

ANALYSIS 7
FALLOUT OF THE US TROOP
DRAWDOWN WILL BE BIG**MONEY 8**
SENSEX SKIDS FOR THIRD DAY;
RELIANCE, HDFC TWINS TOP DRAGS**SPORTS 11**
IPL
CALLED OFF

VIJAYAWADA, WEDNESDAY MAY 5, 2021; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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ALLU ARJUN TO
WORK NEXT
WITH MAHARSHI
DIRECTOR?
Page 12

'LET DOWN BY MANAGEMENT': AIR INDIA PILOTS DEMAND VACCINE, THREATEN STRIKE

The pilots of Air India have threatened strike if pan-India vaccination camps are not held for them. In a letter to the management they have questioned why they were excluded from the vaccination camps for 18-45-year age group held by the management. The vaccine camps at a few bases, they said, were held for employees doing desk jobs and the majority opting to work from home. The pilots said they have gone "above and beyond during the pandemic, risking life and limb to ensure our citizens' well-being".



100 MILLION-YEAR-OLD BONES OF SAUROPOD DINOSAURS DISCOVERED IN MEGHALAYA

Researchers have identified fossil bone fragments of sauropod dinosaurs dating back to about 100 million years from an area around West Khasi Hills District in Meghalaya. The yet-to-be-published findings were made during a recent field trip by researchers from the Geological Survey of India's Palaeontology division in North-East. The GSI researchers noted that this is the first record of sauropods of probable Titanosaurian origin discovered in the region.



STAGGERED OFFICE HOURS, 50 % ATTENDANCE TILL MAY-END: CENTRE TO ALL DEPARTMENTS

All central government departments will continue with staggered office hours and 50 percent attendance of Under Secretary and below level employees till this month-end as the COVID situation has not improved to a desirable level, according to a Personnel Ministry order. It said the guidelines announced last month will remain effective during this period. "Since the situation has not yet improved to a desirable level, it has been decided that the validity of the OM (official memorandum issued in April) may be extended up to May 31."



AUSTRALIA RETREATS FROM JAIL THREAT OVER INDIA TRAVEL BAN AMID BACKLASH

Australia's PM fended off accusations of racism and having blood on his hands Tuesday, as he retreated from a threat to jail Australians trying to escape Covid-wracked India. Scott Morrison's government moved to ban travellers from India from entering Australia until May 15, threatening rule-breakers -- including Australian citizens -- with prison time. Amid a backlash, Morrison on Tuesday said it was "highly unlikely" that Australians who skirted a ban would be jailed.

**Will ejection of Eatebra bring BC matters to a head for KCR?**

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**Post-poll violence in Bengal reminiscent of Partition: BJP**

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**Soulful, meaningful tunes to vibe to**

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AP plans Rs 1,000 cr Vizag Beach Corridor

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Council of Ministers on Tuesday approved a slew of new development projects, including the Rs 1,000 crore Vizag Beach Corridor, to make Visakhapatnam the premier tourist destination.

The Vizag Beach Corridor project, connecting the heritage town Bheemili with the upcoming Bhogapuram International Airport at a total cost of Rs 1,021 crore, aims to create vibrant and thriving new avenues of development, according to Special Chief Secretary (Tourism and Culture) Rajat Bhargava.

"The project will be a 'hospitality district' with world-class accommodation facilities (beach resorts and hotels) for visitors, amusement parks, eco-tourism, swimming pools, water sports avenues, food courts, shopping malls, fisheries, etc., along the corridor," Bhargava said.



Cabinet nod for electronics policy

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Cabinet on Tuesday approved the Andhra Pradesh Electronics Policy 2021-24, which facilitates the creation of world-class electronics manufacturing infrastructure, improves the Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) considerably through various process reforms, and offers a host of incentives aimed at reducing the cost of doing

business in the state.

IT Secretary G Jayalakshmi said the policy was envisioned at transforming the State into a global hub for electronics manufacturing, by focusing on the entire manufacturing value chain -- assembly operations, electronics components manufacturing, Research and Development (R&D), semiconductor and display fabrication.

Adani's offer to buy port accepted

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

In a significant development, the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet on Tuesday approved the proposal moved by the Adani Ports and Special Economic Zones Ltd to acquire the State government's stake in Gangavaram port. The Cabinet also approved merger of Gangavaram Port Ltd into APSEZ.

GPL has paid up equity share capital of 51.7 crore shares of which 58.1 percent was owned by DVS Raju and family (Promoter), 10.4 crore by the Government of AP and 31.5 crore by Windy Lakeside Investment Limited, an affiliate of New York-based private equity firm Warburg Pincus. APSEZ Ltd, a key subsidiary of the diversified Adani Group, from March onwards acquired

the stakes of DVS Raju and family and Warburg Pincus and put forth a proposal before the state government to acquire the remaining 10 pc of its stake.

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



Govt picks Essar for Kadapa steel plant

SNV SUDHIR ■ VIJAYAWADA

With the UK-based Liberty Group beset by financial woes, the State government has now decided to pick home grown steel major, Essar Steels Ltd as its Joint Venture (JV) partner to develop Greenfield integrated steel plant in Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy's home district, Kadapa.

After one of the major lenders of the UK company went bankrupt, the AP government declared Liberty Steels as not business-ready and started working on Plan-B.

The State Cabinet had in February given the nod to pick Liberty Steels as the JV partner on the recommendation of SBI Caps, hired as the transaction advisors to develop Kadapa steel plant. After the Liberty Group's financial woes surfaced the state government immediately asked SBI Caps to reevaluate its recommendation

and also asked it to suggest the way forward. After evaluating the current situation, SBI Caps recently recommended the government to pick Essar Steels Ltd as JV partner.

The latest recommendation of SBI Caps was discussed in the Cabinet meeting held on Tuesday. After a thorough discussion, the State Cabinet had approved SBI Caps' latest recommendation to pick Essar Steels Ltd, now renamed ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India as the JV partner.

"In the altered scenario of Liberty Group's financial inability, the government has asked SBI Caps to reevaluate its earlier recommendation. SBI Caps submitted its report with revised recommendation suggesting Essar Steels as the JV partner to develop the Kadapa steel plant. The Cabinet has accepted the revised recommendation by SBI Caps," said I&PR Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani).

Scribe, lawyer appointed Information Commissioners

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Tuesday selected a journalist and a lawyer for appointment as State Information Commissioners in the AP Information Commission under the RTI Act, 2005.

The selection committee, headed by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, chose U Hari Prasad, a senior journalist, and Kakarla Chenna Reddy, a lawyer, for the SIC posts, according to an official release.

5 L doses of Covishield reach AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

About five lakh doses of Covid-19 vaccine reached Vijayawada airport at Gannavaram on Tuesday from the Serum Institute of India, Pune.

From the aircraft, the vaccine doses were transported to the storage centre at Gannavaram. The vaccine will be dispatched from the storage centre to various districts as per the directions of the medical and health department officials.

The arrival of the about five lakh doses has brought relief to the people since the Covid vaccine stocks had been totally exhausted, forcing



the inoculation process to come to a grinding grinding halt on Sunday and Monday.

Earlier, the Central government

had announced about 13 lakh doses would be given to Andhra Pradesh for the month of May. As part of this allocation, the Centre has announced 9,17,850 doses for the first 15 days of May.

The Central government has allocated 2.12 crore vaccine doses for all the States and Union Territories in the country for the first 15 days of May that includes 1.62 crore doses of Covishield made by the Serum Institute of India and the remaining 50 lakh doses of Covaxin from Bharat Biotech.

High Court tells Govt to reveal Covid battle plans

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The AP High Court on Tuesday directed the Andhra Pradesh government to initiate measures to contain the spread of Covid pandemic in the state.

Chief Justice Arup Kumar Goswami and Justice C Praveen Kumar, hearing petitions social activist Thota Suresh Babu and activists of civil liberties on Covid treatment in the state, asked the State government on the plans it has drawn to tackle the situation if the number of Covid cases increases in the days to come.

More than an hour-and-a-half of the court's time was spent on key issues such as oxygen, beds, medications, Covid test results, and vaccination.

The High Court appointed senior advocate YV Ravi Prasad as Amicus Curiae in the case.

The Government was instructed to cremate the Covid victims while ensuring dignity of the deceased is maintained.

Directing the Government to submit complete details on the treatment and facilities for Covid patients on Thursday, the court was adjourned.



Zoo parks, tourism centres across AP shut

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Principal Chief Conservator, Forest and Wildlife Department N Pradeep Kumar said that all zoo parks, parks, eco-tourism centres and temple eco parks in the state will remain closed in the wake of surge in Covid positive cases. He said the decision was taken by the state government as per the instruction of the Union Ministry of Forests.

The Chief Conservator directed the closure of Nehru Zoological Park in Visakhapatnam, Sri Venkateswara Zoological Park in Tirupati, 29 eco-tourism centres in the state, 23 city parks and seven temple eco-parks in the state.

Pradeep Kumar directed the conservators and DFOs in the respective places to take special measures regarding animals in the zoos. He said that the health of the animals in the zoos would be monitored by the concerned authorities from time to time. Pradeep Kumar said the orders will remain in force till further instructions from the Central and state governments.

State Forest Minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy also said that clear directions have already been issued to them in this regard.



Cabinet ratifies decision on partial curfew in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Cabinet headed by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Tuesday gave its nod for the imposition of partial curfew across Andhra Pradesh from Wednesday, where even the APSRTC will suspend its services after 12 noon.

Briefing the media of the key decisions taken during the Cabinet meeting, I&PR Minister Perni Venkataramaiah said that the state Cabinet discussed the pandemic situation in the state, supply of oxygen, medicines and the vaccination drive.

With the spike in the number of Covid cases, the Cabinet approved imposition of a partial curfew limiting working hours from 6 am to 12 noon.

Nani said that the Chief Minister has decided to write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the vaccination programme stating that only a limited number of vaccine stocks are available in the state and to arrange more doses.

The Cabinet decided to take special measures to address the oxygen issue in AP, by importing the precious gas from Karnataka, Odisha and Tamil Nadu.

The Pioneer loses its shining star to Covid

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

There is no tougher task than writing the obituary of a colleague, especially one who had his heart in the right place, who worked hard and was always popular with his co-workers due to his friendliness and kindness.

On Tuesday, Sumit Kumar Onka, reporter with The Pioneer based at Vizag lost his fight against Covid-19, leaving his family and colleagues devastated.

He was 34.

Sumit was a native of Jeypore in Odisha and had shifted to Vizag in 2015 to pursue a career in journalism. Before his stint in journalism he had briefly worked in a BPO at Delhi.

His first job as a reporter was with the Deccan Chronicle and when The Pioneer launched its Andhra Pradesh editions in 2018, Sumit opted to strengthen our team.



TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Chaitra & Krishna Paksha
Panchangam**Tithi** : Navami: 01:21 pm**Nakshatram** : Dhanishtha: 09:10 am**Time to Avoid** : (Bad time to start any important work)**Rahukalam** : 12:12 pm - 01:48 pm**Yamagandam** : 07:27 am - 09:02 am**Variyam** : 04:47 pm - 06:28 pm**Gulika** : 10:37 am - 12:12 pm**Good Time** : (to start any important work)**Amritakalam** : 02:55 am - 04:37 am**Abhijit Muhurtham** : NIL

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast : Mostly sunny**Temp** : 39**Humidity** : 52%**Sunrise** : 05:48 am**Sunset** : 06:37 pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated may 4, 2021 5:00 PM

Will ejection of Eatela bring BC matters to a head for KCR?

Will the image of Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao take a beating because of the calculated, timed ejection of Health Minister Eatela Rajender? Will Eatela's social background as a popular Backward Class leader propel his plans? What are the reactions of Telangana protagonists on the removal of Eatela, who has played a vital role in the state administration while holding key portfolios like finance and health? These are some of the searching questions in the public domain.

Telangana's social fabric comprises sizeable backward and weaker sections. Due to lack of political representation and dearth of strong leaders within communities, power has not gravitated to these sections. Still, some representatives of the Backward Classes have managed to get plum



posts, though they are largely at the mercy of their political bosses who value their 'leadership' quality on the basis of their hold on BC communities. If anything goes wrong on the part of such representative, he or she has to pay a heavy price, which includes being stripped of their post without notice. This explains why Eatela had to go.

In his first innings as Chief Minister of Telangana, KCR sacked then health minister & pediatrician by profession Dr. T. Rajaiah of the combined Warangal district for reasons which were not perceived by others as serious. The grapevine has it that KCR considered setting up a University of Health Sciences at Warangal. However, before KCR could himself make a formal announcement, Rajaiah jumped the gun and revealed the CM's plans. So, KCR got

In a way, Eatela has been humiliated by two chief ministers on two separate occasions. If it was 'arrogance' of YSR then, how can it be 'not arrogance' of KCR now? Is it acceptable for Telangana protagonists to set aside the humiliation of a son of soil?



M D RATNA KUMAR
Senior Journalist

Telangana Rashtra Samiti, while characterizing people of TS as shareholders of the movement. This comment singularly disturbed KCR's mind. So, despite being a staunch follower of KCR for over two decades, Rajender got distanced.

Perhaps, the overall outcomes of elections for ULBs and RLBs, including the bye-election for the Nagarjuna sagar Assembly

constituency, may have emboldened KCR to take on those flexing muscles within the party.

Eatela, one among them, has created a sensation by stating that he would not hesitate to resign from the Assembly after having consultations with his constituents in Huzurabad -- his home turf since 2004. Should he resign from the Assembly, it would necessitate a bye-election at Huzurabad. In such eventuality, the split, if any, among Telangana forces that had fought to achieve statehood for T-region would be wide open.

Eatela's removal would have a tremendous impact on those who had worked for separate T-state under the leadership of KCR. Persons like Prof. Kodandaram, of course, have always described it as 'collective leadership'. Prof. Kodandaram steered T-joint action committee and KCR himself followed its line, particularly during the period he

weathered 'continuous disturbances' created by the then Congress government headed by Dr.YS Rajasekhara Reddy. On one occasion, YSR ridiculed Rajender, who was floor leader of TRS then, for his claims of public support in Telangana region. Pointing out that TRS had won only 10 seats out of the 50 it contested then, YSR suggested that Eatela should feel ashamed! This high-voltage political scene unfolded on the floor of the House, and Telangana protagonists, including KCR, came down heavily on YSR remarks.

In a way, Eatela has been humiliated by two chief ministers on two separate occasions. If it was 'arrogance' of YSR then, how can it be 'not arrogance' of KCR now? Is it acceptable for Telangana protagonists to set aside the humiliation of a son of soil?

Eatela has good rapport with the Reddy community.

He is married to a Reddy woman and got alliances for his two children from the same community. Naturally, he could get support from the powerful Reddy community. The Congress party, which granted Telangana State, had faced electoral debacles at the hands of KCR in two successive elections -- 2014 and 2018. The grand old party needs considerable support from BC communities. The Congress may be weighing the pros and cons of the emerging political situation!

It would be a gripping political drama if, in the days to come, the Eatela episode paves the way in Huzurabad for a situation akin to the 2006 Karimnagar bye-election!

Remember that KCR's TRS got rejuvenated following the resounding victory in the Karimnagar Lok Sabha constituency in 2006. That win altered the course of T-movement!

Education dept to sign pact with CBSE Board

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Cabinet has also approved implementation of CBSE syllabus in state schools from the coming academic year, where 44,639 schools will be having CBSE curriculum from Class VII and by 2024-25 first batch of Class X students will be passing out. State school education department has been authorised to enter into an agreement with the CBSE Board.

In order to revamp government schools under Nadu-Nedu and develop them in all fields, the State government will be borrowing USD 250 Million (Rs 1,860 crore) from the World Bank at an interest of 2.5 percent, which has to be repaid in 10 years. The Minister stated that enrol-

ments in government schools are going up because of the effective measures taken by the State government.

In order to improve quality education in aided institutions, the State Cabinet has put two options for the managements, either to hand over their institutes to the government to be run efficiently or turn them into complete private organisations.

Also, the State Cabinet has given its nod for the amendment in AP Private University Act 2016 by allocating 35 percent of the University seats to convenor quota to benefit meritorious students from poor families and provide fee reimbursement and scholarships to them. The government has

decided to develop an engineering college under Yogi Vemana University in Proddatur with Rs 66 crore and a Degree college in Vempalli with Rs 20 crore.

With regard to the welfare schemes, Perni Nani said that YSR Rythu Bharosa will be implemented on May 13 by crediting Rs 4,050 crore to benefit around 54 lakh farmers.

Similarly on May 25, YSR Free Crop insurance will be paid to the farmers who suffered crop losses in Kharif 2020, by crediting Rs 2,589 crore into the accounts of 38,30,000 tillers. He also said that Rs 10,000 would be paid to each fisherman family on May 18 compensating for the annual fishing ban in the sea.

HC reserves order on Parishad polls

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has reserved its orders on the counting of votes for the Parishad elections, voting for which was held in April.

Hearing a petition filed by the State Government seeking the nod for counting of votes polled for various Parishads across the state, the court on Tuesday reserved judgment.

It may be recalled that a single judge bench of the High Court had ordered a halt to the election process after a petition was filed not to hold elections.

The government appealed to the division bench which in turn directed the SEC not to announce the results till further orders. Subsequently, the High Court adjourned the hearing of these petitions several times.

Govt picks Essar for Kadapa steel plant...

Continued from Page 1

Amidst much fanfare, the State Cabinet on February 23 had given its nod to pick Liberty Group, part of Indian-British businessman Sanjeev Gupta owned GFG Alliance, as a Joint Venture (JV) partner to develop Kadapa Steel Plant.

The cabinet also approved to issue Letter of Authorisation (LOA) to YSR Steel Corporation Limited (YSRCL) MD to proceed further on JV procedure.

However, from the first week of March onward, GFG Alliance started facing financial difficulties as its major source of finance, London-based Greensill Capital, had filed for insolvency.

The YSRCL, a government entity, had issued RFP in November last year inviting potential partners for a JV to

develop the integrated steel plant in Kadapa.

Government sources said that at least seven domestic and internationally reputed companies had evinced interest in JV by responding to the Expression of Interest (EoI) issued by YSRCL.

