



**WINDOWS**  
Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh Bhupesh Baghel and his wife Mutkeshwari worship at Srikalahasteswara temple in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh on Saturday

## Myanmar forces kill dozens of protesters

**YANGON:** As Myanmar's military celebrated the annual Armed Forces Day holiday with a parade on Saturday in the country's capital, soldiers and police elsewhere reportedly killed dozens of people as they suppressed protests in the deadliest bloodletting since last month's coup. A count issued by an independent researcher in Yangon who has been compiling near-real time death tolls put the total as darkness fell at 93, spread over more than two dozen cities and towns.

## Tendulkar tests positive for Covid

**MUMBAI:** Cricket great Sachin Tendulkar revealed on Saturday that he had tested positive for coronavirus. He took to Twitter to share the news, saying that he has quarantined himself at home. "I have been testing myself and taking all the recommended precautions to ensure Covid is kept at bay," the cricket legend tweeted.

## Protesting farmers thrash BJP MLA

**CHANDIGARH:** A BJP MLA in Punjab was allegedly thrashed and his clothes torn by a group of farmers at Malout in Muktsar district on Saturday, police said. When Abohar legislator Arun Narang reached Malout along with local leaders to address a press conference, they got surrounded by a group of protesting farmers and black ink was thrown at them, officials said. Some police personnel took the MLA and local leaders to a shop.

## Minor fire at Rail Bhavan, says DFS

**NEW DELHI:** A minor fire broke out in a room at the Rail Bhavan here on Saturday, Delhi Fire Services officials said, even as the railway claimed it was "just smoke" emanating after a suspected computer motherboard short circuit.

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# 5-FOLD STRATEGY TO CURB COVID SPREAD

NEW DELHI

THE Union government on Saturday came up with a five-fold plan to tackle the surging cases of coronavirus in 12 States and Union Territories, including Maharashtra, West Bengal and Delhi.

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan chaired a high-level meeting with additional chief secretaries, principal secretaries and secretaries of 12 States and Municipal Commissioners and District Collectors of 46 districts most affected by the pandemic.

Representatives of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Delhi, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Punjab and Bihar attended the meeting, according to a release issued by the ministry. NITI Aayog member VK Paul was also present during the meeting.

India in March saw the steepest rise in weekly infections and fatalities since May 2020, the release read, adding that the 46 participating districts contributed 71 per cent of the cases and 69 per cent of the deaths this month. "Of total 36 districts in Maharashtra, 25 are most affected that account for 59.8% of the cases reported in the country during the past one week," it said.



Rajesh Bhushan

Here is the five-fold strategy laid out in the meeting:

1. The strategy includes increasing testing at an exponential rate, with a higher share of RT PCR tests—more than 70 per cent of total testing should be done via this method. "Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) to be mostly deployed as a screening tool in flushing out cluster cases from densely populated areas," the release read. 2. Effective isolation and contact tracing of those infected was also advised. An average of 30 close contacts of those infected should be traced, tested and isolated in the first 72 hours. 3. Re-invigoration of public and private healthcare resources was stressed upon. Infrastructure should be upgraded and the healthcare workers should be 're-energised' to minimise complacency and fatigue. A targeted approach to reducing the mortality rate and the number of deaths should be implemented, the release said. **Continued on P4**

Increased testing and vaccination, effective tracing, and adherence to Covid-appropriate behaviour pivot of Centre's five-step containment strategy



A health worker collects swab sample from a person for COVID-19 test, at the India Gate in New Delhi on Saturday

## 80% of new Covid cases in Maha, 5 other States: Govt

**NEW DELHI:** Nearly 80 per cent of the 62,258 cases of coronavirus reported across the country in the last 24 hours came from six states, according to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on Saturday.

Maharashtra, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh continue to report a surge in the daily cases of Covid-19, the Union Health Ministry said. "79.57% of the new cases are reported from these 6 States," its statement said. Of the 62,258 cases of the coronavirus disease registered between Friday and Saturday morning, Maharashtra has reported the highest infections at 36,902, followed by Punjab with 3,122, Chhattisgarh with 2,665, Karnataka 2566, Gujarat 2190 and Madhya Pradesh with 2091 infections.

**Continued on Page 4**



## Prez condition stable, shifted to AIIMS for planned bypass procedure

**NEW DELHI:** President Ram Nath Kovind was on Saturday shifted to AIIMS, Delhi, from Army's Research and Referral Hospital for a planned bypass procedure which is expected to be performed on Tuesday, Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a statement.

Confirming that the President's condition is stable, the President's Secretariat said that he is under the care of experts.

Kovind, 75, had to undergo a health check-up at the Army Hospital after he felt a chest discomfort on Friday morning. "The condition of President Shri Ram Nath Kovind is stable. He is being referred to AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences), Delhi for further investigation," R&R Hospital said in a medical bulletin on Saturday afternoon. The President underwent a health check-up in the military hospital following a chest discomfort on Friday morning. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited Kovind at the Army hospital on Friday.

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# Lockdown in Delhi ruled out

NEW DELHI

**DELHI** Health Minister Satyendar Jain has said as of now there is no possibility of imposing a lockdown in the national capital even as coronavirus cases continue to rise. He also said that lockdown was not a solution as it had failed to check the spread earlier as well.

"As of now, there is no possibility of lockdown. First, it was said that it's a 14-day cycle between the infection and recovery. Experts said if all activities are stopped for 21 days, it won't spread. The lockdown was extended, but it didn't stop the spread completely. So, I don't think lockdown is the solution," said the Health Minister.

Jain further said there has been an increase in the



number of coronavirus cases over the past few weeks in Delhi. Several states across the country have witnessed an upsurge in the past weeks while a to-

tal of over 62,000 cases were recorded on Saturday, in the biggest spike of 2021.

"There were fewer cases earlier but it has increased now. So, we have increased the number of testing and conducting 85,000-90,000 tests every day in Delhi, which is more than 5% of the national average. We are also doing contact tracing and isolation," said Jain. **Continued on Page 4**

# ‘Supplied more vaccines globally than inoculated our own people’

NEW DELHI

**INDIA** has supplied more Covid-19 vaccines globally than vaccinated its own people, the country has told the UN General Assembly and cautioned that vaccine inequity will defeat the collective global resolve to contain the coronavirus as the disparity in the accessibility of vaccines will affect the poorest nations the most.

India was one of the ini-

**INDIA AT UN**



tiators of the 'Political Declaration on Equitable Global Access to COVID-19 Vaccines' that garnered the sup-

port of more than 180 UN member states.

India's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador K Nagaraj Naidu said at the General Assembly informal meeting on Friday that while the Covid-19 pandemic continues to persist, the year 2021 began on a positive note with the global scientific community coming up with multiple vaccines to contain the pandemic.

## SPORADIC INCIDENTS IN PHASE 1 POLLS

# 80% turnout in Bengal, 73% in Assam

NEW DELHI

**WEST** Bengal reported 79.79 per cent voter turnout in the first phase of the 2021 Assembly elections, while Assam, which also began voting on Saturday, reported 72.14 per cent turnout.

Voting for the first phase of elections in the two States began in the morning - for 30 and 47 seats, respectively. In Bengal, the Trinamool faces a stern test from the BJP (and a lesser one from the Congress-Left alliance) in its



People wait to cast votes at a polling station during the first phase of West Bengal Assembly elections, at Sirshi in Jhargram on Saturday

bid for a third straight term. In Assam, the BJP is hoping to win a second straight

term, with Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, the biggest name on the ballot on

Saturday. In 2016, the Trinamool swept 26 of the 30 seats on offer on Saturday. In Assam, the BJP won 35 of the 47 seats. Polling booths opened at 7 am and polling has been extended by an hour due to the Covid pandemic. Results will be declared on May 2. Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee reacted sharply to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day Bangladesh visit, accusing him of trying to influence voters in the State. **Continued on Page 4**

## UPSURGE IN COVID CASES

# No plan to curtail flight services: Puri

NEW DELHI

**CIVIL** Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Saturday that the government is not planning to curtail flight services further amid the second wave of the coronavirus disease. However, plans of making all services functional from April 1 have been postponed amid a sharp rise in Covid cases, Puri added.

"No intention of cur-



tailing [flight services]. Domestic flights were halted in March 2020 and

resumed on May 25. We have been further re-opening them. Our inten-

tion was to open them 100 per cent with the onset of the summer schedule from April 1 since we are at 80 per cent right now. We can't open it 100 per cent now due to the second spike of Covid," he said.

Puri said to check the second wave of infections, airport authorities have been instructed to blacklist passengers who fail to adhere to Covid-appropriate behaviour. "I

have told the airport operators and airlines to passengers who do not wear masks and fail to maintain social distancing norms into a no flyers list," he said.

The minister also said that the second wave of Covid-19 has delayed airlines being allowed to operate 100 per cent that was planned to happen from the start of the summer schedule this month-end.

# Biden invites Modi to climate summit



WASHINGTON

**PRESIDENT** Joe Biden has invited 40 world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, to a US-hosted virtual summit on climate next month to underscore the urgency and the economic benefits of stronger climate action, the White House said.

Biden will host a two-day climate summit of world leaders starting on Earth Day, April 22, in which he will outline the US goal for reductions of carbon emissions by 2030 -- known as the nationally determined contribution under the historic Paris accord.

The White House on Friday said a total of 40 world leaders, including Prime Minister Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian

President Vladimir Putin, were invited to the conference, which will be live streamed to the public. It will be a key milestone on the road to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) this November in Glasgow, it said. Other leaders invited for the summit include Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi Arabia King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Bhutanese Prime Minister Lotay Tshering are the other two leaders from South Asia to be invited for the mega conference.



# 34,878 street vendors rescued through PM Swanidhi scheme

An amount of Rs 10,000 was given to each of them to develop their business, which was hit due to nation-wide lockdown after the corona outbreak

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) stood atop among the five cities in the country in the implementation of PM Swanidhi Micro Credit Scheme, which was introduced to support the small traders in the city and disbursing the amount.

Till now 34,878 people received an amount of Rs 10,000 each. The Central government devised this scheme to encourage the street vendors to reopen their business, which was let down due to the lockdown im-



posed after the corona outbreak. In GHMC limits, a total of 1,62,105 people were identified under this scheme and ID cards were issued for 1,54,335 members and loans sanctioned for 42,911 members.

Indore holds the second place as it has sanctioned 36,661 and disbursed for 34,855 members and Lucknow is in third position as it has sanctioned 38,169 and disbursed the amount for 34,195. Kanpur is in fourth and Varanasi at fifth.

Further, the GHMC also trained these street vendors to transact through digital platforms like Google Pay, Phone Pay etc.

## BJP leaders urged to get national project status for Kaleshwaram

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

TELANGANA Planning Board vice-chairman B Vinod Kumar on Saturday demanded the BJP leaders in the State to get national project status to the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project.

The Planning Board vice-chairman said that the Centre said that it was a welcome move that Jal Shakti Ministry considered Upper Bhadra Project in Karnataka for national project status. He said that during his tenure as an MP (2014-19) when his party raised the issue of national project status for Kaleshwaram, the then Jal Shakti Minister Nitin Gadkari categorically stated that the Cen-

**After Upper Bhadra Project in Karnataka considered for national project status by the Jal Shakti Ministry, State Planning Board vice-chairman B Vinod Kumar demands the State BJP leaders to secure a similar status for Kaleshwaram**

tral government would not be giving the national project status to any project in the future.

Vinod said that Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao took up the task of irrigating 1,00,000 lakh acres with Kaleshwaram project. If it's for the Upper Bhadra Project, then why not for Kaleshwaram? he asked. He demanded the Central government to award national project status to one

major irrigation project in each State, and should consider giving national project status to Kaleshwaram project.

"I also request the BJP Members of the Parliament elected from Telangana and Union Minister from Telangana to pursue the matter with the Government of India vigorously and get the national project status for Kaleshwaram Project," said Vinod.

# More CCTV cameras installed to make Hyd safer

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

A total of 358 CCTV cameras have been installed at various zones in the jurisdiction of Hyderabad City Police to make the city more safer. Home Minister Mohammad Mahmood Ali, along with Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav and Director General of Police M Mahendar Reddy, inaugurated the cameras here at an event on Saturday.

The community CCTV cameras were installed at all four zones East, West, North and South of Hyderabad commissionerate limits. The CCTV clips of different crimes such as road accidents, snatching, suicides and processions were played on the screen to show how important the cameras installed and how they were working.

