



About 200,000 animals could be stranded in the ships held up at the canal, according to an estimate from advocacy group Animals International. The group has tallied 18 vessels that departed Romania, Spain and South America and are currently stuck in the queue. Many are likely carrying sheep, said European Union director Gabriel Paun. Vessels can't easily unload animals in other nearby countries due to health protocols or a lack of trade agreements, he said.

Womenia

Inspiring women: Breaking stereotypes to earn

TEJAL SINHA

Shell India, unveiled the campaign, 'Great things happen when we move' that aims to celebrate the indomitable spirit of Indians, their dreams, and aspirations along with their inspiring journeys. As a part of the campaign,

Geeta Tandon, Bollywood's leading stuntwoman

For Geeta, the journey before becoming a stunt woman was definitely not an easy one. Geeta got married and entered the motherhood at a very young age. Even before she could understand, she had to face physical abuse by her spouse.

When she took up this profession, there was no choice left for her. Geeta never thought of being a stuntwoman, it just came her way at the right time. During this, she was desperately in need of work and money to support her family. Few of her favourite projects have been the stunts in the movies like 'Uda Punjab', 'Chennai Express' and 'Singham'.

Geeta shares, "I love adventure, and I love challenges, and this field has given me wonderful experiences and so much exposure. I have also got to meet so many great people in this journey. Though there were some people who doubted my capability of performing stunts, many also said that a woman should not take up a job as dangerous as mine, but I didn't let those opinions deter me. I realised that if you are good the industry will be good to you and vice versa. Today, my work gives me strength; every new assignment, every new opportunity, is what keeps me going. You have one life so why waste it. I hope I can inspire more women and Shell India is helping me get this message across to them."

Working in a male dominated field, there were people who doubted her capability of performing stunts.

She adds, "Many said that a woman should not take up a job as dangerous as mine, but I didn't let those opinions deter me. I kept on moving forward, challenging and proving myself with my actions. With Shell highlighting my story, I want to tell all the women, that one just has to learn to be brave and fight their fears, if you have decided to do something, nothing is too difficult. It was heart wrenching for me to lock them up at home and go to work in those days. There was no one to look after them in my absence. But I had to be strong and keep moving forward anyway. My children have been extremely supportive all this while."



they launched three brand films that showcase inspirational stories of women. The campaign shares the stories of three inspiring women: Yogita Raghuvanshi, India's first woman truck driver, Geeta Tandon, Bollywood's leading stuntwoman and Sumitra Senapaty, founder of Women on Wanderlust.



Sumitra Senapaty, traveler, writer and founder of WOW Foundation

Sumitra discovered a love for adventure as a young woman and went on to have a successful career as a travel writer to follow her passion.

Sharing about WOW foundation, Sumitra shares, "For many women in India, the idea of embarking on a solo holiday to relax and recharge may get pushed down the priority list in favor of devoting time to families or careers. I also realized, many of Indian peers lacked the confidence and the knowledge to travel independently. I created WOW Club in 2005 to provide these women with an easy way to explore their adventurous sides. WOW (Women on Wanderlust) is a trip-planning community that draws on my personal travel experience and global contacts. The club organizes dozens of journeys each year for small groups of women, who can travel with confidence – and safely enjoy trips together."

According to Sumitra, in the early days of the service many potential customers felt constrained by family and career obligations as they contemplated signing on for a trip.

She adds, "Women loved it, but they always came up with this barrier that they would need to discuss it with their family, and when those family discussions occurred, perhaps over the weekend, husbands often asked their wives to plan a different kind of trip. These were few initial challenges WOW faced. However, today, 15 summers later, women do not raise those same issues anymore. Discussions are no longer about checking with family but about seeing how they can coordinate their personal lives and maybe take their professional leave before they get back with us. And then they do it."

Yogita Raghuvanshi, India's first woman truck driver

Yogita Raghuvanshi, a qualified lawyer who is well-known as India's first woman truck driver. She also worked at a salon and a course in dress designing. However, she was not able to earn much and later had to take up driving after the death of her husband to look after her kids.

Yogita shares, "I had to take up driving after the death of my husband. My kids were young, and I had to support my family, however, we didn't have much of an income. We had employed a driver, but I was making losses because of that. So, I decided to take the matters in my own hands, changed the course of my life from losses to profitability and realized that Great Things Happen When You Move. When I started driving, I never knew in that moment that my story will inspire so many people, especially women."

Though Yogita was a qualified lawyer, she chooses driving truck on the highways.

She adds, "I needed work after the death of my



husband that could pay me immediately. Starting as a fresher in the legal profession would have required for me to work under a senior lawyer for a few initial years and grow in the field. I realized that driving trucks meant instant wages and greater stability. In a country that is developing at such a rapid clip, there will always be work for a truck driver. However, the society will always look

at you in a different way, if you take up something that doesn't fall under the stereotypical gender roles. Being a woman driver, I had to face snide comments, hostile stares and much more. But I chose to rise above those challenges, move forward and make a better future for myself and my family. And that is exactly what Shell India has highlighted in their film that features me. I truly believe that Great Things Happen When We Move and once you start moving, the barriers and road-blocks mean nothing."

Yogita shares that she loves what she does but shuttling between cities across the country with her truck had its inevitable load of problems.

"Nobody believes that I drive trucks, whether then or now. They assume that I am the driver's woman. Mechanics on the highway, men at dhabas and elsewhere leer at me, but when they see me at the wheel their look changes dramatically. But none of this bothers me, it never did," adds Yogita.

Why India needs more women on internet

Having said that, the digital gender gap in India stands at 50 per cent - which means that women are 50 per cent less likely to have access to the internet than men, depriving them of benefits of information, knowledge, access to jobs and markets, peer support and more. Qualitative research from around the world shows that when you create relevant 'legit' use cases for women on the internet, it reduces other barriers such as gatekeeping by men on grounds of safety and security.

Story of Savita, an uneducated middle-aged farmer from Maharashtra. A few years back she got exposed to the internet and Facebook. She was fascinated by its potential. She wanted other farmers to learn what she had. So, she started an online Facebook com-

munity using a basic feature phone.

In under three years, she has one million farmers in her two groups women farmers who access information and capital, share best practices and support each other in times of crisis, all through an online group. What Savita achieved with just a feature phone and zero funds is more than what many NGOs achieve through large funded programs. This is a true example of what technology can do for women's empowerment. And how a 'legit' use case can reduce women's barriers to internet access. She then created a disruption.

Traditional development experts would gravitate towards the proven model of self-help groups - small physical groups of 10-15 women who meet weekly. Self-help groups are proven enablers for empowerment and social

change. But at the end of the day those 10-15 women are from the same village, same community and hold similar norms. The reference group is small and static. The moment we bring millions of women from other villages, even other states, to the same group - it completely changes and dramatically expands the reference group. It allows new ideas to blossom, new norms to thrive.

A Facebook group called Pune Ladies (PULA) brought together aspiring women entrepreneurs and that has led to over 9,000 women to start their own businesses or grow their existing business. Digital Beti, a partnership between Facebook and CSC academy has trained over 250,000 women village level entrepreneurs, 70 per cent of whom were first time digital users, in basic digital skills. The program led to an average increase

of 20 per cent in the annual income of these women. Many of these outcomes are not possible at this scale, cost and speed without technology. And Savita understood that.

Technology is one of the greatest enablers of change. We all saw that during the pandemic, but we need to approach it with confidence not fear, with vision not hindsight. Savita does not need to be an exception. While big organizations imagine the disruptions that will empower millions of women rapidly and exponentially each of us can play our small part too. Introducing a woman farmer, a house-help, a young student or a village level entrepreneur to relevant, legit use cases on the internet can transform their lives and with every woman who joins the worldwide web, the world becomes a better place.

TWEET PATROL



PRIYANKA
@PRIYANKACHOPRA

Holi, the festival of colors is one of my favorites ☺
Hope we can all celebrate it with our loved ones, but in our HOMES!
#HappyHoli everyone ♥



Slay your floral dress this summer

Floral prints and summer season are synonymous to each other. Floral fashion is never out of trend even for high-end designers

Pink and white dress outfit- strawberry kiss!

You can look different if you choose unique and bright accessories for dresses. For summer purposes, choose light jewellery and avoid heavy ornamentation such as beads or metal pieces as these might cause skin irritation due to sweating. If possible, wear minimum jewellery such as light earrings over your

floral print dresses, as they do not touch the skin much as compared to rings, bracelets or necklaces.

If you do not like to wear simple white floral dress, the pink sand white dress in long dress styles will steal your heart. You could later try a more patterned look by adding a soft shrug featuring a simple floral pattern to grace your attire. Go for contrast shades shoes or heels to pair up with the light pattern, for example, you can try pairing your white floral dress with tan shoes to give a defined outline to the whole outfit.

Blue floral outfit

The best thing about blue floral print dresses is that you can straightaway transform as well as upgrade your style with a single dress piece. If you are confused about how to choose accessories for dresses, then don't be. Your flowery dresses will make you look like a dream. Keep a scarf or if you want to punch up the floral appeal, choose long floral shrugs instead and these can prove to be beneficial on a hot summer day and add a rich look to any flower print dress.

Red floral dress outfit

This is romance at its best. Floral fashion can be elegant and playful at the same time. The red floral print short dress outfit is a very general term to describe perfect floral clothes but it is that versatile. The design can be anything from multi-coloured to single coloured, bright or neutral pallet, or even a simple floral pattern. But it will make an extremely loved dress with flowers, till the time the fabric is of good quality. Natural fabrics like cotton are more favourable in summer than polyester. These fabrics are breathable and dry easily in case of excessive sweating in contrast to synthetic clothes. They'll serve as great material for your floral print clothes.

Clutches, shoes and scarfs can be matched to give a complete touch to your outfit. Long floral shrugs are always go-to add-ons for a fresh and breezy look.



NEWS ROUNDUP

Shilpa Shetty: Don't let my producer and actor sides interfere with each other

WHILE actress Shilpa Shetty Kundra owns a production house, she says she never lets this interfere in her work as an actor.

"When I look at a film, I have always looked at it in totality while knowing where does the project demands me to put in my best. So, I am very clear and comfortable about my space in the whole dynamics," she told.

However, she adds that being a producer has helped her be more patient. "I don't let my producer side or actor side interfere with each other. Having said that, being a producer has been a very enriching experience. I now, know what really goes behind making a project. It has made me more patient," she says.

Shilpa claims awards don't matter to her. "As long as you are true to your job and have passion for what you do, it doesn't really matter. In the end, we are here to tell a story, an inspiring and interesting one, and that is the goal of any project," she says. "Once you achieve that, awards and box office figures are complementary," she adds.

Meanwhile, Shilpa is reprising the role of a judge in the dance reality show Super Dancer-Chapter 4 for the fourth year in a row.



THIS DAY IN HISTORY
HASTHINAPUR

DOCTORS DAY



It's easy to forget just how important, valuable and necessary good doctors are, that is until you get ill or sustain an injury. Doctors Day puts hard-working doctors in the spotlight, and encourages us to be considerate of the long hours they work, their compassion, and the effort they put into practicing medicine.

All around the world, Doctors' Day is celebrated, as we all recognize the contributions that physicians make in the community and to individual lives. Some countries will celebrate Doctors' Day on a different date, yet all nations make sure that those in the healthcare sector are appreciated. We think that it is only right that these people are celebrated. After all, just imagine how life would be if there weren't any doctors in the world.

There is no denying that healthcare is one of the most pivotal industries in the world. Jobs in this field are also getting more and more advanced and complicated. Progressions are being made in medicine all of the time, with doctors having more information and tools at their fingertips than ever before. It can be an overwhelming job, to say the least.

