

## ANALYSIS 7

TEXAS CRISIS EXPOSES  
PAKISTAN'S TENTACLES

## MONEY 8

BUDGET SHOULD FOCUS ON BRIDGING  
WIDENED INEQUALITY IN ECONOMY

## SPORTS 11

RAVI BISHNOI GETS MAIDEN  
CALL-UP FOR WINDIES SERIES

VIJAYAWADA, FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 2022; PAGES 12 ₹3



# the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com



RASHMIKA OVER-  
WHELMED BY  
AUDIENCE RESPONSE  
TO SAAMI SAAMI

Page 12

## DELHI LIFTS WEEKEND CURFEW, RESTAURANTS, CINEMAS TO OPEN

The weekend curfew has been lifted in Delhi, odd-even curbs for markets have been removed and restaurants and cinemas can reopen at 50 per cent capacity, the government said today, as Covid cases continued to drop in the capital. Schools and colleges will remain shut for now. The decision to ease curbs enforced during the Omicron surge was taken at a meeting of the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), in which the Delhi government and Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal were present. Cinemas, restaurants and bars can operate at 50 per cent capacity.

## MAHA: WINE CAN NOW BE SOLD IN SUPERMARKETS, WALK-IN SHOPS

The sale of wine will be allowed in supermarkets and walk-in stores in Maharashtra, the state cabinet decided on Thursday. Opposition BJP slammed the decision, saying that the government was promoting liquor. The decision was taken to give a boost to fruit-based wineries which provide additional income to farmers, Minister for Skill Development Nawab Malik told reporters. A statement from the Chief Minister's Office said 'shelf-in-shop' method will be adopted in supermarkets and walk-in-stores which have area of 100 sq mt or more and which are registered under the Maharashtra Shops and Establishments Act.

## SPOOKY OBJECT FOUND IN MILKY WAY 'UNLIKE ANYTHING SEEN'

Australian researchers have discovered a strange spinning object in the Milky Way they say is unlike anything Astronomers have ever seen. The object, first spotted by a university student working on his undergraduate thesis, releases a huge burst of radio energy three times every hour. The pulse comes 'every 18.18 minutes, like clockwork,' said astrophysicist Natasha Hurley-Walker, who led the investigation after the student's discovery, using a telescope in the Western Australian outback known as the Murchison Widefield Array.

## TWITTER SUSPENDS BOT ACCOUNT OFFERING SPOILERS FOR 'WORDLE'

Twitter suspended a bot account on Wednesday for spoiling the solution to the next day's Wordle, the wildly popular internet word puzzle. The game, which only offers one puzzle per day, has amassed millions of players since it came online last year. But the Twitter profile @wordlinator seemed determined to ruin the fun for participants posting their scores on the social media site. "The account referenced was suspended for violating the Twitter Rules and the Automation Rules around sending unsolicited @mentions," a Twitter spokesperson told AFP.

# Covid: CM directs officials to complete vaccination process

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has reviewed the prevailing Covid conditions across the State and directed the authorities to complete the vaccination process in all districts.

During the review meeting held at the camp office here on Thursday, the Chief Minister instructed the officials to focus on providing better facilities for those in Covid-care centers. He said that all those who are availing of treatment in private hospitals should be provided with AarogyaSri coverage based on their eligibility. Further, officials were instructed to focus on the procedures to be followed as part of Covid treatment and review the situations.

The Chief Minister said that Andhra Pradesh should be a role



model for other states in the effective implementation of AarogyaSri and EHS. He stated that AarogyaSri is being implemented as a revolutionary model, and paying better rates for treatments under AarogyaSri than insurance companies. Like never before, only GMP standard drugs are being given in government hospitals and revamp-

ing them with modern infrastructural facilities under the Nadu-Nedu initiative.

He directed the AarogyaSri CEO to visit the field for at least 8-10 days, as the programme can be further strengthened by field-level observations.

Meanwhile, describing the Covid situation in the state, offi-

cials said the number of people who need to be hospitalized is few in number although the cases are being registered, and even those admitted in the hospitals are getting recovered with treatment. They informed the Chief Minister that the positivity rate is also gradually declining, and only 2709 patients were admitted in hospitals of all the 1.06 lakh cases registered, and only 287 were admitted to the ICU.

Authorities said that about 93 percent of those admitted to hospitals are being treated under AarogyaSri. In regard to vaccination, they said that 90.34 percent of those over 18 years of age have completed two doses of vaccination and 98.91 percent of 15 to 18-year-olds completed the first dose of vaccination.

2



## AI back under Tatas wings

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Salt-to-software conglomerate Tata Group on Thursday took over Air India and vowed to turn the loss-making carrier, it had founded but had lost control nearly seven decades back, into a world-class airline.

N Chandrasekaran, Chairman of Tata Sons, which in October last year beat a consortium led by rival SpiceJet promoter to win the bid for the national carrier, first called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi before heading to the Air India office where the takeover formalities were completed.

A new board of directors met shortly thereafter, formalising the management takeover.

Both the government and Tata made separate announcements of completion of the transaction -- the first privatisation in nearly

## Govt settles over Rs 61,000 cr Air India debt

The government has settled over Rs 61,000 crore of Air India's legacy debt and other liabilities that were left in AIAHL -- the company holding residual assets and liabilities of the airline -- ahead of the transfer of the national carrier to the Tata Group, a top official said on Thursday. The airline had a total debt of Rs 61,562 crore as of August 31, 2021. Of this, the

Tata Group took over Rs 15,300 crore and the rest 75 per cent or around Rs 46,000 crore was transferred to a special purpose vehicle, AI Asset Holding Ltd (AIAHL). AIAHL also held Air India's non-core assets such as stake in Hotel Corp of India (HCIL), paintings and artifacts and immovable properties.

2

## Talks only alternative for unions: Sajjala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Government Advisor and member of the government-appointed committee, Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said there is no alternative to the employees' unions other than taking part in the discussions.

Talking to reporters after waiting for the members of the PRC Struggle Committee, Ramakrishna Reddy said that the government had invited them for the talks at least three times in the last few days.

Stating that the union leaders were acting with immaturity, he observed that treasury staff was not complying with the orders of the government which amounts to indiscipline. He also said they will again wait for the union leaders on Friday.

He suggested that they shun their unilateral attitude and stop communicating and talking sitting somewhere else.



Ramakrishna Reddy said that instead of sitting somewhere else and talking, the union leaders should participate in talks with them to find a solution to solve the impasse.

The Government Advisor said they can discuss with the Chief Minister and strive to find a solution only if the union leaders participate in talks with them. He also said that they will talk to other unions.

## Sajjala's remark incurs wrath of employees

Employees in Andhra Pradesh got agitated after Advisor to the State Government (Public Affairs), Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy, on Thursday called the leaders of their associations immature. This prompted the Finance department to issue a circular ordering the Treasury officials to draw up this month's salary bills in accordance with the new pay scales. The leaders took exception to the Advisor's remark and demanded that it be withdrawn immediately. Meanwhile, the struggle committee of PRC stayed away from talks with the government committee for the third day to resolve the pay revision issue.

2

## AP govt issues another circular for processing of salaries

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The government appears to have intensified its efforts to process the salaries of the government employees as per the new PRC. After repeated memos in the last few days to process the salaries finance department on Thursday had issued a fresh circular setting a deadline of Friday to the treasury offices to process the Bills as per the provisions of the new PRC. The department had also warned of action if the salaries are not processed on time and paid on February 1.

The treasury employees union stating that they are also part of the agitating employees had refused to process the salaries.

2

## Karvy MD, CFO in ED custody

NAVEENA GHANATE  
■ HYDERABAD

A special court on Thursday granted to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) four days' custody of Comandur Parthasarathy, CMD of Karvy Group, and G Krishna Hari, CFO of Karvy Group, arrested in an alleged multi-crore money laundering case.

The Enforcement Directorate had arrested Parthasarathy and Hari Krishna in the Rs 2,000-crore security scam. The accused were lodged in Central Jail, Bangalore, and, on a production warrant of ED Court, produced before the PMLA Special Court MSJ Hyderabad on January 20. The court has remanded both the accused to ED custody from January 27 to 30.

Parthasarathy was arrested under the Prevention of Money-laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, for the fraud committed through illegal diversion of clients' securities worth Rs 2,873.82 crore by Karvy Stock Broking Ltd and pledging of these securities with banks/NBFCs for seeking loans



and subsequent loan default.

The ED initiated money-laundering investigation based on an FIR filed by HDFC Bank with CCS Hyderabad Police under various sections of the IPC for defrauding the bank. Subsequently, more FIRs were filed by other banks and a few investors.

ED had recorded the statements of several employees of the Karvy Group and conducted searches at

nine locations on September 22, 2021. IT uncovered the complex web of transactions designed by the senior management of the group to misuse the securities of their clients and to raise loans fraudulently, which were then rotated via multiple related companies and diverted away from the stated purpose.

2

## Vizag, Hyd record sharpest rise in pollution levels

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Visakhapatnam and Hyderabad have recorded the sharpest rise in particulate matter (PM) levels among 10 southern Indian cities.

As per a report by Greenpeace, in comparison, annual PM10 levels in Visakhapatnam and Hyderabad exceeded the prescribed

WHO guidelines of 15 µg/m3 by 6 to 7 times.

The PM2.5 levels in Visakhapatnam and Hyderabad have increased by 7 to 8 times. Apart from that, Visakhapatnam and Hyderabad values are 1.5 to 2 times higher than NAAQS prescribed standards and those of the rest of the cities are within the lim-

its.

On other hand, Bengaluru, Mangalore, Amaravati, Chennai and Kochi recorded data that exceeded the limit by 3 to 4 times. Mysore, Coimbatore and Pondicherry recorded PM10 data that exceeded the WHO guidelines for safe air by 2 to 3 times. It was found that, despite pan-

2

## Mapping as per NEP won't hit schools:Min

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The Andhra Pradesh government on Thursday made it clear that no school or Anganwadi Centre would be closed down in the State after the ongoing mapping exercise, taken up as part of the NEP-2020.

Similarly, no teacher post would be suppressed after the mapping, Education Minister A Suresh said.

"The mapping of schools, undertaken as part of the National Education Policy (NEP)-2020, will only improve the education system in the state. The main intention of the mapping is to ensure expert teachers are available to impart quality education to all students," the Minister maintained.

The Education Minister inaugu-



rated a three-day workshop in the state Secretariat here for legislators on creating awareness on the NEP-2020.

On the first day, legislators from Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari district attended the workshop.

2

## Jagan's master stroke leaves TDP gasping

■ Jagan puts TDP on the backfoot ■ TDP leadership remains tight-lipped ■ Purandeswari thanks Jagan

MARTHI SUBRAHMANYAM  
■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has apparently put the TDP on the defence, scoring a political goal over the beleaguered Opposition party by naming the new district of Vijayawada, formed upon bifurcation of Krishna district, after the thespian and founder of Telugu Desam and former chief minister NT Rama Rao.

The CM kept his promise to the people of Krishna district by naming Vijayawada district after NT Rama Rao. The decision dumbstruck the TDP leaders, who barely responded saying that the government should have named Machilipatnam after NT Rama Rao as NTR was born in Nimmakuru which is near Gudur, and



which in turn falls in the new district of Machilipatnam in the absence of a policy decision by the TDP leadership.

While NTR's daughter and BJP

national leader Purandeswari has welcomed the

decision, former Chief Minister and TDP national president Chandrababu Naidu has been

maintaining a stoic silence on the issue. Similarly, NT Rama Rao's son Balakrishna, TDP MLA from Hindupur, also did not say anything on the latest developments.

While TDP leaders have a reason not to respond on the issue as it would put the TDP in the bad light whichever way it choose to respond. But, what happened to Junior NTR, who is in no way connected with the TDP. He at least should have hailed the decision.

In spite of not being controlled by the TDP diktats, Junior NTR, who is in the habit of giving full-page advertisements in print media to pay tributes to the legendary grandfather on the day of the birth anniversary surprised one and all by seeking to remain tight-lipped on the issue.

2

### TODAY

#### ALMANAC

Month & Paksham:

Pausa, Krishna Paksha

Tithi : Bhadshi - Jan 28 02:16 AM to Jan 29 11:36 PM

Dwadshthi - Jan 28 11:36 PM to Jan 29 03:37 PM

Nakshatram : Anuradha Jan 27 03:51 AM to Jan 28 07:10 AM

Jan 28 07:10 AM to Jan 29 05:07 AM

Rahukalam : 11:05 AM to 12:29 PM

Yamagandam : 3:17 PM to 4:41 PM

Variyam : 01:22 AM to 02:49 AM

Gulika : 8:16 AM to 9:40 AM

Amritakalam : 09:04 PM to 10:32 PM

Abhijit Muhurtham : 12:06 PM to 12:51 PM

#### VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: PARTLY CLOUDY

Temp: 33°

Humidity: 65%

Sunrise: 6:41 AM

Sunset: 6:06 PM

Updated JANUARY 27, 2021 5:00 PM



# CM launches AP Seva Portal 2.0

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has launched AP Seva Portal 2.0 (Citizen Service Portal) at the camp office here on Thursday to deliver better services for the people.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said that all the officials right from village/ward secretariats to higher authorities will be using AP Seva Portal, a digitalised platform to provide citizen services in a transparent manner. He said that this initiative will take governance much closer to the people where even those in remote villages can



also avail citizen services right from their doorstep, without running from pole to post.

He said that the public can track the status of their appli-

cation themselves without any hassles. Also, SMS alerts on the status of the application will be sent to the applicants and the portal is also enabled with payment gate-

ways to access paid services.

He stated that the new updated portal has over 30 services of Revenue and Land Administration, 25 services of Municipal Administration, 6 services of Civil Supplies, 3 services of Rural Development and over 53 services of Energy depart-

ments. The Chief Minister said that Village/ward secretariat services along with a volunteer system was brought to take governance to the village level, where almost 4 lakh people are part of the delivery mechanism and offering over 540 services directly to the people. Since 6 January

2020, as many as 3.46 crore government services have been provided to the public through village/ward secretariats.

He said that with the latest technology, AP Seva Portal was brought, where the applicant can know the details of their application and would also receive phone alerts related to the service sought. All the applications can be approved online and the officials can also provide certificates and documents online with digital signature. Further, he said that the applicants can avail the services from any village/ward secretariat across the State.

## Sajjala's remark incurs wrath...

Continued from Page 1

We are ready for talks with the employees' associations...we're ready to climb four steps down, said the advisor (public affairs).

He has said that employees' leaders should not act in an immature manner.

"Immature is a small word. I should use something bigger," he remarked.

Amid this, the employees started submitting request letters to the drawing and dis-

bursing officers seeking the salary for January 2022 as per the old scales of pay.

"I request my salary to be paid only in old scales, including dearness allowance sanctioned up to July 1, 2021. My salary will be lesser if fixed in Revised Pay Scales 2022 as per the Government Orders," the employees said in the letter.

They said they would be willing to accept the new pay scales after exercising their option as and when provided. Then, the Finance

Department issued yet another circular memo saying the January month's salary should be paid as per the revised scales.

Special Chief Secretary (Finance) Shamsher Singh Rawat was quoted as saying in the memo that preparations of salary bills for January were considerably behind the prescribed timeline and he directed that all the bills be uploaded by Friday and salaries and pensions credited on February 1.

## Karvy MD, CFO in ED custody...

Continued from Page 1

The shares of clients, who did not owe any funds to KSB, were also transferred to the margin/pool account of KSB and were pledged with the banks/NBFCs. The Power of Attorney (POA) given by the clients to KSB to facilitate exchange settlements was grossly misused by KSB at the directions of the CMD and senior executives.

The ED, in a press release, said: "Comandur Parthasarathy and G Krishna Hari were the main conspirators who gave instructions to others. Fund trail investigation

has shown that the borrowed funds were transferred to other group companies, particularly to one WoS of KSB i.e. M/s. Karvy Realty (India) Limited (KRIL) and then to 14 shell companies floated by the Karvy Group. The same have been further diverted by layering done through a complex web of transactions from the several accounts of group companies without any financial rationale. Various financial consultants and defunct NBFCs were used to route the funds".

ED found that KSB availed of loans from NBFCs to the tune of Rs 400 crore in the name of five such shell

companies by pledging shares of the clients of KSB after illegally transferring these shares to their account. The fraudulently availed loans were used to clear pending loans of related companies and do massive stock transactions, which have allegedly turned into complete losses and diverted to personally held family companies.

ED had earlier frozen shareholding of Parthasarathy worth around Rs 700 crore. It is investigating the money trail to trace the proceeds of crime, which are close to around Rs 2,000 crore.

## Covid: CM directs...

Continued from Page 1

Deputy Chief Minister Alla Kali Krishna Srinivas, Chief Secretary Dr. Sameer Sharma, Principal Secretary of the Medical and Health Department Anil Kumar Singh, Principal Secretary of the Medical and Health Department (Covid Management, Vaccination) Muddada Ravichandra, Industries, Commerce department Special CS Karikal Valaven, Covid Task Force Committee Chairman MT Krishnababu, Finance Secretary N Gulzar, 104 Call Center In-Charge A Babu,

APIIC VC and MD Javadi Subrahmanyam, APMSIDC VC and MD Muralidhar Reddy, Arogyasri CEO V Vinayachand, Health Department Commissioner Katamaneni Bhaskar, Health Department Special Secretary GS Navenkumar, APVVP Commissioner V Vinodkumar, Director (Drugs) Ravishankar, APM-SIDC Chairman B Chandrasekhar Reddy, Arogyasree Trust Chairman Dr. Sambasiva Reddy, Law and Order Additional DG Ravishankar Ayyanar and other senior officials were present.

