

DECCAN Chronicle

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED ENGLISH DAILY IN SOUTH INDIA
KARIMNAGAR | SATURDAY | 20 FEBRUARY 2021

WEATHER

Max: 27.8°C
Min: 18.4°C
RH: 93%
Rainfall: 4.7 mm
Forecast: Cloudy sky.
Rain likely in parts of city.
Max/Min temp. 29/19 °C

COVID-19 COUNT

CASES	DEATHS
(+14,132)	(+113)
1,09,76,388	1,56,237
STATE GOVERNMENT BULLETINS	
(+165)	(+1)
TS: 2,97,278	1,623
(+79)	(+1)
AP: 8,89,156	7,167

CASES AROUND THE WORLD

11,10,28,030
DEATHS
24,56,554
COUNTRIES AREAS WITH CASES
219

worldometers.info/coronavirus

ASTROGUIDE

Sarvari: Uttarayani
Tithi: Magha Shuddha Ashtami
till 1.29 pm
Star: Rohini full day
Varjyam: 11.46 pm to 1.33 am
(Sunday)
Durmuhurtam: 6.43 am to 8.15 am
Rahukalam: 9 am to 10.30 am
HJRI CALENDAR
Rajab 7,1442 AH
PRAYERS
Fajar: 5.40 am
Zohar: 12.40 pm
Asar: 4.42 pm
Maghrib: 6.25 pm
Isha: 7.32 pm
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.39 AM
SUNSET TODAY 6.19 PM
MOONSET 12.39 AM
MOONRISE 12.09 AM

COUNTER POINT



Lift? Sure, but you will have to pay 50% of the petrol cost!

SHORT TAKES

e-Vehicles mulled for all govt staff

New Delhi: Transport minister Nitin Gadkari on Friday made a case for making it mandatory to use electric vehicles for all officials in government ministries and department. He also suggested that government should give subsidy to buy electric cooking appliances instead of giving support for buying cooking gas to households.

Uber's UK drivers get workers tag

London: Taxi ride-hailing giant Uber must classify its drivers as workers with minimum wage, holiday and sick pay rights, rather than be categorised as self-employed, the UK Supreme Court ruled on Friday. The decision follows a long-running legal dispute which the American company had taken right up to the highest court in Britain.

SC rejects plea against MP law

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea challenging the validity of Madhya Pradesh ordinance regulating conversions due to inter-faith marriages. The apex court bench asked petitioner lawyer Vishal Thakre to go to the MP High Court in the proceedings conducted through video conferencing.



NATION | 4

Sreedharan ready to be Kerala CM

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WORLD | 5

Prince Harry to lose all honorary titles

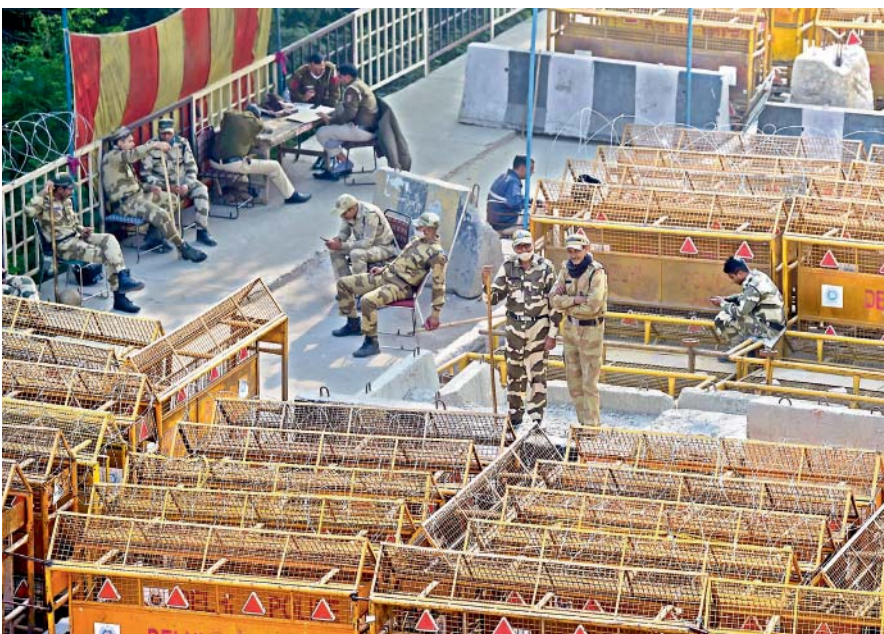
SPORTS | 8

Medvedev sets up Oz Open final with Djokovic



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Battle ready



Security men near barbed wires and barricades at Ghazipur border during farmers ongoing protest against the farm laws in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

ELIGIBLE ADIVASIS AWAIT OLD-AGE PENSIONS FROM STATE GOVT.

DC CORRESPONDENT
KERAMERI, KOMARAM
BHEEM ASIFABAD, FEB. 19

Many elderly Adivasis are waiting for their applications to get the nod for availing old-age pension benefits as they were earlier rejected with the officials stating 'under age' though they had crossed the eligible age to get pensions.

Many of them were happy when Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao announced that the state government would release new pensions soon and these elderly people pinned hopes that their applications will be considered, this time around.

It may be recalled that the government was also trying to cut down the age of eligibility to 58 years from 65 and data was collected from the ground.

The age of many illiterate Adivasis was mistakenly registered as being less than the actual one in Aadhar cards though they have crossed 65 age and many of them are between 70 and 80 years.

■ **Page 2: Elderly rue officials' apathy**

Centre's delay in notifying 2 districts hits hiring drive

KCR's plans to fill 50,000 vacancies in limbo

L. VENKAT RAM REDDY | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

An "inordinate delay" on the part of the Central government in approving and notifying two newly formed districts in Telangana state has blocked the K. Chandrasekhar Rao-led state government's plans to take up recruitment drives to fill over 50,000 vacancies in various government departments, said a top official on condition of anonymity.

Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao had on December 13, 2020, had announced the intent of the government to fill over 50,000 posts within three months. However, it has

● **KCR'S DECISION** to create two more districts — Mulugu and Narayanpet — in 2019 has affected the existing zones, which require the Centre's approval and the Presidential assent.

not made headway even after more than two months, the senior official pointed out.

The CM had reorganised 10 districts in Telangana state to 31 in 2016, besides augmenting the two zones into seven. He also created two multi-zones, all of which decisions the state government sent to the Union home ministry for approval.

Post the approval from the ministry, the decision was sent to President Ram Nath Kovind for final approval. President Kovind approved the zonal changes in May 2018, after which the Centre issued a gazette notification immediately.

However, the Chief Minister decided to create two more districts in 2019 (Mulugu and Narayanpet), taking the total to 33. It was done to fulfil a poll promise ahead of the 2018 Assembly polls, due to strong demands from the local people. This affected the zones by shuffling some districts.

■ **Page 2: Hiring without Prez nod will invite mess**

As Jagan reigns supreme, Naidu's hubris hits TD hard

SRIRAM KARRI | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

A long spell of a confrontational stalemate in Andhra Pradesh, featuring the YSR Congress government led by Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and the State Election Commission led by the commissioner Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, invariably ending in court, has finally found a thaw.

