

Forecast: Sunny. **Temp:** Max.34°C. Min.16°C. **Humidity:** 10% **Sunrise:** 06:09 **Sunset:** 06:40

Womenia

Reviving traditional Kota fabric

ASKARI JAFFER

Kota Doria Silk is known for the largest collection of traditional fabric. Kota Doria Silk (kotadoriasilk.com) founded in 2014, with a vision to make Kota Doria fabric more accessible and affordable. Anjali Agrawal began her entrepreneur journey and created a desired platform for this rich fabric.

Anjali founder her entrepreneurial side into her passion for dressing up traditional. Little did she know that her hobby turned profession will create a path-breaking journey for her. As an entrepreneur, my journey has been rewarding and I am glad that not only for me, Kota Doria Silk has been a work of dedication to our artisan and heroes behind the curtain, who have put in hours of their craftsmanship into building this Brand.

Gurugram-based Anjali Agrawal, a techie-turned-entrepreneur, says, "At KDS, we have maintained the au-



Anjali Agrawal found her entrepreneurial side into her passion for dressing up traditional. She shares her journey of setting up her venture 'Kota Doria Silk'

thenticity of the fabric, and yet have given it a new life incorporating yarns with it to make it more sustainable, and affordable. Our product portfolio ranges from suits, sarees, dupattas, home décor and the latest addition is the ready to wear men's ethnic apparel. From designs perspective, we have modernised it using latest technology, digital prints, embroidery, Azrakh, Bagru, Indigo to artistry like Madhubani, Kalamkari and Warli etc."

Anjali shares that while she was at work, she would always be complimented for her sartorial choices, and was asked to procure the same materials and fabric by friends and colleague.

"My favourite apparel was traditional Kota Doria fabric made. As I was helping my friends have the same, I began to develop a thought on making this fabric accessible and available for people. In compilation of all the thoughts, inputs and encouragement bonded into one, I began my entrepreneurial journey in 2014.

We had our first order within first week from South

India via online page created on Facebook. Honestly speaking, it is nostalgia to think about how we grew from 1 order to our first 1000. We were thrilled. We still take the same passion, and dedication to treat every single order with same effort," she adds.

Anjali comes from a service class family, wherein, all her family members are associated with a corporate or government job. Anjali being the first women entrepreneur from her family had to face her own challenges.

While setting up the business, Anjali had a lot to learn, from understanding the market eco-system to wholesaler and negotiations and logistics partner. Her family was discreetly supportive, but with a lot of apprehensions and fear.

She says, "From visiting the mandis to figure out the raw materials, finding out what works best with Kota Doria fabric to make it more sustainable and affordable since it is a very delicate and expensive fabric. Artisans who align with your thought process and import the blue prints on real fabric. But it's all

been a learning process. I cherish all of it, and take pride in going with my gut and beginning my entrepreneurship."

They have launched their ready to wear men's ethnic apparel collection and additions in their home decor. They are also targeting to go in more European markets and launch their brick and mortar at PAN India level.

Sharing about the future of the business, Anjali shares, "We keep a close eye on the new trends and our continued research and development contributes a lot into innovate the fabric with modern designs, patterns. We also seek our customer's feedback, requirement and their changing behavior. Continues efforts to try something new have always given a push to go beyond the boundaries and create something unique."

WHEN HAIR OIL COMES TO RESCUE

Caring for your mane is a bigger task than even recalling the pink lipsticks. However, if you've been a regular at treating your hair to essential oils, then here's everything you need to know so as to avoid hair damage of any sort.

Avoid combing your hair right after applying oil

Did you know your hair is fragile and your scalp is relaxed after oiling? It is, therefore, best to avoid combing through your locks immediately after applying oil as it could lead to hair loss and breakage. If you do want to get rid of knots, then start from the tips and slowly work your way to the top. This way, you'll not only detangle your hair, but also be able to spread the oil evenly on your strands and scalp.

Don't let the oil sit for hours at end

Regular oiling is great and all, but letting it sit in your hair for too long has its own downside. When you keep the oil in your hair for more than six to eight

hours, it tends to collect dirt and mixes with your scalp's natural oil. While you want healthy hair, you don't want to have to deal with excess grime that sticks to oily hair, do you?

With oiling, less is more

Once you've taken a generous amount of oil to apply on your hair, don't go for more. Instead, spread what you already have evenly so as to cover every strand. More oil means using more shampoo, and this in turn can strip your hair of its natural oils and moisture, leaving you with dull, damaged and dry locks.

Don't tie your hair up in a tight bun or ponytail

Tight hairstyles are a strict no-no especially after you've oiled your hair. When your hair is

BEAUTY FUNDA



oiled, it is in a vulnerable state. Tying it up in a tight bun or ponytail can add pressure and lead to breakage, and at times, also cause split ends. You don't want to deal with any more hair woes now, do you? So, to avoid damage, tie your hair in a loose braid or bun, but nothing too constricting.

Jacqueline Fernandez launches new campaign by beauty brand

The actress, who is the brand ambassador of Lotus Herbals, has launched a nationwide hunt to select four faces who will be the brand's face for two months

Puja Gupta Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez has launched Lotus Herbal's new campaign 'Go Glow Girls' which is a nationwide hunt to choose four new faces from across India, who will be represent the brand on social media platforms for the next two months.

Jacqueline Fernandez, who is the brand ambassador of the beauty brand, says, "This is a

fun peppy campaign and it's wonderful that Lotus White-Glow is creating a platform where budding talent can showcase their creative skills. It's a perfect medium to connect with young aspirational women and I am really looking forward to seeing the new Glow Girls".

Winners will sign a paid collaboration with Lotus WhiteGlow, a sponsored trip to Goa and complimentary White-Glow skin care products for a

period of two months.

Commenting on the launch of the Campaign, Nitin Passi, Joint Managing Director, Lotus Herbals says, "This is the first time that we are embarking on a nationwide hunt to discover new talent who will be the social faces of the brand. With this campaign we aim to break through the clutter and engage directly with millennials, who form a large part of our consumer base."



NEWS ROUNDUP



Nora Fatehi's scorching challenge to fans

Actress and dancer Nora Fatehi scorches social media with her new Instagram post on Friday, and challenges fans saying she doesn't think they can take it.

"Wet hair, bronzed skin, see I don't think that u can take it," she wrote as the caption with a set of photos where she strikes a pose or two in a metallic silver fringed dress, doing the half split. Nora is all geared up for her next film "Bhuj: The Pride Of India", which revolves around the Indian Air Force pilot Vijay Karnik.

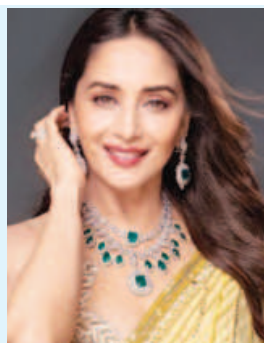
The film stars Ajay Devgn with Sonakshi Sinha. The period drama looks back at the story of 300 women of Madhapar village in Gujarat's Kutch district, who played a pivotal role during the 1971 Indo-Pak war.

TWEET PATROL



MADHURI DIXIT NENE
@MADHURIDIXIT

To the super talented dancer, filmmaker & dear friend... Many happy returns of the day @remodsouza 🎉



Rejuvenating western styling with Indian touch-up

TEJAL SINHA

AMRTA is founded by Guneet Kondal while she was immersed in her Fashion Career.

After designing and producing women's apparel, décor and lifestyle products for Fashion retailers and Fashion Houses across the globe for 18 years, AMRTA is a long-awaited dream to recreate the Indian aesthetics enriched with her inspirations from travel and her experience from fashion industry. She strongly believes that there is her community who will truly love and embrace the handwriting from Amrta.

Being born and raised in the Capital of India and a lover of culture, nature, romanticism and inspired by everything beautiful, AMRTA is an extension of Guneet's world, rooted in travel and inspired by creative and like-minded people.

Sharing about Amrta, Guneet shares, "Our idea is to create a piece for every occasion, every wardrobe and every celebration. We believe in creating occasion wear that is ideal for when you want to dance your heart out to when you feel like retreating in nature's cocoon. Our aim is to create season less clothing for all year round, and for every mood."

Amrta is a dream that she had as a child. She was always passionate about designing and would make sketches. Being inspired by Ritu Beri and Rohit Bal who were fashion icons in her growing years, she further did her masters from NIFT, Delhi to pursue her dream.

She adds, "For almost 2 decades I worked with brands like Stella Mc Cartney, Ann Taylor, Antik Batik, Anthropologie, Next and many other global fashion retailers and finally took the leap for my true calling in 2020. The brand was born out of the desire to make women feel beautiful, sophisticated and powerful, with timeless garments that are impeccably tailored. With a focus on craftsmanship, the entire collection is designed and made in India. Our pieces have Indian craftsmanship remodeled into contemporary silhouettes. We intend to create soft romantic timeless classics affordable luxury and offer bespoke tailoring."

Their classics are slow fashion, pieces to treasure.



Amrta is a 'Western styles with Indian touch-up' of hand beading and hand weaving enriched with Guneet's inspirations from her travel and her experience from the fashion industry

Guneet believes that in India, we either have very expensive designer brands or more casual and young fashion. There is still a huge product and price gap as we don't have such hand beaded contemporary bespoke clothing at affordable prices and customization which is where we want to position ourselves.

Being started almost near to the pandemic, Amrta had its own challenges. Sharing about the same, Guneet shares, "We began in January 2020 and due to covid we had to shut in between and hence retaining labor force at that point of time was challenging, but we managed to sail through the time and restarted in September 2020. At personal level creating that work life balance is another challenge which I am yet to come over and there is a sacrifice in every dream that we pursue but when we have passion and drive in our bones we shall see it all through."

According to Guneet, sustainability is not only limited to using sustainable fabrics but it needs to be running in the entire eco system of one's business model.

"We aim to keep the complete product and supply chain as sustainable as possible. Beginning from the use of natural and sustainable fabrics,

chemical free and azo free dyeing, trims with azo free certifications, we ensure fair practices for our workforce, our workshop has all LED lights which is one of many eco-friendly choices that we have made. Finally, the Packaging it comes with zero plastic, "we make ecofriendly fabric packaging bags and for couriers we are using recycle courier bags," adds Guneet.

They are a team of 10, comprising of 2 embroidery artisans, 4 tailors; skilled to make high fashion products, 1 pattern maker, 1 production coordinator, designer and a merchandiser.

They have collaborated with Nushrat Barucha recently and are also in talks with a few like Shilpa Shetty, as she carries whatever she wears with a lot of grace.

"The pandemic impacted the industry and space we were looking at heavily. People had stopped buying and travelling and hence the sales are impacted heavily. However, we do look at it from a brighter perspective, there is a strong sense of sustainability and people are more conscious of their footprints and they are moving towards slow fashion which is what our brand stands true to," ends the designer and entrepreneur.

DIY DAY

We spend a lot of money getting other people to do things for us, cut our hair, fix our cars and computers, mow our lawns, bake our cakes... you get the picture. And true, there are things that we would prefer to have experts with knowledge and experience doing for us, like performing surgery or filling out our tax papers. But more and more people are starting to agree that people these days have become too dependent on others and, as a result, too helpless when left on their own. Sure, not everyone knows the construction of an engine in detail, but surely most of us could learn to change a tire on our own? Sure, you may be no Jamie Oliver or Martha Stewart, but surely you could manage to bake a birthday cake by yourself?

Not to mention it would probably be better than most of that bland store-bought cakes anyway! So why not celebrate DIY Day by learning to do something new yourself?

DIY Day was created just recently by the Craft Box Girls team, and 2016 is the first year we're celebrating it. Craft Box Girls' mission is to celebrate makers and inspire regular people like you and me to create things on their own. From fruity cocktails to wreaths and vases to pillow-



THIS DAY IN HISTORY
REASS-INDIA

cases to just about anything else you can imagine, Craft Box Girls can make it all by themselves, with just a few easy to come by knick-knacks.

