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WINDOWS



Military stages coup in Myanmar, detains Suu Kyi

YANGON: Myanmar's military seized power in a bloodless coup on Monday, detaining democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi as it imposed a one-year state of emergency. The intervention ended a decade of civilian rule in Myanmar, with the military justifying its power grab by alleging fraud in the November elections that Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party won in a landslide. The coup sparked global condemnation, with the United States leading calls for democracy to be immediately restored.

Farm stir: Twitter withholds multiple accounts

NEW DELHI: Twitter on Monday withheld multiple accounts on its platform, including those linked with the ongoing farmers' protest against the Centre's three farm laws. Sources confirmed that the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) had directed Twitter to block around 100 accounts and 150 tweets that it claimed were using a controversial hashtag and making "fake, intimidatory and provocative tweets". It was not immediately known if all the accounts and tweets were linked to the farmers' protest. Among the accounts withheld were Kisan Ekta Morcha (@Kisanekta-morcha) and BKU Ekta Ugrahan (@Bkuektaugrahan), both related to the ongoing farmer protest. Apart from these, several individual and organisational accounts, including that of media outlet The Caravan, Prasar Bharti CEO Sashi Shekhar Vempati, activist Hansraj Meena, actor Sushant Singh, AAP MLA Jarnail Singh and CPM leader Md Salim.

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The way govt is increasing the fuel prices, there should be a scrappage policy for new cars too!

No changes in personal income tax

NEW DELHI

EXPERTS' speculations seem to have come true as Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's first budget of the decade didn't have much for the common man. While no changes were made to the personal income tax slabs, senior citizens and NRIs were offered big benefits.

Under the proposal, those above the age of 75 will no longer have to file I-T returns. The FM said that income tax return forms have been further simplified. A Covid-19 cess

Senior citizens, NRIs get relief

that was much speculated to be enforced to revive the economy in post-coronavirus world did not find

mention in the Union Budget 2021-22. Taxpayers had been eyeing the income tax benefits

as Covid-19 has burnt pockets of 'aam admi' in over a year. People had been anticipating tax incentives to increase spending and reinvigorate household consumption demand.

Presenting the Budget, the FM announced that the central government planned to reduce timeline for reopening of tax cases to 3 years from 6 years.

To further ease of income tax filing, capital gains from listing securities and interest income to come pre-filled in ITRs, the FM announced.

UNION BUDGET-2021

HEALTHCARE, INFRA GET BIGGEST BOOST

NEW DELHI

IN her third Union Budget, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman gave extra push to health and infrastructure, while underlining that the government was prepared to facilitate a reset of the economy that suffered badly due to Covid pandemic.

The budget also saw the government focusing on the poll-bound states with the Finance Minister allocating special funds for road and highway projects in Kerala, Assam, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu.

At a time when the farmers are at loggerheads with the government over new farm laws, the budget aimed to boost agriculture infrastructure with agri infrastructure on many products. However, for the salaried class, the budget was a let-down as there had been no change in the income tax slabs.

In fact, the Sitharaman's budget this time was all about prioritising key issues like creating more jobs, ramping up healthcare spending and boosting economic growth. The allocation for the defence sector was also comparatively higher in the wake of the India-China conflict.

A host of announcements were also made on the government's disinvestment strategy for the upcoming fiscal year starting April 1,



2021. It is also worth mentioning that no major tax changes were announced in the budget.

The decision to allocate more funds to healthcare and infrastructure is in line with the biggest hurdles India currently facing -- Covid-

19 pandemic and growth.

For healthcare, a new centrally-sponsored scheme, PM Atmanirbhar Bharat Yojana, will be launched with an outlay of about Rs 64,180 crore over 6 years. According to the Finance Minister, this will be

used to develop capacities of primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare systems, strengthen existing national institutions, and create new institutions, to cater to detection and cure of new and emerging diseases. This will be in addition to the Na-

tional Health Mission. The total healthcare allocation in the budget is Rs 2.23 lakh crore, which is a 135 per cent hike over the previous budget.

Infrastructure was the next-biggest focus point of the Union Budget 2021-22. Stressing on the need to focus on local manufacturing for India's USD 5 trillion economy dream, Sitharaman said the government had already announced a production-linked incentive scheme (PLI) for 13 sectors.

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Iron	LED lamps
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Insurance	Solar lanterns
Steel utensils	Mobile phones
Silk and cotton	Mobile Chargers
Platinum	Automobile parts
Medical devices	Leather goods
Electricity	Kabuli chana

REACTIONS



No burden on common man

Due to corona, many experts were assuming that the government would increase the burden on the common man, but keeping in mind its obligations towards fiscal sustainability, the government insisted on increasing the size of the budget. This budget

emphasizes on increasing the ease of living in the lives of common people by simplifying rules and procedures.

All-inclusive budget

This budget was definitely a complex task in the Corona epidemic. But under the guidance of Narendra Modi ji,



Nirmala Sitharaman ji has presented an all-inclusive budget. This self-reliant India, a \$ 5 trillion economy, will pave the way for the farmers to double their income. The global economy is in a resetting mode after the Corona epidemic, I believe this budget will help India to use this opportunity to emerge stronger in the global scenario.



Country on sale

Forget the cash in the hands of the poor, the Modi government has planned to hand over the wealth of the country to the capitalists.

Great budget: Amitabh Kant

Great budget. This will not

only accelerate our Covid recovery phase but also provide a direction for 3-4 years. The government this time focused on the monetization of infrastructure and assets. The government's thinking shows that it is necessary to involve the private sector in the long term.

Unprecedented

During this challenging time of Covid epidemic, the Finance

Minister has presented the budget which is unprecedented. In 2020, five mini budgets were introduced as a package. This budget is the biggest addition to that series. This budget is unprecedented in many ways and it will strengthen the resolve of self-reliant India.



FM slashes sports budget by ₹230 cr

NEW DELHI

IN the Union Budget presented in Parliament on Monday, the Central government allocated Rs 2,596.14 crore to the sports budget for the next financial year 2021-22, less by Rs 230.78 crore -- or, 8.16 per cent -- allocated in the previous fiscal.

The Sports Authority of India (SAI) has been allocated Rs 660.41 crore, which is an increase from the Rs 500 crore that was allocated in the last budget.

The Sports Ministry's flagship Khelo India, on the other hand, has had its allocation slashed to Rs 657.71 crore from Rs 890.42 crore allocated in the 2020-21 budget. Assistance to the National Sports Federations, however, has been increased by Rs 35 crore. This year's budget is Rs 280 crore while last year's was Rs 245 crore.

The year 2021 is an Olympic year due to the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Agri tax on petrol, diesel offset with excise tweak

NEW DELHI: The Union government on Monday imposed agriculture and infrastructure development cess at the rate of Rs 2.5 per litre on petrol and Rs 4 per litre on diesel to mobilise additional resources required for massive investment required in these two key segments of the economy that hold the key to bringing back the country on the path of growth. However, to prevent the additional cess from impacting the retail price of two petroleum products that have already reached historically high levels across the country, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that rates of basic excise duty and special additional excise duty on petrol and diesel are being reduced from the existing levels.

MORE BUDGET REPORTS: PAGE 2,6,7

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Farmers’ stir: A fortress in making in Ghazipur

NEW DELHI

WITH parked DTC buses sealing main entry points, multi-layered security arrangements and check points - both by police and farmers’ union volunteers - Ghazipur, the new focal point of the ongoing farmers’ agitation, witnessed heightened restrictions on Monday.

The Delhi-UP border site, which is galvanising farmers from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand days after BKU leader Rakesh Tikait’s emotional appeal, is a fortress in the making with security arrangements being amplified with every passing day. Concertina wires - a new addition in at least three points - boulders in between the barriers. No major road is open for movement of vehicles and people which is proving to be a growing problem for many passing the stretch. Rakesh Tikait, the star farmer leader, while addressing a



Delhi Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava during a visit to the Ghazipur border to take a stock of the security arrangements, in New Delhi on Monday

packed crowd from the main stage also mentioned the newly put barbed wires in his speech.

“They (the administration) have put these barbed wires, not us. They are not allowing people

to come to Delhi. We are not the one blocking the roads. If we block roads, they ask us to vacate, but no action is taken when the same is done by these security forces,” he said to a cheering crowd. On Wednesday night, the atmosphere was tense at Ghazipur. The Ghaziabad administration had issued an “ultimatum” to the protesters to vacate a stretch of the Delhi-Meerut expressway they were occupying as the January 26 clashes painted a not-so-peaceful picture of the peasant community.

As security presence at the site escalated, fears grew that the protesters would be forcibly evicted, but the emotional outburst of Rakesh Tikait saved the day - and possibly the whole movement - and people in tens of thousands started converging at the protest site in support of the agitation. Many commuters complained that the heightened security measures and new restrictions on routes day after day

are affecting their daily commute.

“Since December we were facing problems with this stretch, but the security and restrictions has been grown by leaps and bounds. The interior routes which they have not barricaded - as of yet - are not only congested but are in a pathetic condition, making them too dangerous to travel on,” said Navdeep Kumar, a regular commuter of the National Highway-24. To keep at bay an unruly crowd and any possible plot to disturb the peaceful movement, the volunteers have taken the matter into their own hands. They are maintaining high vigil in the area by setting up multiple-check points. “We don’t allow locals to enter without any rhyme or reason. Even if you are media, you have to show your id-card for entry. The drill is applied round the clock,” said a volunteer, standing next to a make-shift checkpoint. rrr

DU reopening: Teachers blame 'mindless order'

NEW DELHI

THE Delhi University Teachers’ Association (DUTA) on Monday criticised the varsity for not giving colleges and teachers “adequate time for preparation” on the first day of limited reopening of colleges.

The Delhi University issued a notification on January 29 to the varsity staff and instructed them to ‘attend to their workplace’ from Monday, which the teachers’ association termed as ‘mindless’ and demanded its ‘immediate withdrawal’. It had also announced that it will allow final year students for practical classes at all its colleges.