People of the state, who were watching with bated breath the visceral antagonism — personal and bitter — were finally given an opportunity to speak. They spoke. And how!

The people of Andhra Pradesh, taking an unforgiving view of Chandrababu Naidu's shenanigans, tired of his obstructionism and back-room manoeuvring, have all but wiped out the Telugu Desam from the map of political relevance in the state.

Even in Naidu's strong-hold and fortress of Kuppam, a bastion he could hold even against the onslaught of late Dr Y.S. Rajashekar Reddy, has crumbled after over 30 years. More than four out of five panchayats in Kuppam now fly the flag of the YSRC, a feat unparalleled in the state's history.

Jagan Mohan Reddy, the young Chief Minister, has trumped over the machinations of his snolly-goster senior. The TD's rout is so complete, its burial by people into the dust so undoubted that it is easy to say that Naidu's hubris and perpetual opportunism have all but



Chief Minister Y.S. Jaganmohan Reddy inaugurates new Chariot of Lord Sri Lakshmi Narasimha swamy at Andarvedi temple in East Godavari district on Friday.

killed the party he stole from his father-in-law and founder late N.T. Rama Rao.

If the TD looks like it is still alive, and hardly it is, it is because nature abhors a vacuum and the YSRC needs some semblance of an Opposition, however moribund.

Naidu, who, in his delusional calculations, wanted to simultaneously trounce the trio of enemies — Narendra Modi, Chandrasekhar Rao and Jagan Mohan Reddy — is now left with dust for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Led by wrong strategies conceived by himself,

carved by his personal insecurities and inability to smell the coffee, Naidu, who like Gandhari from the Mahabharata, voluntarily blindfolded himself to everything except caste and unfair gains, blinded by mammonism, lust for power and money, and an inability to resist the lure to bequeath the throne to his undeserving son, Nara Lokesh, who has never won an election involving common people, still alone in vain glory today of a legacy he could never create.

■ **Page 2: BJP will take over opposition's mantle**

4 killed in Galwan clash, admits China

Indian and Chinese troops end confrontation at Pangong Tso; talks on over other friction points

PAWAN BALI | DC
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

Indian and Chinese troops have completed their disengagement from the most contentious friction point, Pangong Tso, in the Eastern Ladakh after nine months of an eyeball-to-eyeball military stand-off.

Corps Commanders from India and China will meet in Moldo on Saturday morning for the 10th round of talks to discuss disengagement at other friction points in Ladakh — Depsang plains and Gogra-Hotsprings.

On Friday, China for the first time officially acknowledged that its four soldiers were killed and one officer was seriously injured during clashes with Indian troops in the Galwan Valley in June last year. The Indian Army had lost 20 soldiers including Col. B. Santosh Babu, the Commanding Officer of 16 Bihar, during the clash.

Earlier this week, Indian Army's Northern Commander Lt Gen Y.K. Joshi



In this image taken from video footage run on Feb. 19, 2021 by China's CCTV via AP Video, Indian and Chinese troops face off in the Galwan Valley on the disputed border between China and India on June 15, 2020. — AP

had said that Indian observers had counted more than 60 Chinese casualties being picked up on stretchers and taken back after the clash.

"But whether they were fatal or non-fatal, we can't say with authority. So I will not give a figure. But recently, TASS, the Russian (news) agency had put out a figure of 45 (Chinese soldiers killed

during the clash) and I think that could be the figure we can look at," he had said. As part of disengagement, both India and China have withdrawn around 200 tanks and armoured vehicles and troops from the north and south banks of Pangong Tso.

■ **Page 2: No patrol in disengagement zone**

Trees felled for open cast mine

A. RAVINDRA SESHU | DC
KHAMMAM, FEB. 19

Botany students of JVR government degree college in Sattupalli who conducted a dendro-chronology study on trees felled for the open cast mine of Singareni Collieries have found that the average age of these trees were of 12 to 80 years.

The students studied the

dendro-chronology of 42 felled trees as part of a macro anatomy exercise. The trees had been felled between Lankapally and Kistaram in Khammam district. They counted the annual growth rings of dead trunks. Each annual ring had dark and light colours. The study exposed the environmental imbalance caused as a result of the tree-felling.

D. Rajkumar, second-year B.Sc student, said the dendro-chronology method helps find the age of felled trees. This is the science of dating events, environmental change etc by using the characteristic patterns of annual growth rings in timber and tree trunks.

The annual rings of the timber showed the seasonal variations a tree faced

in its lifetime. Irregular and close-overlapping annual rings showed frequency of dry periods, levels of pollution and wounds to trees. The trees felled for road widening etc included Banyan, Neem, Pongamia, Cieba, Albizzia, Nallamaddi, Jambul and other shade-giving varieties.

In dendro-chronology, two rings are calculated as a one-year period.

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IN BRIEF

WOMAN'S VOTER I-CARD HAS VENKATESH PHOTO

DC CORRESPONDENT
KURNOOL, FEB. 19

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

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

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

NO PATROL IN DISENGAGEMENT ZONE

FROM PAGE 1

China has now vacated the area between Finger 4 to 8 on the north bank of Pangong Tso, which its troops had occupied in May 2020. India claims that its territory is up to Finger 8. The Chinese soldiers have dismantled the military infrastructure set up at Finger 5, including jetty and a helipad. Both Indian and Chinese troops have also vacated the Kailash range on the southern banks of Pangong Tso.

Indian Army on Tuesday had released videos, which showed Chinese troops dismantling sangars, temporary structures, and loading up supplies provisions onto trucks. The Chinese soldiers were also seen using earthmovers to dismantle shelters and restoring the landforms as per the agreement.

The videos also showed a large number of Chinese soldiers de-inducting and moving back on trucks.

As per the agreement, the Chinese troops will move east of Finger 8 on the north bank of Pangong Tso and the Indian troops will move to their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3.

There will be a temporary freeze in patrolling by both sides in the area between Finger 4 to 8 on the northern banks of Pangong Tso till both sides reach an agreement.

ELDERLY RUE OFFICIALS' APATHY

FROM PAGE 1

Many of them, including women, were shocked that they were denied pension and their efforts to explain to officials went in vain.

Revenue officials registered the age of Adivasi as per their wish since many were illiterates and had no birth certificates.

Atram Lethu of Token Movad of Kerameri mandal said he was denied pension though his age was over 65 years.

"I was fed up after repeated appeals to officials for sanction of pension", said Lethu and added that the state government should take this age-related technical problem into consideration while issuing new pensions," he said.

There are many such people among the Adivasis who were denied their rightful old-age pension. The old-age pension (Asara) of ₹2,016 would be a great help to them to meet their day-to-day expenses.

TIGER ENTERS VILLAGE IN ASIFABAD DIST

DC CORRESPONDENT
KOMARAM BHEEM ASIFABAD, FEB.19

Villagers of Gundepalli in Penchikalpet mandal are in panic over reports that a tiger tried to kill a cow in the cattle shed of one Gadam Pocham during early hours of Friday. The ir fears have only multiplied after forests officials visited the village and collected some pug marks.

This is the first incident in the recent past where a tiger has reportedly entered the village looking for cattle. It fled after some villagers spotted it and raised a cry. In all probability, it is the same tiger that had attacked a few cattle in Penchikalpet and Bejjur mandals in the last 15 days.