The history of DIY itself probably goes back to the beginning of time. Italian archeologists recently unearthed the ruins of a 6th-century BC Greek temple-like structure in southern Italy that came with detailed assembly instructions and is therefore now being called an "ancient IKEA building".

Much like the world-famous IKEA instruction booklets, various sections of the temple were inscribed with coded symbols showing how the pieces slotted together. So as it turns out, DIY has actually got quite the fascinating history!

Gurugram health department to start random Covid tests at public places

GURUGRAM

FOLLOWING a surge in the number of coronavirus cases in Gurugram, the district health department has decided to again start random Covid-19 tests at all public places.

For this drive, the government health facilities have prepared their action plan.

According to the health officials, random Covid-19 tests would start at the malls, markets, metro stations, bus stands and other public places.

At these spots, the district health department would set up Covid testing camps during the evening hours where random samples of people would be taken.

The officials said that two camps would be set up at public locations every evening. The camps would comprise both rapid antigen and RT-PCR tests.

"According to the guidelines of the Central government, a test-track-treatment scheme is now being adopted for the prevention of the Covid-19 infections. Instructions have been given to conduct 70 per cent RT-PCR tests and 30 per cent rapid antigen tests. Nearly 90 per cent of RT-PCR tests are being conducted in the district," said Gurugram Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Virender Yadav.

The district health department would also enhance rapid antigen tests, which would be used for mass screening of the people.

"The health department has recently received 20,000 rapid antigen kits. Most of the antigen



No plan of another lockdown in Delhi: Kejriwal

NEW DELHI

DELHI Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday said that his government is not thinking about another lockdown in the city amid a significant surge of Covid cases in the last few weeks.

Addressing a digital press conference after chairing an emergency meeting called in view of the surging cases, he said: "This time, Covid-19 cases are increasing faster than last

time but the Delhi government has so far not thought about imposing a lockdown again in the city. If needed in the future, I would talk to the people and will then take any decision on it."

He also stressed that people do not need to panic but must follow the Covid-19 guidelines issued by the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA). Kejriwal also said though the numbers of cases are increasing fast this time but are not as serious as the last wave.

"It has been observed that during October-November (last year) when around 3,000 cases were emerging daily, of them around 1,500-1,700 patients were referred to ICU wards... however, this time serious cases have come down to around 50 percent."

The emergency meeting was called by the Chief Minister to take stock of preparation by the Health Department for the situation. Delhi on Thursday reported 2,790 cases.

UP schools to now remain closed till April 11

LUCKNOW

THE Uttar Pradesh government on Friday extended the closure of Classes 1 to 8 in all schools till April 11, in view of the increasing number of Covid-19 cases.

On March 30, the state government had ordered the closure of schools for students up to Class 8 till April 4.

The Yogi Adityanath government has laid strict instructions to follow the Covid protocols in schools for Classes 9 to 12.

The sudden surge in Covid-19 cases in the state has caused a panic situation among the people.

During the meeting on Friday, Adityanath said the RT-PCR testing should be compulsorily done in suspected cases of Covid-19.

He also ordered officials concerned to increase the number of tests in the state. (IANS)

tests will be done in the camps. Those found positive for Covid-19 during tests will be isolated and those who come in contact with them will be tracked and examined. At the same time, if the report of the antigen test is found negative, but the person shows Covid-like symptoms, then his/her RT-PCR test will also be done" Yadav added. (IANS)



Haryana Deputy CM inaugurates flyover on Gurugram-Faridabad stretch

GURUGRAM

HARYANA Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala inaugurated the newly constructed four lane flyover near village Bandwadi on the Gurugram-Faridabad road on Friday.

After the inauguration of the flyover, the deputy CM said, "This flyover will help to reduce traffic pressure and will improve connectivity between the two major districts (Gurugram-Faridabad) of Haryana. Not only this, it will also prevent the ac-

cidents. In future aspects this stretch will also play a major role to reach Jewar airport in a short span of time."

The project plan was prepared by the Public Works Department (PWD). The estimated cost of the 514 meter long and 21 meter flyover is more than Rs 11.50 crore.

"The construction of the flyover started in June 14, 2019 and was completed in a very short span in March 31, 2021. Despite the Covid-19

pandemic the PWD department took only 21 months for the complication of this project, which is very appreciative," Chautala told the media.

The flyover starts after the 'Valley View' residential apartment located on the Gurugram-Faridabad road and finishes one and a half kilometres before the toll plaza. Service lanes is also built on either side. To go towards Bandwadi village, the commuters and villages can use the underpass.

IIT-BHU develops technique to remove toxins from water

VARANASI

THE scientists of IIT-BHU have developed a system to extract toxic substances from water by using ash made from teak and neem wood.

This method is not only eco-friendly, but also inexpensive and can also be adopted to purify Ganga water besides reducing the cost of ROs while retaining the available minerals in the water.

Vishal Mishra, an assistant professor of biochemical engineering, and his team have prepared two different types of adsorbent from the ashes of teak wood sawdust and neem stalk, thereby, separating the harmful metals, ions from the water that can be made potable.

He said that in recent years, adsorption has been considered inexpensive and more effective than other chemical techniques.

It costs less and is considered very effective in the prevention of water borne diseases.

Mishra said that the wood powder of teak (scientific name: Tectona grandis) is mixed with sodium thiosulfate and heated in an atmosphere of nitrogen to make activated charcoal.

Also, adsorbent is also made from neem (scientific name: Azadirachta indica) and stalk ash (neem twig ash).

On one hand, the teak can extract harmful gases, ions, sulphur, selenium in water from coal made of wood, and, on the other, the study of neem ash is intended for the treatment of polluted water containing copper, nickel and zinc.

He pointed out that many researchers in the world have already investigated available porous (perforated) / extremely small holes) charcoal as an active agent, but their method of chem-

ical synthesis involves several drawbacks.

Porous charcoal made from sawdust wood powder is harmless and eco-friendly. Sodium thiosulfate is not a toxic reagent (a chemical substance helps in the discovery of other substances). It has many medicinal applications.

On the other hand, neem seeds, bark and leaves have been used as an adsorbent by various researchers but neem stalk ashes have not been used for purity of water.

He said that the nickel present in water is responsible for asthma, neuro disorder, nausea, kidney and lung cancer.

Zinc causes fatigue, lethargy, dizziness and excessive thirst while the excess copper in the water is genotoxic, which can cause changes in DNA and also damage the liver and kidneys.

According to him, this method can also be adopted to purify Ganga water.

The Ganga is rich in nickel, zinc and copper.

Packed Bed Column (PBC) method in Ganga is made clean with the help of ETP (Efficient Treatment Plant). In these ETPs, initiatives can be taken to clean Ganga water very cheaply, using coal made from teak wood and ash made from Neem stalks.

He said that it may also reduce the cost of RO being sold in the market.

Currently RO systems are installed in almost every household.

Coal made from teak wood sawdust can be used to purify water in place of the activated charcoal in the RO system.

This will also reduce the total cost of RO and the available minerals in the water will be safe.

Akhilesh Yadav's dream project in shambles

AGRA

THE total neglect and failure to maintain the 207 km-long cycle track from Etawah to Agra, the Rs 133 crore dream project of former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav, has reduced it to a state of shambles.

No longer does the ruined cycle track attract fitness freaks. The concrete layered cycle track through wilderness and ravines of the Yamuna, never found patrons, in fact.

Long-distance runner and cycling maniac Pramod Katara said that "villagers in many stretches used the track for drying cow dung cakes, or for washing clothes".

In the Bah area, close to the dreaded Chambal ravines, the track was not even fully complete, but the Akhilesh government was in a hurry to inaugurate the project on November 26, 2016.

The cycle track with colourful pillars meandering along shady trees, had to be bulldozed in Agra, to make way for the six-lane Fatehabad road, connecting the Kheria airport with the Taj Mahal.

"Since this stretch of road is frequently used by VIPs and foreign dignitaries, a plan to widen it had been there in the pipeline for a long time," a contractor at the site along the city's Mall Road said.

But now the cycle track is used by buffaloes.

In any case the project was a non-starter from the very beginning. These days how many people use cycles? Not many. Even students opt for scooters and mobikes.

"For want of security foreign tourists showed no interest," said environmentalist Shravan Kumar Singh.

It is surprising that no one has raised this issue, how precious resources have been squandered away on a questionable project, flaunted as a green project, that was neither required nor feasible, commented environmentalist Devashish Bhattacharya.

The cycle track, from Etawah's lion safari to the Taj city, wades through the picturesque and adventurous terrain of the dreaded Chambal ravines, connecting more than 90 villages.

It also meanders through the desolate wilderness between Yamuna and Chambal, along Bateshwar, the holy town with 101 Shiva temples in a row along the bend of the river.

(IANS)

Dalit man brutally beaten for inter-caste affair

LAKHIMPUR KHERI (UP)

IN a shocking incident, a Dalit man was beaten and brutalised, allegedly by the family of an upper caste girl with whom he was in a relationship.

The man, who had a rod inserted into his rectum, is now battling for life in the district hospital.

According to reports, the victim, Harendra Kumar, 22, was brutally beaten up in his private parts and a rod allegedly inserted into his rectum by his attackers who hurled caste abuses at him.

The incident took place in the wee hours of Thursday in Tikunia town in Lakhimpur Kheri district.

According to his cousin Anuj "Harendra has been preparing for competitive exams and wakes up at 3 am. On the day of the incident, he woke up early and went to an orchard where the girl's father, Brahmdeen and his three sons - Raju, Bharat and Gajraj- caught him, abused him for being from a lower caste. They beat him up with an iron rod, baton and belts and inserted an iron rod into his rectum and repeatedly hit him in the private parts with the rod."

The SHO of Tikunia police station Gyan Singh said, "After initial investigation, we came to know the victim is involved with the girl and was trying to meet her when he was caught and assaulted. We will record Harendra's statement when his condition improves."

Brahmdeen, Raju, Bharat and Gajraj, meanwhile, have been booked under the SC/ST Act, and for voluntarily causing hurt and intentional insult.

Three of them have been arrested but Gajraj is absconding.

Lakhimpur Kheri SSP Vijay Dhull said, "A section for heinous crime will be added after the supplementary medical examination."

Emergency medical officer of the district hospital, Satish Kumar, said, "The victim has injuries on almost all parts of the body, including his private parts. He has been beaten up with batons and with bare hands. The injuries to his face and trachea were life-threatening, but he has started responding to treatment." (IANS)

Bonded labourers in Punjab: Home Ministry asks govt to take action

PURNA SINGH

NEW DELHI

THE Centre has informed the Punjab government that 58 mentally challenged people from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were found working as bonded labourers in the border districts of the state and asked it to take appropriate action to deal with the 'serious' problem.

In a communication to the chief secretary of Punjab, the Union Home Ministry said the Border Security Force (BSF) has found these 58 people were brought to Punjab with the promise of good salary but exploited, given drugs and forced to work in inhuman conditions.

The home ministry said the BSF has informed it that these labourers were rescued from the border areas of Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Ferozepur and Abohar in Punjab in 2019 and 2020.

'During the course of questioning, it emerged that most of them were either mentally challenged or were in a feeble state of mind and have been working as bonded labourers with farmers in border villages of Punjab.

'The persons apprehended belong to poor family background and hail from remote areas of the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh,' the letter said.

The home ministry said it has been further informed that 'human-trafficking syndicates hire such labourers from their native place to work in Punjab on the promise of a good salary, but after reaching there, they are exploited, paid poorly and meted out inhuman treatment'.

To make them work in the fields for long hours, these labourers are often given drugs, which adversely affect their physical and mental condition, the letter said.

The BSF has been handing over the rescued persons to the state police for necessary action.





