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CHECKS AND
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REMAIN OPEN TODAY: CAIT, AITWA

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WHITEWASH

HYDERABAD, TUESDAY DECEMBER 8, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



'IT'S TAMANNAH WHO'S CARRYING THE FILM ON HER SHOULDERS'

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4 OF INDIA'S MOST-WANTED INSURGENT LEADERS IN CHINA IN OCTOBER

Indian officials say China is assisting rebel groups that have stepped up attacks on its border with Myanmar in recent months, opening another front in the conflict between two nations already engaged in a deadly standoff in the Himalayas. Armed groups in Myanmar -- including the United Wa State Army and the Arakan Army -- are acting as Beijing's proxies by supplying weapons and providing hideouts to insurgent groups in India's northeastern states, according to Indian officials with knowledge of the situation. They said multiple agencies warned that at least four of the most wanted insurgent leaders were in the southern Chinese city of Kunming to train and source weapons as recently as mid-October.



SATELLITE-CONTROLLED GUN USED TO KILL IRANIAN NUCLEAR SCIENTIST

A satellite-controlled machine gun was used in last week's assassination of a top Iranian nuclear scientist, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, who was killed in a gun and car bomb attack on the outskirts of Tehran on November 27, was driving on a highway east of the capital when the weapon "zoomed in" on him "using AI," Mehr said on Sunday, quoting Ali Fadavi, deputy commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Various accounts of his death have emerged since the incident. While early news reports said he was caught in a gunfight between his bodyguards, others said that he was fired at by a remote-controlled machine gun mounted on a truck operated by someone who later fled the country.



DON'T SUPPORT BANDHS BUT BACKING FARMERS' DEMANDS, SAYS MAMATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday came out in support of farmers protesting against the Centre's three new agricultural ordinances saying Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration must either withdraw the laws or simply quit. "I have not forgotten Singur, I have not forgotten... I am promising full support to farmers," Ms Banerjee said, holding up a sheaf of paddy, at a rally held in Medinipur. She was referring to her 26-day hunger strike of 2006 in Singur against the forcible acquisition of fertile land by the then government. Making it clear today that her party does not support a "bandh", she, however, said, "We are supporting the demands being made by farmers tomorrow."



BHARAT BIOTECH SEEKS EMERGENCY USE AUTHORISATION FOR COVAXIN

After Pfizer and Serum Institute, Hyderabad-based pharmaceutical firm Bharat Biotech on Monday applied to the central drug regulator seeking emergency use authorisation for its Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin, official sources said. Covaxin is being indigenously developed by Bharat Biotech in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). On December 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi at an all-party meeting had expressed hope that a Covid-19 vaccine may be ready in a few weeks. That same evening, the Indian arm of US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer sought emergency use approval for its vaccine from the central drug regulator, after the firm secured such clearance in the UK and Bahrain.



Centre asks states to ensure peace

5

Vijayashanti says BJP alone can dethrone KCR

4

Mystery illness overwhelms Eluru

More than 500 people fell unconscious, role of organochlorine substance checked

SNV SUDHIR
VIJAYAWADA

The mystery around the illness that had surfaced suddenly in Eluru of West Godavari on Saturday evening continues to confound experts and doctors, with tests conducted on the samples of water and milk the patients consumed, their blood, cerebral spinal fluid as well as CT scans, returning normal on Monday.

Blood samples were taken for Hb, CBP, LFT, RFT and GRBS. Viral markers for IgM, ELISA for chikungunya, dengue, HSV-2, and all samples returned negative.

However, preliminary analysis of various test reports have almost established the role of organochlorine substances in the infection that has left one dead and over 450 infected since Saturday.

Organochlorine pesticides are chlorinated hydrocarbons used in agriculture and mosquito control.

The compounds include DDT that is widely used in anti-mosquito fogging.



Jagan rushes Eluru, meets patients, kin

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy on Monday visited the Government hospital in Eluru town and interacted with the patients and attendants, assuring all help to them. He later chaired a review meeting with officials on the incident.

The Chief Minister went round the ward, sat on the bed of the patients, and gave a patient ear to those afflicted by the mysterious ailment. He told the patients and their attendants that all help will be provided.

Later, at the review meeting held at the ZP office, the Chief Minister directed officials to be vigilant and prepared to handle any situation. He enquired about the treatment being given to the patients who fell ill, and the measures being taken for the control of the situation.

Jagan also enquired about the possible causes of the outbreak and about the medical tests and investigations that are being carried out on patients.

Centre dispatches team of experts

The Union Government on Monday announced that a team of experts will visit Eluru town to identify the root cause of the mysterious illness that first surfaced on Saturday evening. The team deployed by the Union ministry of health and family welfare will reach Eluru on Tuesday and is expected to submit a preliminary report on the illness by the evening.

THE DISEASE:

- Number of people fallen ill - 340
- Number of people currently receiving treatment - 157
- Number of deaths - 1
- Number of people moved for better treatment - 14
- Number of people discharged - 168
- Of those affected, 180 were men and 160 were women
- People from Eluru - 307
- People from Eluru Rural - 30
- People from Denduluru - 3

SYMPTOMS/IDENTIFICATIONS

- Epilepsy for 3-5 minutes which

was only once and not repeated

- Forgetfulness anxiety, vomiting, headache, back pain

SAMPLES TESTED:

- 22 freshwater samples
- 52 blood samples
- 35 cerebral spinal fluid samples
- 45 people had CT scans
- 9 milk samples
- 10 samples sent to CCMB, Hyd

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

- 62 village and ward secretariats participated in the survey
- Health surveys were conducted on 57,863 households

KTR to support farmers bandh, to stage protest at Shadnagar

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

TRS working president KT Rama Rao would symbolically extend support to the farmers' agitation by taking part in a road blockade protest at Shadnagar on the Hyderabad-Bengaluru National Highway. State Finance Minister T Harish Rao would participate in another protest on the Siddipet highway.



Municipal minister KT Rama Rao, along with Transport minister Puvvada Ajay, participates in the launch of several development works in Khammam on Monday.

Farmers being misled, BJP's intentions are noble

2

Supreme Court upholds Dharmadhikari report

TS power cos asked to take 655 employees

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Monday upheld the concluding report of one-man committee of former top court judge DM Dharmadhikari on distribution of personnel of power companies and corporations between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and

rejected the objections against the findings by the latter.

The top court said it did not find any merit in the objections to the report dated June 20, 2020 and judge DM Dharmadhikari is obligatory for power utilities of both the states and all concerned to implement the committee's directions.

Old laws have now become a burden: Modi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday asserted that reforms are needed for development, and said some laws of the past century have become a "burden" in the current times.

The government believes in all-round holistic reforms, he stressed after inaugurating the construction of the Agra Metro project via video conferencing.

"Reforms are needed for development. Some laws which used to be good in the past century, have become a burden in the present century," he said.

His remarks came in the backdrop of ongoing protests by farmers against three new farm laws.

"Our government is doing holistic reforms. Earlier reforms used to happen in a piecemeal manner," PM Modi said.

Centre will bring Bill on MSP, claims Bandi Sanjay

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Appealing to farmers of Telangana not to support the December 8 Bharat Bandh, TS BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar on Monday said that the Central Government would be soon introducing a new Bill guaranteeing minimum support price to the tillers.

In a chat with journalists from Delhi along with Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy, BJP OBC Morcha chief K Laxman and party senior leader N Indrasena Reddy, Sanjay tried to portray the ongoing farmers' agitation as an "artificial movement" provoked by the Congress. "The Congress must stop doing artificial movements," he said, hinting that the Grand Old Party was behind the farmers' protest that has literally blocked Delhi.

Rythu Bandhu-2 distribution from Dec 27 to Jan 7

Govt releases Rs 7,300 crore

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu on Monday announced that financial assistance under Rythu Bandhu will be given from December 27, 2020 to January 7, 2021.

The CM instructed the officials concerned to ensure that each and every farmer in the state gets the assistance under the popular scheme and make certain that the amount is directly deposited into their bank accounts. He also instructed officials from the Finance Department to release the required Rs 7,300 crore.

"Rythu Bandhu assistance should begin with farmers who hold smaller extent of lands and continue to those having larger extent of land-holding. All farmers should get the assistance in ten days," the Chief Minister said.

He was speaking at a review meeting on Monday at Pragathi Bhavan on the Rythu Bandhu assistance distribution for the summer season.

Agriculture Minister S Niranjan Reddy, Chief Secretary Somesh Kumar, Principal Secretary (Finance) Ramakrishna Rao, Principal Secretary (Agriculture) Janardhan Reddy, and others participated.

JNTUH, OU postpone exams

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Jawaharlal Nehru Technological University Hyderabad (JNTUH) and

Osmania University have decided to postpone semester exams scheduled on December 8, 2020 in view of Bharat Bandh called by farmers unions

and backed by political parties. Accordingly, JNTUH will conduct these exams on December 10, 2020.

KCR working on new welfare schemes for TRS win

VENKAT RAM REDDY LAKKADI
HYDERABAD

Indications are that TRS supremo and Chief Minister K Chandrababoo Naidu is burning the midnight oil, devising new welfare schemes to win the heart of Telangana voters again, as he is said to have lost faith in the existing schemes being the vote-gainers for TRS they once were.

This was indicated by the dropping the TRS received at the hands of BJP in the recent Dubbak Assembly bypoll and then the GHMC elections.

In May this year, KCR announced that he will launch

a new scheme for farmers within two weeks that he said "would make the entire nation gasp in awe".

Though he said that the financial modalities were also worked out for the new scheme, it was never unveiled, despite seven months passing by. KCR is believed to be reworking this scheme now.

TRS government's flagship welfare schemes of Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bima, Shaadi Mubarak, Kalyana Lakshmi, Aasara pensions, KCR Kits etc have ensured victory for the TRS and a second term in office. However, these schemes failed to ensure victory for the party



in the recent Dubbak and GHMC polls. For a party that contests all elections on the plank of its welfare schemes that it has unveiled over the years, the

recent Dubbak bypoll and GHMC polls results were unsettling, to say the least.

KCR as well as his son KT Rama Rao, who led the party's

GHMC poll campaign highlighted TRS welfare schemes and sought votes based on them. Such was their confidence in these welfare schemes that they did not even bother to campaign in Dubbak bypoll.