They have to diagnose different conditions and treat a wide range of people on a daily basis. The outcome is not always good, and this can be difficult to deal with. It is hard to imagine what doctors go through on a day-to-day basis. Plus, they're always available for us. Unfortunately, illnesses and injuries don't wait for a convenient time to strike; they can happen at any time and on any day, and that's why it is so important that we always have doctors to rely on when we're not feeling like our usual selves.



SIDDHARTHA SWARUP

We all know that there is a correlation between gender equality and the digital gender divide. However, until recently, the direction and quantum of that correlation has been unclear to me.

A research published in the US National Academy of Sciences in 2018 studied Facebook data of over 1.3 billion users from over 120 ter-

ritories around the world to understand the impact of Facebook on gender equality. The study found that in countries where there was a smaller gender gap on Facebook in 2015, gender equality in that country improved the following year. However, the reverse was not found to be true. The study concluded that a lower gender gap on Facebook was more likely a contributor to gender equality than a product of it.



President clears Bill giving Delhi LG more powers

NEW DELHI

PRESIDENT Ram Nath Kovind on Saturday approved the Government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) (Amendment) Bill 2021, which was passed by Parliament last week.

The Union Home Ministry will now determine when it comes into effect.

The development came just as Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal welcomed support from Chief Ministers of other states against the new law, which provides more power to the Lt. Governor.

"Thank you @vijayanpinarayi ji for supporting the people of Delhi against BJP's assault on democracy and federalism," he tweeted, welcoming Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's support.

Extending his support to the AAP, Vijayan tweeted: "Govt of NCT of Delhi (Amd) Bill is an affront to our federal principles and rights of States. Restriction of constitutional authority of democratically elected State Govts and violation of Supreme Court's verdicts, should be resisted. @BJP4India has colonial a



The bill, passed by Parliament on Wednesday in a major setback to Delhi's ruling AAP, ensures more constitutional powers to the Central government-appointed Lt. Governor as against the Delhi Assembly

mindset." The bill, passed by Parliament on Wednesday in a major setback to Delhi's ruling AAP, ensures more constitutional powers to the Central government-appointed Lt. Governor as against the Delhi Assembly.

The bill makes it mandatory for the elected Delhi government to seek LG's opinion before any executive action. However, the AAP has been opposing the Bill

claiming that it would stall Delhi's progress by giving undue powers to the Lieutenant Governor.

The GNCTD bill states that the Delhi legislative Assembly will not make any rule to enable itself or its committees to consider the matters of the day-to-day administration of the national capital or conduct inquiries in relation to the administrative decisions.

Soon after the bill was passed four days ago, Kejriwal, in a tweet, termed it as "sad day for Indian democracy". The AAP has said that it will approach the Supreme Court to challenge the Centre's move.

The AAP has been accusing the BJP-led Central government of making an attempt to rule the national capital through the Delhi Lt. Governor.

UP: Cong wants action against RSS workers, threatens agitation

MATHURA

THE Mathura unit of the Congress has threatened to launch an agitation, if an FIR is not registered against RSS and BJP workers for allegedly thrashing policemen a day earlier.

Former CLP leader Pradeep Mathur said that the way the police personnel were beaten up by RSS and BJP workers had demoralised the entire police force and rather than taking action against the culprits, policemen



had been suspended and booked on charges of attempt to murder.

He alleged this was the second such incident when the right-wing workers had taken law in

their own hands and were allowed to go unpunished.

Mathur said that everything is on record as several videos of the incident are available on social media.

"These people should have been booked under National Security Act (NSA) along with other sections of IPC. We will launch an agitation soon if the guilty persons are not booked. They can be identified from the photographs and video clips of the incident.

Thousands reach Punjab shrine for Hola Mohalla celebrations

ANANDPUR SAHIB (PUNJAB)

AMID the coronavirus pandemic, thousands of men, women and children on Monday congregated at Takht Keshgarh Sahib, one of the five top Sikh shrines, as the three-day Hola Mohalla celebrations, which coincide with the festival of Holi, concluded.

This holy town, home to the second most important Sikh shrine after Amritsar's Harmandir Sahib, popularly known as the Golden Temple, was beautifully decked up to mark the oc-



casion. Anandpur Sahib is located about 85 km from Chandigarh. It was at this shrine that the 10th and final Sikh master Guru Gobind Singh had in 1699 baptised five men and founded the Khalsa Panth, which is the modern-day Sikh religion.

The Hola Mohalla celebrations made their beginning

around 1701 as Guru Gobind Singh wanted his troops to have mock battles to keep them battle-ready. Political parties like the ruling Congress, the Shiromani Akali Dal and the opposition Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) did not organise political conferences to mark the occasion owing to the pandemic.

Elsewhere, religious fervour was quite evident at the Golden Temple and other historic gurdwaras across the state as devotees began to assemble since early morning hours to offer prayers. (IANS)

BJP names Mahesh as its bypoll candidate from Salt in U'khand

DEHRADUN

THE BJP on Monday named Mahesh Jeena as its candidate for the Salt Assembly constituency in Almora district of Uttarakhand, where a bypoll is scheduled to be held on April 17.

The bypoll to the seat was necessitated after the untimely death of MLA Surendra Singh Jeena due to COVID-19 in November last year. Mahesh Jeena is the elder brother of Surendra Singh Jeena, who enjoyed the reputation of being an energetic and farsighted leader dedicated to the development of his constituency.

By fielding Mahesh Jeena from the seat, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hopes to reap the advantage of his late brother's good work in his constituency and the sympathy factor.

Mahesh Jeena will file his nomination on Tuesday, the last date for the filing of nominations for the bypoll, state BJP media in-charge Manveer Singh Chauhan said.

According to the voters' list prepared in January, there are 95,241 voters in the Salt Assembly constituency -- 48,682 men and 46,559 women. (PTI)

'SONS OF THE SOIL'



Farmers celebrate Holi with clay during their ongoing protest against new farm laws at Ghazipur border, in New Delhi, Monday.

Priest found dead on temple premises in UP

BULANDSHAHR (UP)

A priest of the famous Dhakwale temple in Achru Kalan village of Shikarpur Kotwali circle area in Bulandshahr district was allegedly strangled to death on Monday. Harendra Kumar, Superintendent of Police, said, "The body of Ashok Kumar, 50, the resident of Kailawan police station, was found near the temple in the field and there are injuries on his neck. A week earlier, he had come to work as a priest at Dhaka temple in village Anchru Kalan and was living in the temple premises." The SP further said that Ashok Kumar was guilty of vandalizing the Ravidas Temple a year ago, and and police were also looking for him in the matter. He also used to consume cannabis and alcohol. During the investigation, the police have found some injections. "We are investigating every aspect. The matter will be solved soon," he added. Further details are awaited. (IANS)

Kejriwal, Delhi LG extend Holi greetings, urge to follow Covid norms

NEW DELHI

DELHI LT. Governor Anil Bajjal and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal greeted people on the occasion of Holi on Monday and advised people to follow Covid norms.

Kejriwal urged all to celebrate the occasion at home, avoid public gatherings and follow norms as prescribed by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in view Covid-19 surge.

The Chief Minister had on Sunday announced that he will not be attending any public gathering on the occasion of Holi celebration, and advised Delhiites to do the same.

"Happy Holi to all the countrymen, this festival of colors brought immense happiness in the lives of all of you," Kejriwal tweets.

Kejriwal's another tweet in Punjabi language, read, "Millions of greetings to you and your family on this auspicious day of Hola Mohalla.

"Stay away from Corona and take care of yourself and your family, the Chief Minister stated.

Delhi Lt. Governor Anil Bajjal also urged people of the city to celebrate festivals at homes in view of growing Covid -19 cases in the city for the last three weeks.

"The people of Delhi are urged that in view of the Corona epidemic, these



festivals should be celebrated at home and keep themselves and others safe by following the guidelines and rules for prevention of Covid," Bajjal tweets.

Delhi registered 1,881 new infected cases of the coronavirus disease and 9 related deaths in the last 24 hours, which have pushed the national capital's cumulative positive cases to 6,57,715, the health department's bulletin showed till Sunday night.

Around 952 people have recovered from the viral disease and 79,936 samples were tested on Sunday.

The city has been witnessing a gradual rise in the number of Covid cases over the past few days. It recorded 1,558 cases on Saturday, while 1,534 cases on Friday, 1,515 cases on Thursday, 1,254 cases on Wednesday and 1,101 cases on Tuesday.

Army jawan killed in encounter with terrorists cremated

BAGHPAT (UP)

THE last rites of Army jawan Pinku Kumar, killed in an encounter with terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, were conducted in his native village in Baghpat district in Uttar Pradesh on Monday.

A pall of gloom descended in his Luhari village as Kumar's body wrapped in a national flag was brought here.

A large number of people paid their last respect to the jawan before his mortal remains were cremated with full military honours on the Yamuna river bank. Kumar was killed in an encounter with terrorists in Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday. Two terrorists were killed in the operation.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday paid his heartfelt tribute to the valour and bravery of Kumar.

According to a statement issued in Lucknow, the chief minister announced a financial assistance of Rs 50 lakh to the family of Kumar, a government job to a family member.

A road in the district will also be named after him, according to the statement. Extending his condolences to Kumar's family, Adityanath said the state government is with the bereaved family in this hour of grief. (PTI)



Woman beaten to death in UP by Holi revellers

ETAWAH: A 60-year-old woman was beaten to death and five members of her family were injured on Monday when they opposed Holi revellers from celebrating the festival outside their house in Mevati Tola locality here, police said. The Holi revellers, in an inebriated state, entered the woman's house around 10 am and beat her to death with sticks and stone, Additional Superintendent of Police (city) Prashant Kumar Prasad said. When other family members tried to save her, five of them, including two women and three children, were also beaten up, the police officer said. In another incident reported from Ekdil police station area, a youth under the influence of alcohol drove a tractor at high speed and in-

jured six people. The tractor got damaged after hitting an electricity pole. The youth was handed over to the police and the injured have been hospitalised, police said. (PTI)

UP man beats girlfriend's father to death

BAREILLY (UTTAR PRADESH): A 28-year-old man beat his girlfriend's father to death after the latter refused to marry his daughter to him. The incident took place in the Shahi area of Bareilly district and the accused, Sripal, has been booked under section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of IPC. According to additional Superintendent of Police (Rural), Raj Kumar Agarwal, "The man's body has been recovered from the house and sent for post mortem. The accused wanted to marry his daughter but he turned down the proposal. Sripal beat him to death with a heavy stick. The accused is on the run. We will arrest him soon." The younger brother of the deceased said, "My brother was looking for a suitable match for his daughter. Our family knew Sripal. On Saturday night, he came to our house with a bottle of alcohol and asked my brother to join him." In an inebriated condition, Sripal asked my brother for his daughter's hand. My brother refused and told him to leave immediately. Sripal first tried to take the girl with him and then bludgeoned my brother to death with a heavy stick and fled."





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This deep tech women-led startup rocks!

FIBRE optic cable assemblies are also playing an increasingly vital role in residential applications. Homeowners now expect high-speed internet access as part of their daily lives, and telecom and data industry leaders are turning to fibre optic technology as a clean, reliable way to provide expected services. In the next five years and beyond, contractors expect to use fibre optic cable for improved connectivity in a wide variety of projects. There are plenty of applications for fibre optic cable assemblies, and their uses are only growing. This technology is the backbone of military networking, medical imaging and laser practices, and private and public networking for cable and internet.

One of the reasons fibre cables are so widely used is because they are extremely secure. This technology does not contain an electromagnetic field, so data cannot be intercepted, slowed, or jumbled with other signals. Astrome, a women-led startup, has developed an innovative wireless product that gives fibre-like bandwidth at fraction of cost of fibre to help telecom operators deliver reliable low-cost internet services to suburban and rural areas.

