

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

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

**MAN LINKED TO SUV NEAR AMBANI HOME
WROTE 'WAS HARASSED' BEFORE DEATH**

Hiren Mansukh, a car parts dealer linked to an SUV filled with explosives found near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's Mumbai home last week, had written letter days before his death, alleging that he was being harassed by police officials and journalists. In his letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, the state's Home Minister and the Mumbai police chief, the man had demanded legal action and police protection. In a major twist to the mystery of the explosive-laden SUV found near Mukesh Ambani's home, Mansukh, 45, was found near a creek near Mumbai on Friday, according to a Thane police officer quoted by news agency ANI.

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

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

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

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



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

2

Storm in Vijayawada TDP leaves unit on brink of split

Tact saves the day after Bonda, Buddha, Nagul revolt against Nani

C PRADEEP KUMAR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Badly in need of a major electoral victory after its drubbing in the 2019 General Elections, the TDP on Saturday received a major scare in its endeavour to win the forthcoming Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections.

On a day in which the party's city unit appeared to be headed for a split with the BC and minority leaders raising the banner of revolt against the domination of Kamma leaders in the party, it took a lot of backroom negotiations, humility in spades and ample doses of diplomacy and tact to salvage the situation.

Rumbles of discontent were felt early in the day from Vijayawada (urban) TDP president Bonda Umamaheswara Rao, party's minority leader Nagul Meera and MLC Buddha Venkanna, who were fuming at the "highhanded" attitude of Vijayawada MP Kesineni Nani. According to

**TDP will win only 3-4 seats: Peddireddy**

VIJAYAWADA: Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy on Saturday exuded confidence that the TDP would not be able to win more than four or five seats in Vijayawada.

Speaking after a meeting with Krishna district leaders on the municipal elections, the Minister urged the TDP leaders to focus on differ-

ences within their own party instead of criticising the ruling YSRCP.

Ministers Peddireddy and Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao strongly condemned the criticism made by TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu against the YSRCP government during his election campaign.

TDP sources, these leaders felt that Nani had hijacked the

party, leading to genuine workers who have been striving for

the party for decades being sidelined.

Temper continued to fray as the hours went by, till a visibly angry MLC Buddha Venkanna announced himself as the TDP candidate for the Vijayawada seat in the next Lok Sabha elections. The trio alleged that Nani was ill-treating them and deliberately sideline them, to the extent that they were not even informed about the route map of TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu's visit. The rumblings of discontent reached the TDP seniors.

Sensing danger to the party's prospects in the upcoming VMC elections, the party high command swung into action paving the way for talks with upset leaders and began efforts to calm them.

Differences in the Vijayawada TDP had been an open secret since years, and became more marked with the selection of candidates for the VMC polls by Nani.

2



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

8

SEC warns volunteers not to campaign for parties

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar on Saturday warned ward volunteers in urban areas against taking part in electioneering in the ongoing ULB polls.

In a statement, Ramesh Kumar said the SEC has been receiving numerous complaints from political parties, besides media reports and from the public at large about alleged illegal electioneering by ward volunteers.

He said illegal electioneering involving any ward volunteer in the urban local bodies where elections are taking place is a prohibited and punishable electoral offence and in violation of Model Code of Conduct.

2

**Anurag Thakur:
Govt open to
explore
cryptocurrency**

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union minister Anurag Thakur on Saturday said the government is open to evaluate and explore new technologies, including cryptocurrencies, for improving governance.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself is a strong advocate of embracing technology in various aspects of governance, the Minister of State for Finance said.

"Let me say that we welcome innovation and new technology...blockchain is a new emerging technology. Cryptocurrency is a form of virtual currency. I firmly believe that we must always evaluate, explore and encourage new ideas with an open mind," he said.

A High-Level Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) was constituted under the Chairmanship of Economic Affairs Secretary on digital currencies and it has submitted its report.

2

Government ready to amend new agri laws, says Tomar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Eleven rounds of talks between the Centre and 41 protesting farmer unions have so far remained deadlocked.

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

New Delhi: Farmer leaders on Saturday said the protesting unions stand firm on their demand of a complete repeal of the three agri laws and asserted that they are ready for talks with the government, but that should be held without any condition. Earlier in the day, thousands of farmers blocked the Kundli Manesar Palwal (KMP) Expressway at some places in Haryana to mark the completion of 100 days of their agitation at the Delhi borders.

Darshan Pal, a senior member of the Samkyukta Kisan Morcha which is spearheading the going protest, said farmer unions stand firm on the demand of repeal of three agri laws. "Since the beginning of our agitation, our demand remains the same which is the repeal of three new agricultural laws. We are ready to resume talks with the government, but it should be held without any precondition," Pal told PTI.

2

The government has offered concessions including suspension of the legislations for 12-18 months and setting up a joint panel to find solutions, but the unions have rejected.

Tomar said the government has passed these three laws to boost investment in the farm sector and give freedom to

farmers to sell their produce wherever they want and at price determined by them.

The laws, which were passed by Parliament in September last year, would also enable to grow those crops that can fetch more prices in the market, he added.

2



Members of Team India pose with the Anthony De Mello Trophy after defeating England 3-1 in the four-match series on Saturday.

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

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

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

All India needed was a draw to book a Lord's date in June with Kane Williamson's New Zealand but Patel (24-6-48-5), in company of Ashwin (22.5-4-47-5), literally blew England away in a session and half for a paltry 135 in 54.5 overs to

complete a 3-1 rout, ensuring that the Anthony De Mello Trophy will stay at the Cricket Centre in Mumbai.

It was another two and half days finish but even the most partisan England experts like their former skipper Michael Vaughan have admitted that the 22-yard strip had almost nothing to do with their side's abject surrender.

A case in point could be India's first innings score of 365 and a lead of 160 on the same track where England could cumulatively manage only 340 runs across two innings.

2

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Sixty-three districts in the eight states and union territories "continue to be of concern as these districts are seeing a decrease in total tests being conducted, low share of RT-PCR tests, increase in weekly positivity and low number of contact tracing of the COVID positive cases," the Union Health Ministry said in a statement today. "These together can pose high risk of transmission to the neighbouring states and union territories," the Health Ministry said. Of those identified by the government, nine districts are in Delhi, 15 are in Haryana, 10 in Andhra Pradesh, 10 in Odisha, nine in Himachal Pradesh, seven in Uttarakhand, two in Goa, and one in Chandigarh.

An average close contact tracing "of minimum of 20 persons per positive case," should be conducted, the government has said in a suggested action plan that also stresses on improved overall testing and an active monitoring of "super-spreader events".

"Make optimal use of the available vaccine doses and focus on critical districts, and collaborate with the private hospitals to open up vaccination time-table for a minimum of 15 days and maximum of 28 days at a time," the states were told.

2

**Ex-Ranji cricketer
poses as KTR's PA,
held for cheating**

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Police on Saturday arrested an ex-Ranji cricketer in Andhra Pradesh, who allegedly impersonated as a personal secretary to Telangana IT Minister K T Rama Rao and cheated nine establishments, including corporate firms.

B Nagaraju, who played in Ranji matches for AP during 2014-16, allegedly called companies, corporate hospitals, educational institutions and realtors and introduced himself as PS to Rama Rao, a police release said.

2

Slapped by Balayya, fan says he's 'honoured'

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

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

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

In a video that has gone viral, Balakrishna is seen hitting a man asking him to delete his pictures.



It appears that the Hindupur MLA just cannot keep his temper in check.

2

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

SUMIT ONKA
■ VISAKHAPATNAM

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

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



India. In 2020-21, Telangana was among the top five states

in the number of fire alerts. As many as 7,500 fire points were

spotted in the state.

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

FSI has been alerting State Forest Departments and other registered uses of forest fire locations detected by the MODIS sensor onboard Aqua and Terra Satellites of NASA since 2004.

Man-made incidents coupled with prolonged dry spells,

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

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

The most severely forest-fire affected areas in the State are Visakhapatnam, and Rajahmundry circles and parts of Srisailem Project Tiger reserve forest, says the department analysis.

