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UK notes China’s brazen human rights violation

The United Kingdom has accused China of human rights violations amounting to “barbarism” against its Uyghur Muslim minority, as it unveiled new rules to ban imports of goods suspected of using forced labour. The abuses were “on an industrial scale”, said the country’s Foreign Secretary. This, of course, will not help improve the UK’s ties with Beijing. The two are already sharpening knives over crack-down in Hong Kong. “It is truly horrific barbarism we had hoped lost to another era, in practice today as we speak, in one of the leading members of the international community,” the official told Parliament. “We have a moral duty to respond.”

The UK plans to bar British companies which have a role in the human rights violations against Uyghurs in Xinjiang province in Northwest China. The

measures included a strengthening of the UK’s Modern Slavery Act to introduce fines for businesses not complying with transparency rules, extending the act to the public sector, and an “urgent review” of export controls around Xinjiang. The move stands in contrast to a December trade deal between the European Union and China, which approved major investment and opened up the Chinese market to the 27-member bloc.

The deal was criticised because of widespread claims of forced labour in Chinese supply chains and put the EU out of step with like-minded partners including the US, Australia and the UK, which have all sought to check China’s ambitions. The UK left the EU in January last year, and as of January 1 this year is no longer bound by its rules. It is hoping to use Brexit as a way to promote

a more globally focused Britain beyond Europe. Its “Global Britain” strategy includes targeted sanctions against human rights violators, which so far has slapped restrictions on individuals and groups from Russia and Saudi Arabia to North Korea.

The UK is also ‘watching’ India to weigh its business deals as India seems to offer little in return. Earlier last month the United States banned cotton imports from a powerful Chinese quasi-military organisation - the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) - over forced labour concerns involving detained Uyghurs. The XPCC, founded in 1954 to settle China’s far west, produces about a third of Xinjiang’s cotton. But similar to Tibet, Xinjiang is a tightly controlled region of China. Many Uyghur communities also live in countries neighbouring China,

such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.

An estimated 3,000 Uyghurs live in Australia. China’s President Xi Jinping has overseen a hardline approach towards Muslim minorities living in Xinjiang, especially the Uyghurs. In recent years, the government has installed sophisticated surveillance technology across the region, and there has been a surge in police numbers. Recent reports have identified more than 100 Uyghur intellectuals including writers, poets, journalists and university professors are now among those detained. The persecution of intellectuals, who speak out against oppression, and continue traditional practice, occurs even if they are moderate in their views and working towards reconciliation.

Members of the Uyghur diaspora have been reported as requesting “proof of life” from Beijing over disappeared family members back in Xinjiang. Uyghurs in Australia have reported missing relatives.



Australian cricket is racial, unsporting

DR DUGGARAJU SRINIVASA RAO

THE just drawn third cricket test between India, Australia at Sydney ground will be remembered not only for great heroic rear-guard action of Indian cricketers and also for the unacceptable racial behaviour of the Australian spectators, and also the condemnable unsporting behaviour of the Australian cricketers, including its current captain Paine and former captain Smith. The year ban imposed on Australian cricketers including the then captain Smith, involved in ‘sandpaper gate’ scandal in 2018, seems to have not changed the mindset, ‘winning the match through hook or crook’ of Australians.

Team Australia may be producing great cricketers but certainly not producing players with good sportsmanship. Australian cricketers are liked for their skill in the game but hated across the cricket playing nations because of their on-field behavior and their unprovoked ‘verbal diarrhoea’. Their beastly bowling prowess and ferocious batting talent gave them the number one position in cricket arena for a long time. As other nations also grew in cricket and started producing great bowlers and batsmen the Australians have been challenged in their own game. Team Australia frustrated with their performance with both bat and ball seems to have developed the unsporting and cheating ways to win back the lost position in Test rankings.

Australian cricketers are established experts in sledging. The other cricketing nations, overwhelmed at the way the Australian teams were performing, largely failed to challenge their sledging for the fear of getting the label of bad losers. Taking advantage of this, the Australian cricketers reacted violently at times. Indian players like Sachin, Rahul and VVS are so gentlemanly that they refused to react but replied with bat. The sole aim of sledging was to disturb the concentration of the batsman and force his to commit a mistake while batting.

The sledging and wordy duel on the field and off the field seems to have ingrained in the blood of the Australians. For, there appears a pattern in the way the cricketers of past and present start mouthing out unnecessary words whenever a series is approaching. The retired

greats of the Australia start writing columns and comments in the channel interviews running down the visiting teams, whether it is India or England, with the kind of negativism which we rarely see in other countries.

It happened even at the beginning of the current tour of Indian team. The retired cricketers wrote columns labelling ‘this Indian team as weakest, “they can’t repeat this time what they did in the last tour” and “the Australian team will crush the Indian team” as they can’t stand the pace battery of Australians were some of the words they used. Then they start a campaign like situation aiming at hitting the confidence of the visiting team batters and bowlers. Lot is written and said about at the weaknesses of those visiting cricketers using all their ‘past experience’, in fact some of them using the visuals of past dismissals. This is all intended to effect the morale of the players and also to inject some sort of suspicion in their art of batting and bowling.

The crushing defeat of Indians in the first test at Adelaide, where Indian team was bundled out for 36, their lowest total in recent test cricket gave the past and present Australian cricketers to exhibit “we said so” attitude. Never to lose a chance to hit the morale of the visiting teams the Australian commentators went overboard in writing in “sympathetic way” on the performance of Indian team in the rest of the three tests more so when their aggressive captain and best batsman left on paternity leave.

The Indian team seems to have hit Australians both in the ground and outside by outperforming the team Australia in all the fields of the game and scoring an emphatic 8-wicket victory in second test in Melbourne. The Australian ‘experts’ were silenced as they gave Indian team no chance to win except in Adelaide, where they lost badly and scored victory in Melbourne where the expert prediction was no chance.

It is in this background that the team Australia couldn’t stomach the spirited performance in the third test. The racial abuse by the spectators started almost on the second day and went into fourth day, the new star Siraj and seasoned lion Bumrah were targeted with ‘brown dog’, ‘go home’ like words. That the other spectators have not objected to those insulting words confirms the racial mentality of the Australians. Till the players talked to their captain and umpires the abuses went on and even though the racial abuse is a punishable offence in Australia, those six suspected abusers were not booked but simply asked to leave the stands.

That unruly spectators when compared to the seasoned Australian cricketers is certainly innocent. The players have crossed all the decency which is expected of player representing his nation. The captain Tim Paine was leading his team in sledging. His frustration at the way the Ashwin and Hanuma Vihari fought brought out the typical Australian cricketer’s ‘toxic culture’ out and started sledging to unsettle Ravichandran Ashwin. As the stump microphone has picked up Tim Paine’s series of verbal jabs the Australian captain was forced to condemn himself about the behaviour.

The ‘sandpaper gate’ ball tamper leader Smith has not learnt any lesson from his punishment of earlier offence but went with his unsporting act of ‘scuffing up’ the batsman Rishabh Pant’s guard at the batting crease. But there is no remorse in Smith despite being caught on camera about his scuffing act and netizens lambasting him as a habitual offender on the cricket field.

The sledging gang is exposed. The Australian captain Tim Paine who tried to disturb the concentration of Ashwin himself lost the focus and dropped three catches and helped India to draw the test. These are small things when compared to the wider issue of sporting image of cricket Australia and that seems to be unchanged for the present.

America and politics of infamy



THERE is a visible danger of USA turning politically unstable in the near term, with unprecedented politics of infamy at play. The political landscape since elections in November 2020 has transformed into a bitter ideological divide across the nation. For the first time since it is founded, USA is showcasing its worst politics and setting bad precedence for the entire world.

Americans for so long have been extremely proud of their democratic legacy, transparent electoral system, constitutionally protected personal-liberties and a functional federal republic. However, the ongoing politics seems to be beyond ideological differences and partisan overtures. It is moving towards rapid destabilisation of the great American core values.

All functional democracies are fundamentally rooted in differential ideologies of political parties at electoral play. Difference, dissent and deliberation are natural drivers of a healthy democracy. These three activities play-out between incumbent and opposition parties, within an established legal-framework and Constitution.

