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Small investors P 6
can fund road projects



India doesn't have a Prime Minister, P 5
but a king: Rahul



Ukraine not joining P 10
NATO; so, why does Putin worry?

In brief

'Mumbai's traffic congestion breaks marriages'

Traffic jams deny 'family time' to people and cause three per cent of divorces in Mumbai, former Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnis's wife Amruta Fadnis has claimed. The remark drew ridicule from the Shiv Sena, which controls the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). Amruta Fadnis made the comment after attending a function organised by a local BJP unit on Friday. She was asked by reporters about the condition of roads in the city. "I am saying this as a common citizen because I see potholes and traffic jams daily. Do you know how many divorces are taking place because of it in Mumbai? Three per cent," she said.

Over 4 lakh litres of 'lahan' recovered in Ferozpur

In a drive against illicit liquor ahead of the Punjab assembly polls, the police on Saturday said it has seized four lakh litres of 'lahan', a fermentation agent for brewing liquor. Senior Superintendent of Police Narinder Bhargav said the huge quantity of fermentation agent was seized in a series of raids conducted in several villages across the Sutlej river near the India-Pakistan border on Friday evening. Police used motorboats of the Border Security Force in the operation, the SSP said, adding the villages from where seizures were made included Ruknevala, Bhoopewala, Vaddian Chakkian, Nikkian Chakkian, Mahmoodwala, Manumachchi, Ali Ke and Chakkur wala.

Lata Mangeshkar put back on ventilator: Doctor

Singing legend Lata Mangeshkar's health has deteriorated and she has been put back on a ventilator, a doctor treating her said on Saturday. The 92-year-old singer tested positive for Covid with mild symptoms and was admitted on January 8 to Breach Candy Hospital's intensive care unit (ICU) where she is being treated by Dr Pratit Samdani and his team of doctors. "She is not doing well. She continues to be in the ICU under treatment and has been put on a ventilator again," Samdani told PTI. On January 29, Samdani had said Mangeshkar was showing signs of marginal improvement and was taken off the ventilator but continued to be under observation in the ICU. Regarded as one of Indian cinema's greatest playback singers, Mangeshkar started her career at the age of 13 in 1942 and has sung over 30,000 songs.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a reflective mood while beholding the 216-foot-high Statue of Equality, erected as a monument to 11th-century Hindu saint Ramanujacharya, which he unveiled on Saturday at Muchintal near RGIA. TS Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan and Sri Chinna Jeayar Swami of Sri Ramanujacharya Ashram, the moving force behind the statue, is also seen.

'AN INSPIRATIONAL FORCE'

Modi says Sri Ramanujacharya's message of equality spreading across the country

NAVEENA GHANATE
HYDERABAD

Amidst an eerie silence brought about by TS Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao's calculated absence at the airport welcome and at the ashram reception, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, two days after KCR took a swipe at his politically calibrated dress code, turned out in a yellow pattu pancha and shawl on Saturday at the inaugural of the Statue of Equality complete with Vishnu namam.

Modi inaugurated the 216-foot tall 'Statue of Equality', built as a monument to the 11th-century

Hindu saint Ramanujacharya. "This statue of Ramanujacharya is a symbol of his knowledge, detachment, and ideals," he observed.

Noticeably, while hailing the contribution of Telugu, he referred to Hyderabad as "Baghyanager" a couple of times, perhaps to lift the spirits of his party leaders and cadre who may not have expected KCR to skip the airport welcome and the ashram reception, thus avoiding any form of contact with the Prime Minister. He also brought the connection of Sarda Patel.

Digital agriculture is Nation's future

Modi launches ICRISAT 50th anniversary celebrations, visits campus

PNS HYDERABAD

'Digital agriculture' is the country's future, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Saturday.

The PM visited the campus of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) at Patancheru

here and inaugurated the institute's 50th-anniversary celebrations.

Mentioning another dimension of changing India, that is, digital agriculture which he described as India's future, he stressed that Indian youth can contribute a great deal to this.

He listed areas like crop assess-

TRS claims 'No necessity to receive PM on a private visit'

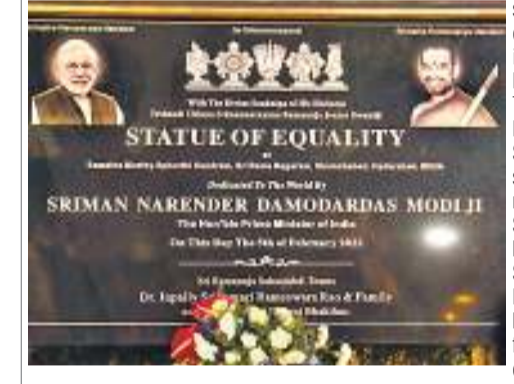
PNS HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao didn't meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the PM's visit to the state on Saturday. The BJP claimed that this violated protocol, but the TRS said that the CM had not violated protocol.

"Both the ICRISAT of

Patancheru and the Statue of Equality at Muchintal are non-governmental organisations and hence the PM's visit to Telangana is nothing but a private visit. There is no need for the CM to receive the PM while the PM is on a private visit," the TRS said.

KCR's name absent on inscription stone



There is no name or portrait of the Chief Minister on the inscription stone erected at the unveiling of the Sri Ramanujacharya Statue of Equality. The inscription stone carries the full name of the Prime Minister, that is, Shri Narendra Damodar Das Modi. There are also photos of Modi and Chinna Jeayar Swamy on the inscription stone apart from the names of Tiridanti Chinna Srinannarayana Ramanuja Jeayar Swamiji, Sri Ramanuja Sahasrabadi, Dr. Juppally Srikrumari Rameshwara Rao and family and the names of devotees.



Committee of Ministers and Employees' union leaders holding talks at the AP Secretariat on Saturday

Talks fruitful, employees call off stir

PNS VIJAYAWADA

Finally, the talks between the State government and the employees have been fruitful. The seven-hour marathon negotiations have become successful with both the government and the employees arriving at a consensus on most of the contentious issues.

Continuing their talks for the second consecutive day on Saturday, the Ministers' committee and the Employees' unions hammered out a consensus, thus ending the impasse.

In a joint press conference late on Saturday night, along with employees' union leaders, Advisor to AP Government (Public affairs) Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said that the

fitment would remain 23%. He said that the government understood the anguish of employees and carried out a series of negotiations on Friday and Saturday.

He said that the Ashutosh committee report would be handed over to employee unions after the issuance of a GO related to it. He made it clear that there would be no recovery of amount.

Ramakrishna Reddy said that It had been agreed upon to pay 10% HRA to employees working at places less than 50,000 population. The HRA will be 16% to the cities with population 50,000 to 50 lakh. The HRA for district headquarters will be 16%. The HRA will be 24% for above 50 lakh population cities.

The HRA for Secretariat HoD would also be 24%.

Ramakrishna Reddy said that the quantum of additional pension for the retired will be 7% to 70-74 years of age and It will be 12% to those in the age group of 75-79.

Ramakrishna Reddy said the decision to do away with CCA was withdrawn and the issue of CPS would be solved in a time-bound manner.

Employees union leaders formally called off the strike and said they would meet Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to express their gratitude to them. They said the government had done more than what they expected from the negotiations.

Those behind Mahatma Gandhi's assassination opened fire at me: Owaisi

PNS BAGHPAT (UP)

AIMIM national president Asaduddin Owaisi on Saturday cautioned minorities against Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, claiming that he will not keep his promises once the election process is over.

The All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief also alleged that those behind the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi were the ones who opened fire at him.

"They fired bullets at me because I dared to look into the eyes of BJP and tell the truth. Those who fired at me are the very people who had murdered Mahatma Gandhi. If you kill one Owaisi, lakhs of Owaisis will be born," he claimed at a public meeting in Asara village in support of party candidate Anees Ahmed from Chhaprauli seat.

On Thursday, gunshots were fired at Owaisi's vehicle at Hapur in western Uttar Pradesh when he was returning to Delhi after campaigning for the assembly elections.

On the participation of Muslims in politics, he said, "They go to the doorsteps of others and ask for tickets, they should come to me, we will give (them) tickets."

Sounding a cautionary note against the SP president, Owaisi claimed, "I'm alerting you today that Akhilesh will cheat you again. He is giving a lollipop to minority community leaders that they will be made Rajya Sabha members, MLCs, but he will not do anything later."

He said his party will make minority community members sit on their shoulders and polish their politics but "Akhilesh will drown them."

In an attempt to highlight the power of a vote, he said that just as an elephant is tied from a chain, similarly Muslims have been tied up by political parties. They should recognise their power and break the chains to become as strong as an elephant, he said.

Owaisi also attacked Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and alleged, "Yogi Baba" tells lies like 'his Ustad (Narendra) Modi'.

AP logs 3,396 fresh Covid cases

PNS VIJAYAWADA

The cumulative Covid-19 count in Andhra Pradesh crossed 23 lakh on Saturday, with the last one-lakh cases coming in 11 days.

Simultaneously, the gross recoveries also went past the 22 lakh mark. But the declining trend continued as the state registered 3,396 fresh cases in 24 hours ending 9 am on Saturday.

The latest bulletin said 13,005 infected persons got cured and nine more succumbed in the state.

The number of active cases dropped by 9,618 to 78,746, the bulletin said.

The coronavirus caseload now stood at 23,00,765. While the total recoveries increased to 22,07,364, the overall toll touched 14,655.

East Godavari district reported the highest of 516 fresh cases and Srikakulam the lowest of 46 in 24 hours.

Vizianagaram logged 56 while the remaining 10 districts added between 100 and 500 new cases each.

Anantapuram, SPS Nellore and Prakasam districts reported two fresh fatalities each.

Chittoor, Guntur and Kurnool had one Covid-19 death each in a day.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Magha & Sukla Paksha

Tithi: Shreshthi - Feb 05 03:47 AM to Feb 07 04:38 AM

Saptami - Feb 07 04:38 AM to Feb 08 06:16 AM

Nakshatram: Hasti - Feb 05 04:03 PM to Feb 05 10:10 PM

Ashwini - Feb 05 10:10 PM to Feb 07 02:58 PM

Rahukalam: 4:45 PM to 6:10 PM

Yamagandam: 12:30 PM to 1:55 PM

Variyam: 02:40 PM to 04:24 PM

Gulika: 3:20 PM to 4:45 PM

Amritakalam: 02:40 PM to 04:20 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham: 12:07 PM to 12:52 PM

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: SUNNY

Temp: 33°

Humidity: 65%

Sunrise: 6:39 AM

Sunset: 6:10 PM

Updated FEBRUARY 06, 2021 5:00 PM

OBTUSE ANGLE



Veteran BJP leader Janga Reddy is dead

PNS HYDERABAD

Veteran BJP leader Chandupatla Janga Reddy passed away in the wee hours of Saturday while undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Hyderabad.

Janga Reddy was born at Parakala in 1935 in erstwhile Warangal district. He served people as an MLA and MP. Janga Reddy was elected as an MP in 1984 in the 8th Lok Sabha from Hanmakonda.

Staff hold pen-down strike across AP

PNS VIJAYAWADA

Government employees observed a pen-down strike across the State on Saturday in protest against PRC and demanding solution to other issues.

Leaders of the PRC Struggle Committee made it clear that the movement will continue to function until the government gives a clear assurance on fitment and other issues. The Collectorate employees protested against the 'reverse' PRC by walking back-

wards on the main roads in Nandigama and Machilipatnam.

In Guntur, the government employees took part in the strike in response to the call given by APNGOA, Amravati JAC and other employees' unions. The employees wore black badges to protest the government's adamant attitude to resolve their issues.

In Prakasam district, municipal school teachers handed over a representation to the Chirala Municipal Commissioner informing him that they will go on strike from Monday if the problems of the employees are not resolved.

Employees of the Visakhapatnam district collectorate staged a protest against the PRC GOs. All employees of the Treasury Department at various places in the Visakhapatnam Agency areas took part in the pen-down protest.

Revenue and Education department employees in Payakaraopet demanded that the government resolve their problems immediately. While employees in the Yelamanchili municipality staged a pen-down protest, the teachers

of all government schools did not enter the classrooms though they went to their respective schools.

In Vijayanagaram, the district employees staged a pen-down. Collectorate employees participated in the protest. The collectorate employees protested at the Gandhi statue on the collectorate premises during the lunch break.

The employees demanded to cancel the PRC GOs and do justice to the government employees, teachers and pensioners.

APSRTC employees stage protests across State

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Public Transport Department (APPTD) employees staged black-badge protests across the State on Saturday seeking resolution of their demands.

The APSRTC employees said that they would continue dharnas on Sunday also and join the indefinite strike with the government employees on Monday. The RTC employees staged protests in front of APSRTC depots in Krishna, Guntur, East and West Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Prakasam, Nellore, Kurnool, Chittoor, Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, Kadapa and Anantapur districts.

APPTD unions united forum conveners Y Srinivasa Rao and P Damodar Rao said that the RTC employees at all units and depots attended duties wearing black badges



and demonstrated protests during lunch break. The leaders said that there is no use to the RTC employees with the merger of APSRTC into the government as their issues remained unresolved without any progress. They said that RTC employees hailed the

merger of APSRTC in the government, thanked Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy and performed 'palabhishekam' to the photos of CM Jagan but their hopes were dashed as their services were not on par with the government employees.

They deplored that there is a lot of difference in the wages, allowances, medical services and other issues. They recalled that earlier APSRTC identity cards were enough for RTC employees to get treatments but after merger the government issued health cards which are of no use as the hospitals are refusing to provide treatment.

The leaders said that the RTC employees staged protests in front of the depots and submitted memorandums to the officials concerned and affirmed that RTC employees will join the indefinite strike with the government employees on Monday by stopping bus services.

Meanwhile, APSRTC officials decided to run bus services with the support of police with available staff. The authorities instructed the officials to run all hired buses without fail.

Punjab elections: 1,304 candidates left in the fray

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A total of 1,304 candidates are left in the fray in the high-stakes February 20 Punjab assembly polls.

As many as 341 candidates withdrew their nomination papers on Friday which was the last date for the exercise, said Punjab's Chief Electoral Officer S Karuna Raju.

Raju said 2,266 candidates had filed their nomination papers for the 117 assembly constituencies of the state.

During the scrutiny, 1,645 nomination papers were found valid, he further said. The highest number of 19 candidates are contesting from Sahneval and Patiala assembly constituencies.

Five candidates, the least number, were contesting from Dinanagar constituency. Among prominent candidates who are contesting the state assembly polls are Chief



Minister Charanjit Singh Channi from Chamkaur Sahib and Bhadaur seats and Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu from Amritsar East seat.

Ninety-four-year-old Parkash Singh Badal, who is the oldest candidate in the elections, is fighting from his home turf Lambi seat in Muktsar district.

Former chief minister Amarinder Singh, who resigned as chief minister last year and parted ways from the Congress, is contesting from

Patiala Urban seat as a candidate of the Punjab Lok Congress which he heads.

Shiromani Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Singh Badal is fighting from Jalalabad seat while Aam Aadmi Party's chief ministerial face Bhagwant Mann from Dhuri seat in Sangrur district.

SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia is contesting against Navjot Sidhu from Amritsar East seat while Balbir Singh Rajewal, leader of the Sanyukt Samaj Morcha, a political party of farmers, will fight from Samrala seat.

Voting for Punjab's 117 Assembly seats will be held on February 20 and the counting will take place on March 10.

