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## WINDOWS



*Puducherry Lt Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan during her visit to 'Anganwadi', in Puducherry on Friday*

## Australian PM urges Facebook to lift news blockade

CANBERRA: The Australian Prime Minister on Friday urged Facebook to lift its ban on news access for Australian users and return to the negotiating table with media organisations, warning that other countries would follow his government's example in making digital giants pay for journalism. Prime Minister Scott Morrison described Facebook's move on Thursday to prevent Australians from accessing and sharing news as a threat.

## Coronil gets Ayush Ministry certification

NEW DELHI: Yoga guru Baba Ramdev's Patanjali Ayurved on Friday said its Coronil tablet has received certification from the Ayush Ministry as a medicine supporting Covid-19 treatment as per the World Health Organization's certification scheme. Patanjali also released what it claimed was research work supporting Coronil's efficacy in Covid-19 treatment.



*Malkajgiri Congress MP Revanth Reddy felicitates BKU leader Rakesh Tikait at the Gazipur border in New Delhi on Friday*

## 3-day judicial custody for Disha Ravi

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Friday sent climate activist Disha Ravi, arrested for allegedly being involved in sharing a "toolkit" on social media related to the farmers' protest, to three-day judicial custody.



# Extensively used tech to probe Delhi riot cases: Police chief

PURNA SINGH  
NEW DELHI

DELHI Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava said that technology was used extensively to investigate over 750 cases related to the northeast Delhi riots that led to the arrest of over 200 people.

Addressing the annual press conference at Delhi Police headquarters on Friday, Shrivastava said 755 FIRs were registered in connection with the riots and his force ensured a "free and fair" investigation. Communal violence had broken out in northeast Delhi on February 24 after clashes between citizenship law supporters and protesters spiralled, leaving at least 53 people dead and around 200 injured.

"You are aware of the ri-



*Delhi Police Commissioner S N Shrivastava speaks during the 'Annual Press Conference', in New Delhi on Friday*

ots which led to 53 deaths and 581 injuries. Riots reached its peak on February 24 and 25 last year. A total of 755 FIRs were registered and we made it a point that no one had a grievance that their complaint was not acknowledged," he said. He said three SITs were formed to

investigate the cases. One of the cases was registered to unearth the conspiracy behind the riots, which was investigated by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police while the remaining cases were investigated by northeast district, he said.

**Continued on Page 5**



# New bill gives 8-year path to US citizenship

## Huge benefit to Indian IT professionals

WASHINGTON

IN a major move that will benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals in America, the Biden administration has introduced an ambitious immigration bill in Congress which among other things proposes to eliminate the per-country cap for employment-based green cards.

The legislation, known as the US Citizenship Act of 2021, hews closely to the outline that Biden sent to Congress on his first day in office. The proposal includes an eight-year path to citi-

zenship for most of the roughly 11 million immigrants living illegally in the US, bolsters the nation's refugee and asylum systems and calls for additional technology to be used to help secure the southern border.

The bicameral immigration 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 workers and those who came to the country legally. **Continued on Page 5**

## India-Australia partnership to play key role in shaping post-Covid world

NEW DELHI: The strong India-Australia partnership will play an important role in shaping the post-Covid world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday and expressed confidence that the two countries would take the lead in providing circular economy solutions. Addressing the valedictory function of India-Australia Circular Economy Hackathon, Modi said consumption-oriented economic models had put a great strain on the planet. "We must never forget that we are not the owners of all that Mother Earth has to offer, but merely its trustees for all the future generations to come," he said. Stressing that it is not enough to make production processes more efficient and less polluting, Modi said no matter how fast or slow one drives, if the direction is wrong, then one is bound to reach the wrong destination. "And so, we must set the right direction," he added. The Prime Minister called for looking at consumption patterns, and how their ecological impact could be reduced.

# 'Metro Man' throws his hat in the ring for CM post

## Predicts landslide migration to BJP in Kerala

NEW DELHI

ENTERING the political fray by joining the BJP, technocrat E Sreedharan, fondly known as India's 'Metro Man' said his main aim is to help the party come to power in Kerala and that he will be open to the chief ministership.

Sreedharan said his 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.

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."

**Continued on Page 5**

## GALWAN SHOWDOWN

# ROGUE CHINA ADMITS FALL OF 4 PLA SOLDIERS

NEW DELHI

FOUR Chinese military officers and soldiers were killed in last year's Galwan Valley clash in eastern Ladakh with the Indian Army, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) officially acknowledged for the first time on Friday.

Four Chinese frontier officers and soldiers stationed in the Karakoram Mountains have been recognised by the Central Military Commission of China (CMC) for their sacrifice in the border confrontation with India, which occurred in the Galwan Valley in June 2020, the PLA Daily, the offi-



cial newspaper of the Chinese military reported on Friday.

Those killed included Qi Fabao, the regimental commander from the PLA Xinjiang Military Command, state-un Global Times

quoted PLA Daily report as saying. A total of 20 Indian soldiers died in the Galwan Valley clash on June 15, regarded as the worst in over four decades at the India-China border.

**Continued on Page 5**

## India, China complete disengagement

### Next round of talks today

NEW DELHI: In what would mark a significant breakthrough in the over nine-month-long standoff in eastern Ladakh, the first phase of disengagement between Indian and Chinese troops, from both, the north and the south bank of Pangong Tso, is complete and the next round of the senior military commander-level talks are scheduled to be held on Saturday. **Continued on Page 5**

# NASA's Perseverance rover lands on Mars

## Begins mission to search for life on red planet

WASHINGTON

AFTER seven months in space, NASA's Perseverance rover survived a nail-biting landing phase to touch down gently on the surface of Mars on Thursday, ready to embark on its mission to search for the signs of ancient microbial life.

"Touchdown confirmed," said operations lead Swati Mohan at around 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 completed more than 11 minutes earlier, which is how long it takes for radio signals to return to Earth.

**Continued on Page 5**



After almost 300 million miles and seven months, NASA's science rover Perseverance successfully touched down on the red planet Friday



## MEET SWATI, THE INDIAN-AMERICAN WHO HELPED NASA LAND ROVER ON MARS

NEW DELHI: 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.

Swati Mohan also confirmed that the rover had survived a particularly tricky plunge through the Martian atmosphere. "Touchdown confirmed," exclaimed Swati Mohan, who emigrated from India to the US when she was only a year old. She says the Guidance, Navigation, and Controls Operations (GN&C) are "eyes and ears" of the spacecraft.

**Continued on Page 5**

## New curbs in Mumbai as Covid cases zoom

MUMBAI: The civic authorities in Mumbai on Friday clamped down with fresh safety measures as Covid numbers in the state and the city remained in an upward trajectory for a week, logging over 5000 cases on Thursday. Mumbai reported 736 cases. Citizens flouting rules for home isolation, weddings and public gatherings will be prosecuted, said an order from Municipal Commissioner Iqbal Singh Chahal.

# 56 kg gold given to weigh then PM Shastri will go to govt

## At present, this gold is lying in a cupboard in Udaipur Collector's office

JAIPUR

Gold weighing 56.86 kg, given to the District Collector in Rajasthan's Chittorgarh for weighing then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in wake of the 1965 India-Pakistan war, will be passed on to the government, a court has ordered.

The gold, valued at Rs 4.76 lakh at that time, is now valued at Rs 27.29 crore.

The District and Sessions Court in Chittorgarh has directed the officials concerned to hand over the gold to the Assistant Commissioner of Central Goods and Service Tax.

The controversy over ownership of the gold dates back to late 1965 when the precious metal was given to Chittorgarh District Collector for

weighing Shastri. The case has been heard five times earlier in different courts since then, and each time, the decision went in the government's favour.

At present, this gold is lying in a cupboard in the Udaipur District Collector's office.

On December 9, 1965, a person named Gunwant filed a case against Ganpat and two others, alleging that the accused did not return 56.86 kg gold to him.

On December 16, 1965, Ganpat handed over the gold to Chittorgarh Collector for weighing Prime Minister Shastri, who had a scheduled visit in Udaipur. However, Shastri passed in Tashkent in January 1966 following talks with Pakistan organised by the then Soviet Union.

**Continued on Page 5**

# Thousands of displaced families yet to receive VSP benefits

VASU POTNURU  
VISAKHAPATNAM

DECADES ago, people from 64 villages had sacrificed their lands for the establishment of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant (VSP) with a hope that a big industry would come up, providing employment to thousands of locals.

Close to 22,000 acres of land, including vacant sites and houses, were handed over to the authorities concerned for the construction of the plant. As a part of the first phase, land was ac-

quired in Nellimukku, Nadupuru, Sidheshwaram, Sitanagaram, Gangavaram and Dibbavanipalem panchayats.

In the second phase, Kondayavalasa, Vadlapudi and Aganampudi panchayats lands were acquired.

In 1966, the government issued a notification for the first phase of the land acquisition and paid only Rs 1,250 per acre as compensation to each displaced family. Dissatisfied over the amount received, the inhabitants staged protests that continued for a long



*Visakha Ukku Nirvasitula Ikya Sangham members staging a protest at Kurmannapalem seeking jobs at VSP in Visakhapatnam*

time to increase the compensation.

In 1987, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Justice RK Pathak handed over the revised

compensation to the tune of Rs 20,000 per acre. In addition, the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi promised to give a job to a person from each dis-

placed family. The same was also mentioned in the project report of the VSP. But till date, 8,000 families did not get employment in the plant.

Of the 16,600 inhabitants, only 8,500 families were employed in VSP on both permanent and temporary basis. Even for this per cent of placements, the youth had to put up endless fights. Those who sacrificed their lands for the VSP were given 107 square yards of house sites then.

Followed by a series of protests, permanent em-

ployment was provided to 5,000 locals in the presence of the then District Collector Arjuna Rao in 1984. After a while, 3,500 persons were given temporary jobs in a phased manner.

For a long time, stretching from 1991 to 2006, there was no recruitment for permanent jobs in VSP. In 2008, the then Union Steel Minister announced allocation of 50 per cent of jobs to the inhabitants. However, the proposal is yet to see the light of the day.

