public issuance of NCDs



As many as eight firms raised over Rs 9,100 crore through retail issuance of non-convertible debentures in the first ten months of the ongoing fiscal to meet their business needs. In comparison, firms had garnered Rs 14,161 crore through this route in the April-January

period of 2019-20. Most of the funds have been mobilised to support lending activities, working capital requirements and other general corporate purposes. Non-Convertible Debentures (NCDs) are zero-linked bonds that cannot be converted into stocks and usually offer higher interest rates than convertible debentures. According to the latest data available with markets regulator Sebi, eight entities mopped up funds totalling Rs 9,118 crore through retail issuance of NCDs in the current fiscal till January 2021.





## VAANI KAPOOR: WANT TO BUILD SOMETHING IN HEALTH AND NUTRITION SPACE

**A**ctress Vaani Kapoor said that she wants to build something of her own in the health and nutrition space in future.

"Holistic lifestyle has been a part and parcel of my life even before I made my debut in Bollywood. I have always wanted to lead a healthy lifestyle and working out and eating right was always a top priority for me. I want to build

something of my own in the health and nutrition space in the coming years and I have been researching the same for years now," Vaani said.

"I want to actively promote and raise awareness about how important health is among the citizens of my country. Being healthy should be a top priority for us all, at all times. It really doesn't take much to ensure that we are eating right and living right and I want to

engage with people on the same," she said.

Vaani said she has many great ideas and will be working round the clock to envision the feasibility of these ideas.

"I have many exciting ideas on this but it's too premature for me to speak openly about it. As of now, I'm concentrating on being the best version of myself every single day and to showcase that to the people

so that when I decide to start on my health journey, they will be convinced about it," she said.

"I have to walk the talk and set examples for people to believe in my vision and I want to do just that for now," said the actress, who has three back-to-back releases lined up over the next few months — *Bellbottom*, *Shamshera*, and *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui*.

# what's brewing?

## Friends Reunion to start shoot within a month: David Schwimmer

**A**merican actor David Schwimmer on Wednesday revealed that the highly awaited *Friends* Reunion Special will start filming "in little over a month."

Schwimmer, who portrays paleontologist Ross Geller in the hit American sitcom *Friends*, said he couldn't be more excited to start the shoot, which will see the reunion of the six leads — Courtney Cox as Monica Geller, Lisa Kudrow as Phoebe Buffay, Jennifer Aniston as Rachel Green, Matt Le Blanc as Joey Tribbiani and Matthew Perry as Chandler Bing, besides Schwimmer's Ross.

"Oh, it's happening. Actually, in a little over a month, I'm heading out to LA," Schwimmer told *Sirius XM*'s host Andy Cohen on Wednesday, as reported by *New York Post*. "So, finally, I mean, we figured out a way to film it safely,



and there's going to be a portion of it that we film outside because of, you know, for safety protocols," he added.

During the chat Schwimmer ruled out the possibility of the

reunion being hosted by Ellen DeGeneres or Billy Crystal.

Shoot for the reunion of the iconic show was supposed to happen last year, but the pandemic forced the unit to take a break.

## Singer Shreya Ghoshal announces first pregnancy

**S**inger Shreya Ghoshal and her husband Shiladitya Mukhopadhyaya are expecting their first child, she announced her first pregnancy in an adorable post on Instagram on Thursday. Shreya and Shiladitya Mukhopadhyaya, her childhood sweetheart, got married in 2015 as per traditional Bengali ceremony.



Shiladitya.

Shreya Ghoshal rose to popularity for her work in the 2002 hit film *Devdas*, for which she received the National Film Award for Best Female Playback Singer. She sang *Silsila Ye Chahat Ka*, *Bairi Piya*, *Chalak Chalak*, *Morey Piya*, and *Dola Re Dola* in the film. She also won the Filmfare Award for Best Female Playback Singer and Filmfare RD Burman Award for New Music Talent for these tracks. Shreya is also known for singing *Piyu Bole* from *Parineeta*, *Jadu Hai Nasha Hai* from *Jism*, *Barso Re* from *Guru*, *Ooh La La* from *The Dirty Picture*, *Manwa Lage* from *Happy New Year* and *Ghar More Pardesiya* from *Kalank*.

## Richa Chadha, Ali Fazal announce first production *Girls Will Be Girls*

**A**ctor-couple Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal's first project as producers will be the coming-of-age story *Girls Will Be Girls*.

The two actors, who have worked together on *Fukrey* series, will produce the project through their newly-launched banner Pushing Buttons Studios.

Debutante filmmaker Shuchi Talati will direct the movie from her own script.

Set in an elite boarding school in a small Himalayan hill town, the story is about 16-year-old Mira, whose sexy, rebellious coming-of-age is hijacked by her mother who never got to come-of-age.

Mother and daughter grow up together through the course of the script and their fraught but ultimately loving relationship is the beating heart of the film.

*Girls Will Be Girls* is the only Indian script invited to the prestigious Berlinale Script Station

2021, a lab that selects 10 projects from around the world every year, according to the makers.

It is also the only Indian project at the Jerusalem Script Lab this year where it will be presented formally at the Jerusalem Film Festival in July, they added.

Lauding Talati, Chadha said the cinematic world the filmmaker has created in *Girls Will Be Girls* is "relatable, often cruel but never hopeless or nihilistic."