Unfortunately, politics of USA has wrong tracked since 2016 election. It is natural that a strong leader with massive national agenda to implement, even if it is in the interest of his nation, will be projected as one who is trampling the democratic process. Mostly, the reasons for this accusation are change in the political status-quo, quicker decision-making, faster policy implementation and very less bi-partisan appeasement. More so, when that leader is considered a political outsider and doesn’t follow established ‘politically correctness’ like President Donald Trump.

President Donald Trump fits this profile perfectly. However, an elected national leader in a hurry to finish-up his agenda for a nation in four short years of his term, cannot accomplish much, if he doesn’t do what President Trump did. Radically break the status-quo on many fronts, make massive decisions and not indulge in any bi-partisan appeasement, unlike a career-politician. But one cannot take away from President Trump, the ‘USA-

First’ development-agenda he delivered for USA, under his watch.

I will highlight four historic, infamous political mistakes both Democrats and Republicans have made in recent times, which will alter the fundamentals of American politics from here on.

Personalised political attacks normalised

It is President Donald Trump who has started the new culture of ‘Personalised Political Attacks’ in the mainstream American politics during his run for Presidency, since 2015. After his spectacular win in 2016, it was officially mainstreamed.

If I were to advice, I would have asked President Trump to quit that dimension of his communication right from the first day in office at White House. It would have saved him the fall from Presidential grace all through his term and would have certainly earned him a decisive re-election in 2020. I am not writing this in retrospect, it was on my mind throughout his term.

Democrats have walked into this un-American method of communication, as if it is necessary to win the next election. They have bought the new communication model of President Trump, and applied it against him all across the current term, almost giving it authenticity and bi-partisan acceptance. Republican Party has neither admonished nor repudiated President Trump’s personal attack model, there by ended up endorsing it. The grand old parties of a great democracy have together accepted, endorsed and even promoted the pathetic fall of ‘political-discourse’ in USA.

Media too has propagated and normalised the new ‘careless communication’ model as socially acceptable. In fact, the media and journalist discourse in USA has fallen way below the political discourse, and today looks like it has regressed beyond repair.

There is no ‘political correctness’ left in the politics of USA as both parties have adopted this sensational communication method. There is no ‘social correctness’ left in communication of most regular Americans either, nor there is ‘media-correctness’ in the mainstream and social media.

Unfortunately, it took USA just over five years to reduce their world renowned and respected ‘careful communication’ model, shockingly into unimaginable ‘Careless-communication’ laced with impoliteness, brazenness and hate. As I see, this is where it all began.

Social media mainstreamed the ‘Idiot Voice’

America until recently was



considered a nation of intellect, innovation, enterprise and great social values. Social-media in the name of seamless expression for all, has exposed the dirty underbelly of USA, and in fact of the entire world. The underdogs, loud-mouths, social-amateurs, Identity-deprived, knowledge-less idiots have found a medium to voice, which they have successfully used, to drown all others. Especially the voice of those, who positively contribute to a nation, knowledgeable, meaningful and those who add real-time-value through their professions, have found themselves muted by massiveness of the ‘Idiot-voice’ being broadcasted both on mainstream-media and social media.

USA has inadvertently has led this regressive transformation not just within their nation but across the world, through innovative social media platforms like Face Book, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram and You Tube. This historic shift of balance has wrecked not just the quality of social interaction and expression in general but has irreparably damaged the quality of political expression and dissent.

Moderate expression with ‘careful-communication’ finds no resonance in either mainstream-media or social-media, in comparison to rabid, brazen, uncouth and hate filled expression which is always ‘viralised’ and consumed across board. The new leaders and heroes of the world today are those who clamor for number of likes, shares and retweets through sensationalism, careless communication and anti-social (national) behavior on social-media.

The shallow posts, illiterate comments, un-informed statements, peripheral judgements leading to abusive and foul expression. Many with almost no fundamental understanding of issues, knowledge in the relevant area make superlative hate comments, and mostly even unre-

lated to their personal and professional lives. If these kind of individuals voice, opinions and positions shape of our future world, imagine where a nation or the world will be in a decade from now! Thoroughness and well-informed political discourse have died a billion deaths in the last five years in USA and the world.

Gross deterioration of legislative discourse

At least, the legislative discourse in the House and Senate should have been spared of the cheap expression and low value tactics prevailing in the virtual world. However, there seems to be neither introspection nor even a thought given to legislative the conduct of the House and Senate representatives.

It’s evident by now, that everyone is trying to capture the fingers and eye-balls of the massive size of ‘Idiots’ on social media. Only hate-laced, derogatory, sensational or abusive statements can lead up to a ‘great speech’ even in legislative chambers with thousands of likes and shares. The proof of this communication pattern is in the unimaginable crass speeches being broadcasted from the House and Senate in session. The quality and depth of most speeches have touched rock bottom already.

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi is supposed to set an example and lead from the front, for exemplary conduct in the House. However, she chooses words like ‘domestic terrorists’ for protestors and claims the President of the United States poses ‘clear and present danger to United States’ – There can’t be anything more beneath, than these kinds of speeches from the House of Representatives.

Unfounded, shallow, illiterate and cheaply dramatic street discourse is being spelt out on the House floor, by Speaker of the House of a celebrated democracy, exhibits the future stature

LETTERS

Stop this anti-society move

FESTIVALS like Sankranti and Diwali are occasions for family gatherings /unions. Millions travel from cities where they work to villages to meet relatives and friends and keep up relations. This must be encouraged. On China’s new year day, the government encourages and facilitates such travel by running special trains at reduced fares, holding family bonds should be preserved. Indian Railways and State Road Transport Corporations (SRTC) do

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run special trains but increase fares including for platform tickets. The RTC increase fares by 50 per cent. This increase in fares is undue profiteering and anti-society. Indians cherish family bonds and their villages. This is a cultural value. Therefore Railways and SRTC’s must not increase fares; on the other hand they should reduce the fare and run maximum number of trains and buses.

Dr T Hanuman Chowdary,
Secunderabad

Vaccination unrolls

16th January, 2021 is a red-letter day in the annals of Indian medical history in the view of launching Covid-19 vaccine on this day all over India in a phased manner.

I feel that the death toll in India on account of Corona is relatively less when compared to US, Europe etc and the Indian initiative to contain this otherwise devastating disease is praiseworthy. Still the use of vaccines without finishing third phase of clinical trial may not be warranted and it got to be waited till the trials are over.

I am afraid that the fears of yet another viral affront on humanity much more disastrous than what has besieged. The universal competitiveness on the front of vaccine arena with claims and counter claims may be unwarranted. But, in this current scenario the country has got to be more cautious and more assuring to the people with claim either available vaccine is equally effective and not to be choosy.

Dr T Ramadas, Visakhapatnam

Housewives should be paid

THE idea of payment of salary to the unemployed housewives by the MNM party of Kamal Hasan is novel to India. Income earned by a family member should be used for purposes like family health and children’s education. So instead of crediting the funds to the account of the housewife it is better to pay directly to the beneficiary concerned, the school management or a nursing home as the case may be, so that hard earned money is not wasted by dominant male members of the family, if any.

M Ramakrishna,
Anantapur



Tributes paid to MKVVG Trust Board ex-chairman

HANS NEWS SERVICE
HYDERABAD

MUNNURUKAPU Vidyarthi Vasathi Gruham (MKVVG) Trust Board, Kacheguda, consoled the death of Myadam Kishan Rao, former chairman of the trust board. The board met on Friday and passed a resolution lauding the services rendered by Kishan Rao towards the uplift of the community in the Telangana State.

Trust Board members Prof M R Venkat Rao, Akula V Panduranga Rao, Gampa Chandramohan and Pannala Vishnuvardhan and Jelli Siddaiah paid rich tributes Kishan Rao, who initiated slew of welfare programmes for the betterment of the poor community brethren. They conveyed heart-felt condolences to the bereaved family.

India's youngest State turns rice bowl of India

- Rice production reaches 1.3 cr tonnes in 2019-20
- Completion of new irrigation projects yields results

HYDERABAD

TELANGANA is on way to emerge as the rice bowl of India with the rice production reaching 1.3 crore tonnes during 2019-20.

With completion of new irrigation projects and increase in irrigation land, the production increased by more than 20 per cent over the previous year.

Telangana, which grows rice in about 14.19 lakh hectares, saw huge improvement in production ever since it was carved out of Andhra Pradesh in 2014. The rice production, which stood at 29.6 lakh tonnes in 2015-16, rose to 51.7 lakh tonnes in 2016-17 and to 62.5 lakh tonnes in 2017-18.