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WTO and the politics of subsidies

TO MSP or not? That is the question confronting the government as the farmers continue their protest in their quest for an elusive assurance from an authority caught up in a catch-22 situation. This is not just a political dilemma alone. This is an issue with layers and layers around it. The biggest challenge for the government is in knowing where to begin with: whether it should be with the MSP or should the government begin to end inequality in World Trade Organisation's laws. India has followed a thin trading line between food and livelihood security issues and those of the laws governing the trade practices of the WTO.

This has attracted the attention of some of the international organisations and politicians and groups all over the world. Sikhs for Justice, a se-

cessionist organisation, too pitted in with eagerness to encash the protest in favour of its 'Khalistan' demand and levels most outrageous charges against the Indian government "of catching, torturing and killings hundreds of Sikh farmers for peacefully agitating".

Equally bizarre is the conduct of some of the Parliamentarians of the UK, Canada and the US who demand a halt to the atrocities against the farmers ignoring the fact that the farmers are peacefully agitating and there has been no effort by the Government to use force against them. All those doing so must be ashamed of their own governments and their doublespeak.

India has been a founding member of the WTO and it is also a signatory to the multilateral Agreement on Agriculture (AoA). This agreement is reg-

ulatory in nature and is aimed at containing the domestic agricultural subsidies to even out the trade distortions. This agreement says that such aid or support given by the governments domestically would always affect the competitiveness of the global market.

To understand this argument further, one needs to understand the Green Box and Amber Box subsidies mentioned in the WTO agreement. The first one of these two is the permitted subsidy which has no trade distorting effect at all (at the most some minimal effect) as the WTO argues. This Green Box subsidies have no limit. The US, Canada and the EU are entitled for the same along with Japan. The second one is the Amber Box subsidy defined under Article 6 of the AoA. The WTO claims these are the ones

that damage the world trade and have the potency to distort the relevant markets. These subsidies need to be checked, the WTO agreement says. These two boxes figured in the Uruguay Round of negotiations between 1986-1993. The present MSP issue falls in the Amber Box and the de minimis level (meaning 'about minimal things') is capped at 10 per cent of the total value of the product concerned.

If India's domestic support exceeds the level, it would be a violation of this agreement. The US and Canada have been vociferously opposing India's MSP policies and complaining. Even China's domestic support to farmers has been opposed. The issue is, hence, not just about the MSP. All political parties should arrive at a consensus in this regard and fight the inequalities against the developing countries. Let them not confine themselves politics alone.

Without fear and bombings

This Jammu border village is harvesting crops

UMAR SHAH

A folk song, "Jade log de jandene ithe qurbaniyaan, duniya chi rendiya ne undeya nishaniya" sung by farmers in the agricultural fields of Jammu, means -- the ones who render sacrifices are the ones remembered by the world after their lives. However, this tradition of singing in the fields has been on a decline, at least in the village of Suchetgarh, which is a stone's throw from Pakistan along the International Border in Jammu's RS Pora sector. Bombings across the border have made farming a life-threatening livelihood to pursue in this village that has a little over 200 households. Singing or being carefree is out of the question.

However, things are looking different this year. Last month, India and Pakistan declared a ceasefire -- it's the first time in many decades that a truce has been called here during the harvesting season, which spans from March to April. A ceasefire was announced earlier too, during the holy month of Ramzan in 2018, but it proved to be short-lived.

In fact, India and Pakistan had signed a ceasefire pact in November 2003 but they haven't been able to honour it, especially after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks. Given the chequered history of this agreement, it's difficult to say how long the latest ceasefire will last but the locals are hailing it as the new dawn. It's been unusually quiet in Suchetgarh for the past few weeks. The thuds of the guns and mortar shells have been replaced by the carefree chirping and warbling of birds. The families are wandering into their fields without fear, admiring the crops and hoping for good returns.

As per the government records, 454 hectares of land in Suchetgarh is under cultivation and is used mostly to grow Basmati rice and maize. "The feeling that no one is going to kill you (in the crossfire) is inexplicable. You have to experience it (to know what we are feeling right now)," shares Madhu Kumari.

Her family's four-acre farmland is the closest to this border, which the locals call 'the zero line'.

What's farming like on the border? According to Kumari's husband Bhaga Ram, more than 20 residents of Suchetgarh have lost their lives in the ceasefire violations but none have died while working on their farmland. "But there hasn't been a single year since my childhood when harvesting wasn't a scary affair. All the time a sword was hanging over our heads that artillery fire might hit us as we reap the year's hard work," the 61-year-old says.

In Avinash Kumar's case, the mortar shell missed him by a few metres in the cross-border hostility that escalated in 2018. The violence that year was worse than it was during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, residents of the border villages have described in this report.

"I remember it was February. My father wasn't well. So, I went to the field to prepare the land as the harvest season was a month away. Suddenly, I heard a loud thud and a strong blow of air threw me off to a corner. My ears were toggling with strange sounds as I tried to crawl around to take shelter. Within one hour, we all were taken away in a government bunker and later shifted to a safe-house. The land, the crops, the harvest -- everything was destroyed," remembers the young farmer.

It's a drill the residents of Suchetgarh have got used to. Every time the armies trade fire across the border, they have to flee their fields and homes and take shelter in government safe-houses. And when the tensions subside, they return to bruised homes and farmlands. Farmer Talib Hussain dubs the experience nightmarish.

"(After the skirmishes in 2018), we would often find some unexploded shells lying around. Our own fields had become death wells for us. We were reluctant to sow the crops (the season begins from September). We were even hesitant to harvest them," he recalls. That year, he incurred a loss of more than Rs 2 lakh as a part of his crops



It's been unusually quiet in Suchetgarh for the past few weeks. The thuds of the guns and mortar shells have been replaced by the carefree chirping and warbling of birds. The families are wandering into their fields without fear, admiring the crops and hoping for good returns. As per the government records, 454 hectares of land in Suchetgarh is under cultivation and is used mostly to grow Basmati rice and maize. "The feeling that no one is going to kill you (in the crossfire) is inexplicable. You have to experience it (to know what we are feeling right now)," shares Madhu Kumari. Her family's four-acre farmland is the closest to this border, which the locals call 'the zero line'

got damaged in the violence.

Forced to do other jobs

Farming in Suchetgarh has suffered in more ways than one. The bombings have left behind toxic residue on the farmlands, turning them infertile in most places. A putrid odour greets you when you visit the fields and there is no respite from the constant buzzing of mosquitoes. In fact, according to government records, an estimated 17,000 hectares of land get destroyed due to shelling every year all over Jammu & Kashmir.

Suchetgarh's Vinaay Kumar knows the pain of losing his land and crops all too well. He could not sow anything on his two-acre land after the intense shelling

from Pakistan in 2018. "(I was hoping for a profitable yield that year). But I got nothing at the end. I could not sow any crop the next year. The land was giving off the pungent smell of a burnt powder keg," Kumar remembers.

The volatile situation has forced the residents to look beyond farming, which has been their traditional source of livelihood -- A quintal of Basmati rice sells for Rs 4,000. "Farming is in our blood. My father often tells me that his farmland is dearer to him than his three sons," says Avinash with a gentle smile.

But now, many have either started migrating to nearby towns or have taken up odd jobs to supplement their income. Vinaay, for instance, runs a shop

to sell bicycle spare parts while his brothers work as masons. Vinaay has little choice but to do this because the compensation given to the farmers after the crop loss due to firings is too meagre to even cover the basic farming costs.

He explains, "We were given Rs 6,000 as compensation in 2018. Initially, I thought it was a joke or maybe the government was planning to pay us in instalments of Rs 6,000. But I was told by the local relief officer that the amount was full and final." A farmer in Suchetgarh, on the contrary, spends almost Rs 12,000 to buy seeds and fertilisers for an acre of farmland alone, he adds.

'Let us live & sing'

Despite the disappointment, the farmers haven't protested against the paltry compensation yet. They don't want to be thrown into this situation ever again, that's all they say. They want the ceasefire to be honoured in true spirit. "Saving our lives and the lives of our families is always a priority for us. We can only hope that the ceasefire remains intact so we can live and do our work without any fear," Ram says. And do it with joy, adds Avinash as he says: "Believe me, the toilers of this land had abandoned that trend (of singing songs in the fields) a long time ago. But now, it seems the truce will last and we can euphorically sing 'Jade log de..."

Eco-friendly booths, cultural legacy add to new age Assam polls

SUJIT CHAKRABORTY



UNLIKE previous elections, this time the Assembly polls in Assam are being conducted with a different milieu by displaying the state's cultural legacy and value-added products of the local artists and artisans, besides setting up eco-friendly polling stations that have become a new attraction for the voters. The first two phases of polling in 25 of Assam's 34 districts on March 27 and Thursday were held peacefully, without reports of any untoward incident.

Thanks to the Election Commission, in the first two rounds of the three-phase Assembly elections in Assam, over 220 polling stations in 86 Assembly constituencies have been categorised as model polling stations. These model polling stations were decorated with colourful balloons, flowers, bamboo crafts, Assam's traditional 'gamocha', local vegetation and various other local items.

The traditional 'gamocha' is a white piece of cloth with a red border having a customary pattern, which is almost synonymous to Assamese identity and culture. "In the model polling stations, our officials have provided saplings, 'gamocha' and various other items for encouraging the voters to turn up in large numbers," an election official told IANS.

According to the Chief Electoral Officer of Assam, Nitin Khade, of the total 33,530 polling stations (for all three phases of polling across Assam), as many as 1,351 booths are being managed by only women polling staff.

Khade said that the Election Commission has also been asking the political parties to use only environment-friendly material for campaign purposes since long. The poll panel has instructed that all the political parties should take adequate steps and measures to not use single-use plastic as campaign materials (posters, banners etc.) during the elections in the interest of human health and environment.

"Adequate and suitable arrangements have also been made for the 1,38,290 eligible PwD (people with disabilities) voters," the CEO said, adding that Assam has 289,474 voters aged 80 years and above.

The state has the total of 2,33,74,087 voters, including 1,15,50,403 women. The election officials said that e-rickshaw facilities were also given to the voters aged 60 years and above, especially to those who have difficulty in moving. They are also being felicitated for their will to cast their votes. Election officials said that to avoid crowding, the number of voters for every booth has been brought down to a maximum of 1,000. As a result, the number of polling booths has been augmented by 34.71 per cent to 33,530 from 24,890 in 2016.

To avoid direct contact with the Electronic Voting Machines, every voter is being given hand gloves. "For the first time in the past 50 years I have never seen such a decorated and beautiful polling station with all the necessary facilities," said Basana Chakraborty, 79, after casting her vote at a model polling station in Silchar.

In another first in Assam, the Election Commission has also arranged for voting through postal ballots for persons with disabilities, Covid-19 infected people and those above the age of 80 years, which were held two weeks before the polling began.

The Election Commission had earlier said that all the voters in certain categories would have to apply within five days of notification of elections in their respective Assembly constituencies, if they wished to use the option of postal ballot for voting. Election officials said that a polling team comprising two officials along with a videographer and security staff went to the elector's house along with a voting compartment to get the elector to vote using postal ballot by maintaining complete secrecy.

The second phase of polling in 39 constituencies were held in 13 districts on Thursday without reports of any untoward incident, with 77 per cent voter turnout. Of the three-phase elections to the 126-member Assam Assembly, the third and final phase of polling will be held in 40 seats on April 6. The results will be declared on May 2. Nearly 80 per cent of 81,09,815 voters had cast their votes in the first phase of polling on March 27.

Political parties field actors, TV stars in Kerala

USHA RAM MANOHAR

TO spice up the electoral arena in Kerala, political parties have fielded a host of film and television personalities for the April 6 Assembly polls, hoping to woo the electorate with their favourite stars. As many as nine actors are in fray in the state, trying their luck in the electoral battle for their respective fronts. National award winning film actor and Rajya Sabha MP Suresh Gopi has been fielded by the BJP-NDA from the Thirissur constituency, while his tinsel town colleagues--K B Ganesh Kumar and Mukesh, both sitting MLAs of the Left Front, are trying their luck from Pathanapuram and Kollam assembly constituencies respectively.