Reaching internet access to remote places in countries like India is difficult because laying fibre is too expensive. There is a need for wireless backhaul products that can deliver low cost, high data capacity, and wide reach. Currently available, wireless backhaul products either do not provide sufficient data speeds or the required range or are very expensive to deploy. The wireless product called Giga Mesh could enable telecom operators to deploy quality, high-speed rural telecom infrastructure at five times lower cost. Rural connectivity customers and defence customers who have already signed up for pilots will soon witness the demonstration of this product by Astrome.

The deep tech startup incubated at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore, and supported by DST-ABI Woman Startup Programme of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India proved their millimetre-wave multi-beam technology in the lab in 2018, for which the company has been granted a patent in India and US. Since then, the technology has been converted to a powerful and scalable product called Giga Mesh, which can solve

much of the last mile connectivity telecom needs of our country.

The product has been proven on the field and also integrated with partner products for its upcoming commercialisation. Astrome also received the ITU SME Award for the 'Most Promising Innovative Solution in Connectivity', a major recognition for this product from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). They also got selected by a prestigious 5G accelerator program called EvoNexus (sponsored by Qualcomm) which will help them launch their product in the global market.

The Multi-beam E-band product, GigaMesh, packs 6 Point-to-Point E-band radios in one, thereby distributing the cost of the device over multiple links and hence reduces capital expenditure. The radio provides long-range and multi-Gbps data throughput at each link. Features like automatic link alignment, dynamic power allocation between links, and remote link formation help operators achieve significant operating expenditure cost reduction. Astrome is currently conducting a field trial at Indian Institute of Science (university campus). In this field trial, the company has already achieved data streaming at multi-Gbps speeds across the campus. Some women power, Sir!



CAG report holds a mirror on state of affairs in TS

PRASHANTH KUMAR

THE Comptroller and Auditor General, India's supreme audit agency report of 2020 on Telangana State government is in the public domain. The report reveals certain indicators of financial mismanagement and opaqueness in the State budget.

The CAG report primarily expressed concerned over the diversion of funds by the State government. The Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) utilised an amount of Rs 29.15 crore for works undertaken by Roads and Building Department towards creation of additional facilities in Pragathi Bhavan out of the loans given to HMDA. Using the loan amount for the renovation works at Pragathi Bhavan which is the official residence of Chief Minister clearly shows the questionable approach of the policy makers. However, HMDA did not offer its remarks as to how the works relating to additional facilities in Pragathi Bhavan came under the purview of developmental activities for which loan amounts were approved by the Legislature.

According to the report, the State Government has spent Rs1,01,877 crore on capital projects during the years 2014-19. Within the capital projects, the major share of the Capital Expenditure was on Irrigation and Flood Control. There have been inordinate delays in completion of projects and this has adversely affected the quality of the expenditure and also deprived the State of the intended benefits and economic growth.

Out of 26 ongoing projects, 20 projects were delayed with delays ranging from three months to 11 years and led to escalation of projected cost to Rs 1,87,848 crore. An amount of Rs 1,00,494 crore was already spent on these incomplete projects so far. The State Government did not disclose the financial results of any of the Irrigation projects.

Today, the outstanding public debt of Telangana State is Rs 1,65,164 crore, which is been increased by 16 per cent in 2018-19. Appallingly, this is slightly higher pace than growth of GSDP. The CAG report has reportedly found that the interest payments of the Telangana State are increasingly consuming revenue receipts. Interest payments relative to revenue receipts were much higher at 12.41 per cent against the target of 8.37 per cent fixed by XIV Finance Commission. The maturity profile of outstanding public debt as of March 2019 showed that 46 per cent which is Rs 76,262 crore. The total outstanding public debt need to be repaid over the next seven years. The revenue generating resources are very negligible to repay the public debt.

Interestingly, the CAG has observed that the excess expenditure of Rs 29,133.69 crore was incurred by the State government. A total expenditure of Rs 3,507.17 crore was incurred at sub-head level without any budget provision in 34 cases. It was found that the persistent excess expenditure occurred in fiscal administration, planning, surveys and statistics and home administration grants. This is in violation of Article 204 of the Constitution which provides that no money shall be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund except under appropriation by law by the State legislature. This vitiates the system of budgetary and financial control and encourages financial indiscipline in management of public resources.

The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2005 places an onus on the State Government to monitor and control the Fiscal Deficit. It also requires the State Government to make disclosures and statements under Section 10 of FRBM Act, 2005 together with Rule 6 of Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Rules, 2006.

The State government, however, did not make the following four out of ten disclosures required to be made: Statement of Assets, claims and commitments made by the government on revenue demands raised but not realised, liability in respect of major works and contracts, committed liabilities in respect of land acquisition charges and claims on State government in respect of unpaid bills on works and supplies, details of number of employees in Government, public sector and aided institutions and related salaries and pensions in the forms prescribed under FRBM legislation.

A comparison of fiscal priority of Telangana government with other General Category States revealed that Telangana focused more on development expenditure and capital expenditure. The focus of government on education and health was comparatively lesser across the years. Further, the State government did not disclose financial results of any of the Irrigation projects. As a result, there was no proper assurance of returns from the heavy public investments in Irrigation and Flood control.

The Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project was implemented by Irrigation and Command Area Development department through a Special Purpose Vehicle, viz., Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project Corporation Limited (KIPCL). The Detailed Project Report (DPR) of Kaleshwaram Project mentioned that the project would hardly generate any revenues as irrigation water was being provided at a very nominal water charges since the command area lies in the drought prone districts of Telangana.

Hence, no analysis of the revenues was made in the DPR since there were no proposals for imposing water charges. It was observed in audit that while providing guarantees of Rs 27,990 crore to KIPCL for obtaining loans from various Banks, the Irrigation Department stipulated a condition that KIPCL shall undertake to repay the loans through revenue accruals from the project or project revenues. In view of the mention in the DPR that there might be hardly any revenues from the Project, there is a risk that the Guarantee given by the State Government to KIPCL turns out to be an off-budget borrowing.

The above indicates that the State government provided guarantees to the organisations without ensuring financial accountability through which financial performance could be assessed. Providing Guarantees without proper risk evaluation assumes importance in the background that all the Guarantees given by the government were categorised as 100 per cent risk weighted as per the Statement of Fiscal Policy presented to the Legislatures.

The content of the CAG report clearly outlays the discreet approach of the State government and also reveals the fact that the state treasury is under excessive stress. The structural imbalances in the state economy need to be redress in order to build "Bangaru Telangana"

(The author is post-doctoral scholar in Political Science, University of Delhi)

The crisis of citizenship rejection letters



Madabhushi Sridhar Acharyulu

IN the entire country, Assam is the only State having National Register of Citizens compiled, wherein more than 19 lakhs that were left out of the final register should get rejection letters. This process has taken five years at the cost of Rs 1,220 crore. As a consequence of this, rejection slips must be issued, which did not begin. The reasons cited are Covid-19, floods and the officers being very busy with elections.

Issuance of rejection slip is a problem and not a solution. A person who received rejection slip has to fight against such rejection claiming that they continue to be the citizens of India but wrongfully rejected. According to the Centre's standard operating procedures, a rejected person would have 120 days from the date of receiving the rejection slip to approach a Foreigners' Tribunal (FT) for judging their citizenship status.

Union orders to issue

Even as the Assembly elections are underway, the Union Government is insisting on issuance of rejection letters to those people who are excluded from the NRC. A letter came from the office of the Registrar General of India (RGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to Assam Home Secretary S R Bhuyan on March 23 stating that the supplementary list of exclusions and inclusions were published on August 31, 2019 on the directions of the Supreme Court. In spite of the objections of the State Government and stiff opposition the Union decided to issue rejection slips. In this letter, the joint director asked the Assam government to assess the software used for managing the register and discontinue the ones not required. The letter said the State government's requirement of Rs 3.22 crore per month for the upkeep of records appeared to be "too high" and also asked to discontinue the additional staff.

The defects

Compilation of NRC in Assam was criticised for its defects. The BJP government in Assam also did not agree with the way the NRC exercise was conducted in Assam. It demanded reverification of 30 per cent of names which are included in the NRC in the territory bordering Bangladesh and 10 per cent in other areas of the state.

Here is an example. Ali with his three brothers were listed among rejected persons. They have been trying to salvage any document they might have missed while applying for inclusion in the NRC. One Ms Begum has been absconding as her petition was dismissed. That's what she can do, and she has to had herself for a lifetime to live in India. Ali and thousands like him lose hope if the NRC authorities prepare to issue rejection slips and they have nothing to show that they are citizens.

During the updating exercise, the NRC authority had listed 14 documents as admissible. These included the NRC of 1951, which Ms. Begum had submitted (of her parents), electoral rolls up to the midnight of March 24, 1971, land and revenue records, citizenship certificate and refugee registration certificate. An additional list of admissible documents includes ration card and certificate from circle officer of Gram Panchayat secretary in case of married women. "What can we show beyond those we have already shown? What will stop them from finding fault with the fresh documents we submit?" said petty trader Jamaluddin. All 26 members of his family were excluded because his father's name had minor alphabetical changes in different "admissible" documents possibly due to clerical errors.

It is difficult to prove the fact of their time of coming to India. Kamal Chakraborty, the leader of the Unconditional Citizenship Demand Committee based in southern Assam's Silchar, a Bengali-dominated town says: "Many NRC-



Compilation of NRC in Assam was criticised for its defects. The BJP government in Assam also did not agree with the way the NRC exercise was conducted in Assam. It demanded reverification of 30 per cent of names which are included in the NRC in the territory bordering Bangladesh and 10 per cent in other areas of the State

rejected Bengali Hindus have been living in Assam before 1971. The CAA is no guarantee for their inclusion, as they will first have to declare themselves as refugees who entered Assam between 1971 and 2014, which they are not". He further said: "It will be a long legal battle for them, perhaps never-ending, that will kill them and their descendants financially and psychologically."

Problems at Foreigners Tribunal

The problem may not be resolved at Foreigner's tribunal. All Assam Minority Students' Union president Rejal Karim Sarkar told the media that "excluded will have to go the FTs, which will be like jumping from the frying pan to the fire".

The Amnesty International had cited in September 2019, an Assam government's assessment report that said members are retained or fired depending upon how many people they mark as foreigners. The Supreme Court has directed the process to continue, which does not mean SC has done the actual ground processing. But the BJP has put the onus on the Supreme Court. While the Ministry always tags their letter with "NRC prepared as per directions of NRC". Can they say that the defects in listing have the approval of Supreme Court?

"No organisation in Assam is happy with the NRC list and a petition is pending in the apex court for re-verification of at least 10% of the names in districts where demographic changes have been drastic. We are waiting for the Supreme Court's guidance," the party's spokesperson Rupam Goswami said. "How can you accept this NRC that has included the names of illegal Bangladeshis? We have petitioned for 100% re-verification of names, but with the involvement of corrupt officials and the government's negligence, it seems no one wants a solution," said APW president Aabhijeet Sharma.

The Centre says rejected people have legal remedies. "The Centre has clarified that the rejected people remain Indian citizens until their cases are settled. They cannot be deprived of their voting and other rights although there are reports of a few people being denied passports," said Aman Wadud, an advocate who has fought for people declared foreigners by the FTs.

Validity of Assam NRC

Is this NRC valid? Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Choudhury, chairman of the Bar Council of Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram,

Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, said the NRC had no legal validity until the Registrar General of India issued a gazette notification confirming the list. "Because the NRC has not taken any legal shape, they cannot issue rejection order and no person can file an appeal. In its present form, the NRC is basically a Rs1,600 crore waste paper that drove many to suicide, made thousands of poor people poorer and be in perpetual fear of being ejected from their homes," he said.

