



President Ram Nath Kovind receives the first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, during the second phase of a countrywide inoculation drive, in New Delhi on Wednesday

## Expressing views different from govt not sedition: SC

NEW DELHI: Observing that expression of a view which is dissent from a decision taken by the Central Government itself cannot be said to be seditious, the Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a PIL seeking action against National Conference president Farooq Abdullah over his comments on abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution. A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta rejected the plea and also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the petitioners for making such claims and directed them to deposit the amount with the Supreme Court Advocates Welfare Fund within four weeks.



Integrated exercise 'Rudrakavach' carried out between mechanized columns and Rudra attack helicopter squadron by the Western Command of the Indian Army.

## Sex for job: K'taka Minister Ramesh quits

BENGALURU: Karnataka Water Resources Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi on Wednesday resigned from the state cabinet, following allegations of sexual harassment against him. His resignation came after protests and criticism by opposition parties and several sections of society, causing a huge embarrassment to the government and the ruling BJP. In his resignation letter to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa just ahead of the cabinet meeting this afternoon, Jarkiholi claimed he was innocent.



# I-T raids B Town's Anurag Kashyap, Tapsee, Vikas Bahl

MUMBAI: IN a massive action against some big Bollywood personalities, the Income Tax department on Wednesday carried out searches at over 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune, including the premises of noted film Director Anurag Kashyap, actor Tapsee Pannu and filmmaker Vikas Bahl. An I-T department source related to the probe said, "Searches are on at the premises of Pannu, Kashyap and Bahl

in Mumbai and other locations." The source, however, refused to share further details of the case. The source further said that multiple teams of the agency sleuths were carrying out searches at over 30 locations in Mumbai and Pune, including the premises of the Phantom Films and former partner of Phantom Films Madhu Mantena. Phantom Films was established by Anurag



Kashyap, Director Vikramaditya Motwane, Producer Madhu Mantena



and the former head of UTV Spotboy Vikas Bahl in 2011 and was dissolved

in 2018. However, officials of the I-T department remained tightlipped on the searches at the premises of Phantom Films. According to another I-T department official, the searches are going on at the premises of these Bollywood personalities in connection with some "tax evasion" matter. Kashyap, Bahl and Pannu have been vocal on the social media platforms and have also

raised their concern over the farmers' protest, which have been going at the borders of the national capital since November 26 last year against the three farm laws. Reacting to the news of the I-T searches on the Bollywood personalities, Congress Lok Sabha MP Manickam Tagore said, "Why (Union Finance Minister) Nirmala Sitharaman is so predictable? It's sad story for the I-T department, it has become so one sided and political too."



## Delhi municipal bypolls AAP wins 4, Cong 1

NEW DELHI: The AAP on Wednesday won four of the five civic wards in Delhi in a bypoll, with Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal asserting that people were desperate to bring the party to power in the three municipal corporations in the national capital. The AAP, however, suffered a shock defeat in the minority-dominated Chauhan Bangar ward, where Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad of the Con-

gress defeated the party's candidate Mohammad Ishraq Khan by a whopping margin of 10,642 votes. The BJP failed to open its account in the bypolls, being seen as the semi-final ahead of the civic polls due in 2022, and even lost the Shalimar Bagh seat held by it to the AAP. "The people of Delhi have once again voted in the name of work. Congratulations to all. The people are fed up with misrule of the BJP at MCD

for 15 years. People are desperate to bring the AAP to rule the MCD," Kejriwal tweeted after the party's victory. AAP candidate Dhirender Kumar won the Kalyanpuri ward by 7,043 votes. The party candidate Vijay Kumar from Trilokpur defeated BJP's Om Prakash by a margin of 4,986 votes. AAP's Sunita Mishra defeated Surbhi Jaju of the BJP in Shalimar Bagh ward by 2,705 votes.

# Vaccination CENTRE REMOVES TIME CONSTRAINT ON HOSPITALS

## No time limitations on Co-WIN portal: Health Secy

NEW DELHI: UNION Health Minister Harsh Vardhan has informed that time constraint on hospitals vaccinating people has been removed in a bid to increase the speed of vaccination. Thus, hospitals are now free to extend or advance their vaccination schedules. In a tweet, on Wednesday, the Minister said: "The government has removed time constraint to increase the speed of vaccination. People can get vaccinated 24x7 at their convenience. Prime Minister Narendra Modi understands the value of both time and health of citizens."



On Tuesday, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan pointed out that the Co-WIN portal has no 9 am-5 pm vaccination system. "It allows hospitals to vaccinate for as long as they want, even till 8 pm they can vaccinate. They can start as early as 8 am if they want. They will have to coordinate with the State government for schedule and capacity. Bhushan had further said

that the flexible timing is being offered to avoid crowding at vaccination sites. "We did not want to divide time into compartments. It can be morning or afternoon, depending on hospital capacity... It's an important feedback that overcrowding is happening. We will make changes in the system to prevent overcrowding at vaccination sites." The Health Ministry has also said that States/UTs in consultation with private hospitals should open the vaccination slots for 15 days to a month and announce the same as part of their 'Vaccine Time Table'.

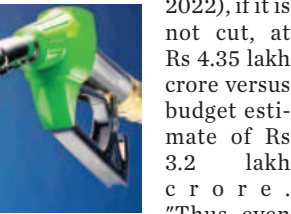
## Chinese hacker still active at Indian port: US firm

WASHINGTON: The US firm which has warned of Chinese attacks on India's power grid systems, said on Wednesday that at least one connection opened by Beijing's state-sponsored hackers into the network system of an Indian port is still active. Recorded Future said authorities are blocking attempts to penetrate India's electrical sector. Stuart Solomon, the firm's chief operating officer said they could see a 'handshake' - which is an indication of an exchange of traffic - between a China-linked group and an Indian maritime port. Calling the group 'Red Echo', the firm said it had targeted as many as 10 entities under India's power grid as well as two maritime ports when Recorded Future first notified India's Computer Emergency Response Team on February 10. Solomon said most of these connections were still operational as recently as February 28. "There's still an active connection between the attacker and the attackee. It's still happening," Solomon told Bloomberg, referring to the port. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said without any proof, slandering a specific side was "irresponsible behaviour and an ill-intentioned one".

## SKYROCKETING OF PETRO PRICES Govt can cut excise duty by ₹8.50/L

NEW DELHI: THE Union government has room to cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by up to Rs 8.50 per litre without impacting its target for revenue from the tax on the two fuels, analysts said. Petrol and diesel prices hover at a historic high following a relentless increase in rates over the past nine months. There have been calls by Opposition parties as well

as sections of society to the government to reduce excise duty to ease consumer pain. "We estimate excise duty on auto fuels in FY22 (April 2021 to March 2022), if it is not cut, at Rs 4.35 lakh crore versus budget estimate of Rs 3.2 lakh crore. "Thus, even if excise duty is cut by Rs 8.50 per litre on or before April 1, 2021, FY22 budget estimate can be met," ICICI Securities said in a note.



## Man held for robbing, killing property dealer

NEW DELHI: A 58-year-old man was arrested for allegedly killing a property dealer during a robbery bid in west Delhi's Punjabi Bagh area, police said on Wednesday. The accused has been identified as Anil Kumar, a resident of Nihal Vihar, who already has nine cases registered against him, they said. Police said that on February 16, a person named Radhey Shyam (52), was found lying in a pool of blood near the Madipur Bus stand on the Rohatk Road in Punjabi Bagh. He was rushed to a hospital where he was declared brought dead. During investigation, it was found that on the day of the incident the victim left for his home at Nihal Vihar after 12 am from Sadar Bazaar area.

# Covaxin 81% effective Works against UK variant, claims Bharat Biotech

NEW DELHI: COVAXIN is 81 per cent effective in preventing Covid and can work against the UK variant of the virus, Bharat Biotech said on Wednesday as it revealed Phase III trial results for a vaccine that was cleared in January amid concerns over its safety and efficacy. "... Covaxin demonstrated 81 per cent interim efficacy in preventing Covid-19 in those without prior infection after the second dose," Bharat Biotech said in its statement. The company said the "first interim analysis is



based on 43 cases, of which 36 cases of Covid-19 were observed in the placebo group versus seven cases observed in the BBV152 (COVAXIN) group". The data has yet to be peer-reviewed. Bharat Biotech said it expects to share further

details as additional data becomes available. "An additional interim analysis is planned for 87 cases, and the final analysis is planned for 130 cases. All data from the second interim and final analyses will be shared via pre-publication servers as well as submitted to a peer-reviewed journal for publication," the company said. The trial, which began in November last year, involved 25,800 participants - between 18 and 98 years old - across 25 sites, who were randomly divided into two groups.

# Sasikala quits politics ahead of TN polls

CHENNAI: VK Sasikala, the expelled former chief of Tamil Nadu's ruling AIADMK, who was released from jail in January and was widely expected to fight for her position in the run-up to Assembly elections, has quit politics and public life. In a printed letter released Wednesday night, Sasikala - who was a close aide of former Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa and spent four years in a Bengaluru jail on corruption charges - wrote: "I have never been after power or position even when Jaya (J Jayalalithaa) was alive. Won't do that after she is dead. (I am) quitting politics but I pray that her party wins, and her legacy goes on."

"I urge supporters of AIADMK to all work together and defeat the DMK (the primary opposition). I urge the party cadre to work to keep her legacy going," she added. Earlier this month, Sasikala, 66, took a legal

step towards reclaiming her position in the ruling party months ahead of the polls, filing a fresh application in a Chennai court against Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam, in an attempt to stake a claim for the AIADMK top post. Sasikala had stepped in as chief of the party after Jayalalithaa's death in December 2016 and was set to take her post when she was sentenced to a four-year jail term for corruption. Before leaving for jail, she handpicked EPS to take over as Chief Minister but in her absence, he patched up with OPS - who had rebelled against Sasikala's leadership - and they both had her removed from the post and the party. Her return earlier this month has once again stirred turmoil in the party that has never quite recovered from its leadership vacuum after the death of the charismatic and powerful Jayalalithaa.





# Womenia

TWEET PATROL


**MADHURI DIXIT NENE**  
**@MADHURIDIXIT**

Beauty, poise, grace and elegance are all words you'd associate with Anamika. But skeletons hidden in her closet all come rushing out when an untoward event takes place. There's always more than meets the eye, isn't there?



## NOURISH THE WOMAN WITHIN – THE KEY TO ‘EXCEL’



Naini Setalvad

In the run up to International Women's Day (8th March 2021) I am going to share with you lovely women some of my tips that will give you the power to Excel in life.

### Boost immunity

From fruits, vegetables, whole grains and millets, daals pulses and lentils, spices and good quality fats keep your plate filled with real, whole, sustainable, organic, local and seasonal foods. This is my pro tip to see high energy levels, better mood and good immunity. Be sharp enough to avoid white flour, white sugar, fried food, aerated drinks, soft drinks and alcohol.

### Cooking

As the pandemic taught us to be self-reliant and cook fresh daily, I tell the smart woman that she and her family from

the smallest and oldest member should know how to cook simple Indian foods.

### Hydration

For an instant pick-me-up I say reach out to water. This valuable liquid carries your nutrients through your body. It aids in digestion, assimilation and excretion of food. It should be a sensible woman's best friend, if she also wants glowing skin and healthy hair.

### Move your body

I say move the body or lose the body – be it household chores or getting up and talking a walk every hour while work-

ing. Be wise and add in exercise may it be a walk daily to see more vitality and zeal in your body.

### Mental health

I advocate the witty woman to know how to use good food as a tool for boosting moods and turning the emotional turmoil upside down. Do not cut out any food group especially carbohydrates and see how your mind and body sings with joy improving your productivity.

### Stress-free

I say add in Tulsi to your food may it be in soups, salads or herbal infusions as it's a mir-

acle natural de-stressing herb. Take time to deep breath and meditate to curb those stress hormones, keep them at bay and see a brighter you!

### Circadian rhythm

Your body's natural sleep and wake up cycle which supports optimal metabolic functions in the body. I say to the smart woman cut out sugar completely and caffeine post 4 pm. Sleep minimum 2 hours before midnight. Eat easy to digest foods in your last meal which is minimum 2 hours prior to sleep, and see how your overall performance peaks.



### Relax

I always tell the clever woman to take time to relax and rejuvenate. Give yourself this love and time to unwind and watch yourself bloom overall. A suc-

cessful woman knows the importance of the above 8 fold path, gets organized and gets ready for success in all aspects of her life – get ready to Excel with my tips.

## Anamika Khanna to open FDCI x Lakme Fashion Week



Anamika Khanna

Celebrated designer Anamika Khanna is set to present her latest collection 'Timeless the World' at the opening showcase of the joint fashion week being organized by powerhouses of fashion & beauty in India - Lakmé Fashion Week (LFW) jointly organised by Lakmé & RISE Worldwide (formerly IMG Reliance); and Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI).

The opening show will be presented jointly by FDCI and LFW on March 16 and will kick start the five-day Phygital fashion event. Anamika's collection is modern while recognizing the timelessness of Indian heritage.