2

OBTUSE ANGLE

‘ALL AND SUNDRY’

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

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

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

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

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



S NAGESH KUMAR
Former Resident Editor, The Hindu

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

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

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

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

Ex-Ranji cricketer poses as KTR's PA, held for cheating

Continued from page 1

Claiming that Rama Rao would be taking oath as CM, he demanded money from them for erecting hoardings at the LB Stadium here and issuing advertisements in media in connection with the swearing-in ceremony, it said. Using this modus operandi, he cheated firms and collected an amount of Rs 39,22,400, the release said. Sleuths of Commissioner's Task Force, North Zone Team apprehended him on Saturday. He was arrested in 10 cases earlier and was released on bail, but he did not change his attitude after coming out of prison, it added. Rama Rao, son of Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhara Reddy, is the working president of the ruling TRS.

115 new Covid cases in AP, one death

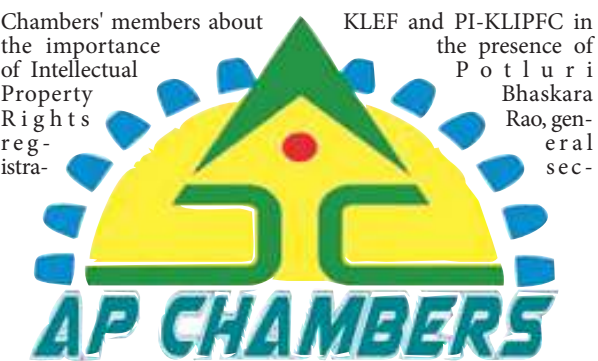
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The cumulative Covid-19 positives rose to 8,90,556 as Andhra Pradesh added 115 new cases in 24 hours ending 9 am on Saturday. The state also reported 93 recoveries and one fatality, a health department bulletin said. The active caseload has now increased to 921 after a total of 8,82,462 recoveries and 7,173 deaths, it said. Chittoor district once again reported the highest 32 cases in a day, followed by Krishna 20 and Visakhapatnam 18. Of the remaining 10 districts, SPS Nellore and Prakasam reported zero new cases and Vizianagaram one and the others less than eight each. Chittoor also reported one more Covid-19 fatality in a day. Krishna district again crossed the three-figure mark, having 115 active cases now, behind Chittoor's 236.

AP Chambers signs pact to safeguard IP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Federation has signed an MoU with KL Intellectual Property Facilitation Centre (KLIPFC) to promote and provide Intellectual Property Rights registration (trademark, copyright, patents, design patents, etc.) for MSMEs, start-ups and businesses. The Chambers will play the role of a coordinator to bring awareness and educate interested parties about the importance of Intellectual Property Rights and foster the culture of IPR registration in the State. KLIPFC will provide Intellectual Property Rights registration services. AP Chambers and KLIPFC will be organising a series of webinars to educate the



Chambers' members about the importance of Intellectual Property Rights registration. KLEF and PI-KLIPFC in the presence of Potluri Bhaskara Rao, general secretary, AP Chambers, Prof VSV Prabhakar, director, Industrial Relations, KLEF, Velagapudi Sambasiva Rao, president, All India Chilli Exporters Association, MS Ramachandra Rao, general secretary, AP Small Industries Association and BS Koteswara Rao, managing director, Profit Shoe Company.

Shooters on the mark in shooting tourney

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The final phase of the XXI Andhra Pradesh State Shooting Championship was held from March 3 to 6 in which shooters displayed their talent in events like 50 Meter Rifle and 50 meter pistol. Speaking to the media on Saturday, Salathil Tottempudi, president of the Rifle Association of Andhra Pradesh applauded the successful conduct of the shooting championship. He extended his best wishes and congratulated all the medal winners for providing an outstanding performance in all the events. D Raj Kumar, General Secretary of RAAP, also congratulated the medal winners. In the small bore and shotgun events, Akash Geddam won Gold, M Umamahesh -

Silver, and Raja Sagi sri Charan Kamal Varma - Bronze. In the 50M Rifle prone (NR) Championship, women individual even, the winners were B Vara Nounisree Gold, VVS Kiran - Silver and Vedha - Bronze. In the 50M Rifle prone (NR) Championship Junior Men individual event, Akash Geddam won Gold, M Umamahesh Silver and R Rishabh Shankar Bronze. In the 50M Pistol (NR) Championship Men individual NKM Sai Suchandar won Gold, K Krishna Vamsi Silver and N Mukesh Bronze. In the 50M Rifle Three Position (NR) Championship Men Individual R Rishabh Shankar won Gold, M Umamahesh Silver and M Thiruloknath Bronze.

SEC warns...

Continued from page 1

He said that complaints can be made to the Commission's 24/7 call centre on the number 0866-2466877 and they will be immediately dealt with and action shall be taken duly. The SEC also suggested that the complaints can be mailed to the Commission's email: secy.apsec2@gmail.com and to district collectors and municipal commissioners concerned. Complainers can also call on the helplines and call centres in the districts which are already functioning 24/7, Ramesh Kumar said. A written complaint can be also lodged so that the SEC can early and effectively deal with the complaint/electoral offence. All the district collectors and municipal Commissioners are informed to take immediate necessary action, Ramesh Kumar said.

AP, TS report most forest fires in last 7 days

Continued from page 1

Forest officials say they are mobilising village communities, VSS members and farmer associations to keep tabs on the forest fires. Awareness programmes are also being conducted on forest fires for the ignorant and unaware tribal youths. From 2017, FSI has also started disseminating alerts obtained from SNPP-VIIRS sensor, which has a better resolution (375 m X 375 m) compared to MODIS (1 km X 1 km). Alerts are disseminated up to beat-level in the case of 10 states including Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In case of other States/UTs, alerts are sent up to district-level in the absence of administrative boundary information from State Forest Departments.

India fix Lord's date...

Continued from page 1

"The comeback in Chennai pleased me the most. The first game was an aberration and England outplayed us," said India skipper Virat Kohli at the post-match presentation. "Every team in international cricket is a quality side and we need to work hard to beat them, even at home. Keeping that intensity going is most important and is the hallmark of our team." Atrocious application and unbelievably poor mindset while playing spinners cost the Englishmen dearly during the last three Tests and skipper Joe Root had little to offer in terms of explanation. "We haven't matched India in the last three, and we need to keep learning and keep getting better for this experience and this series, and we need to keep evolving and move forward," admitted Root. This was one Test match where Indians, even before a ball being bowled, created an

illusion of a turning track. It was a ploy of playing with the minds of a team that was already in a negative zone. There wasn't much turn but enough to ensure that the visitors wilted under pressure as Patel's series tally stood at highest for a newcomer (27) while man of the series Ashwin was peerless as ever with 32 scalps in his kitty. A lot of credit for this victory should go to the indomitable Rishabh Pant and Washington Sundar. These two knocks literally made it impossible for England to make a comeback as a total of 365 seemed like 650. The coming of age of Pant as a real replacement for the iconic Mahendra Singh Dhoni and emergence of Washington as a potent batting all-rounder only augurs well for the team. So formidable is India's bench strength right now that Hanuma Vihari, who saved an epic Test in Sydney only a couple of months back, may not get to play a Test in near future.

TDP will win only 3-4 seats: Peddireddy

Continued from page 1

The Ministers, along with the party's key Krishna district leaders, met at the YSRCP Tadepalli office on Saturday to fine-tune their election strategy. Speaking on the occasion, Peddireddy expressed confidence that the YSRCP would win all the municipalities, including Vijayawada and Guntur corporations. "TDP would hardly get three or four seats in Vijayawada," he said, adding that internal differences within the party have reached the climax. "Before criticising the YSRCP, Chandrababu Naidu has to take care of his own party which is in a bad shape," the Minister said. Kodali Nani said that TDP MLA N Balakrishna was unaware of the situation in the state and was criticising Chief

Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy for not questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the Vizag Steel Plant issue. "Balakrishna keeps travelling to other countries and states for shooting films and he has no knowledge on the current politics in the state," Kodali Nani said. "Balakrishna only reads the script written by Chandrababu Naidu and knows nothing. Balakrishna is just like a puppet in the hands of the TDP chief," he said. The Minister also took on BJP state president Somu Veerajulu saying that the latter has started to "talk too much these days". Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu questioned Veerajulu on how the Modi Government would be able to control the YSRCP government, as claimed by the BJP leader.