SBI Caps recommended Liberty as the joint venture partner to the state government, giving it a score of 153.50, ten points more than Essar Steel Limited.

The YSRCL, the special purpose vehicle established by the state government, set March 31, 2024 as the commercial operation date for phase-1 of the project in which it has been targeted to produce one MTPA of crude steel finished products.

Chief Minister Y S Jaganmohan Reddy laid the foundation stone for the project on December 23, 2019.

AP plans Rs 1,000 cr Vizag Beach Corridor

Continued from Page 1

"The 19.66-km Bheemili-Bhogapuram stretch will be a six-lane access-controlled greenfield road for friction-free movement (expressway)," he said.

"The Government of Andhra Pradesh has declared Visakhapatnam as the Executive Capital of the state and, as such, tourism development in this area assumes greater importance. There is an immediate need to create world-class infrastructure in Vizag to develop tourism in the city," Bhargava told PTI.

The Vizag Beach Corridor project would have Smart Road elements like bicycle tracks (2.2m each side), pedestrian walkways (1.8m each side), high standard street furniture with landscaping, smart poles (LED streetlights, CCTV, public WiFi and sensors), utility crossings (water, drainage, power, fibre), bus bays, auto bays, public bicycle stations and parking bays for recreation.

The project would include hanging/suspension bridges over the river Gosthani at two locations.

The riverfront area near the bridges on the river Gosthani would be developed as urban recreation zones, the Special Chief Secretary added.

He said the Cabinet also approved to develop seaplane terminals at Bheemili Beach and Bhogapuram Airport.

The Cabinet approved the development of a Marina with Jetty and passenger terminal at Bheemili Beach to pave way for cruise tourism.

The Dutch-era monuments in Bheemili, one of the oldest civic bodies in the country, would be revived and tourism products around heritage tourism created through home-stays, museums, experience centres, etc., Rajat Bhargava said. This apart, ten new beaches would be developed between Kailasagiri (Visakhapatnam city) and

Bhogapuram.

"These will be developed to be safe swimming zones with beach sports," the Special Chief Secretary said.

According to Information and Public Relations Minister Perni Venkatramaiah, the State Cabinet gave its nod to develop

Kailasagiri-Bhogapuram region in soon to be executive capital Vizag by laying 1-8 lane roads on a stretch of 19 km.

The state government will be developing 12 other projects in the Kailasagiri region like establishing a sky tower, aquarium tunnel, a floating restaurant in the abandoned Bangladesh ship and developing 11 other beaches in the surrounding area.

At an expenditure of Rs 6,190 crore, the government has decided to widen the main canal of Handri-Neeva to provide drinking water in Rayalaseema region and also take up phase-2 developmental works worth Rs 9,318 crore. Further, the Cabinet approved to lift irrigate water from Polavaram dead storage at a cost of Rs 912 crore in order to meet the irrigation needs of Coastal AP.

Also, the Cabinet approved setting up of Eluru-Tandava Link Canal with Rs 470 crore

and taking up YSR Palnadu Karuvu Nivarana scheme with an outlay of Rs 2,747 crore.

The Cabinet also decided to lease closed cooperative dairies that are listed under AP Dairy Development Corporation to Amul and collect the lease amount.

As on date, after signing up MoU with Amul, their services were operational in 708 villages across the state. Aiming for the Dairy Development, the state government sanctioned two Animal Husbandry Polytechnic colleges in Srikakulam and Chittoor districts.

Honorarium for clergymen hiked

As promised during elections, the state government has approved increase of the honorarium for priests, imams, muezins and pastors, where the priests in A category temples would receive Rs 15,000 and priests of B Category temples would receive Rs 10,000 up from the present Rs 5,000.

Similarly, imams would receive Rs 10,000, muezins will receive Rs 5,000 and pastors will receive Rs 5,000 as honorarium.

Adani's offer to buy port accepted

Continued from Page 1

"Cabinet considered and approved the proposal of APSEZ for acquisition of GoAP's stake -10.40 percent in GPL at a price of INR 120/share translating to consideration of Rs 645.1 crore; or receive shares in APSEZ worth Rs 645.1 crore as a result of proposed merger between GPL and APSEZ," said a senior government official.

It is learnt that after the merger of GPL with APSEZ, the state government may

need to sign another Concessionaire agreement with the new Segregated Portfolio Company (SPC) as per terms of the original concession agreement for safeguarding the obligations of the original concessionaire agreement.

"The revenue share is expected to substantially increase due to more business. GPL by handling 32-35 Million Tonnes per annum is paying revenue share of about Rs 22 crores per year. GPL is handling only 30-35 MT per

annum in spite of having the capacity to handle 50 MT. New entity operated by APSEZ is likely to increase the business to 40-45 MT with an expected revenue share of Rs 30 crore per annum in short term and up to 100 MT with an expected revenue share of Rs 70 crore per annum in medium term," pointed a source in the government.

State government is of the opinion that APSEZ is the leading port operator in the country and due to their rich

expertise and strength in the port sector they are likely to substantially increase the traffic and business of Gangavaram port and also invest in new businesses such as Container, Liquid and LNG terminals and create higher revenue share for government and value.

"Besides LNG and Petroleum, Oil and Lubricants (POL) business can earn VAT for the state. With 1 MT of LNG import AP will earn VAT of Rs 1,200 crore," the source pointed out.

| VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES | |
|--------------------------|---|
| GOLD | |
| ₹ 48, 220(10 gm) | |
| ₹ -220 | ↓ |
| SILVER | |
| ₹ 72, 800 (1kg) | |
| ₹ -2500 | ↓ |

| CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG | |
|--------------------|------|
| Dressed/With Skin | ₹119 |
| Without Skin | ₹135 |
| Broiler at Farm | ₹82 |

| EGG RATES ₹/100 | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| HYDERABAD | 365 |
| VIJAYAWADA | 365 |
| VISAKHAPATNAM | 355 |
| RETAIL PRICE (IN HYDERABAD) | ₹3.67 |

AP adds 20,034 new Covid cases, 82 deaths

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh reported 20,034 fresh cases of coronavirus, 12,207 recoveries and 82 deaths in 24 hours ending 9 AM on Tuesday.

The state's cumulative Covid-19 positives rose to 11,84,028, recoveries to 10,16,142 and toll 8,289, according to the latest bulletin.

There are 1,59,597 active cases in the state now, it said. Srikakulam district reported the highest 2,398 fresh cases, Chittoor 2,318 and Anantapur 2,168 in 24 hours.

Only Krishna (998) and Kadapa (793) districts reported less than 1,000 new cases while the remaining eight added between 1,000 and 2,000.

West Godavari district saw 12 fresh Covid-19 fatalities.

Anantapur, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam and Vizianagaram reported nine fresh deaths each, SPS Nellore seven, Krishna six, Guntur five, Chittoor, Kurnool, Prakasam and Srikakulam four each in a day.

5 L doses of Covishield ...

Continued from Page 1

Andhra Pradesh was allocated with 9,17,850 doses while neighbouring Telangana 8,35,960 doses.

The highest doses are allocated to Maharashtra with 23.25 lakh followed by Uttar Pradesh with 17.61 lakh, Rajasthan with 17.34 lakh, Gujarat 16.60 lakh, Karnataka with 13.36 lakh, West Bengal with 13.23 lakh, Madhya Pradesh with 11.58 lakh, Bihar with 10.16 lakh doses.

As per the vaccine doses allocation, Andhra Pradesh stands 9th and Telangana 12th.

Based on the allocation by the Central government per day 14,16,666 people will be given the vaccination jab. On April 30, as many as 27,44,485 people were given vaccine doses across the country.

The Pioneer loses its shining star to Covid

Continued from Page 1

He was tested positive for Covid on April 22 and was admitted to a Covid Care Centre.

As his condition deteriorated, Sumit was shifted to VIMS, where the virus claimed one more noble soul.

Remembered by his friends and colleagues as an affable and down-to-earth person, Sumit had a keen interest in photography, reading and travelling. He studied at JELC High School in Jaypee and graduated in BSc from VD College.

He also got a masters degree in journalism from Central University at Koraput in Odisha.

His last post on Facebook on April 25 read 'In His service forever and ever..'



His friends were shocked to know the news about his sudden demise.

Media fraternity, officials and people's representatives of Visakhapatnam expressed their condolences over the untimely demise of Sumit.

He has been working from home since last March due to Covid induced situation. His close associates will always remember Sumit as a kind-hearted soul who was passionate about journalistic ethics and values.

Scribe, lawyer appointed Information Commissioners

Continued from Page 1

Leader of Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu did not attend the selection committee meeting, while Home Minister M Sucharita attended as the other member.

The committee sent the two names to Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan for formal appointment.

The AP Information Commission currently has a retired IAS officer as Chief Information Commissioner and five Commissioners, including a retired IPS officer.

Now, the Commission's strength goes up to eight.

Govt unveils rules for partial curfew

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Principal Health Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal has issued standard operating procedures (SOPs) to be followed during the partial curfew being imposed from May 5 across the state.

He said that the state government has taken several steps to contain the spread of Covid with special focus on test-trace- treat-vaccinate and inculcate Covid-appropriate behaviour among people.

Government after careful examination has imposed the curfew from 12 noon to 6 am with effect from May 5 to 18, he added.

During the curfew, all firms, shops, commercial establishments, offices, educational institutions, restaurants, etc., will be closed at 12 noon and reopen after 6 am next day.

However, emergency services like hospitals, diagnostic labs, pharmacies and essential services will function as usual.

The essential services include print and electronic media, telecommunications, Internet services, broadcasting services, IT and IT enabled services, petrol pumps, LPG, CNG, petroleum and gas outlets, power utilities, water supply and sanitation, cold storages and warehousing services, private security services.

All manufacturing industries shall operate duly follow-

Govt will set up 176 new PHCs, says Health Secretary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Medical & Health Principal Secretary Anil Kumar Singhal said that said that 176 new primary health centers would be set up in the state with an estimated cost of Rs 346 crore and that as many as 1,400 posts, including doctors and nurses, would be filled for these new primary health centers.

He said that the state gov-

ernment would bear an additional financial burden of Rs 165 crore per year for recruiting them.

He said that nine lakh vaccine doses would be available in the state by May 15.

There is only one PHC in 188 mandals and CHCs will also be set up in all the agency mandals, he added.

He said during the last 24 hours 1,15,784 tests have been conducted and 20,034

persons were tested positive for the virus, while 82 people succumbed to the virus. He said that 12,412 medical staff was discharging their services at 85 centres.

Stating that there is no shortage of Remdesivir injections, Singhal said that as many as 21,898 injections were currently available in the state, while another 12,000 doses would be received by Wednesday.

In all 14,030 injections were supplied to private hospitals. During the past 24 hours, 446 MT of medical oxygen was supplied across the state and three more tankers were available for the transportation oxygen, he added.

The Health Principal Secretary said that the 104 call center received 16,856 phone calls from across the state in the past 24 hours.



persons availing covid vaccination in designated health facilities, patients travelling in private vehicles for availing health

services, persons coming from/going to airports, railway stations, bus stands will be allowed on production of valid papers and tickets.

The local administration shall make appropriate arrangements at airports and railway stations to enable such travel. Inter-state and intra-state movement of essential and non-essential goods is permitted.

Local transport services including autos and taxis and city bus services shall be allowed to function within the stipulated time (6 am to 12 noon) duly following Covid protocol.

Intra and inter-district public transport shall not be

allowed. However, inter-state public transport shall also remain suspended from 12 noon to 6 am.

Functions like marriages etc., which have been scheduled already and cannot be rescheduled shall be carried out with a maximum of 20 persons with due permission from the local authorities duly following Covid norms.

All departments of the Secretariat/Commissioners of Police/District Collectors shall issue consequential orders/notifications to implement the above instructions. They shall also make arrangements to issue passes to the exempted category of persons to facilitate their movement.

Mad rush for essentials, medicines ahead of curfew

C PRADEEP KUMAR ■ VIJAYAWADA

With the state government imposing partial curfew in Andhra Pradesh for 14 days from Wednesday to check the spread of coronavirus, there is a mad rush for essential commodities and medicines.

The state government made an announcement a couple of days ago imposing 14-day partial curfew. Soon after the announcement, people thronged supermarkets and kirana stores to stock up essentials as people feel that the curfew might be extended in phases as done during the Covid first wave.

As the pandemic was spreading rapidly since the beginning of April, AP government imposed night curfew from 10 pm to 5 pm from last week of April in the state. The situation was so worse in certain places across the state that people voluntarily followed lockdown locally.

Nearly 20, 000 new positive cases are being registered in AP everyday for the past few days. As many as 23,920 new positive cases were registered on May 2 alone. Further, the Covid deaths are also increasing day after day.



The Vijayawada Municipal Corporation has imposed a ban on the sale of mutton, chicken, fish and prawns on Sundays to avoid huge gatherings at non-vegetarian shops in Vijayawada city.

Ironically, Vijayawada people rushed to suburban places to purchase mutton, chicken, fish and prawns for consuming a healthy diet to cope with coronavirus. It clearly reflects the priority given to essential commodities by the people.

A trader, Kaja Aadinarayana, who runs a supermarket, said that people are swarming shops and stores to purchase essential commodities needed for next two

months fearing that curfew could be extended. He said that the stocks were emptying rapidly in the shops due to huge purchases and soon stocks might become unavailable.

A private employee, D Suresh Kumar, said that the lockdown was imposed all of sudden in March 2020 and that was continued further due to which people faced several hardships.

He said that they came to store to purchase essential commodities for at least two months as a precautionary measure as immunity boosting diet is the need of the hour besides essential commodities.

Restart ration delivery immediately: TDP to govt

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP MLC P Ashok Babu on Tuesday demanded that the government should immediately revive the distribution of ration all over the state to the rescue of jobless poor workers during the pandemic.

In a letter to Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy here, Ashok Babu stressed the need for resolving the problems in door delivery of ration scheme to prevent 1.47 crore poor people in the state from starvation. Problems with vehicle operators and dealers with regard to door delivery of ration scheme should be resolved immediately for the welfare of lakhs of people, he added.

Ashok Babu deplored that not even 10 per cent ration was distributed till now this time. The free ration announced by the Centre came to a standstill for the last three days. The YSRCP regime's door delivery



programme has badly hit over 30,000 ration dealers who have been giving their services smoothly in the past, he alleged.

The TDP leader said that the government spent Rs 539 crore for the mobile dispensing units (MDUs) given to over 9,260 unemployed youth.

Another Rs 230 crore was

being paid to them towards salaries. Altogether, Rs 769 crore was spent in the name of door delivery of ration. Eventually, these unemployed youth were turned into workers handing over ration bags to the beneficiaries, the MLC said.

Ashok Babu said that the ration dealers were unhappy that they were being seen as robbers. Since they were removed from their work, they were not ready to take part in ration distribution during the present critical situation.

If the government exerted force on them, the dealers have also threatened to go on a strike, he said.

The TDP leader pointed out that the youth operating ration vehicles were facing life threat as they had to do multiple tasks involving public contact and touch points. In Vijayawada alone, three such youths died due to Coronavirus, he said.

Constable found dead at his residence

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A constable working in Madannapet police station was found dead in a room of his house in Musrarnabagh with his throat and wrist slit. His body was found lying in a pool of blood, reports said on Tuesday. He was identified as Abhilash who is living with his family in Musararnabagh. Two days ago, he left his wife and two children in his in-laws house in Kodad.

According to reports, Abhilash went inside his room and bolted it from inside. His family members suspected something fishy as he did not come out of the room and broke open the doors only to find Abhilash's body was found lying in a pool of blood.

According to the preliminary investigation report, Abhilash committed suicide by slitting his throat and wrist. His body was sent to OU for autopsy.

PM Modi responsible for Covid second wave, alleges Butchaiah Chowdary

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP senior leader and MLA Gorantla Butchaiah Chowdary on Tuesday slammed the Narendra Modi government for making India a 'laughing stock' in the eyes of the world with its thoughtless policies in tackling the Coronavirus second wave in the country.

Butchaiah Chowdary said that the Covid calamity was now threatening to tear whole India apart even as the situation was fast deteriorating in different states.

People elected Modi for the second time with a hope that he would develop the nation, but he eventually created a situation where the



whole world was boycotting India right now, he added.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP MLA said that till recently, the Prime Minister spoke as if the country had triumphed over Covid

and it was able to provide Covaxin and Covishield vaccines to other countries.

He gave priority to religion and elections over the lives of people in the country. The whole world is looking at

India with suspicion.

In his capacity as the Prime Minister of the country, Modi should stop the politics of conspiracy and narrow mindedness and should focus on the people's welfare, he added.

Butchaiah Chowdary alleged that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was causing even greater harm by totally neglecting the preventive measures and vaccination. There was no guarantee for the lives of the people during the second wave of Covid. The Chief Minister disregarded the cautionary advice given by the TDP and ignored the infections making his trademark 'paracetamol and bleaching powder' comments, he added.

Reel-life scene creates problem for a person in real life

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A scene in reel life has created a problem for a person in real life. According to police, a man approached the police complaining that he was flooded with phone calls as his phone number was flashed in a scene in the Pawan Kalyan starrer 'Vakeel Saab'.

Sudhakar, a resident of the man, lodged a complaint with the Punjagutta police alleging that the producers of the movie had used his mobile phone number 'illegally' during a scene in the film following which he was getting numerous phone calls causing mental agony.

Sudhakar said that in the movie, his phone number was mentioned below an image. "People who watched the movie are noting down the number and calling me. It is resulting in a lot of inconvenience. The callers are also abusing me in vulgar language," he said in the complaint. He alleged that the pro-



ducers used his mobile phone number without seeking his permission and demanded a case be registered against them for allegedly defaming him. The Punjagutta police accepted the complaint from him.

"We have sought legal opinion and will decide on further course of action after that," said M Niranjan Reddy, SHO (Punjagutta).

■ Sudhakar, a resident of the man, lodged a complaint with the Punjagutta police alleging that the producers of the movie had used his mobile phone number 'illegally' during a scene in the film following which he was getting numerous phone calls causing mental agony.

