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SHORT TAKES

WOMAN's VOTER ID
WITH CINESTAR
VENKATESH PHOTODC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 19

Electoral rolls of a village panchayat in Kurnool district have the photograph of cine star Venkatesh against the name of a woman voter.

The actor's picture has come to notice in 31st ward of Kallur village panchayat. Immediately after realising the mistake, district collector G. Veera Pandian directed the RDO to rectify the issue. He also asked the RDO to take action against the BLO responsible for voter enrolment.

Kurnool has the dubious distinction of issuing passports in the name of film stars, underworld dons and so on.

NO INFO LEAK ON
POLLING TRENDS:
POLL PANEL

From Page 1

It mandated that no information should be leaked out on polling trends. It instructed officials to order for recount of votes only in close cases and not where the win margin was in double-digits. The returning officers have been asked to permit recounting of votes only once as per the law. The Commission instructed to position a supervisory officer in sensitive, hyper sensitive and in large gram panchayats in order to ensure recording of the counting process.

Referring to the High Court order that all the concerned officers should implement the directions in letter and spirit, the SEC extended such a facility in sensitive, hyper-sensitive and trouble-prone gram panchayats.

BAD ROADS
BECOME MAIN
ISSUES IN TIRUPATIDC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 19

As the State Election Commission (SEC) announced the date for the civic body elections in the state, bad roads and other urban-woes will be the main issues among the voters in Tirupati – one of the major urban local bodies in the state.

Many residents express their displeasure about the bad roads, which they say are not in good shape. Tirupati is slowly transforming into a smart city with several big projects being implemented, but the city roads – be it a thoroughfare or internal roads, are blighted by alleged civic-body neglect. The potholed roads and overflowing drains during the rainy season are encountered continuously in the city, and citizens complained that officials hardly paid heed to their complaints. With the urban-woes still smouldering, political experts opine that the issues may become a deciding factor in the polls because people may show interest in voting only for an accountable leadership to power.

Tirupati is the first municipal council in Chittoor district formed on 1 April 1886. It underwent many upgrades over the years and became a Municipal Corporation in 2007. With a nearly 4.5 lakh population, the city had spread across 27.44 sq km, with the highest number of 50 wards, which will go to polls on March 10.

However, the city remained without an elected body for the past 14 years due to various reasons and governed by the official machinery. With the absence of an elected civic body, lack of politically accountable leadership and official apathy, the city residents have encountered many urban issues over the years.

“One of the major link roads in the city like Ramalayam road and other internal roads in Korlagunta division has been in bad shape for several years. Even internal roads were dug up many times for various developments, but the civic body never bothered to lay them again. There are no people representatives to hold the officials for what is done or not done in the absence of an elected body. Now, I got a chance to elect my representative, and I'll choose the one who vows to resolve issues”, said Mr S. Sai Kiran Reddy, a resident of Kothapalli.

Another voter – Mr D. Pradeep Kumar, a resident of SV Nagar, echoed similar issues and said the bad roads would be a big issue in the coming elections because they deserve better roads. “We expected that the YSRC party would develop the city infra after coming to power. But, they are concentrating only on smart city projects and neglecting the urban-woes,” he added.

Intra-party politics bane
for TD in VMC elections

Naidu asks Nani to oversee polls in Vijayawada this time

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

Internal group politics within main opposition Telugu Desam are turning out to be a bane for the party in Vijayawada. Separate groups headed by TD MP Kesineni Srinivas, popular as Nani, party MLC Buddha Venkanna, and another leader Nagulmeera have entered into a major tussle for party tickets in the Vijayawada Municipal Corporation (VMC) elections, which is turning out to be a major headache for TD leadership.

Vijayawada city is an important political centre. Its corporation was bagged by Telugu Desam the last time. In an attempt to retain VMC for TDP, party chief N. Chandrababu Naidu has asked MP Nani to oversee the municipal elections in the city this time. Polling will be held for VMC on March 10 and counting of votes will be on March 14.

Last time, Telugu Desam chose Koneru Sridhar of Vijayawada East constituency as the mayor. Thus, TD leaders of cen-

YSRC candidates
speed up campaignDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

The YSRC Congress candidates have speeded up their campaign in Vijayawada city to swing voters in their favour, including by holding door-to-door campaigns. Party's candidate from 28th Division Punuru Likhita is assuring that she will develop Vijayawada city with support of the YSRC government in the coming years.

Dr. Likhita said earlier Telugu Desam government allotted houses to only its party cadres. Not

a single house was allotted to common people. She has assured that YSRC government will allot houses to all eligible without any political bias. She alleged that despite being in power for five years in VMC, TD has not resolved the issues being faced people in Vijayawada.

Like her, YSRC nominees in several other divisions of the city are carrying out door-to-door campaigns seeking votes for the ruling party in the forthcoming Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections.

Telugu Desam. She is a follower of Buddha Venkanna. Taking her by surprise, TD has now announced that K. Siva Sarma will be the TD candidate. As Sarma was formerly with the YSRC, his nomination is now being opposed by certain leaders within the Telugu Desam Party. So much so, when MP Nani came to inaugurate the election office of Siva Sarma, dissident leaders, including Pujitha, accosted the MP and heated arguments ensued between the two groups.

Similarly, there are conflicts within the TDP in other divisions of Vijayawada too. This could hugely impact the party in Vijayawada Municipal Corporation elections, thereby helping YSRC in the civic body polls. MP Nani has, however, maintained that differences of opinion are common within a political party and intra-party issues within the Telugu Desam in various divisions will be resolved soon. He said TD is determined to again emerge winner in VMC with people of Vijayawada continuing to support the party.



Guntur district collector Vivek Yadav, along with others, inspect polling booth in view of 4th phase of gram panchayat elections in Amaravati mandal of Guntur district on Friday.

— DC

Citizens demand better
amenities in GunturDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

Residents are raising their voice for better civic amenities in Guntur Municipal Corporation that is up for civic polls on March 10.

They complain about the incomplete underground drainage works causing severe hardships to them in their daily lives. The roads remain dug up and the pits are left open with gaping holes. There were several instances of pedestrians falling into them and suffering injuries. There were also a few instances of such incidents resulting in deaths, say harried residents.

Fearing safety for their lives, some residents in posh colonies like Vidyannagar got some such pits filled up by spending money from their own pockets.

The narrow roads and

● GMC has a population of 48.89 lakh as per the 2011 Census; and there are 10.74 lakh voters.

● GMC has 57 divisions of which 14 are unreserved, 16 reserved for women, 19 for BCs, seven for SCs and one for ST.

● Guntur municipality was set up in 1866. It gets elevated as a municipal corporation in 1994.

● First elections to the corporation were held in 1995 and the last elections were in 2005.

vehicles.

Though the APSRTC ran city services on a pilot project, it withdrew such services after a while, saying they were not viable.

The city lacks proper green cover, exposing the people to hot weather conditions and the scenario gets worse during the summer. The city also faces the problem of mosquito menace due to lack of proper upkeep, while stray cattle and dogs add to the mess in the city streets.

Retired employee M. Yesu Ratnam said, “Sometime ago, we paid ₹12,000 for laying underground drainage pipes and the work remains incomplete. We don't know when we will be asked to pay charges for sewerage connection. Moreover, we can't travel on roads during peak hours with heavy vehicular traffic and there is no proper regulation.”

SEC could not act and decide on silent rules, argues Counsel

COURT ORDER

HC against inquiry on unanimous polls

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

The Andhra Pradesh High Court has directed the State Election Commission not to hold any inquiry if Form-10 was issued for the unanimous election of MPTCs/ZPTCs. “In case Form-10 is not issued, no result should be declared till February 23,” the court ruled while issuing an interim order on Friday.

A single-judge bench headed by Justice DVSS Somayajulu heard the petition, rising objections to the State Election Commission's order directing the district election authorities to inquire

about prevention of contestants from filing nominations or instances of candidates being compelled to withdraw nomination under duress in the earlier election process to MPTCs/ZPTCs in March, 2010, and submit their report by February 20.

Petitioner's counsel C.V. Mohan Reddy raised a question about the power of the SEC to pass the impugned order after elections were declared. “Once the elections were declared, the SEC cannot order an inquiry,” counsel said.

Counsel argued that the SEC could act and decide on issues when the act or the rules were silent.

● STATE ELECTION COMMISSION counsel N. Ashwani Kumar submitted that the SEC was interested in maintaining the purity of the election and it asked for conduct of an inquiry.

● HE ARGUED that a distinction should be made between the cases in which Form-10 is to be issued and where Form-10 need not be issued, and sought some time to file the counter in the case.

“When the act and the rules were clear, they would govern the field.” He took the view that the SEC had no authority to order a de novo enquiry and stressed that the two-day period to complete the inquiry was inadequate.

State Election Commission counsel N. Ashwani Kumar submitted that the SEC was inter-

Election campaign



YSRC candidate for 21st Ward, Vamsi Krishna Srinivas, campaigns for the upcoming GVMC elections at Peetalaveedhi in Visakhapatnam on Friday.

TD slams YSRC for
attacking SCs in APDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

Telugu Desam chief N. Chandrababu Naidu on Friday slammed YSRC Congress leaders for 'launching' attacks on SCs in the capital city surroundings just because they came forward to contest in the panchayat elections. He asked whether the ruling party would not like to see Dalits rise to higher positions in politics.

Naidu said that the Chief Minister and his party leaders should realise that the country's democratic vibrancy gives rights to every citizen to contest elections.

Meanwhile, the former chief minister condemned Dalits being pelted with stones, allegedly at the behest of YSRC leaders, in Pedakurapadu Assembly constituency's Lingapuram village. He said the attack was only because SCs had fielded a candidate against the ruling party nominee.

Naidu alleged that the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime sent rowdies to create chaos in vil-

● NAIDU SAID that the Chief Minister and his party leaders should realise that the country's democratic vibrancy gives rights to every citizen to contest elections.

lages. He said that the goons were not only striking terror among the people but also insulting women. He lamented that police personnel were deliberately not taking any action although complaints were filed against YSRC leaders for abusing SCs in the name of caste and attacking them with stones.

The TD chief asserted that Jagan Mohan Reddy would go down in history as a Dalit-betrayer because of his government's unchecked atrocities against weaker sections. He alleged that the panchayat elections were not being held in a free and fair manner as anti-socials were disrupting the process at every stage but the YSRC leaders were shamelessly claiming that they have people's support.

Nara Lokesh accuses
govt of luring votersDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

Telugu Desam national general secretary and MLC, Nara Lokesh, on Friday accused the YSRC leaders of misusing the sacred laddus of the Tirumala hill temple as enticement to voters in the panchayat elections.

This showed Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy and his party leaders have no respect for the people as well as the God of the Seven Hills, Lokesh said and urged the State Election Commission (SEC) to disqualify a ruling party supported candidate who allegedly offered the Tirumala laddus as “inducement” to the voters.

Lokesh said a large number of Sri Vari laddus were distributed by ruling party leaders along with the voter slips in Thondavada Panchayat in Chandragiri assembly segment. “This had an ulterior motive to win over voters along reli-

● LOKESH PLEADED with the SEC that action be initiated against the staff of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams on this count.

gious lines, but the YSRC forgot the fact that Tirumala laddus are looked at with a lot of respect by Hindu devotees.”

He stated that at a time when pilgrims were struggling hard to get laddus atop the Seven Hills, thousands of these laddus were finding their way into the hands of YSRC leaders. Lokesh pleaded with the SEC that action be initiated against the staff of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams on this count.

Lokesh said a case should be filed against YSRC leaders for their “show of disrespect to God by illegally transporting these laddus in a ration delivery vehicle, violating the election code, and for caste discrimination”.

2 INDEPENDENTS
FILED PAPERS FOR
COUNCIL POLLSDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

Two independents filed their nominations to contest in biennial election to AP Legislative Council from two teachers' constituencies in AP on Friday.

For East-West Godavari Teachers' constituency, an independent candidate identified as Ganta Nageswara Rao (Navajeevan Paul) filed two sets of nomination papers.

Similarly, for Krishna-Guntur Teachers' constituency, an independent candidate identified as Battu Syam Prasad filed one nomination paper set.

NANI: I WOULD
NOT FOLLOW
ANYONEDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

Vijayawada MP and Telugu Desam leader Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani sought to project himself as being above all else in the party here on Friday. “I would not follow anyone, others should follow me,” he ruled in the context of the factionalism in the TD here.

He said the TD would win the elections with the support he has in Vijayawada and he does not have to depend on others for electoral success. “What is wrong if a candidate who will face defeat is kept aside,” he asked.

He said people will believe in candidates with character and calibre and they do not have trust in corrupt and lazy people.

JAGAN CHEATED
MUSLIMS,
CLAIMS TD MPDC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

Vijayawada MP Kesineni Srinivas alias Nani alleged that Chief Minister Jagan came into power with support of Muslim votes but he cheated the Muslim community by supporting the NRC and CAA legislations in Parliament. He, with other TD leaders, conducted the election campaign in 50, 51 and 56 divisions of Vijayawada city on Friday.

MP Nani said he did not support the CAA and NRC bills and came out of Parliament without giving his vote for the “black bills”.