Storm in Vijayawada TDP...

Continued from page 1

By oversight or intent, followers of Buddha Venkanna and other senior leaders were conspicuous by their absence in the list of candidates. What was more galling to the aforementioned trio was the candidature of Kesineni Swetha, the daughter of the MP himself, as the TDP's candidate for the Mayor's post. Buddha Venkanna seized upon this point - he bluntly said that the MP was being delusional that it was his personal charisma that had led to his victory in the General Elections from Vijayawada. "If that were to be true, how could six TDP candidates for the Assembly face defeat in the Vijayawada Parliamentary Constituency?" the senior leader asked. He challenged Nani to resign and face the electorate again, but this time not on the TDP ticket. Buddha Venkanna

continued to berate the MP, saying that he has become synonymous with "immoral politics" and said that it was for this reason that the MP was forced out from the erstwhile Praja Rajyam Party. "He is now trying to damage the TDP," Buddha Venkanna said, adding that they were vexed with the ill-treatment being meted out by Nani. Umamaheswara Rao alleged that Nani was suppressing BCs, who were traditionally TDP supporters, in Vijayawada city. Nagul Meera reminded that they are senior leaders in Vijayawada and have been working in the party right from its inception or at least from its early years, but Nani was a comparatively late entry. "He is trying to suppress BCs, minorities and other communities through caste politics. Nani changed the route map of Naidu's visit, and he did not bother to inform us about the

changes, despite the TDP supremo's tour being scheduled in their respective areas," Nagul Meera said. By this time, the party's intervention started showing results. By the evening, Nani's daughter Swetha, accompanied by TDP senior leader N Raghuram, reached Umamaheswara Rao's residence and tried to bring peace. Raghuram said that there was a misunderstanding about the change of Naidu's route map by Nani and said that it was actually the party high command that made the change. He said that all leaders should work in tandem for TDP's victory. His words yielded the desired result and gradually Buddha Venkanna, Umamaheswara Rao and Nagul Meera calmed down, agreeing to work for the victory of Swetha and other TDP candidates.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES	
GOLD	
 ₹ 45,490 (10 gm)	
 ₹ 1090	
SILVER	
 ₹ 70,100 (1kg)	
₹ 2400	
CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
	
Dressed/With Skin	₹191
Without Skin	₹218
Broiler at Farm	₹132
EGG RATES ₹/100	
	
VIJAYAWADA	401
HYDERABAD	393
VISAKHAPATNAM	505
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.01

Government ready to amend...

Continued from page 1

Referring to the ongoing farmers' agitation, Tomar wondered how this agitation was going to benefit farmers. "Main ye mantaa hoon, loktantra mein asahmati ka apna sthan hai, virodh ka bhi apna sthan hai, matbhed ke bhi apne mahatva hai. Lekin kya virodh is keemat par kiya jaana chahiye, jo desh ka nukshan kare (There is a place for disagreement in democracy and so is for opposition and difference of opinion, but should there be any opposition that can harm the nation)," he said. No one is ready to talk on how these protests can be in the interest of farmers, the minister said. Tomar stressed that the gov-

ernment's proposal to amend laws does not mean that there were any deficiencies in these reform laws. He said the government has made a proposal to amend these laws as farmers continue to be the face of this ongoing protest. Tomar said the government's priority is to uphold farmers' respect and therefore, it is ready to make amendments in the laws. He said there are always an opposition to big reforms, but people do accept changes if the intention and policies are correct. The Supreme Court had on January 12 stayed the implementation of the three contentious farm laws for two months and asked the committee to submit a report after consulting the stakeholders.

Tomar regretted that farmer unions as well as the Opposition parties have failed to point out faults in provisions of these laws. "Loktantra hai toh rajneeti karne ki swatantra sabko hai. Lekin kya kisan ko markar rajneeti ki jayegi, kisan ka ahit karke rajneeti ki jayegi, desh ke krishi ki arthvybastha ko tilanjali dekar apne man-soobon ko pura kiya jayega, is par nischit roop se naye phidi ko vichar karne ki zaroorat hai (Everyone is free to have any political view in democracy, but the new generation must think, should there be any politics by sacrificing farmers or by hurting farmers' interest or at the cost of the agriculture economy)," he asked. Tomar stressed that the gov-

Farmer leaders firm on the...

Continued from page 1

In January, the government had proposed to suspend the three contentious farm laws for 1-1.5 years and set up a joint committee to find an amicable solution in the interest of the farming community, which the protesting unions had then rejected it. Senior farmer leader Kulwant Singh Sandhu said farm unions have never said 'no' to talks with the central government, adding that their stand on talks as well as demands have been the same from the beginning. He said the Samyukta Kisan Morcha has called a meeting on March 9 to decide the next course of action to intensify their ongoing agitation.

Anurag Thakur: Govt...

Continued from page 1

The government would take a decision on the recommendations of the IMC and the legislative proposal, if any, would be introduced in Parliament following the due process, he said while inviting suggestions and views on this issue. Cryptocurrencies are digital or virtual currencies in which encryption techniques are used to regulate the generation of their units and verify the transfer of funds, operating independently of a central bank. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the government is still formulating its opinion on cryptocurrencies and will take a calibrated position. Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das had last week said the apex bank has certain "major con-



cerns" over the impact cryptocurrencies may have on the financial stability in the economy and has conveyed the same to the government. The RBI had virtually banned cryptocurrency trading in 2018 and had directed all entities regulated by the central bank to cease dealing in virtual currencies. The Supreme Court had also asked the Centre in 2019 to frame policies for crypto, and in 2020, struck down the curbs imposed by the RBI.

Slapped by...

Continued from page 1

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



Naidu reminds people of his work as CM to seek votes



PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

On the second day of his campaign for party candidates contesting ULB elections in Vizag, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu launched a no-holds-barred attack on Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy raising the issues of welfare schemes, steel plant and liquor business. Naidu covered many areas through the road show that drew a good number of people in Vizag. "Besides our efforts to make Vizag the financial capital of AP, we had also launched welfare schemes like Anna Canteen and Kalyana Lakshmi, which were later withdrawn by the Jaganmohan Reddy government," the TDP supremo said. He asked the people to remember his 10-day stay in the city in the aftermath of the super cyclone Hudhud during which he sourced food and water from neighbouring states. The TDP chief said that the Jaganmohan Reddy government had begun imposing

taxes on even water and air and said that it "would not hesitate to even tax stray dogs". Poking fun at the YSRCP government's liquor policy, Naidu said it was a pity to witness people lining up in front of wine shops for brands which they most probably had never heard mentioned. "What is Boom Boom beer? It seems Jaganmohan Reddy is manufacturing liquor himself to make profits, ignoring the popular and safe brands," Naidu said. He said this was the time to give a fitting lesson to the YSRCP government by defeating all its candidates in the elections. He alleged that development, which was initiated during the TDP regime, came to a grinding halt and the Chief Minister was seeking blessings from fake godman to get rid of his sins. Later, MLC from Anakapalle Buddha Naga Jagadishwara Rao called on Naidu and asked him to campaign in Anakapalle where five TD candidates were contesting the GVMC poll.

Cash for vote by YSRCP, TDP, says Congress complaint

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada City Congress president Naraharishetti Narasimha Rao on Saturday lodged a complaint with the State Election Commission, accusing both the YSRCP and the TDP in the state of distributing money to voters by loading cash in empty curd boxes and distributing them to voters. Narasimha Rao said that the party's Legal Cell lodged a complaint with the SEC over the distribution of money to voters by the YSRCP and TDP in the city. He said that both the ruling and opposition parties were resorting to illegal activities during campaigning for the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections. Narasimha Rao complained that the two parties were distributing money and liquor to lure voters ahead of the elections. He said that the Congress has complained to the SEC that money was being distributed during the door-to-door campaigning by both the ruling and the TDP in empty curd boxes.