The political analysts doubted that there is a political design in keeping the issue of "illegal migrants" burning for "yet another election". The Congress party criticised the BJP for delaying the process after the complete list left out many non-Muslims.

Assam's BJP govt wants 100 % re-verification

An official said laws existed to "detect, detain and deport illegal immigrants", and the power to identify and deport the foreign nationals staying illegally had been delegated to the States. In November 2019, the State's Finance Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, said Assam had asked the Centre to reject the updated final NRC in the State. According to human rights activist Harsh Mander, the NRC exercise, if conducted across the country, would be catastrophic for the social fabric and future of India as a secular, democratic republic.

Ineligible inclusions

On February 19, 2020, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) Coordinator Hitesh Dev Sarma wrote to the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and District Registrar of Citizen Registration of all the districts on the issue of an erroneous updating exercise and asked them to provide details of "ineligible persons" in the final list of citizens published on August 31, 2019 within 24 hours.

The Hindu claimed that it has the copy of the letter and reported that the indigenous groups believe many illegal immigrants have made it to the NRC in the three Bengali-dominated southern Assam districts - Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj. The ineligible persons were specified as DV (doubtful voters), DF (declared foreigners), PPT (cases pending in Foreigners' Tribunal), DVD (descendants of DV), DFD and PFTD.

NGO Assam Public Works (APW) petitioned the Supreme Court for a total reverification of the NRC. After hearing the 2009 petition of APW the Supreme Court monitored the exercise of updating the NRC of 1951. The same NGO is now claiming that 80 lakh illegal immigrants were included in the updated list.

When the whole list is doubted by the State Government led by BJP, NGOs, and several others, it is not proper for the Centre to go forward with issuance of rejection letters to 19 lakh plus people in Assam, that could cause havoc in the State.

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

LETTERS

BJP can still win Telugu hearts in AP

IT is preposterous to say that there is no light at the end of tunnel for BJP in AP (THI, 29 March). The mighty national party, being what it is, may be a "zero" today in AP, but if the Chanakyas of BJP have ears to listen to the "Man ki baat" of the people, the BJP can become a hero in AP. It is right time for BJP to introspect its role in making a prosperous AP into a BIMARU state today.

Had BJP-TDP combine not broken its own promise of special category status to AP, the mighty BJP would have become a super star in AP. Not to speak of the BJP's U-turn politics in not implementing the various economic projects to AP under AP Reorganisation Act.

Adding insult to the injury, is the privatisation of VSP. As such the beleaguered Telugu people cannot forgive the BJP today as it is responsible for bread and butter issues like joblessness, incessant price rise, farmer unrest, bad economy and host of others.

Thanks to the good governance of Jagan's government, people have successfully faced the bad days of Covid-19. Against this background, the BJP-TDP combine is seen in poor light today and Jagan is seen as saviour of the people with his innovative schemes and cash incentives to tide over the crisis in the state.

Hence, it is time for BJP to sit under a Bodhi tree and get political enlightenment. To win the Telugu hearts, the BJP should keep up its promises made to the people and help a well performing GoAP, to achieve all-round progress, development and economic prosperity.

P H Hema Sagar, Secunderabad

A blow for democracy

THE Supreme Court has betrayed its lack of will to give precedence to the sanctity of democracy vis-a-vis the electoral system by its decision to not stay the issuance of electoral bonds, if it may be put so bluntly.

The electoral bonds scheme as it exists today is not even remotely transparent. It is hard to believe that it is completely kosher. By its very nature, the scheme undermines the right to know of voters, time and again upheld as a constitutional right

by the apex court. There is no valid reason why the voters should not know the identities of the donors and recipients and the amounts of donated money through the electoral bonds. The Election Commission and banks cannot substitute the people when it comes to possession of knowledge of details of political funding. There is no reason why the public should not know what the Election and the banks know.

The anonymity enjoyed by corporate donors renders it difficult for people to detect the influence of donations on formulation of policies to their benefit. We are not gullible enough to think that there is no quid pro quo; there's no such thing as a free lunch. The opacity of the scheme makes it harder to be sure that no black money is used to fund parties.

The absence of a donation ceiling can result in donor-friendly parties being flush with money. Needless to say, the party in power is the main beneficiary of the scheme. It is an open secret that the bulk of the contributions from the poll bonds have gone to the BJP so far. BJP is not just the world's largest party, but also the world's richest party!

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Disproportionate money power in electoral politics undermines democracy. The country's top court can strike a blow for democracy by striking down the electoral bonds. That it may not be favoured by the ruling class should not dissuade it from what it should do to advance the cause of democracy.

G David Milton, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

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The electoral bonds system is not helpful for flourishing a healthy democracy as it favours the ruling party or a party with more winning chances. It takes away level playing field among parties. The anonymity of donor or the party being donated makes the voter uninformed about the flow of funds and the relation between these two. If the voter is empowered to know the criminal precedents and income details of the contestant in elections, why shouldn't he be equipped with the knowledge of his party's funding patterns and details? After all such information makes him well informed to take a call. The transparency factor in electoral process can discourage the quid pro quo arrangements between corporates and political parties.

Dr D V G Sankarara, Nellimarla



Govt committed to supply 24x7 power in summer: AP Minister

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

THE state government issued strict instructions to power utilities on supplying interruptions-free power during summer as the temperatures soar and demand for electricity is increasing steadily.

The power utilities submitted a detailed action plan to the government in which they stated that the estimated peak energy demand is likely to go up to 222 MU (million units) in the coming days.

During a review on summer action plan, minister for energy Balineni Srinivasa Reddy said that the state was meeting energy demand of around 220.6 MU/day as on March 27 and it is likely to increase to 222 MU in the coming days.

The state government's decision to supply 9-hour free power to agriculture was one of the reasons for the increase in energy demand, the minister said. He directed officials to lay special focus on effective implementation of free power to agriculture.

In view of huge demand, the power utilities would utilise multiple sources to meet the expected higher daily grid demand. All the long-term resources of power generation available with discoms (distribution companies) would be utilised in full and even power



- **Reviewing summer action plan with officials, Energy Minister says the State is ready to meet increased demand for power**
- **Power demand which stands at 220.6 MU as on date, is expected to surge to 222 MU in the coming days**

- **Noting that govt's decision to supply 9-hour free power to agriculture is one of the reasons for rise demand, the Minister asks officials to focus on effective implementation of free power to farming**



maining from power exchange, nearly 35 – 45 MU, as per requirement to ensure smooth power supply.

Secretary for energy Srikant Nagulapalli explained the minister that the demand for electricity had been increasing in the state for various reasons. The consumption of energy was recorded as 185 MU in 2018 which increased to 218 MU in 2020-21. The peak energy consumption of 220.6 MU was recorded on March 27, 2021.

The secretary said that since 24x7 uninterrupted power supply is the key factor for economic activity which helps for development of the state and welfare of the people, the power utilities are putting all out efforts to follow the government directives to 100 per cent to ensure 24X7 for all categories of consumers and all sector like agriculture, commercial, industry etc in all seasons particularly during summer period.

would be purchased from power exchanges to meet the additional demand, the minister explained.

Srinivasa Reddy also said that the government was very keen on power supply without any interruptions to every habitation in the state. It is also ready to meet whatever demand for electricity in summer. "The main objective of government is that every household even in remote village should be given quality power supply 24x7 apart from cities and towns," he said. The

minister also said that in any season or during adverse natural calamity, it is the responsibility of the power utilities and the government to ensure uninterrupted power supply. Officials explained to the minister that out of 217 – 218 MU of grid consumption per day as on date, the state is availing full generation from state generating units with nearly 100 MU, from Central generating stations 40 – 45 MU, other sources like IPPs etc., 10 MU, renewables 30-35 MU and re-

At 40, TDP looks for young blood to make a comeback

- **Party senior leader Butchaiah Chowdary says TDP needs not only Balakrishna and Lokesh, but also Jr NTR besides new leaders from the grassroot level**
- **Marking the 40th Foundation Day of the party, national president Chandrababu Naidu asserts that TDP alone can save AP from Jagan**
- **States that NTR founded the party not for politics but for the golden future of all Telugus**

HANS NEWS SERVICE
MANGALAGIRI

FOUR decades down the lane, the TDP seems to be of the opinion that it needs to go in for drastic changes in the organisational set up and infuse lot of new and young blood if the party were to survive and put a fight to stage a comeback. The party also does not rule out re-entry of Junior NTR into the party activities.

The party, according to senior leader G Butchaiah Chowdary, will get many new leaders representing all communities and regions. The party needs not just N Balakrishna and N Lokesh but also Jr NTR and host of other new leaders from the grassroot level, he said.

Earlier, TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu after unfurling the party flag on the occasion of the 40th Foundation Day celebrations, on Monday called upon the party cadres to fight back with self-confidence and rededicate their sacrifices to save the people of Andhra Pradesh from the destructive, undemocratic and atrocious rule of the YSRCP in the state.

He recalled the statement of Telangana Chief Minister K



TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu pays tributes to party founder and former Chief Minister N T Rama Rao on the occasion of 40th foundation day of the party at TDP state headquarters in Mangalagiri on Monday

Chandrasekhar Rao in Assembly recently where wherein he had said that from a situation where people from AP used to sell one acre land there and buy three acres in Telangana, the situation has reversed. Now people from this state can sell one acre here and buy two acres in AP. This shows how the impact of reverse policies of the YSRCP government, he said.

Just because the ruling TRS in Telangana did not indulge in reverse activities after bifurcation, Hyderabad continues to witness unhindered development, Naidu said.

He recalled how NTR founded the party and upheld the prestige of the Telugu people at the national and international levels at a time when there was no recognition nor identity for Telugus. Over the last 39 years, many rivals tried hard but eventually failed to crush the TDP and YSRCP will also not succeed, he said.

Naidu slammed the government for launching political harassment and attacks against ri-

vals and anyone who questioned them for its destructive activities like the suppression of the Dalits, backward classes and all sections of society.

He said in place of balanced growth and development policy of TDP, YSRCP turned everything in reverse gear with no sign of development. Even the sand which should be provided to people free of cost, turned into gold mine because of the ruling party's atrocious policy.

The TDP chief asserted that only TDP would be able to fight back the rowdism and atrocities of the YSRCP. Ultimately, it would be the TDP which would rewrite history by coming to power once again in the next elections with the popular support, he added.

Naidu said Jagan Mohan Reddy had failed in getting special Category Status though he has 27 MPs, Polavaram is at slow pace and Telugu pride has been put up for sale as government is cooperating with Centre in sale of Visakhapatnam steel plant, he added.

AP CM to get Covid shot on April 1

- **He will launch vaccination at ward secretariats**

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

CHIEF Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy will launch statewide Covid vaccination programme at ward secretariats by receiving Covid vaccination himself on April 1. The Chief Minister will leave for Guntur at 10.30 am and reach ward secretariat 140 at Bharatpetta, 11.10 am. He will register his name for Covid vaccination and get the jab. He will interact with media and secretariat staff during the waiting period. Later, he will leave for his residence.

In the evening, the Chief Minister will attend a orientation programme for newly-elected mayors and deputy mayors of municipal corporations and chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of municipalities at A Convention centre in Vijayawada at 3 pm.

Curtailment of sarpanches' powers draws Congress flak

HANS NEWS SERVICE
VIJAYAWADA

ANDHRA Pradesh Congress Committee criticised the state government for curtailing the powers of village sarpanches by issuing the GO No 2 which is against the spirit of the 73rd Constitutional amendment and the Panchayat Raj Act.