Punjab is going to see a multi-cornered contest this election with the Congress, the AAP, the SAD-BSP alliance, the BJP-PLC-SAD (Sanyukt) and the SSM vying for forming the government

CPI takes objection to KCR'S absence at PM's reception

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

CPI senior leader K Narayana has stated that it is not right on the part of the Chief Minister to skip airport welcome and ashram reception of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He said on Saturday that the Prime Minister is the Chief Minister and the Chief Minister is Chief Minister. Political differences are different from protocols. He said the people would believe in the reports from the Chief Minister Office (CMO) that the Chief Minister has been suffering from fever and hence KCR skipped Prime Minister's ICRISAT programme. The Chief Minister's skipping of the private programme a Muchintal cannot be questioned.

However, Modi should have participated in the official programme at ICRISAT,

Staff hold pen-down strike across AP

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Services were affected at the Palakonda Sub-Registrar's office as employees in Srikakulam district went on a pen-down strike. The pen-down has caused severe inconvenience to the people who came from distant places.

The administration came to a halt in Kurnool district with government employees striking work. The employees in the Nandikotkur constituency closed the offices as part of their strike.

Employees in Kadapa district boycotted work and demanded cancellation of the new PRC GOs and payment of salaries be done as per the old GO.

The staff at Tahsildar, Sub-Registrar, Sub-Treasury and Irrigation offices in Chandragiri of Chittoor district said that they would continue to fight until the new PRC GOs are cancelled. The employees at Uravakonda Tahsildar's office in Anantapur district sported black badges while attending duties.

ITBP official accused in Rs 125 cr fraud case

PNS ■ GURUGRAM

An assistant commandant of the ITBP, who is an accused in the case of fake construction contracts on the NSG campus amounting to Rs 125 crore, has surrendered in a court here which sent him in police custody for five days.

The economic offence wing of the Gurugram Police took him on remand. An SIT formed to probe the fraud had earlier arrested the main accused Praveen Yadav, a deputy commandant of BSF, his sister Rituraj Yadav, a bank manager, wife Mamta Yadav and property dealer Dinesh Kumar in the case, officials said. They said that over Rs 13 crore in cash and six luxury cars were seized.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG	
Dressed/With Skin	₹194
Without Skin	₹214
Broiler at Farm	₹129

EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	456
VISAKHAPATNAM	455
HYDERABAD	433
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.56

Veteran BJP leader Janga

Continued from page 1

He defeated former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao. Janga Reddy was one of the two BJP MPs who won in the 1984 elections.

BJP leaders kept the mortal remains of Janga Reddy at the BJP state office for half an hour and later shifted his body to Hanmakonda. The final rites were completed in the evening.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed shock over the

death of Janga Reddy and tweeted may his soul rest in peace.

Union Tourism Minister G. Kishan Reddy, BJP state president Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Huzurabad MLA Eatala Rajender and others expressed condolences over the demise of Janga Reddy and expressed their sympathies to the bereaved family.

Senior BJP leader Indrasena Reddy said that Janga Reddy's dream was to see the BJP

come to power in Telangana.

Former governor Ch. Vidyasagar Rao said that Janga Reddy was an inspiration for him and others in politics.

Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya expressed condolences over the demise of Janga Reddy.

Ministers Errabelli Dayakar Rao and Sathyavathi Rathod expressed their condolences over the demise of Janga Reddy and described him as a sincere politician.

TRS, BJP fight it out on Twitter!

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi was in Telangana on Saturday the social media witnessed a fierce battle.

The TRS hashtag #EqualityForTelangana was trending number one on Twitter in India. Netizens tweeted many questions to the Prime Minister demanding why Telangana was ignored when it came to allocations of funds or giving national status for its projects.

A few Ministers and public representatives also tweeted issues pertaining to their subject and constituencies.

Agriculture Minister Singireddy Niranjan Reddy in his tweet asked why the Centre does not support the agriculture and industrial sectors of Telangana.

Using the hashtag, Minister Srinivas Goud asked when the Centre gave national project status to Karnataka's Upper Bhadra Project why it did not give the same to the Palamuru Ranga Reddy Project of TS?

Minister Errabelli Dayakar Rao asked, "Sir, What does the Centre do with all the letters and representations given by Telangana Ministers? Very curious to know. There is no reply to our requests, at least answer this sir. #EqualityForTelangana."

College girls attend class with saffron scarves in Karnataka

PNS ■ KARNATAKA

Amid heated protests in Karnataka by some Muslim girls to be allowed to attend classes wearing a hijab, a group of students again marched to their college wearing saffron scarves. Videos from Kundapur in the Udipi district show boys and girls donning the scarves over their college uniforms and raising slogans of "Jai Shri Ram (praise Lord Ram)" while going to college. The protests have made national headlines and also triggered political debates, with Congress and the BJP attacking each other over the issue.

In the video clips, Muslim students can be seen in a separate queue wearing headscarves over their uniforms. A police vehicle is also seen stationed near the college.

Police personnel were breaking up groups of saffron-clad protesters who had gathered near what appears to be a market area



and raised slogans, the videos show.

Earlier videos from the coastal town of Kundapur showed students of the Government Junior College in headscarves, arguing with their principal Ramakrishna GJ after they were denied entry into the campus.

College rules allow students to wear the hijab in class but not during lessons, according to officials.

But Karnataka Home Minister Araga Jnanendra said children should "neither wear the hijab nor saffron scarves" in school.

India adds over 1.27 lakh fresh Covid cases, more than 1k deaths

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday recorded 1,27,952 fresh coronavirus cases that took its infection tally to 4,20,80,664, while the number of active cases declined further to 13,31,648, according to Union health ministry data.

The death toll climbed to 5,01,114 with 1,059 more fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The active cases comprise 3.16 per cent of the total infections in the country, the ministry said.

A reduction of 1,03,921 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

The national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 95.64 per cent, the ministry said. The daily positivity rate was recorded at 7.98 per cent, while the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 11.21 per



cent, it said.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 4,02,47,902. The case fatality rate stands at 1.19 per cent, it added.

So far, the cumulative doses administered in the country under the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive

have exceeded 168.98 crore.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 30 lakh on August 23, 40 lakh on September 5 and 50 lakh on September 16. It went past 60 lakh on September 28, 70 lakh on October 11, crossed 80 lakh on October 29, 90 lakh on November 20 and surpassed

the one-crore mark on December 19.

India crossed the grim milestone of two crore on May 4, 2021, and three crore on June 23. The 1,059 new fatalities include 595 from Kerala and 81 from Maharashtra.

So far, 5,01,114 deaths have been reported in the country, including 1,42,940 from Maharashtra, 57,296 from Kerala, 39,250 from Karnataka, 37,696 from Tamil Nadu, 25,952 from Delhi, 23,286 from Uttar Pradesh and 20,758 from West Bengal.

The health ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

KTR directs GHMC officials to start monsoon-related works

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development K. Taraka Rama Rao on Saturday held a review meeting on road related projects and other programmes being undertaken by the government in Hyderabad.

He instructed the officials to start monsoon related works this month instead of postponing until rainy season. The Minister directed authorities to come up with an action plan to ensure that Strategic Nala Development Programme (SNDP) is executed within the stipulated time. On this occasion, he inquired about the progress of Hyderabad Road Development Corporation and SRDP related programmes and road development projects undertaken by the government in the city.

Hazare writes 'reminder' letter to Maha CM, says he will sit on fast against wine policy

PNS ■ PUNE

Social activist Anna Hazare on Saturday wrote a reminder letter to Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray saying he will launch an indefinite hunger strike against the state government's decision to allow the sale of wine in supermarkets and grocery shops. The decision is unfortunate for the state and it will be dangerous for the coming

generations. To oppose this decision, I decided to go on indefinite hunger strike. I had sent a letter regarding the same to CM and Deputy CM (Ajit Pawar), but no response has been received, Hazare claimed. The social activist was also said that agitation will be launched in Maharashtra simultaneously against the wine sale decision.

TRS claims 'No necessity to receive...

Continued from page 1

In a statement, the party said, "This is totally as per the protocol issued by the Centre and validated by the

Union Ministry of Home Affairs. Besides, the CM is not well."

The TRS said that the BJP is criticising the CM for not receiving the PM who is on

a private visit when the CM is ill. This proves their intention to politicise everything, the party said. The BJP should stop these cheap tactics, the TRS said.

'An inspirational force'...

Continued from page 1

The Prime Minister said: "If Sardar Sahib's 'Statue of Unity' is repeating the oath of unity in the country, then Ramanujacharya's 'Statue of Equality' is giving the message of equality. This is the speciality of India as a nation."

The Prime Minister elaborated on the richness of Telugu culture and how it had enhanced India's diversity. He recalled the long traditions of kings and queen who had been torchbearers of this rich cultural heritage.

In the context of rejuvenation and recognition of India's places of faith, the Prime Minister talked about 13th century Kakatiya Rudreshwara Ramappa temple being declared as a UNESCO World Heritage

Site and Pochampalli being recognised as India's 'Best tourism village' by the World Tourism Organization.

The Prime Minister took note of the contribution of the Telugu film industry, saying it had been making its presence felt globally, let alone making impact in Telugu-speaking areas. "This creativity is reigning on silver screen and OTT platforms. It is being praised even outside India. This dedication of Telugu-speaking people towards their art and culture is an inspiration for all", the Prime Minister commented.

The Prime Minister recalled the tradition of Indian scholars who viewed knowledge as something far above rebuttal and the binary of acceptance-rejection. "If

we have 'advait' (non-duality) then we have 'dvait' (duality) too and we also have Sri Ramanujacharya's 'Vishishtadvaita' (qualified non-duality) that encompasses both 'dvait-advait', said the Prime Minister. He noted that Sri Ramanujacharya, apart from attaining the pinnacle of gyan, was the propounder of Bhakti Marg too. One the one hand he was a saint of rich 'Sanyaas' tradition and he presented the importance of action in Gita Bhashya, on the other. The Prime Minister continued: "In today's world, when it comes to social reforms, progressivism, it is believed that reforms will take place away from the roots. But, when we see Ramanujacharyaji, we realize that there is no con-

lict between progressiveness and antiquity. It is not necessary to go far from your roots for reforms. Rather it is necessary that we connect with our real roots, become aware of our real power."

The Prime Minister said that going along with Ramanujacharya's message, today the country was laying the foundation of its new future with the mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, and Sabka Prayas'. The Prime Minister emphasized that India today was working collectively for development of all without discrimination; social justice for all so that those who had been oppressed for centuries become partners with full dignity in the development of the country.

138 SOCIAL WELFARE HOSTELS GET FACELIFT

C PRADEEP KUMAR
■ VIJAYAWADA

Social Welfare hostels in Krishna district are all set to give corporate institutes a run for their money. With modernisation works of 138 hostels nearing completion under the 'Nadu Nedu' programme, students hailing from underprivileged and weaker sections can hope for comfortable accommodation with all modern facilities.

As per the instructions of District Collector J Nivas, the renovation of the hostels has been taken up under the 'Marpu' programme and the works are going on at a fast pace.

Officials of the Panchayat Raj department have estimated that the works of each of the hostel to cost Rs 10 lakh to Rs 15 lakh. In all, 178 welfare hostels are present in the district. Out of them, 138 are being run out of the government-owned buildings which will get a total facelift soon. The works for the pilot project are underway at Penamaluru and Kaikaluru in the district. The renovated pilot project hostel in Penamaluru will be inaugurated by the minister in 10 days.

After the inauguration of the pilot project, an action plan has been prepared to begin the works for all the 138 hostels in the district and to complete the same in 138 days. As part of it, engineers of Panchayat Raj, RWS, Housing and other departments will



ensure that works are completed soon without compromising on quality.

The District Collector said that branded material or fittings in toilets, bathrooms and ceramic tiles will be used inside the bathrooms. WPC doors will be used for toilets and bathrooms. Besides, washbasin and wall-mounted mirror will be set up. The old doors and windows will be replaced and mosquito nets will be arranged for the hostel inmates hailing from poorer sections. Tap and electricity connections will be con-

sealed. Similarly, LED bulbs and fans will be fitted. In the kitchen, a boiler, mixer, and grinder will be arranged. A mini-library will be set up in each welfare hostel, the

Collector said. Nivas said that the look of the hostels will change so as to create a positive mindset for the inmates. The play area will also be created for the students.



3-year-old boy gets new lease of life

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A three-year-old boy got a new lease of life after doctors removed from his stomach a pencil battery.

According to sources, the boy was admitted to a private hospital in Ongole on February 4 after he swallowed a pencil battery. The doctors took an x-ray and removed the battery from his stomach through a laparoscopic procedure.

Some creating on confusion on TIDCO houses: Botsa

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister Botsa Satyanarayana has said that there are three categories of TIDCO homes. Among them, we are building 300 SQ FT, 365 SQ FT and 430 SQ FT houses," he added.

Speaking to the media on Saturday, he said while TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu was in power, the beneficiaries of TIDCO houses had to repay the complete loans to get the ownership of these houses. They have to pay the loan for 20 years, including the principal and the interest. Only after the loan is paid, the beneficiaries will



get all the rights over the house.

As per the promise made by YS Jagannathan Reddy during the walkathon and

after coming to power the YSRC government was giving 300 SQ FT houses to the poor with full rights. "There are about 2.62 lakh TIDCO houses of which there are 1.43 lakh, 300 SQ FT houses that are being given to the beneficiaries for free making their dream of owning a house come true. For houses under the other two categories, the government will be the facilitator for the bank loans given in the name of the beneficiary.

He said that the scheme was carried out properly but a few are creating confusion among the beneficiaries with false propaganda.

TDP flays power cuts in State

PNS ■ AMARAVATI

TDP Parchuru MLA Yeluri Sambasiva Rao on Saturday held the 'selfish agenda' of CM Jagan Mohan Reddy responsible for the ongoing power cuts and collapse of the power sector in the State.

Sambasiva Rao said that while Chandrababu Naidu steered AP into a power surplus State, the inefficient policies of Jagan Reddy had caused a severe shortage. Despite good rains and the availability of coal, power cuts were being imposed all over the State.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP MLA said farmers were in danger of suf-

fering losses in lakhs of acres due to water shortage. Maize, chilli, green gram and other crops were in the flowering stage. The absence of any Government monitoring was posing a serious threat to crops under the Nagarjuna Sagar ayacut.

Sambasiva Rao recalled how the TDP rule ensured 24 hour supply as against the present regime's struggle to supply even four to five hours supply. Unscheduled power cuts became a constant worry in villages. Young people started playing cricket under transformers.

The TDP MLA deplored that a huge crisis was created

in the power sector in the past three years. Current charges were increased 6 times. Over Rs. 30,000 Cr additional burden was placed on the people. Surcharges were collected. Meters were being fixed on agricultural motors. Now, people were being punished with power cuts.

Sambasiva Rao said Chandrababu Naidu promised to reduce current charges if TDP would win the 2019 elections. It was because there was scope for solar and wind power in addition to 960 MW of Polavaram and 50 MW of Nagarjuna Sagar hydel power. Instead of exploring such options, the YCP rule was opt-

ing to buy peak-hour power at Rs. 14 to Rs. 17 per unit.

The TDP MLA asked why the power sector could not be improved despite massive multi-crore loans brought by the State. In the past, Chandrababu Naidu efficiently spent Rs. 36,000 Cr and improved the distribution and transmission systems.

Sambasiva Rao said the present rulers were only interested in commissions in the PPAs and not at all interested in repairing power lines or irrigation canals. The Government has started setting up pre-paid meters in towns and cities in order to collect power charges in advance.

Five injured in cylinder blast

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Five persons suffered injuries when a cylinder exploded at Kukunurpally village on Saturday.

The accident happened in an industrial unit. Most of the workers who were injured in the incident were reported to be those who hailed from Odisha.