KCR also skipped campaigning for the GHMC elections too, save one public meeting at LB Stadium, that too at the end of campaigning. Here too, he highlighted TRS welfare schemes and sought votes.

But the results proved beyond doubt that voters are no more enthused with TRS welfare scheme and were expecting more.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Kartik & Krishna Paksha Panchangam

Tithi: Ashtami: 05:16 pm

Nakshatram: Purna Pragnani: 01:47 pm

Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)

Rahukalam: 02:53 pm - 04:15 pm

Yamagandam: 09:23 am - 10:45 am

Varjyam: 08:37 pm - 10:08 pm

Gulika: 12:08 pm - 01:30 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritkalam: 07:35 am - 09:08 am

Ahijit Muhurtham: 11:45 am - 12:29 pm

HYDERABAD WEATHER

Forecast: Sunny

Temp: 28/16

Humidity: 52%

Sunrise: 06:34 am

Sunset: 05:41 pm

Current Weather Conditions
Updated December 7, 2020 5:00 PM

Farmers being misled, intentions of Modi govt are noble

Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao had announced a series of policy decisions that kick-started liberalisation and privatisation of the Indian economy. These reforms freed up India from many bureaucratic hurdles and red tape, providing the foundation for strong economic growth.

Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee not only continued PV's reforms, but expedited them. It may be recalled that Pranab Mukherjee, the then Commerce Minister, was a signatory to the WTO when PV was the PM.

As per the WTO agreement, the Patents Act should have been amended to allow manufacturing patents. However, the PV government failed to get Parliament to approve the amendment Bill when it was introduced. Hence, other nations cried foul, alleging that

India had violated the pact it had signed during the formation of WTO.

Murasoli Maran, the Commerce Minister in the Vajpayee Cabinet in 2002 - 2003, reintroduced the Bill for amending the Patents Act. Vajpayee discussed the issue with Manmohan Singh and Pranab Mukherjee; he reminded Pranab to accept it as it was earlier introduced in the Congress tenure.

Pranab and Manmohan Singh discussed Vajpayee's suggestion with Sonia Gandhi and Pranab convinced the MPs about the Bill. With the support of Congress MPs, the Patent Amendment Bill was passed in the Lok Sabha.

It's ironic that Opposition parties are creating misconceptions among people on various Bills being introduced by the present government. The Citizenship Amendment Act of

Agriculture is flourishing in Italy, the birthplace of Sonia Gandhi, as the government there introduced reforms by opening the sector for private players. Similarly, the BJP is striving for the development of farmers as they can sell their produce anywhere in the country with new laws. With this, farmers will be saved from middlemen and from paying bribes.

2019 was passed in both the Houses of Parliament on December 10 and 11, 2019, and came into force from January 10, 2020, when it was formally notified. Unfortunately, the parties launched a campaign and created a fear psychosis among Muslims, saying that it threatened their citizenship, though it was meant for the well-being of the people.

Similarly, now they are instigating farmers to agitate against farm laws. Adding insult to injury, Congress, Left and other parties are now backing the call for Bharat Bandh on Tuesday.

Sadly, leaders like Pranab Mukherjee, who had supported the NDA when the PATENT AMENDMENT BILL was introduced in the Lok Sabha, are no longer with us.



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

The BP had wholeheartedly supported the Congress when PV introduced the economic reforms in 1991. But, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced GST, the Congress did not support it but instead took the government to task. Rahul Gandhi even termed it as 'Gabbar Singh Tax'. PV had pondered over intro-

ducing the reforms in the farm sector. He would have gone ahead if his government had an absolute majority.

Rahul Gandhi, who is opposing the farm laws, had announced in the 2019 Congress poll manifesto that the Agriculture Market Committee Acts would be abolished and farmers' produce would be put for sale in open market. He had also directed the Chief Ministers of Congress-led States that they should allow farmers to sell their produce in the open markets without the intervention of market panels. Similarly, NCP leader Sharad Pawar, who is an ally of the Congress, too declared that Market Committee Act would be abolished in 2005. He emphasised the need for the introduction of farm reforms

for the benefit of farmers. The Modi government is striving to improve a lot of farmers as they are unable to sustain themselves due to the agrarian crisis. They are in depression as they feel the cultivation is no longer viable and many are migrating to cities to eke out a livelihood.

In this backdrop, the Modi government came out with the farm laws to encourage farmers to sell their produce in the open market.

Agriculture is flourishing in Italy, the birthplace of Sonia Gandhi, as the government there introduced reforms by opening the sector for private players. Similarly, the BJP is striving for the development of farmers as they can sell their produce anywhere in the country with new laws. With this, farmers will be saved from mid-

dlemen and from paying bribes.

Importantly, farmers can directly sell their produce to private firms like 'Big Basket' and others by signing contracts. This would allow them to earn good money.

With the new laws, farmers would be able to sell their produce as per their desire, without permission from the government unlike earlier where they had to sell their produce only in markets allocated by the administration.

With new farm laws, farmers can earn good money and with it, they can set up storage units and other amenities.

However, the Opposition parties are creating unnecessary fear, which has become a hurdle for the development of the farm sector. Hence, they should wake up from slumber and support the government in going ahead with farm reforms.



Gudur quits Cong for BJP

Senior Congress leader Gudur Naryaana Reddy on Monday tendered his resignation to the post of TPCC Treasurer, AICC member and primary membership of the Congress party and joined BJP. He joined the saffron party in presence of BJP national president JP Nadda. In his resignation letter, Gudur stated that "As a disciplined soldier of Congress party since my student days in 1981 till this date, I have discharged my duties to the best of my abilities in whatever responsibility was assigned to me by the party. I gave my best performance as the AICC member and TPCC Treasurer in the most efficient and transparent manner. I thank you for the opportunities you have provided me to serve the people and the party. I am here by resigning from the posts of TPCC Treasurer and AICC member and also from the Primary membership of the Congress party with immediate effect. Kindly accept my resignation".

KTR to support...

TPCC working president A Revanth Reddy too would be participating in a protest at Shadnagar, but at the Shadnagar Market Yard. CLP Leader Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka would stage a dharna at Shamirpet on Rajiv Rahadhari while Sangareddy MLA T Jagga Reddy would stop traffic flow on the Mumbai Highway at Sangareddy.

MLC K Kavitha would participate in the protest at Kamareddy on the Nagpur Highway, while Minister Talasani Srinivas Yadav would organise a bike rally in Hyderabad city.

HYDERABAD BULLION RATES

GOLD	₹ 50,090 (10 gm)
SILVER	₹ 63,900 (1kg)
RETAIL PRICE	₹ 3.95

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG

Dressed/With Skin	₹162
Without Skin	₹185
Broiler at Farm	₹112

EGG RATES ₹/100

HYDERABAD	395
VIJAYAWADA	410
VISAKHAPATNAM	441

KTR on inauguration spree

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

IT and Municipal Administration Minister K T Rama Rao undertook a whirlwind tour of Khammam city and its surroundings on Monday and inaugurated a series of developmental works. Rama Rao, accompanied by Home Minister Mohammad Mahmood Ali, Roads and Buildings Minister Vemula Prashanth Reddy and Transport Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar attended inaugurations of as many as 11 newly developed infrastructure projects worth Rs 218 crore.

The Minister inaugurated IT Hub in Khammam district. Spread across 42,000 sq feet, the five-floor IT tower is constructed at a cost of Rs 27 crore. Speaking on the occasion, the Minister said that the government is working hard to decentralise the IT industry and expand it to the tier-II cities like Khammam, Warangal, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Mahbubnagar and Siddipet. "As many as 19 companies signed up to begin operations at the IT Hub which provide employment opportunities to unemployed youth," KTR said. The Minister also said that the



government will sanction Rs 20 crore soon for the phase-II of IT Hub.

The Minister also asked the youth to grab opportunities and enhance their knowledge and skills. "Many youth with book knowledge lack the skills and for those, the government had set up Telangana Academy for Skill and Knowledge (TASK)," he added. The Minister also inaugurated Mini Tankbund at Raghunadhapalem and cemetery in Ballepalli. He also unveiled the statue of former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao in Khammam and vowed to instal his statues in all the districts in the state.

Khammam Police Commissionerate building built at a cost of Rs 6.37 crore, road over bridge (RoB) at Damsalapuram built with a cost of Rs 77 crore, Khanapuram Mini Tank Bund developed with Rs 1.55 crore, NSP canal walk way built with Rs 4.5 crore, Gollapadu channel modernised with Rs 70 crore and IT Hub constructed with Rs 27 crore were inaugurated by Rama Rao and other ministers.

An ultra-modern Vaikuntadham developed at a cost of Rs 3 crore at Ballepalli near Khammam, parks, road widening and central lighting works have also been inaugurated. KMC Park at Indira Nagar,



PV Narasimha Rao statue unveiling, inauguration of divider cum central lighting RoB circle. At Sundaraiyah Nagar where a park was developed as part of Gollapadu channel modernisation the minister Rama Rao invited the Khammam CPM secretary Nunna Nageswar Rao to inaugurate the park much to the surprise of the locals.

DGP M Mahender Reddy, IT Secretary Jayesh Ranjan, Police Housing Board Chairman K Damodar, District Collector RV Karnan, Commissioner of Police Tafseer Iqbal, Municipal Commissioner Anurag Jayanthi, Additional Collector (Local Bodies) Sneha Latha M and others were present.

Mystery illness overwhelms...

Continued from page 1

Multiple teams of experts from premier scientific institutions of the country are on the job to determine the exact cause of the disease in Eluru city of Andhra Pradesh.

With little to go on, the West Godavari administration has now sent these samples to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad for cellular and molecular analysis, hoping for some leads. They are looking forward to the report from CCMB to further make changes in the treatment protocol and also to take measures to contain the disease by identifying its causes.

"Mostly yes, but we are waiting for the laboratory report (for confirmation)," a top official of the Medical and Health Department said here on Monday, when asked about organochlorine being the disease-triggering agent.

Water and milk samples were also sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad for analysis of heavy metal content, sources in the Medical and Health Department said.