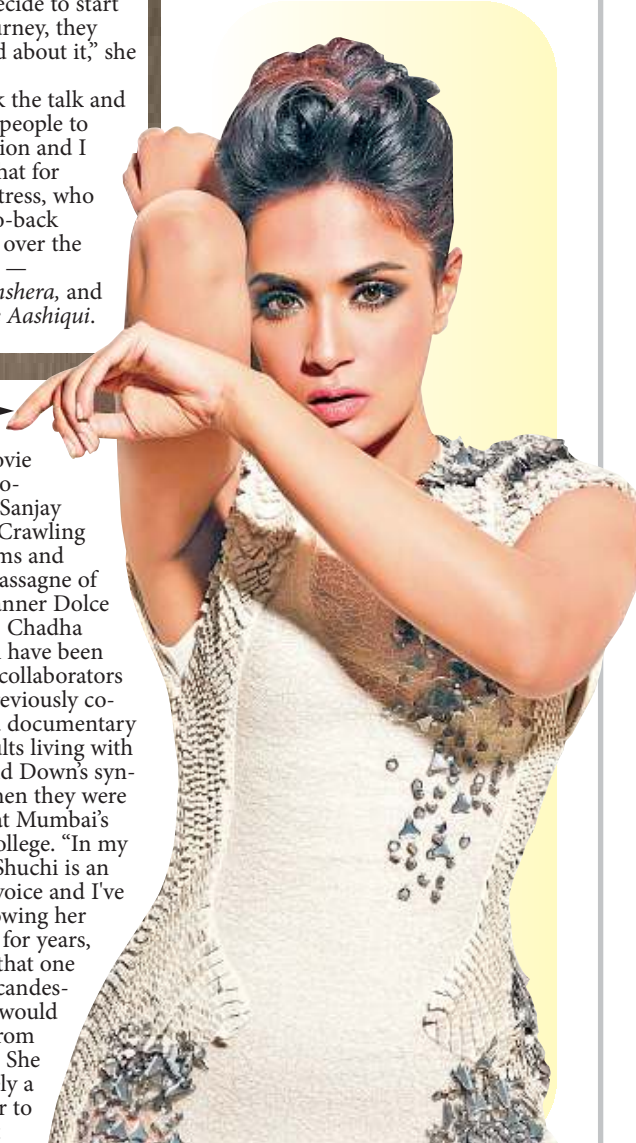
"It's honest awkwardness will make you chuckle, not weep. It's full of relatable, lived-in episodes that one finds oddly satisfying — like popping a zit. The mother in our story routinely dodges the self-sacrificing stereotype of the typical Indian mom — she's complicated, grey, and not a martyr," the 34-year-old actor said in a

statement. "The dynamic between mother and daughter is so under-explored in Indian and world cinema that the possibilities of *Girls Will Be Girls* presents are very exciting," she added.

Fazal, also 34, said the film is close to their hearts as it marks their production debut.

"I am also excited that our studio will enter the market with such a progressive, female-led story. We hope to be able to tell thought-provoking and universal stories with humour and love," he added. Talati is an up-and-coming filmmaker, who is based in the US. She recently won the New York State Council of the Arts Grant for the script of *Girls Will Be Girls*. She has also been selected for Berlinale Talents.

The movie will co-produced by Sanjay Gulati of French banner Dolce Vita Film. Chadha and Talati have been longtime collaborators as they previously co-directed a documentary about adults living with autism and Down's syndrome when they were students at Mumbai's Sophia College. "In my opinion, Shuchi is an amazing voice and I've been following her evolution for years, knowing that one day an incandescent film would be born from her brain. She is definitely a filmmaker to watch out



### FUN

#### ARCHIE



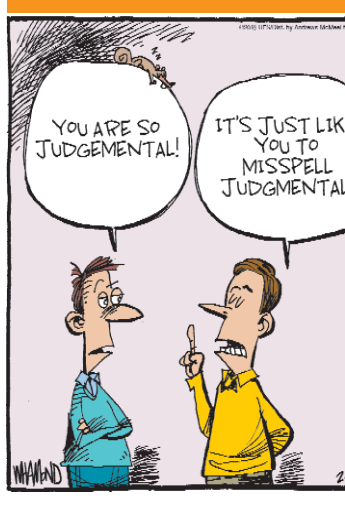
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#### GARFIELD



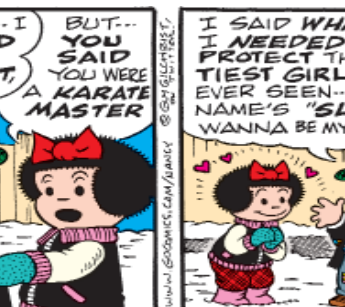
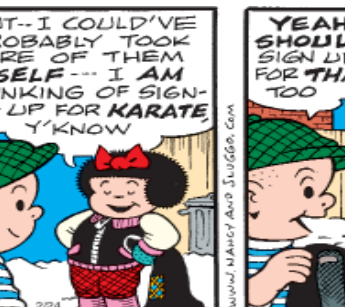
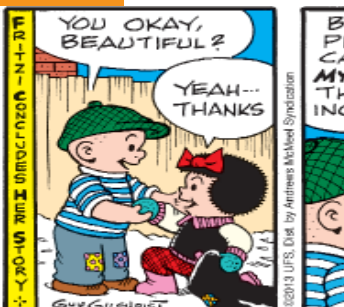
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#### SPEED BUMP



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**Yesterday's solution**

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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.

#### CROSSWORD

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- ACROSS**
- Good-looking
  - Feeling cheerful
  - One third of twenty-four
  - This many-legged creature is the young form of a butterfly
  - Queues
  - An animal to ride
  - People on journeys
  - Yummy brown stuff
  - A part of something
  - A house made of snow
  - A gorilla is one
  - Tidy and well arranged
  - Observes
  - Fifty percent
  - Very uncommon
- DOWN**
- Come to a halt
  - Mix black and white to make this
  - A throbbing pain
  - Make music with the voice
  - Periods of a hundred years
- SOLUTION**
- |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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## HOMESTAYS — THE SAFE AND SUMPTUOUS WAY TO VACAY!