Speaking on the significance of CCTV cameras on the occasion, Home Minister said that CCTV cameras were very helpful to control the crime. Many cases were solved in short duration of time with the help of community CCTV cameras. He said that about 3.75 lakh cameras were fixed in Hyderabad limits while 6.5 lakh cameras installed in Hyderabad, Cyber-

- Home Minister Mohammad Mahmood Ali inaugurates the cameras
- Lauds the city and the State police for early cracking of cases



About 3.75 lakh cameras are fixed in Hyderabad limits while 6.5 lakh are installed in Hyderabad, Cyberabad and Rachakonda Commissionerates

abad and Rachakonda Commissionerates to make the Telangana a safe State.

Mahmood Ali claimed that the crime, especially Naxalism, has been curbed after the formation of the State. He more said that the Central Home Minister Amit Shah accepted that the Telangana government has brought Naxalism under control. Getting an appreciation from Union Home Minister was a proud moment for the State and its people, he added. The Minister applauded the police department for making efforts to control the crime and stated that the credit for maintain

peace in the State goes to police. Speaking on the occasion, DGP M Mahender Reddy thanked the government for providing the facilities to the department, especially for the funds being provided to install the CCTV cameras under constituency development budget. He also appreciated people from the community who are installing CCTV cameras under social corporate responsibility and said that nothing was possible without the cooperation of citizens. Commissioner Hyderabad City Police Anjani Kumar and other police officials attended the event.

## VHP urges Endowments dept to protect Sitharampur temple lands



A delegation of VHP State leaders submitting a representation to Endowments Commissioner in Hyderabad on Saturday

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE State unit of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in a representation submitted to the State Endowments Commissioner asked to take steps to protect the land, admeasuring 1,148 acres, belonging to the Sitharampur temple in the Shabad mandal in Ranga Reddy district.

A VHP delegation led by its State president M Rama Raju and secretary Bandari Ramesh said that the Revenue department had issued a notification for the acquisition of the said land to meet the requirements of Telangana State Industrial Infrastructure Corporation. They said that the temple lands were

**Demands it to take legal action to prevent the State government from going ahead with its land acquisition process of the said temple lands**

gifted to the temple by the donors and it should be the responsibility of the Endowments department to protect such lands.

The VHP leaders asked the Commissioner to take appropriate legal measures to prevent the State government from going ahead with its land acquisition process.



Tourism Minister Srinivas Goud speaking at a meeting conducted by the Forest and Tourism departments in Hyderabad on Saturday. Forest Minister A Indrakaran Reddy is seen next to him

## Forest, Tourism departments to jointly take up eco-tourism projects

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE Forest and Tourism departments would jointly take up the eco-tourism projects at the irrigation project sites at different places in the State.

A meeting of the Forest and Tourism departments was held at Aranya Bhavan on Saturday, which was attended by the Forest Minister A Indrakaran Reddy and Tourism Minister V Srinivas Goud.

The Forest Minister directed the officials to develop eco-tourism facilities in the erstwhile districts of Warangal, Mahbubnagar and Adilabad in the State. "Develop the three districts with all better facilities for tourism by following the norms of ecological needs, and ensure attractive packages to the tourists and people to visit the same," the Minister said.

The Tourism Minister said that the State government was ready to give more funds for tourism development in the districts. Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao is for am-

**These projects to come up in Warangal, Mahbubnagar and Adilabad districts**

ple use of resources and funds for development of eco-tourism and ensuring increased tourist footfall. The Ministers directed that the officials should come up with a plan of action to expedite the provision of facilities in the districts.

The Tourism Minister asked the officials to take up development works at Kavval Jungle Safari, Laknavaram, Pakala lakes, Bogatha waterfalls, Malur trekking, Farhabad Eco-circuit Parks. He also asked the officials to increase the boats at the reservoirs and also to take permissions from the Forest department before taking up development works at sanctuaries, tiger reserve zones and wild animals' preservation centres. On the request of MLA Rekha Naik, the Minister asked the officials to have new boats at Kadem reservoir.

# Do not conduct admission tests, govt tells private schools

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE State government on Saturday warned the corporate educational institutions against conducting admission-cum-scholarship tests illegally.

Following the complaints received by the Directorate of

**Warns of stringent action if they go ahead with the admission-cum-scholarship tests**

School Education, a meeting was held with the management of Sri Chaitanya and Narayana Schools with the Regional

Joint Director of School Education, Hyderabad on Saturday. The two schools were told to not to conduct the admission-

cum-scholarship test, scheduled on March 28.

Referring to the Right to Education, 2009 provisions, the schools' management was told that the capitation fee and screening procedure for admission were in violation under the said Act. Further, the State government has issued directions to all the educational institu-

tions, private and government, in Telangana except medical colleges to remain closed till further orders. The institutions were permitted to conduct classes online and distance mode. Against this backdrop, the two schools were asked not to conduct the admission-cum-entrance tests scheduled on March 28, until further orders.

## RR dist legislators evaluate budget meetings

HYDERABAD

THE MLAs and MPs belonging to Ranga Reddy district participated in a meeting held at the residence of Education Minister Sabitha Indra Reddy on Saturday. River Development Front Corporation chairman Sudhir Reddy, MP Ranjit Reddy, Serilingampally MLA Gandhi, Chevella MLA Kale Yadaiah, Ibrahimpatnam MLA Manchireddy Kishan Reddy, Shadnagar MLA Anjaiah Yadav and Kalvakurthi MLA Jailpal Yadav were present at the meeting in Srinagar Colony. Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) youth leader Karthik Reddy welcomed the MPs and MLAs. Speaking on the occasion, Sabitha Indra Reddy said the meeting with MPs and MLAs was conducted at her residence on the occasion of successful conclusion of budget meetings. The Minister later praised the MPs and MLAs for working hard for the victory of Surabhi Vani Devi in the recently-held MLC elections.

- To implement nutrition intervention action plan in Nagarkurnool, Bhadradi-Kothagudem and Adilabad
- Chenchus, Kondareddis and Kolam primitive tribal groups identified as potential beneficiaries of the proposed plan
- Governor holds a meeting with nutrition specialists, doctors and officials concerned

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

GOVERNOR Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan called for a time-bound action plan to improve the nutritional status of people belonging to primitive tribal groups in the State.

She said this while discussing the "Nutritional Intervention Action Plan for the Primitive Tribal Groups in Telangana," with the scientists of the National Institute of Nutrition, doctors of the ESIC hospital and medical college and representatives of the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) at Raj Bhavan here on Saturday.



A nutrition specialist speaking at a meeting chaired by Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan in Raj Bhavan on Saturday

Expressing her concern over the severe malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies among the people of primitive tribal groups, she called for the result-oriented action plan to address the issue on a priority basis.

It may be noted here that to end the malnutrition among the tribals, the Raj Bhavan will soon implement an ambitious nutritional

intervention action plan in three select districts for the benefit of tribal population.

During the interaction, the Governor reviewed and finalised the modalities of the nutritional intervention action plan with the officials concerned.

Dr Tamilisai said, "Our pro-



posed initiative to improve the nutritional status of the primitive tribal people should become a role model for the rest of the country to initiate

similar interventions."

As part of this, she stressed for convergence of services of various wings like ICDS, tribal welfare, medical, health and education departments as part of the action plan.

The Governor highlighted the concerted efforts to end the micronutrient deficiencies, malnutrition and protein-deficiency by exploring and promoting indigenous foods.

However, for this, "Winning the

confidence of the targeted beneficiaries is crucial for the success and sustainability of our intervention. Capacity-building activities to the local volunteers, promoting indigenous foods with high nutritional value, and constant support from different wings of the government will go a long way in building a healthy society in tribal habitations," she added. She appreciated the participation of NIN, ESIC, and IRCs functionaries in the first-of-its-kind nutritional intervention action plan.

The Governor's husband, Dr P Soundararajan, an eminent Nephrologist, said that exploring locally available nutrient-rich food items to make part of their nutritional diet plan was vital to ensure the sustainability of the initiative.

Secretary to Governor K Surendra Mohan said that in the first phase some select primitive tribal habitations in Nagarkurnool, Bhadradi-Kothagudem and Adilabad districts were identified for the nutritional intervention.

The Chenchus, Kondareddis and Kolam primitive tribal groups were identified as the potential beneficiaries of the proposed nutritional plan.



# India, B'desh want stability, love and peace: PM

DHAKA

INDIA and Bangladesh want stability, love and peace instead of instability, terror and unrest in the world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday as he underlined that the two friendly neighbours want to see the world progressing through their own development. Prime Minister Modi made the remarks while speaking to the Matua community members after offering prayers at their temple in Gopalganj's Orakandi - the birthplace of Hindu mystic figure and community's spiritual guru Harichand Thakur.

"Both India and Bangladesh want to see the world progressing through their own development. Both the countries want to see stability, love, and peace instead of instability, terror, and unrest in the world," Modi said. Modi said he was waiting for this opportunity for many years and during his visit to Bangladesh in 2015, he had expressed desire to visit Orakandi, which has come true now. This place is a pilgrimage site for the spiritual relationship between India and Bangladesh, he said.

"I was speaking to some people here. They were saying who could have thought that India's Prime Minister would visit Orakandi," Modi said, adding that he was feeling the same emotions as felt by the Matua community members in India after coming to Orakandi, from where Harichand Thakur disseminated his pious message. Orakandi is the abode of Hindu Matua community, a



Prime Minister Narendra Modi presents 109 ambulances to Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, in Bangladesh

large number of whom are residents of neighbouring West Bengal.

Prime Minister Modi announced that India will upgrade one girls' middle school and set up a primary school in Orakandi. "My visit to the Orakandi Thakurbari is an experience I will remember for life. This is a very sacred place, which is closely associated with the Matua Community," Modi later tweeted. Analysts said Modi's planned temple visits carry a political significance at the time of the ongoing assembly elections in West Bengal. The Prime Minister was accompanied by BJP MP from West Bengal Shantanu Thakur during his visit to Orakandi.

The Matua community's vote may determine the winner in some seats in the elections to the West Bengal state assembly, the first phase of which began on Saturday. In his speech, Modi said

the Matua community celebrates 'Baroni Shanan Utshab' every year on the auspicious occasion of the birth anniversary of Harichand Thakur and a large number of devotees from India come to Orakandi to participate in this festival. "To make this pilgrimage easier for citizens of India, efforts will be made on behalf of the Government of India," he said. "We are also committed to grand events and various works reflecting the glorious history of the Matua community in Thakurnagar (West Bengal)," Modi said. "I have always been very close to the family members of the Thakurbari," he added. "The way India and Bangladesh governments are working towards strengthening their ties, Harichand Thakur and Thakurbari have been doing this for ages. This place symbolises the spiritual tryst of India and Bangladesh," he said.

In his address, Modi said that

it was important for both India and Bangladesh to come together and fight common challenges. He said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, India and Bangladesh proved their capabilities. "Both nations are facing this pandemic strongly and fighting it together. India is working by considering that it is its duty that the 'Made in India' vaccine reaches the citizens of Bangladesh," Modi added. He said India is moving forward with the mantra of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, and Sabka Vishwas', and Bangladesh is its co-passenger in it. "Bangladesh is presenting a strong example of development and change in front of the world and India is your co-passenger in these efforts," he added.

Modi also mentioned that every year a large number of people travel from India to Orakandi to participate in 'Baruni Snan' on occasion of the birth anniversary of Shri Shri Hari Chand Thakur and more efforts would be made to ease their travel. Last time when Prime Minister Modi visited Bangladesh in 2015, he offered puja at Dhakeshwari temple in the national capital. Bangladesh has taken extra security measures for the Indian premier's visit in the wake of protests by few leftist and Islamist groups.

In 2016, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) said their latest vital sample statistics report found the country's total population to be 15.89 crore by the end of 2015 with the number of Hindus at 1.70 crore in the Muslim-majority nation. (PTI)

# Rahul offers prayers at Sabarimala Ayyappa temple

Attacks BJP-RSS, LDF in poll-bound Kerala

KOTTAYAM

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday offered prayers at a temple of Lord Ayyappa and a Muslim shrine dedicated to Vavarswami at Erumeli, an important centre connected to Sabarimala pilgrimage, as he slammed the BJP-RSS and LDF while campaigning in Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Idukki districts.