With all the incoming patients turning negative for coronavirus, the authorities have heaved a sigh of relief.

Jagan rushes...

Continued from page 1

The Chief Minister said the observations of further analysis done by the teams of National Institute of Nutrition (NIIN) and Indian Council of Chemical Technology (ICCT) along with All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) should be taken into consideration. The Chief Minister enquired about the health status of the patients being discharged and said they should be kept under observation and instructed the officials to provide quality food and best medicines to the discharged patients. The Chief Minister said a high ranking official of the Health Department should stay put to monitor the situation.

Centre dispatches...

Continued from page 1

"All of us are aware that people in and around Eluru, West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh are suffering from some sudden illness. Till date, more than 300 people were required to be admitted for hospital care, which includes one casualty. In order to find the root causes for such sudden illness, the authorities of AIIMS, New Delhi are in continuous discussion with the Health Department officials of the State Government and also requested the State Government to send samples for further examination," said Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy.

National Institute of Nutrition and Indian Institute of Chemical Technology, Hyderabad reached Eluru on Monday and collected various samples for analysis.

Water and milk samples were also sent to the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad for analysis of heavy metal content, sources in the Medical and Health Department said.

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Centre will bring...

Continued from page 1

Turning his attention to Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, he ridiculed the TRS chief for speaking against the three contentious farm laws that the farmers are agitating against. "KCR is speaking about the farm laws only to divert attention from the defeat he suffered in the GHMC elections," Sanjay said.

He pointed out that from the day he came to power, KCR had never staged a single protest, but was now coming out in support of the Bharat bandh call. "KCR did not react when three lakh farmers wrote to him asking him to change his attitude with regard to farm laws. KCR has been adopting anti-farmer policies in the state. He should announce a bonus for the farmers who cultivated superfine variety paddy," the BJP leader said.

Kishan Reddy said that the Centre brought new farm laws to make agriculture beneficial.

"The opposition parties are hatching conspiracies and harming the interests of farmers. No farmer is taking part in the protests, except those goaded by political parties," Kishan Reddy said.

MLAs," the BJP leader said. "Nobody can forget how Khammam farmers were handcuffed in his farm but when it came to farmers, he dictated the variety they had to cultivate. Telangana farmers cultivated a superfine variety of paddy in 30 lakh acres of the total area of 40 lakh acres," Sanjay said.

He added that Telangana society has bowed its head, "ashamed by the attitude of the Chief Minister".

"KCR is opposing the Centre's farm acts without listing the reasons why. KCR is opposing the farm laws that would benefit farmers. KCR didn't extend any help to the farmers affected by thunderstorms and unseasonal rains," Sanjay said.

He said that the BJP will approach courts against the TRS government's "irregularities".

"The BJP will file a petition in court against KCR's corruption very soon with full evidence. We have details of KCR's corruption. We will expose the corrupt practices of the TRS Ministers and

Old laws have...

Continued from page 1

He also said that his government intends to solve pestering problems faced by people, make life easy, increase investment, and ensure maximum use of modern technology.

The ₹ 8,379.62 crore Agra Metro project comprises 2 corridors with a total length of 29.4 km and will connect major tourist attractions like Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, and Sikandra with railway stations and bus stands.

The project, which is scheduled to be completed in 5 years, will benefit the 26 lakh population of the city of Agra. It will also cater to more than 60 lakh tourists who visit Agra every year.

The semester exams scheduled tomorrow (December 8) have been postponed due to Bharat Bandh call given by some organisations, as it may affect the transportation to the students. The postponed exams shall be conducted on Thursday (December 10). The timings of the exams remain unchanged".

Osmania University stated in its official circular, "All the examinations scheduled on December 8, 2020 under Osmania University jurisdiction have been postponed due to Bharat Bandh. The revised schedule will be given in due course of time. The examinations scheduled under December 9, 2020 will be held as per the schedule".

JNTUH, OU...

Continued from page 1

In a circular, the JNTUH said, "The semester exams scheduled tomorrow (December 8) have been postponed due to Bharat Bandh call given by some organisations, as it may affect the transportation to the students. The postponed exams shall be conducted on Thursday (December 10). The timings of the exams remain unchanged".

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Supreme Court upholds...

Continued from page 1

The top court had set up the panel on November 28, 2018 to settle the dispute over allocation of employees between Andhra Pradesh Power Utilities and Telangana Power Utilities.

The dispute followed the division of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh into two states - Telangana and Andhra Pradesh by Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014.

A bench of Justices Ashok Bhushan and MR Shah, after considering all aspects, said,

"We, thus, are of the view that the one-man committee has considered all materials and objections placed before it by both sides including the representation of the employees and employees' organisations submitted from time to time".

The top court bench noted that the process initiated by submitting the final report on December 26, 2019 was followed by a supplementary report dated March 11, 2020 and Concluding Report on June 20, 2020.

KCR working on new welfare schemes...

Continued from page 1

The TRS government is spending nearly Rs 60,000 crore from state exchequer towards welfare schemes, which helped it to develop a solid vote bank among various sections.

However, the recent setbacks hinted at BJP making a dent to this vote bank despite the TRS government implementing these

welfare schemes.

TRS had high hopes on increasing its vote share, if not winning some municipal divisions seats in the Old City with the help of Shaadi Mubarak scheme under which it extends Rs 1,00,016 to Muslim families to perform the marriage of their daughters. Several lakh Muslim families have benefited from this scheme in the Old City alone.

To its shock, TRS lost deposits in over 20 wards in Old City and worse, the party was pushed to third spot - behind AIMIM and the BJP.

Needless to say, the BJP's vote share increased significantly in the Old City while the TRS vote share came down sharply, compared to the 2016 GHMC polls.

Even in Dubbak, the beneficiaries of Aasara pensions,

Rythu Bandhu, Rythu Bima were sizable in number. Even if half of these beneficiaries had voted for TRS, it could have won the seat, but voters opted for the BJP.

In this backdrop, KCR is planning to modify and reform the existing welfare schemes to make them more attractive and thereby woo voters back to the TRS in the coming polls.

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Govt to resume distribution of flood relief in Hyderabad

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana government is set to resume the distribution of Rs 10,000 per family as relief among those affected by October floods in Hyderabad.

The relief distribution, which was stopped by the State Election Commission (SEC) in view of model code of conduct for GHMC elections, will resume with the officials conducting field visits to gather details of those who have not received the money.

The GHMC, however, has appealed to people not to come to Mee Seva centres to apply for relief.

Commissioner Lokesh Kumar said GHMC officials will visit the houses and after verification of the affected the money will be deposited directly into the bank accounts. The distribution of relief was stopped on November 18 on the direction of SEC. The government had promised to resume the same after GHMC elections.

As the polling process was completed with declaration of results on December 4, authorities asked the applicants not to come to Mee Seva centres, the



online citizen services delivery centres. The centres had seen long queues and stampede like situation for a couple of days before the process of applying for relief was stopped. Anticipating a similar situation again, GHMC asked the applicants not to throng Mee Seva centres.

According to officials, Rs 664 crore was distributed among 6.64 lakh families since October 20.

Heavy rains and floods on October 14-15 had battered the city and outskirts, killing about 50 people and inundating hundreds of colonies.

The government had announced that every affected family will be provided Rs 10,000. However, many people in the affected areas complained that they have not received the aid. After Municipal Administration Minister KT Rama Rao announced on November 15 that those who have not received the aid can apply through Mee Seva centres, thousands had turned up at the centres to submit the applications.

The opposition parties cried foul saying that the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi

(TRS) is influencing the voters. Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao had assured the people before the polls that all the affected would get the relief. He had said that the government spent over Rs 600 crore and there will be no problem in spending another Rs 200 crore to 300 crore to cover all the affected.

TRS emerged as the single largest party with 55 seats in 150-member GHMC but its strength came down drastically from 99 it won in 2016. BJP increased its numbers from four to 48 while MIM retained 44 divisions.

Fake godman dupes women

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A fake godman allegedly stole jewelry of four women promising to perform a ritual for wealth and good health, at Shamshabad here on Saturday. He further allegedly kidnapped a minor girl and after taking her ornaments, abandoned her.

Sources said the suspect who is yet to be identified met the women on road and with his fake promises impressed them into believing him. "He told them that many people have benefitted with his rituals and the victims fell for his lies. He took them to a toddy compound and after getting them drunk, took to a room on the pretext of performing rituals. While they were unconscious, he took their valuables," police said.

While leaving the room, he took along a minor girl, daughter of one of the women, on the pretext of purchasing material for ritual. "On the way, he took her jewelry and abandoned her in Kukatapally. Local residents found her roaming on the road and alerted the local police," said an official.

A case was booked and efforts are on to nab the suspect, who is absconding, police said.

Covid recoveries continue to outnumber new cases in TS

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana's Covid-19 recoveries continued to outnumber daily count of new infections as recovery rate jumped to 96.62 per cent, health officials said on Monday.

As many as 862 people recovered from the virus during the last 24 hours, taking the cumulative recoveries to 2,64,606.

The state reported 517 new Covid-19 cases during the last 24 hours, taking the state's tally to 2,73,858.

Two more persons succumbed to the virus, taking the death toll to 1,474.

The fatality rate stands at 0.53 per cent against the national average of 1.5 per cent. According to the director of public health and family welfare, 44.96 per cent of the deaths were due to Covid-19 while the remaining 55.04 were on account of comorbidities.

The number of active cases dropped further to 7,778 including 5,803 who are in home or institutional isolation.

The recovery rate jumped to 96.63 per cent, which is higher than the national average of 94.4 per cent.

Greater Hyderabad reported 102 new cases. Rangareddy district the second highest



number at 57 followed by Medchal Malkajgiri (36), Karimnagar (33), Warangal Urban (28), Bhadradi Kothagudem (26) and Sangareddy (21). Like every weekend, the authorities conducted fewer tests. A total of 33,098 samples were tested during the last 24 hours. The cumulative number of tests rose to 58,12,588.

Officials said 30,918 samples were tested in the government-run laboratories and 2,180 samples in private labs.

Eighteen government-run laboratories, 54 private laboratories and 1,076 Rapid Antigen test centres are conducting the tests in the state. Samples tested per million population ratio rose further to 1,56,168.