SHIKHA DUGGAL

The coronavirus pandemic has wreaked havoc on the travel and tourism sector, travel bloggers couldn't explore the new aspects of travelling, couples couldn't go on a mini-vacay, and there was no fresh travel content. However, these days something called 'staycation' is taking over at home-stays!

Travelling abroad may have taken a backseat for a while but booking a private home-like-luxurious inn is the new normal. Some want to opt for these homestays for a better content strategy for their Instagram handles, some for minimalism and others for privacy! The online vacation rental marketplace Airbnb has adapted to this new normal well, with its multiple and diverse options to host guests at comfortable yet homely places to stay. Search options for a staycation have gone up — Airbnb released a report on new travel trends for 2021 that shows Indians are looking for ways to reconnect with friends and loved ones while enjoying safe, exclusive experiences off the beaten track. Additionally, it is celebrating the journey of exceptional women, including hospitality entrepreneurs who braved the challenges of the past year to nurture successful enterprises in the travel and tourism sector.

Data shows that for many first-time hosts around the world, sharing their homes on Airbnb also provided an important safety net from the economic challenges of the pandemic. The brand ambassador of Airbnb herself, actress Mandira Bedi, often turns her shooting residence into a one-of-a-kind experience for the guests to stay at with her some personal touches! "My first ever encounter at a homestay was when Airbnb was launched



— a fine-looking home in Delhi, structured so tastefully. Why was it so special, you ask? The lady-host made me feel like it's my home! Asking me relentlessly about what I'd want to have for breakfast, my whereabouts, out of concern, it all felt like my own home. Thereafter, the year of pandemic gave me the power of chaining my thoughts to think out of the box! As we were confined to our homes stringently, I considered turning my bungalow at Mudisland, usually used for film-shooting purposes into a getaway spot with the gorgeous beach as its view. I began the renovations so lavishly that all I had in my mind was to have a new holiday chalet for my guests. What helped me give it a fine makeover were my manifold experiences at Airbnb stays; I got hold of what the guests would prefer. All a visitor would have to do was get their bags, everything else would be taken care of," Bedi says.

With the global trend of

homestays hitting the graphs, guests or travellers are seeking for more real, elevating and memorable voyage experience. Valsa Nair Singh, the principal secretary of tourism and culture is all for homestays! Encouraging more and more people to stay at the 'right' home, yes you read that right — a home and not a lodge, both the guest and hosts should hit the right chords and that is why there are homestays now! The country has so much to offer when it comes to sightseeing and Valsa Nair is known for championing the causes of tourism, especially in the state of Maharashtra. "To fulfill your desires of staying at a homestay, or farm stay or just by nature, it's at the moment! Coronavirus is scary but at the same time it has also thrown up a lovely opportunity of trending tourism as people were locked inside their abodes and it as frustrating. Domestic travel is winning right now! A unique accom-

modation place is what attracts the visitors also and home-stays of different kinds and strokes do the thing. After being denied travel for so long, people are hoping to make the most of it through the staycations. Once a traveler hangs about at a home stay, it indeed will send him or her with positive vibes wanting to return. Homestays are so habitat-like that, they won't leave any unwanted glimpses of litter or pen scribbles on the wall, they are rather elegant and classy. Now, you are spinning your own home into a tourist-destination stay and that brings so much pride as well — *Atithi devo bhava*. Moreover, this leads to sustainable tourism — you have an off-the-rack built construction place to stay! Looking from a social, economic and environmental aspect, home-stays are here to stay."

With attractive holiday homes and the advent of technological convergence come fine fondles of content creation! With Instagram leading the social media sites having eye-catching stills of the place one stays at or the 'reels' performed there displaying the good-looking place, the host of a home-stay gets motivated enough to refurbish their inns into something like never before. Be it the newly adopted premises of a penthouse, treehouse, container rooms, forts, wood cabins, snowpods, etc., the visitor wants every corner of it to be on their social media handles!



The first-ever digital influencer of the country, Malini Agarwal famously known as Miss Malini shares how Airbnb managed to make her Goa trip the most unforgettable one. "I had authentic stills of the place I stayed at and the experience that I had. There is no shortcut to success — you have to constantly innovate, self-motivate and never give up! It's amazing to see millions of women get a chance to succeed in their entrepreneurial journeys by partnering with Airbnb. I have always enjoyed my stays at Airbnb homes during my travels across the world and have met so many fabulous female hosts with fascinating stories."

Under this year's International Women's Day theme of *#ChooseToChallenge*, many highlighted the importance of persevering in their unique journeys despite facing unprecedented challenges. "In 2017, while I was fighting cancer, I started my journey with Airbnb as a host. I had a choice — to let my illness define me and give into my difficult circumstances, or embrace my experience as a 'rediscovery'. I chose not just to survive, but to also thrive as an entrepreneur. Becoming a host was a great journey of self-growth for me, and I encourage women across the country to embrace the spirit of entrepreneurship in every possible way," said Pari Sharma, an Airbnb Host.



## Fighting obesity better

Obesity, a chronic disease on the rise, not just in India but across the world, is often viewed by many as a lifestyle issue largely caused due to an individual's eating habit and lack of physical activity. People often associate obesity with just weight, but it is a much more complex condition. Obesity has a direct impact on the quality of life and leads to serious health issues including heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, joint pains and many other serious comorbidities including a propensity for certain cancers.

Being a complex and chronic condition, obesity needs lifelong management. Healthcare practitioners, therefore, need to view eat meal beyond just diet and exercise for obese individuals. The popular narrative around obesity by medical teams is an assumption about personal

irresponsibility, lack of willpower and puts blame on people, eventually shaming them for being obese, the patients also believe that there is some underlying hormonal cause that has been missed and wan quick-fix solutions in medications without having to put in any efforts; neither of these we now realise is true.