**Continued on Page 5**



# Womenia

TWEET PATROL



**LATA MANGESHKAR**  
@MANGESHKARLATA

नमस्कार, हृदयी स्वराज्ञ्याचे संस्थापक, अवघ्या भारतवर्षाचे परम  
दैवत, वशिवाचे शूरदधास्थान महाराज श्री शविछत्रपती यांना जयंती  
नमित्त माझे अनेक दण्डवत.. जय भवानी जय शविजी.



## Alia, Deepika hard to mimic: Jamie Lever

The comedian has featured in the web series #LiveltUp 2021

PUJA GUPTA

Comedian Jamie Lever has been entertaining her fans with her funny videos of mimicking different actors and actresses. But she finds it really hard to mimic Alia Bhatt and Deepika Padukone.

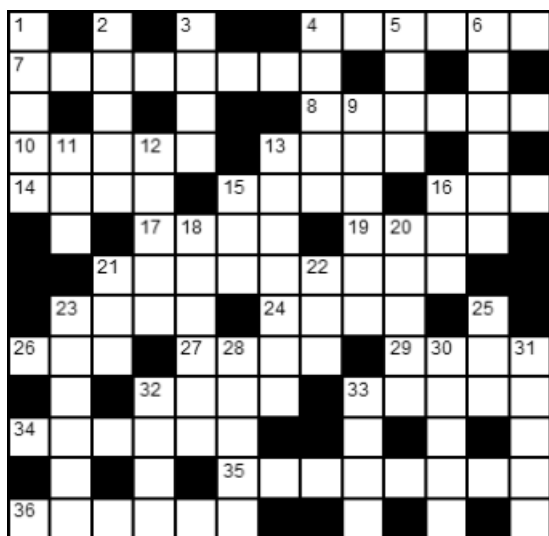
"I was trying to mimic Alia Bhatt and Deepika Padukone, it was not coming right. But I will crack it one day, I will do it for sure. I like to try new things and try copying new actors and actresses. I try to experiment all the time. Yeah, I find Alia Bhatt and Deepika Padukone really hard to mimic but I will do it someday," she tells.

Jamie retaliates that male actors are difficult to mimic. "I try to mimic lot of new actors and actresses. I think male actors are obviously difficult to do, you cannot get the voice right, but you can get the mannerism and body language right. So heroes are difficult to mimic," says Jamie who has associated with Godrej L'Affaire web-series #LiveItUp 2021.

The web-series has been conceived as a quirky courtroom theatrical in which viewers will see the year 2020, played by Jamie, put on trial for the disruptions it caused in our lives this year from travel and food to parenting, groom-

ing and various other nuances of lifestyle.

Asked who has been her inspiration, Jamie replies: "I am really inspired by the female actress-comedian Carol Burnett from Hollywood and she had her own show in 1950's. She is someone who use to do impersonations, comedy sketches, she had her own show on television where she would sing, do parody and things like that. I really take a lot of inspiration from her and I feel like if I ever have to have a show it will be something that. Carol Burnett is just phenomenal and you should look her up as she is just amazing."



M I S H A P C U T G  
A K C O I R O N L Y  
R H Y T H M E N O  
A L E P H E M E R A L  
C R I B O I K T  
A G R U M P S A F E R  
C H I S M B I D  
B Y T E S V O G U E L  
N F A R T R I O  
F I L I P I N O S C O  
C F T C L I E N T  
H A L F I N C A L E  
L Y E N O B E Y E D

SOLUTION TO FEBRUARY 19

### CROSSWORD

Across

- 4 Grammatical structure (6)
- 7 Summary (8)
- 8 Hire (6)
- 10 Ex-Hollywood star Errol \_\_\_\_ (5)
- 13 Praise (4)
- 14 Born Free lioness (4)
- 15 Female horse (4)
- 16 Hypochondria (3)
- 17 Pack (4)
- 19 Con job (4)
- 21 Language of Kerala (9)
- 23 South Africa's Hashim \_\_\_\_ (4)
- 24 Children's books author Blyton (4)
- 26 Unit of illumination (3)
- 27 Nobleman (4)
- 29 Twofold (4)
- 32 Craggy hill-tops (4)
- 33 The nature goddesses (5)
- 34 Ancient Greek region (6)
- 35 Go where it is forbidden (8)
- 36 Extension to hotel (6)

Down

- 1 Purbeck castle (5)
- 2 Famous diarist (5)
- 3 Baking chamber (4)
- 4 Curse (5)
- 5 Big Apple law enforcers (4)
- 6 Assumed name (6)
- 9 Breakfast cereal (6)
- 11 Attorney's deg. (3)
- 12 Of the nose (5)
- 13 Attorneys (7)
- 15 Extinct flightless bird (3)
- 16 Cured pork (3)
- 18 Aztec god of rain (6)
- 20 Golfer's aide (5)
- 21 2010 in Roman numerals (3)
- 22 In addition (3)
- 23 Capital of Texas (6)
- 25 Drain of strength (3)
- 28 Hold forth (5)
- 30 Eskimo boat (5)
- 31 Tibetan capital (5)
- 32 Make weary (4)
- 33 US space agency (4)

### SUDOKU



SOLUTION TO FEBRUARY 19



## Common myths about organic skincare products

N LOTHUNGBENI HUMTSOE

In today's generation, consumers have become more aware and conscious of harmful chemicals hidden in their skincare products. They have even become skeptical of using skincare that wear the claim of being "organic" and "all natural", often questioning if these claims are just marketing gimmicks or more importantly, if the lack of chemicals may contribute to the skin care not being as efficacious.

Dr Jagvir Singh, founder and president, Refresh Botanicals shares five common misconceptions about organic skincare that will make you rethink your regimen:

### Homemade organic face masks and lotions work the same as organic products

You may believe that by whipping up a yogurt and honey smoothie in your blender and using it as a face mask will benefit your skin as would purchasing an organic face mask. However, often skincare brands extract organic molecules from organical, whole plant ingredients.

While we're all up for a DIY face treatment once in a while, the ingredients you find in your kitchen can't really compare to the active ingredients found in organic skincare products. These special ingredients are usually extracted at the molecular level leaving, behind the most active and potent part for your skin care.

### Organic products are ineffective

Many people are afraid of



change and stick to a product that they are familiar with and have used for years. Unfortunately, many drugstore products have been diluted, watered down, and filled with an abundance of chemical preservatives to extend the lifespan. This means that while the product may offer quick results, you shouldn't hold your breath waiting to see any real long-term benefits for the health of your skin.

Organic products, on the other hand, are jam-packed with vital nutrients, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals at high concentrations that they truly feed your skin with the love that it needs. You'll instantly get that "glow" that is often achieved with your latest smartphone filter - except this time it's real! Radiant, hydrated and clear skin. After just a few uses, your friends will be asking what you have been doing differently. Think of yourself as an ambassador of the earth - share your secret: The use of organic skin care products has an everlasting effect on your skin

health (and even the planet).

### Organic Products Need Preservatives to last longer

Highly organic products often require premium packaging that are equipped with airless pumps. This prevents the highly organic plant material from oxidizing - thus spoiling. When looking for organic skincare, look for airless pumps - meaning that the product is being pumped through literally being pushed out of the container.

### Eating healthy is enough for great skin

There is no argument with the benefits of eating clean, antioxidant-rich foods and drinking tons of water. However, a healthy diet alone is not necessarily enough for great skin. While everything you eat does have an impact on your skin, food cannot cleanse away impurities and environmental toxins the way a good face wash can, or provide a protective barrier on the skin the way a moisturiser can. For truly beautiful skin, be sure to eat

healthy, exercise regularly, and practice safe, organic skincare. Organic skincare products should accompany a healthy lifestyle for a more youthful and fresher complexion.

### All "Natural Types" of skincare are created equal

There is a thin line between "organic" versus "natural" products. Note that we use the word natural here, and not organic. While many products may claim to be "all-natural" on their labels, it doesn't mean that their ingredients are in fact "organic". Natural products often contain natural ingredients but may contain pesticides and other harmful chemicals.

For a skin care brand to be able to wear the claim of "organic", ingredient suppliers have to undergo a rigorous process where they are monitored for many years to ensure that their farming methods are free of pesticides, herbicides and chemicals. Additionally, skin care brands must ensure that their manufacturers follow stringent practices to ensure there is no cross contamination of organic and inorganic materials.

In today's time awareness about chemical-laden products is gaining momentum gradually, which is highlighting the importance of natural organic skincare products. This increased awareness is making more and more people to switch to organic products. While more people are making the transition, more become mindful about the use of chemicals in regular everyday products and are adapting to the natural organic skincare regime.

## Fabrics that bring uniqueness to each culture

Studio Gaaba, a production and content communication house that works with brand stories and brand engagements shot Indian ethnic brand Label Varsha's latest collection showcasing a fascinating concept titled 'Kashmir to Kerala'.

Label Varsha, founded in 1984 specialises in women's traditional wear. The collection is timeless and highlights the uniqueness of cultures across the country. Each garment is a unique ethnic treasure. In a time that has divaricated us from everything that we called normal and kept most of us apart from families, the collection gives each culture a warm feeling of being at home. Each piece in the collection is unique to every culture in secular India and has an indigenous feel to it.

The concept of the shoot was inception, curated and conducted by Studio Gaaba in a manner where a single thread was used to bind together our entire country.

In the video shot by Studio Gaaba for the collaboration, various women belonging to different cultures and living in different parts of the country have donned the pieces. The idea was to bring to the forefront that even though we have geographical boundaries dividing us we are all bound by our values, virtue and the soil we hail from. The video is shot in prominent locations from North India to South India and includes cities like Kashmir, Punjab, Delhi, Kolkata and Kerala. The video shows striking images of Shikara, local bazaars and wide stretched farms. The imagery in the video is simply breath-taking and transports the viewers to the location while keeping the focus on the attires completely.

"Fashion is the one thing that has blurs the lines between cultures and religion. A lehenga is not just for a Punjabi woman, anyone can wear it. Through this collaboration, we wanted to celebrate the diversity and unity of all cultures," says Ankit Jain, Founder of Studio Gaaba.

"The collection is one of the finest collections and it would look beautiful on anyone. It brings out a certain grace in the women wearing it and it was an honour to be a part of this vision," he adds.