# AI back under Tatas wings...

Continued from Page 1

Tatas took over Rs 15,300 crore of debt in Air India and Air India Express Ltd while the remaining Rs 46,262 crore loan plus an outstanding of about Rs 15,000 crore towards unpaid fuel bills were paid off by the government.

"It is indeed noteworthy that the disinvestment process of @airindian has been brought to a successful conclusion in a time-bound manner," Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia tweeted. That proves the government's ability and "the resolve to carry out disinvestment effectively in non-strategic sectors in the future."

Air India will give Tatas immediate access to valuable flying rights and landing slots and it will also gain control of low-cost, short-haul international carrier Air India Express as well as a 50 per cent stake in a ground handling company with SATS Ltd.

With Rs 20 crore daily loss and a market share that more than halved to less than 10 per cent last year, Tatas have their task cut out as it has to not just repair the shabby customer services at Air India but also deal with highly unionised and surplus manpower as well as an ageing and a mixed fleet of 141 aircraft.

Tatas cannot retrench any

employee for at least a year, according to the terms of the deal.

Air India's regional arm, Alliance Air, is not part of the deal.

In a tweet, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said the strategic disinvestment transaction of Air India has concluded successfully with transfer of 100 per cent shares of Air India to Talace along with management control.

"A new board, led by the strategic partner, takes charge of Air India," Pandey said after completion of the handover process at the airline's headquarters here.

In October last year, Tatas won the bid for Air India through a competitive bidding for Rs 18,000 crore, including the cash component of Rs 2,700 crore.

"We are excited to have Air India back in the Tata Group and are committed to making this a world-class airline," Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran said in a statement. "I warmly welcome all the employees of Air India to our Group, and look forward to working together."

Tata Group Founder JRD Tata had originally launched the airline in 1932 as the nation's first carrier, flying mail between

Karachi in then-undivided, British-ruled India and Bombay. It was nationalised in 1953.

The Maharaja once shone brightly in Indian skies but competition from the private sector coupled with faulty decisions on aircraft purchases, heterogeneity of fleet and a failed marriage with Indian Airlines led to its downfall.

In 2005-06, the airline placed an order for a new fleet of 111 Boeing aircraft to coincide with the India visit of the then US President George W Bush. Its long haul B777 and B747 aircraft had 'vanity first class cabin' that was rarely filled and the airline did not offer direct non-stop flights from major growth centres.

But the biggest undoing was the 2006-07 merger of Air India and Indian Airlines -- the amalgamation was to ensure better synergies of their resources but resources, aircraft, men, material and machines remained divided. And without employee layoffs, problems like excess manpower got magnified.

A decade back, it had some 300 employees per aircraft, which came down to 95 last year (13,500 employees of Air India and Air India Express on a fleet of 141 aircraft). This ratio is still higher than private airlines.

In a statement, Tata Group said Chandrasekaran was

joined by Chairman Emeritus of Tata Sons Ratan Tata in acknowledging and thanking "the Government of India and its various departments for the successful completion of this important transaction".

Announcing that it has taken over the management and control of the airline, starting Thursday, the group acknowledged Modi's "commitment to reforms and faith in India's entrepreneurship spirit, which made this historic transition possible".

"Our Prime Minister has in action demonstrated what his commitment to 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance' means. We philosophically agree with the Prime Minister's vision for the aviation sector, of making it affordable and ensuring it contributes to boosting 'Ease of Living' for citizens," the statement said.

Separately, a consortium of lenders led by State Bank of India (SBI) has agreed to provide loans to Tata Group for the smooth operations of loss-making Air India.

When the Tata Group won the bid to acquire Air India in October last year, Ratan Tata had tweeted an old photograph of the company's former Chairman JRD Tata getting down from an Air India aircraft, stating, "Welcome Back, Air India".

## Govt settles over Rs 61,000 cr Air...

Continued from Page 1

In an interview with PTI, Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) -- which ran the Air India privatisation process -- said Parliament had last month given nod for spending of Rs 62,057 crore towards equity infusion in AIAHL for repayment of dues and liabilities of Air India.

Of this, broadly about Rs 61,131 crore has been used to repay the entire debt and other liabilities such as fuel dues to oil companies, he said. "The interest outgo on the debt and other liabilities was very high and it was decided to square off the debt now."

As of August 31, 2021, the airline's total debt stood at Rs 61,562 crore, out of which around Rs 46,000 crore was transferred to AIAHL. The airline also had about Rs 15,000 crore excess liabilities towards unpaid fuel bills and other operational creditors.

So the debt and liabilities with the government was around Rs 61,000 crore.

"Both excess debt and excess current liabilities whatever was remaining with the government, about Rs 61,131 crore, have been cleared," Pandey said.

## Vizag, Hyd record...

Continued from Page 1

The annual average values of PM 2.5 and PM 10 show that at all the locations, the values are higher than WHO revised standards. Apart from that, three stations are higher in PM 2.5 and almost all the stations' PM 10 values are higher than NAAQS standards.

The primary contributors to the worsening air quality are fossil fuel-powered infrastructure development, industries, transport, waste burning, and construction activity. Chronic exposure to air pollution increases the likelihood of asthma, low birth weight, depression, schizophrenia, diabetes, stroke, lung cancer and can cause premature deaths.

Avinash Chanchal, Campaign Manager, Greenpeace India, said: "The data shows that lockdown is not a solution to air pollution. Relatively lesser economic activity and vehicles is also putting us in a dangerous position. Past source apportionment studies by

CPCB have indicated that the main contributor of PM2.5 and PM10 is vehicular pollution in Hyderabad. It contributes around 50% of total pollution. We have to prioritize the immediate shift to clean energy and clean transport to stop more damage. In the case of Vishakhapatnam, industrial pollution is one of the major contributors to the crisis. But let us not get derailed, comparing Vishakhapatnam and Hyderabad to other cities, the real problem is that all cities are exceeding WHO's latest air quality guidelines."

Chanchal adds, "The pollution control boards must realise that no level of air pollution is safe and even the long-term exposure of lower level of concentrations of air pollution can severely impact human health. Thus, the CPCB must revise the current national ambient air quality standards for all pollutants based on WHO's proposed interim target and gradually achieve the revised standards."

Chanchal adds, "The pollution control boards must realise that no level of air pollution is safe and even the long-term exposure of lower level of concentrations of air pollution can severely impact human health. Thus, the CPCB must revise the current national ambient air quality standards for all pollutants based on WHO's proposed interim target and gradually achieve the revised standards."



## AP logs 13,474 fresh Covid cases

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Registering a slight dip, Andhra Pradesh added 13,474 fresh cases of Covid-19 on Thursdays, taking the infection count to 22,36,047.

In the 24 hours ending 9 am today, the state also reported 10,290 recoveries, making it a total of 21,11,975 so far.

Nine more deaths took the death toll to 14,579, the latest bulletin said.

The state now has 1,09,493 active cases, the bulletin added.

The state had reported 13,618 new cases yesterday. Kadapa district on Thursday reported 2,031, Kurnool 1,835, Visakhapatnam 1,349, Guntur 1,342, Prakasham 1,259, East Godavari 1,066 and SPS Nellore 1,007 fresh cases.

The remaining six districts added less than 1,000 new cases each. Visakhapatnam reported three, Anantapuram two, Chittoor, SPS Nellore, Prakasham and Vizianagaram one fresh Covid-19 fatality each in a day.

## AP govt issues another...

Continued from Page 1

The agitating employees have been demanding the government to pay them salaries on old scales. The unions also set a condition that they would participate in talks with the government only they agree to process old salaries. But, there appears to be no response from the government and also from the treasury staff who were to process the salaries.

CHICKEN RATES ₹/kg	
Dressed/With Skin	₹210
Without Skin	₹230
Broiler at Farm	₹114
EGG RATES ₹/100	
VIJAYAWADA	430
VISAKHAPATNAM	425
HYDERABAD	405
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.30
(IN VIZIANAGARAM)	

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group's will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.

# CM inaugurates oxygen plant

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy virtually inaugurated Nova Air's oxygen plant of 220 tonne production capacity at Sri City in Chittoor from the camp office here on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said manufacturing 220 tonnes of oxygen was important and launching the plant in 14 months was a milestone. He said the State government had already set up 144 PSA plants in various hospitals and that another 32 plants would be established soon. He said the State government had readied 24,000 oxygen beds. Per day, 300 tonnes of oxygen is produced and the production of Nova Air's oxygen plant would be an addition



to it.

Nova Air MD Gajanan Nabar said oxygen was important not only in treatment of Covid, but also for industries. He said they had set up their first plant in Andhra Pradesh

and completed the construction of the plant in 14 months as there were good infrastructure facilities and cooperation from government departments and officials.

He thanked the officials for

their support in transportation and providing adequate manpower during the pandemic. He added that there were world class infrastructure facilities in Sri City. "We have enormous experience in man-

ufacturing gasses and have introduced advanced technology in the State. The availability of industrial gasses would be beneficial for industries. Utmost safety measures were taken in the plant and preparations have been made to store 1,000 tonnes of oxygen," he said.

The Chief Minister had directed the officials to ensure that there was no shortage of medical oxygen in the State and signed an MoU with Nova Air on January 24, 2020. The works were started on December 18, 2020, and completed by November 2021. The plant was inaugurated on January 27, 2022. The plant manufactures medical oxygen, liquid oxygen, liquid nitrogen and liquid argon gasses.

# Fill vacancies in Village/ Ward Secretariats, CM tells officials

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has directed the officials to focus on filling vacancies in Village/ Ward Secretariats.

During the review meeting held on Village/Ward Secretariats at camp office here on Thursday, the Chief Minister instructed the officials to focus on procuring required technical equipment for providing Aadhaar services in Village / Ward Secretariats and said to take steps to make Aadhaar services fully available in them by May.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to focus on making necessary arrangements for felicitating volunteers for their best services and providing them financial incentives programme on the occasion of Ugadi festival and added to provide uniforms to all the staff of Village/ Ward Secretariats by then.

The Chief Minister instructed the officials to get the reports on the condition of computers and other hardware equipment from Village/ Ward Secretariats every month and make sure all the hardware equipment are in the best condition.

The Chief Minister said the staff of Village / Ward Secretariats should work with full efficiency and directed the officials to create awareness



among them in this regard and added to ensure stipulated SOPs are strictly implemented.

He said the process of recognising Village/ Ward Secretariat staff as regular employees should be completed soon. He said the system should be in place to lodge a complaint immediately if anyone asks for bribe to provide services and also to record the action taken.

The Chief Minister said Citizen Outreach Programme is very important and it should be implemented effectively. He said there should be constant coordination among Secretariats staff and other employees of government departments and directed the officials to conduct coordination meetings Village, Mandal, Revenue division and District level. He instructed the offi-

cials to focus on improving infrastructure in Village / Ward Secretariats from time to time in line with the changing conditions and technology.

Panchayat Raj Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy, Municipal Administration and Urban Development Minister Botsa Satyanarayana Chief Secretary Dr Sameer Sharma, Municipal Administration and Urban Development Special Chief Secretary Y Sri Lakshmi, Housing Principal Secretary Ajay Jain, CM Advisor ( Village / Ward Secretariats) R Dhanunjay Reddy, GSWS Special Secretary Rahul Pandey, VSWs Commissioner and Director Shan Mohan, Civil Supplies Commissioner Girija Shankar, SERP CEO Imtiyaz and other officials were present.

## Firm donates Rs 18.72 lakh worth tablets to cops

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALAKJIRI

Intending to support the efforts of Rachakonda Police in fighting the Covid, Concord Drugs, Hayathnagar has donated tablet strips worth Rs 18,72,000 to Rachakonda Police Commissionerate. Nagireddy, Manoj Kumar Reddy of Concord Drugs Limited have participated in the programme and handed over tablet strips of 6500 LemonCee, 6500 Zincovita and 6500 Vitamin D3 to CP Mahesh M Bhagwat , on Thursday at Neredmet.

CP instructed everyone to avoid crowded places and take vaccination.

## Objections galore over of dists re-organisation

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Even as the government has set the ball rolling to create 13 new districts by issuing notifications, not everyone is enthused with the move. Minor protests and dissidence have been witnessed across the state over either name of the proposed districts or redrawing the boundaries by merging or deleting some mandals or assembly segments.

On Thursday in Rajampeta the municipal chairman K Srinivasulu Reddy led a protest rally march against the government's decision to make Rayachoti headquarters of the newly proposed Annamayya district being carved out of the Rajampeta Lok Sabha segment. He said that Rajampeta will be at loss due to the reorganisation of the district.

Likewise in Krishna district attaching Nuziveedu of Krishna district to Eluru district is also being opposed by locals. Locals are also unhappy over the proposal to merge Penamaluru and Ganavaram



assembly segments close to Vijayawada into far away newly proposed Krishna district with Machilipatnam as headquarters.

In Guntur, objections are being raised over merging the Pedakurapadu assembly segment into the Gurazala revenue division. Demands have cropped up that Sattenapalli and Pedakurapadu segments be made a separate revenue division or merge Pedakurapadu with Guntur's revenue division.

Locals in the Prakasam district are demanding a separate

district with Markapuram as headquarters. Merging the Kandukuru assembly segment into Nellore is also being opposed by the locals.

Similar resistance is being shown in many areas in the Rayalaseema region.

Though the government had planned to make each parliament segment having seven Assembly constituencies into one district, in some proposed districts boundaries are drawn with six districts in few with eight districts as per the population density or geographical compulsions.

## Naidu writes to Governor on 'Gudivada casino'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday urged Governor Biswabhusan Harichandan to order an impartial enquiry into the Gudivada illegal casino, involvement of the ruling YSRCP leaders and their unchecked attacks on the opposition TDP leaders and cadres.

Naidu wrote a letter to the Governor, on Thursday stressing the need for the local Minister to ensure a transparent probe into the Gudivada casino. The lawmakers were turning into lawbreakers, unfortunately, which was leav-



ing a bad impact on contemporary society and politics.

The TDP chief deplored that the administration in the state was deteriorating day by day.

lence and drug-related offences.

Naidu told the Governor that the latest in the series of untoward incidents was a casino held in broad daylight in Gudivada in Krishna district from January 14 to 16, 2022. They promoted gambling and bettings thereby hurting Telugu pride and culture, their traditions and customs. In addition, women were made to do indecent and half-naked dances.

Chandrababu Naidu said over 13 women were brought from outside of AP and they were sent back to Goa on January 17, 2022. Over Rs. 500 Cr changed hands at the

Gudivada casino. Foreign liquor freely. Huge black money was used which was against the spirit of the struggle being waged by the Indian Government against the same.

Expressing serious concern, Naidu said the rampant use of black money was a big blow to national security. All this happened under the supervision of the local Minister and the ruling YSRCP leaders. On its part, the TDP set up a 6-member fact-finding committee to collect details of the impact of casinos on the public and the failure of the ruling party leaders and the police to prevent gambling.

## TDP calls reorganisation of districts 'a diversion game'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The TDP, at its strategy committee meeting presided over by party chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Thursday, has described the reorganisation of districts as nothing but a politically motivated 'diversion game'.

The TDP accused the ruling YSRCP leadership of bringing the formation of new districts to the fore as it was unable to face the rising public resentment on a variety of issues and problems. The present rulers should explain to the public why they had issued 'overnight notifications' to reorganise districts with total disregard for the people concerned.

The TDP leader pointed out that there were clear Central directions not to take up district reorganisation till the nation-wide census was completed. Any formation of new districts should be conducive for administrative convenience and in accordance with the aspirations of the local public. It should not be in the manner of creating new problems.

The Telugu Desam leaders said they had no objection to naming Krishna district after NTR and anybody would be welcome if they truly respected the TDP founder. The TDP

would stick to its demand for Bharat Ratna for NTR. Though NTR's name was removed from Hyderabad airport, the TDP did not politicise the matter. It did not object to naming Kadapa district after YSR either.

Some TDP leaders asserted that their party would not practise double standards like the ruling YSRCP, which was demolishing NTR's statues in the State on the one hand and feigning great respect for him on the other. It was a fact that the Jagan regime stopped NTR Smriti Vanam in Amaravati and also cancelled Anna Canteens, which were started in the name of NTR.

Expressing concern, the TDP leaders slammed the YSRCP regime for handling reorganisation of districts in a very disorderly and indifferent manner. Protests were erupting in several places because the government did not take the local people into confidence.

Opposition was arising against the new districts even within the ruling YSRCP.

The TDP strategy panel said the new districts were brought to the fore despite the Centre's clear orders not to do so. This was only aimed at misleading the public.

## Azhar lodges complaint against HCA ombudsman

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TPCC working president and HCA president Azharuddin lodged a complaint against the ombudsman of the HCA at Begumpet PS in the city on Thursday.

In his complaint, Azhar said that the ombudsmen in the Gymkhana office threatened the HCA current staff. Begumpet police received Azharuddin's complaint. The ombudsman and Azharuddin have been at loggerheads for several days.

## Notorious house burglar held

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALAKJIRI

Meerpet PS of Rachakonda commissionerate police crime team nabbed the notorious house burglar with the coordination of CCS, IT CELL and recovered stolen properties from the accused within 4 hours. Police recovered gold ornaments and silver articles all worth of Rs 13,10,000. The accused is identified as Kodidela Sudhakar (27). Old village, Meerpet, Ranga Rd district and native of Revella Mandal, Nagarkurnool district. According to the police, accused was earlier arrested in a murder case, house burglary and auto mobile theft cases

from Nagarkurnool, Meerpet and LB Nagar police stations. On 7th Jan, he was released from jail and he again started committing offences.