CCMB discovers 5,000 Covid variants in India

Most dominant one found in 82.29% of Coronavirus cases

KANIZA GARARI | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

A research paper of Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), published in the *Indian Academy of Sciences* journal, has mentioned that over 5,000 different variants of SARS-CoV-2 have been found in India during the course of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

The most dominant variant among them is A 23403G, discovered among 82.29 per cent of Coronavirus cases. The variant has D614G spike protein that is able to spread more quickly than the wild-type variant O, which emerged from Wuhan. The O variant is, however, no longer seen anywhere in the world.

Researchers have determined that D614G protein mutation is more in human respiratory cells. For this reason, doctors on Day 1 found a few viruses in the lungs. Within 24 to 48 hours, they found that lungs had turned fully white with this virus. This has been one of the causes of deaths in India due to Covid-19, state medical experts. This variant spread fast from May 2020, accounting for 42 per cent of samples tested. It was largely prevalent in Delhi, Telangana state, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. It later spread to Haryana, MP, West Bengal, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, where the numbers were fewer compared to other states. Researchers have pointed out that D614G is

the dominant mutation. If the new variant B.1.1.7 of Britain is found in more than 100 cases, it could become a cause for worry. As a result, researchers say it is important to carry out more genome sequencing in different areas of the country to control it. If it remains uncontrolled, it could overtake the D614G strain. They state that, luckily, there is so far no evidence that there is community transmission of B.1.1.7.

"We are not getting sufficient samples for testing as required. Sequencing is expensive and resources have to be provided for the same. Till regular and sufficient samples are not collected, it will be difficult to trace B.1.1.7. It is likely to overtake the present strain and drive the pan-

demic in 2021," as senior scientist at CCMB said.

B.1.1.7 has the ability to cause either mild or severe disease among people. This variant is associated with increased risk of death compared to other variants.

Due to S gene target failure in the new variant, there is a likelihood of more cases being missed in viral diagnosis.

The other variant found in 81.12 per cent of population is C14408T, along with mutation P314L. This has also been dominant in all the states of India. There have been 89 variants of the virus exclusive only to Kerala. These have not spread to any other parts of the country. The other mutation noted in Telangana is L46F. Andhra Pradesh has mutation

N440K and Gujarat L54F.

CCMB director Rakesh Mishra, author of the study, explained, "There is now emerging evidence that N440K, which emerged in Andhra Pradesh, is spreading a lot in the southern states. There is need for better surveillance to further understand its spread. The other two variants E484K and N501Y, which have higher transmission rates, are apparently low in India. This could also be because they are not being sufficiently sequenced. Accurate and timely detection of new variants may show greater infectivity or worse clinical symptoms. It is extremely important to check their spread to pre-empt disastrous consequences," the CCMB chief added.

Apollo sponsors 5K women farmers

SANJAY SAMUEL
PAUL | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

Promoting the cause of better food habits and improving the lives of women farmers, the Deccan Development Society and Apollo Hospitals have jointly sponsored an initiative among 5,000 women farmers to grow millets and making it a part of their daily diet.

Millets are superior to

rice owing to their rich content of protein, fibre, iron and calcium. They provide nutritional support and prevent its deficiency among vulnerable sections.

Consuming millets reduces diabetes prevalence among the population.

The Apollo group will be procuring thousands of kilograms of millets every month to support the women farmers of Sangareddy district.

High Court flays counsel, petitioner for misusing PILs

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

Stressing that private interests and issues should not be brought before court in the guise of public interest litigations, the Telangana High Court on Friday chided counsel and a petitioner for misusing the concept of PILs.

A division bench comprising Chief Justice Hima Kohli and Justice Annireddy Abhishek Reddy said it was in a mood to

impose heavy costs on the petitioner for the misuse of PIL provisions. The court noted that the petitioner had filed a case against Narne Estates Private Limited, a real estate firm, with which he was already engaged in litigation.

With a request from his counsel Rapolu Bhasker, the court let the petitioner withdraw the PIL and avoided imposing costs.

Panjal Suresh Goud had filed the PIL seeking a CBI inquiry into alleged land-

grabbing by Narne Estates. The petitioner implored the CBI, the revenue department and the defence establishment, contending that Narne Estates and its functionaries were acting against the interests of the people. The PIL said more than 1,500 acres of Boodhan land was acquired by the company for real estate purpose. However, the petitioner did not disclose to the court that he had filed personal litigations against the company.

Police rescue kidnapped boy

NAVEEN KUMAR | DC
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

In a joint operation, the Abids police and Maharashtra cops rescued a three-year-old boy who was kidnapped while playing on a pavement near Gandhi Bhavan in the city earlier last week.

The police arrested one Shyam Bheem Rao Solanki, 22, a stone cutter from Malegaon of Maharashtra, for allegedly kidnapping the child, Rudramani, and plotting to sell him, Hyderabad police commissioner Anjani Kumar said.

Rudramani is the son of M. Shiva Kumar and Ambika, construction workers from Bidar, Karnataka, who were staying with their son and two

daughters, aged 12 and 9, at a pavement. Shiva was working at a hotel. The accused, posing as Raju, along with one Bhogi Ram, approached the family on February 7 and promised them work in Mumbai. "Two days later, when the children were playing unattended near the escalator of Gandhi Bhavan Metro Station, Solanki kidnapped the child and walked to Afzalgunj and took shelter at the Musi huts, Kumar said. Following a complaint from Shiva Kumar, the Abids police booked a kidnapp case and deployed special teams, by which time Solanki had boarded a train from Secunderabad along with Rudramani and went to Sevagram in Maharashtra.

Hiring without Prez nod will invite legal mess

FROM PAGE 1

These changes are yet to be approved by the Union home ministry, post which, they would also require the Presidential nod.

Unless the President puts his stamp of approval, the sanctioned posts, which are distributed among all districts, zones and multi-zones, the state government cannot go ahead with its recruitment drive. If it does go ahead, it would only land in legal tangles, a legal expert said.

The Chief Minister brought a new zonal system in the state, according to which, 95 per cent of all government jobs sanctioned for a given zone are reserved for locals.

This local status of a candidate is decided based on her or his school study from Class I to VII. Based on these certificates, a candidate is considered a local for jobs. Those who have studied for four years in a particular district/ zone from Class I to VII are treated as a local of that particular district / zone.

The seven new zones created were Kaleshwaram (zone-1), Basara (zone-2), Rajanna (zone-3), Bhadradi (zone-4), Yadadri (zone-5), Charminar (zone-6) and

Jogulamba (zone-7). Zone-1 includes the districts of Asifabad, Mancherial, Peddapalli and Bhupalapally. Zone-2 consists of Adilabad, Nirmal, Nizamabad and Jagtial districts.

Zone-3 comprises Karimnagar, Siddipet, Siricilla, Kamareddy and Medak districts, while zone-4 comprises Kothagudem, Khammam, Mahabubabad, Warangal Urban and Warangal Rural districts.

Zone-5 comprises Suryapet, Nalgonda, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri and Jangaon districts, while zone-6 comprises Medchal-Malkajigiri, Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy and Sangareddy districts.

