

The apex court on November 9, 2019 had ruled in favour of the construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya and directed the Centre to allot an alternative five-acre plot to the Sunni Waqf Board for building a new mosque at a "prominent" place in the holy town in Uttar Pradesh. The state government allotted a five-acre land in Dhanpur village in Sohawal Tehsil of Ayodhya. The blueprint of the mosque was unveiled on December 19. (PTI)



# Womenia

TWEET PATROL



**PRIYANKA @PRIYANKACHOPRA**

Ending opening weekend with a full heart. I'm blown away by the love for #TheWhiteTiger's release on @netflix this weekend. Your support in watching this film has made it trend globally in the top 10 in less than 48 hours + counting.



## GANGA JAMUNI TEHZEEB

# MUSLIM WOMAN COLLECTS DONATIONS FOR RAM TEMPLE

ASKARI JAFFER

Bringing Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb to the fore and showcasing the country's 'unity in diversity' embedded in the very ethos of every Indian, a Muslim woman is at the forefront appealing to her community members to donate for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya.

Meet Zahara Begum, an organiser at 'Tahera Trust' that operates in the two Telugu states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, who is making news for her appeal to members of the Muslim community to donate money for the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Zahara shares, "India is the largest democracy of the world; its Constitution offers freedom of expression and liberty to all its citizens. Presently, when we see India slowly culturally dissociating, we need to start a fresh era of unity with respect, love, cooperation, coordination and understanding each other displaying the real strength of India



to the rest of the world."

According to Zahara, Ayodhya verdict is the outcome of one of the longest-standing legal contests over a place of worship, which occupies a special place in the hearts of Hindu and Muslim communities.

"We have to forget the past battles and work constructively for unity and communal harmony. The temple and the masjid at Ayodhya are the symbols of unity

in diversity. Ayodhya is the birthplace of Sri Rama and Rama and Ayodhya for hindus is what Mecca is to muslims. So, we all need to be happy and proud in participating in the construction of both the temple and the masjid in Ayodhya," she adds.

Indian civilization is the oldest in the world and spirituality is the soul of India and India is the home for spirituality 'Isavasyam Idam Sarvam.' All that is here is



divine. India is the only country that says "God is everywhere and His grace is available to all" and people from all over the world come to our country to explore spirituality.

"We all Indians share the same national pride of having India as our motherland and we are definitely blessed to be born in this country where Rama is born. We need to start a fresh tomorrow by calling an end to all contaminations and Covid-19 is also helping in this process of togetherness and cleanliness. In India, the Hin-

dus send greetings to their Muslim brethren during festivals such as Ramzan, Bakrid, Muharram, etc. likewise, the Muslims send their wishes to Hindus during Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi, Sankranti, Ugadi etc, etc. We, Muslims and Hindus together celebrate the festival muharram which is very unique with the same devotion," she shares.

Sharing about the inspiration for her appeal, she says during her journeys to villages she has seen the Hindus donating good cultivable lands to Muslims for

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harmony. The temple and the masjid at Ayodhya are the symbols of unity in diversity. Ayodhya is the birthplace of Sri Rama and Ayodhya for hindus is what Mecca is to

muslims. So, we all need to be happy and proud in participating in the construction of both the temple and the masjid in Ayodhya



- Zahara Begum

Masjids, Idgahs, Shaadi khaanas and helped them financially to build these structures.

She adds, "I thought this is the good time for coming together and showing our unity forever as we don't get such opportunity again and again, hence gave a call for all the Muslim brothers and sisters to come forward and participate in Nidhi Samarpana program for the construction of the temple and the masjid also at Ayodhya. There is no pressure or a compulsion upon us, but it is our wish left to our choice and

happiness to donate from Rs 10 to any amount."

"This was my voluntary personal request asking to donate and participate in Nidhi Samarpana program as it is the biggest deed we will be earning from this. I am sincerely thanking all the Muslims who have come forward establishing the donations all across India for the construction of the Rama Temple at Ayodhya and this a good gesture for the progressive India. We are all one and always remain united," concludes Zahara.

# Mountbatten family collection to go under hammer

SIDDHI JAIN

Over 350 objects from the 18th century home of the late Patricia Edwina Victoria Mountbatten -- the eldest daughter of Britain's last Viceroy of India -- would go under the hammer at a Sotheby's auction on March 24. The objects span jewellery, furniture, paintings, sculpture, books, silver and ceramics, said the auction house.

Born in 1924, Patricia known as the second Countess Mountbatten of Burma, was the great granddaughter of Queen Victoria. She lived in Newhouse with her husband John Knatchbull, seventh Baron Brabourne.

According to Sotheby's, "The sale will open to door on the history of the family through the art and objects that they lived with, crossing the paths of the twentieth century's leading figures along the way. Many items were inherited from her ancestors and share connections with India, a place that was very special to the family."

Some of the objects on auction in London include a pair of gold and enamel elephants, made in



Jaipur and given by Louis Mountbatten to his wife as a present to mark their 24th wedding anniversary in 1946. The pair had become engaged at Viceroy's House in Delhi in 1922.

A diamond set and enamelled gold bracelet made in India, that once belonged to Queen Victoria

herself and was passed down the family, is also part of the sale, so is an India-inspired set of jewels belonging to the last Viceroy's wife.

Among the auction highlights is the "The Imperial Order of the Crown of India". "Given to Patricia's mother-in-law Doreen, wife

of one-time Viceroy Michael Knatchbull. The only living wearer is Queen Elizabeth II," said Sotheby's.

Harry Dalmeny, Sotheby's Chairman, UK & Ireland, said in a statement: "Lady Mountbatten's



residence, Newhouse, was a private place for entertaining only the closest of family and friends, capturing all the magic of a stately home on an intimate scale. Through her belongings, many passed down from members of the extended family over the years, collectors have the chance to see the story of the 20th century unfold and acquire evocative vestiges of a glittering way of life."

Lady Mountbatten's family said in a statement issued by the auc-

tion house: "Our overriding desire when organising our mother's affairs is to honour her wishes and celebrate the memory of both our mother and our father. They had discussed these arrangements with us, and we are simply putting their plans into effect. We are of course keeping many things and importantly among these are objects which are of sentimental value and are much loved."

Patricia was also connected to India through her husband John's side of the family. "John's father (Michael Knatchbull) spent four months as India's youngest Viceroy in 1938, and John himself worked for Louis Mountbatten in India, before later becoming an Academy Award nominated Film Producer (behind titles such as "A Passage to India"). When Patricia and John married, the newlyweds chose to spend several months in India as part of their honeymoon. A young Princess Elizabeth (who would later become Queen Elizabeth II) had been a bridesmaid at their wedding," said the auction house.



## The art of good handwriting

If you have ever received a comment about your 'bad' handwriting, fret not, chances are that it might not be you but the pen that you used.

Unlike what most people commonly believe, not all pens are equal. Pens don't only vary in quality but also in their design and how they interact with you and your handwriting style. Finding the perfect pen will have an immediate effect on the look of the handwriting and in some cases on the legibility of the script.

Eirini Petratou, Senior User Research Manager, BIC World examines the different factors that can help improve handwriting. While multiple factors can affect the style of one's penmanship, the most important one to note is the consistency and legibility of characters. It does not matter if your character size is large or small, or if it's cramped or spaced out or slanted, ultimately as long as there is uniformity across the shapes and each character is clear and legible, the handwriting will have its unique style.

To ensure consistency and legibility across your writing, there are several points which you should note.

**Grip pressure:** It's important to be able to naturally maintain a consistent pressure while gripping a pen. This has a bearing in terms of having consistency over a longer period, as well as the general flow of your handwriting. It is important to know that the tighter the pinch grip on the pen, the faster your muscles tire and the more inconsistent your strokes get.

**PRO tip:** If you are a person who naturally tends to grip tighter, a pen with a thicker barrel or with a padded grip, would be more suitable since less counterpressure is felt when your fingers are not trying to squeeze around a thinner surface.

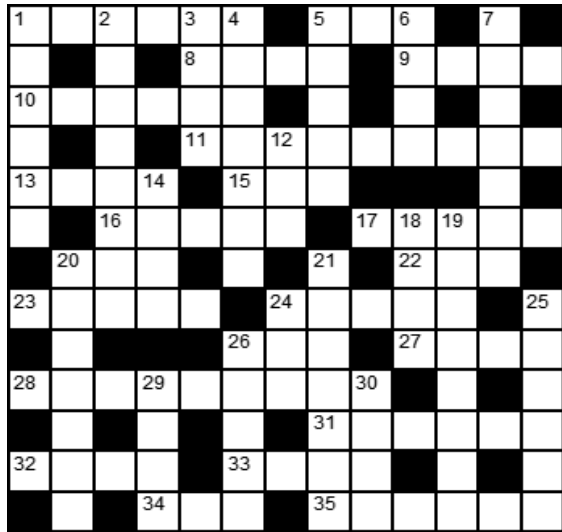
But while choosing the correct thickness of a pen, might help in terms of the tiring of your fingers, it does not address a key factor that influences the amount of

pressure that you apply -- that of, balance and a sense of grip. Different people, writing with the same pen, might have a different outlook to whether the pen feels balanced or is slipping in their hand which impacts the pressure level applied to grip the pen.

**Nail type:** Interestingly, research done by BIC Cello indicates that your fingernail shape also affects the amounts of pressure that you apply while holding a pen. People with shorter square nails should typically prefer thicker circumference pens, while thin circumference pens are better suited for those with longer cylindrical nails.

**Length of the pen:** You might have often noticed that several people tend to affix the pen cap to the back of the pen while writing -- an action that immediately increases the length of the writing instrument as well as acts as a counterweight at the top. This sense of balance and weight is not only linked to the amount of pressure applied to grip the pen but more importantly also directly correlated with the amount of pressure that is applied on the paper itself. Choosing a pen, whose weight, weight distribution and shape, will suit the amount of pressure that you apply on the paper, will immediately affect the consistency of the thickness of your letters and the fluidity of your writing.

**Ink type:** Another factor that is associated with the amount of pressure that you apply to the paper, is the type of ink that you use. Fountain pens, owing to the lower viscosity of the ink, require a significantly lower amount of pressure to be applied, with ballpoint pens being at the other extreme. The smoother the pen glides on the paper, the more control is required to maintain consistency, and where more pressure is required to be applied between pen and paper, the margin of error to maintain consistency automatically increases. The speed at which you write also correlates to this point.



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 25

## CROSSWORD

Across

- Bookies' sign language (3-3)
- Drunken sound (3)
- Mother (4)
- Essen valley (4)
- Frozen region of earth, in a way ? (3-3)
- Piece of manual craft (9)
- Lift inventor (4)
- Refuse-container (3)
- Dandruff site (5)
- Office notes (5)
- Pod vegetable (3)
- Exclamation of surprise (3)
- Gadget (5)
- Blow with the fist (5)
- The Big Apple (3)
- Maori war dance (4)
- Sudden eruptions (9)
- Written in notation (6)
- Goya's "The Duchess of \_\_\_" (4)
- Stringed instrument (4)

Down

- Definite article (3)
- Courting (6)
- Greek sea-god (6)
- Sleeveless undergarments (8)
- Asian nurse (4)
- Competent (7)
- Joseph \_\_\_, Austrian composer (5)
- Exult (4)
- Ancient Egyptian king (7)
- Barely defeat (3)
- Swindle (4)
- Apiece (4)
- Indian empress (8)
- Devoutly (7)
- Capital of Uttar Pradesh (7)
- Monetary unit of Myanmar (3)
- A rotten person or farm product ? (3,3)
- Cheek (5)
- Fishing vessel (4)
- By oneself (4)

## SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO JANUARY 25



# SC rejects UP plea to transfer anti-conversion law cases to top court

NEW DELHI

THE Supreme Court on Monday refused to transfer to itself petitions filed in Allahabad High Court challenging new law of Uttar Pradesh regulating religious conversions for the inter-faith marriages.