The injured were shifted to Hyderabad for treatment. The police are investigating.



KCR breaks protocol by not receiving PM: BJP

BJP state unit chief Bandi Sanjay wondered what prevented the CM from accompanying PM

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

BJP State unit president Bandi Sanjay Kumar has criticised Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar for the breach of protocol Rao by staying away from welcoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Hyderabad.

Sanjay was speaking to the media on Saturday at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport here after welcoming the Prime Minister, who had come to Hyderabad to attend the golden jubilee celebrations of the International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) at Patancheru and to dedicate the Statue of Equality, the statue of 11th century Vaishnavite Saint Sri Ramanacharya, at Muchintal on the city's out-



skirts. "The BJP State president wondered what had prevented KCR from accompanying the Prime Minister during his visit to the State. "Mr KCR, Is this your cul-

ture? You claim to have read 80,000 books. Is this what you have learnt from them," Sanjay asked.

He recalled that the Prime Minister had given an appointment to the Chief Minister

whenever he had sought it. "Have you forgotten the magnanimity of the Prime Minister? How can you confine yourself to your farmhouse without showing the basic courtesy of welcoming the Prime Minister?"

Sanjay said it was shameful on the part of KCR for playing truant during the PM's visit by citing lame excuses.

"It is evident that the Chief Minister does not want to show his face to the Prime Minister, as the entire country abhors the abuses he had hurled at the PM," he said. He said that people were laughing at KCR for staying away from the Prime Minister's visit on the pretext of a mild fever.

"The fact is that KCR has scant regard for democracy. He

insulted Baba Saheb Ambedkar by calling for the redrafting of the Constitution. Now, he has insulted the Prime Minister by violating protocol. What more evidence does one need for his arrogance," he asked.

Stating that insulting the Prime Minister was nothing but insulting the nation, Sanjay said that KCR was obviously afraid of facing Modi after hurling so many abuses. His behaviour is an affront to the nation, Sanjay said.

The BJP leader said such a cultureless, senseless and arrogant character does not deserve to continue as Chief Minister.

"He should remember that once he steps down from the CM's post, even dogs won't care for him," he said.



TPCC president A Revanth Reddy lodging a complaint in a police station at Gajwel in Siddipet district on Saturday

AGAINST KCR'S COMMENTS ON CONSTITUTION

Revanth Reddy lodges complaint against KCR

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee president A Revanth Reddy on Saturday lodged a complaint in Gajwel police station in the district against Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao for his comments on the Constitution.

Speaking to the media later, Revanth Reddy described KCR "more dangerous than a traitor." He demanded that the Chief Minister tender an apology to people for his disparaging remarks against the Constitution. The Congress party, he said, would continue agitation until the Chief

Minister took back his comments.

The newspapers and TV channels in Telangana State had given wide coverage to the Chief Minister's comments. He wanted the police to frame a case against them and take appropriate action against their managements.

He alleged that KCR had extended his cooperation to the BJP for eight years. Now, suddenly he started abusing the saffron party, the TPCC president said. Congress leaders Daripalli Chandram, Bommalu Yadagiri, M Lakshmi, Ramachandram, Ramulu, Bhikshapati, Madhu and other were present.

Congress demands expulsion of KCR from country

PNS ■ MEDAK

Congress on Saturday lodged a case with the CI Shaik Mathar of Narapur police station against Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao charging him with sedition.

Later TPCC official spokesman Anjaneyulu Goud and senior leader Somannagari Ravinder Reddy called KCR as Dalit Drohi (saboteur of interests of the

Dalits) as he demanded rewriting of the Constitution authored by Dr BR Ambedkar.

They demanded the Centre to expel him from the country. Statehood to Telangana has been realised through the Constitution, he said. Later TPCC official spokesman Anjaneyulu Goud and senior leader Somannagari Ravinder Reddy called KCR as Dalit Drohi (saboteur of interests of the

VH decries KCR's comments on Constitution

PNS ■ SIDDIPET

Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao has no guts to change the Constitution, according former Rajya Sabha member and Congress senior leader V Hanumantha Rao on Saturday.

Speaking to reporters along with TPCC former president Ponnala Lakshmaiah and TPCC spokesperson Dasuju Sravan at Gajwel, Hanumantha Rao said people have the power to defeat KCR. The Chief Minister had always said B R Ambedkar had drafted the Constitution to ensure welfare of the downtrodden. As such, he wondered why now the Chief Minister wanted a new Constitution.

He recalled that KCR had backed the farm law in the past. Now, he was criticising the Prime Minister, he said. Due to the Constitution, KCR was able to become Chief Minister, he said.



Former Rajya Sabha member V Hanumantha Rao and TPCC spokesperson Dasuju Sravan addressing a media conference Gajwel in Siddipet district on Saturday

Cold wave likely in 16 districts of Telangana

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Temperatures dropped significantly in the wee hours of Saturday all over Telangana and it is expected to continue till Sunday morning.

On Saturday, the State's lowest temperatures recorded were 6°C at Arli, 6.9°C at Bela in Adilabad district and 7.2°C at Moinabad in Ranga Reddy district.

In the GHMC area, the lowest temperatures recorded were 8.7°C at the University of Hyderabad, 9.2°C at Rajendranagar and 10°C at BHIL.

The Begumpet Airport observatory recorded 13°C on Saturday morning thus making it the second coldest February morning in the last 10 years.

"Cold wave is likely in some isolated pockets of Adilabad, Komaram Bheem Asifabad, Mancheril, Nirmal, Jagityal, Rajanna Sirsilla, Karimnagar, Peddapally, Jayashankar Bhupalapally, Mulugu, Ranga Reddy, Medchal Malkajigiri, Vikarabad, Sangareddy, Medak and Kamareddy districts of Telangana until Sunday morning," the IMD bulletin said.

Encroachments in Vizag will be removed: Commissioner

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Greater Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC) Commissioner Dr. G Lakshminisha has said that all encroachments will be removed under the corporation limits and directed the Town Planning authorities to accomplish the task soon.

As part of his field visit to Wards no. 36 and 38, the Commissioner on Saturday inspected Purna Market, Rangaraju Street, Goshala Hospital, Bukkavari Street, Town Hall Street, Chengal Rao Peta, AVN College Road along with Corporator of Ward no. 36 Mary Jones.

Speaking on the occasion, the Commissioner said that there were many encroachments on the streets in Wards no. 36 and 38 and the Town Planning authorities were

directed to clear them. AMOH was instructed to identify the number of areas where the garbage problem is severe and clear the trash.

The Commissioner directed the Chief Medical Officer to give a charge memo to the Sanitation Inspector and women sanitation workers on duty for not clearing the garbage despite repeated instructions. The Sanitary Inspector was instructed to make the sanitation staff and secretaries fully aware of the Swachh Survekshan. Town planning officials were ordered to remove building debris on Town Hall Street.

Similarly, the shopkeepers were advised not to use banned plastic covers and to be aware of 'wet-dry' garbage classification system.

The Secretariat secretaries were instructed to create

awareness among the public on Swachh Survekshan.

The 36th Ward Corporator requested the Commissioner that the KGH retaining wall on Rangaraju Street, which is in a dilapidated state, to talk to the KGH Superintendent to take steps to remove the wall and build a new one. The Commissioner visited other areas and instructed the officials concerned to take measures to keep the premises clean.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. KSLG Shastri, Zonal Commissioner BV Ramana, Executive Engineer Ratna Raju, AMOH Dr. Kishore, Deputy Executive Engineer Satyanarayana, Town Planning Officers, Assistant Engineers, Sanitary Supervisor, Sanitary Inspectors, Ward Secretariat Secretaries and others were present.



UNSCHEDULED POWER CUTS

Balineni assures ryots of corrective steps

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Energy and Environment Balineni Srinivas Reddy has assured the farmers that he will try to resolve the unscheduled power cuts issue in a few days.

Talking to the media here on Saturday, the Minister said that the power crisis emerged due to failures of the previous Telugu Desam party-led government. The government has to disburse energy charges to the National Thermal Power Corporation and the same would be paid soon.

He alleged that the previous TDP government did not pay the fuel charges to the NTPC which caused the problem. Though the AP state power department is facing many constraints it is supplying uninterrupted power to the people. It is not proper for political parties to exaggerate the issue.

The farmers expressed concern over the frequent power failures for the last few days.

They said that due to lack of water their crops would wither. They said that they were not getting even one hour of power supply and were unable to supply water to their crops. The farmers waited several hours at their fields to water their crops but there was no power supply. Chilli crops, maize, and tobacco crops require water immediately. If there is any further delay in watering the crop they would start withering, the farmers feared.

Meanwhile, the residential localities are also having unscheduled power failures.



Minister releases pamphlet on Ratha Saptami

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Minister for Energy Balineni Srinivas Reddy Saturday released a pamphlet on the events to be organised in the Sri Prasanna Chennakesava Swamy temple on devotional Radha Saptami day here on Saturday.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that Sri Prasanna Chennakesava Swamy temple is conducting a special 'Sapta Vahana

Sevalu' on a devotional account of Ratha Saptami on February 8.

The minister said that a devotional programme would be held in the Sri Prasanna Chennakesava Swamy temple on February 7 and appealed to devotees to participate in the programme by following the Covid norms. Meanwhile on the occasion of the consecration of idols in the newly constructed Sri Suryanarayana Murthy

Swamy temple devotional programmes were held.

EO Vemuri Gopi couple, Board of Trustees Chairman Edupalli Gurusudha Rao, members Kurra Prasad Babu, Kareti Kiran Kumar, Emami Madan Mohan, Priests Sankaramanchi Prasad Shastri, Sankaramanchi Ramakrishna, Ritviks Pawan Kumar Sharma Team, Corporator Bethany Shetty Shailaja B and Raghava participated.

Officials directed to improve green cover

PNS ■ ELURU

West Godavari District Collector Prasanna Venkatesh has directed the Municipal Commissioners to make visible changes in the maintenance of sanitation roads and greenery in towns and cities in the district to the satisfaction of the people.

The Collector reviewed with the municipal commissioners on sanitation in towns and cities, road development, clean Andhra Pradesh (Clap), drinking water supply, construction of TIDCO houses, collection of taxes, housing for the poor, vaccination and more green cover in the cities and towns.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that the authorities should be vigilant on sanitation and it requires daily monitoring. He said there should be competition between the respective



municipalities in keeping cities and towns clean and pleasant. They should take special initiative to increase greenery on road dividers in towns. He said steps should be taken to remove encroachments and widen the roads which are congested with traffic.

"The garbage collection programme from home should be strictly enforced. The officials should fill up the potholes on a war footing by giving priority to road repairs. Necessary steps should be taken to avoid dust pollution. Special mea-

asures should be taken to identify the areas where sewage has accumulated and to remove the overgrowth in the respective drainages from time to time", the Collector said.

In addition to establishing hygiene, the focus should be laid on construction and demolition waste management. The Collector should also be laid on integrated, solid waste management plants. The Collector inquired about the use of green, blue, and red-coloured bins given to the houses as part of the garbage collection.

Necessary measures should be taken to control the use of plastic covers. "As part of this, a special drive will be organized in Eluru city as well as in all the municipalities. Complete transparency in tax collection should be maintained in every municipality", he said.

The Collector directed the municipal officials to inspect the respective commercial and residential complexes and identify the unauthorized structures and take necessary steps. Similarly, it is necessary to look at the tax system and whether there is a tax in accordance with the rules.

The officials should set up a special team to improve sanitation conditions on bridges, flyovers, and other areas in each municipality. Similarly, the Collector suggested setting up another team to de-silt the drainages.

Collector asks bankers to open ATMs at RBKs

PNS ■ KAKINADA

Collector Ch Harikiran has asked the bankers to open ATMs at Rythu Bharosa Kendras (RBK) in order to take banking services nearer to the farmers.

Addressing the district-level bankers' meetings at the collectorate here on Saturday; he said every bank should open at least one ATM at the RBK by March 5. The Collector expressed satisfaction over sanctioning 230 units, the highest in the state, under the PM EGP scheme, the Collector wanted the bankers and officials to complete their grounding also expeditiously.

The Collector asked the bankers to encourage the micro food processing units under one district one product scheme. In order to effectively supervise on ensuring repayments properly for the loans sanctioned by the banks under various pro-

grammes, he said, a special assistance set up was being arranged with the tie up of one village level functionary for each bank.

He also asked the bankers to complete the loans sanctioning targets for housing and poverty eradication programmes. MP Vanga Geeta Viswanath asked the bankers to lay special focus on sanctioning of loans to the SC/ST women industrialists and help them in stabilizing their units. The collector has released the district potential linked credit plan for the year 2022-23 on this occasion.

Joint Collector Bhargav Teja, Bankers Committee convener Union Bank of India regional head Chinna Rao, LDM Srinivasarao, DRDA Project Director Sriramani and MEPMA Project director Priyamvada were among those who were present.

Mega Job mela on Feb 8, over 40 firms to take part

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A mega job mela will be held at Khaja Mansion, Masab Tank on Feb 8 (Tuesday) from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. More than 40 companies are expected to take part in the job mela and conduct interviews, says release.

Both freshers and experienced aspirants of jobs can apply for interviews. Candidates who have cleared SSC, Intermediate, and graduated in any field will have the

opportunity for suitable jobs as per their education qualification. Interested candidates should visit the camp with their two sets of credentials, bio-data, an application seeking employment, and photograph for further information, the candidates may contact 83743-15052.

Meanwhile, Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU) on Friday launched a first-of-its-kind Urdu job mela in the country in online mode.



Three youths killed as bike rams pole

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Three youths were killed when the motorcycle on which they were going to their village rams an electric pole at Krishnayapalem village in Mangalagiri mandal in the wee hours of Saturday.

Police said that deceased Satish Reddy, Sheik Kabir and Sheik Raju, all aged between 18 and 19, consumed liquor on Friday night on the occasion of Satish Reddy's birthday. Later, they were going to their native village on their bike.

As the bike was going at high speed, the rider lost control over it, the vehicle rams an electric pole killing two of them instantaneously and the other youth died while being shifted to hospital.

Driving the bike at high speed in an inebriated condition is said to be the reason for the accident. The police registered a case and shifted the bodies to government hospital for postmortem.

Notorious burglar arrested

PNS ■ KAKINADA

The police arrested a notorious burglar who was involved in 35 cases of burglary in both East and West Godavari districts and recovered gold ornaments weighing about 333 grams worth Rs 18 lakh.

DSP S Rambabu told the media here on Saturday that the accused Kolu Sreenu was a resident of BC colony, Koti Kesavaram village of Korukonda mandal and he was involved in many offences.

Balakrishna urges Collector to declare Hindupur as district hq

PNS ■ ANANTAPUR

Hindupur MLA N Balakrishna on Saturday submitted a representation to District Collector Nagalakshmi urging her to ensure that Hindupur would be headquarter for the newly-formed Sri Satya Sai district.

Balakrishna went to the Collector's office in a car rally along with former minister Kalva Srinivasulu, former MLA Vaikundham Prabhakar Chowdary and other TDP leaders.

Later, talking to the media, he said that he had no objection naming after the district with any name but he demands to make Hindupur district as headquarter.

He said that the YSRCP in its election manifesto promised to make Hindupur and appealed to the govern-



ment to announce Hindupur as district headquarter to the newly formed Sri Satya Sai district.

"If necessary, I will meet Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy to appeal to him to make Hindupur the district headquarter", he said.

When asked about naming the newly formed district as

NTR district, he slammed that in order to divert the attention of people from failures the YSRCP led government named after the district with NTR.