TDP has no right to seek votes of Vizagites: Amarnath

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Castigating the TDP leadership for vehemently opposing development activities in Vizag, YSRCP leaders said the Opposition party has lost the moral right to seek votes for the civic polls. On Saturday, Anakapalle MLA and YSRCP leader Gudivada Amarnath said, "The Opposition has sternly opposed Vizag being the executive capital and they have stalled distribution of house sites to two lakh people. The TDP leaders have placed hurdles in the way of building a guest house and tried to damage the brand image of Visakhapatnam on various counts. Despite all this, the father-son duo (N Chandrababu Naidu and Lokesh) have come to town seeking votes." He said that the TDP has no interest in developing Visakhapatnam or North Andhra region, and has in fact looted the place for personal and political gains. The MLA said that Chandrababu Naidu spoiled the brand image of Visakhapatnam on multiple accounts, and was even involved in land-grab cases. "He is now shedding crocodile tears to gain



political mileage ahead of Municipal polls. After facing a major defeat in his own constituency in Kuppam, Chandrababu Naidu and Nara Lokesh have come for the GVMC elections campaign with a faulty narrative and fake promises," Amarnath said. "How can Naidu and Lokesh ask for votes in Vizag when they are opposing it as the Executive Capital? There were many land grab cases during Naidu's rule. Looting of government lands and handing them over to his close associates was rampant," said Amarnath. He described Naidu and his son Lokesh as "betrayers of Vizag and North

Andhra region". He said that Naidu had not opposed the decision to privatise Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, when the proposal was floated by the Centre in 2014. "However, Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy had written to the Prime Minister suggesting three alternatives to continue it in the public sector. The State will also move a resolution in the Assembly seeking the Centre to review its decision on privatisation," Amarnath said. "TDP lacks the guts to raise its voice against the Centre, BJP or its ally Jana Sena," the MLA said.

YSRCP leaders hardsell Jagan's schemes

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Urging voters to think about the uplift and welfare of the poor and the middle-class and for corruption-free governance, Ministers Velampalli Srinivas Rao, and Kodali Sri Venkateswara Rao, along with Vijayawada Central MLA Malladi Vishnu and several other leaders participated in the campaign in 23rd division on Saturday. They had hit the streets in support of YSRCP candidate Atmakuri Subba Rao. The campaign started from Suryarao Peta Dasari Vari Street and ended at Attarattaya Street. A large number of party leaders, activists and fans participated. Addressing the crowd, Srinivas said the YSRCP has enough MPs to fight against the Centre and raise funds. "Under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, there is rapid development and welfare



schemes are reaching the beneficiaries. For the speedy development works in the city, the corporator should also be from the ruling party," said the Minister. Malladi Vishnu said that barely 15 months of its coming to power, the YSRCP government had sanctioned Rs 10 crore for the development of the division. The work was carried

out and all the works have reached the final stage. "One should think for 5 minutes before voting for 5 long years of development. With the coordination of the corporator and the local MLA, the development works will go on at a fast pace," said Malladi Vishnu. Telugu actor Ali conducted election campaign in Vidyadharapuram and other

areas of the city with minister Srinivas and other leaders. Ali claimed development of the marginalised sections and said that implementation of welfare schemes has helped people during YS Rajasekar Reddy government and it was now being replicated by the Jaganmohan Reddy government. He stated that Jagan has fulfilled a majority of his election promises and was doing justice to all sections of the society through welfare schemes and development activities. Ali claimed that recently, Jagan sanctioned crores of funds for the development of Vijayawada city which shows the dedication of YSRCP. AP Arya Vaisya Mahasabha honorary president CA Penugonda Subbarayudu, former mayor Ratnabindu, Kabaddi Srinu, division leaders Challa Sudhakar, Ogu Vicky Seshan Murali and others were present.

Paritala Sunitha: We will win, distribute TIDCO houses

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TIDCO houses will be constructed and distributed in just a couple of months after the TDP wins the elections for municipalities and corporations, stated former minister Paritala Sunitha on Saturday. Apart from that, the other promises made in the election manifesto like zero interest bank linked loans to the women Self Help Groups (SHGs), construction of community halls and Mepma Bazars for them, will be ensured, she stated. In a statement here, Sunitha assured that the salaries of sanitation workers will be increased to Rs 21,000 per month. She pointed out that the YSRCP Government has suspended the Commissioner of Nagari Municipality K Venkata Rami Reddy for demanding masks and PPEs for sanitation workers, during the height of



"Forget about construction of new houses for the poor, the YSRCP govt could not even hand over the already completed houses to them" the Covid-19 crisis. Sunitha said that the TDP will construct a permanent auto stand along with the provisions for drinking water and toilet facilities for the auto-rickshaw drivers across the urban areas. "Forget about construction of new houses for the poor, the YSRCP government could not even hand over the already completed houses to them," she said. Sunitha said that the

TDP government had constructed over two lakh houses in urban areas through TIDCO, but did not distribute them as the election notification was issued by that time. "Now, the YSRCP leaders are fixing an amount ranging from Rs 20,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh to sanction each of these houses," she alleged. Sunitha said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy promised to give Rs 3,000 monthly pension to women above the age of 45 years for SC, ST, BC and Minority communities which amounts to Rs 36,000 per year. "Instead of paying that, Jagan cheated them in the name of 'YSR Cheyutha' and is granting only Rs 18,750 which means every women beneficiary has suffered a loss of Rs 17,250 per year. This is the 'Jagan Reddy model of reverse tendering' which denies beneficiaries their full benefits," Sunitha alleged.

Notorious bike lifter nabbed with 31 motorcycles

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada police have arrested an interstate vehicle lifter and a vehicle receiver on Saturday and recovered 31 motorcycles worth Rs 20 lakh and a mini goods van from them. The arrested accused were identified as P Sai Sekhar from Vuyyuru Mandal in Krishna district and Ketavath Ravi Teja Naik from Karampudi Mandal of Guntur district. According to the police, as part of the vigil on habitual offenders who were released from jail in Vijayawada city and across the district, they nabbed the interstate vehicle along with the receiver on Friday. The police recovered 31 two-wheelers worth Rs 20 lakh and a mini goods van from them. The police informed that the accused was habituated to easy earning and was resorting to vehicle lifting for the last five years. He was sent to Rajahmundry jail and was released in July 2020. After Sai Sekhar was released from jail, he again started lifting vehicles and fled with 12 from Vijayawada Two-town, six from Krishna Lanka, one each from Gannavaram, Machavaram, Veeravalli and 11 from Telangana state. A total of 32 vehicles were lifted and were sold through K Raviteja Naik.

Rural engg college campuses turn into real estate ventures

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Engineering colleges set up on the outskirts of twin cities long ago with sprawling campuses measuring over 20 to 30 acres have been indulging in real estate business selling the vacant site as many of the colleges have been closed due to lack of demand for seats from students. The Hi-Point Engineering College at one point was abuzz with academic activity with over 5,000 students pursuing education. However, there have been no takers for the college seats over a period of time. The admissions dropped to nil five years ago. The college management has been selling plots developing the college campus into a real estate layout. Currently, the demand for house sites has increased many folds. Some colleges turned their campuses into realty ventures, while some others have rented out their buildings to run hostels. In Moinabad and Ghatkesar areas, the buildings of col-



leges with zero admissions have been pulled down and the campuses are converted into real estate ventures. In Ibrahimpatnam and Keesara areas, six engineering colleges have been closed down. The buildings are rented out to some other organisations to run hostels. During the past five years, at least 72 engineering college on the outskirts of twin cities faced closure. In Chevella mandal alone, 12 engineering colleges have been closed. Most of the colleges that were closed belong to the minority educational institutions category. Under the purview of the

JNTU, at least 16 engineering colleges have been closed down last year. On the city outskirts, especially in Moinabad, Chevella, A b d u l l a h p u r m e t, Ibrahimpatnam, Ghatkesar, Medchal, Keesara, Narsingi and Patancheru, engineering colleges have been set up 15 to 20 years ago in large numbers. Then there were many takers for seats in the engineering colleges. Over a period of time, the number of seats in almost all colleges had increased. Those who wish to take seats in the colleges which are not so reputed have come down gradually over a period of time.