A bench of Chief Justice SA Bobde and Justices AS Bopanna and V Ramasubramanian said that it would like to have the advantage of the High Court order. Taking note of the observation

of the bench, the Uttar Pradesh government preferred to withdraw the transfer petition. Senior advocate P S Narasimha, appearing for Uttar Pradesh government, said to avoid multiplicity of proceedings before the High Court and the top court, the transfer petition may be allowed.

The bench said, "We have issued notice does not mean that the High Court cannot decide the issue". It said, "Why should we stop the High Court from hear-

ing the matter. Let us have the advantage of the High Court verdict". The top court had on January 6, agreed to examine controversial new laws of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand regulating religious conversions for the inter-faith marriages.

It had, however, refused to stay the controversial provisions of the laws and issued notices to both state governments on two different petitions. The top court had issued notice to the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand gov-

ernments and sought their response within four weeks.

The pleas, filed by advocate Vishal Thakre and others and an NGO 'Citizen for Justice and Peace', have challenged the constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Religious Conversion Ordinance, 2020 and the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act, 2018 which regulate religious conversions for inter-faith marriages.

The Uttar Pradesh Ordinance was cleared by the state Cabinet

in November and ascent was given by Governor Anandiben Patel on November 28 last year. It relates not only to inter-faith marriages but all religious conversions and lays down elaborate procedures for those who wish to convert to another religion. The Uttarakhand Act entails two year jail term for those found guilty of religious conversion through force or "allurement", which can be in cash or in kind - employment or material benefit.



# Kejriwal unfurls Tricolour at Secretariat on R-Day eve

NEW DELHI

DELHI Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday unfurled the Tricolour at the Delhi Secretariat ahead of the 72nd Republic Day celebrations.

"Congratulations to the people of Delhi on 72nd Republic Day. The last one year has been very tough for all of us due to the Covid-19 pandemic. And due to this reason, we are celebrating Republic Day this year amid a low crowd presence. Otherwise, we would have celebrated Republic Day at Chhatrashal Stadium like every year," Kejriwal said speaking on the occasion.

He also recalled the day when the national capital reported largest number of coronavirus cases.

"We cannot forget November 11, 2020 - the day Delhi reported 8,500 Covid-19 cases. New York



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal presents an award to Head Warden of Tihar Central Jail No 5, Shahid Ahmed, during the Republic Day celebrations at Delhi Secretariat, in New Delhi on Monday

city in the US reported 6,300 Covid-19 cases in one day and we saw that their healthcare sector almost collapsed. However, that it did not happen in Delhi as the

health infrastructure in Delhi is quite strong.

"It took 6-7 years for the Delhi government to strengthen its healthcare system both in the

private and the government-run hospitals.

"Being the Chief Minister, I am proud of Delhi's healthcare system and the officials, doctors, volunteers... the Delhi Police, and everyone who relentlessly served the people during the tough times," he said.

Recalling the early days (March-April) of Covid-19 in Delhi, Kejriwal said as the people were losing their jobs, there was stress and disappointment among the common people as well as the government.

"However, our government distributed 5 kg ration every month to over 1 crore people. We provided food with 10 lakh food packets to people everyday at different locations. The Delhi government also took care of auto and taxi drivers, rickshaw-pullers and many others who lost their job," the Chief Minister said.

# Negative RT-PCR report must for devotees coming for Haridwar Kumbh

DEHRADUN

DEVOTEES who wish to attend the forthcoming Kumbh mela must bring a COVID-19 negative RT-PCR test report, according to a standard operating procedure (SOP) issued by the Centre for holding the religious congregation.

The RT-PCR test must be conducted within 72 hrs of the date of the visit, stated the document by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

The Uttarakhand government shall ensure that healthcare and other frontline workers engaged during Kumbh Mela medical and public health operations are vaccinated on priority. Only vaccinated healthcare and other frontline workers be deputed for Kumbh Mela duties, it said.

As far as possible, people must maintain a six-feet distance in public places and wear masks, the SOP stated, while the authorities have been directed to ensure the devotees adhere to COVID-appropriate behaviour during the



Kumbh. Mask dispensing kiosks at government-approved rates may be set up at entry points and parking lots. Provision should be kept for distribution of free masks to those who cannot afford them, it said.

Enforcement agencies should levy penalties on defaulters for not

wearing masks or face covers or for not following physical distancing norms, the SOP stated. Those aged more than 65 years, pregnant women, children below the age of 10, those with underlying comorbid conditions such should be discouraged to attend the Kumbh Mela, it said.

# 100 camera traps installed at Rajaji to keep vigil on relocated tigers

RISHIKESH

ONE hundred camera traps have been installed in the western part of Rajaji Tiger Reserve to keep a constant watch on the movement of relocated tigers, officials said on Monday.

Recently, two tigers, one male and the other female, were relocated from Corbett Tiger Reserve to Rajaji to increase their population in its western part. "We have set up 100 camera traps in the western part of Rajaji to keep an eye on the relocated tigers. We are getting pictures of their movement in the reserve regularly. We are also actively exploring whether the relocated male tiger who ran away from its enclosure at Motichoor range of the reserve can be radio collared once again," Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) Vinod Kumar Singhal told PTI.

The relocated male tiger had escaped from its enclosure at Motichoor range of Rajaji just a few days after its relocation there earlier this month, dropping behind its radio collar. "We are studying methods adopted by other tiger reserves in the country for radio collaring relocated tigers. If all the institutions partnering with us in the tiger relocation project agree, we may try to radio collar the tiger again," Singhal said.

A decision on deploying captive elephants to maintain a vigil on the relocated tigers at the reserve may also be taken soon, Singhal said. DIG (forest) of the National Tiger Conservation Authority of India had recently written to the Uttarakhand Forest Department, asking it to step up vigilance of the relocated tigers at Rajaji.



# 30 CBI officials get President's Police Medals

NEW DELHI

AS many as 30 CBI officials have been awarded the President's Police Medals for Distinguished Service and Police Medals for Meritorious Service by President Ram Nath Kovind on the occasion of Republic Day.

Six CBI officers bagged the President's Police Medals for Distinguished Service, while 24 others got the Police Medals for Meritorious Service.

Those awarded for distinguished service included Sampat Meena, currently posted as CBI Joint Director in Uttar Pradesh's Lucknow; Vineet Vinayak, currently posted as Joint Director (Chandigarh) in New Delhi; Saraladas Mishra, posted as ASP in CBI's Economic Offence (EO)-III in New Delhi; Vivek Dhir, posted as Deputy Superintendent (DSP) in CBI's ACB Jammu; Surender Kumar Rohilla, posted as DSP

in CBI's ACU-V in New Delhi; and Basant Singh Bisht, Head Constable, posted at the CBI headquarters here.

Police Medals for Meritorious Service have been awarded to one DIG, two SPs, three Assistant Superintendent of Police, three DSPs, one Inspector, one Sub-Inspector, two Assistant Sub-Inspectors, seven Head Constables, three Constables and one office Superintendent.



# SWR Civil Defence volunteers show their skill

SOUTH Western Railway Civil Defence Organisation, conducted a live demonstration and mock drill at Railway Supervisors Rest House, Tughabhadra, near Hubballi Railway station on Monday. During the demonstration a mock drill was conducted where in volunteers displayed how to respond to emergencies. In this drill, Civil Defence personnel performed various types of techniques to rescue casualties on ground as well as from high buildings in case of disasters

# Covid +ve officer sentenced in graft case hangs self

JAIPUR

AN income tax inspector who was sentenced to jail last week in a bribery case allegedly committed suicide at a hospital here where he was admitted after he tested positive for coronavirus, police said on Monday. Vinay Kumar Mangla, 45, was caught by the CBI in 2016 while taking a bribe of Rs 1 lakh.

A court in Jaipur had awarded him a sentence of five years last Friday, Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Abhijeet Singh. Mangla was taken into custody, a coronavirus test was conducted and the result came positive, following which was admitted to the Rajasthan University of Health Sciences, Pratap Nagar police station incharge Shreemohan Meena said. He was found hanging in the COVID ward of the hospital on Monday morning, Meena said. Mangla, a resident of Kota, was posted in Jhalawar where the CBI had caught him red-handed in December 2016 while taking the bribe from an assessee for not imposing penalty on his income tax return.

# Yogi rules out any plan to split UP

LUCKNOW

UTTAR PRADESH Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday virtually ruled out any plan for the division of the state, saying his government believes in uniting and not dividing.

During the BSP rule with Mayawati at the helm, the Uttar Pradesh Assembly had in 2011 passed a proposal for a

four-way split of the state. The proposal was to divide Uttar Pradesh into Bundelkhand, Purvanchal, Awadh Pradesh and Paschim Pradesh.

Adityanath on Monday said, "The people of Uttar Pradesh are proud of their history and the state has its own importance in the country. We believe in uniting not dividing." He said the state government has given special at-

tention on development of the state's eastern parts and the Bundelkhand region. "With an aim to usher economic development in these two regions, the BJP government has been building Purvanchal expressway and Bundelkhand expressway.

The two expressways will become the backbones of development in these areas," the chief minister told reporters at

his residence. Adityanath claimed that the state government has created an investor-friendly environment in Uttar Pradesh, which has yielded positive results for the state. For ensuring inclusive development of the state, the BJP government has started one-district-one product scheme which is transforming the lives of the poor and the backward people in the state, he added.

# Awaiting Centre's instructions: AAP on 'free vaccine' promise

ASHISH SRIVASTAVA  
NEW DELHI

THE Delhi government is awaiting instructions from the central government for the promise of providing free Covid-19 vaccines to all the residents of Delhi made by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Raghav Chaddha, national spokesperson of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) from Rajinder Nagar constituency told IANS that the demand to provide free vaccine has been conveyed to the Centre and now the gov-

ernment of Delhi is waiting for its instructions.

"The Arvind Kejriwal government is in 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 it does not have wealth. Our demands and ideas have been forwarded to the Centre and we wait for their instructions," he added.

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.

"The vaccine will start getting administered on January 16. It will first be given to corona warriors such as healthcare workers, front-line workers. I had appealed to the Central government

that ours is a poor nation, and a pandemic like this has hit the nation after 100 years, since 1918 when the Spanish flu hit humankind," he had said on January 14.

"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 vaccine to all residents," Kejriwal had stated.

The Centre has finalised a list of 30 crore individuals to receive vaccines in the first phase of vac-

cination roll-out. It includes one crore healthcare providers and workers in healthcare settings, two crore personnel from state and central police departments, the armed forces, home guard and civil defence organisations including disaster management volunteers and municipal workers, and 27 crore persons above the age of 50 and people below 50 with associated comorbidities.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier stated the Centre will provide free of cost vaccines to one crore health care and two crore frontline workers including the police, civil defence

and sanitation workers.