APCC working president Dr N Tulasi Reddy in a statement here on Monday said that the latest government order would weaken the panchayat raj system and threatens its existence.

The GO No 2 would bring 15,004 village secretariats, its 1.34 lakh staff and 2.66 lakh volunteers under the fold of revenue department which in essence amounts to bringing under the state government. The salaries, grant of leave of absence, would be handled by the village revenue officers (VROs).

As a result, the sarpanches would remain nominal without



- **AP Congress working president Tulasi Reddy says GO No 2 is against the spirit of 73rd Constitutional amendment and Panchayat Raj Act**
- **Points out that it effectively brings village secretaries and volunteers under the State govt**
- **Wants to know whether CM is feeling humiliated by the sarcastic comment of KCR regarding backwardness of AP**

any control over the secretariats. "The sarpanches could be described as the sixth finger without any use," he said.

He exhorted the sarpanches to fight if they any self-respect for their rights. It would be better if they boycotted the swearing-in ceremony as sarpanches or submit their resignations, he said.

Referring to the statement of the Chief Minister of neighbouring Telangana that if people sell one acre of land in Telangana they could purchase two acres in Andhra Pradesh, Dr Tulasi Reddy said that it was painful to note the sarcasm in the statement. He wondered whether Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy was feeling humiliated with the comment. It is amply clear that Telangana was developed of late whereas Andhra remained backward.

He advised the Chief Minister to stop vindictive politics and start developing the state with progressive politics.

8 States make up 85% of Covid caseload

Continued from P1

Five States — Maharashtra, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh — cumulatively account for 80.17% of the total active cases in the country, it added. Seventeen States and Union Territories have lower cases per million than the national average (8,724) while 19 States and UTs have higher cases per million than the na-

tional average, according to the Ministry. Ten States — Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Haryana and Rajasthan — are displaying an upward trajectory in the daily new cases, the Ministry said.

On the other hand, the total vaccination coverage in India has crossed 6 crores, it said.

Raut against lockdown

Continued from P1

Revealing that he had had a word with the Chief Minister regarding alternatives, Raut added, "Instead of a total lockdown, the State government should impose restrictions. We need to break the chain of transmission which can be achieved if several restrictions are brought in to prevent overcrowding at public and marketplaces."

Mehbooba hits out at Centre

Continued from P1

She also attached a copy of the letter she received from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) which reads: "Whereas the passport verification report received from the Additional Director General of the Police, J&K CID do not favour issuance of passport and has returned as Not recommended passport case." Mehbooba had applied for a fresh passport in December last year after the previous one expired on May 31, but the application has not been cleared to date in the absence of a police verification report. The officials had earlier said that "an adverse report" has been filed against her by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) but refused to elaborate saying the matter would be taken up before the high court.

Yanamala questions need to skip budget session

- **Reminds that last year too, the YSRCP govt passed the Budget in June citing Covid**
- **This year, it passed an ordinance on the pretext of local body elections and now Tirupati Lok Sabha bypoll**
- **Criticises that the govt is taking advantage of ordinance route without facilitating any discussion on vote-on-account**

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

THE YSRCP government has utterly failed in introducing budget from its formation, said TDP senior leader and politburo member Yanamala Ramakrishnudu in a statement on Monday, reacting to the passing of ordinance by skipping the Budget Session.

On Sunday, the YSRCP government passed a vote-on-account budget that authorises Rs 70,983 crore for the first three months of Financial Year (FY) 2021-22. Passing an ordinance instead of a full budget during a mandatory legislature budget session is not an ordinary practice, he pointed out

All of the government's revenues and loans are kept in the Consolidated Fund of the State. The Constitution states that no money from that fund can be withdrawn unless an appropriation is undertaken. However, appropriation may take longer in which case a vote-on-account is passed, so that in the short-term, the government is able to spend a stipulated amount. Typically, there is no discussion on vote-on-account and is treated as a formality, which the YSRCP government seems to be taking advantage of. The government has, however, stated that budget meetings could not take place due to gram panchayat and urban local body elections and upcoming Tirupati

byelections as the reason behind not conducting the mandatory budget session, he said.

The former finance minister said the YSRCP government has not released a full budget in the Assembly this or the previous year. Previous year, citing Covid-19 as the reason for the ordinance, the government passed the budget in June 2020. In 2019, the TDP had introduced a similar vote-on-account budget. Although, considering it was an election year, it is considered proper that any government not bring new policies that may not be agreeable to the new government post-elections. The YSRCP government has no such credible reasons, only excuses, he said.

Mamata's massive roadshow in Nandigram

Continued from P1

Hundreds of local people and party activists accompanied her, shouting the slogan of 'Mama Banerjee Zindabad!'. She will later address a rally.

The feisty TMC boss has announced that she will stay in Nandigram till the end of voting in the seat on Thursday.

Campaigning for the second phase will end at 5 pm on April 30. B J P sources said that Union Home Minister Amit Shah is also likely to take part in a roadshow in Nandigram on Tuesday.

'Politics of violence will end soon'

Continued from P1

Reacting to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's claim that the BJP will win 26 of 30 seats in West Bengal in the first phase of Assembly elections, Kailash Vijayvargiya said that he would not be surprised if the party wins all seats. "I would not be surprised if we see 30 seats. The way TMC was prevented from capturing booths and fake polling. The people have given their vote by choice. The people's approval will go to BJP and the goons were not successful," he said. He refrained from commenting on TMC MP Nusrat Jahan's alleged outburst during a rally, saying it was an "internal matter" of the party.

UDF will decide its Chief Minister after April 6 polls: A K Antony

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

VETERAN Congress leader and former Defence Minister A K Antony on Monday said the party-led United Democratic Front (UDF) would decide its Chief Minister after the April 6 Assembly polls. No assurance had been given to anyone regarding the top post and an unanimous decision would be taken in this regard post elections, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) member said here on a television channel.

“The UDF will take a decision on its chief minister after the Assembly elections. An unanimous decision will emerge then,” Antony said. The veteran leader’s reaction assumes significance in the wake of former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy being entrusted with the task of leading the Congress-led opposition front in the crucial assembly polls by the party high command recently. A 10-member Election Management and Strategy committee, with Chandy as its Chairman, had been approved by Congress President Sonia Gandhi in January.

Speculations were high when Chandy was projected as the face of the party and front though



senior leader Ramesh Chennithala had been leading it in the state Assembly in the last five years as the leader of opposition. However, the party leadership had set aside all rumours and said its present focus was on ensuring the UDF’s victory in the polls and any other decision would be taken after the elections.

When asked about his political plans, Antony said he had already ended electoral politics in 2004 and would put an end to parlia-

mentary politics by 2022 with the completion of his Rajya Sabha tenure. Unleashing a scathing attack on Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, the Congress leader said the CPI(M) in Kerala has been limited to just Vijayan now and in a democracy, there should not be a leader who is unquestionable. He said it was better for Vijayan to sit in the opposition bench for the next five years so that he would be in a position to be questioned over his

past rule.

Expressing confidence about the victory of Congress nominee K Muraliedharan at Nemom, the lone BJP seat in the state Assembly, Antony said it was not a stronghold of the saffron party. BJP veteran O Rajagopal had won the Nemom segment in 2016 Assembly polls due to the sympathy of the voters towards the candidate as he had repeatedly failed in several previous polls, he added. (PTI)

Apologies to Palaniswami if hurt by speech: DMK leader

CHENNAI

IN a damage control measure, A Raja, the DMK’s Deputy General Secretary and Lok Sabha member, on Monday apologised to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister K. Palaniswami for hurting his sentiments by the alleged derogatory speech made against the latter’s mother. Speaking to the mediapersons at Ooty on Monday, Raja said he apologised to Palaniswami if his remarks had hurt him. With condemnations for his derogatory speech against Palaniswami and his mother pouring in and to avoid any negative impact on DMK’s electoral prospects, Raja regretted his speech.

Recently the DMK leader said Stalin’s slipper is worth Rs one more than that of Palaniswami. Raja had insulted Palaniswami’s late mother saying the Chief Minister was an ‘illegitimate child’ while DMK National President M.K. Stalin was a ‘legitimate child’.

On Sunday Palaniswami while campaigning for his party turned emotional citing Raja insulting his mother. Justifying his speech, Raja said he had tried to explain the political leadership capacity of Stalin and Palaniswami citing a baby as an example. However, the DMK and its alliance parties did not condemn Raja but maintained a frivolous stand on the matter. Earlier, Stalin released a statement urging his party leaders not to use indecent language while campaigning.



‘Report on Raja’s remarks sent to EC for action’

Chennai: A detailed report on DMK leader A Raja’s alleged personal criticism of Chief Minister K Palaniswami has been sent to the Election Commission for action, Tamil Nadu Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Satyabrata Sahoo said on Monday. It includes the video clip and the action taken by district election officer (DEO) and Superintendent of Police, he told reporters here. Explaining that the DEO and SP would analyse the video clip to see if it invokes IPC sections or CrPC while the Election Commission will examine if there has been violation of model code of conduct. (PTI)

In a scathing attack on DMK and A. Raja, Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) founder, S. Ramadoss, said the former was not ready to respect women and cited the late M. Karunanidhi’s responses to various issues in the past.

Ramadoss also said Palaniswami, who rose in the AIADMK rank to become the state Chief Minister has more political acumen than Stalin, the son of DMK’s late President and former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi. When there are several decent words to compare Palaniswami and Stalin, the choice of words used by Raja shows his stature and also that of the DMK, Ramadoss added.

Ramadoss said it was Stalin’s son and party’s Youth wing leader Udayanidhi Stalin, who started the trend of making disgusting remarks about Palaniswami and V.K. Sasikala. Few days back, one of DMK’s Propaganda Secretary Dindigul I Leoni body-shamed women while campaigning in the Thondamuthur constituency for Karthikeya Sivasenapathy.

Leoni had said women have lost their hour-glass figure and have become like a barrel after drinking milk of foreign cows. DMK’s Lok Sabha member, Kanimozhi, said whoever be the political leader, if they are speaking ill about women -- they must be condemned. (IANS)

Kerala HC asks EC to ensure ‘one person votes only once’

KOCHI

IN an interim order, the Kerala High Court on Monday asked the Election Commission to ensure that a voter in the state votes only once.

The interim order came after the court heard the petition of Leader of Opposition Ramesh Chennithala after he approached the court seeking its immediate intervention in the “fraudulent” voters list for the April 6 Assembly polls.

When this petition came up last week, the court directed the chief electoral officer to come with a detailed explanation on this serious issue. The Chief Electoral Officer on Monday informed the court that they were in the process of seriously looking into this issue and a clear picture on this would emerge by Monday evening.

Following this the court passed an interim order asking the election officials to ensure that a voter be allowed to vote only once and posted the case for further hearing on Tuesday.

Chennithala’s public interest litigation, according to him, was a forced one as he had approached the Chief Electoral Officer, in the state five times with a complaint that there are over four lakh fraudulent voters in the 140 Assembly constituencies, having their names in multiple constituencies.

He has been releasing the details of this ‘duplication’ in the



ing on Tuesday.

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past week in various constituencies that he has been touring.

Chennithala in his petition has demanded all such people, who have multiple identity cards, should not be allowed to vote and action under the Indian Penal Code and the Peoples Representation Act should be taken against all the government officials who played a role in issuing such fake cards. Kerala goes to the polls on April 6 to elect 140 legislators. (IANS)

NCP supremo Sharad Pawar unwell, to undergo surgery

MUMBAI

NATIONALIST Congress Party President Sharad Pawar is ill and will undergo a surgery later this week, a top party official said here on Monday.