Covid: TS records 170 new cases, one fatality

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The total number of Coronavirus cumulative cases in Telangana rose to 2,99,742 till date with 170 new Covid cases registered on Friday. The state reported one fresh fatality due to Covid in the last 24 hours taking the death toll to 1,640 so far translating a case fatality rate of 0.54 per cent as against the country-wide mortality of 1.4 per cent, according to a health bulletin here on Saturday. A total of 196 people have recovered from Coronavirus state-wide in a span of 24 hours pushing the cumulative number of recoveries thus far to 2,96,166 constituting a recovery rate of 98.80 per cent while the National recovery rate was 97 per cent. The state now has 1,936 active cases including 812 individuals in home or institutional isolation. About 40,712 swab samples have been tested to detect the contagious virus and out of which the reports of 568 swab samples are awaited.

Webinars held on World Glaucoma Week

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

World Glaucoma Week began with the theme 'The world is bright, save your sight' Centre for Sight launches state-of-the-patient friendly treatment for Glaucoma - 'Endoscopic laser cyclophotocoagulation surgery', at its centre in Hyderabad. Centre for Sight, Hyderabad, is organising various awareness initiatives for ophthalmologists, medical community and public to sensitise them on this permanently blinding eye disease on the occasion. On World Glaucoma Day, Centre for Sight hosted a webinar with international with the topic 'Indian dilemmas: Global Perspectives'. Centre for Sight has also launched a state-of-the-art patient-friendly treatment for Glaucoma, the endoscopic laser cyclophotocoagulation surgery, the only such facility in this part of the country at Banjara Hills.

Cyberabad police bust MLM network

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW), Cyberabad Commissionerate, have busted multi level marketing scheme (money circulation scheme) by the Indus viva Health Sciences Private Limited who cheated 10 lakh people to the tune of Rs 1,500 crore. Police arrested 24 persons in this connection including company CEO and COO and also frozen the bank accounts of Rs 20 crore. Based on a complaint, Cyberabad EOW arrested Abhilash Thomas, 40, CEO of Indus Viva Health Sciences Private Limited, Shobha City, Tannirendra main Road, Bengaluru, Prem Kumar, 39, Chief Operating Officer (COO) Indus viva, Oakyard Apartments, East End, D Main Road, IX Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore and 22 others for the offence, a police release here said on Saturday. The complainant approached Gachibowli Police against Indus

Viva Company on February 20, 2021 stating that he was cheated by the company inducing to promote the company products offering attractive income etc and introduced about four to five products like coffee, juice etc. The complainant attracted towards the schemes and invested Rs12,500 in Indus Viva company through his promoters Hari Prasad, Rajabanoth. After investment, the complainant didn't receive any commission on his investment as promised by promoters. Then the complainant contacted the promoters for his commission but he did not receive any response from them. Thereafter, he enquired and came to know that this business is multi-level marketing business and the income will be earned by joining the members in a chain system or binary method. The complainant requested action against the company and its directors.

Vijayawada police chief promises fair, free elections

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Vijayawada City Police Commissioner B Srinivasulu said that the department is deploying about 3,000 police personnel to ensure smooth conduct of the Urban Local Body election in Vijayawada. Addressing the media here on Saturday, Srinivasulu said that security arrangements are being made by deploying 62 mobile parties, 27 strike force units and 12 special

strike force units. Flag marches are being carried out in problematic areas time and again, the city Police Commissioner said. Special arrangements have been made by the local police along with the SEB to prevent the distribution of liquor and cash, he said. Srinivasulu said that 1,870

rowdy sheeters have been bound under Section 110 and 109. He said that the Department has been receiving complaints that some candidates are distributing cash to lure voters using technology like money transfer through mobile phones and these complaints are being looked into.

"It's come to our notice that cash is being disbursed through apps like PhonePe, Google Pay, PayTm and other similar apps and special cyber-surveillance has been initiated," Srinivasulu said. The Police Commissioner emphasised that there was no question of the police favouring any political party in the upcoming ULB polls and said that the Department is taking steps to ensure that the elections are fair and

transparent. "We will take immediate action if a party complains that they are subject to threats and injustice by their rivals," he said. Srinivasulu informed that anyone can dial 100 if any voter or any candidate is put to trouble and assured that the police will swing into action immediately. "People should exercise their franchise in the upcoming municipal elections without fear," said the Police Commissioner.

BALLOT IN BOOKLET FORM IN GRADUATE MLC POLLS

Problem of plenty worries party leaders

K VENKATESHWARLU
■ HYDERABAD

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

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



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

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

instead of the names of the candidates.

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

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

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



Mend your ways, Bandi Sanjay warns Ministers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

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

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

TRS intensifies campaign for Graduate MLC polls

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

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

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



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

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

Khammam-Warangal constituency.

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

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

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

KCR weakened universities: Kishan Reddy

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

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

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

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



160 acres of land.

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

■ TRS leaders have no right to flay PM

■ Telangana betrayers at Pragathi Bhavan whereas protagonists are on roads, alleged Union Minister of State for Home Affairs

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

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

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

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

Chalk out action plan to buy grains from farmers: Collector

PNS ■ KARIMNAGAR

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

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

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

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

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



Collector K Shashanka addressing a review meeting in Karimnagar on Saturday

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

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

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

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

Bhatti, Jeevan to campaign on bicycle for MLC polls

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

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

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

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

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

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

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



NTPC CGM underlines importance of effective of communication

PNS ■ PEDDAPALLI

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Provide medical services at corporate level in govt hospitals: Collector

PNS ■ JAYASHANKAR BHUPALAPALLY

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

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

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



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

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

The hospital is currently pro-

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

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

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

Six BJP activists injured in bomb attack in Bengal

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Six BJP activists were injured, two of them critically, in an alleged bomb attack by the rival TMC workers in West Bengals South 24 Parganas district, police said on Saturday. Family members of those injured alleged that a few members of the local Trinamool Congress hurled bombs at them while they were returning home in Gosaba area of the district from a marriage ceremony late Friday night. Police, however, claimed that the accident happened inside the house of a BJP activist where the crude bombs



which were being manufactured went off accidentally. "We have listened to the claims of the family members of

those injured but it seems that they were manufacturing bombs when it exploded. "We are investigating the

matter and talking to the locals," the officer said when contacted over the phone. Unconfirmed reports said that on Friday night, Gosaba witnessed clashes between TMC-BJP activists when bombs were hurled at each other, leaving six injured. Nobody has been arrested in connection with the blast, the police officer added. The injured are undergoing treatment at Canning Sub-Divisional Hospital, he said. A huge number of policemen have been deployed there as sleuths of the bomb squad and forensic department reached the spot, the officer said.

TMC, Left begin campaigning for West Bengal elections

PNS/Kolkata : Trinamool Congress and Left candidates kick-started their campaigns for the West Bengal elections on Saturday. While the TMC announced the list of candidates for 291 seats on Friday, the Left named nominees for 39 seats that are going to polls in the first phase. TMC's Ashokenagar candidate Dhiman Roy began door-to-door campaigning in the morning. The party's Jadavpur candidate Debabrata Majumdar also visited the voters in the area. CPI(M)'s Jhargram nominee Madhuja Sen Roy also campaigned in her constituency. In Behala, TMC supporters were seen busy painting

wallgraffitis in the support of the party's two candidates from the area -- Partha Chatterjee (Behala West) and Ratha Chatterjee (Behala East). Ratna, who has been fielded by the TMC from the constituency of her estranged husband and BJP leader Sovan Chatterjee, began her campaigning by offering puja at her Parnasree home. "I will give my best efforts to win this seat. We all are working to make Mamata Banerjee our chief minister for the third time," she said. Exuding confidence, TMC's Labhpur candidate Abhijit Singha said it appeared that there was no opponent against him.