However, there is no word yet on the price factor for 27 crore people over 50 years in age and those with co-morbidities such as diabetes and hypertension, who are also expected to be vaccinated in the first phase.

Simultaneously, the Delhi government has shortlisted 51 lakh citizens including healthcare professionals, front-line workers and people over 50 and those with comorbidities for inoculation in the first phase of Covid immunisation programme which took off with 81 vaccination sites in the national capital.



# Repression, Russian style!

Russian police have detained more than 3,000 people in a crackdown on protests in support of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny, monitors say. Tens of thousands of people defied a heavy police presence to join some of the largest rallies against President Vladimir Putin in years. In Moscow, riot police were seen beating and dragging away protesters. OVD Info, an independent NGO that monitors rallies, said about 3,100 people had been detained, more than 1,200 of them in Moscow alone. Navalny, President Putin's most high-profile critic, called for street protests after his arrest recently. He was detained after he flew back to Moscow from Berlin, where he had been recovering from a near-fatal nerve agent attack in Russia last August.

On his return, he was immediately taken into custody and found guilty of violating parole conditions. He says it is a trumped-up case designed to silence him. Navalny accuses President Putin of ordering his murder, which the Kremlin denies. The stubborn ex-lawyer who has campaigned against Putin for years despite what he de-

scribes as an unrelenting state effort to stifle his activity could now face years in jail, which his supporters are now trying to stop. The unauthorised demonstrations were held in about 100 cities and towns from Russia's Far East and Siberia to Moscow and St Petersburg. Protesters ranged from teenage students to elderly people who demanded Navalny's release.

At least 40,000 people joined a rally in central Moscow. But Russia's interior ministry put the number of protesters at 4,000. In the Siberian city of Yakutsk, attendees at a small protest saw temperatures dip as low as -50C (-58F). Observers say the scale of the demonstrations across the country was unprecedented while the protest in the capital was the largest in almost a decade. The issue, however, is Vladimir Putin can't lose and yet Navalny protests. Navalny is now under arrest, charged with violating his suspended sentence by leaving for Germany and staying there a few months.

The conviction for which he received the suspended sentence was pronounced unlawful by the European

Court of Human Rights. It increasingly seems that the Russian opposition leader has become Putin's main rival, if not yet for the nation's leadership, then at least for the status of the world's best-known Russian. His newly acquired international fame made a joke out of the pro-Kremlin media's policy to refer to him as just a "blogger" and Putin's own refusal to call him by name. Having indeed started as an anti-corruption blogger over a decade ago, Navalny was Russia's first opposition figure who managed to create an extremely efficient nationwide network of supporters, many in their twenties or even teens.

In a country mired by political apathy and pervasive cynicism, he managed to inspire millions by conducting ground-breaking investigations into the astonishing corruption of Putin's entourage and presenting them in easy-to-grasp YouTube videos filled with his trademark irony. Navalny could have lived comfortably in Germany and still remained a global celebrity. The Russian establishment didn't really want to arrest him. They had merely sent him a polite reminder that they would leave him alone if he leaves them alone. By getting arrested upon arrival from Germany, Navalny made the Kremlin look both weak and vengeful.



# Whose farms? whose laws? whose solution?

DR G B REDDY AND BAGLEKAR AKASH KUMAR

EVER since 12th January 2021, when the Supreme Court of India in Rakesh Vaishnav & Ors. v. Union of India & Ors., has "stayed" the implementation of the three central farm laws, there has been an intense debate on several constitutional and policy issues leading to two opposing views. One view is that it is a victory for farmers against the mighty Central Government, whereas, the other view is that it is a victory of Central Government, which, instead of ending the farmers protest forcefully, used the judicial platform, which might lead to end of farmers protests.

Legally speaking, courts cannot "stay" the implementation of any statute, because it is a court's-own-carved out principle that a statute enacted by the legislature, at the first blush, is presumed as constitutionally valid, until it is "declared" as unconstitutional after judicial review.

Nonetheless, in rare circumstances, courts can "stay" the implementation of a statute as pointed out by the Supreme Court in Health for Millions v. Union of India, (2014), that "... the operation of the statutory provisions cannot be stultified by granting an interim order except when the court is fully convinced that the particular enactment or the rules are ex facie unconstitutional and the factors, like balance of convenience, irreparable injury and public interest are in favour of passing an interim order". Generally, when an issue is sub-judice, no views should be expressed, but the Supreme Court's unusual "stay" on implementation of farm laws warrants examination of certain fundamental issues. A look at the relevant factual and legal matrix shows that - it is too early to say that the three farm laws are ex-facie unconstitutional, because, firstly, they cannot be said to be beyond Parliament's competence.

The Parliament, along with State legislatures, is competent to enact laws on "trade and commerce..." by virtue of entry 33 of the concurrent list of the seventh schedule to the Constitution, while the State legislatures alone are competent to make laws on "agriculture" by virtue of entry 14 in the State list. As these farm laws deal with "trade and commerce" in Agriculture, Parliament can be said to be competent to enact these farm laws.

At the same breath, it is equally possible to say that 'agriculture' which is a State entry, is also encroached upon by the Centre through colourable legislation. It is exactly for this reason that one of the petitioners has challenged the entry 33. Secondly, the farm laws, at least on face of them, do not seem to violate any of the fundamental rights of the farmers. All that the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, says is that farmers may enter into agreements with others before planting/rearing of their produce.

It is needless to mention that such agreements must fulfill all the conditions of a valid contract under Indian Contracts Act, 1872. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 takes away the Centre's power to impose stockholding limits on foodstuffs except under "extraordinary conditions", like war, famine, etc., which shouldn't concern the farmers at all, because they are nowhere related to stocking restrictions.

Coming to the most-controversial Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020, which is the main cause of protests, it allows the farmers to sell their produce outside the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis. Many farmers fear that they would lose out the security of procurement by Government of their produce at minimum support price (MSP).

It may be noted that APMC mandis are not totally shut. Moreover, the Government is assuring that it would continue with the procurement at MSP which has been just a Government's policy without any statutory basis. Thus, none of the three laws appears to be ex-facie unconstitutional.

Balance of convenience, irreparable injury to farmers and harming public interest cannot be determined merely on surmises and conjectures without any actual proof, because these are the experimental economic statutes enacted with an aim of ushering the modernity in trade and commerce for agricultural sector.

Such reforming statutes are upheld by the UU Supreme Court under "commerce clause" in cases like Heart of Atlanta Motel, INC v. United States [79 US 241 (1964)]. While staying the implementation of farm laws, our Supreme Court should have taken cognizance of its accepted observations of the US Judge, Justice Brandeis, who in New State Ice Co. v. Ernest A. Liebmann [285 US 262 (1931)], observed that "to stay experimentation in things social and economic is a grave responsibility. Denial of the right to experiment may be fraught with serious consequences to the Nation."

While one may argue that the apex court's sole intention in passing the interim order was an attempt to facilitate a fair, equitable and just solution to the problem, but, the court should have probably considered the following issues- 1) whether by going beyond constitutionality of farm laws, it tried to decide political questions? 2) whether lakshmanarekha was crossed by playing the role of a mediator? 3) whether by ordering continuation of MSP and status quo on farm holdings, which questions were not before court, the court tried its hand at judicial governance? and finally, 4) whether the court should have considered the stand of all the stakeholders and unions which are not agitating, despite few were before it, before passing such stay orders?

On the other hand, questions are raised on impartiality of the court constituted expert committee, the varying stands of different farmers unions, and the inflexible demand of opponents of farm laws to repeal them. In this context, it is trite to recollect the oft quoted phrase from the famous English decision, Rex v. Sussex Justices, ex parte McCarthy [(1924) 1 KB 256], where Lord Hewart, C.J., said "Not only must justice be done, it must also be seen to be done".

Stay of farm laws without a reasoned order exhibits unwarranted judicial over-activism. To put an end to this impasse, it is suggested that the Centre may declare the three farm laws as "model laws" by giving discretion to the States either to follow them or to have their own laws to cater to the needs of local farmers in this matter. This will effectively protect the federal spirit and also will respect the distribution of legislative powers under the Constitution. Any attempt at judicial solution to farmers' agitation may certainly boomerang, exposing the inherent limitations of judicial governance.

(The authors are Professor, University College of Law, Osmania University and student, University College of Law, Osmania University respectively)

# Will AP govt cooperate with SEC now?



Madabhushi Sridhar Acharyulu

The Supreme Court had given a final stamp on the constitutionality of election notification for panchayat election. It is clearly a war of egos and allegations of mala fides are before the courts of law. The law is settled and

decided. The elections have to be held according to Constitutional norms whenever the term of local bodies is completed. The main duty of the Election Commission is to conduct elections. If SEC has scheduled elections, it cannot be termed as mala fide. Not conducting elections is unconstitutional and undemocratic. This must be retold many times by the Supreme Court, every time the AP government wants the Supreme Court to tell them what to do.

Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul rightly asked 'where is acting in mala fide manner'. In response learned counsel said we had nothing to do with tiff with the individual. Judge said that he got that impression from the way appeal is drafted.

The fact is that the political executive is asking judiciary to do the job of different functionaries like an Election Commissioner, a Chief Secretary and a leader of employees' union. Decisions must be taken at administrative level. They cannot defer it for the final opinion of the Supreme Court.

The decision of the SC is dismissal of the Special Leave Petition. The real purpose of law is that the State must abide by the judgment of High Court. The division bench's decision is not appealable. The general law did not provide for appeal over such decision. Exceptionally the issue can be taken in appeal but for that you need leave of the court.

When law provides for no appeal, one has to take leave of court. When leave is not granted by the High Court, Special Leave can be granted under exceptional circumstances, if the SC is convinced. The AP Government should have stopped its legal fight after the decision by the division bench. When it was asking for special leave, the SC was not convinced and rejected the leave. It is not full-fledged rejection of appeal, but it is rejection of permission for appeal.

When the SLP is dismissed, the division bench decision of High Court will be final order as the Supreme Court refused to interfere. It is rather impossible for the Courts to identify the mala fides of each party behind their decisions and actions. The Government challenged notification of SEC as malicious (-guided by bad faith) and SEC challenged the decision of High Court single judge bench using the same ground, among others.

Question is, how a court can consider exercise of legitimate power as mala fide? It is easy to contend, but difficult for advocates to convince and complex for



**The political parties find some or the other excuse to postpone the local body elections. It is a general phenomenon. If the ruling party does not want, there will be no elections. To avoid this, the Constitution was amended to ensure timely elections to the local bodies. Constitution mandates the establishment of local self-government institutions is the responsibility of the States (entry 5, List II, Seventh Schedule). But not all State governments were serious about empowering Panchayati Raj institutions as elections were not being conducted regularly**

judges to decide on mala fides amidst the constitutional functions of two important wings of the 'State'. It is unfortunate that like the Jagan's Government and SEC, several State organisations and wings of the government are fighting each other at the cost of people's money, in the highest courts of law. The Courts have to spend their quality time on these internal feuds or ego issues, instead of considering the breach of human rights requiring urgent attention. How can courts decide challenges motivated by political rivalry and mala fides or mutual lack of trust?