Zone-7 comprises V i k a r a b a d, Mahabubnagar, Gadwal, Wanaparthy and Nagarkurnool districts.

This apart, Chief Minister Rao created two multi-zones. Multi-zone-1 comprises Kaleshwaram, Basara, Rajanna and Bhadradi zones and multi-zone-2 comprises Yadadri, Charminar and Jogulamba zones. All these zones and multi-zones were created by taking 31 districts into consideration, which has the Central nod.

However, the two dis-

tricts the Chief Minister created later — Mulugu and Narayanpet — in 2019, and sent proposals to the ministry of home affairs, seeking to amend the Presidential Orders, taking the total 33 districts into consideration, is still pending.

This apart, Chandrashekar Rao also included Vikarabad district in the Charminar zone, following a demand from the locals. This also requires an amendment to the Presidential Order. Vikarabad is currently in the Gogulamba-Gadwal district. Due to lack of Centre's approval, the state government could not take up any major recruitment drive since 2018, the official confided.

The vacancies to be notified in new job notifications should be distributed among all districts and zones to provide 95 per cent reservations for locals. Unless the Centre approves the two new districts and minor changes in zones, the state government cannot go ahead, he said.

The state government had on Thursday again written to the Union home ministry to approve the new districts and zones, to enable it to take up recruitment drives.

al gathering is believed to have resulted in the fresh outbreak, were already suffering from Covid-19, officials said, adding that efforts were now on to trace all the primary contacts of the 33 persons who were detected to have been infected by the Coronavirus in Chegurthi.

There are fears that there may have been some superspreaders in the funeral gathering who may have contributed to the sudden spurt in cases in the village.

Dr K.K. Aggarwal, president of Confederation of Medical Associations in Asia and Oceania, said, "There are two reasons for the formation of clusters. Either there is a super spreader or there is a mutation in the virus.

BJP will take over opposition's mantle

FROM PAGE 1

The BJP, which is watching with the appetite of a piranha, will move in swiftly like it has in neighbouring Telangana state. It does not have to worry because it will hardly be fighting with the YSRC this term, but, instead, will only have to devour the flesh off the bones of a carcass that the TD has now become.

For Naidu, a vainglorious man used to boast that he will spin the wheel of politics, to be left with a bicycle without a wheel is hardly the fate he would have imagined, even three years ago. The decline will now get swift. Jagan Mohan Reddy's welfare politics have created for the young Chief Minister public goodwill of astronomical proportions. Even if he completely fails on the development front, creating jobs or inveigling investments, and most likely he will, he is going to retain the pole position for bagging another term in power.

Naidu, who already looks desolate and lonely, will find the last of his lieutenants deserting him and his party, hardly keen to remain on a yellow Titanic. The BJP's recruitment will contin-

Both of these must be investigated to control it locally."

Super spreaders of virus are those whose body sheds a lot of virus. They can be ailing or asymptomatic but whoever comes in touch with them gets infected due to the unusually large amounts of virus that is shed.

Super spreaders were noted from March 2020 to May 2020 in Telangana where a single person was found to have infected 40 people. The surveillance officials who were tracking and tracing stated that it is a part of infectious disease spread.

Explaining the trend, a scientist at the CCMB said, "There are super spreaders but are we carrying out surveillance.

● **NAIDU, WHO** already looks desolate and lonely, will find the last of his lieutenants deserting him and his party, hardly keen to remain on a yellow Titanic.

ue, even as Jagan Mohan Reddy will watch the traffic jam on the one-sided street with sangfroid disdain and characteristic nonchalance.

None, except the most die-hard supporters or the woolly-eyed of Naidu's supporters, or members at the core of his cabal, will fancy his chances in an election over eight years from now, or believe Nara Lokesh can do a Jagan on AP politics.

Naidu may rue his fate in his solitude, or cutting his losses pragmatically, merge the TD with the BJP, make peace with Narendra Modi and Amit Shah with the humility of repentance, and save his people and give himself a chance to be part of a battle against his Telugu rivals — Chandrashekar Rao in Telangana state and Jagan Mohan Reddy in AP — on the winning side.

In either case, NTR will be smiling in his grave. All debts will be paid soon.

Only Cong can do justice to youth, employees: Uttam

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president N. Uttam Kumar Reddy has asked the party cadre to focus on winning both the Khammam, Warangal and Nalgonda, and the Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy and Mahbubnagar graduate constituencies of the Legislative Council.

Reddy addressed a review meeting on Friday with the leaders of TPCC, DCC, Assembly, town and mandal office bearers of all departments and cells, virtually. The two Congress candidates, former minister G. Chinna Reddy (Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy and Mahbubnagar) and ex-MLC Ramulu Naik (Khammam, Warangal and Nalgonda) participated in the meeting.

The Nalgonda Lok Sabha MP said that both Chinna Reddy and Ramulu Naik have a clean image, vast experience in politics and a great record of serving people. He said that both of them were true warriors of the Telangana movement. Therefore, he said they have a great potential of winning the MLC elections compared to their rivals fielded by the TRS and BJP.

The TPCC chief said that MLCs Palle Rajeshwar Rao of the TRS and N. Ramchander Rao of the BJP had done nothing for their graduates' constituencies during the last six years. They miserably failed to represent their constituents, especially employees, professionals and jobless youth.

He said Rajeshwar Rao, who is re-contesting from the Warangal, Khammam and Nalgonda constituency, utilised his post to turn his educational institutions into a university.

The TPCC chief directed all party leaders to convince voters that only Congress candidates could represent their



BJP state chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar with Kisan Morcha leaders at the party office in Nampally, Hyderabad, on Friday

— DC

Bandi to cadre: Instal Shivaji statues, never mind the police

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

BJP leaders including Union minister of state G. Kishan Reddy and state party president Bandi Sanjay Kumar paid floral tributes to Chhatrapati Shivaji to mark his birth anniversary here on Friday.

Kishan Reddy offered tribute to the Shivaji statue at Warasiguda of his Secunderabad Lok Sabha constituency. Speaking at the event, he stated that youth will be inspired by Shivaji who protected the nation's culture.

Bandi Sanjay participated in the Shivaji Maharaj arati at Borabanda and paid floral tribute to the Shivaji statue. He alleged that the state government had prevented the installation of statues of Shivaji in Hyderabad.

Sanjay asked if Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao was interested in installing idols of the Mughal emperor Babar in

problems in a fruitful manner. He said that both TRS and BJP have commercialised politics.

The Modi government at the Centre and the KCR government in Telangana state have not fulfilled any of the promises they made to people. The best way to punish the ruling parties for non-fulfilment of promises was ensuring the victory of Congress candidates for both MLC seats.

He said a message should be conveyed to employees that they would get appropriate fitment and decent hike in HRA only if they defeat TRS and BJP in MLC polls. Similarly, he said that jobless youth must give TRS a big shock if they wish to get the promised unemployment allowance of ₹3,016 per month. Uttam Reddy said that the BJP government has neglected Telangana ever since its formation in 2014. He said none of the promises made to Telangana under the AP Reorganisation Act were fulfilled. He said a railway coach factory at Kazipet and a steel plant at Bayyaram could have generated hundreds of jobs. But the Centre did not initiate these projects.