India's youngest state also accounted for about 63 per cent of Food Corporation of India's (FCI) total paddy procurement across the country till date. According to a report by Federation of Telangana Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI), the State recorded a big jump in rice production, mainly due to the fact that more than 60 lakh acres of additional land were brought under irrigation.

This was possible with the completion of many major and minor irrigation projects such

According to a report by FTCCI, the State has recorded a big jump in rice production, mainly due to the fact that more than 60 lakh acres of additional land were brought under irrigation



as Kaleshwaram project, Devadula Project and revival of tanks under Mission Kakatiya. In a report titled as 'Rice exports from Telangana: Opportunities and way forward' the industry body said availability of water coupled with 24X7 free power supply to farmers contributed to substantial improvement in productivity and production of food grains and pulses.

Considering the record paddy production, Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao recently directed the officials to construct

an additional 40 lakh tonnes capacity warehouses and form 2,500 farmer groups. "Under projects, tanks and borewells, there is a possibility of having two crops in 1.45 crore acres and three crops in 10 lakh acres. Then the Telangana State will become the rice bowl of India. The yield will be doubled in the years to come," he said.

The FTCCI report, however, noted that despite the high level of rice production, when it comes to exports, the state's figures are negligible compared to other States. The report identified high

transportation cost for exporters, high levels of pesticide residue in rice produced here, lack of proper warehousing facilities and the shift in cultivation of paddy variety from long grain to short grain as the main reasons for low exports from the state.

Telangana, which exported 10,425 tonnes during 2019-20, accounted for just 0.21 per cent of the total exports of 5.08 million tonnes at national level. Andhra Pradesh, during the same period, exported 16.9 lakh tonnes, which is 33.6 per cent of the total exports.

First direct flight from Chicago lands in Hyd

HYDERABAD

AIR India's first non-stop flight on the Hyderabad-Chicago route arrived from the US city at the Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) here on Friday. A few hours later, the first flight from the city to Chicago departed.

Flight AI-108 landed at 01.00 hours with 237 passengers and 16 crew members. The same aircraft - a Boeing 777LR - took off from Hyderabad to Chicago with 226 passengers and 16 crew around 12.50 hours amid much fanfare.

The flight AI-107 from Hyderabad to Chicago will operate every Friday, departing from Hyderabad at 1250 hrs (IST) and land in Chicago at 1805 hrs (CST/Local US time) the same day. The return flight AI-108 from Chicago to Hyderabad will operate every Wednesday, leaving Chicago at 2130 hrs (CST/Local US Time) and land in Hyderabad at 0140 hrs (IST). Air India will operate B777-200LR aircraft and cover the 13,293 KM in 16 hours 45 minutes while flying from Hyderabad to ORD and take 15 hours 40 minutes to cover the return journey.

"We are delighted that our very own national carrier Air India has commenced this service to bring the two destinations closer for all our passengers, who were waiting eagerly for a direct flight from Hyderabad to the US," said Pradeep Panicker, CEO, GHIAL.

"A strong connectivity with India's centre of innovation is not only exciting for business in Chicago, but also prove to be a fruitful asset for our partners conducting business throughout



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North America," said Michael Fassnacht, Interim President and CEO at World Business Chicago.

Hyderabad-USA-Hyderabad has been the largest unserved market between India and the US, with over 7,40,000 passengers annually. Also, Hyderabad is a gateway to south and central India and a preferred and the largest transit hub. It offers convenient proximity for passengers originating from the nearby cities like Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Nagpur, Bhubaneswar, Rajahmundry, Bhopal, and Tirupati with an additional demand of approximately 2,20,000 passengers annually.

AP CM participates in Gopuja

- TTD conducts the ritual in 2,679 temples across the State
- Jagan performs the PUJA as per Hindu tradition, presents silk robes, garlands the cow and calf after puja

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NARSARAOPETA

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy participated in Kamadhenu Gopuja Mahotsavam organised by TTD here on Friday.

The traditional fete took place amidst pomp and gaiety with people turning in large numbers to cherish the unique fete held at the spacious Sports Authority Stadium Grounds.

The Chief Minister extended Sankranti greetings to all the



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy performing Kamadhenu Gopuja at Narsaraopet in Guntur district on Friday

people present on the occasion. He performed the rituals as per Hindu tradition and presented silk robes, garlanded cow and the calf after puja. The puja was performed to 108 cows at the

event.

As part of the Hindu Dharma campaign, the state endowments department along with TTD conducted Gopuja at 2,679 temples across the state.

The TTD has taken up unique programme called Gudiko Gomata recently presenting a cow and calf to every temple as a part of the mission. According to Hindu Sanatana Dharma, cow has got a prominent place and being revered as an embodiment of 33 crore deities.

Cow has the potential to absorb and emanate the Principles of all these deities. To protect and promote the cows, this year, the Kanuma Gopuja was observed in a big way across the state in all the temples on the festival day.

Ministers Vellampalli Srinivasa Rao, Mekathoti Sucharitha, Cherukuvada Sridharanadha Raju, TTD chairman Y V Subba Reddy, Deputy Speaker Kona Raghupathi, MPs, MLAs, MLCs, public representatives, TTD officials and vedic scholars were present at the event.

SAFETY OF TEMPLES DGP condemns 'false campaign' by some political parties

- Claims accused include 17 supporters of TDP and 4 of BJP
- Says police found a conspiracy by 'some parties' to disturb communal harmony

AMARAVATI

DIRECTOR general of police D Gautam Sawang said that people of some political parties were resorting to false propaganda regarding attacks on temples to disturb the functioning of the government.

Speaking to media persons at Mangalagiri on Friday, the DGP said that there was no truth in the campaign of some political leaders that there was no safety and security to temples and reiterated that there was no increase in cases of attacks on temples during last year. "Of the 44 cases of attacks on temples, 29 cases have been solved and 81 persons were nabbed. Twenty-one people from



DGP D Gautam Sawang and other officials addressing a press conference on temples at DGP office, Mangalagiri on Friday

different political parties, including 17 from TDP and 4 from BJP, are involved in nine cases of attacks on temples. Of them, 15 have been arrested so far. Police detected a conspiracy by some political parties to disturb communal harmony," he said.

As part of providing additional security to temples, the DGP said 44,521 cameras were arranged in 13,296 temples and 18,050 village protection committees were formed. As many as 4,643 persons

were bound over and 337 persons were arrested related to communal incidents, he added.

Sawang said SIT was formed to investigate the cases of attacks on temples and a phone number: 9392903400 was allotted to receive information from public.

Appealing to political parties not to instigate people with communal feelings and spread rumours on social media. He warned of stern action on those who spread false rumours.

Pastor held for derogatory video on Hindu gods

AMARAVATI

STATE police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested a pastor, Praveen Chakravarthy, for allegedly featuring in a 7-year-old video in which he declared that he had kicked tree Gods and stone Gods. "We arrested him on Tuesday night itself at Kakinada. We brought him here (Guntur) and on the next day we produced him in the Court," R. Vijaya Paul, CID coastal superintendent of police (SP) confirmed.

Paul said that the video is seven years and from 2013.

"That's what he said. We have written the same in his confession statement. That's of 2013," said Paul. Police arrested the pastor under Indian Penal Code (IPC) Sections 153A, 294, 124 and other relevant ones.

The SP said the video is inflammatory in nature and police officials are verifying his bank transactions, including checking if any more such video were made.

Though the video emerged in 2013, before even the bifurcation of united Andhra Pradesh, Paul said no case has been filed against this video all these years.

"The thing is that if somebody makes a complaint then we are there to verify it. This is not a suo motu case. Somebody has made a

- Police say though video is from 2013, they arrested Praveen Chakravarthy following a complaint as the content of the video is offensive
- In the footage, the pastor is boasts that he had 'kicked tree Gods and stone Gods'
- BJP national secretary and AP co-incharge Sunil Deodhar points out that there are 3,600 pastors under Chakrvarthy who work along with him, they allegedly received Rs 90 cr



Pastor Praveen Chakravarthy

complaint, we verified it. We got him (Chakravarthy) and asked him, he said it is his own voice," said the senior police officer.

Paul clarified that though the video is not from the current time, it is still offensive and said that the CID is acting on this case for the first time. "We are not taking the punishment second time. This is the first time. On this video, nobody has taken any action," he observed.