According to National Spokesperson and Maharashtra Minority Affairs Minister Nawab Malik, Pawar, 80, complained of abdominal pains last night and was rushed to the Breach Candy Hospital for a checkup. Upon diagnosis it has emerged that he has some problem afflicting the gall-bladder. He has been on a blood thinner medication which has been stopped now due to this issue, said Malik.

Now, Pawar will be admitted to the hospital on Wednesday and an endoscopy will be conducted followed by a surgery, Malik added.

In the meanwhile all engagements of Pawar have been cancelled. (IANS)

Allegations of attack on nuns in UP ‘wrong’, says Piyush Goyal

KOCHI

UNION Railway Minister Piyush Goyal on Monday dismissed as wrong the allegations that two nuns belonging to a Kerala-based congregation were “attacked” during a train journey via Uttar Pradesh recently and alleged that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan was “making false statements” on the issue.

“There was no attack on any nun whatsoever...the Chief Minister of the state (Kerala) is completely lying and making false statements when he says that,” Goyal told a press conference here.

The alleged incident occurred at Jhansi railway station on March 19 had its echoes in the

IT raid at house of AIADMK MLA’s driver, ₹1 cr seized

CHENNAI: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Income Tax Department seized Rs 1 crore on Monday morning from the residence of Alagarasamy who is the driver of AIADMK MLA R. Chandrasekar. Chandrasekar represents Manapparai constituency in Trichy district of Tamil Nadu. Alagarasamy was working with the MLA since the past nine years and IT officials said that the unaccounted money was stacked in Rs 500 denomination. Raids were also conducted at the residences of the MLA’s two other accomplices in Thangapandi and Muruganandam of Kovilpatti village.

Chandrasekar is seeking re-election from the Manapparai Assembly constituency after representing it since 2008. Manithaneya Makkal Katchi (MMK) Tamil Nadu State General Secretary, P. Abdul Samad, is contesting with the DMK alliance against Chandrasekar.

Huge money is being seized from different parts of Tamil Nadu ever since election dates were declared. The Income Tax and the Enforcement Directorate officials had seized an amount of Rs 11.5 crore from the office and residence of Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) Treasurer’s residence on March 15. (IANS)

2 women among 5 Maoists killed in Gadchiroli



NAGPUR

AT least five Maoists, including two women were gunned down after two encounters with the security forces in the deep forests of Khobramendha in Gadchiroli, officials said here on Monday.

The first encounter took place when the Gadchiroli Police’s C-60 Commandos team was engaged in a search and combing operation on Saturday morning, culminating in a fierce exchange of fire with around 50-60 extremists hiding in the jungles at various locations.

In that gun-battle, the firing continued for over an hour after which the Maoists retreated and escaped into the forest that morning. Later, the police scanned the vicinity and recovered 3 pressure cooker bombs, 303 rifle magazines, live cartridges, electric wires bundles, fire-cracker bombs,

solar plats, medicines and other material, DIGP Sandip Patil told mediapersons today.

After 48 hours lapsed this morning, when a new team of commandos resumed the jungle search operations based on intel-info around 7.30 am, they encountered a group of around 25 Maoists who opened indiscriminate firing in their direction.

In the retaliatory firing during this second encounter, the C-60 commandos managed to gun down five Maoists including two women, and a search is on to trace out if there were more victims and terror material stashed in the vicinity, Patil said.

Efforts are underway to identify the slain victims, which groups or dalams they belonged to, their ranks, and other details even as the forces remain on high alert as the Holi festival is being celebrated on Monday. (IANS)



Pavement dwellers sit on a structure in front of a wall painted as part of Congress party’s campaign for Assembly polls in Kolkata on Monday

Three prominent J&K leaders join People’s Conference

SRINAGAR

SAJAD Lone-led People’s Conference (PC) received a major boost with the entry of three prominent politicians into the party fold on Monday.

Former minister Basharat Bukhari, former legislators Peer Mansoor Hussain and Khurshed Alam on Monday joined the PC in presence of party Chairman Sajad Lone.

Speaking on the occasion, Lone said that the PC will immensely benefit from their experience in politics and public life.

“I wholeheartedly welcome Basharat Bukhari sahib, Mansoor Hussain sahib and Khurshed Alam sahib into the PC. They are experienced and mass-based politicians who will, in the coming decades, play a pivotal role and contribute to the politics and welfare of J&K. Their political acumen and experience will immensely benefit the party. I am hopeful that these leaders will continue to work for the cause of people and help navigate them through these extraordinary and troubled times,” he said.

On the occasion, these leaders maintained that “sincerity of thought of the People’s Conference Chairman Sajad Gani Lone, the history of service and sacrifice of the party obliged them to join the party”.

They vowed to take forward the founding mission and objectives of the PC and work for the welfare of the people.

Earlier, former People’s Democratic Party patron and former J&K Deputy Chief Minister Muzaffar Baig joined the PC. Khurshid Alam had also disassociated from the PDP a few days back. (IANS)

Over 4 cr rural homes get tap water connections

NEW DELHI

‘JAL Jeevan Mission’ has achieved a new milestone in providing tap water supply to four crore rural households across the country, Ministry of Jal Shakti said on Monday.

As per the latest data shared by the Ministry, 7.24 crore people (38 per cent), more than 1/3rd of rural households, are now getting potable water through taps.

Announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on August 15, 2019 with the aim to provide tap water supply to every rural home by 2024, Jal Jeevan Mission has reached a new milestone in providing over four crore rural households with tap water supply, said the Ministry.

Across the country, Goa has become the first state to provide 100 per cent tap water

supply followed by Telangana and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

“The untiring efforts of states and the Union Territories have helped Jal Jeevan Mission provide assured tap water supply to every family living in 56 districts and over

86,000 villages.

“States and UTs are now competing with each other and focusing on the target to ensure that every household in the country gets safe drinking water, so that ‘no one is left out’,” said the Ministry in a statement. (IANS)

BIZ BRIEFS

TTBS hosts virtual conference

Tata Tele Business Services (TTBS) has hosted a CXO roundtable on rising to the challenge with tech advantage. The virtual roundtable aims to enable a platform for the industry leaders across various sectors to share insights on the role of technology in providing growth momentum to the enterprises even during the pandemic. TTBS led discussion underscores the key aspects related to transformed connectivity and collaboration tools for SMEs in India. Kalidas KS, vice-president, Tata Teleservices, said: "The growth in adoption of collaboration tools has seen massive increase; digital economy is at play as both businesses and consumers are now making extensive use of digital tools for online buying. We at TTBS are embracing these changes and helping enterprises to securely enable the new form of collaboration practices at their organisations."

Federer to push Swiss Tourism

Roger Federer has now become an official brand ambassador for the destination of Switzerland. After years of representing Switzerland through his sporting excellence and friendly manner. He is entering into a long-term cooperation with the Swiss national tourism board, Switzerland Tourism (ST). The common goal is attracting guests to visit Switzerland with its energizing nature. Both of them together will develop initiatives to promote Switzerland globally. "I have always felt, whenever I step on the court, I am representing Switzerland. Whenever it says my name, there is a Swiss flag next to it. I have been very proud to do that for the first 22 years I have been on tour, and it will always be like that. To join forces with ST now is a logical step for me," said Federer.

Forum Sujana Mall's initiative

Forum Sujana Mall has rolled out a unique customer delight initiative and assures gratification on every shopping experience at the mall. This initiative will be available for patrons for a limited time under the week of happiness campaign, where everybody who shops over a certain amount, takes home an assured prize. During this week from 27 March to 4 April, the mall shall reward everyone for shopping over a minimum amount. Tanveer Shaikh, Cluster Head, Nexus Malls, said: "This time around, while the country celebrates the festive week, we thought it was only fair to reward the loyal patrons who have shopped with us over the last few years and are responsible for where we are today. Everyone will take home something for shopping for a minimum of Rs 2,500."

Purple.com raises \$45mn

Purple.com, closed a \$45M deal from Verlinvest, Sequoia Capital India, Blume Ventures, and JSW Ventures. While the three existing investors reinforced their commitment, the company welcomed Sequoia Capital India. The investment will further bolster the brand's ambition to deliver eight-ten X growth in the next four-five years. Manish Taneja, Co-founder & CEO Purple.com, said: "We are excited to partner with Sequoia Capital India, as they foray into the online beauty industry. Reinvestment from Verlinvest, JSW Ventures, and Blume Ventures, is a testament to the conviction of our investors. Purple has been on a robust growth trajectory. Even with a Covid year, we have delivered 90 per cent GMV CAGR for the last three years."

SUEZ CANAL LOGJAM DISRUPTS INDIA'S FOREIGN TRADE

Blockage costs exim biz dear

Pharma cos importing intermediates from Europe, exporters of rice, cashew and other products feel the heat

SANTOSH PATNAIK
VISAKHAPATNAM

THE Suez Canal logjam, caused after a Panama-flagged container ship m.v. Ever Given ran aground on Tuesday, is giving tense moments to the trade and commerce in India. Even as day and night salvage operation is on to refloat the giant ship managed by Shipmanagement Company, several people connected with exports and imports through Suez Canal are keeping a tab on the progress to clear the blockade. Social media was abuzz that the giant ship was floated for sometime on Monday raising hopes that the deadlock would end soon.

The narrow man-made 193-km long canal connecting Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through Isthmus of Suez dividing Africa and Asia is projected to hit India's trade and restrict manufacturing supplies and increase freight cost of crude and other products for some time. The business to India through the busy passage is estimated at \$200 billion per annum.

Ever Given, which had all Indian crew was stuck in the canal, while heading from China to Netherlands. The accident reportedly caused after the hull deviated from the waterway under the impact of strong winds. The ship is owned by Shoei Kisen Kaisha Ltd.

WEEK-LONG BLOCKADE

\$200 bn

Business value for India on busy passage of Suez Canal p.a

4,00,000

barrels India imports of crude, more than China, Singapore and South Korea, through Suez Canal



All the crew were found safe. Shipping industry sources said over 300 ships were caught in the logjam for a week affecting the supply chain.

"The blockage has already led to increase in freight costs mainly for sourcing intermediates for pharma industry from the Europe," CII Andhra Pradesh chapter chairman D. Tirupati Raju told Buzz Buzz.

An estimated 12 per cent global trade is routed through Suez Canal. The delays and even diverting of ships to alternative routes will lead to lot of revenue losses to many. Those involved in movement and trading of manufacturing supplies, oil, textiles, furniture and various raw

materials through the shortest sea linkage between Asia and Europe are keeping their fingers crossed with the Suez Canal Authority declaring that they would restore normalcy soon.

"We are worried over the development as rice export and import of cashew to and from West Africa is severely affected due to Suez Canal crisis," MS Kumar, CFO of Kakinada-based Lotus Marine Services Pvt Ltd, said.

"The freight cost has already doubled for many commodities due to Suez Canal impasse and we hope the blockade will be cleared in next few days," Sudhir Mulagada, a food grain exporter said.

India imports four lakh bar-

rels of crude, more than China, Singapore and South Korea through Suez Canal. Due to availability of enough reserves, the crisis may not lead to short-supply. "We also don't foresee immediate threat to supplies for other commodities as alternative routes are being chosen by the ship liners. The logjam will only cause delays in supply chain to a marginal extent," pointed out an official of Visakha Container Terminal Private Ltd (a BOT operator of Visakhapatnam Port Trust).

G Sambasiva Rao, Managing Director of Sravan Shipping Services, said the logjam would not cause much impact on Indian trade and commerce.

Research & Analysis Wing in TS agri dept

HYDERABAD: The Telangana government will set up a Research and Analysis Wing in the agriculture marketing department to study the demand and supply situation for various crops and provide information to farmers time to time.