The daily testing target for the state is 5,600 per day as per the World Health Organization (WHO) benchmark of 140 per million per day.

Out of 2,73,858 total positive cases so far, 70 per cent (1,91,701) were asymptomatic while the remaining 30 per cent (82,157) were symptomatic.

The data shows that 63.9 per cent of those tested positive so far were aged between 21-50 years.

As many as 22.91 per cent were aged above 51 years. The positive cases include 13.18 per cent who were below 20 years.

Of the total cases, 60.44 per cent were male and 39.37 per cent female.

CITY LIGHTS

TiE to host world's largest entrepreneurship summit

TiE, Hyderabad will be hosting World's Largest Entrepreneurship Summit. It will be formally kicked off on December 8th and will go on till 10th non-stop 60 hours across global time zones. It will be formally inaugurated by M Venkaiah Naidu, Vice President of India. It will be graced by Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister for Road Transport and MSME, Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi, K.T. Rama Rao, Minister of MA & UD, Industries and IT&C, Telangana, N. Chandrababu Naidu, Leader of Opposition, Andhra Pradesh. A total of 20,000 entrepreneurs, 200+ investors, 300+ Global Speakers, 10+ world leaders, 50+ star speakers, successful celebrities, sports persons and spiritual and wellness gurus will be attending the summit. The summit will focus on issues faced and challenged by entrepreneurs, provide a platform for funding, insights into strategies to grow and scale business with focus on new start-up ideas, investments in start-ups, pitching tactics to help start-ups attract b2b and b2c businesses and scaling strategies to grow their business by 10x.



Youngistaan organises event to counter gender-based violence

Observing the International Day of elimination of violence against women, Youngistaan Foundation organised a virtual event — "Orange the World, Educate! Respond! Prevent!" on December 5, 2020 to counter gender-based violence and to create awareness on reducing violence faced by women. 50+ participants attended this event while more than 2,000 people watched the event on Facebook and Youtube live streaming. The event was graced by the presence of four esteemed panelists, namely Sumathi Badugula an IPS officer, DIG, CID Women Safety Wing, Sudarsana Kundu, co-director gender at Work Global, Pearl Choragudi, Head of Counseling at My Choices Foundation and Richa Singh, Assistant Manager in digital engagement at Breakthrough in addition to Live music performed by Rinky Sharma.



Last date to apply for Haj 2021 is Dec 10, says chief

Telangana Haj Committee Chairman Mohammed Masiullah Khan and Executive Officer B Shaifulah on Monday informed in a joint statement that the last date to apply for Haj pilgrimage 2021 online is December 10. Mohammed Masiullah Khan also informed that the intending Haj pilgrims who have not applied till now may submit their application through online from the website of Haj Committee of India - www.hajcommittee.gov.in before December 10. He also requested the intending Haj pilgrims to bring necessary documents such as Passports, Bank proof, Address proof, Passport size photos with white background along with debit or credit card to pay the online HAF processing fee.



PGECET aspirants can exercise web options on December 7, 8

Candidates participating in the first phase Telangana State Post Graduate Engineering Common Entrance Test 2020 admission counseling can exercise web options on December 7 and 8. The web options can be edited on December 9 up to 5 pm. A total of 8,040 seats are available under convener quota for the academic year 2020-21. TS PGECET 2020 admissions convener Prof. P Ramesh Babu said preliminary online certificate verification was completed and 7,774 candidates were eligible for exercising web options. Provisional allotments for candidates who exercised web options will be released on December 10. Students have to report at the allotted college along with original certificates, fee paid challan and joining report between December 10 and 14.



MASSIVE UPROAR

Sikhs stage protest against the Centre's farm laws at a Gurudwara in Hyderabad on Monday. The protests against the farm laws entered the 12th day on Monday as tens of thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab and Haryana, camped out at the entrance to Delhi, demanding the government to abolish the new legislations. As many as seven borders connecting Delhi with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh remained completely closed. The Centre, which claims the laws would revitalise India's agrarian economy by boosting produce, has made several attempts to placate the farmers. But five rounds of talks have failed to break the impasse so far.



— SV CHARY

4 men get 20 years RI for raping woman

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A special court at LB Nagar on Monday sentenced four members from Odisha to 20-years rigorous imprisonment for raping a 30-year-old woman in August, 2019.

According to the police, the victim, a migrant from Odisha, used to work in brick kilns at Maheshwaram.

On August 16, 2019, the accused persons abducted her and took her to a secluded place when she went to attend a nature call at midnight. All the four accused sexually abused her and fled away from the spot.

Based on the complaint from the victim, Maheshwaram police booked a case and arrested the accused Rahul Maaji, 25, Manoj Samrat, 23,

Durga Samrat, 20 and Dhaya Nidhi Maji, 20, all the accused hailed from Odisha.

During the trial, the Special Court for Atrocities against Women at LB Nagar examined 27 witnesses and convicted them to undergo 20 years rigorous imprisonment and imposed fine of Rs 2,000 to each of them under Section 376 D gang rape.

While they were in jail, Rachakonda police commissioner Mahesh M Bagawat invoked a PD Act against them and further requested the court to conduct a speedy trial. Further after the announcement of conviction, Mahesh Bagawat felicitated the investigation officers and Additional public prosecutor Buchi Reddy who argued for the prosecution.



Unidentified body of woman found near Jalpally lake

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A body of an unidentified woman was found near Jalpally lake under Pahadishareef police station limits on Monday.

The police officials are suspecting that she was sexually abused and murdered by the suspect. However, suspicion can be ascertained only after postmortem examination. The local residents who found the body of woman, aged in her 40s, informed the Pahadishareef police, who reached the spot, have taken up investigation. Further, CLUES CLUES team and dog squad were pressed into action.

"She is suspected to have been attacked with a boulder on her head leading to her death. We are probing from all possible angles including whether she was sexually assaulted before being murdered," police said. The police booked a case of suspicious death and shifted the dead to Osmania General Hospital for Autopsy and further investigation is underway.

Cops issues traffic advisory for bandh

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

In view of the 'Bharat Bandh' proposed by various farmers' unions and political parties on Tuesday, numerous protest programmes might be held at various places in and around the city affecting regular movement of traffic on roads.

In this background, the Cyberabad Traffic Police have

issued a traffic advisory to avoid inconvenience to citizens.

Accordingly, those travelling to the RGIA have been requested to utilise the Outer Ring Road to reach the airport and to plan their travel accordingly.

The traffic police said there would be free passage for emergency services and ambulances on all roads.

7 SR Nagar cops test positive for Covid in 15 days

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

As many as seven police personnel who were working at SR Nagar police station tested positive for Coronavirus in the last 15 days. The officials are suspecting that the seven including 4 sub-inspectors and 3 constables might have contracted the infection while performing bandobast duties during GHMC elections.

One held for theft, booty worth Rs 4 L recovered

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The sleuths of CCS Bhongir police arrested a habitual property offender and recovered Rs 4 lakhs worth of property from his possession. The police claimed to have solved Six cases.

The accused had been identified as G Nikhil 25-year-old resident of Medchal.

According to the police the accused has been involved in several offences including robbery, extortion and thefts.

The police took him into custody when he was moving suspiciously in Nagaram circle in Valigonda police station limits of Rachakonda commissionerate. When questioned the accused disclosed his Criminal record and also confessed the various offences he



committed under Rachakonda Police Commissionerate.

The accused used to extort the valuables by posing as sudo Police, commits Robberies, snatching offences from old aged people and also commits automobile thefts which were parked in busy areas.

Further the accused has been arrested and sent to judicial custody.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA									
REVENUE (LAND ACQUISITION) DEPARTMENT									
FORM-VI									
PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION									
(See Sub-rule (f) of rule 19 and Section 11(1) of the Act. 30(2013))									
Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam, Land Acquisition Officer, Seetamma Sagar Multi Purpose Project.									
No. C/1018/2020-19 Dt. 17/11/2020									
Collector, Bhadradi Kothagudem									
No. G/3882/2020 Dt. 16/11/2020									
District Gazette No. 83/77/2020 Dt. 21/11/2020									
3	4/2/20	4/2/20	4/2/20	0.10	Punem Bhujangarao Muthaiah	Sarem Krishna S/o Venkatesh	---		
4	4/2/20	4/2/20	4/2/20	0.05	Ganipati Veeravennikonda W/o Shankar Rao	Ganipati Veeravennikonda W/o Shankar Rao	---		
5	4/2/20	4/2/20	4/2/20	0.04	Punem Sarwanthash S/o/Bhujangarao	Punem Sarwanthash S/o/Bhujangarao	---		
6	4/2/20	4/2/20	4/2/20	0.02	Punem Veeraraju S/o Bhujangarao	Punem Veeraraju S/o Bhujangarao	---		
TOTAL 1.07									
ABSTRACT									
Sl No	Type of Land	Extent (Ac. Gts.)							
1	Patta land	1.00							
2	Govt land	0.07							
TOTAL 1.07									
This notification is made under the provision of Section 11 (1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 and the Publicity is made as shown in the below schedule.									
The District Collector, Bhadradi Kothagudem has appointed the Additional Collector, Bhadradi Kothagudem as Project Administrator for Rehabilitation & Resettlement for the Construction of Seetamma Sagar Multi Purpose Project in the village limits Koyyuru(2) of Charla Mandal Bhadradi Kothagudem District. In this acquisition no families coming under displacement.									
Therefore, it is notified that for the above said project in the Village Koyyuru(2) of Charla Mandal of Bhadradi Kothagudem District to and extent of land measuring an extent of Ac.1.07 gts. of standard measurement, whose detail description is as following, is under acquisition.									
SCHEDULE									
Sl. No.	Area (Ac. Gts.)	Name of the Person	Name of the Employer	Use of Land	Area (Ac. Gts.)	Remarks	Assessment	Year of Acquisition	Year of Possession
1	1.00	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
2	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
3	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
4	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
5	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
6	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
7	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
8	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
9	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
10	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
11	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
12	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
13	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
14	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
15	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
16	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
17	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
18	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
19	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
20	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
21	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
22	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
23	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
24	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
25	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
26	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
27	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
28	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
29	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
30	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
31	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
32	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
33	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
34	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
35	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
36	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
37	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
38	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
39	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
40	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
41	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
42	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
43	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
44	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
45	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
46	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
47	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
48	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
49	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
50	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
51	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---
52	0.07	Govt Land	Govt	---	---	---	---	---	---

Efforts on to build brand image for TS cotton

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao on Monday disclosed that the cotton produced in Telangana state is of a very high quality in the country and it is one of the regions in the world, where a high quality cotton is produced. The cotton staple grown in Telangana State is the lengthiest and its hardness is also high in the country.