The Congress leader hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the RSS, accusing them of dividing people on the lines of religion. Speaking at an election rally organised in front of the two places of worship situated on two sides of the road at Erumeli in Kottayam district, Gandhi hailed the practice of people visiting the Vavar mosque and the Ayyappa temple at Erumeli before heading to the Sabarimala temple.

"To live happily and peacefully and protect each others interests - this idea is the biggest gift you can give to this country today," he said. Wearing the traditional black dress and bead-chain and smearing 'bhasmam', the holy ash, on forehead, chest and arms, Hindu pilgrims visit the mosque and offer prayers, reviving the local myth of Lord Ayyappa's friendship with Vavar, a Muslim saint, during the two-month long annual pilgrimage to Sabarimala. Gandhi accused the Prime Minister and the RSS of dividing people on the lines of religion.

"This is the idea that is under attack in India. Our Prime Minister and the RSS spends their whole time and whole life trying to dig up this road (the road to religious harmony). They create hatred and anger so that people who believe in one idea fight with people who believe in the other idea," Gandhi alleged, speaking from the top of a roofless campaign vehicle. He claimed India's inherent



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during an election campaign rally, in Pathanamthitta on Saturday

pluralism is under attack from the RSS-BJP which has blocked socio-economic progress.

"We have to rid our country of this divisive hurdle," he said. Gandhi's Erumeli visit comes at a time when the opposition parties are targeting the state's CPI(M)-led LDF over Sabarimala women entry issue in the election campaign. Kerala had witnessed massive protests during the Sabarimala pilgrimage season in 2018 following the state government's decision to implement a Supreme Court verdict, permitting women of all age groups into the hill shrine. The LDF, particularly CPI(M), had drawn flak from several quarters over the women's entry issue for its alleged hastiness in implementing the order.

Later, addressing an election meeting at Puttady in Idukki district, Gandhi urged the people not to support an ideology "that divides the country, that spreads hatred, anger." "Support an ideology that's affectionate, that believes in brotherhood and in bringing people together. That is why you should support the UDF and the Congress." Earlier, addressing corner meetings at various constituencies in

Pathanamthitta district, Gandhi claimed the Congress-UDF manifesto is a people's manifesto, a manifesto which will give wings to citizens' dreams.

"First thing we'll do is bring in NYAY scheme. It's not a gift or charity, it's how we'll start Kerala's economy. This is an acceptance that only people of Kerala can start its economy. We'll put Rs 6,000 per month into poor people's bank accounts," he said. Noting that without money in people's hands, the economy can't start, the Congress leader alleged that the BJP-led NDA and LDF had been taking money from people's hands - through demonetisation, GST, farm bills and "everytime you pay for fuel they take money out of your pockets." "How do they expect the economy to run?" he asked. Gandhi said Kerala and UDF will together triumph over hatred and divisiveness and will together uphold the idea of India.

"You should vote for a prosperous future for Kerala and whatever you do, do not vote for people who spread hatred and who divide India, who make one brother fight with another brother," he told the gathering. (PTI)

## Minor fire at Rail Bhawan

**NEW DELHI:** A minor fire broke out in a room at Rail Bhawan here on Saturday, officials of the Delhi Fire Services said. No one was injured in the incident, they said. A call about the fire was received around 6 pm and eight fire tenders were rushed to the spot, officials said. The fire broke out in room 451 at Rail Bhawan. The source of the fire is suspected to be a computer. Other materials in the office was also damaged in the fire, a senior official said. The fire has been brought under control, he added. (PTI)

## Registration for Amarnath Yatra from April 1

**JAMMU:** Registration for the upcoming annual pilgrimage to the Himalayan cave shrine of Amarnath in south Kashmir is going to start from April 1, an official said on Saturday. The 56-day yatra to the 3,880-metre-high shrine is scheduled to start from the twin routes of Pahalgam and Baltal on June 28 and culminate on August 22. In a meeting earlier this month, officials had said that all COVID-19 protocols are in place and standard operating procedures issued by the government will be followed. (PTI)

## Forest fires reported in Thane, Palghar

**THANE/PALGHAR:** Two forest fires were reported in the hills of Thane and Palghar districts of Maharashtra in the last two days, a fire official said on Saturday. No casualties were reported in both the incidents, the official said. The first fire broke out in Yeoor Hills of Thane city's Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SNGP) area late on Thursday, said Santosh Kadam, the chief of the Thane municipal Corporation's regional disaster management cell. The blaze was noticed by locals who alerted the cell, and firemen from Vartak Nagar rushed to the spot and put out the fire in a couple of hours, he said. The fire was raging till morning and it affected area near the temple, it was stated. (PTI)

## CENTRE OF ACTION



A health worker collects swab sample from a person for Covid-19 test at the India Gate in New Delhi on Saturday

## Delhi CP reviews law & order ahead of festivals

NEW DELHI

THE Police Commissioner of Delhi, S.N. Srivastava, on Saturday reviewed the law and order situation in the national capital ahead of the upcoming festivals of Shab-e-Barat on March 28, followed by Holi on March 29.

Srivastava has directed the officers to ensure that the Covid-19 guidelines issued by Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) are strictly followed in the national capital.

Srivastava also directed Delhi Police personnel to ensure optimal visibility during the upcoming festivals.

"The commissioner reviewed the actions taken with regard to the enforcement of the Covid guidelines issued by the DDMA and directed everyone to remain extra cautious to ensure that public celebrations, gatherings and congregations during the upcoming festivals of Holi and Shab-e-Barat are not allowed at public places, grounds, parks, markets and religious places," Delhi Police said in a statement.

"At the meeting, crime

against women, kidnapping and POCSO cases were closely monitored and the district heads were directed to expedite the final reports. The appraisal of listing of criminals and the strategy to keep vigil on them were discussed along with the action plan to keep a tab on jailed/released criminals and their activities. Emphasis was laid on taking legal remedies to speed up the investigation into the pending cases," the statement added.

Meanwhile, Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain has also urged people to follow DDMA's Covid guidelines while celebrating the festivals and has directed the district administration to take action against those found violating the norms. The DDMA, which is chaired by Delhi Lieutenant Governor Anil Baijal, had on March 22 directed the authorities, including Delhi Police and Delhi government, to be more cautious in view of the sharp increase in the number of Covid-19 cases in the national capital.

The DDMA had advised the authorities to prohibit gatherings at public places, including gardens and parks. (IANS)



## Goa BJP MLA tests Covid positive

PANAJI

A day after BJP MLA Atanasio Monserrate tested positive for Covid-19, the Goa legislature department has directed all its MLAs to make themselves available for swab testing at local government hospitals.

"All the members should give their swab at the PHC or hospitals of their jurisdiction, so also the primary contact, staff should also give their swab for testing at their PHC or hospitals on March 27, 28, 2021," an advisory issued by Secretary of the Goa Legislature department Namrata Ulman said. The advisory comes in the midst of the ongoing Budget session of the Goa Legislative Assembly is scheduled to end on March 3. There are 40 MLAs in the Goa Legislative Assembly. (IANS)

# Vaccines haven't cured loneliness in New York nursing homes

HERKIMER (NEW YORK)

VACCINES have begun saving lives in New York's nursing homes, but they haven't yet cured another crisis caused by the pandemic: loneliness.

Persistently high rates of COVID-19 have left the majority of the state's nursing homes off limits to visitors, despite relaxed guidance meant to help reopen them. Until this week, under state and federal rules, they could admit visitors only if they had no new infections among either patients or staff for 14 days. That mark proved too hard for most to reach.

A little more than half of the state's 616 nursing homes were ineligible for indoor visits in mid-March, according to an Associated Press analysis of data from the US Centers for Medicaid and Medicare. That's the highest percentage of any state. New York updated its visitation rules Thursday in a way that will now allow visits to resume under certain conditions, even if a resident or staffer has recently tested positive. But that relaxed standard might not clear the way for visitation in many homes having



trouble keeping the virus out. The lack of visits has frustrated people like Debbie Barbano, who has been able to see her 69-year-old mother at a central New

York nursing home only through a window. "When this hit last year, it was like a bullet to your chest," Barbano said. "She didn't understand why I wasn't

## As New York City and its suburbs see an uptick in cases, the State's data shows just 68 per cent of nursing home residents and 51 per cent of staffers in New York City have been vaccinated

coming. It was like I was abandoning her." Under New York's new guidelines, homes would still have to halt visits after any resident or staffer tested positive, but they could potentially resume for some patients if a thorough round of further testing revealed the outbreak was confined to just one part of the facility. It's unclear, though, exactly how that guidance will be applied and whether the change would mostly affect large homes with multiple buildings, floors or units with little mingling of staff or residents between units.

State Health Commissioner Howard Zucker has justified restrictions on visits by pointing to a winter surge that infected 15,000 nursing home residents, killing at least 3,000. The federal programme to vaccinate nursing home res-

idents has helped drive down COVID-19 outbreaks and deaths in nursing homes nationwide. In New York, 41 nursing home residents died of COVID-19 in the second week in March, down from 382 for the week ending January 17. Decreased infections nationwide have allowed 80 per cent of nursing homes nationally eligible to open doors by mid-March, including the vast majority of nearly 1,200 facilities in California. Infections in New York are dropping more quickly among nursing home residents than among staffers.

Some workers have been hesitant to take the vaccine. And as New York City and its suburbs see an uptick in cases, the state's data shows just 68 per cent of nursing home residents and 51 per cent of staffers in New York City have been

vaccinated. "Nursing homes have finally started to see the light at the end of the tunnel," said Christopher Laxton, executive director of the Society for Post-Acute and Long-Term Care Medicine, whose group is seeking clarity on the new rules from the US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. "But we're not out of the tunnel. We're seeing the end of it."

Meanwhile, some relatives are fighting to see loved ones. Family members in New York and nationwide who have organized on Facebook groups say their loved ones are losing weight, falling, declining cognitively, dying alone and suffering from lack of attention. Federal and state guidance allows compassionate care visits, but families in New York and elsewhere say nursing homes don't always allow them.

Laura Corridi, a 56-year-old senior programmer analyst in Hamlin, New York, has driven an hour and a half on the weekends to stand outside her 93-year-old mother's nursing home and shout to her through a window throughout the past year. (AP)



# CM implementing welfare schemes for all: Sajjala



Advisor to the Government of Andhra Pradesh Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy greets State ST Commission chairman K Ravibabu at Tummalapalli Kalakshetram in Vijayawada on Saturday

- Says appointment Ravibabu as ST Commission chief will benefit tribals in the State
- ST Commission new Chairman Ravibabu vows to create awareness among tribals on the rights provided in the Constitution

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
VIJAYAWADA

ADVISOR to the State Government Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy said Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy is implementing welfare schemes for all people in the state irrespective of region and political affiliations.

He was the chief guest at the awareness programme conducted on the rights reserved to the STs in the state at the Tummalapalla Kalakshetram here on Saturday. The awareness meeting was conducted to mark the assuming of office by ST Commission

chairman Kumbha Ravibabu. Referring to Ravibabu, Ramakrishna Reddy said he worked as assistant professor in Andhra University for 15 years and guided many students in his career as educationist. He said Ravibabu created awareness on the rights of the tribals on the national and international forums. He felt the appointment of Ravibabu as chairman of the State ST Commission would benefit tribals of Andhra Pradesh.

Ravibabu addressing the gathering said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy had constituted many corporations for the welfare and development of tribals in the state. He said the Indian Constitution has reserved many rights to the tribals and he would strive to create awareness among the people on the rights of tribals. Tribal welfare department director P Rajat Bhargav presided over the programme. Deputy Chief Ministers P Pushpasreevani, Dharmana Krishna Das, MLAs Ambati Rambabu, N Dhanalakshmi, K Bhagyalakshmi, T Venkata Rao and others attended the programme.

# Commercial flights from Orvakal airport from today

KURNOOL

At least 260 passengers are set to fly in and out of the new Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy Airport located at Orvakal near Kurnool in the state on Sunday, March 28, when regular commercial flight operations are scheduled to start.

IndiGo will launch flights to Bengaluru, Visakhapatnam and Chennai from the airport in Rayalaseema starting Sunday.

Direct flights to the three destinations will be operated under Udan, the regional connectivity scheme (RCS).

Fifty-two passengers are expected to arrive from Bengaluru to Kurnool airport, whose identification code has been designated as KJB.