“Today, teachers turned up at the workplace to find that they had to struggle to find an appropriate space from where they could teach. The internet collapsed in many colleges and teachers were found roaming around with their portable devices or laptops to be able to meet their online classes,” DUTA president Rajib Ray alleged in a statement. The Delhi University allowed final year students, who need to use college facilities for their practicals, to return to campuses, while making staff’s presence mandatory from Monday.

The DUTA claimed that it had pointed it out to the vice-chancellor that the order “was bound to create chaos and confusion”. “No proper mechanism had been put in place to ensure no disruption to the teaching learning process before issuance of the order. It was clear that all teaching had to be conducted in the digital mode, hence, expecting teachers to be at home to take classes and in the college to mark their attendance was ridiculous,” it alleged. “The DUTA takes strong exception to this mindless order and demands its immediate withdrawal so that precious teaching time is not wasted, and classes remain unmet,” the DUTA added. rrr

Editors Guild demands immediate release of Mandeep

NEW DELHI

A Delhi court will pass the order on Tuesday on the bail plea of freelance journalist Mandeep Punia arrested by the Delhi Police from the Singhu border protest site here where farmers are agitating against the three contentious agriculture laws. The Editors Guild of India said on Monday the arrest was an attempt to muzzle young “courageous” voices of independent scribes and demanded his immediate release even as Punia told the court that a freelance journalist not carrying a press card can be no grounds for a case or arrest. Punia was arrested by the police on Sunday in an FIR registered under various IPC sections including 186 (Obstructing public servant in discharge of public functions), 353 (Assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty) and 332 (Voluntarily causing hurt to deter public servant from his duty). He was later sent to 14-day judicial custody.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Satvir Singh Lamba reserved the order for Tuesday after hearing the arguments of the accused as well as the public prosecutor. Advocate Akram Khan, appearing for Punia, told the court that the accused was merely carrying out his journalistic duties. Khan said that another journalist was detained along with Punia but he was released around midnight. The journalist who was released was identified as Dharmender Singh. The reason police gave different treatment to the accused was because he was not carrying a press card, he claimed. “Accused is a freelance journalist and not carrying a press card can be no grounds for a case or arrest. The accused is a well-respected member of the society being a journalist including being a frequent contributor to the Caravan magazine,” he said.

Delhi Police sought dismissal of the bail application, claiming he may again indulge in instigating the protestors and create nuisance at the protest site. The police alleged that the accused tried to break the barricades and scuffled with police personnel deputised for the highly sensitive law and order arrangement in connection with the protest by the farmers. It claimed that during the investigation, Punia neither cooperated nor did he disclose any name of his associates. Demanding that Punia be released forthwith, the EGI said in a statement that Delhi Police should “restore circumstances” in which the media can report without fear or favour. “The EGI is deeply concerned over the incarceration of freelance journalist Mandeep Punia who was reporting on the farm protest from the Singhu border. Punia’s arrest is an attempt to muzzle young courageous voices of independent journalists that through reporting are busting fake news and speaking truth to power,” it said. The Indian Women’s Press Corps, Press Club of India and the Press Association had on Sunday demanded Punia’s immediate release and said no journalist should be disturbed while carrying out their duties at any place. “Such crackdowns impinge on the media’s right to report freely and interferes with our right to freedom of expression, and freedom of the press as guaranteed by the Constitution of India,” the bodies had said in a joint statement. rrr

Delhi Police chief visits Ghazipur border

NEW DELHI

DELHI Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava on Monday visited the Ghazipur border and took a stock of the security arrangements. He addressed the Delhi Police personnel deployed in the area and appreciated the hard work done by them.

Meanwhile, security has been beefed up at the three borders - Ghazipur, Singhu and Tikri - and barricades, boulders, and barbed wires have come up as additional forces make their way there amid apprehensions of more farmers joining the protest from Punjab, Haryana and western UP.

Drones are being used to keep surveillance and intense checking is being carried out at border areas which has resulted in massive traffic snarls in the capital.

The Delhi Police have registered a total of 44 cases in the farmers’ protest till now and a total of 122 people have been arrested.

The Ministry of Home Affairs on Monday extended the temporary suspension of internet at the Singhu, Ghazipur and Tikri borders, till 11 p.m. on Tuesday, in the wake of farmers’ protest. Nearby 250 Twitter accounts have also been suspended.

Leopard spotted near Najafgarh remains untraced for 3rd day

NEW DELHI

SEARCH and rescue operation for a leopard spotted in Najafgarh in south-west Delhi last week continued for the sixth day on Monday without much success, forest department officials said.

The presence of the feline in the area had prompted the Forest Department to issue an alert on Thursday, asking residents not to step out alone, especially at night. Children were asked to remain inside homes.

“The leopard remains untraced. It was last sighted near the Najafgarh drain on January 29. No pugmarks were found in the last three days,” Deputy Conservator of Forest, Delhi (West) Navneet Shrivastava said. The search and rescue operation is likely to be called off if the animal remains untraced for the next one or two days, he said. However, people have been asked to keep their guard up. A cage with a live bait remains in place in the area to catch the feline. Shrivastava had earlier said the leopard may have crossed into Haryana. A senior official of the department said the leopard was first caught on CCTV camera on January 27.

Later, a Forest officer confirmed its presence in the area. “It was sighted again in Ghumanhera village on January 28 and near the Najafgarh drain on January 29,” the official said. rrr



Police detain Delhi Pradesh Mahila Congress members during their protest against the Budget in New Delhi, Monday

WOMEN VS WOMEN!

Tribes can teach a lot to urban populace: Naidu

NEW DELHI

VICE PRESIDENT M Venkaiah Naidu on Monday disapproved of the attitude of those from the “urban mainstream” who believe that they have to teach the tribes to help them develop.

Naidu said it is the tribals who have a lot to teach the urban populace and called for a model of development that preserves their special identity.

“Their culture is their identity”, he said and stressed this culture needs to remain intact while drawing the tribals into the mainstream. After the inauguration of the National Tribal Festival ‘Aadi Mahotsav’ at Dilli Haat here, the Vice President said any loss of tribal culture would be an irreparable loss to humanity. Observing that there are unique challenges in the field of tribal development, he said the government has always treated ‘adivasis’ with a special concern, according to an official statement.

Disapproving of the urban mainstream’s attitude which is often characterized by a belief that they have a lot to teach the tribes to help them to develop, Naidu said, “What we generally tend to forget is that, in fact, the tribes have a lot to teach the urban populace”. Maintaining that tribals are the aboriginals, Naidu said their way of life is guided by primal truths, eternal values and natural simplicity.

“The greatness of the tribes lies in the fact that they have managed to retain their primal and natural simplicity,” he said and underlined that this quality gives their arts and crafts a timeless appeal. Taking note of the wide range of tribal handicrafts, the vice president emphasised the need to channelise the natural skills of tribals to promote and popularise their products and improve their sources of income. Referring to the high-end demand for tribal products in cities and in the international market, the Vice President said that events such as Aadi Mahotsav will play an important role in this regard. Noting that tribals constitute over eight percent of the country’s population, he said their development is an important focus area of the national objective of inclusive development. rrr

NGT seeks to remediate legacy waste dumpsites

Directs Delhi government, municipal corporations concerned to coordinate and execute the works at dumpsites of Bhalswa, Ghazipur and Okhla

NEW DELHI

THE National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Delhi government and the municipal corporations concerned, to co-ordinate and execute the work of remediating the legacy waste dumpsites of Bhalswa, Ghazipur and Okhla, for enforcing the rule of law and protection of the environment and public health.

NGT’s direction came while disposing of an application that said the dumpsites of Delhi, where huge garbage has accumulated over the period of time, adversely impacts the public health and environment, and are in requirement of emergent, scientific and environmentally safe disposal, as per applicable rules.

The bench headed by NGT

Chairman Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel in an order passed on January 29 stated, “Due care has to be taken for preventing fire accidents on the landfill sites and maintaining the stability of the dumps”.

“The Chief Secretary, Delhi, may continue to hold meetings for coordination with all the stake-holders, at least once in a month, as earlier directed to device ways and means to expedite the pending work, including coercive measures against those responsible for the delay. The CPCB is at liberty to recover the compensation already assessed, with further compensation for continuing damage till compliance of the law, following due process of law. The amount of recovered compensation should be spent on restoration of the environment

in Delhi.” The bench continued.

NGT said that providing a clean environment is an inalienable constitutional duty of the state authorities and negligence of duty renders such authorities liable to pay compensation on ‘Polluter Pays’ principle.

“We have perused the report filed by the South Delhi Municipal Corporation, East Delhi Municipal Corporation, North Delhi Municipal Corporation and UD, NCT (Urban Development, national capital territory). We note that even statutory period under the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 for completing all steps specified in Rule 22 will come to an end on April 7. Steps taken can hardly be said to be adequate. This is certainly causing huge damage to the public health and

environment which is a matter of serious concern,” it added.

The Tribunal also said the environmental damage is no less than causing physical injuries to the citizens and any welfare State authority must take the matter with the requisite sensitivity, “which unfortunately is not happening.”

It also took the note on a media article which reported that the said dumpsites were resulting in huge water contamination and were not being scientifically managed. The report said that leachate was getting discharged into the soil and also slipping to the River Yamuna, affecting its water quality.

“Accumulation of huge waste at the said sites posed a serious danger to the environment, life and public health in the area,” he added. ANI



Budget 2021: Focusing on health management

THE United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognised the human right to water and sanitation and acknowledged that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realisation of all human rights. Its Resolution calls upon States and international organisations to provide financial resources, help capacity-building and technology transfer to help countries, in particular, developing countries, to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all. In November 2002, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted General Comment No. 15 on the right to water.

Article 1.1 states that "The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights". Comment No. 15 also defined the right to water as the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses. Health and wellbeing have found sharp focus and central positioning in the Union

Budget 2021-22 presented in Parliament today by the Union Minister for Finance & Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman. They form the basis of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.

There is a steep increase of 137 percent in the Budget outlay for health and wellbeing. Noting that the World Health Organisation has repeatedly stressed the importance of clean water, sanitation, and clean environment, as a prerequisite to achieving universal health, the Budget has made significant allocation to these sectors. The Urban Swachh Bharat Mission 2.0 will be implemented with a total financial allocation of Rs1,41,678 crore over a period of five years from 2021-26.