Suresh Gopi, who has acted in over 200 films, including "Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha", "Thalassanam", "Eklavya" and "Patram", had unsuccessfully contested in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Thirissur and is hoping to make it this time to the state assembly. Former minister Ganesh Kumar, son of Kerala Congress (B) leader R Balakrishna Pillai, entered films in 1985 through K G George's "Trakal" and forayed into the political arena in 2001. He has successfully represented Pathanapuram in the Assembly since then and is confident of sailing through effortlessly this time too. Another actor, Mukesh, known for his comic roles and television programmes, is hoping that the electorate would give him a second stint as an MLA. Actors G Krishnakumar (Thiruvananthapuram) and Dharmajan Bolgatty (Balussery) are making their electoral debut on BJP and Congress tickets respectively. Pala MLA, Mani C Kappan, who switched over to the Congress-led UDF camp, after the LDF denied him the seat, is once again trying his luck from the same constituency, hoping to give a tough fight to his rival Jose K Mani, leader of the Kerala Congress (M) faction.

Kappan has essayed various roles in 25 films, produced at least 12 films, besides directing the super hit "Mannar Mathai Speaking" in which Mukesh had essayed a role. Playback singer Daleema Jojo is the LDF candidate from Aroor Assembly constituency and is locking horns with UDF candidate and sitting MLA Shanimol Usman. Film and television serial actress Priyanka Anoop is contesting as an independent in Aroor. TV actor Vivek Gopan, a favourite of small screen viewers, is trying his luck from Chavara on the BJP-NDA ticket, and is seeking votes on the development plank. His role in the serial "Parasparam", which ran for over 1,500 episodes, made him a household name in the state. Unlike neighbouring Tamil Nadu, where actors like M G Ramachandran and J Jayalalitha went on to become Chief Ministers, the politically conscious voters of Kerala normally keep celebrities at an arm's length. Though late actor Murali had unsuccessfully contested in 1999 from the Alappuzha Lok Sabha seat on the CPI (M) ticket, actor Innocent, won from Chalakudy as CPI(M) backed independent in 2011, but had to bite the dust in 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Eminent film-maker Ramu Kariat whose "Chemmeen" brought Kerala its first National award in Malayalam was elected to the Assembly in 1964 from Nattika as a CPI(M) backed independent. Actor Jagdeesh and TV star Ramesh Pisharody are not in the fray, but are busy campaigning for UDF candidates. Meanwhile, veteran actor Devan, who recently joined the BJP after merging his 17-year-old Kerala Peoples Party with it, is campaigning for the saffron party candidates. Jagdeesh and Devan had unsuccessfully contested Assembly polls earlier.

LETTERS

Look into the GIPT closure issue

IT is heartening to note that the two Chief Secretaries of AP and Telangana are scheduled to virtually meet on April 6 to sort out bilateral issues which include apportionment of institutions not listed anywhere. In this regard, I would like to highlight the wrong and I am sure illegal manner on the part of Telangana government to wind up the state-wide Government Institute of Printing Technology (GIPT) located in a 14-acre prime land in East Marredpally, Secunderabad.

The GIPT was wound up discreetly through a government memo when in actuality and as per Reorganisation Act it should have been done as a collective action. As per the Act the students of AP have the provision to study for ten years ie up to 2024 and instead the college was closed in early 2019. The AP government should revive this and facilitate the students of that state to benefit by establishing an exclusive college for themselves in Amaravati or anywhere else. The AP government is entitled to suitable compensation running into crores, as per the Act.

D Nagarjuna, Hyderabad

Protect middle class

THE ruling dispensation's inefficiency and anti-poor and anti-middle class

attitude is repeatedly exhibited with its intended contents. For stabilising economy good amount of domestic savings is one of the important and inevitable components for any country. This factor is one that had helped China in building its empirical economy. Middle class and the poor always look for government instruments to keep their lifetime small savings even in the background of attractive interest offered by private operators.

Instead of encouraging such savings in government schemes driving the people to fall prey in the hands private players does not speak of the benevolent character of a government. However, the cat is out of the bag and immediately after the spell of elections in some States people are going to be plunged in interest cut, increase in fuel cost and so on.

A G Rajmohan, Anantapur

Apt appointment

The Union Government needs to be lauded for appointing a top class HR professional to Head the PESB. It should also invite open applications from all those candidates who have 35 years working experience in the field to come forward and make a three-minute presentation on the challenges that they foresee in ensuring the sustenance of their company. This will ensure that people with vision and mission are selected to head the PSU units.

After shortlisting ten of these candidates, they must be called for a detailed interview where the challenges and solu-

tions must be debated by PESB before it makes a final recommendation to the Union government. This will help PSU units to perform under a qualitative leadership which is the need of the hour.

A Sreenivas, Secunderabad

'Political' Phalke award

ACTOR Rajinikanth richly deserves the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for his invaluable services to the film industry in general and to the Tamil film industry in particular as an actor, producer and scriptwriter. Making his debut in 1975, Rajinikanth with his humble background has come a long way, essaying many different and popular roles in hundreds of films including in Telugu and Hindi movies. His down-to-earth personality, histrionic talent, and personalized mannerisms won for him millions of fans, admirers, honours and awards. Late film director K. Balachandrar discovered latent talent in Rajini and gave him his first break, but many feel that the industry has not fully utilised his talent and popularity. And to say that the timing of the announcement of the award to him during the State elections has exposed the real intentions of the Centre is to say the obvious.

M Somasekhar Prasad, Hyderabad

II

THE news that Rajinikanth has been bestowed with the prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke Award comes as a delight for everyone. Fondly called as 'Thalaiva' by

his fans, Rajinikanth has made a profound contribution in the sphere of cinema not just as an actor, but also as a producer and a screenwriter. What amuses one is that, while his on-the-screen personality is impressive, his off-the-screen personality is equally inspiring as well. His sincerity, hard work, talent, zeal and above all immense love coupled with humbleness towards his fans has made him create a space for himself in the hearts of billions worldwide. With lots of respect for him, I congratulate Rajinikanth Sir, the Thalaiva for achieving the highest award in cinema.

Ramala Kinnera, Hyderabad

III

KUDOS to Thalaivar, Rajnikant for his prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award. It's not child's play to achieve this goal for an ordinary artist like him; but he did it with his hard work and dedication in acting. Within a short span, Rajani superceded many of the then popular super stars of Tamil and earned laurels from cinegoers. With his talent he also made deep inroads in Bollywood and Telugu films within a short time. After a careful thinking, Rajni took a wise decision to keep away from 'murky political arena' as many of his present day film colleagues including Hindi artist Govinda, who burnt his fingers in past at the cost of his film career.

Govardhan R Jilla, Mumbai

thehansreader@gmail.com

Vizag to host global IT conclave in May

- Minister for IT and Industries says the event will be organised in collaboration with NITI Aayog and NASSCOM
- Goutham Reddy promises to develop the port city as a technology hub
- Industry leaders discuss various issues like skilling, IT, promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship through start-ups in a roundtable organised by IT and Electronics and Communications Dept

HANS NEWS SERVICE
AMARAVATI

MINISTER for IT and industries Mekapati Goutham Reddy announced that the state government will organise a global IT conclave in Visakhapatnam in the end of May this year in collaboration with NITI Aayog and NASSCOM. He expressed confidence that with a specific focus on advanced technologies such as



IT and Industries Minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy addressing CXO Roundtable at a hotel in Vijayawada on Friday. Industry leaders who participated in the meet. Photos: Ch Venkata Mastan

5G, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML) Visakhapatnam will be transformed into a technology hub.

The industry leaders interacted with the senior bureaucrats of the state government and deliberated on topics, including skilling, IT and emerging technologies in primary sectors, IT concept cities and infrastructure, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship through start-ups, new global trends emerging from Covid-19 pandemic such as 'work from anywhere', and how to take advantage of the renewed supply chain dynamics globally to make Andhra Pradesh as a hub for Electronics manufacturing at the

CXO roundtable in Vijayawada organised by IT, electronics and communication departments.

The conclave saw active participation of 70 industry leaders, entrepreneurs, venture capitals and innovators from both information technology and Electronics manufacturing sectors.

Speaking at the inaugural event, the minister stressed upon the vision of Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy to ensure efficient last mile delivery of citizen-centric welfare schemes and outlined the critical role of IT platforms in realising this vision.

The minister also underscored the importance for holistic development of the state which en-



compasses job creation, high-end skill development and enhanced living standards through novel concepts such as leveraging technology in direct benefit transfers, IT concept cities, work from anywhere, connected living, grass-root entrepreneurship among others and invited the technology fraternity to engage with the Government of Andhra Pradesh to finetune its strategy to become India's preferred investment destination and generate employment in the state.

These roundtable discussions involving technology leaders focused on understanding the key measures required to place Andhra Pradesh on the path of

becoming a global technology hub. The meet was attended by MLAs Abbaya Chowdary, Chevireddy Bhaskar Reddy and senior officials including Satish Chandra, special chief secretary, higher education department, Poonam Malakondaiah, special chief secretary, agriculture, fisheries and animal husbandry, Sri-lakshmi, special chief secretary, municipal administration and urban development, G Jaya Lakshmi, principal secretary IT, electronics and communications, B Sundar, special chief secretary, IT, E and C and M Nanda Kishore Reddy, Group CEO, Andhra Pradesh Electronics and IT Agency (APEITA).

VIVEKA MURDER

Daughter questions slow CBI probe



- Expresses concern that further delay may endanger the lives of more witnesses in the case
- Reminds that one witness, Srinivasulu Reddy, has already died
- Alleges that probes so far have not rendered justice to the family and the post-mortem report too is flawed.
- Alleges that local police are brushing aside her pleas for speedy investigation saying the crime is a 'routine murder'

HANS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

DEMANDING the CBI to expedite the probe into her father's murder, Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy's cousin Dr Y S Sunita, daughter of former minister Dr Y S Vivekananda Reddy said any further 'delay' may put witnesses' lives in danger

"It has been two years since the murder of my father. How long do we have to wait for justice," questioned Sunita. Vivekananda Reddy, brother of later Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, was murdered on March 15, 2019.

Addressing a press conference here on Friday after meeting the CBI officials at the agency's headquarters here, Dr Sunita hit out at the investigation agencies. "It is atrocious to note that the

culprits are not brought to justice in this case. My dad was no ordinary person. He was a brother of a former chief minister and an uncle of the present Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. He was a former minister too, if it matters to anyone".

She said the probes so far could not render justice to the family and even the post-mortem report was flawed. The family members failed to get a proper response to their queries from the local police authorities who brushed aside the same as a 'routine murder'.

Asserting that her father was murdered, Dr Sunita said there should be no two opinions about it. There was a possibility of witnesses coming under threat and failing to depose properly due to the delay in launching a trial, she said. "Their lives could be endangered too," she said adding one of the witnesses, Srinivasulu Reddy, has already died and she fear how many more witnesses may die if the investigation is delayed.

Asked the reason for her desperation even as her own cousin being the Chief Minister, Dr Sunita remarked: "No one is telling us anything. No light is being thrown on the case. Will any commoner get justice when the family of a high profile politician does not get justice?"

She said she had submitted a memorandum to the CBI officials in this regard. She pointed out that 15 persons, including Kadapa MP Y S Avinash Reddy and other family members were the main suspects as per the petition in the High Court.

SPDCL cuts power losses to 8.23%: CMD



SPDCL CMD H Haranatha Rao cutting a cake to mark the SPDCL 22nd Formation Day in Tirupati on Thursday

HANS NEWS SERVICE
TIRUPATI

THE AP Southern Power Distribution Company Limited (SPDCL) in its 22 year existence made a phenomenal growth in expanding customer base, infrastructure development and also minimising losses, said SPDCL Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD) H Haranatha Rao.