The Chief Minister instructed the officials concerned to get a brand image to the high quality cotton being produced in the state to increase its demand globally. He also wanted a strategy should be prepared to give publicity to the special qualities of the cotton grown in the State. To this, he wanted the Agriculture Department to hold a conference with all the experts and specialists. The Chief Minister wanted proper instructions should be given to the cotton growers on how to clean the cotton picked from the fields, later packaging with proper caution and in such a way that it would increase the demand internationally.

He said proper care should be taken so that there would not be any dust, rubbish particles and soil in the cotton picked. "Telangana State is the second state that is growing more cotton in the country. In Telangana state cotton is cultivated in 60 lakh acres. Cotton has a good market both in the country and internationally. The cotton staple grown in Telangana state has more length and has more demand



Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao asked the officials concerned to get a brand image to the high quality cotton being produced in the state to increase its demand globally

in the market. Cotton yields are good when it was cultivated through irrigated water. Since many projects are constructed in Telangana state, there is an adequate availability of water for irrigation. Hence if the Cotton is grown under the Canals, it would be beneficial," the CM said.

"The state government has taken all the measures to get demand for cotton in the market. Before the formation of Telangana state there were only 60 ginning mills, they were increased to 300 after formation of the State. Necessary arrangements are made to set up Ginning Mills at the places where the cotton is grown on a large scale," the CM said. "The new methods

have come in for the cotton cultivation. New varieties of seeds also are available for the growers. There are seeds, which can produce one time pick cotton. They should be cultivated in Telangana State," the CM suggested. "We have taken measures in Telangana state to make sure that farmers cultivate profitable crops. Farmers are also following the government policy and cultivating as per the regulated cultivation methods. This is a good tradition. There is a lot of demand in the market for Cotton, pulses and oilseeds. Vegetable are also getting good price. Cultivate vegetable more. Increase cultivation of Redgram to 20 Lakh acres.

CM releases Vriksha Vedam

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao released the book, 'Vriksha Vedam' published by the Green India Challenge on the occasion of TRS MP J Santosh Kumar's birthday at Pragathi Bhavan here on Monday. The book, written by Mamidi Harikrishna and edited by Desapathy Srinivas, has the shlokas highlighting the importance of trees; forests as depicted in the Indian Literature and beautiful photographs show casing the beauty of the forests.

The Chief Minister congratulated Santosh Kumar for compiling the book. The Chief Minister said we have a rich culture, which treats trees as gods. He said with the continuing efforts of the Telangana government the dream of Haritha Telangana is being achieved.



Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao releasing the book, 'Vriksha Vedam' on the occasion of TRS MP J Santosh Kumar's birthday



Tiger sighted in cotton fields in Asifabad

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

A tiger was reportedly sighted in agriculture fields of Rudrapur, Chintalmanepalli and Babasagar and Adipelli villages on Monday. Agriculture labourers who were engaged in picking cotton in these four villages and many other habitations located on forest fringes said they spotted a big cat moving in the cotton fields. Stating that living in the grip of fear, the villagers urged the Forest department to take steps to drive the territorial animal into the forest.

Foresters confirmed the presence of a tiger in the forests of Karjelli, Bejjur and Chintalmanepalli mandals and said that efforts were on to catch the big cat. They urged the labourers to wear face masks supplied by the department free of cost to divert the attention of the big cat. They suggested the farmers to ensure that the labourers were in groups rather than scattered.

Vijayashanti says BJP alone can dethrone KCR

Former actress makes 'ghar wapsi' to the party she says has potential to dethrone KCR

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Stating that the BJP alone has the strength, verve and tenacity to defeat the TRS and dethrone Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao from his post, Telangana Congress Campaign Committee chairperson Vijayashanti on Monday finally switched parties.

The actor-turned-politician, whose 'ghar wapsi' to the BJP - after all, she had started her political career with the saffron party - was long expected, parted ways with the Congress with some comments that many agree ring true. She accused some leaders of joining hands with KCR instead of questioning his government and its "atrocities".

Vijayashanti said that her goal was to expose the corrupt practices of TRS. "The party will decide my responsibilities in the BJP. It has been proven with Dubbak and now the GHMC election results that the BJP alone can defeat the TRS in Telangana," she said, exuding confidence that the saffron party will come to power in the State in 2023. She said that she was ready to campaign anywhere the party wants her to.

"I have waged a struggle for the sake of Telangana right



Vijayashanti with Union Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy in New Delhi on Monday

from the start of my political career," the actor-turned-politician said, after joining the BJP in presence of the party's national general secretary Arun Singh in Delhi. Arun Singh welcomed her into the BJP fold offering her the party's saffron scarf. Telangana BJP chief Bandi Sanjay Kumar, Minister of State G Kishan Reddy, BJP OBC Morcha national president Dr K Laxman and others also present.

Later, Vijayashanti reminded that she had started her political career on January 26, 1998 by joining BJP. She said that she left BJP in 2005 for some reasons. "Later, I merged my Talli Telangana Party with the TRS due to the pressure exerted by KCR. However, KCR suspended me from the TRS on the day the Congress announced that it was according statehood for

Telangana. Later, I joined Congress. Telangana Bill was passed in Parliament with the support of BJP," she said.

Vijayashanti said that KCR portrayed that apart from TRS, no other party should exist in Telangana. "I started waging a fight for separate Telangana state before KCR. We both won as MPs from TRS. However, he suspended me in July, 2013. KCR conspired against me and then did propaganda that I had left TRS on my own," she said. "KCR, who assumed AICC chief Sonia Gandhi that he will merge the TRS with the Congress if she gave Telangana state, took a U-turn. KCR inducted all leaders into the TRS so that there would be no opposition to him. However, BJP has come up as an alternative," Vijayashanti said.

Oil Palm to be cultivated in 8L acres

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Chief Minister on Monday approved the Oil Palm Crop Extension project at a cost of Rs 4,800 crore. The Chief Minister declared that farmers would be given 50 per cent subsidy to cultivate the Oil Palm in the State.

He said Oil palm cultivation is possible only in the areas where there is a continuous availability of water for cultivation. Due to increase in irrigation water facility and 24x7 uninterrupted power supply in the State, the Chief Minister urged the farmers to utilise the opportunity and go in for oil palm cultivation in a big way. The CM disclosed that the national Reassessment



Committee of Government of India had identified 25 districts in the State as convenient for cultivating the Oil Palm.

The Chief Minister held a review meeting on the methods to increase Oil Palm cultivation in the State on Monday

at Pragathi Bhavan. Agriculture Minister Niranjan Reddy, Principal Secretary Janardhan Reddy, Horticulture Corporation MD Venktrammreddy, Seed Corporation MD Keshavulu participated.

It was decided to cultivate Oil Palm in 8,14,270 acres in Nirmal, Mahbubabad, Kamareddy, Warangal Rural, Nizamabad, Siddipet, Bhoopalpally, Peddapally, Karimnagar, Adilabad, Jagtial, Mancherial, Asifabad, Suryapet, Jangaon, Mulugu, Nalgonda, Warangal urban, Wanaparthy, Nagar Kurnool, Narayanpet, Sircilla, Gadwal, Mahboobnagar, Kothagudem districts. Along with the State Oilseed Corporation, several national and international companies are coming forward to set up Oil Palm Nurseries and Processing Plants at their cost. Oil Palm cultivating lands would be formed into Zones and handed over to the companies.

Mukhra declared ODF

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Central Water Resources Ministry under Swachh Bharat Mission has selected Mukhra K Village in Adilabad District as Open Defecation Free (ODF) village in Telangana state. On the occasion, Mukhra village Sarpanch, MPTC and other public representatives met Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao on Monday at Pragathi Bhavan. The CM has expressed happiness over the Mukhra village becoming ODF Plus village.

"The dreams I have dreamt are being realised through your village," the CM said to Mukhra Village sarpanch Gadke Meenakshi and the officials. The CM said it is appreciable that Mukhra village ensured 100 per cent in safeguarding the plant saplings and preparing the bio-fertilisers in the village cent percent.

HC junks BJP plea on SEC's midnight circular

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The obstacle for the counting of votes of Neredmet division election as part of GHMC elections has been cleared. The Telangana High Court on Monday gave permission to include the 544 votes that have marks other than the Swastika on them into the final tally. Accordingly, the SEC will accord these 544 votes to the respective candidates on Wednesday at 8 am.

It may be recalled that the SEC issued a circular the night before counting day stating that the votes that have been cast with marks other than Swastika would be counted in the final tally. However, the BJP moved the High Court challenging the SEC diktat.

Following this, the High Court stayed the counting of these votes and issued interim orders to the SEC not to announce the result if the number of disputed votes could impact the election result. This stopped the SEC from announcing the result since the TRS candidate was leading the count with a 504 vote majority.

Representing the petitioner, lawyer Desai Prakash Reddy said that the SEC issued circular exceeding its limits. He argued that the SEC should not be allowed to consider the votes that were cast with marks other than the Swastika and



SEC issued a circular stating that votes that have been cast with marks other than Swastika would be counted in the final tally

such votes be considered ineligible. However, counsel for the SEC argued that the Supreme Court stated that the High Court not to intervene in the activities of SEC. He said that the SEC was well within its right to issue the circular. Listening to both arguments, the High Court dismissed the BJP petition and directed SEC to count the 544 votes.

KCR enacting new drama in name of Bandh: Cong

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

Former Minister Ponnala Laxmaiah on Monday challenged Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao to pass a resolution against the Centre's new farm laws instead of staging a sit-in on the roads. He said that KCR is extending full support to the Bharath B a n d h only to shield the increasing opposition from the people.

