

Delhi had recorded 94 fresh COVID-19 cases on February 16, the lowest in over nine months. Doctors on Friday warned that the numbers could go up in the coming months. While the vaccination drive which started on January 16 is currently underway, Kumar urged people to continue to wear masks and adhere to safety norms as the vaccine can only to cut the transmission of the virus. Asked what was the most memorable moment of this one year gone by, he said, "Entire period will stay with us in our memories, but feted by the government with floral showers from helicopters really touched our heart."



# Womenia

## FROM RJ TO ARTIST

**Pragya, a city-based artist, explores various forms of art works including calligraphy through her instagram page**

TEJAL SINHA

Pragya Mishra has been drawing and painting since childhood but never thought of doing it professionally.

She chooses to be a Radio Jockey worked with different Radio Stations for around 2.5 years. However, later she decided not to work under someone and get self employed and that was when she switched the profession of artists.

Pragya shares, "I started my page in mid 2019 and it is all about art, you can find different forms of artworks on my page as I love to explore with different mediums. On my page, you can find calligraphy, acrylics, oil paintings, watercolor and inks and as I love different forms of art and mediums a lot that's the reason I named it as palette\_pragya. Now I do conduct art workshops as well as I sell my paintings. I like both of my professions but I love working independently that's why I'm a full time artist now."

Initially she didn't thought of a separate account for her art and felt like her existing account would be enough but it was not for sure because Radio jockey and artist are totally different professions.

She adds, "I made this account and it really helped me to promote my workshops and artworks and I think I got more exposure because of my account only. For an artist its art account is like it's profile so that people can have an idea of their work. So I feel like it's really important these days. Things are a little easy with social media."

Pragya shares that when she was a Radio jockey, she used to



Pragya Mishra



explore whenever she could and art was something really close to her.

She adds, "I once attended one

a r t workshop and I really loved it and that when I thought why I can't do this as it could have been a good way of spreading my knowledge of art but seriously it was not that easy."

In her first workshop nobody turned up and that was really heartbreaking her and that's when she realised that thinking

an idea is easy but applying it can be really difficult for a budding artists who's not having any contacts also. She then collaborated with different venues which were already famous and they helped her getting people in her workshop, and she slowly started doing it independently.

Pragya says that there are always challenges when you are self employed you can never be ignorant as you never know what's going to happen next. Sometimes you may get so many people in your workshop or sometimes not even a single one. So, keep going is the only mantra which she has been following and also helped her to grow..

"I do take very rare orders in which I feel like I'm interested because as an artist you are very specific about what you love to do so you can do anything or everything according to people as you love to be independent with your thoughts and how to convey it. So I don't take a lot many orders but if in case I feel like I'll enjoy it then I don't even charge a lot for it and if someone pleases a lot then I have to do it going out of my way and then of course I charge more. Pandemic did impact me somewhat as I was not sure when I'll be able to teach living again. But I kept on doing online workshops so that helped me to not to think a lot but still we all know offline workshop is more satisfying I think in any field it's same. I don't have very big plans but still I would love to have my own art studio where I can conduct more and more workshops and I can encourage more people to try out art as it gives you peace which is very costly these days," ends the self-learned artist.



TWEET PATROL

**SAMANTHA AKKINENI**  
**@SAMANTHAPRABHU2**

Presenting the dance song of the season !  
@Sai\_Pallavi92 you are mesmerising  
#SarangaDariya @pawanch19 @iammangli  
@LoveStory @chay\_akkineni @sekharkammula  
@SVCLLP @AsianSuniel @adityamusic  
@NiharikaGajula



## Dev DD2's shoot was challenging: Rumana Molla

Actress Rumana Molla, who plays the role of Radha in Dev DD 2, says that it was challenging to shoot for the series as the shoot did not happen in one go. There was a break in the shoot due to the lockdown and other circumstances and it got tough to maintain continuity, says the actress.

"I had a blast with the cast and I am glad I got to know some wonderful people. But was also challenging because the shoot didn't happen in one go due to various circumstances. We shot

and then there was a break. Then, we reshot some portions after some time, but then again, the shoot was halted due to the lockdown. Reprising the same character also means maintaining the same look and that was the most difficult part," says Rumana.

The actress is a huge fan of her character, who she is and what she stands for. She's a good example to follow. She's strong, independent, accomplished but she's will-

ing to drop everything in a heartbeat for the person she loves," says the actress, who has also been seen in the web film Bawri Chhori.

Meanwhile, Rumana says that any project on any medium comes with its own set of challenges. "I don't think there's anything challenging as such about a particular medium. But I think what can make a project challenging is the part, the lack of time, sometimes circumstances, the writing... various factors!" she says.

## Fashion and art are different, but lines can blur at times: Sanjay Garg

PUJA GUPTA

Fashion and art are different, though at times the line can blur, feels fashion designer Sanjay Garg.

He shares, "Audiences - Indian or not - don't need to be spoken down to. We are all audiences throughout the day, and I certainly think that provocations of thought and emotion are important to connect with."

The designer recently launched his latest Spring/Summer 2021 collection titled 'Other' through a campaign released on Instagram. Sharing about the concept, he shares, "Other is what lies within - it is all

### THE DESIGNER SPEAKS ABOUT HIS LATEST SPRING/SUMMER 2021 COLLECTION 'OTHER'

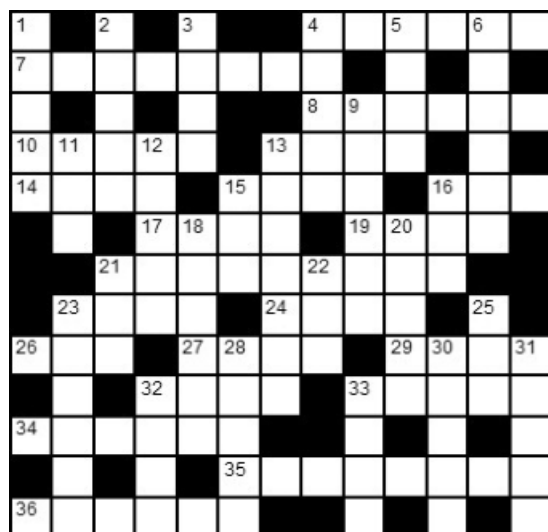
the things we are, everything that makes us. The styling of the collection always speaks to the larger campaign narrative. Equally important is the audience to recognize the garments and relate with them in a wearable way. We were careful to balance both within the images."

The collection is essentially a capsule of digitally printed floral for summer. The cornerstone of the textiles and silhouettes are defined in vivid, acidic colors of digi-

tally printed sarees to garments, in organza and silk.

He adds, "As we were editing, we knew these images would have a varying degree of response, and the digital audience has reaffirmed that. Overall, we are glad that the audience is being vocal about their love, or dislike, of the campaign."

However, the new campaign has seen a major shift from what Garg usually does. Sharing about how he is defining this new campaign to his audience, he shares, "We are not concerned with defining anything for our audience - they are independent minds whose judgment has always been a pleasure to engage with."