As the supervising officer in this case, Paul said the investigating officer has clearly mentioned that the video is more than five years old.

Meanwhile, BJP national secretary and AP co-incharge, Sunil Deodhar, released a video statement questioning Chief Minister

Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy over the video which emerged during the time when Nallari Kiran Kumar Reddy was the CM of united AP, before N Chandra Babu Naidu became the chief minister in 2014.

"He (Chakravarthy) claims that he has converted 699 villages of AP into Christ villages. What is going on Jagan Mohan Reddy garu in your state?" posed Deodhar.

According to Deodhar, there are 3,600 pastors under Chakravarthy, who work along with him and they allegedly received Rs 90 crore.

"And they have received more than Rs 90 crore, claiming that more than 40,000 children are rescued. Where are these children, where is the exact data. It is your duty to find out," he added.

AP has total 4.05 cr voters

AMARAVATI

THE total number of voters in the state touched 4.05 crore, up from 3.93 crore during the general elections in April 2019, at the end of the Special Summary Revision (SSR) on Friday.

State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) K Vijayanand published the final electoral roll here on Friday.

Andhra Pradesh now has 2,04,71,506 female electorate, 1,99,65,737 male voters and 4,135 third gender voters, according to a release from the CEO.

The state has 66,844 service electors and 7,070 overseas electors, as per the final SSR.

The gross number of voters was 4,05,08,222, including 2,83,301 first timers in the 18-19 age group.

The state's elector-to-population ratio was 752, and gender ratio 1,025, the CEO said.

East Godavari topped the list with 43.12 lakh voters while Vizianagaram was at the bottom with 19 lakh. Vijayanand said the number of polling stations in the state has been increased from 45,836 to 45,917 with 1,500 voters each as the upper limit.

"We have rationalized the polling stations by creating 84 new and merging three," he added.

The CEO said the draft electoral roll was published on November 16 with 4,00,79,025 voters. There were 4,25,860 inclusions and 63,507 deletions since the draft publication. Thus, there was a net increase of 3,63,353 voters in the final roll.

Red sanders worth ₹ 1 cr seized near temple city

HANS NEWS SERVICE
TIRUPATI

IN a major haul, the Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force (RSATF) on Friday seized 49 red sanders logs and also a truck near the SV Nagar graveyard of Perumallapalli panchayat, near here. The red sanders logs which were kept ready for transportation were worth about Rs 1 crore in the international market while the huge catch amply revealed that the smuggling of red sanders remaining still far from being controlled from the Seshachalam forests.

Acting on a tip-off, Red Sanders Task Force personnel had been keeping a watch in the forest area behind SV Zoo Park since Thursday evening and seized precious wood as also a truck stationed near the grave yard away from the village, for illegal transportation of the logs that were brought by the smugglers from the deep forests for smuggling them outside the state.

Task Force DSP Venkataiah said that the waiting Task Force team found the smugglers loading the logs they brought from the forest in the truck, near the graveyard, early in Friday morning and tried to nab them but in vain. The alert smuggler escaped

- Task Force says it recovered the precious wood as it was being loaded into a vehicle by smugglers but it could not arrest the culprits
- Huge quantity of rations were also found at the site indicating smugglers were set for a long stay in Seshachalam forests



Task Force personnel with seized red sanders logs and provisions

leaving behind the logs which were later recovered by the Task Force in the searches in the forest fringe area.

The smugglers were sparing the Sankranti festival which is popular in Tamil Nadu as Pongal indicate that either they were in dire need of earning big money or tried to take advantage of the festival believing the Task Force personnel engaged in festivity, Venkataiah said adding that the alert task force outwitted the smugglers. He said the searches are on in the forest to trace the escaped smugglers, he said along with the red sanders logs, task force also seized huge quantities of provisions including five bags of rice indicating that the smugglers were readying to go back

into the forest after loading the logs in the vehicle for a longer stay of three or four weeks there for cutting the trees in the deep forests, for smuggling them. He appreciated the team involved in the major operation, including RSI Vasu, Suresh and FBO Johnny Bash who, despite Sankranti festival, engaged in the combing resulting in the capture of big quantity of red sanders logs.

Venkataiah, along with divisional forest officer (DFO) Hima Sailaja, reached SV Nagar probing from where the smugglers were able to bring the logs in big number in the forest and also steps to intensify the vigil on all the entry and exit points in to the forests.

What's up, WhatsApp? New policy frightening for Indian users

WhatsApp users in India will soon have no other option than sharing their data with Facebook and other group platforms, the messaging app has clarified that its policies on data-sharing remain unchanged for users in Europe

NEW DELHI

WHATSAPP has been facing severe criticism worldwide after introducing new data privacy rules. According to the latest update, the messaging platform will share user data with Facebook and says the change is necessary to help it integrate better with other Facebook products.

In order to continue using WhatsApp, users will have to accept the new data sharing policy by February 8, 2021. By using the messaging platform, users may be sharing with it their usage data, as well as phone's unique

identifier, among other types of metadata. WhatsApp's policy of rolling out separate privacy and data sharing policies for Europe and India has raised fresh demands for a stringent data protection law in India from legal and privacy rights experts. While WhatsApp users in India will soon have no other option than sharing their data with Facebook and other group platforms, the messaging app has clarified that its policies on data-sharing remain unchanged for users in Europe. Niamh Sweeney, Director of Policy for WhatsApp, Europe said "there are no changes to WhatsApp's data-sharing prac-

Cheers! Signal, Telegram

London:Signal saw a significant jump in new sign-ups after Elon Musk's tweet advising his followers to use the privacy-focused app, in the wake of concerns about WhatsApp's new privacy policy where it says it would share user data with Facebook. If you're using either Signal or Telegram you know that dozens of your contacts have been signing up for the messaging apps, and many WhatsApp groups are filled with conversations about switching platforms too..



tices in Europe arising from this update. It remains the case that WhatsApp does not

share European Region WhatsApp user data with Facebook for the purpose of Facebook

using this data to improve its products or ads", according to India Today report.

"The issue needs to be looked at, in detail, given that concerns have been raised by a large section of users including some top business leaders." The same was also updated on WhatsApp Europe's FAQ webpage. WhatsApp official further said that its terms of service and privacy policy update did not require users in the European Region to agree to the sharing of data with Facebook in order to continue using the service. So, what forces WhatsApp to give concession to European citizens and what allows it to get away

with a more stringent policy in India?

Meanwhile, a single judge bench of the Delhi High Court on Friday recused from hearing a petition against the Facebook-owned instant messaging application, WhatsApp's upcoming data and privacy policy, on the grounds that it violates the right to privacy of citizens of India.

Justice Pratibha M. Singh directed that the petition filed by advocate Chaitanya Rohilla shall be listed before another single judge bench subject to the orders of the Chief Justice. "Let the matter be treated as a PPIL," the bench suggested.

CBI OFFICERS SEARCH ITS OWN HEADQUARTERS

Agency officials received kickbacks from companies: FIR Companies accused of siphoning crores of public money

NEW DELHI

CBI officials booked for graft by the Central probe agency were not only receiving regular kickbacks for compromising investigation, but were also acting as conduits to bribe their peers on behalf of companies accused of siphoning off crores of public money from banks, the FIR against them alleged.

According to the allegations levelled in the eight-page FIR, made public on Friday after the completion of a search operation by the agency, Inspector Kapil Dhankad received at least Rs 10 lakh each from his superiors, Deputy Superintendents of Police RK Sangwan and RK Rishi, who were soliciting favours for Shree Shyam Pulp and Board Mills, accused in a Rs 700-crore bank fraud, and Frost International, accused in a Rs 3,600-crore bank fraud.

The embarrassing tale of corruption in the FIR says Sangwan, Rishi, Dhankad, and stenographer Sameer Kumar Singh, in a conspiracy with advocates Arvind Kumar Gupta and Manohar Malik and certain other accused, "have been compromising the integrity of investigation of certain cases on extraneous pecuniary considerations".

