





# Womenia

## Hoo-ha & gambol apart, Holi hues can still be harmful



Shahnaz Husain

The real problem is removal of colours after playing Holi. Rinse the face with plenty of plain water and then use a cleansing cream, or lotion. Apply and massage it on the face. Then wipe off with moist cotton wool. Remember to cleanse the area around the eyes too, using a light touch. A cleansing gel helps to dissolve the colours and facilitates their removal

Holi 'holiday of colours,' is here again. The annual Traditional Hindu festival which marks onset of spring season will be celebrated across India amid the coronavirus scare for the second successive year.

The dry 'Gulal' and the wet colours of today are not derived from natural sources. They contain chemicals, shiny particles of mica and even lead, which not only irritate the skin, but collect on the scalp. Since Holi is played out of doors, sun-exposure can have a detrimental effect on the skin. Apart from harmful UV radiation, sun-exposure makes the skin dry by causing depletion of moisture and also tans the skin. The skin can become dry and dull after playing Holi.

Remember to apply a sunscreen 20 minutes before going out in the sun. Use a sunscreen of SPF 20 and above. If your skin is prone to pigmented patches, select a higher SPF. Most sunscreens have built-in moisturisers. If your skin is very dry, first apply the sunscreen, wait for a few minutes and then apply a



moisturiser. Apply moisturising lotion or cream on the arms and exposed areas.

Apply leave-on conditioner or hair serum on hair before playing holi. This protects the hair from the effects of sun exposure and dryness caused by colours. Hair Cream containing sunscreen is also available. Take very little, spread on both palms and massage light into the hair, or smooth palms over the hair. Or, apply pure coconut oil and massage it lightly into the hair. This also provides protection against colours.

Apply transparent nail varnish on the nails. This helps to protect the nails from absorbing Holi colours.

The real problem is removal of colours after playing Holi. Rinse the face with plenty of plain water and then use a cleansing cream, or lotion. Apply and massage it on the face. Then wipe off with moist cotton wool. Remember to cleanse the area around the eyes too, using a light touch. A cleansing gel helps to dissolve the colours and facilitates their removal.

To make your own cleanser, take half a cup of cold milk and add one teaspoon of any vegetable oil, like 'til', olive or sunflower oil. Mix well. Dip cotton wool into this mixture

and use it to cleanse the skin.

Sesame seed (til) oil can be used to remove colours from the body, massaging it on the skin. This not only helps to remove the colours, but gives added protection to the skin. Sesame seed (til) oil actually helps to counteract sun-damage. While bathing, scrub the body gently with a loofah or wash cloth. Immediately after your bath, apply a moisturizer on the face and body, while the skin is still damp. This helps to seal in moisture.

If there is itching, add two tablespoons vinegar to a mug of water and use it as a last rinse. This helps to reduce itching. However, if the itching continues, and there is rash and redness, there may be an allergic reaction to the colour. Consult a doctor as soon as possible. While washing the hair, first rinse with plenty of plain water to wash away the dry colours and tiny particles of mica. Then apply a mild herbal shampoo, working it into the hair with the fingers. Massage the scalp gently and rinse thoroughly with water again.

The day after Holi, mix two tablespoons honey with half a cup of curd. Add a pinch of turmeric. Apply this on the face, neck and arms. Leave it on for 20 minutes and wash off with water. Helps to re-

move tan and soften the skin.

Within the next few days give your hair a nourishing treatment. Mix one tablespoon pure coconut oil with one teaspoon castor oil. Heat and apply on the hair. Then dip a towel in hot water, squeeze out the water and wrap the hot towel around the head, like a turban. Keep it on for 5 minutes. Repeat the hot towel wrap 3 or 4 times. This helps the hair and scalp absorb the oil better. Wash your hair after an hour.

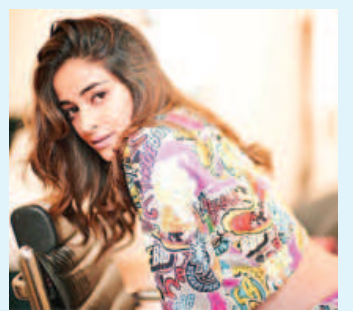
The pandemic has brought the world to a halt. Various state govt has already put reasonable restrictions relating to festival rituals. Please celebrate this festival with full zeal and enthusiasm with your family members in your home taking precautionary measures. Avoid public places including public roads, parks, society lawns, Holi milan gatherings, pool parties and mass gatherings etc. The best way to 'enjoy' Holi is to be at home, eat your favourite dishes and spend time with your close family members maintaining cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene. A person who might have symptoms of flu should avoid Holi gatherings in any case because being drenched or exposure to dry colours can exacerbate symptoms.

TWEET PATROL



**ANANYA PANDAY**  
@ANANYAPANDAYY

#PostPackUpShot with my fave dear friend @avigowariker



## Beauty queen turns women's crusader

ASKARI JAFFER

Mrs Earth 2017-18 and Mrs Eco International 2018-19 Pageant winner Shweta Chaudhary actor, entrepreneur and a Social Activist elucidates about her undertaken social project named 'Tarini' for underprivileged women.

As a Mrs Earth and Mrs Eco International Pageant winner, she always wanted to do meaningful projects that could transform lives. As an achiever in life, Shweta Chaudhary always wanted to inspire other women struggling in daily life to rise and shine.

On talking about the main objective behind the project she says, "The main objective behind the project is to make women independent. So, the only motive is to make them self dependent and this is not only related to women but also for children. So, I always wanted to work for underprivileged women and children and Tarini is that medium. My main focus is healthy, independent and educated women and healthy and educated kids. I have traveled a lot because of my beauty pageants. Wherever I have been, I have noticed problems faced by women and children. I'm not being biased with men but the problems which are prevailing in our country is also there in other countries too. These beauty pageants gave me the platform to fulfil my vision for the underprivileged on a big scale."

Ambujwadi was selected as area of focus and women empowerment as the central theme for transformation. Absence of any meaningful source of income for inhabitants of Ambujwadi slums, the survival was really challenging and to add to it pandemic woes have made them further vulnerable.

At least in Dharavi the leather industry provides some source of employment, here in Ambujwadi women have been facing higher stress and atrocities due to no such opportunities.

Shweta says, "We have done few surveys, out of which a survey found that from where have these slum dwellers hail from and it was not at all astonishing to learn that Majority of them have their roots in UP & Bihar, also they are not skilled nor have formal education and represent both communities with higher than national average represented by minorities."

On talking about the whole idea behind the name 'Tarini', she says that the name 'Tarini' is very close to her heart because the six-member all-woman Indian Navy team circumnavigated the globe in their first ever global journey, on INSV 'Tarini'.

She adds, "Whenever I used to meet these underprivileged women, I always felt they know their problem and their



Beauty pageants gave me the platform to raise my voice and fulfil my vision for the underprivileged

—Mrs Earth Shweta Chaudhary

solution too. By getting inspired by Indian Navy women and these underprivileged women, I decided the name 'Tarini'. As I always tell these women that they are like these Indian Navy women and the sea is their obstacles wherein I want to become that ship as a medium who helps them to come out. They just need a medium to reach their solution."

Recently on the eve of Women's day on 7th March 2021, Shweta distributed Iron Syrup bottles, one time delicious meal for them and their entire families totaling close to 7000+ beneficiaries along with re-usable sanitary pad distribution for 2750 beneficiaries in association with Rotary Club of Mumbai Brave-Hearts. Most heartening part was that these pads can be reused for close to 2 years and were stitched by tribal women.

These women had to be motivated first, by instilling self belief in them guiding them to face these struggles with smile and acquire new skills to empower not only themselves but their entire family to break this vicious cycle of poverty and dependence.

First Step:

On 14th Feb 2021, Mrs Shweta Chaudhary decided to empower these needy women through power of compassion and empathy. Group of 25 women each were chosen carefully from 3 such locations from Ambujwadi, they were asked to identify their problems and best possible solution for those problems, in one-on-one dialogue with each one a direct connect was built. They were gifted special handcrafted Kada's that would remind them daily of the mission they have taken, just like the uniform worn by the 6 amazing young women who successfully circumnavigated the globe.



PUJA GUPTA

As the weather changes, most of us notice changes in the texture and appearance of our skin as well. A shift from dry to oily feeling, increase in skin flare ups and breakouts are common experiences.

Seasonal changes bring with them a lot of environmental changes as well. Along with temperature shifts, humidity levels also fluctuate. The type of pollens or allergic elements in the environment also change, so do microorganisms. All these changes do have an impact on skin, particularly for those who have sen-

## How seasonal shifts affect your skin

sitive skin, points out Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi, Dermatologist from Medlinks, New Delhi.

With summer, some people tend to experience skin irritation or acne. As hot weather induces sweating, bacterial growth may also result in bad odour and rashes on sensitive areas. "Sometimes, even as temperature and humidity increase, we overlook the need to shift to lighter non-comedogenic skincare products. This



in turn may further induce episodes of flare ups or breakouts. Some people even report flare up in skin con-

ditions such as eczema or psoriasis. Often, the use of heating devices in winters sucks away all moisture from the indoor air, exacerbating skin dryness and related conditions," he says.

A study published in the British Journal of Dermatology concluded that a shift of season does not just change the environmental conditions but also induces changes at skin's cellular level. The study found that a seasonal shift un-

leashes a breakdown in filaggrin, a protein that helps modulate the skin's barrier function, along with changes in corneocytes, the cells that form the skin's outer layer. When the skin's barrier function is interrupted, the skin tends to become more vulnerable to irritation and damage, he adds. The expert says it is important therefore as weather changes, our skincare regime also changes to address the needs of hour. Here are a few suggestions from him:

**Change your skincare routine**

While, a good cleansing, toning

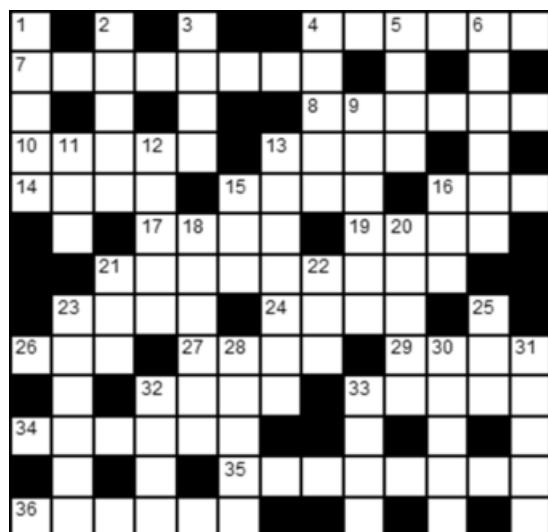
and moisturising routine must be followed round the year, an important thing to do is to modify your skincare products as the weather changes occur. So, shifting to lighter non-comedogenic products is the first thing to do as we transition into the summer. If you have been using a cream-based facewash or moisturiser, now is the time to switch to water-based light formulations

**Consider some skin procedures**

If you have been considering a skin procedure, a seasonal shift is perhaps the appropriate time to undertake it. Not only will it pave the way

for a dermatologist visit, it will also help prepare your skin better against the sudden trauma of weather change.