He had committed house burglary during day time in the limits of Meerpet, Racha konda Commissionerate. The victim Kattakola Rathnakar Rao, resident of Badangpet, Balapur, R.R.Dist gave a complaint in which he had stated that on Jan 26th, he and his family members went to his brother-in-law's house in the same colony by locking their house to attend his mother-in-law's death anniversary. When they returned to their house, they noticed the theft.

## APERC to balance interests of consumers, power companies

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

APERC Chairman Justice CV Nagarajuna Reddy has said that the final decision on tariff proposals submitted by the discoms will be taken to ensure the balance between the interests of consumers and the financial well-being of power companies.

The public hearing on Aggregate Revenue Requirement & Tariff filing for Financial Year 2022-23 programme was concluded on Thursday at the APEPDCL office in Vizag. Along with APERC Chairman Justice C V Nagarajuna Reddy other members P Rajagopal Reddy,

Thakur Ram Singh also took part in the public hearing.

A total of 60 persons participated in the video conference and put forth their opinions on tariff issues. APERC Chairman Justice C.V.Nagarajuna Reddy applauded the Discoms for supplying power 24x7 hours to consumers with quality and without any interruptions.

Consumers and their representatives from all walks of life, including households, political, agricultural, industrial, etc., virtually attended the referendum and conveyed their suggestions, views, and objections.

The CMDs also replied to the objections. Justice Nagarajuna Reddy said that he



was happy to note that none complained about power interruptions. He said that conclusion would be taken only after

considering consumer views and suggestions on tariff proposals on how much to rise and to what extent.

He said decisions would be taken to ensure the balance between the interests of consumers and the financial well-being of power companies.

Energy Deputy Secretary BAVP Kumar Reddy read out the state government's statement. He said that the state government has recognized the importance of the power sector in the industrialisation of the state.

He added that the government is committed to providing uninterrupted 24x7 power at affordable prices to the households , commercial and industrial sectors and 9 hours of quality free power to the agricultural sector.

He said that state power companies are also among the nationwide power companies with the lowest distribution losses in the country. However, state power companies are facing high fixed charge debts of Rs. 82,038 crore and losses of over Rs 26,961 crore and other challenges.

He said the state government was taking all possible steps to bail out the power companies from this financial crisis. The state government is committed to providing subsidies to aqua farmers, SC / ST home users and rolled gold sectors as announced in various government orders.

## Police arrest house burglary offender, recover Rs 1 lakh

PNS ■ MEDCHAL MALAKJIRI

The sleuths of CCS LB Nagar team, along with Saroonagar police of Rachakonda Police Commissionerate, apprehended the professional house burglar and recovered about Rs 1 lakh cash from his possession.

According to police, the accused Ambati Chakravathy (32) who hails from Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh, is a resident of P&T Colony in Dilukhnagar. When he was at his native village earlier, he involved in 20 cases of house burglary and other property cases and he was arrested by

Dachepally police, Piduguralla police, Narsaraopet, Krosuru police of Guntur district and by Kodada police and Nakarikallu police of Suryapet district.

After getting released from jail in 2021, accused came to Hyderabad and was staying in P&T Colony. He again committed offence on Jan 26th at the Mee Seva Centre at P&T Colony X road and police received a complaint from Baira Shankar. The police arrested him when the accused was moving under suspicious circumstances during vehicle checking at Saroonagar lim-

its. On questioning, he revealed his name and also confessed that he had committed the burglary. The case was investigated under direct supervision of Mahesh M Bhagwat, Commissioner of Police and G. Sudheer Babu, Addl. Commissioner with the guidance of Sunpreeth Singh, DCP LB Nagar, P. Yadagiri, DCP Crimes and under the supervision of M. Srinivasulu, Addl.DCP Crimes, P.Sreedhar Reddy, ACP LB Nagar and the Inspector, Detective Inspector, CCS LB Nagar team, IT Cell & Inspector LB Nagar PS.

# Cotton farmers buoyant as prices soar

VASIREDDY RAVICHANDRA  
■ GUNTUR

Cotton farmers in the district are buoyant as the price of cotton has gone up and the farmers are getting remunerative prices for their produce. The cotton production is being purchased from the farmers at Rs 10,000 to Rs 13,000 per quintal by the traders. The cotton used to be cultivated in about 15 lakh acres in Guntur, Krishna, Prakasam, and other districts in the state. However, it has come down to 10 lakh acres during the season because of heavy rains. The Cotton farmers told the Pioneer that this is the first time cotton produce is purchased at Rs 10,000 to Rs 13,000 per quintal.

Reducing the cotton cultivation to 10 lakh acres and damage of crops due to rains and pests resulted in dwindling of cotton produce which created a gap between supply and demand. Though the Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) is purchasing cotton produce at Rs 6000 per quintal, the traders are purchasing at Rs 10,000. In the Prodatur region, the traders are buying



the cotton produce at Rs 13,000 per quintal. The cotton candy is bought at Rs 80,000. The cotton prices spiraled because there is a huge demand for Indian cotton produce in China, Vietnam, and 35 other countries. The CCI manager Gogineni Sai Aditya told the Pioneer that the government announced Rs 6,025 MSP to the cotton producer but the private traders are

purchasing the cotton produce at a higher price due to high demand for the produce. The farmers are also not willing to sell their cotton produce to the CCI since they are getting lucrative prices in the open market, Sai Aditya said. A cotton farmer M Venkateswarlu told the Pioneer that the cotton crop was damaged due to heavy rains and the Gulabi pest also

damaged the cotton crop in some areas. Even though the farmers could raise their crop and yield good cotton produce which ultimately reaped dividends to them, he said. "We have never got this price for our cotton produce. This is the first time over Rs 10,000 per quintal is offered. Despite crop damage, we are being offered lucrative prices for our produce", he said.

Talking to the Pioneer, Muppalla village former sarpanch Modugula Narasimha Rao said that he had never got over Rs 10,000 price for cotton produce during the last 30 years. The cotton farmers in the area were very happy at the steep hike in the price of cotton produce, he said. Though the farmers are happy with the hike in cotton prices, the spinning mill owners expressed their difficulty to run their mills by purchasing the cotton produce at the price. There are about 70 spinning mills in the Guntur district. A spinning mill owner Pacchala Shankar Rao told the Pioneer that it is very difficult for them to run the spinning mills by purchasing the cotton produce at more than Rs 10,000 per quintal. He said that the salaries, electricity tariff, and other charges have gone up considerably and now the cotton produce has become precious. At the same time, the Rs 10,000 crore power subsidy is yet to be paid to the governments, he regretted.

# Nishant Kumar assumes charge as Guntur Commissioner

PNS ■ GUNTUR

Nishan Kumar took charge as Commissioner of Municipal Corporation here on Thursday. He is the 26th municipal commissioner of Guntur. Talking to the media, he said that he would strive to provide corrupt-free services to the people of the city. He said that he would take steps to provide citizen-friendly services. Steps would be taken to improve the sanitation in the city, he said. "Cases of dengue and malaria reported high numbers in the city last year. Precautionary measures will be taken to check the seasonal diseases. The underground drainage problem will also be resolved by speaking with the departments concerned", he added. Nishan Kumar said that he would review each department from Friday onwards and understand the problems at the ground level. Efforts would also be initiated to fill up vacant posts in the municipal corporation departments. He would coordinate with



the mayor and corporators in developing the city, he assured. Later the commissioner held meetings with the heads of various departments and knew the functioning. He also inspected some of the departments in the municipal corporation office after taking charge. He told the officials that the keeping of the city clean should begin with cleaning the corporate office itself. He noticed some files and waste material lying disorderly and untidy manner in a

department and directed the officials concerned to remove and clean the place. The municipal Commissioner also noticed the damaged iron safes lying in the corridor and directed the official to remove them. Additional commissioner P Niranjan Reddy, deputy commissioners D Srinivasa Rao, B Srinivasa Rao and SE D Srinivasa, CMHO Vijaya Lakshmi and city planner Himabindu were among those who were present.

# Students stage dharna demanding Rajampet as district headquarters

PNS ■ KADAPA

Rajampet rocked with massive agitation by a large number of students on Thursday demanding the government to announced Rajampet as headquarter to the newly forming district. The government announced the bifurcation of the YSR Kadapa district by carving out Annamayya district. The government also announced Rayachoti as the headquarters for the new district. Opposing the government decision vehemently, thousands of students took out a huge rally and held a protest demonstration led



by municipal chairman Srinivasula Reddy at Bus station. The students raised slogans like 'Rayachoti Vaddu-Rajampet Muddu'. Srinivasa Reddy addressing the gathering expressed concern that creating a new district with Rayachoti its headquarters

would do grave injustice to Rajampet. He said that all resources are available in Rajampet which would help for the development. He demanded that Rajampet be made as capital to the new Annamayya district.

# Services to be provided more transparently: DC

PNS ■ ONGOLE

Prakasam District Collector Pravin Kumar said the services in the village and ward secretariats would be made more expeditious, transparent and accountable to the people. Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on Thursday launched 'AP Seva Portal 2.0 (Citizen Service Portal)' at the camp office in Tadepalli in Guntur district on Thursday to deliver better services for the people. On the occasion, a video conference was held in which Collector Pravin Kumar, ZP chairperson Buchepalli Venkayamma and Joint Collector TS Chetan were present.



On the occasion, the Collector said that services are being provided to the people through 1,058 secretariats in the district. As many as 20 lakh services

had been provided to the people through the secretariats so far. More than 90 per cent of these services were provided within the stipulated time.

**More than 90 % of the services at secretariats are provided within the stipulated time. The remaining 10 % are delayed due to some technical issues, the Collector told the Chief Minister.**

The remaining 10 per cent were delayed due to some technical issues, he told the Chief Minister. He apprised the Chief Minister that all the services

would be made available to the public within the stipulated time frame as the website of the secretariats has been further developed and the options have been increased. ZP chairperson Venkayamma said that people are satisfied with the services being provided through the village and ward secretariats. She said they would strive hard to bring good name to the state government by providing more and better services to the people in the coming days. A woman, Kumari explained to the Chief Minister in the video conference how she got services easily through a secretariat.

# Workers stage dharna in protest against closure of jute mill in WG

PNS ■ ELURU

A large number of workers of Sri Krishna Jute mill staged a dharna in protest against the closure of the mill here on Thursday and submitted a memorandum to deputy Chief Minister Alla Kalikrishna Srinivas urging him to ensure that the mill is reopened. Workers of the Jute mill, with the support of trade union leaders of TNJKS, IFTU, TNTU, CITU, INTUC and AITUC, took out a huge rally to the labour office located at Ashok Nagar and submitted a memorandum to the Joint Commissioner who assured them to make efforts to reopen the mill. Later they went to the mill squatted in front of the gate.



Addressing the workers, TNJKS president Paladugu Murali Shyam said that the Sri Krishna Jute mill has 118 years of history and the closure of the mill is unjust. He said that about 2,000 people were working in the mill and they would lose their jobs due to the closure of the mill. Moreover, the closure

of the mill would deprive the livelihood of about 10,000 people indirectly, he regretted. The management closed the mill without following the labour acts and norms, he alleged. The trade union leaders warned of intensifying the agitation if the mill was not reopened.

# Two youths drowned in Telugu Ganga canal

PNS ■ NELLORE

Two youths were drowned in the Telugu Ganga canal at Puduru village in Naidupet mandal and the bodies were fished out. Police said that the deceased Kondari Chaitanya (25) and Jagan (25) entered the Telugu Ganga canal for a bath on Wednesday evening and drowned. Another person Mallu Vishnu swam ashore safely. The bodies were fished out on Thursday and shifted to a government hospital for postmortem. One of the deceased Chaitanya was working as a software engineer in Chennai.



# WG Collector Prasanna calls on CM

PNS ■ ELURU

West Godavari district V Prasanna Venkatesh called on Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy at his residence in Tadepalli in Guntur district on Thursday. Collector Prasanna Venkatesh took charge as District Collector on January 26. The Collector thanked the Chief Minister for appointing him West Godavari District Collector.

# Sangameswara temple is out of Krishna water

PNS ■ KURNOOL

The Saptanadi Sangameswara Temple in Kurnool district is completely out of River Krishna water on Thursday. The water level of the Srisailem reservoir reached 842 feet on Thursday and the temple is completely out of the water. The Sangameswara

Temple was underwater for 8 months of the year. Saptanadi Sangameshwara Temple is named after the confluence of seven rivers. Sangameswaram is the confluence of seven rivers namely Tunga, Bhadra, Krishna, Veni, Bhima, Malapaharini and Bhavanasi and the temple is located in

Kothapalli mandal Kurnool District. The shrine is located at a distance of 55 km from Kurnool and 20 km from Nandikotkur. The Sangameshwara temple, which was flooded, was completely submerged in the river Krishna water. The sacred Kalasam of the temple located at the top of the tem

ple emerged from the water in the month of November as the water started receding. Five days ago, half of the temple came out of the water as the water level of the Srisailem reservoir was receding. Now that the water level has reached 842 feet, the temple is completely out of the river Krishna.



# Man, his son killed as car collides with tractor

PNS ■ ONGOLE

In a tragic road accident, a man and his son were killed when the car in which they were travelling collided with a wood-laden tractor at Jagarlamudivaripalem village in the wee hours on Thursday. Police said that the deceased Chowda Venkata Rao (55) his elder son Prasanna (22) and his wife Kalavati went to Chennai airport to send off his

younger son Bhaskar who was going to America to work as a software engineer. When they were returning from Chennai their Innova car collided with a wood-laden tractor on the flyover bridge killing Venkata Rao, Prasanna instantaneously. Kalavati and the car driver escaped unhurt. As the car stuck in the tractor, it took three hours to extricate the bodies from the ill-fated car. The acci-

dent took place when the car was trying to overtake another car. Kalavati who was in deep shock was admitted to a hospital and the relatives hesitated to tell her about the death of her husband and son. The family belonged to Chilakaluripet town in the Guntur district. SI U Umamaheshwara Rao registered a case and shifted the bodies to the government hospital in Addanki.

# YSRCP activists form human chain welcoming new districts

PNS ■ ONGOLE

The YSRCP activists, led by Mayor G Sujata and Ongole city YSRCP president Singaraju Venkata Rao, formed a human chain at the Church centre here on Thursday welcoming the government's decision for the formation of new districts. Addressing the gathering Mayor Sujata hailed Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's decision of enhancing districts of the state to 26 by carving out new districts. The creation of a new district would ease the administration process and the government could reach out to people more efficiently. Creating of new



districts would also help to coordinate among officials

to work more efficiently and transiently.

Trade union district president Jujula Krishna,

**In Guntur district, YSRCP activists led by MLC Lella Appi Reddy took out a candlelight rally welcoming the decision of creating new districts. Holding candles and flex banners, the YSRCP activists took out a rally**

Damaraju Kranthi Kumar and other leaders were among who took part in the programme. Meanwhile, in Guntur, the YSRCP activists led by MLC Lella Appi Reddy took

out a candlelight rally welcoming the decision of creating new districts. Holding candles and flex banners the YSRCP, the activists took out a rally in the evening on Thursday.

Addressing the gathering, the MLC said that as part of decentralisation of administration new districts were being created. He said the people of the state were hailing the decision of Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy for carving out a new district. The decision to increase the district to 26 in the state is laudable. By creating the Palnadu district the 42-year-old dream of the people of the region is going to be fulfilled. The creation of new districts reflects the foresightedness of Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, he praised. MLA Maddali Giridhar described that it was a his-

toric event in the history of the state that could be written in gold letters. He said that the creation of new districts would greatly contribute to the all-round development of the state. He hoped that this would be a good foundation for the comprehensive welfare of all regions. He explained that the real motive behind the formation of new districts was to ultimately benefit the people. Mayor K Manohar Naidu, Mirch yard chairman Chandragiri Yesuratnam and Madaya Vimochana Prachara Committee chairman V Lakshman Reddy were among those who participated in the candle rally.

INDIA CORNER

## MP: Five men injured in attacks by leopard at villages of Damoh in MP

Five men were injured in attacks by a leopard in different villages of Madhya Pradesh's Damoh district, prompting the authorities to use drones and set up cages to capture the predator, an official said on Thursday. One leopard was involved in the incidents that took place in Devran, Hinauta, Bhorasa and Abkhedi villages of the district, the official said. Nandram Adivasi (40), Raghavendra Patel (30), Anish Raikwar (22), Arvind Parihar (26) and his brother Surendra (35) were injured in the attacks and were undergoing treatment at the district hospital, Divisional Forest Officer M S Uikhey told PTI. The leopard had strayed into Devran, then to Hinauta, Bhorasa (village) and Abkhedi village before disappearing into the thickets around, creating a panic in the area, he said. Drones have been pressed into service to track the leopard and a team from the Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) has arrived in Damoh to rescue it, the DFO said.



## Weekend curfew, odd-even system of opening shops lifted in Delhi: DDMA

The Delhi Disaster Management Authority on Thursday decided to lift weekend curfew and odd-even system of opening non-essential shops in the city besides permitting restaurants and bars to reopen with 50 per cent seating capacity, in view of improving COVID-19 situation. The decision was made at a meeting headed by Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal. He, however, postponed the decision to reopen schools for the next meeting, officials said. The government offices have also been allowed to reopen with 50 per cent staff, they said. Another decision taken at the meeting was to allow marriage ceremonies with maximum 200 guests in open areas and up to 50 per cent capacity at indoor venues. So far, only 20 people were allowed to attend these events at home. The night curfew imposed on weekdays from 10 pm to 5 am will continue. The meeting also decided for strict enforcement and enhancement of Covid appropriate behaviour and other guidelines to check rise in cases, they added.