We are in the process of understanding and have very little knowledge about the causation and perpetuation of obesity and most attempts are directed at excluding the hormonal causes (which are seldom the cause) and the effect of the same on the metabolism in terms of glucose and lipid levels.

Whatever its cause, the only known effective methods involve the creation of a negative calorie balance and sustained efforts with the active involvement of the person in question is realising that the plan is a long term one

rather than a course for some immediate returns like weight loss for marriage or planned surgery.

Obesity treatment should be personalised based on the degree of obesity, individual health risks, psycho behavioural, metabolic characteristics, and the result of earlier weight loss efforts.

A multilevel obesity management network working hand in hand will help achieve personalised treatment plans. Centres of excellence in obesity management or a speciality team will be able to provide all-inclusive programs for the treatment of obesity derived from evidence-based medicine. Obesity management is a medically intensive treatment strategy developed to suit the patient's lifestyle, preference, and condition together. The program can cover review and adjustments of medications, nutrition support, increased physical activities, counselling and bariatric surgery if the patient is a right candidate.

It is important to understand that obesity is not just caused by overeating or lack of exercise. A lot goes into it, including genetics, environment, and behaviour. It is a condition that's tough to fight alone and needs to be managed with the help of a medical expert, the process needs sustained efforts with realistic goals but the benefits justify the efforts.

(The writer, Dr Bipin Sethi, is a Consultant Endocrinologist with CARE Hospitals.)



## Grace Rhodes sets her sight on B-Town!

Coming to a foreign land into a completely different cultural environment and then to be permanently a part of the Hindi silver screen is what British actress and pop-sensation Grace Rhodes desires for! Last seen shaking a leg with choreographer Dharmesh Yelande, famously known as 'D' in the blockbuster dance movie *Street Dancer 3D*, Grace wants to begin afresh considering the Indian motherland as her own.

Becoming familiar with the local customs, language, etc., the dancer reduced the cultural gaffe and aspires to build a really good professional graph here in the Hindi film industry. With two locations being completely away from each other, the actress continues to put together some intense feelings about setting the dance floors on fire in Bollywood. More intricately inclined towards special appearances in star-studded films, Grace Rhodes is open to all forms of anticipated roles. "I had my first Bollywood experience with such an incredible unit on the sets of *Street Dancer 3D*. What talent, what energy! Moreover, working with Remo sir was an absolute pleasure. That particular stint made me fall in love with the filmi-duniya here that resides in Mumbai. I would love to do more item-numbers! With a broad-minded upbringing, I am professionally trained in quite a number of talented fields. There is really no limit to the passion I absorb on a daily basis. Being a British actress cannot constrain my competence, I want to try

traditional dance numbers as well, along with the contemporary moves that I am already known for. Personally speaking, it is a long-yearning reverie for me to work for T-Series music group, to be their go-to-girl for exotic dance sequences," she shares.

We have seen several Bollywood actors starring in Hollywood movies, which is like the new talent exchange happening in recent times. But, how often have you seen a Hollywood star paving his/her means on the route that leads to the Indian film industry. Grace Rhodes is obdurate enough to venture more here. This fresh talent has high regards for the field of acting! Telling us in her own words why she loves performing in front of the camera and when the acting bug bit her, she expressed that she has played quite a number of overseas characters as a romantic interest while at the moment seeking to play a badass action-entertainer heroine. "When an artist gets the right opportunity, that is her moment to shine! I am waiting for mine. The entertainment industry is very competitive, be it Hollywood or Bollywood but what remains a similar concentration point is the absolute love to deliver unforgettable performances. If you have that inclination towards the fraternity, you will somehow be drawn to it and it will probably never go away as you explore that hidden part of yourself. I can act, I can sing, I am an artist. No matter what, I am always on the lookout for experiences that sparks the cracker of creativity in me. To discover human emotions is what pulls you

She made fans dance to her tunes with her moves in *Street Dancer 3D*. British actress, danseuse, and singer Grace Rhodes is all set to re-enter Bollywood and would love to try her hands at all things art. She opens up to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about her dream roles, who she wants to act and sing with, and more.

in acting," she adds. Hoping to embed the flag of the United Kingdom in another land in the entertainment business, she wants to seep unfathomably into the Hindustani ethnicity embracing the art-form as it will lend a helping hand for her to progress well, she believes. "From what I have seen so far, actor Tiger Shroff is a marvellous dancer while Ranveer Singh is a power-house. I would love to be cast alongside Katrina Kaif, Shradha Kapoor, Nora Fatehi and Jacqueline Fernandez. And, why not sing with Arijit Singh, Guru Randhawa and Raftaar. I am in talks with Kondzilla, a music company in Brazil, so watch out for my imminent musical! It's a funk-based project. My major focus is on pop or conventional songs. I can't wait to come to India," she signs off.





West Indies skipper Kieron Pollard reacts after he hits Akila Dananjaya for six sixes in an over @CC/Twitter

## Pollard hits 6 sixes in an over

**AFP ■ COOLIDGE**  
West Indies captain Kieron Pollard on Wednesday became only the third man to hit six sixes in an International over in his team's four-wicket T20 victory over Sri Lanka.

The feat came in the sixth over of a bizarre West Indies innings, bowled by off-spinner Akila Dananjaya who moments earlier in his previous over had been celebrating taking a hat-trick.

Pollard followed in the footsteps of South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs against the Netherlands in the 2007 World

Cup and India's Yuvraj Singh, who also achieved the feat in the 2007 T20 World Cup against England.

Pollard was eventually out for 38 off 11 balls as the West Indies chased 132 to win at the Coolidge Cricket Ground, reaching their target in the 14th over when Jason Holder clobbered his side's 13th six.

"I felt I could hit six sixes after the third one," said 33-year-old Pollard.