Talking about the collection and upcoming virtual showcase, designer Anamika Khanna said, "It's an honour to be doing the opening show for FDCI x LFW's

joint fashion week. The past year has been a challenging one to say the least, and I am glad that to have the opportunity to use this platform to showcase my work, and the incredible artists I work with. My collection is a collaboration of art and textile and will be an homage to the fact that what is created will one day perish. What is left behind is legacy, and what matters most is what you do with it."

The opening show will make way for a five-day Phygital fashion extravaganza that will comprise a host of varied showcases. Each of the virtual showcases have been created using state of the art technology during an extensively designed and carefully planned on-ground shoot in Delhi led by FDCI and in Mumbai led by Rise Worldwide.

Commenting on the opening showcase and shoots and the ongoing shoots in Delhi, Sunil Sethi, Chairman FDCI said, "We are thrilled to have Anamika Khanna as the designer to open FDCI x LFW. She always outdoes herself, and we're looking forward to seeing what she has in store for us all, this time around. The Delhi shoot at the FDCI studio has been yet another unique experience, that has been executed keeping in mind the highest level of safety of all those involved. We look forward to supporting this joint initiative by bringing forth the best to the table."



ASKARI JAFFER

Kiran, a 46 year old, is one among the very few (if not only) women from Hyderabad who sports a six-pack body and has represented the country in the World Bodybuilding Championship in Budapest.

Kiran reduced around 24 to 25 kgs in seven months and for Kiran, her family has been very supportive.

Kiran shares, "When I decided to lose weight, my kids were very small. I clearly explained to both my kids and my husband that I wanted to live a healthy and fit life. As I explained how important how important it was to me, they support me wholeheartedly."

Kiran starts her day with a handful of almonds, it is a part of her daily routine. She adds, "I eat a very healthy diet in which everything is included; fiber, vegetables, fruits, high proteins, minerals, nuts like almonds, green leafy vegetables like spinach and protein

supplements too. Sometimes I indulge in rice, but only brown rice. I always take care of the portion control. The quantity of food can lead to gaining/losing weight. So, portion control is very important. I maintain different diets depending on what I want the end result to be. If I want extreme body, I follow a high protein diet. For daily routine, I eat a well-balanced meal including rice, vegetables, and nuts like almonds and fruits which are good for digestion. I also love green tea, ginger tea."

World Bodybuilding Championship in Budapest

It was the first championship that Kiran attended which was in 2013. It was an out of the world experience for her.

She adds, "I cannot put into words the great experience of being on stage after putting in all the hard work but at the same time I felt quite conscious to be in a bikini, since I am an Indian. But then I thought to myself, 'No, this is the time when you have to per-

## Woman with six-pack abs

Kiran Dembla, a celebrity fitness instructor and trainer shares her diet and tips for losing weight

form otherwise all the training hours and what you did will go waste. Just perform well, Kiran'. I got the sixth rank out of the twenty in the world. In 2013, I built my body, though I was not thinking for the championship

then; I just wanted to maintain my form for myself. I wanted to do something in fitness, so, I thought let's do this. I simply built my body for a photoshoot and fortunately, the Indian Body Building Federation (IBBF) saw my pictures on the internet and they directly called me for World Body Building Championship. After that, I prepared my body for this competition. It was a real challenge and I wanted to challenge myself. There was an intuition in my life that

something will happen after this championship, like a sixth sense you can say. I thought that I want to see myself on the stage."

For Kiran, it's not about winning and losing but it's all about the challenge and working towards it."

"I don't believe in size zero, I just believe in a healthy body. When I trained few celebrities, especially women, according to their role I have helped them achieve size zero, but that is something different. When it comes to normal, non-celebrity women, I always believe healthy and toned body works best," shares the celebrity body builder.

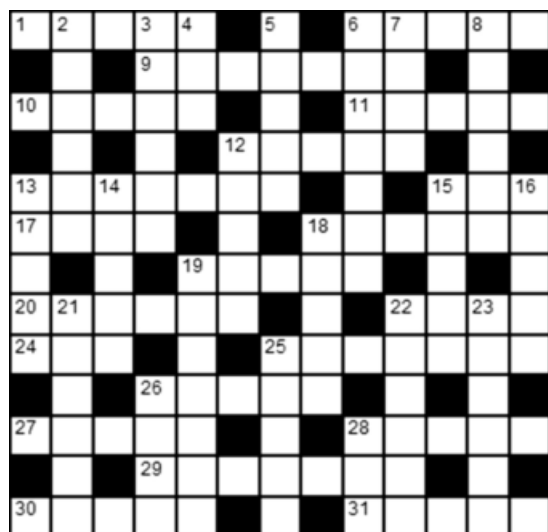


## Almonds help you to lose weight

Almonds are multi-purpose for people who want to lose weight or stay fit in general. You can snack on it the first thing in the morning, instead of a chai/coffee because they are rich in Vitamin B2, Vitamin E, magnesium, and phosphorus, nutrients known for their role in energy release from food. It serves as a very healthy snack to include in your daily diet; it keeps your hunger at bay in between meals, and helps you stay on your fitness track. Almonds are a great snacking option because it consists satiating properties that promotes feeling of fullness and stops you from reaching for that bag of chips. Another great way to benefit from almonds is to consume as a pre/post workout snack. In your journey towards weight loss, only a handful of these power-packed nuts can help you achieve your fitness goals.

## Balanced diet, workout do matter

Having right nutrition, a balanced diet and working out is important to lose weight. Working out according to your fitness level and comfort is very important. It helps to take the help of a fitness instructor when you begin your fitness journey. At the same time, you should take utmost care of what you eat. Replace unhealthy food with healthy home cooked meals consisting of a lot of veggies, fruits and healthy nuts like almonds. Replace all junk food with almonds which are a great source of protein, a nutrient which is not only energy-yielding, but also known to contribute to growth and maintenance of muscle mass.



SOLUTION TO MARCH 3

## CROSSWORD

### Across

- 3 Imperial decree from Russian (5)
- 8 Started (5)
- 10 Open, as a bottle (5)
- 11 Actor Gibson (3)
- 12 To use up (5)
- 13 Anxious (7)
- 15 Our Capital New \_\_\_\_ (5)
- 18 Pastoral sound (3)
- 19 Eagerness, zeal (6)
- 21 Constant grumbler or complainer (3,4)
- 22 Wings (4)
- 23 Alaskan outpost (4)
- 24 Chants (7)
- 26 Governess (6)
- 29 Limb (3)
- 31 Distant (5)
- 32 Develops in stages (7)
- 34 Article of furniture (5)
- 35 Poetic time of day (3)
- 36 Renaissance instrument (5)
- 37 Group of eight (5)
- 38 Stow away (5)

### Down

- 1 Entice (5)
- 2 Diameter of bullet or shell ? (7)
- 4 Retained (4)
- 5 Various (6)
- 6 Concluded (5)
- 7 Hindu ascetic (5)
- 9 Acquire, procure (3)
- 12 Ms Azmi of Bollywood (7)
- 14 Merry or happy (3)
- 16 Company emblems (5)
- 17 Annoyed or irritated (5)
- 19 Exempt or excuse (7)
- 20 Bamboo eater (5)
- 21 Small role, sometimes (5)
- 23 Disregard (7)
- 24 Actually (2,4)
- 25 Modern prefix (3)
- 27 The destruction of tissue (5)
- 28 Short letters (5)
- 30 Heredity units (5)
- 32 Building wings (4)
- 33 Examine, check (3)

## SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO MARCH 3



## Hyderabad-based women wins coveted Glammonn Mrs India 2020 title

Pallavi Singh has been crowned as the winner of 'Glammonn Mrs India 2020'. She has also been awarded with the title of 'The Most Beautiful Smile' in Jaipur.

Shenella from Pune was the first runner up along with Usha of Hyderabad and Sheetal from Kolkata being the joint second runner up. Pallavi Singh told how hard she had worked to reach her destination after her marriage and struggle. With an aim to empower women and help them gain the confidence to display their real beauty and wisdom.

Commenting on how she took her first step towards the glamour world, Pallavi says, "It was my dream to be in the beauty world, it was very much challenging for a girl from a middle class family, after getting a job in Hyderabad I supported my family and then started working on my dreams."

Pallavi is working with Reliance General Insurance Company Ltd as a Segment Head. She hails from Kanpur and has been staying in Hyderabad for the past 7 years. Her father is an accomplished writer and a continuous source of inspiration through his wise words and advises whereas her mother runs an NGO for the last 30 years for the social and economic upliftment of women. Pallavi also has this ambition to carry forward this legacy of her mother and be actively engaged in social causes.



# Water, migration and drought issues to the fore in Bundelkhand

SUNDEEP POURANIK  
LUCKNOW/BHOPAL

WITH the onset of spring, discussions on issues like water, migration and drought in Madhya Pradesh's Bundelkhand district have started gaining momentum. In the coming days these issues are likely to generate heated debates.

Bundelkhand is a water scarce region. Due to the recurring water crisis, various problems have bedevilled people's lives for decades. Bundelkhand is formed

from seven districts each of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and the majority of them are reeling under water scarcity.

Several plans have been made for years to solve the water problem of Bundelkhand, with allocation of budgets and huge funds being spent, but the overall picture of Bundelkhand has not seen much of a change.

To transform the situation in Bundelkhand, the Bundelkhand package of nearly 7,500 crore was approved in 2008 and al-



most the whole amount has been spent. Apart from this, to save various water sources, the governments sanctioned a budget to the tune of crores of rupees, built canals, dug ponds but the issue of water scarcity still persists.

Social activist Pawan Ghuwara, who has fought a long drawn battle over the misuse of the Bundelkhand package, says that few plans have been made keeping in mind the problems of this region.

Funds sanctioned by govern-

ments and other institutions were spent, various structures were built to provide water which also did not benefit the people of the region. These schemes became a means of serving the selfish interests of certain people. That money was looted from the Bundelkhand package is an open secret here.

Bundelkhand expert Ashok Gupta says that the plans and money to solve the problems of Bundelkhand have only worked to fill the coffers of some people. A philanthropist says that the

onset of summer has once again brought a smile to the faces of those who keep a hawk's eye on Bundelkhand and wait till March every year for furthering their interests.

Budgets would be allocated, then the rains will come and water sources will get completely filled up, but no one conducts an evaluation of this pattern.

An evaluation must be carried to see what is the situation in the areas where tall claims of solving the water crisis have been made only on paper.

## UP man kills wife, 2 daughters suspecting illicit relationships



BULANDSHAHR

A 60-year-old man allegedly bludgeoned his wife and two daughters to death with a hammer at their house over suspicion that they had illicit relationships with outsiders, police said on Wednesday.

While the wife and two daughters died, his third daughter, who was also attacked, survived and has been referred to nearby Meerut district for treat-

ment, the police said. The accused is on the run.

The incident took place in Ambedkarnagar colony. The wife was aged around 50 years, while the two daughters who died were aged 20 and 15, Bulandshahr Senior Superintendent of Police Santosh Kumar Singh said.

He said an FIR has been lodged based on a complaint given by the man's 22-year-old son, who lives separately with his wife.

### Teen held for killing Dalit girl

Police say he tried to rape her after watching porn

NEW DELHI

THE Aligarh Police in Uttar Pradesh Wednesday apprehended a teenager for allegedly killing a 16-year-old verbally impaired Dalit girl in Kiwlas village of Akrabad tehsil.

Police claimed the juvenile aged 16-17 years confessed to the crime, saying he attempted to have "oral sex" with the girl after watching porn. The accused killed the girl after she resisted him, police said.

"He accepted his crime. He said he

spent his morning watching porn after which he tried to rape the girl. Since she has speech impairment and he was well aware of it, and because it was noon and no one else was around, he misused the opportunity to force himself on her for oral sex. When she fought back, he pressed her mouth with her dupatta and then strangled her to death," a senior police officer said.

The accused has been charged under IPC sections of rape, murder, and under the

Protection Of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act has also been invoked, according to ThePrint report.

In a statement released Wednesday by the police, the accused said, "I didn't want anyone to suspect me. I wanted the police to keep searching the accused in the girl's village, so I dragged her body and threw her dupatta and slippers at different locations."

body of a 12-year-old girl was exhumed from a pit days after she went missing.

"The father of a girl who did not take back a case of molestation was murdered in Hathras. The body of a girl, who had been missing for several days in Bulandshahr, was found buried in a house," Priyanka said in a tweet in Hindi. "Contrary to the UP government's false propaganda on crime,

one family or the other can be heard "screaming for justice" every day in Uttar Pradesh, contrary to Yogi Adityanath government's "propaganda".

Their attacks on the BJP dispensation came in the backdrop of the Hathras shooting as well as an incident in Bulandshahr where the

### Rahul, Priyanka slam Yogi govt

Gandhi said in a tweet in Hindi with the hashtags #Hathras #Bulandshahr.