Addressing the media on Monday, Ponnala alleged that KCR, who extended his support to the Centre all these days, is suddenly extending support to the farmers' bandh. He demanded KCR to convene special Assembly session to pass a resolution against the farm laws instead of enacting dramas on the roads.

Stating that KCR has the history of not implementing the Centre's Faisal Bhima Yojana Scheme, Ponnala said that Congress is opposing Centre's anti-farmer policies from the beginning. He alleged that KCR raised curtains to the new drama in the name of extension of support to the Bharath Bandh.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
REVENUE (LAND ACQUISITION) DEPARTMENT
FORM-VII
PUBLICATION OF DECLARATION
(See Sub-rule (1) of rule-25 and Section-19(1) of the Act-38/2013 Collection/Additional Collection/Special Collector, LA/SDC(LA)
Collector, Peddapalli Dist. No. 02/1293/2018 Date: 25-11-2020

Where as it appears to the Government of Telangana/District Collector Peddapalli that a total extent of Acs.16-04 Gzs of land is required in the Village Mustyala, Mandal Ramagiri, District, Peddapalli for a public purpose, namely for the purpose of RGOC-V Project/RG. 1 Area of SCGL. Therefore declaration made that land measuring Acs.16-04 Gzs be the same title more or less, to be needed for the public purpose to wit for the purpose of RGOC-V Project/RG. 1 Area of SCGL in Mustyala Village of Ramagiri Mandal, Peddapalli District whose detail description is as following, is under acquisition.

SCHEDULE-1									
Sl No	Sl No for Public Use	Sl No for Land	Sl No for Acquisition	Name of the Public Use	Name of the Enjoyners	Area in Gzs	Area in Acs	Area in Sq Ft	Area in Sq Yds
1	360	1-27	1-27	Particulars: Cherpalla Sharath Rao S/o Kishan Rao	Acute Enjoyners: Sharath Rao S/o Kishan Rao	1	1	1	1
2	361	14-17	6-17	Particulars: Enganti Anura S/o Hanumanth Rao	Acute Enjoyners: Enganti Anura S/o Hanumanth Rao	1	1	1	1
3	362	14-17	6-17	Particulars: Enganti Ram Mohan Rao S/o Marthanda Rao	Acute Enjoyners: Enganti Ram Mohan Rao S/o Marthanda Rao	1	1	1	1
4	363	14-17	6-17	Particulars: Enganti Raju Member Rao S/o Marthanda Rao	Acute Enjoyners: Enganti Raju Member Rao S/o Marthanda Rao	1	1	1	1
Total 16-04									

The Declaration is made after hearing of objections of persons interested and due enquiry as provided U/s 15 of Act No.38/2013. Mines of coal, iron-stone, slate or other minerals lying under the said land or any particular portion of said land, except such part of the mines and minerals which may be required to be dug or removed or used during the construction phase of the project for the purpose of which the land is being acquired, are not needed. A plan of the land may be inspected in the office of the District Collector Peddapalli & Special Deputy Collector, L.A. Unit, SCGL, GodavariKani on any working day

Special Deputy Collector, L.A. Unit, SCGL, GodavariKani
Additional Collector, Peddapalli
District Collector, Peddapalli

DIPR R.O. No: 052/LA/PP/Adv/Pub/2020-21

Cong: Will police arrest Ministers, MLAs?

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

AICC spokesperson Dr Sravan Dasoju on Monday questioned the Telangana Police if they are ready to take into preventive custody the TRS party Ministers, MLAs and other leaders who will be protesting against the Central Government's anti-farmer acts on Tuesday. It may be recalled that Chief Minister K Chandrashekhar Rao has decided to extend the TRS party's support to the agitating farmers in Delhi who are protesting against anti-farmer reforms for the last 12 days. A large number of political parties and farmer associations have called for a Bharath Bandh on December 8.

"Whenever the opposition parties protests against any anti-people decision in Telangana, the police used to house arrest the leaders to restrict them right at their residence itself. I am curious to know if the Telangana police will restrict TRS Ministers, MLAs, MPs and leaders through house arrests which was a usual undemocratic practice whenever opposition conducted or be selective in their policing," Sravan questioned the police on Twitter. "Despite the farmers producing crops dictated by you, the state government isn't buying their produce in time. However, you are now coming out in support of farmers to make a new drama," he alleged.

TRS terms Centre's farm laws as 'Black Laws'

PNS ■ KHAMMAM

TRS working president and IT, Municipal Administration Minister K T Rama Rao on Monday urged all sections of society to participate in the Bharath Bandh called in solidarity with the agitating farmers and dubbed the farm legislation enacted by the Centre as 'Black Laws'.

Earlier, he inaugurated several development works in Khammam district, which included a newly developed infrastructure projects such as the new premises of Khammam Police Commissionerate built at a cost of Rs 6.37 crore, a Road over Bridge (RoB) in Damsalapuram built with Rs 77 crore, Khanapuram Mini Tank Bund developed with Rs 1.55 crore, NSP canal walk way built with Rs 4.5 crore, Gollapadu channel modernised with Rs 70 crore and IT Hub constructed with Rs 27 crore.

In addition to the above, an ultra-modern Vaikuntadhaman developed with Rs 3 crore at Ballepalli near Khammam, parks, road widening and central lighting works have also been inaugurated. Home Minister Md. Mahmood Ali, R&B Minister V Prashanth Reddy and Transport Minister Puvvada Ajay Kumar, District Collector RV Karnan and elected members were present.

IJU extends support IJU extends support to Dec 8 Bharat Bandh Hyderabad, Dec 7 (UNI) The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has expressed solidarity with the protesting farmers around Delhi and elsewhere and extended support to the December 8 Bharat Bandh called by various unions representing farmers in the country. In a statement issued here on Monday, K Sreenivas Reddy and Balwinder Singh Jammu President and

Transport associations extend support

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Telangana State Taxi and Drivers Joint Action Committee (JAC) and Transport Association on Monday extend their support for Bharath Bandh on December 8 in solidarity with the farmers' protest. Shaik Salauddin Chairman JAC said 51 Association and unions have decided to support the farmers. According to Transport Associations, all modes of transportation are likely to take a hit including all road services, especially those along the borders. Members of Transport Associations will hold a rally across the city. Swiggy and Zomato delivery partners have also extended their support to the farmers' protest. Shaik Salauddin, National General Secretary, Indian Federation Of App Based Transport told the Pioneer, "We members of Transport Associations decided to hold a taxi rally on Tuesday as part of Bharath Bandh in LB Nagar and rest of our members will hold rally in different parts of the city. Swiggy and Zomato delivery partners are also joining us. We demand the government to fulfill demands of our farmer brothers."

Secretary General of IJU respectively called on the Union Government to take note of the growing turmoil among the farming community as a result of the three agri laws which can effectively enslave farmers to corporates. The IJU leaders said it is worth mentioning here that no consultation process had preceded the enactment of these highly controversial laws.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA
REVENUE (LAND ACQUISITION) DEPARTMENT
FORM-VI
PRELIMINARY NOTIFICATION
(See Sub-rule (1) of rule-19 and Section-11(1) of the Act-38/2013) Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam, Land Acquisition Officer, Setamma Sagar Multi Purpose Project, R. No. C/1018/2020-20 Dt. 17/11/2020
Collector, Bhadrachalam
R. No. C/3883/2020 Dt. 18/11/2020
District Gazette No. 83/78/2020 Dt. 24/11/2020

Whereas it appears to the Government of Telangana/Collector that a total extent of Ac. 2.38 gzs land is required in the Regu(2) of Cherala Mandal Bhadrachalam District for public purpose, namely for the construction of Setamma Sagar Multi Purpose Project under Section 11(1) of the Right Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act-2013 and the Publication is made as shown in the below schedule.

The District Collector, Bhadrachalam has appointed the Additional Collector, Bhadrachalam as Project Administrator for Rehabilitation & Resettlement for the construction of Setamma Sagar Multi Purpose Project in the village limits Regu(2) of Cherala Mandal Bhadrachalam District. In this acquisition no families coming under displacement.

Therefore, it is notified that for the above said project in the Village Regu(2) of Cherala Mandal of Bhadrachalam District to and extent of land measuring an extent of Ac.2.38 gzs. of standard measurement, whose detail description is as following, is under acquisition.

SCHEDULE									
Sl No	Sl No for Public Use	Sl No for Land	Sl No for Acquisition	Name of the Public Use	Name of the Enjoyners	Area in Gzs	Area in Acs	Area in Sq Ft	Area in Sq Yds
1	364	364	0.03	Govt Land	Govt Land	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
2	365	365	1.08	Govt Land	Govt Land	1.08	1.08	1.08	1.08
3	366	366	1.18	Govt Land	Govt Land	1.18	1.18	1.18	1.18
TOTAL 2.38									

ABSTRACT

Sl No	Type of Land	Extent (Ac. Gzs.)
1	Govt Land	1.25
2	Govt Land	1.13
TOTAL 2.38		

This notification is made under the provision of Section-11 (1) of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act-2013 (Act No.38/2013), to all whom it may concern. A plan of the land may be inspected in the office of the District Collector, Bhadrachalam District & in the office of the Land Acquisition Officer, Setamma Sagar Multi Purpose Project and the Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam on any working day during the working hours. The Government of Telangana/Collector-Sub-Collector-Appropriate Government is pleased to authorize the Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam and his staff On the Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam, Bhadrachalam District to enter upon and survey land, take levels of any land, dig or bore into the sub-soil & do all other acts required for the proper execution of their work as provided and specified in Section-12 of the said Act, Under Section 11(4) of the Act, no person shall make any transaction or cause any transaction of land i.e., sale/purchase, etc., or create any encumbrance on such land from the date of publication of this notification without prior approval of the Collector. Objections to the acquisition if any may be filed by the person interested within (90) sixty days from the date of publication of this notification as provided under Section-15 of the Act before District Collector, Bhadrachalam and the Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam.

Sl- (Govt/Part)	Sl- (K Venkateswarlu)	Sl- (M. V. Reddy)
Land Acquisition Officer, Setamma Sagar Multi Purpose Project & Sub-Collector, Bhadrachalam	Additional Collector, Bhadrachalam	District Collector, Bhadrachalam

DIPR R.O. No: 957/LA/PP/Adv/Pub/2020-21

BHARAT BANDH

Centre asks states to ensure peace

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has asked all states and Union Territories to tighten security during Tuesday's 'Bharat Bandh' called by the farmers unions and supported by opposition parties, while asserting that peace and tranquillity must be maintained on that day, officials said.