A dermatologist will examine your skin in-depth and help you make an informed decision of which skin procedure you need. If your skin is experiencing dryness, flakiness and signs of ageing are troubling you, you may consider a hyaluronic acid-based treatment such as Profillio. Similarly, if you are experiencing oiliness and clogged pores, exfoliating and deep cleansing procedures such as hydra-dermabrasion and carbon peels may help.



SOLUTION TO MARCH 25

### CROSSWORD

Across

- 4 Yielding or resigning (6)
- 7 Blatant advertising (8)
- 8 Armadas; sea forces (6)
- 10 Liberates (5)
- 13 Ex-India skipper Amarnath (4)
- 14 Ripped (4)
- 15 Socially naff (3-1)
- 16 "Treasure Island" monogram (3)
- 17 Distort (4)
- 19 Small arachnid (4)
- 21 Sri \_\_\_ set up a famous Ashram in Pondichery (9)
- 23 Extent of space (4)
- 24 Qum coin (4)
- 26 Big Blue (3)
- 27 Mine, in Aix (4)
- 29 Actor Morales (4)
- 32 Misfortune (4)
- 33 9/11 mastermind (5)
- 34 Home for St Francis (6)
- 35 Squarely (5-3)
- 36 Arrival (6)

Down

- 1 Astern (5)
- 2 Senior (5)
- 3 Deli breads (4)
- 4 Schwarzenegger role (5)
- 5 Prima donna (4)
- 6 Tease, bait or intimidate (6)
- 9 Woman graduate (6)
- 11 Burgle (3)
- 12 Come next (5)
- 13 An uncultured person (7)
- 15 Modern prefix (3)
- 16 Road Transp. Off. (3)
- 18 South African enclosures (6)
- 20 Lazes (5)
- 21 Limb of the body (3)
- 22 Latin trio (3)
- 23 Reviled (6)
- 25 Root vegetable (3)
- 28 Damp (5)
- 30 Arenaceous (5)
- 31 Poetic feet of one kind (5)
- 32 Remain (4)
- 33 A single time (4)

### SUDOKU

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SOLUTION TO MARCH 25

### NEWS ROUNDUP

## MASK UP PEOPLE: POOJA BHATT

Bollywood actress Band filmmaker Pooja Bhatt on Thursday took to social media to remind all that the Covid-19 pandemic was not yet over amid highest spike in Maharashtra as India recorded over 53,000 cases in a day.

"Mask up people and please follow COVID19 safety protocol. The virus is far more resilient than we would like to believe. Help the concerned authorities to help us please! Too many people have been working tirelessly to keep us safe. Yet we behave so irresponsibly. Simply not done!" Pooja tweeted.

The actress' tweet comes just a day after Maharashtra and Mumbai saw steep spike in Covid-19 cases. There were over 5,000 new Covid-19 cases



reported in Mumbai on Wednesday. The city recorded 5,185 cases -- up from the previous high in 2021 on March 21 when 3,779 cases were reported. Maharashtra recorded a fresh peak of 31,855 on Wednesday.



# Farmers prepared for a long haul, will relent only when demands met: Tikait

KARNAL

BHARATIYA Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikait on Thursday said the agitating farmers were prepared for a long haul and will relent only when their demands are met.

Tikait reiterated that the Centre must withdraw the farm laws and provide a legal guarantee on MSP.

He said the farm laws were not only adversely affecting the farmers but will impact other sections as well.

"This fight is not just of farmers but it is also for the poor, small traders..." said Tikait while addressing a farmers' 'mahapan-chayat' at Assandh in this district.

Asserting that farmers were prepared for a long haul, he said, "This agitation will go on for long. We have made preparations till November-December."

Referring to his late father Mahender Singh Tikait, he said, "Tikait sahib used to say that when Haryana stands in support of an agitation, government shiv-



ers."

"They tried to break our agita-

tion by dividing it on lines of Punjab and Haryana and project-

ing it as specific to a particular state but that did not work," he said, hitting out at the government.

Tikait said the government may try to impose restrictions in the garb of coronavirus pandemic at places where farmers are sitting in large numbers as part of the ongoing stir but that will not deter them.

"There is the possibility that in the name of corona, restrictions may be imposed but our agitation will go on. We will follow all the guidelines, but we will not

end our dharnas," he asserted.

He also said farmers have shown how to manage their time for the stir as well as for their crops.

Tikait said the agitation was drawing good support from several states across the country including Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

Hundreds of farmers are camping at Delhi's borders since November last year demanding the repeal of the three contentious farm laws.

Enacted in September 2020,

the three farm laws have been projected by the Centre as major reforms in the agriculture sector that will remove the middlemen and allow farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

The protesting farmers, on the other hand, have been insisting that the new laws would pave the way for eliminating the safety cushion of the minimum support price and do away with the "mandi" (wholesale market) system, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates.

## Punjab CM responsible for DBT scheme for farmers: Akali Dal

CHANDIGARH

THE Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Thursday held Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh directly responsible for the imposition of the direct benefit transfer scheme for farmers even as it asked him why he was agreeing to implement the scheme even from next year when farmers were opposing it.

The SAD also asked the Centre to reconsider its decision on the scheme, saying any unilateral decision on this issue would amount to infringing on the powers of the states and would lead to further weakening of the federal structure of the country.

It condemned the Chief Minister for shedding crocodile tears on the issue now after agreeing in writing to implement the scheme from the



forthcoming rabi season.

"Now when the rabi season is set to arrive next month he is doing a 'tamasha' of writing to the Prime Minister," said SAD kisan wing president Sikander Singh Maluka.

"What has the Chief Minister

done to safeguard the interests of farmers and arhatiyas (commission agents) since the last one and a half years? Why didn't he meet the Prime Minister till now? Why didn't he call an all-party meeting on this issue? Why didn't he take the opposi-

tion with him in a joint delegation to the Prime Minister to ensure the age-old system of payment to farmers through 'arhatiyas' was not disturbed?"

Asking Chief Minister Amarinder Singh not to indulge in skullduggery, Maluka said the truth was that the Congress government never opposed the new system to transfer payment for procurement of food grains to farmer accounts directly instead of through 'arhatiyas' when it was proposed more than one and a half years back by the Central government.

"In fact, the government asked for a one-year period to implement the scheme. Now the Chief Minister is making a display of raising the issue before the Prime Minister when the truth is that he meekly surrendered to the Central government and agreed to its unjust dictates," he said.



## Priyanka slams Yogi govt on cancellation of VDO recruitment

LUCKNOW

CONGRESS general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has lashed out at the Yogi Adityanath government on the cancellation of the recruitment process of village development officers (VDO).

She tweeted that the youth who had appeared for the examination in 2018 and were waiting for the appointment, now face a bleak future.

"They have been getting date

after date but no appointment letter. Every new date has been dashing their hopes," she said.

Priyanka further taunted that while the candidates were looking to a dark future, chief minister (Yogi Adityanath) was away from the state on an election campaign.

It is noteworthy that the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission has cancelled the examinations held for VDO, village panchayat officers and social welfare officers.

## Two shot dead in Haryana gang war

CHANDIGARH

TWO men were shot dead and two others injured as part of a "gang war" in Haryana's Ambala city on Thursday, police said.

The deceased have been identified as Rahul and Pankaj, while the injured were Ashwani and Gaurav.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Sultan Singh said one of injured was admitted to Civil Hospital in Ambala, while another one was taken to the Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER) in Chandigarh.

He said all four were going towards Punjab in a car when the firing took place at Kalka Chowk.

"Prima facie, it seems to be a gang war where the attackers are reported to have arrived in a car and opened fire on the four," he said.



## Gogi gang member escapes after armed accomplices attack police

NEW DELHI

A leading criminal of the Jitender Gogi gang escaped after his accomplices attacked the police team escorting him to an east Delhi hospital for treatment on Thursday afternoon, police said. However, one of the assailants was killed and another wounded and caught.

The escaped criminal was identified as Kuldeep Maan alias Fajja.

The Delhi Police, in a statement, said that the "high risk accused" was brought to GTB Hospital for treatment in OPD, but outside the building, five persons in a Scorpio

car and a motorcycle fired at police party in an attempt to free the accused from police custody.

"Police retaliated in which one assailant died while one assailant injured and caught by police," it said, adding that the remaining accused ran away from spot.

Senior police officials reached the spot and several teams have been formed to nab the escaped criminal.

According to Delhi Police officials, Maan, who was arrested by the Special Cell last year, faces over 70 cases related to murder, attempt to murder and robbery.

## 'Uttam' education is new mantra for Yogi govt

LUCKNOW

'UTTAM' education in 'new' Uttar Pradesh is the new mantra of the Yogi Adityanath government in the State.

The UP government is elated over the fact that in the last four years, about 4.80 crore new students have enrolled in the government schools of the state.

According to the government spokesman, the facelift of the government schools, ensuring cheating-free examinations of the secondary schools, recognition of new universities, establishment of degree colleges, polytechnics and IIT are some of the landmark achievements of the state government which have helped raise the standard of the education.

"Through 'Operation Kayakalp', basic facilities were provided in nearly 1.35 lakh schools of the state. Children were given free books, school bags, two pairs of uniforms, sweaters and shoes-stockings. Apart from this, separate toilets have been constructed for boys and girls," the spokesman said.

Besides, during the four-year tenure of Yogi Government, 193 new Inter-colleges have become operational and 56 new inter colleges were sanctioned.

For the better education of girl students, 30 girls hostels were also started. To ensure the transparency in the transfer process of the teachers, the state government has made the entire process online, preventing any kind of corruption. The creation of 5,987 new posts of teachers and honorarium-based postings on the vacant posts from the pool of retired teachers has changed the picture of secondary education in the state.

Students living in the rural areas of the state do not have to go far to pursue higher education now.

For this, 51 new government colleges are being set up in the state, as well as recognition of 28 new private universities is under process.

The government is also considering opening of universities for industries and skill development, to increase skill development among the youth.

Also, Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh State University Aligarh, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar University Agra and Saharanpur State University are being set up.

The government has also formed a 16-member task force to implement the National Education Policy 2020 besides setting up Centre of Excellence and Language Centre to promote Indian languages. In an important step, the UP government has taken the initiative of Abhyuday coaching for the students going out of the state for the preparation of competitive examinations.