Likewise, 66 flyers will take off from Kurnool airport to Visakhapatnam and 31 passengers booked their tickets to fly in to the Uyyalawada Narasimha Reddy airport from Visakhapatnam.

Similarly, 63 passengers are scheduled to fly from Kurnool airport to Bengaluru airport in neighbouring Karnataka.

Sixteen flyers are expected to fly in from Tamil Nadu's Chennai to Kurnool.



- IndiGo will start flights to Bengaluru, Vizag and Chennai by which around 260 passengers are expected fly in and out of the airport
- Tourism may get a boost as the district has famous temples like Ahobilam and Mantralayam as well as Nallamala forest and Belum caves which high potential

Finally, 32 more passengers are scheduled to return from Kurnool to Chennai.

Flights from Kurnool will enhance accessibility to more avenues for tourists as well as government officials travelling to and from the judicial capital.

With the newly established air connectivity, famous temples such as Ahobilam and Mantralayam as well as Nallamala forest and Belum caves and others will attract

tourists, making these attractions more accessible.

Kurnool will play a vital role in the state's connectivity and infrastructure as it will be a node in the upcoming Hyderabad-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor.

The YSRCP government trifurcated the capital city, with a plan to establish the judicial capital in Kurnool, legislative capital in Amaravati and executive capital in Visakhapatnam.

## Nilam Sawhney quits advisor post

- Submits resignation after being selected as next State Election Commissioner
- Chief Secretary accepts her resignation as Principal Advisor to CM



AMARAVATI

THE state government on Saturday accepted the resignation of retired IAS officer Nilam Sawhney as the principal advisor to the Chief Minister, paving the way for her appointment as the next State Election Commissioner. Upon the advice of Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan, Sawhney tendered her resignation from the principal advisors post on Friday night after the former approved her name for appointment as the SEC, official sources said.

Accordingly, chief secretary Aditya Nath Das issued an order on Saturday accepting Sawhney's resignation as the principal advisor. Nilam Sawhney will take over as the State Election Commissioner upon the retirement of incumbent Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar on March 31. Sawhney, an IAS officer of the 1984 batch, was appointed as the Chief Minister's principal advisor on January 1 following her retirement as state chief secretary on December 31, 2020.

As principal advisor, she was given the rank of a Cabinet minister. She was brought back to the state cadre in November 2019 after the then chief secretary L V Subrahmanyam was removed from the post. A formal order on Sawhney's new appointment will be issued separately later.

## Governor cancels Holi celebrations

AMARAVATI

AMID resurging coronavirus infections in the state, Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan on Saturday cancelled Holi festival celebrations and party at the Raj Bhavan.

"Andhra Pradesh Governor Biswa Bhushan Harichandan has decided not to organise Holi celebrations at Andhra Pradesh Raj Bhavan in Vijayawada this year, due to rise in number of Covid-19 cases," said a Raj Bhavan official.

Harichandan appealed to the people to stay at home and celebrate Holi following Covid guidelines.

He told people to maintain social distance, wear a mask, regularly wash hands with soap and use a sanitiser.

The Governor also appealed to all the eligible people to get vaccinated for coronavirus as it helps in breaking the pandemic's chain of infections.

## SECOND WAVE

### Spike in Covid cases in pilgrim city

- Municipal Commissioner P S Girisha says in the last one month the city and rural areas reported 736 cases
- 2,800 primary contacts and 5,394 secondary contacts were identified for surveillance
- Says Rs 60,000 fine slapped on those who were found not wearing masks in the inspections

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
TIRUPATI

REVEALING the scarring picture of Covid-19 in the pilgrim city, Municipal Corporation Commissioner P S Girisha said that 736 cases were reported in the last one month from the city and in Tirupati rural areas.

Among those found positive, 268 are under home isolation, 91 in private or government hospital awaiting treatment and 190 discharged after treatment, Commissioner said adding that 2,800 primary contacts and 5,394 secondary contacts were identified for surveillance. Ward Health Secretaries and ASHA workers were directed to see the pri-



Municipal Commissioner P S Girisha addressing media over spike in corona cases at corporation office in Tirupati on Saturday

mary and secondary contact remain indoors at least for a period of 7-15 days and visit their homes to monitor their health daily. Reiterating that strictly adhering to precautionary measures like wearing a mask, ensuring physical distance and sanitising hands only check spread of the virus, the Corporation on its part intensified inspection of commercial establishments, shops and malls to see the people complaining to safety norms. In the last one month, Rs 60,000 fine was imposed on those who were found not wearing masks in the inspections including a school which was fined Rs 10,000, he said, warning commercial units of cancelling trade licences, if they, found violating safety

norms second time. Meetings with various associations of business, trade and shops are also being held to create awareness among business community on the imperative need of following safety norms to check Covid cases under control in the city after negligence on the part of many shops and schools in following safety norms was found, he said. He also cautioned stringent action on those violating safety norms. Simultaneously, he said the corporation was also focusing on vaccination, first covering all those who completed 60 years and 45 years and above in the city and informed that about 31,000 took vaccination so far. Daily 200 were coming to the municipal PHCs for vaccination while the ward volunteers motivating the people to get vaccinated as early as possible and 15 private hospitals were also permitted to do vaccination on payment basis of Rs 250 each.

Municipal Health Officer Dr D T Sudharani was also present.

Later, the Commissioner along with the Mayor Dr R Sireesha held a meeting with municipal officials on the measures to be taken up to prevent the spread of virus in the city.

## Govt doing nothing to save people from Covid: TDP

- Party spokesman Pattabhi demands reinstatement of 10,000 frontline warriors
- Asks the govt to pay salary dues to contract frontline warriors

AMARAVATI

TDP national spokesman Kommareddy Pattabhi on Saturday accused the Jagan Mohan Reddy government of exposing the people of the state to greater risk by not taking any preventive measures in the face of rising threat from the coronavirus 2nd wave.

Pattabhi said that the government thoughtlessly removed the 10,000 odd nurses, lab technicians, anaesthetists and other frontline warriors from jobs without any commitment to saving the lives of the people from the epidemic. The Jagan regime should immediately reinstate all these staff and also pay their salary dues that were kept pending after the virus 1st wave appeared to have subsided to a large extent, he said.

Addressing a press conference here, the TDP leader said that states like Maharashtra, Delhi and the neighbouring Telangana were felicitating the frontline warriors with incentives for their courageous services and sacrifices while the AP government was humiliating and ill-treating them by removing them with just WhatsApp messages without giving formal notices. This happened despite the fact that the 10,000 staff were recruited formally through a memo issued by the special chief secretary, health, on April 13, 2020.

The TDP leader recalled how former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu had made great efforts to create awareness through the CBN Foundation and the Global Forum for Sustainable Transformation (GFST). The Jagan Mohan Reddy government turned a blind eye to the suggestions and recommendations made by the experts, he alleged.

# 80% TURNOUT IN BENGAL, 73% IN ASSAM

Continued from P1

Banerjee reminded the Prime Minister of an incident before the 2019 Lok Sabha elections - a Bangladeshi actor who attended a Trinamool rally had his visa revoked - and asked: "Why shouldn't your visa be cancelled?"

The Trinamool and the BJP have traded allegations of sponsoring violence and vote-rigging all day. Soumendu Adhikari, the brother of ex-Trinamool MLA Suwendu Adhikari - whose crossover to the BJP last year triggered a bitter spat with Banerjee - said he had been attacked by Trinamool supporters in Contai. He said his vehicle had been vandalised and driver injured.

Suwendu Adhikari, who will take on Ms Banerjee in a high-stakes battle for Nandigram in the second phase, earlier demanded the suspension of police officers in that constituency and Haldi for helping the ruling party in rigging votes.

Trinamool leader Soham Chakraborty, the Chandipur candidate, flagged EVM issues in Kanthi Uttar. "... votes seem to be going to BJP whenever a vote is cast for Trinamool Congress!"

he tweeted. Party colleague Derek O'Brien wrote to the Election Commission claiming discrepancies in voter turnout for Kanthi Uttar and Kanthi Dakshin.

Hours before polling began in Bengal, the East Medinipur district witnessed violence - bombs were hurled and shots fired in Bhagabanpur constituency. Two security personnel were reportedly injured. BJP leader Samir Das said the Trinamool was responsible for violence in West Medinipur also.

Bengal BJP chief Dilip Ghosh criticised for his "bermuda shots" swipe at Mamata Banerjee, has said the Trinamool is complaining about EVMs because they know they are losing. "TMC and Mamata Banerjee are under pressure and that is why they are saying such things."

In Assam, Chief Minister Sonowal cast his vote at a polling station in Dibrugarh. "I prayed for peace for all..." he told reporters. Mr Sonowal is defending his Majuli seat - a reserved constituency - from the Congress' Rajib Lochan Pegu - a three-time former MLA from this seat.

Other big names contesting in Assam today are outgoing Speaker Hitenranath Goswami and Assam Congress chief Ripun Borah. Activist Akhil Gogoi, in jail for his alleged role in the 2019 anti-CAA protests, is contesting from Sibsagar. Also voting is Titabor - the seat held for four successive terms by former Chief Minister and Congress veteran Tarun Gogoi, who died in November.

Of the 30 seats in Bengal, the BJP is contesting 29; one has been given to the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU). The Trinamool will also contest 29 and support an independent candidate for the other seat. The Congress will contest only five seats. Its allies - the Left parties - will contest the majority; the CPM will fight 18 and the CPI 4.

In Assam, the BJP is contesting 39 of 47 seats in this phase and ally AGP (Asom Gana Parishad) 10. The two parties will go head-to-head in a "friendly contest" in two seats. The Congress - part of a 'mahajot' (grand alliance) - will contest 43, with one each for the AIDUF of Badruddin Ajmal, the RJD, the AGM and the CPIML.

## Naidu writes to CS against move to merge Kuppam RESCO with discom

- Urges exemption of the society from retail licence norm
- Points out it has been in existences since 1981 and its members are mainly small farmers, SC, ST and BC families depending on agriculture

AMARAVATI

TDP national president and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday strongly objected to the cancellation of the sale, distribution and retail licence to the Kuppam Rural Electric Cooperative Society Ltd (Kuppam RESCO) without valid reasons.

Naidu urged the AP chief secretary to exempt Kuppam RESCO from the retail licence in order to allow the cooperative society to continue its activities as before. The orders of the AP Electricity Regulatory Commission (APERC) for the cancellation of the licence were unilateral, he said.

In a letter to the chief secretary here, Naidu said that the APERC order for the merger of Kuppam RESCO with the AP Southern Powder Distribution Company Ltd (APSPDCL) was against the will of the people. The APERC order was given just because of Kuppam RESCO not getting the retail licence. It was not proper on the part of the government to allow the APSPDCL to take over Kuppam RESCO at this juncture.

The TDP chief said that Kuppam RESCO was established in 1981 in the Kuppam Assembly constituency. It was aimed at achieving the 100 per cent rural electrification in the backward and distant corners of Kuppam segment. The Kuppam Society had succeeded in its objective with the support from the RESCO AP.

Naidu told the chief secretary that there were over 1.22 lakh shareholders in Kuppam RESCO Society and they had over 1.24 lakh connections. These consist of residential, commercial and industrial connections. Majority shareholders were small and middle class farmers and SC, ST, BC families.



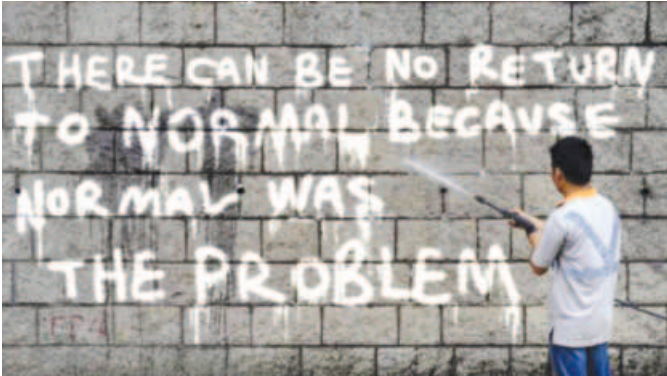
# WE CAN'T AFFORD NEGLIGENCE

It seems that Corona pandemic once again is tightening its clutches around our country. The skyrocketing positive cases reflect the bare fact that the people of our country aren't cooperating with the government. We are well aware of how the pandemic has devastated our country and its development. Of course, it has assaulted the entire world ruthlessly and its mayhem is still on.