## Punjab polls: Rahul Gandhi, Cong candidates offer prayers at Golden Temple

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi along with party candidates for the Punjab assembly polls paid obeisance at the Golden Temple here on Thursday. In a tweet in Hindi, Gandhi said he along with the Congress candidates prayed for the future of Punjab at Harmandir Sahib. After offering prayers at the sanctum sanctorum of the Golden Temple, Gandhi partook 'langar' along with the party candidates. Gandhi was flanked by Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi and party's state unit chief Navjot Singh Sidhu. Kicking off his poll campaign in Punjab, Gandhi is scheduled to address a virtual rally at Mithapur in Jalandhar. He is visiting the poll-bound state for the first time after the election dates were announced on January 8 by the Election Commission of India. Channi, Sidhu and deputy chief ministers Sukhinder Singh Randhawa and O P Soni earlier received Gandhi at the Amritsar airport on his arrival from Delhi. Gandhi later visited Jallianwala Bagh. He will also visit Durgiana Temple and the Bhagwan Valmiki Tirath Sthal here.



# UP: Next-gen leaders leave party, Cong struggles to regain lost ground

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Synonymous with the Congress in Uttar Pradesh for decades, several families are now losing their new generation to rival organisations, making it even more difficult for the party to regain lost ground in the crucial state.

These are the families of stalwarts like Kamalapati Tripathi (Varanasi), Noor Bano (Rampur), Jitendra Prasad (Shahjahanpur) and Kunwar C P N Singh (Kushinagar), who were largely unwavering in their loyalty to the Congress.

But their new generation has been looking elsewhere. From these families, Laliteshwar Tripathi, Haider Ali Khan, Jitin Prasad and RPN Singh have switched sides, leaving the already weakened Congress to promote their own political careers.

While Jitin Prasad and R P N Singh went to the BJP, Haider Ali Khan is now the Apna Dal (S) nominee from Suar seat in Rampur and Laliteshwar Tripathi has joined Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress.



There is speculation that Laliteshwar Tripathi might be picked as an assembly poll candidate by Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav as Banerjee has already announced that her TMC would not contest in UP. Instead, it will support the SP.

While the rivals mock the grand old party over its leaders abandoning a 'sinking ship', the party has put on a brave face. "Primarily, the importance of these leaders was because of the Congress and not the other way round. There could be some

impact because of their influential family backgrounds, but it cannot be taken as a setback," Congress spokesperson P L Punia told PTI.

On the R P N Singh case, Punia said he got whatever the party could offer him when in power, and was later made in-charge of Jharkhand. He got a spot on the decision-making Congress Working Committee and was also named one of the star campaigners for UP.

"What more importance can be given to any leader?" Punia said.

Laliteshwar Tripathi's great-grandfather Kamalapati Tripathi had been the chief minister of the state and the railway minister. Noor Bano family scion Haider Ali Khan's departure was dramatic. He rejected the Congress ticket after it was already announced and crossed over to Apna Dal (S), a BJP ally. He will contest from Suar in Rampur, considered the stronghold of jailed SP MP Azam Khan. Khan, a 32-year old graduate from a British university, is the son of Nawab Kazim Ali Khan, also known as Naved Mian, who had stints with other political parties but returned to the parent Congress in 2019.

Former minister and popular Congress leader Jitin Prasad's father Jitendra Prasad was a party vice-president. His grandfather Jyoti Prasad too was a party member. Jitendra Prasad was also the political advisor to two prime ministers, Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and P V Narasimha Rao in 1994, and fought the Congress presidential election against Sonia Gandhi in 2000.

The exit of these prominent

leaders, and others just ahead of the assembly polls, has made general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's attempt to improve the party's Vidhan Sabha tally in 2022 a difficult task.

The Congress, which had an alliance with the SP in 2017, won a paltry seven seats then. Out of these, two MLAs from Sonia Gandhi's Rae Bareilly parliamentary constituency have crossed over to the saffron camp. Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete has described such moves as 'cowardice'.

"They seem to have left the party for their selfish motives, thinking they will get something either in the state or at the Centre since the BJP is presently in power," Punia added.

Congress spokesperson Anshu Awasthi said the party under Priyanka Gandhi's leadership is making a conscious effort to shun 'old baggage' and present itself in a 'new avatar' in Uttar Pradesh.

Out of 166 candidates declared so far by the Congress in UP, 119 are making their electoral debut, he said.



## Suspected Maoists blast railway tracks in Jharkhand

PNS ■ GIRIDIH/DHANBAD

A portion of railway tracks in Jharkhand's Giridih district was damaged due to a blast triggered by suspected members of outlawed CPI (Maoist) early on Thursday, a police officer said.

Train services on the Howrah-New Delhi route were disrupted for around six hours following the explosion, district Superintendent of Police Amit Renu said.

"The blast, suspected to have been triggered by Maoists, left the fish plates in the tracks damaged. A manhunt has been launched to nab the miscreants," Renu stated.

Senior commandant of Railway Protection Force, Dhanbad, Hemant Kumar, said the incident happened between Chichaki and Karmabad stations around 12.30 am.

## Lata Mangeshkar showing signs of improvement, to remain in ICU: family

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Legendary singer Lata Mangeshkar is showing signs of improvement and has been taken off the ventilator "as a trial", her family said on Thursday. The 92-year-old veteran tested positive for coronavirus with mild symptoms and was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of the Breach Candy Hospital in south Mumbai on January 8.

According to an update shared by the family, Mangeshkar is showing "signs

of improvement but will remain under observation" in the ICU.

"Update from doctor: Lata didi continues to be in the ICU at Breach Candy Hospital, Mumbai under treatment. She has been given a TRIAL of extubation (off the invasive Ventilator) this morning."

"Presently, she is showing signs of improvement but will remain under observation of the team of doctors headed by Dr Pratit Samdani. We thank each one of you for your prayers and good wishes," the family said in a statement.



## Kejriwal unfurls 115-foot high tricolour in Timarpur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday unfurled a 115-ft high tricolour in Timarpur constituency and said such high-mast national flags were installed at 75 locations across the city to mark 75th year of India's Independence. He said he will get it examined if this qualifies for a Guinness world record.

"It is a matter of pride for the country that 75 tricolours on 115-ft high flagpoles have been installed today in Delhi to



mark 75th year of our independence. The target is to install total 500 in the next few months," he said at the ceremony organised near Delhi

University campus in Timarpur assembly constituency. "I have been told that in no city, tricolours (national flags) on flagpoles of this height have been installed on such a large scale. We will get it examined if it qualifies for a Guinness world record, Kejriwal said.

These high-mast national flags are being set up at public places like parks, big school buildings, market complexes, residential complexes, grounds, road roundabouts, among others.

## Woman sexually assaulted and paraded through streets of Delhi locality, four held

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A 20-year-old woman was allegedly abducted, sexually assaulted and paraded by her attackers on the streets of east Delhi's Kasturba Nagar with her hair chopped, face blackened and a shoe garland around her neck, police said on Thursday. Four people have been arrested.

The incident took place on Wednesday afternoon. The woman was at her husband's home in Anand Vihar when the accused who lived near her mother's place in Kasturba Nagar abducted her, police said, describing the incident as the result of personal enmity.

Preliminary investigations indicate the woman and a boy belonging to the family of the accused were friends.

"The boy committed suicide in November last year and his family is now blaming the victim. They have alleged that it was because of her he took the extreme step. To extract revenge from her, they allegedly abducted her. They wanted to teach her a lesson," a senior police officer said.

"We have registered the FIR under relevant sections of Indian Penal Code. We have



arrested four accused persons who all are from the same family. The victim was given counselling and medical aid as well," added R. Sathiyasundaram, DCP (Shahdara).

Condemning the attack on the woman, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said it was really shameful.

"How did the criminals get so much courage? I request the Union Home minister and the LG to direct police to take strict action and pay attention to the law and order situation. Delhiites won't tolerate such heinous crimes and criminals at any cost," he tweeted in Hindi.

## Missing Arunachal teen handed over to Indian Army by PLA : Rijiju

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

China's People's Liberation Army has handed over the missing teenager from Arunachal Pradesh to the Indian Army, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said on Thursday. He said the youth was handed over at Wacha-Damai interaction point in Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday. Nine teen-year-old Miram Taron of Jido Village in Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh was found missing on January 18.

In a tweet, the minister said due procedures are being followed including the boy's medical examination. "The Chinese PLA has handed over the young boy from Arunachal

Pradesh Miram Taron to Indian Army. Due procedures are being followed including the medical examination," he wrote.

In another tweet later, he thanked the Army for pursuing the case meticulously with PLA and safely securing the youth.

Rijiju also shared pictures of armymen and the teenager dressed in personal protective equipment to prevent Covid infection. "The Chinese PLA handed over the young boy from Arunachal Pradesh Shri Miram Taron to Indian Army at WACHA-DAMAI interaction point in Arunachal Pradesh today.



PNS ■ MUMBAI

Amid the BJP's opposition to the alleged move of "naming" a renovated garden here after Tipu Sultan, the Maharashtra Congress on Thursday claimed that even President Ram Nath Kovind had praised the 18th century Mysore ruler in the Karnataka Assembly in 2017.

The BJP had on Wednesday held protests, alleging that the renovated garden has been named after Tipu Sultan. It objected to the name, claiming that Sultan had persecuted Hindus and hence his name was unacceptable for a public facility. However, Maharashtra minister Aslam Shaikh who inaugurated new facilities at

the garden in suburban Malvani, had said that it always bore the name of Tipu Sultan, and that there was no fresh nomenclature. Countering BJP's allegations, Maharashtra Congress general secretary Sachin Sawant said, "President Ram Nath Kovind, while addressing the Karnataka assembly in 2017, had mentioned the works of Tipu Sultan. Has BJP forgotten it completely? It is BJP's deformed politics to bring religion to portray historical figures and to spew venom of hatred and polarisation."

He also claimed that the BJP's style of politics of painting everything black and white is a deformed one and such



approach should be rejected completely. "Sri Mookambika temple in

Kollur performs a special 'aarti' in the name of Tipu Sultan everyday at 7.30 in the evening. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, whose hologram was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had called Tipu as a martyr and his Mysore tiger was made part of his Azad Hind Sena's flag as well as figured on its uniform," Sawant said.

Tipu Sultan was 18th century ruler of the then Mysore state and died while fighting a battle against the British.

Minister Shaikh has claimed that the garden was known by the name of Tipu Sultan since the last 15 years. His cabinet colleague and Shiv Sena leader Aaditya Thackeray said no

such decision (of naming garden after Tipu Sultan) has been taken by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), which is the sole authority to name a public place in the city.

Sawant in his tirade against the BJP said, "When the army of Peshwas attacked Sringeri mutt in Karnataka set up by Shankaracharya - it was redeveloped and later protected by Tipu Sultan only. Mysore Gazette has documented a list of 165 temples, which were supported by Tipu Sultan."

In 2013, BJP corporators had unanimously supported naming a road in M east ward as Shaheed Tipu Sultan road, Sawant claimed, while tweet-

ing a document of the passed resolution from his social media account.

Srikantheshwara temple in Nanjangud in the same state had received a Shiv Linga by Tipu Sultan and people continue to offer prayers even today, he said.

NCP chief spokesperson and state cabinet minister Nawab Malik said, "Tipu Sultan never surrendered before the British and he martyred in the battle against the invaders. BJP is opposing such warriors. BJP leader in Karnataka B S Yediyurappa used to celebrate Tipu Sultan's death anniversary, but after becoming chief minister he cancelled it."

## Scalping hair

India exports hair but there's more moolah if it turns to the hair products industry

Human hair can cause hair-raising problems and the Indian Government is waking up to the reality. If India has a commodity that can never become scarce, grows for free, and has the most of it in the world, it is human hair. Yet, India gets no benefit from this asset because it is not the leader of the hair products industry. It is merely an exporter. Between April-November last, hair exports stood at \$144.26 million. The pandemic lowered these to \$15.28 million in 2020-21. Exports are also hurt by rampant smuggling. Smugglers hire people to collect raw hair and illegally move it in bulk to some East Asian countries. The allegation is the hair is processed there and sent across to China, which makes wigs and hairpieces and exports them for a tidy profit. Hair products manufacturers and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence could not end smuggling despite best efforts. It is estimated that around 16,000 tonne of human hair are smuggled even now. Finally, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade stepped in this week and placed human hair in the restricted export category. That should help genuine exporters. However, it is time the industry shifted from exporting hair to exporting hair products. There is some talk of improving value addition in export products from



India, like wigs and hairpieces, to increase foreign exchange earnings. It has to turn into reality now. India raises huge quantities — 80 per cent — of the best quality of human hair in the world. All of it is donated, at places of worship. The Tirumala temple is the biggest source in the country. If hair export is banned, India's exports of hair products can touch \$3 billion annually and go up to \$6 billion in a few years. Importantly, stopping exports can bring back around 8.6 lakh jobs lost over the last few years and open up new jobs as well. It is not difficult for India to become the leader in the hair industry. But with it comes the responsibility that Indian hair collectors, aggregators, product manufacturers and exporters are unaware of. For instance, the collection of hair from non-temple areas like salons and the villages is not organised at all. Planned collection can earn regular employment for rag-pickers. It can reduce the clogging of hair in pipes and sewers — the biggest contributor to rising plumbing costs. India should have expertise in synthetic hair materials and products to be able to compete with countries that lack natural hair. That the production of polymers, used to make synthetic hair products, leads to several environmental problems is another complication on the way. Indian manufacturers need to speed up research into a key area — the life cycle of hair products. At present, the products have a short life and are deemed disposable. If these are designed for a circular economy where they can be recycled, reconditioned and remanufactured, they can help reduce the demand for hair.



Fishermen row their boats in the Arabian Sea near the Bandra-Worli Sea Link, in Mumbai

## Why Buddhadeb said no to Padma Bhushan



PRAFULL GORADIA

It could have been an opportunity to re-enter the mainstream of politics; in India, there is increasing space for politicians of quality



It is a pity that Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, West Bengal's former Chief Minister, has refused to accept the Padma Bhushan he was offered this Republic Day by the President of India. The offer was not from the Bharatiya Janata Party Government or the Prime Minister. Even his refusal was confused; no one informed him or any member of his family, said Buddhadeb, as if that was the reason for declining the honour. The late Jyoti Basu had declined the opportunity of becoming a coalition Prime Minister when Deve Gowda had to resign as the PM. Later, he described it as "a historical blunder". The immediate reason given then was his party, the CPM, did not permit him to accept the post. While one might not question the genuineness of these persons in not accepting the honour/executive post, their refusals certainly do say something.

With the demise of Marxism as an ideology the world over, these could be the little opportunities to re-enter the mainstream of politics, at the Centre or in States. Why not seize them like floral bouquets? Is there something inherently different about communists? It is true that in Eastern Europe, some of them have managed to creep into the mainstream. However, in Europe, politics has swung towards the Right, especially because of a wave of migrants from Africa and Arabia, more so from Syria. In India, the Left is vacant without any prejudicial obstruction as in Europe. In fact, in our country there has been increasing space for politicians of quality; the Congress continues its decline, while no replacement for it as a national Opposition has come up. The communists cannot, it appears, see this widening gap. Is this because the communists are essentially trade union leaders and not politicians? When their trade unions weaken, they sink with their cadres. In the free world, Margaret Thatcher blew the whistle and best the Left could do in

response to her uncompromising right-wing way of rule was to bring forth Tony Blair, but with the novel label of New Labour, which shunned Leftism during its 10 years in power. The Soviet Union collapsed and scattered into 16 Republics with the advent of the 1990s. The French and Italian communist parties went virtually out of existence just a little earlier.

Nor did Leftism revive in the rest of Europe after 1991. China learnt its lesson from the Soviet Union and converted itself into a pseudo-capitalist system. The Beijing experiment is a novel one with the Communist Party of China owning the armed forces and controlling, with shares, many or most of China's mega enterprises. This was done perhaps with the objective of thwarting any revolt against the regime. Citizens there aren't allowed to set up a political party to compete for votes. But isn't this a new version of fascism?

Can it last? If so, for how long? After all, the CPC members are not blood relations, and they cannot remain beholden forever. Nevertheless, the Chinese experiment is unique and has been studied by experts, although one must add that it



IN INDIA, THE LEFT IS VACANT WITHOUT ANY PREJUDICIAL OBSTRUCTION. THE CONGRESS CONTINUES ITS DECLINE, WHICH INCREASINGLY LOOKS TERMINAL, WHILE NO REPLACEMENT FOR IT AS A NATIONAL OPPOSITION HAS COME UP

is a work in progress.

Until the 18th century, religion, particularly Christianity, provided the governing ideologies through monarchs. The French Revolution shook up this ideological quality and gave birth to a kind of pseudo-nationalism. To prevent nationalism being used or misused by capitalists, the communists supported by the industrial classes became the antidote to the Soviet Union in the lead. The spectre of communism spreading throughout the continent and engulfing European civilisation was very real, and it was in order to prevent such an eventuality that fascism was born. It first came into being in Italy under Benito Mussolini and was soon adopted by Adolf Hitler in Germany with all its consequences, particularly WWII. Today, both communism and fascism have virtually expired. Some former communists believe that they lost because of their lack of democratic functioning within the party. There can be no denying that parties that spawned and brought this ideology to power acquired dictatorial authority over their respective countries. The result was that the fascist leadership did not obtain any regular feedback

nor authentic information about how people felt, or where their country was headed. Third, people in the world outside also did not come to know as to what was happening in a particular communist country.