He also tagged a photo of the funeral procession of a 50-year-old man who was allegedly shot dead in Hathras district by a person out on bail in a case of molesting the victim's daughter. Priyanka Gandhi alleged

NEW DELHI

CONGRESS leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra hit out at the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government over the law and order situation in the state. "Under the BJP rule, Uttar Pradesh is becoming worse day by day. Such disorder in law and order spares none -- it is a curse for every community," Rahaul

### Army widow to get pension after 12-year legal battle

LUCKNOW

AFTER a 12-year-long legal battle, a soldier's widow will finally get her dues. The regional bench of the Armed Forces Tribunal has directed the Chief of Army Staff and other respondents to provide family pension to Savita Singh, wife of a lance naik Shailendra Singh, who was invalidated from service in 2003 owing to disabil-



ity. A bench of Justice U.C. Srivastava (judicial member) and Vice Admiral Abhay Raghunath Karve (administra-

tive member) passed the order on the application of the husband, but later substituted by the wife after his death. Allowing the application, the bench cautioned the Army to give effect to the order within four months otherwise default would invite interest of 8 per cent per annum till actual payment. Further, it ordered to provide the pension from 2008, the year the husband had died.

### MCD polls result gives hope for Congress

NEW DELHI

AFTER losing the ground in the recent Gujarat local body and municipal corporation elections, the Congress found a "ray of hope" with its victory in one of the five seats in the MCD bypolls as results were declared earlier on Wednesday, boosting the party to prepare its strategy for the election on all 272 wards next year.

Congress candidate Chaudhary Zubair Ahmad defeated AAP candidate Mohammad Ishraq Khan by 10,642 votes in Chauhan Bangar ward. The victory as per the Congress leaders is a "ray of hope" as its candidate at Chauhan Bangar area registered an impressive win defeating the AAP candidate by more than 10,000 votes. Reacting on the results, Shakti Singh Gohil, in-charge of Delhi for the Congress, said, "This is the victory of the people of Delhi and the hard work of Congress workers." While the Congress insiders say that the AAP was wiped out due to the erosion of minority votes in Chauhan Bangar, the party's future plan is to work hard to gain confidence of others in Delhi before the elections to all 272 MCD wards in 2022.



### Siddhabali Jan Shatabdi Exp flagged off

NEW DELHI

RAILWAY Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday flagged off Siddhabali Jan Shatabdi Special Train that will run between Kotdwar in Uttarakhand and Delhi junction.

Goyal flagged off the train through video conferencing and during the ceremony, he expressed his gratitude to the railway employees who served the country during the COVID-19 pandemic by supplying medicines, coal and other essential items.

He said the Kotdwar-Delhi route electrification is almost complete with only around 15 km stretch pending which is expected to be completed by this month. "After this, trains on electric traction will ply from Kotdwar to Delhi. It will also save the environment. Going forward all the trains will run on electric traction in the entire Uttarakhand.

## SP walkout in UP Assembly over cane prices

LUCKNOW

THE Samajwadi Party (SP), on Wednesday, staged a walkout from the Uttar Pradesh assembly over the issue of cane price.

The SP members accused the government of being anti-farmer.

During Question Hour, SP member Narendra Verma asked the government whether cane production cost has in-

creased due to rise in prices of diesel, fertiliser, pesticides, agricultural equipment, and sought to know if the government was considering an increase in cane price. In his reply, cane minister Suresh Kumar Rana said the state advisory price (SAP) of cane is declared after taking into note production and sugar production cost and other factors, and that the state had already done so for 2020-2021. While the prices for

early variety is Rs 325 per quintal, for rejected varieties it is Rs 310 per quintal, and Rs 315 per quintal for common variety, he said. On increasing SAP, he said, the 'question does not arise' as the same for 2021 has been already fixed. The minister also cited some data of payments made to cane farmers by the previous Samajwadi Party regime and said the present government is committed to the welfare of farmers.

## 62-yr-old BJP MLA pursues graduation on daughters' demand

ARCHANA SHARMA  
JAIPUR

PUSHED by his daughters to pursue education, Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Phool Singh Meena, now 62, will finally accomplish his dream to be a BA pass MLA.

Initially, a school dropout, he had to take up farming after his father's death. Officially, he was seventh pass but he somehow managed all his day to day chores in personal and professional life.

However, his life changed when his five daughters made him realise the worth of education and inspired him to continue, explaining to him the fact that education has no age limit.

Abiding by their call, Meena on Tuesday took his first exam of BA final in political science stream in Udaipur from the Vardhman Mahaveer Open University.

Speaking to IANS, he said, "I had to drop out from school after Class 7 as my father passed away and



there were many challenges in the family. I got into farming to earn livelihood for my family.

"When I saw, it was not earning me significant returns, I went to Udaipur and started working in supplying labour to private factories. Then I entered politics and there was no looking back," he says.

"One fine day, my daughters, five in number, gheraoed me and asked me about my qualification.

"I asked them what was the reason for this question and they said they wanted to hear the right answer from my mouth. As I said I am seventh class pass, they said, 'Aren't you ashamed

of it? How do you carry yourself amongst people, students and senior leaders?" "Their words were a real inspiration for me. Soon they brought me an application form and insisted me to fill it to crack the Class 10 exam. The form was submitted and I appeared for the exam in 2013. It was election time and I got the ticket so I could not clear two exams which I re-appeared and cleared in 2015. They gave me points so that I can learn from my chapters well," he added.

"Then I cleared my Class 12 exam in 2016-17. Finally, I was confident and there was no stopping me as I

continued my studies for BA in 2018-19 for first year, 2019-20 for second year and 2020-2021 for third year.

"Education is important along with politics and hence I started studying again after 40 years. After BA, I am aiming at completing my PhD too," he said. Meena is serving his second term as MLA from the Godaoli village, Jhajar tehsil from Bhilwara district.

He says his daughters enlightened him about the value of education in one's life and hence wants all daughters of his constituency to spread wings.

In 2015, soon after becoming MLA, he made an announcement that girls studying in the government schools securing 80 per cent and above marks will be given a chance for air travel. "The policy was implemented in 2016 and many girls of our constituency have travelled via air and around 35 girls are awaiting now for their term due to the Covid challenge," he said.





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# For Congress, it’s better to act late, than never!

THOUGH the need of the hour is to have a strong Opposition which can show the mirror to the ruling party at the Centre and question its omissions and commissions, it is unfortunate that the Congress refuses to set its house in order. Rahul Gandhi, who, of late, has been building muscles at the gym is still not willing to take up the challenge of becoming a leader and flex his muscles. He has been taking jibes at the Modi government saying for the BJP it is ‘Hum Do Hamare Do’, but never takes forward the fight against what he believes has been going wrong in the country. The Congress, ever since it lost power in 2014, never made serious efforts to bounce back. It continues to suffer from leadership crisis leading to failure to take on the Modi government. Another major crisis the party faces is that of organisation and lack of a proper leader to guide the party rank and file. The party has been consistently losing ground since

2019 general elections where it could not win more than 52 seats. It somehow managed to squeeze (not lead) into government in Maharashtra as coalition partner but failed to win in Haryana, failed in Delhi, lost power in Madhya Pradesh and the experiment of Mahagathbandhan in Bihar miserably failed. In West Bengal, it has forged an alliance with Indian Secular Front (ISF). This has raised many an eyebrow. It is facing tough challenge in Assam and in Tamil Nadu it will be a junior partner to the DMK. In Kerala, if the local body elections are any indication, it becomes clear that the Congress has lost chance to come to power there as well. Against this backdrop, it is but natural that the leadership issue has once again come to haunt the grand old party. The interim party president Sonia Gandhi’s health does not permit her to go for campaign, so it is being led by Rahul Gandhi in his capacity as Lok Sabha MP, Priyanka

Vadra as party general secretary for UP. Hence, the G-23 meeting gains importance. If the outcome of the meeting is any indication, it seems they are in favour of Ghulam Nabi Azad as the potential Congress president. But then the non-G-23 group is unable to digest the fact that Modi had praised Azad and became emotional and in return, Azad praised Modi. This mutual appreciation at a time when the election campaign is on has caused embarrassment to the non-G-23 group which feels that may be the next destination of Azad is the BJP. There is another section which feels that such open rebellion should not be tolerated. This section supports the theory that the party leadership should not be passed on to non-Gandhi family member. The fight in the Congress has reached a decisive phase and the results of the Assembly polls in the five poll-bound States may see an end to the protracted battle. Some within the Congress

feel that one way of dousing the fire is to send Azad again to Rajya Sabha. But those who have been through the thick and thin of the party politics feel that such fire fighting measures cannot be a solution. The Congress should have done serious introspection in August when the G-23 fired its first salvo and tried to set the house in order. It failed to do so and even now the Sonia-Rahul loyalists are only lashing at the G-23 leaders. Abhishek Manu Singhvi said, “It would have been better if they helped the Congress in five election-bound States. These are respected leaders and we respect them. Sonijai made (Azad) the Chief Minister. Indiraji bestowed on him Cabinet berth in the Central government. He has been a general secretary in the party and has exercised supervision over 20 States across the nation,” he said. The G-23 retorted saying that no one from AICC contacted them to campaign for the party in poll-bound States. Its high time the party took measures to end the leadership tussle and gave a new direction to the rank at least now so that it can hope to regain its lost ground by next general elections.



## Revive Visakhapatnam steel plant respecting popular sentiment

DR SARANGAPANI BOMMARAJU

RASHTRIYA Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), the corporate entity of Visakhapatnam steel plant (VSP) is the largest public-sector industrial unit in the state creating employment opportunity for close to around 20,000 people directly and to an equal number indirectly. The central government decision to privatise the Vizag Steel Plant came as rude shock not only for those who are directly and indirectly dependent on it but also to the common public of the state. It is one of the crown jewels of Northern Andhra Pradesh.

The Steel Plant is spread over 33,000 acres of land and its township with lush green foliage, places of worship and community centres, is home to 8000 employees. There is a strong Telugu sentiment around the steel plant, which is the pride of Andhra Pradesh. The Centre’s decision to privatise came at a time when the RINL has achieved the highest ever capacity utilisation of 6.3 MTPA against the 7.3 MTPA from December 2020 and started making a monthly profit of close to Rs 200 crore. The Centre has proposed to divest 100 per cent of its share in this ‘Navratna’ plant to private parties, with 50 per cent divested in favour of a foreign company.

Indira Gandhi decided against setting up a steel plant in Vizag despite an Anglo-American consortium’s recommendation in 1966. The people led by veteran leaders like late Sri Tenneti Viswanatham and others launched a protracted and historical struggle in which thousands of students, workers and commoners participated across the state. 12 unarmed persons including minors were killed in police firing. Owing to the popular pressure, 66 MLAs and seven MPs including Congress legislators resigned.

The mighty Indira Gandhi was compelled to finally announce the establishment of a steel plant at Visakhapatnam in 1971. However, the central government allotted Rs 1000 crores to the plant only in 1978, due to the concerted efforts of Janata Party leaders Tenneti Viswanatham, P V Chalapati Rao and N S N Reddy. Due to the apathy of the Congress government, after inordinate delay, the steel plant finally started functioning only in 1990.

In the protracted and historical struggle for the steel plant 32 persons sacrificed their lives. For the plant, 22,000 acres of land was acquired and people living in 64 villages were evacuated. While acquiring land, the government issued Rehabilitation Card to each displaced family that entitles the family to monetary compensation and a job in the plant, which is suitable to their qualification. It is saddening to note that an estimated 50 percent of the land donors have yet to get a job, while some are still struggling to get compensation against the land given.

The memories of that historical struggle in which several sacrifices were made - land, villages, and even lives – that makes the privatisation of Vizag Steel an emotional issue for the Telugus. Hundreds of family members of farmers, who gave up their cultivable lands for the sake of building a huge public sector steel plant with the hope of a better future for their next generations and other displaced and dispossessed people are protesting privatisation move.

The plant was set up with an initial central outlay of Rs 5000 crore. Subsequently, the government of India which has 100 percent stake in the plant neither invested a single rupee in the last 25 years nor provided any tax reliefs or subsidies. Normally, even newly started private units are being provided incentives by way of subsidies and tax reliefs. Despite this, the steel plant paid over Rs 40,000 crores in the form of dividends and taxes since its inception.

Due to step-motherly attitude of the central government towards the steel plant, it was forced to borrow to finance for its expansion. It would have never incurred losses if the government had ploughed back even a fraction of fiscal resources that it extracted from the steel plant for its expansion plan. Repeated requests for financial support were never heeded forcing the plant borrowing at high rates of interest.

VSP was debt-free before it started its expansion in 2011 with a 10-year Rs 22,500 crore debt plan. The interest payments on this huge amount of debt are crippling the plant financially. The Ministry of Steel, the legal owner of the plant never bothered about the reports of corruption and nepotism, caste and regional politics, declining work culture, indiscipline and mismanagement and allowed the situation to deteriorate rapidly raising doubts about the intention of the government whether it deliberately allowed VSP to become sick to sell it away.

The VSP has the dubious distinction of the only steel-manufacturing PSU without captive mines. While the raw material expenditure of SAIL and Tata Steel, which have captive mines, is 48 and 35 per cent respectively of the total cost, it is as high as 65 per cent for the VSP. Again, repeated requests for allotment of captive mines fell on the deaf ears of the Steel Ministry!

The absence of a captive mine naturally leads to a high cost of production thereby adversely affecting the profitability of the plant. While Private players in the steel sector like Tata, Mittal, Adani were allotted captive iron ore mines, what prevents the central government to allot captive iron ore mines to its own VSP? Even the recommendations to this effect by Parliamentary standing committees have not been adhered to.