Studio Gaaba shoots label Varsha's collection with an awe-inspiring message







# The race to Mars intensifies

NASA landed a new robotic rover on Mars on February 18, its most ambitious effort in decades to directly study whether there was ever life on the red planet. At 3:48 pm Eastern time, controllers at the mission operations center at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory near Pasadena, California, received word from Perseverance that it had entered the top of the Martian.

Perseverance, NASA's most sophisticated rover to date, landed on Mars atmosphere at a speed of more than 12,000 miles per hour (19,300 kmph). This is NASA's first mission that will search for signs of ancient life on another planet. It launched from Florida at the end of July. NASA only lands a rover on Mars about every 10 years.

The last was Curiosity in 2012. In the final step, the rover was lowered at the end of a cable beneath a rocket-powered jetpack until it touched the surface.

At 3:55 pm cheers erupted in the control room with the announcement that Perseverance was intact on the surface. "Touchdown confirmed," said Swati Mohan, the NASA engineer who provided commentary on the descent. "I'm safe on Mars. Perseverance will get you anywhere," tweeted the official handle of the Perseverance mission. NASA has chosen the impossible landing site for a good reason. Scientists believe the area that now constitutes Jezero Crater was once flooded with water and was home to an ancient river delta. The process of land-

ing site selection involved a combination of mission team members and scientists from around the world, who carefully examined more than 60 candidate locations on the Red Planet.

After the exhaustive five-year study of potential sites, each with its own unique characteristics and appeal, Jezero rose to the top. Jezero Crater tells a story of the on-again, off-again nature of the wet past of Mars. More than 3.5 billion years ago, river channels spilled over the crater wall and created a lake. Scientists see evidence that water carried clay minerals from the surrounding area into the crater lake. Conceivably, microbial life could have lived in Jezero during one or more of these wet times.

If so, signs of their remains might be found in lakebed or shoreline sediments. Scientists will study how the region formed and evolved, seek signs of past life, and collect samples of

Mars rock and soil that might preserve these signs. Perseverance is NASA's ninth landing on Mars and the agency's fifth rover. In order to land, it had to go through the infamous "seven minutes of terror."

The one-way time it takes for radio signals to travel from Earth to Mars is about 11 minutes, which means the seven minutes it takes for the spacecraft to land on Mars occurs without any help or intervention from NASA teams on Earth. This rover is the heaviest NASA has ever attempted to land, weighing in at over a metric ton.

The spacecraft hit the top of the Martian atmosphere moving at 12,000 miles per hour and had to slow down to 1.7 miles per hour seven minutes later when the rover softly landed on the surface. The race to Mars has only begun. China will soon be landing its own rover on the surface. India tried and failed once.



# China to use Pak Army as mercenary force

N C BIPINDRA

NOBEL laureate V.S. Naipaul was not being facetious when he described Pakistan as a 'Criminal Enterprise'. It is, therefore, only to be expected that the army of a criminal enterprise behaves like a mercenary army.

Right from the beginning, the Pakistan Army was always ready to serve whoever was the highest bidder. Until the turn of the 20th Century, the Pakistan military functioned as guns for hire for the US, which bestowed the country with billions of dollars in military and economic assistance.

Apart from the US, the Pakistan Army was also ready to serve the Arab states in the Middle East in return for free money, jobs, and some spiritual satisfaction.

In the 21st century, Pakistan has found a new patron -- China -- which is fast replacing the US as the country that will fund Pakistan and stop it from sliding into bankruptcy. But, just as the Americans demanded their pound of flesh -- SEATO, CENTO, Afghan 'Jihad', 'War on Terror' -- so have the Chinese -- CPEC, Gwadar port, and perhaps Chinese enclaves on Pakistani territory.

Anyone who thinks this is a flight of fancy only needs to read an explosive report published in the Bangladesh newspaper 'Daily Sun'. According to this report, the Inspector General Frontier Corps (South) Major General Ayman Bilal told a Jirga comprising local influential persons and tribal leaders, most of them working as agents of the Frontier Corps and the infamous Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Military Intelligence (MI), that he was specially selected by the Chinese to bring peace in the restive southern districts and Makran belt of Balochistan.

General Bilal also disclosed that he had been mandated to sort out the Baloch resistance in around six months -- the struggle for Baloch independence is as old as Pakistan itself and its latest iteration started around 2001 and remains potent even after nearly two decades.

He said that once Pakistan got rid of the noose that FATF has around its neck, the Pakistani forces will go into Iran and act. He accused Iran of creating unrest in Balochistan and conspiring against CPEC and called Iran the biggest enemy of Pakistan. He claimed that the Chinese were ready to fund the entire operation and asked his audience to take whatever money they wanted to ensure the success of CPEC. Three things that clearly emerge from the 'confessions' of Major General Bilal are as follows: (1) China is fast emerging as the new colonial power in Pakistan, not only deciding policies of the Pakistani state, but also appointments of officials to serve its interests; (2) The genocide and 'Red Indianisation' of the Baloch will continue unabated, and it will not just be backed but also bankrolled by the Chinese; and (3) Iran remains an enemy of Pakistan and CPEC, and both China and Pakistan are preparing plans to carry out operations in Iran to target both Baloch and Iranian elements inimical to CPEC and Chinese presence, even bases, in the region.

Truth be told, none of these three things comes as any surprise; the only surprise is that these have been articulated clearly by a serving, and perhaps rising star, of the Pakistan Army, who has been handpicked by the Chinese to deliver on this agenda.

The growing Chinese influence and interference in Pakistan has increased exponentially since the start of the CPEC project in 2013. While Pakistan has always been careful to never go against China -- the infamous Lai Masjid operation in 2007 was a result of direct Chinese pressure on the then military dictator General Pervez Musharraf -- the sort of subservience that is on display today has no parallel.

In the last seven years, Pakistan has carried out a major military operation -- Zarb-e-Azb -- to appease the Chinese. On CPEC, Pakistan has surrendered its sovereignty and entered into ruinous financial contracts under Chinese pressure.

Wherever the Pakistanis have balked, the Chinese have refused to accommodate their concerns. And since China is the only game in town, the Pakistanis invariably give in after making a show of resistance. The Chinese have influenced not only who comes into the Cabinet. The earlier Planning Minister, who is supposed to be the point person for CPEC projects, was replaced under Chinese pressure to set up a CPEC Authority headed by a top retired Army General to ensure that there is no obstruction or hindrance to the CPEC projects. Now, China has got General Bilal appointed to snuff out any opposition to Chinese neo-colonial plans in Balochistan.

The ongoing genocide of the Baloch is also nothing new. Thousands of Baloch have been killed, thousands of others have been subjected to enforced disappearances by the notorious ISI and MI, giving Balochistan the nickname of 'Land of the Disappeared'. A puppet regime is installed in Quetta as show-boys to maintain the pretense of democracy.

But these political show-boys are powerless and all power vests in the military Generals. After some attacks by Baloch freedom fighters on Chinese engineers and workers and on CPEC projects, the Chinese have leaned on the Pakistan Army to brutally crush the Baloch resistance. In this venture, the Pakistanis have enlisted not just radical Islamic terror organisations but have also formed death squads of local mercenaries to kill the Baloch dissenters.

Pakistan has also been giving in to the Chinese demands for setting up enclaves where Chinese can live without having to interact with the natives. The fencing in Gwadar is one such plan to keep the natives out. Eventually, these tiny Chinese enclaves will become the colonial era equivalents of 'factories' that the European colonists set up in India and which became the springboard for the eventual subjugation of India. The other model being envisaged is that of Shanghai International Settlement that the British set up in the mid-19th Century and which lasted 100 years. Clearly, the natives do not fit into this plan. The residents of Gwadar are being eased out, cordoned off, and even their way of life is being destroyed.

It will not be long before the Baloch will have no presence in the cities and ports, where the Chinese are setting up shop and naval bases, and will be reduced to existence on reservations, much like the Red Indians.

Finally, there is the Iran angle. For a Sunni majority Pakistan, Iran has always been an eyesore, especially after the Islamic Revolution. While both countries have tried to paper over the big cracks in their relationship, neither is fooled by professions of peace and friendship made by the other side. If Pakistan backs Sunni terror groups and provides them sanctuary, the Iranians reciprocate by turning a blind eye to the activities of some Baloch freedom fighters that operate from its soil. Add to this the Taliban and ISIS angle, both of which are seen as Pakistani proxies in the region. On its side, the Iranians are building up the Zain-abiyoun and Fatemiyoun brigades to counter the Pakistani and Taliban designs. But it is not easy for the Pakistanis to strike inside Iran openly as long as the restiveness inside Balochistan is not brought under control. This is where the mercenary Generals like Bilal fit in.

The inexorable slide of Pakistan into the Chinese colonial construct is now a reality and it is only a matter of time before Pakistan is so leveraged to China that it will be forced to subordinate its sovereignty to China. This means giving bases, enclaves, and other concessions to China. And this will come at the cost of the Baloch, who will become aliens in their own land.

(The author is Chairman, Law and Society Alliance and Editor, Defence. Capital magazine. He can be reached at ncipindra@gmail.com. Views expressed are personal)

# Will Sharmila make an impact on TS politics?



IN MY OPINION  
V RAMU SARMA

On February 9, daughter of Andhra Pradesh and daughter in law of Telangana and politically ambitious Y S Sharmila Reddy readied herself to launch her party in Telangana with the promise to bring back 'Rajanna Rajyam'. She would be contesting the next Assembly elections which political analysts say would be held towards end of 2022.

It is a fact that Sharmila nursed political ambitions and has been the star campaigner for Jagan and had played a key role even when Jagan was in jail. She had organised a yatra during the period when Jagan was in prison and had consciously built her profile. So much so that political opponents felt that it was necessary to target her. Her personal life was written about as was her husband Anil Kumar's evangelism, with allegations that he was indulging in religious conversion with the support of the government.

But soon after the 2019 Assembly elections that swept Jagan Reddy to power, Sharmila fell silent. Hardly being seen with her brother since he took office, the rumour mills started to churn. From being spoken of as a possible minister or a Rajya Sabha MP, Sharmila disappeared from the political headlines, until now.