The main interventions envisaged under the scheme are: complete faecal sludge management and waste water treatment, source segregation of garbage, reduction in a single-use plastic, reduction in air pollution by effectively managing waste from construction and demolition activities and bioremediation of all legacy dump sites. Government records show that in 1980, just 1 per

cent of India's rural areas had access to safe, usable water. By 2013, that had increased to 30 per cent, but the majority of rural India continues to live without proper access to safe drinking water.

An estimated 76 million people in India have no access to a safe water supply, and the situation is only getting more serious. The Asian Development Bank has forecast that by 2030, India will have a water deficit of 50 per cent. The Union Ministry of Water Resources has estimated the country's current water requirements to be around 1100 billion cubic metres per year, which is estimated to be around 1200 billion cubic metres for the year 2025 and 1447 billion cubic metres for the year 2050. Ironically, ours is not a water scarce country.

Along with having major rivers, we receive an average annual rainfall of 1170 millimetres. But lack of sensitisation with regard to both conservation of water and pollution of water sources has resulted in a large part of the population for whom water has become more of a curse than a boon. Infrastructure for storage of water must be developed properly to ensure that people have access to safe water across the country. Better late than never. The government has at least woken up now.



A placid Budget for the issues at hand

BHARAT JHUNJHUNWALA

THE Budget has a number of plus points. Investment in infrastructure such as in urban metro rails has been increased. A target of strategic disinvestment of public sector undertakings such as Air India, Shipping Corporation, IDBI Bank, Bharat Earth Movers Limited and even two Public Sector Banks has been set to garner a huge amount of Rs 1.75 crore in the coming year. Private companies are to be encouraged to set up electricity distribution companies so as to save the consumers from the inefficiency and corruption of the State Electricity Boards and to give the consumers a choice of suppliers. These are all good.

However, the fundamental problem of providing employment has been given a miss. Employment is needed not only for its own sake, that is, in order to implement the "right to work," but also to create demand in the economy. The earnings made by a youth puts money and purchasing power in her hands. That leads to the generation of demand in the market and, in turn, encourages the businesses to invest. The budget has missed taking steps towards meeting this fundamental requirement.

The country is on the boil on the farmer's issue. The Finance Minister has rightly drawn attention to the fact that the purchases under the Minimum Support Price Programme have increased 1.5 times between 2013-4 and 2019-20. However, the Capital Gains Index increased from 220 to 289—or 31 per cent—in this same period according to the figures published by the Finance Ministry.

Thus, the "true" increase in the purchase price was a meagre 19 per cent in six years. Even this does not translate into a 19 per cent increase in incomes of the farmer because the costs of inputs such as diesel, labour and seeds have also gone up. Let us assume the increase in the incomes of the farmer was 10 per cent. This is pittance compared to the avowed objective of the Finance Minister to have doubled the farmer's incomes by 2020.

There was a need to implement strong steps to secure the doubling of farmer's incomes. That will be difficult to obtain by enhancing the MSP because the production of the supported crop increases disproportionately leading to over production. The Finance Minister then has to spend further money in storage and the disposal of the surplus stocks at low prices.

The Finance Minister should have taken steps to diversify our agriculture towards high-value crops. Large-scale cultivation of crops like mangoes, flowers, walnuts and bananas for export should have been encouraged. Our research establishment has utterly failed to develop the strains for the international market and the system has shown no interest in developing the infrastructure such as cold chains for exports.

However, the fundamental problem of providing employment has been given a miss. Employment is needed not only for its own sake, that is, in order to implement the "right to work," but also to create demand in the economy. The earnings made by a youth puts money and purchasing power in her hands. That leads to the generation of demand in the market and, in turn, encourages the businesses to invest. The budget has missed taking steps towards meeting this fundamental requirement

The Finance Minister should have given contracts to NGOs and corporate houses for undertaking research and extension, developing the cold chains and then exporting the produce. The contractor, for example, should be given the responsibility to bring the desired strains of cocoons, spread it among the farmers, get silk produced and export it from Mandya in Karnataka. That would have led to higher incomes for the farmers. The Finance Minister has missed the bus.

The Finance Minister has allocated Rs 35,000 crores for research on vaccines. These are in the right direction. However, we have not overcome the Covid pandemic on the strength of the vaccine. We have succeeded on the strength of our lifestyle, that is, consumption of turmeric, ginger, giloi and other immune-boosting spices and by the practice of yoga and the like.

Therefore, the need was to undertake research on the immune-boosting properties of these spices and other lifestyles and then globalise that knowledge. Further, a number of researchers have suggested that the low prevalence of Covid infection in India could be due to the poor cleanliness and health conditions under which our people live. Our bodies are more used to living with bacteria and viruses. It may be that large numbers of our people are dying from diseases developed due to poor quality of drinking water and sanitation.

Those same numbers are now dying in the Western countries due to the Pandemic. That said, our people deserve clean drinking water and good quality sanitation. Therefore, the outlay of Rs 2,87,000 crores made for providing clean drinking water and improving sanitation in the next five years is welcome. But this may lead to reduction in our immunity hence parallel steps to increase immunity were needed.

The third area is that of education. Large number of our youth are entering and will enter the job market in the coming decade. The numbers of jobs in agriculture and manufacturing are declining due to the use of machines like harvesters in agriculture and the use of robots in manufacturing. A number of studies show that the total employment in the organized manufacturing sector has been declining. The informal sector too has been blown away by the triple whammy of demonetization, GST and lockdown. There is no hope for these millions. These youth will take to crime and other destructive activities in absence of productive employment as the saying goes, "an empty mind is a devil's workshop." It also will not be possible to absorb these large numbers in agriculture because the share of agriculture in the GDP is seen to decline as a country develops.

In the developed countries the share of agriculture is today less than one percent. The only path towards providing productive employment to our millions was to develop our services sectors—translations, music, movies, online education, online medical advice, and the like. The Finance Minister, therefore, has moved in the right direction in establishing institutes of translation to make available the Government documents in the regional languages.

But there was a need to go much further. It was necessary to establish institutes in every district, for example, to train the youth in undertaking translations in foreign languages, making music, movies and computer apps, and in running portals for providing online tutorials and medical advice. The Budget has failed to take any steps in this direction.

This is an ordinary budget. The increased investment in infrastructure and the resolve to jump-start the process of privatisation including of the Public Sector Banks are most welcome. However, they fail to address the pressing problems of employment. I expect social tensions to increase as we are seeing in the ongoing farmer's agitation because of the underlying increase in unemployment.

On laws, lawlessness and Satyagraha



Madabhushi Sridhar Acharyulu

Mahatma Gandhi fought the British and their sedition case, invented Satyagraha (righteous indignation) and laid down his life for communal unity. He might have never imagined that the British weapon of sedition law would be used against Satyagrahis in Independent India. He strongly opposed bad laws and awakened the nation saying non-cooperation with evil is equal to cooperation with good. Non-violent Satyagraha was his mantra, which is now under attack of lathis and lawless goons.

On 29 January 2021, a masked group of around 150 persons descended on Singhu border, hurled petrol bombs and destroyed the camp of farmers, who were peacefully agitating against three farm laws enacted against their interest.

On 26th January, a few Journalists and leaders tweeted about an incident with a mistake, for which they are facing 'sedition' charges which may end them up in life sentence.

From Republic Day to Tees January (30th January, Gandhi's murder anniversary) the Indian Republic is celebrating the attacks on agitators, crackdown on Satyagraha and sedition cases on journalists for writing or tweeting. Gandhi was icon of Satyagraha and his trial for sedition during the British Raj is historic episode that showcases his courage against dictatorial rule.

Communal forces did not allow frail (for fasting) 78-year-old great soul of India to enjoy the freedom, which he struggled for, not even for a few months, and even before the agenda for democracy and development – the Constitution for India – was drafted, he was removed from this world. Today, the Constitution of Indian Republic is under attack. Freedom of Press is threatened by sedition case-strategy of the Sarkar.

After Bal Gangadhar Tilak was punished to imprisonment on charges of sedition, it was Gandhi who faced the harsh law. The trial of Mahatma Gandhi, the author of impugned articles and Shankarlal Ghelabhai Banker, editor, and printer and publisher respectively of Young India, on charges under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code was held on Saturday, 18th March, 1922, before C N Broomfield, JCS, District and Sessions Judge, Ahmedabad.

The then Advocate General J T Strangman, with Rao Bahadur Girdhartal Uttamram, Public Prosecutor of Ahmedabad, appeared for the Crown. A C Wild, Remembrancer of Legal Affairs, was also present. Mahatma Gandhi and Shankarlal Banker were undefended. Among the members of the public who were present

► Communal forces did not allow frail (for fasting) 78-year-old great soul of India to enjoy the freedom, which he struggled for, not even for a few months, and even before the agenda for democracy and development – the Constitution for India – was drafted, he was removed from this world. Today, the Constitution of Indian Republic is under attack. Freedom of Press is threatened by sedition case-strategy of the Sarkar.

► Such a great soul, Gandhi openly criticised the British rule as evil and its law of sedition as evil. It is a shame that we killed both Gandhi and his strong message to treat as law of sedition itself as evil. We also attempted to his Satyagraha method of agitation to express our opinion against the farm laws which will harm the farmers and benefit purchasing companies.



eral is entirely in the right when he says that my preaching of disaffection did not commence with my connection with Young India but that it commenced much earlier, and in the statement that I am about to read, it will be my painful duty to admit before this court that it commenced much earlier than the period stated by the Advocate-General....."

The only course open to you, the Judge, is, as I am going to say in my statement, either to resign from your post, or inflict on me the severest penalty if you believe that the system and law you are assisting to administer are good for the people. I do not expect that kind of conversion. But by the time I have finished with my statement you will have a glimpse of what is raging within my breast to run this maddest risk which a sane man can run."

This was followed by Gandhi's written statement as given here: "My public life began in 1893 in South Africa in troubled weather. My first contact with British authority in that country was not of a happy character. I discovered that as a man and an Indian, I had no rights as a man because I was an Indian. But I was not baffled. I thought that this treatment of Indians was as execrable upon a system that was intrinsically and mainly good. I gave the government my voluntary and hearty cooperation, criticising it freely where I felt it was faulty but never wishing its destruction. Consequently, when the existence of the Empire was threatened in 1899 by the Boer challenge, I offered my services to it, raised a volunteer ambulance corps and served at several actions that took place for the relief of Ladysmith (...).