The Congress leader said that TRS was not serious in filling up 1.91 lakh vacancies in different departments, having focussed only on taking loans of over ₹3 lakh crore to fund various irrigation projects to get kick-backs.

Commenting on the murder of lawyer couple, Gattu Vaman Rao and Nagamani, he said that Chief Minister Chandrashekar Rao did not condemn the incident even after two days. By remaining silent, the Chief Minister was sending a wrong message to TRS men with criminal background that they were free to carry on illegal activities.

He reiterated the demand that a CBI enquiry should be ordered into the murders.

Telangana state. He asked why the government had not installed Shivaji statues and why it had instructed the police to object to installing the statues.

He said that BJP leaders and activists need not worry about police restrictions. The BJP will always support the cadre for their sacrifices for protecting Hindutva, he said and urged party cadre to instal the Shivaji statues in every colony and gully. "If the government obstructs the programme, we will see to the downfall of the government," the BJP state president said.

Sanjay also said that only saffron flags should fly in the coming election and no flags of any other colour should be seen in the state.

"The cadre should work hard to win every election from *galli* to Delhi, there should be no scope for other parties," Sanjay said.

OTHER STORIES

IND. MLC CANDIDATE ASSURES SKILL TRAINING CENTER

DC CORRESPONDENT
KHAMMAM, FEB. 19

Yanala Asha Jyothi, an independent candidate contesting from Nalgonda-Khammam-Warangal graduate constituency, assured to set-up skill training centre for the unemployed graduates in the constituency. She said that she will work to set up a skill training centre on behalf of the government not only for software jobs but also other type of jobs.

"The candidates can get jobs easily after imparted training in various skills. I knew the problems of unemployed graduates and they are struggling to get the job", she said. The free insurance to each graduate is must in the present situation and she will make an attempt for it. Asha has also promised to fight for the couple employees to place wife and husband at same work location.

LAYWERS BOYCOTT COURT DUTIES, STAGE PROTEST

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, FEB. 19

Advocates boycotted their duties second day on Friday in Nizamabad in protest against the murder of the advocate couple in Peddapally. Under the aegis of Nizamabad Bar Association, the advocates staged protests with black badges. They demanded an Advocates Protection Act and punish the killers of the advocates in Peddapally district. The protests were staged at a court complex in Nizamabad.

AWARENESS DRIVE ON NLSA IN NIZAMABAD TODAY

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, FEB. 19

District legal services authority organise an awareness programme on NLSA (victims of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation), scheme-2015 on February 20. The programme will begin at 12.30 pm at Nyaya Sevasadan at ghd DLSA premises in the court complex. Principal district and session judge, chairperson of DLSA K. Sai Rama Devi will attend as chief guest.

SANT SEVALAL JAYANTHI OBSERVED

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, FEB. 19

Members and leaders of Lambada community have observed 282 Jayanti of Sant Sevalal Maharaj at various places in the erstwhile Adilabad district on Friday. Khanapur MLA Rekha Naik and Utnoor ZPTC Charulatha Rathod, Congress party senior leader Bharath Chowhan and local political leaders and community elders participated in the Jayanti celebrations organised in Utnoor town. Political and community leaders took out a procession and garlanded the Sant Sevalal Maharaj's photo.

Addressing on the occasion, leaders remembered the contribution of the Santi Sevalal for the empowerment of the community and appealed youth and children to follow the his footsteps.

CM DEPUTES TEAM TO STUDY DELHI'S ARCHITECTURAL

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao sent a team led by roads and buildings minister Vemula Prashanth Reddy to New Delhi to examine buildings, especially Rastrapati Bhavan, Parliament, North Block and South Block housing the Central Secretariat.

The team was asked to examine the stones used in their construction and explore how similar stones could be used in the construction of the Telangana Secretariat complex, the dream project of the CM. The team comprises R&B engineer-in-chief I. Ganapathi Reddy, executive engineer N. Shashidhar, architects for the new Secretariat Oscar & Ponnai, and representatives from Shapoorji Pallonji, which is building the Secretariat.



Cyclists on the new cycling track of 2km set up between Fatima junction and Subedari in Hanamkonda on Friday.

—BY ARRANGEMENT

Officials plan to set up 54 km cycling track

Project taken up as part of India Cycles4Change Challenge

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB. 19

The Greater Warangal Municipal Corporation (GWMC) has set off promoting cycling among the citizens of the tri-cities with the new cycling track set up between Fatima junction and Subedari in Hanamkonda.

The project was taken up as part of the India Cycles4Change Challenge, an initiative of the Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and India's Government to inspire and support Indian cities to implement cycling-friendly initiatives response to COVID-19 quickly.

The city featured as one of the 25 in the stage 1 list of finalists in the cycles4change challenge. However, staying ahead of the rest, GWMC has already completed stage two of the challenge, which is implementing the proposal. GWMC Commissioner Pamela Satpathy told *Deccan Chronicle* they had chosen the best possible location for the 2km stretch of the cycle track. "With educational institutions

like the National Institute of Technology, the University Arts and Science College and several others in the vicinity, we believed this stretch would be best suited for providing a cycling track.

Warangal is one of the only four cities in the country to finish the pilot project from scratch. In the next phase, we have plans to set up another 54 km of cycling track in the GWMC area in the coming days," she said.

Ms Pamela added that they intend first to inculcate the practice and bring about the people's acceptance to ride bicycles to advance its efforts in promoting cycling.

When asked about some of the issues raised by cyclists regarding vendors occupying the track and the bollards placed to restrict the entry of two-wheelers, the commissioner said they would support the police department in shifting the fruit vendors to the designated vending zones constructed for them.

"We practically measured and decided the spacing between



The new cycling track laid by GWMC in Warangal.

● Warangal city featured as one of the 25 in the stage 1 list of finalists in the cycles4change challenge. However, staying ahead of the rest, GWMC has already completed stage two of the challenge, which is implementing the proposal.

● WE HAVE plans to set up another 54 km of cycling track in the GWMC area in the coming days," she said. Ms Pamela added that they intend first to inculcate the practice and bring about the people's acceptance to ride bicycles to advance its efforts in promoting cycling.

bollards so that only cycles can pass and not two-wheelers. Some people are criticising

the project just for the sake of criticising and are unappreciative of our efforts," she said.

VENDOR HELD FOR KILLING CONSTRUCTION WORKER

DC CORRESPONDENT
HYDERABAD, FEB. 19

Neredmet police arrested a 23-year-old for kidnapping and murdering a construction worker to rob her valuables. Police recovered gold and silver ornaments worth ₹1.10 lakh from the accused, P. Suresh a vendor.

The kidnap and murder of M. Chandrakala, 43, a construction worker, was reported earlier last week.

Police said Suresh and his younger brother were earlier arrested for the kidnap of a minor girl in Kurnool. Suresh had borrowed money to pay for his bail.

Police said Suresh, who was selling women's accessories in Neredmet, took Chandrakala on his scooter by promising her work at a construction site on February 9. He took her to a secluded place in the Kowkur forest where he strangled her with a rope and fled with her ornaments. Suresh hid the body in some bushes.

Based on a complaint from Chandrakala's son, the police booked a missing case and after analyzing call data records and footage from surveillance cameras, nabbed Suresh late n Thursday night. He was taken into custody and confessed to the killing during interrogation.