Though VSP paid over Rs 360 crores to the Odisha Mining Development Corporation over ten years ago to acquire mines, not even a single ton is extracted until now. The price of iron ore skyrocketed due to continued exports of ore to Japan in the past and to China in recent times. The plant has been incurring huge expenditure annually due to an abnormal rise in iron ore prices. Expecting a company to run profitably without a level-playing field is like asking someone to run after tying up their legs. It was systematically let down by not being allotted a captive iron ore mine and by allowing steel imports on a large scale. The cheap imports from China, Japan, Korea, etc. have adversely affected the domestic steel sector in general and VSP in particular.

Disinvestment programmes are bound to be counter-productive in recessionary periods like present times. The private investment would go safe investment lines. Private sector is interested in VSP because of its vast land in its possession which valued at current market price would fetch more than one lakh crores.

Vizag Steel is a Navaratna company and one of India’s largest steel-making plants, and the only plant located strategically in the east coast. As mentioned by Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy in his letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the plant had a good performance between 2002 and 2015 earning profits with a positive net worth. Owing to the unfavorable steel cycle globally the company was making losses since 2014-15 and was finding it difficult to service the debt.

In a similar situation in the past, the Vajpayee government rescued the plant by converting the debt of VSP into equity. With that, the plant paid back all its long-term debts in 2003-04. It has had only 3 bad years since the Vajpayee government’s fiscal intervention. The Modi government must consider injecting fresh capital and allocating captive mines to VSP. It may not be prudent to privatize the Visakhapatnam steel plant which has a massive asset base.

Based on the performance of last three years alone, privatising is neither sound economics nor good politics ignoring the sentiments of lakhs of people of Andhra Pradesh. Privatisation must only be considered when a PSU incurs losses continuously for several years.

(The author is Professor of Economics (retd), Machilipatnam)

### PART-II

# Innovation needs bigger encouragement

## TALKING OF MANY THINGS



Dr Mohan Kanda

EVEN in ancient times, when research into disciplines such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, and ship building, to mention just a few, flourished, the rulers of the day extended generous support. In more modern times, while research continues to be supported by governments, the corporate sector has also had its role to play. For instance, when Alexander Graham Bell needed money to develop his “harmonic telegraph”, he got much of it from the wealthy father of one of his students, 16-year-old Mabel Hubbard.

Throughout the ages, science has moved forward with boosts from many well-heeled patrons, from monarchs to millionaires. Galileo’s heretical revelation, that the Earth revolved around the sun, would have been unlikely if not for his education at the University of Pisa, which was founded by Pope Clement VI, which remembered even today as a devoted patron of the arts and learning.

Why, the internet itself, without which there would be no Google, was developed with funds from the Department of Defense’s DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency), and the National Science Foundation (NSF), and was based on research conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and other academic laboratories.

R&D can broadly be categorised into three areas, basic research, applied research and development research. Basic research primarily aims at acquiring

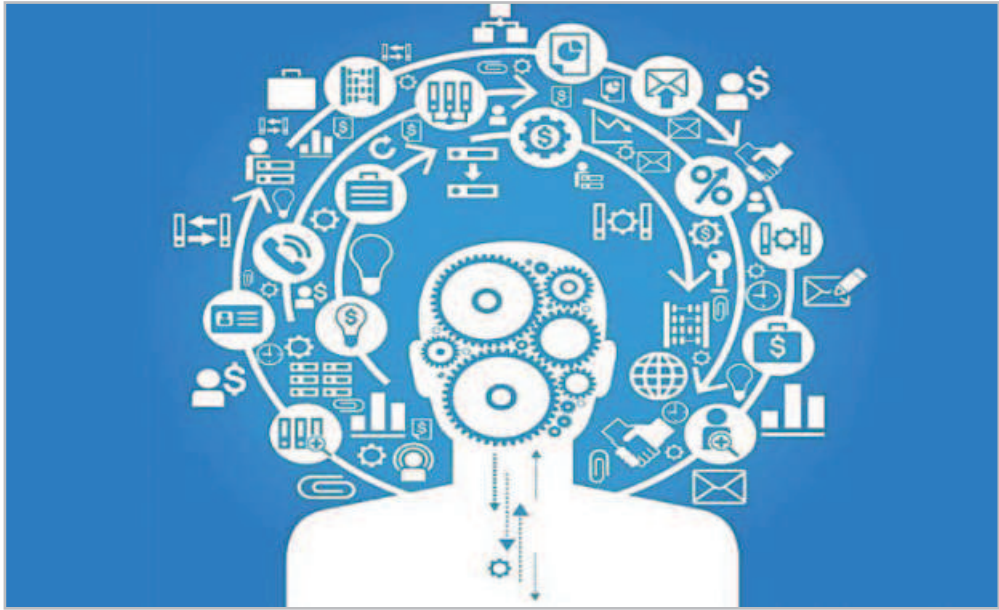
sition of new knowledge, and does not concern itself with its applications or uses. Applied research, on the other hand, generally has an aim objective in mind, and has applications in many fields including education, medicine and business. Development research is concerned with harnessing the knowledge acquired by the other two fields, and employing it to develop new processes and products. Thus, R&D constitutes the first stage in the development of a potentially new service or product.

Flexible R&D dispensations are desirable as they are responsive to signals emerging from the ever changing imperatives of economic development. Countries such as India also need to transform from consumer to producers of technology, so that they can become self-reliant in the technology space, a critical requirement for a sound economic and statistical perspective. This is the surest way towards the destination of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat as declared by Prime Minister Modi. While overall R&D support is essential, focus on research, innovation, standardization, product development, testing and certification, which are integral parts of the total ecosystem, is critical.

A quick look at the manner in which government support to R&D is dispersed, over the different areas, shows that nearly 60 per cent of it goes to agencies working in the areas of Atomic Energy, Space, Earth Sciences, S&T and Bio Technology (BT). In the corporate sector, however, areas that receive the greatest support are healthcare, automobiles, software and semiconductors. Clearly, priorities are a function of the perception of profitability investment.

The central government has, it must be said to its credit, taken several policy initiatives to encourage innovation, an aspect that is at the heart of R&D. For instance, it introduced a Patent Box in 2016 similar to that of Brazil, Turkey and Singapore, among others. Incomes from patents are also taxed at a concessional rate.

The priority R&D needs to be



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accorded is an integral part of the overall narrative concerning options and priorities, which has been discussed in earlier pieces in this column. In the ultimate analysis, it all boils down to the priorities the government of the day identifies in matters of public spend, and the order in which it desires to address them.

At the risk of being repetitive, I would like to ask whether addressing challenges such as the distressing practice of sale of children, the need to protect the honour of women, intensifying the war against scourges just such as poverty, deprivation, iniquity and combatting effectively emerging threats such as climate change, terrorism or, for that matter, the ongoing Covid-19 epidemic, should not receive preferential treatment over issues such as sports, culture or exploration of space or the Arctic continent.

If the answer is yes, which it ought to be, then, surely, increased spend on R&D should also occupy some of the space

hitherto crowded out by somewhat less important sectors of the economy. The need of the hour is a paradigm shift towards the development of the infrastructure needed to enable R&D to flourish, and to incentivise the effort, with a proper perspective informed by the market focus. For India to become the world leader in R&D it needs to learn to be an igniter first.

While it is all very well to emphasise on the need for support to R&D, it should not be forgotten that the issue of end-use monitoring also needs close attention. Performance audit, to ensure that the intended results have been achieved, is essential. Having said all this, we need to remember that our ancestors have bequeathed us with a rich legacy, of ancient, and valuable, Indigenous Technical Knowledge (ITK). The indubitable value of modern science and scientific methods notwithstanding, and while recognizing the pressing need to promote individuals and organisations con-

ducting research in accordance with those methods, this heritage also needs to be preserved, protected and promoted.

While a number of initiatives are already underway, in both the public and private sectors, the central government needs to take the initiative to organise an inventory of all forms and types of ITK, inventorise them, have them validated through appropriate fora in the scientific and technical institutions, and disseminate them to the appropriate destinations, so that they can be put to the best possible use.

Holistic and comprehensive approaches such as, for instance, the one which I knew Dr. C.K. Nayudamma (who, when I first knew him, occupied the position of a Distinguished Scientist - which was accorded by the central government to people of his eminence and experience), recommended, namely, the ‘leaf to route’ approach.

It must be remembered that, in the ultimate analysis, it is not so much the institutions, but the individuals, that have always contributed to the progress of S&T. To quote Dr. Nayudamma once again, “the greatest resource of the country is the resourcefulness of the individual”.

(The writer is former Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

# A CRISIS WITH A WOMAN’S FACE

ANTONIO GUTERRES

AS the world marks International Women’s Day in the midst of a global pandemic, one stark fact is clear: the Covid-19 crisis has a woman’s face.

The pandemic is worsening already deep inequalities facing women and girls, erasing years of progress towards gender equality. Women are more likely to work in sectors hardest hit by the pandemic. Most essential frontline workers are women – many from racially and ethnically marginalized groups and at the bottom of the economic ladder. Women are 24 per cent more vulnerable to losing their jobs and suffering steeper falls in income. The gender pay gap, already high, has widened, including in the health sector. Unpaid care has increased dramatically owing to stay-at-home orders and school and childcare closures. Millions of girls may never return to school. Mothers – especially single mothers – have faced acute adversity and anxiety.

The pandemic has also sparked a parallel epidemic of violence against women worldwide, with skyrocketing domestic abuse, trafficking, sexual exploitation and child marriage. Meanwhile, even though women represent the majority of health care workers, a recent study found that only 3.5 per cent of COVID-19 task forces had equal numbers of men and women. In global

news coverage of the pandemic, just one of every five expert sources were women.

All of this exclusion is itself an emergency. The world needs a new push to advance women’s leadership and equal participation. And it’s clear that such action will benefit for all. The COVID-19 response has highlighted the power and effectiveness of women’s leadership. Over the past year, countries with women leaders have had lower transmission rates and are often better positioned for recovery. Women’s organizations have filled crucial gaps in providing critical services and information, especially at the community level.

Across the board, when women lead in government, we see bigger investments in social protection and greater inroads against poverty. When women are in parliament, countries adopt more stringent policies on climate change. When women are at the peace table, agree-

ments are more enduring.

Yet, women make up a mere quarter of national legislators worldwide, a third of local government members, and just one fifth of cabinet ministers. On the current trajectory, gender parity will not be reached in national legislatures before 2063.

Parity among Heads of Government would take well over a century.

A better future depends on addressing this power imbalance. Women have an equal right to speak with authority on the decisions that affect their lives. I am proud to have achieved gender parity among the leadership of the United Nations.

Pandemic recovery is our chance to chart a new and equal path. Support and stimulus packages must target women and girls specifically, including through scaled up investment in care infrastructure. The formal economy only functions because it is subsidized by women’s unpaid care work.

As we recover from this crisis, we must





## Stipend, internship issues haunt foreign students

HAMID BAHRAAM  
OSMANIA UNIVERSITY

DESPITE various facilities extended to foreign students, the youth from foreign shores are still facing some problems due to language barrier and academic discrimination. They rue that authorities are not paying heed to their concerns the way they should. Appreciating the facilities provided to them, Sphamandla Luvuno, ICCR scholar from South Africa and President of Telangana Foreign Students Association (TFSA), who is a PG student at Osmania University (OU), points to some issues such as ‘deliberately’ giving foreign students backlogs. “Some university authorities don’t take foreign students complains seriously. They simply ignore our grievances without any consideration,” Luvuno added. Mohammad Yousuf Khanmerzoi, President of Afghan Students Association (ASA), who pursues Bachelor of Business Administration at OU, is grateful to ICCR for providing the opportunity. He wants the authorities to ensure stipends on time, which affects the academic life of students. Nawab Najaf Ali Khan, son of Prince Nawab Hasham Jah Bahadur and grandson of H.E.H. late Nawab Sir Mir Osman Ali Khan Bahadur Nizam VII, occasionally meets students and hears their grievances and takes them up.

“When students are away from home, most of them feel alone and get home sick. They need local support and guidance. From the perspective of humanity, we along with the government should check on the well-being of the students,” he observes. He urges authorities to be considerate to the foreign students, thereby ensuring their physical and mental wellbeing.” For the engineering students at OU lack of internship is a matter of concern. They deplore that most of construction companies are not facilitating internships, especially after the Covid-19 outbreak.

When contacted, the General Director of ICCR-HYD, Y L Rao, said that the stipend date of payment is tenth of every month. But this time due to change in accounting policy called ‘Payments through PFMS’, ICCR-HYD had to prepare the data and process it as per its guidelines, which resulted in delays. He assured that this would not recur from next month. “ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) is bearing all costs. Just food expenses need to be borne. Still they (students) continuously complain. We are paying quite handsome amount and the cost of living is low here. Still they can’t manage,” he opined.