The first shock came in the shape of the Rowlatt Act, a law designed to rob the people of all real freedom. I felt called upon to lead an intensive agitation against it. Then followed the Punjab horrors beginning with the massacre at Jallianwala

Bagh and culminating in crawling orders, public floggings and other indescribable humiliations. I discovered too that the plighted word of the Prime Minister to the Musalmans of India regarding the integrity of Turkey and the holy places of Islam was not likely to be fulfilled. But in spite of the forebodings and the grave warnings of friends, at the Amritsar Congress in 1919, I fought for cooperation and working of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, hoping that the Prime Minister would redeem his promise to the Indian Musalmans, that the Punjab wound would be healed, and that the reforms, inadequate and unsatisfactory though they were, marked a new era of hope in the life of India. But all that hope was shattered." (...)

In fact, I believe that I have rendered a service to India and England by showing in non-cooperation the way out of the unnatural state in which both are living. In my opinion, non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is co-operation with good... The only course open to you the judge and the assessors is either to resign your posts and thus dissociate yourself from evil. If you feel that the law you are called upon to administer is an evil and that in reality, I am innocent or to inflict on me the severest penalty, if you believe that the system and the law you are good for the people of this country and that my activity is therefore injurious to the commonwealth."

Such a great soul, Gandhi openly criticised the British rule as evil and its law of sedition as evil. It is a shame that we killed both Gandhi and his strong message to treat as law of sedition itself as evil. We also attempted to his Satyagraha method of agitation to express our opinion against the farm laws which will harm the farmers and benefit purchasing companies.

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

LETTERS

Vaccines and virus variants

AS more vaccines are being rolled out to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, virus variants popping up worldwide are forcing companies to develop boosters for the disease. The arrival of new vaccines to combat the deadly disease that has killed more than two million people is good news. The bad news is that the virus mutations that confer partial resistance to vaccines and antibody treatments are prevalent in South Africa and Brazil and it may spread worldwide.

Bivalent vaccines will have to be developed to stimulate the immune system against both the original strain and new variants. Or the existing vaccine could be used and booster shots customized to generate antibodies against the new variants.

Venu G S, Kollam

Irresponsible behaviour

BLAMING the infiltration of the outside elements for the violence in the Jan 26 tractor rally of the farmers does not wash. Did the farmer unions supply identification tags to the participants while enrolling them? Why did not their volunteers position themselves at the barricades and prevent the participants from breaking them, when the unions were so cocky about their organisational skills?

How come they blame just one person, actor-singer Deep Sidhu, for the desecration of the Red Fort area when a large mob followed him? Why could not the union leaders and activists prevent him? How could thousands of farmers barge into a maze of unpermitted roads and run riot with their tractors and weapons – especially on the Republic Day besmirching it so brazenly – if the in-

tentions and statements of the unions, especially the politically motivated ones, were sincere? How could not their collective might identify and block the infiltrators?

Instead of appreciating the restraint of the police and the government, they are squarely accusing them. It was all an irresponsible, arrogant insidious & pre-meditated game on the part of the rich farmers and their leaders.

Laxmi Rajyam, Hyderabad

Bring the culprits to book

DR Mohan Kanda has rightly identified core issues in stalemate between govt and farmers. Restoration of normalcy is possible once the above core issues are addressed. Secondly The PM is over-emphasising on tricolour, video clip clearly shows the culprit. Administration can bring the culprit to book, instead a campaign is resorted to for various well-known reasons. Contradictory and controversial versions saying genuine farmers procession proceeded on a different route and Red Fort incidents are pre planned to malign farmers as anti-nationals.

G Sivaramakrishna, Hyderabad

Refrain from abusive language

I have been reading The Hans India from the day you launched Delhi edition. I read the column "Legal Circles" and the kind of language and words the author uses are of bad taste. I take strong objection to calling the farmers whether rich or poor as "incurable mad dogs of our Republic". The farmers themselves have condemned the act of violence by a section of farmers and therefore calling the entire community of farmers is unacceptable. On several occasions even the advocates indulged in violence, is it right to call the entire legal professional in the same language? The author has the right to disagree and share

his thoughts, but he needs to be careful and but should understand the animal which he has referred to in the article is more faithful than many human beings.

S Natarajan, New Delhi

Bravo, Rajappan!

IT was indeed a proud moment for persons with physical disabilities (divyang) and nature lovers when Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded Rajappan from Kumarakom (Kottayam district of Kerala) who engages in cleaning the Vembanad lake despite his physical challenges. The PM appreciated Rajappan in his Mann Ki Baat address. The PM said the service done by Rajappan, who is half-paralysed, is an example for everyone.

His commitment to cleanliness though unable to walk due to paralysis is truly one to be emulated. Rajappan collects plastic bottles from water bodies and sells them for a living. Through collection of the plastic materials dumped in the backwaters and canals Rajappan has taken up environmental conservation as a mission.

Though this daily routine is a means to earn a living the mission that this individual has taken along with his work is what makes him different from others – save the water bodies from trash and not to pollute the backwaters, the gift of mother nature.

His words that he makes enough to live by collecting the plastic materials and at the same time able to clean backwaters and canals makes Rajappan a true environmentalist, a dedicated nature lover and teaches us the message of self-reliance too.

M Pradyu, Kannur

thehansreader@gmail.com

Schools come alive once again as kids back to classes

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NALGONDA/KHAMMAM/
MAHBUBNAGAR

THE students and teachers heave a sigh of relief on ringing of bells of government and private educational institutions after a long gap of eight months in erstwhile Nalgonda district, on Monday.

Following the Covid-19 norms, students of Class 9 and above enthusiastically attended the classes and met their teachers and classmates with cheerful faces. Following the strict norms in place, the students with masks were allowed inside the classes after temperature screening and sanitisation of hands.

Teachers and lecturers taught the classes by maintaining physical distance in classrooms. District Education Officers of Nalgonda and Bhongir, Bikshapathi and Chaithanya Jainee respectively and in Suryapet district, AD Shailaja visited few schools on day one of opening and examined the implementation of Covid protocol.



A teacher conducting class at the Zilla Parishad High School in Nalgonda on Monday

Though the students were excited to get back to schools and colleges for offline classes, many were still apprehensive about the corona pandemic.

Nearly 45 per cent of students attended the schools in erstwhile Nalgonda district and school managements took permission from parents of students as per the direction of the government.

Srinidhi, Class X student of a private school of Nalgonda, was happy to be relieved from the pressure of attending online

classes.

Sridhar Reddy, a parent, stated that he educated his daughter about the precautionary measures to be taken even in school and was happy to send to her to school once again.

In Khammam, nearly 50 per cent of students attended the schools and junior colleges in erstwhile Khammam district amid strict Covid protocol. In Khammam district, there are 280 government schools and 178 private schools and of the total

of 31,754 students, 15,670 students attended the classes on Monday. In Bhadradi-Kothagudem district, 12 government junior colleges are present and of the 2,568 students, 1,000 students attended. In 35 private junior colleges, against 5,233 students, 2,145 attended the classes. Similarly, the schools saw 50 per cent attendance of students. Khammam Zilla Parishad chairman L Kamal Raju and Sathupally MLA Sandra Venkata Veeraiah inspected the schools in Khammam town and Sathupally respectively. They examined the facilities in schools and interacted with teachers.

In Mahbubnagar, as per the directions of the Education department, all the District Education Officers of five districts including Wanaparthy, Mahbubnagar, Narayanpet, Nagarkurnool and Gadwal have issued clear instructions to all the high school teachers to strictly abide by the Covid-19 norms while allowing students into classrooms.

‘Greenfield Highway project will affect 2,000 farmers’

● Greenfield Highway Affected Farmers JAC leaders say the area being surveyed for the highway are highly fertile lands and acquiring such lands will cause financial loss to farmers and those dependent on the agriculture activity

HANS NEWS SERVICE
KHAMMAM

THE Greenfield Highway project proposed in Khammam district would affect the livelihood of farmers and farm labourers, stated Greenfield Highway Affected Farmers JAC leaders.

The JAC leaders complained that the area being surveyed for the highway were highly fertile lands. Acquiring the lands would cause financial loss to the farmers and those dependent on the agriculture activity. The farmers, led by the JAC leaders K Rajashekhar Reddy, K Venkateswar Rao, D Murali and others met Transport Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar here on Monday seeking his intervention into the issue and to see that the alignment of the highway was changed. They explained that around 1,980 acres of land would be acquired in 32 villages in 10 mandals for the proposed Khammam-Devarapalli highway. The land acquisition would affect over 2,000 farmers and their families. The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) authorities instead of widening the existing Khammam-Devarapalli road have planned to lay a new road through the agriculture lands, Rajashekar Reddy said in an interaction with the press here on Monday.

First Bal Adalat in Bhadrachalam today

HANS NEWS SERVICE
KOTHAGUDEM

COLLECTIVE efforts were needed for the protection of child rights, stated Telangana State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (TSCPCR) chief J Srinivas Rao. He said the Commission was taking steps for creating awareness among the public and officials at village level. In order to safeguard the child rights, it was planned to conduct Bal Adalat across the State and it was first of its kind initiative. Srinivas Rao addressed an awareness meeting here on Monday. Police, Anganwadi workers and representatives of non-governmental organisations attended the meeting. He informed the first Bal Adalat would be held at Bhadrachalam in the district on Tuesday. The Commission was committed for the protection of child rights and those below 18 years of age should attend the Adalat and present their issues before the Commission. The Bal Adalat was aimed at taking justice close to the children. He urged the officials concerned to make the Adalat at Bhadrachalam a success.

Superintendent of Police Sunil Dutt speaking on the occasion said the police were quickly responding to the issues related to children. Operation Smile was being implemented in an effective manner in the district.