Regimes did not change often; it was only when a revolutionary cataclysm took place that everyone, inside and outside the country, became aware of what had been wrong. By the time they did become aware, they found that it was too late; they were swept away by the tide of change. It needs no reiteration that communism as an ideology has no future anywhere in the world. Places like China and North Korea have to use the State's brute muscle to remain in power. For any political future in free countries, former communists have to jettison their hidebound mindset and embrace a democratic way of functioning, beginning with their own parties.

But given the inherent contradiction between democracy and communism, this does not look like materialising.

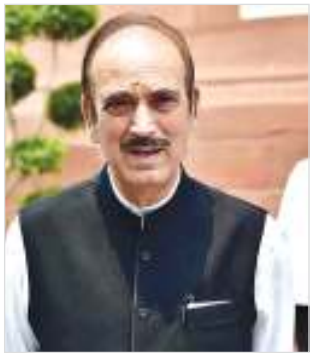
(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal.)

## Missing focus

Rather than taking a jibe at Azad, the Congress will do well to get ready for Assembly polls

The announcement of the Padma Bhushan for senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad has set the cat among the pigeons in the 'grand old party'. While several party members — especially those belonging to the so-called G23 — have congratulated him for being named for the prestigious award, there understandably is a section that is miffed with the Kashmiri leader for accepting the honour. The prominent Congress leaders from among the G23 who supported Azad include Kapil Sibal and Shashi Tharoor, with Sibal even calling it "ironic that the Congress doesn't need his services when the nation recognises his contributions", but the party's chief whip in the Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh took a swipe at Azad, hinting that the latter should have refused to accept the honour. Even though the reasons for the upset section's grouse are not being explained openly, it is being speculated that these leaders are not happy with Azad as he has accepted the award from the BJP-led Government. Now, to put matters in the right perspective, even though the honour may have been bestowed upon Azad during the BJP-led Government's rule at the Centre, it can be no stretch of imagination to be counted as coming from the Bharatiya Janata Party.

It has simply been announced by the Government of India, by the President who is the executive head of the sovereign Republic. However, the upset colleagues refuse to subscribe to this view and, in this context, are even citing the "example set by" former West Bengal Chief Minister and CPM leader Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, who has since refused to accept the award. Now Bhattacharjee's reasons and circumstances could be totally different from Azad's who has been for a long time now sidelined within the party and practically forced into oblivion. Had the Congress been treating him fairly, even of late, there was a possibility that the Kashmiri leader might have considered the wishes of the party old guard and high command. But now that he has been left to his own devices, there is no justification in trying to vilify him, especially for something which isn't even his own doing. It's time that the Congress, which is already in a visible state of decline across the country, had a relook at its priorities and kept its focus on Assembly election in the five States that are going to polls within days from now.



### LEAVE GHULAM NABI AZAD ALONE

Sir — Those who believe in the adage, "Coming events cast their shadow earlier" were already perking their ears when the Prime Minister got emotional and broke down during Ghulam Nabi Azad's farewell function in February last year due to his long association with the latter. Now, several people, including some of Azad's colleagues, are casting aspersions on him upon being conferred the prestigious Padma Bhushan, though some expressed happiness and extended their greetings. Among the G-23 members, Anand Sharma heaped praise on his friend being awarded the country's third highest honour but Kapil Sibal's tweet, "Congratulations bhaijan; ironic that Congress does not need his services when the nation recognises his contributions to the public service", carried a sarcastic touch.

Jairam Ramesh came up with the phrase "Ghulam, not Azad" (enslaved, not free) and simultaneously referred to former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee who refused to accept the honour. Film star-turned-politician Raj Babbar, however, felicitated Ghulam Nabi Azad, calling him an elder brother whose immaculate public life and commitment to Gandhian ideals have always been an inspiration. The Congress leadership, meanwhile, has maintained a studied silence. All these scenarios have made public the ideological fissures continuing unabated among the grand old party members.

Azhar A Khan | Rampur

### DON'T LET THE GUARD DOWN

Sir — On the one hand, the spirit of people has been just amazing and an example is the way people have been venturing out in large numbers to celebrate festivals and functions. On the other hand, most people have been turning a blind eye to the current COVID status, especially in the wake of the Omicron variant, by not wearing masks. Ignoring such serious yet simple protocols as wearing masks, these people pose a great threat to society. Incidentally, I see numerous

## Arunachal teen returns home



It's heartening to know that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has handed over 17-year-old Miram Taron from Zido, in Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, to the Indian Army. The matter of Miram's kidnapping was first reported by BJP MP Tapir Gao, though the PLA had denied the kidnapping allegation. Instead, it claimed that he "illegally entered Chinese territory... and then was routinely questioned... and given humanitarian assistance". Kudos to our Army for pursuing the case meticulously with the PLA and safely securing our Miram back home. This is not the first such incident. In March 2020, a 21-year-old was kidnapped by the PLA from the Asaphila area in the same district and was returned after two weeks.

On September 3, 2020, five youth of Tagin community, engaged as porters for the Indian Army, were captured by the PLA on the McMahon line and returned home after 10 days. The reason for this type of dispute with China and why our citizens are continuously harassed is that Upper Siang district shares the boundary with China. People from Arunachal Pradesh often go into the interiors for hunting and inadvertently cross the border. To stop it permanently, some barbed wire barricade on the border with China or other method should be resorted to. Who knows it may create a major problem for both the nations one day?

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

people venturing out for their daily needs without wearing masks. Sticking to my own mask, I have been advising to wear masks to many people in my native areas in Tamil Nadu.

As for the Omicron threat, it depends on us to keep away these fears. Even though vaccination has been a big hit worldwide, people should come out only after wearing masks. Plus, the Government and all media houses should come forward to churn out daily local feeds about important Corona protocols with a strong message and celebrity voice/word of advice. After all, countries have to look into their economic needs like agriculture activities and industrial operations. For this, the international community must come out of the COVID loop soon.

P Senthil Saravana Durai | Mumbai

### KICKING UP A CONTROVERSY

Sir — This refers to three different issues, with the common agenda to defame Prime Minister Modi, that are hitting the head-

lines in media during the last three days. I would like to repudiate these one by one. The first issue pertains to withdrawal of "Abide with me" from the Beating Retreat ceremony. The Scottish-origin tune has been replaced by Lata Mangeshkar's popular "Ae mere watan ke logo".

The second controversy which should be laid to rest is the shifting of Amar Jawan Jyoti to the National War Memorial. The eternal flame at India Gate has still not been extinguished. The third dissent is the refusal to accept the Padma Vibhushan bestowed on former West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and its acceptance by Ghulam Nabi Azad, with castigation of the latter by his party colleagues. The corollary of all these uncalculated situations is that since all this has been done by the Modi dispensation, it is not acceptable to those who hate him ad nauseum.

Sagar Singh | Muzaffarnagar

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## SOUND BITE

It's our sacred national duty to follow the precautions suggested by our scientists and experts.

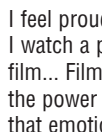


President — Ram Nath Kovind



The Afghan girls must return to schools, women to work. Our religion allows it.

Afghan ex-President — Hamid Karzai



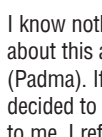
I feel proud when I watch a patriotic film... Films have the power to evoke that emotion.

Actor — Rakul Preet Singh



Setbacks normally are part of life when you are in sports. But not these kinds.

Indian women's football coach — Thomas Dennerby



I know nothing about this award (Padma). If they've decided to offer it to me, I refuse to accept it.

West Bengal ex-CM — Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee

FIRST COLUMN

PRE-POLL GUARANTEES

FILL UP's HORIZON

Freebies do represent unfulfilled aspirations and needs of society



VIRENDRA SINGH RAWAT

With the election fever in Uttar Pradesh gaining momentum, pre-poll promises of freebies by major political parties are filling the horizon of the poll-bound state. Samajwadi Party (SP) has taken the lead in promising doles. Congress and comparatively new entrant Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have zealously spiced up the freebie pot as well. These freebies pertain to free electricity, unemployment dole, pension for targetted sections, crop loan waiver, free two-wheelers for girls, etc. Considering there are about 28 million power consumers in UP, of which the domestic connections comprise 24 million, the promise of free power by competing political parties has created the maximum buzz in the media and the public alike. Taking a leaf from its gainful experience in Delhi, where it the ruling party, AAP has announced to provide 300 units of free electricity to domestic consumers if voted to power. It also promised to waive off out-




standing power bills and give free power to farmers if it formed the UP Government. Besides, Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia had also announced to provide ₹5,000 unemployment dole per annum to the beneficiaries. Not to be left behind in the pre-poll math, SP president Akhilesh Yadav also announced to provide free power up to 300 units to all households. Yadav promised ₹25 lakh ex-gratia to the kin of the farmers who died during the recent protest against the central farm laws. Meanwhile, Congress has promised to give smartphones and electric two-wheelers to girls if the grand old party forms the next UP Government after more than three decades of political wilderness in the State. Moreover, the party has talked about increasing pension for widows and senior citizens, increasing honorarium for ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) and Anganwadi workers, free bus travel for women, three free gas cylinders a year, etc.

Interestingly, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) has promised to double the ex gratia payment under PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana from ₹6,000 to ₹12,000 if it forms the next Government. Meanwhile, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is yet to release its official poll manifesto, which the party calls 'Sankalp Patra'. The party had gained immensely from its pre-poll promise of crop loans waiver in the run-up to the 2017 UP elections. After coming to power, the BJP government of Yogi Adityanath, in its first cabinet meeting on April 4, 2017, had approved to waive crop loans worth almost ₹36,000 crore, projected to benefit 8.6 million small and marginal farmers. The flagship crop loan waiver scheme was hailed as a game changer for the party. In its recent Supplementary Budget of nearly ₹8,500 crore for 2021-22, the Yogi Government allocated about ₹4,000 crore for the bottom of the pyramid sections, viz., unorganised workers, including farm labourers, sharecroppers, and street vendors to be distributed as social security payment or doles. Besides, ₹670 crore was allocated for senior citizens and farmers' pension schemes, wherein their payout was increased from ₹500 to ₹1,000 a month. This is estimated to benefit more than 5.6 million elderly persons in the state. The financial grant to the differently-abled was doubled and the honorarium of shikshamitras hiked by ₹2,000 a month. Freebies do represent the unfulfilled aspirations and needs of the society, while on the other, they cast a taint on the tendency of pre-poll allurements to gain advantage at the hustings. A discerning voter is expected to make an informed choice before casting his/her vote to keep the Indian democracy healthy and vibrant beyond the narrow boundary of pre-poll guarantees.


(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

# Sardar Patel's rationale for a permanent civil service

## Principles of new public management are needed to make administration facilitatory, rather than regulatory, to private enterprise and capital



RAKESH SARWAL



MRINALI DUDI

(Sarwal is Additional Secretary, NITI. Dudi is an intern at NITI. The views expressed are personal.)

As early as October, 1945, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had a resolution adopted at conference of Congress Chief Ministers authorising the setting up of two all-India services, the IAS and the IPS, to succeed the ICS (Indian Civil Service). Despite oppositions, Sardar Patel stood his ground for varied reasons - avoid an administrative gap and to retain the steel frame for a diverse republic as India.

A permanent civil servant is not bound to any political party or leader, its autonomous nature makes it stand unique and therefore work independently for the welfare of society hence, is also accountable to the Constitution of India on which they take oath of allegiance. Patel's public acknowledgment of the patriotism and dedication

of public servants and his expression of trust in them, gave them the self-assurance without which they could not have given their best.

The services need to shed the colonial legacy that makes officers act as the rulers rather than as public servants. Rapid Assessment System (RAS) in which a generic technology-enabled platform is used for seeking real-time citizen feedback on public services have been tried in many countries with success.

A lack of articulated and consistent goals, mismatch

between authority and accountability which loosens the scope for fixing responsibility, duplication of roles, absence of a system of strong incentives or disincentives, in-adequate delegation or excessive discretion - all these bring slack in the system. Lean, accountable, empowered work teams with clear responsibilities are likely to deliver better results, as in the case of Elections, Census or disaster relief.

Interference by or collusion with politicians can come in the way of delivery of services as per rules. Sometimes, cases of transfer and posting receive greater attention that those of public policy. Tenures of officers are one indicator of the flux in the dynamic systems of governance. For example, tenures of Chief Medical Officers range from eight months to three

years across the States. While political engagement and participation in governance is essential for ensuring accountability, transparency and garnering citizens' perceptions, the bounds and norms of acceptable conduct are social constructs built over time.

The New Public Management (NPM) in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavian countries represented an attempt to make the public sector more businesslike and in order to increase the performance of government, private sector management principles borrowed. It seeks to borrow from the private sector principles of flexibility, transparency, minimum Government, de-bureaucratisation, decentralisation and market orientation. The main principle of NPM is to empha-

size economy, efficiency, and effectiveness by downplaying the importance of regulation. It is not surprising that these countries score high on governance effectiveness index.

Today's government is trying to inject more specialists into the bureaucracy through lateral hires at the level of Director and Joint Secretary. Globally, countries like US, Belgium, UK, Australia have in fact institutionalized this practice as a part of their system. Debates around lateral hires have centered around perceived lack of rigour in the selection procedure. It is feared that due to the pressure of a fixed time contract, the lateral hires might not express or put forward their views freely in an unbiased manner.

There is no doubt that India's permanent civil service

needs reform. This is vital to the country's progress and development. While the country needs talent and expertise to man specialized assignment, Patel's ideals of permanent, unbiased, independent administrators who can work for the betterment of country with a loyalty towards the people and commitment to rule of law should be kept alive. The ideas of the Constitution makers need to be imbibed in the process of lateral hires. In addition, principles of new public management need to be mainstreamed by amending our regulations to make the administration facilitatory, rather than regulatory to private enterprise and capital. This way the administration will be strengthened and made more relevant to current requirements.



# Texas crisis exposes Pakistan's tentacles



NANDINI SINGH

There are no US-Nato forces in Afghanistan and rogue elements have the entire country to themselves to train Pak-backed militants, suicide bombers

The Texas hostage crisis at a synagogue that US President Joe Biden called an 'act of terror' has been resolved with the release of four hostages and the death of the hostage-taker but the dreadful situation has brought back the focus on Al Qaeda and its Pakistan connection.

The hostage taker identified by FBI as a British citizen named Malik Faisal Akram demanded for release of a terrorist in the US prison called 'Lady Al Qaeda', who is a Pakistan-born neuroscientist, Aafia Siddiqui. The case of the so-called Lady Al Qaeda has exposed links of Pakistan government, Al Qaeda and Taliban as Islamabad has joined forces with the terror groups to seek release of Aafia Siddiqui from the US prison.

The hostage-taker, Malik Faisal Akram, who stormed a Texas synagogue on the Sabbath and was holding hostages before he was shot and killed was demanding the release of 'Lady Al Qaeda', who is serving 86 years in a federal prison less than 30 miles from where the hostage standoff took place for attempting to murder US soldiers in Afghanistan.

Siddiqui was arrested in Afghanistan in 2008 with cyanide and plans to attack the Brooklyn Bridge and Empire State Building. Later she was extradited to the US and convicted in 2010. The demand for her release has brought a number of terror and jihadists groups together along with Pakistan establishment, who have been plotting or negotiating to seek Siddiqui's release. Terror groups in Pakistan, Afghanistan, who have taken US citizens hostage have tried to negotiate with the US Government offering they would free US citizens in return for Siddiqui's release.

This curious case of Aafia has also exposed how Al Qaeda, Taliban and Pakistan government are operating hand in glove with one another. Their causes are common and they work in collaboration with each other keeping the terror network very much activated.

Aafia was born in Karachi, Sindh in Pakistan to a Sunni family and later went to the US to study. Aafia returned to Pakistan from America for a time following the 9/11 attacks and again in 2003 during the war in Afghanistan. Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, a Pakistani Islamist militant and the principal architect of the 9/11 attacks, held by the US at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, named Aafia as a courier and financier for Al-Qaeda. She was later placed on the FBI Seeking Information- Terrorism list and remains the only woman to have been featured on this list.

Pakistanis view her as the 'national symbol of honor and victimization' and the Pakistani news media have called her trial a 'farce' and 'politicized' from the start. In July 2019, while visiting Washington DC, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan suggested Siddiqui should be exchanged for



PAKISTAN HAS BEEN DISOWNING TERRORISTS OF PAK ORIGIN WHENEVER THEY ARE ARRESTED IN OTHER COUNTRIES BUT NOT SO IN THE CASE OF AAFIA. IN AUGUST 2009, PAKISTANI PRIME MINISTER YUSUF RAZA GILANI MET WITH SIDDIQUI'S SISTER AT HIS RESIDENCE AND ASSURED HER THAT PAKISTAN WOULD SEEK HER RELEASE FROM THE US

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)



Shakil Afridi, a Pakistani doctor accused of helping the Americans confirm the identity of Osama bin Laden, in advance of the raid where he was killed.

Earlier, the Pakistan embassy in the US hired a three-person defence team to supplement Al Qaeda terrorist Aafia's two existing public defenders during her trial. The Pakistani government paid \$2 million for the services of three lawyers to assist in the defense of Siddiqui during the trial. This is a curious case, where a Government has so openly come out to support an Al Qaeda terrorist exposing its own nefarious designs, how Pakistan harbours Al Qaeda militants and uses them too, all the while giving false assurances to the Americans that it is helping them to finish Al Qaeda, which is very much active and calling shots more after lying low for some time until the Taliban consolidated its takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

Terror groups carried out a number of attacks to take revenge for Aafia's imprisonment, which again exposes whether it is Al Qaeda, Taliban or Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan or Haqqani network or JeM; they all are one when it comes to jihad or targeting foreign nationals or people of other religions. They join forces with covert support from Pakistani establishment to target whom they brand as an 'enemy of Islam.' According to a video released by Hakimullah Mehsud, head of the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) at the time, the 2009 Camp Chapman attack in Afghanistan that killed seven CIA officers was partly in revenge for Aafia's imprisonment. The 2010 Times Square car-bombing attempt

occurred one day after Mehsud released another video promising to avenge Siddiqui. The perpetrator of the attempt was Faisal Shahzad, a recently naturalized Pakistan-born citizen who had contacts with Jaish-e-Muhammad and Hakimullah Mehsud.