He said that many statues of N T Rama Rao had been destroyed but the government did not respond. He struck down naming after the new district with NTR as a political stunt.

Subba Rao Gupta joins hands with Raghu Rama

PNS ■ ONGOLE

YSRCP leader Somiseti Subba Rao Gupta's episode has taken an interesting turn as he joined hands with YSRCP rebel MP K Raghu Ramakrishna Raju.

Subba Rao Gupta, an ardent YSRCP sympathiser and a close associate of Energy Minister Balineni Srinivasa Reddy, was thrashed by a YSRCP activist Subhani for his remarks that the comments of some YSRCP leaders including Minister Kodali Nani would have an adverse impact on the party.

The YSRCP leaders including the minister tried to mollify Subba Rao after being thrashed by a YSRCP activist. However, he met the YSRCP rebel MP in Delhi and posted his photo with RRR on social media which went viral. The Arya Vyasa Association con-



demned the attack on Subba Rao Gupta. The YSRCP leaders including the minister and MLA Anna Rambabu consoled Gupta and pacified him after he was being thrashed by Subhani.

However, Gupta went to Delhi and registered his protest

by holding a placard at Jantar Mantar seeking justice.

Later, he met the YSRCP rebel MP RRR and took a photo with him and posted it on social media. Subba Rao Gupta's episode created a commotion in the district in the YSRCP circles.



Karnataka Gov offers prayers at hill shrine

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

Karnataka Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot offered prayers to Lord Venkateswara Swamy here on Saturday.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) Deputy Executive officer Ramesh, priests and officials welcomed the Governor.

After darshan of the lord, the TTD Deputy EO presented 'Sri Vari Prasadam', TTD Calendar and lord's photo to Gehlot at Ranganayakula Mandapam inside the temple complex.



20 red sanders logs seized, 4 held

PNS ■ KADAPA

The police seized 20 red sanders logs and arrested four inter-state smugglers at a forest area at Akulanarayanapallai village in Kasinayana mandal.

Superintendent of Police KKN Amburajan told the media here on Saturday that on a tip-off the police teams conducted a raid at a forest area and found 20 red sanders logs, weighing 445 KGs, which were kept ready for smuggling

to other states.

The police arrested four persons including D Subramanyam, R Umashankar, D Ramanaiah and B Vasant Kumar and seized a car and a transport vehicle. The SP said that the Preventive Detention (PD) Act is being invoked against the four inter-state red sander smugglers.

The SP warned of stringent action if involved in red sander smuggling activities.

Dharani portal shows distorted map of India

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Social media users have found that the Dharani Portal has been using a distorted map of India showing Pak occupied Kashmir and Aksai Chin as parts of Pakistan and China.

As if the complaints regarding the Dharani Portal are not enough, the Indian map on the portal has also become a point of contention.

Netizen CGS Kumar first pointed out the matter. "The TRS government is officially supporting Pakistan. This is the Dharani Portal of Telangana.

The Dharani Portal map shows PoK as a part of Pakistan and Aksai Chin as a part of China."

The map has triggered strong reactions among Netizens especially BJP sympathisers with many criticising the TRS government.

A closer look at the map revealed that the software was developed using maps imported from OpenStreetMap which is similar to Google maps.

Existing classrooms inadequate to follow Covid norms: Teachers

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Teachers have been expressing doubts over accommodating 20 students per classroom if the attendance of the students increases.

It may be recalled that schools have been reopened in Telangana from Tuesday after extended Sankranti vacation.

Teachers say that attendance of teachers is unlikely to be full and also that of students for at least one week as several teachers have been having the symptoms of cold, cough and fever. The recent door to door fever survey indicated that there are more patients suffering with Covid symptoms.

In view of the reopening of the schools from Tuesday, the schools and college managements and teachers have undertaken sanitation works on a big way.

The school education department officials say that committees have been constituted to ensure the schools adhered to the Covid rules.

In some schools, there are no facilities even to observe physical distance, it is said.

The teachers have been



expressing inability to run classes up to one week as many teachers have the symptoms of Covid-19. It is not proper to ask them to come to school. As every house hold has one or two persons suffering from these symptoms, the attendance of students will be not up to the mark. However, SSC students will come to the school as they would have to appear for public exams in April. Syllabus should be completed for them in time.

Osmania and JNTU have decided to continue the online teaching for the next one week or so. Many students have been suspected to be suffering from Covid-19 symptoms. If they are allowed inside the university

hostels there is every danger of Covid-19 spreading rapidly. Therefore, OU Vice-Chancellor Ravinder said that the online classes will continue for the next one week or so.

Head mistress of government school in Nalgonda confirmed that schools have received orders on strict adherence of Covid rules. It is not possible to limit the number of students per classroom to 20 if the student attendance increases. More benches are required to accommodate them. In case there are benches in schools, the existing rooms are inadequate to accommodate 20 students per room. Therefore, she felt that alternative arrangements are necessary.

Two held for having hashish oil, ganja

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Prohibition and Excise department personnel here on Saturday arrested two persons on charges of smuggling marijuana (ganja) and hashish oil from Araku in Visakhapatnam and selling the same to the customers in the city.

The arrested persons are identified as Harshavardhan (24) and Vijay (25). Hashish oil worth Rs.4 lakh and ganja sachets were seized from the arrested persons, said Serlingampally Excise Inspector B Gandhi Naik.

He said Harshavardhan, hailing from Vijayawada in AP purchased hashish oil worth Rs.50,000 in Araku and came to Hyderabad four months ago. He was staying in a flat in Hafeezpet and was allegedly selling five grams of oil in a box at prices ranging from Rs.1,500 to Rs.2,000 depending upon the demand.

Following information that some persons were possessing narcotics, a team of personnel from Excise department of Serlingampally raided Harshavardhan's flat and seized 230 boxes of hashish oil.

India doesn't have a Prime Minister, but a king: Rahul

PNS ■ UDHAM SINGH NAGAR

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said India does not have a prime minister today but a king who believes that people should keep quiet when he takes a decision.

Addressing a rally, Uttara Khandi Kisan Swabhiman Samvad, in Kichha here, Gandhi also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of leaving farmers on roads for a year amid a raging COVID-19 pandemic and said the Congress will never do that.

He said his party will never shut its doors on farmers, labourers or the poor and it wants a partnership with them.

"If a prime minister does not work for all he cannot be a PM. By that token, Narendra Modi is not a PM," Gandhi said.

"India does not have a PM today. It has a king who believes that when the king takes a decision, everyone else should keep quiet," he said.

Targeting Modi over the

year-long farmers' agitation against the Centre's agri laws, the former Congress president said the prime minister left farmers on the road amid the pandemic.

Asserting that his party will never treat farmers the way the Modi government did, Gandhi said, "Congress will never shut its doors on farmers while it is in power. We want to work in partnership with farmers, the poor and labourers so that every section feels it is their government."

'Modi left farmers on road amid Covid'

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of leaving farmers on roads for a year amid the COVID-19 pandemic and said his party will never do that. Addressing a rally in Kichha here ahead of the upcoming Uttarakhand Assembly polls, the Congress leader also said India does not have a prime minister but a king who expects the public to keep quiet when he takes a decision. Gandhi said the Congress will not shut its doors on farmers, youths, labourers or the poor and it wants a partnership with them. Elections to the 70-member Uttarakhand Assembly will be held on February 14.

He also congratulated the farmers for their rock-solid resistance against the three farm laws that forced the government to withdraw them.

Thousands of farmers from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh camped at Delhi's borders for over a year demanding the repeal of the Centre's three contentious farm laws.

They decided to suspend their protest, which began in November 2020,

on December 9 last year after the government gave in to their demand and agreed to consider six others, including withdrawal of cases registered against farmers during the agitation, a legal guarantee on MSP and compensation for kin of farmers who died

during the course of the protest. Gandhi reiterated that there are two Indias today, one for the rich and one for the poor.

"A select group of around 100 people in the country have as much wealth as 40 per cent of the country's population. Such income disparity is not seen anywhere else," he said.



Naqvi: 'Modi-Yogi' factor replaced 'Muslim-Yadav'

PNS ■ NOIDA

Hitting out at the "syndicate" of Samajwadi Party-BSP-Congress ahead of the assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh, BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi on Saturday said his party's "Modi-Yogi" factor has replaced the previous "Muslim-Yadav" factor which was communal and casteist.

The Union minister and the Deputy Leader of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha also credited his party for ushering in a "golden age" in Uttar Pradesh, which he said was earlier counted in the "BIMARU" states, (or sick states, referring to less developed states).

He was campaigning for the BJP in Gautam Buddha Nagar district in the western part of the state, where the three assembly constituencies of Noida, Jewar and Dadri will go to the polls on February 10.

"The BJP has defeated the pseudo-secularism and appeasement politics with the determination to development with dignity of all. The MY (Modi-Yogi) factor, which is synonymous with inclusive empower-



ment, has replaced the previous MY (Muslim-Yadav) factor, which was a symbol of communalism and casteism," Naqvi said.

While addressing locals at a 'Jan Chaupal' at Haldoni village, he alleged that the 'SBC' (SP-BSP-Congress) syndicate betrayed the people of Uttar Pradesh during its more than 60 years' rule. "The best state had been made a BIMARU state by this SBC syndicate," he said, asking people to "teach them a lesson" during the upcoming polls.

Naqvi said the tenure of BJP leaders late Kalyan Singh,

Rajnath Singh and now Yogi Adityanath as the UP chief minister is considered as the "golden period" of the state.

The BJP rule not only brought the state out of "BIMARU" states to the "best state", it also demolished the "den" of "balwaa, bahubali, beimaan" (rioters, mafia, and the corrupt), he added. Gautam Buddha Nagar is among the 11 districts in western UP where elections will be held on February 10. Polls will be held in Uttar Pradesh over seven phases and results will be declared on March 10.

Centre orders 5 cr doses of Corbevax

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

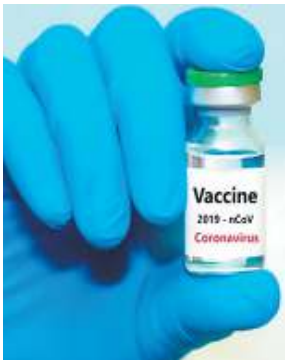
The Centre has placed a purchase order with Biological E for five crore doses of Covid vaccine Corbevax each costing Rs 145 excluding taxes, official sources said on Saturday.

The government is yet to decide on which segment of beneficiaries this new vaccine would be administered.

However, according to sources, discussions are underway in technical groups and in the Health Ministry's immunisation division about expanding the scope of the precaution doses which are currently being given to healthcare and frontline workers, and comorbid senior citizens.

The HLL Lifecare Limited, a public sector undertaking, has issued the supply order of Corbevax to Biological E in January-end on behalf of the Union Health Ministry.

According to the order, the Hyderabad-based company is



expected to provide the supplies in February.

"The cost implication of five crore doses of Corbevax at the rate of Rs 145 per dose plus GST as applicable come to Rs 725 plus GST as applicable. In this regard, it is also stated that Rs 1,500 crore has been released as advance vide sanction order dated June 2, 2021, to HLL Lifecare Limited for procurement of Corbevax from Biological E Limited," the order stated.

Assam tea seller clears NEET in first attempt

PNS ■ ASSAM

It was no mean task juggling studies and serving tea to customers at the shop run by his mother. Rahul Das (24), however, took the challenges in his stride and managed to do both. His hard work has finally paid off as the tea seller from Assam's Bajali district secured a seat at AIIMS-Delhi, having cleared NEET exam in the first attempt.

The journey wasn't an easy one. Das and his brother were raised by their mother, who was left alone to fend for herself and two sons by her husband some 11 years ago. Poverty forced Das to quit his studies after Class 12, but he did not give up on the dream to become a doctor.

Das said he would find time to study in between serving customers at his mother's shop in Patacharkuchi Chowk area of the district. "I have seen my mother toil hard for us. We couldn't afford a helper at the shop. Since school, I made it a point to help her in some way



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or the other... I made tea and sold it, too. And as and when it was possible, I would sit down to study at the shop," he explained. In 2015, he had

cleared the higher secondary examination, and left studies for want of money.

However, his zeal for higher education prompted Das to

join the Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering & Technology (CIPET), two years later, to pursue a diploma in plastic engineering.

Das passed with a distinction (85 per cent marks) after three years, and started work at a multi-national company in Guwahati as a 'quality engineer' in October 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There was no job satisfaction at all... I always wanted to be a doctor. One of my cousins is a dental surgeon and he happened to be my inspiration. I decided to leave my job and begin preparations for NEET with whatever resources were available online as I had no money to buy books," he told PTI as customers lined up outside his shop to have a cup of piping hot tea.

Das, who has a burn injury on one of his hands, candidly said that he bagged the 12,068th position in NEET, but his Scheduled Caste (SC) and Person with Disabilities (PWD) certificates helped him get through AIIMS.

SCBA seeks resumption of physical hearing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) on Saturday requested Chief Justice of India N V Ramanathas that physical hearings in the apex court be reassessed to the pre-pandemic level as the COVID-19 situation is in control and stressed that 'open court hearing' is both the "convention and constitutional requirement".

In a letter addressed to the CJI, SCBA president Vikas Singh said the positivity rate in the national capital has come down to below four percent and the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) has decided to reopen schools, colleges and gyms here with effect from February 7.

The apex court is presently hearing matters virtually after the number of COVID-19 cases started rising in December last year due to the Omicron variant of the virus.

The letter said due to the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, the apex court had started hearing matters virtually and from November 9 last year, it had commenced



physical hearing on three days - Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday - in a week.

"The hearing in open court is both the convention and a constitutional requirement in the Supreme Court. It is, therefore, requested that physical hearing in Supreme Court be resumed forthwith as it was pre-pandemic," said the letter, a copy of which has also been sent to the five senior-most judges of the top court.

It said pandemic in the country has been "very much in control" in the last two weeks and in Delhi and the positivity rate has come down to 3.85 percent as on date.

The letter said that offices

are now allowed to function with 100 percent capacity in Delhi and school for nursery to class 8th will reopen from February 14.

"In these circumstances, there is no justification to not open the Supreme Court for full physical hearing on all five days forthwith," it said. The SCBA president has said in the letter that as has been demonstrated in the earlier phase of physical hearing in the apex court in November and December 2021, the lawyers will continue wearing masks and abide by the COVID protocol as long as the same is in place. Singh has also referred to his

January 6 letter addressed to the CJI in which he had raised concerns over the non-consideration of several urgent pending issues of the bar.

The letter said on January 18, a meeting was convened between the five senior-most judges of the apex court and the SCBA's executive committee (EC) to discuss the issue of muting or unmuttering lawyers during a virtual hearing.

It said other issues of the bar, as mentioned in the previous letter, were kept in abeyance with an assurance that those issues would be taken up immediately when the situation would become better.

Singh said that based on the assurance, the unanimous decision of the SCBA EC to hold a candle march raising grievances of the bar was kept in abeyance. "Till date, we have not heard anything from your good offices with regard to those long pending issues. If any of our demands is unjustified, then we may be told so and we would not insist upon the same but please do not force us to take the agitation path by keeping our legitimate demands pending," the letter said.

Hijab row: Won't allow 'Talibanisation' of education

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Amid continuing protests by a section of students seeking permission from authorities to wear Hijab in classrooms in some colleges in Karnataka, the BJP state chief Nalin Kumar Kateel on Saturday said the state government will not allow 'Talibanisation' of the education system.

Kateel's remarks come as Burqa-clad women in some parts of the state continued to protest against the decision to bar female students from wearing 'hijab' (headscarf) inside classes. "There is no scope for such things (wearing Hijab in classrooms). Our government will take stringent action. People

have to follow the rules and regulations of the school. We will not allow Talibanisation (of the education system)," he told reporters here.