In a landmark decision, in Election Commission of India vs Ashok Kumar & Ors., (https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1247997/) the SC held that according to Article 329(b), the elections couldn't be called in question until the process is not finished. While exercising the powers conferred by Rule 59A of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, the Election Commission of India issued a notification published, according to which the areas where the voting was to be done by ballot paper, the counting of such votes was to be done by mixing the ballot papers and not station wise.

Writ petitions were filed before the High court against this particular notification, claiming that the counting must be done station-wise. The High court ordered in favour of the petitioner. Aggrieved by this

order, the ECI filed an SLP in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court overturned the order of the High court.

The political parties find some or the other excuse to postpone the local body elections. It is a general phenomenon. If the ruling party does not want, there will be no elections. To avoid this, the Constitution was amended to ensure timely elections to the local bodies. Constitution mandates the establishment of local self-government institutions is the responsibility of the States (entry 5, List II, Seventh Schedule). But not all State governments were serious about empowering Panchayati Raj institutions as elections were not being conducted regularly.

Amendment to the Constitution 1992 The Constitution was amended in 1992 to define the term (five years) for these institutions. Simultaneously, another provision was made for setting up a constitutional authority, the SEC, on the lines of the EC to conduct regular panchayat elections.

The Article 243K, which provided for setting up of SECs, is drafted in almost the same language of Article 324 related to the EC. This means the SECs will have the same status and powers as the EC. The State Election Commissioner can only be removed via impeachment like the only method of removal for Central Election Commissioner.

In 2006, the Supreme Court cleared the doubts and held the two constitutional authorities enjoy the same powers. In Kishan Singh Tomar vs Municipal Corporation of the City of Ahmedabad, (https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1736371/) the five-judge Constitution Bench headed by CJI of Supreme Court gave on 19th October 2006 a categorical direction that State governments should abide by orders of the SECs during the conduct of the panchayat and municipal elections, just like they follow the instructions of the EC during Assembly and Parliament polls.

The Courts cannot interfere in the conduct of polls to local bodies and self-government institutions once the electoral process has been set in motion. Article 243-O of the Constitution bars interference in poll matters set in motion by the

SECs; Article 329 bars interference in such matters set in motion by the EC. Only after the polls are over can the SECs' decisions or conduct be questioned through an election petition.

The law is clear and the powers for the SEC make them independent and it is the duty of the Government and machinery to support the SEC to complete the process of elections as per the notification. In Andhra Pradesh, every step in conducting elections to Panchayats is made a point of constitutional controversy and being taken to Supreme Court after single judge and division bench of High Court of Andhra Pradesh.

When SEC deferred Elections to Panchayats in March 2020, the Government and SEC went up to the apex court several times. Thereafter, the Government removed him and appointed another as SEC, which again was escalated to SC and Nimgadga Ramesh Kumar's was restored as Commissioner. Ramesh Kumar's attempt to complete the process of elections in 2021 is also facing legal challenges. To conduct elections is his basic duty. One has to question him if he does not initiate steps to conduct elections to panchayat bodies.

Supreme Court said in Election Commission of India Through Secretary v. Ashok Kumar and others, that "the Court must guard against any attempt at retarding, interdicting, protracting or stalling of the election proceedings. Care has to be taken to see that there is no attempt to utilise the courts indulgence by filing a petition outwardly innocuous but essentially a subterfuge or pretext for achieving an ulterior or hidden end. Needless to say, that in the very nature of the things the Court would act with reluctance and shall not act except on a clear and strong case for its intervention having been made out by raising the pleas with particulars and precision and supporting the same by necessary material".

Rejecting the argument based on bad faith, the High Court bench in para 32 explained "By the order dated 08.01.2021, the State Election Commission had decided to fulfil its obligation to hold election, which is overdue by almost 2½ years. Thus, the Commissioner was acting on the legitimate exercise of power that he has. It is not explained to us how in pursuing a legitimate exercise, the Commissioner had been acting mala fide in the sense of pursuing an illegitimate aim. In any event, the Court would be slow to draw adverse inference unless material of high order of credibility is placed before the Court regarding mala fide, more so, when imputations are attributed to holder of an office discharging high responsibility such as the Commissioner of the State Election Commission."

At least now, the government should cooperate with SEC and complete the process of elections.

(The writer is Professor of Law, Bennett University and former Central Information Commissioner)

# Burgula Narsing Rao was one of a kind

UMA MAGAL

BURGULA Narsing Rao has often been recalled a true son of Telangana and a true-blue Hyderabad. I met him on several occasions during the research for our film on the rocks of Hyderabad and found him generous with his time and his capacity to share knowledge of the lay-out of the land in all aspects. A great storyteller who kept me rapt with accounts of personal history which also happen to be musically tied into the area's history. A fierce champion of the ideals of the freedom movement and in the mould of its greatest leaders and thinkers. One of the sharpest minds the city has seen. Witty and urbane and yet a son of the soil, his passing is an incomparable loss to Hyderabad. He would start from his origins in Burgula village near Hyderabad. From the feudal set up of his grandfather's time to modern day Hyderabad, he would describe the many eras in the history of the area, in vivid detail. He had a scholar cum practitioner's grasp of this history and had a way of sorting it by decades, making it easy for anyone to follow it. He was always sharp in his criticism of the systems of social exploitation he saw in older times as well as those that are current in our own times.

His accounts were relayed with keen per-



ception of feudal exploitative systems, British politics, the growth and spread of the freedom movement, the sharpening of communal tendencies, the coming of independence, the challenges thereafter. The bedrock of these accounts was a passionate commitment to the area and the first-hand experience of having lived through these times and participated wholeheartedly in the struggles they embodied and the successes they achieved.

It was exhilarating to hear him speak of so many intellectual and artistic luminaries of Hyderabad and their engagement with the issues of the times. His involvement and

contribution to the struggle for Telangana and social and economic justice for all, is well known and documented. But what made it so special was to hear it all from him. He mentioned how Magdum Moidudin, his friend, condensed their goals in the now oft quoted lines:

*Hayat leke chalo qayanaath leke chalo Chalo toh saare zamaane ko saath leke chalo (Take along all existence, take along all creation If you go ahead, take along all of the world)*

And another less known couplet that sums up the acute discernment of events by this group of leaders:

*Na kisi aah ki awaaz, na kisi zanjeer ka shor Aaj kya ho gaya zindaan mein, ki zindaan chup hai*

(There is no sound of pain, no sound of chain What unfolds today in prison, that the prison is silent?)

The fire in his eyes when he recounted the details of the students' agitation of which he was a prominent leader, changed easily to a twinkle as he recounted how he had to negotiate the fact that he was the nephew of the ruling Chief Minister Burgula Ramakrishna Rao, against whom they were making their demands.

On one occasion the Chief Minister uncle

promised the agitating student leader nephew, that he would come personally and deliver on promises made to the students. 20,000 people had gathered outside Osmania hospital. But the Chief Minister was a no show! Burgula Narsing Rao recounts smilingly how he had to contend with people saying: "Chacha bhatija peeche kuch kar liye! Dono mil liye! But the people trusted me and eventually the movement (which started from Warangal and spread to Hyderabad, Aurangabad, Marathwada and engulfed the whole state) was too strong and powerful to be ignored, and all the students' demands were eventually met."

He states: "The foundation for the birth of the state, its roots, began there in the 1952 student movement. The entire movement was against the denial of opportunity to the people of Telangana. But we were not against anyone. We did not support the slogans that some raised of 'Andhras go home' We agitated for fair opportunities in education and employment for the local people." It would not be amiss to say Burgula Narsing Rao was one of a kind. We will miss him, his sharp intellect and easy wit, his generous sharing of knowledge, his fierce commitment to the land and its people. In gratitude, the deepest affection and wholehearted respect.





# Poaching ghost haunts political parties

BJP has already started luring leaders of other parties even before the poll notification is issued

PATAN AFZAL BABU  
HYDERABAD

AS the by-election to Nagarjunasagar Assembly constituency is already in sight, leading political parties in the State seem to be a tad skittish over possible poaching of their leaders and cadres ahead of the hustings.

Even before the poll notification is out, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has already begun luring the Congress workers, while the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) is eying to poach the BJP and the Congress leaders. The Congress leadership is trying hard to protect their cadre from the allurements by the two other major parties.


"The BJP is in touch with several Congress leaders in the constituency and is trying to convince them to join the party before the notification issued. Already a few followers of senior Congress leader and party candidate K Jana


Reddy shifted their loyalties to the saffron party recently. Some more mandal level Congress leaders are likely to join the BJP at the time of poll campaign," a senior BJP leader from Nalgonda district said. He claimed the TRS was also trying to lure the Congress leaders, but the BJP was ahead of the ruling party. Some 'disgruntled' TRS leaders are also understood to be in touch with the BJP and expressed their willingness to join the BJP, the leader said, adding that the State party leadership had already chalked out an action plan to consolidate the party and emerge victorious like it did in Dubbaka by-election.

To counter the BJP's poaching politics, the TRS has roped in State Energy Minister G Jagadish Reddy and State Legislative Council Chairman G Sukhendar Reddy to lure the BJP and the Congress leaders into the party fold. A flurry of activities is expected soon in the


constituency as several leaders from the two Opposition parties are getting ready to switch loyalties during TRS working president KT Rama Rao's visit to the constituency. The alerted Congress leadership began deliberations with the local leaders who prepared to join the BJP and the TRS. "The Congress' winning prospects in the by-elections are bright but the poaching politics by the rivals are worrying the leadership. Jana Reddy is taking every possible measure protect the cadre from leaving the party in the crucial time," a source said. Amid speculations that film actress-turned-political leader Vijayashanti will be the BJP candidate in the by elections necessitated following the untimely death of sitting TRS MLA N Narasimhaiah, the Congress and the TRS are making extra efforts by preparing a strong social media campaign during the poll campaign.

**'POLL' VAULT IN SAGAR**






**BJP begins luring of Congress workers**



**Cong leadership tries hard to protect cadre  
BJP in touch with several Congress leaders**



**TRS eying to poach BJP, Cong leaders**

**A few Jana followers shifted loyalties to saffron party**

**Some 'disgruntled' TRS leaders in touch with BJP**

**BJP State leadership chalked out action plan**

## VOTERS DAY PLEDGE ADMINISTERED



Somesh Kumar, the Chief Secretary, on Monday administered a pledge on National Voters Day to the Secretariat officials and employees present in the programme at BRKR Bhavan

## e-EPIC facility launched

HYDERABAD

THE Election Commission of India launched the Electronic Electors Photo Identity Card (e-EPIC) facility on the occasion of 11th National Voters' Day on Monday. The e-EPIC is Portable Document Format (PDF) version of the EPIC which can be verified using authentic and secure QR code reader application. Till January 31, only newly enrolled electors with unique mobile (Unique mobile number means mobile number give with only one application) during SSR 2021 can download e-EPIC. From February 1 onwards, all

electors can download e-EPIC having unique mobile number in E-roll otherwise, they have to do e-KYC thereafter they can download e-EPIC.