The Taliban threatened to execute US soldier Bowe Bergdahl, whom they had captured in 2009 in retaliation for Lady Al Qaeda - Siddiqui's conviction. Bergdahl was later released in 2014 in exchange for five Guantanamo Bay detainees. In September 2010, the Taliban kidnapped Linda Norgrove, a Scottish aid worker in Afghanistan, and Taliban commanders insisted Norgrove would be handed over only in exchange for Siddiqui. But later Norgrove was accidentally killed. In July 2011, then-deputy of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Waliur Rehman, announced that they wanted to swap Siddiqui for two Swiss citizens abducted in Balochistan. The Swiss couple escaped in March 2012.

In December 2011, al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri demanded the release of Siddiqui in exchange for Warren Weinstein, an American aid worker kidnapped in Pakistan in August 2011. Weinstein was accidentally killed in a drone strike in January 2015.

Al Qaeda, Taliban, TTP and a host of other affiliated outfits have been kidnapping Americans, Europeans to make an exchange offer for Siddiqui's release and the recent hostage taking in a Texas synagogue is just another incident in the long series of events for several years. Given Pakistan's insistence on release of Siddiqui, now questions are being raised whether

all the kidnappings, hostage takings for Siddiqui was at the behest of Pakistan or whether Pakistan gave a tacit approval for the same? Pakistan's role in these terror activities has become more and more suspect.

Pakistan has been disowning terrorists of Pak origin whenever they are arrested in other countries but not so in the case of Aafia. In August 2009, Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani met with Siddiqui's sister at his residence and assured her that Pakistan would seek her release from the US. In 2010, President Asif Ali Zardari requested Richard Holbrooke, US Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, that the U.S. considers repatriating Siddiqui to Pakistan under the Pakistan-US Prisoner Exchange Agreement. Siddiqui, who had links to al Qaeda and the banned jihadi group Jaish-e-Muhammad has received support not only from Islamic terror groups but Pakistan Government too and this in itself is a clear sign of hobnobbing between jihadists and Pakistan.

The latest hostage crisis at a Texas synagogue and number of similar incidents in Af-Pak demanding release of Lady Al Qaeda must be taken as a warning; the threat of Al Qaeda remains imminent, Taliban takeover of Afghanistan would only worsen it. Now there are no US-Nato forces in the region to check these rogue elements and they have the entire Afghanistan to themselves to train militants and suicide bombers backed by Pakistan government and ISI; this is a dangerous scenario and the sooner the world takes note the better.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

I REQUEST STUDENTS THAT RAILWAYS IS YOUR PROPERTY, PLEASE DO NOT DESTROY IT. WE WILL SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS.  
— RAILWAYS MINISTER  
ASHWINI VAISHNAW



NO AMOUNT OF CONDEMNATION IS ENOUGH FOR THE REPRESSION OF YOUTH ASSOCIATED WITH RRB NTPC AND GROUP D EXAMINATIONS.  
— CONGRESS LEADER  
PRIYANKA GANDHI

# Budget should focus on bridging widened inequality in economy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming Budget should focus on creating jobs and bridging the widened inequality in the economy besides accelerating growth, former RBI Governor D Subbarao said on Thursday while observing that given the continuing need to raise spending on education, health and infrastructure, there is not much leeway for tax cuts.

Subbarao also opined that experience shows export promotion behind protectionist walls is seldom competitive, so there is a case for reducing the tariffs. "Accelerating growth is the objective of every Budget as it should be of this one. But this Budget should pay special attention to bridging the widened inequality in the economy," he told PTI in an interview.

While noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused enormous distress to the low-income segments who operate in the informal economy, Subbarao said the upper income segments have not only been able to protect their incomes but have in fact been able to grow their savings and wealth.

Citing the latest World



Inequality Report which had said that India is among the most unequal countries in the world, he said," Such wide inequality is not only morally wrong and politically corrosive, but it will also dent our long-term growth prospects," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget 2022-23 in Parliament on February 1. "We need job intensive growth. If there is a theme for this Budget, it should be jobs," he said.

The former RBI Governor pointed out that jobs have been lost because of the growth slowdown and also because of the shift in activity from the

labour-intensive informal sector to the capital-intensive formal sector. "Growth is necessary to generate jobs, but not sufficient," he said, adding that there is a need for stronger emphasis on improving the ease of doing business through governance reforms so that investment becomes a promising option for both domestic and foreign investors.

Subbarao pointed out that raising the level of exports is good not just for balance of payments reasons but also from a jobs perspective because export production is labour intensive.

"Experience shows that export production behind protectionist walls is seldom competitive.

There is a case therefore for rolling down the tariffs," he said.

Asked if there is any scope for reduction in taxes in the upcoming Budget as that will provide some relief to the poor, Subbarao said as per media reports, this year's tax collections will be better than the budgeted target which, he said, will be largely offset by lower privatization proceeds and higher expenditure on food and fertilizer subsidies.

"So, the net positive impact on the fiscal deficit is likely to be marginal," he said.

Also, Subbarao noted that the tax buoyancy the country saw this year will dissipate next year as the informal sector revives. "Besides, given the continuing need to raise spending on education, health and infrastructure, I don't believe there is much leeway for tax cuts," he argued.

Asked whether the government should continue with stimulus measures in order to stimulate growth, Subbarao said in the last Budget, the finance minister committed to a fiscal consolidation path of reducing the fiscal deficit to 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025/26. "I believe it's important to operate within that space.

Sensex sinks 581 pts on weak global cue; Nifty below 17,150

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Equity benchmark Sensex tumbled 581 points on Thursday, in tandem with a global selloff after the US Federal Reserve signalled policy tightening from March.

The 30-share index ended 581.21 points or 1.00 per cent lower at 57,276.94. Similarly, the NSE Nifty plunged 167.80 points or 0.97 per cent to 17,110.15.

HCL Tech was the top loser in the Sensex pack, skidding over 4 per cent, followed by Tech Mahindra Dr Reddy's, Wipro, TCS, Titan and Infosys.

On the other hand, Axis Bank, SBI, Maruti and Kotak Bank were among the gainers.

The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday indicated that there is ample room to raise interest rates to fight inflation.

Investors fear foreign capital outflows from emerging markets like India after rate hikes in the US.

Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul and Tokyo ended sharply lower on the hawkish Fed stance.

# Cylinders used for filling non-toxic gases, liquids to be tamper proof

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has mandated that all high pressure cylinders and cryogenic containers used for filling non-toxic, non-flammable gases and liquids should have a tamper proof marking that will be easily visible.

The move is aimed at promoting industrial and public safety.

The government has inserted a rule in the Gas Cylinders (Amendment) Rules, 2022. A notification has been issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in this regard.

"All the high pressure cylinders and cryogenic containers used for filling of non-toxic, non-flammable gases and liquids shall have permanent and tamper proof marking in form of Bar Code or RFID or QR code or any means of electronic identification number at conspicuous place on cylinders and containers," the notification said. It also said the cylinders manufactured before the publication of these rules (January 20) shall have these markings, before expiry of six months in case of oxygen cylinders and one year in case of other non-toxic and non-flammable gas cylinders. The time frame would be calculated



**The DPIIT has implemented several reforms to ensure industrial safety in critical premises such as petroleum installations, explosive manufacturing facilities, cylinder filling and storage premises to enhance public safety as well as create an enabling ecosystem for domestic and international investors.**

from the date of publication of these rules.

The DPIIT has implemented several reforms to ensure industrial safety in critical premises such as petroleum installations, explosive manufacturing facilities, cylinder filling and storage premises to enhance public safety as well as create an enabling ecosystem

for domestic and international investors. The Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organization (PESO), an autonomous body under the DPIIT, is in charge of designing and implementing policies and standard operating procedures for the manufacturing, storage, transport and use of explosives, petroleum as well as hazardous chemicals.

## MONEY MATTERS

### Rupee slumps 30 paise to 75.08 against US dollar

Registering its third straight session of loss, the Indian rupee on Thursday depreciated by 30 paise to close at 75.08 (provisional) against the US dollar, tracking the strength of the American currency after a hawkish US Fed policy stance.

Forex traders said muted domestic equities, sustained foreign fund outflows and firm crude oil prices also weighed on the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local currency opened at 75.18 against the greenback and witnessed an intra-day high of 75.07 and a low of 75.31 during the session. The rupee finally settled at 75.08, down by 30 paise over its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee had closed at 74.78 against the US dollar. The forex and equity markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Republic Day. This is the third straight session of loss for the local unit, during which it has declined by 63 paise. Indian rupee depreciated against US dollar on massive risk-off sentiments after the US Fed's hawkish stance," said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities. Fed, as expected, indicated a rate hike in March. Consequently, the dollar rallied following higher treasury yields. At the domestic front, India 10-year benchmark bond yield surged to 6.74 per cent, the highest since 2019, Parmar added.

### Hindustan Zinc CEO elected as acting chairman of IZA



Hindustan Zinc CEO Arun Misra has been elected as the acting chairman of the International Zinc Association (IZA). Misra is the first Indian and Asian to hold this position, according to a statement.

"It is a privilege for me to take on the role of IZA Chair and continue the tradition of excellence of those who came before me," Misra said. "The IZA has an exceptional team of professionals and I look forward to working together to grow global demand for zinc and promoting its essentiality to human health, crop nutrition, sustainable development, and modern life," he added. The International Zinc Association is a non-profit organisation that represents the global zinc industry. Its mission is to advance zinc products and markets via research, development, technology transfer, and communication of the unique attributes that make zinc a sustainable and essential component for life. IZA members produce 60 per cent of global zinc and 80 per cent in the Western hemisphere. IZA has offices across China, Europe, Latin America, North America, India and Southern Africa, with its headquarters in Durham, North Carolina (US). Rahul Sharma, Director-India, IZA, said, "We at IZA-India are extremely happy with Misra being appointed as the Chairman. Being the Industry leader, Misra has a deep understanding of the industry and will accelerate IZA's efforts towards increasing consumption of Zinc globally and making India a self-reliant market for Commodities, specifically Zinc."

### CG Power net profit jumps 28 pc to Rs 546 crore in Dec



CG Power and Industrial Solution on Thursday posted a 28 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 546 crore in the quarter ended December 2021, mainly on the back of higher revenues.

The consolidated net profit of the company was at Rs 425 crore in the quarter ended December 2020, according to a BSE filing. The company's total income increased to Rs 1,558.89 crore in the latest quarter under review from Rs 834.51 crore in the year-ago period. The consolidated results include the performance of the operating subsidiaries in USA (OEI, LLC) and in Sweden, Germany and Netherlands (Drives and Automation Europe) and other non-operating and holding subsidiaries, the filing said. Sales in the latest December quarter were at Rs 1,551 crore as against Rs 820 crore in the year-ago period and profit before tax before exceptional items stood at Rs 174 crore as against Rs 64 crore during the same period. The company completed the long pending sale of land at Kanjurmarg during the December quarter and the entire sale proceeds of Rs 402 crore, including refund of security deposit, have been received.

# NTPC invites bids to set up 3GW energy storage facility in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

State-run power giant NTPC's arm, NTPC Renewable Energy Ltd (NREL), has invited bids for selection of developers for inter-state transmission system (ISTS)-connected energy storage facility of 3,000 MW capacity at any location in India to meet round-the-clock requirement of renewable energy.

NTPC Renewable Energy intends to avail energy storage facility to meet its round-the-clock renewable energy requirement with a wind/solar generation profile under service model through an ISTS-connected energy storage solutions with capacity of 3000 MWh with 500 MW (minimum) at any location in India, as per the bid document.

As per the document, the capacity shall be installed under a Capex mode through Global Competitive Bidding Process (conducted online followed by reverse auction).



After the conclusion of the bidding process, NREL shall enter into an energy storage service agreement on an annual fixed charge basis with the selected bidders for a period of 25 years.

The power generated by any of the RE projects of NTPC/NREL shall be used for the charging of the Energy Storage Service (ESS) project and NREL shall utilize this energy storage facility, on an "On-Demand" basis, suited to its requirements during the

peak and off-peak hours to meets its round-the-clock requirement of renewable energy. The project size will be of minimum 600 MWhr with 100 MW (min) capacity.

The bidders can quote capacities in different combinations like manner 600 MWh with 100 MW (min) capacity or 1200 MWh with 200 MW (min) capacity or 1800 MWh with 300 MW (min) capacity or 2400 MWh with 400 MW (min) capacity or 3000 MWh with 500 MW (min) capacity.

## India's 2021-22 sugar production to rise 2.90 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sugar production in India, the world's second largest producing nation after Brazil, is estimated to increase by 2.90 per cent to 31.9 million tonnes in the ongoing 2021-22 marketing year, according to the first estimate released by the trade body AISTA on Thursday.

With estimated production of 31.9 million tonnes plus opening stock of 8.3 million tonnes with mills, the total availability of sugar in the country is expected to be 40.2 million tonnes in the current marketing year, slightly lower than the previous year, it said.

However, the supply of

sugar in the country would be sufficient to meet the domestic consumption, which is estimated to be at 27 million tonnes in the 2021-22 marketing year, it added.

Sugar marketing year runs from October to September.

In case of exports, the All India Sugar Trade Association (AISTA) said the outbound shipments are estimated to be lower at 6 million tonnes in the current 2021-22 marketing year, as against 7.2 million tonnes in the previous year.

"The actual exports in 2021-22, would depend upon the level of domestic sugar prices vis-a-vis international sugar prices," the trade body noted.

## Deutsche Bank sees biggest annual profit

PNS ■ FRANKFURT

Deutsche Bank reaped its best annual profit in 10 years and said it had put most of its wrenching, years-long restructuring behind it. The bank underlined its progress by announcing a dividend for 2021 and a 300-million euro share buyback to return money to shareholders.

Germany's largest bank said in a statement Thursday that it had already accounted for 97 per cent of its restructuring costs anticipated through end of 2022.

That would be 3 1/2 years since CEO Christian Sewing in July 2019 announced a 7.4 billion-euro (USD 8.3 billion) restructuring that involved cutting overhead costs and



thousands of jobs in an attempt to end years of uneven profits and large losses from run-ins with regulatory authorities.

The bank had just under 83,000 employees at year-end 2021, down from 91,737 at the

end of 2018.

Sewing's plan involved shedding billions in risky investments, leaving less profitable lines of business where the bank was not a dominant competitor. The capital release unit charged with running

down holdings no longer seen as parts of the bank's core activities had shrunk to 28 billion euros, down from 34 billion in 2020 and remained ahead of its 2022 goal.

Costs for restructuring such as severance for employees being let go continued to weigh on earnings into the last months of the year, hitting fourth-quarter earnings with charges of USD 456 million.

Full-year net profit rose fourfold from the year before to 2.5 billion euros, the highest since 2011. Revenues rose 6 per cent to 25.4 billion euros.

For the fourth quarter, the bank managed to turn in a net quarterly profit of 82 million euros despite higher remaining restructuring expenses including employee severance.

# India's renewable energy sector can employ 1 mn

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's renewable energy sector has the potential to employ around one million people by 2030, and most of the new jobs would be generated by small-scale renewable energy projects, according to a study.

India's renewable energy sector could potentially employ around one million people by 2030, which would be ten times more than the existing workforce of an estimated 1.1 lakh employed by the sector, according to an independent study released on Thursday by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Skill Council for Green Jobs (SCGG).

The study "India's Expanding Clean Energy Workforce" highlighted that



most of the new jobs would be generated by small-scale renewable energy projects such as rooftop solar and mini and micro-grid systems compared

to utility or large-scale projects like solar parks.

The CEEW-NRDC-SCGG analysis also highlighted the adverse impact of the pandem-

ic on employment in the renewable energy sector. In comparison to 12,400 new workers employed in the sector in FY19, only 5,200 new

workers were employed in FY20 and 6400 were employed in FY21, it said.

In FY21, a majority of the new workers were employed in the rooftop solar segment where annual capacity additions grew by nine per cent over FY20 and accounted for 1.4 GW capacity, it added.

The study further noted that India has successfully trained 78,000 people under the Suryamitra training program, between 2015 and 2017, to improve the availability of skilled workers for clean energy projects.

"The upcoming Union Budget must especially focus on scaling up rooftop solar, mini and micro grid systems, and domestic solar manufacturing to maximise the employment opportunities in the sector," Dr Arunabha Ghosh, CEO, CEEW said.

## Wockhardt Q3 consolidated net profit Rs 1.77 cr

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Drug maker Wockhardt on Thursday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 1.77 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2021.

The company had posted a net profit of Rs 32.4 crore in the same period of 2020-21 fiscal.

Income from continuing operations rose to Rs 853.89 crore in the third quarter as against Rs 764.02 crore in the October-December period of the previous fiscal, Wockhardt said in a regulatory filing.

The company said it plans to bring in a rights issue to raise upto Rs 1,000 crore.