"Once I had five sixes I knew I had the bowler on the back foot. He was going around the wicket and it was difficult for him. I just told

myself: 'Go for it'." Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews hailed his opposite number. "Pollard as we know is very destructive," Mathews told the post-match presentation.

"What I told Akila was to go for his wicket even if he gets hit for six sixes. If he miscued one we could have got him out. Unfortunately it didn't happen."

Only eight men have hit six sixes in an over in all forms of cricket with fellow West Indian Garfield Sobers the first to do so in an English county game in 1968.

# Axar, Ashwin undo Poms batting graft

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England's batsmen lost the battle of both mind and skills in yet another shoddy performance to surrender the momentum to India with Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin calling the shots on the opening day of the fourth and final Test here on Thursday.

After five innings, England crossed the 200-run mark but a total of 205 in 75.5 overs was certainly not what Joe Root had expected when he called it right at the toss on a day which would have ideally been best for batting.

There was turn and bounce but the pitch was far from being a minefield that some of the England batsmen save Ben Stokes (55, 121 balls) made it out to be.

For India, spinners Axar Patel (26-7-68-4), Ravichandran Ashwin (19.5-4-47-3) and Washington Sundar (7-1-14-1) toyed with the already muddled minds, clueless on how to deal with the conditions.

Mohammed Siraj (14-2-45-2) also played his part to perfection with the semi-new and old ball, hurrying the batsmen with sheer pace as he did with Jonny Bairstow.

India ended the day at 24 for 1 with wily old James Anderson (5-5-0-1) accounting for an out-of-form Shubman Gill (0). Rohit Sharma (8 batting, 34 balls) and Cheteshwar Pujara (15 batting, 36 balls) were holding fort for the home side.

A cursory look at the England line-up, loaded with an extra batsman, will reveal that four — Stokes, Bairstow (28, 67 balls), Dan Lawrence (46 off 74 balls) and Ollie Pope (29 off 87 balls) got starts but failed miserably on the conversion part.

The others came in and went without breaking a bead of sweat. It was as if already in their minds, they were playing on a track they thought would turn square.

Stokes was a cut above the rest both in defence and offence before a moment's indecision cost him his wicket.

Washington angled one in



Axar Patel celebrates with his Indian teammates after he takes wicket of England batsman on Day 1 of 4th Test PTI

4th Test, Day 2  
Live from 9:30am IST  
STAR SPORTS 1 NETWORK

and Stokes was on backfoot after initially trying to come forward preempting an off-break. The ball didn't turn and hit the back leg with clear indication of crashing into the leg stump.

Stokes' dismissal, after a good show, upset the team's rhythm just when it was looking to redeem itself after a poor first session.

Similarly for Lawrence, who was ready to play the attacking game, and Pope, intent on using his footwork to defend while negating the turn. There was always going to be a delivery with their name written all over it.

In case of Lawrence, he was beaten by the away turn when he dived down the track only to be stumped.

In case of Pope, the strategy that kept him on course brought about his downfall.

He came out when Ashwin changed the line of his delivery, dropping it a bit short and the attempted flick went between his legs and Gill had a reflex catch at forward short leg.

Patel, whose straight deliv-

eries have scarred the English batsmen, was again menacing in the first session with Siraj giving him good support.

Stokes and Bairstow, during their 48-run stand, showed that if one can trust their defences, batting wasn't impos-

sible. Both played the spinners close to their body on most occasions and especially on the front-foot.

But on a track like this, no batsman would feel completely set and that's what happened with both Bairstow and Stokes.

## Archer out due to elbow injury

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

England pacer Jofra Archer was not considered for the fourth Test due to a persisting elbow injury and some of the squad members including Ben Stokes also have an upset stomach, the ECB said on Thursday.

Archer had missed the second Test in Chennai due to the same issue.

"Jofra Archer is not playing in this Test match due to his ongoing right elbow issue. The ECB medical team will provide an update in due course," read an update from the England cricket board.

"Ben Stokes has had an upset stomach, the same issue that has affected other members of the touring party. It is not expected to keep him off the field," it said.

Archer returned to play the third Test in which he picked up a wicket.

## Sindhu, Srikanth & 2 others in Swiss quarters



PTI ■ BASEL

Olympic Silver medalist P V Sindhu and former champion Kidambi Srikanth advanced to the quarterfinals of the singles competition along with two other Indians at the Swiss Open badminton tournament here on Thursday.

While Sindhu and Srikanth had contrasting wins, Ajay Jayaram and last edition's runners-up B Sai Praneeth too dished out superlative performances to make it to the last-eight in the Super 300 event, the first tournament in the extended Olympic qualification period.

It was double delight for young Satwiksairaj Rankireddy also as he progressed to the quarterfinals in both the mixed doubles and men's doubles competitions with respective partners Ashwini Ponnappa and

Chirag Shetty.

World champion Sindhu hardly broke any sweat, beating USA's Iris Wang 21-13, 21-14 in women's singles, while former world number one Srikanth notched up a 21-10, 14-21, 21-14 victory over world number 50 Thomas Rouxel.

Jayaram eked out a hard-fought 21-18, 17-21, 21-13 against third seed Dane Rasmus Gemke.

Praneeth, an Olympic hopeful, later saw off Spain's Pablo Abian 21-12, 21-17 to join others in the last eight.

Satwik and Ashwini, who had reached the semifinals at Toyota Thailand Open Super 1000 in January, defeated the Indonesian combination of Rinov Rivaldy and Pitha Haningtyas Mentari 21-18, 21-16 in a mixed doubles second-round match.

Satwik and Chirag, ranked 10th in the world, then dashed the challenge of Indonesia's Pramudya Kusumawardana and Yerima Erich Yoche Yacob Rambitan 21-17, 20-22, 21-17 to also make it to the last eight.

However, Sourabh Verma had a rough day as he lost 17-21, 14-21 to Vitidarn to crash out of the men's singles event.

Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy too were ousted after losing 11-21, 15-21 to Denmark's Amalie Magelund and Freja Ravn in the women's doubles second-round.

## SA appoint new Captains

Bavuma gets limited-overs charge, Elgar to lead in Tests

**Johannesburg:** Cricket South Africa on Thursday appointed Temba Bavuma, who is rather inexperienced for the role, and Dean Elgar as the national team captains for limited overs and Tests respectively.

In a statement, CSA Director of Cricket Graeme Smith thanked Quinton de Kock for leading the side in what are tumultuous times for South African cricket. Both Bavuma and Elgar take over from de Kock, who led the team temporarily.

"We are grateful to Quinton for the work he has put in as captain of the team in the limited overs formats and are indebted to him for stepping up while the National Selection Panel continued its search for the Test captain," said the former South Africa captain.

Bavuma has played 44 Tests, six ODIs and 8 T20s for South Africa while opening batsman Elgar has played 67 Tests and eight ODIs. Bavuma will lead the Proteas in the 2021 and 2022 T20 World Cups as well as the World Cup in 2023. Elgar will take the reins into the next cycle of the World Test Championship. PTI

## Nagal stuns world No 22 Garin

PTI ■ BUENOS AIRES

India's Sumit Nagal registered the biggest win of his career when he stunned second seed Cristian Garin of Chile in straight sets to enter the quarterfinals of the Argentina Open ATP 250 tournament here.

Nagal, ranked 150, produced high-class

tennis on Wednesday night to register an impressive 6-4, 6-3 second round win over his Chilean rival, who is ranked way above at the 22nd spot in the ATP chart.

Nagal will play Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas, in what will be the Indian's maiden quarterfinal appearance at the ATP Tour level.

Ramos-Vinolas had defeated Dominik Koepfer of Germany 7-5, 6-4.

**SANIA OUSTED**  
Sania Mirza's first tournament in more than a year ended with a semifinal defeat

as she was ousted from the Qatar Total Open along with her partner Andreja Klepac, here on Thursday.

Sania and her Slovenian partner lost 5-7, 6-2, 5-10 to America's Nicole Melichar and Dutch player Demi Schuurs in one hour and 28 minutes.

Sania and Klepac split \$1000 and earned 185 ranking points each. Since Sania was not defending much points, it will help her improve her ranking.

Sania will break back into top-200 and is expected to climb to the 177th spot from the current 254.

## Dhoni in Chennai; CSK camp from Mar 9

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni has landed here to take part in the team's training camp likely to begin on March 9 in the lead-up to the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League. The former India captain arrived here late on Wednesday and will serve a five-day quarantine.

CSK tweeted a picture of Dhoni at the airport and wrote: "Thalai-Vaa! Smile with the Mass(k) on! Super Night! #DenComing #WhistlePodu #Yellow."

Former India batsman Ambati Rayudu also reached Chennai on Wednesday while the Tamil Nadu players in the squad will be joining a little later.



"First #Dencoming of the summer from across the border is Manavaadu Bahubali!!! #Yellow #WhistlePodu," CSK posted with a photo of Rayudu.

The camp is likely to get underway from March 9, CSK CEO K S Viswanath said, adding the players who are available would take part in it.

"Yeah...The camp is likely to start from March 9. Whoever is available would take part in the training sessions," he said.

"The players will undergo five-day quarantine before they start training. Also, they will have to return three negative tests..." he added.

The Indian players in the CSK will be a part of the camp, he said, adding they would be arriving in batches.

## Man Utd, Leicester drop more points

AFP ■ LONDON

Manchester United were left a huge 14 points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City as Crystal Palace held them to yet another goalless draw on Wednesday.

The stalemate at a foggy Selhurst Park was United's third successive goalless draw in all competitions ahead of Sunday's Manchester derby against City, who are on a record-breaking 21-game winning streak.

Elsewhere, third-placed Leicester had captain Kasper Schmeichel to thank for a point in a 1-1 draw at Burnley. Aston Villa missed the chance to move to within two points of the top four as they suffered a shock 1-0 loss to bottom-of-the-table Sheffield United, who held on for the final half an hour with 10 men.

A point in south London left second-placed Man United just one ahead of Leicester, with the main aim now for Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side to cling on to a top-four place that will secure Champions League football next season.

"We have to do much better, we have to risk more in attack to create more chances," United midfielder Nemanja Matic, who almost broke the deadlock with a deflected shot, told Sky Sports.

"We are Manchester United, we have to win this kind of game. On Sunday we have a big game against Manchester City. We have to refocus for that."

Leicester's challenge for a return to the Champions League next season has been badly hit by injuries to key players, with Chelsea, Liverpool and Everton all able to close in on the Foxes — who

have not won in their last three games — when they are in action on Thursday.

**MILAN SALVAGE POINT**

Franck Kessie scored a 97th-minute penalty to rescue a 1-1 draw for AC Milan at home to Udinese on Wednesday, giving Serie A leaders Inter Milan the chance to pull six points clear at the top.

Rodrigo Becao's second-half header at the San Siro completely deceived Milan goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma and Stefano Pioli's faltering side looked destined for a third defeat in four games.

But a needless handball from Udinese substitute Jens Stryger Larsen offered Milan a lifeline, with Ivorian international Kessie converting the penalty with the final kick of the match.

Elsewhere, Robin Gosens, Jose Luis Palomino, Luis Muriel, Josip Ilicic and Aleksei Miranchuk all scored for Atalanta in a 5-1 rout of bottom club Crotona.

## Barca return to Copa del Rey final



AFP ■ BARCELONA

Barcelona needed extra-time to reach the Copa del Rey final on Wednesday, with a 3-2 aggregate win over Sevilla com-

cial goal in the fifth minute of extra-time with a diving header off a Jordi Alba cross.