Migrant workers who came to reap chilli in fields cooking food at the fields in Julurpad mandal.

Guest workers back to work at Julurpad

DC CORRESPONDENT
JULURPAD (BHADRADRI), FEB. 19

Guest workers from Maharashtra, Odisha and Chhattisgarh, who had abruptly left their places of work following the lockdown since March 23, 2020, are back at Julurpad mandal after a gap eleven months.

These labourers used to come and work in the chilli fields in Julurpad every year as migrant workforce. They would set up tents near the fields, work, cook food and stay there for the entire duration of the harvest. Chilli farmers provide power and water free to these workers.

Sekhar, a farmer from Julurpad, said nearly 4,000 migrant workers come to the mandal during the harvest season to work at farms in Julurpad, Gandhinagar, Papakolli, Suraram, Padamata Narasapuram and Anantharam. Chilli crop is

raised over 3,500 acres in Julurpad mandal. The chilli farmers will also engage these workers in tending to or harvesting other crops like cotton and paddy.

Sadanlal, who came from Chandrapur in Maharashtra, said the male and female workers remained for the past 11 months in their native villages. "The situation has changed now and transport vehicles are plying," they said.

The workers said they reach the chilli farms in groups by engaging trucks from their native places. They also bring in their children who would help the parents in cooking and the like.

A worker gets ₹8 per kilo of chilli pods reaped. The farmers say that with the arrival of these workers from other states, the reaping of the harvest will be done in a speedy manner.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The public in general are hereby informed that Sri Gopal Agayya Kanaparthi, S/o. Gopal Agayya Kanaparthi, R/o. Saraswathi Colony, Degloor Road, Udgir, Lathur, Maharashtra State made an application for availing purchase loan before ICIC HFC Ltd. Lathur Branch to purchase the RCC house H.No. 10-5-146 in the land admeasuring 181.5 Sq.Yards in Sy. No. 81 situated at Kisanagar, Karimnagar City and entered into an agreement with Sri Erroju Laxmana Chary, S/o. Ramaswamy, R/o. Kashmirgadda, Karimnagar City & District. The said Sri Erroju Laxmana Chary was purchased the said house from Sri Erroju Ramaswamy, S/o. Venkatesham, R/o. Kodurupaka Village, Boipally Mandal, Karimnagar District through Registered No. 7418/2016. It represented by Sri Erroju Laxmana Chary that he was lost its link document Original Registered Sale Deed No. 2844/2006 and Original Registered Sale Deed No. 5076/1996, and the same was not traceable. Therefore general public are hereby informed that if anybody has got any claim or right over the said Registered Sale Deeds, They may submit his objections with documentary evidence within 15 days from this publication to the undersigned. Later, said ICIC HFC Ltd., Lathur Branch will initiate the loan proceedings.

Sd/- Sana Chandra Mohan Advocate (AP/138/1995) Flat No. 303, Sree Sai Avenue, Mukarampura, Karimnagar, Mobile: 9666077777, 9141499999

PSPCL Punjab State Power Corporation Limited

Regd. Office: PSEB, Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001
O/o CE/MM, Room No. 215, 2nd floor, Multi Store Building, PSPCL Head Office, The Mall, Patiala. Phone No. 0175-2213047, Mob: 96461-22954, 96461-11034, e-mail: po-transformer@pspcil.in, Corporate Identification Number (CIN) : U40109PB2010SGC033813, Registration Number: 33813, website: www.pspcl.in; e-tendering portal : https://eproc.punjab.gov.in

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender Enquiry No.	Q-3992/20-21/PO-T/CE-MM
Scope / Short Description	Procurement of 25,000 Nos. EEL-3 (re-designated as EEL-2 as per Amendment no. 4 to IS 1180)/Star-2 (New), ISI Marked, 11/0.433 KV, 16 KVA, Three Phase, 50 cycles, outdoor type, oil immersed, naturally cooled, core or Shell type, Stack/ wound core type construction (aluminum wound), CRGO / Amorphous core distribution transformers complete with fittings as per PSPCL specification & conforming to IS 1180 Part-1 (2014) & 2026 (with latest amendments).
Start date for down loading of specification/tender documents from PSPCL's web site https://eproc.punjab.gov.in	22.02.2021
Last date for down loading of specification/tender documents from PSPCL's web site https://eproc.punjab.gov.in	09.03.2021 (upto 11:00 AM)
Last date of bid submission	09.03.2021 (upto 11:00 AM)
Bid opening date	12.03.2021 (02:30 PM)

For detailed NIT & Tender specification please refer to https://eproc.punjab.gov.in. **Note :** It is informed that in case tender process is not completed due to any reason, no corrigendum will be published in newspaper. Details regarding corrigendum may be seen on official PSPCL website www.pspcl.in.

C-66/21 RO : 76155/12/106/2021/1633 Chief Purchase Officer/MM, Central Purchase Organization, PSPCL, Patiala.

Chatrapathi Shivaji Jayanti celebrated

DC CORRESPONDENT
ADILABAD, FEB. 19

Leaders of all the major political parties and many people and activists of Hindu organisations participated in the Chatrapati Shivaji's Jayanti celebrations. They paid rich tributes to the Shivaji at various places in the erstwhile Adilabad district on Friday.

Adilabad MP Soyam Bapurao and senior BJP leaders and RSS activists and leaders participated in the rallies taken out locally. Soyam Bapurao participated in the Chatrapati Shivaji's Jayanti procession in Nirmal, Ichoda and Bela. In Utnoor, BJP party Khanapur Assembly Constituency in charge Satla Ashok and former MP Rathod Ramesh and Hindu organisations leaders garlanded the Shivaji's photo. Adilabad MLA Jogu Ramanna garlanded the Chatrapati Shivaji's statue in the Adilabad.

ARVIND UNVEILS SHIVAJI STATUE IN BORGAM

DC CORRESPONDENT
NIZAMABAD, FEB. 19

Chhatrapati Shivaji Jayanti was celebrated across the district on Friday. The statues of Shivaji Maharaj garlanded by different organisations. Nizamabad MP Dharmapuri Arvind unveiled the Chatrapati Shivaji statue at Borgam village in Renjal mandal on Friday. Hindu Vahini set up the statue in the village. BJP Bodhan Assembly constituency in-charge Medapati Prakash Reddy, Capt. Karunakar Reddy and other leaders were present. Youths in large numbers took part in the Jayanti celebrations.

Speed breakers set to prevent mishaps

DC CORRESPONDENT
WARANGAL, FEB. 19

Following the death of three people, after a speeding car dived into the SRSP canal in Konkakapa under the Parvathagiri police station limits on the 10th of this month, the Parvatagiri and Sangem police, under the supervision of Parvatagiri Inspector of police Pulala Kishan took precautionary measures to prevent a recurrence of the incident.

As part of this, the police cleared the bushes on either side of the culvert and constructed speed breakers to control the speed of vehicles on the route.

Similarly, the police also set up a Flexi in the accident spot, indicating to motorists of the road accident. The local people were happy with the action taken by the police and offered their support. SIs Suresh, Prashant Babu and other personnel participated in the program.