UNION BUDGET

Yanamala blames Jagan for raw deal



- Ex-Minister says the injustice to AP in Union Budget reveals CM's frequent meetings with PM, Shah were only for his personal favours
- Criticises the Centre for ignoring AP-specific projects under Visakhapatnam-Chennai and Bangalore-Chennai Industrial Corridor

AMARAVATI

FORMER finance minister and TDP senior leader Yanamala Ramakrishnudu on Monday slammed the Union Budget 2021-22 for 'not providing any funds or projects' to fulfil the promises made for Andhra Pradesh in the AP Reorganisation Act.

Ramakrishnudu held Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy responsible for the Central government's raw deal to AP in the Union Budget. Alarming, there was no mention of AP in this year's budget. No funds for any metro rail or industrial corridor in the state. The Chief Minister and his party MPs owed an explanation to the people in this respect, he said.

In a statement here, the Opposition Leader in Legislative Council said that it became obvious that Jagan Mohan Reddy's visits to meet the Prime Minister and

Union ministers were solely aimed at his own personal benefits and favours.

He objected to the manner in which the AP-specific projects were ignored under the Visakhapatnam-Chennai Industrial Corridor and Bangalore-Chennai Industrial Corridor. Whereas, the Centre gave generous funds to the industrial corridors in Bangalore, Chennai, Kochi, Nagpur and other places. Huge funds were also allocated for the metro rail projects there but not in AP, he pointed out.

The TDP leader demanded that the Chief Minister explain why he failed to bring the Special Category Status to AP even though the people had given his party 22 MPs in the 2019 election.

He also said that the budget did not seek to attract private investments and no funds allocation was made for this purpose.

YSRCP decries ‘step-motherly’ treatment

- Laments that the State has been ignored in all fronts, mainly in connectivity
- Criticises Union FM for ignoring the ‘Atmanirbharata’ of State while talking about ‘Atmanirbharata’ of country
- Demands National Institute of Virology, export-oriented textile park out of the planned 7 in the country, release of Rs 4,282 cr dues to the Civil Supplies Corporation for paddy among others



YSRCP Parliamentary Party leader Y Vijayasai Reddy along with other MPs address the media in New Delhi on Monday

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

YSRCP parliamentary party leader V Vijayasai Reddy said here on Monday that the Budget had disappointed Andhra Pradesh. It is not a ‘never before’ Budget as stated by the finance minister but a Budget like ‘always before’.

Claiming that the Budget had given a step-motherly treatment to the state as far as connectivity was concerned,

he said the national highway works had been sanctioned only to Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal and Assam making it an election-oriented one. Even the metro rail projects were announced for Kochi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Nagpur but not for AP.

Assailing the Union finance minister for not taking into consideration the ‘Atmanirbharata’ of AP while talking of ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’, Vijayasai said that

there was no mention of the clearance of the of revised cost estimates (RCE) of Rs 55,656 crore for Polavaram irrigation project (PIP) as recommended by the Central Water Commission. The extent of land to be acquired for the project had increased to 1,55,465 acre from the previously estimated 1.02 lakh acre, yet it was ignored.

On railway projects, he said no new railway projects for Andhra Pradesh were

announced. “Additionally, we have been demanding for the implementation of the South Coast Railway Zone and retention of Waltair division in Visakhapatnam. This was also not done.”

Allocations required for the railway line between Kadapa to Bengaluru found no mention in the budget. AP wanted an increase in the number of Kisan Rails from Andhra Pradesh as it was the largest producer of fruits and

vegetables, accounting for 11.8 per cent of India's production. But the budget was silent on it, he pointed out.

On the long-pending demand of Special Category Status (SCS), Vijayasai Reddy said the Budget this year also did not meet our demands for giving SCS to the state. The 5th Finance Commission also stated in its report that the domain of SCS was entirely under the Union government.

The YSRCP MP demanded that AP be given at least a National Institute of Virology, export-oriented textile park out of the planned seven in the country, Vistadomes as demanded between Vizag and Araku, release of Rs 4,282 crore dues pending to the AP State Civil Supplies Corporation for paddy procurement, provisions for white revolution in Andhra Pradesh, Kendriya Vidyalaya for Vizag and extension of CGHS for KV teachers, interlinking of inter-state rivers and their distribution based on geographical parameters and Increased tax slab and increase in standard deductions for citizens.

Budget receives brickbats, a few bouquets

V PRADEEP KUMAR
TIRUPATI

THE Union Budget 2021-22 is drawing criticism from various sectors who are terming it as most disappointing and regressive in nature. However, certain proposals like huge increase in allocations to the healthcare sector and steps to simplify the income tax procedures are being welcomed.

Noted Chartered Accountant E Phalguna Kumar said that the current budget has further simplified various income tax procedures making it more transparent and efficient. The faceless assessment announced in August 2020 has gone further with the introduction of faceless tribunal. The announcement of a mechanism called dispute resolution committee to address the disputes of having below Rs 50 lakh income is a significant feature.

He added that by abolishing settlement commissionerates, a new system of Interim Board of Settlement was announced which helps in quick settlements of disputes. Also, to reduce compliance burden, the budget provides reduction in the time-limit for reopening of income tax proceeding for three years from the present six years which is another key feature.

Kumar further said that the budget proposed to increase the limit for tax audit for persons who are undertaking 95 per cent of their transaction digitally from Rs 5 crore to Rs 10 crore. This move will incentivise the digital transaction.

IMA Academy of Medical Specialities state chairperson Dr P Krishna Prasanthi termed the

137 per cent hike in allocation at Rs 2,23,846 crore in the current budget for the healthcare sector as highly impressive compared to the previous year's Rs 94,452 crore.

She welcomed the move to set up rural and urban health wellness centres and integrated public health labs in all districts. However, she felt that there should be a differentiation between communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). As the Covid is an infectious disease, the entire focus was on the

● Proposals to simplify IT procedures, huge hike in healthcare allocations get praise

● Agri cess, static GST slabs criticised as they will push inflation

● Medical experts call for more focus on non-communicable diseases too



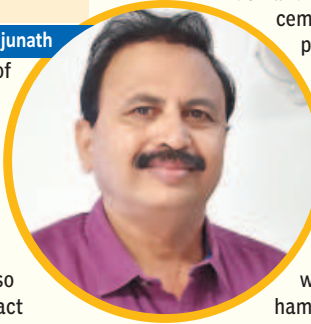
E Phalguna Kumar



Dr P Krishna Prasanthi



Prof D Krishna Murthy



A Manjunath

vaccine and the importance of NCDs is missing totally. Dra Krishna Prasanthi said budget should also have been focussed more on the geriatric diseases given the fact that the longevity has increased. The emergency and trauma care also need special attention given the fact that the road accidents are increasing which are more of a socio economic burden rather than a medical disease burden. Adult immunisation programme was one neglected

area and needs a serious look at it.

Dr D Krishna Murthy, Professor of Economics at S V University observed that the increase in the customs duty on solar inverters from 5 to

20 per cent, cotton from 0 to 10 per cent are expected to boost domestic production of these products under the Make in India initiative. The cut in the customs duty on imports of gold from 12.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent is expected to please the women who love gold ornaments. The cut in copper scrap imports to 2.5 per cent will help electricity

products. However, he felt that the agri infra cess will result in soaring prices of essential commodities like pulses, edible oil, petroleum products, etc., which will only increase the rate of inflation. When LIC is working efficiently on par with private insurance companies, where is the need to increase FDI limit in it from 49 per cent to 74 per cent, he questioned.

Tirupati Chamber of Commerce president A Manjunath said that the budget has failed to give any impetus to the trading community at this crucial juncture. The GST slab rates were left untouched. There was a long-pending

demand to reduce the GST on cement from the existing 28 per cent. This particular commodity is being used by common people to the affluent in the society who want a big relief in it.

As such, no incentives were given to the construction sector which will seriously hamper the economic growth on a whole, he said adding the prices of various commodities had gone up after the pandemic and the trading sector expected big reliefs to bring down the prices.

Budget dashed State's hopes, officials to CM

● Chief Minister holds a meeting with officials of Finance and CMO on the Budget and its implications for the State

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy conducted a meeting with officials on the Union Budget 2021-22 and financial allocations to various sectors.

The officials informed that there were no major budget allocations to the state, though there were expectations of major relief as the state had lost a major chunk of assets and infrastructure in bifurcation. Although there were high hopes and expectations towards special allocations to state,

the budget left a huge disappointment, it was opined.

The neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka received a good share of allocations, while AP was left without any special consideration from the Centre. The officials said that the allocations made to various sectors and programmes in the context of the budget were nothing special to the state except it covered in general on par with all other states. There was a slump in the allocations for PM Kisan, PM Awas Yojana and NREGS as compared to previous year besides cut in subsidy on food grains, petrol and fertilisers, the officials said.

The Chief Minister instructed officials to work hard to get more funds from the Centre. He asked them to liaison with the Union government and ensure a timely inflow of funds. Officials of the finance department and CMO participated in the meeting.

No rail allocation to TS irks Khammam residents

HANS NEWS SERVICE
KHAMMAM/ KOTHAGUDEM

AFTER the corona outbreak and the subsequent domino effect it showed on world economies, including India, the Union Budget presented by the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday gave a little respite to people with the 137 per cent hike in allocation to health sector. However, the people of Khammam feel that they were let down with no word on Khammam to Sathupally railway line. Speaking to The Hans India,

K Johan David, a private employee, stated that the Centre favoured corporates in the Union Budget, and rued over increase in fuel prices and no fund allocation to the State.

“The government has not allotted funds for women. During the Covid pandemic, the women suffered a lot as they lost their jobs.

Thought that government would support women, but it let down hugely,” felt M Uma, a social worker from Kothagudem.

Lashing out at the Centre for giving no respite to middleclass,

Nunna Nageswara Rao, a Left leader, stated that the government hiked the charges of petrol, diesel, cooking oil and groceries despite knowing that how people are being affected by the price rise and leading pathetic lives after Covid-19 breakdown.

Another resident, M Vinay Kumar said, “We were expecting a railway line from Khammam to Sathupally and to Sarapaka, which has been pending for the last many years. This time also we are let down with no announcement and allocation to this.”