Irregularities in APPSC online exam alleged

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP national general secretary and MLC Nara Lokesh on Tuesday criticised the YSRCP government for not taking any steps to ensure justice to the genuine candidates in the online examinations and selections held by the APPSC in the state.

Lokesh said that large scale irregularities took place in conducting of APPSC online examinations and selections. Injustice was done to the sincere candidates in the unsupervised digital evaluation and final selections, he alleged.

Lokesh stressed the need for bringing credibility to the APPSC examinations as they are involved the selection of administrators.

Police arrest Olx fraudster

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Petbasheerabad police arrested a person belonging to Ramakrishna Nagar for having defrauded a private company employee to the tune of several thousands of rupees by offering to sell Play Station-5 through Olx.in.

According to the police, the person was identified as Ranjit, who on April 20 offering to sell the play station by placing an advertisement Olx.in. Responding to it, a resident of Krishnamurthy Nagar in Suchitra Junction shared his phone number. Ranjit called him up on his mobile and offered to send the equipment if the customer sends Rs 15,000 to his bank account. He also shared his Aadhaar card photo. Therefore, Raju sent the money to the advertiser.



US fiat to students on classes

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The United States Consulate General Hyderabad on Tuesday said student visa holders would be able to enter the US if their classes start on or after August 1 this year.

"Under the current Presidential Proclamation, student visa holders are able to enter the United

States if their classes start on or after August 1, 2021. We are unfortunately unable to approve exceptions for F visa holders with a program start date before August 1, 2021," said a tweet from the official handle of the US Consulate General in Hyderabad.

The US Consulate asked the students to contact their respective educational institutions to discuss options if their start date is before August 1, 2021 and asked students to check the link, <https://rb.gy/q78s8u>.

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Private hospitals continue to flout norms, fleece patients

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Despite several attempts by the government to check the excesses of the private hospitals during the pandemic, they continue to fleece the Covid patients.

In yet another incident, kin of a Covid patient have lodged a complaint with the district officials that a private hospital collected nearly Rs 5 lakh from them for treatment.

As the deceased was well known to the ministers and the higher officials, they interfered and warned the hospital would be seized for violating the rules. The incident took place in Kakinada of East Godavari district.

According to the relatives of the deceased, the Covid patient was admitted to a private hospital in the city on the night of April 24 for treatment.

Ministers Kursala



Kannababu, Chennuboina Venugopalakrishna, Botsa Satyanarayana and East Godavari Additional SP Karanam Kumar recommended that the patient be given proper treatment.

However, the patient died while undergoing treatment and the hospital charged Rs 4,48,125 for treatment in violation of the charges prescribed by the government.

The government has set a

price for the treatment of corona patients. The hospital management has charged lakhs of rupees despite recommendations from the minister and officials.

In the light of the incident, doubts are being raised over the functioning of task force appointed by the government.

The relatives of the patient had lodged a complaint with District Collector D Muralidhar Reddy, Joint

Collectors Kirti Chekuri, Chandaka Sattibabu and Additional SP Karanam Kumar against the hospital on the issue. They immediately instructed officials to inspect the hospital.

Shocked over the charges levied by the hospital, joint collectors Kirti Chekuri and Ch Sattibabu immediately phoned the management and warned that the hospital would be seized.



Freedom fighter Pavuluri no more

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Prominent freedom fighter Pavuluri Sivaramakrishnaiah, 98, who had been ill for the past few days, died due to heart attack on Tuesday. Pavuluri was born on November 15, 1923 in Govada village of Amrataluru mandal in Guntur district. Pavuluri completed his primary education in Govada. After completing his studies, working as a Hindi teacher, Pavuluri Sivaramakrishna was influenced by Gandhi's ideas. He took part in the independence movement for some time as a disciple of Gandhi. Pavuluri is survived by wife, two sons and a daughter. Several prominent expressed grief over the death of Pavuluri.

Strictly enforce curfew, staff told

PNS ■ ELURU

West Godavari district Collector Kartikeya Mishra has directed the officials of revenue and police departments to strictly enforce the curfew which will be imposed from Wednesday to contain the spread of corona virus.

He discussed the curfew arrangements with officials via video conference from the collector's office and made several suggestions.

He suggested that the shops should be allowed to open from 6 am to 12 noon only and after 12.00 noon people should not be allowed to step outside.

Agricultural workers have been exempted from the curfew. Except emergency services, all other commercial establishments should be closed.

Public transport services would be available till noon, he said.

He said that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was seriously worried about controlling the Covid spread.



West Godavari Collector Kartikeya Mishra addressing a meeting on implementation of partial curfew at Collectorate in Eluru on Tuesday.

Collector's surprise visit to Polavaram project area

ELURU: West Godavari district Collector Kartikeya Mishra on Tuesday conducted a surprise inspection of the Polavaram project area for the first time after taking charge as district collector. He directed the irrigation officials to strengthen the Godavari flood banks in the villages of Agency area in the river basin during the coming monsoon season. District SP K Narayan Nayak briefed the District Collector on the ongoing works of the project. Irrigation and police officials accompanied the Collector during inspection.

Home quarantine suggested for patients with mild symptoms

PNS ■ NARASAPURAM

West Godavari district sub-collector KS Vishwanathan on Tuesday advised the Covid patients with mild symptoms to quarantine themselves at home and that medical kits would be provided to them.

Speaking o the media in his chamber, he said that nine public and private hospitals in the division were ready for treating Covid patients.

There are a total of 385 beds, including 93 ICU beds, 169 oxygen beds and 170 normal beds, in these nine hospitals.

The sub-collector said that more beds would be made

available in other private hospitals as well in a couple of days.

Apart from these, Covid Care Centres set up at Palakollu and Bhimavaram Tidco have thousand beds each for those with mild symptoms.

The sub-collector also said that emergency oxygen beds in hospitals were a top priority as patients above 50 years of age with other health complications like asthma, shortness of breath and diabetes, were in need of those beds.

He said that a district-wide fever survey has already been completed.

As part of the survey, 1,467 suspected patients under

Narasapuram division have been medically examined and persons who have been tested positive for Covid have been advised to quarantine themselves at home or undergo treatment at Covid care centres.

In the wake of the Covid second wave, people are advised to take all precautionary measures to control the disease for the next fortnight.

He said shops and business centres would be open from 6 am to 12 noon from Wednesday onwards as per the directions of the state government. The curfew would be in force from 12 noon to 6 am the next day.



Sarvepalli MLA Kakani Govardhan Reddy distributed the aid sanctioned by the government from the Chief Minister's Relief Fund to the beneficiaries of Sarvepalli constituency. He handed over cheques to the beneficiaries at a meeting held at District YSRCP office at Magunta Layout in Nellore on Tuesday.

Places of worship to be closed in East Godavari

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The East Godavari has decided to close all temples and prayer halls across the district from May 3 as part of efforts to curb the spread of the virus keeping in view the current 30 per cent positivity rate in the second wave of Covid.

Hence, all the temples and prayer halls have been closed from Tuesday morning.

District Collector Muralidhar Reddy, along with SP Adnan Naem Azmi, held a meeting with religious heads of various communities at Collectorate on Monday to discuss the measures to control the pandemic.

He said that temples, mosques, churches and other places of worship should be closed and only priests, imams and pastors would be allowed to conduct rituals and prayers.

He instructed the officials to set up signboards at the temples and places of worships advising the devotees not to enter temples. He also said that the process of conducting auction for other community organisations had been postponed.

Rallies and processions should not be organised in the villages. Violators will be prosecuted under Sections 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act 2005, Sections 188 of the IPC and other applicable laws as the latest directives, he said.

Kakinada, Rajahmundry SPs and other concerned officials were directed to take action to implement the orders.

Despite taking all the precautions, the virus has been spreading people fast. Hence, it has been decided to take tough decisions in the current situation. Everyone has a responsibility to protect the people, he said.

He asked the religious heads to cooperate with the government in implementing precautionary measures to which they extended full support.

In-charge JC (Welfare) DRO CH Sattibabu, Minority Welfare Officer PS Prabhakara Rao, Hindu religious leaders CH Venugopal and CH Kankandurga Prasad, Muslim cleric Razak, Christian leader Rev William, Rev Joel, Rev Mispia Vijayakumar and others participated in the meeting.

AWARENESS DRIVE



Home Minister Mekathoti Sucharita launches a campaign to spread awareness on precautions to be taken against the coronavirus on Tuesday.

Traders warned against selling essentials at higher prices

PNS ■ GUDIVADA

Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Kodali Srivenkateswara Rao (Nani) has warned the traders that the government should take stern action against them if they sold essential commodities at high prices.

Addressing the media here on Tuesday, Nani said: "We

have taken all steps to prevent the rise in prices of essential commodities."

Speaking on the occasion, Controller of Weights and Measures IGP Dr Kantarao said that extensive raids were carried out across the state last April to register cases for selling essential commodities at high prices and other violations.



Torching of chilli harvest worries farmers in Guntur

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Farmers in Guntur district are a worried lot as chilli crops were set ablaze by unidentified persons in two separate incidents in the district in the past week.

Nearly 20 quintals of dried chillies was burnt by unidentified persons in Bhatlur, Sattanapalli mandal on April 30. Recently, another chilli crop was set ablaze creating tension among the farmers.

Recently, Venna Subba Reddy of Erraguntlapadu village in Firangipuram mandal dried up chillies in the fields on the village outskirts. However, the produce was set on fire last night.

The farmer suffered a loss to the tune of over Rs 10 lakh as 60 quintals of chillies reduced to ashes.

He said he entered he had a fight with his nearest relative, Hanimi Reddy, a few days ago.

Subba Reddy had lodged a complaint with the police expressing suspicion against Hanimi Reddy with whom he had disputes.

The police registered a case and launched an investigation. These incidents have caused concern among the farmers in the district.



Police officials observe the harvest that was torched by unidentified persons in Erraguntlapadu village of Firangipuram mandal in Guntur district on Tuesday.

One dead, twenty shops gutted in fire at Tirumala

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

A person died on the spot and several shops were gutted when a massive fire broke out in a shop at Tirumala Asthana Mandapam Shopping Complex here on Tuesday morning. The deceased was identified as Murali Krishna, a local photographer.

The incident took place near Asthana Mandapam opposite to the temple of Lord Sri Venkateswara.

According to authorities, the fire broke out in the shop number 84 and spread to other shops as well. As many as 20 shops were damaged in the fire.

The damage due to the fire accident is estimated to be



over Rs 60. Though reports suggest that short circuit could have caused the mishap, officials are yet to declare how the fire broke out.

According to Tirumala Fire Station officials, the accident occurred at 6.45 am. The fire fighting teams swung into action and controlled the fire by 7.30 am.

MIN STARTS COVID CARE CENTRE



Narasaraopet MLA Dr Gopireddy Srinivasa Reddy inaugurated the Covid Care Center at Narasaraopet Tidco housing complex in Guntur district on Tuesday. Municipal Commissioner Ramachandra Reddy, Tahsildar Ramana Nayak, ME0, DE, and officials were present.

TTD priest files case over violation of practices

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The present chief priest Archakam Venugopal Deekshitulu filed a case in a court of law seeking protection of his rights against the TTD and ex-chief priest and present Temple Honorary chief priest AV Ramana Deekshitulu.

The previous TTD trust board under the chairmanship of Putta Sudhakar Yadav passed a resolution fixing the retirement age as 65 years for the hereditary priests at the Tirumala temple and forcibly removed chief priests of the TTD temple including AV Ramana Deekshitulu who had made allegations of financial irregularities and about missing jewels of

Temple against the TTD Trust Board.

The hereditary priest AV Ramana Deekshitulu approached High Court seeking cancellation of TTD resolution and the High Court set aside the resolution of TTD in December 2018.

But the temple administration didn't take any steps to reinstate the retired hereditary priests of Tirumala Temple even though the High Court set aside the resolution.

However, after YSRCP came to power in the state, the present TTD Trust under the chairmanship of YV Subba Reddy issued orders appointing the former chief priest Ramana Deekshitulu as advisor of the 'Agama Shashtra' and now as the honorary



chief priest of the Tirumala temple.

After being appointed, Ramana Deekshitulu created differences among the hereditary priests with his controversial attitude.

Venugopla Deekshitulu alleged that the TTD board has not followed due process in the reappointment of Ramana Deekshitulu who is also the parental uncle of Venugopal.

The differences between the TTD priests came out in the open when honorary chief priest Ramana Deekshitulu and chief priest Deekshitulu argued over temple rituals on December 31.

A group of priests led by Venugopal and Ramana tried to deviate from the norms by trying to use Tulasi malas, other flowers and ghee to lit lamps in the temple from Ramana's home, but Venugopal pointed out that it was not proper to bring the articles from his home which

is to be used in the temple.

He further told Ramana that the responsibility of arranging ghee to lit lamps is entrusted to Jeeyar Mutt.

However, Ramana said that he has rights to adorn garlands to the presiding deity in the temple as he was the honorary chief priest.

He said that nobody has the right to question him and added that he was pouring ghee into the lamps for the wellbeing of Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy and Andhra Pradesh State.

The senior officials at TTD tried to pacify the priests. The controversies between the priests for their rights in the temple led A Venugopal Deekshitulu to approach the court.

Post-poll violence in Bengal reminiscent of Partition: BJP

PNS ■ KOLKATA

BJP president J P Nadda on Tuesday said the widespread post-poll violence in West Bengal is reminiscent of the atrocities people had to face during the country's Partition, and exhorted party workers in the state to democratically fight the "savagery".

Nadda, who arrived on a two-day visit to Bengal, said BJP workers across India have expressed solidarity with their activists in the state, who are "facing violent attacks".

"We are committed to democratically fight this ideological battle and the activities of the TMC, which is full of intolerance," he told reporters at the NSC Bose International Airport here.

"I had heard of the immense atrocities committed during the Partition, but I have never seen such post-poll violence that is occurring in West Bengal after the declaration of election results (on May 2)," the senior BJP leader said.

Nadda said he will visit the residences of BJP workers "killed" in attacks in South 24 Parganas district and speak to their kin.

"We want to give this message that crores of BJP workers across the country are with them," he said.

The BJP has claimed at least six of its workers and supporters, including a woman, were killed in violence allegedly unleashed by the Trinamool Congress following its victory in the assembly elections.

Party is with workers facing atrocities by 'TMC goons': BJP Bengal chief

KOLKATA: The BJP's West Bengal president Dilip Ghosh on Tuesday said that the party is with the workers who, he claimed, are facing atrocities at the hands of goons owing allegiance to the Trinamool Congress after the announcement of assembly election results two days ago. The state is in the grip of post-poll violence that allegedly left several BJP workers dead and injured, prompting the Centre to seek a report from the state government on the incidents of attack on opposition workers. "I have not done the politics of running away in adverse situations. We have fought a daunting battle," Ghosh told reporters here. Ghosh said that the BJP has won record seats in the West Bengal election, bagging 77 constituencies. The TMC, on the other hand, emerged victorious in 213 seats and will form the government for the third time in a row. Claiming that attacks are taking place at places where the TMC won with a huge majority, Ghosh said that the BJP leadership is with the workers who have fought the election risking their lives. "We are fighting and will continue to do so in future. Today or tomorrow, Bengal will witness change at the hands of the BJP," the party's state president said. BJP national secretary Rahul Sinha said that it is time for the party to stand by the workers who are facing attacks. "We can analyse the results later.



TMC worker stabbed to death in Ketugram, three injured: Police

KOLKATA: A 54-year-old TMC worker was stabbed to death in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district, police said on Tuesday. Srinivas Ghosh (54), a TMC panchayat member of Ketugram's Agardhanga area, was stabbed alleged by members of the BJP on Monday night when he was returning home, they said. Ghosh was declared brought dead when taken to a nearby hospital, they added. Three people were also injured in the incident and are undergoing treatment, a police officer said. BJP denied the charges and said their members were in no way connected to the incident. Tension was palpable in the area after the incident. Police said a huge contingent of personnel was deployed to prevent any further flare-ups. Four persons were detained in connection with the incident, they said. Incidents of violence were reported from other parts of the state as well. In Coochbehar district, the house of BJP activist Bharati Nandy in Dinhata was set on fire allegedly by TMC supporters, a police officer said. Incidents of violence were also reported from Tufanganj where houses of several BJP workers were vandalised, he said. At least 15 houses of BJP workers were vandalised in Howrah, police said. A probe has been started into the matter, they said.

No place for violence in democracy, Mamata should control it: Cong

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

After the BJP and the CPI-M, the Congress also condemned the post-poll violence in West Bengal by TMC cadres, saying such incidents were unacceptable and people of the state have not voted for lawlessness. Congress' West Bengal incharge Jitin Prasada alleged on Tuesday that his party cadres were attacked by Trinamool Congress workers and even women and children were not spared. "The post-poll violence that

has been unleashed by the TMC on the Congress workers is unacceptable. Even women and children are not spared. I'm sure the people of West Bengal did not vote for this lawlessness," Prasad said on Twitter. He said the duty of every politician or public servant is to speak up against 'all wrongs and stand by their cadre irrespective of which ideology one belongs to'. Asked about the post-poll violence taking place in West Bengal after the Trinamool Congress' victory in the state,

Congress spokesperson Shaktisinh Gohil said his party never condones such violence. "Congress has never supported any kind of violence. The Congress party never condones or supports any kind of violence. There is no place for violence in a democracy," he said. "We expect that if Mamata Banerjee has received so much love and votes in Bengal, she should control the violence," he said. The Congress leader said, "Even if those who have died are BJP workers, our

condolences are with their families". The BJP has charged that the state is burning due to state-sponsored violence and several of its workers have been assaulted and murdered. The Left has also claimed that its workers have been targeted. "Are these reports of gruesome violence in Bengal TMC's 'victory celebrations'? Condemnable. "Will be resisted & rebuffed. Instead of focusing on combating the pandemic TMC unleashes such mayhem," CPI(M) leader had Sitaram Yechury tweeted.

'Foreign aid allocated to states, UTs for Covid management'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry on Tuesday said that aid received from other countries has been distributed in different states to help deal with the rising number of COVID-19 cases.