Besides this, he said, he toured the whole of AP state in a campaign against the CAA and NRC. He promised to work for protection of the rights of the Muslim community.

Nani alleged that the YSRC government totally failed in the past 20 months in providing good governance and put a huge financial burden on the people through abnormal increase in taxes. “Vijayawada Municipal Corporation is an autonomous body. Hence, there is no dependence on the state government for development. TD developed Vijayawada city and did the construction of the Durga and Benz flyovers.”

OTHER STORIES

DAM DESIGN
REVIEW PANEL
VISITS POLAVARAM

Vijayawada: Dam design review panel of Polavaram irrigation project chairman A.B. Pandya and several members and senior officials inspected the progress of execution of several components of the project Polavaram in West Godavari on Friday.

The panel inspected the works at spillway bridge, spill channel right side slopes, upstream cofferdam, earth-cum-rock-fill dam gaps-1 and 2, powerhouse and others. The panel members and officials discussed left guide bund, beams grouting, spillway instrumentation, spill channel right bank protection, cofferdam health assessment, gates erection, and several other project components.

RAINS LASH
VARIOUS PARTS OF
NELLORE DISTRICT

Nellore: Rain lashed various parts of SPSR Nellore district with the southern parts of the district recording the highest rainfall on Friday. Naidupeta recorded 5.2 cm followed by 4 cm in Sullurpeta, 3.2 cm in Vinjamuru and 2 cm in Rapur.

Nellore also received rainfall to the tune of 1.6 cm. and the IMD forecast indicates rains and thundershowers for next two days. Doravari Satram, Konnapuram, Varikuntapadu, Duttaluru, Udayagiri, Dagadarthi, Vidavaluru, Anantasa-garam, Pellakuru, Jaladanki, Kavali, Gudur, and Muthukuru mandals also received drizzles.

BIE extends deadline
for exam fee payment

DC CORRESPONDENT
VIJAYAWADA, FEB. 19

The Board of Intermediate Education (BIE) extended the due date for payment of examination fee for the second year inter students up to Feb. 25.

The BIE Secretary V. Ramakrishna, in a statement here on Friday, said that second-year regular and previously failed students (general and vocational), attendance exempted candidates appearing for humanities (without college study), and those with the change of group will be permitted to remit the fee to

appear for Intermediate Public Examination, March up to Feb. 25.

However, the principal's remittance to the BIE account through online transfer will be permitted up to Feb. 26. Submission of MNRs and fee paid data ring out in the RIO office will be permitted up to Feb. 27.

The BIE said that there would be no further extension of the last date for the examination fee payment.

However, it said that payment of examination fee after the due date would be accepted only on a case by case with the penalty of Rs 500 per candidate.

PDS vehicle used
to give laddus

From page 1

In addition to this, they also used a state-owned PDS vehicle to distribute laddus to voters along with voter slips and pamphlets.

In a video that went viral on social media, a couple of persons were seen distributing laddus, packed in a bag along with voter slips and a pamphlet listing the credentials of the candidate-Mallam Deepika Reddy. They were carrying several laddu bags in the vehicle.

"Mallam Chandramohan Reddy, husband of Deepika Reddy, had sent his supporters to the village to distribute the sacred Srivari laddu prasadam to each household and appealed to the vil-

lagers to vote for his wife. This is an utter disrespect to the prasadam and a clear violation of the election code", Uma Reddy and Sridhar Reddy, two Srivari devotees from Thondavada, said while appealing to the Election Commission to intervene and take action.

Meanwhile, when Deccan Chronicle contacted G.C. Venkateswarulu, Chandragiri tahsildar, he said

"We received information from the villagers about the distribution of Tirumala laddus. Acting on the instructions of the District Collector, we initiated an enquiry and a report will be submitted to the collector for further action", the official said.

India, China withdrew 200 tanks

From page 1

"But whether they were fatal or non-fatal, we can't say with authority so I will not give a figure. But recently, the Russian (news) agency Tass had put out a figure of 45 (Chinese soldiers killed in the clash) and I think that could be the figure we can look at," he had said.

Both India and China have withdrawn around 200 tanks and armoured vehicles and troops from the north and south bank of Pangong Tso.

The speed with which the disengagement, which started on January 10, has been completed by the Chinese PLA has taken many observers by surprise as it looked that they had come in for the long haul. China had built a large number of structures

in the Finger area on the north bank of Pangong Tso and had deployed a significant number of its troops.

China has now vacated the area between Finger 4 and Finger 8 on the north bank of Pangong Tso, which its troops had occupied in May 2020.

India claims that its territory is upto Finger 8. The Chinese soldiers have dismantled the military infrastructure they had set up at Finger 5, which includes a jetty and a helipad.

Both Indian and Chinese soldiers have also vacated the Kailash range on the southern bank of Pangong Tso.

The Indian Army had on Tuesday released videos which showed Chinese troops dismantling sangars, temporary structures, and loading supplies

and provisions onto trucks. The Chinese soldiers were also seen using earthmovers to dismantle shelters and restoring the landforms as per the agreement.

These videos also showed large numbers of Chinese soldiers de-inducting and moving back on trucks.

Under the India-China agreement, the Chinese troops will move east of Finger 8 on the north bank of Pangong Tso while the Indian troops will move to their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3.

There will be a "temporary" freeze in the patrolling by both sides in the area between Finger 4 and Finger 8 on the north bank of Pangong Tso till both sides reach an agreement in the diplomatic and military talks.

AP denies Odisha claims
on intrusion during polls

Odisha sought initiation of contempt proceedings against AP

PARMOD KUMAR | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

Andhra Pradesh on Friday denied Odisha's claim that it has intruded in its three border villages for the conduct of panchayat elections, telling the Supreme Court that the people of the three villages have been voting with Andhra Pradesh ever since the creation of the state in all Lok Sabha, Assembly and panchayat elections.

The Odisha government has sought initiation of contempt proceedings against Andhra Pradesh for including three villages —

G a n j a y b a d r a ,

Pattuchennuru and

Paguluchennuru — for the conduct of panchayat elections.

Odisha has asserted that these three villages

● **ODISHA HAS** asserted that these three villages were part of its territory and conduct of panchayat elections in these villages was in breach of 2006 undertaking jointly given before the top court by both the states.

● **ODISHA GOVERNMENT**, in its contempt petition, has alleged that Andhra Pradesh has notified panchayat polls in three of its villages of Kotiya gram panchayat in Koraput district.

were part of its territory and conduct of panchayat elections in these villages was in breach of 2006 undertaking jointly given before the top court by both the states.

Giving details of panchayat members elected from these villages ever since the Panchayat Act came into force, Andhra Pradesh told a bench comprising Justice A.M. Khanwilkar and Justice Dinesh Maheshwari to dismiss the contempt plea by Odisha as it is

"grossly misconceived and is not maintainable at all in view of the fact that no contempt, whatsoever, has been committed by the state of Andhra Pradesh".

Stating that it has not taken any step in violation of any direction of the top court, Andhra Pradesh in its reply filed by Mude Hari Jawaharlal, district collector of Vizianagaram district, said that it has been "duly administering its own territories

and has not infringed upon the territory of the petitioner."

As senior counsel Vikas Singh appearing for Odisha government wanted to file a rejoinder to Mr Jawaharlal's affidavit, the court gave it (Odisha) four weeks time to do so.

The Odisha government, in its contempt petition, has alleged that Andhra Pradesh has notified panchayat polls in three of its villages of Kotiya gram panchayat in Koraput district.

The Odisha government has also contended that Andhra Pradesh has wilfully and deliberately violated the top court's December 2, 1968, and March 30, 2006, orders by venturing into its territory and notifying elections in three of its villages.

Harishankar to be honoured soon

From page 1

Kadapa STEP Chief Executive Officer Dr Mallireddy Ramachandra Reddy told Deccan Chronicle that Harishankar Reddy, who has brought good recognition to Kadapa district,

would be honoured soon.

Harishankar Reddy speaking to *Deccan Chronicle* said that he did not have proper facilities to play in his native village but that did not deter his spirit.

He went to Kadapa municipal ground in 2012

with one Ganesh Kumar for participating in the district selections.

After being picked up for the Under-14 squad and later U-16 team, he came under the tutelage of coach C.D. Thomson, who also coached him when he was part of the

ACA team at Vizianagaram in 2016. Vikram Verma and Nagesh Kumar were also part of the special coaching stint. Harishankar Reddy is currently in Indore with the Andhra Hazare Trophy, which starts on Saturday.

Oz paedophile case
adjourned again

DC CORRESPONDENT
VISAKHAPATNAM, FEB. 19

The court of the second additional district and sessions judge here has adjourned the case against the Australian "paedophile" Paul Dean to May 10 when the case came up for hearing on Friday.

The court had remained closed due to Covid-19 since March last and is yet to be opened.

The railway court had, in March 2018, sentenced the 75-year-old Dean to three years' simple imprisonment under various sections of IPC and slapped a fine of ₹32, 000.

He was convicted and sentenced based on the statement of a lone witness and victim, David, a blind man, who was in his teens when the crime was committed.

Paul later challenged the decision in the appellate court, the second additional district judge court.

Paul had been arrested from his RK Beach apartment in Visakhapatnam in August 2001 following a report in these columns.

Upon hearing about the adjournment on Friday, one Peter Poat from Australia said in his email to this correspondent that Dean had made a mockery of Indian justice system for many years, adopting various ploys to avoid jail.

"He may be getting old. However, that is no reason why he should not be held to account for the damage he caused to many children's lives over a long period," he alleged.

Poat said, "The huge catalogue of dishonesty and terrible abuse of Indian

● **UPON HEARING** about the adjournment on Friday, one Peter Poat from Australia said in his email to this correspondent that Dean had made a mockery of Indian justice system for many years, adopting various ploys to avoid jail.

children perpetrated by this Australian — who fled justice from his own country — must be held to account.

"He has ruined many lives, and there is strong evidence that some have committed suicide due to his grotesque sexual exploitations. This man deserves to spend the rest of his days behind the bars," Peter said in his mail.

Mary Ellen Gerber, 84-year-old woman from France, said in her email: "Paul Dean changed his name seven times. He is notoriously identified for being an accomplished forger, thief, liar and charged with sexual assault of hundreds of underage children for the past 45 years. Dean was arrested several times by the police, incarcerated, but still released thanks to the help of his, long-time accomplices."

"This man should be imprisoned for life for causing sufferings to hundreds of underage Indian children," she said.

Mary said she and her friends had donated huge amounts to Paul to look after children in his orphanage at Kothavalasa in Vizianagaram district, Muniguda and Puri in Odisha and Visakhapatnam.

RATHA SPTAMI
CELEBRATIONS
HELD IN TIRUMALA

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 19:

A sea of humanity from different parts of the country has turned up to Tirumala's hill town to witness Lord Venkateswara's procession on seven different vahanas on the occasion of the annual Ratha Saptami festival, observed with much grandeur here on Friday.

As part of the Ratha Saptami festival on the auspicious occasion of Surya Jayanthi, the processional deity of Lord Malayappa Swamy donned different guises. It took a celestial ride on seven vahanams from dawn to dusk to cheer pilgrims.

SARPANCH
ASPIRANT'S
HUBBY ATTACKED

DC CORRESPONDENT
TIRUPATI, FEB. 19:

Tense situation prevailed at Kandadu village panchayat in Yerpedu of Chittoor district on Friday when some unidentified persons attacked a sarpanch aspirant's husband. The victim has been identified as Radha Reddy, husband of Devakamma, a sarpanch aspirant and reportedly a rebel candidate of the ruling party.

According to CI Siva Kumar, the 67-year-old victim was on his way back home after winding up electioneering in Rajulapalem this morning when a group of unknown persons attacked him with knives. In the incident, Radha Reddy sustained a severe knife wound on his hand.

Kalyanotsavam till month end

FROM PAGE 1

The government swung in to action when the old chariot was gutted. It appointed a committee headed by Amalapuram sub-collector Himanshu Koushik with regional joint commissioner as convener. The endowment department appointed additional commissioner K. Ramachandra Mohan as special officer for supervising the construction of the new chariot.

The committee identified

good quality Bastar teak at a timber depot in Ravulapalem and bought it. Earlier the government sanctioned ₹95 lakh for the chariot. Along with the subsequent hydraulic braking system, it cost ₹1.16 crore. The Kalyanotsavam will be celebrated till the month end.

As part of Kalyanotsavams, 'Surya Prabha Vahanam' and 'Tiru Kalyanotsavam' will be performed on February 22 and the 'Rathotsavam' will be organised at 2.30 pm the next day.

Those present on the occasion included Rajya Sabha member Pilli Subhashchandrabose, MPs Vanga Gita, Chinta Anuradha and Margani Bharat, MLC P. Ravindrababu, MLAs Rapaka Vira Prasad, Dwarampudi Chandrasekhara Reddy, Kondeti Chittibabu, Ponada Venkata Satish, Pendem Dorababu, N. Dhanakshmi, DCCB chairman Anantha Udaya Bhaskar, Eluru DIG K.V. Mohana Rao, endowments commissioner P. Arjuna Rao.