Speaking on the occasion of SPDCL 22nd Formation Day at the corporate office here on Thursday, he said the number of services (customers) of all category which was 39.15 lakh in 2000 to 63.55 lakh in 2021 and added that the loss which was 26.84 percent 22 years back was now reduced to 8.23 percent while the substations which was 478 increased to 1439. Besides, SPDCL through 4,903 energy assistants strengthened the customer service, he said adding that IT Enable Services (ITES) also introduced on a massive scale for transparency to check corruption and improve facilities like digital payments for the convenience of the customers. In this connection, he said through Urja Mitra 13.79 crore messages were sent to alert the customers on power interruptions.

SPDCL thanks to the late YS Rajasekhara Reddy government liberal help, the SPDCL was able to construct a massive corporate office looking like a mini-secretariat which was inaugurated in 2007 by former chief minister YSR, he averred.

Stating that the SPDCL had so far won 43 national awards with the dedicated service of employees, he wanted them to work with the same vigor and commitment to customers to win many more laurels. Senior officials and employees participated in the celebration.

Naidu announces parishad poll boycott

HANS NEWS SERVICE
MANGALAGIRI

FOR the first time in over 39 years, the TDP has decided to boycott the ZPTC and MPTC elections citing lack of trust in the State Election Commission (SEC) and its unilateral decisions taken in the past two days. Announcing this at party headquarters at Mangalagiri on Friday, TDP national president and former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu, strongly objected to SEC Nilam Sawhney's action of releasing the poll notification without consulting all the political parties. The Supreme Court has laid clear guidelines for taking the opinion of the respective parties in the state before issuing such poll notifications but the new SEC has conveniently violated the court's orders.

However, the TDP filed a petition against the SEC notification now and the same would come up for hearing on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference,

- Says TDP has no trust in SEC's ability to hold a free poll
- Explains the tough decision was taken in view of nexus between YSRCRC, SEC and police
- Party moves High Court against poll notification



TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu addressing a press conference at party state office in Mangalagiri on Friday

the TDP chief said that their party had lost faith in the State Election Commission considering the fact that Nilam Sawhney did not even try to follow the court direction that the model code should be re-imposed four weeks before the notified date of polling. With a premeditated plan, the SEC has taken this decision only to favour the ruling

YSRCP leaders. Naidu asserted that the TDP has never known to step aside from the fight in any election but the existing situation in the state under the atrocious Jagan Reddy regime was pathetic and hopeless in view of its degraded politics.

Sawhney's predecessor N Ramesh Kumar had written a letter to the Union home secretary

Kejriwal rules out lockdown in Delhi

Continued from P1

The Chief Minister said that 3,583 new cases have been reported in Delhi in the last 24 hours - making it a new high this year and a 28 per cent jump over the day before. A day ago, cases had climbed 53 per cent.

Kejriwal once again pushed for opening up the vaccination drive to all age groups, saying, "Centre should allow states to vaccinate everyone on war footing. Need to involve non-healthcare facilities in inoculation drive." Vaccines are currently being given out to only frontline workers and those above 45.

Modi attacks DMK, Cong over Jallikattu

Continued from P1

The Prime Minister also slammed the Congress-DMK alliance for suspending the AIIMS project in Madurai and said that the NDA government will provide quality healthcare facilities for the people in the region. He also claimed that the Congress in the 1980s had dismissed Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran's (MGR) democratically elected government but paid for it later by losing the.

"In 1977, 1980 and 1984, MGR won from places around this region. His vision for an inclusive and prosperous society inspires us," the PM said.

He said the NDA government at the Centre is guided by the mantra of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" and is focussing on three Is -- infrastructure, irrigation and investment -- for the development of the State.

India overtakes America in daily spike of Covid cases

Continued from P1

About 469 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, taking the total toll to 1,62,927.

Six States account for 83.16 per cent of the new deaths. Maharashtra saw the maximum casualties (249) and Punjab followed with 58 daily deaths. Maharashtra has reported the highest daily new cases at 43,183. It is followed by Chhattisgarh with 4,617 while Karnataka reported 4,234 new cases.

India's total active caseload has reached 6,14,696. It now comprises 5 per cent of the country's total positive cases.

Five States -- Maharashtra, Karnataka, Chhat-

tisgarh, Kerala and Punjab -- cumulatively account for 77.91 per cent of the total active cases in the country. Maharashtra alone accounts for nearly 60 per cent (59.84 per cent) of the total active caseload of the country.

India's cumulative recoveries stand at 1,15,25,039 today. The national Recovery Rate is 93.68 per cent. A total of 50,356 recoveries were registered in the last 24 hours.

Recently, NITI Aayog member VK Paul said that the current situation of the surge in coronavirus cases in the country is going from "bad to worse" and the trends show that the virus is still very active.

AP records 1,288 new cases, five deaths

AMARAVATI

THE state reported 1,288 fresh cases of Covid-19, 610 recoveries and five deaths in the 24 hours ending 9 am on Friday. The state's Covid-19 chart now showed a total of 9,04,548 cases, 8,88,508 recoveries and 7,225 deaths, according to the latest bulletin. The active caseload went up to 8,815, it said. Guntur district reported the highest 311 fresh cases, Chittoor 225, Visakhapatnam 191 and Krishna 164 while Nellore too added 118 in 24 hours.

Prakasam district added 62, Srikakulam 54, Kurnool 52, Vizianagaram 31, East Godavari

and Anantapuramu 26 each and Kadapa 21 new cases. Only West Godavari registered just seven cases in a day. Anantapur, Chittoor, Guntur, Prakasam and Visakhapatnam districts reported one fresh Covid-19 fatality each.

Covid 19 cases increasing in AP for the past one week despite of the efforts of state govt. As many as 1288 people are inflicted with Corona virus and five people died of the deadly virus today.

It may be noted that the state government has been taking up the vaccination programme in a vigorous manner and Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy launched the

vaccination at village and ward secretariats too to make it easy for more number of people receive jab.

Meanwhile, Union Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba conducted a video conference with chief secretaries of eight state governments including Andhra Pradesh where more number of corona positive cases are getting reported and stressed the need for more efforts to prevent spread of the virus. He asked the chief secretaries to take up vaccination drive in a big way.

State chief secretary Aditya Nath Das and commissioner of medical and health K Bhaskar participated in the videoconference.

Will vaccine & alcohol make a deadly cocktail?

Continued from P1

Apparently, it is always better to abstain from consuming alcohol irrespective of the shots to be taken. People should not get carried away with such false propaganda and avoid getting the doses administered," reasons PS Surya Narayana, District Medical and Health Officer.

From mild temperature to body pains and a headache, some may experience symptoms post vaccination. Health officials, however, assure that there is nothing to worry about as it depends on the individual immune response. But, they quickly add, not all will experience such symptoms.

Laying emphasis on getting vaccinated, Covid nodal officer of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant Maturi Srinivas, says, "When a foreign element enters our body through vaccine, it is better to be safe and stay away from antibiotics, alcohol and tobacco as they might hamper the natural process of generating antibodies. Though it is not clinically proven, we generally advise people to refrain from drinking alcohol at least for a couple of weeks after taking the shots."

Shunning unnecessary fear and erasing doubts, health officials urge people not to neglect taking the shots and least of all, for the sake of consuming liquor!

'SEC decision to benefit YSRCP'

HANS NEWS SERVICE
MANGALAGIRI

FORMER Minister and TDP leader K S Jawahar on Friday strongly objected to State Election Commissioner (SEC) Nilam Sawhney issuing the notification for the parishad elections very hastily even before taking the opinions of the all political parties meeting in the State.

Jawahar said that it was obvious how the new SEC was showing all eagerness to satisfy the ego and requirements of Chief Minister Y S Jaganmohan Reddy. Instead of upholding the constitutional requirements, the SEC was acting like an assistant and political servant for the Chief Minister.

In a statement here, the TDP leader said how the Election Commissioner could notify the conduct of the ZPTC, MPTC elections in just one day. These elections should have to be held in over five phases. The SEC was apparently showing undue haste to complete the election process without bothering to conduct them in a free and fair manner. She should have taken the opinions of the political parties before taking this decision.

Jawahar slammed the SEC for releasing the notification on the very first day of her taking charge as the new SEC of the state.

It was clear from this how there was going to be a deep nexus between the SEC and the ruling YSRCRC leadership. They should explain whether there would be any need for holding the polls when they have arrived at secret deals in the process.

The TDP leader said that the robbers and the police had joined hands now and they were certain to subvert the election process. If the SEC took an independent decision after talking to the all-party meet, then she would have been considered an efficient commissioner.

'Help widen my victory margin'

Continued from P1

The tweets appeared on the same day that Modi campaigned in Tamil Nadu for the BJP and its ally, the AIADMK.

With voters set to go to the polls on April 6, the party first put out front page advertisements across newspapers in the State attacking the incumbents by depicting what it claims are the "dreams of the fascists and their slaves", presumably referencing the ruling alliance partners. The viral tweets came as the DMK approaches the Election Commission to intervene in the raid and direct the Income Tax Department to refrain from abusing its power.

No export ban on Covid vaccines: MEA

Continued from P1

Asked about reports that Nepal has approached India to procure 5 million more vaccine doses but has not got any response, he said India has taken the lead on sending vaccines abroad. "No country has shared with the world the number of vaccines that India has while vaccinating its own population. Till now, we have supplied vaccines to more than 80 countries across the world and we have already stated that our external supplies would be done keeping in mind our domestic requirements," the MEA spokesperson said.

"At this time, I hope our partners understand that vaccines are primarily purposed for domestic consumption. I want to emphasise that we have not imposed any export ban on vaccines," Bagchi asserted. Regarding the concerns of other countries, India's position has been suitably conveyed through its official channels, he added.

DMK goes for the kill in Stalin's Kolathur segment

AIADMK banks on warhorse Aadi Rajaram

V GANGADHARAN
CHENNAI

THE DMK men are in an upbeat mood in the Kolathur constituency and bullish about their party president M K Stalin's re-election for the third straight time from this city segment which they say he nurtured for a decade though being in the opposition. The DMK's campaign appeared to be the most visible with propaganda at a feverish pace across the segment for the April 6 Assembly polls and Stalin is the party's Chief Minister candidate.

DMK's electioneering is driven by several teams like a small group of men affiliated to the Labour Progressive Front, party's trade union wing led by a man in his 50's, who criss-cross the nook and crannies off Paper Mills Road holding LPF-DMK flags and distributing pamphlets. Young women, separately go door to door giving away pamphlets that list out the 'achievements' of 'Anitha Achievers Academy', an initiative by Stalin to train students-free of cost-from middle, low income and poor families in accounting software, 'Tally' and tailoring.

The AIADMK camp is counting on its government's slew of welfare schemes and poll promises like free houses for those who do not own one and Rs 1,500 assistance per month to people and the ruling party is also pinning its hopes on its nominee Aadi Rajaram to take on Stalin. A noted party warhorse



once praised by late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalithaa for resolutely opposing not only rivals but also party backstabbers, ruling party men take pride in recalling that Rajaram gave Stalin a run for his money in the Thousand Lights segment in 2006 and the DMK leader managed to win by a whisker, a margin of 2,468 votes that year.

The extent to which the DMK is focussing in this constituency could be gauged from the fact that a small stretch of Red Hills Road in Kolathur alone has two 'Therdal Panimani' (Election workstations that team with partymen) not to mention others. Stickers with words 'Stalin thaana vaararu, vidiyal thara poraru' (Stalin is set to become CM and usher in dawn) with an image of a beaming DMK chief in the middle appeared in many places including over the name boards of shops. Shoulder bags used by partymen and a table calendar being distributed to people with similar content could not be missed.



On the AIADMK front, the propaganda on the ground did not seem to match the scale of the DMK's campaign. In several areas including Agaram, though AIADMK workers could be seen going out door to door and loudspeakers on campaign vehicles blare out songs listing 'Ammu' government's achievements and assurances, the strength of men and propaganda vehicles on roads, pale in comparison with the DMK's.