SOLUTION TO FEBRUARY 27

### CROSSWORD

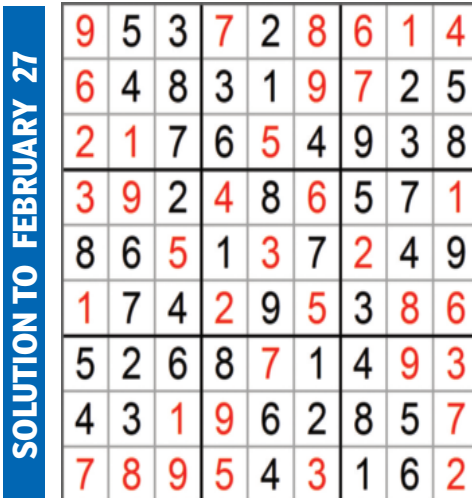
#### Across

- 4 Achieve (6)
- 7 Italian composer - "gripes hi" anagram (8)
- 8 Musician - wind section player ? (6)
- 10 Twilight (5)
- 13 Blemish (4)
- 14 Clothing (4)
- 15 Poker holding (4)
- 16 Hours, in short (3)
- 17 Drag (4)
- 19 Cooking rod (4)
- 21 Architect of glasnost and perestroika (9)
- 23 Young salmon (4)
- 24 Eccentric persons (4)
- 26 Joule fraction (3)
- 27 Formerly (4)
- 29 Works of art (4)
- 32 Small and sweet (4)
- 33 Test ore (5)
- 34 Umbrian town (6)
- 35 Language spoken in Surat and Ahmedabad (8)
- 36 Pain in side (6)

#### Down

- 1 Confederate Civil War general (5)
- 2 American Fur Company founder (5)
- 3 Motion picture (4)
- 4 Garlicky mayonnaise (5)
- 5 Medium pace (4)
- 6 Put in (6)
- 9 Russian soup (6)
- 11 A young boy (3)
- 12 Dislike intensely (5)
- 13 Equilibrium (7)
- 15 Tavern or inn (3)
- 16 Virus that causes AIDS (3)
- 18 Darts (6)
- 20 Mexican money (5)
- 21 Joke (3)
- 22 Hint (3)
- 23 Fix beforehand (6)
- 25 \_ carte (3)
- 28 Sound of horse (5)
- 30 SF writer Asimov (5)
- 31 Arab state (5)
- 32 Add colour (4)
- 33 Trojan War hero (4)

### SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO FEBRUARY 27

### NEWS ROUNDUP

## Lakshmi Manchu cycles 100 km for a cause

Actress Lakshmi Manchu on Sunday completed 100 km of cycling here for a cause. She had pledged this initiative to support the differently abled for sports.

Sharing her experience, Lakshmi says, "I have always been moved by the Philosopher Marcellus Aurelius. He says, 'To be tolerant to others and strict with yourself. This is what drove me every day for the last 60 days - waking up at 5am, drawing my boundaries, setting a structure, and toiling hard every day.'"

The actress participated in the cause for Aditya Mehra's foundation and says that her inspiration came from various people in need.

Lakshmi, who was recently seen in Telugu web series, "Pitta Kathalu" says, "Inspired by the many who have less than me and inspiring my community who have more than me. I'm grateful to Aditya for putting this ride together."



The actress had earlier shared her reasons for taking up the cause. She said, "My heart again went out to these people, who have a limb or something missing from their lives because of they weren't born like this, they had an accident or they were in the front lines saving our country and they willingly gave up a part of their body for the betterment of us or an accident took it away



# DJB yet to evolve a concrete plan to avoid water crisis

PRAVEEN DWIVEDI  
NEW DELHI

WITH no increase in supply of raw water from its sources for the last four years and a month-long closure this summer of a water channel that caters to 25 per cent of Delhi's potable water supply, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) is facing enormous odds. Delhi is fully dependent on neighbouring states for raw water supply to cater to around four crore people in the city as it generates only around 100 MGD from groundwater resources.

According to a senior official, the DJB must provide up to 135 litres per capita per day. However, owing to shortage of raw water supply, the target could not

be achieved and it provides 100 liters per capita per day on an average.

DJB member Shalabh Kumar, told IANS, "Demand of water has increased to around 1500-1600 MGD in summer months, whereas, the DJB at present maintains water supply at around 935 MGD after recycling the raw water received from multiple sources. We are already facing a shortage of raw water. DJB has increased its capacity for recycling of raw water received but there has been no increase in raw water supply since the last three to four years. But upto 10 MGD of water consumption increases every year in Delhi. It may be that water consumption may not increase in comparison to last summer as scores of people have left the city due to



Covid-19, but still we do not have sufficient water to cater to around 4 crore people in Delhi." Replying to whether

the DJB has prepared any alternate plan to get supply of raw water when the Nangal Hydel Channel decides to stop

raw water supply from March 25 to April 24, an official said, "We are in the process to convince the Bhakra Beas Management Board to postpone its plan for repair of canal for the next few months. We have also requested the Haryana government to increase raw water supply, at least during that period, so that we can avoid any major water crisis. But, we are yet to reach any concrete decision so far."

He further added that DJB has taken some initiatives to generate raw water on its own, through recycling and other processes but those projects are at the initial stage.

Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB), a central government agency, would cut off 232 million gallons per day

(MGD) of water that Delhi receives from the Ravi and Beas rivers, which is around 25 per cent of its total water supply.

DJB vice chairman Raghav Chadha had said a couple of days back that if Delhi faces 25 per cent reduced water supply, then several national and international institutions of importance will also suffer from a water crisis. This includes the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the residence of the Prime Minister, the Supreme Court of India, the High Court of Delhi, National Green Tribunal and the embassies.

However, a senior official in DJB said NDMC and Delhi Cantonment are bulk users of water and they may not get affected as compared to residential or any other areas.

## EYE ON 2022 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

# UP: Bhim Army inches closer to SP-RLD alliance

LUCKNOW

THE ongoing farmers' agitation and the changing political scenario in western Uttar Pradesh are now throwing up new political combinations, ahead of the 2022 Assembly election.

The Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Lok Dal alliance in the region is likely to be joined by the emerging Bhim Army's political wing - Azad Samaj Party.

According to highly placed sources, channels of communication have been opened between Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and Bhim Army chief Chandra Shekhar.

"The two leaders have spoken to each other thrice and if all goes well, west UP may see a SP-RLD-Bhim Army combine in the 2022 Assembly elections," said a source. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, SP-RLD alliance was joined by Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh.

Chandra Shekhar, when asked, evaded all questions about the



**Bhim Army chief Chandra Shekhar** possible alliance but said that all parties must come together to defeat the BJP which has caused irreparable damage to the state and its people, particularly weaker sections.

A senior Bhim Army functionary, meanwhile, said that in the present situation in western

UP, the SP-RLD-Bhim Army alliance could prove to be a winning combination.

"The best thing is that Bhim Army and RLD are not in the race for the chief minister's post. Alliances break only when there are more than one claimants for the top post," he said. Chandra

Shekhar told reporters that his first priority was to contest the upcoming panchayat elections under his own banner. "We will build up our organisation till the booth level in the panchayat elections and then decide our future course of action," he said. Political analysts feel that the SP-RLD-Bhim Army combine could bring Muslims, Jats and Dalits on a single platform and this could upset the BJP's apple cart in region.

For the Samajwadi Party, this could be the much-needed shot in the arm.

Akhilesh has also been looking for a formidable ally for the Assembly polls after the BSP walked out on him last year and Bhim Army fits the bill.

The icing on the cake, meanwhile, is the sudden resurgence of the Rashtriya Lok Dal which has been catapulted to the political centre stage in western UP during the farmers' agitation.

Any alliance which has RLD in it, is bound to start with a major advantage.

## MCD bypolls amid Covid



AAP members at a polling station, during by-polls in five wards of MCD, at Kalyanpuri area in New Delhi on Sunday

# Nearly 43% voter turnout

NEW DELHI

A turnout of about 42 per cent was recorded in the first eight hours of voting for the bypolls to five municipal wards in Delhi on Sunday, the first electoral exercise being conducted in the national capital amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The results of these bye-elections are likely to have an impact on the big-ticket 2022 Delhi civic polls. Polling began at 7:30 am amid tight security arrangements. By 3:30 pm, the overall turnout across the five wards was 42.91 per cent, with Kalyanpuri ward recording the maximum 50.56 per cent, as per the data shared by a senior official of the State Election Commission in Delhi.