The voters are informed that they can download the e-EPIC through <https://nvsp.in> or <https://voterportal.eci.gov.in> or through Voter Helpline Mobile app (Android/iOS)

The voters are also informed that a pledge was administered by Staff and Officers of in virtual mode on 25.01.2021 in connection with NVD 2021 with a theme to promote "Making our Voters Empowered, Vigilant, Safe and Informed."

## DELIGHT TO THE EYES



The historic Moazamjahi market tastefully illuminated on the eve of Republic Day, on Monday. Photo : CH Prabhu Das

## TS sustains declining trend in Covid cases

HYDERABAD

THE declining trend in Covid-19 cases in Telangana continued as the state reported 148 new cases during 24 hours between Sunday and Monday. The state's cumulative tally rose to 2,93,401 while the death toll increased to 1,590 with one more person succumbing to the virus.

According to the Director of Public Health and Family Welfare, the daily count in Greater Hyderabad remained below 50 for a fifth consecutive day. The state capital reported 35 new cases between Sunday and Monday. Rangareddy district logged 11 cases while Karimnagar reported 10. The daily count in the remaining 31 districts was in single digit. During the last 24 hours ending at 8 pm

on Sunday, 302 people recovered from the virus taking the cumulative recoveries to 2,88,577. The recovery rate improved further to 98.35 per cent against the national average of 96.8 per cent. The active cases dropped to 3,234 including 1,697 who are in home or institutional isolation.

A majority of the beds in hospitals treating Covid cases remained vacant. As many as 8,004 beds out of 8,577 beds in 62 government hospitals are vacant. Similarly, in 219 private hospitals 6,787 out of 7,753 beds are vacant. The authorities conducted 19,821 tests between Sunday and Monday. While 16,952 samples were tested in government labs, 2,869 tests were conducted in private labs.

The cumulative number of tests conducted in the state rose to 76,82,361. Tests per million population climbed to 2,06,404. According to officials, 70 per cent of 2,93,401 cases reported in the state so far are asymptomatic.

The data shows that 63.90 per cent of those tested positive so far are aged between 21-50 years, 22.91 per cent are aged above 51 years and 13.18 per cent are below 20 years. Of the total cases, 60.44 per cent are male and 39.37 per cent are female. The fatality rate remained 0.54 per cent against the national average of 1.4 per cent. While 44.96 per cent of the deaths occurred due to Covid, 55.04 per cent had comorbidities.

# Municipal polls in Warangal, Khammam to be put on hold?

The terms of Warangal and Khammam municipal corporations is coming to end in the months of February/March

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE TRS which had gone to GHMC elections prior to the end of the term of the Corporation is not keen on doing the same for Warangal and Khammam municipal corporations and is likely to use the provision in the Act to defer the elections by three months.

The ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi had gone for elections much before the ending of term of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC). The term of the GHMC is ending on February 10 but the elections were held in the month of December. There is a provision in the Municipal Act that the election to a local body can be taken up either three months prior or three months after the end of the term of the body.

While everyone was expecting that the ruling party would follow the same in the upcoming municipal corporations, the party has taken a different approach. According to party leaders the TRS chief wanted to go slow on the polls in the district for various

## POINTS TO PONDER...

- There is a provision in the Municipal Act that the election to a local body can be taken up either three months prior or three months after the end of the term of the body
- According to party leaders the TRS chief wants to go slow on the polls in the district for various reasons
- There is another provision with which the government can avoid the election by appointing the special officers in the local bodies.

reasons. The party leaders believe that the growth of the BJP in the State and better performance in the GHMC elections had made the party to think of going slow in the two corporations. Apart from that the infighting in the party in Khammam is also a cause for concern for the party. Recently, the TRS working president had asked the Khammam leaders to work with coordination and work for the party forgetting the differences.

The terms of Warangal and

Khammam municipal corporations is coming to end in the months of February/March. Since there is no scope to take up the elections at this juncture, the party leaders expect that the elections may be after three months. The government can have elections as and when the term of the local body ends but there will be a budget session of the Assembly during February and March hence the leaders feel that there is no scope of elections immediately after the end of the

term. Political analysts say that there is another provision with which the government can avoid the election and that is by appointing the special officers in the local bodies.

Sources said that the party would look at the results of Council and Nagarjunsagar bye election to gauge the mood of the people in the State and take a decision on having elections in these municipal corporations and other municipalities in the State.

# SEC revises election schedule

State Election Commissioner Ramesh Kumar says he got information that necessary arrangements have not been made by the district administrations to receive nominations



AMARAVATI

IN the light of the Supreme Court dismissing Andhra Pradesh government's appeal to defer rural local bodies elections and allegedly no arrangements being made by the district administrations, State Election Commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar revised the election schedule to make Phase II, Phase III and Phase IV polls as Phase I, Phase II and Phase III elections.

"Phase II, Phase III and Phase IV gram panchayat elections notified in the said notification dated January 23 will become Phase I, Phase II and Phase III respectively," ordered Kumar.

Kumar highlighted that he received information from several quarters that necessary arrangements were not made by the district administrations to receive nominations scheduled from Monday for Phase I elections.

According to the notification issued on Saturday, January 23, nominations for the first phase of the four phase elections should begin on Monday.

"The State Election Commission came to a conclusion that the election process has been vitiated as the district administration has not made arrangements for receiving nominations for the Phase I gram panchayat elections scheduled from Monday," he said.

Meanwhile, the SEC issued new dates for Phase IV elections, whose polling will be held on February 21.

According to the rejigged schedule, nominations for Phase I election will begin from January 29 while the elections will be held on February 9. Phase II election is scheduled on February 13 and Phase III on February 17.

# Parents kill 2 daughters, say they will come alive

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
TIRUPATI

A highly educated couple alleged murdered their two daughters and prepared themselves to end their lives too, in the belief that they would all come back alive. The incident which sent shockwaves across the state and created nationwide sensation took place at Sivanagar, on the outskirts of Madanapalle town in the Chittoor district on Sunday.

According to police, the father of the girls himself called one of his colleagues over the phone soon after the incident on Sunday night and disclosed the killings. The shocked colleague immediately tipped off the police, who rushed to the couple's house and found them in a trance. Police suspect that the family had apparently been following certain occult practices for some time now. According to Madanapalle DSP Ravi Manoharachari, it was the mother who bludgeoned the daughters to death. One of the daughters was tonsured before she was killed, he said.

The man remained a spectator as his wife went about the alleged killings. The younger daughter was first killed with a trident. Then, the elder one was bludgeoned with a dumbbell. Police sources said the couple had actually planned to kill themselves as well to prove that they would come back alive but the timely entry of police personnel averted the possible suicide.

V Purushottam Naidu, M.Sc, PhD, worked as an associate professor in the Government



A file picture of V Purushottam Naidu's family

- Of the well-educated couple, husband Purushottam Naidu is an Associate Professor in the Government Women's Degree College and wife is also principal of a private school
- The mother allegedly bludgeoned the two daughters in their 20s to death
- Police say they had been into some occult practices since the lockdown

Women's Degree College in Madanapalle. He was also the college vice-principal. His wife Padmaja, a post-graduate and gold medalist, was correspondent and principal of a local private school.

The eldest daughter Aleikhya, 27, was doing her post-graduation in Bhopal while the youngest Sai Divya, 22, was a ward in the KM Music Conservatory of A R Rahman. The daughters were staying with their parents since the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

According to the DSP, the family apparently "transcended the peaks of spiritualism," going

by their interaction. "They asked us to wait for a day as their daughters will come back to life again," he said. Manoharachari said the family was well-educated but wondered why they resorted to such an act. Police detained the couple in their house and started questioning while forensic teams were examining the closed-circuit television footage to establish if someone else were also involved in the spiritual rituals practised by the family. Bodies of the victims have been removed for post-mortem while police launched a full-scale investigation into the case.

# Oppn welcomes apex court's order on polls

- TDP chief claims YSRCP's Constitutional violations got exposed
- Hopes that the verdict will serve as an 'eye-opener' to the Jagan govt
- Calls for free and fair elections



AMARAVATI

TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday welcomed the Supreme Court judgement that has come in favour of holding the panchayat election in the state. Naidu asserted that after coming to power, the ruling YSRCP has been committing unchecked constitutional violations in many instances. No system or institution was being allowed to function peacefully and normally. Hurdles were being created at every step.

In a statement here, the former chief minister said that all the four pillars of democracy, legislature, judiciary, executive and the media, were undermined with the ruling party leaders issuing continuing threats to the heads of the constitutional institutions. Out of political vindictiveness, a Bill was passed to abolish the Legislative Council altogether. The honest and committed officers were being targeted and harassed. The judiciary and the courts were coming under unforeseen attacks. The judges were being threatened. The State Election Commission was ignored. The State Election Commissioner was unduly criticised in the name of caste, he said.

Naidu said the Supreme Court order would go a long way in upholding the democracy in the state adding that the apex court's order should serve as an eye-opener for the "fascist and anarchic" Jagan Mohan Reddy regime.

## Congress hails SC judgment on PR polls

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
VUJAYAWADA

ANDHRA Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Monday welcomed the judgment of the Supreme Court on the elections to panchayat raj bodies and said that the APCC cadres were ready to contest the elections.

He stressed the need for conducting a free and fair election for the panchayats for which all necessary steps should be taken. "The polls should be held in an unbiased manner without any scope for irregularities and intimidation. The kind of violence and the ruling party's harassment that was witnessed in the March last year should not be allowed to be repeated this time," he said.

Meanwhile, BJP state general secretary P Vishnuvardhan Reddy while welcoming the Supreme Court order on panchayat elections said that the elections should be conducted in a free and fair manner. He said once the elections were completed, the panchayats would get Central funds. He said the unanimous elections declared earlier should be cancelled and polls should be conducted afresh.



# Engineering student works as labourer to pay college dues

**Loji Behera has five sisters. Two of them are helping her in the work to clear her dues. While one is pursuing B-Tech degree and the other is a Class 12 student. The sisters are engaged in soil lifting work at a daily wage of ₹207**



Loji Behera

The college authorities withheld her certificate as she could not clear her dues. She says the college chairman refused to release her certificate despite repeated requests

BHUBANESWAR

A Dalit girl in Odisha has been working as a labourer under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) to pay for her pending dues in a private engineering college to get her diploma certificate. Loji Behera of Goradapidha village under Pipili block in Puri district is working as an MGNREGA labourer to earn money so that she can pay her college dues of Rs 25,000 to obtain the certificate. The college authorities have withheld her certificate as she could not clear her dues. Loji has five sisters. Two of them are helping

her in the work to clear her dues. While one is pursuing B-Tech degree and the other is a Class 12 student. The sisters are engaged in soil lifting work at a daily wage of Rs 207. "I have completed my diploma degree in civil engineering during the session 2016-19. Though the course fee was paid by the government, my parents could not pay hostel fee. Of total due amount of Rs 44,000, my parents paid Rs 20,000 and but I could not manage the rest," said Behera. She said that the college chairman refused to release her certificate despite repeated requests. Loji rued that she could not take admission

in B.Tech course as the certificate was not released by the college authorities. "We are five siblings and all are studying. It is very difficult for my father to bear expenses towards studies of five daughters. Therefore, I preferred to work as a daily wager under MGN-REGA," said Loji. Meanwhile, popular 'Jatra' artiste Rani Panda has extended her helping hand to the poor girl and deposited Rs 25,000 in her account. "I felt very bad to hear that the girl is working as a labourer to get her certificate for higher studies. I will help her to continue her education," said Panda.