# GHMC to embark on massive green drive

SUSTAINABLE CLIMATE-PROOF

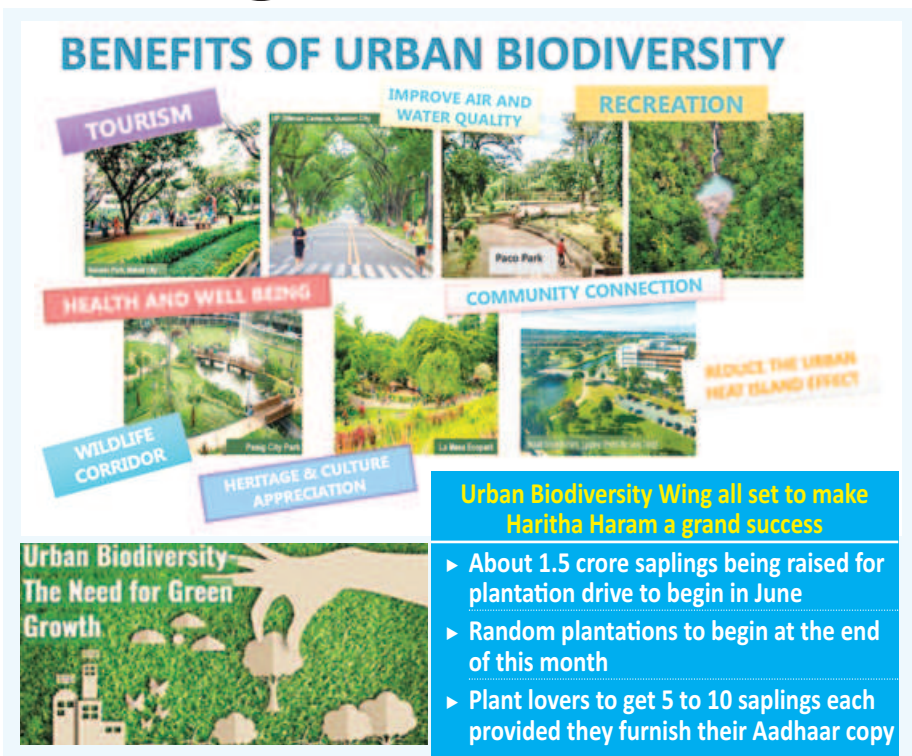
ESA BIN ABDUL REHMAN  
RAJENDRANAGAR

A green city is one which facilitates and abounds in rich biodiversity, reduces air pollution, ensures water storage. It is also said that greening of urban environs dampens noise and help cooling down in warm periods.

The Urban Biodiversity Wing (UBW) of Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) has planned to raise a total 1.5 crore saplings of different varieties in 600 nurseries in all the six GHMC zones.

This time, UBW has proposed to take up plantation drive in the month of June, by planting 20 thousand saplings of floral, medicinal and other species of aesthetic importance in each circle, for which the seedlings process has reached the advanced stage. However, random plantations will begin at the end of this month.

“About 1.5 crore saplings are being raised to take up plantation drive from June this year. But, the random plantation at isolated places, where the trees were damaged and dried up due to various reasons, will be taken up by the end of this month itself,” informed a senior official from UBW. “The seedling process has already begun in 100 nurseries of all the 6 circles such as Malakpet-6, San-



toshnagar-7, Chandrayangutta-8, Charminar-9, Falaknuma-10 and Rajendra Nagar-11 in Charminar Zone. These nurseries together will bedeck nearly 25 lakh saplings of different varieties,” he added.

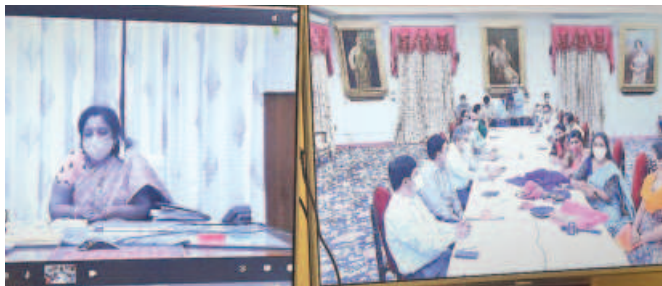
According to officials, several varieties of saplings such as tabebuia rosea, spathodea bohemia, bignonia, sissou, pongamia, nemal nara and neem would be used for avenue parking in several parks, roads and main thoroughfares in all the

circles under South Zone.

“Out of 100 nurseries spread in the south zone area, 34 are located in Rajendra Nagar and Falaknuma circles. Recently, we have taken up plantation in National Police Academy in Shivrampally on the occasion of Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao’s Birthday. Now, we have planned to take up avenue plantation on Shamshabad route from March 15,” Informed Prasanna Kumar, UBW Manager for Rajendranagar and

Falaknuma circle.

“Last time, the Haritha Haram program was not taken up due to coronavirus lockdown. But this time, if the situation permits, it will be taken up in a big way for which the ensemble of saplings has already made ready. As public participation is an important aspect, the people, especially the plant lovers will be given at least 5 to 10 saplings each provided they furnish their Aadhaar copy,” informed another official.



## Guv call to motivate public to take job

SOMAJIGUDA

GOVERNOR Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan on Wednesday called for an intensified campaign to motivate all the eligible people to get vaccinated. She directed the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS), Telangana branch, to co-ordinate with all the district units to take a massive campaign to create awareness among the people and facilitate the Covid vaccination.

“The country is presently witnessing the world’s largest vaccination drive. Our country has emerged self-reliant in vaccine development, production, supply, and vaccination. It is a great opportunity for all the eligible to get vaccinated,” Dr. Tamilisai Soundararajan added.

The Governor was reviewing the developments in the State with the officials of the Raj Bhavan, here, from Raj Nivas in Puducherry, where she is holding an additional charge as the Lt. Governor. During the video conference, she also interacted with the participants of Atma Nirbhar Bharat self-employment training

program for women of the Raj Bhavan Pariwar and took a look at their embroidery and other products.

Expressing her happiness at the creativity of the participants in coming out with innovative and quality designer masks, scarves, and other

products, Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan appreciated the participants’ work. She directed the officials and the Raj Bhavan dispensary medical officers to coordinate with the Niloufer Hospital paediatric surgeon

for ensuring an early surgery to treat the ailing daughter of a Home Guard working at Raj Bhavan. She also appreciated the eligible Raj Bhavan officers and staff members on getting vaccinated.

“We (Raj Bhavan staff) must be role models to others. Ensure that all the eligible staff members are vaccinated,” she directed.

As part of her initiative to be available to the visitors, the Governor has virtually interacted with a delegation. Secretary to Governor K Surendra Mohan led the team of officials from the Raj Bhavan, here, in apprising the Governor of the developments.

## Nizamabad blazes at 38.6 deg C

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
BEGUMPET

NIZAMABAD recorded the day’s highest maximum temperature of 38.6 degrees Celsius recorded during the last 24 hours ending at 8.30 am on Wednesday, the IMD bulletin said. The day temperatures across the State were above normal ranging from 1.6 to 3 degrees Celsius in some parts. The other maximum temperatures registered were: Adilabad 38.3, Bhadrachalam 38.2, Mahbubnagar 37, Ramagundam 36.8, Dundigal & Medak 36.4 each, Hyderabad 36.2, Khammam 35.6, Nalgonda 35, Hakimpet 34.8, Hanamkonda 34.5.

The bulletin forecast the day temperatures in Hyderabad of 36, 37, 37, 36, 37 and 38 deg C during the period March 4 to 9. The corresponding night temperatures are: 20, 19, 19, 20, 19 and 19 deg C respectively, with outlook of haze on all six days. According to the bulletin, the lowest minimum temperature of 14.7 degrees Celsius was recorded in Adilabad. There was an appreciable fall in the night temperatures ranging from -2.1 to -4 deg C in some parts of the State.

They were below normal by -1.6 to -3 deg C in some parts. The other temperatures registered elsewhere in the State were: Nalgonda 18.4, Medak 18.5, Ramagundam 18.6, Dundigal 18.7, Hakimpet 19.1, Hanamkonda 19, Bhadrachalam & Hyderabad 20 each, Khammam 21.4, Nizamabad 21, Mahbubnagar 22.5.

# DISTRICTS’ REJIG TO TAKE MORE TIME

AMARAVATI

THE proposed reorganisation of districts in the state may not happen by the March 31 deadline due to a variety of reasons.

A high-level official committee headed by the chief secretary, set up for the purpose, could not yet thrash out various contentious issues, particularly that related to drawing the borders of the new districts, officials said.

Besides, creation of required infrastructure like new office buildings for the newly-carved out districts is also seen as a handful task, given the precarious financial position of the state.

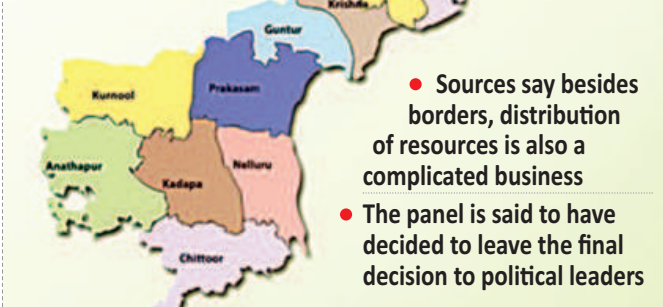
In respect of staffing, the panel is said to have noted that no new posts need to be created as the existing ranks could be distributed and re-assigned.

“The major problem is with regard to demarcation of the boundaries as there are several geographical disparities. Distribution of resources is also proving ticklish,” a top official involved in the exercise said.

On the eve of the 2019 general elections, the YSRCP promised to carve out new districts with each Lok Sabha constituency as the base, thus taking the number to 25.

However, the government later

● A high-level committee led by CS is still grappling with many issues, mainly demarcation of borders of new districts though deadline of March 31 is fast approaching



● Sources say besides borders, distribution of resources is also a complicated business

● The panel is said to have decided to leave the final decision to political leaders

decided to split Araku parliamentary constituency, spread over four districts now, into two new tribal districts, thereby increasing the overall number to 26.

The Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy government said creation of new districts was a measure aimed at ensuring ease of administration and accessibility to people as the present districts are large in size and have become “unwieldy to administer”.

The high-level committee headed by the chief secretary has held several rounds of deliberations so far but could not come to a conclusive decision on the dis-

tricts reorganisation exercise.

The committee was said to have decided to leave the ultimate decision to the political bosses, given the many contentious issues involved, including the conflicting demands from various parties.

Now that the ruling political dispensation has been completely engaged in the elections to panchayat raj institutions and urban local bodies, the districts reorganisation process has been kept on the back-burner, an official source said.

“It will happen but will take more time,” a top bureaucrat said.

JUBILEE HILLS

THE war of words between the ruling TRS and opposition BJP over the Information Technology Investment Region (ITIR) intensified with IT minister KT Rama Rao on Wednesday demanding an apology from the saffron party for shelving the project.

The working president of Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) hit back at state BJP president Bandi Sanjay Kumar a day after the latter shot off an open letter to Chief Minister K Chandrashekar Rao alleging that the TRS government advertently failed to implement the ITIR project.

Rama Rao slammed Bandi Sanjay for what he called his ‘ignorance’ and pointed out that Union IT and Electronics Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad made a clear statement in the Parliament that the ITIR scheme had been shelved in the country.



KTR alleged that the BJP leadership was adopting double standards on the issue. He wondered how BJP can blame TRS for shelving the scheme. He pointed out that the Centre did not sanction the ITIR to Bengaluru despite being in power

in Karnataka.

The minister said the BJP should apologise to the unemployed youth in Telangana for stepping back from the ITIR project. If the BJP leaders have any honesty left in them, they should make the Centre issue a

## Sajjala confident of YSRCP sweep in civic polls

AMARAVATI

YSRCP general secretary and government advisor Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy expressed confidence that the party will sweep the municipal elections as indicated by the wave of unanimous elections by YSRCP candidates in many municipalities. Addressing the media at YSRCP headquarters in Tadepalli on Wednesday, he said that people were expressing confidence in the YSRCP government for its implementation of several welfare schemes despite Covid pandemic.

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu had been resorting to false campaign fearing defeat in the elections, he said alleging that TDP had colluded with State Election Commissioner who ordered handover of mobile phones of ward volunteers. However, his order was rescinded by the High Court.

Referring to unanimous elections, the YSRCP leader said that the officials act as per rules in case of unanimous elections. He said that though the SEC gave an opportunity for renomination of candidates only one nomination was filed and others did not file due to lack of confidence in TDP.

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy suggested digitisation of APCOB, DCCBs and PACS for comprehensive banking services. He discussed recommendations of NABCONS (NABARD Consultancy Services) on management methods to strengthen the co-operative services at a review on cooperative sector at his camp office in Tadepalli on Wednesday.

The NABCONS suggested that PACS (primary agriculture cooperative society) should offer non-credit services along with credit services and extend their network. It proposed for setting up one PACS for every three Rythu Bharosa Kendras and to appoint professionals in agriculture, banking, finance and accountancy as directors in one third ratio in boards of APCOB and DCC banks. It was also recommended to amend the APCS Act to allow half of the board to retire every two-and-a-half years. Professionals are to be brought in one third ratio in PACS including agriculture assistants working in village secretariats. The Chief Minister agreed for the recommendations and to amend the Act. It is decided to audit PACS regularly



Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy reviewing cooperative sector at his camp office in Tadepalli on Wednesday

and the Chief Minister directed preparation of an action plan on irregularities and suggested that the investigation should be done through third party agencies.