The coronavirus is changing its genetic structure and evolving as a new strain and infecting the people asymptotically. We have seen very less cases of incidence in January and February but in March it is marching towards a high positive rate with reduced doubling time. As per the opinion of CCMB director in April the positivity rate will reach to peak and it will gradually reduce its graph when the people will get vaccinated irrespective of their age.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to vaccinate the people above 45 years of age across the country from April 1 is welcome. This will really shield the people. It has been proved in the history that vaccines have played a vital role in controlling various viral infections. The people also voluntarily involved in the universal administering of vaccines. But, in the case of corona the people aren't following the same measures due to the robotics of life.

The union government has already issued all the necessary instructions to the state governments to act accordingly as per the magnitude of pandemic. It



has been proved that the reduction of the positivity rate and mortality rate during the months of November and February is due to the safety measures followed by the people. The negligence and ignorance of the people once again offered a scope to the deadly virus to infect more masses.

It is really laudable contribution of the Indian scientists that have developed efficient vaccines against all variants of coronavirus. The government should think about a universal immunisation program because it seems that the pandemic is gradually transforming as a seasonal threat. It is not correct to think about lockdowns every time the pandemic throws its lethal paw. The past lockdowns proved that fact and caused grave injuries to all areas of public life.

The government should think about bringing stringent laws for following the safety measures against pandemic. It was so correct by the director, CCMB Hyderabad that negligence is the key factor for the second wave of the Coronavirus in our country. The people are not at all cooper-

ating with the government and turning their deaf ears to its suggestions. This is an ample opportunity for all the intellectuals and political outfits to disseminate the benefits of vaccination and preventive measures against pandemic. It is not correct to create some apprehensions about the efficiency of vaccines.

The zooming positive cases are reflecting the fact that the people are not adhering to the basic precautionary measures. In 2020, the country though it has many hurdles had encountered the pandemic effect with the great support of the people. Hope, in 2021 also we will repeat the same within a scientific manner by following physical distance, wearing masks, using sanitizer and by getting vaccinated.

The academic institutions should have to shoulder the responsibility to promote awareness among the people by organizing the awareness camps across the country. The people should not forget the remark that "Negligence of responsibility teaches lessons in life"

—E Gajendra Nath Reddy, Badvel

## Freebie frenzy

The talk of the town is about elections in five states. We have a law for prevention of corruption. If you give a bribe, both the bribe giver and the bribe taker is punished. Now let's look at the elections. First the manifesto released by each of the parties is a vote teaser. A statement of lofty promises, which are forgotten soon as the elections are over. Has anyone, ever, compared the manifestos with what is delivered. No chance.

No one really is interested. But what do the manifestos say? Freebies. If you elect me to power, I will give you doles and not the other aspirational stuff which has no meaning whatsoever to the voter. It is just the laptops, mixer grinder and the cash payouts in an election era.

— M R Jayanthi, Mumbai

T K NANDANAN

India treaded on a cautious path striking a balance in its explanation of vote statement when the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva adopted a resolution titled 'Promotion of Reconciliation Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka' against the country's human rights record. During the voting, 22 out of 47 countries backed the resolution and 11 opposed it with 14 countries including India abstained.

While India asserted its support to both the Tamils of Sri Lanka for equality, justice, dignity and peace, India also ensured the unity, stability and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is our neighboring country and there are a lot of similarities between these two nations especially millions of Tamils inhabiting the country bear testimony to our rich culture and ethos.

But a costly tactical blunder on India's part committed in 1987, which is still believed to be India's diplomatic hara-kiri, when the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi decided to send Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to kill our own brothers and sisters though India gained nothing from such a decision. However, at the same time, the

## Vaccinate and stay safe

This refers to your thought-provoking, informative and eye-catching article "Get Vaccinated now, don't repent later" (Hans India – March 27). India has started the second phase of the Covid-19 vaccination drive on March 1, 2021, for people with co-morbidities and those above 60 years of age. More than 20 million people in India have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine in what is the world's biggest inoculation drive.

According to the World Health Organisation, "Like any vaccine, Covid-19 vaccines can cause mild side effects, such as a low-grade fever or pain or redness at the injection site. Tiredness, fever, chills, nausea, vomiting, joint pain after getting vaccinated are common, and will subside within a day or two. India is a vaccine powerhouse as it makes 60 per cent of the world's vaccines and is home to half a dozen major manufacturers.

Getting vaccinated is a safer way to help build protection against Covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus yet, experts have said that the relatively rapid development of the Covid-19 vaccine does not mean safety measures were compromised. It is also reported that even after the vaccination, one cannot lower their guard and start roaming around freely till at least 70% of the population gets immunized.

The government aims to use up to 500 million doses to cover 250 million "priority people" by the end of July. India has about

150 days to administer two doses and meet its target. While government hospitals are offering the vaccines for free, private hospitals have been allowed to charge a maximum of Rs 250 per dose.

Everyone one knows that there is a vaccination going on in the country, but the people are now aware about how to get it. Central government should ask the states to encourage and motivate the online registrations and need to create a better framework. A major number of people have concerns regarding Covid-19 vaccine safety, and intend to "wait and see," before deciding to be vaccinated. It is reported that eminent doctors, along with many other health-care workers within the government as well as the private sector, have taken the vaccines and returned to work without any side-effects.

Nobody enjoys having a blood test or an injection, but for some people, the thought of a needle puncturing their skin can send shivers down the spine. With a vaccine now available for Covid-19, it's important that as many people as possible receive this safe and effective vaccine. One must remember that Vaccination against COVID-19 will lead to people not transmitting the disease and its eradication in some time. Let us continue taking all the precautions, whether vaccinated or not till 70 per cent of our population is vaccinated.

— Vinod Chandrashekar Dixit, Ahmedabad



## No time for laxity

The frightening pace and surge with which Covid-19 is being reported in the country as part of third wave of the pandemic - with daily cases surpassing 50,000 plus, must make every citizen sit up and do his/her mite in tackling the pandemic from further spread, by adopting the routine and foolproof procedures imparted, by way of maintaining maximum possible physical distance, along with other personal hygiene procedures.

The states that are in the surge of Covid-19 in the country were supportive in controlling the virus from the day one and had shown some laxity despite the latent risks involved knowing well the pandemic has come to stay for a long haul. It is definitely time

to redraw, once again fool-proof strategy in tackling the pandemic that is not predictable in nature, and capable of assuming newer and deadlier forms that the researchers are yet to come to terms with.

The law-enforcing authority must once again swing into action, as it did earlier, against the violators, when the lockdown was in place in the country. The educational institutions must not be in a hurry to start classes, albeit for high-school and undergraduate students; with the potential of the kind looming large to neutralise what the society and the country have gained and achieved in fighting the pandemic, so far.

— K V Raghuram, Wayanad

## PAST AND PRESENT

# Life through generations



K R SRINIVASAN

When several aspects of today's lifestyle regarded as extravagances in the 1970s and were beyond the reach of the middle class families, I grew up in such an environment with pride enjoying life with the necessities available. I and my friends travelled daily by public transport buses to go to school and college later and also visited places in nook and corner of the city to meet relatives on holidays.

While on travel, we enjoyed every moment chatting and laughing all the time. The monthly bus pass priced reasonably coming in handy for our travels in the city was considered one of the prized possessions by me because it not only saved money but also spared me from bothering my parents every time for money. But after the invasion of household gadgets and gizmos into the middle class homes in the 90s and thereon, the lives of first young generation has changed drastically to a large extent. With access to bikes and smart phones and more money on hand coming easily, their outlook towards life changed further with chatting and e-mailing becoming the norm even as traditional letter writing have become passe.

Further, as I vividly recollect the typewriting institute located in a sylvan surrounding in my colony where I first started learning the rudiments of typing, my eyes brighten though later computer edged out the good old typewriter like what mobiles saw decline of landlines which was once a status symbol for those owning it. Imagining the generation that got Independence, I feel proud that despite lack of comforts, they were out there fighting to make India free. While we got independence, I remember their sacrifices and feel thankful and happy that life during my generation was a better off as the nation was making rapid strides towards progress.

In this midst, I also proudly recall that how I eagerly looked forward every year to a major cricket tournament Moyn-ul-dowla hosted by Hyderabad Cricket Association and played over for 18 days in Lal Bahadur Stadium. It was enjoyable watching star cricketers playing exciting cricket on all the days 18 days in the company of my friends. We clapped at every boundary and as well fall of wickets. Our favourite team was the one led by stylish batsman, the late M.L. Jaisimha, the darling of the sporting crowd.

Moreover, the fun-filled days watching matches every year till the late 1970s is deeply etched in my memory. Even now, whenever those glorious moments splash my mind, I feel really happy. Gone are those days with India now coming under the footprints of foreign channels and cable television, most watch sports from their drawing room. Even cinema which captured the imagination of cine-goers watching in a single theatre in the seventies and before has also lost its sheen in the peak of TV and mobile boom.

The only saving grace been the new swish multiplexes but these still not able to ignite and generate the same imagination and interest like what we saw and enjoyed movie in single theatres in the bygone days due to the present urban culture having undergone a new redefining lifestyle. In a nutshell, as today's youth brimming with false prestige and notion only believes in wasting time by reacting only to sensational news and thinks less for the larger good of the nation, it is time that he/she is reminded that living a superficial life only harms the society and country and therefore try to coax to engage his/her mind in productive and creative things to make the nation rich and oneself humble by making him understand "the way generations before lived to make country rich" in all aspects.

# India is walking tightrope with Sri Lanka



dreaded outfit - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) modus operandi was totally unacceptable as it engaged in crass violence and bloodshed throughout its existence in Sri Lanka. The massive military opera-

tion by the Sri Lankan army against the LTTE put an end to the Tamil separatist conflict in 2009. The end of the civil war was a moment to celebrate for most Sri Lankans, but questions as to the disappearance of

thousands of people still remained unanswered. Fingers point to Sri Lankan President, Rajapaksa's role in the disappearance of thousands of people. The IPKF was formed under the mandate of the 1987

Indo-Sri Lankan Accord that aimed to put an end to the Sri Lankan Civil War between Sri Lankan Tamil nationalists and the Sri Lankan military. The IPKF's operation was laudable, and with its combing operations, the Tamil militants were almost cordoned off and were disarmed and the IPKF withdrew from Sri Lanka in 1989 after their mission was completed.

For India, this neighbouring nation is so important, but under the presidency of Rajapaksa, Sri Lanka is rather well disposed towards China than to India, which makes India more cautious. To counter this strategically, India must establish better ties with this nation so that both countries can feel united more by strategic and military ties. Sri Lanka is our neighbor with a lot of similarities in culture and religious practices.

So, Sri Lanka must always remain on our side and we should always be on good terms with them. But China is another big nation looking for an opportunity to establish a strong tie with this nation. India should not let China access Sri Lanka too much. It is a proven fact that if they are given an inch, they will take away a mile. So, India should be cautious about dealing with this international issue.



- Vasavi Raju Barde, Nagpur



# UP's Palash 'Gulal' goes global

VIVEK TRIPATHI

THE herbal colours made from the 'Palash' flower (Butea monosperma) by women self-help groups in several Uttar Pradesh districts are much in demand for Holi celebrations not only in the country but also foreign lands.

Women of self-help groups (SWG) operating under the Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission are preparing 'gulals' (Brightly coloured powder) in red, green, purple, pink from the flowers in Sonbhadra, Mirzapur, Chandauli, Varanasi and Chitrakoot districts.

The gulals have found a demand in London besides other states in the country. Kanchan, a woman working with the Sonbhadra Bhima Prerna group, said, "The Palash flowers are plucked and dried for a day. This is followed by boiling the flower in water for two hours which leaves behind a colour. After this, we add coloured water of Arrowroot to it, then it is spread and dried."

"The herbal gulal costs a small amount of money. It is prepared on an average cost of Rs 60 to 70. In the market, it is sold easily between Rs 150 to 200. It yields a good profit. As many as 11 women are preparing these herbal gulals with me. Till now our self-help group has prepared herbal gulal worth three quintals which has been sold in the Sonbhadra district," said Kanchan.