"The CBI has a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption, be it other departments or within the organisation. The case is a result of strict vigil and action on any input which indicates involvement of our officials in corrupt practices," an official of the agency said. The Central Bureau of Investigation

Shree Shyam Pulp and Board Mills, accused in a Rs 700-crore bank fraud, and Frost International, accused in a Rs 3,600-cr bank fraud



(CBI) has booked four of its officers -- Sangwan, Rishi, Dhankad and Singh -- besides Malik and Gupta, additional director of Shree Shyam Pulp and Board Mills Mandeep Kaur Dhillon and directors of Frost International Sujay Desai and Uday Desai in the case. After registering the case, the agency carried out searches at its own headquarters, where some of the accused officers are posted, its academy, where Rishi is posted, and 12 other locations across the country, officials said. It is alleged that Dhankad, after receiving a bribe of Rs 10 lakh from Sangwan on behalf of Dhillon, conveyed confidential information relating to a probe against Shree Shyam Pulp and Board Mills to Sangwan, the former investigation officer of the case, with an intention to favour the accused.

Rishi, another DSP now posted in the CBI Academy, also paid Rs 10 lakh to Dhankad in a separate case of Frost International to gain vital information and protect the accused, the FIR alleges. Rishi paid the bribe to Dhankad on behalf of Sujay Desai and Uday Desai for extending favours to Frost International Private Limited, it alleges. "...Rishi received Rs 15 lakh twice through two advocates namely Manohar Malik and Arvind Gupta (having office in Defence Colony) to extend favours to a Chandigarh-based company against which a corruption case was being investigated by CBI," the FIR alleges. It alleges that Dhankad twice received Rs 2.5 lakh from Gupta for having brokered the deal through Rishi.

Nitish loses cool after being asked about rising crime

PATNA

BIHAR Chief Minister Nitish Kumar lost his cool on Friday after he was asked questions about the rising crime graph in Bihar.

While inaugurating the 6.7 km long elevated road between R-block and Digha in Patna, Kumar was asked about the rise in criminal activities in the state, especially the recent murder of Indigo airlines state head Rupesh Singh, a case which is yet to be cracked.

An agitated Kumar said that investigation into the case is currently underway and the miscreants will be put behind the bars very soon.

"Every incident of crime has some reasons. In case of Rupesh Singh's murder, the police are working on the case. The miscreants will be put behind the bars soon. We will take the strongest action against them and also conduct speedy trial in this case to provide justice to the victim's family," Kumar said.

When asked about the rising crime graph in Bihar, Kumar said: "Before accusing the government, you should look at the tenure of the Lalu Prasad-Rabri Devi regime that ruled Bihar for 15 years."

"According to the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) data, Bihar is placed 23rd in the country," he said.

TRP scam's leaked chats

Javadekar useless, will 'prefer' Irani as I&B Min: Arnab

MUMBAI

MUMBAI Police this week submitted a 3,400-page supplementary charge sheet in the TRP case against BARC (Broadcast Audience Research Council) and Republic TV among others. It had earlier submitted a 1,400-page charge sheet in November, according to National Herald report. While senior advocate Harish Salve appeared for Republic TV, Mumbai Police was represented by Kapil Sibal, who objected to Salve's submission that if the Enforcement Directorate's findings turn out to be contrary to the findings of Mumbai Police, it would prove that Mumbai Police is unduly harassing Arnab Goswami.

More than 50 pages of Goswami's WhatsApp conversations are said to be part of the supplementary charge sheet in the Republic TV-TRP fixing case. These chats show how Arnab Goswami abused his access to PMO, I&B ministry and 'AS' to fix his business interests. At various instances Arnab boasts off his access to PMO, NSA and I&B ministry.

Chats show the two collaborating on a strategy to trip rivals and boost the ratings of Republic TV. This in-



cluded Partho sharing confidential BARC data with Arnab over WhatsApp and email and seeking help from the PMO in return. Dasgupta also claims in these chats that he has helped the government several times in the past.

In the chats, both seem unhappy with the new I&B minister Prakash Javdekar, in one of the chats he was called useless. Arnab is also seen making fun of IndiaTV chief Rajat Sharma and NBA, claiming that Sharma had no access to the PMO.

However, in later chats he tells that he preferred Smriti Irani because she was a "great friend".

NCP leader Eknath Khadse grilled by ED

MUMBAI

Senior Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Eknath Khadse went to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for questioning in a Pune MIDC land deal case, official sources said here on Friday.

Khadse, who has just recovered from Covid-19, arrived at the ED office in south Mumbai, nearly three weeks after he was first summoned in the alleged land-grab case.

Last month, a team of ED had gone to Pune to scrutinize evidences and gather documents pertaining to the alleged irregularities in the deal, which forced Khadse to quit as minister in the erstwhile BJP-led government in 2016.

Subsequently, the ED recorded the statement of the whistle-blower activist Anjali Damania in the matter in which she had moved the court.

Damania had also submitted documents and other evidences concerning the land deal which the State Anti Corruption Bureau had probed, given a clean chit to Khadse and later closed the case.

MIRACULOUS ESCAPE



Tamers attempt to get on to the hump of a bull as part of the traditional 'Jallikattu' festival, in Madurai district on Friday. Seven persons were injured

Kota's coaching biz set to reopen

KOTA

THE Kota coaching industry is set to restart from January 18 following the Rajasthan government's nod to reopen schools and other educational institutes with some restrictions after almost 10 months due to the coronavirus outbreak. Home to at least 10 big coaching giants and 50 other institutes, the city has around 25,000 paying guest (PG) facilities and 3,000 hostels to cater to nearly 1.50 lakh students from across the country every year.

The coaching business in Kota has an annual turnover of Rs 3,000 crore and employs at least 5 lakh people, according to those in the industry. The Kota district administration has formed 11 teams, including health and police

officials, to ensure compliance of the standard operating procedure (SOP) for COVID at the coaching institutes. They are fully prepared for the resumption of classes in coaching institutes and schools with proper compliance of the coronavirus protocol from January 18 and have constituted 11 teams to oversee it, Kota Collector Ujjawal Rathore told PTI on Friday. He said the teams will visit every coaching institutes to ensure the compliance of the guidelines. According to the SOP, the number of students in a teaching session has been restricted to 50 per cent of total strength. Students will be checked for body temperature before being allowed to attend a class. Classrooms will have to be sanitised after every teaching session and wearing of masks will have to be ensured.

Offensive drones now part of Army's autonomous weapon

Army carries out a live demonstration of Drone Swarming capability using 75 indigenously designed and developed drones which executed an array of Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled simulated offensive missions and close support tasks

SUMIT KUMAR SINGH
NEW DELHI

FROM artificial intelligence to autonomous weapon systems to quantum block chains and now robotics, the Indian Army is now into offensive technology.

For the first time, the force demonstrated use of offensive drone technology during the Army Day Parade held at Delhi Cantonment on Friday. The Indian Army has, in fact, also bought offensive drones since August last year. In August, 2019, the force procured five drones, in October 20 drones and in December 35 drones.

These drones carry out automated, ran-

domised sonic missions to the target area through use of artificial intelligence and on-board adaptive computers driven by continuous satellite feeds. They have a mother drone and child drones attached to it.

On Friday, Indian Army carried out a live demonstration of Drone Swarming capability using 75 indigenously designed and developed drones which executed an array of Artificial Intelligence (AI) enabled simulated offensive missions and close support tasks.

This demonstration is a recognition of the Indian Army's steady embrace of emerging and disruptive technologies to transform itself from a manpower-intensive to a technology-enabled force to meet future secu-



Army soldiers display drone attack during the 73rd Army Day parade, at the Parade Ground in New Delhi on Friday

urity challenges.

These drones can fly deep into enemy territory upto 40 kms. The Indian Army is investing heavily into Artificial Intelligence (AI), Autonomous Weapon Systems, Quantum Technologies, Robotics, Cloud Computing and Algorithm Warfare in order to achieve a convergence between the Army's warfighting philosophies and military attributes of these technologies.

The Indian Army has undertaken a wide array of technology initiatives in coordination with Dreamers, Startups, MSMEs, Private Sector, Academia, Defence Research and Development Organisation

(DRDO) and Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs).

One such project is the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Offensive Drone Operations which has been incubated with an Indian Start Up. This project symbolises the beginning of the Indian Army's tryst with autonomy in weapon platforms and showcases the Army's commitment towards merging the cutting edge of digital technologies with its human resource.

These offensive drones are part of the capability development road map.

These combat drones shown during the demonstration carry out a series of autonomous tactical missions.

TODAY'S QUOTE

Eye BIMSTEC nations for startups

BIMSTEC nations will certainly experience unprecedented growth in the post Covid pandemic world and start a golden era of development. I would encourage both Indian capital and Indian investors to look at the BIMSTEC region and work towards greater engagement through investments.