Govt proposes 10 pc hike in farm loan target for FY22s

NEW DELHI

ASSERTING that the government is committed towards farmers' welfare, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday proposed 10 per cent hike in the farm loan disbursement target to Rs 16.5 lakh crore in the Budget, and introduced an agri-infra and development cess of up to 100 per cent to create post-harvest infrastructure for improving farmers' income.

The minister also proposed higher allocation for Rural Infrastructure Development Fund and Micro Irrigation Fund, and extended Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to APMCs for augmenting infrastructure facilities. The government also proposed substantial investments for the development of fishing harbours, fish landing centres and promote seaweed farming.

Presenting the first digital Budget in Parliament, Sitharaman said the proposal on agriculture will further strengthen "the Sankalp of the nation first, doubling farmers' income, strong infrastructure.", among others. To provide adequate credit to our farmers, the minister said, "I have enhanced the agricultural credit target to Rs 16.5 lakh crores in FY'22. We will focus on ensuring increased credit flows to animal husbandry, dairy, and fisheries". The farm credit target set for the next fiscal is however higher than Rs 15 lakh crore set for the current fiscal. Stressing on the need to improve the farm infrastructure to ensure higher remuneration to farmers, the Finance Minister proposed an Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC) in the range of 2.5 to 100 per cent on certain commodities. "There is an immediate need to improve agricultural infrastructure so that we produce more,



while also conserving and processing agricultural output efficiently. This will ensure enhanced remuneration for our farmers," she said. However, while applying this cess, the government has taken care not to put additional burden on consumers on most items, she noted. Last year, the government had announced the Rs 1 lakh crore Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to finance projects at subsidised rates for post-harvest infrastructure facilities. Besides the new cess, the minister said the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund would be made available to Agriculture Produce Marketing Committees (APMCs) for augmenting their infrastructure facilities. The minister also proposed enhancing the allocation to the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund from Rs 30,000 crore to Rs 40,000 crore and double the corpus of the Micro Irrigation Fund from the current Rs 5,000 crore created under the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). To boost value addition in agriculture and allied products and their exports, the Finance Minister said the scope of 'Operation Green Scheme' that is

presently applicable to tomatoes, onions, and potatoes, will be enlarged to include 22 perishable products. On electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM), she said around 1.68 crore farmers are registered and Rs 1.14 lakh crore of trade value has been carried out through the e-platform. "Keeping in view the transparency and competitiveness that e-NAM has brought into the agricultural market, 1,000 more mandis will be integrated with e-NAM," she said. To boost the fishery sector, the minister proposed substantial investments in the development of modern fishing harbours and fish landing centres. To start with, five major fishing harbours – Kochi, Chennai, Visakhapatnam, Paradip, and Petuaghat – will be developed as hubs of economic activity. We will also develop inland fishing harbours and fish-landing centres along the banks of rivers and waterways, she said. Stating that seaweed farming is an emerging sector with the potential to transform the lives of coastal communities, the minister said it will provide large scale employment and additional incomes. "To promote seaweed cultivation, I propose

a Multipurpose Seaweed Park to be established in Tamil Nadu," she added. On the government grain procurement, the Finance Minister said, "The minimum support price (MSP) regime has undergone a sea change to assure price that is at least 1.5 times the cost of production across all commodities". The procurement has also continued to increase at a steady pace. This has resulted in an increase in payment to farmers substantially, she added. The government payment to farmers on procurement of wheat, rice, pulses and cotton has increased substantially since 2013-14, Sitharaman said. When the minister was mentioning about MSP procurement, the Opposition shouted slogans saying that the government should repeal the new farm laws, against which some farmers are protesting at Delhi borders for over two months now. Sharing further on MSP procurement, the minister said the government's payment on wheat procurement has increased to Rs 62,802 crore in 2019-20 and even better in 2020-21 from the level of Rs 33,874 crore in 2013-14. About 43.36 lakh wheat growers have benefitted from the MSP payment in 2020-21 as against 35.57 lakhs in the last year. Similarly, the MSP payment on rice procurement has increased to Rs 1,41,930 crore in 2019-20 and an estimated Rs 1,72,752 crore in 2020-21 from Rs 63,928 crore in 2013-14. The payment made to farmers on pulses procurement has increased to Rs 10,530 crore in 2020-21, more than 40 times higher from Rs 236 crore in 2013-14, while payment to cotton growers has increased to Rs 25,974 crore till January 27 this year from Rs 90 crore in 2013-14. (PTI)

AGRI and food companies on Monday hailed the decision to hike farm credit target and increase allocation for the agriculture ministry in the Budget, saying this will help in boosting farmers' income and overall growth of the sector.

Asserting that the government is committed towards farmers' welfare, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday proposed 10 per cent hike in the farm loan disbursement target to Rs 16.5 lakh crore, and introduced an agri infra and development cess of up to 100 per cent to create post-harvest infrastructure for improving farmers' income. The minister also proposed higher allocation for Rural Infrastructure Development Fund and Micro Irrigation Fund, and extended Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to APMCs for augmenting infrastructure facilities. "2020 has been a year of exceptional and

unprecedented challenges and has highlighted the critical importance of two core sectors, agriculture and healthcare. The Union Budget 2021 has correctly called out the role of these two sectors in leading the nation's recovery and being catalysts to sustainable growth," said D Narain, Senior Bayer Representative, South Asia and CEO & MD, Bayer CropScience. Higher allocations for both healthcare and agriculture with specific focus on building public health infrastructure, expansion of credit to farmers, additional allocation for rural infrastructure and micro irrigation are welcome moves, he said. "These initiatives complement actions already initiated to double farmers' incomes and enabling wider healthcare access for the nation," Narain added. Ram Kaundinya, Director General, Federation of Seed Industry of India (FSII), said it is a status quo budget for agriculture in general and for seed industry

in particular. "Agriculture contributed significantly to our successful fight against COVID. But the sector did not get the needed attention in the budget. No transformative measures have been proposed," he said. On the positives, Kaundinya said an increase in agricultural credit to Rs 16.5 lakh crore will help farmers in accessing more credit and Rs 10,000 crore for micro irrigation is also a good measure.

"Increasing import duty on cotton is a good measure that should help in improving domestic prices although we are no longer a major cotton importer. We are actually the largest exporter in the world, courtesy Bt Cotton driven increase in cotton production," he said. Output marketing related measures like extending eNAM (National Agriculture Market) to 1,000 more mandis and making Agri Infrastructure Fund available for upgrading infrastructure in APMCs are welcome, FSII said. (PTI)

Higher allocation for RIDF to speed up ongoing projects: Nabard Chairman

MUMBAI

INCREASE in allocation to the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) to Rs 40,000 crore and doubling of Micro Irrigation Fund announced in the Budget will accelerate the progress of ongoing rural infrastructure projects, Nabard chairman G R Chintala said on Monday.

While presenting the Budget 2021-22, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "We are enhancing the allocation to the Rural Infrastructure Development

Fund from Rs 30,000 crore to Rs 40,000 crore." She also announced to increase the corpus of the Micro Irrigation Fund by Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 10,000 crore. Both the funds are being created under the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard). "On the rural infrastructure front, the Rs 40,000 crore allocation for Rural Infrastructure Development and the doubling of Micro Irrigation Fund to Rs 10,000 crore will speed up ongoing rural infrastructure projects," Chintala said. He said the Budget has accelerated sustainable agriculture sector's

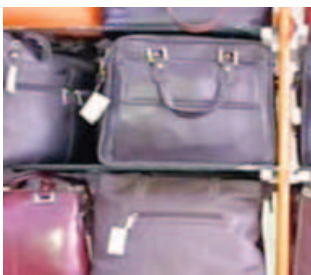
growth by pegging an agriculture credit target of Rs 16.5 lakh crore and has focused on structural reforms for "aatma nirbhar farmers". In order to provide adequate credit to farmers, the Finance Minister enhanced the agricultural credit target to Rs 16.5 lakh crore in FY22, with focus on providing higher credit flows to animal husbandry, dairy, and fisheries. Chintala further said the recapitalisation of Rs 2,000 crore to Nabard and that of Rs 1,200 crore to regional rural banks (RRBs) will help achieve the target of agriculture credit.

Leather products to get costlier after 10% customs duty, say manufacturers

NEW DELHI

THE imposition of sharp 10 per cent customs duty on import of finished leather products will lead to price increase, manufacturers said on Monday.

The hike would also make it difficult for the manufacturers of footwear and other leather products to remain competitive in exports due to higher input costs. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has proposed to impose a basic customs duty of 10 per cent on "wet blue chrome tanned leather, crust leather, finished leather of all kinds, including splits and sides" from nil duty. Reacting to the announcement, Harkirat Singh, managing director, aero club, which operates in the shoes and apparels segment through brand - woodland and woods, said this might lead to an increase in costs. "The



10 per cent customs duty hike on the leather is in line with its intention to promote local sourcing and might lead to an increase in costs till we manage to find alternate sourcing hubs without compromising our quality standards though we do welcome the intention of being self-reliant," he said. Expressing similar views, Iatric Industries Director and CEO Ashish Jain said that for the footwear industry, there are no major benefits in the budget. (PTI)

Budget for tourism ministry slashed by 19 pc; industry unhappy

NEW DELHI

THE budgetary allocation for the ministry of tourism has been slashed from Rs 2,500 crore in 2020-21 to Rs 2026.77 crore this year, in a blow to the tourism industry which is reeling from huge losses due to the coronavirus crisis. The revised estimate for the ministry was Rs 1,260 crore. The budget has allocated Rs 1088.03 crore for development of tourism infrastructure. With the coronavirus crisis restricting not just foreign tourist footfalls into the country but also keeping domestic travellers at bay, the budget has focused on pushing funds for promotion and publicity to help woo tourists back. Out of the Rs 668.72 crore allocated towards promotion and publicity, Rs 524.02 crore is for the overseas market and Rs 144.70 crore has been kept for domestic tourists. "I am thankful to the PM and FM for giving us a budget which is pro-tourism. It is a budget which shows confidence in the self and a budget which is self-reliant," Union Tourism minister Prahlad