DOLLAR SMUGGLING CASE

LDF takes out rally to Customs offices in Kerala

PNS ■ KOCHI

Declaring a war against the BJP-led central government over the Customs investigation against its top leaders in connection with dollar smuggling in poll-bound Kerala, the ruling LDF on Saturday organised protest marches towards the offices of the central agency in the state. Taking a serious note of the CPI(M)-led alliance's move to target it politically, the Customs alleged that a political party was trying to intimidate the investigation agency but made it clear that it will not work. "A political

party trying intimidation, will not work," Customs (Preventive) Commissioner Sumit Kumar wrote on his Facebook page. He also shared the notices of the LDF announcing march towards Customs offices in the state. A political battle erupted in the state a day after the Customs, probing the gold smuggling case, claimed primeV accused Swapna Suresh has made 'shocking revelations' against Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, assembly Speaker P Sreeramakrishnan and some ministers on dollar 'smuggling' involving UAE consulate officials.

TMC's Shibpur MLA quits party for denying ticket

Howrah : Upset over not being nominated this time, TMC's Shibpur MLA Jatun Lahiri announced on Saturday that he has resigned from the party. Talking to reporters, Lahiri said that despite being a "loyal soldier" of the TMC he was

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

the TMC anymore. I am leaving the organisation," he said. TMC has nominated former cricketer Manoj Tiwary from the Shibpur seat in Howrah. Lahiri, a veteran politician, also hinted that he may join the BJP. However, BJP

sources said that there was no information about Lahiri joining the party. Lahiri is one of the several TMC MLAs and leaders who have voiced their anguish over being dropped from the party's candidate list for the upcoming assembly

elections. Among them are Satgachia MLA Sonali Guha, Basirhat Dakshin MLA Dipendu Biswas, Singur MLA Rabindranath Bhattacharjee, former Bhangar MLA Arabul Islam and Barrackpore civic body chief Uttam Das.

Uncover truth behind Mansukh's death: Sena

PNS ■ MUMBAI

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



should unearth the truth at the earliest. It is important for the prestige and image of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) government," he said. On Friday, state Home Minister Anil Deshmukh had announced that the probe into the case has been handed over from Mumbai Crime Branch to the state Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS). Talking about it, Raut said that the opposition BJP's demand is to hand over the case to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). "But it (giving the investigation to NIA) does not mean the case would be solved immediately.



Train staff for quick disposal of cases: Prez

PNS ■ JABALPUR

President Ram Nath Kovind on Saturday appealed to judicial academies in states to provide training to quasi-judicial staff along with judges in district courts for the speedy disposal of cases. "The academies should set up a permanent platform for the exchange of legal knowledge and information to discuss on simplifying court legal procedures for the speedy disposal of cases," he said.

15 lakh vaccinated on March 5, highest in a day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 15 lakh people were inoculated against coronavirus on March 5, the highest in a day so far, taking the total number of vaccine doses administered in the country to over 1.94 crore, official sources said on Saturday. The countrywide COVID-19 vaccination drive was rolled out on January 16 with health-care workers (HCWs) getting inoculated. The vaccination of frontline workers (FLWs) had started from February 2. Administering of second dose of COVID-19 vaccine started on February 13 for those beneficiaries who had completed 28 days after receipt of the first dose. The next phase of COVID-19 vaccination drive commenced from March 1 for those above 60 years of age and for people aged 45 years and above with specified comorbid conditions. As on Day 49 (March 5) of the vac-



cination drive, a total of 14,92,201 COVID-19 vaccine doses were given. Out of which, 11,99,848 beneficiaries were vaccinated across 18,333 sessions for the first dose (HCWs and FLWs), and 2,92,353 HCWs and FLWs received the second dose of COVID-19 vaccine, health ministry said. These beneficiaries (11,99,848) include 1,10,857 individuals, aged between 45-60 years, having specified comorbidities, and 7,61,355 people aged above 60 years.

Approached court to prevent smear campaign: K'taka Ministers

PNS ■ BENGALURU

sions judge seeking injunction, and the order is likely today. The Ministers are Labour Minister Shivaram Hebbar, Agriculture Minister B C Patil, Cooperation Minister S T Somashekar, Health and Family Welfare, and Medical Education minister K Sudhakar, Youth Empowerment and Sports Minister K C Narayana Gowda and Urban Development Minister Bhadrathi Basavaraj. Health Minister Sudhakar alleged that there seems to be a big political conspiracy to defame them by misusing the media, and that they have approached court to prevent this hit-and-run smear campaign.



Pointing to the conspiracy to tarnish the image of individuals and destroy the goodwill gained from years of good work, he told reporters here that it was necessary to put an end to it and the government is also mulling bringing a law to check this kind of mischief. Both mainstream media and social media platforms are being misused to broadcast misinformation and fake news. He further said if there is truth in the allegations, none

can be protected, culprits must be punished, but smear campaign to tarnish image and goodwill is not acceptable. Cooperation Minister S T Somashekar said we have come to know from our old friends in the assembly about the conspiracy to target us with an intent to defame and make us resign. "There is a conspiracy to target during the assembly session with an intent to defame us, so as a precautionary measure we have approached the court, six of us have gone, today another six may go, totally 15-16 of us who have come to (BJP) as there is apprehension about attempt to defame us, so we have sought court protection," he told the media.

Govt sends health teams to Maha, Punjab

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's COVID-19 tally rose to 1,11,92,088 with over 18,000 fresh cases being reported in a span of 24 hours in the country after 36 days, while active cases registered an increase for the fourth consecutive day on Saturday and were recorded at 1,80,304, according to the Union Health Ministry. The death toll reached 1,57,656 with 108 more fatalities, while a total of 18,327 new cases were registered in a day, the ministry's data showed. On January 29, 18,855 new infections were recorded in a span of 24 hours after which the daily rise in fresh cases remained below 18,000. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 1,08,54,128 which translates to a national Covid recovery rate of 96.98 per



cent, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.41 per cent. The Covid active caseload has increased to 1,80,304 which now comprises 1.61 per cent of the total infections. Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have reported a high number of Covid daily new cases, cumulatively accounting for 82 per cent of the new cases reported in a span of 24 hours, the ministry said. According to the ICMR, 22,06,92,677 samples have been tested up to March 5 with 7,51,935 samples being tested on Friday.

NIA charge sheets 3 Bodo militants

PNS ■ GUWAHATI

The NIA has filed a chargesheet before a special court here against three Bodo militants for their alleged involvement in carrying out an ambush in which two people, including an additional superintendent of police, were killed in 2014, an official said on Saturday. Bishnu Narzary, Nitul Daimary and Runiluish Daimary have been charged under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Arms Act, he added.

The chargesheet was filed before the Special NIA Court in Guwahati on Friday. The case relates to an ambush that resulted in the death of Gulzar Hussain, the then Additional Superintendent of Police, Sonitpur, and a civilian, Anil Kumar Basumatary, and injuries to several police personnel in Assam's Sonitpur district. The National Investigation Agency (NIA), which took over the probe in the case in August 2019, said members of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB-S) had laid the ambush.