Uttar Pradesh is also the only state in the country to offer free Abhyuday coaching to students. The dream of the students to become engineers, doctors and administrative officers will be fulfilled by this initiative of the Yogi government.

Free training centres have been started at each divisional headquarter for interview / online training / mentoring of talented and enthusiastic students for various competitive examinations.

## NCW chief to visit Raj on April 16 over rising rapes

JAIPUR

WITH mounting cases of rapes being reported from the desert state, some even inside police stations, hospitals, DCP office -- National Commission for Women chairperson Rekha Sharma has confirmed she will be visiting Rajasthan on April 6 to seek answers from the Ashok Gehlot government.

Sharma, speaking to a women delegation which went to Delhi to apprise the commission of surging numbers of crime cases against women said, "The situation in the state of Rajasthan is indeed worrisome. I have written several letters to the state government but there has been no response."

"I will come to Rajasthan on April 6, and seek answers from the state government on all matters," she said. Sharma expressed her displeasure at the way the Congress government has been handling the crimes. She said that it has been more than two years since any key appointments have been made to the State Women's Commission. MP Diya Kumari along with other women leaders went to Delhi and met Rekha

Sharma and national human commission senior member Justice P.C. Pant urging them to take immediate cognizance into the matter of rising rape cases in the state.

Diya Kumari told Rekha Sharma that the situation in Rajasthan "has gone out of control as women are not safe even in police stations".

As per the official sources, one of the most gruesome incidents was reported in Kota when a 15-year-old minor was raped by more than 30 culprits from February 25 to March 6 in Jhalawad. On March 5, a rape victim was immolated, while

on March 6, a woman was gang raped in Kota. On March 7, an ASI allegedly raped a woman in Alwar district, who came to a police station to lodge a complaint. On March 13, rape attempt was made on a school teacher in Nagaur district. In the most shocking incident, an ACP attempted rape on a woman inside DCP office in Jaipur on March 14 and the next day, a woman, admitted in ICU, was raped by nursing staff in a hospital. Diya Kumari was accompanied by Alka Gurjar, Jaskaur Meena, Anita Baghel, Alka Mundra, Anita Gurjar among others.



## NHRC seeks UP govt reply over arrest of 10 persons in fake case

LUCKNOW

THE National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken suo motu cognizance of reports in Etah district where the policemen got involved in a squabble at a roadside eatery over the payment of bill for the food they consumed.

The policemen then falsely implicated and arrested ten people, including the brother of the owner of the eatery and eight customers in an alleged encounter with them. The persons reportedly arrested by the police are presently lodged in judicial custody.

The Commission has issued a notice to the Director General of Police to submit a report within six weeks.

A copy of these proceedings has also been sent to the Member Secretary, Uttar Pradesh State Legal Aid Services Authority to



ensure free legal aid to the arrested people, if not provided.

Issuing the notice, the Commission has observed that the contents of the media report, if true, raise serious issue of violation of human rights.

The incident, apparently, is a classic example of failure of the entire system of checks and balances. Hence, fair investigation is required to be conducted to know from where the policemen could manage to procure these items.

It may be recalled that on February 4, some policemen were

eating food at a roadside eatery. These cops had an argument with the owner over paying for the food. They were regularly visiting the eatery but never paid for their food. Some of the customers, present at that time, also asked the policemen to pay the bill. An argument reportedly took place and the policemen started beating the brother of the owner of the eatery.

After some time, around 15 policemen reportedly arrived in three vehicles, pointed guns and took away the brother and the

cousin of the eatery owner as well as eight customers with them to the Kotwali police station and lodged an FIR against them.

The persons arrested by the police are lodged in judicial custody and as per the FIR, ten people, part of a gang, were hatching a plan to commit a crime of loot and the police caught them after an encounter.

Six illegal weapons, 80 litres illicit liquor and 2 kg contraband had been reportedly projected as recovered from the persons arrested by the police.

The matter came to light almost 40 days later after senior police officials learnt of the case and ordered action against the guilty police personnel.

A police inspector and two constables have been suspended for allegedly arresting the persons after a fake encounter and booking them on charges of possessing illicit liquor and cannabis.

## Delhi HC hearing against Ramani's acquittal on May 5

NEW DELHI

THE Delhi High Court will hear on May 5 a petition filed by former Union Minister M.J. Akbar against the acquittal of journalist Priya Ramani by the court in a criminal defamation case.

The matter was adjourned after the court of Justice Mukta Gupta did not assemble on Thursday. It will now be taken up in May.

On February 17, a district court had acquitted Ramani.

"The women has right to put her grievance at any platform of her choice and even after decades," Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Ravindra Kumar Pandey had noted, while acquitting her.

The court had further said that right of reputation cannot be protected at the cost of right to dignity. "Women cannot be punished for raising voice against the sexual abuse in the pretext of complaint of defamation."



In the wake of #MeToo movement in 2018, Ramani had made allegation of sexual harassment against Akbar.

Pursuant to this, he filed the criminal defamation case against her and resigned as the Union Minister. Trial began in 2019 and went on for almost two years.

In 2017, Ramani wrote an article for the Vogue where she described her ordeal of being sexually harassed by a former boss during her

job interview for his publication. One year later, she revealed that the person alluded to as harasser in article was M.J. Akbar.

Akbar told the court that Ramani's allegations were fictitious and cost him his stellar reputation. Priya Ramani, on the other hand, contested these claims, pleaded truth as her defence and said that she made allegations in good faith, public interest, and for public good.



## Variants of Covid-19 reveal continuing menace

If there are people who still don't accept that Covid-19 virus is back and back with a vengeance in the country, the research being conducted by our scientists should be an eye-opener. The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Consortium on Genomics (INSACOG) is a grouping of 10 National Laboratories that was established by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India on December 25 last.

INSACOG has since then carried out genomic sequencing and analysis of circulating Covid-19 viruses, and correlating epidemiological trends with genomic variants. Genomic variants of various viruses are a natural phenomenon and are found in almost all countries. Since INSACOG initiated its work, 771 variants of concerns (VOCs) have been detected in a total of 10787 positive samples shared by States/UTs. These include 736 samples positive for viruses of the UK (B.1.1.7) line-

age. Thirty four samples were found positive for viruses of the South African (B.1.351) lineage.

One sample was found positive for viruses of the Brazilian (P.1) lineage. The samples with these VOCs have been identified in 18 States of the country. Genome sequencing and analysis have been carried out on samples from arriving international travelers, contacts of those positive for VOC and community samples from most of the States at INSACOG partner laboratories which are 10 in number. The analysis of samples from Maharashtra has revealed that compared to December 2020, there has been an increase in the fraction of samples with the E484Q and L452R mutations. Such mutations confer immune escape and increased infectivity.

These mutations have been found in about 15-20 per cent of samples and do

not match any previously catalogued VOCs. These have been categorised as VOCs but require the same epidemiological and public health response of "increased testing, comprehensive tracking of close contacts, prompt isolation of positive cases & contacts as well as treatment as per National Treatment Protocol" by the States/UTs.

From Kerala, 2032 samples (from all 14 districts) have been sequenced. The N440K variant that is associated with immune escape has been found in 123 samples from 11 districts. This variant was earlier found in 33 per cent of samples from Andhra Pradesh, and in 53 of 104 samples from Telangana. This variant has also been reported from 16 other countries including the UK, Denmark, Singapore, Japan and Australia. As of now these can be at best said to be variants under investigation.

Though VOCs and a new double mutant variant have been found in India, these have not been detected in numbers sufficient to either establish or direct relationship or explain the rapid increase in cases in some States. Genomic sequencing and epidemiological studies are continuing to further analyze the situation. India's total Active Caseload has reached 3,68,457 today, comprising 3.14 per cent of the total Positive Cases. India's cumulative recoveries stand at 1,12,05,160 as on March 23.

The national Recovery Rate is 95.49 per cent. But, the death rate is slowly climbing. Six States account for 83.27 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (132). Punjab follows with 53 daily deaths and Chhattisgarh reported 20 deaths by Tuesday. Do we understand the seriousness of all this? We cannot afford another long lockdown that melts away our economy and wipes out marginal lives. Get tested, tracked and treated.

# Secular colours of Nowruz in Kashmir

JAVED BEIGH

MOST people think of Kashmiri culture in terms of binary of Kashmiri Hindu Pandit and Kashmiri Muslim culture, but the reality is that Kashmirs culture and the origin of Kashmiri people remains buried in mystery.

While Kashmir remains among few places in South Asia with a recorded history as exhibited brilliantly in the Sanskrit language epic work of "Rajtarangini", written by Kashmiri Pandit writer, Kalhana, there are many aspects of Kashmiri culture that make Kashmir a far more complex, mysterious and interesting places and the celebration of the spring festival of Persian new year Nowruz is one of them.

Most people associate Nowruz with Iran or Shia Muslim community but in Kashmir, Nowruz is truly a secular festival and it is marked by Kashmir's all religious communities in one form or the other. The festival of Nowruz traditionally falls around March 21 on the day of vernal equinox that marks the beginning of spring in Northern hemisphere. In Kashmir valley, the famous almond blossom festival at Badam Wari on the foothills of Hari Parbat in Srinagar city has become the symbol of the onset of spring as well as Jashn-e-Bahar - Nowruz festival in recent times.

Contrary to what many people believe, Nowruz is not a Muslim festival but has roots in ancient Zoroastrian and Rig Vedic culture of ancient Persians and Vedic Aryans. The Parsi community of Gujarat and Maharashtra continues to celebrate Nowruz till this day as part of thousands of years old Parsi Zoroastrian cultural heritage.

Within Kashmir valley, the Kashmiri Hindu Pandit community marks the Nowruz as "Navreh", both of which literally mean the same thing - "New Day". The Kashmiri Hindu Pandits celebrate Navreh in exactly the same manner as Parsi Zoroastrians and Iranian Shias by symbolic display of seven or more items displayed as a symbol of fortune and thanks giving called "Haft Seen" in Iran and "Thal Bharun" in Kashmir. The difference between Iranian "Haft Seen" and Kashmiri Pandit "Thal Bharun" is that while in Iran, items are displayed on a table, among Kashmiri Hindu Pandits, the items are displayed in a platter called "Thal" in Koshur language.

The composition of seven or more items displayed varies according to local



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customs but some common items include coin, pen, grain, mirror, holy book etc., each having a significance and meaning of its own. Kashmiri Pandits attribute the celebration of "Thal Bharun" and Navreh to the Rig Vedic origin of Kashmiri Hindu Shaivite community.