In Kalyanpuri ward in east Delhi, two of the seven polling locations are in "critical" category. A total of 16

polling locations out of the total 44 have been kept in this category, as per official data. According to the State Election Commission, around 2.42 lakh people are eligible to cast their votes in two wards under the North Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and three wards under the East Delhi Municipal Corporation (EDMC). The main contenders are the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the BJP and the Congress. All of them have expressed confidence that they will emerge victorious in the bypolls, being held under strict COVID protocols. The municipal wards where polling is underway are Rohini-C, Shalimar Bagh (North), Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri and Chauhan Banger. While Shalimar Bagh (North) is reserved for women, Trilokpuri and Kalyanpuri are reserved for the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, according to the poll body.



## NSA invoked against murder accused

**BAHRAICH** : A man accused of abduction and murder of a 12-year-old boy in Bahraich in October last year, has now been booked under the National Security Act (NSA).

Under the NSA, a person can be detained for up to 12 months without a charge. A person can be held for 10 days without being told of the charges against them.

The accused, Hasan Mohammed, had kidnapped a 12-year-old boy for ransom, murdered him and dumped his body in Shravasti district. Superintendent of Police, Bahraich, Vipin Mishra, said that NSA was invoked on Saturday against the accused following the approval of the district magistrate.

He said that the police had recorded statements of eye-witnesses and gathered evidence on the role of the accused, who was arrested along with his son, Kalim, 48 hours after the body was found.

"We filed the charge sheet on November 22 last year and collated forensic details a few weeks back," said Mishra.

Kalim was selling 'biryani' in Mumbai, but was forced to return to his Bahraich home after the Covid-triggered lockdown came into force.

"He tried to revive his business in his village, but failed. He was in heavy debt and then Kalim planned, with his father, Hasan, to kidnap a 12-year-old boy for ransom," the officer said.

On October 29, Majholi police received a complaint about a 12-year-old boy of a contractor who had gone missing.

A case of kidnapping was registered, but his body was found the next day.

# SI-rank cops to get time-bound promotion in Har

CHANDIGARH

HARYANA Director General of Police (DGP) Manoj Yadava on Sunday announced that the Sub-Inspector's (SI) rank police officers will now get time-bound promotion once they become eligible for it.



Yadava said that the parameters have been set to conduct the Departmental Promotion Committee meeting once in a year in which names of all eligible Sub-Inspectors would be considered for promotion. After recommendation, their promotion order would be issued from the month they be-

come eligible.

He said earlier the committee meeting could not be held every year regularly. "Under the new system, a total of 184 Sub-In-

spectors were promoted in 2020. These include 116 women officers," Yadava added.

"In addition, we are also expediting the process of carrying out promotions of all categories of posts at all levels."

To improve the police-public ratio, the DGP said the police is all set to add more than 10 per cent staff to its total strength this year. The process to recruit 7,818 police personnel has begun.

## SEERS DEMAND CLEAN WATER

# 'Won't participate in shahi snan in Yamuna'



AYODHYA

**UNDERLINING** the Yamuna's acute water pollution, three prominent Hindu seers of the country vowed not to take another bath on other shahi snan' days during the ongoing Vrindavan Kumbh near here unless the river water is clean.

The declaration to boycott the shahi snan in the river on three remaining auspicious days -- March 9, 13 and 25 -- and thereafter during subsequent Kumbh

fair was made by the chief of the Ayodhya-based Maha Nirvani Akhara, Mahant Dharm Das.

Mahant Dharam Das made the declaration in presence of the chiefs of two other Vaishnavi akharas -- Maha Nirmohi and Maha Digambar akharas.

"In the next 'shahi snan', we would take the holy dip in the Yamuna, only if the water is clean," Mahant Dharm Das said, with the chiefs of two other prominent akharas nodding in agreement.

The Mathura district administration had promised to arrange for clean water in the river at its Devraha Ghat during the Vrindaban Kumbh by discharging additional water from the Ganga but nothing appears to have been

**HARIDWAR** :

Ahead of the Kumbh mela in Haridwar, the Uttarakhand government has issued standard operating procedures making it mandatory for devotees to produce a negative report of RT-PCR test conducted not earlier than 72 hours of arrival and warning of penal action against violators of COVID-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs). Based on the

## Penal action against violators of Covid SOPs

guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the SOP also makes it compulsory for devotees to bring a medical fitness certificate and an e-pass or e-permit issued to them after registering on the Kumbh Mela web portal, Chief Secretary Om Prakash said.

The Kumbh Mela is likely to begin on April 1 and will go on only for 28 days.

done, he said.

Mahant Dharam Das made the critical remark on the pollution in the Yamuna after taking a holy dip along with the two other seers at the Devraha Ghat of the river.

The three seers earlier led a

procession of saints to the river bank for 'shahi snan' during which they were showered with flower petals all along the route of the procession, said Nagendra Pratap, a government official deputised to supervise arrangements for the Vrindavan Kumbh fair.

# Gurugram condominium declared Covid containment zone

GURUGRAM

AN upscale condominium in Gurugram's Sector-67 has been declared a containment zone after 20 cases of Covid-19 infection were detected there, a health official here said on Sunday.

The condominium was declared a Covid-prone zone on Thursday. It is reported that the residents in the condominium were infected after having attended a party at a restaurant earlier this February.

According to information, the party took place on February 7 where nearly seven people, mostly the elderly citizens, contracted the infection. Nearly 12 people had tested positive later on different days.

"At present, nearly 20 Covid-19 cases were detected in the condominium. We can't comment on the source of the infection. A team of Health Department has conducted contact tracing of those who had tested Covid-19 positive," said Virender Yadav, Gurugram Civil Surgeon.

"So far we have collected more



than 780 samples from the condominium. We have directed the residents to strictly follow the Covid-19 norms. Jitender Kumar, Joint Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG), and Raman Yadav, MCG Executive Engineer, have been appointed as the Cluster in-charge and Incident Commander, respectively, for the containment zone," Yadav added.

The Health Department said they have conducted a meeting with the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) of the condominium and directed them to ensure the residents are tested.

According to the residents, the main cause of the infection spread was a lack of social distancing in the society. Out of the 800 flats in the society, most of them are four-storey towers.

The district official said all necessary steps have been taken and movement of people has been restricted in the containment zones. The curfew would be lifted if no new case is reported after 14 days.

Gurugram has reported more than 35 cases a day since the last week of February with more than 3,000 tests conducted in a single day.

ASHISH SRIVASTAVA  
NEW DELHI

AS the vaccination for people aged above 45 with comorbidities and above 60 is around the corner, the enthusiastic promise of 'free vaccination to all' by the Delhi government appears a far fetched dream for the UT residents.

So far, there is no clarity in the government whether or when it will provide vaccines free to the residents.

Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain while speaking to IANS said that the government "will see" about the free vaccination promise it made a month ago.

"The central government is formulating a policy and we will see what could be done," Jain said.

"So far, vaccinations have been provided free. The Centre is managing the vaccines' cost from our Delhi's Budget," he added, directing towards the free vaccination given to the healthcare and frontline workers under nationwide Covid vac-

# No clarity by Delhi govt on free vaccination to all residents



cination drive which started on January 16.

"We will see and will inform you about the development in this situation," Jain stated.