In a countrywide advisory, the Union Home Ministry also said the state governments and UT administrations must ensure that the COVID-19 guidelines issued with regard to health and social distancing are strictly followed. The states and UTs were told that peace and tranquillity must be maintained during the 'Bharat Bandh' and precautionary measures taken so that no untoward incident takes place anywhere in the country, a home ministry official said.

The 'Bharat Bandh' has been called by the farmers unions who have been protesting the three farm laws enacted in the Monsoon Session of Parliament. Major political parties, such as the Congress, NCP, DMK, SP, TRS and Left, on Sunday came out in strong support of the bandh. Thousands of farmers, mostly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, are protesting at various border points of Delhi against the new farm laws. Talks between the government and protesting farmers remained inconclusive on Saturday even after five rounds of discussions as union leaders stuck to their demand for the repeal of the new farm laws and went on a 'maun vrat' seeking a clear 'yes or no' reply, forcing the Centre to call for another meeting on December 9 to resolve the deadlock.



Ashok Chavan tells people to support farmers protest to awaken Centre

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

Everyone should participate in Tuesday's 'Bharat bandh' to support farmers who have been agitating over the past fortnight in bitter cold in Delhi against the Centre's new farm laws, Maharashtra minister and senior Congress leader Ashok Chavan

said here on Monday. In a video message, Chavan said the Centre is unwilling to listen to the demand of the protesting farmers that these three new laws be scrapped. "The government has taken a rigid stand that the laws will not be changed or withdrawn. The temperature in Delhi is

very low, but despite that farmers have gathered to protest," he said. "The Bharat bandh called on Tuesday is very important. Everyone should support this bandh to show the intensity of the agitation and awaken the Central government," Chavan, a former chief minister, said.

23 groups form umbrella body in Gujarat

PNS ■ AURANGABAD

As many as 23 farmer groups have formed an umbrella body called Gujarat Khedut Sangharsh Samiti and extended support to Tuesday's 'Bharat bandh' call given by those protesting against the Centre's three new farm laws. The decision to form such an umbrella organisation was taken at a meeting of the Gujarat

Khedut Samaj and Gujarat Kisan Sabha on Sunday, said Jayesh Patel, president of Gujarat Khedut Samaj. "We have extended support to Tuesday's bandh in support of farmers. We will hold protests all over Gujarat on December 10, and a day later, we have organised a 'Kisan Sansad' at Satyagrah Chhavan in Gandhinagar. On December 12, farmers from here will march to

Delhi to join the protests there," he said. However, the RRS-backed Bharatiya Kisan Sangh has distanced itself from the protests. "In the present situation, when political parties and some elements have entered these protests, there is a huge possibility the bandh will turn violent. There is no need for a bandh if the issue can be resolved through dialogue," Patel said.

Transporters union extend support to protesting farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Transporters' union AIMTC on Monday said it will suspend operations in the entire country on Tuesday to support the Bharat Bandh called by agitating farmers. The All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) is the apex body of transporters, representing about 95 lakh truckers and other entities. It has already extended its support to the farmer agitation from day one. "Earlier it was decided that the transport fraternity from northern India will participate in the Bharat Bandh, but now it has been resolved in the meeting that transport



associations and unions in other parts of the country will join the Bharat Bandh and suspend their operations on December 8, 2020," said AIMTC President Kultaran Singh Atwal. AIMTC said it was unanimously decided to extend support to the Bharat Bandh.

Sena MP Sanjay Raut urges people to back farmers

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut on Monday said farmers' call for a 'Bharat Bandh' on Tuesday is apolitical and people of the country should willingly take part in it to express support to cultivators. Talking to reporters here, Raut also reiterated the Shiv Sena's support to the bandh. Apart from the Shiv Sena, the NCP and Congress -- two



other constituents of the ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra -- have declared support to the bandh. Various parties, including many regional outfits, have come out in support of the 'Bharat Bandh' on December 8 called by farmer unions which have been protesting on Delhi's borders for over 10 days, demanding the repeal of the Centre's new agri-marketing laws. "People should willingly take part in the bandh. This will show true support to the farmers. This is not a political bandh though several parties have decided to take part in it," Raut said. "This is not the bandh for raising demands of a political party, but to strengthen the voice of farmers of the country," the Rajya Sabha member said.

INDIA CORNER

Maha: Drunk driver mows down cop at toll plaza checkpoint

A 40-year-old policeman died after being run over at a checkpoint on Pune-Solapur highway by a tempo whose driver was allegedly drunk, said an official on Monday. Police constable Sagar Chaube was manning a checkpoint near Varavade toll plaza on Sunday and had asked tempo driver Navnath Gutte to stop but the latter sped past, in the process mowing down Chaube, an official of Tembuni police station in Solapur district said. "Chaube died on the spot due to severe head injuries. Gutte was caught by those present and was found to be under the influence of alcohol," the official said.



BJP activists clash with police during protest rally in Bengal

BJP workers on Monday fought a pitched battle with the police in north Bengal, as they were stopped from moving past barricades at two points near branch secretariat 'Uttarkanya' here during their rally in protest against TMC dispensation's 'misrule'. The activists, as part of the 'Uttarkanya Abhijan' called by Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), took out two protest marches, alleging that the state government has not fulfilled the promises made to the people of north Bengal, and benefits of the welfare schemes launched by the ruling dispensation has failed to reach common man. The police used water cannons and burst tear gas shells to stop the BJP workers from moving ahead, and were pelted with stones by the protesters in return. Some activists had even set fire to the bamboo barricades set up in the area.



Air India crew member, catering staff held for smuggling gold

An Air India crew member and a catering staff were arrested by the customs officials for allegedly trying to smuggle into the country gold valued about Rs 72.46 lakh at the Indira Gandhi International airport here, an official statement said on Monday. The crew, who had come in a flight from London on Sunday, after seeing the customs officers had secreted the gold in the overhead bin of the aircraft, it said. The officers later apprehended the staff of the catering company - M/s Ambassador Sky Chef - and "based on the discussion between the above said crew of Air India and staff of the catering company" recovered four 'kadas' from the aircraft.



Rajini seeks brother's blessings before taking political plunge

Tamil superstar Rajinikanth met his elder brother Sathyannarayana Rao here, days after announcing his decision to take a plunge into politics, sources close to him said. Rajinikanth visited his brother's residence here on Sunday night and sought his blessings, the sources said. "Thalaivar" (meaning leader), as the southern superstar is fondly addressed by fans, had been mulling political entry for many years. Rajinikanth announced on December 3 that he would launch a political party in January 2021.



Athletes march towards Raisina Hills to return awards, stopped

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Led by two-time Asian Games gold-winning former wrestler Kartar Singh, a few sports persons from Punjab on Monday marched towards the Rashtrapati Bhavan to return "35 national sports awards" in a show of solidarity with farmers agitating against new agriculture laws but were stopped midway by the police. Kartar, who was presented the Arjuna award in 1982 and Padma Shri in 1987, was accompanied by Olympic gold-winning former hockey player Gurmaj Singh and former women's hockey captain Rajbir Kaur among others.

While Gurmaj is a 2014 Dhyanchand awardee, Rajbir was bestowed the Arjuna in 1984. "The farmers have always supported us. We felt bad when we saw that our farmer brothers were lathicharged, roads were closed. Farmers are sitting on streets in bitter cold for their rights," said Kartar, gold medallist in the 1978 and 1986 Asian games. "I am a farmer's son I still do farming despite being IG, Police," he added.



The athletes, who reached Delhi on Sunday, began their march from the Press Club of India but were halted near Krishi Bhavan by the police and sent back. "I would like to request the government to repeal the draconian law. When the entire country was shivering for the

fear of corona, they passed the bill in both houses and got it passed from the President," Kartar said. "I agree there is a need for

change in farm laws but when our children are not happy, the government's priority should be to make them happy... Why is the government forcibly trying to push the farmers into accepting the contentious bill?" he asked. The marching athletes claimed to have the support of several Arjuna and other national sports awards winners. Earlier, Khel Ratna awardee and India's first Olympic medal-winning boxer Vijender Singh had also threatened to return the honour in support of the protesting farmers. Thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana are camping at various Delhi bor-

der points for over a week, protesting against the new farm laws, which they claim will dismantle the minimum support price system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporate houses. Farmers' concern is that these laws, aimed at reforming the sector, will eliminate the MSP and mandis that ensure their earning. But the government says the MSP system will continue and the new laws will give farmers more options to sell their produce. The government is holding talks with farmers, who have called for a 'Bharat Bandh' on December 8, supported by various political parties.

DCC polls: J&K records over 41% voter turnout in 4th phase

PNS ■ JAMMU

Over 41 per cent voter turnout was recorded till 1 pm in the fourth phase of District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir on Monday, officials said. As per the figures given by the office of State Election Commissioner, in Kashmir division, Kupwara recorded a voting percentage of 28.77, Bandipora 44.82, Baramulla 37.40, Ganderbal 43.45, Budgam 36.36, Pulwama 5.66, Shopian 1.76, Kulgam 6.59 and Anantnag 23.63 till 1 pm.



Similarly, in Jammu division, Kishtwar recorded 59.29 per cent till 1 pm, Doda 67.86 per cent, Udhampur 48.24 per cent, Ramban 61.50 per cent, Reasi 49.30 per cent, Kathua 54.23 per cent, Samba 59.64 per cent, Jammu 62.71

per cent, Rajouri 65.49 per cent and Poonch 59.15 per cent. Kashmir division recorded an overall polling percentage of 25.54, while Jammu division recorded 59.38 till 1 pm. The voter turnout in the Union Territory was recorded at 41.94 per cent till 1 pm, the officials said. There are 138 candidates, including 48 women, in the fray in the Kashmir division, while in the Jammu division, 111 candidates, including 34 women, are contesting in the fourth of the eight-phase DDC polls, which began on November 28.