Based on the criteria and principles laid out by the ministry, depending on each state's requirement, 24 different categories of items numbering nearly 40 lakhs were distributed to 86 institutions in different states, the ministry said in a statement.

Major categories of equipment include BiPAP machines; oxygen (concentrators, cylinders, PSA Oxygen plants and pulse oximeters); drugs (Favipiravir and Remdesivir); and PPE (coveralls, N-95 masks and gowns).

Since grant in aid is limited in quantity, it has to be optimally utilized by allocating it to high burden states [states with higher number of active cases], where the requirement for such equipment/medicines is more, according to the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for allocations.

Spreading such aid thinly each time over a large number of states may not bring forth the desired results, the ministry said, adding it will also lead to small packages travelling large distances, high turnaround times and possible wastage of resources.

The requirement of the high burden states in the context of number of persons admitted in hospitals and prior distribution done by the central government resources would also be considered.

Special focus can also be on states considered as medical hubs of the region, which have a patient in-flow from neighbouring states/cities.

In some cases, resource low



"Accessibility and the immediate use of resources to save the lives drives the need for immediate allocation of short-notice incoming consignments. The materials from abroad are currently coming in different numbers, specifications and at different times"

consignee is the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS). Upon receipt of the papers outlined in the process flow chart, IRCS issues the necessary certificates immediately to HLL for processing customs and regulatory clearances at Airports.

IRCS also ensures liaison with MoHFW and HLL so that delays are reduced and quick turnarounds are achieved, the ministry said. The HLL Lifecare Limited (HLL) is the customs agent for IRCS, and the distribution manager for MoHFW.

The consignments are processed at airport and transported for distribution by HLL. In case of consignments arriving at military airports, or bog items like oxygen plants, Dept of Military Affairs (DMA) assists HLL.

"Accessibility and the immediate use of resources to save the lives drives the need for immediate allocation of short-notice incoming consignments. The materials from abroad are currently coming in different numbers, specifications and at different times," the statement said. "Hence there is a need to reconcile the distribution logistics with the need to reach the materials as expeditiously as possible to the states," it added.

INDIA CORNER

Muslim youth help cremate Hindu man who died of Covid

A group of Muslim youth helped cremate a 60-year-old Hindu man, who died of COVID-19 here, as his family members were hesitant to go ahead with the ritual for fear of contracting the disease.



Mukund Mohan Pandey (60) died on Monday but his family members were hesitating on his cremation as his elder brother, Lalit Pandey, too succumbed to the virus on April 30, local people said. Nagar Palika chairman Shaban Ali said when he came to know about this, he had some of his friends, Tariq, Anas, Guddu and Shafiq, make all the arrangements and take the body to the cremation ground. After the arrangements were made, Pandey's son consigned him to flames, Ali added.

Encounter between security forces and militants in J&K

An encounter broke out between militants and security forces in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, police said. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation at Nathipora in Bomai area following information about the presence of some militants in the area, a police official said. He said the search operation turned into an encounter after militants



opened fire on the security forces who retaliated. "One foreign terrorist involved in killing of two councillors and a policeman is trapped in the encounter," Inspector General of Police, Kashmir Vijay Kumar said in a tweet. No casualties have been reported so far from either side, police said.

Museums, planetarium, zoos, national parks closed in Bengal

With the spike in COVID-19 cases, museums, planetarium, zoos, national parks have been closed in West Bengal to avert contamination. The Alipore Zoological Gardens in the city had recorded 400 visitors on an average in April and only 150 people on April 30 before closing down indefinitely from May 1, Director Asis Samanta told PTI on Tuesday. "As decided by the state government, all forest department run zoos in state, national parks and sanctuaries remain closed for public from May 1 till further notice. We had recorded over 1,000 visitors on an average in February which gradually went down to 400 in April with report of spread in infection," Samanta said. Director of M P Birla Planetarium and well-known astrophysicist Debiprasad Duari said the popular spot for students and others interested in cosmic world had to be closed since April 17 for fear of contamination of the pathogen despite taking all Covid control measures and reducing the audience capacity to one third.



Oxygen tankers fitted with GPS to track movement

PNS ■ MUMBAI

All tankers carrying liquid medical oxygen (LMO) in the state are being fitted with GPS devices in order to track their movement and ensure better management of supply of the life-saving gas to COVID-19 patients, a senior official said on Tuesday.

Speaking to PTI, state transport commissioner Avinash Dhakane said currently, 250 tankers are being used for the supply of LMO, demand for which has surged with the rise in COVID-19 cases.

"Nearly 50 per cent of the 250 tankers are already fitted with GPS, while the remaining will be fitted with it within a few days. Once all the tankers fitted with these device, their movement can be tracked from the control room," Dhakane said.

A control room has been set up for monitoring the movement of tankers supplying oxygen across the state and officials from the Road Transport Offices have been deputed to get the GPS devices fitted, he said, adding that LMO is being supplied from 19 different plants through tankers.

The Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA) has funded the work of installing GPS on oxygen tankers, the official said.

'Delhi got 393 MT oxygen last week against requirement of 976 MT'

NEW DELHI: AAP MLA Raghav Chadha on Tuesday said 41 hospitals with around 7,000 people on oxygen support sent SOS calls to the Delhi government on May 3. He also said that the national capital received an average of 393 metric tonnes (MT) of oxygen a day last week against the requirement of 976 MT. "Forty-one hospitals, with 7,142 people on oxygen support, sent SOS calls to the Delhi government on Monday," Chadha said, adding that "Team Kejriwal" promptly responded to all the SOS calls and delivered 21.3 MT of oxygen to these hospitals. The AAP leader also rued that "Delhi received an average of 393 MT of oxygen a day last week against the requirement of 976 MT". He noted that 393 MT is just 40 per cent of the total demand. Chadha said the city got 433 MT of oxygen, just 44 per cent of the total requirement, on Monday. Several hospitals here continue to grapple with the shortage of medical oxygen, as coronavirus cases continue to spike every passing day.

Ex-J&K Guv Jagmohan passes away

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Union minister and Jammu and Kashmir governor Jagmohan, whose tough measures as an administrator in various roles won him many admirers but also drew criticism from some quarters, passed away following a spell of illness.

He was 93.

President Ram Nath Kovind and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday paid tributes to Jagmohan and described him as an exemplary administrator and devoted politician. He passed away on Monday.

The Jammu and Kashmir administration has announced three days of state mourning



from Tuesday to Thursday on the demise of the former governor.

"Saddened to hear about the demise of Shri Jagmohan Ji, former governor of J&K. He was a great visionary, dynamic and effective administrator. Jagmohan Ji will be remem-

bered for his great contributions, reforms in J&K and untiring efforts to serve the society," the office of the Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor tweeted.

A civil servant who made his name as a town planner while serving as the Delhi Development Authority's vice chairperson in the 70s, Jagmohan steered the controversial beautification drive in Delhi as the trusted man of Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency but his image as a no-nonsense officer and doer endured, earning him key positions, including of governor and Union minister, in the later decades.

"In the demise of

Jagmohanji, the nation has lost a unique town planner, able administrator and man of letters. His administrative & political career was marked by unparalleled brilliance. His death leaves a void that will be felt forever. My condolences to his family and friends," Kovind tweeted.

Prime Minister Modi said in his tribute, "Jagmohan ji's demise is a monumental loss for our nation".

"He was an exemplary administrator and a renowned scholar. He always worked towards the betterment of India. His ministerial tenure was marked by innovative policy making. Condolences to his family and admirers.

Matuas choose to split votes despite wooing by BJP, TMC

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The Bharatiya Janata Party in its electoral mathematics for Bengal had counted on the 3 million strong Vaishnavite Matua community spread over the districts of Nadia, South and North 24 Parganas as a major vote bank, with the Prime Minister taking time not only to pay repeated visits to Matua dominated constituencies but even to a Matua shrine in neighbouring Bangladesh.

However actual voting patterns showed that the Matuas did not vote en-bloc for any one party and preferred to split their vote between both the ruling TMC with which many in the commu-

nity had good relations them as well as BJP which had launched a charm offensive aimed at the community. The saffron party had left no stone unturned to win the Matua community's favour. Besides Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and other senior leaders held a series of public meetings in Matua areas.

The community has the highest concentration in North 24 Parganas and Nadia, along with some places in South 24 Parganas district, but has adherents in other districts and in large parts of western Bangladesh too. Hailing from the Namashudra, a scheduled caste, adherents of this Vaishnavite sect are followers of

Harichand Thakur a 19th century Vaishnavite reformer. While the original seat of the Matua Mahasangha was in Oraikandi in Bangladesh where Thakur was born, Indian Matuas have set up their sects inner sanctum in a new township called Thakurnagar, in North 24 parganas, near the border with Bangladesh.

However, despite the BJP launching a campaign blitzkrieg in North 24 Parganas, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah holding public meetings to win the hearts of the Matuas, the party could win only five seats out of 33 seats in North 24 Parganas, with TMC accounting for an overwhelming 28 seats.

Security for Nandigram constituency R0

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The West Bengal government has informed the Election Commission that it has provided security to the returning officer of the Nandigram assembly constituency which saw a cliffhanger between TMC chief Mamata Banerjee and BJP's Suvedu Adhikari, sources said on Tuesday.

Banerjee lost by 1,956 votes to former protegee-turned-BJP adversary Adhikari. On Monday, the Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader had alleged that the returning officer of Nandigram did not order recounting of votes even after she demanded it as he feared for his life.

Insufficient infra caused more deaths in Delhi: Experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A more virulent strain of coronavirus, insufficient infrastructure to handle critical cases and hoarding of essential drugs has led to more deaths in Delhi, experts said on Tuesday.

They also said the number of deaths could be more as many patients die outside hospitals waiting for a bed.

Dr Jugal Kishore, the head of community medicine at Safdarjung Hospital, said the "insufficiency of infrastructure" to handle critical patients is leading to more deaths.

"The virus is not causing so many deaths, it is the insufficient resources and facilities. This is the

major reason," he said.

Critical cases are piling up but there are no beds available for them. Many patients have died on the way to hospitals or outside healthcare facilities waiting for a bed, while many have died due to unavailability of oxygen, Dr Kishore said.

Critical patients spend 10 to 20 days in ICU or on oxygen support. So, the beds remain occupied for this period, even as the number of critical cases keep increasing every day, he said.

Black-marketing and hoarding of essential drugs being used to treat critical patients is another reason.

"This has limited the people's access to these drugs," he said.



Sudhanshu Bankata, the Executive Director of Batra Hospital in Tughlakabad Institutional Area, said a critical patient succumbs to the virus

after 14 to 15 days of testing positive.

"So, if there are more cases today, the number of deaths will be high on the 14th or the 15th

day," he said. Bankata also said that a large number of patients are being treated at home, as hospital beds are full.

"In many cases, patients require high oxygen flow which can only be provided at hospitals and not through concentrators or cylinders. By the time a bed becomes available, their situation has already deteriorated sharply," he said.

Dr D K Baluja, medical director of Jaipur Golden Hospital, said, "The quantum (of infections) is very high. The number of cases has increased from 8,000 to 25,000. So, the absolute number of deaths will be three times more."

"Your logistics, manpower,

everything crashes in such a situation. The way the load is increasing, your capacity is not able to match up to it," he said. Of the 17,414 COVID-19 deaths in Delhi since the pandemic began, more than 5,050 have occurred in the last two weeks.

Delhi logged 448 deaths due to the deadly coronavirus on Monday, the highest in the city since the pandemic began ravaging countries.

The capital reported 407 deaths on Sunday, 412 on Saturday, 375 on Friday, 395 on Thursday, 368 on Wednesday; 381 on Tuesday, 380 on Monday, 350 on last Sunday, and 357 on Saturday last week, according to government data.

Sticky wicket

The SP, and even the Independents, are breaching the BJP's citadel in rural UP

The political wind blowing across Uttar Pradesh (UP) may not be very soothing for the ruling BJP. The results of the recent panchayat elections give the first indication of the emergence of a challenge for the saffron outfit in rural UP. The Opposition, led by the Samajwadi Party and Independents, has made significant inroads in the village politics of the State. Though Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath still remains well-entrenched and the BJP continues to enjoy enormous appeal among the masses, one has to keep a close eye on the change in popular perception about the Government in the wake of the COVID-19 surge as it can pose a serious challenge to Yogi's bid to retain power in 2022. Both the BJP and its rivals are claiming victory in the polls, but reports trickling in from the counting booths clearly indicate that the saffron outfit has not done as well as its leaders might have planned while plunging the State into such a massive exercise in the dreaded Corona era. The panchayat elections were being treated as a referendum on the Yogi Government's work. These elections are not contested on any party symbol, but the BJP named its candidates. This was done with the belief that its candidates would win the elections and then the party would go to town claiming its hegemony in rural politics. Sadly for the BJP, the Independents stole the march in the *gram sabha*



polls while the SP exceeded expectations in the district panchayat elections.

Many relatives of the BJP leaders lost to the SP or Independents. Take the case of Lucknow where Sarita, the daughter-in-law of BJP MP Kaushal Kishore lost the district panchayat election in Mohanlalganj. Kishore's wife Jaya Devi is the MLA from Maliabad. Vijay Laxmi, the wife of SP MLA Ambrish, won this segment. The reports from other districts like Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Ayodhya, Kanpur and Kannauj, too, do not augur well for the BJP. In Ayodhya, of the 40 District Development Council seats, the SP won 22, the BJP eight, the BSP four and the rest of the seats went to Independents. In Varanasi, the BJP failed to reach double digits while the SP won 17 seats. In Etawah, the SP swept the polls, winning 18 seats. In Mainpuri, Sandhya Yadav, the niece of SP patriarch Mulayam Singh Yadav who contested on the BJP's ticket, lost to the SP-backed candidate by 1,905 votes. In Mathura, the BJP-supported Chanda Devi lost to Devati, an Independent, by over 12,000 votes. The panchayat elections are important as they help gauge the influence of political parties in the rural areas. It is believed that a *gram pradhan* can sway 10-15 per cent votes in any *gram sabha* while the BDC and DDC members can influence the block and district voters, respectively. The DDC chairman is considered the 'first person' of the district. The poll outcome shows that the BJP will have to revise its political strategy while Akhilesh Yadav needs to strengthen his party organisation to replicate this success in the 2022 Assembly elections.

PICTALK



The Alster Swans are accompanied by boats towards the Outer Alster area in Hamburg, Germany

PTI

The bubble bursts

Finally, COVID-19 has breached the IPL franchises' 'safe and secure' bio bubble

So, the ongoing edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) has been suspended indefinitely. Officially, they tell us, the reason is that the bio-secure bubble was inexplicably breached and then, before we knew it, the cricketers and support staff started falling prey to the accursed virus one after another. Since the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is quite concerned about the "health and wellbeing" of the IPL players, it was left with no option but to suspend the matches. Well, cutting clear of all the jargon



that is being thrown at us, and more of it will come our way in the coming days, here's a simpler, possible narrative. The greed of the cricket authorities managing the show — namely the BCCI, the various State cricket Boards and the IPL governing council — is mainly responsible for the current fiasco. Remember, even when the situation wasn't dire last year, they arranged for the matches to be held in the UAE and even roped in a company, renowned globally for its expertise in creating and maintaining bio-secure bubbles.

So, especially this year when the situation has rapidly worsened in terms of the exponentially rising cases and the healthcare personnel and equipment are stretched

thin, what was the need to organise the tourney in India? And that, too, without re-engaging the bio bubble firm which had performed its duties last year with aplomb and finesse. Only because the cricket authorities wanted to save cheap pennies, even though it was crystal clear even before the start of the tournament that COVID-19's second wave, with its more virulent and burgeoning strains and mutants, was a definite risk to everybody associated with the cash-rich league. Another point: Just as they now started contemplating moving all the machinery and paraphernalia from Ahmedabad and Delhi back to the Wankhede and DY Patil stadia in Mumbai, why weren't the authorities content to host all the matches in Mumbai and Pune in the first place; something that would have helped the teams avoid air travel and significantly cut their exposure risk? But, no, the State cricket associations also needed to be kept in good humour with a slice of the profits' pie! Hopefully, the cricket authorities won't plan to resume the IPL in a hurry. In this hour, when our nation needs all possible help from all quarters, let's not get busy listening to the tinkle of silver and neglecting human life. Basically, let it not boil down just to the lure of lucre.

The Myanmar crisis lingers on

The General has to decide whether to escalate the conflict or seek a temporary pact through a mediated political dialogue



ASHOK K MEHTA

The most effective means of foiling a coup is a counter-coup. In Myanmar, that will not happen as the military is rock solid and led by an officer corps that considers itself elite and the guardian of Myanmar's core values.

As the coup in Myanmar enters its fourth month with multiple centres of resistance taking root, it will take more than an Asean summit and its five-point consensus agreement to unlock the impasse. Senior Gen Ming Aung Hlaing will not ride into the sunset anytime soon. Signs of a third front, after Kachins in the north and Karens in the east have battled central forces, are developing at Meiktila in the central plains after rocket attacks struck the military base there. Meanwhile, the protestors have taken to flash marches that will enable people to disappear before confrontation with the police. The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) activists are asking people to start non-cooperation campaign by stopping payment of electricity, taxes and repayment of loans.

In its 73-year history, the Myanmar Army has never fought foreigners but its own people in internal wars. The coup has marked the battle lines between an Army led by the Burman-dominated officer corps and a range of opposition forces — the CDM consisting of youth aged 20 or below who have tasted a decade of democracy: the Committee representing National Parliament that has morphed into a National Unity Government. This organised resistance has the potential to explode into a civil war when some of the 20 Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) like Karen or Kachin join the NUG to challenge the Tatmadaw, the primary centre of power. A call has been made by a Karen, General Baw Kyaw Heh, to all ethnic groups to unite to fight the Burmese military dictatorship. This could be a game changer.

The General has to decide whether to escalate the conflict into a bloodier phase or seek a



modus vivendi through a mediated political dialogue. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy had won a clear and outright political victory trouncing the military-backed USDP. It seems inconceivable that the NLD's victory can be set aside by the military on grounds of fraudulent voting. It will be unconstitutional. Can the clock be set back to January 31?