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SHORT TAKES

AHMED PATEL'S SON SAYS READY TO CONTEST POLLS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PASSPORT SERVICES LINKED TO DIGILOCKER

DC CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 19

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

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

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

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

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

SHAHAB ANSARI | DC
MUMBAI, FEB. 19

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

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

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

Snow festival



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

— PTI

Political climate hots up in Kerala ahead of elections

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

GILVESTER ASSARAY | DC
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 19

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

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

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

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

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

Open for chief ministership if BJP wins, says Sreedharan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When asked about whether he will be open to chief ministership, he said, "If they (BJP) want, certainly. To tell you very frankly, unless I am the chief minister these (pri-

orities) cannot be achieved." He is likely to formally join the BJP on February 25 and said that he was entering the "political fray".

On the reasons for deciding to join the BJP which is in power at the Centre, Sreedharan said that he wanted to do things for the benefit of Kerala as the UDF and the LDF have not been able to bring any tangible progress to the state.

"Why I chose BJP is for a different reason. The two others in Kerala — UDF and LDF — have been ruling Kerala alternately.... They have not been able to bring any tangible progress to the state, not even one industry has come to the state in the last 20 years..."

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

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

— PTI

and house to landless and homeless people, social welfare pensions to the poor, development projects and the helping hand provided during Covid and back to back floods, it also has its share of controver-

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

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

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

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

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

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

Modi says Visva Bharati should help farmers

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

"I urge the students and teachers of this inspirational institution to help farmers, artisans living in villages adopted by the institution to find global markets for their products. That will be a step towards building an 'Atmanirbhar' (self-reliant) Bharat," he said. He told the gathering that with knowledge comes responsibility and the knowledge attained by them was not theirs alone but a legacy for future generations.

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

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

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

He encouraged the youth to take risks without the fear of failure.

"If your intentions are

Agri ministry gets nod to use drones

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

"The ministry of civil aviation and directorate general of civil aviation have granted conditional exemption for Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) usage to ministry of agriculture and farmers welfare (MoAFW)," an official statement said on Friday.

This will allow MoAFW to use drones for remote sensing data collection in agricultural areas of 100 districts of the country for gram pan-

PM INAUGURATES MAJOR PROJECTS IN KERALA

DC CORRESPONDENT
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 19

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

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

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

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

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

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

ON THE | ANVIL

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

India's next Mars mission likely to be an orbiter

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

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

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

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

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

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

Announcement of Opportunities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"CNES and Isro, with the

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

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

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

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

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

— PTI

Isro to give leg-up to space startups

Bengaluru, Feb. 19: ISRO has embarked on a mission to take startups in the space sector to a higher orbit with a string of initiatives to help them realise their business potential.

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

tion (Isro) K. Sivan said.

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

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

— PTI

SHORT TAKES

31 DEAD IN DR CONGO PLAGUE OUTBREAK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

U.S. SCIENTIST ACCUSED OF CAVIAR RACKET

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

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

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

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

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

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

OZ, FB IN TALKS OVER SWEEPING BAN OVER NEWS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nasa’s rover touches down on Mars

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

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

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

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

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

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

US President Joe Biden hailed the “historic” event.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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



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

Biden admin introduces Citizenship Act

Bill to create an earned roadmap to 11 million undocumented immigrants

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

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

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

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

US ends Trump policy, lets in refugees stuck in Mexico

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

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

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

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

United States.

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

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

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

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

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

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BREACH FUELS CALLS FOR U.S. ACTION ON CYBERSECURITY

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

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

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

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

MYANMAR’S ANTI-COUP MOVEMENT SEES FIRST DEATH

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

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

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

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

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

ROYALTY | STRIPPED

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

Prince Harry to lose all honorary titles

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

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

Under the terms of their

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It noted they had offered their continued support to the organisations they had represented “regardless of official role”.

“We can all live a life of service. Service is universal,” the spokesperson added. — AFP

DECCAN Chronicle

20 FEBRUARY 2021

Cong's Punjab lesson: Set store by local stalwarts

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

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

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

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

No doubt, the farmers' agitation helped the Congress greatly. Former party chief Rahul Gandhi's initiative in the Lok Sabha in holding two minutes silence — by treading into the Speaker's domain — in memory of the farmers who have died in the agitation could hardly have gone unnoticed in Punjab or anywhere else.

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

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

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

Prince's ransom for cricketers

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

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

DECCAN CHRONICLE

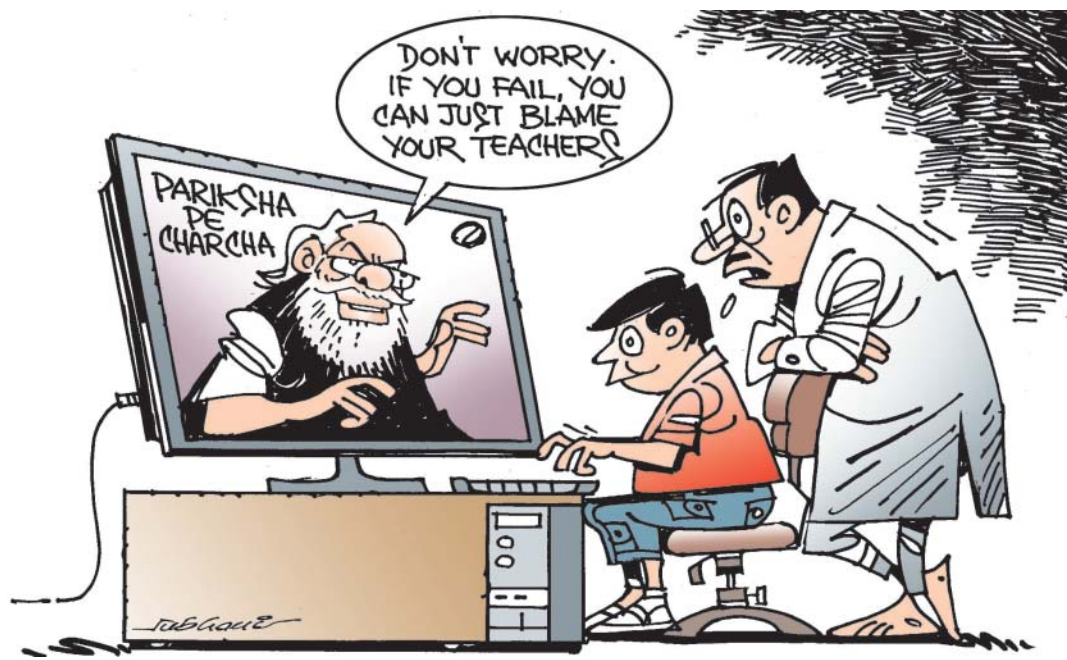
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Subhani



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



Shobhaa De

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

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

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

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

to bully and browbeat women — no questions asked.

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

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

does that diminish her truth.

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

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

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

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

LETTERS

HYDERABAD TREE CITY

We are delighted (*Hyderabad now India's Tree City, DC, Feb. 19*). The TRS deserves applause for encouraging planting of trees since the state formation. While millions of saplings are planted annually, not many survive. Indigenous species that can survive a prolonged dry spell must be chosen. Watering exotic plants every year may not be practical. Secondly, axes and knives are used to trim overhanging branches. It hurts the tree and eventually kills it. It is not only a loss of trees, but also the effort and money spent to raise them. Mechanical saws must be used.