Meanwhile, the national capital is witnessing a rise in cases of Covid-19 which is in line with many states and Union Territories, pushing the positivity rate to reach 0.5 which had been reduced to 0.2 per cent. However, Jain assured that the pandemic is in control.

"That decimal rise is just a

fluctuation. It cannot be called an upsurge. However, we are watchful of the trends," he told IANS.

A month ago, Raghav Chadha, national spokesperson of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Rajinder Nagar constituency had told IANS that the demand to provide free vaccines was conveyed to the Centre and the Delhi government was waiting for their instructions.

"The Arvind Kejriwal govern-

ment is of a firm view that the vaccines should be provided to every citizen free of cost. It is the bounden duty of every government to ensure that it is given. One should not be deprived of the vaccine if one does not have wealth. Our demands and ideas have been forwarded to the Centre and we will wait for their instructions," he had said.

Days before the country embarked on Covid immunisation drive, Kejriwal had publicly announced that his government will ensure free Covid-19 vaccines to the residents of the national capital. He had guaranteed that the AAP government would provide free Covid-19 vaccination even if the Centre fails to do so.

"There are a lot of people who would not be able to afford the vaccine. I had appealed to the Centre to provide free vaccines to all the people of the country. If required and if the Centre doesn't do it, the Delhi government will provide free vaccines to all residents," Kejriwal had stated.



## Political opportunism at its best in AP

It is time political parties stop playing hide and seek on important issues. The national parties always say by and large all the State units follow the same policies, programmes and strategy that are decided at the national level. We have over six national political parties. But in reality, that does not happen. They seem to have lost courage to say 'Yes, this is the decision of our national party and we stand by it'. We have seen how the State Congress leaders from Andhra region opposed bifurcation of the State while Telangana leaders were either playing safe or making excuses by telling that it should be bifurcated only after the agitation reached its peak. Apparently, both were playing to the gallery. After bifurcation, when the residuary State of Andhra Pradesh was demanding Special Category Status as promised by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in the Rajya Sabha in response to a demand by the BJP that the period of special status should be for 10 years, the Centre had decided not to give Special

Category Status but the State BJP kept on saying that it was representing and trying to convince the Centre to re-think its decision. When it became clear that special status was a mirage and would never be given, they started saying that the Centre was very generous in announcing the special package which gives more benefits than special status. In regard to Amaravati as capital city, the State unit had supported in the Assembly. They praised the farmers for giving land under land pooling. But once there was change of government and serious friction between the TDP and the BJP, they started criticising the previous government for not completing the construction of capital city forgetting the fact that even the BJP government took over a decade to give a shape to Naya Raipur. The BJP was in power for three consecutive terms there since 2003. When the present Andhra Pradesh government came up with the proposal of three capitals, the State BJP had two different voices. One group said the BJP at Centre had no role in it and it was the decision of the State government. Another group said it was not proper to shift capital city, supported the agitation by the farmers of Amaravati capital region who had given their land under land pooling for construction of capital city. Now comes the issue of privatisation of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. Here again the

Prime Minister made it clear that the government had no business to be in business, but the State unit says they are opposed to such move and will put pressure on the Centre to rethink the decision. They also participated in some demonstrations. Why this duel policy of national parties? Why can't they be honest enough to follow the decision of the Central party leadership? Is this not opportunistic politics? Even on issues like hike in petroleum prices, the State units demand that the governments reduce the VAT percentage but when it comes to the Centre, they are silent. Union Ministers justify the hike saying that it was because of international prices of crude oil. If the government has no business to be in business, it also has no business to be a mute spectator when prices shoot up beyond a limit. It can have a large heart and forego part of the VAT or show the courage of bringing the petroleum products under GST. They are in power in 18 States and if they want, they can bring it under GST. As the Prime Minister says, they cannot take hard decisions in running PSUs, but can't it take even hard executive decisions like bringing petroleum products under GST? The Congress party which now finds fault with the BJP for everything is no different. All political parties chant same mantra, 'Paisa Mein Parmatma Hai.'



## The role of NGOs in combating Covid-19 pandemic

PUJA MARWAHA

IN the very first week that India entered the lockdown in March 2020 to curb the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called on non-government organisations (NGO) to help the government — by providing basic necessities to the underprivileged, by supplying medical and protective gear and assisting with awareness campaigns on social distancing.

The NITI Aayog reached out to more than 90,000 NGOs and civil society organisations (CSO) in the first week of May, seeking assistance in delivering services to the poor as well as health and community workers.

The Supreme Court, on a similar note, applauded the contribution and role played by NGOs in coming forward to help migrant workers by providing food, water and transport during the difficult time.

Development experts believe it is crucial to understand that it would not have been possible for the government alone to holistically address the pandemic — develop, implement and ensure that measures reached the needy, last-mile people.

To add to its reach and resources, the government needed the civil society, non-government and community organisations to spearhead its initiatives with their extensive reach and large volunteer-base embedded in the community — as the PM rightly observed.

António Guterres, the secretary-general of the United Nations, also praised civil society and grassroots organisations for the fundamental role they played in fighting COVID-19 at local levels, as he highlighted in the recent Report on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19. NGOs, according to him, bring economic and livelihood opportunities and can adapt responses to the community context.

'Impact of COVID-19 on India's non-profit organisations' — a snapshot report released by the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP), Ashoka University, in June 2020 — revealed:

"Three-fourths of the interviewed NPOs were actively engaged in ongoing relief work, using their embedded presence in communities as a particular strength. This work ranged from last-mile delivery of relief material such as dry ration and sanitation kits, community awareness and sensitisation, setting up health camps and isolation facilities, rescuing stranded labour, provision of direct cash transfers, to offering rehabilitation of the distressed communities."

Voluntary Action Network India (VANI), in its recently published 'Study Report on National Policy on Voluntary Sector', observed:

"In a country like India, the voluntary sector bridges the gap between the government and the population of the country. It identifies the needs of the community and provides its support and services, even in the most untouched and marginalized areas, where the government is not able to reach."

This World NGO Day (February 27), with all humility, we celebrate achievements of the flag-bearers of sustainable development and social change. The gritty efforts of the CSOs and NGOs become all the more significant, if we keep in mind the fact that they themselves have been reeling under a huge economic stress impacted by the pandemic.

In the wake of this deadly pandemic and the lockdown induced by it, our first thoughts were about how to reach out to our children and their communities. Topmost in our minds were the remotest regions of our operational areas and urban slums, their survival, safety and their health.

Therefore, during the lockdown period, CRY's efforts, along with its partner NGOs, have been concentrated on reaching all households as far as possible, with basic health and hygiene kits for the children and their families.

We also focused on our awareness generation and advocacy programmes with our target communities and local government bodies, primarily through occasional home visits and mainly through phone calls and messages, in keeping with the social distancing protocols.

CRY has been spreading awareness, distributing relief materials and advocating for the access and availability of services to the communities and children. Awareness-building programmes covered topics like social-distancing, best practices related to public health and hygiene and behaviour change, sanitization, use of face masks, following government guidelines during the lockdown period and ways to protect people from community spreading of the epidemic.

As part of the awareness programme, children created posters, wall paintings and short videos on hand washing, social distancing and wearing masks.

There is no doubt that the grit and resilience shown by the civil society crusaders against Covid-19 is paramount. Though we are yet to see the end of the pandemic, it is key that the civil society organisations collaborate with the government in a constructive and meaningful way to build back better, and enhance India's preparedness to face any threat on the development of its society and people.