AIADMK's allies, Pattali Makkal Katchi and BJP, though do their bit, not many could be seen everywhere. Stalin's list of 'achievements' for Kolathur as an MLA speaks of a slew of initiatives including payment of fee for over 1,000 school, college students, giving laptops to 74 poor students, 'seervaisai' (marriage gift and financial assistance) for the poor families and so on. DMK men also credit Stalin for infrastructure development in the segment despite being in the opposition.

Rajaram, however, rejected such development claims. "Stalin's focus

is only on publicity and he completely ignored people's basic needs and aspirations," he told PTI. "If at all Stalin claims credit for development, it happened because of government support and the credit goes to the AIADMK government." The AIADMK nominee listed several civic and infra woes that Stalin in his capacity as MLA 'failed' to address and did not bring such matters to the government's attention, he alleged.

Asked on AIADMK's campaign appearing to be not matching with that of the DMK, he said it is a 'wrong' view. "We have covered door-to-door campaign at least four times till now and we are getting excellent support from the people," he said.

Kolathur with 2.82 lakh voters (1,44,050 women, third gender 68 and 1,38,181 men) has woes that are common in any urban segment in the country, like uncleared garbage and most residents are from middle income groups. In 2011, the first election for Kolathur after it was carved out following delimitation, Stalin won by a margin of 2,734 votes and AIADMK's Saidai Duraisamy was the runner-up.

In 2016, Stalin increased the victory margin to 37,730 and again the AIADMK's nominee was pushed to the second place. Nam Tamizhar Katchi's Selva and Makkal Needhi Maiam's Jagadeesh Kumar are among the total of 36 candidates in the fray though the fight is essentially between Stalin and Rajaram.

(PTI)



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a roadshow in support of BJP candidates ahead of the third phase of West Bengal Assembly polls, at Barupur Paschim in South 24 Parganas on Friday

TMC govt runs on 3T model of 'Tolabaji, Tanashahi, Tushtikaran': Shah

SITALKUCHI (WB)

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday lashed out at West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, accusing her of running the TMC government in the state on the 3T model of 'Tolabaji' (extortion), 'Tanashahi' (dictatorship) and 'Tushtikaran' (appeasement). Shah exuded confidence that Banerjee, who is contesting her former lieutenant and BJP candidate Suvendu Adhikari in Nandigram seat, will lose from the constituency in Purba Medinipur district.

Identifying cross-border infiltration as the biggest problem of the north Bengal region, which he claimed faced injustice at the hands of the TMC government, the Union home minister promised to completely stop illegal im-

migration from neighbouring Bangladesh if the BJP is voted to power in the state. He also promised that the BJP will spend Rs 2,000 crore annually on north Bengal's development and establish an AIIMS to cater to the medical necessities of the people of the region.

Addressing an election rally in Coochbehar district's Sitalkuchi, situated near the India-Bangladesh border, he said, "Cross-border Infiltration is north Bengal's biggest problem. The TMC government can never stop it, only we can." "Mamata Banerjee runs the state government on the 3T model of 'Tolabaji' (extortion), 'Tanashahi' (dictatorship) and 'Tushtikaran' (appeasement)," he said.

Exuding confidence of coming to power in the state with a mas-

sive mandate, Shah said, "We are winning in the first two phases of elections (held on March 27 and April 1). Mamata didi is losing in Nandigram." Shah accused the TMC government of meting out injustice to the north Bengal region. "Mamata didi has done nothing for the development of the region."

After coming to power, the BJP will constitute a North Bengal Development Board and spend Rs 2,000 crore annually on the region's development. "We will also establish an AIIMS, which will cater to the medical necessities of not only Coochbehar district but also of the entire region," he said. The constituencies in Coochbehar district will go to polls in the fourth phase on April 10. Results of all the 294 assembly seats will be declared on May 2. (PTI)



AINRC will be dumped by BJP: Narayanasamy

CHENNAI

SENIOR Congress leader and former Puducherry Chief Minister V. Narayanasamy on Friday said the AINRC, heading the NDA in Puducherry, would be dumped by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), its ally, once the Assembly polls on April 6 are over.

In a video message, Narayanasamy said the AINRC leader N. Rangasamy should be wary of the BJP as all his expectations that the BJP-led government at the Centre would bring developmental schemes to Puducherry would remain unfulfilled. He said that the BJP is not interested in the development of Puducherry and said that it did not help in the development of the Union Territory when AINRC was in power from 2014 to 2016 when Narendra Modi was in power in New Delhi. In his video message, Narayanasamy also said that the people of the state of Puducherry will teach a befitting lesson to the NDA and cautioned Rangaswamy to be wary of the BJP.

Narayanasamy also reminded him that BJP leader and Union Home Minister during his roadshow in Puducherry on Thursday did neither promise any development for the UT, nor promise statehood for Puducherry.

DINHATA/NATABARI
/FALAKATA (WB)

ASSERTING that she was winning the election from Nandigram, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that she does not need his "suggestion" on contesting from an alternate seat. The prime minister had on Thursday asked Banerjee to clarify whether there is truth in "rumours" that she would file her nomination for another seat going to the polls in the last phase, maintaining that the TMC chief has admitted defeat in Nandigram.

"I want to tell the prime minister to control his home minister first and then try to control us. We are not your party's members that you will control us," Banerjee said at an election rally in Dinhat in the north Bengal district of Coochbehar. Banerjee had on Friday alleged that Shah was influencing central forces to behave in a partisan manner during the Bengal polls. "I am not your party's member that you will suggest I contest from another seat. I have contested from Nandigram and will win from there," she added. Baner-



jee, who began her north Bengal tour with the rally here, alleged that the election is not being conducted by the Election Commission but by Amit Shah, the Home Minister. She also alleged that the central forces were being used to intimidate the voters. "I want more than 200 seats, since anything less than that will mean they (BJP) will buy the 'gaddars' (traitors)," Banerjee

said, apparently admitting that TMC MLAs may be up for grabs if her party wins by a slender margin in the elections to the 294-member assembly. The TMC supremo while speaking at Falakata in Alipurdwar, claimed the names of 14 lakh Bengali speaking citizens residing in Assam were deleted in NPR, and maintained the BJP had similar plans for Bengal also. (PTI)

India declines to comment on Pakistan's flip-flop on bilateral trade

NEW DELHI

INDIA on Friday declined to comment on Pakistan's flip-flop on plans to go for limited imports of sugar and cotton from the country. "We have seen reports on this. But as is evident, we are not the right party to whom this question should be directed at," said Arindam Bagchi, Spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). His response came following questions on the issue at a media briefing. In a volte-face, Pakistan's Cabinet on Thursday rejected the proposal of a high-powered committee to import cotton and sugar from India.

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said there can be no normalisation of ties until New Delhi reverses its decision to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. The somersault came a day after the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) under newly-appointed Finance Minister Hammad Azhar on Wednesday decided to buy the two key items from India, lifting a nearly two-year-long ban on their import from the neighbouring country. Asked whether India is planning to restore the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Pakistan, Bagchi said he does not have any information on it. India withdrew the MFN sta-

tus to Pakistan following the Pulwama terror attack in 2019.

To a question on whether there was any interaction between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Pakistani counterpart Qureshi in Dushanbe on the sidelines of a conference, the MEA spokesperson said he was not aware of any such interaction with the Pakistani delegation. Both Jaishankar and Qureshi were at the Tajikistan capital earlier this week to attend the Heart of Asia conference. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is an initiative aimed at bringing together all the key stakeholders to bring lasting peace and stability in war-ravaged Afghanistan. (PTI)

TV actor among those arrested in ATM cards theft case

PALGHAR (MAHA)

A jobless TV actor was among five persons arrested in Maharashtra's Palghar district for an ATM cards fraud, police said on Thursday. The gang stole debit/credit cards on the pretext of helping people at ATM centres and then syphoned off money from the victims' bank accounts, said an official. The accused were identified as Dharmendra Dubey (40), Ajay Shukla (33), Bablu Saroj (35), Jitendrakumar Chamar (24), and Brijesh Chouhan (22). Shukla had acted in various TV serials including crime shows and even in a web series. He allegedly told police that he committed the crime as he was not getting work due to lockdown. Palghar crime branch is conducting further probe. (PTI)



CLAMPING DOWN

Police personnel stop a city bus after a passenger was spotted without mask, amid a countrywide surge in coronavirus cases in Nagpur on Friday

Stones pelted at Tikait's cavalcade: Police



JAIPUR

SOME people threw stones at a cavalcade of farmer leader Rakesh Tikait damaging his car's rear windshield when he was going to address a rally in Rajasthan's Alwar district on Friday, police said.

Tikait was not in his car when the stones were pelted at his cavalcade, Bhiwadi Superintendent

of Police Ram Murti Joshi said, adding no one was injured in the incident. Stones were pelted at the cavalcade when it reached Tatarpur chauraha on its way to Tikait's second rally venue, he said, adding the farmer leader addressed two rallies in the district on Friday.

Police have detained four persons, including a student leader in this connection, he added. (PTI)

TODAY'S QUOTE

India builds 37 km of highway per day

TREMENDOUS progress has been achieved in building national highways across the country. We have achieved a road building pace of 37 km of highways a day. These achievements are unprecedented and have no parallel in any other country in the world. Over the past seven years, length of national highways has gone up by 50 per cent

— Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister



GREEN PROJECTS

FMO commits \$137 mn to Everstone

DUTCH development bank FMO has committed \$137 million investment in the India's green growth fund managed by an arm of private equity major Everstone Group. Everstone Group on Friday said this investment by the Hague-based FMO will help accelerate investments into India's green infrastructure projects

FOREX (buy rates in ₹)

US Dollar	73.84	South	
Euro	86.96	African Rand	5.74
UAE Dirham	20.5	Hong Kong Dollar	10.81
Thai Baht	2.57	Japanese Yen	0.76
British Pound	102.18	New Zealand Dollar	51.9
Australian Dollar	56.25	Saudi Riyal	21.44
Canadian Dollar	58.8	Swedish Krona	9.64
Swiss Franc	78.46	Singapore Dollar	55.48

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BIZ BRIEFS

TTK Prestige's new product

TTK Prestige has come out with Tri-Ply Splendor cookware. This range comes equipped with three layers of metal bonded together, which enhances the strength of the cookware. Each of the products in the series comprises multiple layers for durability and visual appeal. The cooking surface comes with food grade 304 stainless steel, the middle layer is thick gauge aluminium and the outer surface comprises stainless steel. The price of the product ranges from Rs 1,420 to Rs 3,150. The products include a frying pan, tawa, kadai, casserole and a saucepan. The cookware comes with a lifetime warranty, which is available at all Prestige Exclusive stores and e-commerce portals such as Amazon and Flipkart. The range is rust resistant with cool touch handles, which ensures the safety of home-cooks.

Yamaha updates YZF-R15 3.0

Yamaha Motor Pvt Ltd has announced update on the existing range of YZF-R15 version 3.0. The super sports model will now be available in the all new enigmatic metallic red color from April 1, 2021, in India. The edition is priced at Rs 1,52,100. The YZF-R15 will retain the standard features such as 155 cc, liquid-cooled, 4-stroke, SOHC, 4-valve, fuel-injected engine that uses innovative technologies like Variable Valve Actuation (VVA) and Assist & Slipper (A&S) Clutch. The model is also equipped with a side stand engine cut-off switch which prevents engine ignition till the side stand is withdrawn & ensures convenience to riders. The BS-VI enabled bike is available in three existing colours Racing Blue, Thunder Grey and Dark Night. The product translates the passion with stylish appearance creating an everlasting sporty impression.

70% RISE IN ENGINEERING GOODS SHIPMENTS

Merchandise export growth at record high

India's total merchandise exports were \$34 bn in March 2021 as compared to \$21.49 bn in March 2020 registering a jump of 58.23%

NEW DELHI

RISE in outbound shipments of India's 'engineering goods' in March pushed the monthly growth of overall merchandise exports to a new record high. Accordingly, the 'engineering goods' exports jumped 70 per cent in March.