Interestingly, Kashmiri Pandits are the only Hindu community that celebrates this Persian Iranian festival of Nowruz, which many anthropologists and historians allude to presence of Zoroastrian or a modified form of Zoroastrian faith in Kashmir valley, often called "Avestan" or Eastern Persian culture that was spread over present day Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pashtun parts of Northern Pakistan and Gilt Baltistan. The surviving traces of Nowruz means that ancient Kashmir was also part of this extended Eastern Persian cultural realm.

In Iran, the festival of Nowruz, which

was main festival of ancient Zoroastrian rulers continued to be celebrated by ordinary people as well as royalty even after the advent of Islam. While many Zoroastrian festival faded away from Iran, the Persian New Year festival of Nowruz continued its uninterrupted patronage by the Iranian Muslim royalty and ordinary Iranian people.

The festival of Nowruz is widely celebrated by Shia communities all over the world but it is not restricted to any one particular Islamic sect. The festival is also the most important secular cultural celebrations among Sunni Muslim communities of Central Asian nations like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, where it is marked by preparation of special feasts and days of widescale music and dance by ordinary people as well as that organized on grand scale by government on na-

tional level that includes parades. Similarly, the Pashtun Sunni Muslim community of Afghanistan and Pakistan also celebrates this festival by feasting, dancing and singing.

The festival is also celebrated by Chinese Turkic Uyghur Sunni Muslim community from Xinjiang (East Turkestan) province and Kurdish Sunni Muslim community in Iraq and Turkey, where it's widescale celebrations has been revived by ethnic Kurds of younger generation to take pride in their glorious historic cultural legacy.

Even in Kashmir valley the Muslim community, especially Kashmir valley's Shia community celebrates Nowruz on a big scale by preparing special meals of fish and lotus stem (Nadru), wearing new clothes, frequenting Kashmir's famed gardens, parks and taking family tours on shikaras and most importantly planting new trees. It is a way of celebrating man's ties with nature and thanking God and mother earth for its limitless bounty.

The festival because of its secular and pre-Islamic origin has come under attack from conservative and orthodox religious elements, who have declared the festival as un-Islamic, but most countries including Iran, Central Asian Sunni countries and Afghanistan has largely ignored these dictates and Muslim communities in these countries celebrate it widely almost on the scale of celebrating two Eids as part of paying tribute to their historic cultural legacy and heritage. Given the cultural significance of this festival across Central and South Asian nations, the UN also declared the marking of 'International Nowruz Day' as a cultural legacy of entire humanity

In Kashmir valley, the significance of Nowruz or Navreh lies in the age old secular spirit of Kashmiriyat, where Hindu Shaivite and Sufi Islam as well as Shia and Sunni brotherhood all came together to welcome the advent of spring after months of harsh winter in a non-religious manner in the true spirit of one Koshurness that encompasses all religions and sects of Kashmir. It is a pity that the celebrations of this wonderful festival that is an important part of Kashmiri culture has scaled down in recent times due to political turmoil. It is high time that, we the people of Kashmir once again strive to revive this amazing secular festival that marks the celebrations of the beauty of Kashmir and the communal and sectarian harmony of Kashmiri people that is the real hallmark of Kashmiriyat.

(Javed Beigh is State Secretary Jammu and Kashmir People's Democratic Front).



## Even polls don't change fortunes of these graffiti artists in TN

COME election time and graffiti artists across Tamil Nadu would be richer with loads of work, but those good old days are gone as far as the graffiti artists of the southern state are concerned this time.

John Samuel, a graffiti artist in Coimbatore, told IANS, "We used to get a lot of work during elections and that was the time when we settled all our financial commitments, but now we are short of work. There are two reasons behind this -- firstly, the technological advancement and use of social media, and secondly, the Model Code of Conduct in Tamil Nadu which prevents graffiti campaigns on walls in urban areas. We now have to scout for villages. It's less work and we are hard pressed."

Samuel (48) has been in the business of wall graffiti since the past 25 years and has a small studio at the Avinashi road in Coimbatore. However, he said that he is now slowly migrating to social media campaigns to survive in the industry.

The electoral officer of Tamil Nadu has banned wall paintings and graffiti in the urban centres of the state, leading to lesser work for the artists.

Muruganandan, a graffiti artist at Egmore, is also having a tough time. "We were expecting good work as lots of political parties are now in the fray, including the AIADMK, DMK, BJP, MNM, AMMK, DMDK and several other parties, but the work flow is less and its mainly owing to the Election Commission's order banning wall graffiti in the urban areas."

Muruganandan, however, said that he is going to the rural areas of Tamil Nadu along with his fellow workers where they have managed to get some small work which will help them survive the tide.

The graffiti artists used to charge anything from Rs 150-300 for drawing a symbol while full wall paintings cost much more. Each artist used to earn anything between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh, provided they got work during election time.

Muruganandan said, "It seems that the good times are over and this system will be in place in the coming years also. We have to shift to some other areas for survival. I am trying to come to terms with social media but its difficult at this point of time."

The Secretary of DMK's Kanyakumari unit, M.R. Velmurugan, told IANS, "Graffiti on walls gave a feel of elections and without these the elections are turning dull. Earlier, the popularity and presence of a candidate was measured by the number of walls booked and written in his name. But with changing times and new rules coming up, the political parties are also evolving and switching over to social media campaigns." (IANS)



## Assam river island voters push for development

SUJEET KUMAR

VOTERS in the world's largest river island of Majuli have been rallying behind Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, who is seeking re-election from the tribal stronghold seat which is surrounded by the turbulent waters of the Brahmaputra.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) heavyweight is pitted against three-time Congress MLA Rajib Lochan Pegu. But the Scheduled Tribe-reserved voters of Majuli seem to have decided to bet on Sonowal for "trying to honour his commitment to the people in the past five years".

Majuli will go to the polls in phase-1 on Saturday. The state has a total of 126 seats and the first phase polling will be exercised in 47, that will decide whether the BJP-led alliance retains power or the Congress-led grouping that includes the AIUDF stages a comeback.

"We have decided to vote for Sonowal again, he has done a lot for the people of Majuli since 2016, especially building roads everywhere," said Kamaleswar Noroh from the Naganchuk village.

He belongs to the dominant Mising tribe, the biggest indigenous tribal community in Majuli.

The Mising tribe has a significant vote bank in Majuli and it always supported Congress but they switched their loyalty to the BJP since the last assembly polls.

A hardcore Congress supporter, Srimanta Saikia from Potiyari village, said: "Sarbananda Sonowal had given Majuli the status of district in 2016 which was the long pending demand and thus people have great respect for him but Congress is giving a tough fight to him."

Majuli is shrinking fast as Brahmaputra's erosion has destroyed a significant chunk over the years and it is feared that the river island district will be a part of history by 2050.

Majuli was 880 sq.km in size at the start of 20th century, but now it has been reduced to roughly 350 sq km. The pace of erosion is alarmingly fast in recent years.

Majuli is always a dream destination for tourists mainly for bird watchers but road connectivity is still a huge issue as residents are largely dependent on ferry services to communicate people outside of the world.

The construction work on a two-lane river bridge to connect Jorhat district which was a lifelong demand of Majuli voters is yet to begin. The ruling BJP says that all decks have been cleared for the Majuli-Jorhat bridge and 'bhoomi poojan' has already been performed and construction work would follow soon.

## LETTERS

### Shameful attack on nuns

THE detention of four nuns, by right wing zealots, from a train in UP, on the suspicion of forceful conversion of certain youth, is highly barbaric, unconstitutional and un-Indian. (Forceful conversions? 4 Nuns briefly detained from train in UP, TH1, 25 March). What right these misguided forces have, to insult, intimidate and persecute the nuns, who are respected for their distinguished services to the society in the fields of education, health and charity all over the world?

As we all know, conversion is a false allegation being floated by these right-wingers for taking political mileage. In fact this ancient theory of forceful conversion of gullible poor taking advantage of Article 25 of Indian Constitution by the Christian missionaries, is invented by the rightwing family and is baseless and without any proof, because the stats and ground reality do not match with the allegation. The demographic data shows that Christian population remains 2 per cent since 2021 years right from the days of Apostle Thomas's visit to India about AD 48. Therefore, it is time, India should wake up, deflate the falsehood of forceful conversion and protect the rights of our fellow Christian citizens as guaranteed in the Constitution in the interest of social tranquility and national solidarity.

P H Hema Sagar, Secunderabad

II

THE attack on two nuns over suspicion of forceful religion conversion by Bajrang Dal members is highly condemnable. The home minister Amit Shah gave assurance that the culprits who allegedly harassed nuns will be punished, just because keeping in view that there are elections in Kerala. Lynching of innocent people, frequently attacks on minorities are carried out because of

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BJP government policy that is winning by dividing people to create vote banks. The seeds of hatred is spreading throughout the country and it will take a long time to recover.

Zakir Hussain, Kazipet

III

WE deplore and condemn the harassment, heckling and de-boarding of two nuns and two postulants travelling by train by ABVP members in Uttar Pradesh. We are still a secular democracy to countenance such an atrocity as this one. The incident laid bare the BJP student wing's religious intolerance and demonstrated its inability to curb the tendency to act against people of other religious faiths wantonly. It exposed the hollowness of BJP's posturing of reaching out to the second largest religious minority in Kerala - Christians - in its anxiety to gain a toehold in the state.

It is here worth noting that the so-called upper class Christians in Kerala who claim a superior descent to maintain their identity distinct from Dalit and OBC Christians' may lean towards the Hindutva forces. Race sometimes prevails over religion! It is also here interesting to note that most of the proponents and leading lights of the Hindu Right are products of church-run schools and colleges. The nub of the matter is that the notion of equality of all religions is something that Hindutva outfits find hard to accept. Hindu revivalists are so myopic that the very sight of nuns in their religious attire leads them to the conclusion that they are engaged in 'forced religious conversion'.

G David Milton, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

### Pollution chokes Indians to death

THE fact that 22 out of the world's 30 most polluted cities are in India is alarming and needs urgent attention. Instead of trying to improve the air quality, the leaders of the central government are busy with campaigning in states due to go for polls. The adverse effects of breathing polluted air are well documented. Children are the worst affected, thus ensuring a generation of unhealthy adults. The economic cost of providing health fa-

cilities is going to be enormous and the government is going blissfully around as if it does not matter in the least. We are being slowly poisoned to death and nobody seems to care. Even the people do not place air pollution as a priority. The people must force the political parties to make it an issue at elections. Unfortunately we tend to vote on emotive sentimental issues rather than the real ones that matter most.

Anthony Henriques, Mumbai

### Vaccinate all above 10 yrs

VACCINATIONS are given to all aged above 45 years of age. But people above 60 years old are retired seniors and almost stay indoors, very rarely go outside. Hence it would be better to vaccinate people aged between 10 and 60 years first on priority as they go out every day on different works, who can't sit at home. But it should be done without stopping vaccine to seniors.