(Courtesy: Down To Earth)

### THE WAY AHEAD



Dr Bharat Jhunjhunwala

The Finance Minister has announced in the budget for the coming year that two Public Sector Banks (PSBs) will be privatised. The policy of the government in the last three decades of economic re-

forms was to sell a part of the shares in the Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) including PSBs to the public while retaining the controlling share in its own hands. This is known as "disinvestment." The Secretaries of the respective Ministries, and more often than not, IAS officers continued to head the management of these PSUs. In contrast, the controlling shares of a PSU are sold to a particular private buyer in "privatisation." The management is transferred to the hands of the buyer and the government interference in the affairs of the privatised company ended completely.

Privatisation of PSBs is important because the government has been investing huge amounts in them every year in the last decade to keep these banks from collapsing. This is called "capitalisation" of banks, that is, augmenting the capital to compensate for the losses incurred by them. One aspect of this investment is to bring the capital of PSBs in line with the international norms. The other aspect is that this investment covers up the losses incurred by these PSBs. More capital is required because they have incurred losses and their existing capital has been wiped off. The present policy marks a departure because the government will be able to earn monies by the privatisation of these PSBs instead of having to invest more monies to keep them afloat. It is like an owner of four cars having to invest huge amounts every year to repair a decrepit car when she could have earned money by selling it off.

The first criticism of this step is that the money earned from privatisation will be used to support the increasing consumption expenditures of the government such as paying higher salaries and dearness allowance to its employees. This criticism is only partially correct. The government is expected to obtain a revenue of Rs 20,000 crore from disinvestment in the current financial year 2010-21. The target for the coming year 2021-22 is Rs 175,000 crore. There is an increase of Rs 155,000 crore in the revenue to be earned from this head. In tandem, the capital expenditures of the government are targeted to be increased from Rs 4,30,000 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 5,54,000 crore in 2021-22 indicating an



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increase of Rs 1,24,000 crore. The targeted increase in receipts from privatisation is only marginally higher than the targeted increase in capital expenditures. Indeed, it would have been better if the increase in capital expenditures was more. Yet, we should appreciate the government's efforts in this direction.

The second criticism of privatisation is that the government is stepping back from its responsibilities of "Welfare State." The banks were nationalised in 1971 with the idea that private banks were not serving the rural areas and the poorer sections of the society. They were nationalised so that they could be directed to open branches in the rural areas and provide loans to the priority

sectors. This objective has largely been fulfilled. PSBs are today providing services in interior areas. However, another problem has arisen. The PSBs are incurring losses due to inefficiency and corruption. And, the government is investing money to keep them afloat. The people are being taxed to raise the money for this investment. In this way, the policy of nationalisation has had a twofold effect on the people. On the one hand, the PSBs have provided services to them. On the other hand, the same people are taxed to make investment in the PSBs. On the whole, the backward areas and poorer people would not have benefitted much in my reckoning.

Truly speaking, it was not necessary

to nationalise the banks in order to provide banking services to the rural areas. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had adequate powers to direct the private banks to open branches in the specified backward areas. The government made a mistake in 1971. The private banks were nationalised instead of setting right this failure of the RBI to give suitable directions to them. In the process now these nationalised banks are incurring losses. We have fallen from the frying pan into the fire. The need today is that the RBI should strictly require the private banks to provide services in the rural areas along with privatising the PSBs.

The third criticism of privatisation is that private banks indulge in giving loans to the sister concerns of their owners. This is correct. However, the same problem exists in the PSBs. They provide loans to doubtful entities at the asking of the Secretaries and the Ministers coupled with corruption by the bank officials. The Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) of PSBs have arisen in large measure due to such lending. The problem of "bad" lending, therefore, has no relation with the lender being a PSBs or a private bank. Both can equally be at fault. The solution of this problem, again, is for the RBI to vigilantly track the lending portfolios of the private banks and take proactive steps when they indulge in lending to their sister concerns or doubt about the viability of the borrowers emerge. The RBI has indeed behaved in this excellent manner in Yes Bank and other weak banks in the recent past. This proactive approach of the RBI must be strengthened.

The Finance Minister has to be congratulated that she had decided to privatise two PSBs. Knowledgeable sources indicate that two small PSBs could be privatised initially, so to say, to test the waters. The Finance Minister should move fast and take steps to privatise the major PSBs. The stock market conditions are favourable at present. The saying goes, strike when the iron is hot. Let us not forget that the efforts of the government to privatise Air India were put on the backburner, in part, because of the adverse stock market conditions. The Finance Minister must use the present buoyancy in the stock market to privatise the larger PSBs. That will provide the much-needed revenues to meet the contingencies arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic. The additional receipts from privatisation should be used to make public investments in new areas such as genetics, big data and space research. This will lay the foundations of our technological prowess of India in the coming decades.

(The writer is formerly Professor of Economics at IIM, Bengaluru)

## LETTERS

### Nirav Modi has no other go than to languish in Indian jail

FINALLY, fugitive Nirav Modi seems to be coming back to India. Two years ago, the PNB scam was the highlight of every news channel, about how a person who was a jeweller and a designer Nirav Modi made a fraud of Rs 14,000 crore (approx.) and ran away to the UK. But this is all because of corruption, system loopholes and a combination of a person's greed. As the UK provides great immunity in the name of protecting human rights, India strived to bring back many fugitives from the UK but failed. Now, the court's decision to extradite him to India is a great victory. However, he still has got many legal remedies left. I hope, once he runs out of all his options, he will live the rest of his life in Indian Jail.

Anshita Rochwani, Ujjain

### Roads should be accident-free

It is axiomatic that the incidents of road accidents are increasing at an alarming rate. Many valuable lives are lost in these mishaps. Both the government and the public are equally responsible for these tragedies. Negligence on the part of the government and lack of foresight on the part of the public are the formidable reasons. Governments should widen roads wherever narrow. Speed-breakers should be painted with radium colour to make them more conspicuous especially during night times. Those indulge in drunk and drive should be dealt with seriously. A legislation should be passed to ban vehicular traffic from midnight to early hours. This was

implemented in Tamil Nadu sometime back. Speed limits should be indicated by sign boards and the violators should be given punishment. The government has to take all measure to make the country accidents-free. The public also are equally responsible for these accidents. The youth must realise that nothing is greater than life. It is only the life that cannot be restored, if lost. "Speed thrills but kills" should be understood in letter and spirit. Wearing of helmet and safety belts should not be forgotten. It should be remembered that all traffic rules are intended for safety of human life. Self-discipline is the need of the hour in the matter of traffic regulations. Many youngsters are under the illusion that nothing will happen to them if they follow examples of celluloid heroes. The police department ought to organise awareness classes from time to time. Through pamphlets also, necessary awareness can be imparted to the young minds. Let us hope good sense will prevail on the minds of the youth and save the roads from the blood stains.

E Sreerama Murty, Yellamanchili (Vizag dist), AP.

### Accident victims should get quick relief

INDIA'S largest insurance firm, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance company has knocked the door of the Supreme Court on compensation to the road accident victims. Bajaj Insurance Company filed a writ petition, on the plight of the victims who have been waiting for years together for accident compensation. The Supreme Court is exploring the creation of a nationwide online mechanism to help road accident victims and their families get compensation within a short time of the accident. It should be established as early as possible to give helping hand to the victim's family members. The Supreme Court said that, to speed up the compensation

process, including the setting up of a national grid to seamlessly disburse compensation across State to the online submission of police records and accident claims documents in motor accidents claims tribunals. Usually in many parts of the country, the police take months to even file accident report for submission before the claims tribunal. So, it should be done prescribed time only. Otherwise there is no use of Insurance rules in view of help of the family members and delay also would destroy crucial and important evidence. Hence, in these times, institutions must think on humanity grounds and do justice as laws desire. Due to pandemic, most of the general activities also turned in to technology and virtual mode. So here also strengthen the legal activities done in active mode to provide compensation as early. In general days also must provide quick relief to the accident victims.