There were speculations that Sharmila was going to launch a political party in Telangana but no one knew what it really meant and in which direction Sharmila who was known as Jagananna Banam (Arrow from Jagan's bow) during last election in Andhra Pradesh would travel and who the target was.

Is this a part of the new strategy of TRS to see that they provide a punching bag to the people so that the anti-incumbency votes would be split? Has this

plan been scripted based on the advice of political strategist Prashant Kishor? Or Is she being propped up by the BJP, to split the Reddy and Dalit Christian votes?

Well there have been any number of theories making rounds since the day the news first broke out that Sharmila would float YSR Telangana Party. Though initially, the family rift theory was intense, it somehow was not logically appealing. It was said that she had anticipated some position either in government or a Rajya Sabha seat.

Since nothing of the sort had happened and as she was sidelined by her brother, theorists said she decided to launch a party. Fine but if that was so and if it was a rift in the family, she would have launched a party in Andhra Pradesh. What was the logic in thinking of launching a party in Telangana?

Apparently, there is something more than what meets the eye. It certainly is a well-calculated and well thought of move. Theorists are still having field day, but no one knows for sure what the real reason behind Sharmila's moves to float a new party in Telangana.

The latest theory is people are unhappy with TRS on many issues starting from poor performance on two-bedroom houses, dragging feet in giving unemployment dole and filling of vacancies in government departments. Calculations in Sharmila's camp is that with her entry into electoral politics, there could be significant shift of leaders and cadre from TRS to her new outfit. If that happens, it would certainly cause dent in the vote share of TRS.

In Khammam district, supporters of YSR are more. Similarly, in Nalgonda and Nizamabad districts Muslims are in good numbers and they too have been hardcore supporters of YSR in the past. Similarly, in Ranga Reddy, Hyderabad, Mahabubnagar and parts of Nalgonda, Reddys and Christians are in large numbers. Her strategists feel that she would be able to attract a major chunk of these sections of voters. It is also said that



There were speculations that Sharmila was going to launch a political party in Telangana but no one knew what it really meant and in which direction Sharmila who was known as Jagananna Banam (Arrow from Jagan's bow) during last election in Andhra Pradesh would travel and who the target was. Is this a part of the new strategy of TRS to see that they provide a punching bag to the people so that the anti-incumbency votes would be split? Has this plan been scripted based on the advice of political strategist Prashant Kishor? Or is she being propped up by the BJP, to split the Reddy and Dalit Christian votes?

her husband and evangelist Brother Anil Kumar can also play major role in attracting Christian community, some say.

It is said that Dalit Christians, Muslims and Reddy community account for over four percent of total voters in the state. The focus of Sharmila is to see that these sections rally behind her. In the GHMC elections, the Reddy community, majority of whom had come from Andhra Pradesh and settled here for several decades had voted in favour of TRS.

The question now is will she be able to wean away this section from TRS? Another theory is that though some disgruntled people from these sections may decide to rally behind Sharmila, majority of them would still prefer a time-tested party despite its omissions and commissions.

Interestingly, the social media wing of the TRS initially came out all guns blazing with memes and caustic remarks asking Sharmila to sort out her issues in Andhra Pradesh and not in Telangana. But surprisingly they were later removed which further added to the suspense. It is said that they were removed on the directions of the TRS leadership not to attack Sharmila. This once again ignited the talk that she was being propped up by TRS.

While there were reactions from all political parties most of them saying that Sharmila's party will not be acceptable in Telangana for two reasons. One she is from Andhra and secondly YSR was against bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, it was the TRS which maintained stoic silence initially. Analysts however felt

not in agreement with it on issues affecting the lives of people.

Everyone is entitled to the presumption of innocence until they are proved to be guilty. Nowadays the burden of proof of innocence is put on those who are framed for political reasons without adequate proof. Even comedians and cartoonists are not spared from being booked under the sedition law. The strength of a democracy lies in its ability to accommodate different points of view. One is at a loss to understand how criticism of, say, abrogation of Article 370, Citizenship Amendment Act or farm laws or support to farmers protests can be interpreted as seditious activity. No one ceases to be a patriot and becomes an enemy of the country by criticizing the government for its acts of commission and omission.

The Congress too used the sedition law against Arundhati Roy, Binayak Sen and S P Udayakumar who led the protests against the Kudankulam nuclear power projects to seize the moral high ground. There is a lot of substance in the inference that but for the Congress the BJP would not have come to power and the BJP is taking a leaf out of Congress' book on many issues. In a way, the Congress was the forerunner of the BJP. This is not to deny the fact that Rahul Gandhi represents the better side of Indian politics.

The 22-year-old green activist Disha Ravi was charged with sedition even though we have it on the authority of former SC judge Deepak Gupta that there is nothing in the toolkit now in the public domain, to attract the charge of sedition. Most countries have done away with the archaic sedition law. Still it is on the

statute book in India - Section 124A of Indian Penal Code. It is part of the colonial legacy that we will do well to free ourselves from.

G David Milton, Maruthancode, TN

## Halt VSP privatisation

The editorial on VSP is an eye opener and wake up call for six crore Telugu people. The burning issue of privatisation of Vizag steel plant, should be seen by Telugu people as a God given opportunity to fight unitedly and demonstrate the "Telugodi Debba" to New Delhi. (VSP stir: A wild goose chase?, 18 Feb). In this connection, it is pertinent to recall the heroic Gandhian struggle of 1969 for VSP, fought by the Telugu people in the erstwhile AP State, with one mind and one purpose.

Thanks to the united fight, a major industry like VSP was established and built on the foundation of blood, tears and supreme sacrifices of Telugu people.

The then Congress government, in a rare Democratic gesture, respected the sentiment of Slogan " Vishaka Ukku- Andhra Hakku ", and magnanimously conceded the demand of the people of AP.

The same unity among the Telugu people and political parties is the need of the hour to launch the Gandhian struggle to stop authoritarian decision to privatise VSP and make the GOI to honour the sentiment and restore VSP.

P H Hema Sagar, Secunderabad

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## LETTERS

### Murders most foul

The brutal murder of advocate couple, Gattu Vamana Rao and Nagamani in broad daylight in the presence of passers-by, in Peddapalli Mandal, allegedly by a local TRS leader Bandi Sanjay Kumar for taking on the government over Dalit custodial deaths; sand and land mafia, and other gross irregularities, having a passively supported by the KCR government, is highly condemnable. The murder has grossly undermined the democratic credentials in Telangana, to muzzle and silence any sane voice rising against the government for a course correction and justice.

If filing PILs in the High Court against the government is a taboo as being viewed by the ruling dispensation, is akin to clear and unmistakable tactics that are adapted by the Maoists and Naxals, by an elected government. If the investigation into murders cannot be efficiently handled by the state police, the demand by the opposition and the BJP that a CBI probe should be considered to probe the murders, with an open and unbiased mind by the TRS.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

### Path-breaking judgement

By acquitting journalist Priya Ramani, the Delhi court has given a landmark and remarkable judgment. Women having lost of faith in the justice of public

institutions, they were making use of the tools available to them, so that mee #too movement gained momentum. Now a Delhi court acquitting journalist Priya Ramani is a huge step forward for women speaking up against sexual harassment. Her acquittal proved that women can speak truth of their experience without fear, especially about defamation case filing against them. This will definitely serve as encouragement to other victims and survivors to take on their abusers. Indeed this is just a start. This is the first step to give women a safe working environment. Indeed Priya Ramani is acquitted in the defamation case but still criminal proceedings against M J Akbar has not yet started. I appreciate court for its comments "women cannot be punished for raising voice against the sexual abuse in the pretext of complaint of defamation".

Zakir Hussain, Kazipect

### Break free from colonial legacy

The term 'sedition' now has wide currency. The credit or discredit for it should go to the ruling dispensation. The sedition law is increasingly misused against activists, dissenters and protesters. The spike in sedition cases does not show our democracy in a good light. It is most unfortunate that the government relies on or finds itself in a position or deems it necessary to rely on a draconian colonial-era law to govern the country. It is a sign of insecurity that the government slaps sedition charges on those who are



# Religious fervour marks Rathasaptami at Tirumala

SRIDHAR G  
TIRUPATI

AFTER a lull, Tirumala witnessed a huge gathering of pilgrims on Friday on the occasion of the annual Rathasaphthami which was observed amidst gaiety and religious fervour on the holy hills.

As it was the first major religious event which TTD resolved to allow pilgrims to participate after nearly a year, the auspicious Rathasaptami, also popular as Surya Jayanti, naturally saw a huge congregation of devotees from all over the country at the hill top temple town to witness the colourful vahana sevas held as part of the fete.

The highlight of the day-long celebrations was the devotees had the rare opportunity of witnessing seven vahana sevas that were held one after another from dawn to dusk. According to the inscriptions, the temple has been conducting the annual fete since 1564 AD.

The galleries around the shrine were packed with devotees who started pouring in from early in the morning well before the commencement of the Vahana sevas which began with Suryaprabha vahanam that took off at the auspicious hour at 5.30 am. The processional deity Malayappa richly dressed in and adorned with dazzling ornaments, mounted on flower-decked Suryaprabha vahanam blessed the devotees who in ecstasy chanted 'Govinda, Govindaa' reverberating the skylines of the holy hills.

This was followed by Chinna Sessa, Garuda and Hanumantha Vahanam which were conducted one after another till noon.

Later, the deity was taken in a



Priests performing Chakrasnanam at the temple tank as part of Rathasaptami celebrations at Tirumala on Friday

- Huge turnout of pilgrims witnessed as the event is a major festival for which devotees were allowed after a gap almost a year
- The highlight of the celebration is the devotees have the rare chance of witnessing 7 vahana sevas held back to back from dawn to dusk
- But TTD priests perform Chakrasnanam at temple pond in Ekantham, i.e. without presence of pilgrims

procession atop tastefully decorated Kalpavruksha, Sarvabhupala and Chandraprabha Vahanam in the four mada streets much to the delight of the devotees.

However, the TTD, as a precautionary measure, held Chakrasnam, immersion of holy disc in Pushkarini (temple tank), in Ekantham without permitting devotees, disappointing them.