Kashyap resumes shooting of 'Dobara'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

"With all our love to all the haters", filmmaker Anurag Kashyap said on Saturday in a message on Instagram to announce that shooting of his film "Dobaaraa" with Taapsee Pannu had resumed. This was Kashyap's first comment since March 3 when the Income Tax Department searched his properties as well as those of Pannu and his partners who launched the now shuttered production house Phantom Films. The director took to the social media platform to share an on-set picture with Pannu and said they have restarted filming on their second project together. Both Pannu and Kashyap are



known for their outspoken views on a range of issues. "And we restart #DoBaaraa... with all our love to all the haters," he captioned the photograph, refraining from directly mentioning the I-T raids. Earlier in the day, Pannu posted a three-point statement on Twitter on an "alleged bungalow" in Paris, the "alleged receipt"

of Rs 5 crore and her "memory of 2013 raid". The searches targeting Pannu and Kashyap are part of a tax evasion probe against Phantom Films. Pannu also took a dig at Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement that the actor was raided in 2013 as well. Besides the actor-director duo,

the IT department conducted searches at Reliance Entertainment group CEO Shishir Sarkar and some executives of celebrity and talent management companies Kwan and Exceed, premises. The others searched included some employees of Phantom Films, which was dissolved in 2018, and its then promoters Kashyap, director-producer Vikramaditya Motwane, producer Vikas Bahl and producer-distributor Madhu Mantena. The Income Tax Department has detected financial irregularities of over Rs 650 crore after it raided two film production companies, two talent management companies and a leading actress, the Central Board of Direct Taxes has claimed.

INDIA CORNER

Former TMC MP Dinesh Trivedi joins BJP

Former Trinamool Congress MP Dinesh Trivedi joined the BJP on Saturday, weeks after he announced quitting his Rajya Sabha membership on the floor of the House deploring "violence" in poll-bound West Bengal. He joined the BJP in the presence of its president J P Nadda, and Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and Dharmendra Pradhan besides other leaders. Lauding Trivedi as a principled politician, Nadda said he was earlier a right person in the wrong party and was now in the right party. Trivedi said he had been waiting for this "golden moment" and added that family is supreme in some parties but it is people who are supreme in the BJP. He also praised the Modi government for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the issues involving neighbouring countries. A number of TMC leaders have quit the party in recent months to join the BJP as the saffron party mounts an aggressive all-out campaign to end Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's 10-year-old reign in the state. Trivedi (70) was once a close confidante of TMC president Banerjee and was her choice for holding the important railway ministry portfolio in the Union Cabinet during the UPA government.



Cattle-smuggling: CBI issues lookout notice

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



SC to commence hybrid physical hearing of cases from March 15

The Supreme Court, which is hearing cases through video-conferencing since March last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will commence hybrid physical hearing from March 15. The apex court has issued the standard operating procedure (SOP) for the hybrid physical hearings. The top court has been hearing cases through video-conferencing since March last year due to the pandemic and several bar bodies and lawyers have been demanding that physical hearings should resume immediately. "On an experimental basis, and as a pilot scheme, the final hearings/regular matters listed on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays may be heard in the hybrid mode, as may be decided by the bench, considering the number of parties in a matter as well as the limited capacity of the courtrooms; all other matters, including those listed on Mondays and Fridays, shall continue to be heard through video/tele-conferencing mode," said the SOP issued by the apex court. "The hybrid physical hearings are to commence with effect from March 15, 2021," it added. It said unless otherwise directed by a bench, the final hearings or regular matters where the number of lawyers for the parties is higher than the average working capacity of the courtrooms according to COVID-19 norms, that is 20 per courtroom at any given time, shall invariably be listed for hearing through the video or tele-conferencing mode.



Covid: Speedy variant virus sweeps Europe
PNS ■ MILAN

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

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

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

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

15TH FINANCE COMMISSION

Opted for continuity in tax devolution: NK Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

tion) is estimated to be Rs 103 lakh crore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mutations may help it evade T-killer cells

PNS ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Will facilitate recovery of MSMEs, vows Odisha CM

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

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

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

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



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

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

In a bid to provide market access to entrepreneurs, the

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

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

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

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

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

100% duty on apple imports sought

PNS ■ SRINAGAR

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

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

MONEY MATTERS

TVS Motor Company to provide free Covid vaccination to all



Two-wheeler and three-wheeler RPT three-wheeler manufacturer TVS Motor Company on Saturday announced that it had extended free COVID-19 vaccination for all employees and their immediate family members. This vaccination drive is in line with the ongoing Government guidelines and will cover 35,000 direct and indirect company employees across the country, the company said in a statement.

Executive Vice President Human Resources, TVS Motor Company, R AnandaKrishnan said the company has strived to provide complete support to its employees and their extended family members through the pandemic, ranging from apps for emergency requirements, doctor-on-call, COVID-19 awareness communication and mental wellness programmes.

“With this vaccination drive, we continue our endeavour to prioritise the health and safety of all our employees and their families,” he said.

In the initial phase, the vaccine will be made available to all employees and their families above the age of 60 and 45 years or older suffering from certain medical conditions, it was stated.

Maha: Steel industry wants resumption of power subsidies



The Maharashtra steel industry has urged the state government to resume power subsidies for enterprises and provide a higher budgetary allocation of Rs 1,800 crore for this to support industries in backward regions such as Marathwada and Vidarbha.

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

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

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



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

As the first vice president, Hassan will be the New York Fed’s second ranking officer as well as an alternate voting member of the Federal Open Market Committee. Hassan, whose parents had immigrated from India, is a 25-year veteran of the financial services industry with expertise in strategy, digital transformation, cybersecurity and regulatory/risk management. She was, most recently, the Chief Digital Officer for Morgan Stanley Wealth Management (MSWM). President and Chief Executive Officer of the New York Fed John Williams said Hassan’s leadership background, deep commitment to fostering diverse teams, and extensive technology and financial experience will be critical to her role as a Bank leader.

Denise Scott, executive vice president of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and chair of the New York Fed’s board of directors, said Hassan’s leadership experience and operational expertise are “fully aligned” with what the search committee and he envisioned for this role. Scott said Hassan will be taking on the role that is critical to advancing the Bank’s mission and strategic priorities. The statement added that Hassan has served in various capacities in the financial services industry, focusing primarily on digital and business process transformation.

NMDC leaves iron ore rates unchanged

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Muthoot chief MG George dies at 71

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Royalty TV: UK monarchy and television have complex ties

PNS ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

“The royals, particularly the younger royals, have moved from the realm of state appar-



atus to the realm of celebrity culture in recent decades,” Harrison said.

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

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

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

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

PNS ■ BRUSSELS

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

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

The suspension will last for

an initial period of four months.

Von der Leyen called it a very positive signal for our economic cooperation in the years to come.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

The move came only a few

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

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



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

THE POWER OF ATTENTION

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



HIDDEN SOULS
PRAMOD PATHAK



Best to mind your mind

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

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

FROM PAGE 1

MAPPING THE SACRED DWELLINGS OF SHAKTI

SHAKTI AND HER BHAIRAVA

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

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

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

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



Kamakhyia Temple

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

Bheeshana Bhairava and Samhaara Bhairava.

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

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

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

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

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

Thank God, we have you

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

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

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

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

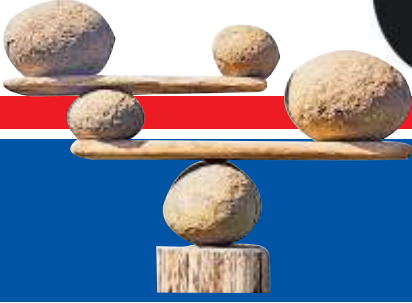


ful in choosing with whom I associate. I try to maintain close relationships with only the really good ones. For others, my rule is to be strictly formal with them, i.e. what is the minimum required. Going further, I worship "*Shanideva*", as advised by my astrologer, and I do so quite seriously. Gaining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

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

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

Bishnoi is a spiritual writer and can be reached at spiritual@ajitbishnoi.com





the pioneer
agenda



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

FROM THE INSIDE

The power of attention

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



harvest of hope

There are some who believe in going with the flow and there are others who take the road less travelled.