Jakka Vijay Kumar, Secunderabad

### Crocodile tears over Lankan issue

PCHIDAMBARAM is ranting against the Centre for abstaining from voting on UNHRC resolution against Sri Lanka and said the development is a "gross betrayal of the Tamil people". He should know that the UNHRC resolutions are non-binding, and it is not possible to haul Sri Lanka up before the International Criminal Court on the basis of the resolution at issue; the UN Security Council has to sanction, and any attempt, at that level, to initiate a war crimes probe against Sri Lanka is bound to be vetoed. It is also a crying shame that a State, like the United Kingdom, which had committed many atrocities in the world - including the biggest genocide in separating India and Pakistan, as well as a co-sponsor in annihilating the Middle Eastern countries, with spurious weapons of mass destruction allegations - is leading the UNHRC resolution against countries like Sri Lanka! The pile-on over Sri Lanka by UNHRC is a blatant use of human rights as a political weapon in the geopolitics of today's world.

J S Acharya, Hyderabad



# ‘CM keen to solve podu land issue’

Minister Satyavathi Rathod says the CM will soon show a permanent solution to the issue

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

MINISTER Satyavathi Rathod said on Thursday that Chief Minister KCR would show a permanent solution to the controversial podu lands issue. She said that the CM had already assured the House that he would take his entire cabinet and officials to the podu lands area and solve all the problems related to them. Adding that nobody should interfere with the podu cultivation by the tribals, she said that the officials were showing overenthusiasm and creating problems to the tribals.

The Minister informed that the government had given land pattas to 94,774 eligible tribals over 3,03,970 acres of land under the ROFR-2008 (Recognition of Forest Rights). They had received 1,84,730 claims related to 63,850 acres of land. She also said that they received 27,990 claims since 2018 related to 98,745 acres of land and added that they found 2,401 claims related to 4,248 acres of land. She insisted that they were allocating pattas to all the eligible beneficiaries. The Minister informed that they had found 9,976 claims related to 40,780 acres of land through DLC and added that 15,558 claims related to the 53,565 acres of land under the DLC. She said that they were planning to appoint a liaison officers to solve all the problems and also working on providing 3 phase power facility to every tribal house by spending Rs 220 crore. Commenting on the recent fire accident in Nallamalla forest, she said that they had rescued the injured tribals and shifted them to Osmania General Hospital for treatment. Three of them succumbed to the injuries and the government paid Rs1 lakh ex gratia each to their families. Rs 50,000 was provided each injured in the incident.

## Diagnostic centres in all districts by April

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

HEALTH Minister Eatala Rajender said that new diagnostic centres in various district hospitals across the State would be started soon. As many as 18 diagnostic centres would be set up by April this year. The Minister was responding to the queries raised by his fellow Legislative Members during the Assembly session on Thursday. He said the government hospitals have diagnostic facilities as per standards. The State already has two major centres in Hyderabad and Siddipet districts

while a total of 327 centres are active in Hyderabad which have facilities for 60 types of tests including CBP and sugar free of cost. Not only pathology labs but also the eight radiology labs were set up in various locations under GHMC limits in which Xray, ECG, and Ultrasound were being done and the response was excellent.

The Minister informed that the diagnostic centres were being set up across the State with the aim of providing treatment free of cost to the poor. They can be used to diagnose diseases at an early stage. A diagnostic centre in Hyderabad with state-of-the-art fa-

cilities has been set up at Narayanaguda as many as 5,000 samples per day are being collected from these Basti Dawakhana, urban PHCs. The reports were being provided online and on mobiles, he added.

Responding to the request by the Legislative Member M Anand about providing labs for breast and cervical cancer test in the state, the Health Minister noted that the cancer cases are increasing in Telangana and labs for Mammogram test would come up in coming days at AIIMS and CVC Vellore will be the nodal hospital for those tests.

## House to be adjourned sine die today

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

THE 10-day budget session of Telangana Assembly would be ending on Friday as the House would be adjourned sine die. The budget sessions of the Assembly were started on March 15 with the Governor's Address. Finance Minister T Harish Rao presented an annual budget amounting to Rs 2.30 lakh crore on March 18. The House would take up discussion and pass the Appropriation Bill on Friday. The session was held following strict Covid19 protocols as the visitors were allowed only after getting tested and only with negative reports were allowed to enter the House. During the session, the House paid tributes to former members including Nomula Narasimhaiah, Naini Narasimha Reddy and others.

The House passed bills including enhancing the pensions of public representatives like MLAs and MLCs. The House also passed a bill pertaining to increasing the retirement age of the government employees from 58 to 61. The House discussed demands of various departments till Thursday.



## KTR flags off 325 Swachh vehicles

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

MUNICIPAL Administration and Urban Development (MAUD) Minister KT Rama Rao on Thursday flagged off new 325 Swachh vans at Necklace Road along with Animal Husbandry Minister T Srinivas Yadav and officials.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister asked the people to participate in the Swachh drive voluntarily. "Keep your premises clean and cooperate with the government and GHMC in the upkeep of the areas and streets," he exhorted.

Rama Rao said that a fleet of 2,500 Swachh vehicles are working in the GHMC premises and the government plans to acquire more, he said. The minister said that the government and GHMC

alone cannot implement the Swachh programme fruitfully. So, the people's participation is a must for the maintenance of a clean and green society. "Our aim is to get fresh air and environment around filled in green to hit the pollution," he said.

The minister asked the people to keep their surroundings clean and ensure that diseases do not spread. The government is committed to providing necessary support in this regard and public participation is a must for any programme to be a success, he said.

The minister said another 650 vehicles would be added soon for the purpose and ensure that the garbage is not piled up on streets and residential locations. Of this, half were started on Thursday and the rest would be rolled out in near future, he added.

“Keep your premises clean and cooperate with the government and GHMC in the upkeep of the areas and streets,” he exhorted

### VSP IN PARLIAMENT

## YSRCP's fight makes no impact

- Compared to the vociferous protests by the party MPs for SCS in the past when TDP was part of NDA, the recent protests on steel plant in the House look tame and half-hearted
- Though YSRCP assured the steel plant unions that it will prevent privatisation, the proceedings in Parliament clearly show that the Centre was completely unperturbed by YSRCP's protests
- Union Ministers repeatedly declared that there is no going back on privatisation and the loss-making plant will be privatised

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

BUDGET session of Parliament is the best bet to highlight issues and problems of any state or region. The move to privatise the RINL (Visakhapatnam steel plant) is an issue serious enough for the state government to take up with the Centre.

Any political party with a good number of MPs strategise its fight for their demands properly and raises the matter in Parliament. With its strength in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, the



YSRCP MPs submit a memorandum to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman against privatisation of VSP (file picture)

YSRCP could have done a better job rather than mere mentioning of the matter or staging a walkout in the end.

Compare the whimper of a protest with at least the one for seeking the Special Category Status (SCS) for Andhra Pradesh in the past. The YSRCP MPs confronted the BJP at every turn of the session in raising the demand vociferously. From display of placards to protests outside the Parliament, the YSRCP tried its best to embarrass the ruling BJP and the NDA, of which the TDP was a partner for a good period.

The protests culminated in resignations of the five YSRCP MPs over the issue and the then Speaker, Sumitra Majahan, accepted the same finally. Of course, the same was termed as hogwash by the TDP which found itself in not so comfortable corner in this regard.

All the then MPs, P V Mithun

Reddy, Y S Avinash Reddy, Y V Subba Reddy, V Varaprasad Rao and YSRCP floor leader M Rajmohan Reddy, were among those who quit their positions.

The SCS could not be conferred on AP because the 14th Finance Commissioner had ruled it out, the Centre had consistently claimed (it is doing so even now despite the fact that the commission never mentioned it).

As for the RINL, the YSRCP which is in power in the state now, promised to the steel plant workers that it would fight tooth and nail the same. Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy had also written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking a rethink on the issue of RINL, Visakhapatnam.

The steel plant unions had been assured by the YSRCP leaders that they would prevent the privatisation of the plant. However, the proceedings in the

Parliament clearly indicate that the stronger and firmer voice was that of the Centre but not that of the YSRCP in this case. The Centre had categorically ruled out a rethink and reiterated that the "loss making" plant would face the sword. In addition, there was no effort on part of the YSRCP to drum up support from the Opposition in the House.

YSRCP knows for sure that the Centre had always been unkind to Andhra Pradesh. Be it in implementing the promises of the bifurcation times or in sanctioning the much sought after and one of the most justifiable demands of SCS, the Centre had always arm twisted the State and its government.

The TDP had paid heavily for the Centre's doublespeak in the elections of 2019 despite being the BJP's ally for a long time of its tenure.

Now that the session is over, the state government has little choice of taking up the issue energetically. It can only either join or allow the protests to continue and can instead declare support to anti-Centre programmes like bandhs, etc.,

The YSRCP's image has only taken a beating as far as RINL is concerned. The trust of the people with regard to RINL has taken a beating.

YSRCP has simply failed in making out the steel plant's case and also has failed in drawing national attention to it.

### IMPROVING EDU STANDARDS

## Govt cancels self-exams in autonomous colleges

- The move is aimed at improving education standards and prevent irregularities
- In a review on autonomous colleges and Jagananna Vidya Deevena held by CM, it has been decided that JNTU will set examination papers and conduct valuation for both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges
- CM says fee reimbursement as part of Vidya Deevena will be made on April 9 and Vasati Deevena on April 27

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

AS part of efforts to effect drastic changes in education system, the state government has decided to cancel self-examination system in autonomous colleges. Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy conducted a review on education system and Jagananna Vidya Deevena here on Thursday.

He said every student should come out of college with sufficient knowledge to face global competition.

As part of the decision to improve education standards, the government cancelled the self



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy reviewing autonomous colleges and Jagananna Vidya Deevena at Tadepalli on Thursday

examination system in autonomous colleges and entrusted the responsibility of conducting exams to JNTU. The JNTU will prepare examination papers and conduct valuation for both autonomous and non-autonomous colleges. The measures were taken to prevent irregularities in examination system.

The Chief Minister directed the officials to study the education patterns in development countries. He specially mentioned the need to establishing a degree college in Visakhapatnam with preferred subjects in Arts.

Reviewing Jaganna Vidya Deevena and Vasati Deevena, the Chief Minister said fee reimbursement as part of Vidya Deevena will be made on April 9 and Vasati Deevena on April 27 benefiting 10 lakh students.

The officials said there was a significant rise in admissions in degree colleges which reached 50,000. The admissions in degree colleges have increased to 2.70 lakh this year compared with 2.2 lakh last year.