The colourful cultural programmes by troupes from various states, traditional music, sonorous chanting of hymns

from Vedas and Divyaprabhanda by the pundits added more to the spiritual ambience palpable on the holy hills.

It is needless to say that the fete generated much interest among the devotees as they missed the vahana sevas in the two Brahmotsavams which were conducted last year as the ut-savams were held in Ekantham due to Covid effect.

TTD management made elaborate arrangements for the smooth conduct of the Saptami fete for which only the devotees having darshan tickets were per-

mitted to witness. The Anandanam wing through Srivari seva volunteers ensured continuous distribution of food items beverages and drinking water to the pilgrims waiting in galleries while the vigilance and security wing made fool-proof arrangements for orderly movement of pilgrims and also smooth flow of vehicles on the hills and the ghat roads.

TTD chairman Y V Subba Reddy, EO Dr K S Jawahar Reddy, Addl EO A V Dharma Reddy, TTD board members and others were present.

# BJP alleges plot to defame it in the name of VSP

HANS NEWS SERVICE  
VIJAYAWADA

LEVELLING serious charges against the state government and the opposition parties, BJP state president Somu Veeraju said here on Friday that the state government was encouraging religious conversions while the opposition parties which are against the BJP are fomenting trouble in the name of Vizag steel plant.

Addressing the media, Veeraju said that the Visakhapatnam steel plant is a sensitive issue which is being used by the parties which are against the BJP to provoke people on the basis of a tweet without knowing the final decision of the Central government.

Referring to the continued attacks on temples all over the state, he said that the state government either directly or indirectly encouraging the attacks on temples. However, when the people reacted to the incidents, the state government ordered an inquiry only to whitewash the issue. He said that the Hindu leaders believe that attacks on temples were a conspiracy hatched by the Christian missionaries to create a favourable atmosphere to encourage religious conversions. He recalled that the state government, which allowed the leaders of the YSRCP and the TDP, did not allow the BJP leaders to visit the Ramateertham temple.

In an attempt which could be described as attention diversion,



BJP President Somu Veeraju addressing the press conference at state BJP party Office in Vijayawada on Friday

Photo: Y Vinay Kumar

- State party chief Veeraju says YSRCP govt is using VSP issue to divert public attention from continuing attacks on temples
- Accuses communists, TDP, Congress and YSRP of instigating people against the BJP by creating unrest among steel plant employees
- Claims all this is going on the basis of just a tweet on VSP, though there is no final decision by the Centre

the steel plant privatisation issue was raked up only to stop the BJP from raising its voice against the religious conversions, he alleged adding the YSRCP and their crony communist parties, and Congress were trying to create insecurity among the steel plant employees by spreading canards.

Veeraju said that the BJP leaders met the Union minister and Central BJP leadership to submit the alternative proposals to protect the interest of the steel plant employees. The leadership was also informed about the attacks on temples, promotion of religious conversions, stopping the BJP can-

didates from filing nominations in gram panchayat elections, promotion of English neglecting the mother tongue Telugu and other issues.

He said that the state BJP believes that the steel plant privatisation issue was raked up only to divert the attention of people from attacks on temples and to tarnish the image of the BJP.

Veeraju appealed to the steel plant employees not to be misled by the leaders of Communist parties, TDP, YSRCP and the Congress which are creating unrest among the employees for their political ends.

## Rogue China admits fall of 5 PLA soldiers

Continued from P1

The CMC, the overall high command of the PLA headed by President Xi Jinping, has awarded Qi Fabao, the regimental commander from the PLA Xinjiang Military Command, the title of "Hero regimental commander for defending the border," Chen Hongjun with "Hero to defend the border," and awarded first-class merit to Chen Xiangrong,

Xiao Siyuan and Wang Zhuoran.

This is the first time China has acknowledged casualties and details of these officers and soldiers' sacrifice, four of whom died when dealing with the Indian military's "illegal trespassing" of the Galwan Valley Line of Actual Control (LAC), the report said.

A total of 20 Indian soldiers died in the Galwan Valley clash

regarded as the worst in over four decades at the India-China border.

While India has announced the casualties immediately after the incident, China did not officially acknowledge the casualties until Friday.

The Russian official news agency TASS reported on February 10 that 45 Chinese servicemen were killed in the Galwan Valley clash.

## Meet Swati, the Indian-American who helped NASA land rover on Mars

Continued from P1

Raised in Northern Virginia and Washington DC metro area, she completed her bachelor's degree from Cornell University in Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering, and her MS and Ph D from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Aeronautics/Astronautics.

Over the course of her career with NASA, Swati Mohan has worked on the Cassini mission to Saturn and GRAIL — a pair of for-

mation flown spacecraft to the Moon and has been a mainstay with the Mars 2020 mission since its beginning in 2013.

According to Swati Mohan, her interest in space was peaked after watching the popular TV show Star Trek when she was nine-years-old. "Seeing the beautiful depictions of the new regions of the universe that they were exploring. I remember thinking 'I want to do that. I want to find new and beautiful places in the universe.' The vast-

ness of space holds so much knowledge that we have only begun to learn," she had told NASA.

She noted that her passion for space increased further when she took her first physics class. "I was lucky enough to have a great teacher, and everything was so understandable and easy. That was when I really considered engineering, as a way to pursue space," she added.

Commenting on her team's role in the current mission, Swati Mo-

han said during the cruise phase heading toward Mars, their job is to figure out how the spacecraft is oriented, and make sure it is pointed correctly in space — "solar arrays to sun, antenna to Earth, and manoeuvre the spacecraft to get it where we want to go." She said during the "seven minutes of terror" leading to the entry, descent, and landing on Mars, GN&C determines the position of the spacecraft and commands the manoeuvres to help it land safely.

## Naidu decries YSRCP attack on Dalits

- TDP chief alleges that ruling party leaders pelted stones on SCs at Lingapuram village in capital area for daring to contest panchayat polls

AMARAVATI

TDP national president N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday slammed the ruling YSRCP leaders for 'launching attacks' on the SCs in the capital city area just because they came forward to contest in the panchayat elections. He asked whether the ruling party would not like to see the Dalits rise to higher positions in politics. The Chief Minister and his party leaders should realise the fact that the vibrant democracy in the country gave rights to every citizen to freely contest in the elections, he said.

In a statement here, the TDP chief condemned the pelting of stones on the Dalits at Lingapuram village in Pedakurapadu Assembly constituency. The ruling party leaders resorted to this attack as the SCs put up a candidate who filed his nomination papers to take on the ruling party candidate. This attack in the midst of the election process would remain a stain for the democratic functioning of the state.

Naidu alleged that the Jagan Mohan Reddy regime has sent thugs to create chaos in the villages. They were not only threatening and striking terror among the people but also insulting the women. Though the complaints were made against the YSRCP leaders for abusing the SCs in the name of caste and attacking them with stones, the police were not taking any action deliberately, he added.

The former chief minister asserted that Jagan would go down as a betrayer of Dalits because of his government's unchecked atrocities against the weaker sections. Goondas were going to the houses of Dalits and threatening them. The panchayat elections were not being held in a free and fair manner. Anti-socials were disrupting the process at every stage. But, the YCP leaders were shamelessly claiming that they have got people's support.



## NASA's Perseverance Rover lands on Mars

Continued from P1

"WOW!!" tweeted NASA Associate Administrator Thomas Zurbuchen as he posted Perseverance's first black and white image from the Jezero Crater in Mars' northern hemisphere.

US President Joe Biden hailed Perseverance's "historic" landing. "Today proved once again that with the power of science and American ingenuity, nothing is beyond the realm of possibility," he tweeted.

Over the course of several 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, it 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 embark on its lofty quest, it first had to overcome the dreaded "seven minutes of terror" -- the risky landing procedure that has scuppered nearly 50 percent of all missions to the planet.

Shortly after 3:30 pm Eastern Time (2030 GMT), the Mars 2020 spacecraft careened into the Martian atmosphere at 12,500 miles (20,000 km) per hour, protected by its heat shield.

It then deployed a supersonic parachute the size of a Little League field, before firing up an eight-engine jetpack to slow its descent even further, and then eventually lower the rover carefully to the ground on a set of cables. Its target site was "absolutely treacherous for landing," Allen Chen, lead engineer for the landing stage said on Thursday.

But the vessel had new landing technologies up its sleeve to help it navigate during descent, including the "Terrain Relative Navigation" that uses a special camera to identify surface features and compare them to an onboard map.

Scientists believe that around 3.5 billion years ago the crater was home to a river that flowed into a lake, depositing sediment in a fan-shaped delta. "The question of whether there's life beyond Earth is one of the most fundamental and essential questions we can ask," said NASA geologist Katie Stack Morgan.

"Our ability to ask this question and develop the scientific investigations and technology to answer it is one of the things that make us as a species so unique." It will begin drilling its first samples in summer, and its engineers have planned for it to traverse first the delta, then the ancient lake shore, and finally the edges of the crater.

## 56 kg gold given to weigh then PM Shastri will go to govt

Continued from P1

Thereafter, police seized the gold but its custody was given to the Chittorgarh Collector.

In 1969, a challan was presented in the Assistant District Session Court in Udaipur and gold was then brought to Udaipur. On January 11, 1975, the court sentenced Ganpat and Hirralal to two years imprisonment and rights over the gold were given to the Gold Controller.

Ganpat and Hirralal challenged

the judgment in the sessions' court and were freed, but they did not regain the right to possession of the gold.

A petition was again filed by Gunwant against the verdict in the High Court, which, on September 14, 2007, upheld the order of acquittal, but rejected the appeal for transferring them rights over the gold.

In 2012, Ganpat's heir Govardhan filed a writ in court, saying that the gold belonged to his father and police had recovered it

## Thousands of displaced families yet to receive VSP benefits

Continued from P1

"Even the trade unions fighting against strategic sale of the VSP are not concerned about our issues pending for decades. Though the R-cards (rehabilitation) given to the displaced families of the VSP to avail job opportunities later were transferred for the next generation, the eligible persons are yet to get jobs in the company," laments P Bhasakara Rao, president of Visakha Ukku Nirvasitula Ikya Sangham. Expressing their concerns, the displaced families are conducting relay hunger strike at steel plant gate, Kurnannapalem, demanding the government to provide jobs as promised.