Hlaing is from the Army's elite 77 Light Division. He was the mastermind of the ruthless operations against the Rohingya in Rakhine in 2017 where this Division was employed. In the 1988 coup, 77 LID was used and 3,500 protestors were killed. But that was 30 years ago. The General's aim is for Myanmar to return to 2011-16 when the USDP was in power and when he took over as the C-in-C in 2011. He does not have much time if he is to return Myanmar to his vision of a disciplined democracy. This goal is a bridge too far even for the Tatmadaw to achieve, especially in 2021. The General has to weigh in the consequences of the coup and preserving the gains the military has secured in the 2008 Constitution. By

THE AIM OF SENIOR GEN MING AUNG HLAING IS FOR MYANMAR TO RETURN TO 2011-16 WHEN THE USDP WAS IN POWER AND WHEN HE TOOK OVER AS THE C-IN-C IN 2011. HE DOES NOT HAVE MUCH TIME IF HE IS TO RETURN MYANMAR TO HIS VISION OF A DISCIPLINED DEMOCRACY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

KARNATAKA HAS LOST THE COVID BATTLE

Sir — Karnataka's fight against COVID-19 has faced many pitfalls right from the start, with Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa failing to rein in his warring Ministers during the initial days. Then his inability, along with that of the Ministers concerned to evolve a strategy to counter the second wave, explains the lack of strong political leadership in this hour of crisis. Authorities insist that the deaths in Chamarajanagar were not linked to non-availability of oxygen and that the deceased had comorbidities. But the fact remains that all the dead were on oxygen support and it is unlikely that they all succumbed to ailments within 24 hours.

The Government has repeatedly assured that there is no scarcity of medical oxygen but the ground reality is completely different. Many deaths are being reported from across the State due to oxygen shortage, and the hospitals and common man face immense difficulty in procuring oxygen cylinders and concentrators. While Kerala exports surplus oxygen to other States, it is baffling that Karnataka lacks basic facilities like ICU beds, COVID Care Centres, vital medicines or vaccines. The States like Karnataka are responsible for the worsening of COVID-19 crisis — the deaths have become mere numbers for the insensitive politicians.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

BENGAL VIOLENCE IS UNFORTUNATE

Sir — It's quite unfortunate that violence erupted in West Bengal in the aftermath of the announcement of the Assembly election results in which at least eight people have died. The BJP said that six of its workers were among those killed and that the TMC goons attacked and vandalised several of its offices, including one in Nandigram. Political animosity is the cause of this bloodshed and it's shameful, to say the least. Such incidents are a blot on our democracy and make us wonder whether we are living in a civilised democratic society or a lawless State ruled by barbarism.

That deadly weapons were used in the clashes is a cause for concern. The goonda raj should not be re-established since

Make vaccine prices uniform



In the absence of a regulated vaccine policy by the Government, the country is in chaos and uncertainty. The Centre should have framed a national policy on vaccine procurement and pricing that should have been applicable across India so as to effectively manage the vaccination drive. Currently, the bulk of the responsibility of vaccination has been passed on to the States and private players. Further, procurement of vaccines from a limited number of manufacturers can result in confusion and conflict of interest among the States and private players. The manufacturers will be lured into maximising the profits by selling the

many more innocent people could lose their lives in the coming days. At a time when the pandemic has devastated the country, political parties should set aside their differences and help the people win the war against COVID-19. We must not fight among ourselves but against the virus. Further, as Mamata Banerjee has been given a fresh mandate, she should take the State towards development and shun violence. All political parties should join hands to mitigate the sufferings of the people.

Sravana Ramachandran | Chennai

STOP BLACK MARKETEERING OF DRUGS

Sir — During the ongoing second wave of the pandemic, the non-availability of COVID drugs and oxygen is the main issue the country is facing. Mainly due to the hoarding of drugs like Remdesivir, their prices have skyrocketed in the black market. Long queues

vaccines to the highest bidder rather than the State Governments. The bigger States may get preference over the smaller ones.

Further, the Supreme Court has called upon the Centre to revisit its vaccine procurement policy, stating it would "prima facie result in a detriment to the right to public health which is an integral element of Article 21 of the Constitution". In early 2020, it was well known to Indian manufacturers that excessive dependence on a single source could prove to be disastrous. But we have failed to learn valuable lessons. Sadly, our active pharmaceutical ingredients and raw materials still come from China and America, due to which Indian drug manufacturers are facing adverse circumstances. The idea of allowing other vaccine manufacturers to expand the production capacity by invoking compulsory licence of vaccine technology can cater to the needs of a large and populous country like India. For instance, countries like America, England and Israel have successfully rolled out vaccines in a short span of time are a case in point.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

can be seen at the places selling these in black. Black marketers are charging exorbitant prices from hapless citizens. Though there are contradictory opinions on the efficacy of this drug, hospitals do prescribe it due to its purported benefit on improving mortality.

It is inhuman and criminal if intermediaries exploit the patients at such critical times. The Government should curb it by promulgating an ordinance immediately, categorising hoarding of any medicine or oxygen as culpable homicide amounting to murder, and make the applicable punishment valid for these offences. Considering the gravity of the situation, the Supreme Court may also consider passing *suo moto* orders.

M Raghuraman | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUNDBITE

A murder case should be initiated against Arvind Kejriwal and his Government for not giving Delhi a robust healthcare



system. They even did not complete those hospitals which were initiated by the previous Government.

Former Congress MP

— Sandeep Dikshit

The Senate Republicans will not support the mega \$4.1 trillion spending package proposed by President Joe Biden.

US Senate minority leader

— Mitch McConnell

We have sent a request to the Maharashtra CM to allow us to purchase COVID-19 vaccines for 30,000 registered members of the film industry's federation in Mumbai at the earliest.

Filmmaker

— Aditya Chopra

Our focus will be on maintaining our fitness levels and avoiding any injuries in our practice sessions.

Indian hockey player

— Lalit Upadhyay

I urge all panchayats and municipalities to open essential services 100 per cent or, else, they will face trouble and so will the people of the State. The people will indulge in panic buying.

Goa Chief Minister

— Pramod Sawant

FIRST COLUMN

CHARITY IS NOT A ONE-STOP SOLUTION

India can encourage philanthropy by incentivising it on a tax and individual level and offering tax deductibility



ANURADHA PRASAD

Philanthropy is not a novel concept in India as Indians most often part with wealth in the name of faith, charity or nation-building. A 2020 Charities Aid Foundation report recounts that “the most popular causes for donation remain the same as previous years: Helping the poor (54 per cent), supporting religious organisations (51 per cent) and supporting children (49 per cent),” in India. Unfortunately, charity in our nation is largely either faith-based, or is a response to a natural disaster or relief effort like the current COVID-19 pandemic. However, it remains insufficient for addressing the longstanding social issues. In this context, philanthropic capital from the private sector has become a lifeline for the development sector over the last few years. According to a 2021 Bain-Dasra Report, private-sector funding was about ₹64,000 crore in 2020, which is almost 23 per cent more than the previous year. The money primarily comes from foreign donors, corporate entities, retail (or crowdfunding), high-net-worth individuals (HNWIs) and families. The report highlights that HNW contributions



account for a quarter of all funding, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) donations account for 28 per cent and retail investors or everyday charity account for another 28 per cent. The remaining 20 per cent comes from family philanthropy — the biggest source of growth — that accounts for nearly two-thirds of the increase in funding since 2019. With these numbers in place, it’s not surprising that non-profits in India have directed their energies into unlocking philanthropic capital coming from HNWIs and families. After all, the number of ultra-high-net-worth individuals (UHNWIs) in India will grow 73 per cent in the next five years. It is estimated that the number of UHNWIs will double by 2024. While India prides itself on being home to more than 200 billionaires, the country has also been in the news for topping the world-wide income gap indices.

So, where does philanthropy feature in the larger scheme of things? The easy answer would be that the growing wealth (of a few) in India should automatically translate into more charity. Unfortunately, the reality is not so simple. India still ranks very low on philanthropic giving in comparison to other countries. As per the ‘World Giving Index 2019’, “India was the least generous of the seven South Asian countries in the index, behind its neighbours Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.”

In India, particularly, the concept of giving is an altruistic and value-driven act, rather than an obligation or economically-incentivised. Interestingly, the developed world — particularly the US, has seen a rise in demand for a progressive tax regime by the HNWIs and UHNWIs. Walt Disney and Co heiress Abigail Disney, former BlackRock Inc. managing director Morris Pearl, and Danish-Iranian entrepreneur Djaffar Shalchi are petitioning for higher taxes on the rich to help pay for the billions in new Government programmes made necessary by the pandemic. Alternatively, in India, there has been a shortfall in the overall collection of taxes by the Indian Government.

Another effective method to increase charity is by incentivising it on a tax and individual level. For larger philanthropic donations, the Government can offer tax deductibility. For instance, in the face of the COVID crisis, the US Government increased their allowance for deductible donations of any individual’s annual gross income to 100 per cent from 60 per cent the previous year. Creating a national charity platform or offering major tax breaks for donations is an effective impetus for charity. Perhaps a crucial step would be Government-supported recognition and honour for citizens, incentivised charity, changing the culture and a progressive tax regime.

(The writer is founder and director, India Leaders for Social Sector. The views expressed are personal.)

Fallout of the US troop drawdown will be big

While the Afghans will have to prepare themselves for a possible civil war, the global community must get ready for a renewed and more vigorous threat from extremist Islam



ANIL GUPTA

US President Joe Biden has announced September 11 as the final cut-off date for the complete withdrawal of the US troops from war-torn Afghanistan. Earlier, he had denounced his predecessor Donald Trump’s decision for a complete drawdown by May 1 as “impractical.” As per the new blueprint the pull out which began on May 1 must terminate by September 11 this year. Significantly, September 11, 2022 will mark the completion of two decades of invasion of Afghanistan codenamed ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ (when the twin objective of overthrowing the ruling Taliban regime and decimating Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda was partially achieved) and ‘Operation Freedom’s Sentinel’ thereafter, the longest-running war in American history. At a time when the US and allies are leaving, Afghanistan is in turmoil due to the internal war for control over the country continuing between the elected Government of President Ashraf Gani and the insurgents led by the Taliban, who already control more than 40 per cent of the country.

A Pakistan-brokered peace agreement between the US and the Taliban reached in February 2020 succeeded only to the extent that the Taliban stopped attacking the foreign troops. It failed to achieve the main purpose of a negotiated settlement and permanent ceasefire with the Afghan Government. The Taliban had also agreed to ensure that its soil would not be used as a launch pad for the global jihadi terror groups, which also has been violated many times. In fact, the violence has surged in Afghanistan ever since the beginning of peace talks, with the deaths of civilians and the security forces recording an upward trend as deadly terror attacks increased.

In a nutshell, Afghanistan continues to be in a quagmire and the melting pot for global jihadi terror. The question arises, what did the US achieve even after spending over \$2 trillion and losing 2,216 precious lives? Billions in ‘aid’ are said to have gone down the drain, with the bulk invested in the Dubai property market. The cost to Afghan civilians has been equally appalling, put at between 50,000 and 1,00,000 deaths over the last two decades. Many analysts believe that the present regime in Kabul is unlikely to hold on for long after the Americans leave. It could hardly govern with American help and is unlikely to succeed without the US.

Come September, Afghanistan is likely to be back with the Taliban, a scenario dreaded not only by the Afghans, particularly the women, but India as well. Afghanistan has once again lived up to its reputation of “the graveyard of the Empires.” Yet another power is leaving Afghanistan in ruins and without ushering peace in the war-torn nation. This is straightforward abandonment. Kabul faces a threat not only from the Taliban but from the Islamic State (IS) as well, which is reported to have formed an affiliate IS in Khorasan province.

The country has witnessed a sea change with regards to infrastructure development under the ‘Reconstruction of Afghanistan’ programme, to which India is a major contributor. Will it have any value for the radical Islamists for whom the rule of Sharia is ultimate, even if it means a return to the Medieval Era? The Taliban have already announced themselves as the winners. “We have won the war, America has lost,” they say. That the



THE GOODWILL OF THE AFGHANS EARNED BY INDIA SHOULD ALSO BE EXPLOITED BY NEW DELHI TO SOFTEN THE TALIBAN APPROACH TO US. THE EMERGING SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN WOULD DEFINITELY TEST OUR POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC METTLE IN THE DAYS TO COME

The author is a Jammu-based veteran, political commentator, columnist, security and strategic analyst. The views expressed are personal.



Taliban see themselves as a government-in-waiting, speaks volumes of their plans to overthrow the current regime after the Americans leave. They have already decided to rename the country as the ‘Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.’

“This is jihad, it is worship. We don’t do it for power but for Allah and His law. To bring Sharia to this country. Whoever stands against us we will fight against them,” says Haji Hekmat, Taliban’s shadow mayor in Balkh District. The statement reflects the mindset of the Taliban leadership. However, some elements feel that with the passing of time and change of mindset among many Muslim countries, a group of moderates has also emerged among the Taliban. How much they would be able to influence the new Government or how the new Islamic Government will accommodate them, only time will tell.

India has both, strategic and internal security issues with the American abandonment of Afghanistan. While India’s arch rival in the region, Pakistan seems to be in a win-win situation, India will have to face many challenges. Though,

New Delhi has been included, at Washington’s insistence, in the United Nations’ supervised talks for ensuring intra-Afghan peace, it is not going to make much of a difference, as any positive outcome of the talks is almost ruled out. As and when the Taliban assume power, Pakistan would emerge as a major

player. While Pakistan will not like any Indian influence in Afghanistan, New Delhi can ill-afford to lose all the goodwill and strategic leverage it has gained through huge investments in its economic uplift. Afghanistan is as strategically important to India as it is to Pakistan.

The major threat that would emerge to India, is the likelihood of the situation as it prevailed in the 1990s and early 2000s in relation to jihadi terror. A pliant Government in Afghanistan will allow Pakistan to continue to adhere to its policy of using terror as an instrument of State policy. To avoid international pressure and the fear of watchdogs, it is likely to shift the terror infrastructure to the badlands of Afghanistan.

Jihadi terrorists who would become surplus to the internal need in Afghanistan may well be diverted across the border by Pakistan, as in the past. The security of the infrastructure built by India, including the alternate road route via the Sistan Baluchistan of Iran and, the Indian personnel deployed there, would be another major concern.

To ensure that the gains made by India are not buried along with the anticipated change in regime post-September, New Delhi needs to formulate and put in place a robust response based on a long-term strategy. Without losing time the Government must appoint a special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation with the mandate to

open communication channels and negotiations with all stakeholders, including the Taliban and the IS. Putting boots on the ground has been opposed by India till now and hopefully New Delhi will stick to its stance hereafter. A greater outreach to strengthen the Afghan forces, including training and equipping them, must continue with increased emphasis on capacity-building.

India would need to leverage its good relations with Iran and Russia to keep Pakistan and Turkey away from harming our interests. The emerging threat from radical Islamists will have to be highlighted to China, since it is very sensitive to such threats in its Xinxiang province.

The goodwill of the Afghans earned by India should also be exploited by New Delhi to soften the Taliban approach to us. The emerging situation in Afghanistan would definitely test our political and diplomatic mettle in the days to come.

While the Afghans will have to prepare themselves for a possible civil war, the global community must get ready for a renewed and more vigorous threat from extremist Islam. The epicentre of the new global ‘Great Game’ may be shifting to the Indo-Pacific or the South Caucasus, but Afghanistan will continue to be the epicentre of global jihadi terror, rejuvenated and resurrected. The US may abandon Afghanistan but it would not be able to abandon its war on terror.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

AFTER A DISCUSSION WITH THE ASSOCIATE MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS, IT HAS BEEN DECIDED TO IMPLEMENT THE LOCKDOWN IN BIHAR TILL MAY 15. —BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER
NITISH KUMAR



AT LEAST ONE ORDER HAS BEEN COMPLIED WITH. WE HAVE ALL FAILED. ALL OF US FEEL ASHAMED FOR WHAT WE HAVE DONE. —ADDITIONAL JUDGE, PATNA HIGH COURT
JUSTICE CHAKRADHARI SHARAN SINGH

Breach of fundamental duties led to the spread of Corona

The top court has asserted that under Article 47, the State shall regard the improvement of public health as among its primary duties. Here, it seems to have failed us

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has stipulated certain public health and social measures to contain the spread of the Coronavirus after taking into account the levels of COVID-19 transmission. One of the major measures stipulated is to maintain social distancing and avoid congregations.

There is an obligation on the State to adhere to the measures stipulated by the health watchdog which has also played a vital role in eradicating small pox, polio and so on. As the world, particularly India, witnesses an unprecedented health emergency, it is vital to adhere to the COVID-protocols. Historically, the second wave of any pandemic has proven to be more intensive and dangerous than the first one and India is learning this bitter truth the hard way.

The State has an obligation



CHITTARVU RAGHU

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to protect the health of the people. In this context, the State has to regulate all social and religious events which involve congregations so as to prevent the spread of the virus. Apart from the State, every individual has an obligation to regulate his/her conduct and see to it that their behaviour does not result in any adverse impact on society. We Indians have failed in both these aspects.

Permitting road shows and massive rallies during the conduct of the Assembly elections in various States, particularly West Bengal and allowing the conduct of the Kumbh Mela at Haridwar in the middle of the Coronavirus outbreak clearly demonstrates the same. Consequently on April 15, Uttarakhand recorded its highest upsurge in COVID-19 cases. The Centre was fully conscious of the fact that such large congregations would definitely

spread the virus, but failed to prevent the same. The State ought to have realised that the “Right to Life” guaranteed under the Indian Constitution overrides the rights conferred by the Constitution in relation to a religious activity.

Article 21 of the Constitution mandates that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. The Supreme Court has held that the “Right to Life” guaranteed under Article 21 includes within its ambit the right to health and medical care. Article 47 a directive principle of State policy stresses on the improvement of public health and so on.

The apex court had expanded the concept of “Right to Life.” It was held that it derives its life breath from the directive principles of State policy. When the constitution-



al right to manage religious affairs came up for discussion before the drafting committee, the Chairman had proposed to make the said right, subject to public order, morality and health. It was accepted without any debate. This proves the vision of the founding fathers of the Constitution. But we are failing miserably to act in a proper perspective to protect the constitutional rights being enjoyed by us. Lack of preven-

tive measures and the callousness of the general citizens reflect the same.