UP Rural Livelihood Mission Director, Sujit Kumar, told IANS, "During Holi one must use chem-



ical-free colours. For this purpose, gulal is being prepared from the flowers of Palash. The women of the self-help groups are engaged in this work. Especially in Sonbhadra and Mirzapur districts. So far, 5,000 kilogram of herbal colours and gulal have been prepared by 4,058 women self-help groups across 32 districts in the state, which have been sold for nearly Rs 7 lakh."

He said, "Apart from preparing herbal colours, chips, 'papad' and 'gujiya' are also being prepared by the women of the self-help groups. For this, training is also being imparted under the mission. A target of Rs one crore has been set to sell

these products. The demand for herbal colours prepared by the Sonbhadra self-help group has come from London, where an order has been placed and sent abroad."

Pandit Sarojkant Mishra said, "According to mythological beliefs, rituals such as Yajna are performed from the stem of the Palash flower. Project Manager Acharya Shekhar said due to the fear of coronavirus, people are hesitant in playing with colours on this year's Holi. In such a situation, the demand for 'Palash' flower is increasing. This is because the colours made from Palash flowers are natural and do not cause any

harm to the body. The demand for Palash flowers has grown in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Uttarakhand besides London where orders have been placed and sent."

Ayurveda Acharya Vijay Seth said, "Palash flower is very beneficial for human beings. Its herbal colours do not harm the skin. Palash flower always enhances the skin. It protects against antiviral and antifungal infections as well as reduces pollution. It is very beneficial to cure stomach diseases. By not adding chemicals while making colours from Palash flowers will not cause any harm to the body."

Nagarjuna Mamidipudi

## Remembering a dynamic mentor

S PRADEEP KUMAR

I consider myself fortunate to have had an opportunity to work under Late Nagarjuna Sir, IAS, (1955-2002) when he was a State Project Director, District Primary Education Programme, Andhra Pradesh in early 2000s. I would like to recall my experiences and knowledge that I gained under his noble aegis.

His humble and down to earth attitude always won people over. He always interacted with people of all levels to understand their issues and provide solutions for improving the functionality of the department. He insisted on innovative thinking in works.

For instance, when I designed and proposed child-friendly elements like elephant model slides, animal-shaped & fruit-shaped chalkboards, created child-friendly environment through drawings & paintings on walls etc. for eight schools in Khammam District, without any second thought, he immediately gave the green signal to go ahead. This had tremendous impact on children and improved the enrolment in schools.

His personal integrity. He said their personal honesty should not affect their discretion and wisdom in disposing of files obstructing the system. He further added that he had come across officers who consciously gloated about their honest image and looked at files from that angle delaying decisions and inconveniencing people. He opined that this kind of attitude in officers derails the smooth functioning of the system. I would like to recall an incident that once happened.

There was a general review meeting conducted by him with staff members and officers wherein he said that lots of complaints had come to his notice that the funds were not released for conducting Residential Bridge Course for dropout children in Hyderabad. These centres were facing problems for not getting their due share of funds. This was because an officer concerned in the department has stopped releasing payments to the agency. When questioned, the officer replied that he stopped releasing payments because there were allegations against the NGO that they were indulging in corrupt

departments' responsibilities. If NGOs are corrupt then the matter should be left to the investigating agencies to decide the course of action against the erring NGOs. But not take matters relating to other departments into one's hands and play God. For no one escapes from the clutches of the law of the land. There's a system in place where every department has its own role to play to make the nation run on a smooth track. We all should fall in line and strengthen the system by making our actions responsible and accountable to the public. After all we are public servants. We are here to serve the public and give them the best they deserve.

He further let out the secret that what makes the officer good. He said,

- One should have positive approach in reading, understanding and subsequent disposal of files.
- They should cultivate the habit of interacting with people at ground level and understand their needs.
- Improve analytical skills to be in a position to decide whether his signature of authority or his decision-making power is benefiting the public and falling within the ambit of the law.
- Thorough subject knowledge; good assessing skills in deciding what is good and what is bad for the public or for the State; good knowledge of service rules or rules relating to the subject that they are dealing with.
- Commitment to one's work; commitment to use one's discretionary powers; and commitment to the speedy disposal of files in good faith with good judgment is all what is required in an efficient officer.

True to his words, he lived all his life by what he preached. The nation needs more of such officers who possess the calibre and characteristics of Late Nagarjuna Sir; and not the procrastinating indecisive officers who put off the files confining them to the dusty attics which is going on piling like a China Wall. It is this bureaucratic attitude that should be consigned to flames.

For two years, he was my mentor and inspiration. I learnt a lot from him. On his 19th death anniversary on March 28, as part of my humble tributes to the memory of late Nagarjuna Sir, I recollect and reminisce the memorable moments that I had with him and wish to share it with my colleagues and you all.

(The author is Deputy Executive Engineer, Commissioner of School Education, Government of Telangana, Hyderabad)



He was well acquainted with all the issues of the department and prepared notes for all important events or meetings by himself and never depended on others. His dynamic nature was visible in the way he worked, especially when it came to disposing of files. No files were left pending on his table. He hated procrastinating attitude in officers. He stressed on speedy disposal of files so that the system should not suffer. He was honest to the core but never let this honest image go to his head affecting his duties. His prime focus was on ensuring speedy disposal of issues so that the department gets streamlined for better performance. He expected the same honesty and commitment from the staff.

In one of the meetings he said that personal honesty and integrity is good in officers and equally stressed on their profes-

practices misusing the released funds.

Nagarjuna Sir then rebuked the concerned officer saying that his high-handed behaviour in stopping payments to NGOs has made thousands of children suffer starvation for several months. He said that starving children is the worst crime. He further said, 'Suppose if you had released the funds due to the NGO he could have embezzled 60 per cent or 70 per cent of funds. But the remaining 30 per cent or 40 per cent funds utilised could have benefited the children to some extent. But since you have not released funds to the NGO all the children suffered starvation'. He then immediately ordered the release of payments to ensure the programme activities to continue unhindered.

He further gave a dressing down to all present that no one should poke their noses in other

## Will South India become the new BIMARU?

VISHWAPRASAD ALVA

LET'S look back at "BIMARU" (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) which were once seen as sick or backward states of India and losing out because of high levels of corruption, lawlessness and crime.

Why did they get there? It all started with lack of justice for common man. A minuscule minority patronised by the politicians and criminals took law into their own hands and threatened people to submission. A minuscule minority of the police force colluded with the criminals, never registered FIRs, never gave justice to the victims and the courts as usual took decades to provide justice to common man. Gradually the minuscule minority grew in percentage with the lure of wealth and patronage leaving the law-abiding common man with only three options to choose from.

- Yield to the reality, get subdued and become submissive. Kill their

own energy and enterprise to buy peace.

- Leave the State to places where they could live with dignity and peace.
  - Join the criminals and the insignificant corrupt minority in the law enforcing bodies to threaten and loot others.
- The ones with enterprise migrated to greener pastures did well for themselves. There was large scale migration in the intellectual and the labour population. Everywhere it was the minuscule minority that ruled the large population of law-abiding common man. Percentage didn't matter here.
- In the last few years, we have seen the so called BIMARU states reforming because of decisive leaders like Nitish Kumar, Shivraj Chauhan and Yogi Adityanath. Rajasthan unfortunately hasn't seen a good leader during the BJP or Congress rule.
- Now watch the KAMATT States (Karnataka, Andhra, Maharashtra, Telangana and Tamil Nadu). These

states that were once prosperous, literate, enterprising are seeing the same situation that BIMARU faced decades ago.

Be it any party which came to power, we just saw corrupt leaders, corrupt police, delayed justice system that failed to act on time and subdued the common man into submission. We see people helpless with the corrupt and unfair leaders and justice system.

We see the govt indulging in large scale corruption, In some States the government never getting formed till the end of its 5-year term, defections, buying and selling of elected representatives, caste divisions, fight to get classified as backward and/or minorities, government being the perpetrator of injustice, patronising criminals and looting public money by rigging tenders, not making payment to service providers on time, insensitive to notices and to the legal system.

These are clear signs of a lawless society and of leaving the law-abid-

ing common man with the same three choices: Yield to buy peace, migrate out of State or join the corrupt and criminal syndicate.

The writing is on the wall. While the Centre seems to be working on reforms, on transparency in governance and development, we see these once prosperous states drifting towards BIMARU. Our judicial system has never introspected ever to see why justice takes years and decades, why the society is drifting towards crime or surrender. Unless the police and the judiciary wakes up, we don't see much hope in the near future. Without Justice, there is no "Sabka vikas", there is no "Acche Din". We will be left with just slogans and hype.

The future is bleak and scary unless we nail the corrupt politicians, the police and the slow judicial process. Independent, fair and up-right police department and a free and quick judiciary is the basic need of the common man. The rest can wait.

# Punjab women make living out of their backyard greens

SIDDHARTHA BANDHOPADHYAY

BUT today, Sudarshna walks with an air of confidence -- minus the ghoonghat and an entourage of men. She owes this confidence to the scrub forest in her 'backyard' in Dhar Kalan block of Punjab's Pathankot district, where she stays. She collects medicinal plants from the forest and sells them to local traders. "Last year, I made Rs 1.5 lakh," she tells us proudly.

Like Sudarshna, the lives of close to 300 women in this block have transformed since they started making a livelihood from agro-forestry. The forest they go to has also benefited in return.

### PLPA restricted forest use

The forest stands on the border of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh and falls in the Lower Shivaliks range of hills. It is 10 to 15 minutes of walk from most of the 31 villages that fall under the Dhar Kalan block. But despite the proximity, the residents could not make a living from this forest for close to a century.

This stems from the complicated history of this forest land. Dhar Kalan block is governed under The Punjab Land Preservation Act, which the British had introduced in 1905. Called PLPA in short, the Act banned all commercial and livelihood activities to arrest soil erosion and flash floods. Villagers could collect firewood and timber for personal use with the permission of forest officials but they could not plough this land.

Dhar Kalan has some parcel of panchayat land for farming but the majority is PLPA forest land, spread across 15,771 hectares. As a result, most men in Dhar Kalan work as daily-wage labourers while women manage homes.

It was only in 2010 when the Punjab government started withdrawing the land under PLPA so as to relax a few restrictions earlier imposed by the forest department and make it eligible for

**Sudarshna Devi has changed. "Changed for good," the 72-year-old says, in Punjabi, with a chuckle. Until 2003, the Class 8 dropout used to cover her face in ghoonghat and would barely step out of her home without a male company. Cooking, fetching water, raising children, rearing the cattle, her time was spent performing these household chores**

common use. This step opened up livelihood opportunities for the communities living close to the forest.

As a result, 8,599.72 hectares of forest land in Dhar Kalan was withdrawn. This patch is now jointly managed by the villagers and the forest department.

### 'It gives us income'

The women of Dhar Kalan started to make a living from the withdrawn forest patch in 2017. Thanks to a project started by the Punjab Forest Department under the aegis of the National Medicinal Plant Board (NMPB). The project aims to employ women in the processing and sale of herbs collected from the local forest.

It was Sunita, a social development facilitator with the state forest department who goes only by her first name, who mobilised these women to come out and work. Most of these women did face resistance from the men and elders in their family initially. But when extra income started trickling in, these families saw value in this initiative.

Sunita's intervention in Dhar Kalan started in 2003 when she organised women into self-help groups to sell locally-grown fruits and products like aam papad. This was part of the Punjab Afforestation Project.

Later, when the project to harvest medicinal plants was announced, she trained these women to pick plants like giloy, amla, neem, amalbas, gandla, basuti and bhabbar and operate machines to make juices and powders.



Krishna Devi, a 36-year-old from Mothwan village, admits that she joined the project "after seeing the kind of money it brought (sic)." Today, Krishna and her farmer-husband have been able to build a home of their own, partly because of her income, she shares happily.

The intervention has not only brought them money but also given them social mobility and agency. The practice of

ghoonghat is on the decline because they have to go to the market and interact with traders in the city of Amritsar on a frequent basis. Women such as Sudarshna and Krishna have gone from being members of the self-help groups to taking on the role of a mentor.

Since this is a part-time vocation and women have household chores to do as well, they take on the tasks as and when

they are free. However, tasks are cut out between different age-groups. "Older women are responsible for boiling berries such as amla and extracting juice, younger ones head out to the forest to collect them," Krishna says.

### 'They help conserve the forest'

The project has given the forest department more reasons to cheer about.

Pathankot Divisional Forest Officer Sanjeev Tewari informs 101Reporters, "They (these women) inform us about fires breaking out in the forest. They have also alerted us about poachers a few times and individuals encroaching the land. Their participation has helped us in conserving the forest."