A Bruhathi, Hanamkonda, Warangal Urban

### Sharmila's political dreams in TS not viable

IN view of old experiences, it is not advisable for Y S. Sharmila to start a new political party in Telangana, which may hardly fetch Rayalaseema voters settled in Telangana. Though she was born in Hyderabad, she is the daughter of legendary Rayalaseema leader Y S Rajasekhara Reddy. Sharmila may start seva kendras for women in AP on voluntary basis so that she could solve women's problems and then think about the political entry in future. Padayatrass for women's sake should be the immediate action that Y S Sharmila take.

VR K Valmeeky, Kukatpally, Hyderabad

thehansreader@gmail.com



# IT exports could have been higher, feels KTR

The IT and Industries Minister recalled that in 2013-14, the IT exports from then undivided Andhra Pradesh were only ₹57,258 crore. “The State recorded IT exports of ₹1,28,807 crore, an increase of 17.93% over 2018-19

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

WITH the information technology exports from Telangana likely to grow at seven per cent to cross Rs 1.40 lakh crore during 2020-21, Information Technology Minister K T Rama Rao on Sunday said the growth rate would have been much higher if the Centre had not scrapped the ITIR (Information Technology and Investment Region) project.

The Minister said he was delighted that projected Telangana IT export numbers show terrific growth, at a much higher rate than national average. He said despite numerous personal requests to the Prime Minister and Union IT Minister, the ITIR has been scrapped for reasons unknown. “Telangana government had submitted Detailed Project Report and IT Cluster details but unfortunately neither ITIR has



● Scrapping of ITIR (IT and Investment Region) project limited the growth

● Says IT exports likely to grow at 7%; National rate estimated to be 1.9%

Nasscom, the national growth rate during the same period is estimated to be just 1.9 per cent,” he added.

been taken forward nor has there been an alternate progressive policy. According to

KTR recalled that in 2013-14, the IT exports from then undivided Andhra Pradesh were only Rs 57,258 crore. “The State

recorded IT exports of Rs 1,28,807 crore, an increase of 17.93 per cent over 2018-19. The growth rate was more than double the national average of 8.09 per cent and more than two-and-a-half times the rest of the nation’s average of 6.92 per cent,” he said.

## ‘Auto bandh’ on March 15 called for

HYDERGUDA

TELANGANA Auto Drivers Joint Action Committee has given one-day ‘Auto bandh’ call on March, 15 demanding corruption-free RTA offices and demanding that the government formulate necessary guidelines to stop private auto financiers’ ‘zulum and harassment’ among other things. The JAC is demanding immediate transfer of Hyderabad East Zone and West Zone corrupt RTOs Subash Reddy and CP Venkateshwar Rao respectively without further delay.

Mohd Amanullah Khan, the JAC convenor, pointed out that if the top to bottom corruption is to be routed out the RTA corrupt staff should be nick-named as “Corrupt-Mad Dog, Pick Pocket” and “we do not take bribes” written boards should be erected in every RTA office without fail and corruption should be put down with an iron hand.

The other demands of the auto drivers include: the central government should withdraw the steep rise in the petroleum products including LPG & CNG rates; the diesel-run OLA, Uber cabs causing pollution should be banned from plying on the city roads; stern action against the OLA Uber cabs looting the passengers in the name of ‘surge-pricing,’ like AP State the Telangana state should also provide Rs 10,000 to every auto annually and help the poor automen.

## WHO CARES...



Visitors thronging Charminar area, cocking a snook at Covid safety norms on Sunday.

Photo: Adula Krishna

# Kavitha to help kin of loan app fraud victim

HYDERABAD

RESPONDING to media reports of a man who died by suicide after falling prey to a financial fraud on a Chinese loan app, MLC Kalvakuntla Kavitha on Sunday reached out to the family of the victim and promised to support the education of her three daughters.

The former MP from Nizamabad offered her condolences to the daughters and wife of the victim, Saritha, and shared that she would be supporting the education of all the daughters till they graduate and get a job. She also promised Saritha a job at a prestigious institution and has asked them to contact her in case of

any distress. “The Chinese loan app scam that took the precious life of Chandramohan had left a deep void in the life of Saritha and their daughters. Today, I met the family and extended my support to them,” Kavitha tweeted.

The victim of the incident, Chandramohan, died by suicide earlier this month after falling prey to fraud on a Chinese loan app. Kalvakuntla Kavitha, daughter of Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, has been a vocal advocate and driver of women empowerment. In the past, she has been known for launching several free meal centres across Telangana and reaching out to the needy.

## Ruling party leaders harassing TDP activists, alleges Naidu

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu has alleged that the YSR Congress party has been harassing TDP leaders and indulging in destroying the properties of TDP men as the ruling party is unable to face the TDP in

municipal elections.

In a statement here today, the TDP supremo said that Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy has been destroying democracy by resorting to threatening and harassment of TDP leaders to prevent them from contesting elections. He condemned the removal of a 20-year-old pan

shop of Srinivasulu at Tirupati. He said that the YSRCP removed the shop of Srinivasulu, as he is contesting as corporator candidate in the municipal elections. He said by threatening the TDP leaders, the YSRCP was forcing the TDP men to join the YSR Congress party at Palasa in Srikakulam district.



## MUNICIPAL POLLS

# Candidature to be reconsidered in case of forcible withdrawals

- SEC to issue orders in this regard today
- N Ramesh Kumar says Collectors and SPs are working in coordination to ensure smooth conduct of polls to urban local bodies
- Hopes that the voting percentage will increase as the polls will be held in a free and fair manner
- Covid-19 guidelines to be followed at the polling centres
- Points out that more than 80% polling was recorded in panchayat elections



HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

THE State Election Commissioner (SEC) N Ramesh Kumar said that the SEC will take a decision on reconsidering the candidature of those who are forced to withdraw their nominations for the municipal polls in the past on benefit of doubt. He said that the SEC for the first time is taking a decision on reconsid-

ering candidatures by using its powers. He said the SEC will issue necessary orders by Monday.

Speaking to mediapersons here on Sunday, the State Election Commissioner said that officials including Collectors and Superintendents of Police are working in coordination for smooth conduct of municipal elections. Praising the services of officials, the SEC expressed hope that poll percentage will definitely in-

crease in municipal polls as the elections will be conducted in a free and fair manner. He said more than 80 per cent polling was registered in panchayat polls.

The State Election Commissioner said some of the candidatures rejected in scrutiny and those who want to file nomination afresh also appealed to SEC to consider their plea to give a chance. He said that the SEC has no such power to reconsider their candidature.

The SEC said that no political campaign will be allowed within a range of 100 metres from polling stations. He said the polling will be conducted following the Covid guidelines. Referring to money distribution to voters in elections, he said that so far 100 teams were set up to prevent distribution of money to voters and stressed the need for increasing the number of teams.

# Ward volunteers told not to indulge in political activity

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
VIJAYAWADA

RECALLING that the State Election Commission had earlier issued instructions that the ward and village volunteers should not indulge in any political activity such as canvassing or indulging in any manner in elections to local bodies, State Election Commissioner N Ramesh Kumar reiterated in a statement here on Sunday that strict neutrality governs all categories or government servants and the volunteers are no exception.

It may be recalled that the SEC issued notifications for 12 municipal corporations and 75 municipalities and nagar panchayats in

the State and poll is scheduled on March 10.