The Chief Minister asked the officials to prepare a calendar for filling vacant posts. He directed authorities to release funds for improving infrastructure at IIITs at Ongole and Srikakulam.

Minister for education A Suresh, special chief secretary higher education Satish Chandra, AP State Council for Higher Education chairman K Hemachandra Reddy were present.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister asked the officials to prepare a calendar by Ugadi to fill vacant posts, including 6,000 in police department, this year.

## Peddireddi rubbishes TDP allegations on sand tender

- Says it was TDP leaders who encouraged sand mafia during their rule
- Wonders how can the Oppn leaders allege 'thousands of crores' of corruption when the entire transaction value of sand in a year is Rs 950 cr, out of which Rs 765 cr will be paid by the company to the govt

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

SLAMMING Opposition TDP for levelling "baseless" allegations against the government regarding sand tender process, panchayat raj minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy said it was TDP leaders, who encouraged sand mafia in the previous government in the name of free sand policy.

Speaking to media at party central office at Tadepalli on Thursday, the minister said

the state government has brought new sand policy ensuring transparency, leaving no scope for corruption and TDP leaders are unable to digest it.

He said the government has introduced new sand policy to curb illegal sand transportation and black-market sales and APMDCL (AP Mining Development Corporation) was entrusted with the task of sand mining and supply. Multiple issues were reported during the implemen-



Panchayat Raj Minister Peddireddi Ramachandra Reddy addressing a press conference at YSRCP central office in Tadepalli on Thursday

tation of the policy and a Cabinet sub committee was constituted to formulate and implement corrective measures.

He said the committee submitted the report which was made public for citizens to refer and suggest any changes. The government has made changes aiming at eradicating corruption, ensuring transparency, environmental protection, adequate supply at affordable prices. The task of selecting the contractor

has been entrusted to MSTC, a Central government agency. He said the government had also decided to collect Rs 120 crore as bid security for the participation of skilled, efficient, and experienced companies and tenders were also called online. He said MSTC has selected Jaiprakash Power Ventures Limited (JPVL) and it was given target of supplying two crore tonnes of sand.

Ramachandra Reddy said with the price capped at Rs

475 per tonne, the total value on this contract is not more than Rs 950 crore, out of which the company will have to pay Rs 765 crore to the government and questioned TDP leaders how there would be "thousands of crores" of corruption in it. He asked why TDP leaders have not participated in open tender process if there is crores of profit in it. He also said how would Jaypee group company deposited Rs 120 crore if the company is bankrupt.



# Mystery woman baffles investigators; made scapegoat: Waze

NIA is also ascertaining 5 black coloured bags which Vaze was seen carrying while entering the hotel during his stay

MUMBAI

EXACTLY a month after an SUV Scorpio was found parked outside Antilia, the home of industrialist Mukesh Ambani, the National Investigation Agency is now tracking a 'mystery woman' accompanying the prime accused Sachin Vaze to a five-star hotel in south Mumbai.

Vaze, currently in NIA custody, was seen entering the hotel where he spent at least five days in mid-February using some fake identity papers and the woman close behind him was noticed, baffling the investigators, official sources said.

Though her antecedents are not clear, she is reportedly from Gujarat and may have been involved in some other case being probed by the

Mumbai Crime Branch's elite Crime Intelligence Unit (CIU).

The NIA is also ascertaining five black coloured bags which Vaze was seen carrying while entering the hotel during his stay from February 16, hours after Thane businessman Mansukh Hiren lodged a complaint of his missing SUV Scorpio.

The current whereabouts of the bags are not known, but the NIA is quizzing the hotel staffers and others to trace them and their contents.

As part of the ongoing probe into the SUV and Hiren cases, the NIA is scanning all persons who had met or spoken with Vaze from mid-February till his arrest, and the mystery woman may be questioned shortly.

A special court here on Thursday extended the



Sachin Vaze

NIA custody of suspended police officer Sachin Vaze, arrested in connection with the recovery of explosives- laden vehicle near industrialist Mukesh Ambani's house, till April 3. He had nothing to do with the crime and had been made a scapegoat, he told the special NIA court. Waze (49), an assistant police inspector with Mumbai crime branch, was arrested on March 13 by the National Investigation agency.

He was produced before the court after his earlier remand expired. The NIA, which has invoked the stringent provisions of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) against Waze, sought his custody for another 15 days.

"I have been made a scapegoat and have nothing to do with the case," Waze told judge P R Sitre

during the hearing.

"I was investigating officer of the case for one and a half days, and did whatever I could in that capacity. But there was suddenly change in some plan somewhere. I went to the NIA office on my own and was arrested," the police officer said, adding he had not confessed to anything.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, the NIA lawyer, told court that everything was shocked to find that a policeman was involved in the crime. During the probe, the NIA recovered 62 bullets from his house and it needed to probe why they were kept there, Singh said.

The police department had issued Waze 30 bullets of which only five were recovered, and the rest were yet to be found, the ASG added.

# 'Current Covid wave may last 100 days'

NEW DELHI

India is currently seeing a spike in daily coronavirus cases with over 50,000 new infections were reported over the past 24 hours. The entire duration of second wave might last up to 100 days counted from 15 February, says a report from SBI's research team, which is authored by Soumya Kanti Ghosh, the bank's chief economic adviser. The report said that India is better placed this time to control the pandemic with vaccinations gaining pace.

Increasing the speed of vaccination is the only way to win the battle against COVID-19 pandemic, the report said.

The situation in Mumbai, which has broken all pandemic records this past week in terms of daily infections, is worsening every day and is in the critical stage right now. Mumbai Mayor Kishori Pednekar, said that people's consistent and complete

disregard to norms is forcing them to consider imposing a lockdown or at least a night curfew.

She also said that most cases are being reported from highrises and residents are refusing to adhere to quarantine and isolation norms which is resulting in many of these structures becoming containment zones.

After featuring on the seventh spot in the list of the top 10 worst-affected cities in India, Bengaluru is readying for some strict curbs.

Mewanwhile, the United States surpassed 30 million cases even as the country is making progress on the number of vaccinations.

While daily new infections have decreased significantly from their peak in January, new cases remain high at around 55,000 cases per day, while 1,000 people are dying every day despite a decline in casualties due to vaccinations, reported The Hill.



File pic: Masks placed on a statue, depicting a mother and child, to spread awareness against Covid-19 in Kolkata

# Should be completely back to normal by 2022-end: Bill Gates on pandemic

**WARSAW:** The world should be back to normal by the end of 2022 thanks to COVID-19 vaccines, Bill Gates said in an interview for Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza and television broadcaster TVN24.

"This is an incredible tragedy," the Microsoft co-founder said on the pandemic, adding that the only good news was the access to vaccines.

"By the end of 2022 we should be basically com-

pletely back to normal," Gates said.

Gates, a billionaire who stepped down as chairman of Microsoft Corp in 2014, has through his philanthropic Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation committed at least \$1.75 billion to the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. That includes support for some makers of vaccines, diagnostics and potential treatments.

# '1K deaths a day in next 2 weeks in Maharashtra'

MUMBAI

ACTIVE Covid-19 cases in Maharashtra could top 3 lakh by April 4 with Pune district recording the highest number of active infections (61,125) followed by Nagpur (47,707) and Mumbai (32,927), said the state health department. Several districts are likely to face a shortage in treatment facilities. Nagpur and Thane could be among the most-affected district unless they amp up their facilities, it said.

The death toll could also rise above 64,000 in next 11 days. Projections of the public health department were based on the current 1% weekly average growth rate of infections, and has been shared with all districts in the state.

Using a cumulative case fatality rate of 2.27%, the department predicted 64,613 possible mortalities against a total caseload of 28,24,382, indicating a projection of up to 1,000 deaths a day over the next two weeks, said a report.

Actor-model Milind Soman on Thursday said he has tested

positive for coronavirus and is currently under quarantine.

The 55-year-old actor shared his health update on Twitter. "Tested positive. #Quarantine," Soman wrote. The actor was last seen on the ALTBalaji and ZEE5 series "Paurashpur", which started streaming in December.

Earlier in the day, actor R Madhavan also said he has tested positive for COVID-19, adding he was "recovering well".

Recently, several other Bollywood celebrities, including Kartik Aaryan, Manoj Bajpayee and Satish Kaushik contracted the virus.

Actor Ranbir Kapoor has recovered from COVID-19 and is doing well, his paternal uncle and veteran actor Randhir Kapoor said on Thursday.

On March 9, Ranbir Kapoor's actor-mother Neetu Kapoor had informed his fans that the 38-year-old actor had tested positive for the virus and was under self quarantine. "Ranbir is absolutely fine now. He is alright. I have met him," Randhir Kapoor told PTI.

# Cops oppose Mehbooba's passport renewal

SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir Police has opposed giving passport to former CM Mehbooba Mufti citing "adverse report" against her, officials said.

A report has been submitted to the J&K High Court which is hearing a petition filed by Mehbooba over the delay in clearing her passport application. Mehbooba had applied for a fresh passport in December last year after the previous one expired on May 31, but the application has not been cleared till date in the absence of a police verification report.

The officials said that "an adverse report" has been filed against her by the CID, but refused to elaborate saying the matter would be taken up before the high court. Hearing the petition on March 23, Additional Solicitor General T M Shamsi, representing the Ministry of External Affairs and the Regional Passport office, sought a short adjournment after the counsel representing the Jammu and Kashmir CID informed Justice Ali Mohammed Maqar that the verification report on her passport application had been submitted on March 18. However, Shamsi informed the court that he had received a communication from the Passport Officer in Srinagar on March 22 and the contents "reveal that the verification of the petitioner is under process and as soon as verification process is completed, the requisite report will be submitted immediately for further course of action".

# Mithun leads mega roadshows in Bengal

KOLKATA

BOLLYWOOD star Mithun Chakraborty led two mega roadshows in the Jungle Mahal region of Bengal in support of the BJP candidates. Chakraborty, who was in a white kurta with a long saffron scarf loosely wrapped around his neck, led the first roadshow in Saltora in Bankura, while the second one was in Keshiary in the Paschim Medinipur. Amid chants of 'Jai Shri Ram', Chakraborty stood on a MUV, decked with marigold, and greeted the enthused supporters. People went atop their houses and gathered near Chakraborty's car to have one look at the superstar even as shouts of "guru guru" were ringing in the air.

Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Sheikh Alam's purported remarks that "four Pakistan" can be created if India's "30% Muslims come together" drew flak from the BJP on Thursday.

BJP leader Amit Malviya, who is the party's co-incharge for West Bengal, tweeted a video that showed Alam purportedly making the controversial statements.