Asserting that bringing religion to educational institutions was not right, Kateel said what children require is education. "There is no scope for Hijab or any such thing in the schools. Schools are the temples of 'Saraswati' (Goddess of knowledge). It is the duty of the students to learn and abide by the regulations of the school," the BJP leader said.

Vijayapura BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal said some people were intentionally demanding permission for wearing Hijab in classrooms.

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INDIA CORNER

Subdued Saraswati Puja celebrations in Bengal



Saraswati Puja was celebrated in households and educational institutions across West Bengal in a subdued manner on Saturday with strict adherence to COVID-19 norms. As weather conditions improved in the morning after incessant rain on the previous day, campuses of colleges and universities came to life as students turned up in large numbers to offer 'pushpanjali' to the goddess of learning. Students were overjoyed as Saraswati Puja was celebrated in many schools after two years. Many educational institutions, where the festival was celebrated with participants wearing masks and maintaining social distancing, had reopened a couple of days back.

Tripura to soon have national law university: Official



Tripura is set to have a national law university soon, as a bill seeking its creation will be tabled in the next session of assembly, a top official of the state's education department said on Saturday. Academic activities of the varsity is expected to be held from the Tripura Judicial Academy building for the next academic session. It will be later shifted to a new building, he said. Tripura Law Minister Ratan Lal Nath has met with the officials concerned to push the plan for setting up a full-fledged law university, the official said.

Parkash Singh Badal to undergo health check-up at PGIMER



Shiromani Akali Dal patriarch Parkash Singh Badal (94), who recently recovered from COVID-19, will undergo a health check-up at PGIMER here, a party leader said on Saturday. The former Punjab chief minister was on January 24 discharged from a hospital in Ludhiana where he was admitted after he tested positive for COVID-19 a few days prior. Parkash Singh Badal will come from Muktsar to Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research in Chandigarh for a health check-up, said Harcharan Bains, principal advisor to SAD chief Sukhbir Singh Badal.

Minor siblings charred to death in cylinder blast in Ghaziabad



Two minor girls were charred to death in a cylinder explosion inside their house in Shatabdipuram area here, police said on Saturday. The deceased were identified as Ruby (5) and Rani (4), they said. The incident happened Thursday night when one of the two girls, both sisters, tried to ignite the gas stove but the rubber pipe attached to it caught fire and led to the cylinder explosion, they said. The house belongs to Brjesh, a native of Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, who lives there with his wife Mamma and six daughters, they said.

DMK flays TN Gov over NEET

PNS ■ PUDUCHERRY

The Puducherry unit of the Dravida Munnetra Kazha gam (DMK) has condemned the Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi for returning the anti-NEET Bill back to the State Assembly and said the action was a case of violating democratic principles and smashes the dream of poor students to become doctors. Leader of the Opposition in Puducherry Assembly R Siva, in a statement, on Saturday said that the Tamil Nadu Governor had transgressed his constitutional responsibility by adopting a negative stand.

CM's face key to win people's trust: Sidhu

Punjab Cong chief says that the Chief Ministerial candidate decides if 60 people become MLAs

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

A chief ministerial face will decide whether 60 candidates are elected as MLAs or not, Punjab Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu said on Saturday, referring to the number 60, one more than 59 lawmakers needed to form government in Punjab with 117-member assembly.

Without naming any party, Sidhu made the remark ahead of the announcement of the Congress' chief ministerial face



by the party's former president Rahul Gandhi during his visit to Ludhiana for the February 20 Punjab assembly polls. Sidhu

also stressed that a person who has a roadmap for Punjab and who enjoys the people's trust can only ensure 60 contestants get elected as legislators.

Notably, a party needs 59 seats out of a total of 117 assembly segments for forming the government in Punjab.

For the last several weeks, both Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and state Congress chief Navjot Singh Sidhu have, directly or indirectly, made a case for themselves to be declared as the party's

nominee for the top post.

Addressing the media in Amritsar on Saturday, Sidhu who is contesting from Amritsar East seat, said he was never a "worshipper of power".

"But today Punjab has to decide a big thing. A person will become CM if there are 60 MLAs. Nobody is talking about 60 MLAs. Nobody talks about on which roadmap the government will be formed," he said.

Sidhu again batted for his Punjab Model for bringing the state back on its feet.

'Will raise money from small investors for road projects'

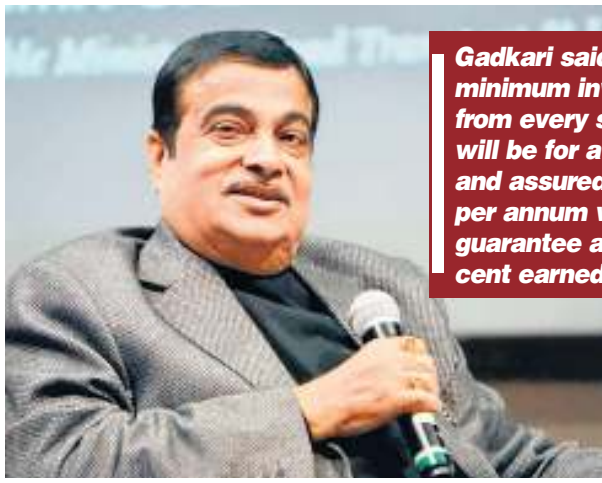
PNS ■ MUMBAI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Saturday said the government will not take money from foreign investors to build infrastructure projects like roads, and instead mobilise funds from small investors willing to put Rs 1 lakh for an assured return of 8 per cent per annum.

The minister said a Rs 8,000-crore project to build road over bridges over railway crossings in towns and cities is also under the works, but the announcement will be made after the budget.

Gadkari said his department does works of over Rs 5 lakh crore a year and added that foreign investors are now making a beeline to invest in Indian road projects but clearly stated a lack of interest on his side to engage.

"I do not want to make the rich (more) richer, but will collect money from farmers, farm labourers, constables, clerks and government employees, Gadkari said, addressing an event organised by Maharashtra Chamber of



Gadkari said the plan involves a minimum investment of Rs 1 lakh from every small investor which will be for a specified road project and assured a return of 8 per cent per annum with sovereign guarantee as against a 4.5-5 per cent earned on bank deposits

Commerce, Industry and Agriculture here.

Gadkari said the plan involves a minimum investment of Rs 1 lakh from every small investor which will be for a specified road project and assured a return of 8 per cent per annum with sovereign guarantee as against a 4.5-5 per cent earned on bank deposits.

The investment proposal is pending with capital markets regulator Sebi and once their

nod is received, the same will be launched, Gadkari said.

He said over the years, many foreign investors like Australia's Macquarie or Canadian pensioners have invested in India but now, it is essential for us to mobilise funds by ourselves.

Recalling an instance where a foreign investor had declined to invest in a Rs 1,500 crore masala bond roadshow a few years ago, the Union minister said now the same entities are

making a beeline for investments and added that a few days ago an investor approached him offering to invest up to Rs 5,000 crore.

"I usually give them (foreign investors) tea and say thank you, the Union minister said.

Gadkari said the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is raising loans at very competitive rates of 5.75 or 5.85 per cent at present and has two banks competing with offers of Rs 25,000 crore loans at present.

The minister listed a slew of projects which are being executed including the Delhi-Mumbai access controlled expressway which will be open

for traffic in a year and asserted that he does not see a crunch for funds in the foreseeable future.

The Delhi-Mumbai expressway will be extended to the nearby JNPT, the country's largest container port, as well as a Rs 660-crore multi-tier intersection is being planned in Panvel, he said.

The projects being carried out will reduce distances, travel time, pollution and also fuel, and help the economy, he said.

Gadkari said fuel alternatives like ethanol, liquefied natural gas, green hydrogen need to be used the most for saving forex on crude, curbing pollution and also helping domestic industry and sugar growers.

Probably referring to the corporate group Essar's interests, Gadkari said a brother of Prashant Ruia showed him two trucks running on LNG in Nagpur a few days ago, which will help save up to 60 per cent on the running costs after fitting a LNG kit costing Rs 8 lakh and its cost can be recovered in 295 days.



FM urges India Inc to open up their purse

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday asked India Inc to invest in the economy so that the virtuous cycle kicks in.

Referring to the government's decision to cut corporate tax rate, she said, the government has also opened up many sectors including atomic energy and space.

The government in September 2019 slashed corporate tax rate for companies that do not avail of any tax incentive, to 22 per cent. New

manufacturing companies have to pay at an even lower corporate tax rate of 15 per cent.

The Budget 2022-23 presented on February 1 proposed that the concessional 15 per cent corporate tax rate would be available for one more year till March 2024 for newly incorporated manufacturing units.

Addressing members of CII, she said industry should quickly join in the government to help virtuous cycle gain traction and push growth.

IndusInd Bank to initiate insolvency proceedings against ZEEL

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Private sector lender IndusInd Bank has filed a plea before NCLT to initiate insolvency proceedings against Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL).

IndusInd Bank, in its plea before the Mumbai bench of National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has claimed a default of Rs 83.08 crore against the media and entertainment firm, ZEEL said in a late evening regulatory updates on Friday.

"An application has been filed... by IndusInd Bank Ltd, claiming to be a Financial Creditor, before the NCLT, Mumbai for initiation of Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) against the company, claiming a default of Rs 83.08 crore," it said.

The application has been filed under Section 7 of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC), said ZEEL.

Under Section 7 of IBC, a financial creditor may move NCLT for initiation of CIRP over default of Rs 1 crore and above.

Budget 2023 more directional with long-term growth: Goyal

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Stating that the budget 2023 is more directional with a quarter of a century of sustained growth in mind, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday sought to deflect criticism in certain quarters that the government focused more on the supply-side than on growth-boosting demand side of the economy.

On February 1, the government presented a budget with no tax increases and thus no new revenue generation measures but chose to do record borrowings to fund a budgeted 35 per cent increased capital investment at Rs 7.5 lakh crore and also offered an additional Rs 1 lakh crore to the states for capital investment in interest-free loans. Together with the states, the overall capital expenditure next fiscal will be at a record high of Rs 10.5 lakh crore.

This will have the government borrowing hitting a historic high with gross borrowing at Rs 14.95 lakh crore and net borrowing of Rs 11.6 lakh crore.

Demand has been the biggest missing link in the economy even before the pandemic hit the nation and scuppered the last strain of demand as those who had money chose to save and not splurge while tens of millions became jobless.

"I am surprised at the criticism in a section of the industry that the budget is supply-side focused while what was more needed was boosting demand. The fact is that this is a direction setting budget, with clear focus on the macro as well as micro issues plaguing the economy. Such a focus will lead to faster and deeper trickle-down effect.



CAs play important role in nation-building: Gehlot

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Chartered accountants play an important role in nation-building and they owe it to the people to spread financial awareness among them and make them understand various aspects of the economy, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot said on Saturday.

A CA audit is always considered reliable as it is done after a lot of scrutinies. In such a situation, it is their responsibility to maintain their credibility while playing their important role in nation-building, the chief minister said. Gehlot made the remarks in an online address to the inaugural session of the sub-regional conference of the Central India Regional Council of ICAI.

He said in the pre-budget meeting held recently, the representatives of the State Level Tax Advisory Committee gave many good suggestions.

It will be our endeavour to include these suggestions in the budget so that entrepreneurs can be benefitted from it, he promised.

CMS Info Systems logs 48% growth in Dec qtr net at Rs 60 cr

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Cash management firm CMS Info Systems, which closed the last IPO of 2021 with a Rs 1,100-crore share sale in the third week of December, has reported a net income of Rs 60.2 crore for the quarter ending December 2021, which was higher by 48 per cent year-on-year, when the company was privately held.

The city-based company said its annualised revenue rose 21.4 per cent to Rs 40.37 crore driven by growth across both cash management and managed services businesses.

Its earnings per share for the quarter was Rs 4.07, higher by 48 per cent.

CMS Info is the country's largest cash management company based on number of ATM points and the number of retail pick-up points as well as one of the largest ATM cash management companies worldwide. Its businesses include ATM and retail cash management, currency chest automation, bullion logistics, banking automation solu-

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tions, brown label ATMs and managed services, multi-vendor software solutions, remote monitoring services and card issuances and management personalisation.

Commenting on the earnings, Rajiv Kaul, executive vice-chairman & chief executive of CMS, said, "We are witnessing a strong recovery as activity levels across our network of over 1,45,000 touch-points. This had our volume and market share

growing across all our verticals of cash management, ATM managed services and tech solutions."

The total currency in circulation continues to grow at a robust rate and has crossed Rs 30 lakh crore in December, he said, adding its network continued to see a strong ATM requests for proposal pipeline that demonstrates the banking sector's focus on refreshing and expanding the ATM network.

The pipeline stands at over 30,000 ATMs over the next 12 months. Revenue from cash business for the quarter rose 19.4 per cent to Rs 292.4 crore, giving it an operating profit of Rs 70.7 crore, higher by 22.8 per cent.

MONEY MATTERS

LIC offers opportunity for policyholders to revive lapsed policies



PO-bound Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has launched a campaign for revival of individual lapsed policies. Policies, which are in a lapsed condition during the premium paying term and not completed policy term, are eligible to be revived in this campaign, which will begin from February 7 and on March 25, 2022, a press release said on Saturday. "While the current Covid-19 pandemic scenario has emphasised the need

for mortality protection, this campaign is a good opportunity for LIC's policyholders to revive their policies, restore life cover and ensure financial security for their family," the state-run insurer said in the release. It said that concessions are being offered in late fee for other than term assurance and high risk plans, depending on the total premiums paid. There are no concessions on medical requirements. Eligible health and micro insurance plans also qualify for the concession in late fee, the release said.

SBI Q3 net profit surges 62% to Rs 8,432 crore

The country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) on Saturday posted 62 per cent jump in standalone net profit at Rs 8,432 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2021. The bank had earned a net profit of Rs 5,196 crore in the year-ago period. "Bank has registered its highest quarterly net profit of Rs 8,432 crore in Q3FY22. This represents an increase of 62.27 per cent YoY," SBI said in a regulatory filing. Total income also rose to Rs 78,352 crore during the quarter under review as against Rs 75,981 crore in the same period of 2020-21, it said. On a consolidated basis, the SBI Group clocked 51 per cent increase in net profit at Rs 9,692 crore during the quarter as against Rs 6,402 crore in the year-ago period. The bank's asset quality improved as gross non-performing assets fell to 4.5 per cent of gross advances as of December 31, 2021 from 4.77 per cent by the year-ago same period.



Paytm Q3 loss widens to Rs 778 cr



Digital payments and financial services firm One97 Communications, which operates under Paytm brand, on Friday reported widening of consolidated loss to Rs 778.5 crore in the December 2021 quarter. Paytm had registered a loss of Rs 535.5 crore in the same period a year ago, according to late night BSE filing by the company. Its consolidated revenue from operations, however, increased by about 88 per cent to Rs 1,456 crore during the reported quarter from Rs 772 crore it posted in the December 2020 quarter. "Our consolidated revenue from operations grew by 89 per cent year-on-year and 34 per cent quarter-on-quarter to Rs 1,456 crore in the third quarter of financial year 2022 driven by growth in merchant payments through MDR bearing instruments, new device subscriptions and loan disbursements," Paytm said in the filing. The payment services of Paytm to consumers grew by 60 per cent to Rs 406 crore from Rs 254 crore and payments services to merchants more than doubled to Rs 586 crore from Rs 269 crore in the quarter under review.