The Commission while interacting with representatives of recognised and registered political parties with reserved symbols at the regional conferences received serious complaints as in the case of Gram Panchayat elections concerning ward volunteers. It has been decided that sterner measures are necessary to ensure free and fair polls by completely isolating the ward volunteers from the municipal election process. The Commission accordingly directed the Collectors and District Election Authorities that ward volunteers shall be completely kept away from poll process and they shall

not be entrusted with distribution of authenticated photo voter slips to the voters.

The officials were also instructed that ward volunteers shall be grounded and their movements are to be closely monitored and their phones shall be kept in safe custody as the database of beneficiaries is likely to be leveraged and misused.

The Commission views the participation of ward volunteers in the election process either directly or indirectly in support of a candidate or a political party is a serious violation of Model Code of Conduct and any evidence in deviation of the Commission’s ‘Direction’ shall result in their summary discharge.

## School Edn Dept denies declaring holidays for schools

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
VIJAYAWADA

SHARPLY reacting to the false and fake news spread in the social media that holidays are announced for all schools and colleges in the State from March 1 to May 4 due to increasing coronavirus cases in the State, Director of School Education V Chinaveerabhadru in a statement here on Sunday stated that the government has not declared any holidays to the schools regarding corona cases in the State. He recalled that the government issued orders for reopening of schools and colleges in a graded manner. Accordingly, schools are running from classes 1 to 10.

The director said that the messages being circulated in the social media platforms are false and fake. He warned that necessary action would be taken against the persons who spread such false and fake news.

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I, K.Hanumanta Rao hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

March 1st 2021

Sd/- K. Hanumanta Rao  
Publisher



# Exam burden issue reaches NHRC, child panel in Delhi

Due to lockdown, many govt school students have also been deprived of online study due to lack of resources

NEW DELHI

AFTER the Delhi government's decision not to hold an examination for the students from Class 3 to 8 studying in its schools, parents of the children studying in the private schools are feeling discriminated as the rule does not apply for the private schools.

Parents are calling it discriminatory and Online exams are also being sought for Class 9 and 11. The controversy related to the examination has now reached to institutions like the National Human Rights Commission and the National

Commission for Protection of Child Rights.

According to the Directorate of Education, Government of Delhi, students studying in classes 3 to 8 will not have to take the annual examinations. The directorate said that this decision will be applicable to government and government-aided schools. This decision of the Delhi government is not acceptable to the millions of parents whose children study in private schools.

Parents have alleged discrimination, saying that whether government or private, all schools are closed for children

studying in small classes for almost a year. President of Delhi Parents Association Aparajita Gautam said, "We have written a letter to the Governor and the Chief Minister. We have raised the issue that the education department has addressed the concern of student studying in government school while children of private schools have been ignored."

Gautam said, "Till now we were appealing for online exams of 9th and 11th class. The Education Department did not



respond to our appeal. From above, the department issued orders only for the children of 8th class in the government schools.

"Now, by writing a letter to the Governor, Chief Minister, NHRC and National Commission for Protection of Child

Rights, an appeal has been made to conduct online exams of Class 9th and 11th in private schools of Delhi."

At the same time, President of All India Parents Association, Ashok Aggarwal said, "We welcome the decision of the

Delhi government but it needs further improvement. In addition to the students up to the eighth standard, the government should adopt the same policy for the students of class 9th and 11th. Due to Corona, all the students of Delhi who are studying in small classes are not able to go to school.

In this case, this rule should be applied to private school students also." In favour of the decision taken by the Delhi government, educationist K.C. Kandpal said, "Due to the lockdown, many government school students have also been deprived of online education due to lack of re-

sources. However, students studying in private schools have also been affected. In such a situation, if the government wants, students studying in private schools can also be given relief.

According to Vaibhavi, a student of Class 11, studying in a private school in Delhi, said, "There is no regular education in schools. We have studied online for the whole year. In such a situation, examinations could also be conducted online, but this decision has not been implemented. Now the offline examination has also been announced from next week."



Supporters during a joint rally of Left, Congress and Indian Secular Front (ISF), ahead of West Bengal assembly polls, in Kolkata on Sunday

## ‘MAMATA, BJP PACT AFTER POLLS’

TMC has to be defeated to stop communal bandwagon of RSS-BJP: Yechury  
CPM wonders how Home Minister Shah's son became the secy of BCCI

KOLKATA

CPM General Secretary Sitaram Yechury on Sunday said that the Trinamool Congress has to be defeated first to stop the communal bandwagon of the RSS-BJP, and claimed that the TMC might rejoin the NDA to form the government in West Bengal in case of a hung assembly.

Terming the ongoing political tussle between the TMC and the BJP as a "mock fight", Yechury alleged that the saffron party is using money from the PM CARES fund, set up to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, to "buy" leaders during the time of elections. "The farmers at the Singhu border in Delhi are fighting against the

### Modi hails Tamil, regrets he couldn't learn it

Terming the world's oldest language Tamil, as beautiful and popular, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that he regrets not being able to learn the language.

In 'Mann Ki Baat', one listener Aparna Reddy asked Modi if there was something he missed out on during these long years as CM and PM. "I thought about the question and felt that -- it is a regret of sorts that I could not learn the world's oldest language Tamil. It is a beautiful language and popular across the world. Many people told me about the qualities of Tamil literature and the depths of Tamil poetry," the prime minister said.

(Narendra) Modi government's anti-people policies. If farmers who provide us with food can put up such a gallant fight, we too can do it here," he said.

"This grand alliance of the Left and the secular forces will fight to defeat the cor-

rupt TMC government and the BJP in the state, will fight for a better Bengal," Yechury said while addressing a joint rally at the Brigade Parade Ground in Kolkata ahead of the assembly election in West Bengal.

The CPM leader alleged that the Mamata Banerjee administration is doing the same to youths what the Narendra Modi government is doing against the farmers. "Many people ask me what we would do in case of a hung assembly. I tell them to direct their question to the TMC as they are in the best position to answer it.

Criticising the BJP for attacking several other political parties, especially the Congress, over the issue of dynasty politics, Yechury wondered how Union Home Minister Amit Shah's son became the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

## Maha Min linked to woman's death resigns

BJP WELCOMES DECISION

MUMBAI

MAHARASHTRA Minister Sanjay Rathod, facing flak from the opposition BJP after being linked to a woman's death, on Sunday resigned

from the state cabinet. Rathod made the announcement after submitting his resignation to Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who is also the president of his Shiv Sena party. "There has been a lot of dirty politics over the issue of the woman's death," Rathod told reporters, adding he has quit the ministry so that the truth can come out.

Rathod, who holds the forest portfolio, was facing allegations of complicity in the death of Puja Chavan (23), a resident of Beed district, who was found dead in Pune on February 8, apparently after falling off from the building in which she lived. Talking to reporters after meeting the chief minister at his official residence Varsha, Rathod said he had resigned to facili-

tate a free and fair probe. "Attempts were made to tarnish my image and destroy my reputation I had built after 30 years of socialwork. I was saying that let the probe happen before taking any decision. But the opposition

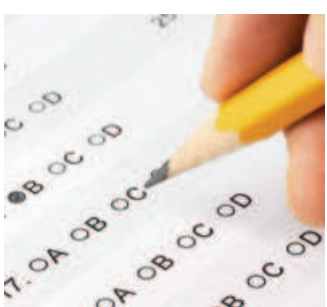
threatened to disrupt the budget session," Rathod said.

The BJP on Sunday welcomed the resignation of Sanjay Rathod.