STATE GAZETTEE ANDHRA PRADESH Part -1 Extraordinary Published by Authority											
No. 01		ONGOLE						10-02-2021			
Rc.G1/e.49091/2017								Dated: 09.02.2021			
FORM - VII u/s 19(1) of the Act read with Sub Rule (1) of Rule -25 Declaration											
Where as it appears to the District Collector, Prakasam District, Ongole that a total extent of Ac. 0.71 Cents of land is required in K.Bitragunta Village, Zarugumalli Mandal, Prakasam District for a public purpose i.e., for construction of Tripling of Railway Line from Vijayawada to Guduru Sections by South Central Railways, Guntur at K.Bitragunta Village of Zarugumalli Mandal, the District Collector, Prakasam District have been satisfied that the lands specified in the schedule below have to be acquired for public purpose, after having heard the objections of the persons interested and after due enquiry as provided U/S 15 of the Act 30 of 2013 and that the Requiring body viz i.e. Deputy Executive Engineer, Constructions, South Central Railways, Guntur has deposited the amount in full towards the cost of acquisition of lands, the following declaration is made under section 19 (1) of the Act 30 of 2013 (Central Act 30 of 2013).											
DECLARATION											
Under section 19(1) of the Act 30 of 2013 (Central Act 30 of 2013), the District Collector, Prakasam District is hereby declares that the lands specified in the the Schedule below and measuring Ac. 0.71 Cents be the same a little more or less, is /are needed for a public purpose, to wit for construction of Tripling of Railway Line from Vijayawada to Guduru Section at K.Bitragunta Village of Zarugumalli Mandal.											
SCHEDULE - Patta Lands											
District : Prakasam		Mandal: Zarugumalli						Village: K. Bitragunta			
Sl. No	Sy. No	Type of Land	Total Extent	Area under acquisition	Name& Address of the person interested Pattadar & Enjoyer	Boundaries				Crop details	
						North	South	East	West		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
1	566/B	DRY	1.29	0.71	Oguboyina Venkata Subbaiah S/o. Narasaiah					Mango Trees	
Total Extent				0.71							
As plan of the lands are kept in the Office of the Collector, Prakasam District Ongole and Revenue Divisional Office, Kandukur and may be inspected on any working day during office hours.											
There are no families likely to be displaced due to land acquisition.											
Mines of coal, Iron-stone, slate or other minerals lying under the said land or any particular portion of the said land, except such parts of the mines and minerals which may be required to be dug or removed or used during the construction phase of the project for the purpose of which the land is being acquired, are not needed.											
Sd/- Dr. Pola Bhaskar Collector & Dist. Magistrate, Prakasam District, Ongole.											

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SHORT TAKES

AHMED PATEL'S SON SAYS READY TO CONTEST POLLS

Ahmedabad, Feb. 19: Faisal Patel, son of late Congress leader Ahmed Patel, has said he is ready to join politics and will contest Assembly polls if the party wishes.

Only last month he had announced on Twitter that he would not join politics and rather focus on his late father's social initiatives.

"Just like my father, I will continue doing social work. We have two hospitals and a public school in Bharuch. That is my real work," he told reporters on Thursday night.

"I will enter electoral politics if the (Congress) party high command asks," 40-year-old Faisal Patel said.

"If the high command wishes, I will also fight elections. Preferably from Bharuch, because that is my area," said Patel when asked if he would contest the 2022 Gujarat Assembly polls.

He was in Khadia area of the city to canvas for Congress candidates ahead of elections to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation.

Elections to Ahmedabad and five other municipal corporations will be held on February 21. He was invited by local Congress MLAs Gyasuddin Shaikh and Imran Khedawala to support party candidates, Patel said.

PASSPORT SERVICES LINKED TO DIGILOCKER

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

Citizens can now submit various documents required for passport services through the Government's DigiLocker app system in a paperless mode and are therefore not required to carry the original documents, the ministry of external affairs (MEA) announced on Friday. In a move that will also provide great relief to those who have lost their passports and aid them for re-issuing of the document, the MEA also announced it was "working on the idea of passport to be included as one of the documents in DigiLocker" to "help citizens to retrieve the passport whenever it is required" and which will also help them in the process of re-issuing in case of passport loss.

The MEA also said it was "working towards rolling out of ePassport for the citizens that are designed to increase security, making it more difficult to tamper with data recorded on a passport, thereby limiting the chances of fraud" and that "in the coming years, biometric passports would help improve immigration processes at airports which are equipped with automatic e-Passport gates".

All this was announced by minister of state (MoS) for external affairs V. Muraleedharan on Friday at an event to "inaugurate 'DigiLocker for Passport Seva'", who also stated that "in the upcoming Passport Seva Programme V2.0, the use of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, Chat-Bot, Analytics, Robotic Process Automation (RPA) will further ease the citizen experience and expeditious service delivery".

The DigiLocker is a flagship initiative of the ministry of electronics and IT and aims to provide access to authentic digital documents stored in a citizen's digital document wallet. As per rules, these digital documents are on par with original physical documents and can therefore be accessed by citizens anytime and anywhere.

Snow festival



A monastery made of snow during the Snow Festival at Hansa Village in Lahual-Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh on Friday.

— PTI

Political climate heats up in Kerala ahead of elections

The polls might be held in second week of April or first week of May

GILVESTER ASSARAY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
FEB. 19

With Kerala currently witnessing the 'ceremonial' yatras of political parties crisscrossing 140 Assembly segments in the state, rival Fronts have started vying with each other to woo the voters besides galvanising their cadre for the forthcoming elections.

After the recent two day visit of the Election Commission team to Kerala, there are speculations that the Assembly polls might be held in the second week of April or first week of May. Quite understandably then, the political parties are leaving no chance to prepare for the crucial electoral battle.

The ruling CPM-led LDF has launched two yatras — Vikasana Munnetta Yatra (Development yatra), one from Kasargod to cover the northern districts and another from Kochi to cover the southern districts. The Congress-led UDF's Aishwarya Kerala Yatra led by opposition leader Ramesh Chennithala is almost on its last leg covering southern districts.

The BJP's yatra is set to be flagged off by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on February 23 in Kasargod. Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was in Kochi on Sunday to launch projects worth ₹1,600 crore took time to attend the BJP state unit's core committee meeting in which he asked the leadership to attract all sections of people in Kerala.

So what are the stakes for different political fronts? For the CPM-led LDF, it's prestigious battle to safeguard its last bastion in the country. With no signs of immediate revival of party in West

Open for chief ministership if BJP wins, says Sreedharan

New Delhi, Feb. 19: Set to enter the political fray by joining the BJP next week, technocrat E. Sreedharan on Friday said his main aim is to help the party come to power in Kerala and that he will be open to chief ministership. He also said that the focus will be on developing infrastructure in a big way and bring the state out of the debt trap if the BJP wins the assembly polls that are likely to be held in April-May this year.

Known as 'Metroman' for the efficiency in completing big infrastructure projects, Sreedharan said that he will contest the Assembly elections if the party wants and will also be open to chief ministership if the party asks.

The 88-year-old technocrat also made it clear that he will not be interested in governorship, saying that it is purely a "constitutional position and no powers at all" and that he won't be able to make any positive contribution to the state in such a position.

"My main idea is to bring BJP to power in Kerala. If BJP comes to power in Kerala, there will be three to four major areas we want to focus. One is infrastructure development in a big way and another is to bring industry to the state," he said.

Bengal and Tripura too going out of hand, the Left has to keep its flag flying in Kerala. Moreover, the Left is desperate to retain power for what it says — to present an alternative development model to the

Speaking over phone from Ponnani in Kerala where he is based now, Sreedharan said that a finance commission could also be formed for the purpose of improving the finances of the state, which is in a "debt trap today".

"The state is in a debt trap today, so much of borrowings. And debt burden on each Malayalee is ₹1.2 lakh today.... That means we are heading for bankruptcy and the government still continues to borrow. The state finances need to be propped up and for that, we need to find a solution," he said.

His entry into the BJP is being seen as a major boost for the party in election-bound Kerala. The state is being ruled by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) alternately for the past many years.

"If BJP wants, I will contest (the Assembly elections)," he said during an interview. Sreedharan said that he is "certainly" ready to be the chief minister if the party wants him to be after coming to power.

When asked about whether he will be open to chief ministership, he said, "If they (BJP) want, certainly. To tell you very frankly, unless I am the chief minister these (priorities) cannot be achieved." He is likely to formally join the BJP on February 25 and said that he was entering the "political fray".

On the reasons for deciding to join the BJP which is in power at the Centre, Sreedharan said that he wanted to do things for the benefit of Kerala as the UDF and the LDF have not been able to bring any tangible progress to the state. "Why I chose BJP is for a different reason. The two others in Kerala — UDF and LDF — have been ruling Kerala alternately.... They have not been able to bring any tangible progress to the state, not even one industry has come to the state in the last 20 years....

"They were having tussles with the (central) government all the time. The two governments are not able to see eye to eye on many matters. The development of the state is suffering. If the BJP comes to power here, they will have a good rapport with the Government of India," he said. He was referring to apparent differences between the Centre and the ruling LDF in Kerala.

On what it means to enter the political fray, Sreedharan said it only means that all his professional responsibilities are coming to an end by the end of this month. — PTI

sies like the gold smuggling case involving the Chief Minister's office. The Left leaders claim that they will create history by winning back to back term in office. But considering the Kerala voters penchant for change after every five years, it's a tough call.

Many who had started writing off Congress in Kerala, got a shock in 2019 Lok Sabha polls when the UDF won 19 of the 20 seats. While the credit for the stupendous victory went largely to Rahul Gandhi who contested and won from Wayanad, the win did boost the sagging morale of the Congress cadres. It emerged strongly as a winning party in the political landscape of Kerala.

The BJP which did quite well in the 2016 Assembly polls with the help of BDJS an outfit floated by the office bearers of SNDP which represents the dominant backward class Ezhava community. Since the Ezhava community is one of the main support bases of the Left parties in Kerala, many predicted a threat for the CPM and CPI.

However, more than the LDF the BDJS-BJP alliance cut into the votes of Congress. The CPM too did lose a good number of votes in many constituencies. The BJP-led NDA secured close to 15 per cent votes registering nearly 9 per cent increase in vote share compared to previous poll in 2011.

With the BDJS no longer the force that it used to be in 2016 and the BJP too having developed cold feet over the alliance, it is unlikely to cut much ice in the forthcoming polls.

Political observers say it is difficult to read the voters mind at this stage. However, the situation would be much clearer when the yatras get over by first week of March.

Modi says Visva Bharati should help farmers

Visva Bharati (WB), Feb. 19: Extolling Visva Bharati for its inspiring legacy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asked its students to help farmers and artisans in villages adopted by the institution find global markets for their products. He said Guru Rabindranath Tagore had not envisioned the university as a typical educational institution but one that will help Indian culture realise its full potential. Addressing the convocation of Visva Bharati, the country's oldest central university, Modi said knowledge was not a "still and static but a dynamic concept".

"I urge the students and teachers of this inspirational institution to help farmers, artisans living in villages adopted by the institution to find global markets for their products. That will be a step towards building an 'Atmanirbhar' (self-reliant) Bharat," he said.

He told the gathering that with knowledge comes responsibility and the knowledge attained by them was not theirs alone but a legacy for future generations.

"Your knowledge and skill can make society proud but it can also push it into the darkness of ruin. There are many examples in history and in the present.

"You will find some highly educated, skilled people among those who are spreading terror and violence in the world. On the other hand, some people are toiling day and night to free the world from a global epidemic like corona. What matters most is the mindset," he said.

He said the National Education Policy was a major step towards building a self-reliant India as it gave impetus to research and innovation. India, he said, cannot become 'Atmanirbhar' without the self-confidence of its daughters. New National Education Policy having a gender inclusion fund was a major step towards building a self-reliant India, he said.

He encouraged the youth to take risks without the fear of failure. "If your intentions are

PM INAUGURATES MAJOR PROJECTS IN KERALA

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,
FEB. 19

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of key projects of power and urban sector in Kerala including country's first High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) project featuring state of the art technology.

The projects inaugurated by the Prime Minister via video conferencing, included 320 KV Pugalur (Tamil Nadu) — Thrissur (Kerala) Thrissur. The Voltage Source Converter (VSC) based HVDC project will facilitate transfer of 2000 MW power from western region and help various sectors including industrial and commercial units. The project has been implemented at a cost of ₹5,070 crore.

Modi dedicated to the nation the 50 MW Kasargod Solar Power Project developed by the National Solar Energy Mission. The project has come up in an area of 250 acres of land in three villages of Kasargod district at a cost of ₹280 crore.

Besides, Modi also inaugurated 75 MLD water treatment plant at Aruvikkara in Thiruvananthapuram district up under the AMRUT Mission. The project will scale up the distribution of drinking water to people of Thiruvananthapuram.

Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan who attended the inauguration via video conferencing thanked the Prime Minister and said that the Centre state cooperation was important for development in a federal structure.

clear and your loyalty is to 'Ma Bharati' every decision of yours will take you towards finding a solution. Success and failure do not determine our present and future. You may not get the results you thought after taking a decision, but you should not be afraid to take a decision," he said. — PTI

Agri ministry gets nod to use drones

Mumbai, Feb. 19: The agriculture ministry has been permitted to use drones for remote sensing data collection under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).