Their vigilance is significant because "the number of unemployed youths in this area [Lower Shivaliks] is very high and they are likely to be easily lured in unlawful activities like poaching, illicit felling," cites a forest management plan prepared for the Pathankot forest division in 2015. The forests in Punjab need to be protected on a priority basis also because their cover is low in the first place, spanning only six per cent, Tewari informs.

These women don't go into the forest with the prime motive of patrolling but when they do see any suspicious activity, they call up "Sunita ma'am" as soon as possible, Krishna tells us.

Since these women have taken up this vocation to generate income, could it lead to greed and over-exploitation of the forest? The Dhar Kalan patch is a thriving habitat of the wolf, clawless otter, leopard, panther, blackbuck, Indian gazelle, pangolin and other wildlife species.

No, says Sunita. She explains, "The NMPB scheme not only aims to generate livelihood but also promote in-situ conservation of medicinal plants. So we have trained them to survey and document important medicinal plants in their natural habitat. This way we make sure we don't harvest certain plants excessively. They have also been told to identify and report the invasive species."

As a parting question, we ask Sunita why women were chosen for this project and not men. "Because they were ghoonghat and stayed in," says Sunita, implying that a little incentive right in the 'backyard' can boost the self-confidence and social standing of the women.



## Vivo launches new X60 series

HANS BUSINESS  
HYDERABAD

VIVO India has unveiled its all-new flagship 'X60 series' smartphones in major international markets including India. The smartphone company also unveiled 'Vivo X League' to offer premium service experience and privileges for Vivo X60 customers.

The new X60 series comes with 5G technology and has professional photography capabilities, premium sleek design, and great performance. The new series is available in three variants as X60, X60 Pro and X60 Pro+ in blue and black colours. The smartphones will be available in stores from April 2 at a starting price of Rs 37,990.

These flagship smartphones mark the inaugural of Vivo devices to sport ZEISS lens for ul-



timate mobile photography experience. The X60 series will be best-in-class optical lenses, sensors, image processing algorithms and diverse multi-modal features allow users to enjoy camera technologies that were previously only limited to professional photographers.

"Vivo has always been driven by innovation, and the X60 series is a testament to that promise. The new X60 series takes our learning from the very successful X50 series to a whole new level. The phone features the latest Gimbal 2.0 technology, running on the leading 8 series Snapdragon processors, all encapsulated in an elegant and ergonomic design," said Nipun Marya, Director - Brand Strategy, Vivo India.

To give our users unparalleled sharpness, clarity and image quality, we have co-engineered with ZEISS, he added. In tune with Vivo's commitment to 'Make in India', the Vivo X60 series has been manufactured at Vivo's Greater Noida facility.

# Equity MFs most preferred investment asset class

Given a positive outlook on longer term growth, equity as an asset class should outperform alternate investment options

KUMUD DAS

*The industry has crossed the mark of Rs 31 lakh crore of late in terms of AUM? What is the way forward?*

An average Indian household holds around 95 per cent of its wealth in real estate, other physical goods, and gold and the residual five percent in financial assets. But this is changing, and preference is increasing for financial assets over physical assets. I believe the trend towards the financialisation of savings would continue in the longer term. India Mutual fund is well regulated savings option with an average investor. This investment option not only provides a high level of disclosures, but also offers good liquidity. Past return performance on various mutual fund schemes (equity) has outperformed other alternate investment options. It is also tax efficient choice for the investor. With increasing awareness, I would believe that the trend towards financialization of saving would improve, and within this, the mutual fund industry should also benefit.

*The market has recently touched the 50K mark. What is your future outlook? I mean outlook on the current market scenario over all basket of market performance.*

Markets generally tend to be forward looking and discount near term news unless they are surprise events. Therefore, post a deep correction in March 2020, it has started to focus on the economic recovery path, which was aided by stimulus packages. Corporate earnings performance for Q2 and Q3 FY21 has been generally ahead of the expectations. Many sectors have participated in this positive surprise. This performance has come on the back of better sales and volume



Volatility is an inherent part of the equity market and it provides an opportunity for long-term investors to realign their portfolios. "Therefore, one has to prepare for volatility in the markets," says Sachin Trivedi, Head (Research) and fund manager, UTI MF, in an exclusive interview with Bizz Buzz

performance and tighter cost controls exercised by the companies. Some of this cost rationalisation could be structural, to which investors can start ascribing higher value. Post this pandemic event, I expect some larger players to benefit at the cost of small unorganised players. We expect these broad trends to continue. I agree that broader market indices look expensive when we examine it from an earnings perspective, but these earnings are depressed due to pandemic related impact. However, on the price to book matrices, markets are in the fair value range. I would argue that given a positive outlook on longer term growth, equity as an asset class should outperform alternate investment options.

*Investing a certain portion in the overseas market is a new trend these days. How do you see this trend when compared to the domestic market which is also doing very well?*

Investing in the overseas mar-

ket is always challenging, given regulatory restrictions and cost associated with the same. Yes, I agree, for investors with high net worth, who can afford to take high risk and have access to the right advisors, can diversify. But again, there is a regulatory cap on the absolute quantum of investment. At the same time, when we compare the performance of some of the widely available equity-oriented options (in overseas category) to retail investors, it is hard to conclude if these options are better than diversified domestic oriented equity mutual funds. In comparison, domestic equity oriented mutual fund schemes, which offer high growth potential, lower cost of a transaction, and strong regulatory framework should remain a preferred choice for the investor.

*Navigating the volatility strategy for investors to combat volatility. Kindly explain.*

Volatility is an inherent part of the equity market, and it provides an opportunity for long term investors to realign their

portfolios. Therefore, one has to prepare for volatility in the markets. However, longer-term analysis suggests that equity as an asset class has outperformed alternate asset classes and has protected investors' money against inflation. Given this background, investors are better off allocating money towards equity assets, but the proportion of the same should be based on the investor's net worth, his or her income profile, and end goal they may have. Given the sharp recovery that we have experienced in the market, if asset allocation to the equity has gone higher than the target level, the investor may reduce and bring it back to the intended level.

*How do you see the performance of UTI Transportation Logistics Fund - view on logistics and auto space in the current scenario.*

The last financial year (FY20) has been a challenging period for Auto Industry wherein two-wheeler, four-wheeler, and M&HCV Industry has seen the

sharpest decline in volume in the last four decades. This decline persisted in FY21 as well. Bunching up factors like slowing income growth, increase in cost (led by changing emission norm and safety standards), uncertainty regarding the validity of registration of BS four vehicles, and expectation for lowering GST rates led to a decline in the volume of the industry. This decline in volume and operating leverage have put further pressure on companies' profitability. However, India remains under penetrated market, where vehicle penetration is far less than in developed and some developing countries, and we have a long way to go. Our sense is that, long term demand drivers remain intact and volume growth should trend back to averages sometime in the future, which will improve the volume and revenue of the companies and improve the profitability of these companies.

*Please throw some light on the sectors that are likely to do well in the near to medium term - sectors and themes that can over and underweight for portfolio strategy. Currently emerging investment opportunities road ahead for near terms.*

Post pandemic, the shift of business from unorganised (small players) to organised (listed/ larger) players may have just got accelerated. We like companies benefiting from this trend. Further, we remain constructive on select private sector financial companies, which are adequately capitalised, have the distinct advantage of low-cost deposit, and are judiciously perusing growth opportunities leveraging technology. We also remain positive on IT services companies, where the pace of growth got accelerated post pandemic. We also remain overweight on Automobile and Pharma space.

## Niyo, Equitas ink pact to launch NiyoX

HANS BUSINESS  
HYDERABAD

Niyo, a banking fintech company, has launched the 'NiyoX' a state-of-the-art mobile banking solution for millennials in partnership with Equitas Small Finance Bank and Visa.

The company aims to onboard two million customers by the yearend and it also conducted a nationwide survey among 8,000 millennials residing in metro and non-metro cities to understand millennials' banking needs post Covid-19 pandemic. The study revealed that 70 per cent of Indian millennials are now inclined towards digital banks.

Interestingly, 55 per cent respondents said that they would



switch banks for rewards, offers and 45 per cent said would switch banks for better interest rates. Addressing these needs, the NiyoX comes with '007 banking' features such as zero per cent commission on mutual funds investment, zero per cent account maintenance charges, and up to seven per cent interest on account balances.

"We are delighted to launch our most ambitious product through our strategic partnership with Equitas SFB where we will provide the best possible savings account combined with a best-in-class investment account," said Vinay Bagri, Co-founder and CEO, Niyo. The study also notes that 84 per cent of millennials would like know how they can track their expenses with convenience.

"We are happy to partner with Niyo on this path breaking initiative. The need today is to create use case driven digital banking products and we aim to do just that with our Neobank and Fintech programs," said Vaibhav Joshi, Chief Digital Officer, Equitas Small Finance Bank.

## Time govt cut oil prices aligning with global dip

The rise in prices has been not just due to international prices going up but the heavy taxes levied on these products by both centre and States

SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN

Just a few weeks ago, India had urged the oil cartel OPEC and its allies to ease production cuts in order to stabilise rising oil prices. The plea had met with the sharp response from Saudi Arabia that India could utilise the oil it had bought cheaply last year in April and May to fill up its strategic reserves. This rather diplomatic comment must be viewed in the backdrop of last year's crash in global oil prices that has hurt the economies of oil producing countries. But prices are now falling yet again. The benchmark Brent crude has dipped from a high of \$69 per barrel at the beginning of March to about \$61.62 per barrel currently. Similarly, the American benchmark crude West Texas Intermediate (WTI) is ruling at even lower levels of \$57.98 per barrel.

The net result in this country has been a small cut in retail prices of petrol and diesel. These had soared to record levels of Rs 100 per litre for petrol at one point. The price cut carried out right now is only marginal but raises hopes that it may deepen in the coming days and ease the pain of consumers.

The current dip in oil prices can be attributed largely to the volatile Covid scenario in many parts of the world that could reduce demand for petroleum products. In Europe, for instance, there has been a series of fresh lockdowns in Germany, Italy and France owing to a surge in new cases. The slowdown in the vaccine rollout in Europe has also raised doubts of a swift economic recovery in this region. At the same time, the shortfall in vaccine availability in many countries has equally had a depressing effect on



The central government's tax collections from these products are reported to have risen by over 300 per cent over the past six years. The burden of this revenue bonanza has been borne by the common man. It is now time to provide some relief

the market. The American Petroleum Institute has also reported a build up in crude oil inventories of 2.9 million barrels for the week ending March 19. Rising inventories always have a depressing effect on prices.

The earlier rising trend of prices that cheered the oil markets over the last three months has been due to the revival of the world economy. For instance the outlook in the US has been improving rapidly owing to rising vaccination levels, financial aid from the stimulus package and the easing of social distancing rules. Similarly, political tensions in West Asia including the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Yemen have also affected prices. But the trend has reversed lately owing to higher inventories and surge in Covid cases.

This is bound to worry the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries with

their allies, known as OPEC plus. It will hold its next meeting in the first week of April to review the situation and take a view on production quotas. At last month's meeting, it had been decided to extend the existing cuts in production by another month, though exemptions were given to Russia and Kazakhstan. However, the situation has changed over the past few weeks and the cartel may have to take a view on whether production curbs should be extended further given the fact that prices are showing a softening trend.

What is now called as OPEC plus does a loose group comprise 13 OPEC members as well as ten other oil exporting countries. OPEC was forced to collaborate with other oil exporting countries after the huge increase in shale oil output in the US changed the equations in the world markets.

It was no longer the earlier situation in which OPEC was able to control prices by maintaining production quotas for member countries. It could ensure that supplies were curtailed and prices kept within a controlled band. This method of keeping prices at a level needed to sustain economies of oil producers was no longer possible after the entry of shale oil in the market. It greatly enhanced oil availability and brought about a sharp fall in prices.

The subsequent collaboration of OPEC with other major producers like Russia ultimately pushed prices upwards to about 67 dollars per barrel by December 2019. The pandemic upset the scenario yet again as the world wide economic collapse led to a steep fall in demand for oil, and an unprecedented crash in prices last year. It was at that time - in April and May 2020 -

that India purchased 16.7 million barrels to top up its strategic reserves.