Agriculture Minister S Niranjana Reddy said that Rs 15 crore was allocated for the purpose in the state Budget for 2021-22. Of this, Rs 6.5 crore has already been released for the department. The government has also en-

trusted to international firm Ernst & Young (E&Y) the task of analysing marketing trends in the State, the country and the world and educate the state farmers to ensure that they get remunerative prices. The minister said the aim of the state government was to ensure that the farmers get remunerative prices for their produce. It is estimated that with the suggestions of scientists and experts, the agriculture production of the state will reach four tonnes.



Dr Reddy's to unveil Sputnik V soon

Expects nod for Russian coronavirus vaccine from Indian regulator

HYDERABAD

PHARMA major Dr Reddy's Laboratories expects the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V to get approval from the Indian regulator in the next few weeks, a company official has said.

"We expect to get the approval in the next few weeks. It is a two dose vaccine. You take the first dose on day zero and the second one on day 21. The peak immunity develops somewhere between day 28 to day 42. So, it is a two-dose vaccine and we expect it to be available in the next few weeks," Deepak Sapra, the company's CEO, APIs and Services, said.

Sapra, who was speaking in a webinar on Sunday evening, was asked as to how soon Sputnik would be available and whether it is a one dose or two doses vaccine. Dr Reddy's has partnered with the Russia Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to bring the Sputnik V vaccine to India and other countries, he said. Observing that trials of the vaccine have been conducted in Russia, India, the UAE

and others, he said the vaccine demonstrated an efficacy of 91.6 per cent as published in reputed journal Lancet. The data on trials is currently with the Indian regulator and the company expects it to get approved in the next few weeks, he said.

"Now, what we have done in India, in addition to all this, we also conducted trials in India and evaluated the vaccine on the Indian population for both safety as well as for immunogenicity. This data is currently with the Indian regulator and we expect it to get approved in the next few weeks," he said.

The webinar on "India's vaccination journey and the second wave of Covid-19" was con-

ducted by the All India Professional Congress (AIPC), Telangana. Former minister J Geeta Reddy, a medical doctor, moderated the event. Mahima Datla, Managing Director of Biological E, and Nageshwar Reddy, Chairman of AIG Hospitals, spoke on various important issues concerning Covid-19 surge and the vaccines. PTI



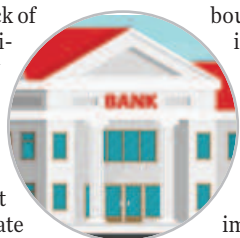
Dr Reddy's has partnered with Russia Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to bring the Sputnik V vaccine to India and other countries

Large private banks gain market share

NEW DELHI

LARGE private banks are well placed to accelerate market share gains, Motilal Oswal Financial Services (MOFSL) said in a report.

As per the report, the rise in market share is expected to take place on the back of strong capital position, robust liability franchise, and higher provisioning coverage on stressed assets. The report pointed out that most large private bank reported 3-7 per cent QoQ growth. "Though the strong sequential growth is supported by ECLGS disbursements, the growth in many business segments has crossed pre-Covid levels. We expect the growth momentum to remain strong as we project FY22E or FY23E systemic loan growth at 11 per cent or 13 per cent, with the mix of retail loans increasing to 31 per cent." "This will be led by 19 per cent growth in 'Private



Banks'. We estimate Private Banks share in total banking credit to increase to 45 per cent by FY25E."

In addition, MOFSL expects large private banks to see strong improvement in profitability led by market share gains, lower cost of funds to support margin, retail bounce back to revive fee income trends, and controlled credit cost as they are carrying excess provisions. "We expect aggregate RoE for 'Private Banks' in our coverage universe to improve to a decadal high of 16.3 per cent by FY23E."

"Among PSUs, we estimate RoE for SBIN to touch 15 per cent by FY23E. Earning swings and improving return ratios will continue to drive a re-rating in banking stocks."

On the overall banking industry, the report said that large banks have shown strong improvement in collection efficiency, while slippages or restructuring outlook remains in control.

Sensex surged more than 66% in FY21

Scales record highs multiple times braving Covid disruptions

SUMEDHA SHANKAR
NEW DELHI

EQUITY markets braved all odds this fiscal and rewarded investors with high returns as the benchmark Sensex surged more than 66 per cent despite Covid-led disruptions and concerns over its impact on the economy.

Market analysts termed FY 2020-21 as a roller coaster ride for not only Indian markets but also for equity indices globally due to the pandemic. In an unprecedented come back, the 30-share BSE Sensex has jumped 19,540.01 points or 66.30 per cent so far this fiscal. This extraordinary rally holds significance as markets faced volatile trends this fiscal.

The BSE benchmark hit its one-year low of 27,500.79 on April 3 last year. But, towards the latter part of the fiscal, indices marched

higher and the frontline BSE 30-share index zoomed to its all-time high of 52,516.76 on February 16, 2021. "The bull-run got further strength with the progressive unlocking and sharp rebound in the economy. Discovery of vaccines and optimism it generated gave further strength to the bulls. Globally, markets witnessed a huge rally in November. Emerging markets continued to be flooded with FPI money," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. The benchmark Sensex hit record highs multiple times during this financial year which ends on March



31 and just two trading days are left. The frontline index had closed above the 50,000-mark for the first time ever on February 3 this year, mainly driven by euphoria over the Union Budget. It closed above the 51,000-mark on February 8. It rallied over the 52,000-mark for the first time on February 15.

"The 2021 Union Budget was path-breaking. Major reform initiatives like privatisation lifted markets' sentiments further," Vijayakumar said. From witnessing mammoth losses to record-shattering gains, investors witnessed a wide array of emotions in fiscal 2020-21. Equity markets had gone into a tailspin in March 2020, with the Sensex sinking a massive 8,828.8 points or 23 per cent during that month as concerns over the pandemic impact on the economy ravaged investor senti-

Araku Aroma to launch costliest coffee Celebrity Sip

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

CITY-BASED Araku Aroma coffee shop will launch its costliest coffee called 'Celebrity Sip' in their flagship store in Gurugram (National Capital Region) on April 14. The coffee, a speciality from Araku valley, costs a whopping Rs 3000 for one person, according to a media release. Araku valley coffee is the one of the world's best coffees, this Celebrity Sip will carry the Araku coffee farmers' legacy across the globe. "We nurture those relationships the same way they nurture their beans. We work to get farmers a fair price and to make sure everyone in the community can benefit from the coffee industry considered gateway to the world," said Mr Krishna Chaitanya Reddy, Founder & CEO of Krish Food's & Fun Pvt. Ltd.

This makes and creates a big market for the Araku valley coffees, which improves the lives of coffee farmers.

Fuel prices fall as Covid surge dampens crude cost

NEW DELHI

THE slide in global crude oil prices below \$60 a barrel mark on Monday gave hope for a similar fall in domestic petroleum prices. The fall in oil prices comes after a massive wave of Covid-19 infections continued to impact large parts of Europe. Resultantly, global fears have resurfaced on the slowdown in the economic recovery due to this wave. At present, crude prices are reacting to the negative news flows. The Brent crude futures slipped below \$60 a barrel on Monday. Similarly, the US crude traded lower. However, the surge in domestic Covid cases will weaken the rupee. Consequently, lower crude oil cost will dampen domestic petrol and diesel prices. "Crude oil prices are expected to slide due to increasing coron-



Currently, petrol costs ₹90.78 per litre in Delhi, while diesel is at ₹81.10 per litre

avirus cases and lower demand. Lower import from China is also a negative for crude oil," said Anuj Gupta, VP Research, IIFL Securities. "In addition, the rupee is also expected to depreciate due to rising cases and fall in the equity market. Petrol and diesel prices may be revised downwards in India." Currently, petrol costs Rs 90.78 per litre in Delhi, while diesel is pegged at Rs 81.10 per litre.

Lately, prices of petrol had crossed the psychological Rs 100 per litre mark in some cities leading to increasing public outcry against the high prices and the inflationary impact of the auto fuels.



Telangana remains among top 5 States in the personal loan portfolio of women. It rose by 18% over the previous year and by 6% for home loans

of anonymity of his bank name, told Buzz Buzz: "Women are stepping ahead more than men which is a reason for hike in women borrowers, in specific, we receive

applications of women for home loans because they want to extend their support to their male counterpart. Some of them come forward for education loans because

South Indian women avail more bank loans

Financial independency, varied schemes propelling women accessing different credit options

DEEPIKA PASHAM
HYDERABAD

AS women become financially independent, they started understanding different investment options such as owning property, investing in business, buying the enterprise they are running and other schemes. Further, the schemes initiated by the Centre and State government are enabling women avail of several loans, observe experts. A recent report by CRIF highlighted that women borrowers from southern States have higher credit book size as compared to western and northern States. Telangana remains among top five States in the personal loan portfolio outstanding for women which increased by 18 per cent over the previous year and by sixper cent for home loans as of December 2020.

Satya Narayana, an official from the banking sector, on a condition

72ND NATIONAL TRACK CYCLING C'SHIP ENTERS DAY 3



Participants speed through during the 72nd National Track Cycling Championship-2021 at Velodrome SATS, Osmania University in Hyderabad. Satbir Singh, Manjeet Singh and Naman Kapil finished first, second and third respectively in the Mens' Elite Omnium held on Monday. The five-day event in which more than 700 cyclists, both men and women from across India are taking part will conclude on Wednesday. The event being organised by Telangana Cycling Association is the first-ever Indian National Championship to be recognised by the UCI and as such have been listed in the UCI World Track Cycling Calendar. (Photo: Ch Prabhu Das)

Ashwin, Patel, reach DC team hotel

NEW DELHI: Spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel have arrived at the Delhi Capitals' (DC) team hotel in Mumbai along with batsman Shimron Hetmyer and all-rounder Chris Woakes. The players will be in quarantine for one week before joining the training camp ahead of their first match of the 2021 Indian Premier League (IPL). DC start the season with a match against three-time champions Chennai Super Kings at the Wankhede Stadium on April 10. Both Ashwin and Patel had stellar outings in India's four-match Test series against England. Ashwin was the highest wicket taker in the series with 32 scalps while Axar, who made his Test debut in the second match, took 27 wickets. Earlier, head coach Ricky Ponting said that he had departed for India to join DC, with his first task being to find a replacement for captain Shreyas Iyer.