The Chief Minister said DCC banks should give loans in a fair manner and there should be definite procedures on disbursement of loans. Recommendations were made to ensure DCC banks’ support the programmes being implemented by the government in agriculture and allied sectors. It was decided to increase the market share of cooperative banks up to 20 per cent and the planning of disbursement of

loans should support the programmes of RBKs and food processing MSME units.

The Chief Minister also reviewed multi purpose facility centres which would bring revolutionary changes in agriculture and allied sectors. An action plan has been prepared for completion of construction of warehouses in a year for which the tenders will be finalised by April 15. The government will spend around Rs 12,000 crore for warehouses, drying yards, cold rooms, crop collection centers, other farm equipment and other machinery.

Reviewing Palavellu programme, the officials said the farmers are getting fair price due to the implementation of schemes of government and added that the project has been extended to other districts also. They said the cost of buffalo milk in Kadapa district is Rs 44.31 earlier and it is Rs 53.95 now and farmers have been gaining Rs 9.64.

Agriculture and cooperatives special chief secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, cooperative services special secretary Y Madhusudan Reddy, commissioner and registrar of cooperative services Ahmed Babu and other officials were present.



## Imran government offers scholarships for MBBS and engineering courses

# Admitting Kashmiris in Pak colleges part of radicalisation: NIA

NEW DELHI

PAKISTAN offering scholarship for MBBS and engineering courses to Kashmiri students has remained a part of its strategic game plan to radicalise the youth and make them lean towards separatism.

The lid over the murky intentions of India's rogue neighbour was blown off by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in 2018 while investigating different aspects of the terror funding case in Jammu and Kashmir.

In a charge sheet filed by the NIA in the terror funding case in February 2018, the investigating agency stated that there is a triangular nexus of terrorists, the Hurriyat and the Pakistan establishment that is patronising the

Kashmir students in order to prepare a generation of doctors and technocrats who will have leanings towards Pakistan.

Sending young students to Pakistan was managed by the Hurriyat leaders, the hawk Syed Ali Shah Geelani and the Hurriyat dove, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. They were the ones who used to provide the students with letters of recommendations for visas.

"During the course of investigation, it was ascertained that students who were proceeding to Pakistan on student visas were either relatives of ex-militants or relatives of families of active militants who had indulged in various anti-national activities and had migrated to Pakistan or they were known to Hurriyat leaders," the NIA charge sheet had



For representational purpose only

stated. Besides sending the relatives of ex-militants, the henchmen of Hurriyat leaders, used to take money from the affluent people to send their wards to neighbouring country for various courses. Their modus operandi was simple: They used to keep the money with them and certify that the family members of candidates being sent by them to Pakistan were somehow connected with separatist ideology. The biggest qualification for attaining a visa to Pakistan for studies was to prove that one had separatist leanings.

The NIA had seized a document from the house of Nayeem Khan wherein he had recommended a student for admission in a "standard medical college" in Pakistan because "her family had remained committed

to the freedom struggle through thick and thin". This practice of recommending students continued for a longtime under the watchful eyes of the erstwhile political regimes in Jammu and Kashmir but none of the former chief ministers, including Farooq Abdullah, his son Omar Abdullah or Mehbooba Mufti cracked a whip to stop this unholy nexus which more than providing education was aimed at polluting the young minds. Kashmiri students, who went to Pakistan to pursue their higher studies, from the very first day were fed with a narrative that they have got the admission on the basis of them being a part of a family that pursues separatist agenda and opposes New Delhi's rule in Jammu and Kashmir.

# Expressing views different from govt not sedition: SC

## PIL seeking action against Farooq Abdullah dismissed

### Cases of its misuse increasing exponentially: Justice Deepak

NEW DELHI

OBSERVING that expression of a view which is dissent from a decision taken by the Central Government itself cannot be said to be seditious, the Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a PIL seeking action against National Conference president Farooq Abdullah over his comments on abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Hemant Gupta rejected the plea and also imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the petitioners for making such claims and directed them to deposit the amount with the Supreme Court Advocates Welfare Fund within four weeks.

"The expression of a view which is dissent from a decision taken by the Central Government itself cannot be said to be seditious. There is nothing in the statement which we find so offensive as to give a cause of action



for a Court to initiate proceedings. "Not only that, the petitioners have nothing to do with the subject matter and this is clearly a case of publicity interest litigation for the petitioners only to get their names in press. We must

discourage such endeavours," the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea which referred to his statement on restoring Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and con-

tended it clearly amounts to a seditious act and therefore he is liable to be punished under section 124-A of the IPC. The petition filed by Rajat Sharma and Dr Neh Srivastava, both belonging to an organisation Vishwa Guru India Vision of Sardar Patel, alleged that the former chief minister is trying to "hand over" Kashmir to China and thus, he should be prosecuted for Sedition.

The petitioners also referred to a statement made by BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra to claim that Abdullah is misleading the people of Jammu and Kashmir to join China for the restoration of Article 370 of the Constitution.

Retired SC judge Justice Deepak Gupta said that sedition is used by governments to create fear in the citizen to prevent or throttle dissent. He said the law is widely misused and, worse, cases of its misuse are increasing "exponentially".



An aircraft rolls to the runway as the sun sets at the international airport in Frankfurt, Germany on Tuesday

# Maha cops strip girls, made to dance

MUMBAI

THE Maharashtra government has formed a four-member high-level committee to conduct a probe into an incident where girls were allegedly stripped and forced to dance by policemen at a hostel in Jalgaon, Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said on Wednesday. The minister made the announcement in the State Assembly after the issue was raised by Opposition members.

According to media reports, some girls from a hostel in Jalgaon complained that people from out-

side and policemen were allowed to enter the facility on the pretext of a probe and some girls were forced to strip and dance.

A video clip of the same has also surfaced.

"It is a very unfortunate incident. A four-member high-level committee of officials has been formed to conduct a probe into it... they have been asked to submit a report in two days. Action will be taken as per rules after the report is submitted," Mr Deshmukh said.

Before the minister made the announcement, a BJP MLA said the incident is very serious.



## Army officer shoots himself dead in J-K

SRINAGAR

AN Army officer allegedly shot himself dead at an Army depot in Khonmoh area of Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, officials said here. Lieutenant Colonel Sudeep Bhagat, who was posted at the depot, died on the spot, they said. It was not immediately known why the officer took such an extreme step.

In another incident, 24-year-old soldier shot himself dead Wednesday with his service weapon at an army camp in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, officials said.

The jawan who fired shots on himself died en route to the hospital, they said. Rajouri Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital's Superintendent Dr Javaid Iqbal Choudhary told reporters that it appears to be a case of suicide. The soldier fired few bullets on himself, one of which passed through his heart, he said. Police registered a case and began investigation, they said.

# BJP in a fix as EPS says no tie-up with Sasikala

CHENNAI

TAMIL Nadu Chief Minister and AIADMK leader Edappadi K. Palaniswami (EPS) has communicated to the BJP national leadership that his party will not have any truck with the "Mannargudi Family" led by V.K. Sasikala and her nephew TTV Dhinakaran.

This, according to highly placed sources in the AIADMK was conveyed by the Chief Minister with the support and connivance of Deputy Chief minister O.Panneerselvam to the BJP national general secretary in-charge of Tamil Nadu electioneering, C.T. Ravi.

Sources also told IANS that the Chief Minister has communicated that any support garnered from Sasikala would be counterproductive for the AIADMK, BJP alliance as there are a lot of negative factors associated with the "Mannargudi Family".

Meanwhile, AIADMK leadership scoffed at rumours that the state Deputy Chief Minister and party strong man Panneerselvam will support Sasikala in the post election scenario if a hung Assembly comes in place.

A senior AIADMK functionary while speaking to IANS over telephone said, "These rumours are owing to the fact that Sasikala and Panneerselvam are from the same community -- Thevars. This does not mean that Panneerselvam will be seeking the support of Sasikala. The AIADMK decision to stay away from Sasikala and her family has been a conscious one taken by the party leadership and there is no reason why the decision is to be changed now."

The seat sharing talks between the DMK and the Congress have hit a roadblock after Chief Ministerial candidate of the front M.K.Stalin refused to allot more than 18 seats to the Congress.

The Congress, which had demanded 45 seats, has now settled for 33 seats.



A vendor displays sweets with different political party symbols at his sweet shop in Kolkata

## Kamal Haasan inducts Kalam's advisor as party vice president

A month ahead of the Tamil Nadu assembly elections, actor turned politician Kamal Haasan inducted former President and scientist Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's scientific adviser V Ponraj as the vice president of his Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) on Wednesday.

This time actor-turned-politician Haasan's party MNM is also in the fray.

In December 2020, Haasan inducted former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Santhosh Babu, as the general secretary of his MNM. Haasan had launched the Makkal Needhi Maiam on February 21, 2018, in Madurai.

## BJP and AGP wrangling over seat-sharing for Assam polls

With the Assam assembly elections inching closer, the BJP and its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) have started wrangling over seat-sharing, according to sources.

The AGP is demanding around 40 seats, which is not amenable to the BJP. A number of BJP and AGP leaders are likely to reach the national capital Wednesday and discuss the issue with the central leadership, said a senior BJP leader who didn't wish to be named.

The BJP's Central Election Committee (CEC), which decides on the final candidate list, will meet Thursday to finalise the lists for all five poll-bound states.

## Rahul admits 1975 Emergency error, now BJP's turn: MVA

MUMBAI

LAUDING Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's candid admission, that the Emergency imposed 45 years ago was a mistake, the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) jumped to its feet and said "now it's the turn of the ruling party at the Centre to own up its mistakes", here on Wednesday.

State Congress President Nana Patole, Nationalist Congress Party Spokesperson and Minister Nawab Malik, Shiv Sena leader Kishore Tiwari and Samajwadi Party state President Abu Asim Azmi made near-identical demands from the BJP after Gandhi's surprise statement on Tuesday.

Patole said that the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has owned up that the 21-month long Emergency imposed in 1975 was a "mistake". "Now, will Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP also admit that the 2002 Gujarat riots were a blunder and own up their responsibility?" Patole demanded.

Malik said that after the Congress' submission that somehow the Emergency was not the right step, it's now the turn of the BJP to reciprocate and accept its own mistake of the Gujarat riots.

"Earlier, the Congress had even apologised for the anti-Sikh riots (1984) in Delhi and now they feel imposing the Emergency was wrong. They are attempting to improve upon their mistakes. When will the BJP similarly admit and apologise for the Gujarat riots," Malik asked. Welcoming Gandhi's assertion, Tiwari, accorded a Minister of State status, said that it was a magnanimous gesture on the part of the Congress and its time for BJP to follow suit in a democratic spirit.

## In a first, jawans to join PM-led defence meet

NEW DELHI

FOR the first time, jawans from armed forces would be taking part in the Combined Commanders' Conference to be addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi later this week.

The Combined Commanders' Conference was till now involved only Commander-in-Chief rank officers who along with their respective services chiefs would be addressed by the prime minister and given the directives on dealing with the security challenges perceived by the government.

"The jawans would take part in different discussions involving issues related to the functioning of forces and operations," government sources told ANI. Sources said the suggestion to involve jawans in the discussions came from the Prime Minister's Office itself.

The jawans participating in the discussions would include junior commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers and they would be giving presentations on topics given to them, the sources said. Sources said the insights of jawans come in very handy in day to day functioning of the forces and during the recent India China clash also, the jawans provided valuable suggestions during the digging of trenches and building defences against the Chinese.

# 'CJI must step down for asking rape accused to marry victim'

## It fills us with rage that women bear the burden of having to explain the meaning of rape to CJI: 4K activists

NEW DELHI

A group of more than 4,000 women's rights activists, progressive groups and concerned citizens have written an open letter to Chief Justice of India S.A. Bobde, saying that he must resign for asking a rapist to marry his schoolgoing victim and justifying marital rape in the Supreme Court.

While hearing the bail request of a government employee, a bench headed by CJI Bobde recently told the man, one Mohit Subhash Chavan, "If you want to marry we can help you. If not, you lose your job and go to jail. You seduced the girl, raped her."

These remarks – which seem to suggest raping a minor is okay as long as the rapist marries the girl later – have caused widespread outrage. In their open letter, the activists say, "It fills us with rage that women bear the burden of having to explain the meaning of 'seduction', 'rape', and 'marriage' even to the Chief Justice of India, who holds the power and duty to interpret the Constitution of India and sit in judgement."

The signatories also bring up the Indian justice system's marred track record when it comes to dealing with violence against women and sexual harassment, saying 'Enough is enough'.




We bore witness when your predecessor sat in judgement over an accusation of sexual harassment against himself, and lobbied false, defamatory attacks on the complainant and her family from the Bench of the Supreme Court. An appeal against the atrocious acquittal of a convicted rapist on the premise that a woman's 'Feeble No might mean a Yes' was not admitted. You have asked why women farmers are being 'kept' in protests against farm laws and asked for them to be 'sent back home' – again, implying that women lack the autonomy and personhood that men do. Then yesterday, you said, "If a couple is living together as man and wife, the husband may be a brutal

man, but can you call the act of sexual intercourse between a lawfully wedded man and wife as rape."