Gerard Pique had equalised in the fourth minute of stoppage time with virtually the last play of the game to save Barca.

The veteran international headed in at the near post after a fine cross from Antoine Griezmann.

That was after Ousmane Dembele, who scored in the 2-0 win at Sevilla in La Liga at the weekend, had given the 30-time Spanish Cup winners a 12th-minute lead in the second leg with a right-foot drive from outside the area.

Sevilla could have killed the game off in the 73rd minute

to deny Barca their place in the final for a 42nd time.

They were awarded a penalty when Lucas Ocampos was brought down by Oscar Mingueza. However, Ocampos saw his tame right-foot effort from the spot saved by Marc-Andre ter Stegen.

Flagging Sevilla were then reduced to 10 men in injury time when Brazilian Fernando was red-carded for a foul on Francisco Trincao.

"The team deserved to qualify," said Barca coach Ronald Koeman. "This is a very important result for the club, for the players, and for me of course as well. This is an important step in earning a title."

## SINGLES

**PSL POSTPONED AFTER 3 MORE TEST + VE KARACHI:** The Pakistan Super League was on Thursday postponed with immediate effect after three more cricketers tested positive for Covid-19, taking the total number of cases in the T20 event to seven and prompting the cricket board to announce an inquiry into the fiasco. Out of the seven cases, six are players while one is a support staff member. PCB CEO Wasim Khan said an inquiry will be conducted to understand what went wrong.

**PANGHAL LOSES IN BOXAM QUARTERS**  
**NEW DELHI:** World championship Silver-medallist Amit Panghal (52kg) on Thursday bowed out of the 35th Boxam International Boxing Tournament after being upstaged by European Games champion Gabriel Escobar in the quarterfinals. The Olympic-bound Panghal, went down in a split verdict to make a surprisingly early exit from the tournament.

**SHARATH KAMAL LOSES IN PRE-QUARTERS**  
**DOHA:** Indian challenge at the World Table Tennis Contender series ended after veteran Sharath Kamal suffered a loss to world No 7 Lin Yun-Ju of Chinese Taipei in the men's singles pre-quarterfinals here on Thursday. The 38-year-old Indian suffered a 6-11, 4-11, 8-11 defeat against Lin. Earlier, Manika Batra and Sreeja Akula also lost their respective final qualifying round matches in the women's singles category.

**LIVERPOOL TO PLAY LEIPZIG IN BUDAPEST**  
**NYON:** Liverpool and Leipzig are going to Budapest for a second time in the Champions League round of 16 next week. UEFA confirmed on Thursday that Liverpool's home second-leg game will also be at Puskas Arena next Wednesday.

**NEERAJ IN LINE FOR BRONZE**  
**ROME:** India's Greco Roman wrestler Neeraj kept himself in contention of a Bronze medal in the 63kg but four of his compatriots faded on the opening day of the UWW Ranking Series event on Thursday. Neeraj began by losing his quarterfinal 1-4 to Sultan Aseetuly but since the Kazakhstani's wrestler reached the final, he got a repechage round. Making the most of the chance, Neeraj defeated Russia's Aleksei Tadykin 7-3 to book himself a slot in the Bronze play-off.

**LEIPZIG REACH GERMAN CUP SEMIS**  
**LEIPZIG:** Yussuf Poulsen and Hwang Hee-chan netted second-half goals as RB Leipzig beat Wolfsburg 2-0 in Wednesday's German Cup quarter-final in a tense battle between the in-form Bundesliga sides. After Poulsen opened the scoring, South Korea striker Hwang came off the bench to hit a late second goal and seal a semi-final berth alongside Borussia Dortmund and second-tier Holstein Kiel.

**LILLE WIN TO STAY AHEAD OF PSG**  
**PARIS:** Canada forward Jonathan David scored two late goals as Lille beat Marseille 2-0 to stay top of the French league. David netted in the 90th minute and again two minutes into injury time on Wednesday. The northern side remains two points ahead of defending champion Paris Saint-Germain, which won 1-0 away to Bordeaux.

**24 HOURS OF LE MANS POSTPONED**  
**PARIS:** The 24 Hours of Le Mans has been postponed from its original dates in June until August in the hope fans will be able to attend, organisers announced on Thursday. The race, which was held behind closed doors due to the coronavirus pandemic last year, was scheduled for June 12-13, but has been pushed back until August 21-22.

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# NAVDEEP CONFIDENT OF GOOD SECOND INNINGS

He's wowed fans and critics alike with his intense roles in films like *Arya 2*, *Chandamama*, and *Baadshah*. Back with *Mosagallu*, a film that promises to set a benchmark, Navdeep says he's finally in a place to choose better roles, writes K RAMYA SREE



**B**ased on a true series of incidents that conned a whopping \$380 million (Rs 2,800 crores) and shook the Indian IT Industry, *Mosagallu* is about cultural clash — between generations; between east and west; between rich and poor. A brother-sister duo in India uses the loopholes of the American laws and rips off millions of dollars of US tax payers' money. This hurts the ego of Americans and they deploy Interpol to nab the culprits. Being released in Telugu and English, the film directed by Jeffrey Gee Chin and produced by Vishnu Manchu under the banner of AVA Entertainment and 24 Frames Factory, is making all the right noise ever since its launch — for its ensemble cast and a story on true incidents that shook the US. Navdeep, who will be seen as a white-collar criminal who lives a lavish lifestyle in the film says, "The film is about Interpol's biggest operation. With *Mosagallu*, I have experienced how it feels to work with a Hollywood director. The treatment is special. I will