ICC WC SUPER LEAGUE STANDINGS

INDIA MOVE TO 7th POSITION

NEW DELHI

INDIA moved up to seventh position on the International Cricket Council's (ICC) Men's Cricket World Cup Super League standings after their seven-run win over England in the third ODI. The victory helped India seal a 2-1 win over England in the series. Despite the loss, England remain the top-ranked team in the standings with 40 points. England have played nine matches in the league out of which they have won four and lost five. India, on the other hand, have played six matches, winning three and losing as many. While England are on 40 points, India are on 29. The Super League started on July 30, 2020 with England's three-match series against Ireland. It includes the 12 full members of the ICC along with the Netherlands, who won the 2015-17 ICC World Cricket League Championship to qualify for the competition. Teams that finish within the top eight will gain automatic qualification for the 2023 World Cup which is scheduled to be held in India. Since India are the hosts, they have already gained automatic qualification but are a part of the league anyhow. (IANS)



Kohli becomes 3rd captain to lead India in 200 international matches

NEW DELHI

VIRAT Kohli has become the third captain to lead India in 200 international matches. Kohli, who became India's captain in all formats of the game in January 2017, led India for the 200th time on Sunday in the third ODI against England. He thus joins his predecessor MS Dhoni and Mohammad Azharuddin as the only players to have led India in 200 international matches. While Azharuddin had led India in 221 matches, Dhoni led India in 332 matches. Dhoni retired from Test cricket in December 2014 after which Kohli became India's captain in the longest format of the game. Dhoni then resigned from limited overs captaincy in January 2017, thus handing over the reins to Kohli in all formats, before eventually from international cricket in August 2020. Azharuddin, meanwhile, had succeeded Krishnamachari Srikanth in 1989 until 1999. (IANS)

Germany beat Romania, top group

BERLIN

SERGE Gnabry's first half goal ensured Germany won 1-0 in Romania and stayed top of World Cup qualifying Group J despite a string of missed chances in Bucharest. Gnabry tapped in a 15th goal in 19 internationals in the 16th minute but coach Joachim Loew watched in growing frustration as Germany failed to make the game safe through a combination of poor finishing and inspired goalkeeping from Florin Nita on Sunday, DPA news reports. But with Romania toothless in attack, Gnabry's solitary strike was enough to keep Germany perfect in the group with two wins out of two before they conclude their opening triple-header at home to North Macedonia on Wednesday. "We have worked very well against the ball and won it well," Loew told broadcaster RTL. "We had some good combinations. "If you can be critical, it is the chance conversion - we could have made the game easier if we'd score the second goal." But Loew, one game closer to leaving the German job after Euro 2020 in summer, added: "Overall you can be happy, we have something to build on." Italy extend unbeaten run to 24 matches Italy extended its unbeaten run to 24 matches as the Azzurri won 2-0 away to Bulgaria in the 2022 World Cup qualifiers, claiming the second consecutive victory in this campaign. Italy conquered Northern Ireland 2-0 in the opening match, and coach Roberto Mancini made several changes in the starting line-up, as Andrea Belotti, Stefano Sensi and Federico Chiesa stepped in on Sunday, Xinhua news reports. The four-star took the domination from the very beginning but couldn't find the net until the 42nd minute as Belotti went down in the box, and the Torino hitman converted the penalty by himself. Italy ranks first in Group C with six points, Switzerland who also beat Lithuania 1-0 on Sunday places second on goal difference. Denmark exhibit ambition with 8-0 win over Moldova An efficient Denmark used 90 minutes to ruthlessly dictate the course of their World Cup qualifier against Moldova, winning 8-0 at the MCH Arena in Herning. Denmark, ranked 12th in the FIFA World rankings, employed a comprehensive attacking game around using combination play to dissect the weak defence of Moldova, ranked 177th. A 20-minute barrage of shots upon the Moldova goal netted a bounty of five goals in the first half and effectively ended the game on Sunday, Xinhua news reports. In the second half, Denmark, despite having an early goal from Kasper Dolberg in the 47th minute, the tempo of the game noticeably dropped. The victory maintains Denmark's first place in 2022 World Cup qualification group F, with six points after two games. Israel's players celebrate during a World Cup 2022 group F qualifying soccer match between Israel and Scotland in Tel Aviv, Israel on Sunday. Israel held to 1-1 draw



Israel's players celebrate during a World Cup 2022 group F qualifying soccer match between Israel and Scotland in Tel Aviv, Israel on Sunday. Israel held to 1-1 draw

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Chiesa stepped in on Sunday, Xinhua news reports. The four-star took the domination from the very beginning but couldn't find the net until the 42nd minute as Belotti went down in the box, and the Torino hitman converted the penalty by himself. Italy ranks first in Group C with six points, Switzerland who also beat Lithuania 1-0 on Sunday places second on goal difference. Denmark exhibit ambition with 8-0 win over Moldova An efficient Denmark used 90 minutes to ruthlessly dictate the course of their World Cup qualifier against Moldova, winning 8-0 at the MCH Arena in Herning. Denmark, ranked 12th in the FIFA World rankings, employed a comprehensive attacking game around using combination play to dissect the weak defence of Moldova, ranked 177th. A 20-minute barrage of shots upon the Moldova goal netted a bounty of five goals in the first half and effectively ended the game on Sunday, Xinhua news reports. In the second half, Denmark, despite having an early goal from Kasper Dolberg in the 47th minute, the tempo of the game noticeably dropped. The victory maintains Denmark's first place in 2022 World Cup qualification group F, with six points after two games. Israel's players celebrate during a World Cup 2022 group F qualifying soccer match between Israel and Scotland in Tel Aviv, Israel on Sunday. Israel held to 1-1 draw

PARA BADMINTON

Bhagat, Joshi to lead Indian challenge at Dubai

NEW DELHI: Reigning men's and women's world champions Pramod Bhagat and Manasi Joshi will spearhead India's challenge at the third Dubai Para Badminton International Championships that gets underway in Dubai from Tuesday. Bhagat and Joshi, both SL3 players, will lead a 26-strong Indian team, the biggest contingent in the tournament. SL3 players could have impairment in one or both legs and poor walking/running balance. They must play standing. Other top players in the team include two-time Asian Para Games champion Parul Parmar, 2019 World Championships bronze medallists Sukant Kadam, Manoj Kumar and Krishna Nagar, besides promising players like Palak Kohli among others. This will be the first BWF Para Badminton tournament in more than a year after the COVID-19 Pandemic. The last international meet was held in Peru in February 2020. As many as 127 players from 29 countries, including hosts United Arab Emirates, have confirmed their participation at the March 30-April 4 championships. Several world champions, including Indonesia's top players Leani Ratni Oktilla, Suryo Nugroho and Dheva Anrimusthi, France's Lucas Mazur, Malaysia's Cheah Like Hou among others will be seen in action. Teams from Kuwait, Maldives and Nepal are set to compete for the first time. (PTI)

In Sam Curran's 95, Buttler saw shades of MS Dhoni

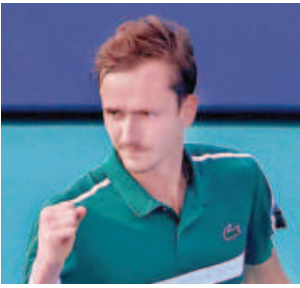
PUNE

ENGLAND'S stand-in skipper Jos Buttler saw shades of legendary finisher Mahendra Singh Dhoni in Sam Curran's valiant 95 not out in the third and final ODI against India here. In pursuit of 330, England slumped to 168 for six at the mid-way stage but Sam, who came into bat at No. 8, took them to the verge of an unlikely win with his counterattacking knock. "Sam played an outstanding innings there and will take a lot from that moving forward, even though there's the disappointment of losing the game," Buttler said at the post-match press conference on Sunday night. "I'm sure there were shades of the way that he (MS Dhoni) would have liked to take the game down if he was in that situation. He's a great person for Sam to have a conversation with when he meets up MS (in the IPL)." "He's a real impact player in the game. He will just continue to get better and better. He is still only 22 and the scope of where you can take his game to is massive. So we're all very excited for him." India won a close game by seven runs despite Sam's exploits with the bat. Continuing his praise for Sam, Buttler said: "Many guys are never really exposed to that kind of situation in their whole career. He will take great learning from that. I can't think of many times myself I've ever been in those situations. "All of us in the team and the squad will have taken great learning from watching him and trying to think through how we would

take that situation down individually as well." The pace bowling all-rounder not only notched his career-best score but also dismissed the dangerous-looking Rishabh Pant for a 62-ball 78. "Sam just keeps showing what a match-winner he is really. He came up with Rishabh Pant's wicket as well. He takes big wickets whether it's a Test, ODI or T20. "We're all very proud of the way Sam played, showed all the traits that we know he has in abundance and the character and the skill level that embodies what we're about as a team." In contrast to the Test series that India won handsomely by a 3-1 margin, England showed resistance in the white-ball leg, even as they lost in both the 20-over and 50-over rubbers. Buttler, who led the side after Eoin Morgan suffered a split-webbing in the first ODI, said there were a lot of positive takeaways. "There'll be some great learnings taken from the

tour, and some great exposure to players playing in this part of the world for the first time," he said, referring to the impressive performances from Dawid Malan and Liam Livingstone, who made his ODI debut in the second match. "We've expanded the talent pool available to us in one-day cricket, building ahead to the T20 World Cup in a few months' time and, of course, the 2023 World Cup later on down the line as well. "So anytime we expand that player pool, that creates competition, that creates better performances, and that's the upward trajectory that we're always after as a side, that continuous improvement," he added. The loss meant that the reigning world champions have now suffered successive ODI series defeats. They had earlier lost to Australia by the same 1-2 margin at home. "We've been a brilliant side for a long time now... We've lost two series now but it's two series in the last 11, I wouldn't read too much into it." Apart from Morgan, England also had pace spearhead Jofra Archer on the injured list, while Joe Root and Chis Woakes were rested as part of their rotation policy. "We are still a very good side and we're expanding the talent pool with a few guys missing and few other guys getting opportunities." "It's a long cycle looking ahead to the next World Cup (in 2023) and of course you want to learn and win at the same time. We're disappointed when we don't do that but there's a big picture. I think we're in a good place," he concluded. (PTI)

Medvedev reaches third round of Miami Open



MIAMI

TOP seed Daniil Medvedev of Russia needed two tie-breaks over more than two-and-a-half hours to overcome an inspired Alexei Popyrin of Australia 7-6 (3), 6-7 (7), 6-4 in the third round of the Miami Open men's singles. "It's probably one of the sweetest victories in my career because I was cramping like hell in the third set," Medvedev said, Xinhua news reports. "At the same time, I should have won in two sets and we would not be talking about cramping. But anyway, we have the result on the board and I'm happy that I managed to go through all the difficulties of this definitely crazy match," added Medvedev, who failed to convert three match points in the second set after taking a 5-2 lead. Elsewhere, John Isner of the United States defeated Canadian star Felix Auger-Aliassime 7-6 (5), 7-6 (5) while seventh seed Roberto Bautista of Spain came from behind against Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany 4-6, 6-3, 6-2. In women's singles, Japanese star Naomi Osaka advanced to the fourth round for the first time in her career when qualifier Nina Stojanovic of Serbia withdrew with a right thigh injury. In women's doubles, Chinese players Zhang Shuai and Xu Yifan lost to Poland's Iga Swiatek and US player Bethanie Mattek-Sands in the round of 16. (IANS)

Wrestler Anshu recovers from injury, eyes Oly berth

NEW DELHI

PROMISING freestyle wrestler Anshu Malik has fully recovered from a back injury she sustained in the first week of this month, and is now keen to book an Olympic Games quota place next month. Due to a stiff back, 19-year-old Malik was forced to withdraw from the women's 57kg bronze medal bout during the Matteo Pellicone World Ranking Series held in Rome from March 4 to 7. However, the international wrestler from Nidani, Haryana, went on to win last week's national selection trials for the Asian Olympic qualifier, held in Lucknow. A good performance at the continental compe-

tion in Almaty, Kazakhstan, from April 9 to 18, will ensure Malik books her ticket to the Tokyo Olympics, starting on July 23. "After the trials in Lucknow she had come home. She is better now. We hope she would live up to expectations and win the quota place," Malik's father Dharamvir Malik told IANS. In the 2019 Olympic qualification cycle, Vinesh Phogat had won an Olympic quota place in the women's 53kg. The other top female wrestlers weren't successful in the 2019 season. After the 2020 season was disrupted due to Covid pandemic the qualification system has resumed again. The Asian Olympics qualification tournament is the first for the Asian countries.

The other three quota places in the men's freestyle event came in 2019. Bajrang Punia (65kg), Ravi Dahiya (57kg), and Deepak Punia (86kg) were successful in booking berths to Tokyo. Malik has given a good account of her prowess since moving up to senior level in 2019. She won bronze in the Asian Championships held in February last year at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Sports Complex in New Delhi.