Patel told reporters. "For tourism we primarily have two schemes - PRASAD and Swadesh Darshan which have both been continued this year. A new scheme of iconic sites has also been introduced. Infrastructure is significant for tourism and this budget has talked of air connectivity to smaller cities. This will benefit tourism," he said. With the coronavirus crisis bringing the tourism sector to its knees, the union budget has allocated a sum of Rs 63.65 crore for capacity

building for service providers and Rs 138.65 crore for training and development. The budget also has included the Development of Iconic Tourist Sites/ Destinations, a new central sector scheme, which has been framed for development of 19 identified iconic destinations in the country following a holistic approach involving infrastructure and skill development, use of technology, attracting private investment, branding and marketing. FAITH, the policy federation of all the na-

tional associations representing the complete tourism, travel and hospitality industry of India, said, “Lack of immediate direct support in budget has disappointed the Indian travel and tourism industry”. In a statement, Nakul Anand, Chairman-FAITH said there was a need of corpus of at least Rs 2,500 crore for global branding budget to enable sub-branding of three tourism segments -- Indian MICE, Indian adventure, Indian Heritage under the Incredible India main brand to enhance each of these verticals’ global outreach. “Not addressing any of these critical measures in the budget announcement has thrown the industry into a state of shock and deep dismay. The tourism, travel and hospitality industry is battling the worst in century crisis from the impact of Covid 19, revival from which will not be seen minimum for the next financial year till vaccination is fully undertaken with no observed side effects in all source and destination markets,” the statement said.⁽⁷⁷⁾

Hiking FDI cap in insurance to open up large source of fresh funding for industry: Goyal

NEW DELHI

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday said that hiking foreign direct investment (FDI) limit to 74 per cent in the insurance sector will open up a large source of fresh funding for the sector. In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to amend the Insurance Act, 1938 to increase the permissible FDI limit from 49 per cent to 74 per cent in insurance companies and allow foreign ownership and control with safeguards. "This will open up a large source of fresh funding for the insurance industry," Goyal said in a tweet. He also said that seven textile parks will be established to create global export champions. (PTI)

Govt targets gross tax revenue of ₹22.17L cr in FY'22

NEW DELHI

THE government on Monday projected a 16.67 per cent growth in gross tax revenue in the next fiscal beginning April 1, at over Rs 22.17 lakh crore. The revised estimates of gross tax revenue for the current fiscal has been pegged at Rs 19 lakh crore, lower than the Rs 24.23 lakh crore budgeted earlier. Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj said "our revenue figure is under-stated not overstated. We have taken nominal GDP at 14.4 per cent and revenue growth at 16.7 per cent. So the buoyancy is only 1.16. We are hopeful we will get more than this". (PTI)

NEW DELHI

FINANCE Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the government has come out with open and transparent Budget and has not made any attempt to hide anything under the carpet.

She said that the focus of the Budget 2021-22 has been on spending big on infrastructure and attending to the needs of healthcare sector for reviving Indian economy which is expected to contract by 7.7 per cent in the current fiscal ending March hit by the COVID-19 crisis. Briefing media after the presentation of Budget in Parliament, Sitharaman said the government has not lost opportunity to clean up its own book. "I had started in July 2019 continued it in February 2020 and even now we have made accounts more transparent. Nothing is



pushed under the carpet. We are showing clearly where money is going. Money given to FCI is also brought on board. So accounting of government expenditure and revenue statements are now lot more transparent and open," she said. The Budget has also given glide path for deficit management and bringing it down below 4.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2025-26.

The government has increased capital expenditure for the current fiscal and for the coming financial year to push demand in the economy hit by COVID-19 pandemic, she said. "As a result, the borrowing increased and our fiscal deficit which started at 3.5 per cent during February 2020 has gone to 9.5 per cent of GDP. So, we have spent ... otherwise the fiscal deficit would not have reached this number," she said. She further said that the spending on infrastructure has gone up from Rs 4.12 lakh crore to Rs 5.54 lakh crore while on the health sector rose to Rs 2.23 lakh crore from Rs 94,000 crore in the Budget estimate for 2020-21. "The Budget comes at a time when all of us have decided to give a greater impetus to economy. That impetus would be qualitatively spent and create a necessary demand push if we

choose to spend big on infrastructure. That is why if there are two important features of this Budget it is that we chose to spend big on infrastructure and attending to the needs of health sector," she said. Even for the health sector the government has decided to build up capacity in terms establishment of testing labs, and critical care centres, she added. On the GDP growth, Economic Affairs Secretary Tarun Bajaj said Real GDP growth would be 10-10.5 per cent in the next fiscal. "Our revenue figure is understated not overstated. We have taken nominal GDP at 14.4 per cent and revenue growth at 16.7 per cent. So the buoyancy is only 1.16. We are hopeful we will get more than this. We will definitely within 6.8 per cent and could be lower also," he said. On the rationale

for Rs 12 lakh crore borrowing for the next financial year, Bajaj said the government will spend the money borrowed on infrastructure development which has multiplier effect. "But I presume it (Rs 12 lakh crore borrowing) will not have that inflationary impact. So we have taken that into account," he said. "RBI dividend would come. We have said non-tax revenue would be Rs 2.43 lakh crore. It was last time Rs 2.10 lakh crore. So it is not something that we have inflated the number that we are going to get from them. "We will definitely achieve this Rs 2.43 lakh crore of non-tax revenue. We are in touch with RBI, we know how much they are going to give us, hopefully by the end of March when the year ends, but its not something to be disclosed at the moment," he said. (PTI)

East Bengal, Bengaluru eye playoffs berths

VASCO (GOA)



EAST Bengal face Bengaluru FC in the Indian Super League (ISL) at the Tilak Maidan Stadium on Tuesday as both teams

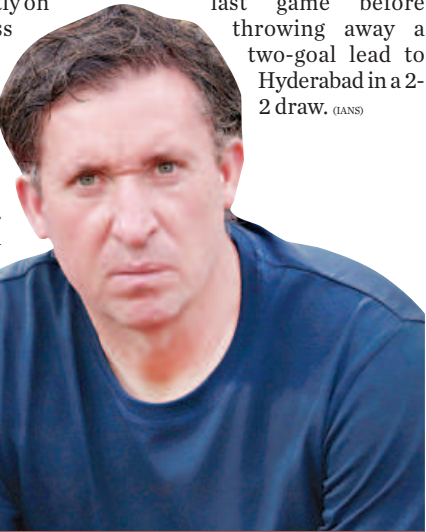
look to stay in contention for a spot in the playoffs. Placed second-last on the league table, Robbie Fowler's East Bengal have accumulated just 13 points from 14 matches. The inability to convert chances has cost East Bengal points. They are currently on a four-match winless streak and have netted just 12 goals all season, which is the second-lowest tally in the league. East Bengal are currently four points away from fourth spot.

Similarly, Bengaluru have also been on a lean patch. They are winless in their last eight matches, having lost five of those and against East Bengal, they will be

RESULT
Odisha FC lose to Jamshedpur FC 0-1

missing defender Erik Paartalu and midfielder Juanan. Conceding goals has been a problem for Bengaluru, who have now failed to keep a clean sheet in 11 matches. They have conceded 19 goals so far, with only Odisha and Kerala Blasters conceding more.

So far this season, the Blues have dropped nine points from winning positions. They were close to securing a win in the last game before throwing away a two-goal lead to Hyderabad in a 2-2 draw. (IANS)



TODAY'S MATCH

SC East Bengal vs Bengaluru FC
at Tilak Maidan Stadium 7.30pm

ISL STANDINGS

CLUB	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
Mumbai City FC	14	9	3	2	20	7	13	30
ATK Mohun Bagan	14	8	3	3	16	9	7	27
Hyderabad FC	15	5	7	3	20	16	4	22
FC Goa	14	5	6	3	19	14	5	21
NorthEast United FC	14	5	6	3	19	18	1	21
Jamshedpur FC	15	4	6	5	14	17	-3	18
Chennaiyin FC	15	3	7	5	11	16	-5	16
Bengaluru FC	14	3	6	5	17	19	-2	15
Kerala Blasters FC	15	3	6	6	19	25	-6	15
SC East Bengal	14	2	7	5	12	18	-6	13
Odisha FC	14	1	5	8	13	21	-8	8

2-time Olympian Bhattacharjee to undergo brain surgery



NEW DELHI

TWO-time Olympian shuttler Dipankar Bhattacharjee has been diagnosed with brain tumour and will be undergoing surgery in Mumbai on Thursday.

Bhattacharjee has been admitted to Hinduja Hospital in Mumbai where the surgery is slated to take place, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) informed on Sunday evening. "Two-time Olympian and national champion Dipankar Bhattacharjee has been diagnosed with a brain tumour. He has been admitted to Hinduja Hospital where the surgery is slated for February 4," BAI said in a tweet.

"On behalf of Himanta Biswa Sarma, BAI and badminton fraternity we pray for his speedy recovery," it added. Sarma is the BAI president.

Born on February 1, 1972 in Assam, Bhattacharjee represented the country at many international tournaments, including 1992 Barcelona and 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

The 49-year-old was the Indian national badminton champion thrice and a runner-up twice. At Barcelona Olympics, he reached the pre-quarters.

He retired early from the game in 2004, after playing the last Indian National Championships at Guwahati. (IANS)

Jehan finishes third at F3 Asian Championship

DUBAI

MUMBAI Falcons made an impressive debut in the Formula 3 Asian Championship in the United Arab Emirates, with Jehan Daruvala clinching the third place in the first race of Round 1 at the Dubai Autodrome.

Jehan had a good start and quickly moved up a place to third and he held on to it to claim the podium. His good run over the weekend helped him finish in seventh position in the overall drivers' standings with 27 points.

Kush Maini, however, was unfortunate as he was hit by another car and had to pit, which put him at the back of the entire field. He still managed to clock the second fastest lap time in this race which allowed him to start second for Race 2.

An unlucky brake issue, again, saw Kush barely move fifty meters down the track, at the start of the race.

Jehan too lost a few positions in the opening lap but recovered well later to finish seventh.

Race 3 saw Kush get a fantastic start. But four cars entered the first corner side by side, leading to a contact. This forced Kush to pit once again to repair damage,



to re-join at the back.