Enough is enough. Your words, scandalise and lower the authority of the Court. From the towering heights of the post of CJI of the Supreme Court, it sends the message to other courts, judges, police and all other law enforcing agencies that justice is not a constitutional right of women in India. This will only lead to the further silencing of girls and women, a process that took decades to break. To the rapists, it sends the message that marriage is a licence to rape; and that by obtaining such a licence, the rapist can post facto decriminalise and legalise his act.



FOREX (buy rates in ₹)			
US Dollar	77.23	South	
Euro	92.43	African Rand	5.61
UAE Dirham	21.82	Hong Kong Dollar	10.8
Thai Baht	2.76	Japanese Yen	0.78
British Pound	105.98	New Zealand Dollar	55.81
Australian Dollar	59.86	Saudi Riyal	21.35
Canadian Dollar	60.65	Swedish Krona	10
Swiss Franc	82.7	Singapore Dollar	57.53

DELHI THURSDAY 4 MARCH 2021

## BIZ BRIEFS

### Bajaj Electricals, Mahindra in pact

Bajaj Electricals Limited and Mahindra Logistics Limited (MLL) on Wednesday made an announcement of signing an agreement for innovative logistics optimisation and outsourcing arrangement. This deal is aimed at achieving enhanced and industry-best service levels, coupled with a logistics cost saving in excess of 25 per cent. MLL has developed for BEL a fully redesigned and consolidated logistics network, with storage optimisation, transportation management and inventory movement through technology. Rampraveen Swaminathan, CEO & MD, MLL, said: "I believe what we are aiming to do for Bajaj Electricals is truly unique and exceptional; enhancing service levels to their customers significantly, while simultaneously driving down costs. I don't think this would be possible without the extensive use of technology".

### Little Caesars' India foray

Little Caesars Pizza is set to touch the right chord with franchisees in India as it looks to serve customers who crave for increased cleanliness, safety, a contactless experience and pocket-friendly meals anywhere in India. The global brand, which currently operates in 26 countries and territories worldwide, has plans to set foot in India with a solution-driven approach, offering a silver lining to new investors amidst the pandemic. The brand is excited to throw spotlight on its Hot-N-Ready model which allows customers to be in and out of the store in 30 seconds or less, making it safe and convenient keeping the crisis in mind. The global QSR giant ensures that all pizzas are baked in ovens that reach 245 degrees Celsius and are not touched after that.

### AIPIA rues price rise

All India Plastic Industry Association (AIPIA) expressed its displeasure over the ever-increasing prices of raw materials. It blamed large petrochemical companies including public sector units for the price rise, alleging that they increased prices without any valid reason. "Plastics processing sector producing plastic goods for food processing, agriculture, toys, health-care, pharma, automotive, infrastructure and consumer segments and belonging to micro small and medium enterprises sector are facing acute raw material shortage. Around 50,000 units in the plastics processing sector that offer employment to about fifty lakh workers in the country are already operating below 50 per cent of their rated capacity, and if the crisis prolongs, then thousands of MSMEs will have to close," representatives of the industry body said.

### Bridgestone's new initiative

Bridgestone India has undertaken a one-of-its-kind initiative, the 'Go Extra' campaign with the primary aim of showcasing Bridgestone's new M721 tyre, the 15 per cent extra mileage tyre, to key stakeholders in the commercial vehicle (CV) industry including fleet operators, drivers and mechanics at key trucking hubs across the country. The campaign also involves the participation of other brands such as Ashok Leyland as trucking partner, Delux Bearings as bearing partner etc. The campaign will run for over 50 days, with the truck covering 6,500 km from start to finish. "We are delighted to partner with leading commercial vehicle magazine MotorIndia for the 'Go Extra' campaign," Tushar Bansode, Head Marketing, Commercial Business, Bridgestone India said.

## GLOBAL RALLY

# Sensex surges 1,148 pts to reclaim 51,000 mark

Nifty crosses 15k on intense buying in financial, energy stocks

MUMBAI

CONTINUING their winning run for the third session in a row, the BSE Sensex surged nearly 1,148 points to breach the 51,000-level and the NSE Nifty recaptured the 15,200-mark on Wednesday, propped up by intense buying in financial and energy stocks. At the closing bell, the 30-share Sensex was up 1,147.76 points or 2.28 per cent at 51,444.65 - the biggest single-day rise since February 2. Intra-day, the index swung 1,243 points.

Likewise, the NSE Nifty climbed 326.50 points or 2.19 per cent to end at 15,245.60 with 43 of its constituents closing in the green. Over the last three sessions, the Sensex has risen by 2,344.66 points or 4.77 per cent while the Nifty has added 716.45 points or 4.93 per cent. The Sensex rally was driven by Bajaj FinServ, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finance, ICICI Bank, HDFC and Axis Bank.

Of the 30 Sensex constituents, 27 closed in the green. Bajaj FinServ rose the most by 5.15 per cent. Reliance Industries rose by 4.52 per cent a day after its telecom arm emerged as lead buyer in spectrum auctions. Reliance Jio picked up 488.35 MHz of spectrum in bands such as

## INVESTOR WEALTH ZOOMS ₹9.41 LAKH CRORE IN 3 SESSIONS

INVESTORS' wealth has jumped by a massive Rs9.41 lakh crore during three successive days of gains in the domestic equity market. At the close of trade, the total market capitalisation (mcap) of the BSE-listed companies increased by Rs 3,69,170.72 crore to Rs 2,10,22,227.15 crore. Since March 1, 2021, the market capitalisation of the BSE-listed companies has zoomed by Rs 9,41,131.42 crore to reach Rs 2,10,22,227.15 crore on Wednesday. During this time, the Sensex rose 2,344.66 points or 4.77 per cent, while the Nifty added 716.45 points or 4.93 per cent.

Binod Modi, head (strategy), Reliance Securities, said: "Domestic equities extended gain for the third consecutive day as fading concerns of rising bond yields and continued rebound in high frequency key economic indicators in February 21 emboldened investors. Additionally, global markets also remained supportive."

800 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2300 MHz for Rs 57,122.65 crore. Analysts said strengthening of spectrum footprints by Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio in the auctions is expected to yield market share gains for the two telcos. Bharti Airtel, which bid about Rs 18,699 crore to pick up 355.45 Megahertz, rose by 0.92 per cent. "Markets across the globe were filled with optimism as the



focus shifted from concerns over high valuation to a stronger economic recovery and earnings growth. The Indian market was on a rising streak echoing the global sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services said. Meanwhile, a monthly survey said that India's services activity expanded at the fastest rate in a year during February amid improved demand and more favourable market conditions. Bourses in Paris, London, Tokyo and Shanghai advanced as investors took heart from an easing in bond yields that has alleviated worries over possible interest rate hikes.

## India not yet ready for EVs

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

RENAULT India, CEO, Venkatram Mamillapalle, on Wednesday said that India is not yet ready for EVs as there is no proper infrastructure available for the segment in the country. At least it takes another three to five years of time to fully roll-out EVs in the country, he added. Mamillapalle also said: "With Covid-19 there is an increase in car sales from rural India as many urban people are staying back in their hometowns as the work from home concept is picking up. Furthermore, change of lifestyle among rural people is also adding to the car sales. Mostly the car buyers are first timers as the new normal made the people to have a car for their daily life."

The automobile industry has significantly recovered after the lockdown period and is back to pre-Covid times in car sales. The industry also expects three million car sales by FY22, he added. Renault has doubled the market share with 1,30,000 car sales in India.

## Fintech firm Tide to hire 300 employees

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

TIDE, UK fintech, announced that it would hire 300 employees at its Global Development Centre (GDC) in Hyderabad. It will recruit 180 people for engineering and product development, and over 100 employees for customer support.

The company's total headcount at its GDC will be over 350 by the year end. Post the hiring, Tide's India headcount is expected to increase to over 400 by end of year.

The company also announced plans to hire another 50 employees in marketing and other areas for its corporate office in Gurugram as it seeks to replicate its success in the UK market, in India.

"As we look to scale globally, we have a growing need for the best technical talent, which is fortunately readily available in India. The Hyderabad centre is key to our ambitious global ex-



## Real GVA may grow 3-4% in Q4: Report

Overall contraction in real GVA for this fiscal would stand at 6.2%, says Motilal Oswal report

MUMBAI

INDIA's real gross value added (GVA) is likely to grow at 3-4 per cent a year-on-year basis in the ongoing quarter of FY21 largely on the back of expected better growth during February and March.

A report from Motilal Oswal Financial Services said that post the expected 3-4 per cent growth in the Q4, the overall contraction in real GVA for this fiscal would stand at 6.2 per cent.

"Overall, aggressive fiscal spending and relatively better farm activity seem to have driven up overall economic activity in the first month of 4QFY21. Additionally, as per early indicators, there are positive signs of sustained growth momentum," it said. While daily e-way bill generation was at the highest-ever level of 2.3 million units, daily power generation was also up 4 per cent YoY in February 2021.

"With better growth expected over Feb-Mar'21 (partly supported by the base as well), we believe real GVA could grow 3-4 per cent YoY in 4QFY21, but contract 6.2 per cent YoY in FY21," it said.

The 'Ecoscope' report noted that Motilal Oswal's in-house Economic Activity Index (EAI) for India's real gross value-added (EAI-GVA) posted faster growth of 4.9 per cent YoY in January 21, against growth of 4.1 per cent YoY in December 2020 and 4.7 per cent in January 20.

"Faster growth in January 2021 was led by higher growth in the services sector and farm activity. On the other hand, growth in industrial activity moderated during the month," it said.

Additionally, while the services sector was driven by fiscal spending, expected decline in construction activity and slower growth in the manufacturing sector led to muted industrial growth in January 2021.

## TS, AP trade bodies' meet tomorrow

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

FEDERATION of Telangana Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FTCCI) jointly with Federation of Andhra Pradesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FAPCCI) is organizing a virtual conference on "Business Opportunities with largest sources of Funding" on March 5, 2021 (Friday) from 10.30 am to 2.00 pm.

The Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) play a significant role in the social and economic development programs of nations by way of advising, funding, assisting in implementation of development projects and even though the banks operate independently, have a shared vision and common goals and objectives.

The MDBs provides financial and technical support to developing countries to help them strengthen economic management and reduce poverty.



pansion plans - fueling the constant innovation that is required for Tide to stay ahead in its mission to deliver higher value to its SME members globally," said Guy Duncan, Chief Technology Officer, Tide.

"While Tide's global development centre in Hyderabad has a global mandate and role, it is integral to our India plans as well. It is a huge advantage to have such capability locally and I am confident the team will help us tune our offering better for Indian SMEs and deliver superior support to them when we roll out our offering here in India," said Gurjodhpal Singh, Chief Executive Officer, Tide India.

# Speedy recovery from Covid washout fuels oil demand in India

Overall fuel demand in the current financial year, which runs to March 31, is expected to fall 8.5%

DEBJIT CHAKRABORTY

INDIA, once the center of global oil demand growth, expects its fuel consumption to bounce back during the coming year as the nation recoups the losses caused by Covid-19.

Demand for gasoline, diesel and other fuels will reach a record 215.24 million tons in the 12 months through March 2022, according to estimates by the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell of India's oil ministry. That's almost a 10 per cent rebound from the current year, which has been hit hard by the virus.

At one stage last year, India's fuel consumption plunged by as much as 70 per cent, led by the world's biggest lockdown. The measures forced a sharp reduction in crude processing and imports and helped drive a slump in



international oil prices. On Thursday, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and allied nations will discuss how much crude to pump, and India is urging them to open the taps.

The world's third largest oil im-

porter and consumer expects strong demand for transport and industrial fuels to drive next year's rebound. Consumption of diesel an economic barometer and the country's most-used fuel will grow by more than 13 per cent, as will demand for gasoline.

Overall fuel demand in the current financial year, which runs to March 31, is expected to fall 8.5 per cent.

India's economy pulled itself out of recession last quarter, helped by a boost in government spending and the reopening of an economy that's mainly driven by domestic consumption. It was one of the few major economies to post growth in the final three months of 2020.

A trend for more commuters to use personal cars instead of buses, trains and other modes of public transport is expected to drive India's demand for gasoline.

Demand for aviation fuel, which suffered the biggest blow, is estimated to grow more than 74 per cent during 2021-22 fiscal but will remain a little lower than the pre-pandemic year, the PPAC's projection showed. (Bloomberg)



Minister for IT and Municipal Administration KT Rama Rao presenting a memento to Vidit Aatre, Founder and CEO of Meesho after signing the MoU, flanked by Deepthi Ravula, CEO of WE Hub and Jayesh Ranjan.

## WE Hub partners with Meesho

HANS BUSINESS HYDERABAD

WE Hub, Telangana State-led incubator for women, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Meesho, a social commerce platform to help the women entrepreneurs to achieve financial independence by providing market exposure. The MoU was inked between Deepthi Ravula, CEO, WE HUB, and Vidit Aatre, Founder and CEO, Meesho, in the presence of Satyavathi Rathod, Women and Children Welfare Minister, Telangana. She added, "We will work together in ensuring national market access to women entrepreneurs

and women led businesses in Telangana. The entrepreneurs will register as suppliers on the Meesho platform, which enables them to sell their wide range of products at national level. WE Hub through this partnership also aims to promote homepreneurs by providing digital and financial literacy training to the women registered as homepreneurs on the Meesho platform. This effort will enable them to achieve financial independence, she added. "I am truly heartened to see WE-Hub and Meesho coming together to help the women of Telangana realise their economic, social and financial goals." said Minister Satyavathi Rathod.