The sector was among the major commodity groups of export and recorded positive growth during March 2021 along with iron ore, electronic goods and gems and jewellery. Notably, India's total merchandise exports during this period were \$34 billion as compared to \$21.49 billion in March 2020 registering a jump of 58.23 per cent.

According to EEPC India, the sudden jump in outbound shipments offers hope of a sustained growth in the sector in coming months on the back of vaccine roll-out and containment of virus spread. It expects international trade could reach pre-Covid level sooner than expected as major economies of the world including India have taken steps to boost demand and enhance business activities. "The strong growth in exports of engineering



According to EEPC India, the sudden jump in outbound shipments offers hope of a sustained growth in the sector in coming months on the back of vaccine roll-out and containment of virus spread

goods in the month of March suggests a bright outlook for the sector but one needs to be cautious before arriving at any conclusion on the basis of short-term surge," said EEPC India chairman Mahesh Desai.

"Despite downside risks in view of new virus strains and possible disruption in trade we remain optimistic given that the government

has taken a number of measures to make India manufacturing hub and export competitive." As per EEPC India, engineering items account for about 25 per cent of India's total global exports in the goods sector and is one of the largest foreign exchange earners. It employs nearly four million skilled and semi-skilled workers.

RELIANCE EXTENDS DEADLINE FOR DEAL WITH FUTURE GROUP

NEW DELHI

RELIANCE Retail Ventures, the retail arm of Reliance Industries, has extended the timeline for six months to complete its Rs 24,713 crore deal with Kishore Biyani-led future group to buy its retail and wholesale business.

Reliance Retail Ventures Ltd (RRVL) has extended the timeline for the 'Long Stop Date' from March 31, 2021 to September 30, 2021, said a regulatory filing by Future Retail. "Pursuant to the provisions of scheme and other transac-

tion documents executed in relation thereto, RRVL has in exercise of the right provided thereunder, extended the timeline for 'Long Stop Date' from March 31, 2021 to September 30, 2021 which has been duly acknowledged by Reliance Retail and Fashion Lifestyle Limited, wholly-owned subsidiary of RRVL," it said. Long Stop, an established practice in mergers and acquisition transaction, is a timeframe in which parties agree on which all the conditions precedent for a transaction need to be fulfilled and the transaction completed.

NMDC sees 8% output growth in FY21

HYDERABAD

NMDC, State-run iron ore producer, has registered eight per cent growth in iron ore production at 34.11 million tonnes (MT) in FY21 as against 31.49 MT in FY20. Iron ore sales for FY21 increased by six per cent to 33.27 MT from 31.51 MT in FY20.

Quarterly production and sales of 12.31 MT and 11.11 MT in Q4 are the highest ever since inception and are more by 2.84 MT (30 per cent) and 2.49 MT (29 per cent) respectively over previous

year, according to a release.

Sumit Deb, Chairman and Managing Director, NMDC, said: "It has been a year of challenges for everyone. In spite of these situations, team NMDC has been able to excel on all fronts, including fight against Covid-19, enhance production and sales and also take care of its community. I congratulate all our employees



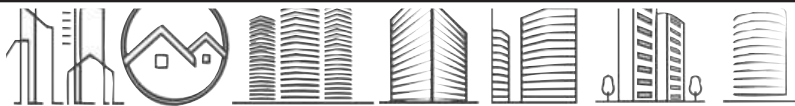
and stakeholders and take pride in their resolute efforts towards this goal. I am sure with this kind of zeal and enthusiasm, we will definitely surpass 42 MT in FY22."

The mining major's Bailadila Projects at Chhattisgarh have produced 26.56 MT in FY21 as compared to last year's production of 24.49 MT, thus registering a growth of eight per cent in pro-

duction. The total sales of iron ore from Bailadila projects in FY21 were 25.85 MT as against 24.46 MT in FY20, which is six per cent higher year-on-year.

The production at Kirandul Complex is 136.29 LT, monthly production 19.92 LT in March 2021 and daily production of 1.21 LT (as on March 28, 2021) are the highest ever since its inception.

The production at Bachel Complex is 129.27LT and monthly production 19.86LT (March 2021) are the highest ever.



REAL CORNER



Credai appoints Ram Reddy as national vice president

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

GUMMI Ram Reddy, Chairman and Managing Director of Hyderabad-based Ark Group, has been appointed as the national vice president of Confederation of Real Estate Developers' Association of India (Credai) for 2021-23. Reddy was the founding president of Credai Telangana from 2015-19 and is its Chairman since 2019.

Hailing from Nalgonda district of Telangana, Ram Reddy, a civil engineer by profession, established Ark Developers in 1989 and nurtured it into a diversified group with presence in real estate, building construction, infrastructure development and agro farms. Ark Group executed complex and innovative construction projects for blue-chip companies like Tata Aerospace, Mahindra, JBM, Decathlon and many more. He received many awards for his achievements in real estate and infrastructure sectors. He has been honoured with 'Business Leader' award by TV5 news channel in 2012. He also received World's Greatest Leaders award for 2018-19 in Dubai. Reddy also set up a foundation that helps the needy people in their educational pursuits and takes up other activities, benefitting the poor.



Aparna to launch 8 new projects in 2021

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

APARNA Constructions and Estates will launch eight new residential projects this year including its 58th project 'Aparna Sarovar Zicon' a luxury gated community located at Nallagandla in the city.

Out of eight projects, three are developed in Hyderabad, two in Bengaluru and also launch of two plotted layouts in Hyderabad. With these new ventures, the total portfolio of Aparna Constructions in the residential segment will be 64 projects. The newly launched 'Aparna Sarovar Zicon' is built on 25.6 acres and comprises 3,024 Vastu-compliant apartments spread over fourteen 26-storey towers. The project comprises 2 BHK, 3 BHK and 4 BHK luxury apartments ranging from 1240 sq ft to 2,765 sq ft. The



project will be tentatively ready by September 2024. "Aparna Constructions has continued to maintain a strong growth trajectory, despite the challenges that the lockdown and pandemic brought for the real estate sector. Our new launches are a testament to this

growth vision. Apart from the eight residential projects, we are also planning multiple commercial launches in the south market this year. To complement the growth vision, we will be ramping up our hiring efforts; our current plan is to on-board 400 people across new and existing projects," said Rakesh Reddy, director, Aparna Constructions and Estates. "We are seeing a positive uptick in consumer sentiment for residential properties. There has been an influx of new home buyers over the last few months. This has enabled the real estate industry to bounce back with rigor. In fact, at Aparna Constructions, we were able to achieve 100 per cent revival in consumer demand within the first two months after the lockdown. We are optimistic that this demand will continue to grow further this year," Reddy added.

Credai postpones Hyd property show

HANS BUSINESS
HYDERABAD

CONFEDERATION of Real Estate Developers' Associations of India (Credai) has postponed the 10th edition of Credai Hyderabad property show. The property show has been postponed in view of the GO issued by the Telangana government regarding no public gatherings and events till April 30, 2021, in view of the rising cases of Covid-19. "The government has issued orders imposing restrictions on public gatherings, congregations, rallies, and processions due to the increase in the Covid-19 cases. In line with the government directive, we are postponing the 10th edition of property show," said P Ramakrishna Rao, President, Credai Hyderabad.

We will get back with the revised schedule for the property show as and when the Government feels safe to allow organizing such events, he added.

"We would request the prospective home buyers to beware of any promotion and attractive real estate deals being propagated through various social media platforms re-



V Rajashekar Reddy, General Secretary and P Ramakrishna Rao, president, Credai

garding UDS or pre-launch sale of properties. At Credai, we care about the safety and well-being of customers and urge people to do thorough research and only purchase the RERA Telangana registered properties to safeguard your hard-earned money," said V Rajashekar Reddy, general secretary, Credai-Hyderabad.

NEW DELHI

HYDERABAD stood at 122nd position globally in terms of annual appreciation in housing prices during October-December 2020 as rates for residential properties in the city rose marginally, according to Knight Frank.

As per Knight Frank's Global Residential Cities Index Q4 2020, Bengaluru was at 129th position, Ahmedabad 143rd,

Housing price rise: Hyderabad ranks 122nd globally

Mumbai 144th, Delhi 146th, Kolkata 147th, Pune 148th and Chennai at the 150th place in the global list.

"Hyderabad is the only Indian city globally to witness residential price appreciation in Q4 2020, positioning at 122nd rank with a marginal 0.2 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) rise in

home prices," Knight Frank India said in a statement. Chennai was the lowest-ranked Indian city at the 150th spot, registering a 9 per cent decline in home prices during October-December 2020 as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. Among the other Indian cities that have seen de-

growth in home prices, Bengaluru saw a decline of 0.8 per cent y-o-y, followed by Ahmedabad 3.1 per cent, Mumbai 3.2 per cent, and Delhi 3.9 per cent. Kolkata witnessed a y-o-y decline of 4.3 per cent in home prices, while Pune fell 5.3 per cent. Globally, Ankara (Turkey) ranked first with an annual price

appreciation of 30.2 per cent, followed by Izmir in Turkey with a 29.4 per cent increase and Istanbul with a 27.9 per cent rise. Auckland in New Zealand is at 4th place with an appreciation of 26.4 per cent, St Petersburg in Russia at 5th position with a 25.4 per cent rise. As per the list, Seoul in South Korea was ranked

6th with a 22.3 per cent increase in housing prices, followed by Moscow in Russia with a 21.1 per cent rise. Ottawa Gatineau in Canada is at 8th position with a 19.7 per cent rise, Wellington in New Zealand was ranked 9th with an 18.4 per cent surge in prices.

Halifax in Canada ranked 10th

with an annual appreciation of 16.3 per cent in home prices. Prices across the 150 cities worldwide increased by 5.6 per cent on average in 2020, up from 3.2 per cent in 2019.

The report highlighted that 81 per cent of cities saw prices rise in 2020, and the index's annual rate of growth increased for the sixth consecutive quarter in Q4 2020. Besides, 20 per cent of cities registered double-digit growth in the year.

Dubai Para Badminton

TOP INDIAN SHUTTLERS
REACH KNOCKOUT STAGE

DUBAI

REIGNING world champions Pramod Bhagat and Manasi Joshi were among Indian stars who made it to the knockout stage of the 3rd Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum Dubai Para Badminton International 2021 at the Shabab Al Ahli Club here.

Top seeds Parul Parmar (WSSL3) and Krishna Nagar (MS SH6) also won their respective singles and doubles matches in emphatic manner on Thursday.

Bhagat, the reigning world champion, said he is aiming for nothing less than gold in his singles and men's doubles SL3-SL4 where he is paired with Manoj Sarkar.

He will face Ukun Rukaendi in his men's singles SL3 quarter-finals on Friday. The Indian defeated newcomer from Maldives Abdul Latheef Mohamed 21-10, 21-9 in his third-round singles match.

However, second seed Manasi was stretched to the limit before beating Turkey's Halime Yildiz 21-13, 13-21, 21-17 in a 38-minute women's singles SL3 Group B match.

"It's always tough to play against Halime, a strong opponent. She played very well and gave a tough fight. I also made a few mistakes which I will try to avoid as we progress to the next round. Felt a lot of energy in the whole stadium today," she said.

On Wednesday, Manasi had to overcome her Ukrainian opponent Oksana Kozyna in three sets in her second-round match.

With just four players in the fray, Manasi and Parul are expected to play the women's singles SL3 finals. Parmar in fact had won two out of three doubles matches also alongside Palak Kohli in women's doubles SL3-SU5.

The highlight of the day was Nitesh Kumar pulling off a shock win over third seed Indonesia Ukun Rukaendi 21-10, 21-13 in men's singles SH3



third round match.

"It feels great to win against a high ranked player and especially against a player who has been a world champion and is consistent about his performance. This boosts my confidence for the upcoming matches," said Nitesh.