— Union minister, Piyush Goyal



TELECOM

Bharti Airtel shares jump 4%

Shares of Bharti Airtel extended its gaining momentum for the fifth day and further gained nearly 4 per cent. Defying a weak broader market trend, the stock jumped 3.84 per cent to close at Rs 602.50. During the day, it gained 5.13 per cent to Rs 610. It was the biggest gainer among the BSE benchmark.

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	77.45	South	
Euro	94.13	African Rand	5.55
UAE Dirham	21.88	Hong Kong Dollar	10.83
Thai Baht	2.8	Japanese Yen	0.81
British Pound	103.64	New Zealand Dollar	55.15
Australian Dollar	59.41	Saudi Riyal	21.42
Canadian Dollar	60.44	Swedish Krona	10.07
Swiss Franc	85.63	Singapore Dollar	57.78

DELHI SATURDAY 16 JANUARY 2021

BIZ BRIEFS

Itel launches new product

Itel on Friday announced the launch of smartphone, Vision 1 PRO, which comes with bigger screen, 6.52inchHD+ Waterdrop display, bundled with trendy features like Triple AI Camera, multi-functional fingerprint sensor, 4000mAh Li-Polymer battery and 2GB RAM + 32GB ROM, face unlock for its discerning customers in India. Arijet Talapatra, CEO, Transsion India, said: "Our previous offering Vision 1 with its communication 'Naye India Ka Naya Vision' received an overwhelming response from consumers and aligned with providing innovative features backed with affordability, we have launched Vision 1 PRO with key communication message of 'India Badhega Aage Naye Vision Ke Saath' - which accords with our Vision 1 PRO smartphone in a newer, power packed and bigger avatar."

YFLO's initiative to save water

YFLO Chairperson Apurva Jain and committee members are looking to focus on the noble cause of saving water and on the same subject conducting virtual event on January 20, 2021 which is available at national level on Youtube. They have invited Amla Ruia, an Indian social activist known for her work in water harvesting. She has set up Aakar Charitable Trust to create water sources for drought-stricken villages of India and built 350 check dams benefitting 400 villages. She has now set a goal of completing 3,000 dams in her lifetime. Hyderabad FLO Chairperson Usha Rani Manne and National FLO President Jahnabi Phookan will be key speakers during the event.

Time to give relief to consumers on oil prices

PETROL AND DIESEL RATES REACHED RECORD HIGHS PLACING A BURDEN BOTH ON CONSUMERS AND TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

SUSHMA RAMACHANDRAN

OIL prices are rising rapidly at the retail level. Petrol and diesel rates have reached record highs recently placing a burden both on consumers and the transport industry. The reason for the sudden uptick, according to the public sector oil marketing companies, is owing to firming up of global crude oil prices. This is only partly true. Consumer prices of petrol and diesel are much higher than they should be if based on a linkage with international market prices. The fact is, as much as 60 per cent of the cost of petrol and diesel is due to high taxes.

Much of this tax burden was imposed last year in April when global oil prices crashed owing to the world wide pandemic and sudden fall in demand. From 70 dollars per barrel in September 2019, the benchmark Brent crude prices fell to about 18 dollars per barrel in April 2020.

This should have led to a matching decline in domestic prices as petrol and diesel are supposed to be linked to world prices. Instead, the government decided to mop up resources, recognizing that the lockdown would mean a decline in revenues during the rest of the year. It went ahead to raise excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs. 13 and Rs. 15 per litre respectively. This had a minimal impact on consumers at the time as the overall retail price did not change. The benefit was due to the base price having fallen owing to the dip in world markets.

The global crude oil scenario has changed vastly since then. Prices are now hardening in anticipation of widespread vaccinations and resumption of normal economic activity bringing about revival in demand. Brent crude prices which



For India, hardening of world oil prices is never good news. It needs to be remembered that the country imports over 80 per cent of its fuel needs and oil comprises the biggest chunk of its import bill

had been hovering around Rs. 40 to 45 dollars per barrel over the last six months are now over 50 dollars per barrel. Currently prices have spiked to 56 dollars per barrel, leading to the latest round of petrol and diesel prices hikes in the domestic market.

The international oil markets still have large inventories though these are recently reported to have been drawn down by 5.8 million barrels, much higher than anticipated earlier. The last meeting of the oil cartel, the Organisation for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) along with Russia, resulted in Saudi Arabia announcing further production cuts. Saudi Arabia is one of the biggest oil exporters and reducing output is one way of boosting prices. Along with the vaccination news, this has led to a growing bullishness in the market.

As for the coming year, it looks as if oil prices will continue to rise in tandem with the pickup in the global economy. Share prices of oil majors like Exxon, Shell and BP have already gone up in the past few weeks in the hope that consumption will continue to rise. Even in

India, which is the third biggest importer of crude oil in the world after China and Japan, consumption has risen back to pre-Covid levels. Hopes are being pinned on the effect of widespread vaccinations, stimulus packages unveiled in many countries and the fact that Saudi Arabia has agreed to cut output. The cumulative effect of these factors is expected to result in oil prices reaching nearly 60 dollars per barrel by the end of 2021.

For India, hardening of world oil prices is never good news. It needs to be remembered that the country imports over 80 per cent of its fuel needs and oil comprises the biggest chunk of its import bill. The cost of

oil imports was 102 billion dollars in 2019-20. It will be far lower in the current fiscal with one projection being 65 billion dollars. This is partly due to falling world oil prices and partly due to decline in oil products consumption owing to the lockdown and disruption in economic activity.

It cannot be denied that this is a year when the government needs to marshal all available resources, given the fact that industrial output had been disrupted during the lockdown and revenues are lower than ever before. It also has to try and balance the forthcoming budget, even if the fiscal deficit is allowed to widen considerably. But the increase in excise duties on petrol and diesel has raised prices steeply for consumers at a time when many are undergoing severe hardship owing to the fallout of the pandemic. The impacts will also being felt on prices soon as inflation may have eased to 5.9 per cent in December but this follows a rise to 7 and 7.6 per cent in the previous two months.

It is time for the government to give some relief to consumers by curbing further price hikes of petrol and diesel at the retail level. While it may not be possible to roll back the existing rates of excise duty on these oil products, at least the burden of rising international oil prices should not be placed on consumers. This should be borne by the exchequer for the time being. The consumer has already faced nearly ten months of stress and strain during the pandemic and unemployment levels have been rising despite the revival of economic activity. It is now high time to provide some relief to the common man and also reduce inflationary pressures on the economy.

Markets plunge on profit taking

Sensex sheds 549.49 pts, Nifty tumbles 161.90 pts

MUMBAI

EQUITY indices sank deep into the red on Friday as concerns over stretched valuations and a bearish trend in global markets triggered across-the-board selling.

Investors preferred to book profits at higher levels despite a good start to the earnings season, traders said. The 30-share BSE Sensex slumped 549.49 points or 1.11 per cent to finish at 49,034.67. The broader NSE Nifty tumbled 161.90 points or 1.11 per cent to 14,433.70. Tech Mahindra was the top loser in the Sensex pack, shedding 4.35 per cent, followed by HCL Tech, ONGC, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement, HDFC and HUL. Only four Sensex components closed with gains - Bharti Airtel, ITC, Bajaj Auto and Bajaj Finance, spurring up to 3.84 per cent. During the week, the Sensex advanced 252.16 points or 0.51



per cent while the Nifty rose 86.45 points or 0.60 per cent.

Global equities were on the backfoot on Friday even as US President-elect Joe Biden unveiled his widely-anticipated \$1.9 trillion stimulus package as investors fretted over possible tax hikes and higher interest rates. "Markets began circumspect amidst weak job data in the US even as Joe Biden unveiled details of the \$1.9 trillion rescue package.