Amazon India to help women become entrepreneurs

PNS ■ BENGALURU

Amazon India on Saturday said the company has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Karnataka State Rural Livelihood Promotion Society (KSRLPS) to support the growth of women entrepreneurs.

The MoU was signed and exchanged in the presence of Karnataka Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai and Minister of Skill Development, Entrepreneurship and Livelihood CN Ashwath Narayan.

Amazon India will launch Sanjeevini-KSRLPS in its marketplace and extend benefits of the Saheli programme to train and empower thousands of



women entrepreneurs to come online and access a wider market for their products, the company said in a press release.

This association will help bring in regional selection and unique products from categories like grocery, home and

fashion accessories made by over 30,000 women entrepreneurs and self-help groups (SHGs) associated with Sanjeevini-KSRLPS online and make them available to millions of Amazon customers across the country, the release said.

BharatPe's other founder backs CEO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Ashneer Grover, the embattled co-founder of BharatPe sought removal of CEO Suhail Sameer from the Board, the fintech startup's other founder Shashvat Nakrani has thrown his weight behind the chief executive, saying the official continues to enjoy his confidence.

In a move that is expected to complicate Grover's pursuit to oust Sameer as both the founders need to consent jointly to remove the CEO, Nakrani asserted that he himself has not given any consent or demand for such removal and that the CEO continues to enjoy his support.

Legal experts contend that the CEO cannot be removed from the board on the sole demand of Ashneer Grover and any such removal can only be done jointly by both the co-founders. Lawyers also confirmed that if the CEO is a nominee of both founders, then one founder's unilateral withdrawal is not valid under the law.

When contacted, Nakrani confirmed that he has not given any consent or demand for removal of Suhail Sameer from the Board.

"I have neither given my consent, nor sought the removal of Suhail Sameer from the Board of BharatPe. News reports suggesting this are incorrect", Nakrani said.

Reliance Jio faces service outage in Mumbai

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Reliance Jio's telecom services have been affected since Saturday morning in the financial capital, with many users complaining of inability to connect calls. The problem was first reported at 12 noon across the city with users complaining of getting a message saying a subscriber is not registered on the network.

A company official admitted to a technical glitch and added that efforts are on to restore the same. The exact reason for the issues was not immediately known.

As a result, many users had to depend on alternatives like the calling feature in the popular messaging app, Whatsapp, to speak with others.

Industry dept using drones to lift Lakadong turmeric in Meghalaya

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The commerce and industry ministry on Saturday said it is promoting use of drones for transportation of famous Lakadong turmeric from Meghalaya to other parts of the country with an aim to resolve first mile connectivity issues of farmers from the hinterland.

Lakadong turmeric has been identified under the One District, One Product (ODOP) Initiative of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) as a product with huge potential for growth and export from West Jaintia Hills, a district of Meghalaya.

"West Jaintia Hills today witnessed the first-of-its-kind Fly-Off Event to demonstrate the use of novel and innovative drone/UAV technology for payload delivery, that could serve as a model of solving the first mile connectivity issues for Lakadong Turmeric farmers from the hinterland," the ministry said in a statement.

Sumita Dawra, Additional Secretary, DPIIT said that this event was a first step towards showcasing the innovative solutions that can propel first mile connectivity.

The flyoff event would not only give a fillip to the ODOP initiative but also leverage modern technology



as a fundamental solution to overcome the bottleneck of transportation that acts as a barrier in realizing the opti-

mal potential of this spice from Meghalaya, she said. Despite India being the world's largest turmeric pro-

ducer and exporter, turmeric imports had also been increasing.

It said that in spite of the highest curcumin content and excellent potential for domestic sales and export, Lakadong turmeric faces severe market access issues due to the remoteness of the location, topography and terrain.

"Thus, buyers have to incur additional costs to transport the goods from the villages via local pick-up trucks till the major transporters' loading point. Additional costs of transportation and delays in the same act as barriers / disincentives for the buyer in the process of procurement," it added.

This turmeric has the highest curcumin content of 7-9 per cent (in comparison to 3 per cent or less in other varieties). Meghalaya has also applied for a Geographical Indication tag for Lakadong turmeric.

The percentage of curcumin and oleoresin content in turmeric determines its demand by the industry and the price. India is the largest producer and exporter of turmeric. India exported USD 236.5 million worth of turmeric in 2018 from USD 182.53 million in 2017.

India produces 78 per cent of the world's turmeric. In 2018-19, turmeric production was 389 thousand tonnes.

Bank of Baroda net profit doubles to Rs 2,197cr in Dec qtr

State-owned Bank of Baroda on Saturday reported doubling of its net profit to Rs 2,197 crore on a standalone basis in the quarter ended in December 2021.

The lender had posted a net profit of Rs 1,061 crore in the same quarter a year ago. Total income during the third quarter of 2021-22 rose to Rs 20,482.26 crore as against Rs 20,407.45 crore in Q3FY21, Bank of Baroda said in a regulatory filing. Interest income rose to Rs 17,963 crore in the quarter under review from Rs 17,496.71 crore in the year-ago quarter. The bank witnessed improvement in its bad loan ratio, with the gross non-performing assets (NPAs) falling to 7.25 per cent of the gross advances as of December 31, 2021 from 8.48 per cent by end of December 2020. Net NPAs came down to 2.25 per cent from 2.39 per cent.

Provisions for bad loans and contingencies fell to Rs 2,507 crore for quarter ended December 2021 as against Rs 3,449.90 crore in the year-ago quarter. On a consolidated basis, the net profit during October-December 2021-22 rose to Rs 2,463.75 crore, up from Rs 1,195.96 crore in year ago period.





FAITH IS A KNOWLEDGE WITHIN THE HEART, BEYOND THE REACH OF PROOF —KHALIL GIBRAN

COPING WITH STRESS

If stress was supposed to be helpful to our survival, why did it become detrimental to our lives? questions PAYAL ANAND. An edited excerpt:

Once, in an organizational behaviour class, I asked my students, 'What is that one thing that makes you similar to others sitting in the class?' Their answer, 'The fact that we all are stressed out and depressed,' cracked me up. While it really sounded funny, in reality, it isn't. For one of my research projects, I particularly wanted to dig a little deeper and understand if managing stress is really a pervasive issue for young working professionals. I asked around 450 working professionals 'What bothers you most at work?' After analysing the responses, there were five major trends observed as a result of word cloud analysis. The dissolution of work-life boundaries and its consequent strain was one of the major observations that came out consistently. The next couple of trends that stood out were the building up of frustration and physical and psychological exhaustion. The overall feeling of gloominess and loneliness were the last two that completed the top five trends. Frankly, these trends do not baffle me. They all have been in the heavily discussed topics in psychology. However, if you notice, the common denominator for all the above-mentioned issues is stress. Work may become stressful for us if we perceive too many challenges, demands and threats in the environment that we are not able to deal.

Imagine a casual day when your boss asked you to make an impromptu presentation in front of the board members. Or you heard bad news from the client you were not prepared for. Do you feel sudden rush in your body in such unexpected situations? Your breathing becomes heavier, face becomes pale and/or you feel sudden weakness in gut or legs. Do you suddenly become more attentive and your eyes get dilated? All of us do. This is a natural response of our body when we see a life-threatening situation. This is our bodily response of fight or flight, also known as acute stress response. Either we fight, in other words, approach the situation, or we flee, that is, avoid the situation. Both are different from each other and are separate constructs. Fight or flight can be considered as a bodily coping mechanism with threats, a response to something that is terrifying, either mentally or physically. There is an evolutionary explanation behind this phenomenon. Our ancestors used to be surrounded by various sorts of threats including attack from huge animals. It was matter of life or death. As their entire life was surrounded by dangerous species, to survive better, they developed the fight or flight coping mechanism. This instinct is very much intact in us even now. Through this mechanism, once our brain senses a life-threaten-



ing situation, it prepares to cope with it. 'Stress', in this regard, acts as a signal to the brain, which then releases a stress hormone, whose objective is to create an alarm in us. Thanks to our ancestors, we have a mechanism to prepare ourselves physically and biologically when encountered with stressors. Either it prepared their body to stay and deal with a threat (i.e., fight) or to run away to safety (i.e., flight). The way stress was defined traditionally is in stark contrast with its modern definition. The old definitions explicitly indicated the positive connotation that was attached with stress at that point. It is intriguing to know that stress was a biological phenomenon against a physical or mental threat that was created to work in our favour (to alarm us of dangers), instead of working against us. The modern definition of stress, however, speaks volumes about the current interpretation of the phenomenon. The contemporary scholars define it as 'a feeling of emotional strain and pressure'. Shocking, isn't it? Modern lives have distorted our understanding of events and processes that once

IT IS SADDENING THAT, IN CURRENT TIMES, NOT GETTING THE 'BEST EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR' AWARD IS COMPARABLE TO HUNTING FOR FOOD AND SAVING OURSELVES FROM MAN-EATERS

were considered as a gift to humankind. In fact, the definition of 'life-threatening situations' has changed totally. Nowadays, disagreement with peers, argument with the boss, fear of missing out, fear of rejection, exclusion or unknown stresses us out, including many other things. In fact, we have created a gamut of 'modern' issues that stress us out. Many years ago, we started off on a note that stress is positive and helpful for our survival. However, as kids growing up, we never heard people telling us that stress is positive. We commonly hear people saying, 'Stress is extremely bad for our emotional, mental and physical health.' 'Stress can be severely detrimental to life,' and 'Don't stress yourself over things.' No doubt stress has become one of the most common reasons for psychosomatic illnesses in the current times. High stress levels lead to cardiovascular diseases, lifestyle disorders (such as hypothyroidism), sexual illnesses, strokes and what not. If stress was supposed to be helpful to our survival, why did it become detrimental to our lives?

Note that over the years, our body has evolved to respond in a certain way (fight or flight) every time it encounters danger. Whether it is an attack from an animal or nomophobia, what we define as 'dangerous' or 'stressful' for ourselves is completely upon us. Our body will react accordingly. It is saddening that, in current times, not getting the 'best employee of the year' award is comparable to hunting for food and saving ourselves from man-eaters. So, who is to be blamed? It goes without saying, we have not quite understood the importance of acute stress in our lives. Unfortunately, we have not fully accepted that those heated arguments with clients/bosses/colleagues or that two hours extra work that we did the other day for free are part and parcel of life. These events, by no means, are and should become a source of stress for us. These events should not control our lives. We really have not quite understood it.

Excerpted with permission from *Mastering Behaviour: Managing Self and Others* by Payal Anand; Published by SAGE Publications India



HIDDENSOULS PRAMOD PATHAK



Corona's parting message to us

Some two years back God instructed me to visit your world. Not happy with your ways, God directed me to make you understand what divine disruption is all about. You had been interfering with the ways of the nature causing all sorts of disruptions to feed your ego. You advocated disruption as the new way of life, proclaiming that it was the next big thing. You thought that your escapades would not irk God and you can get away with all that. But God's patience gave way. I was thus pressed into service. One more time your actions invited the ire of Almighty. In the past also your unruly ways had forced the Lord to send my other brethren to make you mend your ways. For centuries this has been happening. But you forget things easily. Once again you invited God's ire. Perhaps you forgot the devastation by one of my cousins 100 years ago. The destruction you have caused needed divine intervention and I was pressed into service. As your actions disturb the equilibrium of this wonderful system created by the Lord, He had no option. He wanted you to realise that all those perks and benefits you enjoy as human beings is not your entitlement but was bestowed on you by God's grace. Since you failed to acknowledge God's munificence and show gratitude in your actions for all that you are given in life as a gift from God, I had to descend as an agent of the divine. My mission was to make you mend your ways and behave like you were supposed to by virtue of being a human being. But you tampered with nature's bounty, destroying His creations for sensual gratification, even playing dirty with your own brethren. My intervention was the divine wish to make you realise your mistakes. I don't know how far I have succeeded in accomplishing my task, but as you should understand, even my patience is wearing out. Being sick and tired of causing disease and devastation in your world, I intend to leave. Two years is a long time to learn the basic lessons that God wants to impart and if you still don't understand, it's your choice. My experience suggests that much learning is still to be done but the question is how much more time can be given. God has been trying to make you realise to discriminate between right and wrong for centuries but he, too, has limitations. Those many pandemics of the past had only short term effect with you resorting to business as usual without remorse. Since the time of stone age I have observed that you have not changed much. The same old human nature this time also. Even as you watch your tribe perish, your greed does not go away and your ego continues to drive you to unreason. These two years that I stayed with you made me realise that despite so much of devastation and death, there are some who still want me to be here. For them my presence became opportunity to make hay even if the sun doesn't shine. Many balance sheets became profitable. Many filled coffers, many created new businesses and many became monarchs usurping all power, posing as the Messiah. But its time I must depart. To you O'Man I can only say that be what God wanted you to be. And to God when I meet him I would say better luck next time.

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Be resilient to thrive

Don't get discouraged by failures. Instead, work hard and keep taking the next logical step, writes ANAMIKA YADUVANSHI

Though it may be, but change is inevitable. The only way you can survive its impact is by being resilient. Your resilience can increase your chances bouncing back. In turn, you will realise that you have emerged stronger with respect to your mental and physical health. Build your resilience by using the following tips:

- **Assemble a support system of family, friends or mentor:** Having caring, supportive people around you can be a protective factor during the time of crisis. It is important to have people you can confide in. While simply talking about a situation with a friend or a loved one will not make trouble go away, it allows you to share your feelings, gain support, receive positive feedback and come up with solutions to deal with it.
- **Take care of yourself:** When you are going through a crisis, you may neglect your own basic needs. Don't eat properly, no exercise, yoga or physical activity to keep you in shape or perhaps not taking enough sleep are all sorts of natural reactions to a crisis. But doing this won't resolve it. You may make things worse. Focus on building your self-nurturance skills even when you are dealing with bad times. Make time to do activities that you enjoy. By taking care of your own needs, you can boost your overall health and resilience and be fully ready to face life's challenges. Take breaks and treat yourself with good food, good



entertainment or long drives can motivate you and give you a fresh perspective. Don't use alcohol, nicotine or caffeine as a coping mechanism. Long term use of these mechanisms will add to your problems further.

- **Make goals:** Resilient people look at the crisis in a more realistic manner and try to set goals to deal with it. Dealing with a bad situation can be overwhelming and one gets confused. Making goals and dealing with things one by one can be a practical and realistic way of dealing with a crisis. Setting goals and thinking of ways to achieve them can be transitional and can take you from not knowing to achieving new things

- **Develop your problem solving skill:** Study shows that people who are able to come up with solutions to a problem are better able to cope with problems than those who cannot. Whenever you encounter a new challenge, make a quick list of possible ways to deal with it. Experiment with different strategies and focus on developing a logical way to walk through common problems. If you practice problem solving skill on a regular basis, you will be better prepared to cope with serious challenges.

Take action: Simply waiting for a crisis to go away on its own only prolongs its existence. Thinking too much and plan-

ning on the safe side may not help either. By going through all the tips that I have mentioned above, just make an action plan and take action because action will give you result and over thinking won't. Take small steps to work towards resolving the crisis and your small progress each time will encourage you further to take more steps, however sometimes, few actions may turn out to be failure but they won't failures, it would be experience and learning. Don't get discouraged by failures, work hard and keep taking the next logical step and you will be the best resilient version of you!