Meanwhile, third seed Sukant Kadam who ran out a 21-11, 21-18 victor against Turkey's Sedat Tuemkaya

in his men's singles SL4 match said:

"As we still didn't enter into real computation, these initial rounds were a bit easy. But match by match I am getting to know how the other players are playing. This is also a good assessment of our own games," he said.

Kadam is expected to face Indonesia's Freddy Setiawan in the semi-finals. (IANS)

On this day: MS Dhoni led India to 2011 World Cup victory



NEW DELHI

ON this day 10 years ago, India lifted their second World Cup title, defeating Sri Lanka by six wickets in the final.

10 years have passed, and the memory of India lifting the World Cup title in 2011 still feels fresh as morning. Powered by the knocks of Gautam Gambhir (97) and MS Dhoni (91*), India defeated Sri Lanka by six wickets to lift their second World Cup trophy on this day.

Dhoni, the Indian captain in the tournament, finished the final with a towering six over the long-off against Nuwan Kulasekara, sending the entire nation into a frenzy.

With this victory, India became the first team to win a World Cup at home and became the only team to win the 60-over World Cup and the 50-over World Cup. Also, this was Dhoni's second ICC title as captain after having clinched the inaugural World Twenty20 in South Africa in 2007. In 2013, he would go on to complete the trinity, adding the Champions Trophy title to his trophy cabinet.

Chasing 275 to win, the men in blue held their nerves in the tense final to register a six-wicket win against Sri Lanka at the iconic Wankhede stadium in Mumbai. Opener Gautam Gambhir top-scored for the hosts with a special knock off 97, while, Dhoni played a memorable hand with his unbeaten 91.

Earlier, riding on Mahela Jayawardene's magnificent hundred Sri Lanka managed to put up a competitive score of 274/7 in 50 overs. The visitors put themselves in great

position after dismissing Sehwag and Tendulkar cheaply.

However, it was Gambhir who steadied the ship for India with an 83-run stand with Virat Kohli before the latter was dismissed for 34.

After Kohli's dismissal, Dhoni promoted himself up the order ahead of in-form Yuvraj Singh and it proved to be a masterstroke.

Both Gambhir and Dhoni then stitched a brilliant 109-run stand for the fourth wicket. During the chase, the Indian skipper also notched up his first World Cup fifty but Gambhir missed a memorable ton by just three runs as he was bowled by Thisara Perera for 97. However, Dhoni kept his calm and anchored India's chase with supreme ease.

The World Cup victory had added significance due to the presence of 'Master Blaster' Sachin Tendulkar in the squad. Tendulkar had represented India in five World Cups prior to the 2011 edition, but the coveted trophy remained missing in Tendulkar's enviable cabinet.

The wait eventually ended in 2011, which also turned out to be Tendulkar's final World Cup for India.

India had won the first World Cup in 1983 under the captaincy of Kapil Dev. While the victory in 1983 put India on the cricket map, the win 28 years later laid the foundation of India's dominance in the sport.

Since the 2011 edition, 10 players who were part of India's squad have retired, including captain MS Dhoni. From the team, only Virat Kohli, Ravichandran Ashwin, Harbhajan Singh, Sreesanth and Piyush Chawla are active in the sport.

Tashkent to host 2023 men's boxing World C'ships

TASHKENT

UZBEKISTAN capital Tashkent will host the 2023 men's boxing World Championships, the International Boxing Association (AIBA) said on Friday.

"I am happy to announce Uzbekistan, the country which has strong boxers and a champion's character, to be the host of the 2023 Championships. I am confident in the high-level organization, the huge fan's support and spectacular fights," said AIBA President Umar Kremlev in a statement.

Tashkent was awarded the World Championship after the s board of directors voted in favour of the move.

"Uzbekistan is one of the most active members of the International Boxing Association, we have rich boxing history. We are proud of our athletes and their victories. We have discussed the creation of an education centre for coaches and R&Js here in Tashkent. This centre will work for the whole region of Central Asia," said Boxing Federation of Uzbekistan president Rustam Shaabdurakhmonov. (IANS)

Overseas players make Afghanistan, Bangladesh stronger, says Stimac

NEW DELHI

INDIA football coach Igor Stimac has said that opponents like Bangladesh and Afghanistan are stronger than what they are made to be due to their policy of allowing overseas citizens to play in their teams.

Stimac's India had managed to hold free scoring Asian champions Qatar to a 1-1 draw in the 2022 FIFA World Cup qualifiers but went on to draw 1-1 with Bangladesh and Aghanistan before a 1-0 loss to Qatar put paid to their slender hopes of progressing in the qualifiers.

"Sometimes I get the impression that we have too much opinion of ourselves when it comes to opponents like Afghanistan or Bangladesh. Let me remind you that Afghanistan has allowed Overseas Citizen players to play for the National team. They now have 13 players coming from European leagues. They are competing in Germany, Poland, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden. They also have two players playing in Australian clubs, and one player in the USA top division. Bangladesh has introduced a 3 + 1 policy - and

their league is extremely competitive too," Stimac is quoted as saying by the All India Football Federation's (AIFF) website.

Stimac also defended his decision to make wholesale changes to the squad before they played UAE in an international friendly on March 29. India managed a remarkable 1-1 draw against Oman but ended up getting thrashed by the UAE 0-6 subsequently. He had made eight changes to the squad that played Oman, which itself had 10 debutants.

"The sole reason we played these games against Oman and UAE was to check how much our guys are able to match strong teams at t h e mo-



ment. And it wouldn't be fair if we hadn't given everyone a chance in their positions to check them out, and get the answers we are looking for. It was easier against Oman because they also went out of the competitive rhythm, but it was entirely different against UAE wherein the competitive rhythm was at the maximum - their championship is in full swing," Stimac said.

The defeat was India's heaviest defeat since their 1-9 defeat to Kuwait in 2010 and made it 10 matches without a win for Stimac as head coach of the team. The Asian leg of the World Cup qualifiers also double up as qualifiers for the 2023 Asian Cup as well, for which India are still in contention.

They need to win at least two out of three matches -- against Qatar, Bangladesh and Afghanistan -- to gain direct qualification to the Asian Cup, which Stimac said was the real target before the friendly against Oman. (IANS)

Down with COVID-19, Tendulkar hospitalised as precautionary measure

MUMBAI: Former India captain and batting icon Sachin Tendulkar has been hospitalised as a precautionary measure, six days after he tested positive for COVID-19.

The 47-year-old took to twitter to announce the development on Friday. "Thank you for your wishes and prayers. As a matter of abundant precaution under medical advice, I have been hospitalised. I hope to be back home in a few days. Take care and stay safe everyone," Tendulkar wrote.

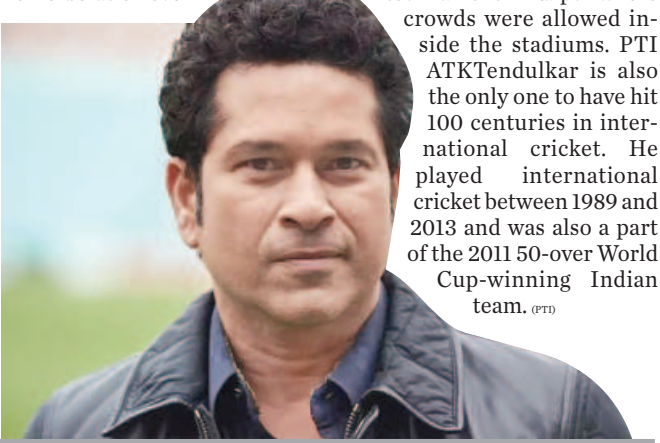
Tendulkar had tested positive for the dreaded infection on March 27 and was in home isolation ever

since. The batting great, who was part of India's historic World Cup win in 2011, also wished his teammates on the 10th anniversary of the victory.

"Wishing all Indians & my teammates on the 10th anniversary of our World Cup win," he tweeted.

Besides Tendulkar, former India all-rounder Irfan Pathan, his elder brother Yusuf and S Badrinath -- all of whom had recently participated at the Road Safety World Series Challenge -- have so far announced that they have tested positive for COVID-19.

Tendulkar had led the Indian team to victory in the veteran's tournament in Raipur where crowds were allowed inside the stadiums. PTI
ATKTendulkar is also the only one to have hit 100 centuries in international cricket. He played international cricket between 1989 and 2013 and was also a part of the 2011 50-over World Cup-winning Indian team. (PTI)



Miami Open: Barty into 2nd consecutive title clash

MIAMI

BEHIND five breaks of serve, world number one Ashleigh Barty of Australia rolled into the Miami Open women's singles final with a straight-sets win against fifth seed Elina Svitolina of Ukraine.

Barty, playing with intelligence, athleticism and a breathtaking diversity of shot, won the semifinal 6-3, 6-3 in one hour and 27 minutes on Thursday, Xinhua news reports.

"I think it was my best match in Miami," Barty said.

"I think with Elina, you have to produce your best tennis. Happy with the way we were able to execute today.

"Every time you're on the court you're able to improve, try to get a little bit better and grow every single day.

"And I think that's come with every single match. Every single match I feel like I've done something a little bit better and that's all you can ask," Barty added. (IANS)

'Like players, umpires too have form & I would like to make most of it'

BHARAT SHARMA

NEW DELHI

NITIN Menon, who showed remarkable accuracy in his debut series as an ICC 'Elite Panel' umpire, feels pressure situations bring the best out of him and like cricketers, he too wants to make most of this purple patch.

The 37-year-old from Indore was inducted into the ICC elite panel of umpires in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic in June last year but had to wait till this February for his first major assignment.

With the pandemic forcing the ICC to appoint local umpires in a bilateral series, Menon officiated in all four Tests between India and England besides three of the five T20s and three ODIs. By the end of it, he was showered with accolades for his stellar performance.

Speaking to PTI, Menon, who is now quarantining in Chennai ahead of the IPL, looked back at his gruelling assignment with fondness.

"The last two months have been great. It gives one great satisfaction when people notice and appreciate your good work. This series was al-

ways going to be a very challenging one because of the hype associated with it - a place in the World Test Championship final at stake, both teams coming back from impressive overseas wins, challenging pitches to officiate on.

"As for the white-ball series, it was between the two top-ranked teams in the world. Taking all these factors into consideration, I am pleased that we did well as an umpiring team," said only third Indian in the ICC elite panel after S Venkataraghavan and S Ravi.

As world's two top teams fought it out in the middle, Menon was an epitome of calmness. Out of the 40 referrals taken against his decisions during the series, only five were upheld. More importantly, only two decisions were overturned out of 35 referrals taken against his lbw decisions.

The DRS, especially the umpire's call, once again was a big talking point throughout the series. In a normal scenario, Menon won't get to officiate in back to back games over two months. So, how did he cope up with high pressure scenarios match after match?

"I believe umpiring is all about mental tough-

ness. More the pressure better is the focus. If we can give our best performances when we are under pressure, that is the true reflection of how strong we are mentally. It's not new for me to officiate in back-to-back matches, thanks to the amount of domestic cricket organised in India. On an average, we do eight four-day first-class games on the trot in Ranji Trophy, with travel in between from one venue to another.

"Even in the IPL, we do around

14-16 games without a break, so all this experience has really helped me in this series. Like players, umpires also have form. I always feel that when in good form, I should do the maximum number of games without any break," said Menon, who played two List A games for Madhya Pradesh and

comes from a family of umpires.

With his consistent performances, Menon has got closer than ever to his dream assignment -- the Ashes -- but for that to happen, the COVID related restrictions have to ease. When at home, Menon likes to watch the game on television and while he is in the middle of the action, he makes a conscious effort to enjoy it even in the tensest of situations.

"I enjoy it thoroughly (in the middle).

If I don't enjoy my job as

an umpire, then it will

reflect on my performance. Enjoying the game is another way of releasing the pressure. We have the best seat in the house to watch the game.

"And whenever I find time, I make it a point to watch international cricket as it helps me professionally. I have particularly enjoyed watching the Ashes



Nitin Menon