## All eyes on tractor rally today

# Farmers will destroy new laws, Modi govt: Pawar

**Maha Governor has time for Kangana, not for *kisan*, says NCP chief 'Govt's offer best for farmers; hopeful that unions will reconsider'**

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

THE Centre may pass any law undermining the Constitution and on the back of its majority, but once the common man and farmers rise, they will not keep quiet until the new farm acts and the ruling party are destroyed, NCP president Sharad Pawar said on Monday. The former Union Agriculture Minister also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of not enquiring about the condition of farmers agitating near Delhi borders against the Centre's farm laws for two months now in cold weather. Pawar hit out at Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari for heading to Goa at a time when peasants from the state were to submit a memorandum to the latter against the farm laws.



A farmer dances on top of a tractor as others look on the eve of 72nd Republic Day, at Indus Border in New Delhi on Monday

Pawar said Koshiyari, who holds the additional charge of Goa, had time to meet Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut after the BMC last year demolished parts of her office here, but has no time for farmers. Union Agriculture

Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Monday termed the government's proposal to suspend new farm laws for 1-1.5 years as the "best offer" and hoped that the protesting farmers' unions will soon reconsider it and convey

their decision.

Even as he termed their Republic Day tractor rally a testimony to the celebration of the Indian Republic and its constitutional ethos, Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Monday appealed to the farmers to ensure that the event remains peaceful, just as their anti-farm law protests have been so far. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of hatching a conspiracy against farmers by issuing directions for non-provision of diesel for their tractor rally on Tuesday. With just five days to go for the Parliament's Budget Session to commence on January 29, the Trinamool Congress on Monday demanded the government to introduce a new Bill to repeal the three farm laws.

## Farmers to march towards Parliament on Budget day

NEW DELHI

AHEAD of their proposed tractor parade on Republic Day, protesting farmer Unions Monday announced they will march towards Parliament from different locations on February 1 when the annual Union Budget is scheduled to be presented. Darshan Pal of the Krantikari Kisan Union said the protesting farmers remain firm in their stand of repealing the three new farm laws and their agitation will continue till their demands are met. "We will march towards Parliament on foot from different locations on the budget day on February 1. As far as tomorrow's tractor rally is concerned, it will give the government an idea of our strength and they will know the agitation is not just limited to Haryana or Punjab but it is an agitation of whole of the country," he said. Every march or protest will be peaceful as the movement has been so far, he said. "The farmers who have come for the tractor parade will not go back now and will join the protest."



## ELECTRONIC VOTER I-CARDS ROLLED OUT

NEW DELHI

THE Election Commission on Monday rolled out the electronic version of the voters' photo identity card which can be stored on mobile phones and downloaded on personal computers. The e-voter card, available in the PDF format which cannot be edited, can be self-printed and laminated by the voter when required. With its formal launch on Monday, e-voters in poll-bound West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Kerala and Puducherry can use e-voter card on polling days. Elections are due in these states and the union territory in April-May. The conventional 'PV' physical voter card would continue to be in

use. Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad launched the e-EPIC programme and distributed e-EPICs and Elector Photo Identity Cards to five new voters here to mark the National Voters' Day. The e-electoral photo identity card is a non-editable digital version of the elector photo identity card and can be saved in facilities such as digital locker as well as can be printed in the PDF format. The physical card takes time to print and reach the voter, and the idea is to provide faster delivery and easy accessibility to the document, EC officials said. The Aadhaar card, Permanent Account Number (PAN) card and driving licence are available in digital mode.

## Modi 'leaked' info to Arnab on Balakot strike: Rahul

KARUR

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday charged Prime Minister Narendra Modi with being 'involved' in the 'leaking' of prior information on India's air strikes in Balakot in Pakistan in 2019 to Republic TV editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami. It was also a 'breach' of the Official Secrets Act, he contended. The Congress MP, however, did not provide evidence to back up his claim. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) also did not immediately respond to the unfounded claim. Gandhi, who made the claim during his roadshow during the final day of his three-day election campaign in poll-bound Tamil Nadu in this district, later reiterated it in a brief media interaction. Only five people including the PM and the Defence Minister would have prior information of the planned strikes. "Some days back it came out that a journalist knew about the air strikes in Balakot. Three days before the (Indian) air force bombed Pakistan, an Indian journalist was told it was going to happen," he said in his public address. This meant the lives of our IAF pilots were put at 'risk,' he said. "Now, five people in this world knew about Balakot (air strikes).

## WhatsApp treating Indians differently: Centre tells HC

NEW DELHI

THE Centre on Monday told the Delhi High Court that WhatsApp was treating Indian users differently from its European ones with regard to opting out of its new privacy policy, and this was a matter of concern for the government which is looking into it. The central government told the high court that it was also a matter of concern that Indian users were being "unilaterally" subjected to the change in privacy policy by social networking platform WhatsApp. The submissions were made before Justice Sanjeev Sachdeva by Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma during hearing of a petition by a lawyer against the new privacy policy of the social networking platform owned by Facebook. During the hearing, Sharma told the court that by not giving Indian users the option to opt out of sharing their data with other companies of Facebook, WhatsApp prima facie appears to be treating users with an "all or nothing approach".



"This leverages the social significance of WhatsApp to force users into a bargain which may infringe on their interests in information privacy and information security," he told the court.

Sharma said the government was already looking into the issue and has sent a communication to WhatsApp seeking certain information. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for WhatsApp, told the court that the communication has been received and will be responded to. The court, thereafter, listed the matter for hearing on March 1.

## Man tied to tree, burnt alive in UP

BAREILLY

IN a shocking incident, a 45-year-old man was tied to a tree with barbed wires and set on fire in Sheeshgarh area of Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, over an old enmity. The charred body of Dharampal was found late on Saturday night and an FIR against two persons was filed on late Sunday evening. Station House Officer (SHO) of Sheeshgarh, Rajkumar Bhardwaj, said: "Our forensic team has collected samples and we have also started investigation. The circumstantial evidence suggests the man was forcefully tied to the tree and set on fire." The post-mortem examination was conducted on Sunday which confirmed the cause of death as shock due to ante-mortem burn injuries. This means that Dharampal was alive when he was set on fire. The brother of the deceased, Bishanlal, said that Dharampal was abducted and murdered. "He had gone to sleep on Friday night after dinner and went missing a few hours later. His charred body was recovered about 800 metres from the house. He was not wearing slippers," said Bishanlal. His brother-in-law, Mangal Dev, said: "The body was tightly tied to the tree. He was brutally killed."

## BJP insulted Netaji by raising 'Jai Shri Ram' slogans: Mamata I'm sure Mamata has faith in Lord Ram: Sena leader Not forcing anyone to raise 'Jai Shri Ram': Yogi

PURSURAH

WEST Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday lashed out at the BJP, accusing it of insulting Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose by raising 'Jai Shri Ram' slogans at an event to mark the icon's 125th birth anniversary. Banerjee said she had to face taunts and insult in the presence of PM Narendra Modi at Victoria Memorial during the main 'Parakram Diwas' celebration. Branding the BJP as a group of "outsiders" and "Bharat Jalao Party", she said it has been continuously insulting the icons of Bengal, Netaji being the "latest addition to the list". "I would have saluted you if you had hailed Subhas Chandra Bose. But if you try and put me at gun point, I know how to retaliate. What they (the audience) did on that day was an insult to Bengal," Mamata Banerjee said "Would you invite anyone to your house and then insult

the person? Is this the culture of Bengal or our country? I would have had no problem if slogans hailing Netaji were raised. I would have saluted them. "But they didn't do that. To taunt me, they shouted slogans which had no relation to the programme. This is their (BJP) culture," she said. Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut said nobody should feel pain while chanting the slogan. Raut said he is sure Mamata Banerjee also has faith in Lord Ram. "Jai Shri Ram is not any political word. It is a matter of our faith, and I am sure that Mamata Didi also has faith in Lord Ram," the Rajya Sabha member said. The BJP has identified Mamata Banerjee's "weak point" and it will keep playing up such sensitive issues until the Assembly elections (in West Bengal) are over, it said. No one is being forced to raise 'Jai Shri Ram' slogans and there is nothing to feel bad about its chanting as it is a greeting, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a public rally in Hoogly on Monday

## 'No sexual assault if there is no skin-to-skin contact'

# Obnoxious, unacceptable, outrageous: Activists on HC verdict

NEW DELHI

ACTIVISTS and child rights bodies have slammed the recent judgement of the Bombay High Court that there is no sexual assault if there is no "skin-to-skin" contact, terming it "absolutely unacceptable, outrageous and obnoxious" and called for challenging it. In a judgement passed on January 19, the Bombay High Court said groping a minor's breast without "skin-to-skin contact" cannot be termed sexual assault as defined under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. Justice Pushpa Ganediwala of the Nagpur bench of held that there must be "skin to skin contact with sexual intent" for an act to be considered sexual assault. It has drawn the ire of child rights bodies and activists, who have termed it "absolutely unacceptable, outrageous and obnoxious", and called for challenging the

judgement. Dhananjay Tingal, executive director of child rights NGO Bachpan Bachao Andolan, said their legal team was looking into the matter and all the data related to this is being collected. "We shall be appealing the Supreme court on the basis of their inputs," Tingal told PTI. The apex child rights body National Commission for Protection of Child Rights on Monday asked the Maharashtra government to file an urgent appeal against the recent judgement. Activist Kavita Krishnan, secretary of All India Progressive Women's Association, called it an "outrageous judgement" that goes against the letter of the law. "The POCSO law defines sexual assault very clearly and it has a provision for sexual touch. This notion that you will circumvent the law by saying touch with or without clothes makes no sense at all," Krishnan said.



"That is absolute rubbish and it fails the test of common sense also. For me, it's a larger question of who qualifies to be a judge in cases related to gender," she said. Yogita Bhayana, an activist who heads the People Against Rape in India (PARI), said it was disappointing to hear from a judge and such statements "motivate the criminals". "I really think it's very regressive of her to say this," Bhayana said. After the Nirbhaya case, Bhayana said they were trying to push that even verbal gestures are included as assault, adding that they wanted to be more progressive and move to issues of cyber bullying. "On other hand, they are talking about this!" she said. Prabhat Kumar, deputy director of Save the Children, said nowhere in the POCSO Act itself there is talk about skin-to-skin contact. "The act talks about physical (abuse), which is

largely the use of force to sexually assault. So we feel that this interpretation is not right," Kumar said. "If there are inconsistencies in interpretation of this law, then we must choose the law with the stricter punishment for the person accused of the offence. So even that has not been complied with," he said. Women's rights activist Shamina Shafiq called it very unfortunate that a lady judge had come out with this judgement. "As a woman, you must understand that groping while you are wearing clothes is very usual and unfortunately normal in this country and this is something that keeps on happening to women and girls. And to say such a thing will give ideas to men also and it will not act as a deterrent," Shafiq said. "It's shocking and the judge is a woman. I absolutely fail to understand how a woman judge can pass this kind of judgement," social activist Shabnam Hashmi said.