The writer is a life coach and motivational healer

Chant for positivity

Chanting of Rama *naam* effectively blocks out negative thoughts, if done with attention, writes AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Chanting is a very ancient practice. Lord Krishna has mentioned about it in the verse #10.25 of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Chanting is done by two ways. One is mantra chanting like 'Om Namah Shivaya', and the other is name chanting like 'Rama'. Surprising as it may seem, Lord Shiva, Himself an incarnation of God, is busy chanting 'Rama' only. He, as a matter of fact, is a great setter of standard in this regard. Lord Krishna states, 'Whatever a superior person does, other people follow that only. Whatever standard he establishes a common man tries to emulate that. (3.21) Lord Hanuman — a great devotee of Lord Rama is another practitioner of chanting Rama regularly. Rather all His acts begin with 'Jai Shriram'.



Let us get an idea about how powerful the word Rama is from *Shri Ramacharitamansa*, written by Tulsidas. In the famous dialogue between Narada and Lord Ramachandra, Narada requests the Lord to empower Rama name such that it can benefit the chanter immensely. The Lord consented, and we see evidence of chanters of the name Rama benefiting greatly in multiple ways. It is not surprising that Rama *naam* is glorified even in a person's last journey with the chanting of 'Rama nama satya hai'. Mother Ahilya caught attention of Lord Ramachandra by incessantly chanting Rama. The Lord delivered her from the curse she was under, because of which she had turned into stone.

The word Rama is a primal sound like Om, and we are aware of unimaginable benefits of chanting Om. The name Rama is similarly beneficial if chanted regularly. Calling the Lord's name gets His attention immediately,

because He is near us only. How God responds depends upon Him. In *The Gita*, Lord Krishna has specifically mentioned, 'God is outside and inside of all living entities. He is situated far away and He is nearby also. (13.15) This is how God hears our prayers also. Such chanting of God's names is very useful because this activity makes us noble. (7.18), whatever may be our desires, we can be distressed, seekers of wealth, inquisitive or wise. (7.16) Those who chant Rama regularly and with attention/devotion can vouch for the fact that one's wishes are responded to in an appropriate manner, because God never ignores our taking His shelter, which chanting His name is.

Peace begins to descend on the practitioner, one can sense that he is not getting agitated/worried to the extent he was prone to earlier. Chanting of Rama *nama* effectively blocks out neg-

ative thoughts, if done with attention. Yes, this will take time, because it is not easy to be rid of negative thoughts, but it will happen as chanting of Rama name begins to purify the chanter's existence. Additionally, one will begin to feel assured. God's presence, who is omnipresent, does wonders to the consciousness as one continues chanting His name. One begins to feel assured.

In the cosmic design, there are only two duties/responsibilities for us souls. They are doing our material and spiritual duties. And the easiest and most effective to do spiritual duties is to chant Rama. Go out/do your material duties and return to chanting Rama. Soon you will be able to get used to it and may even one day get it synchronised with your breath.

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the pioneer agenda

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Women can be powerful, graceful, and complex, with the ability to make any choice they desire
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Large-scale development of digital & manufacturing sectors has resulted in a booming demand for cosmetics in India, which is no longer restricted to urban centers, but equally powerful in rural areas, writes RITIKA SHARMA



INDIAN BEAUTY MARKET: IN FOR A MAKEOVER

With the ever-evolving economic and social conditions, the manufacturing and digital sectors in India have made the country a force to be reckoned with. With an improved quality of life, India's personal care market saw an instant surge, to the point where predicted growth between the 2018-2023 period (before the health pandemic) was 9.7%, according to Euro monitor International. However, since its outbreak, the global pandemic has certainly played a significant role in slowing down the country's evolution of the cosmetics industry. Large-scale development of digital and manufacturing sectors has resulted in a booming demand for cosmetic products in India, which is no longer restricted to metro and mini-metro urban centers, but equally powerful in rural areas.

GAUGING THE INDIAN BEAUTY MARKET

International Mass beauty is a calculated sector in India as per Euro monitor, with a market value of more than \$11 billion. This is followed by hair care and personal hygiene products that showcase an unwavering market value of over \$3 billion. Given that retail has expanded drastically in the online space, a lot of new and innovative businesses have mushroomed to fill the gap in the market. Regardless of the setback people faced due to the pandemic, the beauty industry, albeit at a slightly slower pace, showcased resilience.

However, taking into account the repercussions faced by people due to the pandemic, a large number of consumers began to consider products that were ethically sourced, packaged, and made, thereby creating a global shift in trends. Today, the clean beauty market is estimated to reach \$22 billion by 2024. Due to digitisation, the new age consumer is exceptionally aware, conscious of their environment, and demands products that align with their values. These 'clean' brands contribute anywhere between 5-10 percent to the overall category of the beauty and skincare business in India. Given the emerging trend of 'skiminalism' — a term that describes using the bare minimum that your skin needs, and embracing your skin with all its flaws and strengths — it is easy to assume that consumers will continue investing in ethical, organic products built on sustainable practices and take a holistic approach to beauty.

Even as the post-pandemic complexion of the global beauty business sees a change, the \$11 billion Indian market as per Statista continues its makeover with brands, finding ways to tap India's young consumer. Expected to become \$30 billion by 2025, the Indian beauty business is betting big on multi-brand online stores, driven by key trends — the increasing number of smartphone users in the country, the penetration of the internet, the continuing rise of India's young, aspirational workforce, among others. Post pandemic, consumers are spending money on small indulgences during economic downturns and moving towards 'revenge spending' and 'lipstick effect' which has contributed to the growth of the beauty and skincare market size.

In addition to this, digitisation plays a huge role in changing the fabric of the beauty sector. For instance, connecting brands to consumers, introducing international brands, providing access, and setting new trends amongst beauty aficionados. This has simultaneously resulted in elevating standards consumers expect and pivoting with changing times to keep itself fresh, relevant, and innovative.

DIVERSITY OF THE MARKET

India is a diverse physical market — creating a 'retail experience' at scale is capital and time-intensive — and it still runs the risk of not finding 'critical mass' as one goes deeper in the population strata. Well-being in the definition is far more comprehensive than health or wellness — an ideology Boddess has embedded — as it considers a broader universe of personal factors and speaks to the goals of a well-rounded life. Fueled by the informed ideology and mass influence of younger generations like Gen Z, who are hyper-aware of social and environmental issues, the future of consumer health and wellness is proactive, mindful, and motivated towards well-being. There may never be a better time to be a beauty consumer or brand.

BEAUTY AND SELF-CARE ARE BECOMING SYNONYMOUS

The Indian beauty market is witnessing an acceleration in the self-care sub-sector. More consumers are now taking proactive steps to achieve a more sustainable and holistic approach towards their beauty regimen that serves them in the long term. We believe that the slow beauty philosophy explores the idea of remaining young, promotes the spirituality of holistic beauty & wellness, celebrating consciousness and self-expression — our ideals about ultimate beauty at large. One of the core principles of the slow beauty philosophy is to engage in practices that prioritise feelings and encounters of joyfulness.

As briefly stated earlier, customers have taken an ethical approach to their habits due to increased global awareness and exposure. The key focus to ascertain product value has now shifted towards ingredients that go into a product. With this, one can easily forecast a considerable rise in the "conscious" beauty trend. Continuing to look forward, we can also expect our make-up to double-up as skincare. A recent Mintel report reveals that 50 percent of consumers now prefer to purchase hybrid cosmetics with skin benefits, a burgeoning beauty category that is set to blossom next year. Producing make-up with skincare characteristics is a priority for both niche brands and household names.

However, as we consider conscious beauty, one of the more important factors that come into play is the impact that beauty has had on mental health. In the endeavour to make beauty a holistic approach, one cannot simply bypass addressing the repercussions of conditioned beauty standards. Hence, playing a catalytic role in the market of beauty and skincare taking initiatives to become more inclusive and gender-fluid. With times and technology constantly

MALE-MARKETED BEAUTY AND GROOMING IS ON THE RISE AND IS A SECTOR EXPECTED TO GENERATE GLOBAL SALES OF \$81.2 BILLION BY 2024. THIS IS PARTLY DUE TO THE LOCKDOWNS — WHEN MEN EXPERIMENTED WITH PRODUCTS COMFORTABLY AT HOME. BUT IT'S ALSO DOWN TO A MORE GRADUAL EVOLUTION OF THE NORMS AROUND HOW MASCULINITY IS DEFINED, ALONGSIDE OUR COLLECTIVE INTEREST IN SELF-CARE AND THE BEAUTY BRAND BOOM OF RECENT YEARS OFFERING MEN MORE PRODUCT CHOICE AS WELL AS AGENDAS THEY CAN ALIGN WITH

evolving, the industry has moved to social and Livestream selling through 'social media influencers. Global brands are signing trans models and actors, K-pop stars, social-media influencers, promoting products that are gender binary for that matter. We can expect more communication in the coming year from beauty brands that will be bespoke, personalised but not hinging on any specific gender. It's taken a long time for the beauty world to think beyond the gender and fair skin box, but we're definitely on our way to becoming more inclusive today. Skincare, makeup, and hair care have all focused on the needs of those with the clichéd 'fair skin and straight hair' look for decades. But with the emergence of strong beauty markets around the world, it was only time till the rest of the spectrum came into focus. The Indian beauty market has majorly consisted of international labels till a few years ago, which meant that the products dominating our beauty aisles were more suited to the brands' home markets, as opposed to Indian skin. However, several homegrown and international brands are now developing product lines especially for melanin-rich skin, recognising that India's needs are different.

ACCESSIBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL BRANDS

Millennials believe that the products they put on their skin can impact their health and they are seeking the same clean label transparency in beauty products. Their purchase behavior supports this — 40% of millennials report increasing their purchases of natural skin and hair care products in the last year.

Self-expression and creative freedom are important to Gen Z, and experimentation plays a significant role in that sense of self-discovery. Gen Z sees makeup as a form of creativity and is seeking inspiration through video or social content. Earlier, a beauty store would cater to a limited captive audience, primarily to those who resided near it. Now, connecting users across locations is much easier because of progressive leaps in technology — connecting billions of users at once. Such advancements have commoditised technology in a manner that has never been witnessed before.

The future of beauty will reside in an Omni channel experience, bringing offline and online closer with the advent of a host of digital tools to enhance the consumer experience.

Another way that the market has adapted and made skincare and makeup more accessible to a wider audience is through mini-size products. Initially aimed at branching out to the tier 2 and 3 demographic — as mini products bring down costs — small packs have made their way to the bags of women across all ages and income groups. From convenience to portability, it is no surprise that miniatures are a hit in the market!

SHIFT ENABLED BY TECHNOLOGY & BEAUTY GOING VIRTUAL

However, given that we are now entering a tech-dominant era, the real trendsetters in the beauty business will be brands offering hyper-personalized experiences to consumers. An example could be Boddess' focus on AI and AR

technology, skin and makeup diagnostic tools that have set the growth of our beauty business. Personalised packaging — name engraved on a lipstick or a customised moisturiser formula that penetrates deeper into the skin — will be a trend to watch out for. Moreover, brands in the coming year will increasingly go 'phygital', ensuring both online and offline experiences.

In addition to the pandemic causing a digital revolution in the skincare and makeup industry, one of the post-covid shifts in sales would be the male market. Male-marketed beauty and grooming is on the rise and is a sector expected to generate global sales of \$81.2 billion by 2024. This is partly due to the lockdowns — when men experimented with products comfortably at home. But it's down to a gradual evolution of the norms around how masculinity is defined, alongside our collective interest in self-care and the beauty brand boom of recent years offering men more product choice as well as agendas they can align with.

To transform the beauty and skincare shopping experience for its patrons through the perfect blend of digitisation and bespoke customisation, brands should aim to offer personalised product solutions, if done well. In keeping with the current scenario and the way forward, integrating augmented reality and virtual reality to bridge the digital and physical world is the future. Such tools help customers navigate solutions and seek recommendations for themselves while staying within the safety of their homes. Backed by Consumer data sets, machine learning, and augmented reality, the tools enable brands to diagnose beauty issues faced by several consumers, all while understanding consumer psychology. This enables consumers to have an enriched shopping experience.

Albeit over a year later, Covid-19 continues to shape the space, but brands are now better equipped to deal with the seismic shift in consumer values and expectations. In 2022, the beauty industry is taking with it learnings and permanent shifts from the past year. And while some trends end up fizzling out, others will only expand their reach. In light of the above, let's briefly recap on the beauty trend forecast that might take over the industry this year:

- **Sustainability:** With access to more information, consumers have taken the path towards a more wholesome beauty regime. The focus has now shifted to overall well-being and feeling good within — a strong mind and healthy body.
- **Clean beauty:** As a by-product of holistic beauty and wellbeing, consumers are incorporating ethical practices into their consumer habits. From ethically sourced ingredients, vegan products, to environmentally friendly packaging, people are gravitating towards products that not just help their skin and health but also their ecosystem.
- **Natural look:** As we delve further into the concept of holistic wellness, we become more comfortable in our own skin. The trend of minimalism comes from realising that beauty products are here to enhance beauty.

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Unlearning from crisis: Tiny fraction of GDP for health

On the same day, February 1, 2021, when the ongoing health crisis was marching toward the peak, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her 100 minutes long Budget speech mentioned the word "health" at least 34 times. In the Economic Survey 2020-21, an entire chapter, "Healthcare Takes Centre Stage, finally!" was devoted to health. This chapter was full of figures, though criticised later for superfluous correlation and better performance of outlier States, and it seems like the government accepts the importance of public spending on healthcare on out-of-pocket expenditures (OOPE), poverty, and public health.

In the Budget documents, clubbing the related heads and some finance commission grants, the rhetoric of 137 per cent increase in health expenditure was streamed under the title "Health and Well-Being" budget. A careful analysis showed that it was just 10.16 per cent larger than the 2020-21 Budget Estimate (BE) and 0.34 per cent of the GDP.

This year on February 1, 2022, in her shortest (92 minutes) of four Budget speeches, the word "health" is used only 19 times and the word "digital" is mentioned 36 times which is more than twice of (16 times) 2021.

Unfortunately, the term "digital divide", a stark reality, is not mentioned even once. Looking at the Budget figures, there is a clear indication that the Government is unlearning from the health crisis. The total budget of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) is ₹86,200.62 crore (Dept of Health ₹83,000 crore,

& Dept of Health Research ₹3,200.62 crore) which is meagerly ₹200 crore larger than the revised estimate (RE) for the year 2021-22, and if seen in real terms, the expenditure is decreased.

As a per cent of the GDP, the allocation to MoHFW is 0.33 per cent which is 0.01 percentage points less than the previous year. In 2021-22 Budget, ₹12,359 crore were allocated to India Covid-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness Package, but allocation was reduced to zero for the current year. With such a snail pace, the target of 2.5 per cent of the GDP spending on health, envisioned in National Health Policy 2017, is becoming difficult, if not impossible. To show an increase in health budget as a share of the GDP, water and sanitation both crucial but not directly connected, are clubbed as expenditure on health.

The Covid-19 exposed the flaws of the market-oriented private health system due to its high unequal access and elite capture. By relying on insurance (actively encouraged by the profit-seeking health industry), the Government is unlearning the basic fact that the insurance market is full of imperfections, adverse selections, and moral hazards. If we do not have a robust public health infrastructure, private insurance schemes are a behavioural experiment to reduce the demand for free and publicly accessible public healthcare.