"The ministry of civil aviation and directorate general of civil aviation have granted conditional exemption for Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) usage to ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare (MoAFW)," an official statement said on Friday. This will allow MoAFW to use drones for remote sensing data collection in agricultural areas of 100 districts of the country for gram pan-

chayat level yield estimation, under PMFBY.

The conditional exemption will be valid for one year from the date of issue of the permission letter or until the operationalisation of the Digital Sky Platform, whichever is earlier; the statement by the civil aviation ministry said.

This exemption shall be valid only if all conditions and limitations are strictly adhered to, it said. While conditional exemption has been given to MoAFW, it still needs to obtain necessary clearances from other ministries, the statement added. — PTI

2 NURSES BOOKED IN CONNECTION WITH DEATH OF 10 INFANTS IN MAHA HOSPITAL

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 19

Maharashtra police have registered a case of criminal negligence against two staff nurses in connection with the fire at a government hospital in Bhandara in which 10 infants had died.

A case under IPC section 304(2) (causing death by negligence) has been registered against Shubhangi Sathavane and Smrita Ambildukhe, both nurses, said director general of police Hemant Nagrale. Further probe is on, he said. The blaze had broken out at the Special Newborn Care Unit of the four-storeyed district hospital in Bhandara city last month.

The inquiry report said the two nurses were supposed to be at nursing stations but were out for paperwork at the time of the fire.

The ward had 17 infants admitted to it when the fire broke out. Seven of them were rescued. The two nurses and a paediatrician were earlier terminated for negligence following an inquiry.

A civil surgeon, the medical officer on duty, and another nurse were suspended. An additional civil surgeon was transferred.

The report said the ward caught fire due to either voltage fluctuation or internal insulation wear out in the control panel of the baby warmers. It cited a forensic report and added three infants died of the shock due to burns while seven others of suffocation. The report said inflammable material including plastic, cotton beds aggravated the fire.

Maharashtra home minister Anil Deshmukh said the matter is being "thoroughly" probed by DSP-level officers.

ON THE ANVIL

After the Mars Orbiter Mission's success, Isro also decides to explore Venus

India's next Mars mission likely to be an orbiter

New Delhi, Feb. 19: As NASA's Perseverance rover landed on Mars in the early hours of Friday to look for signs of past life, Isro's next mission to the Red Planet is likely to be an orbiter.

Perseverance, the biggest and the most advanced rover ever sent by NASA, made its landing at Jezero Crater.

After its successful Mars Orbiter Mission, the Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) called for 'Announcement of Opportunities' on Mars Orbiter Mission-2.

"It is now planned to have the next orbiter mission around Mars for a future launch opportunity," according to the

● **MANGALYAAN OR Mars Orbiter Mission was India's first endeavour to successfully reach another planet.**

● **ISRO PLANS to send three humans to space by 2022 under the Gaganyaan (human space) mission.**

Announcement of Opportunities.

But there are other major projects that are lined up. After the Mars Orbiter Mission's success, Isro also decided to explore Venus.

However, the immediate priorities of Isro remain to be Chandrayaan-3 and Gaganyaan — both proj-

ects have been delayed due to the Coronavirus-induced lockdown.

Under Chandrayaan-3, Isro will once again try to land a rover on the Moon. The mission was to be launched late last year. Chandrayaan-2 did not yield expected results as the lander hard-landed, dashing India's hopes to successfully land on the Moon.

Isro plans to send three humans to space by 2022 under the Gaganyaan (human space) mission.

The India France Joint Vision for Space Cooperation also mentions about the possible collaboration to explore Mars.

"CNES and Isro, with the

support of Laboratoire de meteorologic dynamique (LMD, CNRS), will jointly work on the modelling of Mars and Venus atmospheres," the vision statement said.

Mangalyaan or Mars Orbiter Mission was India's first endeavour to successfully reach another planet.

The launch vehicle, spacecraft and ground segment cost ₹450 crore, one of the cheapest missions to Mars so far.

Designed to work for six months, the mission has completed over six years.

The Mars orbiter has sent thousands of pictures totalling more than two terabytes. — PTI

Isro to give leg-up to space startups

Bengaluru, Feb. 19:

ISRO has embarked on a mission to take startups in the space sector to a higher orbit with a string of initiatives to help them realise their business potential.

It is keen on formulating an exclusive space startup programme — "Space Entrepreneurship & Enterprise Development (SEED)", Secretary in the department of space and chairman of the Indian space research organisa-

tion (Isro) K. Sivan said.

SEED is conceived as a competitive early stage encouragement programme to startups and MSMEs (Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises) keen on developing products/services in focus areas of interest to ISRO with the space agency helping them to use its facilities, officials said.

A formal mechanism for the programme was expected to be announced soon, they said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

31 DEAD IN DR CONGO PLAGUE OUTBREAK

Bunia , Dr Congo, Feb. 19: Thirty-one people have died in an outbreak of plague that erupted in northeastern DR Congo three months ago, health officials and experts said on Friday.

“We have more than 520 cases... of which more than 31 have been fatal,” Patrick Karamura, health minister in Ituri province, where plague is endemic, said.

The cases are the bubonic form of the disease, except for five cases of pneumonic plague and two of septicaemic plague, he said.

Anne Laudisoit, an epidemiologist with a New York-based NGO called Ecohealth Alliance, said the cases had surfaced between November 15 and December 13 in Biringi, in Ituri’s Aru Territory.

The average age of patients was 13, but this varied between three months and 73 years, she said.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) issued an alert in July of a plague outbreak in Rethy, also in Ituri.

Plague has persisted in the province since it was first confirmed there in 1926.

A long-feared disease with biblical connotations, but treatable today with antibiotics, the plague is caused by a bacterium called Yersinia pestis.

U.S. SCIENTIST ACCUSED OF CAVIAR RACKET

Washington, Feb. 19: The fish eggs were supposed to be for research, not for eating — but a US biologist reportedly known as Wisconsin’s “sturgeon general” was hatching another plan.

An alleged caviar racket, in which sturgeon eggs meant for a research study were being sold and processed as food, has landed Wisconsin’s top sturgeon biologist, Ryan Koenigs, in hot water.

The scientist allegedly accepted at least \$20,000 in kickbacks in the form of jars of caviar from a processor in exchange for eggs intended for research, according to the *New York Times*, citing a Winnebago County filing.

Catching sturgeon, a freshwater fish whose eggs are turned into caviar, is allowed during the month of February on frozen Lake Winnebago, in the northern state of Wisconsin.

According to the Times, eggs must be either returned to the person who speared the sturgeon or thrown away under state law, while local news station *Fox 11* reported that it is illegal to barter processing for a portion of the product.

Wardens employed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources had been instructed to collect sturgeon eggs that fishers did not want to keep, for use in a research programme, *Fox 11* reported.

OZ, FB IN TALKS OVER SWEEPING BAN OVER NEWS

Sydney, Feb. 19: Australia and Facebook held high-stakes talks on Friday after the social media giant sparked global outrage by blacking out news for its Australian users, as Canberra insisted it wouldn’t back down on a new law that would force the tech firm to pay for journalistic content.

From Thursday, Facebook has blanked out the pages of media outlets for Australian users and blocked them from sharing any news content, rather than submit to the proposed legislation.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg said he had spoken with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg on Friday to find a way out of the showdown, and that negotiations would continue over the weekend.

“We talked through their remaining issues and agreed our respective teams would work through them immediately,” Frydenberg said.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison also urged Facebook to “move quickly past” what he called threatening behaviour and “come back to the table”.

He said his government’s world-first legislation to force Facebook and Google to pay Australian media for news content published on their platforms was garnering interest from leaders around the world.

“People are looking at what Australia is doing,” he said, noting that he had already discussed the situation with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Canada’s Justin Trudeau.

Nasa’s rover touches down on Mars

After 7 months in space, overcomes tense landing phase called ‘seven minutes of terror’

Washington, Feb. 19: After seven months in space, Nasa’s Perseverance rover overcame a tense landing phase with a series of perfectly executed maneuvers to gently float down to the Martian soil on Thursday and embark on its mission to search for signs of past life.

“Touchdown confirmed,” said operations lead Swati Mohan at 3:55 pm Eastern Time (2055 GMT), as mission control at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena erupted in cheers.

The autonomously guided procedure was in fact completed more than 11 minutes earlier; the length of time it took for radio signals to return to Earth.

Shortly after landing, the rover sent back its first black-and-white images, revealing a rocky field at the landing site in the Jezero Crater, just north of the Red Planet’s equator.

More images, video of the descent and perhaps the first sounds of Mars ever recorded by microphones are expected in the coming hours as the rover relays data to overhead satellites.

US President Joe Biden hailed the “historic” event.

“Today proved once again that with the power of science and American ingenuity, nothing is beyond the realm of possibility,” he tweeted.

Perseverance’s prime mission will last just over two years but it is likely to remain operational well beyond that, with its predecessor Curiosity still functioning eight years after landing on the planet, said Nasa acting administrator Steve Jurczyk.

“It’ll be on Mars for its entire life,” he said, adding “these robots tend to be really reliable.” Over the

● **AS THE** world witnessed the historic landing of Nasa’s Perseverance rover on the Martian surface, it was Indian-American scientist, Swati Mohan, who led the guidance, navigation, and control operations of the Mars 2020 mission.

● **MOHAN ALSO** confirmed that the rover had survived a particularly tricky plunge through the Martian atmosphere.

coming years, Perseverance will attempt to collect 30 rock and soil samples in sealed tubes, to be eventually sent back to Earth sometime in the 2030s for lab analysis.

About the size of an SUV, the craft weighs a ton, is equipped with a seven foot- (two meter-) long robotic arm, has 19 cameras, two microphones and a suite of cutting-edge instruments to assist in its scientific goals.

Before it could set out on its lofty quest, it first had to overcome the dreaded “seven minutes of terror”—the risky entry, descent and landing phase that has scuppered nearly half of all missions to Mars.

The spacecraft carrying Perseverance careened into the Martian atmosphere at 12,500 miles (20,000 kilometers) per hour, protected by its heat shield, then deployed a supersonic parachute the size of a Little League field, before firing up an eight-engined jetpack.

Finally, it lowered the rover carefully to the ground on a set of cables.

Allen Chen, lead engineer for the landing stage, said a new guidance system called “Terrain Relative Navigation,” which uses a special camera to



This Nasa photo shows the first images from Nasa’s Perseverance rover as it landed on the surface of Mars. Nasa said that the Perseverance rover has touched down on the surface of Mars after successfully overcoming a risky landing phase known as the ‘seven minutes of terror.’ — AFP

identify surface features and compare them to an onboard map, was key to landing in a rugged region of scientific interest.

“We are in a nice flat spot, the vehicle is only tilted by about 1.2 degrees,” he said. “We did successfully find that parking lot, and have a safe rover on the ground.” Scientists believe that around 3.5 billion years ago the crater was home to a river that flowed into a deep lake, depositing sediment in a fan-shaped delta.

Perseverance ended up landing about two kilometers (a mile) southeast of the delta, NASA scientist Ken Farley said, in a geologically significant area.

— AFP



This Nasa photo shows members of Nasa’s Perseverance rover team as they react in mission control after receiving confirmation the spacecraft successfully touched down on Mars at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. — AFP

Biden admin introduces Citizenship Act

Bill to create an earned roadmap to 11 million undocumented immigrants

Washington, Feb. 19: A bicameral US Citizenship Act of 2021 proposing a pathway to citizenship to 11 million undocumented workers, elimination of per country quota for employment-based green cards and work authorisation for dependents of H-1B foreign workers, was introduced in the Congress.

The bill, if passed by both the chambers of the Congress — House of Representatives and the Senate — and signed into law by President Joe Biden would bring citizenship to millions of foreign nationals, including undocumented and those who came to the country legally.

The legislation would also benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals and their families. Authors of the bill — Senator Bob Menendez and Congresswoman Linda Sánchez — told reporters that the US Citizenship Act of 2021 establishes a moral and economic imperative and a vision of immigration reform that is expansive and inclusive.

It grows the economy by making changes to the employment-based immigration system, eliminating per-country caps, making it easier for STEM advanced degree holders

US ends Trump policy, lets in refugees stuck in Mexico

San Diego, Feb. 19: After waiting months and sometimes years in Mexico, people seeking asylum in the United States are being allowed into the country starting from Friday as they wait for courts to decide on their cases, unwinding one of the Trump administration’s signature immigration policies that President Joe Biden vowed to end.

The number of asylum-seekers coming in initially will be very limited, beginning on Friday at a border crossing in San Diego and expanding to Brownsville, Texas, on Monday and El Paso,

Texas, next Friday.

US officials are warning people not to come to the US-Mexico border, saying an estimated 25,000 people with active cases in the “Remain in Mexico” program and several hundred who are appealing decisions should register on a website that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is launching early next week.

The International Organisation for Migration, the UN migration agency, plans to test asylum-seekers for Covid-19 and will quarantine anyone who tests positive for 10 days before they enter the

United States.

Friday marks a key milestone in unraveling one of former President Donald Trump’s cornerstone policies to deter people from seeking protection from persecution and returns the US asylum system to the way it worked for decades.