be seen as a white-collar criminal who lives lavishly, spots Vishnu Manchu and makes him bail him out of a scam. He and his sister (Kajal Aggarwal) go beyond the brief after they realise that they can pull off the scam on their own and the entire film revolves around solving the scam." "When Vishnu approached me with the offer, I was told that *Mosagallu* is based on a true story and that caught my attention. I'm sure the audience will have a good ride with this film as every scene is gripping with thrilling visuals," he adds. Speaking of sharing screen space with Kajal, who is his good friend off-screen, the *Chandamama* actor tells, "I have previously worked with Kajal in *Chandamama*, *Baadshah* and *Arya 2*. For the first time, we have played enemies to each other. She plays a really strong character in the film." The actor, who is waiting for a hit in the industry for quite some time now, says he did take up many disastrous projects to just keep himself going in the industry not understanding the importance of the script and not knowing how to reject a few offers. He explains, "Successful actors are not in a dilemma about the kind of roles they want to do. But others are not like that. *Gautham SSC*, *Arya 2* and *Chandamama* are the few films that were written for me. I ended up doing not-so-great films early on in my career because I was too small to say 'No' to a number of

producers/directors. After *Chandamama*, for which I teamed up with Krishna Vamsi, no story impressed me until *Arya 2* came. After 17 years in the industry, I have realised to take up films that will bring me a good name and I am now in a position to make such choices." The actor has recently gained appreciation for his work in *Aha's Masti* and he wishes OTT came into existence a few years ago. "With OTT, actors have become too busy. It would've been very nice if OTT came into existence earlier. Now, at least 90 projects, both feature films and OTT ones, are on the floors. So much so, production houses are finding it hard to rent equipment." "After I started a writers' collective C Space, 6,000 aspirants approached us in just 6 months. We interviewed them all and zeroed in on 40 talented people. Most writers have just one idea because they don't hone their writing skills. Writing is a collaborative effort. There are seven methods of screen-writing. A writer has to smartly adapt to suit the Indian sensibilities. At our collective, we give writing exercises to the writers and make them think through. We have pitched stories for *Aha*, *Amazon Prime* and also to Trivikram Srinivas garu. Krish Jagarlamudi garu asked us to write a story based on a book. Swapna Dutt garu too made another offer," he tells us. Speaking about his next, a fantasy love story, where one of the writers of *Baahubali* will wield the megaphone, Navdeep says, "All this beard you see on my face is for the film. I will be shooting in Meghalaya for 75 days. I am confident that my second innings will begin well with that movie. I have got goodwill in the industry. I just need one success. People are now convinced that I am good but I was misunderstood in the past." The film, one of the most expensive ones in Vishnu Manchu's career, that is set to release on March 11, also stars Sunil Shetty, Ruhi Singh, Naveen Chandra, Karma McCain in key roles.



## 'My hunger for something new led to *Shaadi Mubarak*

**T**he film *Shaadi Mubarak*, which has TV actor Veer Sagar making another try at his luck on the silver screen, has kept audiences eagerly waiting for its release today. Directed by Padmasri, the film is produced by Dil Raju and Sirish under Sri Venkateshwarra Creations. The film has actress Drishya Raghunath playing Sagar's romantic interest. Talking about Dil Raju producing the film, Sagar says, "To be working as part of a film that is being produced by him is so gratifying. He believes in pushing films with great content and his faith in us was a great morale booster. Dil Raju sir loved the script and said it'll lead me to even better projects in the future." A dialogue from the trailer that says, 'Marriage is for safe sex' has been garnering a lot of controversy. Sagar explains, "Taking one dia-

# BHEESHMA DIRECTOR

## duped of Rs 60K, speaks up

**T**ollywood director Venky Kudumula of *Bheeshma* fame is the latest victim of online phishing. The director said he lost Rs 63,600 but luckily realised that he was being duped before he could lose more. Venky even lodged a com-

plaint against the fraudster by the name Naveen with the Cyber Police of Hyderabad and put out a statement explaining his version after having received numerous calls from well-wishers. He said the fraudster asked him to send money to file for the consideration of National Awards and the director fell for it. "However, there was some mix-up and the person came back to me saying that we would get a refund and asked us to make a transfer of money again. That's when things felt a little fishy and I dug deeper into the bank details. It was supposed to be the account of a film corporation but it was an indi-



This forced him to take to social media to reveal his version. "Maybe I was 'easy bait' but haven't we all been there? Should we keep silent so that no one knows or should we raise our voice so that it doesn't happen to anyone else?..... Many friends suggested I should not file a complaint and asked me to keep quiet. But should I? No. I went ahead and filed a complaint just to make sure that fraudsters don't repeat this with anyone else from our industry or anyone outside as well," he wrote in the statement. The *Chalo* director concluded saying, "*Poga thraguta, madhyam sevinchute kaadhu apramatham ga lekavovadam kuda hanikaram..* (It's not just smoking and drinking that are injurious to health, not being vigilant is, too)."



## Bigg Boss fame Ariyana Glory has her hands full

**B**igg Boss 4 Telugu finalist Ariyana Glory has been roped in to play sister to Mega hero Kalyaan Dhev in an upcoming Telugu film. The film is said to be a sports-based drama, which will be directed by Sreedhar Seepana and produced by People Media Factory and Abhishek Agarwal Arts, presented by GA2 Pictures. Director Sreedhar Seepana, sources say, cast Ariyana after loving her candid demeanour in the reality show *Bigg Boss 4* Telugu. Recently during a media interaction, Ariyana Glory said, "I am enjoying this fame and recognition. I have just started shooting and it's an exciting role that offers a lot of scope to perform." Kalyaan Dhev, the son-in-law of Megastar Chiranjeevi, made his debut with the romantic and family entertainer *Vijetha* that released



in 2018. Currently, he is also working for another Telugu film *Super Machi*. Meanwhile, Ariyana Glory will be essaying another crucial role in the young actor Raj Tarun-starrer upcoming untitled film under Srinivas Gavireddy.