There exists a gulf in actual and targeted public health spending. This year the so-called "V" shape recovery, if it is, and an upward RE of the GDP for 2021-22 gave an



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman arrives at Parliament to present the Union Budget on February 1

Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

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tion: if such an undesirable global crisis cannot force the government to prioritise

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MUKESH KUMAR



PRATAP MOHANTY

PERSPECTIVE

Undemocratic political parties rot the system

There is an urgent need to democratise the political parties which are the very heart and soul of a democratic regime. Political parties often are accused of partisan functioning during ticket distribution, a charge that can't be shrugged off if the internal working of the party gets a democratic set-up



ABHINAV NARAYAN



NIRAJ DUBEY

One is compelled to believe that reforms can't be incorporated, and if incorporated, it will remain ineffective till the time political organisations understand their responsibility towards the citizens and establish internal democracy within their parties. Neither political parties nor the Government can make this democracy a democracy unless political parties themselves introduce it in the internal working of their parties. The Indian democracy is incomplete without the intra-party democracy. The political parties cannot be a "dictatorship internally and democratic in its functioning outside."

Political parties are an essential part of the electoral system in the democratic country. It must be understood that the foundation of a democratic nation and conduction of free and fair election can't be settled on the undemocratic roots. Internal democracy in political organisation can't be witnessed in India. Either there is a single man stranglehold or a single-family ascendancy in the party. How these political parties function, whether elections take place internally or not, what all are the functioning procedures of a political party, what are the minimum set of rules, all these questions remain unanswered for all outsiders. However, lack of transparency within the political parties is a great gamble on the public at large.

On June 16, 1949, Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, during a debate in the Constituent Assembly, had said: "If we cannot expect common honesty from persons occupying the highest positions in the discharge of their duties, the foundation for responsible government is wanting and the outlook for the future is indeed gloomy."

We have witnessed in last few years that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has targeted the Congress party for dynastic politics. It is not a hidden

fact that from 2001 to 2017, Sonia Gandhi was elected as the president of the party without a contest. This was not the first time when the family dominated in the party; same was the case at the time of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, and now with Rahul Gandhi. The domination of the Nehru-Gandhi family in the INC is unquestionable. And this is not a problem with the Congress alone.

Regional parties are also on the same page or a step ahead of them. Such parties do not have any democratic-decision making and are built around a towering leader. Their leader's whims and fancies are the party's policies. Some of the most suited examples are the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Shiv Sena, the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) or the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). Their internal politics or policy-making revolves around single person or single family.

170th Report of the Law Commission of India

Here, the Commission recommended for a regulatory framework dealing with internal structures and inner democracy of parties, financial transparency, etc, and in the chapter titled "Necessity of providing laws relating to internal democracy within parties", it was highlighted that:

"If democracy and accountability constitute the core of our constitutional system, the same concepts must also apply to and bind the political parties which are integral to parliamentary democracy. It is the political parties that form the government, man the Parliament and run the governance of the country. It is, therefore, necessary to introduce internal democracy, financial transparency and accountability in the working of the political parties. A political party which does not respect democratic principles in its internal working cannot

be exposed to respect those principles in the governance of the country. It cannot be dictatorship internally and democratic in its functioning outside."

There are certain areas which need immediate concern:

1. "Structural and organisational reforms: Party organisations - national, State and local levels inner party democracy - regular party elections, recruitment of party cadre, socialisation, development and training, research, thinking and policy planning activities of the party.

2. Party system and governance - Mechanism to

make parties viable instruments of good governance.

3. Institutionalisation of political parties - need for a comprehensive legislation to regulate party activities, criteria for registration as a national or State party, de-recognition of parties.

Powerless Election Commission

In recent time, no such provision is there with regard to intra-party democracy. There is just one "Section 29A of the RPA, 1951" incorporated through an amendment in 1989 dealing with registration of political parties with the ECI, but this section is also nowhere

related with the internal functioning and working mechanism of the political parties since it is only limited to registration.

Now, in the absence of any statutory backing, the Election Commission's power is somewhat compromised when it comes to holding internal elections for the office-bearers or in case of candidate selection. Ironically, the ECI cannot take suo-motu cognizance and has no power to de-register or cancel the registration of any political party on ground of the violation of the Constitution of India or breaching the undertaking annexed at the time of regis-

tration. While dealing with the writ petitions, the Supreme Court in 2002 in Indian National Congress (I) v. Institute of Social Welfare & Ors., observed that, "neither under the Symbols Order nor under Section 29A of the Act, the Election Commission has been conferred with any express power to de-register a political party registered under Section 29A of the Act on the ground that it has either violated the provisions of the Constitution or any provision of undertaking given before the Election Commission at the time of its registration."

255th Report of the Law

Commission of India
By this report, the Commission made certain recommendations on intra-party democracy, such as:

1. Need for an amendment to Section 29A(5) of the RPA, 1951, binding political parties to add specifically in their memorandum to "shun violence for political gains, and avoid discrimination or distinction based on race, caste, creed, language or place of residence"

2. Insertion of new part in the RPA, 1951 for "Regulation of Political Parties" dealing in formation and constitution of political parties, procedure for voting, candidate selection, and regular election, etc.

3. Insertion of a special provision empowering the ECI to de-register or cancel the registration.

Conclusion

There is an urgent need to democratise the political parties which are the very heart and soul of a democratic regime. Political parties often are accused of partisan functioning during ticket distribution; a charge that can't be shrugged off if the internal working of the party gets a democratic set-up. Also, it has been noted that various posts in the party are held by powerful and influential people who often convince the party leadership to do away with formal internal elections. This leads to favouritism, corruption and in many cases shifting of member between parties. Corruption is caused by over-centralisation since "the more remotely power is exercised from the people, the greater is the distance between authority and accountability." These are implications of the fact that provisions related to intra-party democracy are most of the time ignored and put on the shelf.

(The writers are advocates based in New Delhi)



Pentagon: Deadly Afghan airport attack was not preventable



The military investigation into the deadly attack during the Afghanistan evacuation has concluded that a suicide bomber, carrying 20 pounds of explosives packed with ball bearings, acted alone, and that the deaths of more than 170 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members were not preventable. The blast at Abbey Gate outside the Kabul airport on Aug. 26 killed 11 U.S. Marines, a sailor and a soldier, who were screening the thousands of Afghans frantically trying to get onto one of the crowded flights leaving the country after the Taliban takeover. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack. At the Pentagon on Friday, military officials laid out a detailed and graphic minute-by-minute account of the bombing. The bottom line, they said, was that those who died had wounds that were "so catastrophic" that they couldn't be overcome. And they said that earlier thoughts that it was a complex attack involving gunfire turned out to be unfounded. "A single, explosive device killed at least 170 Afghan civilians and 13 U.S. servicemembers by explosively directing ball bearings through a packed crowd and into our men and women at Abbey gate," said Gen. Frank McKenzie, head of U.S. Central Command.

Macron's government seeks to give Islam a French makeover

The French government on Saturday forged ahead with efforts to reshape Islam in France and rid it of extremism, introducing a new body made up of clergy and laymen — and women — to help lead the largest Muslim community in western Europe. With France bloodied by past Islamic extremist attacks, having hundreds of citizens who went to fight with jihadists in Syria in past years and thousands of French troops now fighting extremists in Africa, few disagree that radicalisation is a danger. But critics also see the efforts as a political ploy to lure right-wing voters to President Emmanuel

Macron's centrist party ahead of April's presidential election. The new body, called the Forum of Islam in France, is being introduced Saturday by the French Interior Ministry. Supporters say it will keep the country — and its 5 million Muslims — safe and free of foreign influence, and ensure that Muslim practices in France adhere to the country's cherished value of secularism in public life. Its critics, including many Muslims who consider the religion a part of their French identity, say the government's latest initiative is another step in

an institutionalised discrimination process that holds the whole community responsible for violent attacks of a few and serves as another barrier in their public lives. The new body will include imams, influential figures from civil society, prominent intellectuals and business leaders.



'GAY code for Gaya airport inappropriate'



Queen halted by canine gate-crasher

Queen Elizabeth II was interrupted by a canine gate-crasher as she viewed mementoes from her reign ahead of the 70th anniversary of her ascension to the throne. While the monarch inspected the memorabilia, including cards and artwork sent in by children and other members of the public to congratulate her on earlier anniversaries, one of her dogs trotted into the room at Windsor Castle.

Candy — a cross between a dachshund and a corgi, known as a dorgi — lapped the room and inspected a small group of reporters on hand. "And where did you come from? I know what you want," the queen chirped as Candy came over. The event was held two weeks ago but announced by the palace on Friday ahead of the milestone on Sunday. Elizabeth has three dogs. The elderly Candy, a young corgi called Muick, and a corgi puppy which replaced another puppy that died unexpectedly last year.



Parliamentary panel on Friday said the use of 'GAY' code for Gaya airport is inappropriate for the holy city and asked the government to make all efforts to change the code.

The Committee on Public Undertakings, in its first report tabled in Parliament in January 2021, had recommended changing the code of Gaya airport from 'GAY' and also suggested an alternate code name like 'YAG'.

According to the civil aviation ministry, IATA has expressed its inability to change the code without a "justifiable reason primarily concerning air safety".

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) assigns the code for airports. The committee said the code name appeared inappropriate, unsuitable, offensive and embarrassing considering that Gaya is a holy city.

tabled in Parliament on Friday, the panel mentioned about the issue and has asked the government to "make all effort to take up the matter with the IATA and concerned organisation as the issue involves inappropriate code naming of an airport of a holy city of our country."

The ministry, in its action taken reply, has submitted that the matter was referred to IATA by Air India.

In this regard, IATA stated that as per Resolution 763, the location codes are considered permanent and a strong justification primarily concerning air safety needs to be given.

"Gaya airport IATA code 'GAY' has been in use since operationalisation of Gaya airstrip. Hence, without a justifiable reason primarily concerning air safety, IATA has expressed its inability to change the IATA code of Gaya airport," the ministry told the panel.

The ministry's reply has been mentioned in the panel's report tabled on Friday.

"The committee appreciate the efforts of Air India being a member airline of IATA taking up the request with the international air transport association but, yet, re-emphasise the government also to make all effort to take up the matter with the IATA..." the report said.

In the first report that was tabled in Parliament in January 2021, the panel had mentioned that it was appraised about a request received by the civil aviation ministry regarding change of code name of Gaya airport.

The panel had also recommended that the government and Air India complete all the requisite consultations and formalities in a time-bound manner to change the code name of Gaya airport.

US Covid death toll 900,000

Propelled in part by the wildly contagious omicron variant, the US death toll from COVID-19 hit 900,000 on Friday, less than two months after eclipsing 800,000.

The two-year total, as compiled by Johns Hopkins University, is greater than the population of Indianapolis, San Francisco, or Charlotte, North Carolina.

The milestone comes more than 13 months into a vaccination drive that has been beset by misinformation and political and legal strife, though the shots have proved safe and highly effective at preventing serious illness and death.

"It is an astronomically high number. If you had told most Americans two years ago as this pandemic was getting

going that 900,000 Americans would die over the next few years, I think most people would not have believed it," said Dr. Ashish K. Jha, dean of the Brown University School of Public Health.

He lamented that most of the deaths happened after the vaccine gained authorization.

"We got the medical science right. We failed on the social science. We failed on how to help people get vaccinated, to combat disinformation, to not politicize this," Jha said. "Those are the places where we have failed as America."

President Joe Biden lamented the milestone in a statement Friday night, saying, "After nearly two years, I know that the emotional, physical, and psychological weight of this pandemic has been incredibly difficult to bear."

He again urged Americans to get vaccinations and booster shots. "Two hundred and fifty million

Americans have stepped up to protect themselves, their families, and their communities by getting at least one shot — and we have saved more than one million American lives as a result," Biden said.

Just 64 per cent of the population is fully vaccinated, or about 212 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nor is COVID-19 finished with the United States: Jha said the U.S. could reach 1 million deaths by April.

Among the dead is Susan

Glicker-Berg, 53, of Sterling Heights, Michigan, whose children had to take her off a ventilator just before Thanksgiving after COVID-19 ravaged her lungs and kidneys.

"She's always cared more about people than she did herself. She always took care of everyone," said a daughter, Hali Fortuna. "That's how we all describe her. Very selfless." Glicker-Berg, a smoker, was in poor health, and was apparently unvaccinated, according to her daughter. Fortuna just got the booster herself.

"We all want it to go away. I personally don't see it going away anytime soon," she said. "I guess it's about learning to live with it and hoping we all learn to take care of each other better."

The latest bleak milestone came as omicron is loosening its grip on the country.



What message did China send by choosing Uyghur torchbearer?



As soon as a Uyghur athlete helped light the Olympic flame at the Beijing Olympics, the debate began: Was it a defiant signal from Chinese leaders, or proof that protests around the world were having impact? The selection of Dinigeer Yilamujiang for the supreme honor of being a final Olympic torchbearer at the ceremony that opened the Winter Games in Beijing on Friday night was a huge surprise. What it meant — because Olympic gestures like this always have meaning — wasn't clear. U.S.-based human rights lawyer Rayhan Asat — whose brother Ekpar Asat is among more than 1 million Uyghurs that China has imprisoned — was at first aghast. The crosses of Yilamujiang, a 20-year-old cross-country skier, holding the torch with Zhao Jiwen, a skier from China's dominant Han majority — both of them all smiles — reminded Asat of the half-Jewish fencer, Helene Mayer, who competed for Germany at the 1936 Summer Olympics that Adolf Hitler hosted in Berlin. "I did feel like history is repeating itself," Asat said in a phone interview. "This is like a new low. That is how I felt, initially." But on reflection, Asat saw crumbs of encouragement. China has steadfastly rejected international criticism of its crackdown on Uyghurs, treatment that the US government and others have said is tantamount to genocide. China's hosting of the Games has made many exiled Uyghurs feel that their voices aren't heard. But the selection of a relatively unknown athlete to light the flame couldn't be a coincidence.



Lethal US raid on IS encounters a doll, crib, bomb, bullets

When helicopters carrying some 50 US commandos thumped onto the ground in Syria an hour after midnight, the raiders confronted a houseful of extremists and children.

Baby comforts were inside — a stuffed bunny, a blue plastic swing, a crib. So was the paraphernalia of violence — such as the bomb Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi is said by US officials to have used to blow up himself, his fam-

ily and perhaps others in his immediate proximity.

It was an audacious raid in an extremist stronghold of northwest Syria, months in the works and executed with the understanding that children might die as well as the hunted IS chief if the building's occupants did not get out when given the chance to leave.

The apparent suicide bombing came before early in a two-hour gun battle Thursday. First respon-

ders said 13 people died, six of them children. No US commandos were wounded, military officials said.

President Joe Biden, who ordered the raid, said the world is rid of a man he described as the driving force behind the "genocide of the Yazidi people in northwestern Iraq in 2014," when slaughters wiped out villages, thousands of women and young girls were sold into slavery and rape was used as a weapon of war.

Ukraine not joining NATO; so, why does Putin worry?

At the core of the Ukraine crisis is a puzzle: Why would Russian President Vladimir Putin push Europe to the brink of war to demand the West not do something that it has no plan to do anyway?

Russia says NATO, the American-led alliance that has on its hands the biggest European crisis in decades, must never offer membership to Ukraine, which gained independence as the Soviet Union broke apart about 30 years ago.

Ukraine has long aspired to join NATO, but the alliance is not about to offer an invitation, due in part to Ukraine's official corruption, shortcomings in its defense establishment, and its lack of control over its international borders. Putin's demands go

beyond the question of Ukraine's association with NATO, but that link is central to his complaint that the West has pushed him to the limits of his patience by edging closer to Russian borders. He asserts that NATO expansion years ago has enhanced its security at the expense of Russia's.

The Russians demand a legal guarantee that Ukraine be denied NATO membership, knowing that NATO as a matter of principle has never excluded potential membership for any European country — even Russia — but has no plan to start Ukraine down the road toward membership in the foreseeable future.

The principle cited by NATO is that all nations should be free to choose whom they align with.