## New bill gives 8-year path to US citizenship

Continued from P1

The legislation would also benefit hundreds and thousands of Indian IT professionals and their families. Those waiting for a Green Card for more than 10 years, would get the legal permanent residency immediately as they would be exempted from the visa cap.

Indian IT professionals, waiting for more than a decade now, and whose number runs into thousands, are likely to be the biggest beneficiary of this provision of the bill. Authors of the bill — Senator Bob Menendez and Congresswoman Linda Sanchez — 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 (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) advanced degree holders from US universities to stay in the US and improving access to green cards for workers in lower-wage industries. It would also give dependents of H1B holders work authorisation, and prevent children of H-1B holders from "ageing out" of the system.

## Bank unions protest privatisation; plan to march towards Parliament in March

Continued from P1

Thereafter, 10 lakh employees and officers of the banks will observe two days of continuous strike on 15-16 March, 2021. "If the government proceeds further, we will intensify the agitation and go for prolonged strikes and indefinite strike. We demand of the government to reconsider their decision," AIBEA added. The union said after India got independence no private sector bank came forward to help the economic development of the country that necessitated the nationalisation of major private sector banks in 1969. Since then, banks have made great strides and have played a significant role in the country's development and from 8,000 bank branches in 1969, today there are as many as 100,000 bank branches across India, of which many are in rural areas.

## Extensively used tech to probe Delhi riot cases: Police chief

Continued from P1

Elaborating on the use of technology, the Delhi Police chief said 231 accused were arrested on the basis of CCTV footage. "Of them, 137 were identified through FRS (Facial Recognition System) when matched with criminal records and remaining 94 were through driving license photographs," he said. He said the investigation team used video analytics and FRS to analyse CCTV footage to identify the accused, retrieved deleted data from electronic device, used geo-location to ascertain the presence of the accused and drone mapping for crime scene reconstruction. Use of DNA finger printing, e-Vahan database, facial recognition, fund flow analysis and forensic teams comprising physical, chemical, biological and ballistic analysis of videos and photographs through open sources were also used to investigate the cases, he added.



Development  
is our religion:  
PM Modi

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said development is for everyone and it is the aim and religion of his government.

Development and good governance do not know caste, creed, race, gender, religion or language, Modi said while inaugurating and laying foundation stones of some key projects in power and urban sectors in poll-bound Kerala via video conference. He also quoted the iconic lines of the great Malayalam poet Kumaranasan who had said, "I am not asking your caste, sister, I ask for water, I

am thirsty."

"Development is for everyone. This is the essence of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Viswas. Development is our aim, development is our religion," he said concluding his brief speech. Modi also sought the support of the people of the poll-bound state to "realise the

shared vision of togetherness and development". He dedicated to the nation the 320 KV Pugalur-Thrissur power transmission project, built at a cost of Rs 5,070 crore.

The virtual function saw the PM inaugurating the 50 MW Kasaragod Solar Power Project, developed under the National

Solar Energy Mission and the much-awaited 75 MLD (million litres per day) Water Treatment Plant at Aruvikkara near here under the AMRUT Mission. Modi also laid the foundation stones of the Integrated Command and Control Centre and Smart Roads Project, both in Thiruvananthapuram (PTI).

EU team takes note of  
current status in J&K

NEW DELHI

THE European Union on Friday said it has taken note of recent steps such as district council elections and the resumption of 4G internet services in Jammu and Kashmir, and was looking forward to a number of other important steps, including the early organisation of the legislative assembly polls.

The comments by a spokesperson of the EU came a day after a number of top diplomats from the 27-member bloc returned from Jammu and Kashmir after a two-day visit as part of a trip by 24 foreign envoys.

The visit presented the opportunity to see the situation on the ground and interact with local interlocutors as part of the EU's outreach to all stakeholders, the official said, adding the EU look forward to continuing its dialogue with India on it. "We have taken note of recent steps such as the election of district development councils and the resumption of 4G internet services. The right to freedom of expression online and offline is a key value for all democracies," the spokesperson added.



visit of EU envoys to the Union Territory of J&K.

The EU spokesperson also said the EU ambassador to India and several envoys of EU member states, among other countries, participated in the visit to J&K Kashmir on February 17-18 on invitation of the Ministry for External Affairs (MEA), and the programme included meetings with civil and military authorities, some newly elected political representatives, and selected representatives of civil society.

MEA Spokesperson Anurag Srivastava on Thursday said the visit by 24 foreign envoys to J&K was aimed at enabling them to witness the union territory's march on the path of inclusive development and the dynamism in the grass-root democratic institutions following the successful conduct of the recent local elections. (PTI)

logue with India on it. "We have taken note of recent steps such as the election of district development councils and the resumption of 4G internet services. The right to freedom of expression online and offline is a key value for all democracies," the spokesperson added.

"We look forward to a number of other important steps to be taken in the political and economic sphere, including the early organisation of the legislative assembly elections," the spokesperson said. The statement was released by the EU mission in Delhi in response to queries about the

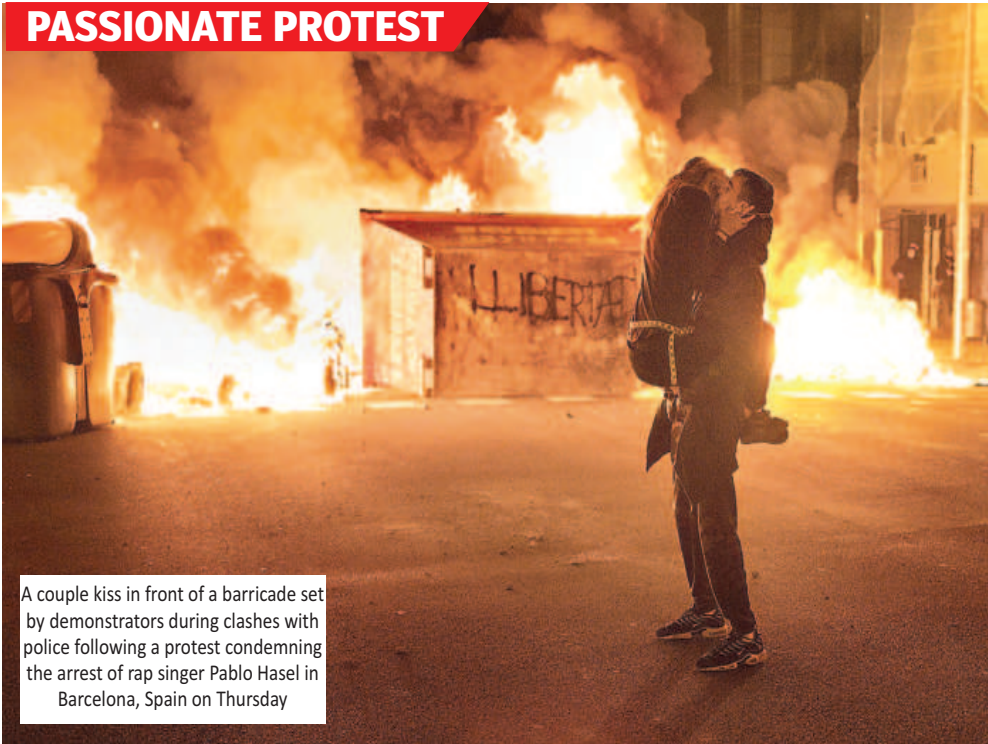


India successfully tests  
Helina, Dhruvastra  
anti-tank guided missiles

NEW DELHI

INDIA on Friday successfully test fired indigenously-developed anti-tank guided missile systems 'Helina' and 'Dhruvastra', paving their induction into the Army and the Indian Air Force respectively, officials said. The defence ministry described the missiles as one of the most-advanced anti-tank weapons in the world. The missiles were test fired at Pokhran deserts in Rajasthan. "The system has all-weather day-and-night capability and can defeat battle tanks with conventional armour as well as with explosive reactive armour. It is one of the most-advanced anti-tank weapons in the world," the ministry said.

It said five missions were carried out for evaluating the capabilities of the missiles in minimum and maximum range. "The missiles were fired in hover and max forward flight against realistic static and moving targets. Some missions were carried out with warheads against derelict tanks. A mission was carried out against a moving target from a forward flying helicopter," the ministry said in a statement. The 'Helina' and 'Dhruvastra' are third generation anti-tank guided missiles that can engage targets both in direct hit mode as well as top attack mode. The ministry said the joint user trials of Helina (the Army version) and Dhruvastra (IAF version) have been carried out from Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) platform. The missile systems have been designed and developed indigenously by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated DRDO, the Army and Indian Air Force on successful conduct of the user trials. DRDO Chairman G Satheesh Reddy appreciated the efforts of teams involved in the successful trials. (PTI)



Snag-hit plane makes  
emergency landing in  
Thiruvananthapuram

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A flight from Sharjah to Kozhikode with 112 passengers made an emergency landing at the international airport here on Friday due to a snag in the aircraft. The Air India Express plane developed the snag in the hydraulic system and made the landing at Thiruvananthapuram where the airlines has the base with more technical experts, an airport official said.

"The flight landed safely at around 1 PM. All the passengers, including the crew, are safe and evacuated. The aeroplane has been moved to the technical area for repairs," Director of the airport C V Ravindran told PTI. Airline sources said arrangements would be made to transport the passengers soon to Kozhikode, formerly Calicut. The aircraft took off from Sharjah at 7 AM and was supposed to land at 12.40 PM in Kozhikode. Airport sources said the flight was diverted to Thiruvananthapuram as there was the risk of landing at the table-top runway of Kozhikode airport, especially in an emergency situation. The flight was carrying 104 passengers and eight crew members. (PTI)

Rats nibble farmer's body  
kept at mortuary in Haryana

CHANDIGARH

THE body of a 72-year-old farmer was allegedly gnawed at by rats at the mortuary of the civil hospital in Haryana's Sonapat district, prompting the authorities to order a probe. The incident came to light on Thursday morning when the family of Rajender found injury marks on his face and foot.