With the launch of vaccinations in December 2020, however, economic recovery seemed to be on the way and demand for oil began to pick up. Prices began firming up since January this year. It is only in the last few weeks that there has been a sudden downturn in prices. One must mention that there is a little blip right now with a ship having blocked the Suez Canal and hence oil supplies from the region. This has pushed up prices but it is likely to be a temporary phenomena.

With international prices broadly declining, however, it is now time for the government to gradually reduce domestic prices of petrol and diesel. These had reached record levels of Rs 100 per litre for petrol in some cities. The rise in prices has been not just due to international prices going up but the heavy taxes levied on these products by both centre and states.

Though Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has conceded that some way has to be found to cut petroleum product prices in consultation with state governments, there has been little action on this front. Neither the centre nor States are prepared to lose the massive revenues accruing from taxes on oil products. The central government's tax collections from these products are reported to have risen by over 300 per cent over the past six years. The burden of this revenue bonanza has been borne by the common man. It is now time to provide some relief. This may reduce revenue inflows to some extent but with a reviving economy, the shortfall may be made up from other sectors.

QUIZ NO.  
166

## HANS BIZ QUIZ

### 4 Years of UK's Article 50 - BREXIT

1. On 29 March 2017, the UK invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on the European Union to begin the process of leaving the EU. In which year did the UK participate in the first-ever referendum to leave the European Union and organized the 'The Big Vote'?

- a) March 2018
- b) August 2017
- c) June 2016
- d) March 2015

2. The draft withdrawal agreement between the UK and the EU consists of 585 pages. What percent of votes polled in favour of leaving the European Union in the referendum, known as the Big Vote?

- a) 51.89%
- b) 53.26%
- c) 58.47%
- d) 63.28%

3. Who was the UK prime minister when the referendum to leave the EU took place and which side the PM supported in the vote?

- a) Gordon Brown - to remain in the EU
- b) Boris Johnson - to leave the EU
- c) Theresa May - to leave the EU
- d) David Cameron - to remain in the EU

4. What impact did the result of the UK's first-ever referendum to leave the European Union had on the value of the Sterling Pound in the currency exchange market?

- a) Pound dropped to a 12-year low
- b) Pound gained to a 12-year low
- c) Pound dropped to a 23-year low
- d) Pound dropped to a 31-year low

5. Identify the lead negotiator for the European Union?

- a) Jean-Claude Juncker
- b) Ursula von der Leyen
- c) Michel Bernard Barnier
- d) Elisabeth Werner

6. With which European Union country will the United Kingdom share a land border after Brexit?



- a) Germany
- b) Republic of Ireland
- c) France
- d) The Netherlands

7. When did the United Kingdom originally joined the European Union, then known as the European Economic Community?

- a) 1968
- b) 1973
- c) 1977
- d) 1981

8. Who was the UK prime minister when the United Kingdom joined the European Union, known as the European Economic Community (EEC)?

- a) Edward Heath
- b) Sir Harold Wilson
- c) Margaret Thatcher
- d) James Callaghan

9. "The people of Britain gave their verdict. Respect their verdict and invoke article 50 now to enable us to negotiate an exit from the EU" - Which leader asked for article 50 to be invoked the day after the referendum?

- a) Arlene Foster
- b) Steve Baker
- c) Jeremy Corbyn
- d) Sir Alan Campbell

10. Which country withdrew from the European Union by a famous decree after a referendum in 1985?

- a) Greenland in 1985
- b) Belarus in 1982
- c) Georgia in 1986
- d) Iceland in 1985

The Hans Biz Quiz has been compiled by **Sunil Dhavala**, CEO, The Third Umpire Media. He had held senior management roles at Bertelsmann, NGC, Fox Broadcasting, Star TV and others. He is an alumnus of Indian Institute of Foreign Trade

KEY

1C 2A 3D 4B 5C 6B 7B 8A 9C 10A



# 3<sup>rd</sup> ODI: India look for early wickets in ODI series decider

PUNE

INDIA and England will lock horns in the third and final One-Day International (ODI) which will decide the winner of the ongoing three-match series here at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium on Sunday.

After India had won the first match by 66 runs, defending 317 runs, England came back into the series hammering the hosts by six wickets in the second match on Friday. They chased the 337-run target in the 44th over.

While the Indian bowlers excelled in the first game as they ran through the English middle-order, they looked easy meat in the second game on Friday. Spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Krunal Pandya, who were the fourth and fifth bowlers for India, were a let-down, going for 156 runs in their 16 overs. In comparison, England's spinners Moeen Ali and Adil Rashid were much better.

India could rest Chinaman Kuldeep and replace him with leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, who has been Kohli's other trumpcard spinner in the ODI set-up. Chahal was not picked in the playing XI for the last two T20Is and the first ODI after he conceded quite a few runs in the initial games of the T20 series. The pacers have performed well but they have not been effective with the new ball in both the games.

England openers Jason Roy and Jonny Bairstow have been



Match starts at 1.30pm

Indian captain Virat Kohli congratulates Jonathan Bairstow after loosing the 2nd ODI match at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune on Friday

allowed to set up century stands in both the one-dayers, showing Indian bowlers' weakness in their ability to exploit the new ball.

Newcomer M. Prasidh Krishna admitted that they need to take early wickets.

"Personally I would like to start better. I would like to improve on how I have been starting, bowling with the new ball," he said.

Allowing a good start to the England openers can be dangerous considering the visitors have a power-packed batting line-up. In fact, their strength in ODIs in recent times has been their batting. Apart from the openers, the Indians also need to be wary of Ben Stokes who was in a murderous mood in Friday's match, batting at No. 3. The left-hander clobbered a 52-ball 99 to take the game away from India.

The home team's batting has, however, looked good with K.L. Rahul coming good in the middle-order and Shreyas Iyer's replacement in the second ODI, Rishabh Pant scoring a swashbuckling 77 off 40 deliveries.

Focus will also be on skipper Virat Kohli who has scored four consecutive half-centuries in ODIs but has failed to convert it into a century.

Both teams, inside the top three of ICC rankings, are known to play fearless cricket. And they take pride in doing that. India captain Virat Kohli said that when two top teams like England and India play, one of them is bound to win convincingly. (IANS)

## TEAMS

**India:** Virat Kohli (captain), Rohit Sharma (vice-captain), Shikhar Dhawan, Shubman Gill, Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant (wicket-keeper), KL Rahul (wicket-keeper), Yuzvendra Chahal, Kuldeep Yadav, Krunal Pandya, Washington Sundar, T Natarajan, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Shardul Thakur.

**England:** Jos Buttler (captain), Moeen Ali, Jonathan Bairstow, Sam Billings, Sam Curran, Tom Curran, Liam Livingstone, Matt Parkinson, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, Ben Stokes, Reece Topley, Mark Wood, Dawid Malan.

“It's very kind of him (Kohli's words of praise) to say that. He's been one of the best players around the world for a period of time. Likewise, I'm pleased to be striking the ball like I am at the moment

—Jonny Bairstow

## ODI Super League: India in 8<sup>th</sup> spot, but no worries

NEW DELHI

INDIA are languishing at eighth position in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Super League table after the second ODI on Friday.

India have played five matches, won two and lost three to garner 19 points. They lost one point due to slow over rate.

Their opponents in the ongoing series England lead the table with 40 points just like Australia although the European team is ahead of its arch-rivals on net run-rate.

New Zealand are third while Afghanistan are fourth, both on 30 points after playing three matches each.

Bangladesh (30), West Indies (30) and Pakistan (20) occupy the 5th, 6th and 7th positions while Zimbabwe, Ireland and Sri Lanka are on 9th, 10th and 11th respectively.

The ODI Super League, competed among 13 nations, will decide the teams that qualify for the ODI World Cup to be held in India in 2023.

It will not affect India's fortunes. They are already assured to play since they host the 50-over tournament.

The top seven teams in the table, as on March 31, 2023, as well as India will make it to the World Cup.

The remaining -- or the bottom -- five teams will fight it out in a qualifying tournament.

A teams plays a three-match series against eight other teams, meaning they have to play 24 ODIs in the period which will be part of the Super League. Four of these series have to be away and four have to be home. A win carries 10 points, a tie/ no result/ abandoned match carries five points while there are no points for a loss.

This is the second series India are playing, having lost their first in November, 2020 to Australia.

The Super League is scheduled to start on May 1, 2020 and end on March 31, 2022. However, the Covid-19 pandemic forced the league to start on July 30, 2020 and end on March 31, 2023. (IANS)

## Saina out, Krishna-Vishnu enter maiden Super 100 final at Orleans Masters

PARIS

SAINA Nehwal bowed out in a straight games in the women's singles semifinals but unheralded duo of Krishna Prasad Garaga and Vishnu Vardhan Goud Panjala kept India in the title hunt by storming into men's doubles final at the Orleans Masters here on Saturday.

London Olympic bronze medalist, Saina lost 17-21 17-21 to Denmark's Line Christophersen in 28 minutes, while women's duo of Ashwini Ponnappa and N Sikki Reddy also faltered 18-12 9-21 to top seeded Thai pair of Jongkolphan Kititharakul and Rawinda Prajongjai at the semifinals.

However, Krishna and Vishnu cheered up the Indian camp with a 21-17 21-17 win over English pair of Callum Hemming and Steven Stallwood in a 35 minute semifinal clash to reach their maiden final of a Super 100 event.



The Indian duo, playing their first event together this year, will take on either Indonesian pair of Sabar Karyaman Gutama and Moh Reza Pahlevi Isfahani or fourth seeded English combination of Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the title clash on Sunday.

Krishna and Vishnu had a slender 4-2 early on but the English pair soon jumped to a 11-8 lead at the break. However, the Indian pair soon caught up at 13-13 and marched on to seal the opening game.

In the second game, Krishna and Vishnu slowly moved ahead to a 11-7 advantage at the interval and even though their rivals narrowed down the gap to 15-17, the Indian duo ensured there was no hiccup. Krishna, 21, is India's no. 1 ranked doubles player and used to pair up with Satwiksairaj Rankireddy in his junior days.

After Satwik and Chirag Shetty were paired together, Krishna started playing with Dhruv Kapila since November, 2016. The duo continued for two and a half years before separating in 2019.

The 20-year-old Vishnu also played with a few other Indian doubles players in his junior days. He and Ishaan Bhatnagar had reached the finals at the 2019 Bulgarian Junior international. (PTI)

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## Call before you comment on me: Bairstow to Gavaskar

PUNE

SOON after recording his 11th ODI century and helping England chase India's 337-run target with 39 balls to spare, Jonny Bairstow questioned the basis on which former India captain Sunil Gavaskar had commented that the England batsman looked 'uninterested' in Test cricket.

The right-handed batsman had got three ducks in four Test innings of the series against India that ended earlier this month. But he bounced back into form, scoring 94 and 124 in the first

two ODIs while providing England with rocking starts.

"I am interested [in knowing] as to how that opinion could have been made, especially as there's been no correspondence or communication between myself and him," said Bairstow.

"He's more than welcome to give me a ring and I'll speak to him about my will to do well in Test cricket, and the enjoyment I do get out of playing Test cricket.

"My phone is on and if he does want to give me a call or a message, he

should feel free."

The 31-year-old, with 11 tons, is behind Joe Root (16), Eoin Morgan (13) and Marcus Trescothick (12) in the list of English batsmen with most ODI centuries. He said he would love to surpass Root and become England's top century-maker.

"Naturally, you would like to have the most ODI hundreds for England," he said.

"I'm happy with how I'm playing and I'm happy with those figures, but they mean nothing if you don't keep converting in the future." (IANS)

## TRACK CYCLING C'SHIP ROLLS OUT IN HYDERABAD



The Cycling Federation of India's 72nd National Track Cycling Championship-2021 was flagged off by Sports Minister V Srinivas Goud at Velodrome SATS, Osmania University, Hyderabad on Saturday. More than 700 cyclists, both men and women from across India are taking part in the five-day event being organised by Telangana Cycling Association. It will conclude on March 31. This is the first-ever Indian National Championship to be recognised by the UCI and as such have been listed in the UCI World Track Cycling Calendar. Competitions are being held in Individual Time Trial, Individual Sprint; Individual Pursuit; Point Race; Keirin; Scratch Race; Team Pursuit; Team Sprint and Flying Lap. The National Track Cycling Championship has come to Hyderabad after a gap of 14 years.

(Photo: Ch Prabhu Das)

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