Friday's afternoon trade saw profit taking in IT stocks despite the biggies putting out positive commentary with large deal wins as MCAP to GDP crossed 100 per cent, leading to volatility," said S Ranganathan, Head of Research at LKP Securities. Sector-wise, BSE oil and gas, IT, realty, capital goods, utilities, energy, power and consumer durables indices fell up to 2.43 per cent, while telecom rallied 3.68 per cent. In the broader markets, the BSE midcap and smallcap indices skidded up to 1.25 per cent. Elsewhere in Asia, bourses in Shanghai and Hong Kong ended on a positive note, while Seoul and Tokyo were in the red. (PTI)

IMF chief predicts brighter outlook for India

WASHINGTON

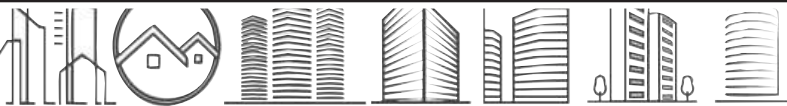
INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on Thursday predicted a

less bad outlook for India in the upcoming World Economic Update due to the steps taken by it. "When I called on everybody to stay tuned for January 26, that applies very much to India. You would see a picture in our update that is less bad. Why? Because the country actually has taken very decisive action, very decisive steps to deal with the



Kristalina Georgieva, IMF, MD

pandemic and to deal with the economic consequences of it," she said. The IMF is scheduled to release its World Economic Update on January 26. "What the government has done on the monetary policy and the fiscal policy side is commendable. It is actually slightly above the average for emerging markets. Emerging markets on average have provided six per cent of the GDP. In India, this is slightly above that. Good for India is that there is still space to do more... If you can do more, please do," Georgieva said.



REAL CORNER



Beating odds, housing realty sees uptrend during Oct-Dec

HYDERABAD, PUNE, AND MUMBAI WERE THE TOP THREE CITIES IN TERMS OF NEW LAUNCHES

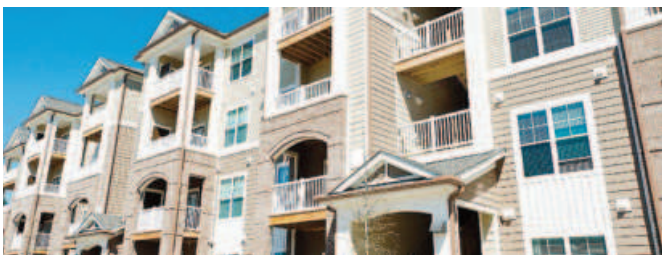
HANS BUSINESS
NEW DELHI

RESIDENTIAL real-estate sector has recorded significant growth in 2020, a year which was marked by global pandemic, lockdowns and subsequent restrictions. According to a recent report by PropTiger.com, a leading digital real estate advisory firm in the country, new homes' supply and sales showed a significant improvement in the fourth quarter of 2020 (Oct - Dec) owing to factors such as changing preferences of the buyers in major cities.

The company surveyed eight major cities in India namely Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Delhi NCR (Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad, and Faridabad) and Mumbai MMR (Boisar, Dombivli, Mumbai, Mazgaon, Panvel, Thane West), and Pune, to highlight the upwards trend in residential sector.

According to the report, Real Insight Q4 2020, by PropTiger.com, 54,329 new residential units were launched during the three months, amidst the phased easing of restrictions put in place in India. New launches grew by 173 per cent quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) 19,865 units that were launched in the eight key markets during the July-September period.

The report also reflected a 12 per cent year-on-year (YoY) growth over the 48,530 new units that were launched in the December quarter in 2019. Signalling a turnaround in the residential real-estate in the southern part of the country - Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad - showed signs of revival, with new launches as well as sales



numbers showing an improvement in the October-December period of 2020.

In terms of new launches, the report also shows quarterly increase in the October-December period across markets, except Ahmedabad. Hyderabad, Pune, and Mumbai were the top three cities in terms of new launches. The spike in supply numbers could be attributed to the increase in home-buying interest in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic and also the fact that new launches were muted over the prior three quarters. Some cities like Mumbai and Pune, driven by stamp duty cuts by the Maharashtra government, overall low interest rates, stagnant housing prices and attractive offers by developers.

"While the trends point to a market recovery and positive news, given the imminent launch of a vaccine that will ease the pandemic concerns, our optimism should be cautious. Buyers continue to expect low home loan rates, extension of developer offers and prefer ready-to-move inventory than those under construction," said Mani Ranganathan, Group COO, Housing.com, Makaan.com and PropTiger.com, while launching the report.

He added, "We believe that the government should continue to support the sector through moves such as lowering stamp duty, re-evaluating circle rates and increasing tax deduction limit for interest on home loans to ensure that the sector continues to revive. The sector is digitizing at a rapid pace and more than 90 per cent of potential home buyers have moved online to shortlist properties to buy. We have seen a strong growth in online booking throughout 2020."

Hyderabad leads in new launches for the fourth quarter standing at 12,720 as compared to 2019 which recorded at 2,410 (Q4). While cities such as Pune, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Delhi NCR recorded (new sales) 10,770, 10,070 and 6,100 respectively, Chennai, Ahmedabad and Kolkata came last at 4,890, 3,000, 1660 respectively.

In terms of residential space preference, 2 BHK spearheads the market, with 45 per cent of the total sale of 1,82,640; 4 BHK preference was recorded at mere 4 per cent of the total sales of 2020. The survey report suggests that in view of work from home, 47 per cent of (surveyed) potential buyers were looking for larger homes.

ARCHANA RAO
NEW DELHI

WITH Union Budget scheduled to take place in the next two weeks, real-estate sector in India is lobbying for additional support from the government through initiatives such as tax relaxation and establishment of SWAMH Funds.

The industry, which suffered period of stagnation due to Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown, is pacing its way back in the country with many rejoining the workforce.

In the wake of upcoming financial budget, India's apex real-estate body National Real Estate Development Council (Naredco) under the ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, has submitted a letter to the Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, expressing measures to combat the ongoing economic crisis in the country and suggestions for upward growth trend for the real-estate sector. The wishlist includes reforms such as relaxation of taxes to avail home loans, affordable rental housing schemes, establishment of SWAMIH fund for Rs 25,000 crore to rescue the stalled projects, liquidity measure, Special Economic Zones, and revoking the ban on Subversion Scheme.

Niranjan Hiranandani, President of Naredco, in a press conference said, "The economy is on the right path to recovery

BUDGET 2021



The industry is pacing its way back in the country with many rejoining the workforce after stagnation due to lockdown

and the Prime Minister has focused on rebuilding the country. Initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat, proves that India is ahead of other developing nations in a lot of things. The fiscal impetus announced under Aatmanirbhar Bharat has renewed consumer demand that led to the emergence of green shoots in Indian economy and real estate sectors. The laudable measures like tax rationalisation, additional stress fund and ample liquidity tools will keep the momentum going and propel India towards a \$5 trillion economy."

Hiranandani said that it is plausible for the nation to achieve 10 per cent additional growth in GDP by the year end of 2021, keeping in mind the

target of creating \$5 trillion economy. With Digital Bharat initiatives being a success, Naredco President hopes revolution in the education and housing sector through a greater push by the government.

On establishment of SWAMHI Funds, Naredco welcomed the special reserve of Rs 25,000 crore to help real estate sector. The letter suggests that allowing more such stress funds will help facilitate the last mile funding for stressed and stalled projects.

"Industry demands estimated Rs 1,25,000 crore via many HFCs / NBFCs who are ready to establish such funds for ailing real estate sector. This will allow for faster appraisals

and sanctions," the Naredco letter adds.

"Interest on housing loans should be fully allowed under Income Tax deduction without any ceiling. The current limit of interest deduction under Section 24 of IT Act 1961 on housing loan of INR 2 lakh should be removed to incentivise home buyers and spurring overall demand. Also, loss from house property should be fully allowed to be adjusted against other heads of income. In case of unadjusted loss, it should be fully allowed to be carried forward to subsequent years," Raveesh Talwar, Chairman of Naredco said.

The letter has expressed confidence in housing schemes such as affordable rental housing through enhancement in HRA Tax Exemption and an increase in depreciation rate for the rental projects like in commercial buildings. In addition to this, Naredco explained, in the letter, that the deduction of 30 per cent from the annual rental income (for purpose of maintenance) should be increased to 50 per cent which would further improve ROI.

"The RBI, through a notification in 2017, allowed a loan to value ratio (LTV) of up to 90 per cent for home loans for affordable houses of Rs 30 lakh or less. Same facility should be permitted for other housing including MIG and HIG as well," Talwar added.

Sundar, Siraj abused by Gabba crowd, called grub

BRISBANE

RIGHT-arm fast bowler Mohammed Siraj on Friday once again found himself at the receiving end of rude behaviour from spectators as he was repeatedly labelled a "grub" by a group on the opening day of the fourth and final Test between Australia and India at the Gabba.