DELHI TUESDAY 26 JANUARY 2021

## BIZ BRIEFS

### IIFL launches loan mela

IIFL Finance has launched 'Gold Loan Mela' across Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The mela offers a special scheme for businessmen and also offers assured gifts on gold loan for new customers. With gold loan interest rates starting one per cent per month with a commitment of quick processing in just five minutes. This offer is live for a limited period in 252 IIFL gold loan branches of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. IIFL Finance has seen its customer base and business growing significantly even during the lockdown phase due to #SeedhiBaat with customers. Sreekanth Remala, Zonal Head, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, said: "This new year 2021, IIFL Gold Loan Mela provides an avenue to fulfil their dreams with instant cash on their gold loan along with assured gifts and discounts. The mela is being appreciated by our new customers."

### Ketto rewards winners

Ketto hosted the second edition of Ketto awards which aims to recognize key initiatives taken up by individuals, corporate and social entrepreneurs to create meaningful and sustainable change in society. The jury comprised of Minnie Bodhanwala, CEO, Wadia Hospitals, Sheila Nair CEO of Thought Frame and Sukant Deepak Deputy Editor of Indo Asian News Services Society shortlisted three nominees from eight different categories. The list of winners awarded are Best Start-up NGO: Project Mumbai, Best National NGO: Pratham Mumbai Education Initiative, Best International NGO: Concern India Foundation, Best Social Entrepreneur: Rajshri Deshpande of Nabhangan Foundation, Best Celebrity Changemaker: Sonu Sood.

### Saraf sees sales growth

Saraf Furniture has registered an overwhelming year-on-year (YoY) financial growth. The proudly made-in-India brand has witnessed a turnover of Rs 100 crore in the year 2020. The furniture brand famous for its diverse portfolio had registered a turnover of Rs 35 crore in the year 2019. In the year 2020, the average sales volume a month stood at Rs 3,350, amounting to Rs 8.5 crore. Raghunandan Saraf, Founder & CEO, Saraf Furniture, said: "We are happy over the substantial growth, but we are not going to sit back and relax. The jump in our sales volume and financial growth signifies that Saraf has established a reputed name in the furniture industry due to its one of its kind designs and quality offered in the 100 per cent Sheesham and solid wood items."

### APG holds vitruval meet

American Pistachios Growers (APG), a non-profit trade association, organized a virtual knowledge session to talk about the immunity building properties in pistachios and also announce Luke Coutinho as its Lifestyle Ambassador in India. The session was addressed by Luke Coutinho, globally renowned holistic lifestyle coach and Mike Rousell, Nutrition Consultant and Advisor to Men's Health Magazine, United States. Luke Coutinho said: "I am very happy to be associated with American Pistachio Growers. Indians have always used pistachios as a garnish on desserts, biryanis etc. It is time we become more aware about this amazing nut and make American-grown pistachios a part of our daily diet."

## COVID-19 PUSH

# India's 100 richest grow bigger by ₹12.97 lakh cr

Wealth of Indian billionaires increased by 35% during lockdown and by 90% since 2009 to \$422.9 bn

NEW DELHI

INDIA'S 100 top billionaires have seen their fortunes increase by Rs 12,97,822 crore since March last year when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the country. Billionaires like Gautam Adani, Shiv Nadar, Cyrus Poonawalla, Uday Kotak, Azim Premji, Sunil Mittal, Radhakrishnan Damani, Kumar Manglam Birla and Laxmi Mittal working in sectors like coal, oil, telecom, medicines, pharmaceutical, education and retail increased their wealth exponentially since March 2020 when India announced the world's biggest Covid-19 lockdown and economy came to a standstill, according to the latest India supplement of the Oxfam report 'The Inequality Virus'.

According to the report, the wealth of Indian billionaires increased by 35 per cent during the lockdown and by 90 per cent since 2009 to \$422.9 billion, ranking India sixth in the world after the US, China, Germany, Russia and France.

The report, which has been released on the opening day of the World Economic Forum's



'Davos Dialogues', said it would take an unskilled worker 10,000 years to make what businessman Mukesh Ambani made in an hour during the pandemic and three years to make what he made in a second.

"Data shows what Ambani earned during the pandemic would keep the 40 crore informal workers that are at risk of falling into poverty due to Covid-19 above the poverty line for at least 5 months," the report said.

Calling the coronavirus pandemic the world's worst public health crisis in a hundred years,

the report said it triggered an economic crisis comparable in scale only with the Great Depression of the 1930s. "India's 100 billionaires have seen their fortunes increase by Rs 12,97,822 crores since March last year which is enough to give every one of the 138 million poorest Indians a cheque for Rs 94,045 each," the report said.

The new global survey of 295 economists from 79 countries, commissioned by Oxfam, reveals that 87 per cent of respondents, including Jeffrey Sachs, Jayati Ghosh and Gabriel Zucman, expect an 'increase' or a

## Sri City likely to get more investors

HANS BUSINESS  
VISAKHAPATNAM

A top official of Andhra Pradesh Industrial Infrastructure Corporation has expressed satisfaction over progress in promoting business opportunities at Sri City.

During his maiden visit after taking over as the Vice-Chairman-cum-Managing Director of APIIC Raveen Kumar Reddy said nearly 190 industries had already invested in Sri City, an integrated business city developed at Tada in Chittoor district on the southern end of Andhra Pradesh and 55 km north of Chennai. With robust infrastructure in one of the backward regions of the State, Sri City is spread over an area of 100 sq km with a Special Economic Zone, a Domestic Tariff Zone, Free Trade Warehousing Zone and an Electronic Manufacturing Cluster (EMC).

The FTWZ primarily caters to companies dealing in imports and re-exports, packaging, warehousing and distribution in the local markets. In line with the 'Make in India' and 'Make in AP', the dream campaigns of the Central and State, Sri City had emerged as one of the best



global manufacturing hubs in the country, a spokesperson for the integrated business city told *Bizz Buzz*. During the year, seven new customers signed MoUs, at a committed total investment worth Rs. 1,158 crore and have scope to offer employment to over 2,378 people.

The management is confident of attracting more investors once curbs on foreign travel are removed following success of Covid vaccine.

Reddy said during the visit on Sunday that the business city had created world-class facilities. He said facilities had been created on par with international benchmarking. Appreciating the initiatives taken by Sri City management in developing such a mega industrial park in a backward region, he expressed happiness that many more were showing interest to invest in the area.

### Panasonic breaks ground for new mfg unit in AP

HANS BUSINESS  
HYDERABAD

PANASONIC Life Solutions India, a subsidiary of Panasonic Corporation, on Monday held the groundbreaking ceremony of its new manufacturing facility in Sri City, Andhra Pradesh. The company plans to make a total investment of Rs 600 crore in second phases. The previously announced investment of Rs 294.7 crore in phase one is part of the company's robust manufacturing and expansion plans to support the infrastructure and increase production capacity in India.

Upon completion, the new facility will be Panasonic Life Solution India's eighth electrical equipment material production base in India, followed by facilities in the North and West regions.

The facility will include a state-of-the-art assembly line of the electrical equipment materials and wiring devices offered by the company.

Tetsuyasu Kawamoto, Managing Director, Panasonic Life Solutions India Pvt. Ltd. said, India is growing exponentially in terms of housing development.

## L&T Q3 net profit up by 3% to ₹2,648.33 cr

NEW DELHI

ENGINEERING and construction giant Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Monday posted a 3 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 2,648.33 crore for the quarter ended in December 2020.

The company had clocked a net profit after tax and share in profit/(loss) of joint ventures/associates from continuing operations before exceptional items of Rs 2,560.32 crore in the year-ago period, it said in a regulatory filing.

The increase in profit is largely attributed to higher profit from IT and ITES segment and sale of commercial property in Realty, the company said in a statement. PAT also includes gain on divestment of Rs 209 crore from discontinued operations for the quarter ended December 31, 2020. "The gain of divestment is accrued against the sale of the Electrical and Automation business to Schneider Electric SE and



... sale of the UK based Marine control and automation systems subsidiary to Rolls-Royce Power Systems AG," the company said.

Total consolidated income was almost flat at Rs 36,661.08 crore in the October-December quarter, against Rs 36,711.69 crore in the year-ago period. Total expenses slipped to Rs 32,980.58 crore from Rs 33,488.46 crore

in the corresponding quarter earlier. "During the quarter the Company was awarded the biggest EPC contract in the country and first of its kind - the prestigious High Speed Rail order. With this, the

Group order inflow for the quarter ended December 31, 2020 registered a strong growth of 76 per cent over the corresponding quarter of the previous year and stood at Rs 73,233 crore," the company said. International orders during the quarter constituted 14 per cent of the total order inflow. On a cumulative basis, the order inflow for the nine months period ended December 31, 2020 stood at Rs 124,846 crore.

### Cheaper options to cement, steel needed: Gadkari

NEW DELHI

AMID rising steel prices in the country, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday highlighted the need to explore alternatives to steel as well as cement, for bringing down their prices. The Minister for Road Transport and Highways and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) said he has asked some people from Indian Institutes of Technology to carry out research on alternatives to cement and steel. "Steel prices have increased by 65 per cent in the last six months," Gadkari, said adding that the steel and cement rates will reduce once cheaper alternatives are available.

Addressing an event to launch products prepared under the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Vignyan Gram Sakul Pariyojana, the Minister also cited the example of soyabean cakes. He said when used for mass consumption, they can be served as cheaper alternatives to mutton while alleviating the problem of malnutrition, due to their high protein content of 49 per cent.

### Global IT spend likely to rise 6.2% in 2021

SAN FRANCISCO

AFTER a decline in the pandemic-hit 2020, worldwide IT spending is projected to total \$3.9 trillion in 2021, an increase of 6.2 per cent from the previous year, according to the latest forecast by Gartner on Monday. Worldwide IT spending declined 3.2 per cent in 2020 as Chief information officers (CIOs) prioritised spending on technology and services that were deemed 'mission-critical' during the initial stages of the pandemic.

The unprecedented speed of digital transformation in 2020 to satisfy remote working, education and new social norms presented lockdowns and social distancing measures as double-edged swords - one which has abated the pandemic's negative effect on IT spending going into the New Year.

## IT, energy stocks take sheen off mkts

Sensex tanks 531 pts, Nifty plunges 133 pts

MUMBAI

THE benchmark Sensex dived nearly 531 points to close at 48,348 on Monday, extending its losses to the third straight session due to massive selling in energy and IT stocks.

After swinging nearly 1,000 points during the session, the BSE benchmark settled with a loss of 530.95 points or 1.09 per cent at 48,347.59.

The 30-share index opened over 375 points higher and hit the day's high of 49,263.15 before succumbing to selling pressure that took the index to the session's lowest point at 48,274.92. The broader NSE Nifty plunged 133 points or 0.93 per cent to end the session at 14,238.90. Over the last three sessions, the BSE Sensex has lost 1,444.53 points or 2.90 per cent and the NSE Nifty has shed 405.80 points or 2.77 per cent.