But there are unanswered questions, including how Central Americans who returned home will get back to the US-Mexico border. It’s also unclear how long it will take to work through more than 25,000 active Remain in Mexico cases, with the oldest going first. — AP

the House and Senate. However, in the upper chamber, they need support of 10 Republicans to get the legislation through the Congress before it can be signed into law.

The Democratic leadership and the White House hope that they will get the necessary support in the interest of millions of non-citizens living in the country. Supported by the White House, the bill creates an earned roadmap to citizenship for all 11 million undocumented immigrants, with an expedited three-year path to citizenship, and giving all other undocumented immigrants who pass background checks and pay taxes with an eight-year path to citizenship without fear of deportation.

It reforms family-based immigration system to keep families together by recapturing visas from previous years to clear backlogs, including spouses and children of green card holders as immediate family members. It also eliminates discrimination facing LGBTQ+ families, provides protection for orphans, widows and children, allows immigrants with approved family-sponsorship petitions to join family in the US on a temporary basis while they wait for green cards to become available. — PTI

BREACH FUELS CALLS FOR U.S. ACTION ON CYBERSECURITY

Washington, Feb. 19: Jolted by a sweeping hack that may have revealed government and corporate secrets to Russia, US officials are scrambling to reinforce the nation’s cyber defenses and recognising that an agency created two years ago to protect America’s networks and infrastructure lacks the money, tools and authority to counter such sophisticated threats.

The breach, which hijacked widely used software from Texas-based SolarWinds Inc., has exposed the profound vulnerability of civilian government networks and the limitations of efforts to detect threats.

It’s also likely to unleash a wave of spending on technology modernisation and cybersecurity. “It’s really highlighted the investments we need to make in cybersecurity to have the visibility to block these attacks in the future,” Anne Neubecker, the newly appointed deputy national security adviser for cyber and emergency technology said Wednesday at a White House briefing.

The reaction reflects the severity of a hack that was disclosed only in December. The hackers, as yet unidentified but described by officials as “likely Russian,” had unfettered access to the data and email of at least nine US government agencies and about 100 private companies, with the full extent of the compromise still unknown. — AP

MYANMAR’S ANTI-COUP MOVEMENT SEES FIRST DEATH

Yangon, Feb. 19: A young protester died on Friday, more than a week after being shot in anti-coup demonstrations in Myanmar, offering a fresh source of anger inside the country as international pressure grows on the generals who seized power.

Much of the country has been in open revolt since troops deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, with disparate strands of Myanmar society uniting to protest against a return to military rule.

Security forces have steadily stepped up the show — and use — of force, by deploying troops against peaceful protesters, and firing tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets.

A rally on February 9 in Myanmar’s capital Naypyidaw turned violent when police fired rubber bullets at demonstrators, though doctors at the hospital later said that at least two people had been critically wounded by live rounds.

Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing, who turned 20 last Thursday as she lay unconscious in a hospital bed, was shot in the head. A doctor confirmed her death Friday, adding that her body will be examined as it is a “case of injustice”. — AFP

ROYALTY | STRIPPED

Harry still 6th in line to the throne, with no change in the line of succession

Prince Harry to lose all honorary titles

London, Feb. 19: Britain’s Prince Harry will relinquish his honorary military appointments and patronages after confirming to Queen Elizabeth II that he and his wife Meghan Markle will not return as working royals, Buckingham Palace announced on Friday.

The Duke and Duchess of Sussex, as they are officially known, rocked the British monarchy when they quit frontline royal duties a year ago and relocated to the United States, where they have embarked on several commercial ventures.

Under the terms of their

departure, thrashed out at an emergency summit with the queen in early 2020, Harry agreed the couple would stop using the “Royal Highness” title and no longer carry out duties on behalf of the monarch, but vowed to review the moves a year on.

“The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have confirmed to Her Majesty The Queen that they will not be returning as working members of The Royal Family,” Buckingham Palace said.

“The Queen has written confirming that in stepping away from the work

Britain’s Prince Harry and Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex attend the 91st Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey in London. — AP FILE PHOTO

of The Royal Family it is not possible to continue with the responsibilities and duties that come with a life of public service.

“The honorary military appointments and Royal patronages held by The Duke and Duchess will therefore be returned to

● **THE QUEEN** has written confirming that in stepping away from the work of The Royal Family it is not possible to continue with the responsibilities and duties that come with a life of public service.

Her Majesty, before being redistributed among working members of The Royal Family.” The palace statement added: “While all are saddened by their decision,

The Duke and Duchess remain much loved members of the family.” However, it appears they

will retain their official titles of Duke and Duchess of Sussex, and Harry remains sixth in line to the throne, with no change in the line of succession.

A spokesperson for Harry and Meghan said the couple had shown they “remain committed to their duty and service to the UK and around the world”.

It noted they had offered their continued support to the organisations they had represented “regardless of official role”. “We can all live a life of service. Service is universal,” the spokesperson added. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

20 FEBRUARY 2021

Cong's Punjab lesson: Set store by local stalwarts

The spectacular sweep by the Congress in the civic polls in all three regions of Punjab earlier this week presents an object lesson to the Narendra Modi government as well as the Congress itself. The poll results have pushed the otherwise powerful Akali Dal, which derives its authority from Sikh religious forums, and the BJP into a narrow corner.

The lesson for India's oldest party, which now appears to be in a semi-somnolent state in many parts of the country — is that the road to revival is not closed. But there is a proviso: in the states the party must be led by local stalwarts who have come up the political ladder in the normal course of elections and manoeuvring, and not by lightweight flunkies accidentally selected by the central leadership and its nominated committees on a whim or to bestow personal favours.

In Punjab, Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh, in spite of his advanced years, proved his mettle. He gave mature political leadership. He could instinctively pick issues to highlight that matter. He also dealt with upstarts favoured by the Centre in a manner that did not raise any dust and he did not throw tantrums, although he is a maharaja. Attempts by his opponents to throw barbs of a personal nature at him cut no ice.

The Modi government and the ruling BJP cannot but have noticed that the day after the Punjab civic poll results came out, Rakesh Tikait called on the community of farmers to intensify their agitation

But these meaningful acts of symbolism may not have gone far enough and been translated into votes, were it not for the astute leadership of the state by Captain Amarinder Singh and the tending of the state party organisation by PCC chief Sunil Jakhar in a sober manner. The Congress high command, such as it is, will doubtless realise that the party could have swept the Assembly election in neighbouring Haryana if only it had handed over charge of the party to Bhupinder Hooda early enough.

The Modi government and the ruling BJP cannot but have noticed that the day after the Punjab civic poll results came out, Rakesh Tikait, who has by now emerged as a famous farmers' leader from western Uttar Pradesh, called on the community of farmers to intensify their agitation and not return home until the controversial farm laws are rolled back. It is not unlikely that the farmers will show up in poll-bound West Bengal to queer the pitch for the BJP, which is trying hard to challenge Trinamul Congress supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

The Punjab results also point to the fact that the dissatisfaction with the Centre's policies that have fuelled unemployment, shutting down of micro, small and medium industries, and the relentless climb in diesel and petrol prices, are hurting the urban voter badly. The government leadership and the ruling party leadership need to look sharp and make wise choices.

Prince's ransom for cricketers

A couple of IPL teams seem to have gone overboard in splashing crores on cricketers who are looking to rediscover their mojo after very poor outings in the last edition of the league played in the UAE. Considering that 130 countries around the globe are yet to lay their hands on the vaccine in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic, such splurging seems a tad extravagant. But then, chasing sporting success is an expensive but far from scientific pursuit. Perhaps, the extravagance has to be seen as part of a larger sport bubble that comes more as an entertainment package and is not to be equated with normal pay for work rewards in the lives and livelihoods of the people. The 2020 records of Chris Morris of South Africa, who at ₹16.25 crore has become the cash-rich league's most expensive player at an auction, and Glenn Maxwell of Australia, who gets close to ₹13.25 crore (the approximate procurement cost of 5.7 lakh vaccines) bear no relation to the prince's ransom being paid as salaries.

The teams seemed so overenthusiastic about foreign T20 all-rounders that they could not show the same largesse to homegrown talent. The riches showered on some youngsters in this annual auction like K. Gowtham, bought by Chennai Super Kings for ₹9.25 crore and M. Shahrulkh Khan, picked up by the renamed Punjab Kings for ₹1.2 crore, may have been heartwarming as their potential to shine in the T20 format is being recognised. The champions Mumbai Indians, who were parsimonious compared to the likes of Royal Challengers Bangalore, who broke their bank at the auction on a couple of expensive buys, also chose to take on the cricketer with the famous surname — Arjun Tendulkar — at the modest starting price of ₹20 lakh. In cricketing terms, the hunt for impact players who can be expected to swing games with bat and/or ball seems logical enough. The timing of the commitment of millions seems a bit awkward when the world is vaccinating against the existential crisis posed by the virus.

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Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



"There is time always, Bachchoo, To talk of many things As the Walrus did expound On cabbages and kings

And yet this global fear Clips conversation's wings The only news we hear Is of Covid's mutatings!"

— From O For a Sip of Bepsi Kohla by Bachchoo

Why it's crucial to stand up for views you may not agree with...

Without freedom of speech and opinion, there is no democracy. The system of counting votes and giving the majority the privilege of governing in fairness to the minority — is only the first requirement. The rule of unoppressive, uncoercive law, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of speech — yes, even on Twitter — are some of the rest.

Twitter has now banned Donald Trump's outpourings, not because they're left-wing or supportive of some mythical religious bias, but because very many of them amount to hate speech and incitement to break the law.

In Britain, there are laws against hate speech. Though difficult to define, the law trusts judges and

juries to identify speech which calls for any sort of attack on the minorities — or even a majority of the population. It's a law that upholds decency, but "hate crime" shouldn't stretch to expressing a questioning or dissenting opinion about, say, a religion. I am free to publicly proclaim that I don't believe in virgin births, or that God engraves, by lightning, laws on stone tablets or indeed dictates books to prophets. I won't have, I hope, crossed the line between a theological or scientific belief and incitement to attack any religious group or the buildings they pray in.

The definition of hate crime in any democracy should not deteriorate or ever be interpreted as "Disagree Crime". Dictatorships and fascistic regimes, some, as in Turkey, based on religion and others on a maflocracy, are universally known for their intolerance of dissent. Turkey locks up its journalists and Russia arrests and imprisons 11,000 of the protesters who took to the streets in favour of the release of a dissident politician. Other nations disgracefully encourage and allow curtailment of the freedom of speech or even fiction, on the grounds of dubious interpretations of religious sanctity.

In recent years, American and British universities have entertained insidious attacks on the principle of freedom of speech. Cambridge University, for instance, backedpedalled in recent months on an edict they issued to "respect" all opinions. Several senior and junior members of the university interpreted this injunction as a "shut-up" call to all dissidence. They wanted the diktat to be modified to "tolerate" all opinions, while reserving the right to contradict and oppose them. The dissidents won.

Several prominent writers and academics, among them J.K. Rowling of the Harry Potter books, Germaine Greer, widely recognised as a pioneer of contemporary feminism and, most recently, Prof. Selina Todd of Oxford University, have been variously "no-platformed" by university student organisations because they've argued, in the media or through social media outlets, that transgender women were not really women and shouldn't be afforded the reserved rights and spaces that belonged to the gender. They had rational and scientific arguments on their side and each one, and others on the side of these three, strongly aver that they are not denying social or political rights to

transgender people, but insist on their own freedom, without censure and abuse from trolls, to hold scientific and biological arguments which deny that humans or animals can change gender because they want to.

In a recent case, brought by a young woman who was, when she was underage, subject to what she called pressure and "mind control" at the Tavistock Institute, the court ruled that influencing or indulging minors to change their gender and undergo medicinal, surgical and psychological therapy to do so, was unlawful.

This censorship, the denial of platforms to people whose opinions, politics or stances on any issues which the banning and debarring bodies disagree with, has been confined to supporters of what has come to be known as the "woke" agenda. People with doubts or dissenting opinions on race, gender, sexual orientation — and politicians who have acted in favour of right-wing policies — have been the targets of this denial of appearance on university platforms, sometimes being informed of the banning only hours before they were invited to appear.