MAPPING THE SACRED DWELLINGS OF SHAKTI

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

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

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

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

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

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE DEVI

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

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

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

RITUALS OF PRAYER AND DARSHAN

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Panchbhoota	Jnanendriya	Sense	Puja
Akash	Space	Ear	Hear
Vayu	Air	Skin	Touch
Agni	Fire	Eye	Vision
Jal	Water	Tongue	Taste
Bhoomi	Earth	Nose	Smell

PRASADA

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

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

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

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

HARVEST OF HOPE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Lending a hand



Raja Bhaiya with women at Nibi village

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fighting water woes



Kusuma at the well

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

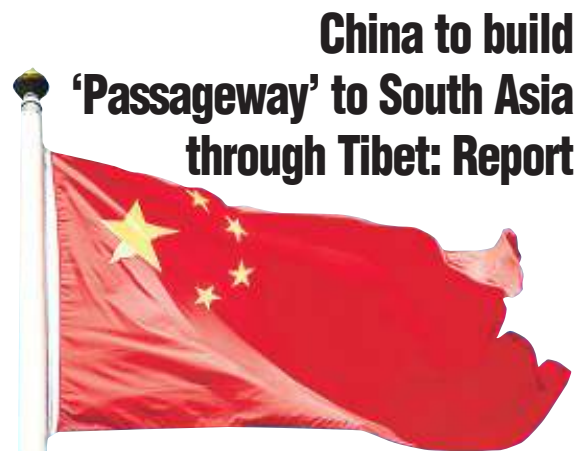
This time her caste came to her rescue. Being a *dalit* her house was at the corner of the village. There was a well at one corner of the field which was lying defunct for many years. The well was built by upper caste people of the village but they stopped using it after they installed pumps in their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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



Great apes at San Diego zoo receive first Covid vaccines

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

Software icon John McAfee charged in cryptocurrency scam

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



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

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



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

The Mail On Sunday, part of a UK newspaper group that lost a high-profile privacy case brought by Meghan Markle, must print a front-page statement acknowledging her legal victory, a judge ruled on Friday. High Court judge Mark Warby also ordered Associated Newspapers, which owns the Mail On Sunday and MailOnline website, to publish a notice on page three of the paper stating that it had “infringed her copyright”. Warby in February upheld Meghan’s claim that Associated Newspapers had breached her privacy and copyright by publishing parts of a 2018 letter she sent to her father Thomas Markle.

The letter to her estranged father was written a few months after she married Queen Elizabeth II’s grandson, Prince Harry, and asked him to stop talking to tabloids and making false claims about her in interviews. Warby has already ordered Associated Newspapers to make an “interim payment” of GBP 450,000 (\$627,000) to cover legal costs for the Duchess of Sussex, as Meghan is formally known. On Friday he also formally refused its appeal bid, saying the newspaper group had “no real prospect” of success. In his written ruling, the judge said the front- and third-page statements about Meghan’s successful copyright claim would have “genuine utility”.

20,000 US organisations compromised through Microsoft flaw: Source

More than 20,000 U.S. organizations have been compromised through a back door installed via recently patched flaws in Microsoft Corp’s email software, a person familiar with the U.S. government’s response said on Friday. The hacking has already reached more places than all of the tainted code downloaded from SolarWinds Corp, the company at the heart of another massive hacking spree uncovered in December. The latest hack has left channels for remote access spread among credit unions, town governments and small businesses, according to records from the U.S. investigation. Tens of thousands of organizations in Asia and Europe are also affected, the records show. The hacks are continuing despite emergency patches issued by Microsoft on Tuesday. Microsoft, which had initially said the hacks consisted of “limited and targeted attacks,” declined to comment on the scale of the problem on Friday but said it was working with government agencies and security companies to provide help to customers. It added,

“impacted customers should contact our support teams for additional help and resources.” One scan of connected devices showed only 10% of those vulnerable had installed the patches by Friday, though the number was rising. Because installing the patch does not get rid of the back doors, U.S. officials are racing to figure out how to notify all the victims and guide them in their hunt. All of those affected appear to run Web versions of email client Outlook and host them on their own machines, instead of relying on cloud providers. That may have spared many of the biggest companies and federal government agencies, the records suggest. The federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency did

not respond to a request for comment. Earlier on Friday, White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters that the vulnerabilities found in Microsoft’s widely used Exchange servers were “significant,” and “could have far-reaching impacts.” “We’re concerned that there are a large number of victims,” Psaki said. Microsoft and the person working with the U.S. response blamed the initial wave of attacks on a Chinese government-backed actor. A Chinese government

spokesman said the country was not behind the intrusions. What started as a controlled attack late last year against a few classic espionage targets grew last month to a widespread campaign.



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

Just setting up my twttr” - the first ever tweet on the platform is up for sale after Twitter boss Jack Dorsey listed his famous post as a unique digital signature on a website for selling tweets as non-fungible tokens (NFTs). The post, sent from Dorsey’s account in March of 2006, received offers on Friday that went as high as \$88,888.88 within minutes of the Twitter co-founder tweeting a link to the listing on ‘Valuables by Cent’ - a tweets marketplace. Old offers for the tweet suggest that it was put for sale in December, but the listing gained more attention after Dorsey’s tweet on Friday. NFTs are digital files that serve as digital signatures to certify who owns photos, videos and other online media. Dorsey’s 15-year old tweet is one of the most famous tweets ever on the platform and could attract bidders to pay a high price for the digital memorabilia. The highest bid for the tweet stood at \$100,000 at 0125 GMT on Saturday.

Launched three months ago, Valuables compares the buying of tweets with buying an autographed baseball card. “There is only one unique signed version of the tweet, and if the creator agrees to sell, you can own it forever.” A tweet’s buyer will get an autographed digital certificate, signed using cryptography, that will include metadata of the original tweet, according to the Valuables website. The tweet will continue to be available on the Twitter website.

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

The Mars rover Perseverance has successfully conducted its first test drive on the Red Planet, the US space agency NASA said Friday. The six-wheeled rover travelled about 6.5 meters (21.3 feet) in 33 minutes on Thursday, NASA said. It drove four meters forward, turned in place 150 degrees to the left, and then backed up 2.5 meters, leaving tire tracks in the Martian dust. “This was our first chance to ‘kick the tires’ and take Perseverance out for a spin,” said Anais Zarifian, Perseverance mobility test bed engineer at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. Zarifian said the test drive went “incredibly well” and represented a “huge milestone for the mission and the mobility team.” “We’re going to do some longer drives,” she added. “This is just the beginning.” NASA engineers said

they were studying possible routes for longer rover voyages on the surface of Mars. A slightly longer trip was planned for Friday, and perhaps another Saturday if all goes well, NASA said. The rover can cover 200 meters per Martian day, which is slightly longer than a day on Earth. And it goes five times faster than Curiosity, its predecessor, which is still functioning eight years after landing on Mars. Perseverance deputy mission manager Robert Hogg said engineers were also preparing for the first flight of a helicopter drone carried by the rover. Hogg said the rover team was working out flight zones and hoped to conduct the first flight in late spring or early summer.



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

California health officials set new rules on Friday that would allow Disneyland and other theme parks, stadiums and outdoor entertainment venues to reopen as early as April 1, after a closure of nearly a year due to the coronavirus pandemic. But the return of Mickey Mouse to the “Happiest Place on Earth” and live spectators to the California ball parks of America’s favorite pastime still come with major caveats. Theme and amusement parks would be permitted to restart on April

1 with severely limited capacity, but only if the counties where they operate are removed from the “purple” tier of California’s color-coded COVID-19 restrictions, the system’s most stringent classification. Masks and other safety measures would still be required, and the parks initially would be open only to state residents. Attendance would range from 15% to 35% of normal capacity. Outdoor stadiums, ball parks and performance arenas would also be allowed to welcome back live audiences starting April 1, though at a fraction of maximum seating and subject to the

same tiered system of constraints. Opening day turnouts for Major League Baseball games would be muted affairs in Southern California, with no more than 100 spectators allowed in venues located in purple-zoned counties. That would include the stadiums of the Los Angeles Dodgers, the San Diego Padres and the Anaheim Angels. San Francisco and Oakland, home of the Giants and the Athletics, respectively, are currently designated red, which would limit seating to 20% capacity.