# India ready to cook England's goose

AHMEDABAD

A ruthless India will not take their foot off the pedal while taking England for another "spin ride" in the high-stakes Test series finale starting Thursday, aiming to not just complete another dominant home performance but also realise their World Test Championship dreams.

Virat Kohli's

instincts, wouldn't like to play a defensive game which at times can be counter-productive.

India laid a venomous trap on the refurbished Motera and with the pink ball, demolished England inside two days, messing more with their minds than getting any tangible help from the track.

Axar Patel bowled ramrod straight and England had their heads "spinning" from the start. The play has worked well for the hosts since the second Test in Chennai. Both Ajinkya Rahane and Zak Crawley felt that the track for the fourth Test looks "similar" to what they got in the previous two matches but the red ball which skids less off the surface compared to the pink one promises to make it a better contest between the two teams.

This is a Test match where England have little to gain save salvaging a bit of pride in a drawn series while India have everything to lose. Despite being India's most prolific Test captain in terms of numbers, Kohli would be the first one to admit that he hasn't had the kind of success his illustrious predecessor Mahendra Singh Dhoni had with regards to the ICC events.

While this is an ICC event of a different kind, no one more than Kohli would be itching for a course correction and build his own lasting legacy as a captain. For that, he wouldn't pull back punches. And on another track that helps his 'snipers' Axar Patel and Ravichandran Ashwin, Kohli would love to see an 'inflation' in their current cumulative tally of 42 wickets for the series.

With Indian spinners accounting for 49 of the 60 English wickets in the first



Ground staff use rollers on the pitch ahead of the fourth India-England test match, at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad on Wednesday

three Tests, it was anybody's guess as how things will pan out in the final Test at the 'Narendra Modi Stadium'. Kohli wouldn't have any complaints with his spinners, who have delivered what was expected of them, but the batting has left a lot to be desired in the entire series.

It's just that England have been worse in their last four innings. But that is no sound explanation for Indian batsmen's failure to dominate the proceedings in their own backyard. Rohit Sharma's 296 runs in three games is 120 runs more than second best Ashwin (176 runs), who got a hundred on a difficult Chepauk track. Save Rohit, none of the Indian batsmen have felt too comfortable till now on the turners on offer. Kohli, de-

spite two fifties, hasn't had the best of times while Ajinkya Rahane, Cheteshwar Pujara and Shubman Gill have all had only one innings of note over three Test matches.

All Kohli would want is a steady, if not exceptional performance, in games such as these where a failure can leave 'many a slip between the cup and lip'. While there won't be any Jasprit Bumrah for the final Test, one of the finest exponents of bowling on sub-continental tracks, Umesh Yadav, is expected to be back in action. It remains to be seen whether Ishant Sharma or Mohammed Siraj partner him.

For England, poor team selection

has also contributed to their shoddy batting where Joe Root (333 runs), with his first Test double hundred, managed to maintain a fair gap (187 runs) between him and the second highest scorer Ben Stokes (146). Not having a second specialist spinner in Motera, didn't exactly make the team management look too smart, especially after Joe Root scalped a career-best 5 for 8. Jack Leach (16 wickets) has done his bit but he does have his own set of limitations and with his pace, which is on an average 10km less than Patel, he is unlikely to always trouble the batsman. But he would again play a significant role on a similar sort of track and may expect Dom Bess for company. Bess was impressive in the opening Test in Chennai but since then, has cooled his heels.

Match starts at 9:30 am

## Pitch looks very similar to last Test: Root

AHMEDABAD

ENGLAND skipper Joe Root on Wednesday said the pitch for the fourth and final Test against India looks very similar to the one on which his team was decimated in the third game but the visitors have learnt their lessons to be ready for the challenge starting Thursday. "It's (the pitch) looking very similar...I think the most important thing is that we learn all the lessons from the last two test matches and make sure we're back for it," Root said when asked about the raging debate over the pitch in



the last Test and how this one was looking. "It's important that if we get ourselves in a similar position in the first innings, we really make that count. And try and get some scoreboard pressure in the game, you know, early on," he said at the virtual press conference, on the eve of the game here. Root said the English batsmen will look to build partnerships. He also informed that the team has not finalised its 11 or 12 at this stage but made it clear that off-spinner Dom Bess was up for selection. (PTI)

## Too much noise about spin-friendly tracks: Kohli

AHMEDABAD

STOP the noise, tighten up that defence and get on with the game -- a combative Indian skipper Virat Kohli said on Wednesday ahead of the fourth and final Test against England as he navigated persistent queries on the spin-friendly tracks in the country. India annihilated England inside two days in the Pink-ball Test at Motera, days after the visitors crumbled on another spin-assisting pitch in Chennai in the second Test.

"There is always too much noise and too much conversation about spin tacks," Kohli said at the pre-match press conference ahead of the fourth and final Test starting here on Thursday. "I am sure if our media is in a space to contradict those views or present views which say that it is unfair to criticise only spin tracks, then it will be a balanced conversation." Kohli, at the end of the third Test, had blamed the batsmen's technique for their failure on the Motera track. "But the unfortunate bit is everyone plays along with that narrative (spinning tracks) and keeps making it news till the time it is relevant. And then a Test match happens, if you win on day 4 or 5, no one says anything but if it finishes in two days, everyone pounces on the same issue," he said.

### Rotation policy

India skipper Virat Kohli feels rotation policy is the way forward in the age of bio-bubbles as mental fatigue caused by restrictive quarantines will make it extremely difficult for players to stay hungry. England have been following a rotation policy in their ongoing tour of India, something that has drawn criticism from legends such as Kevin Pietersen. Kohli, though, is convinced that as long as players are staying in bio-secure environments, taking intermittent breaks is not a bad idea. (PTI)

## This is the best team I have ever trained: Marqueeze

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
HYDERABAD

HYDERABAD FC Head Coach Manuel Manolo Marqueeze on Wednesday said that he is very much satisfied with this season and this was best group he has ever trained in his life.

Speaking to media persons, Marqueeze, who was in the city to express his appreciation for the support shown to the club, said "I am very much satisfied with this season and of course we need to be ambitious even after this very good season. We felt maybe we could make it to the semifinals and lets see after that what would happen, but I think that it's very beautiful to look for some things to criticise the players in this season."

## A day after saying cricket gets forgotten in IPL, Steyn apologises

NEW DELHI

SOUTH Africa pace great Dale Steyn on Wednesday apologised for his criticism of the Indian Premier League, saying he never intended to "degrade or insult" the world's biggest franchise-based T20 tournament.

The 37-year-old veteran fast bowler said his statement that cricket is sometimes forgotten amid all the money talk in the IPL was taken out of context in social media. "IPL has been nothing short of amazing in my career, as well as other players too. My words were never intended to be degrading, insulting, or comparing of any leagues. Social media and words out of context can often do that," Steyn tweeted. "My



apologies if this has upset anyone." Steyn's apology came after he claimed on the sidelines of the Pakistan Super League 6, where he is representing Quetta Gladiators, that money is given more importance than the game in the IPL. Steyn had said that this was one of the reasons why he had not featured regularly in the event. (PTI)

## Australia beat New Zealand in 3rd T20

WELLINGTON

GLENN Maxwell dashed 70 from 31 balls, Aaron Finch returned to form with 69 and Ashton Agar took a career-best 6-30 as Australia beat New Zealand by 64 runs in the third Twenty20 international on Wednesday to keep the five-match series alive.

Maxwell reached a half century from 25 balls during an over in which he hit 28 runs -- two sixes and four fours -- from the bowling of Jimmy Neesham. At its end, his innings included eight fours and five sixes and set Australia on course to its commanding total of 208-4. Tall Tasmania fast bowler Riley Meredith took 2-24 in his international debut, then Agar claimed six wickets in succession to stifle New Zealand's reply. The home team was bowled out for 144 in 17.1 overs. (AP)

## Pelé gets his first Covid-19 shot, urges mask use

SAO PAULO

PELÉ received his first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday, calling it an "unforgettable day." The 80-year-old Brazilian soccer great posted the news on his social media channels along with a picture of himself receiving the shot in his right arm. Pelé, a three-time World Cup champion, did not disclose where the dose was given, but he has been staying at his home in Guarujá, outside Sao Paulo, since the pandemic hit Brazil one year ago. "Today is an unforgettable day -- I received the vaccine!" Pelé said.

"The pandemic is not over yet. We must keep discipline to preserve lives until many people have taken the vaccine." Less than 4 per cent of Brazil's population has been vaccinated against the coronavirus. Brazil has the world's second highest



COVID-19 death toll, nearing 260,000 victims.

Last week was the country's deadliest since the beginning of the pandemic, with 8,244 confirmed virus-related deaths. Pelé also urged his followers to wash their hands and stay home if possible. "When you go out please don't forget your mask and maintain social distance. This will pass if we can think of others and help each other," he said. (AP)

### Kapil Dev receives first dose of Covid-19 vaccine

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket legend Kapil Dev on Wednesday received his first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a renowned city hospital here. The 62-year-old World Cup-winning captain got vaccinated at the capital's Fortis hospital. Kapil Dev, thus, became the second former India cricketer to receive the vaccine after India head coach Ravi Shastri, who got vaccinated on Tuesday at Ahmedabad. Both the cricket legends received the vaccine after India's inoculation drive entered its second phase on Monday in which the coverage was expanded to include everyone above 60 and those over 45 with co-morbidities. India's greatest-ever fast bowler Kapil Dev had undergone an angioplasty in October last year after suffering a heart attack. (PTI)

## Top FIFA gamers in first-ever AIFF eFootball Challenge

NEW DELHI

INDIA'S best FIFA gamers are set to take part in the first-ever AIFF eFootball Challenge beginning on March 20, wherein 16 of the top eligible Playstation eAthletes of the country will be competing against each another.

The competition to be organised by the All India Football Federation (AIFF) will determine the representatives from the country. They will be a part of the eNational squad and compete at the FIFAe Nations Series 2021 (FeNS21).

The flagship tournament of the FIFA is contested by eNational Teams using the EA Sports FIFA 21 game. The official logo for the inaugural AIFF eFootball Challenge has been designed in line with the overall logo identity of the federation. To be played in a knock-out format, the Round of 16 of the tournament will take



place on March 20, with the quarter-finals scheduled for March 21.

The semi-finals and finals will be held on April 2 and April 4 respectively. The AIFF will soon initiate the registration process for the tournament by sending out invitations to the top 16 Indian PlayStation eAthletes in the FIFAe Global Series Rankings (West Asia Region), as per the

cut-off date and time of 12am IST on February 25.

However, if any of the top 16 eAthletes do not meet the eligibility criteria for the tournament, which will be communicated to them during the registration period, or do not confirm their participation, the next eligible eAthlete in the ranking order shall qualify, a release said. (PTI)

## Srikanth, Satwik-Ashwini pair through to second round of Swiss Open

BASEL

TOP Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth staved off a spirited challenge from compatriot Sameer Verma to make a winning start to his campaign at the Swiss Open Super 300 tournament here on Wednesday. The fourth seeded Indian, who had claimed the title in 2015, took little over an hour to see off 2018 winner Sameer 18-21 21-18 21-11 in a hard-fought men's singles opening round match.

World no. 13 Srikanth, an Olympic hopeful, will be up against France's Thomas Rouxel in the Round of 16. Rouxel beat Canada's Xiaodong Sheng 21-18 21-14 in another first round match. Sourabh Verma also won his first round match against Switzerland's Christian Kirch-

mayr 21-19 21-18. He faces eight seed Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand in the Round of 16. However, H S Prannoy made an early exit after losing to France's Mark Caljouw 19-21 21-9 17-21 in a men's singles first round match.

Last night, Indian mixed doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Ashwini Ponappa notched up an upset 21-18 21-10 win over the world no 8 and second-seeded Indonesian pair of Hafiz Faizal and Gloria Emanuelle Widjaja in the opening round. Satwik and Ashwini, who reached the semifinals of the Toyota Thailand Open Super 1000 event in January, had earlier defeated the Indonesian combination at the Yonex Thailand Open in a thrilling three-game match in January.



The world no 19 duo, who have been training under new foreign coach Mathias Boe for the last one month, will face another Indonesian pair -- Rinov Rivaldy and Pitha Haningtyas Mentari -- next. The second seeded Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty also won their first round men's doubles match against Christopher Grimley and Matthew Grimley of Scotland 21-18 19-21 21-16.

Another Indian shuttler, Pranaav Jerry Chopra, who was returning to action after a COVID-19 pandemic break, didn't have a good outing as he along with his mixed doubles partner N Sikki Reddy lost 18-21 15-21 to the third-seeded English pair of Marcus Ellis and Lauren Smith in 39 minutes. Swiss Open is the first event of the extended Olympic qualification period which will end on June 15.