The phenomenon has been taken up by right-wing commentators, who argue that this is an anti-demo-

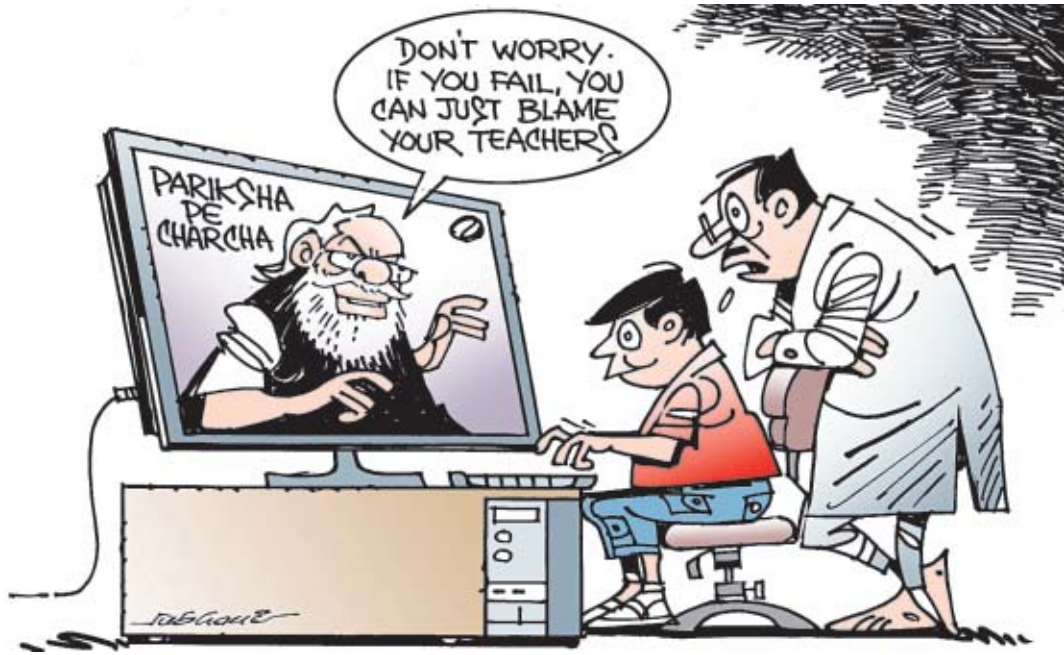
cratic assault on free speech in the very institutions, the universities, where opposing arguments should be debated. Britain's Conservative government, with an ear wide open to these commentators, has now resolved to legislate for "free speech" and appoint a sort of supreme to see that this law is enforced.

Prof. Todd has expressed her support for such a law. She says it's necessary as the atmosphere on campus, perpetrated by self-appointed activists and attitude-enforcers, inhibits the expression of dissenting opinions — about history, science, politics, sociology and even literature.

The National Union of Students' representatives argue that there is no need for such a law and that it has constantly been vigilant about absolute freedom of speech in universities. A good cellar of salt should flavour this assertion.

Time will tell if this law and its enforcement have any effect. Perhaps every country with a claim to being democratic should pass such a law and appoint a manifestly independent "neyta" with powers to dismiss frivolous and outrageous attacks on the freedom of opinion and creativity from politicians and charlatans.

Subhani



Women walk taller.. But what if Ramani had lost?



Shobhaa De

The temptation to gloat at this very moment is pretty darn overwhelming. I'm sure millions of women across India (and possibly the world) are viewing journalist Priya Ramani's acquittal by a Delhi court in a criminal defamation case filed by former Union minister/journalist/author M.J. Akbar as a personal victory. It was a goose-bumps-inducing historic few minutes for those present at Delhi's Rouse Avenue courts on Wednesday as Ravindra Dubey, additional chief metropolitan magistrate, pointed out what should have been obvious to everybody all along — that even a person of high social standing can be a sexual harasser and a woman cannot be punished for raising instances of abuse decades later. The irony of that significant observation is not lost on anyone, given that Priya Ramani was the accused in this case, and had to fight valiantly for her truth to be established in court! And yes — as in most such cases, it is men (and more infrequently, women) "of high social standing" who are guilty of misusing this very "social standing", secure and complacent in the belief that nothing and no one can touch them because of it.

Well, a plucky woman, Priya Ramani, and her equally plucky lawyer, Rebecca John, just threw that smug self-assurance into the dustbin. Good on you, ladies! What I appreciated the most was the sobriety and restraint displayed by both women as soon as the verdict was delivered (M.J. Akbar was surrounded by dozens of policemen, while Priya had all the

women of India behind her). In Priya Ramani's place, I know I would have behaved most indecorously, immaturely and irrepressibly. I might have broken into a victory dance or something silly and spoken to the media between sobs of relief. Priya and Rebecca must know what this victory and acquittal signifies for women — it is like the biggest validation of all times! It shows one thing unequivocally — women matter. Their voices matter. Their hurts, pain, humiliation and subjugation matter! None of it can be ignored or devalued. For centuries, a woman's "virtue" has been equated with her "value". If a woman's "purity" is defiled — her market worth crashes. Even if it's she who has been at the receiving end of sexual harassment! It is the perpetrator who generally wins! When after she has been raped, tortured and brutalised... because society decides "women always ask for it".

With this important verdict, all of a sudden, women are experiencing a surge of confidence. They are walking taller, heads held high. Courage they have never lacked! Just the thought that they will get a fair hearing, is enough for now. The silence of victims has been misread as weakness. Worse, it has been equated with consent and compliance. Ravindra Dubey spoke on behalf of many men who share the sentiments expressed in the verdict but dare not go public with their pro-women views. Why? Because they fear the wrath of other men and are scared of being mocked by a hyper-macho, over-patriarchal system that entitles men

to bully and browbeat women — no questions asked.

Often it is the unalloyed arrogance of men in power (I refuse to call them "powerful men" — they are anything but) that makes them believe in their own invincibility. Here's my theory for what it's worth: M.J. Akbar overplayed his card. Plus, he was badly advised by his mighty legal team. He probably thought he could turn the tables on Priya Ramani and crush her with formidable money power and political clout. Who was she, after all? That's the way mediocre minds function. One expected M.J. Akbar to be a shrewder strategist. Like some of his contemporaries, who ducked under the radar, and waited for the #MeToo storm to blow over. Today, hardly anybody remembers who they were — and nobody cares! The momentum is long over. People have moved on. And those very same men are carrying on with their lives like nothing ever happened. A few are still lying low, perhaps hoping their accusers have "forgotten", preferably "forgiven". Dream on! No Sir... Women do not forget. Never! Some are unable to fight back, others too emotionally drained to rage on. But no woman forgets the face of her abuser or his despicable abuse, till her last breath.

The court in this remarkable verdict has emphasised that there is no time bar for speaking out. A woman is entitled to do so decades later, if she so chooses. In no way

Priya and Rebecca must know what this victory and acquittal signifies for women — it is like the biggest validation of all times! It shows one thing unequivocally — women matter. Their voices matter.

does that diminish her truth.

"A woman cannot be punished for raising her voice," the court said. But she is! Often, with extreme punishment — rape and murder. Then comes the question of her "rights" — what rights? Those are enshrined in our Constitution — but does anybody bother with these rights when women across the board face the worst form of torment? Priya Ramani spoke for working women everywhere when she outed M.J. Akbar — her boss in the 1990s. I wrote four impassioned columns at the time, and was asked to "calm down", mostly by men of his generation, some of whom had faced similar charges in the media and had denied them. Most of the Bollywood men accused during the height of the #MeToo movement are back in the studios, chastened for now, but certainly not sensitised. It's just that they don't want to be caught with their pants down — not that they see anything wrong with sexual harassment per se. It's the same power trip as the one M.J. Akbar imagined would insulate him when he tried to put Priya Ramani on the back foot by suing her for defamation. The point is: A man's reputation has to be impeccable to have the guts to sue a woman for tarnishing it. That's really rich, in this case, considering the court accepted advocate Rebecca Jacob's argument that M.J. Akbar's reputation was far from "stellar". Bravo!

"Right of reputation can't be protected at the cost of life and dignity of the woman..." Yessssss! So ... all the "powerful" men cowering at the moment at the thought of the repercussions of this verdict — cower away. It's your turn next! "... But what if Priya Ramani had lost?"

Readers can send feedback to www.shobhaade.blogspot.com

LETTERS

SHINING VERDICT

Priya Ramani's clean chit by a Delhi court is good (*A shining verdict, DC, Feb. 19*) and a big boost not only for #MeToo movement in India. It also infuses mental strength to women who might have suffered sexist overtures inside and outside their homes to come forward and mitigate their pain by lodging FIRs against their tormentors. These cases generally take a long time and involve huge expenses which could be beyond the victim's capacity and hence a deterrent unless some NGO comes to their rescue.

K. Nehru Patnaik
Visakhapatnam

Yes, justice was done at last to journalist Priya Ramani. It is never late to get a fair judgment in such delicate personal relationships going wrong with the victim having to show proof of the misdeed of the mighty culprit. We have to wait and see if the loser approaches the Supreme Court against the verdict.

Parthasarathy Mandadi
Tirupati

COVID GUARD

It is worrisome and disturbing that South African and Brazilian mutations of the Covid have entered India at a time when there has been laxity and slackness all around the country (*Covid -19 variants : India not out of the woods yet, DC, Feb. 19*). The escalation of Covid cases in Maharashtra is alarming. Given the slow vaccination, masks and social distancing are our life savers. Further, it is too early to lower the guard against Coronavirus.

Dr C. Ghanshyam
Visakhapatnam

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Alarming rise in payments: ESI benefits

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY. 19 Mr. D. Sanjivayya, Labour Minister today announced that the ceiling of incidence on medical care under the Employees State Insurance Scheme should be fixed at Rs. 50, Rs. 54 and Rs. 64 per annum, depending upon the type of emdical care.

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	50,889.76	-0.85
Nifty 50	14,981.80	-0.91
S&P 500*	3,926.25	0.31
Dollar (₹)	72.64	0.16
Pound Sterling (₹)	100.98	0.02
Euro (₹)	87.67	0.15
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	45,568.239	0.52
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	63.41	-0.81
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.132	0.00
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	1.321	0.034

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Urban consumer confidence up in February

Consumer confidence among urban Indians has moved up slightly, by 0.9 percentage point, in February, according to a monthly Refinitiv-Ipsos Primary Consumer Sentiment Index (PCSI) survey. The PCSI is driven by four weighted sub-indices. Its Jobs sub-index moved up 1.5 percentage points, Current Conditions, by 2.8 pps and Investment by 2.1 pps. But Economic Expectations was down by 1.3 ppt.

Govt to appeal against Cairn Energy tax award



The government is likely to file an appeal against the \$1.4 billion international arbitration award won by Cairn Energy in a tax dispute, sources said. Soon after the second round of meeting between Cairn CEO Simon Thomson and finance secretary Ajay Bhushan Pandey ended on Friday, the source said the government intends to defend its sovereign right in taxation and will file an appeal against the tribunal award.

Foragen Seeds gets Israeli firm's breeding lines

Foragen Seeds Pvt Ltd, a Hyderabad-based seed genetics start-up, has signed an agreement with Israeli ag-tech major NRGene to acquire and commercialise the latter's crop breeding programme of maize, rice and chilli-pepper. NRGene is focused on developing software genomics solutions for the ag-tech industry while Foragen Seeds would work for the field breeding programme of elite seed development.

UTI AMC launches Nifty 200 Index-based fund

UTI AMC has launched the country's first momentum-based passively managed fund, based on the Nifty 200 Index. UTI, which manages seven equity ETF funds with an AUM of around Rs 44,000 crore, said the new fund will be based on the 30 best performing stocks from the Nifty 200. Sharwan Kumar Goyal, fund manager, said the UTI Nifty200 Momentum 30 Index Fund, opened for subscription on Thursday, will close on March 4.



Platinum up 120% on auto demand Gold down ₹10K from Aug. rally

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 19

Gold prices have corrected 18 per cent and lost more than Rs 10,000 since August while platinum prices have gained more than 120 per cent since April. Despite the current weakness in gold, both the metals are expected to see further rally in 2021.

Gold prices have dropped to Rs 45,950 per 10 gm in the Multi Commodity Exchange from the highs of Rs 56,590 in August—losing more than Rs 10,000 per 10 gm. In the international market, the yellow metal had touched a record high of \$2,075 an ounce in August as the favourable macro-economic factors got a boost from the pandemic uncertainty. Since then prices have been receding and have fallen to \$1,760 levels, losing more than \$300 per ounce.

"Gold prices have slipped below the crucial Rs 46,000/10gm level, to hit an eight-month low. The rise in the US Treasury yields and stronger dollar, optimism of a larger economic stimulus package, and the vaccination drive have led to downside pressure on gold prices," said Nish Bhatt, founder and CEO, Millwood Kane International.

"Gold has seen considerable weakness as investors started profit-booking ever since the vaccine news started coming. Easy money started flowing into riskier assets like equities and Bitcoin and the indus-



trial recovery saw the base metal prices more than doubling. Most of the equity markets are trading at their life-time high levels and Bitcoin has shot up from Rs 4,000 in March to Rs 52,800," said Ajay Kedia, MD, Kedia Commodities.

Another precious metal, platinum, too saw a rally with the recovery in the automotive sector. Prices are at a six-year high and have moved up from \$560 an ounce in April to \$1273—up by more than 120 per cent.

"Tougher pollution regulations requiring vehicle makers to use more platinum in catalytic converters are supporting prices. China is implementing Phase 6 standard for both gasoline and diesel vehicles from January 2021. As other economies follow the same, the demand will further go up. Moreover, platinum may see a third consecutive annual production deficit in 2021 amid supply concerns from South Africa," said Kedia.

Despite the divergent movement seen in both the metals in the second half of last year and the initial months of this year, analysts say the metals will rally in 2021.

"Gold rally never ends in a year. It goes on for six to eight years. Despite the current weakness, there are several factors that still support gold. A possible weakness in the US dollar, low interest rates, overvalued equities, ETF inflows and recessionary trends in major economies will continue to support gold," said Kedia.