A report in Sydney Morning Herald quoted a spectator as saying that Siraj was repeatedly called a "grub" by vocal spectators in front of Section 215 and 216 at the stadium.

"Grub", an Australian slang, is used for a person who is unclean or who has messy habits.

According to the spectator, debutant off-spinner Washington Sundar was also subjected to the same chat from the unruly section.

"The guys behind me have been calling -- shouting -- both Washington and Siraj grubs," a spectator named Kate was quoted as saying in the report.

"They started targeting at Siraj and it was a chant similar to the SCG one [in which fans sung to the tune of Que Sera, Sera but substituted the lyrics with Que Shiraz, Shiraz]. But this time it was Siraj. I suspect it's not a coincidence that it's Siraj being targeted post the SCG stuff," she added.

The report further said that the spectator was seated in a section of the stadium where several men dressed as life guards had a beer snake dismantled by security guards and another man was escorted out of the ground for standing on his seat and starting an "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie" chant.

This is not the first instance when Indian players have been targeted by spectators. During the drawn third Test in Sydney, Siraj and Jasprit Bumrah had complained about racial abuse they were subjected to by a section of the crowd at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Day Three and Four. These incidents were condemned by all across the cricket spectrum. (IANS)

Natarajan put brakes on Oz charge

BRISBANE

THE incredible underdog fairytale of Thangarasu Natarajan got better with his twin strikes on debut headlining a commendable effort from an inexperienced Indian bowling attack, which reduced Australia to 274 for 5 despite a stylish hundred from Marnus Labuschagne on the opening day of the final Test here.

Marnus Labuschagne on Friday once again lived a charmed life as he went on to score a brilliant ton to hand Australia a slight edge over India at stumps, while Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith also made notable contributions of 45 and 36 respectively.

Earlier, electing to bat, the hosts didn't get off to a good start as both David Warner and Marcus Harris went back to the dressing room with just 17 runs on the scoreboard against a very inexperienced Indian bowling line-up.

Warner was the first wicket to fall as he got caught in the slips in the very first over of the innings bowled by Mohammed Siraj. Rohit Sharma took a good, low catch at second slip to send the left-handed batsman back in the Australian dressing room at his individual score of just 1.

Harris, playing his first match of the series as he replaced injured Will Pucovski, then tried to stitch a partnership with Labuschagne but got

out on the first ball bowled by Shardul Thakur in the ninth over. At his individual score of 5, Harris was caught as square leg by Washington Sundar. However, Labuschagne and Smith took control over the innings and stitched a useful partnership as Australia went into the Lunch break without losing any further wickets.

Resuming the second session at 65/2, both Smith and Labuschagne scored freely and collected boundaries whenever the Indian bowlers erred in their line and lengths.

However, just when Australia looked to be in control, debutant off-spinner Washington Sundar claimed the big wicket of Smith at his individual score of 36, getting the prolific batsman caught at short mid-wicket by Sharma.

India could've got their fourth

wicket soon after that had skipper Ajinkya Rahane not dropped the catch of Labuschagne at gully against Navdeep Saini. What added to the wounds of the Indian team was that Saini suffered injury in his groin after that incident in the 36th over and was taken off the field, only to be sent for scans later in the day.

Wade, who came to bat after the fall of Smith's wicket, started off slowly but once he got set, the left-handed batsman stitched a brilliant partnership with Labuschagne. The pair added 113 runs before Wade became the first Test scalp of T Natarajan in the final session of the day.

Natarajan, playing his first Test, then removed Labuschagne and brought India back into the game.

However, Paine and Green then played cautiously and stitched an unbeaten 61-run partnership to help the hosts end the opening day of the series decider, having the upper hand. (IANS/PTI)

'Net bowler' Natarajan becomes first Indian to make int'l debut in 3 formats on same tour

BRISBANE

PACER Thangarasu Natarajan, who came to Australia as a net bowler, on Friday became the first Indian cricketer to make his international debut across all three formats during the same tour.

The 29-year-old Tamil Nadu player was one of the rookies named in the playing eleven of the injury-ravaged Indian team against Australia in the fourth and final Test which started here on Friday.

He made his international debut in the third ODI against Australia on December 2 in Canberra, which India won by 13 runs.

Natarajan made an immediate impact by taking two wickets for 70 runs from his 10 overs. Natarajan then played his part in India's 2-1 series win in the subsequent three-match T20 International rubber by taking six wickets during the series.

"Welcome to Test cricket... Thangarasu Natarajan becomes the first Indian player to make his international debut across all three formats during the same tour," the ICC tweeted.

The Tamil Nadu player, whose mother worked as a daily wage, picked up two wickets in the 20 overs he bowled on the day, conceding 63 runs.

"The stuff dreams are made of. A perfect treble for @Natarajan_91 as he is presented with #TeamIndia's Test No. 300. It can't get any better! Natu is now an all-format player," tweeted the BCCI. (PTI)

The Gabba pitch will tax the Indians not just because of the cracks appearing on surface but also because of the hot and humid weather

DAY 1 SCOREBOARD

Australia first innings

D Warner c Rohit b Siraj -----1
M Harris c W Sundar b Thakur -----5
M Labuschagne c Pant b T Natarajan 108
S Smith c Rohit b W Sundar -----36
M Wade c Thakur b T Natarajan -----45
Cameron Green batting -----28
Tim Paine batting -----38
Extras: (B-4, LB-4, NB-5) -----13
Total: (For 5 wickets, 87 overs) -----274
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-17, 3-87, 4-200, 5-213.
Bowling: Mohammed Siraj 19-8-51-1, T Natarajan 20-2-63-2, Shardul Thakur 18-5-67-1, Navdeep Saini 7.5-2-21-0, Washington Sundar 22-4-63-1, Rohit Sharma 0.1-0-1-0.

Brisbane: India's Thangarasu Natarajan (left) and Shardul Thakur talk during the first day of the fourth Test against Australia at the Gabba, Brisbane, Australia on Friday

NEW DELHI

DIEGO Maradona's death on November 2, 2020 was followed by a flood of tributes from around the world and all walks of life. His death had been attributed to a heart attack but it wasn't this alone that caused arguably the greatest footballer of all time to die at the age of 60. It is this point that the Discovery Plus documentary "What Killed Maradona?" tries to put across. It features interviews with writers and journalists who have followed Maradona's life along with his former

'What killed Maradona?' shows the flipside of life of a football god

fitness trainer Fernando Signorini and his former Napoli team mate and captain Giuseppe Bruscolotti. It also features interviews with health experts and psychologists who give a perspective on the kind of toll the rough nature of the sport in the era that Maradona was playing in, the rudimentary manner in which he was medicated for his injuries and his addiction to alcohol and cocaine kept chipping away at his health, particularly the strength of his heart.

Additionally, it also gives a brief insight into the mental and physical toll that comes with the kind of adulation that Maradona received. One of the ways in which he coped with it is by separating himself into two different individu-

als -- "Diego" was the player whose job was to play football and take care of his family while "Maradona" is the larger than life figure that people in Naples and Argentina adore.

Just over 40 minutes long, the assortment of individuals that lend their voices along with footage from Maradona's playing days and after helps the documentary paper over the repetitive nature of the footage and, towards the latter stages, a few abrupt editing cuts. It isn't quite the same territory as Asif Kapadia's account of Maradona's years in Italy but gives enough information to provide a sense of closure to those fans of the legendary forward who still suspect foul play in his death. (IANS)



Hyderabad FC face high-flying Mumbai City

BAMBOLIM (GOA)

HYDERABAD FC recorded dominant wins against Chennaiyin and NorthEast United in their last two matches but now face the daunting prospect of facing the high-flying Mumbai City FC at the GMC Stadium on Saturday.

Mumbai hold a five-point lead at the top of the table that has come from a run of nine unbeaten matches since they lost 1-0 to NorthEast in their opening game in November. They have won eight of these matches, and have conceded just two goals in their last five games. Coach Sergio

RESULT

SC East Bengal draw with Kerala Blasters FC 1-1

Lobera, while being happy with the performances, knows that maintaining this level is the difficult part. "I am very happy with the results so far. It's very difficult to keep this situation (going) but the most important thing for us is not the table but improving our performance," stated Lobera.

The Islanders have scored in each of their last nine games wherein they also remained unbeaten. During this run, Mumbai scored (17 goals) in each of their last 9 matches. (IANS)

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