# Spiced coffee for chilly evenings



- Pumpkin puree: 3 tsp
- Honey: 15 ml
- Nutmeg (pinch of)
- Cinnamon: 1 stick
- Whipped cream

## How to make:

- In a pan take almond milk, honey, pumpkin puree, cinnamon stick and nutmeg and boil it in medium heat.
- Once the milk starts boiling, remove it from the fire and also remove the cinnamon stick. Pour milk mixture into a French press and just push and pull the plunger 6-8 times to get nice silky and smooth texture foam.

## Vegan spicy pumpkin Cappuccino

A vegan and healthier option for one of the most famed recipes which you should try making at home this winter season. It's a tasty, delicious and very simple recipe to give a festive feeling.

### What you need:

- Espresso (also can try Moka pot coffee): 30 ml
- Almond milk: 200 ml

- Take a shot of espresso or Moka pot coffee into a serving mug, pour the milk with foam over espresso.
- Make sure you get a thick layer of milk foam top, if you can't manage to get it by pouring then just scoop it with a help of spoon.
- For garnish, add whipped cream on the top and sprinkle some freshly grated nutmeg.

## Spice Latte

This simple diet-friendly latte is flavourful, easy to make, and with an amazing aroma.

### What you need:

- French press coffee: 200ml
- Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
- Cloves: 3
- Small cinnamon stick: 3

- Water: 60 ml
- Demerara Sugar for sweetness
- Milk: 200 ml
- Whipped cream: optional

### How to make:

- Combine the water and spices in a saucepan, cover and simmer for 3-4 minutes.
- Add the demerara, milk and

bring to the boil. Remove from the heat and stir in the coffee. Strain to remove the spices and pour the coffee into a coffee mug or glass.

- For more creamer options, add a swirl of whipped cream on the top, sprinkle some demerara and cinnamon.



## Spicy Mexican Mocha



This coffee is the perfect combination of strong, freshly brewed coffee, chocolate, and spices. You'll love the sweetness of chocolate and spice flavours of cinnamon and cayenne pepper with the richness of whipped cream on the top.

### What you need:

- French press coffee: 200 ml
- Pinch of cinnamon.
- Pinch of cayenne pepper
- 200 ml half-and-half (simply a mixture of equal parts whole milk and cream).
- Chocolate syrup: 15 ml
- Demerara: 2 sachet
- Vanilla syrup: 10ml
- Cinnamon sticks, whipped cream, chocolate shavings, optional, garnish

### How to make:

- Add the coffee grounds and cinnamon together while brewing in a french press.
- While the coffee is brewing, bring the half-and-half, chocolate syrup, and demerara to a gentle simmer in a small saucepan. Make sure to cook on low heat so you don't burn the mixture.
- Remove from the heat and add the brewed coffee to the milk mixture. Whisk in the vanilla extract/ flavour.
- Pour the coffee into Mug and top with whipped cream and garnish with a sprinkle of cinnamon or chocolate shavings, and add a cinnamon stick, if desired. Enjoy immediately.

## FUN

### ARCHIE



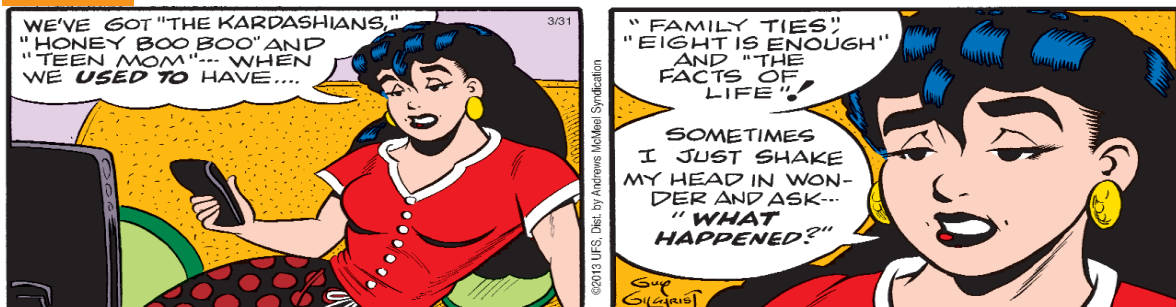
### CALVIN AND HOBBS



### GARFIELD



### NANCY



### GINGER MEGGS



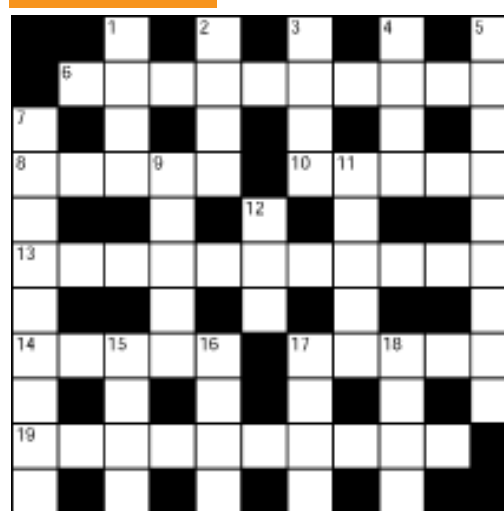
### REALITY CHECK



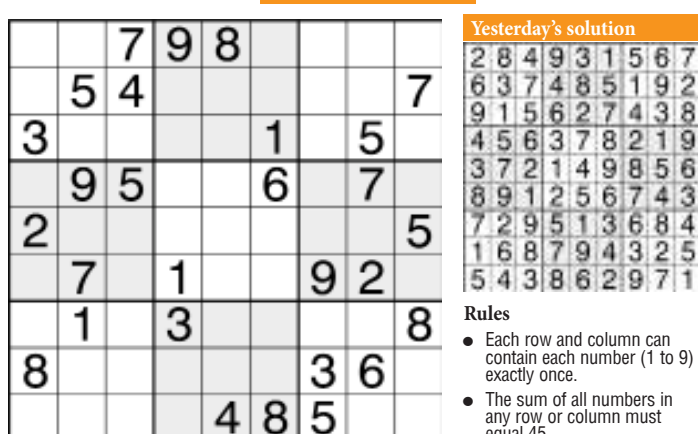
### SPEED BUMP



### CROSSWORD



### SUDOKU



### ACROSS

- Words that ask you politely to come
- Arm joint
- The head of a city council
- Very tall city buildings
- From Ireland
- These birds honk
- A person who has seen something happen and can give evidence in court

### DOWN

- A round handle
- The scene from a window
- Do damage to
- Very small
- Took clothes off



# Dibyendu Bhattacharya looks forward to better days

SHREYA SRIKONDA

Dibyendu Bhattacharya, who you've previously seen in *Delhi Crime*, *Undekhi*, *B.A Pass* and many more as a supporting character, now weaves his magic again in the much-awaited *Rocket Boys* that's soon to hit OTT screens. He talks about his excitement for the show's release on February 4, saying, "Everyone has worked really hard on the show. I'm very emotionally attached to the series as well and I'm glad that it's finally seeing the light of day."

The show has been repeatedly postponed because of the Pandemic, but it's finally going to be streaming on SonyLIV as another one of its original projects after the extraordinary success of *Scam 1992*.

"*Rocket Boys* was the ideal set for me. A filmmaking set is like a playground, there's openness and attention to detail — you read and re-read before shooting and then improvise during the shoot—there's a give and take with all the people on set and it was very fun to work on this particular set. A lot of my favourite actors and filmmakers were involved in this project, so it was a wonderful experience," the actor says.

*Rocket Boys* is based on life events, the series is a story of Homi J Bhaba and Vikram Sarabhai, the men behind India's nuclear energy and space programs. The trailer of the show went viral recently. Dibyendu plays the role of Raza Mehdi, a scientist. He mentions that though the show is based on events that took place in real life, Raza Mehdi is a completely fictional character.

He explains, "Raza is the representative of many scientists. It's

a very important character as he plays a role in propelling the story forward. In filmmaking, you have to take creative liberties for the overall flow of storytelling."

"I am an actor who enjoys every sort of role. If you see my body of work, you'll see that I've worked in every kind of genre. By the grace of God, no one's ever given me a role I didn't enjoy. I've had fun with all of them so far. But I do find every role difficult. To identify with a character who is a completely different person from me, is always a challenge- and I love the challenge," he says, before talking about how the pandemic stalled many of his projects, but 2022 seems to have a lot in store. He goes on to talk about how he's looking forward to a better world. "I'm really looking forward to the better days. We could freely meet people, go around town, shoot without fear — those were better times."

He says that OTT is exciting with the huge amount of choice it presents it's viewers with.

"It's not like the movies where you can only get a ticket for something and have to sit through the whole movie,

there's truly something for everyone in OTT and frankly speaking I really enjoy it. Along with the Audie, there's more things for filmmakers to play with. There's more topics to work on, and more formats that are exciting. This has brought in a lot of new actors and directors and everyone is busy! Earlier, directors had to spend lots of time getting everything together to make a movie but now — everyone's always at work! It's wonderful," he signs off on a positive note.



Rocket Boys was the ideal set for me. A filmmaking set is like a playground, there's openness and attention to detail — you read and re-read before shooting and then improvise during the shoot—there's a give and take with all the people on set and it was very fun to work on this particular set. A lot of my favourite actors and filmmakers were involved in this project, so it was a wonderful experience.



## Do not pass off abdominal pain!

Omicron can affect your gut apart from the upper respiratory tract and the abdominal symptoms are becoming common in people infected with the new strain. Some of the new symptoms of Covid-19 include nausea, abdominal ache, vomiting, loss of appetite and diarrhoea.

"People may initially present with abdominal symptoms without any respiratory complaints. The presenting complaints could be back ache, abdominal ache, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite and diarrhoea. This could be due to Omicron infecting the gut mucosa and the resulting inflammation," says Dr Manoj Goel, Director, Pulmonology, Fortis Memorial Research Institute.

The doctor also says that even though double-vaccinated people are also coming forward with complaints of abdominal issues, these symptoms are not adverse and not of much concern.

"Do not pass off abdominal pain, nausea and loss of appetite as a normal flu, if you have symptoms, isolate yourself. Avoid self-medication including so-called safe Ayurvedic treatment without consulting your doctor. Try and maintain good hydration, eat frequent, small, wholesome and light meals including nuts. Avoid spicy food and alcohol. Symptoms if mild might not be of concern," says Dr Goel, adding, "One should test for Covid if you have abdominal complaints even without respiratory symptoms or fever as this could be due to Omicron infection."

# Building blocks

Architecture is more than just throwing together raw materials such as concrete, glass, and wood. The concept of architecture has changed over the years, and today, architecture is a way for the designer to play around with various elements while honing their art and practice.

Architecture is a complex discipline that is an amalgamation of design, art, math and science to arrive at a balanced compendium of form and function. The monuments of India are some of the world's most stunning works of architecture. From the Red Fort to Hampi, everything that our forefathers and ancestors built has been a source of great pride. But due to pollution, natural weathering, and poor civic sense, the monuments have been facing a preservation crisis. However, with the help of architects, and the way they are devising new plans to preserve the monuments, there is an excellent chance that these pieces of our collective history will be standing tall for future generations. Architects have been employing stratification techniques, logistic recognition, and using reconstruction methods to preserve the monuments in all their glory.

We got in touch with four architects to learn how architecture has transformed over the years in our country.

Manish Dikshit, the founding partner of Aum Architects believes that architecture is a way to look at human history as a whole. "It reflects the change in needs and thinking patterns of a community, which becomes even more critical when one is looking to contextualise their existence. The power of good architecture must not be underestimated as it helps in connecting people while protecting the environment. Since the awareness and need for sustainable architecture have been expressed by experts, architects have been working tirelessly to help fit extremely utilitarian buildings while expressing the need to have carbon-neutral structures. We, as architects, are constantly looking to upgrade systems and functions, so it is fulfilling for us to deliver highly concise designs," says Manish.

Meanwhile, Sumit Dhawan, the founder and principal architect at Cityspace '82 Architects

is of the view that architecture is synonymous with endurance and longevity. He explains that buildings and structures made by man must be long-lasting while being able to withstand the rapidly changing human times. "A building needs to be both functional and have perfectly-balanced aesthetics. It also needs to be expectant of the human changes that will inevitably come as time passes. Architecture is also becoming more community-based. So, long gone are the days wherein architects would create lofty structures that would inevitably intimidate folks. Simple and highly utilitarian buildings are the new vogue. We cater to a myriad of community-based activities that serve to increase its value," he shares.

Anil Badan, founder and architect at Studio B Architects, states that architecture is all about being accessible. "From simple structural incorporations like ramps and banisters that would help the elderly or the disabled to buildings designed with the help of logic and common sense, we firmly believe in having architecture made for the public and its people. So, in a way, architecture is all about improving the lives of people. Architecture also deals with the simplest forms of human equations, wherein it has the capacity to change lives, enrich human experiences and create a context for human existence to move forward. With the advent of new materials or finding new methods of using old, reliable materials, the art of architecture has changed by leaps and bounds," adds Anil.

In conclusion, Anurag Pashine, the principal architect from Salankar Pashine & Associates, recommends that design has the potential to change the way we work. Explaining his view with an example, he says, "An office with a scorching and sweltering area with poor ventilation and lack of windows will impact the productivity of employees as they will not be able to focus on their work. With the help of new technology and new materials being discovered every day, this office conundrum can easily be solved with proper glass facades that allow ventilation and an HVAC system that will eventually help air circulation. Taking one element out of the equation and working on it so that it is better

can lead to changing human lives for the better. While architects aim to create user-friendly buildings, aesthetics also play an essential role in attracting people to the facets, so it is more like a delicate game of Jenga that needs to balance various elements."

At the same time, it is also essential to recognise the fact that architecture and human lives are constantly in touch with each other. While recognising that architecture is used to shape and help propel human lives, human interactions also aid in shaping architecture. Reflecting the changing needs and wants of the communities, architecture ultimately helps in the proliferation of urbanisation of various rural areas as well.





PTI ■ NEW DELHI

**Y**oung leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi was on Wednesday rewarded with a maiden India call-up for the upcoming Twenty20 series against the West Indies, while senior wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav also returned to the white-ball setup after a knee surgery.

Skipper Rohit Sharma on the day cleared his fitness test and as reported by PTI on January 17, was back in-charge for the series that starts with ODIs in Ahmedabad from February 6.

Among senior players, Ravichandran Ashwin has been dropped from the white-ball team, while Washington Sundar, who missed the South Africa series due to COVID-19, was back in the squad. "Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammad Shami have been rested from the series,"

BCCI secretary Jay Shah was quoted as saying in a press release.

While Ashwin is believed to be

injured and out for six weeks, BCCI statement didn't mention his injury status so it can be concluded that even if he is fit, he wouldn't have been picked after an indifferent white-ball series in South Africa.

The other notable comeback has been Baroda batter Deepak Hooda, who had changed states and did wonderfully well for Rajasthan in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy as well as Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Hooda is being looked as a potential finisher in shorter formats and for now in the ODI team. He was part of the Nidahas Trophy squad in Sri Lanka four seasons back but didn't get a game.

"If you go and look at Hooda's performances in white-ball cricket this season, most of his runs have come when the team has been in trouble. That shows he can take pressure. The selectors would like to see more of M

Shahrukh Khan, who is a good talent. There are a lot of matches and if he has a good IPL, who knows, he will

**"Ravindra Jadeja is undergoing his final stage of recovery post his knee injury and will not be available for the ODIs and T20Is. Axar Patel will be available for the T20Is," Shah added**

be right there," a BCCI source informed PTI on condition of anonymity.

However it is understood that Himachal Pradesh captain Rishi Dhawan wasn't in consideration as his bowling is friendly medium pace and can't be seen as a finisher in

white-ball cricket.

It is also learnt that vice-captain KL Rahul will be available from the second ODI onwards as he is set to miss the first 50-over game due to personal reasons.

"Ravindra Jadeja is undergoing his final stage of recovery post his knee injury and will not be available for the ODIs and T20Is. Axar Patel will be available for the T20Is," Shah added.

Bishnoi has been one of the finds of the Indian Premier League for the Punjab outfit and has been picked up by new franchise Lucknow Super Giants from the drafts for the next IPL. In 42 T20 games, he has 49 wickets at a great economy rate of 6.63. In 17 List A games, he has 24 wickets and an economy rate of 5.48.

He primarily bowls googlies which is his stock delivery and occasionally

bowls leg-breaks. With Kuldeep, Yuzvendra Chahal and Bishnoi, India is again going back to the trust-ed formula of wrist spin which gave

them lot of success between 2017 to 2019.

Bhuvneshwar Kumar has been dropped from the ODI squad but retained for the T20Is while former skipper Virat Kohli featured in both the teams.

It is understood that Kuldeep, who had lost his mojo in the Kohli-Ravi Shastri era, has been called back as the current team management and selectors feel that he has the X-factor to contribute to the team's cause.

He underwent a knee surgery in September last year.

Avesh Khan and Harshal Patel, who were part of the New Zealand T20 Internationals are predictably back as reported by PTI.

The six-match series against the West Indies will feature three ODIs starting in Ahmedabad from February 6, followed by as many T20 Internationals in Kolkata.

Due to COVID-19 protocols, the BCCI has curtailed the number of venues from six cities to two.

## Roach returns to West Indies squad



PTI ■ ST JOHN'S (ANTIGUA)

**S**easoned pacer Kemar Roach and young all-rounder Nkrumah Bonner have been recalled to the West Indies ODI squad for the three-match series in India beginning February 6. Roach, who has not played any List A cricket since his last ODI in 2019, has made the return with West Indies great Desmond Haynes picking him in his first squad selection since taking over as lead selector. Six additions have been made to the squad, to be led by Kieron Pollard, that lost to Ireland at home. The ODIs against India will be played at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on

February 6, 9 and 11.