Talking about Rathod's resignation,

state BJP chief Chandrakant Patil said, "It was due to the constant pressure of the people of Maharashtra and the workers of the BJP that the chief minister had to ultimately yield."

He said he was glad that the chief minister showed courage in removing Rathod from the cabinet. Patil said he hoped that NCP chief Sharad Pawar would also take a similar decision regarding another minister Dhananjay Munde, accused of rape by a Mumbai-based woman, who later withdrew her complaint.



### Army cancels recruitment exam after paper leaked

NEW DELHI

THE Army has cancelled an examination for pan-India recruitment of general duty personnel after paper was found to have been leaked, officials said on Sunday.

They further said at least three persons have been arrested in Pune so far.

"The Indian Army has zero tolerance towards corrupt practices in the recruitment process for selection of suitable candidates," an official said. Based on a proactive joint operation with local police at Pune, a case of possible leakage of question paper prepared for Common Entrance Examination for Recruitment of Soldiers (General Duty) was reported last night, the official added.

While further investigations are underway, it was decided to cancel the examination to ensure continuous transparency in the recruitment process.

## Rahul dubs Modi a 'formidable enemy,' vows to defeat him

CHENNAI

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday described Prime Minister Narendra Modi a "formidable enemy" who 'crushed' his opponents and vowed to send him to political oblivion by following the path of love and non-violence. When a participant wanted to know if Gandhi felt it was possible to nudge the Modi government to implement his 'good ideas'



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi drinks coconut water at the roadside during his election campaign near Alangulam in Thenkasi district on Sunday

rather than waiting to assume power which seemed 'Utopian', he said it could be done with the 'powerful' and 'valuable' support of the people.

It was important to dream big, though some of it may not come true, he said in an obvious reference to snatching the reins of power from the BJP at the Centre.

Continuing, he said, "yes we are fighting a formidable enemy (Modi). We are fighting an enemy that is dominating the money in this country. We are fighting an enemy that is crushing its opponents. But we have done this before. We have defeated a much bigger enemy (British) than this new enemy that has come."

Recalling the country's independence movement, he said the Britishers were much more powerful than Modi would ever be. "Who is Narendra Modi in comparison to the British empire? nobody. People of this country sent the British empire back and in the same way we will send Narendra Modi back to Nagpur (RSS headquarters in Maharashtra)," he said.



Paramjit Singh, husband of a 25-yr-old woman, who was allegedly stabbed to death during a robbery bid, is consoled by relatives as he walls outside Babu Jagjivan Ram Memorial Hospital in New Delhi on Sunday

## Woman carrying baby stabbed to death in chain snatching bid

NEW DELHI

A 25-year-old woman Simran Kaur, holding her child was stabbed to death during a robbery bid in North-West Delhi, police have said. The incident was captured by a CCTV camera in the capital's Adarsh Nagar locality. This is at least the second such incident reported from the city in the past two days. The police said the woman, identified only as Simran, was stabbed while trying to resist a snatching bid. She was coming home from a market and was holding her child when the incident occurred at around 9.30 pm on Saturday.

The CCTV footage clearly shows two women walking when one person approaches them from behind and tries to snatch a chain from one of them. On facing resistance, he stabs one of the women with a knife and leaves. A case has been filed but no arrests made till now as 10 police teams probe further. Residents of the locality have al-

leged that several incidents of snatching have taken place in the area in recent times but the police have not intensified patrolling, ANI reported.

Simran had came to the national capital only last week to meet her elder sister who was visiting from Canada. Simran's aunt said that the 25-year-old had got married to Pramajeet, a Patiala-based businessman, three years ago and they had a two-year-old daughter together.

Anil Jindal, Simran's neighbour, said three years ago, an incident of snatching took place at the same spot where Simran was stabbed.

Gurvinder Singh, a local resident, said crime in the area is increasing day by day. "Crime in our area has become routine. Thieves are highly active here. They snatch gold chains, mobiles and other valuables. Incidents of battery theft are also increasing in the locality. I locked the battery of my car with a chain, despite that it was stolen by thieves," Gurvinder said.

### CBI identifies 10 more victims of child sexual abuse by UP's junior engineer

NEW DELHI

THE CBI has identified 10 more victims of alleged child sexual abuse by now-suspended Uttar Pradesh Irrigation department junior engineer Ram Bhuwan, the alleged paedophile also accused of selling the illicit acts with kids on the dark web, officials said.

Further expanding its exhaustive probe, the central probe agency recorded the statement of these 10 male victims to buttress its charges against Bhuwan who was arrested along with his wife and a suspected accomplice, they said. The person arrested from the national capital, whose identity is being kept secret by the CBI, is understood to be an important link in unravelling the mystery of the 50-year old junior engineer using the dark web to sell child sexual abuse material and making money from it, they said.

The agency team has so far identified around 35 victims and is in the process of identifying others, they said. The CBI is also working on deciphering digital evidence from recoveries made during searches at the premises of Bhuwan and his suspected accomplice, they said.

## My dream is to see India, Pak become true friends: Malala

‘The old philosophy of borders, divisions and divide and conquer, they just don't work anymore’

NEW DELHI

THE old philosophy of having borders and divisions doesn't work anymore and the people in India and Pakistan want to live in peace, Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai said on Sunday, stressing that it is her dream to see the two countries become "good friends".

She also said that minorities need protection in every country, be it Pakistan or India, adding that the issue is not related to religion but to the "exploitation of power" and must be taken seriously. Yousafzai, a Pakistani activist for girls education who miraculously survived a bullet to the head from the militant Taliban in October

2012, said the news of internet shutdown and arrests of activists "protesting peacefully" in India is "worrying" and expressed the hope that the government will make sure that people are heard.

"You can continue to watch Pakistani dramas, we can continue to watch Bollywood movies and enjoy cricket matches," the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner said. She was speaking on her book "I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban" on the concluding day of the Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) which is being held in the virtual mode. "You are Indian and I am Pakistani and we are completely fine, then why is this hatred created be-



tween us? This old philosophy of borders, divisions and divide and conquer... they just don't work anymore, as humans we all want to live in peace," she said.

The actual enemy of India and Pakistan is "poverty, discrimination and inequality" and both countries should unite and fight them, not each other, she added. Apart from "India-Pakistan friendship", Yousufzai said she also dreams of the day when every girl would get to go to school and have access to quality education. The 23-year-old activist also raised her voice for minorities across the world and said they are at "risk" and need to be protected globally by governments and human rights organisations. "Minorities are at risk.

Minorities' rights are not given to them. Be it Hindus and Christians in Pakistan, Muslims, Dalits and other minorities in India... Palestinians, Rohingya refugees. It is not religion, it is the exploitation of power, it is just elites vs the poor and minorities. "Minorities need protection globally from every country. They need a voice, need protection, and it is a reminder to governments, to human rights organisations to take this very seriously," she noted. During the discussion, she also applauded Indian girls and young women fighting for human rights, "speaking out" for farmers in India, climate change and protection of the minority rights, and called their work "empowering and inspiring".



### Bank Nifty

The NSE's banking index Bank Nifty closed at 34,803.60 points, a net fall of 1,038 points or 2.9 per cent from 35,841.60 points. Bank Nifty March month rollover is at 77.76 per cent versus 74.55 per cent. Bank Nifty saw a spectacular run up of 20 per cent on an expiry to expiry basis and touched lifetime high at 37,708 level. The Open Interest declined by 21 per cent and it indicates short covering in the index. Rollover in Bank Nifty was 77.76 per cent as against the three-month average of 77.34 per cent with a huge rollover cost of 171 points, indicating long rollover in the next series.