In a report published in November, CitiGroup found gold prices pushing to \$2,000 an ounce in the medium term with a target of \$2,500 for 2021. Similarly, platinum also may move towards \$1,500 with tougher pollution norms in the automotive sector increasing demand. Platinum ETFs too have been seeing significant inflows in the recent months.

18 mn Indians to find new occupation by 2030: Report

Mumbai, Feb. 19: Covid-19 will have a lasting impact on labour markets, and as much as 18 million Indian workers will be forced to switch to a newer occupation by 2030 because of the pandemic, a report said on Friday.

The impact will be "disproportionately" felt on low-wage workers in retail, food services, hospitality, and office administration, the report by McKinsey Global Institute, said.

The pandemic has disrupted labour markets because companies have been forced to respond to a new dimension of work-physical proximity. The report identifies the lasting impact of Covid-19 on labour demand in eight countries.

Three broad changes in consumer behaviour and business models will persist to varying degrees, which include the rise of remote work, the increased embrace of e-commerce and virtual interactions, and the more rapid deployment of automation and artificial intelligence.

This will lead to a reshuffling of jobs in the economy over a decade, and over 100 million workers will have to find a new job, it said, adding 18 million of those will be in India itself.

The impact on India has been minimised because 35-55 per cent of the country's workforce depends on the outdoor production and maintenance arena.

—PTI

₹25,000-cr fund for stalled realty projects bearing fruit

DHWANI PANDYA FEB. 19



Irfan A. Kazi

A 25,000-crore (\$3.5 billion) fund set up by the government to complete stalled housing projects is set to deliver its first finished apartments in 2021, offering a template for a problem that has washed out savings of thousands of home buyers and bank-ruptured developers.

The fund will hand over 16 projects, or more than 4,000 homes, in the financial year starting April 1, said Irfan A. Kazi, chief investment officer at SBI-CAP Ventures Ltd, the government-appointed manager of the alternative investment fund. The 'Special Window for Completion of Construction of Affordable and Mid-Income Housing Projects' (Swahim) fund was announced in November 2019.

At the time, India had an estimated \$63 billion of such stalled projects as an economic slowdown and a credit crisis cascaded through the sector. Builders were unable to service their loans, forcing banks to write off the debts and worsen what was already one of the world's biggest bad-loan piles. The government created the fund as a measure to unclog the financing pipes.

Kazi spoke in a phone interview Feb. 12. Edited excerpts:

How much money has been disbursed?

We have given approvals to around 159 projects involving investment of about Rs 14,500 crore, which will complete around 100,000 homes. Of this, about 47 projects (Rs 5,000 crore) have received final approval but 112 are early-stage

approvals, where due diligence is pending. We don't disclose disbursement amount as we give funding only against project progress; two projects will complete construction by April.

What kind of returns do you expect?

We take first charge on assets and cash flows, so when projects get completed we are the first one to get our money back. Existing lenders have to agree to take second charge. We invest via zero-coupon non-convertible debentures. All our investments are done at 12 per cent internal rate of return across projects.

Was there any push-back?

There was a significant degree of resistance from lenders about our first charge on repayment but, as our deal track record shows, that hurdle is being gradually scaled. We now allow sharing of the security with lenders and sharing of cash flow to some extent. We keep having internal discussions and also with the finance ministry on what criteria can be relaxed.

Who are your investors?

We have 14 investors, the government has 50 per cent

Southern states, UP among losers of divisible pool share

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 19

SHRINKING SHARE

► Karnataka will be the biggest loser, followed by Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Odisha

► The loss has been due to the changes made by the Finance Commission in computation of the income distance and tax effort criteria

Changes in criteria made by the 15th Finance Commission will see the share of 10 states in the divisible pool of gross tax revenues declining during the period FY 2022-26 from FY 2016-20.

Among the 10 states, Karnataka will be the biggest loser, followed by Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Odisha. Tamil Nadu, too, is there in the losers' list.

The loss has been due to the changes in computation of the income distance and tax effort criteria, says rating agency Ibra. For the award period FY2022-26, income distance and tax effort have been calculated based on data for FY2017-19, as compared to FY2016-18 for FY2021.

"The Finance Commission had addressed one of the concerns of the south Indian states and a few others regarding the weight given to 'popula-

tion' by introducing the criterion 'demographic performance'. We had hoped that our share in the divisible pool would go up because of this. However, it has come down and this is because of the criterion 'income distance'," Thomas Issac, finance minister of Kerala, told Financial Chronicle.

The 15th Finance Commission was required to use population as per the 2011 Census. This would have put some of the states that have worked on their fertility rate at a disadvantage. However, the Finance Commission also used demographic performance with a weight of 12.5 per cent to

reward those states that have performed well on demographic management.

Tax Effort also was a new criterion introduced by the 15th FC. It is measurable by the ratio of three-year average of per capita own tax revenues and per capita gross state domestic production (GSDP). This criterion has 2.5 per cent weight.

Maharashtra, meanwhile, is the biggest gainer in terms of share in divisible pool of taxes during FY2022-26, relative to FY2016-20. The other states which have increased their share include Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan.

V-Guard promoter sells shares worth ₹90 cr for social causes

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 19

Kochouseph Chittilappilly, the promoter of V-Guard Industries who donated his kidney to a stranger a decade ago, has raised Rs 90 crore by selling 40 lakh shares of the company for social causes. Earlier in 2019 also he had raised Rs 110 crore by selling shares.

"The sale of 40 lakh shares of V-Guard Industries executed on February 17, 2021 was to raise funds for two initiatives I have undertaken as part of my commitment to social causes," Chittilappilly said in a regulatory filing.

K. Chittilappilly Foundation (KCF), formed to undertake charitable and philanthropic activities will use the proceeds of the sale to execute "Chittilappilly Square" envisioned as the hub for social activities with a vast public park with garden, walking and jogging tracks, sports and games areas, yoga and health club, amphitheatres, auditorium and multiple halls for social gatherings, a heritage and cultural



Kochouseph Chittilappilly

museum, exhibition centre, library and reading room, model organic farm, etc.

KCF also has been assisting entrepreneurs who face shortage of funds to scale up their businesses, by providing credit funds at reasonable rates and terms. A company named K. Chittilappilly Capital has been incorporated and it has applied for Certificate of Registration as a NBFC from the RBI. Part of the proceeds of the stake sale will also be utilised for funding the initiative.

Chittilappilly had raised Rs 110 crore in 2019 by selling 51.20 lakh shares in the open market, mainly for buying land for Chittilappilly Square. According to Mithun Chittilappilly, managing director of V-Guard Industries, the promoter group holding in the Kochi-based electrical appliances manufacturer has come down from 64 per cent four years back to 60 per cent now. It was 70 per cent during the IPO in 2008 and had gone up to 74 per cent after the buy-back of shares two-three years later.

Kochouseph Chittilappilly is likely to sell part of his shares in the company in the future also for his social causes, said Mithun. This will see the promoter group holdings coming further down.

Earlier in 2011, after turning 60 years, Kochouseph Chittilappilly had donated one of his kidneys to a truck driver—a total stranger in need. He has also promised to donate one-third of his fortune in his lifetime for various philanthropic activities.

TRAI SECY FAULTS RESIDENTIAL BODIES CHARGING TELECOM FIRMS FOR ACCESS



New Delhi, Feb. 19: Minimum standards need to be developed for provision of telecom services within buildings and residential complexes and the "wrong" mindset that telcos should pay to get access for laying down infrastructure in housing complexes must change, a senior Trai official said.

The growth of telecommunications, the underlying critical infrastructure, is closely linked to growth of every sector and the economy as a whole, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India secretary S.K. Gupta said.

"Different types of builders, their associations and RWAs resident welfare associations) have to be taught about the importance of telecom and (need to be) convinced that they have to change their mindset of penalising telecom service providers by asking money from them to provide the services—in fact it is you (building residents) who requires the services, not telecom service providers," Gupta said.

He was speaking at an interactive workshop of industry body Broadband India Forum (BIF).

The pandemic and work-from-home culture has driven the need for seamless connectivity inside residential buildings and multiple data users within a family—from children taking online classes to professionals working remotely from home—have underlined the importance of good coverage in every nook and corner of the house, he noted.

He emphasised that unless the quality of services is good, next generation 5G will not serve its purpose. "...if you talk about the economy, you have to talk about the health of telecommunications."

—PTI

TECH TO | THE FRONT Firm aims to electrify two-thirds of global car sales by 2030

Honda appoints R&D chief as new CEO

RIVER DAVIS FEB. 19

Honda Motor Co is promoting its current head of research and development (R&D) Toshihiro Mibe to chief executive, the latest in a number of bold moves the automaker is taking to step beyond its more than half-a-century-long reliance on selling gasoline-powered cars.

Mibe, 59, will assume the president role effective April 1, the company said in a statement on Friday. Honda's current CEO Takahiro Hachigo, who helmed the firm for six years, will become a director and then retire from the company at its general meeting in June. Honda's new chief is



Toshihiro Mibe

taking the top job as the Japanese carmaker pushes to stay abreast of the two great shifts hitting the auto industry: automation and electrification. Since joining Honda in 1987, Mibe has occupied various roles, including as the chief of Honda's R&D subsidiary, where he was central to driving the company's

► In recent months, Honda has taken a number of steps to reallocate resources into next-generation technologies

electric vehicle technologies and autonomous driving strategies.

Honda, like most legacy automakers, is struggling to find ways to fund next-generation electric and driverless car technologies while keeping its gas-powered car sales afloat. Hachigo, who took office in 2015, sought to move away from past initiatives

prioritising scale to focus on costs. Under his leadership, Honda trimmed a number of factories in Japan and abroad.

In recent months, Honda has taken a number of steps to reallocate resources into next-generation technologies. In September, it formed an alliance with General Motors Co to cooperate in areas such as research and connected-car services. The next month, Honda announced it will no longer participate in Formula One racing, seeking to reallocate resources to its development of EV and fuel-cell technologies.

Honda, which aims to electrify two-thirds of its global car sales by 2030,

has weathered a tough 2020, a period when vehicle sales were crushed by pandemic-related disruptions. It's targeting an operating profit of 520 billion yen (\$5 billion) for the 12 months through March, down about 18% from the previous year.

The automaker is also grappling with a chip shortage that's forcing automakers worldwide to pare their output just as car demand begins to recover. The semiconductor shortage is estimated to knock 500,000 units off the Japanese carmakers' output largely in the first half. Within Japan, it's estimated Honda will shoulder the bulk of those losses.

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Pugilists Chanu, Vinka make semis

New Delhi: Asian youth gold medallists Babyrojisana Chanu (51kg) and Vinka (60kg) advanced to the semifinals of the 30th Adriatic Pearl tournament in Budva, Montenegro, assuring themselves of at least a bronze medal each with dominating first-round wins. Manipur's Chanu, who trains at MC Mary Kom's academy, did not put a foot wrong and dominated her opponent Georgieva Blagovesta of Bulgaria from the word go and as a result, the referee had to stop the contest in the first round itself. She will face Uzbekistan's Feruza Kazakova in the semifinals. Vinka, who was up against Uzbekistan's Sevara Ashurova in a quarterfinal bout, produced a flawless display of her attacking prowess. She will face Suvi Tujala in the semifinals. — PTI

BWF extends Oly qualifying time

New Delhi: The Tokyo Olympics badminton qualification period was on Friday extended by nearly two months to June 15 after the postponement of three important tournaments due to Covid-19 related restrictions. The qualification period was earlier to end on April 25. "The Olympic Qualifying period for the Race to Tokyo will now close on 15 June 2021, with the last tournament counting for qualification being the Singapore Open 2021," the BWF said in a statement. "BWF is working with the IOC to update the Tokyo 2020 qualification system whereby the final updated regulation will be shared once ready following formal approval by IOC," it added. — PTI

Star high jumper Vlasic retires

Zagreb: Croatia's two-time world champion and double Olympic medallist Blanka Vlasic announced on Friday she was retiring after struggling with injuries for years. Vlasic, 37, said in an open letter that since winning a bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics, "I have been trying to cure my injury, four years full of hope that I will once again stand in front of the bar and challenge myself. "The following years brought countless rehabilitation treatments, hope and disappointment," she added. Vlasic has long suffered from injuries to her Achilles tendon and heel and had to undergo frequent operations. She said she let the decision to end her career "come naturally". — AFP

Krishna stars for Bhadradi

Hyderabad: Sai Krishna fell three runs short of a century but his knock powered Bhadradi to a comfortable win over Suryapet in the Telangana Cricket Association U-19 East Zone inter-districts tournament. Krishna's 97 took Bhadradi to 185 for 9. In reply, Suryapet were all out for 151. **Brief scores:** ■ Bhadradi 185/9 in 20 overs (Sai Krishna 97 — 39b, 11x4, 7x6, Manda Srinath 31, Narsi 3/22) bt Suryapet 151 in 17.2 overs (Avinash Kailash 65, Shiva Nagendra 3/16). ■ Bhupalapally 140/5 in 20 overs (Anruth 69 n.o., Farhan 3/22) bt Warangal Urban 86 in 18 overs (P. Gangadhar 4/26).