The State cannot remain a silent spectator when massive congregations, either political or religious, are being organised, which will result in exacerbating the health emergency that we are currently facing. In this context it’s also relevant to examine Article 26 of the Constitution. It contemplates that the freedom to manage religious affairs is subject to public order, morality and health. Therefore, it is not an absolute right. It is conditioned by Article 21 of the Constitution when it relates more particularly in relation to the aspect of public health.

We failed in adhering to the social distancing norms which is a major cause for the spread of the virus. Mahatma Gandhi had said on the aspect of a person’s duty towards society that

“the true source of right is duty.” If we all discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek. If we neglect our duties and run after rights, they will elude us.

The Supreme Court, too, in the Minerva Mills Vs Union of India case, held that there may be a rule which imposes an obligation on an individual or authority and yet it may not be enforceable in a court of law and, therefore, not give rise to a corresponding right in another person. But it would still be a legal rule because it prescribes a norm of conduct to be followed by such an individual or authority.

The law may provide a mechanism of enforcement. A rule imposing an obligation or duty would not cease to be a rule of law because there is no regular judicial or quasi judicial machinery to enforce its command. Such a rule would exist despite any problem relating to

its enforcement. Otherwise the conventions of the Constitution and even rules of international law would no longer be liable to be regarded as rules of law.

This shows that an individual plays a vital role in a State and its welfare. Fundamental duties were introduced in part IV A by the 42nd amendment and were based on the recommendations of the Swaran Singh Committee.

The Supreme Court in the Javed Vs State of Haryana case, held that fundamental rights are not to be read in isolation. They have to be read along with directive principles of State policy and fundamental duties enshrined in Article 51A. The top court also asserted that under Article 47, the State shall regard the improvement of public health as among its primary duties. Here, it seems to have failed us.

Sensex skids for third day; Reliance, HDFC twins top drags

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmark Sensex surrendered early gains to finish in the red for the third consecutive session on Tuesday following brisk selling in frontline stocks. The grim COVID-19 situation and continued selling by foreign funds has sapped risk appetite, traders said. After a gap-up opening, the 30-share BSE index succumbed to profit-taking in afternoon trade to finish at 48,253.51, down 465.01 points or 0.95 per cent. On similar lines, the broader NSE Nifty slumped 137.65 points or 0.94 per cent to close at 14,496.50. Dr Reddy's was the top loser among the Sensex constituents, retreating 2.26 per cent, followed by Reliance Industries, Sun Pharma, HDFC twins, Infosys, M&M and Bharti Airtel. On the other hand, ONGC, Bajaj Finance, TCS, SBI, Kotak Bank and Nestle India were among the gainers, climbing up

to 1.86 per cent. "Indices lost a percentage on Tuesday as the street punished earnings disappointment in several high-quality midcaps. Afternoon trade witnessed profit-taking in metals and pharmaceutical names as the street exhibited nervousness on regional lockdowns which accentuated the weakness. "In the broader market, paper stocks were sought after today on hardening pulp prices while coffee producers saw investor appetite," said S Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities. Binod Modi, Head Strategy at Reliance Securities, said the mounting uncertainty led by rise in second wave of COVID-19 cases weighed on investor

sentiment. While a persistent increase in daily case-load in several states is still a matter of concern, visible modest decline in new cases in many parts like Maharashtra and Delhi offers comfort, he added. The total tally of coronavirus cases in the country

mounted to 2,02,82,833 with 3,57,229 new infections being reported in a day, while the death toll increased to 2,22,408 with 3,449 new fatalities, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday. Sectorally, BSE healthcare, energy, telecom, consumer durables, auto and basic materials indices lost as much as 1.50 per cent, while oil and gas, utilities and capital

goods ended with gains. Broader BSE midcap and small-cap indices fell up to 0.57 per cent. Global markets were mixed as investors wagered on a strong economic rebound even as many countries see an unabated rise in COVID-19 cases. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Hong Kong and Seoul ended on a positive note. Stock exchanges in Shanghai and Tokyo were closed for holidays. Equities in Europe gave up initial gains to trade mildly lower in mid-session deals. Meanwhile, international oil benchmark Brent crude was trading 1.79 per cent higher at USD 68.77 per barrel. The rupee gained for the second straight day and closed 10 paise higher at 73.85 against the US dollar on Tuesday. Foreign institutional investors were net sellers in the capital market on Monday as they sold shares worth Rs 2,289.46 crore, as per exchange data.

Move to amend National Electricity Policy criticised

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

All India Power Engineers Federation on Tuesday condemned the central government's move to amend the National Electricity Policy "to facilitate privatisation". According to a statement by the AIPEF, the proposed changes require extensive discussions as such time for submission of comments should be six months. When fundamental changes are being introduced by way of privatization of the power sector, there is no basis to rush through more so under extreme distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, it said. "All India Power Engineers Federation (AIPEF) condemns the government of India's move to amend the National Electricity Policy to facilitate the privatization of the power sector," the statement said. The body alleged that this is a clear attempt to introduce privatization through the backdoor and deserves to be scrapped. The purpose of the central government is not to review or



revise the existing National Electricity Policy but the total replacement of existing policy with a new policy to be recommended by the expert group so as to achieve privatization, the body alleged. As per Electricity Act 2003, National Electricity Policy is to be prepared in consultation with the state governments and Central Electricity Authority, a statutory body. However, the body said that the CEA is not included in the proposed schedule of discussion. Further, only 5 states have been included in an expert group instead of all the states,

it added. K Subramanian, Chief Economic Adviser, has stated that India is the only country that readily implemented a slew of reforms and used this crisis to herald a change in India's economic thinking, it said. The strategy of government seems to be "never waste a crisis" and use the crisis of pandemic to streamroll so-called reforms by way of privatizing, it alleged. The draft proposal is of serious nature for which the present situation of a pandemic is a serious constraint, it stated.



Godrej Properties clocks record sales

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties' sales bookings grew by 14 per cent to an all-time high of Rs 6,725 crore during the last financial year, despite a slowdown in the property market due to the pandemic. In an investor presentation, the Mumbai-based company said it has achieved sales bookings of more than Rs 1,300 crore each across its four major markets -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Bengaluru and Pune. "Godrej Properties Ltd is amongst India's largest developers by booking value. "Total booking value in FY21

grew by 14 per cent YoY (Year-On-Year) to Rs 6,725 crore," the company said in the presentation. The residential segment contributed Rs 6,663 crore, while commercial projects Rs 62 crore in the overall sales bookings during the 2020-21 financial year. Of the total sales bookings, Godrej Properties said the sales from existing inventory stood at Rs 4,550 crore, while sales from new launches stood at Rs 2,175 crore. "Sold 9,345 homes (YoY growth of 27 per cent) with a total area of 10.8 million sq ft (YoY growth of 23 per cent) in FY21," Godrej Properties said.

Singapore expands facility to revive aviation, hospital sectors

PNS ■ SINGAPORE

Complimenting the Singapore government's broader efforts to reinvigorate aviation and local hospitality sectors in a safe and calibrated manner, a state-funded COVID-proof facility has expanded by four-fold to 600 guest rooms and 160 meeting rooms for visiting international business executives to manage their deals through the city state. Each in-person meeting at Connect@Changi, without the need for quarantine upon arrival, represents a small but concrete step towards the resumption of business and economic activities, Aloysius Arlando, CEO, SingEx-Sphere Holdings, one of the consortium partners led by the state-owned Temasek Group that is behind the facility, said on Tuesday. "Connect@Changi is a pilot short-stay facility built to support the resumption of business and economic activities while safeguarding the local



community," he said about the facility, a 10-minute drive from Singapore's Changi international airport. It is uniquely designed to meet the immediate needs of business travellers who have to conduct in-person business meetings and other engagements with their Singapore-based counterparts, while being in a safe and contained environment, Arlando said. "The facility made possible face-to-face business engagements like job interviews for senior management, product demonstrations, confidential business negotiations and contract signings from a diverse slate of business sectors and industries such as manufacturing, finance and engineering," it said.

fit, and they might include small-scale or side meetings and presentations as part of a larger regional or international event or conference," said Arlando. The 150 guest room facility started in February but has been expanded to 600 guest rooms from this month, responding to over 100 confirmed bookings from international guests. In the three months of its operation, the facility facilitated over 150 in-person meetings and hosted guests from regional countries such as Indonesia and Japan, as well as guests from the Americas, Europe and the Middle East. "The facility made possible face-to-face business engagements like job interviews for senior management, product demonstrations, confidential business negotiations and contract signings from a diverse slate of business sectors and industries such as manufacturing, finance and engineering," it said.

Alembic Q4 net profit up by 12 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug firm Alembic Pharmaceuticals on Tuesday reported an 11.60 percent rise in consolidated net profit to Rs 250.70 crore for the quarter ended March 2021, mainly on account of robust sales. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 224.63 crore for the corresponding period of the previous fiscal, Alembic Pharmaceuticals said in a filing to BSE. Consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 1,280.39 crore for the quarter under consideration. It was Rs 1,206.83 crore for the same period a year ago, it added. For the fiscal year ended March, the company posted a net profit of Rs 1,178 crore as against Rs 829 crore in 2019-20, Alembic Pharma said.

MONEY MATTERS

BSE STAR MF registers 1.11 cr transactions worth ₹33,735 cr



Leading stock exchange BSE on Tuesday said its mutual fund distribution platform STAR MF has processed a record 1.11 crore transactions worth Rs 33,735 crore in April. It surpassed its monthly record of 1.10 crore transactions achieved in March 2021, the exchange said in a statement. In spite of the nationwide pandemic and lockdown, BSE STAR MF has helped asset management companies (AMCs) members and their clients in smooth paperless transactions. The platform has clocked 1.11 crore transactions in April 2021, a sharp increase of 75 per cent from 63.17 lakh registered in April 2020. Overall, the platform achieved 9.38 crore transactions in the financial year 2020-21. Besides, the platform registered 4.99 lakh new systematic investment plans (SIPs) amounting to Rs 129.95 crore in April 2021, the exchange said.

Gold gains Rs 97; silver jumps Rs 1,282



Gold gained Rs 97 to Rs 46,758 per 10 gram in the national capital on Tuesday, according to HDFC Securities. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 46,661 per 10 gram. Silver also jumped Rs 1,282 to Rs 70,270 per kilogram from Rs 68,988 per kilogram in the previous trade. In the international market, gold was trading marginally lower at USD 1,788 per ounce and silver was flat at USD 26.90 per ounce. "Gold prices traded marginally down with spot prices at COMEX (New York-based commodities exchange) trading at USD 1,788 per ounce on Tuesday," according to HDFC Securities, Senior Analyst (Commodities), Tapan Patel.

Rupee gains 10 paise to end at 73.85, rises for second day



Rising for the second day in a row, the rupee closed 10 paise higher at 73.85 against the US currency on Tuesday on dollar selling by traders. A stronger dollar in the global markets, losses in the domestic equities and high crude oil prices, however, restricted the gain in the local unit. "The Indian Rupee appreciated for the 2nd successive session against the US Dollar this Tuesday as traders trimmed their dollar long positions," said Sriram Iyer, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities. At the interbank forex market, the rupee opened at 73.83, and hit an intra-day high of 73.76 and a low of 73.97. On Monday, the rupee had settled at 73.95 against the American currency. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, surged 0.42 per cent to 91.33.

Accenture pledges \$25 mn for Covid relief efforts in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Global IT and professional services company Accenture on Tuesday said it has pledged USD 25 million (about Rs 185 crore) for pandemic relief efforts in the country. This is in addition to the company's ongoing investments in people and communities, Rekha M Menon, Chairperson and Senior MD of Accenture in India, said in a blog post on LinkedIn. Local and global efforts are already underway including providing ventilators, oxygen concentrators, and medical kits, she added. "Accenture stands in solidarity with India. We have made



a fresh pledge of USD 25 million (about Rs 185 crore) for pandemic relief efforts in addition to ongoing investments in our people and communities... Additionally, we will be augmenting existing hospitals with beds and ICUs and setting up portable hospitals," she noted. Menon - who was recently appointed as the Chairperson of Nasscom - said Accenture is also engaging with the government to support vaccination camps and provide local lan-

guage call-centre support. To support its over 2,00,000 employees and their families in India, the company has built several resources including 24/7 telemedicine, care-at-home services, enhanced insurance coverage, virtual childcare, mental health support, and support for testing and vaccinations. "Across the globe, our people have expressed their support. In addition to their time, they are also donating funds, and Accenture will match 100 per cent of our people's contributions for Covid relief efforts. Sharing gratitude for our ONE Accenture family - the 5,37,000 people standing with us every day," Menon said.

'MFIs to witness asset quality pressures'

PNS ■ MUMBAI

With increasing Covid cases and the resultant restrictions in movements imposed by many states, the microfinance industry is likely to see an impact on their collections and may witness asset quality pressures in the near term, says a report. However, good on-balance sheet liquidity and sizeable provisions created by most of the Microfinance Institutions in 2021 will provide a cushion for absorbing shocks, IcrA Ratings said in a report on Tuesday.

FADA raises ₹10L to procure O₂ tankers

PNS ■ MUMBAI

The Maharashtra unit of automobile dealers body FADA has raised Rs 10 lakh to support the state's transport department to procure 250 oxygen tankers fitted with GPS devices. Federation of Automobile Dealers' Association (FADA) Maharashtra chapter has decided to make its contribution to strengthening the hands of the state administration in battling the second wave of Covid which is proving more fatal and health care battling to reach out to people in the state, a release said. The federation said it has raised the required contribution of Rs 10 lakh and placed

the order, it said. The fitment of the GPS devices in these tankers has already commenced from Monday, FADA Maharashtra said, adding it has roped in MOBA Mobile Automation (India) for the necessary technological know-how and expertise to deliver the same in a time-bound manner. "FADA got an opportunity to strengthen the hands of Maharashtra state administration. We have tried to do our best as this is a small contribution towards enabling the transport department to monitor oxygen tankers movement on a single dashboard. This will definitely help save the lives of patients," FADA President Vinkesh Gulati said.

IIT-M, UK researchers develop paper-based sensor to detect AMR

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Researchers at the IIT-Madras and hailing from the United Kingdom have developed a paper-based sensor that can detect antimicrobial pollutants which induce antimicrobial resistance in water bodies. According to IIT-M, the sensor works on a 'see and tell' mechanism that makes it logistically effective for wide implementation. Scientific communities were engaged in the study of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and the water bodies were the major source for the dissemination and

transfer of AMR. Underlining the need for periodic monitoring of antimicrobial pollutants in water bodies, antibiotic resistant genes was the key to assess the current situation of Antimicrobial Resistance in the country. The research on developing the paper-based sensor to detect anti-microbial pollutants was funded by the department of science and technology in collaboration with the United Kingdom's Natural Environment Research Council under the Indo-UK Water Quality Research programme.

Auto sales witness impact of lockdowns

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Auto sales in April have started showing the impact of lockdowns that has put the brakes on the recovery of the sector, a report said on Tuesday. With more states announcing lockdowns and some more OEMs expecting to go for maintenance shutdowns, as many as 50 per cent of the dealers are likely to be impacted by the move, it added. However, the full-year prospects remain positive if the COVID wave recedes in the April quarter and the vaccination drive goes as planned, brokerage firm Centrum said in the report. The opportunity cost was higher in April as it had a mini-festival period and weddings that fell after Holi. Two-wheeler sales were higher in this period and hence channels



were stocked up. However, the lockdowns happened in the states that contributed 25-30 per cent of the sales, it added. Centrum said the passenger vehicles sales started in the month with low inventory and hence stocked up before the production shutdowns in May. The commercial segment was the worst hit and lagged the registrations, indicating low channel inventory now,


while tractor sales have also declined sequentially hinting at the pandemic impact in the hinterlands, it said. "We expect May to be subdued with more states taking lockdowns and as OEM's take maintenance shutdowns," Centrum Broking said. Noting that April was anticipated to be a good month for two-wheelers on the back of mini-festivals at the regional

level and marriage season demand in the rural areas, the OEM's had prepared their channels with stock. However, with the rising COVID cases, states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Delhi started imposing lockdowns as a result of which, the wholesalers of domestic two-wheelers got impacted especially in the lower cc-segments, with month-on-month sales of Hero MotoCorp, Bajaj Auto and TVS Motors declining by 37 per cent, 30 per cent and 35 per cent, respectively, in the domestic market. Bajaj Auto's management expects 50 per cent of dealers to be shut in May as compared to 30-35 per cent in April on the back of lockdowns, the report said, adding inventories are also higher than normal for the industry.

Covid: Samsung pledges \$5mn, Paytm to set up oxygen plants



Tech giant Samsung on Tuesday said it has pledged USD 5 million (Rs 37 crore), while Paytm Foundation intends to set up oxygen plants in 12-13 cities as part of efforts to support India's battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. Samsung will donate USD 3 million to the Centre and states of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, and provide USD 2 million worth of medical supplies, including 100 Oxygen Concentrators, 3,000 Oxygen Cylinders, and one million LDS syringes, a statement said. LDS or Low Dead Space syringes minimise the amount of drug left in the device after injection, optimising vaccine usage. The technology has demonstrated up to 20 per cent greater efficiency and if existing syringes were to deliver one million doses, LDS syringes could deliver 1.2 million doses with the same amount of vaccine. Samsung has helped the manufacturer of these syringes increase production capacity, the statement said.



Kangana's Twitter account suspended permanently

Kangana Ranaut's Twitter account has been permanently suspended after she commented on the alleged violence in West Bengal following the assembly election results. In a series of provocative tweets, the actor also commented on the victory of the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC) for the third consecutive term in West Bengal. Her Instagram remains functional.

Responding to the suspension, Kangana told a news agency, "Twitter has only proved my point they're Americans & by birth, a white person feels entitled to enslave a brown person, they want to tell you what to think, speak or do. I have many platforms I can use to raise my voice, including my own art in the form of cinema." She went on to add, "But my heart goes out to the people of this nation who have been tortured, enslaved, and censored for thousands of years, and still, there is no end to the suffering."