K. Ahmedullah
Hyderabad

FUEL PRICE RISE

The people are suffering the most due to the relentless rise in fuel prices. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's allegation that his predecessors' policies caused the fuel price rise is illogical. The LPG price under Modi has risen to a whopping ₹715 per cylinder. The PM should concentrate on burning issues instead of TN and WB polls.

G. Vinod
Hyderabad

KILLING ADVOCATES

The government machinery has failed. When it remains silent about illegal works, those who raise an alarm about them will become victims. Investigation, legal procedures and punishments will be a long drawn affair. But the damage is already done. This is the trend in many issues.

S. Venkateswara Rao
Hyderabad

50 YEARS AGO IN

DECCAN Chronicle

Alarming rise in payments: ESI benefits

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

Farrukh Dhondy
Cabbages & Kings



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

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

— From **O For a Sip of Bepsi Kohla** by Bachchoo

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

quick BITES

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

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Urban consumer confidence up in February

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

Govt to appeal against Cairn Energy tax award



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

Foragen Seeds gets Israeli firm's breeding lines

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

UTI AMC launches Nifty 200 Index-based fund

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



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

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 19

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

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

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

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



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

Another precious metal, platinum, too saw a rally with the recovery in the automotive sector. Prices are at a six-year high and have moved up from \$560 an ounce in April to \$1,273—up by more than 120 per cent.

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

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

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

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

18 mn Indians to find new occupation by 2030: Report

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DHWANI PANDYA FEB. 19

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

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

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

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

How much money has been disbursed?

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



Irfan A. Kazi

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

What kind of returns do you expect?

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

Was there any push-back?

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

Who are your investors?

We have 14 investors, the government has 50 per cent

in the fund, Life Insurance Corporation and State Bank of India each have 10 per cent and the rest are other public and private sector players. Global funds have not shown a large interest for a couple of reasons: they prefer rent-yielding office and warehousing assets over residential. They also expect returns of more than 20 per cent to account for risks, including asset class and exchange rate, at which level our projects will be loss-making. We have raised Rs 10,000 crore so far (of the Rs 25,000 crore fund size) but the government has assured us that more will be made available when required.

What kind of challenge has the fund faced?

In many cases we are dealing with the bottom rung of companies, which have lost manpower and some even no longer have a finance team, so due diligence can be hard. A no-objection certificate from existing lenders has come only in some cases and takes an exceedingly long period of time. Then there are also pending court cases or home buyers demanding compensation.

How and where does the fund operate?

Before setting up the fund, we did a market study which established that about 40 per cent of the stressed projects were in the National Capital Region, about 25 per cent in the Mumbai Metro-politan Region and the top seven cities accounted for about 85 per cent of all the stalled projects. However, we are a pan-India fund.

—Bloomberg

Southern states, UP among losers of divisible pool share

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 19

SHRINKING SHARE

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

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

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

Among the 10 states, Karnataka will be the biggest loser, followed by Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Odisha. Tamil Nadu, too, is there in the losers' list. The loss has been due to the changes in computation of the income distance and tax effort criteria, says rating agency Ibra. For the award period FY2022-26, income distance and tax effort have been calculated based on data for FY2017-19, as compared to FY2016-18 for FY2021.

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

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

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

reward those states that have performed well on demographic management.

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

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

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

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, FEB. 19

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

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

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



Kochouseph Chittilappilly

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

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

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

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

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

TRAI SECY FAULTS RESIDENTIAL BODIES CHARGING TELECOM FIRMS FOR ACCESS



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

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

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

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

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

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

—PTI

TECH TO | THE FRONT

Firm aims to electrify two-thirds of global car sales by 2030

Honda appoints R&D chief as new CEO

RIVER DAVIS FEB. 19

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

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



Toshihiro Mibe

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

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

electric vehicle technologies and autonomous driving strategies.

Honda, like most legacy automakers, is struggling to find ways to fund next-generation electric and driverless car technologies while keeping its gas-powered car sales afloat.

Hachigo, who took office in 2015, sought to move away from past initiatives

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

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

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

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

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

—Bloomberg

SHORT TAKES

Pugilists Chanu, Vinka make semis

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

BWF extends Oly qualifying time

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

Star high jumper Vlasic retires

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

Krishna stars for Bhadradri

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

Live on TV

TENNIS

Australian Open: Women's singles final from 1.30 pm, followed by mixed doubles final on Sony Six, Sony Ten 2

CRICKET

PSL: Karachi Kings vs Quetta Gladiators from 7.30 pm on Sony Six

South Africa T20 League: Lions vs Warriors from 1.30 pm; Knights vs Dolphins from 5.55 pm on Star Sports Select 2, HD

FOOTBALL

English Premier League: Southampton vs Chelsea from 6 pm; Burnley vs West Brom from 8.30 pm; Liverpool vs Everton from 11 pm; Fulham vs Sheffield United from 1.30 am (Sunday) on Star Sports Select 1

UFC

Fight Night: Curtis Blaydes vs Derrick Lewis and other bouts from 6.30 am (Sunday) on Sony Ten 1, HD

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Money, Money, Money

Jamieson didn't know how much ₹15 crore was

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



New Zealand bowler Kyle Jamieson in this file photo.

₹9.25 crore IPL contract is nerve-wracking: Gowtham

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

so happy for me," Gowtham said.

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

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

ARJUN CAN'T WAIT TO WEAR MI'S JERSEY

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

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

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

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

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

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

MORRIS ROLE IS TO SUPPORT ARCHER: SANGA

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

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

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

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



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

Medvedev mauls Tsitsipas, in final

THE RESULTS

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

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

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

ELISE-SABALENKA DUO CLINCHES DOUBLES TITLE

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

It is likely to be their last for a while.

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

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

— Agencies

INDIA'S ANKITA DAZZLES, WINS MAIDEN WTA TITLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bruno nets brace in Man U victory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Australian speedster Jhye Richardson in this file photo.

I almost got blanked: Jhye

Christchurch, Feb. 19: Promising Australia fast bowler Jhye Richardson was left "excited as well as exhausted" after he earned a "life-changing" bid of ₹14 crore from Punjab Kings at the IPL auction.

Richardson was in quarantine in a Christchurch hotel room for the upcoming T20 International series against New Zealand when he tuned into the broadcast of the IPL auction in Chennai.

"My name came up and I got this wave of (nausea) just not knowing what to expect. For the first, what to me felt like about 20 minutes, no one put their paddle up and it's one of those things where you're just like, 'Oh no'. You have no idea what's going to happen," Richardson was quoted by *cricket.com.au*.

"Then the first paddle went up, which was probably (only) like 10 seconds or five seconds (later), but it felt like a

lifetime. I feel like I played a game yesterday. I mentally exhausted myself of feeling all these emotions, of feeling sick and excited."

"I almost blanked. I was watching it, but I felt like I wasn't actually watching it. After everything happened you're obviously really, really excited but then you just hit this massive wall," he said.

He said emotions took over and he felt as if he had hit a "massive wall". — PTI

Captain Virat opens up on depression

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

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

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

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

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

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



Virat Kohli

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

Kohli remembered feeling alone despite the fact

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

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

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

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

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

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