"Domestic equities were quite volatile today and gave up all early hours' gains. Investors continued to prefer in taking profits off the table ahead of union budget and F&O expiry. Barring pharma and select financials, most of key sectoral indices were in pressure today," Binod





# Chirandeeep makes regatta debut with resounding win

Poor wind conditions take the sheen off colourful Republic Day Regatta 2021 on inaugural day

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE Republic Day Regatta 2021 was off to a colourful start at the Hussain Sagar Lake here on Monday. The five-day regatta in the

city of Yacht Club of Hyderabad happens to be the first regatta in the Sailing calendar of India and the largest ever in the Junior and Sub Junior categories.

The wind conditions on Day One continued to be poor but the Race Officer Gautham Kankatla managed to squeeze in one race for the Sub Junior Green Fleet and

Chirandeeep Perelli of St.Patrick's led the race from start to finish to clinch a scintillating win on his debut regatta. He was closely followed by Daniel Israel of Valerian Grammar High School and Jampanna Arapu of Balamrai Govt School.

Moutameen Mohammad of Udbhav School Rasoolpura, who was the winner in all the races at the recently concluded training session, had a bad last leg and finished 4th overall after languishing behind Chirandeeep in second position for most of the race before being outplayed at the dying minutes of the race by Daniel and Jampanna who managed to catch a

gust of wind he missed.

A colourful fleet of 42 sailors had to paddle back to the Yacht Club of Hyderabad under dead wind conditions.

"We expect better conditions as per the met office in the next few days and the regatta has been extended till January 29 to ensure a few more races" said Suheim Sheikh the Founder President of the Yacht Club of Hyderabad.

## DAY 1 RESULT

### Green Fleet

Chirandeeep Pirelli	1 <sup>st</sup> place
Daniel Israel	2 <sup>nd</sup> place
Jampanna Arapu	3 <sup>rd</sup> place
Mouthameen Mohammad	4 <sup>th</sup> place

## Four footballers die in Brazil plane crash

RIO DE JANEIRO

FOUR players and the president of Brazilian football club Palmas lost their lives after their plane crashed ahead of a local cup match.

President Lucas Meira and players Lucas Praxedes, Guilherme Noe, Ranule and Marcus Molinari died on Sunday when the plane plummeted to the ground shortly after takeoff at the Tocantinsense airfield, near the northern city of Palmas, the club said in a statement. The pilot, identified as Wagner, was also killed, reports Xinhua news agency.

"The plane took off and crashed at the end of the runway at the Tocantinsense Aviation Association. We regret to report there are no survivors," it said.

The plane was en route to the central city of Goiania, around 800km away, for a Copa Verde match against Vila Nova on Monday. Local media reported that the victims had travelled separately from the main squad because they were completing the last day of mandatory isolation, having previously tested positive for Covid-19.

Founded in 1997, Palmas Futebol e Regatas plays in Brazil's Serie D.

Authorities said the plane was a twin-engine Baron model that had been engulfed in flames after the crash. An investigation into the cause of the incident was already under way on Sunday, officials said.

The incident came less than five years after 19 players and the entire coaching staff of Brazilian Serie A side Chapecoense died in a plane crash in Colombia. In 2014, former Internacional and Brazil striker Fernandao died in a helicopter accident in central Brazil. (IANS)

## Former int'l umpire Piloo honoured

MUMBAI: Former international umpire Piloo Reporter was on Monday honoured for his service to Indian cricket by the Cricketers Foundation here.

The 82-year-old, who stood in 14 Tests and 22 ODIs in a career spanning 28 years, was handed an amount of Rs 75,000 by the foundation. He was invited by former Pakistan skipper Imran Khan in 1986 to officiate with another Indian V K Ramaswamy in the Pakistan versus West Indies series, making them the first pair of neutral umpires in the world. The Cricketers Foundation has helped several unsung heroes of Mumbai cricket. (PTI)

## India juniors beat Chile seniors in last match of tour

SANTIAGO (CHILE): The Indian junior women's hockey team defeated Chile senior women's team 2-1 in their sixth and last match here at the Prince of Wales Country Club.

Forward Beauty Dungdung's brace scored in the 6th and 26th minutes helped India register the much deserved win and also remain unbeaten on the tour. The lone goal for the hosts was scored by Francisca Tala (40').

The Indian team started proceedings on the front-foot as they created pressure on the hosts, and open the scoring in the 6th minute, with Dungdung converting a beautiful team move. The early advantage worked in India's favour as they maintained the pressure on their opponents and ended the first quarter with a 1-0 lead.

## FOOTBALL FRIENDLY

# India U-16 team beat UAE 1-0

NEW DELHI

YOUNGSTER Sohail struck the target in the 79th minute from Taison Singh's cross to help India U-16 football team register a 1-0 win over their UAE counterparts in a recent friendly match.

Sohail, who came off the bench and scored the decisive goal, on Sunday dedicated his goal to his "teammates". Incidentally, it was his first international goal wearing the India jersey.

"I'm very happy to have scored

my first international goal. I would like to dedicate this goal to my teammates. It was a result of pure team effort and nothing else," Sohail said as per the aiff.com.

Although the hosts were pushing from the get-go, UAE defenders kept them at bay until the first half ended. After the game resumed, Bibiano Fernandes' boys hurled attack after attack in their pursuit of the elusive goal.

Sohail, who replaced Himanshu Jangra in the 55th minute, almost breached the opponent's defence

on the hour mark but his shot missed the target narrowly. Three minutes later, Ebendas' effort also went out of bounds leaving the UAE dugout much relieved.

Finally, Sohail scored the goal which, eventually, made the difference till the referee blew the final whistle.

Fernandes, head coach, said that the boys recuperated well after their narrow loss to the gulf country in the first match to register a victory.

"I'm happy with the boys' performance. We could have done well in the first match but we regrouped well and got the result tonight. This victory will provide the boys with the belief and the boost that we're looking for. That'll be very helpful for the future," Fernandes said.

India U-16 team starting XI: Lionel Rymmei (GK), Halem Nongtdu, Abhishek Singh, Amandeep, Anish M a z u m d e r , Ebendas, Taison Singh, Fanai, Maheson Singh (C), Himanshu Jangra, Shubho Paul. (IANS)

# England close in on Australia in World Test C'ship final race

GALLE

THE World Test Championship (WTC) final race is hotting up with fourth-placed England moving within 0.5 percentage points (PCT) of third-placed Australia. India are on top of the table with 71.7 percentage points, followed by New Zealand on 70.0 per cent.

England now have 68.7 percentage points, which is 0.5 lower than Australia's 69.2 percentage points.

"With a 2-0 series sweep over Sri Lanka, England are now only 0.5 percentage points behind Australia in the ICC World Test Championship standings," the International Cricket Council (ICC) tweeted.

The gap between the two teams was wide at the start of this year. However, Australia's 2-1 Test series loss to India saw them slip to third and England's 2-0 series win over Sri Lanka in Sri Lanka has narrowed the gap.

The top two teams will play the ICC World Test Championship final in London in June.

**WTC rankings after England-Sri Lanka series:** 1. India (71.7 percentage points); 2. New Zealand (70.0); 3. Australia (69.2); 4. England (68.7); 5. South Africa (40.0); 6. Pakistan (30.7); 7. Sri Lanka (16.7); 8. West Indies (11.1); 9. Bangladesh (00.0).

## Red-hot Root looking to extend batting form to India

NEW DELHI: England skipper Joe Root's ability to rack up big scores like he did in Sri Lanka in the just-concluded Test series will be key for England to put up a fight against India in the four-Test series starting next month. He scored 426 in two Tests in Sri Lanka at 106.50, with two centuries -- 228 in first Test and 186 in second Test.

England and India play two Tests in Chennai, beginning on February 5, and the last two in Ahmedabad.

Root was the second highest run-getter behind Virat Kohli the last time England toured India, in 2016-17. His 491 runs in five Tests at 49.1 was behind Kohli's 655.

Root is already looking forward to the Tests against India.

"We will look at this as a platform. We have got four very important games against arguably the best team [India] in the world in their own conditions. We are going to have to play right at the top of our game. We couldn't be any better-placed than this to challenge them. That really excites me," he said on Monday, after beating Sri Lanka 2-0 in the two-Test series.

## Weren't allowed to enter lift with Aussie players in it: Ashwin

NEW DELHI

RAVICHANDRAN Ashwin revealed that the Indian players were not allowed to enter a lift with the Australian players in Sydney during their recently concluded tour Down Under.

"We reached Sydney, they locked us with severe restrictions. There was a unique thing that happened in Sydney. It was strange, to be honest. Both India and Australia were in the same bubble. But when Australian

players were in the lift, they won't allow Indian players inside it," Ashwin in Youtube video chat with India's fielding coach R. Sridhar.

"Seriously guys? We felt so bad at that time. We are in the same bubble. But you get into the lift and you can't share the space with another person staying in the same bubble. It was too difficult for us to digest. We are all in the same bubble, but you get into the lift and share the lift space!" he said. (IANS)

# NorthEast United look to avoid slip-ups to stay in play-off race

MARGAO

TIME running out fast for them, NorthEast United FC (NEUFC) can't afford any more slip-ups if they have to stay in contention for the Play-offs berth as they gear up to clash with second-placed ATK Mohun Bagan in a Hero Indian Super League match, here on Tuesday.

With teams entering the business end of the tournament, fifth-placed season NEUFC, fortunately, line up against a team that has been stingy at the back all season.

Adding to that, NEUFC found an unexpected source of goals against Jamshedpur FC on Sunday, as the winner was scored by Deshorn Brown, who arrived from Bengaluru FC recently. The Jamaican, who had failed to impress at BFC, seems to have hit the ground running at his new club.

The departure of Gerard Nus seemed to have



worked wonders for NEUFC as they snapping a winless run against Jamshedpur, which propelled them all the way to fifth on the table. But now a challenging task awaits them as they face a much-tougher test in the form of ATK Mohun Bagan at the Fatorda Stadium.

"It's a different style to what Bengaluru play," NEUFC's Brown explained, ahead of the clash with ATKMB. (PTI)

## ISL STANDINGS

CLUB	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
Mumbai City FC.....	13	.....9	.....3	.....1	.....19	.....5	.....14	.....30
ATK Mohun Bagan .....	12	.....7	.....3	.....2	.....12	.....5	.....7	.....24
FC Goa .....	13	.....5	.....5	.....3	.....18	.....13	.....5	.....20
Hyderabad FC .....	13	.....4	.....6	.....3	.....16	.....14	.....2	.....18
Chennaiyin FC .....	14	.....3	.....7	.....4	.....11	.....14	.....-3	.....16
NorthEast United FC.....	12	.....3	.....6	.....3	.....15	.....16	.....-1	.....15
Bengaluru FC.....	13	.....3	.....5	.....5	.....15	.....17	.....-2	.....14
Jamshedpur FC .....	13	.....3	.....5	.....5	.....13	.....17	.....-4	.....14
Kerala Blasters FC.....	13	.....3	.....5	.....5	.....17	.....22	.....-5	.....14
SC East Bengal .....	13	.....2	.....6	.....5	.....11	.....17	.....-6	.....12
Odisha FC.....	13	.....1	.....5	.....7	.....13	.....20	.....-7	.....8

## RESULTS

Chennaiyin FC draw with  
Mumbai City FC 1-1

## TODAY'S MATCH

NorthEast Utd FC vs ATK Mohun Bagan  
at Fatorda Stadium 7.30pm





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