The T20Is will be played at Eden Gardens in Kolkata on February 16, 18 and 20 and the Caribbean squad for that is expected to be announced on Friday. Besides the experienced Roach, the 22-year-old Bonner, a middle-order batter whose last ODI appearance was exactly a year ago, and Brandon King, an opener, have been recalled to the squad.

The 27-year-old King's last one-day outing in national colours was back in 2020. Roach has so far played 92 ODIs with 124 wickets. Bonner made his ODI debut in Bangladesh a year ago and has so far played three matches, while King has appeared in four matches

in this format.

"Kemar Roach is one of our leading fast bowlers and we believe we need bowlers upfront to get early wicket, and Kemar, with an economy rate of five, is certainly good enough to play. "Over the last few years, Nkrumah Bonner's cricket has come on leaps and bounds and we believe he should be given an opportunity to play in the 50-over format," said Haynes in a statement."

The series will be part of the ICC ODI Super League and the West Indies will have the opportunity to win points to be one of the top seven teams, excluding hosts India, to gain automatic qualification for the 2023 World Cup.

## Powell's 107 leads West Indies over England by 20 runs



AP ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

**R**ovman Powell hit 10 sixes among his 107 runs from 53 balls to lead West Indies to a 20-run victory over England and a 2-1 lead in the five-match Twenty20 series.

Powell, brought in for Odean Smith, formed the backbone of the home side's 224 for five, with Nicholas Pooran clubbing 70 off 43 deliveries. England finished at 202-9.

Tom Banton gave England hope of pulling off its third-highest chase ever with a 39-ball 73 but his dismissal left the tourists needing 96 from 45 deliveries before Phil Salt kept its flickering hopes alive.

Salt, one of three T20 debutants alongside George Garton and Harry Brook, brought the equation down to 36 in an over, playing the first two deliveries for six en route to a 22-ball 50 before being bowled.

England was captained by Moeen Ali because of a slight quad injury to Eoin Morgan.

The final two matches are on Saturday and Sunday, also in Bridgetown.

## NZC moves all games against Indian women to Queenstown

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

**T**he Indian women's team will play all its six upcoming matches against New Zealand in Queenstown as NZC on Thursday announced a revised schedule to reduce chances of a COVID-19 outbreak.

The Indian women's team, which is already in New Zealand, is now scheduled to play all five ODIs and a T20I, starting February 9 at John Davies Oval in Queenstown.

The bilateral series, which is key for India ahead of the World Cup in March-April, was earlier scheduled to begin with the one-off T20I at McLean Park in Napier followed by the first ODI at the same venue two days later.

The Saxton Oval in Nelson was to host the second and third ODIs on February 14 and 16, with the final two ODIs to be played in Queenstown on February 22 and 24.

Other changes in the schedule announced by NZC include the South Africa men's side remaining in Christchurch for the entire duration of its visit, playing both its scheduled Tests at Hagley Oval rather than



decamping to Wellington for the second match, as initially scheduled.

Australia's three T20s against the New Zealand men's side will now be hosted in Napier (subject to MIQ availability), and the Netherlands men's tour is set to be split between Mount Maunganui (one T20 and one ODI) and Hamilton (two ODIs). All matches have been kept on originally-scheduled days. The changes in the venues is aimed to cut down on domestic travel and the increased likelihood of exposure to the Omicron variant of COVID-19.

"These risk mitigations

are based on avoiding known Covid-19 hotspots, and include limiting air travel, limiting accommodation transfers and, essentially, operating in safer environments," NZC chief executive David White said in a statement.

"We know the more domestic flights we have, and the more movement there is between hotels, the greater the chance of a match or even a series being put at risk," he added.

White added the intent is to explore the concept of allowing multiple pods, each of no more than 100 spectators, in venues in accordance with government guidelines.

# Tough road awaits Kuldeep, Harbhajan wants Team India to 'stick by'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

**W**hen Kuldeep Yadav had gone for a skier during a Kolkata Knight Riders practice session in the UAE last September, little did he know that within seconds his world would come crashing down with a twisted knee.

Those present at the Dubai training facility were horrified seeing his condition as he lay there writhing in pain, waiting to be stretched out.

In a week's time, he underwent a major knee surgery in Mumbai, which cast doubts on how long it would take for him to get fit for competitive cricket. He visited Mathura with his family on Thursday to offer

prayers on his comeback, for Kuldeep really needed some divine intervention to make his way back into the Indian team.

Otherwise, all that he could have done was to wait at home to hear from the BCCI if it would hold the now-postponed Ranji Trophy, where he was supposed to lead Uttar Pradesh.

"It will be a very tough road ahead for Kuldeep. He hasn't had any proper domestic games under his belt and it's not easy to make an international comeback just like that," one of India's greatest spinners, Harbhajan Singh, told PTI when asked about his expectations.

"He wasn't playing regularly before surgery and when you are making a comeback in white



ball, the first thing that's at the back of your mind is 'I don't want to get hit'.

"So it's like striking a balance as you are naturally dealing with a lot of insecurities. It's a test of mental fortitude," said Harbhajan, who saw Kuldeep from close quarters at KKR nets.

But Kuldeep has the skills and the 'Turbanator' expects that he can get a few early wickets and make it a different ball-game.

"Let me make it clear. If he gets a couple of early wickets, he will be a different bowler but things may not go as per plan. It might take some time for him to get back the rhythm.

"My only suggestion would be that stick with him since you have shown conviction based on

his past performances and give him enough time and confidence. He is a man who can deliver the goods for India," said the holder of 700-plus international wickets.

The national selectors made an exception for him as he is one of the rare cricketers who is coming back without having to prove his match-fitness as there is no domestic cricket at the moment.

The rub of green finally seems to be going Kuldeep's way after enduring rough times as his exclusion from the playing XI wasn't always a cricketering one during the earlier regime of Virat Kohli and Ravi Shastri.

Call it India's bare spin cupboard and injuries or poor form of some elite spinners.

# England first team to reach U-19 World Cup semifinals

PTI ■ NORTH SOUND

**J**acob Bethell's blistering batting display helped England advance to the semi-finals of the ICC U-19 World Cup with a six-wicket win over South Africa here.

Bethell was one of the bowlers to restrict South Africa to 209 all out before hitting 88 to see England set up a clash with either Sri Lanka or Afghanistan.

South Africa endured a slow start having won the toss and chosen to bat, their first boundary came off the final ball of the fourth over, before Joshua Boyden dismissed Valentine Kitime off the next delivery.

Boyden would claim his 12th wicket of the tournament to send the other opener Ethan-John Cunningham back to the hutch and reduce South Africa to 21 for two.

Dewald Brevis and Gerhardus Maree combined to steady the South African ship, adding 55 runs to the total before Bethell dismissed Maree.

Brevis remained a familiar stronghold for South Africa as he brought up his fourth fifty-plus score in a row even-



tually falling just short of a century on 97.

His dismissal brought about a batting collapse for South Africa as three wickets fell for one run as the batters went in search of boundaries, but only found the grateful hands of fielders with

Rehan Ahmed claiming figures of four for 48.

The final-wicket partnership of Matthew Boast and Asakhe Tsaka frustrated England adding 40 runs as South Africa ended on 209 all out.

Bethell came out all guns blazing in

England's chase, hitting the fourth fastest half-century of U19 World Cup history, reaching fifty off just 20 balls, as the Young Lions went at over 10 an over.

George Thomas was a delighted onlooker at the non-striker's end only

moving into double figures in the tenth over, before smacking a six to bring up England's hundred.

South Africa finally struck as Bethell went for one heave too many but not before he had put on 88 from 42 deliveries to place England as overwhelming favourites.

That tag was backed up by good partnerships in the top order, before William Luxton came in at five to strike 47 from 41 balls and get England into the semi-finals with a six.

Zimbabwe, West Indies win in the Plate competition

Matthew Welch's 78 helped Zimbabwe set Scotland a tricky chase of 249 in their Plate quarterfinal.

Scotland were unable to build partnerships as they slumped to 140 all out to see Zimbabwe advance to meet Ireland. They will be joined in the semi-finals by hosts West Indies who were too good for Papua New Guinea in a 169-run win. The West Indies will now face the United Arab Emirates, while Papua New Guinea are set to take on Uganda in the Plate play-offs.

## ICC unveils NFT in partnership with 'FanCraze'

PTI ■ DUBAI

**T**he International Cricket Council on Thursday released 'ICC Crictos', the official range of digital (NFT) collectibles, in partnership with FanCraze.

Crictos enables fans to collect and trade their own slice of cricket history from a range of ICC events.

Featuring 75 unforgettable moments from the 2015 and 2019 editions of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, fans can start their Crictos collection with one of three packs: a Base Pack, a Booster Pack and a Hotshots Pack.

Fans that have reserved a pack will be the first to have the chance to own NFTs of some of the most talked-about shots, catches and wickets in international cricket.

The roster of collectibles will continue to grow and will include classic plays from past ICC Men's and Women's events as well as iconic moments created at future events.

The number of Crictos vary by pack-type and Crictos will vary in their rarity across four tiers: Common, Rare, Epic and Legendary with Common Crictos being the most minted whilst Legendary will be the rarest.

Finn Bradshaw, ICC Head of Digital said: "We are so excited to drop our first packs of Crictos today which is a unique opportunity for fans to own and be part of historic moments in cricket. Crictos will be a digital record of those moments cricket fans love, and enable them to collect these legendary video highlights. "This Beta launch is our first step into the cricket metaverse and those lucky enough to be part of it can start their Crictos collection today and shortly start growing it by trading on the peer-to-peer marketplace through our partners FanCraze before we move to a full launch in the near future."

Some of the digital collectibles include Glenn Maxwell whipping one over square leg for a boundary against Sri Lanka, Hardik Pandya smashing Mohammad Amir through the covers at Old Trafford in 2019 and Joe Root drilling one over long-on in the World Cup 2019.

Alongside MS Dhoni and Steve Smith moments, a Lasith Malinga yorker from the ICC Men's World Cup 2019 can be found.

Other NFT products of 2019 edition include David Warner executing a checked lofted drive down the ground for six at the 2019, KL Rahul lofting Akhila Dhananjaya over long-off for a six and AB de Villiers showing his 360-degree range against Andre Russell.



## Saad Khan to make directorial debut in Telugu!

SHIKHA DUGGAL

**S**aad Khan is wearing many hats these days including writer, director and a comic. Under his company FirstAction Studio, Saad has produced content-rich films including *Station*, *Love*, *She*, as well as the much-hyped *Humble Politician Nograj*, which made Danish Sait a household name recently. But what's the latest buzz that led us to speak to the typical Bengaluru guy? Now, Saad Khan is making his directorial debut with a romantic movie titled *Sangeeth* in Telugu! He exclusively spills the beans, "Supposed to go



on floors in February, *Sangeeth* is a romantic comedy and I always wanted to merge comedy with some romance. Years ago, I got a chance to play with this genre

on the stage as a play-writer but this is going to be the first time that I'll showcase it on big screens. I am dwelling all my energies in moving out from political satires now and adorn the urban comedy mood. I had been working on this script for a really long time and the screenplay has come out so well." Wondering who the lead pair is? He continues, "We are yet to start the casting process, I'll be locking my lead pair by mid February! Earlier, I was conceptually involved with a romantic genre with a little bit of drama but comedy will be new to me. This time, the lead pair will be going through a free-flowing urban romance that's going to catch hold of Teluguites. The male protagonist will spot his lady love at a friend's *Sangeeth* and then you can imagine the plot! Even though I am going regional these days, I make it a point to keep the concept well urbanised because that's how I like it as a director. I am sure *Sangeeth* will not just be a hit in Hyderabad, but in cities like Bangalore and Bombay too."

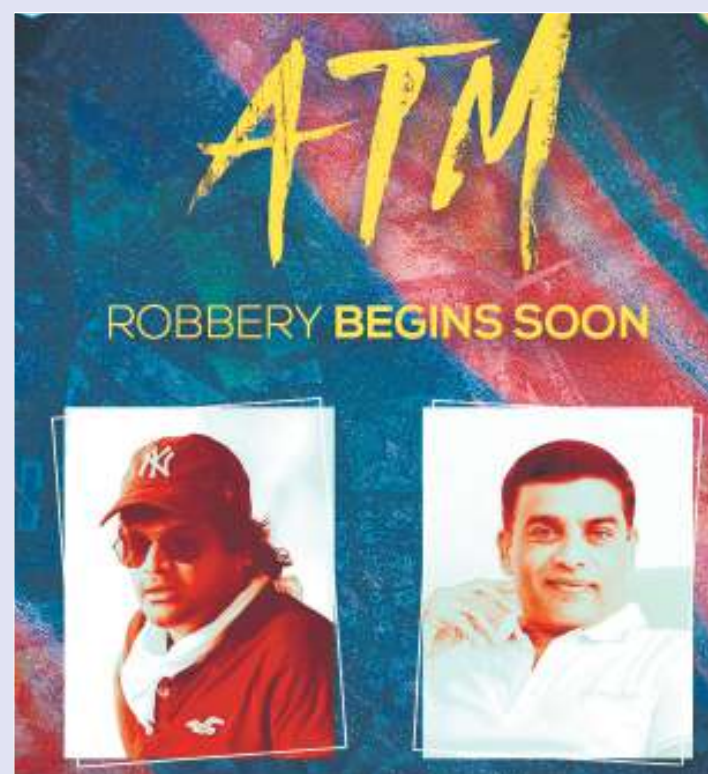
**T**he advent of OTT is taking the entertainment industry by storm. Many biggies have already made their OTT debut. The latest to join is the famed producer Dil Raju along with director Harish Shankar. The duo has joined hands for a web series, a thrilling heist in the city of Hyderabad titled *ATM*. Director Harish Shankar turned producer for this drama. The thriller will be aired on Zee5 soon.

Apart from producing *ATM*, Harish Shankar is also providing the story, and the web drama will be helmed by Chandra Mohan. Dil Raju's daughter Hanshitha Reddy and nephew Harshith Reddy are bankrolling it along with Harish Shankar.

Speaking about their association and the project, Dil Raju shares, "After

being a successful distributor, I was thinking 'what's next?'. Then, I started my journey as a producer in 2003 with the film *Dil*. From there, I have been making new-age movies like *Arya*, *Bommarillu*, *Munna*, introducing many new directors. Many directors have worked hard to sustain themselves in this industry. After being a successful producer, I started to think, 'What's next?'. Now Dil Raju Productions is all set to make an entry in Bollywood. When Harish Shankar called me and told me about this story, I was impressed. We immediately decided to do a web series called *ATM*." Further, about the series, he says, "This series will have all elements. We made *ATM* with many new elements. We look forward to seeing you with our brand value."

## ATM will have many new elements: Dil Raju



## Rambha living her dream

**O**ne of Tamil and Telugu cinema's most popular actresses Rambha, who is now happily settled with her family in Canada, has announced that she is fed up with gym exercises and is going to take a break.

Taking to Instagram, the yes-teryer actress, who

was at one time one of the top actresses of the Tamil film industry, said: "Training off this week. I suggest you follow your heart. Got fed up with gym exercises, dieting, beauty tips, yoga, cooking healthy food etc. Thinking of the above makes me depressed, scared and sad! I decided to follow my heart and keep myself happy by just enjoying

nature, my love and my kids! I am going to live my life the way I wanted and dreamed about. I am living my dream."

The actress posted a picture of herself with her son on a snowmobile along with the post.

Rambha married Indrakumar, a Canada-based Sri Lankan Tamil businessman, after which she quit acting in films.



## Nikhil worried about his films

**A**fter many ups and downs, actor Nikhil Siddarth finally seemed to be getting back in form until Covid hit us. Like many others even Nikhil is now worried about his films that are taking a backseat. Nikhil, who is becoming increasingly concerned and conflicted about his films, expressed his feelings in a video shared by him on his social media.

The actor said, "It's heart-breaking to learn that the pandemic is affecting careers at this level. Following the success of *#ArjunSuravaram*, I

signed four films... four fantastic scripts in which I have complete confidence. However, all of the release dates have gone awry. I'm praying to God that everything works out and that the movies are released flawlessly."

On the work front, Nikhil is now working on a variety of projects, including *Karthikeya 2*, a sequel to his popular film *Karthikeya*, directed by Chandoo Mondeti, and *18 Pages*, directed by Palnati Surya Pratap. He is currently starring in a spy thriller directed by Gary. He also has *BH*, as well as *Traitraim*, directed by newcomer Ravikumar.

## Rashmika overwhelmed by audience response to *Saami Saami*

**H**ailed as the National Crush of India, Rashmika Mandanna managed to leave a lasting impact even in a deglam role like Srivalli from the mega-blockbuster *Pushpa: The Rise*. Her song *Saami Saami* went on to become a nation-

al sensation, and has even been trending across all social media platforms. It had clocked over ten million views in less than 24 hours of its release.

Expressing gratitude, Rashmika Mandanna said, "The amount of love I have received for my song *Saami Saami* is overwhelming. I would like to thank all my fans for making the song so successful and loving me in it. I had great time shooting for *Saami* and I remember rehearsing for it for long hours to give my best to the peppy number. In the past few days, I've been seeing so many of you doing the hook step on social media, which takes me back to the

shooting days of *Pushpa*. All the love I have received from people all over the world just makes the song super special and memorable!"

The actress was praised for pulling off the choreography in her signature style with hundreds of fans and social media users recreating the steps from the popular song that's become a mass sensation.

With the massive success of *Pushpa: The Rise*, Rashmika has achieved waves of appreciation and praises from all across, and is rightfully touted as 'The Next Big Thing' in Bollywood'. She will be making her big ticket Bollywood debut with *Mission Majnu* and *Goodbye*.