Jehan's car too momentarily went airborne and spun him around. The young Indian managed to get his car started and re-

joined in eighteenth. From there on, Jehan drove a brilliant race. On a circuit with few overtaking opportunities, the 22-year-old was practically overtaking a car a lap.

From eighteenth, Jehan steadily climbed up the order and was by far the quickest driver on track. Some excellent racecraft helped him get into the points and eventually finish in seventh position.

Jehan's phenomenal pace meant he also had the fastest lap of the race, which was almost 3 tenths of a second faster than any other racer on track.

Salah ends EPL drought, Reds back as threat to City



Brighton's Alexis Mac Allister shoots with an overhead kick during an English Premier League soccer match between Brighton and Tottenham Hotspur at the Amex stadium in Brighton, England, Sunday

LIVERPOOL

WITH a trademark left-footed curler into the top corner and the deftest of finishes from a clinical counterattack, Mohamed Salah ended one of his longest goal droughts in the Premier League for Liverpool in style.

The champions' chief scorer is back doing what he does best. And that should make them the biggest threat to relentless leader Manchester City in the title race. Salah's sublime, second-half double set Liverpool on its way to a 3-1 win at West Ham on Sunday, which backed up a victory by the same scoreline at Tottenham on Thursday. Jurgen Klopp's team hadn't won any of its previous five games and had dropped off the remorseless title pace

being set by City, which has won eight straight league games. Despite its lengthy injury list — and Sadio Mane joined it this week because of a minor muscle problem — Liverpool cannot be discounted, even if the third-place Reds are four points behind City having played one game more in their turbulent title defense. They jumped above Leicester, which lost 3-1 at home to Leeds earlier Sunday.

"If you want to win the league, you have to win every game," Salah said. "This year, City were struggling in the beginning. We were struggling three or four games ago. You just need to keep winning if you want to win the Premier League.

"It was a really big week." Salah scored twice in an FA Cup loss to

Manchester United last weekend, but he hadn't netted in six league matches, a barren run he had only experienced once — in February-March 2019 — since joining Liverpool in 2017.

Patrick Bamford scored one goal and set up the other two for Leeds as Leicester fell to only its second loss since Nov. 30. Harvey Barnes had opened the scoring for the hosts.

Before that, Chelsea had picked up its first win under newly hired coach Thomas Tuchel by beating Burnley 2-0 thanks to goals by Cesar Azpilicueta and Marcos Alonso. Even a recovery under Tuchel might be too late for Chelsea to challenge for the title, with the London club 11 points behind City. Liverpool, though, is still very much in contention. (AP)

India-England series

50% CROWD FOR 2nd TEST ALLOWED

Media given permission to cover from press box; ECB wanted behind closed doors

CHENNAI

THE BCCI and the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association have decided to allow 50 per cent spectators at the second India-England Test to be held at the M A Chidambaram stadium here, a top TNCA official told PTI on Monday.

The issue was discussed by the TNCA members after fresh COVID-19 guidelines on easing of public movement and entry of spectators into sporting venues were issued. The move was cleared in a meeting between TNCA and BCCI officials.

"We discussed the issue of allowing spectators for the second India vs England Test following fresh COVID-19 guidelines by the Central government permitting crowds at sporting venues and also the state government's SOPs given on Sunday," the TNCA official told PTI.

"It has been decided by the BCCI and TNCA to allow 50 per cent spectators for the second Test by following all safety protocols."

The M A Chidambaram stadium has a capacity of 50,000. The first Test begins on Friday while the second match starts on February 13. Crowds have already been allowed for the third and fourth Test in Ahmedabad.

The official also said that media would be allowed to cover both the Tests from the press box at the stadium. However, media conferences would still be held virtually.

The BCCI and the TNCA had earlier decided that the first two matches would be held behind closed doors. But the fresh home ministry guidelines on easing of restrictions on public movement have changed the scenario.

The official said there was little time to allow entry of spectators for the opening Test. He said even though there was only a gap of three days between the first and second Tests, the TNCA was confident of making arrangements to allow 50 per cent spectators in the stadium.

"There is little time to make arrangements for spectators entry for the first Test so the crowd cannot be allowed. Though the gap between the two Tests is only three days, we are confident that arrangements can be made for (50 per cent) fans in second Test keeping the safety norms in mind," the official added.

The Tamil Nadu government on Sunday announced that for sports, including



Both team players cleared to train after negative Covid results

CHENNAI

MEMBERS of the Indian cricket team have returned negative results in their latest Covid-19 tests and have been cleared to begin their outdoor training from Tuesday for the four-match Test series that begins here on Friday.

Earlier on Monday, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) confirmed that the results from England players' Covid-19 tests, conducted on Sunday, have returned negative results.

"The Indian cricket team completed their quarantine period today in Chennai. Three RT-PCR tests for Covid-19 were conducted at regular intervals and all tests have returned negative results. The team will have their first outdoor session today from 5 pm and nets sessions will begin from tomorrow," BCCI said in a statement on Monday.

The England squad will begin training as a full group from Tuesday at the MA Chidambaram Stadium. Up until now, only Jofra Archer, Ben Stokes and Rory Burns had been

training as they had reached India before the rest of the squad which was touring Sri Lanka for a two-Test series which Joe Root's men won 2-0.

"All PCR tests from yesterday's test have returned negative results," said a statement from ECB.

"The England party are now out of quarantine and will train for the first time as a full group at the stadium tomorrow afternoon 2pm-5pm (IST)," the statement added.

India only need to win the four-match Test series against England, beginning February 5, with a 2-0 margin to seal a spot in the World Test Championship (WTC) final, to be played in June at Lord's, London. If India lose one Test against England, they will need to win the other three matches of the series.

England, on the other hand, need to beat India 3-0. Even a 2-2 drawn series will not be enough for England to go past India and finish among the top two on the WTC final.

India recently defeated hosts Australia 2-1 in the Test series. (IANS)

cricket, 50 per cent occupancy would be allowed in stadiums.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had requested that matches be

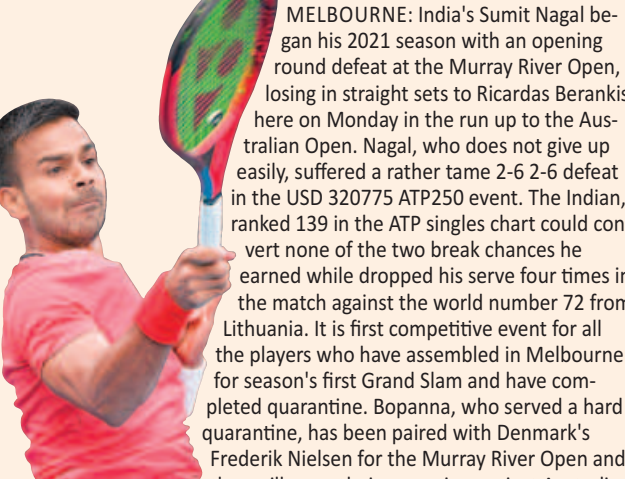
played behind closed doors. An ECB spokesperson said it would react only after getting an official communication from the BCCI. "We are not going to comment

on speculation. We are still waiting to hear from the BCCI in terms of their protocols for the forthcoming Test series," the spokesperson asserted. (PTI)

Pierre Gasly 6th F1 driver to test positive for Covid-19

PARIS: AlphaTauri's Pierre Gasly has revealed he has tested positive for novel coronavirus and is self-isolating. "I wanted to let you know that I tested positive for Covid-19. I have told everyone I've been in contact with during these last days," Gasly said on Twitter. "I'm currently self-isolating and following the protocol set by the local health authorities. I'm feeling ok and will continue to follow my training plan from home while I remain in isolation," he added. He is the sixth Formula One driver to contract the virus. Sergio Perez, Lance Stroll, Lewis Hamilton, Lando Norris and Charles Leclerc have all tested positive since the start of the pandemic. Norris and Leclerc tested positive after spending time in Dubai post-season. The Frenchman had won the 2020 Italian Grand Prix for AlphaTauri last season and will be partnered by rookie Yuki Tsunoda this coming season, which is set to kick off in March at Bahrain International Circuit. (IANS)

India's Nagal begins 2021 season with defeat



MELBOURNE: India's Sumit Nagal began his 2021 season with an opening round defeat at the Murray River Open, losing in straight sets to Ricardas Berankis, here on Monday in the run up to the Australian Open. Nagal, who does not give up easily, suffered a rather tame 2-6 2-6 defeat in the USD 320775 ATP250 event. The Indian, ranked 139 in the ATP singles chart could convert none of the two break chances he earned while dropped his serve four times in the match against the world number 72 from Lithuania. It is first competitive event for all the players who have assembled in Melbourne for season's first Grand Slam and have completed quarantine. Bopanna, who served a hard quarantine, has been paired with Denmark's Frederik Nielsen for the Murray River Open and they will open their campaign against Australian wild card pair of James Duckworth and Marc Polmans. Bopanna is going into the event without much practice as protocols required him to stay inside his room for 14 straight days. He stepped out only on January 30. Divij Sharan and Igor Zelenay will clash with Guillermo Duran and Albert Ramos-Vinolas in their opening round. (PTI)

Former Barca forward Tejada dies

Barcelona: Former Barcelona and Real Madrid forward Justo Tejada has passed away at the age of 88. Born in Barcelona on January 6, 1933, Tejada played a total of eight seasons for FC Barcelona's first-team: 1953 to 1961. During those eight years, the forward played in 194 official matches and scored 92 goals. As for titles won, he acquired two league championships, two Copas del Rey and two Fairs Cups. After his time at Barcelona, he played for two seasons at Real Madrid (1961-63) and two more at Espanyol (1963-65). Tejada was one of the footballers who played the first ever game at Camp Nou on September 24, 1957. He assisted Eulogio Martinez with the first goal in the history of the stadium, and scored the second in a 4-2 win for Barca against a team of players from Warsaw. He was part of that legendary Barca side, along with players such as Kubala, Antoni Ramallets, Stanislaw Basora, Evaristo de Macedo and Eulogio Martinez. During his time at Real Madrid, he won two LaLiga titles and one Copa de Espana. He was also a full international for Spain. (IANS)