According to Malviya, Alam made the remarks at "Basa para, Nanor" in Birbhum assembly constituency. "...He obviously owes his allegiance to (chief minister) Mamata Banerjee... Does she endorse this position?" Malviya asked in a tweet.

"TMC leaders like Sheikh Alam have the audacity to dream of 4 Pakistan because of Mamata Banerjee's brazen appeasement politics over the last 10 years. She reduced the majority community in WB to second grade citizens, where they had to seek court approval even for Durga visarjan!" he said in another tweet. BJP's Pandabeswar candidate Jitendra Tiwari was show-caused by the Election Commission for promising voters a free trip to the temple of Lord Ram in Ayodhya if elected, officials said on Thursday.



BJP candidate from Nemon constituency Kumanam Rajasekharan performs 'Thulabharam' ceremony at Shiva Temple on Tuesday

# Chandy gets clean chit in sex scam

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM:** Two-time former CM Oommen Chandy, who is busy campaigning for the April 6 Assembly elections, on Thursday got a major boost when a Crime Branch Police report gave him a clean chit on the allegations raised by the solar scam accused, that she was sexually abused by the former. The Crime Branch wing of the Kerala Police had probed this case after the victim raised a complaint and on detailed probe, it has found out that the allegations raised by her had no evidence to corroborate her complaint. This clean chit has been intimated to the Union Home Minister, as this case last year was referred by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan-led government to the Centre for a CBI probe.

# Ultimate betrayal: Kamal Haasan

**CHENNAI:** Superstar turned politician and chief of Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) Kamal Haasan said India not voting in the resolution against Sri Lanka at the 46th General Council of the UNHRC was "ultimate betrayal". He said in a tweet, "Six countries, including the UK had called on the United Nations to hold a proper inquiry into Sri Lanka's human rights abuses and moved a resolution in the UN Human Rights Council against the Sri Lankan government. "The demand of the Tamil diaspora is to bring Sri Lanka before the International Court of Justice and punish them for war crimes. While the world Tamil's were expecting India to support and vote against Sri Lanka in the resolution, we abstained from voting..

# TMC spends more than BJP as Bengal tops in FB Ads

KOLKATA: Among the four states and one union territory that are going to polls from March 27, West Bengal emerged as the topper in spending for political advertisements on Facebook this year, according to data available with the social media platform.

Besides West Bengal, assembly elections will be held in three other states Assam, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and in the union territory of Puducherry.

The Facebook ad spend of the Trinamool Congress which seeks to return to power in West Bengal for the third consecutive term, exceeds that of the BJP, the main rival of the Mamata Banerjee-led party, in 90 days till March 22, the data revealed. During the period, political parties of West Bengal spent about Rs 3.74 crore on poll-related campaigns which fall under Facebook's advertisement category of 'social issues, election or politics'.

In ad spend under this category, West Bengal is followed by Tamil Nadu (Rs 3.3 crore), Assam (Rs 61.77 lakh), Kerala (Rs 38.86 lakh) and Puducherry (Rs 3.34 lakh) during the period, as per the data.

The Trinamool Congress has spent the maximum amount among parties, around Rs 1.69 crore, of West Bengal during the period on campaigns such as 'Banglar Garbo Mamata' (Bengal's pride Mamata). It also has constituency level versions such as 'Dum Dum-er Garbo Mamata'.

The TMC's digital advertisements are handled by the Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) which runs other campaigns also for the party on the social media platform.



# Two CRPF personnel killed in militant attack

SRINAGAR

Two CRPF personnel were killed and two jawans sustained injuries in a militant attack in Lawaypora on the outskirts of Srinagar on Thursday, police said. The militants opened fire on the CRPF personnel in Lawaypora in the Parimpora police station area in Jammu and Kashmir, a police official said. Four Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were injured in the attack and were rushed to a nearby private hospital, where a sub-inspector was declared dead on arrival, the official said. He said the injured personnel were moved to a military hospital here, where a constable succumbed to injuries. The deceased have been identified as sub-inspector Manga Ram Dev Barman and constable Ashok Kumar.

# Terror infrastructure in Pakistan remains intact, says Naravane

NEW DELHI

THE Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir has been silent for the first time in around five to six years as not a single shot was fired in March, Army Chief Gen M M Naravane said on Thursday referring to the recent commitment by Indian and Pakistani militaries to observe ceasefire in the region.

The Army Chief, however, said the terror infrastructure including terrorist launch-pads on the Pakistani side remained intact, asserting that it cannot be business as usual unless the neighbouring country stops supporting terrorism. Speaking at the India Economic Conclave, Gen Naravane said he was optimistic that the cease-

fire will hold as the Pakistan Army was on board. "I am glad to inform that in the whole month of March, we have not had a single shot fired at the Line of Control (LoC) barring an odd incident. It is for the first time in about five or six years that the LoC has been silent. That really bodes well for the future," he said. Last month, the Indian and Pakistani armies recommitted themselves to the 2003 ceasefire agreement on the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir.

The return to the ceasefire was agreed upon by the director generals of military operations of the two countries. "Our core issue is that they have to stop support to terrorism. Unless they stop that it cannot be business as usual," Gen Naravane said.



Army Chief Gen M M Naravane

# Situation in Ladakh eased distinctly: China

BEIJING

THE Chinese military on Thursday said the situation at eastern Ladakh has "eased distinctly" thanks to the joint efforts with India on the disengagement of troops from the Pangong Lake area but gave no indication about when the pull out will take place from the remaining areas along the Line of Actual Control.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two countries had completed withdrawal of troops and weapons from the North and South banks of Pangong Lake last month in line with an agreement on disengagement.

But the disengagement is yet to take place in remaining areas along the LAC. The Indian Army has been pitching for a faster disengagement process in areas like Hot Springs, Gogra and Depsang to bring down tension in the mountainous region.

At present, China and India have disengaged front-line troops in the Pangong Lake area and both countries have positively commented on the current moves, Senior Colonel Ren Guoqiang, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defence said at an online media briefing.

"Thanks to the joint efforts made by China and India, the situation in the border area has been eased distinctly," he said.





## TODAY'S QUOTE

### India close to 170 GW of renewable energy

170.14 GW capacity has either been installed or under various stages of implementation including a total of 92.97 GW renewable energy capacity (excluding large hydro), which has been cumulatively installed as on February 28, 2021. Further, a capacity of 50.15 GW is under various stages of under-implementation, and a capacity of 27.02 GW is under bidding process

— RK Singh, Union Power Minister



## SOCIAL SECURITY

### ESIC adds 11.55L members in Jan

Around 11.55 lakh new members joined the ESIC-run social security scheme in January 2021 as against 12.22 lakh in the previous month, according to National Statistical Office (NSO). Gross new enrolments with the ESIC were 8.87 lakh in June 2020, 4.89 lakh in May and 2.63 lakh in April, showing the increase in enrolments after easing of the lockdown

## FOREX (buy rates in ₹)

US Dollar	73.35	South	
Euro	86.65	African Rand	5.61
UAE Dirham	20.36	Hong Kong Dollar	10.75
Thai Baht	2.57	Japanese Yen	0.77
British Pound	100.65	New Zealand Dollar	51.21
Australian Dollar	55.81	Saudi Riyal	21.29
Canadian Dollar	58.43	Swedish Krona	9.68
Swiss Franc	78.41	Singapore Dollar	55.01

DELHI FRIDAY 26 MARCH 2021

## BIZ BRIEFS

### ABD relaunches product

Allied Blenders and Distillers Pvt. Ltd. (ABD) has re-launched a product in the deluxe segment. Delivering a smooth palate experience, while bringing together a blend of the finest Indian grains, OC Blue will now be positioned with a creative communication, a unique product superiority story and a refreshing pack to appeal to its desired target audience. OC aims to inspire people to hold their dreams and aspirations close to their hearts and be unstoppable, through their expression Rok Sake Toh Rokle. Anupam Bokey, Chief Marketing Officer, Allied Blenders and Distillers Pvt. Ltd. said: "The new communication on OC Blue embodies the unstoppable spirit of today's youth to achieve their dreams by overcoming societal naysayers and all other challenges encountered."

### Crocs offers Holi collection

Crocs offers classic Holi collection which are easy to clean, lightweight and comfortable. The iconic Croslite technology provides extra foam cushioning allowing one to stay comfortable for long hours without stopping the fun. The comfortable and stylish collection can be personalised to go with one's mood and creativity, providing that extra pop of colour to Holi outfit with jibbitz charms. The jibbitz charms are fun little images, letters, sayings, characters, and bits of pop culture mounted on a post to pop into the holes of Crocs classics. With a tight fit, jibbitz charms will stay put, allowing customer to show off hobbies, sense of humor, or latest obsession on feet.

### MetLife's initiative

MetLife Foundation has announced that it is working with multiple non-profit organisations to help mitigate the health and financial impacts of Covid-19 and empower communities across India. SEEDS India used financial support from MetLife Foundation to provide dry rations, hygiene kits and financial relief to more than 2,800 families across Mumbai, Bangalore, Wayanad, Dehradun and Haridwar. MetLife Foundation worked with Grameen Foundation India to offer unconditional cash transfers to 1,225 vulnerable households across Bihar, Nawada district and Vidarbha in Maharashtra. Krishna Thacker, Director, Asia Region for MetLife Foundation, said: "At MetLife Foundation, our aim is to help build stronger communities. By partnering with these credible organisations in India to identify impactful ways to help the most affected by Covid-19."

### India Housing opens AP unit

Andhra Pradesh Government has launched the State chapter of India Housing Forum jointly by Habitat for Humanity India and AP State Housing Corporation. The India Housing Forum, AP chapter is supported by Mahindra Home Finance, Ultratech Cement Private Ltd, Balmer Lawrie & Company Ltd, Svatantira Micro Housing Finance Corporation Limited, Roca Parryware, ESAF Small Finance Bank and Habitat for Humanity's Terwilliger Center for Innovation in Shelter. "The behemoth initiative of Navaratnalu Pedalandariki Illu envisioned by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy is one of the largest comprehensive programmes in the world to provide housing for over three million families from the economically weaker sections," said Cherukuvada Sri Ranganadha Raju, Minister for Housing.

## BANKING REGULATOR LISTS SLEW OF MEASURES FOR BOOSTING MKT MORALE

# RBI STICKS TO 10.5% GROWTH FORECAST

NEW DELHI

SHOWING confidence on economic recovery in India, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das said that the growth projection of 10.5 per cent for the next financial year (2021-22) would not have to be revised given the strong economic recovery of the country.

Speaking at the India Economic Conclave, Das said that now the world knows the dangers of the Covid-19 pandemic and it is not as in the case of 2020 when there was complete uncertainty.