The body of Rajender, who died of heart attack, was kept at the mortuary on Wednesday night, the officials said on Friday. There were three rodent bite marks on the body, they said. Sonapat Principal Medical Officer Jai Bhagwan said a team of three doctors — Deputy Medical Superintendents Ginni Lamba, Sandeep Lathwal and Senior Medical Officer Sushil Jain has been formed to inquire into the matter.

"A team of three doctors are inquiring into the matter and they will see on whose part the negligence has been in this incident," said Jai Bhagwan. The team of doctors will submit the report within a day, he further said. Rajender was a resident of Baiyanpur village in Sonapat. Senior Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala described the incident as shocking. In a tweet, he said a farmer's body is nibbled by rodents and the "BJP government acts as a mute spectator". (PTI)

Sambalpuri fabric needs online  
marketing platform, modern  
design: IIM-S study

SAMBALPUR (ODISHA)

THE famous Sambalpuri fabric of Odisha needs online marketing platforms and modern handloom designs to expand its reach to consumers across the globe, according to a study by a premier management school. The Indian Institute of Management, Sambalpur (IIM-S) which conducted the study on weavers has also planned to work for taking the Sambalpuri fabric to the global market.

Director of IIM-S, Mahadeo Jaiswal said: "marketing of the Sambalpuri fabrics on digital platforms will take the beautiful fabric to global markets. We have already initiated dialogue for marketing of Sambalpuri handloom products. If everything goes well as per plan, an MoU will be signed with Flipkart in New Delhi in March". Jaiswal further said that there is also a need to improve the financial literacy levels of the weavers here. There are many weavers in this area with awesome skills.

However, when it comes to business, many of them are



unaware of what is required to undertake business in the national or the global market. "We have also planned to instil them with the required business knowledge so that they could do the business in national and global markets. We have also planned to organize workshops and training programmes for the weavers for this purpose", he said.

Jaiswal said new and modern designs should also be introduced in Sambalpuri fabrics considering the demand of the people of different regions. He said IIM-S has planned to take the help of professional designers.

"We will also create a fund to rope in professional designers. We have planned to ap-

proach PSUs to provide money from the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) fund for this purpose", he added. Meanwhile, the IIM-S has already started discussion with the weavers of the region for marketing and new designs.

While around 5,500 weavers directly work under the Sambalpuri Bastralaya Handloom Cooperative Society, there are around 25,000 weavers in the districts of Bargarh, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Balangir, Nuapara, Jharsuguda and Kalahandi in the western region of Odisha. Weaving is the second largest employer after agriculture in this region of the state, he said. (PTI)

Army provides  
food, medical  
help to stranded  
tourists in  
Sikkim

GANGTOK

THE Indian Army provided food, medical help and warm clothes to over 400 tourists who were stranded in East Sikkim district due to sudden heavy snowfall, an official said on Friday. Around 447 tourists in 150 vehicles were struck at JN Road Axis about 40 km from the state capital on Thursday afternoon due to heavy snowfall while returning from tourist destinations like Tsomgo lake, Nathula, Baba Mandir, Memencho Lake and Kupup, the official said.

Many tourists with medical problems were provided medical help at the 317 FD hospital by an Army medical team. The other tourists were given hot food, warm clothes and shelter by the Army and were sent back to Gangtok after the weather improved and the blocked roads were cleared by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), the official added. (PTI)



Pakistan to register  
Himalayan pink  
salt as Geographical  
Indication

SAJJAD HUSSAIN  
ISLAMABAD

PAKISTAN has decided to register Himalayan pink salt as Geographical Indication (GI) to prevent its unauthorised use by other countries. A GI tag is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess origin-based qualities and reputation in the region.

The precious salt is extracted from the Salt Range in Punjab which extends along the south of the Potohar Plateau and the north of the Jhelum River. The decision was taken in a meeting with the Intellectual Property Organisation (IPO) Pakistan chaired by Commerce Adviser Razak Dawood. IPO Chairman Mujeeb Ahmed Khan also attended the meeting, the Dawn

newspaper reported on Friday. An official announcement said that during the meeting, GI registration of products from various regions of Pakistan was discussed.

The move aims to curb unauthorised use of Pakistan's GI by other countries. Pink Himalayan salt is said to be loaded with minerals that are beneficial to health. Pakistan is fighting a case in the 27-member European Union against India's move to get Basmati rice registered as its product. "We decided that, after registration of rice, pink salt from the Salt Range mountains of Pakistan will be registered as GI," the adviser said, adding that this will encourage and motivate our producers to expand their business at a global level. (PTI)

Over one lakh people achieve literacy in Kerala in four years

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

IN a historic achievement, a total of 1,08,057 illiterate people, majority of them belonging to the marginalised sections, have been initiated into the world of letters in the last four years in Kerala, according to government figures. It was also a period (2016-2020) that saw most number of tribal people achieving literacy in the last 30 years in the southern state, it said.

Besides tribals, a large number of fisherfolk people and migrant workers who came to Kerala from other states in search of jobs were also among those who either achieved literacy or pursued their discontinued studies through equivalency courses, of-

ficials sources said. The rare feat was achieved through various programmes implemented by the Kerala State Literacy Mission Authority (KSLMA), an autonomous institution under the General Education Department, Government of Kerala.

Besides those who learnt their first letters through the KSLMA programmes, a total of 1,35,608 people including women have cleared its various equivalency programmes- 24,148 students (fourth standard), 21,950 (seventh standard), 64,663 (10th), 24,847 (plus two), as per the figures released by the Authority. Official sources said the figures assumed significance as only 4,600 people had achieved literacy through state govern-



ment programmes during the period 2011-2015, during the

tenure of the previous UDF government.

"After the much touted total literacy programme during

1990s, Kerala had given more prominence to primary education than the eradication of illiteracy in the later decades. After so many years, it was during the last four years under the present government that total literacy campaign was given due importance," a KSLMA official told PTI.

As per the state Planning Board figures 2011, there are 18 lakh illiterate people in Kerala, he said. KSLMA director P S Sreekala said the achievement in the literacy and education sector was the result of special drives implemented by the agency focusing on the marginalised areas including tribal colonies and fishing hamlets.

Listing out various projects by

the Literacy Mission, she said 12,968 people became literate through the special tribal literacy drive implemented in Wayanad and Attappady in Palakkad district, one of the largest and most backward tribal settlements in the southern state.

A total of 11,941 people achieved literacy through the "Aksharasagam" project, a literacy-cum-equivalency project implemented in coastal areas of the state, she said. "Changathi" drive helped over 5,400 migrant workers to learn Malayalam while 3188 people turned literate through the "Navachethana", an initiative envisaged to eradicate illiteracy in scheduled caste (SC) colonies, the official added. (PTI)







# Kohli reveals he suffered depression; bats for professional help on mental health issues

NEW DELHI

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 anything 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 are 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." The India captain, considered one of the best batsmen in modern cricket, 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.

Kohli is currently in Ahmedabad for ongoing home Test series against England. The two teams have won a game each and will compete in the third Test from February 24. Fondly remembering his growing up days, Kohli said the Indian team of '90s had really inspired him to take up the sport.

"The Indian team of the '90s really opened up my imagination about what could be done with the sport because it is so different from anything else I had seen before. It just instilled a lot of faith and belief in me that magical things can be

done if an individual believes or decides," he said.

"That's where the spark started...the dream of wanting to play for the country really started." Kohli lost his biggest supporter, his father Premchand, at the age of 18 and he considers it as the "most impactful" incident of his life. "...that incident really put things in proper perspective for me.

My father did work very hard in initial days to make sure that I get the best cricket gear or I continue with my cricket practice. "From there on it made my belief even stronger that come what may, I am definitely going to realise my dream to play at the highest level and represent my country," he said.

Kohli is seen as a tough, competitive and enigmatic character on the field and he revealed that in real life too he is no different. "...the disconnect for many years now is people don't seem to understand, don't seem to process, a lot of the times is that I have never worked towards creating a perception for myself which is perfect from a worldly point of view.

"For me what matters is what I can do an individual and how much I can provide on the cricket field as an individual," he said. "I cannot fabricate things to look good in front of certain set of people. That's just not who I am," he asserted. Another thing he hardly cares about is the expectations from him when he is on the field. "Expectation is honestly a burden when you start thinking about it too much." (PTI)



## Australian Open Medvedev beats Tsitsipas, sets up final against Djokovic

MELBOURNE

RUSSIAN fourth seed Daniil Medvedev on Friday beat Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas to reach his first Australian Open final. Medvedev was clinical throughout the match and dismantled Tsitsipas in straight sets with the score reading 6-4 6-2 7-5 at the Rod Laver Arena.

This is Medvedev's second Grand Slam final, having made it to the title clash at the 2019 US Open where he lost to Spain's Rafael Nadal. Medvedev will be facing Serbian world no.1 Novak Djokovic on Sunday with the latter vying for a ninth Australian Open title. The 25-year-old Russian is looking to become the first Russian male winner in Melbourne since Marat Safin in 2005.

Medvedev was largely untroubled throughout the match except in the third set when Tsitsipas threatened to make a comeback as he did in his semi-final match against Rafael Nadal. Tsitsipas was two sets down to love in that match as well before rallying to take the match in five sets over the 20-time Grand Slam champion. Tsitsipas got his first break to level the third set and then held his serve to lead 4-3. Medvedev then fought back to break back and lead the third set 6-5. He then held his serve again to quell Tsitsipas's brief fightback.

Earlier, second-seeded pair Elise Mertens of Belgium and Aryna Sabalenka of Bulgaria beat Czech Republic's Barbora Krejickova and Katerina Siniakova 6-2, 6-3 to win the

women's doubles title of the Australian Open. This is the second Grand Slam title for the pair, having earlier won the 2019 US Open.

The last game went on for eight minutes



Elise and Aryna dropped three championship points. The former earned a fourth championship point with an ace and then won the title after a backhand from Katerina went wide at the Rod Laver Arena.

Both players had reached the fourth round of the singles event at the Australian Open. While Mertens lost to Czech Karolina Muchova, Sabalenka lost to 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams.

Elise and Aryna had earlier beaten Nicole Melichar and Demi Schuurs in a hard-fought semi-final match. The second seeds won the match 7-5 6-4 in an hour and 36 minutes.