Commenting on the development, a Twitter spokesperson said as per a news agency, "We've been clear that we will take strong enforcement action on behavior that has the potential to lead to offline harm. The referenced account has been permanently suspended for repeated violations of Twitter Rules specifically our Hateful Conduct policy and Abusive Behaviour policy."

The spokesperson said that the rules were applied judiciously, "As explained in our abusive behaviour policy, you may not engage in the targeted harassment of someone, or incite other people to do so. We consider abusive behavior an attempt to harass, intimidate, or silence someone else's voice."

The actor retaliated with a video on Instagram titled, "Distressed, beyond words, death of democracy. important message for our government." She asked for President's rule in the state in the video. Kangana Ranaut is notorious for her outrageous, no-filter posts on social media.

Earlier, Kangana's sister Rangoli Chandel's Twitter account was also suspended for violating the regulations of the platform. Kangana's account was also restricted for a few hours earlier this year after the actor's incendiary tweets against the web series *Tandav*. The tweet was deleted later.

"We take action on any account that violates the Twitter Rules. We welcome people to freely express themselves on our service, however as outlined in our Abusive Behaviour Policy, you may not engage in the targeted harassment of someone, or incite other people to do so," Twitter had said in a statement to a news channel at that time.

Responding to the move, Bollywood actor Kubbra Sait of said the suspension of the account was a permanent relief. She wrote, "Amen! I was in a mental state of tripping her with my left foot if I ever met her. But, this is way better. I hope a permanent relief. Social media can be better without her."



Met Gala to return in September

The star power is back. When the Met Gala returns in September, it will feature a heavy-hitting contingent of celebrity co-chairs: Actor Timothée Chalamet, musician Billie Eilish, poet Amanda Gorman and tennis star Naomi Osaka.

Honorary chairs for the evening will be designer Tom Ford, sponsor Instagram's Adam Mosseri, and Vogue's Anna Wintour.

The museum made the announcement on the traditional day of the Met Gala — the first Monday in May. Those plans, of course, were upended by the pandemic. The September 13 gala will be a more intimate affair, to be followed by a larger one on May 2, 2022. Both will launch a two-part exhibition, a survey of American fashion to be on view for almost a year.

In America: A Lexicon of Fashion, opening September 18, will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the museum's Costume Institute and "explore a modern vocabulary of American fashion," the museum has said. Part two, In America: An Anthology of Fashion, will open in the museum's popular American Wing period rooms on May 5, 2022, and will explore American fashion, with collaborations with film directors, by "presenting narratives that relate to the complex and layered histories of those spaces." Both parts will close on Sept. 5, 2022.

Filmmaker Melina Matsoukas (Queen & Slim) has been commissioned to create an open-ended film to project in the galleries, with content changing during the course of the exhibition.

The gala, which was canceled last year, is a major fundraiser, providing the Costume Institute with its primary source of funding.

As always, the exhibits will be the work of star curator Andrew Bolton. In a video preview Monday, Bolton noted how challenging the past year had been for the fashion community. "It's been incredibly inspiring to see how designers have responded to the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, how they've found new outlets to express their creativity and new ways to present their collections," he said.

Bolton added that many designers had been at the vanguard of the discussion about diversity and inclusion: "The social justice movements of last summer reinforced their commitment to these issues and also consolidated their leadership in advancing the conversation."

In addition to Matsoukas, other confirmed collaborators from the film world include cinematographer Bradford Young, whose projects have included Selma and When They See Us; production designers Nathan Crowley and Shane Valentino; and Franklin Leonard, film executive and founder of The Black List, a listing of top unproduced screenplays.

Radhe gets U/A certificate, becomes shortest Salman Khan film with 114 minutes runtime

Salman Khan's *Radhe - Your Most Wanted Bhai* has been cleared by the Central Board of Film Certification with no cuts. The actioner has been given a U/A certificate which means it can be watched by people of all age groups but under parental guidance. The board gave the certificate to the film two weeks ahead of its release.

Helmed by Prabhudheva, *Radhe* is scheduled to release on multiple platforms on the occasion of Eid on May 13. While it will be screened in cinema halls in over 40 countries, it will have its digital premiere on ZEE5's pay per view platform ZeePlex. It will also be available to watch on DTH services, including Dish TV, D2H, Tata Sky and Airtel Digital TV. The advance booking for *Radhe* has already begun in UAE, informed Salman.

Taking to Twitter, *Dabangg* Khan wrote, "#Radhe ki advance bookings ho gayi hain shuru for the UAE. Milte hain theatres mein. Stay safe! (The advance booking of *Radhe* has begun in UAE. Will meet in the theaters)." *Radhe*'s CBFC certificate also mentions that the film's runtime is only 114.24 minutes, making it the shortest Salman Khan film ever.

In a career spanning over three decades, the actor has never acted in a film that has been shorter than 120 minutes.

Besides Salman, *Radhe* also stars Randeep Hooda, Disha Patani, Jackie Shroff and Gautam Gulati in prominent roles.

In an earlier statement, Shariq Patel, CBO, Zee Studios had shared why *Radhe* is releasing on multiple mediums. He said, "The ongoing pandemic forced us to innovate, and we are proud



to be the first to embark upon this new distribution strategy. While we all love to catch the latest movies at the nearest theatres, we realized we'd be doing a disservice to Salman's fans nationwide if we aren't able to release theatrically in all Indian states. We sensed the need for a pay per view solution along with theatres, which gives the consumers flexibility and convenience of viewing the film."




Will Smith says he is in 'the worst shape' of his life, reveals dad bod

Sactor Will Smith does things differently, even if it means embracing the "worst shape" of his physique. The versatile Hollywood star, in his impeccable style, confessed about his body shape through an Instagram post on Monday. Smith posted a candid click where he's flaunting his dad bod. In this caption, he wrote, "I'm gonna be real wit yall — I'm in the worst shape of my life."


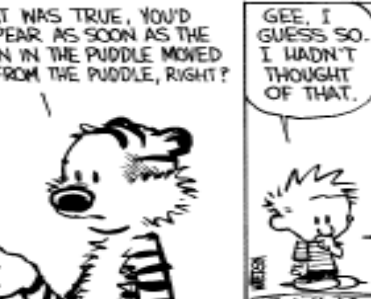

Smith's post received reactions from several global celebs like Joel Kinnaman, Ava DuVernay, DJ Steve Aoki, Ludacris, Harry Hudson, Sonna, DJ Lana Michele Moorer and many more.

They either laughed at his unique comic timing, or left fun emojis for him. Will Smith's co-production martial-arts comedy drama *Cobra Kai* is set to release its fourth season by the end of 2021, Netflix confirmed recently.




ARCHIE






CALVIN AND HOBBS






GARFIELD



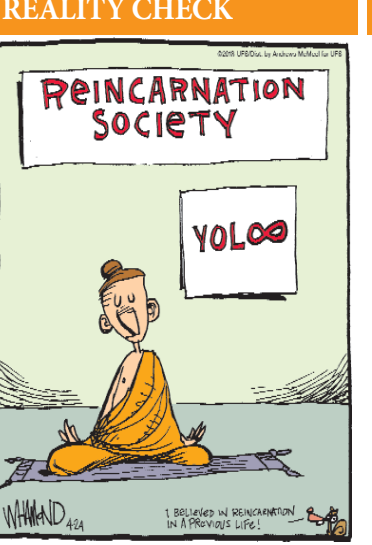
NANCY




GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD

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Yesterday's solution

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Rules

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

ACROSS

6 Speed up

8 Elephant tusk material

10 Leather belt

13 Performer

14 Keep your money in this

17 Large group of singers

19 Avalanches

DOWN

1 Sound bouncing back

2 Extremely

3 Fewer

4 Head covering

5 Not permanent

7 A tropical fruit

9 These tall grass-like plants grow in or near water

SOLUTION

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SOULFUL, MEANINGFUL TUNES TO VIBE TO

SHIKHA DUGGAL

When *Jaani Tere Naa* released, every diehard fan of Punjabi music was asking one another whether if they heard this new bombarding track or not. That was the kind of effect of the popular actor and singer from the Bollywood industry Sunanda Sharma.

With every new track that she releases, it's bound to create ripples in the Punjabi music industry! Things slowly turned wild and frantic for her when she seized an opportunity to be featured in a Hindi music video opposite Sonu Sood — she couldn't control her excitement, it was way beyond her. *Pagal Nahi Hona* with India's new Covid hero had listeners hooked on so much that there she was with a new music video having promising actor of our era Nawazuddin Siddique shaking a leg with her while going through diverse nuances of emotions in one single music video!

Sunanda's song *Baarish Ki Jaaye* sung by B Praak has received a lot of love and praise from fans. Inspired by a true story, the music video for *Baarish Ki Jaaye* tells the tale of a gangster who falls in love and marries a woman with mental health issues. *Baarish Ki Jaaye* has received over 111 million views on YouTube with over 2 Million likes so far and Sunanda Sharma can't contain her elation anymore! Despite being restricted because of a pandemic, the singer came on board only to accelerate the change to an amplifying benefit. It was no music video with a lavish production budget but only a new sensation coming from the land of five rivers which is always spilling over with artists competing for liveliness and stardom.

"What's the primary job of a *kalakaar* (artist)? It's to delve deep into the character they have been asked to play or sing, regardless of which film/music industry they belong to. It's a talent pool! It's the modern era, everyone is busy collaborating either for a web-show, music video or movie and we all know, each

to its own, we are entitled to our own fan-base and wherever we go as a *kalakaar*, our fandom will come along. It's a world of experiments and there's an increasing consensus of new normal changes, hence we as artists are also adjusting to the novel norms. As far as revenues are concerned, '*muh-maange paise milte hai*' so why not take it up!" she says.

Media reports quoted her talking about playing a girl with mental health issues — "It wasn't the usual glamorous girl showing how pretty she is. The character has this real side to it and a lot of people will agree. It needed intense work and that became the deciding factor for me. I play a girl who is a special child, has no idea about the world. She doesn't even know what love is but is getting married to this gangster played by Nawazuddin, who cares for her."

While one was a top-notch romantic track that she did, the new music video is a complete contrast to it, while both of them bring two souls together. Adding to that she says, "Everyone goes through a stage where they get attracted, fall in love and even get to experience a heart-break, while what I have noticed is that for every song there will definitely be a strata of people who resonate with whatever track I come up with. If music can bring cultures together, so can it bring souls together! When we share music, it gets a meaningful glimpse into another way of life as you can also witness in *Baarish Ki Jaaye*. On a personal note, whenever I am caught up with a hectic schedule on set, I turn on music for a while and loosen up. That's how it plays an important element even in my life because it takes me into another *duniya*. Music has spirituality! When an interaction seems to be closed, music helps."

The moment Sunanda got the news that she'll be collaborating with Sonu Sood for a music video, as mentioned earlier, she couldn't contain that moment of exhilaration because she could feel the *theth punjabi* vibe already! She already knew the vibe on the set is going to be world class and more importantly, she built an unspoken regard for

him as a philanthropist who's giving his blood and sweat for the nation's progress in the times of crisis where one can't even take the risk of venturing out from their homes. Asserting firmly that '*kalakaar ko pehle kaam chahiye*', she as a singer certainly first associates with how meaningful a song is, instead of who's in the video.

The 28-year old self-taught musician further says, "Both the actors are immensely humble! The kind of chivalry they had shown was something that clenched onto my heart. Punjabi music is on a heady rise these days because it's being loved by the masses and how! The atmosphere, while shooting in Mumbai, gets a tad bit authoritarian and back in Punjab, it's all slackening. I was literally following a 9-5 shift in

Mumbai because they keep professionalism a priority!"

The state that she belongs to has a long-standing tradition of music and live performance! Punjabi music has a diaspora of its own that's even far-fetched to overseas, one can imagine now. At the moment, Bollywood is also being deeply influenced by Punjabi culture and they can't get enough of those songs. Music gives Sunanda Sharma a sense of emotional power! Like any other individual, music impacts her in ways that other sounds don't. Fond of listening to Pakistani music whenever having a dull moment around, the singing sensation finally discovered that music can inspire such strong feelings and bind us so tightly to other

people! In today's success, one thing she has noticed is that music industry has placed a pathway for singers to be featured in their own music video! Sunanda doesn't want to do a playback for any popular actress but rather be the face of her own music video as it provides more dynamism. "Nobody would better know on how to act on a song sung by me but me! I

there's no need to transform it!" she concluded.

Instagram reels are filling the gap of Tiktok these days and Sunand's song *Baarish Ki Jaye* is one of the trending reel trends on it, leave



would better have a hang of it on how to impress my fan-base. And, I don't like remixes at all! A certain track carries a *khoobsurati* of its own, we mustn't change that because at times we over do it. Adding an international influence to a folk song famously known for its sounds of dhol may spoil it. Some music is legendary and behind all the despair and make merry on it! This artist of Punjabi music industry is on the crest of a good wave right now and she wants to rise and dazzle in Bollywood soon.



VISIT ACCINATE ACAY!

Where did most Indians escape to, once they thought the Covid surge has come down? Where did our celebs go for a vacay in the past few months, to put behind their stress and tensions? The Maldives! This tourist destination is easily on everybody's 'favourite list'. But with the increase in the influx of tourists, came an increase in the number of covid cases, to the point of the country having to shut its door on India!

Now, in a bid to welcome more tourists and to assure them of their safety, the island nation of Maldives has launched the 'I'm Vaccinated' tourism campaign, which highlights the archipelago's intentions to have the world's first fully vaccinated tourism workforce in place. According to a report in The

National News, 'Visit Maldives' has collaborated with the country's ministry of tourism for this campaign. The messaging is such that it comes across as attractive for international tourists looking to travel somewhere that the island archipelago has undertaken some initiatives which make it one of the safest destinations in the world for tourists.

Maldives had already announced plans to offer tourists the Covid-19 vaccine. Its tourism minister Abdulla Mausoom in an interview with CNBC had announced a '3V' plan that stands for 'Visit', 'Vaccinate', 'Vacation', as an incentive to visit the country.

"The main idea of tourism being open is to provide reasonably safe tourism with minimum inconvenience. So, once the country gets vaccinated, then we will move

on to '3V' tourism," Mausoom had said.

Now, it wants visitors to feel a sense of safety and comfort amid the pandemic. For them to visit a place where they can not only socially distance themselves but also interact with the first fully vaccinated tourism workforce. As per the report, at present, 65 per cent of eligible people in the Maldives have been vaccinated and 90 per cent of those eligible in the tourism industry in the country have received their doses, too. Additionally, all members of the tourism industry, who have been vaccinated, will wear a dedicated 'I'm Vaccinated' badge. Maldives, at the moment, is accepting tourists with a negative PCR test report, taken less than three days before travel, or those who are fully vaccinated with no quarantine requirements.



Awareness key to tackling mid-life crisis

If you are, or know a middle-aged man, you sure know of the perils of the mid-life crisis that they could already be going through. And if the man grapples with feelings of loneliness, problems tend to get serious. But here's worse news: Findings of a recent study by

the University of Eastern Finland researchers suggest that loneliness among middle-aged men is associated with an increased risk of cancer! "It has been estimated, on the basis of studies carried out in recent years, that loneliness could be as significant a health risk as smoking or overweight. Our findings support the idea that attention

should be paid to this issue," Project Researcher Siiri-Liisi Kraav from the University of Eastern Finland says.

According to the researchers, taking account of loneliness and social relationships should thus be an important part of comprehensive health care and disease prevention. The findings were published in *Psychiatry Research*.

The study was launched in the 1980s with 2,570 middle-aged men from eastern Finland participating. Their health and mortality have been monitored on the basis of registered data up until the present day. During the follow-up, 649 men, i.e., 25 per

cent of the participants, developed cancer, and 283 men (11 per cent) died of cancer.

Loneliness increased the risk of cancer by about ten per cent. This association with the risk of cancer was observed regardless of age, socio-economic status, lifestyle, sleep quality, depression symptoms, body mass index, heart disease, and their risk factors. In addition, cancer mortality was higher in cancer patients who were unmarried, widowed, or divorced at baseline.

"Awareness of the health effects of loneliness is con-

stantly increasing. Therefore, it is important to examine, in more detail, the mechanisms by which loneliness causes adverse health effects. This information would enable us to better alleviate loneliness and the harm caused by it, as well as to find optimal ways to target preventive measures," researchers say.

There's hope: Increased awareness helps to deal with problems better. Researchers hope the study will equip more people to notice, identify and address warning signs early on.



IPL CALLED OFF



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Premier League was on Tuesday suspended indefinitely after multiple Covid-19 cases were reported in its bio-bubble, ending a month-long relatively smooth run for cricket's most glamorous and cash-rich event in the middle of a raging pandemic.

"The tournament has been suspended indefinitely. We will try to conduct the event in the next available window but this month is unlikely," league chairman Brijesh Patel said.

The announcement came after Sunrisers Hyderabad's wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha tested positive for Covid-19 along with Delhi Capitals' veteran spinner Amit Mishra. Hours after the postponement, CSK batting coach Michael Hussey also tested positive for the dreaded virus.

"...We will take stock if we can find a suitable window later during the year. It could be September but these are all speculations. As of now we are not conducting it any further," BCCI vice-president Rajiv Shukla said.

On Monday, Chennai Super Kings bowling coach Lakshminarayanan Balaji along with Kolkata Knight Riders bowlers Sandeep Warrier and Varun Chakravathy had also returned positive results.

The spread of infections had led to postponement of two IPL games earlier.

The league organisers also issued a formal statement and said that safety of its players and staff is paramount.

ONE THING I WANT TO MAKE VERY CLEAR — IPL HAS NOT BEEN CANCELLED. IT HAS BEEN POSTPONED, SUSPENDED AND DEFERRED. THE REMAINING PART OF THIS IPL WILL HAPPEN. IN DUE COURSE, WHEN THE COVID SITUATION IMPROVES, A DECISION WILL BE TAKEN ABOUT IT.

— RAJEEV SHUKLA
(BCCI VICE-PRESIDENT)

their homes safely. IPL features stars from England, Australia, and New Zealand among other countries.