"The revival of economic activity which has happened, should continue unabated going forward. My understanding and our preliminary analysis show that the growth rate in next year, which is at 10.5 per cent which we had given could not require, I repeat, would not require a downward revision," he said. On the recent frenzy bond market and the surge in the bond yields globally, the Governor cautioned that disorderly yield curve evolution will act as an impediment for growth and will undermine the process of economic recovery, not just in India but globally.

Regarding the proposed privatisation of state-run banks, Das said that the central bank is discussing the privatisation of public sector banks with the centre, adding that the process will move on.

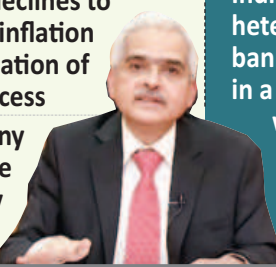
He said that a healthy banking

Assures orderly yields curve to ease standoff between RBI and Bond mkt; voices concern over cryptocurrencies; rules out possible lockdowns

## TAKING IT TO THE BANK

● Governor declines to comment on the inflation trajectory privatisation of PSBs in process

● RBI never used any alphabet to denote the recovery



India will have heterogeneous banking sector in a decade with four types of banks — Das

sector, with a strong capital base and ethics-driven governance remained a policy priority.

The governor affirmed the central bank's commitment to use all its policy tools to facilitate the economic revival from the debilitating impact of the pandemic while ensuring price and financial stability. It can be noted that after deep rate cuts initially, the RBI has been focusing on a slew of measures uncharacteristic policy measures to help the economic revival as inflation - its primary objective - became into a point of concern. Das declined to comment on the inflation trajectory he sees going ahead, asking everybody to wait for the resolution of the Monetary Policy Committee early next month which will have the RBI's outlook.

## Bond market row

When asked about the bond market, Das said the central bank and the market are in no fight and added that the relationship should be non-combative. He, however, added that the RBI would like for an orderly evolution of the yields curve and no sudden spikes. The RBI does not want excessive volatilities in the forex market and has been accumulating reserves to protect against the possible impact of the withdrawal of the stimulus measures in advanced economies, Das said. At present, India's forex reserves are sufficient to cover for 18 months of imports but there is no level of the reserves which the RBI is tracking, Das said, committing to keep the rupee stable.

## Awaiting decision on Cryptocurrencies

The Reserve Bank has 'major concerns' on the cryptocurrencies traded in the market and has conveyed the same to the government, said Das. Underlining that both the government and the RBI are committed to financial stability, Das said there are no differences between the central bank and the Finance Ministry on the matter, and we should now await the final decision on the matter from the Centre.

## Making banks competitive

The Reserve Bank foresees a "competitive, efficient and heterogeneous" banking sector with four distinct sets of banks dominating the landscape over the next decade, Das said.

There will be large banks having presence across the country and the world, mid-size banks present across the economy, small finance banks/regional rural banks/cooperatives to take care of the small borrowers and digital players, he said. The comments come days after the RBI appointed a panel headed by former Deputy Governor Shyamala Gopinath on bank licences to evaluate applications for universal banks and small finance banks.

# Covid virus woes pull key indices down on BSE

Sensex tanks 740 pts, Nifty falls 224 pts amid F&O expiry

MUMBAI

EQUITY benchmarks crashed for the second straight session on Thursday as a spurt in Covid-19 cases in the country and fears of localised lockdowns triggered an across-the-board selloff.

Bearish global cues and expiry of monthly derivative contracts added to the volatility, traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex slumped 740.19 points or 1.51 per cent to close at 48,440.12. The broader NSE Nifty tanked 224.50 points or 1.54 per cent to 14,324.90. Maruti was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 3.98 per cent, followed by HUL, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Auto, NTPC, Bajaj Finance and UltraTech Cement.

Only four index components managed to close in the green - Dr Reddy's, ICICI Bank, HDFC and L&T, rising

up to 0.74 per cent. "Increased rate of infection across the country and world is creating more pessimism in the market, which has increased today due to monthly expiry. After the stellar rally, the market was on a consolidation stage during the last one month, which amplified post the sudden rise in infection impacting future economic growth."

"The economic fallout in India from the reduction in world GDP growth is likely to be marginal. A fall in the rate of infection through tougher restrictions and pace in vaccination may quickly stabilise the market," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at



Geojit Financial Services. Binod Modi, Head - Strategy at Reliance Securities, said the market capitalisation of domestic market slipped below Rs 200 trillion for the first time after February 3, 2021, resulting in wealth erosion of over Rs 5 trillion in the last two days.

All sectoral indices ended in the red, with BSE telecom, power, auto, energy, utilities and realty indices declining as much as 3.14 per cent. Broader BSE midcap and smallcap indices tumbled up to 2.22 per cent. India saw 53,476 new coronavirus infections in a day, the highest single-day rise so far this year, taking the nationwide Covid-19 tally to 1,17,87,534, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Thursday.

Global markets retreated as investors fretted over the rising Covid-19 cases and the slow pace of vaccination in many countries.

# Parliament passes Bill to set up NaBFID

NEW DELHI

PARLIAMENT on Thursday passed a bill to set up the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) to fund infrastructure projects in India.

The Rajya Sabha passed the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID) Bill 2021 by voice vote on Thursday. The bill was passed in the Lok Sabha on March 23, 2021.

The bill seeks to establish the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development to support the development of long-term non-recourse infrastructure financing in India including development of the bonds and derivatives markets necessary for infrastructure financing and to carry on the business of financing



infrastructure and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

The DFI (Development Finance Institution), called the National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), will be answerable to Parliament.

Replying on the bill in the House, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman explained that the five years' tax break to the DFI or NaBFID is given so that more funds flow to it.

# Petrol, diesel prices fall for 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive day

NEW DELHI

CONSUMERS can heave a sigh of relief as oil marketing companies (OMCs) have finally relented and started reducing the retail price of petrol and diesel after keeping them steady for 24 days in March. This is the second reduction in petrol and diesel prices in as many days in 2021.

Petrol price fell by 21 paise per litre and diesel by 20 paise per litre in Delhi on Thursday. This has brought down the retail price of petrol to Rs 90.78 and diesel to Rs 81.10 a litre respectively in the national capital. Across the country as well the petrol and diesel prices fell with the quantum varying depending on the level of local levies in respective States. In Mumbai and Kolkata, the retail price of petrol fell by 21 and 20 paise per litre respectively and in Chennai by 18 paise per litre on Thursday. For diesel, the prices fell by 19 paise, 20 paise and 22 paise per litre respectively in Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai.

# IRDAI issues directions on fraudulent calls

CHENNAI

INDIA'S insurance sector regulator IRDAI has directed all insurers to register their template of messages with their telecom service providers to control unsolicited and fraudulent messages to policyholders.

Pointing out at the menace of spam calls and messages to policyholders, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has issued the direction.

The IRDAI said the Telecom

Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has notified a regulatory framework in July 2018 for unsolicited calls and messages.

As per TRAI notification, principal entities including insurers have to have to register with their respective telecom service providers, to be allotted a header along with their identity for proper identification of all messages and voice calls.

The IRDAI has directed the insurers to register themselves with their telecom service providers and confirm compliance by on or before April 5.



# TS to promote organic farming

Plans for polytechnic college; Increasing acreage under organic farming around Hyd; Farmers see export potential

DINESH MACHARLA  
HYDERABAD

RECENTLY answering a question about organic farming in the Telangana State assembly, Agricultural Minister Niranjan Reddy said that the State government was planning to establish Polytechnic college for promotion of Organic farming.

The state government has identified that growth potential for individual farmers or group of farmers who tie up with the companies for selling the organic produce in the market or directly deliver the organic foods to customers.

Particularly, in the surroundings of Hyderabad, of late, majority of farmers have taken up organic farming. Many farmers are converting barren lands into organic fields. With the increasing awareness about organic farming, some farmers ended practice of cultivation using pesticides.



However, agriculture experts suggest farmers to follow a scientific procedure for converting the pesticide-infested farmland into organic farm. It takes three years for converting a normal farm land into an organic field. The farmers also need to get the organic certificate from the organisations nominated by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) for exporting and marketing the organic foods within the country. Telangana Organic Cer-

tification Authority (TOCA) in the State gives the organic certification for farmers and trade bodies. TSSOCA does the inspection and certification of agricultural products and food processing by assessing conformity of products with NPOP standards and other international standards. "We give the certification after inspecting the farm field every year from the date land was registered. Even during the conversion period, the farmer has to get certificate for each year. At present, we

have 250 farmers and traders, who are certified by us to do organic farming and related business," said Yogamayi, Organic Evaluator, TSSOCA.

Though there is good development in organic farming, yet no proper facilities are available to the farmers in the State. The farmers find difficulty in selling the cultivated organic products in the market, as they don't find any separate platform for organic foods when compared with general foods.

"The State government should provide separate stalls for organic product vendors in Rythu Bazaars or vegetable markets to differentiate them from the regular vegetable vendors. The government should also establish separate cold storage units in the State for organic products. These steps will benefit the organic farmers and also encourage the other farmers to take up organic farming," said Vemula Satyanarayana, organic farmer, Sri Shiva Sai Nursery.



## NEW DELHI

The Indian rifle team shot 43 in the gold medal showdown to finish behind the Polish team, which scored 47 to grab the top prize. (PTI)

Stokes is also likely to open for Rajasthan Royals in the IPL but the all-rounder said it would have no bearing on where he bats for England in The T20 World Cup. (PTI)

India's Krunal Pandya, KL Rahul and Suryakumar Yadav celebrates the wicket of England's Moeen Ali during the first One Day International match at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, in Pune on Tuesday

**Injured  
India batsman  
Shreyas Iyer has  
left the bio-secure  
bubble here after he was  
ruled out of the ongoing  
ODI series against England  
as well as the entire IPL  
starting next month even as  
he vowed to come back  
stronger. Iyer dislocated his  
left shoulder while fielding  
during the first ODI against  
England on Tuesday and he  
is set to undergo surgery,  
which will rule him out  
of action for a  
minimum four  
months**

Earlier, Ashwini Ponnappa and N. Sikki Reddy reached the women's doubles quarterfinals after receiving a walkover in the second round against Indonesia's Fabiana Kusuma and Amalia Pratiwi. (IANS)

Besides Ankita, the other Indian women in the auction, Rituja Bhosle was taken by Pune Jaguars for Rs 3 lakhs. While each team picked two men's and one women's player at the auction, another male and women's player for each team will emerge from the Talent Days, to be played from June onwards. Besides the owners of the respective 8 teams, co-owners Leander Paes, Rakul Preet Singh, Sonali Bendre Behl and Divya Khosla Kumar were present to select the best players for their respective teams.

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