Live on TV

TENNIS
Australian Open: Women's singles final from 1.30 pm, followed by mixed doubles final on Sony Six, Sony Ten 2
CRICKET
PSL: Karachi Kings vs Quetta Gladiators from 7.30 pm on Sony Six
South Africa T20 League: Lions vs Warriors from 1.30 pm; Knights vs Dolphins from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD
FOOTBALL
English Premier League: Southampton vs Chelsea from 6 pm; Burnley vs West Brom from 8.30 pm; Liverpool vs Everton from 11 pm; Fulham vs Sheffield United from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1
UFC
Fight Night: Curtis Blaydes vs Derrick Lewis and other bouts from 6.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Money, Money, Money

Jamieson didn't know how much ₹15 crore was

Christchurch, Feb. 19: Waking up at around midnight in New Zealand, Kyle Jamieson wondered how much ₹15 crore would be in his country's currency, after having watched an intense three-way bid for him in the IPL auction. The 6'8" pacer eventually ended up with Royal Challengers Bangalore for \$2 million approximately, making him the highest paid New Zealander and fourth highest in the IPL's 14-year history. "I woke up around midnight and decided to check the phone. Rather than trying to avoid the situation, (I thought) I'll sit back and enjoy it. It was certainly a weird hour and a half waiting for my name to be called up," Jamieson was quoted as saying by *stuff.co.nz*.

"I had a message from Shane Bond (former New Zealand pacer and Mumbai Indians bowling coach) as it was going and he said, 'How good is this'. "I didn't actually know what the amount of money, how that translated to New Zealand dollars. It was quite cool to share that moment with him and ride that two or three minutes with him," he added.

Also showing in interest in him were Delhi Capitals and the Punjab Kings in the auction on Thursday.

Former Black Caps coach Mike Hesson, RCB's director of cricket operations, led the charge to win the three-way bidding for Jamieson, who made his Test debut against India at home last year.

His retainer fee for the Black Caps, according to the report, is between \$100,000 to \$150,000, which makes RCB's winning bid amount 20 times more.

It completed a rapid rise for Jamieson, who is known for extracting awkward bounce. The right-arm quick, playing in the 2019 Super Smash, picked up 6 for 7 in four overs, a New Zealand T20 record.

He has so far played in six Tests, two ODIs and four T20Is. He took two five-wicket hauls in his first four Tests and has also shown a lot of competence with the bat as well.

Asked what would he buy if his New Zealand teammates asked for a treat, Jamieson said, "Probably a few coffees I would have thought."

"I don't know. It's only been a few hours. My bank account hasn't changed overnight, but there'll be a bit of stick given and a few coffees and a few beers I'm sure," the New Zealand speedster further added.

Jamieson will join a star-studded RCB team who scooped ₹14.5 crore in the auction. — PTI



New Zealand bowler Kyle Jamieson in this file photo.

₹9.25 crore IPL contract is nerve-wracking: Gowtham

Ahmedabad, Feb. 19: A net bowler with the Indian team right now, uncapped Karnataka all-rounder Krishnappa Gowtham is still trying to get a grip on his emotions after fetching a mind-boggling ₹9.25 crore deal with Chennai Super Kings which left his parents and wife overwhelmed by tears of joy.

After a bidding war at the IPL auction in Chennai on Thursday, Gowtham was bought by CSK, his price surpassing that of Krunal Pandya's then record of ₹8.8 crore by the Mumbai Indians in 2018 for an uncapped player.

"It was nerve-wracking. I was very anxious, watching on TV," Gowtham, who is currently with the Indian Test team here as a net bowler for the series against England, told *ESPNCricinfo*.

"We'd just landed in Ahmedabad and I'd just switched on TV and my name came up. Emotions were changing every minute. Then, Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya knocked on my door and gave me a big hug and they asked for a big treat," he added.

His base price was ₹20 lakh, and he was quickly the focus of a fierce bidding war between the Kolkata Knight Riders and the Sunrisers Hyderabad, before CSK swooped in with a late bid.

Krishnappa has modest



It was nerve-wracking, I was very anxious, watching on TV. My parents had tears, happy tears. They were all so happy for me.

— KRISHNAPPA GOWTHAM after fetching a mind-boggling deal with Chennai Super Kings

IPL statistics. He has played just 24 matches in three seasons since 2018 and has scored 186 runs and taken 13 wickets.

He was a part of RR for two seasons — 2018 and 2019 playing 15 and 7 matches respectively — and was with Kings XI Punjab (now Punjab Kings) in 2020 where he featured in just two games before being released.

Gowtham's parents and wife in Bengaluru were in tears when they came to know of the good news.

"My parents had tears, happy tears. They were all

so happy for me," Gowtham said.

"It's hard to describe that feeling. It's all just sinking in. Obviously this isn't the first time I've been part of the auction but every time your name comes up, the kind of butterflies in your tummy is unimaginable," he added.

Gowtham will be playing under M. S. Dhoni and he remembers queuing up with a few other uncapped players to get his bat signed by the legendary wicketkeeper batsman after an IPL game three years ago. — PTI

ARJUN CAN'T WAIT TO WEAR MI'S JERSEY

New Delhi, Feb. 19: Pacer Arjun Tendulkar cannot wait for his maiden IPL stint to start with Mumbai Indians and thanked the coaches for having faith in him after being picked by the five-time champions at the players' auction.

The 21-year-old, son of iconic former captain Sachin Tendulkar, got a major fillip on Thursday when he was bought by Mumbai Indians at his base price of ₹20 lakh.

His celebrated father hasn't just played for the franchise but is also the mentor of the side, which is the most successful team in the IPL.

"Since childhood I have always been a die hard fan of Mumbai Indians. I would like to thank the coaches and support staff who showed faith in me."

"I am excited to join the MI Paltan and can't wait to wear the blue and gold," Arjun said in a video message posted on MI's *Twitter* handle.

Arjun has been a net bowler for the franchise for the past two-three seasons. He recently made his senior Mumbai team debut when he played in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, the national T20 championship, against Haryana. — PTI

MORRIS ROLE IS TO SUPPORT ARCHER: SANGA

Mumbai, Feb. 19: Rajasthan Royals' director of cricket Kumar Sangakkara on Friday said that allrounder Chris Morris, who was brought by the franchise for ₹16.25 crore in the IPL auction, will have a "very specific role of supporting" pace spearhead Jofra Archer.

Morris became the most expensive buy in IPL history when he was picked by RR following an intense bidding war at the auction on Thursday.

"Morris was significantly high in terms of auction price. Morris has a very specific role for us to play in supporting (Jofra) Archer. It gives us a lot more flexibility in the way we use Archer," Sangakkara said.

"Also, Morris' numbers, when he is (has) been fit and strong, has been some of the best in all IPLs," Sangakkara added. — PTI



Belgium's Elise Mertens (left) and partner Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus leap with their winner's trophy after defeating Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova 6-2, 6-3 in the women's doubles final at the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on Friday. — AFP

Medvedev mauls Tsitsipas, in final

Melbourne, Feb. 19: Russia's Daniil Medvedev overpowered Stefanos Tsitsipas to make his first Australian Open final Friday, where he will bid to stop world number one Novak Djokovic from clinching an unprecedented ninth title.

The fourth seed proved far too strong for Greece's Tsitsipas, crushing him 6-4, 6-2, 7-5 in front of more than 7,000 noisy fans at Rod Laver Arena to extend his win streak to 20.

The 25-year-old, ultra-confident on the back of his unbeaten run, which includes three titles, has been knocking on the door of Grand Slam success for some time, but has yet to win a title.

To finally get over the line he must on Sunday beat top seed Djokovic, who has won all eight finals he has played at Melbourne Park.

But nobody on tour has more momentum than Medvedev, whose tricky game has stymied all opponents since November, and he has won three of his last four against the 17-time Grand Slam-winning Serb.

"It definitely wasn't easy," said Medvedev, only the third Russian after Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Marat Safin to reach the Australian Open final.

"I got a little bit scared and tight (in the third set) because it's a semifinal of

THE RESULTS

Men's singles semifinal: Daniil Medvedev (RUS x4) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x5) 6-4, 6-2, 7-5.

Women's doubles final: Elise Mertens (BEL)/ Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2) bt Barbora Krejickova (CZE)/ Katerina Siniakova (CZE x3) 6-2, 6-3.

a Slam... but happy I was able to turn my game on, especially in some tight moments on my serve."

ELISE-SABALENKA DUO CLINCHES DOUBLES TITLE

Elise Mertens and Aryna Sabalenka won the Australian Open women's doubles final Friday to collect their second Grand Slam trophy as a team.

It is likely to be their last for a while.

The 22-year-old from Belarus was the dominant player on court as she and Mertens, the U.S. Open doubles champions in 2019, combined for a 6-2, 6-3 win over third-seeded Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova of the Czech Republic.

Second-seeded Sabalenka and Mertens wasted three championship points in an eight-minute last game. Sabalenka earned a fourth championship point with an ace and clinched the title when Siniakova sent a backhand wide.

— Agencies

INDIA'S ANKITA DAZZLES, WINS MAIDEN WTA TITLE

Melbourne, Feb. 19: India's Ankita Raina on Friday claimed her maiden WTA title by lifting the Phillip Island Trophy along with Russian partner Kamilla Rakhimova, a feat which will catapult her into the top-100 in the doubles for the first time in her career.

Ankita and Kamilla erased a one-set deficit to beat the Russian combination of Anna Blinkova and Anastasia Potapova 2-6, 6-4, 10-7 in the summit clash here.

The 28-year-old Indian shared the \$8000 prize money with her partner and earned 280 ranking points, which will take her to 94 from the current 115 when the WTA doubles chart is updated next week.

Ankita will become only the second player to crack the doubles top-100 since Sania Mirza, who is a six-time Grand Slam champion.

The past two weeks have been extremely memorable for the gritty Indian, who made her Grand Slam debut at the Australian Open in the doubles, and also won a round in the main draw of a WTA singles tournament.

"It's been a great week. Kamilla and I played together for the first time. We signed up just 20 minutes before the draw because there was a lot of confusion with the entry list," Ankita said. — PTI

Bruno nets brace in Man U victory

Paris, Feb. 19: Bruno Fernandes scored twice as Manchester United romped to a 4-0 victory over Real Sociedad in their Europa League last-32 first leg on Thursday, while Gareth Bale impressed for Tottenham in a 4-1 thrashing of Austrian side Wolfsberg.

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's United are all but into the last 16, with four 'away' goals to take into the return game in a week's time, after the first leg was played in Turin due to coronavirus travel restrictions.

The Premier League outfit grabbed the lead in the 27th minute when Fernandes pounced on a defensive mix-up to slot in from Marcus Rashford's clipped pass.

Solskjaer's men doubled their advantage 12 minutes into the second period as Fernandes stroked home his 21st goal of the season.

United continued to play at a pace Sociedad could not deal with and Rashford finally got his goal in the 65th minute.

The tie was surely put to bed in the final minute of normal time as Daniel James raced clear and fired into the bottom corner.

Meanwhile, Gareth Bale notched his first Tottenham assist since April 2013 to tee up Son Heung-min for the opening goal in Budapest against Wolfsberg, before drilling in the second before the half-hour mark.

A wonderful individual strike from Lucas Moura extended Spurs' first-half lead, and although Michael Liendl pulled one back for the Austrians with a second-half penalty, the English club have one foot in the next round after Carlos Vinicius' 88th-minute goal. — AFP



Australian speedster Jhye Richardson in this file photo.

Captain Virat opens up on depression

New Delhi, Feb. 19: India captain Virat Kohli has revealed that he battled depression during a harrowing tour of England in 2014 where he felt like the "loneliest guy in the world" after a string of failures with the bat.

In a conversation with former England player Mark Nicholas on his 'Not Just Cricket' podcast, Kohli conceded that went through a tough phase during the particularly difficult tour.

"Yes, I did," was his response when asked whether he had suffered from depression at the time.

"...it's not a great feeling to wake up knowing that you won't be able to score runs and I think all batsmen have felt that at some stage that you are not in control of anything at all," he recalled.

Kohli had a disastrous tour of England in 2014, registering scores of 1, 8, 25, 0, 39, 28, 0, 7, 6 and 20 in five Tests, averaging 13.50 in his 10 innings. He roared back to form in the tour of Australia after that, accumulating 692 runs in the Test series.

"You just don't understand how to get over it. That was a phase when I literally couldn't do any-



Virat Kohli

thing to overturn things...I felt like I was the loneliest guy in the world," he said of the England tour.

Kohli remembered feeling alone despite the fact

that there were supportive people in his life. He said professional help was what he needed.

"Personally, for me that was a revelation that you could feel that lonely even though you a part of a big group. I won't say I didn't have people who I could speak to but not having a professional to speak to who could understand what I am going through completely, I think is a huge factor. I think I would like to see it change," Virat added.

Virat believes mental health issues cannot be overlooked as they can destroy a person's career.

"Someone whom you can go to at any stage, have a conversation around and say 'Listen this is what I am feeling, I am finding it hard to even go to sleep, I feel like I don't want to wake up in the morning. I have no confidence in myself, what do I do?'"

"Lot of people suffer with that feeling for longer periods of time, it carries on for months, it carries on for a whole cricket season, people are not able to get out of it," Kohli said.

"I strongly feel the need for professional help there to be very honest," he added. — PTI