They are unlikely to play anymore doubles matches this season as Aryna, who is in the top 10 of the singles rankings, has chosen to not play doubles this year. (ANS)

"I don't have a lot of pressure because Novak has never lost here in the final. He has all the pressure to get to Roger Federer and Rafa (in the all-time record of 20 men's titles). I hope I will get out there and show my best tennis. As we have seen, I can win against the best names if I play well. He has more experience but more things to lose than me."

—Daniil Medvedev

## Sabalenka to focus on singles after winning doubles crown

MELBOURNE

ELISE Mertens and Aryna Sabalenka won their second Grand Slam doubles title on Friday at the Australian Open but the pair won't be competing together in Grand Slams for the rest of the season. Sabalenka said after the match that she will be concentrating on her singles career this year.

"Together we're not going to play Grand Slams, maybe a little bit of premier tournaments," Sabalenka said on court after the match.

Both players had earlier reached the fourth round of the singles event at the Australian Open. While Mertens lost to Czech Karolina Muchova, Sabalenka lost to 23-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams.

Sabalenka is ranked seventh in the WTA singles standings while Mertens is 16th.

"For this year, I want to put more focus on singles, so a little bit less doubles, see what happens. I just want to manage my energy. Still when you go out for doubles, you're still there for competing, to put everything you have... I just want to try something different this year," she further said. Mertens said that she decided to stick to the net due to Sabalenka's strength in service.



## Ankita wins 1st WTA title with doubles crown at Phillip Island

MELBOURNE

INDIA'S Ankita Raina and her Russian partner Kamilla Rakhimova on Friday won the Phillip Island Trophy WTA 250 tennis tournament in Melbourne. The pair beat Russia's Anna Blinkova and Anastasia Potapova 2-6, 6-4, 10-7. This is Ankita's first title on the WTA tour.

The win will help Ankita, 28, enter the top 100 of the WTA rankings in doubles with the live rankings currently showing her in the 94th position. She won ITF doubles titles and WTA 125k series title before Friday's win.

The Indo-Russian pair had

earlier pulled off an impressive 4-6, 6-4, 11-9 over Francesca Jones and Nadia Podoroska in the doubles semi-finals. Ankita also won two matches in the singles event of the tournament to reach the Round of 32 where she lost to Australia's Kimberly Birrell on Monday.

Earlier, Ankita had become the fifth Indian woman to play in the main draw of a Grand Slam when she made the cut for the women's doubles event at the Australian Open with Romania's Mihaela Buzarnescu.

The pair lost their first round match 3-6, 0-6 to Australia's Belinda Woolcock and Olivia Gadecki. (ANS)

TODAY'S MATCH		RESULT
Jamshedpur FC	vs	ATK Mohun Bagan
Mumbai City FC		draw with
at Tilak Maidan Stadium 7.30pm		SC East Bengal
		3-1

ISL STANDINGS										
CLUB	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS		
ATK Mohun Bagan	18	12	3	3	26	11	15	39		
Mumbai City FC	17	10	4	3	27	15	12	34		
Hyderabad FC	18	6	9	3	25	17	8	27		
FC Goa	18	6	9	3	29	22	5	27		
NorthEast United FC	18	6	9	3	27	24	3	27		
Bengaluru FC	18	5	7	6	23	23	0	22		
Jamshedpur FC	18	5	6	7	16	20	4	21		
Chennaiyin FC	19	3	10	6	16	22	6	19		
SC East Bengal	18	3	8	7	16	25	9	17		
Kerala Blasters FC	18	3	7	8	22	33	11	16		
Odisha FC	19	1	6	11	18	33	15	9		

## Sangakkara, Jayawardene lament lack of Sri Lankan presence in IPL

NEW DELHI

FORMER Sri Lanka cricket stars Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene, who occupy major off-field roles for Rajasthan Royals and Mumbai Indians respectively in the Indian Premier League (IPL), have blamed lack of clarity on tours programme by Sri Lanka Cricket and lack of bowlers and all-rounders for the absence of any player from the country in the 2021 season of the tournament.

This is the first time that none of the franchises will feature any Sri Lanka cricketer in the IPL. It is especially surprising since the island country hosted its first edition of its T20 tournament, the Lanka Premier League (LPL) in late 2020.

"I think there were some fantastic players there (in the Lanka Premier League) and in Sri Lanka currently. But I think the crucial thing is the unpredictability of the touring programme of SLC (Sri Lanka Cricket) where it is very hard to predict for how long players can be available and if they have to even leave at some point in the IPL season," said Sangakkara while speaking to the media on Friday.

"So it adds a bit of volatility that franchises kind of shy away from. That is one of the big reasons why you see lack of Sri Lanka players in the IPL and definitely not because they don't have the capability," added the former Sri Lanka wicketkeeper and captain.

Jayawardene, on the other hand, said that the auction saw the demand for bowlers and



bowling all-rounders which Sri Lanka don't have. "It is disappointing and disheartening... I think a few guys were on the radar, but it is a tough place because we are looking at 20-odd slots for overseas players, and the majority of those slots were for the fast bowlers and all-rounders. Sri Lanka lacks a bit of that," Jayawardene told media.

"IPL is the place where you try and get the best players in world cricket, and it's a good message for the Sri Lankan cricketers to lift their game and be competitive so that they could be part of the IPL on their merit," the former captain added. (ANS)

## Bangladesh board allows players to miss national duty for IPL

DHAKA

BANGLADESH Cricket Board (BCB) has decided to give No Objection Certificates (NOC) to its players for the Indian Premier League, allowing them to miss matches for the national team.

Bangladesh are due to play a Test series against Sri Lanka next month -- details not finalised yet -- and that will be followed by a three-match ODI series in May, according to tentative schedule.

"We will surely give NOC to (pace bowler) Mustafizur [Rahman] if he applies for it. We have given NOC to Shakib [Al Hasan] and it will be the same for Mustafizur," Akram Khan, chairman of BCB's cricket operations told the media here.

"The board has decided that whoever will ask for the NOC. We will give because it is useless to insist someone who is not willing to play," he said. The Bangladesh board had initially refused to give NOC to Rahman.

It had allowed Shakib to miss Test matches against Sri Lanka that are to be played in April. The left-arm pace bowler and Shakib are the only two Bangladesh players in the Indian Premier League.

While Rahman was picked by Rajasthan Royals for Rs.1 crore, all-rounder Shakib was bought by Kolkata Knight Riders for Rs.3.2 crore. Bangladesh tour NZ for three ODIs and three T20Is from March 20 to April 1 and then follow it with Tests and ODIs against Sri Lanka.

## 'Oly qualification period extension good for players'

NEW DELHI

EXTENSION of the Olympic qualification period for badminton can only be good for Indian players as it gives them more time in between tournaments, said chief national coach Pullela Gopichand. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) said on Friday that the qualification period for the sport has been extended by about a month to June 15.

"It's the same for everyone, so from that perspective it's fine I guess. It gives players chance to space out their tournaments, so it is good overall," Gopichand told IANS on Friday.

The extension came after the postponement of the Malaysia Open Super 750 and Singapore Open Super 500 tournaments, both of which are listed as part of the qualification cycle. While the Malaysia Open will take place from May 25 to 30, the Singapore tournament will be held from June 1 to 6.

The Olympic qualification period was earlier scheduled to end with the Indian Open which is currently slated between May 11 and 16 in New Delhi.

"I think all the players would welcome the spacing out of tournaments. It benefits at least our Indian players. It's good that we have the time in between tournaments to train and prepare better," he further said.

The Tokyo Olympics is set to be held from July 23 to August 8 this year after being postponed from its original dates of July 24 to August 9, 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The announcement of the postponement of the Olympics came in mid-March, 2020, shortly after which the BWF froze its calendar and rankings, including 'Race to Tokyo' Olympic qualification rankings. While the calendar resumed late last year, tournaments that will come within the Olympic qualification period starts with the Swiss Open to be held from March 2 to 7.

Asked what Gopichand made of the Indian players' performances at the tournaments thus far, the 47-year-old former All England Open champion said that it remains too early to draw conclusions.

"Some have been a

bit rusty but some also put in good performances. It is a bit early to say anything. Wait for another couple of tournaments before we can get to concrete conclusions," he said.

"There is also the fact that Japan and China -- two big countries -- did not really participate. It was a depleted field and so we can't read too much into these results yet. Neither can we read much into the next two tournaments because we might still have a depleted field," he further said.

Gopichand said that the players and the coaching staff are trying not to concern themselves with changes in the calendar leading up to the Olympics or uncertainty around the Games itself.

"I think for all of us it is important we just take it from where we were last year. We didn't have any tournaments last year. At least compared to that we have some to play this time. The players will be happy that they are in a space where tournaments are there (for them) to play in," he said.

"The uncertainty is there but still with the vaccination coming around, possibility of more tournaments happening in the next few months is higher. So I think lot more to be positive about than negative. Just prepare and hang on, they have done the hard work of staying positive for the last one year," he signed off. (ANS)

## Tournament for the blind: Rao's century helps AP retain title

NEW DELHI

INDUSIND Bank Nagesh Trophy National T20 Cricket Tournament for Blind comes to a close in an eventful manner with a thrilling finale. In the finals played today at Bengaluru's Altire Cricket Grounds, Andhra Pradesh exploited the conditions well and dominated Odisha from the very start to earn the coveted Trophy.

Player of the Match, Captain Venkateswara Rao won the toss and made a wise move and opted to bat first; the idea was to amass a big total and put pressure on Odisha. He commenced his innings well with the company of Thanava Krishna (22 of 16) and stitched a valuable partnership with Durga Rao (47 from 30) to score an unbeaten 132 from just 65 deliveries.

He smashed Odisha's bowlers to all parts of the ground, smashing 23 fours to set up a formidable total for the opponent (246/3). The impact of his batting was such that all Odisha bowlers had run rates that exceeded 10.

AP's Durga Rao played a key role to put a pressure in Odisha's chase. He bowled 4 overs for 2 wickets by conceding just 15 runs. At the end of 20th overs, Odisha scored 166/5 (Sukhran - 52 from 33 and Nakula - 40 from 41). Andhra Pradesh won by 80 runs and lifted the trophy for the second time in a row.