"These are difficult times, especially in India and while we have tried to bring in some positivity and cheer, however, it is imperative that the tournament is now suspended and everyone goes back to their families and loved ones in these trying times," the IPL stated.

"The BCCI will do everything in its powers to arrange for the secure and safe passage of all the participants in IPL 2021."

The tournament began on April 9 and ran smoothly before KKR's Covid-19 cases caused the initial jitters on Monday. The tournament final was planned for May 30.

There was cause of concern in Delhi too as a few groundsmen at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium tested positive even though DDCA chief Rohan Jaitley asserted that "none of the groundsmen on duty" were among the infected.

REMAINING MATCHES IN SEPT?

According to Cricbuzz, an official said that the board could look at the September window after England's tour of India is complete and before the T20 World Cup scheduled in India for October-November.

"A September window is being considered. By then the England-India series would be over and the foreign players would be ready for the T20 World Cup. That small window is being explored," said a franchise official who is in know.

We'll find way to send back foreign players: IPL chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IPL chairman Brijesh Patel on Tuesday said the BCCI will "find a way" to send the league's foreign recruits back to their respective countries after the event was suspended indefinitely due to a Covid-19 outbreak in its bio-bubble.

"We need to send them home and we will find a way to do that," Brijesh told PTI when asked how will the foreigners return home but did not elaborate beyond that.

The foreigners involved in the lucrative league are concerned about returning to their respective countries due to travel restrictions.

"CA is in direct contact with the BCCI as they work through plans to ensure the safe accommodation and repatriation of Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators back home to Australia."

— CRICKET AUSTRALIA

"The players are in a relatively safe environment and those within affected teams are in isolation. We'll continue to liaise with the BCCI, the ECB and New Zealand Government authorities in terms of managing their situation."

— NEW ZEALAND CRICKET

"CSA has made contact with all of the relevant franchises to ensure the expedited travel of all South African players and support staff back to our shores. Those travelling back to South Africa will undergo home quarantine in line."

— CRICKET SOUTH AFRICA



imposed in the wake of a deadly resurgence of the pandemic in India.

The BCCI had assured foreign players of a safe return earlier as well.

The IPL had 14 Australian players left, after three pullouts a few days ago, along with 10 from New Zealand and 11 Englishmen. South Africa had 11 players in the league, which also featured nine West Indians, three Afghans and two from Bangladesh.

In a joint statement, Cricket Australia and the Australian Cricketers Association said they respect their Government's decision to suspend flights operating out of India due to the Covid surge here and will not seek exemptions for its players stuck in the country ravaged by a deadly second wave of the pandemic.

"CA is in direct contact with the BCCI as they work through plans to ensure the safe accommodation and repatriation of Australian players, coaches, match officials and commentators back home to Australia."

"CA and the ACA respect the decision of the Australian Government to pause travel from India until at least May 15 and will not seek exemptions."

They further stated, "CA and the ACA thank the BCCI for their efforts and cooperation for the safe repatriation of all participants at the IPL."

Reacting to the big BCCI move, Cricket South Africa said it is in contact with its players who will need to home quarantine on arrival from India as per the World Health Organization recommendations. "Those travelling back to South Africa will undergo home quarantine in line with the current World Health Organization recommendations," it said in a release.

"CSA and the South African Cricketers Association (SACA) are in contact with all players and are assured of their safety and comfort in their respective locations."

CSA said it supported the BCCI decision of suspend the league keeping in mind the current situation and thanked the Indian board for looking after its players.

"CSA supports the decision to put the health and safety interests of all involved in the tournament first and foremost and has made contact with all of the relevant franchises to ensure the expedited travel of all South African players and support staff back to our shores."

New Zealand Cricket expressed faith in BCCI's ability to handle the situation.

"The players are in a relatively safe environment and those within affected teams are in isolation," read an NZC statement posted by ESPNcricinfo. "We'll continue to liaise with the BCCI, the ECB and New Zealand government authorities in terms of managing their situation — but at this juncture it's too early to discuss potential options."

Oz players, support staff might fly off to Maldives

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With their country shut for all those flying from India, the now suspended IPL's Australian contingent, comprising players, support staff and commentators, is expected to head to Maldives before taking a connecting flight for home.

There are 14 Australian players along with coaches and commentators who might now take a detour as the Australian Government has imposed strict sanctions for people returning from India.

"A mass exodus of Australian players, coaches and support staff to the Maldives is the expected remedy to a dilemma created by the postponement of the 2021 IPL and the current closure of the Australian border to citizens



currently in India during its rampant Covid-19 outbreak," ESPNcricinfo reported.

"There are close to 40 Australians in the IPL bubble comprising players, coaching staff and commentators," it added.

"The likes of Pat Cummins, Steven Smith, Glenn Maxwell,

Ricky Ponting, Simon Katich and company are expected to join commentator Michael Slater, who had already headed to the Maldives as a temporary post..."

Premier pacer Pat Cummins, who is contracted with KKR, called the situation unprecedented.

"Once we flew out of Australia we knew we'd signed up for 14 days quarantine coming home so you feel a bit further from getting home, but when the hard border shut no one has ever experienced that before," Pat Cummins told *The Back Page* on Fox Sports.

"(It has) added a bit of anxiety for the Aussies over here but we signed up to play the tournament until the start of June so hopefully it all reopens on May 15 and we can get back," Cummins added.



'Daddy, come home'

New Delhi: Australia opener David Warner shared an emotional message sent to him from his family back home after IPL 2021 was postponed indefinitely on Tuesday. Warner took to social media to share the message with his followers.

"Please daddy, come home straight away. We miss you and a lot and love you. Love from Ivy, Indi and Isla," the message in Warner's post read. **PNS**

BCCI set to incur losses of over ₹2000 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BCCI stands to lose over ₹2000 crore of the broadcast and sponsorship money earmarked for this year's Indian Premier League which was indefinitely postponed on Tuesday.

"We would be losing anything between ₹2000 to ₹2500 crore for the midway postponement of this season. I would say something in the range of ₹2200 crore will be closer to accurate estimation," a senior BCCI official told PTI.

The 52-day 60-match tournament would have concluded in Ahmedabad on May 30. However, only 24 days of cricket was possible with 29 completed games before the virus halted proceedings.

The biggest loss for BCCI is the money it gets from *Star Sports* for the broadcast rights of the tournament.

Players' payment would be based on duration

In case players are available only for a part of the tournament, the salaries are paid on pro-rata basis which means "assigning an amount to one person according to their share of the whole."

However, a senior player said that pro-rata is only

applicable when a player voluntarily makes himself available for only a part of the tournament based on the matches available.

In this case, the organisers have halted the event so the franchises are likely to pay for at least half of the season.

Star has a five-year contract worth ₹16,347 crore which is ₹3269.4 crore per year. If there are 60 games in a season, the per match valuation comes to approximately ₹54.5 crore.

If *Star* pays per match, then the amount for 29 matches would be ₹1580 crore approximately out of what would have been ₹3270 crore for a full tournament. This

means a loss of ₹1690 crore for the Board.

Similarly, mobile manufacturers *VIVO*, as tournament's title sponsors, pay ₹440 crore per season and BCCI is likely to get less than half of that amount because of the postponement.

Add to it, associate sponsor companies like *Unacademy*, *Dream11*, *CRed*,

Upstox, and *Tata Motors*, who pay in the range of ₹120 crore each. Some subsidiary sponsors are also there.

"Slash all the payments by half or a bit less and you will be reaching a loss in the range of 2200 crore. The actual losses could be much more but this is a back of the hand calculation for the season," the official said.

The loss of a substantial amount of money will also reduce the central revenue pool for the season (the money that BCCI distributes among eight franchises) to nearly half.

The official, however, didn't divulge how much each franchise would lose due to the suspension of the tournament.

"It is difficult to say what kind of sponsorship and co-sponsorship money they earned this season as the economic climate has been pretty hostile," he said.

T20 World Cup set for UAE shift

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

This year's T20 World Cup is set to be moved from India to the UAE with the BCCI acknowledging that none of the participating teams would be "comfortable" coming here because "a third wave" of Covid-19 cases is expected at the time of the event.

While a final decision will be taken in a month's time but it is understood that even the Indian cricket board is jittery about holding the 16-team tournament in October-November after the ongoing IPL had to be suspended because of multiple Covid-19 cases inside the bio-bubble.

It is learnt BCCI officials have had very recent discussions with some of the top decision-makers in the central Government and a shift to the UAE has been more or less agreed upon. The dates of the marquee competition, which was planned across nine venues, have not yet been finalised.

"The suspension of IPL within four weeks is an indicator that it's not really safe to host a global event of that magnitude at a time when the



country is fighting its worst health crisis in last 70 years," a senior BCCI source privy to development said.

"There is a chance of a third wave hitting the Indian

shores in November. So while BCCI will remain the hosts, the tournament will probably shift to the UAE," he added.

Health experts have warned of a third wave in India

in September.

The dire situation in India, where a daily addition of over 3 lakh new cases has continued for the past many days, has shaken most of the member boards and the ICC is unlikely to take a risk with safety of International cricket teams.

"You can be rest assured that most of the top nations wouldn't like to tour India within next six months unless the situation comes to normalcy. The players and their families would be very wary to travel if they are in the middle of another surge."

"So expect BCCI to agree with shift of tournament to UAE," another source also chipped in.

He said IPL's suspension after a string of positive cases has made the officialdom very jittery of taking any more risks.

"The IPL in India was a platform to prove to the world as well as participating nations that it is safe to host a tournament even when the second wave is hitting its peak."

"It was going well but the bio bubble has now become porous. What's the guarantee it won't happen again in

October-November. Nations like Australia, England and New Zealand are almost certain to have travel advisories in place," he argued.

One of the biggest reasons for conducting the tournament in the UAE is that it can be kept to three groups — Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi — and there is no air travel.

"Look six venues for IPL was always a dangerous proposition when they successfully managed with three during the last edition," the source said.

"In UAE, all of them were in one bubble from start to finish while here each team was travelling to three bubbles. Most of the positive cases emerged after bubble travel."

"Therefore even if you reduce the number of venues from 9 to 5 in October, still there will be air travel unlike UAE. Also for players, they would not be mentally in a space to play in India unless the situation drastically improves," he added.

There is an ICC meeting in June where a final decision will be taken but retaining the tournament in India after cancellation of IPL seems far-fetched at this point.

shortpasses

HALEP KNOCKED OUT

MADRID: World No 3 Simona Halep was dumped out of the Madrid Open, losing 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 in the round of 16 to Elise Mertens.

4 INDIANS IN 'THE HUNDRED'

NEW DELHI: The BCCI has granted NOCs to four Indian women cricketers, including T20 captain Harmanpreet Kaur, to play in the inaugural 'Hundred' tournament in the UK.

BFI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DEAD

NEW DELHI: The Boxing Federation of India's Executive Director R K Sacheti died on Tuesday after battling Covid-19. He was 56.

INDIA'S MATCHES POSTPONED

LAUSANNE: India's upcoming FIH Hockey Pro League away fixtures against Spain & Germany later this month have been postponed due to the international travel restrictions.

SEVILLA'S TITLE HOPES DENTED

SEVILLE: Sevilla's chances of winning La Liga could be over after they suffered a 0-1 defeat by Athletic Bilbao on Monday night.

WEST HAM STAY IN TOP 4 HUNT

LONDON: West Ham maintained their bid for a place in next season's CL as Michael Antonio scored twice to beat Burnley 2-1.

26-PLAYER SQUADS FOR EUROS

LAUSANNE: UEFA said on Tuesday it would allow expanded 26-man squads at Euro 2020.

PARMA RELEGATED

TURIN: Parma were relegated from Serie A on Monday after a 1-0 defeat at Torino. Agencies



Mourinho takes Roma job

Rome: Jose Mourinho is back.

The Portuguese manager, who was sacked by Tottenham Hotspur in late April, will return to the touchline next season after being introduced as the new manager of AS Roma, the Serie A club announced on Tuesday.

Mourinho agreed to a three-year contract and will officially take charge ahead of the 2021-22 campaign.

"After meetings with the ownership and Tiago Pinto, I immediately understood the full extent of their ambitions for AS Roma," Mourinho said.

"It is the same ambition and drive that has always motivated me and together we want to build a winning project over the upcoming years."

"The incredible passion of the Roma fans convinced me to accept the job and I cannot wait to start next season."

Mourinho will replace Paulo Fonseca, who will leave at the end of the season after two years in charge.

AP

Allu Arjun to work next with *Maharshi* director?



Stylish Star Allu Arjun and *Oopiri* director Vamshi Paidipally's possible collaboration has been in news for a while now. However, things haven't moved forward since then. According to the latest news, it is being learnt that Bunny and Vamshi are actively discussing a story. If all goes as planned, the film may soon materialise. Vamshi is said to be working on the story further and fine-tuning the script to suit Allu Arjun and

his fans' taste. Vamshi hasn't done a movie after his National award-winning film *Maharshi*. Although he was supposed to team up with Mahesh Babu for a film, it didn't take off. With this, Vamshi has been working on stories and scripts. An official confirmation about the actor-director collab is yet to be made. Meanwhile, Bunny has an interesting line-up of projects with Prasanth Neel and Koratala Siva. As Koratala Siva would be working with NTR, Allu Arjun is also keeping other collaborations ready. After *Pushpa*, Allu Arjun has huge plans. He is aiming to work on pan-India films depending on *Pushpa*'s success. Let's see where Vamshi's film fits in!

Nithya Menon replaces Sai Pallavi



We already knew that Power Star Pawan Kalyan and Rana Daggubati are all set to star in the much-awaited Telugu remake of the Malayalam blockbuster movie *Ayyappaanum Koshiyum*. Initially, sources say, that the makers of the film had roped in Sai Pallavi to pair up with Pawan Kalyan in the movie. But according to the latest reports, talent house, Nithya

Menon has replaced Sai Pallavi in the film. A source from the unit reveals that Sai Pallavi has apparently demanded a whopping amount of 3 crores as remuneration to play the female lead in the movie. It was then that the makers approached Nithya Menon who agreed to play the role, and that's how the *Fida* actress was replaced. However, there hasn't been an official confirmation on the same.

Pawan Kalyan's daughter's first time on TV



Rarely do we get to see Power Star Pawan Kalyan's children with actress Renu Desai — Akira Nandan and Aadhyaa in public. Both the children live with their mother and never make any public appearances. At least, in the past few months, fans of the star actor have been able to catch a glimpse of son Akira at mega family functions these days. But Aadhyaa has managed to never come in front of the camera. But looks like the wait is over! The little mega princess has finally made her first public appearance on a television show. Akira participated as a special

guest in the TV show *Drama Juniors*, which airs on Zee Telugu. Her mother, and former actress, Renu Desai is also one of the judges of this show. The promo of the episode featuring Aadhyaa was released earlier Tuesday morning by the broadcasting channel. Renu was pleasantly surprised by Aadhyaa's appearance on the show. She is shown walking up to the stage and hugging her daughter and calling her the best, to which Akira responds, "Mummy's the best Mummy in the world," to a set full of cheers. Fans are now eagerly waiting to witness them together on the small screen. The episode will be aired on May 9 at 8 pm.

KGF beauty to dance with Prabhas?



Srinidhi Shetty is one of the most popular Kannada film actresses who gained fame in Tollywood as well. The actress shot to fame with the superhit film *KGF: Chapter 1* starring Rocking Star Yash. The Miss Supranational 2016 and former model is now all set to come up with her next project *KGF: Chapter 2* which is going to be the much-awaited sequel of *KGF: Chapter 1*. Directed by Prashanth Neel, the audience is super excited about this project. We know that Prashanth Neel is going to join hands with Young Rebel Star Prabhas for his next movie titled *Salaar*. Touted to be an action drama, the director is said to have recently

approached *KGF* beauty, Srinidhi Shetty, to shake her leg in a special song in the film. The official announcement regarding the same is yet to be released. Shruti Hassan will be playing the female lead in this movie which is gearing up for a grand release in April 2022.

Family Man 2 coming this June?



Popular Hindi web series, *The Family Man*, needs no special introduction as this action-thriller was binge-watched by many in 2019. Season 1's concept was a novelty with fast pace incidents, giving us a zeal to watch all episodes at a go. Starring Manoj Bajpayee, Sharib Hashmi and Priyamani, *The Family Man*'s season 2 is long-awaited by a huge masses. The teaser for the second season was unveiled in January this year and ever since then, fans are waiting for the makers to announce the date of the release. The makers' Raj Nidimoru and Krishna DK announced that season 2 will be unveiled in summer. "We know you have been

eagerly waiting for the new season of *The Family Man*. We are truly grateful and humbled by all the love! We have an update for you. The *Family Man* Season 2 will premiere on Amazon Prime Video this summer! We have been working super hard to get you a kickass season. And we are pretty sure you will love it. Can't wait to bring it to you," the statement read. However, we now have a new update on this much-awaited show. "*The Family Man 2* is absolutely ready and will be released in June. Amazon Prime Video along with Raj and DK will be announcing the final release date soon," informed a source close to the development. Samantha Akkineni,

who celebrated her birthday recently, is also an integral part of the show. She is said to be playing an antagonist in the show. Raj and DK had taken to social media recently to wish their 'Raji' from *The Family Man 2*.

Chiranjeevi demands Padma award for Dasari



Dasari Narayana Rao was undoubtedly one of the prolific filmmakers in India. He made more than 150 films and many of them were blockbusters at the box office. Dasari's films had received many national and international awards as well. Sadly, many lamented that despite contributing so much to the field of cinema, the celebrated director was not conferred with a Padma award. On the birth anniversary of Dasari, Megastar Chiranjeevi requested the government to propose Dasari's name for the upcoming Padma Awards. Chiru tweeted, "Remembering Darshakaratra Dasari Narayana Rao on his birth anniversary. His contribution towards films and film industry will be remembered forever." "It is quite sad that an eminent film-maker like

Dasari has not been conferred with a Padma Award till now. I feel it would be great if the government confers him with the posthumous Padma Award at least now. #RememberingALegend #DrDasari #Padma ForDrDasari," added Chiru. Many other celebrities and fans too joined the chorus supporting Chiru in amplifying this request.