Implement Vajpayee govt Act, Pawar asks States

PNS ■ MUMBAI/NAGPUR

The Nationalist Congress Party on Monday said when NCP chief Sharad Pawar was the agriculture minister during the UPA regime, he persuaded many 'reluctant' states to implement the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led government's model APMC Act.



Senior NCP leader and former Union minister Praful Patel said his party had not supported the new farm laws in Parliament, adding they were introduced without discussions with anyone. NCP spokesperson Mahesh Tapase pointed this out after government sources shared content of letters Pawar wrote

to many chief ministers when he was the Union minister. "The model Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act 2003 was intro-

duced by the Vajpayee-led NDA government. However many state governments were reluctant to implement it at that point of time," Tapase said.

"After taking over as Union agriculture minister, Pawar tried to form a broader consensus amongst state agriculture marketing boards by inviting suggestions for the implementation of the Act," Tapase said in a statement here. "The benefit of farmers as per the model APMC Act was explained (by Pawar) to various state governments and many state governments came forward to implement it. Farmers across the country are gaining from the implementation of the Act which was fine tuned by Pawar to protect farmers' interests," Tapase said. "The new farm laws introduced by the Modi-led government have raised doubts and

created insecurity in the minds of farmers regarding issues like minimum support price, Tapase said. "The BJP regime has also failed to address many other issues in the new farm laws, which has led to the large scale protests and agitation by farmers across the country. The Modi regime could not form a broader consensus and has failed to satisfy legitimate apprehensions of the farmers and entire Opposition," Tapase said. Patel told reporters in Nagpur that the three farm laws introduced by the Modi government were not discussed with anyone and they do not have any benefit for the farmer.

DEFAMATION CASE

Manoj Tiwari's plea to quash summons rejected

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and prosecution Monday opposed in the Delhi High Court a plea by BJP MP Manoj Tiwari seeking quashing of summons issued against him in a defamation complaint filed by the AAP leader.



Sisodia's advocate contended that this was not a stage to see original documents and it has to be seen at the time of trial. The counsel for the State argued that Tiwari and BJP

MLA Vijender Gupta, who has also sought setting aside of the trial court order, have not challenged the summoning order saying that what they said was not defamatory and

they have maligned Sisodia's reputation. After hearing arguments extensively, Justice Anu Malhotra reserved the order on the petitions by Tiwari and Gupta and said the verdict will be pronounced on December 17. The high court also asked the trial court to defer the hearing in the matter, which was scheduled for Monday, to a date after December 17. During the hearing, senior advocate Pinky Anand, representing Tiwari, argued that the summoning order of the trial court was based on legally inadmissible evidence so it was illegal.

She further claimed that the trial court's November 28, 2019 order was bad in law and it should be quashed. Anand added that only three witnesses were examined by the trial court and nobody from the media testified. "The complaint itself should have been quashed by the trial court and no summoning order should have been passed... This is a fit case where the high court should stay the trial court proceedings," she contended. Senior advocate Sonia Mathur and lawyer Gaurang Kanth, representing Gupta, also sought quashing of the summoning order.

Singapore Airlines, Vistara strike commercial deal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Singapore Airlines and Vistara have signed a commercial cooperation framework agreement that will allow them to harmonise efforts in capacity planning, sales, marketing, joint fare products, customer services and operations, an official statement said Monday. The agreement is an extension of a codeshare partnership between the airlines. "Strengthening the partnership between SIA (Singapore Airlines) and Vistara will allow both airlines to achieve further



synergies on services between Singapore and India, as well as in the key regions of South East Asia, Australia and New Zealand," the airlines said. Vistara is a 51:49 joint venture between the Tata group and Singapore Airlines, it said. The commercial coopera-

tion framework agreement is subject to regulatory approval in Singapore, the statement mentioned. "This will be important as the aviation industry recovers from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and both international and domestic connectivity is restored in a gradual and calibrated manner in tandem with the demand for air travel," the statement noted. India resumed scheduled domestic passenger flights on May 25 after a gap of two months due to the coronavirus lockdown.

What's the rush?

SC reprimands Govt for aggressively pushing Central Vista project, withholds construction



Is building a citadel as testimony to one's transformative legacy and power so important when the nation is going through its worst crisis brought on by the pandemic? Or is considered and reasoned opinion now a dispensable ritual in the rush to tick the boxes of jobs done, good or bad? May be the Narendra Modi Government thinks that it can make its priorities the nation's own, ignoring reality. So the Supreme Court pressed the much-needed pause button yesterday, literally rebuking the Government for "moving forward aggressively" on Delhi's Central Vista project, even before a decision could be taken on a slew of petitions challenging it.

And though it allowed Modi to lay the foundation stone for the project, it categorically ruled out any construction or demolition in the demarcated area or any cutting of trees, the last so not advisable in a climate-challenged city like Delhi. The Government has justified the ₹1,000 crore project, that provisions for a new Parliament building and a do-over of the Central Vista, on grounds of adapting to the requirements of changed times. But the top court sensed the Government's real intent of making a power statement and curbed the adventurism, saying, "Just because there is no stay, does not mean you can start construction. We did not pass any clear stay order because we thought you are a prudent litigant, and you will show deference to the court." When Government counsel Tushar Mehta sought time to respond to the court's order that no construction or demolition could continue, the court insisted that he reply in five minutes on compliance. To that extent, the court played conscience keeper and made it amply clear that runaway ambitions could not be allowed to have their way when the timing and the spends are clearly inappropriate. It underlined that just because the Government considered its authoritarian and signature move as important, everybody shouldn't agree and fall in line.

The real intent of the argument that Lutyens' Delhi needs a makeover, particularly the Central Vista of the Rajpath, to create more spaces for a more streamlined operation of Ministry offices and freeing up more citizen-friendly spaces, is entirely political and in no way cultural or futuristic. It is quite unlike the French experiment with the Louvre though parallels have been drawn to it. When the glass Pyramid came up in the courtyard of the museum, ostensibly to free up spaces for an easier visitor movement, the then French President Francois Mitterrand was lambasted for creating "an architectural joke, an eyesore, an anachronistic intrusion of Egyptian death symbolism in the middle of Paris and a megalomaniacal folly." The oddity of its existence was such that critics and conservationists compelled the architects to tone down on drama, keep much of the rejjig of the Louvre's internal map underground and stay away from the surrounding classical architecture. Of course, Mitterrand, an avid art lover, was thinking about keeping the Louvre relevant for generations than sealing a political legacy. Here, it is the latter taking precedence. The Government's move is about overwriting history with its own. Yet tradition's co-existence with modernity is encoded in our DNA and Delhi is the best testimony, where each successive ruler has sedimented through relics and monuments that have stood the test of time. And Delhiites have never denied heritage its place, be it Rajput, Islamic, European or colonial, making it a part of their living history, one where Lutyens' Delhi is a key chapter. And no argument holds before the elegance and classicism of the design — the green pavilions, perches, cupolas and the islands are the only democratic spaces where citizens can move and roam free, catching the afternoon sun in the middle of winter and the gentle breeze of a summer evening. No kiosk and retail space is needed here for it is precisely to escape those that Delhi families assemble here. Besides, being the first stretches to be locked down for security around Republic Day and Independence Day, they are anyway sanitised and cannot ever be a porous event space like Washington's National Mall. Redevelopment wouldn't mean more freedom to the masses. Considering the India Gate and now the war memorial respects martyred soldiers no less, do we need to scream our triumphalism and identity any louder? Shouldn't the Government be wiser to leave a legacy of policy and governance instead? Repurposing or modifying administrative offices within the shell of an existing facade and rejigging interiors are the done thing. But to change the skyline is quite the other. Agreed, there may be an increasing demand for land in the cities and the size of the Government means that its bureaucracy needs to be accommodated. Question is why can't they be relocated to a space where vertical growth is possible. The Rajpath has been our ceremonial pivot, providing a monumental, dignified and symbolic setting for governmental structures, museums and national memorials. Attempting to change it for no pressing reason, therefore, is like marginalising and eroding its place-based identity. Simply because of its historicity as a power statement. One that the current regime wants to overlay with its own definition of a monolithic and a neo-cultural India, as if we never had roots through millennia. Prime Minister Narendra Modi doesn't quite like the "Lutyens' world" and the power structures and codes embedded in it. But in the name of breaking elitism and freeing up space for people, one cannot justify political point-scoring. There are fruits of preservation; they serve as reminders of what was and where we need to go. There are only ruins of demolition, forcibly reconstructing the past to suit our ends. Besides, no amount of overwriting can erase the imprint of the city in our hearts. In the end, Delhi's soul gets damaged.

West Asian outreach

Arab nations are warming up to India and the Army Chief's visit will further strengthen ties



The visit of Army Chief, General MM Naravane, to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) should be welcomed by all who are keen for India's relations with the Arab world to improve. The Narendra Modi Government might have made 'Look East' a cornerstone of its foreign policy but the most dramatic improvement of ties in the past six-and-a-half years has been with the Arab world. And as many Arab nations normalise their relationship with Israel, their one-time mortal enemy, India, a long-standing friend of Israel, can only be most pleased. Combined with the fact that Pakistan, which often found a steady hand of support in the Arab world, has seen its ties with the two leading nations, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, deteriorate in the recent past, India can only look from the sidelines and be pleased at the state of affairs. Saudi Arabia is upset with Pakistan switching allegiance to Turkey as a leader of the neo-Islamic world despite feeding off Gulf largesse. The Saudis went so far as to recall a major loan from Pakistan and UAE stopped issuing visas to Pakistani citizens. However, with the Saudis and the Emirates involved in complicated politics in the area, particularly with Iran, overtly through a war in Yemen, and also internecine issues in Qatar, India will also need to tread a tightrope.

India has to maintain amicable relations with all sides because of both commercial and military reasons. Naravane as a representative of the Government must be careful. That said, India's improved relations with West Asia are here to stay for the medium-term with major nations having political stability. OIC member states have been drawn by India's compliance of rulebook diplomacy, respect its non-provocative gestures and scent its economic growth and wide markets. There's a new-found respect diplomatically after we held off China. Besides, India continues to provide skilled manpower to Arab nations. Of course, there is the challenge of how the incoming US administration will treat the area but one expects more of the same.

Recipe for disaster

Before giving banking licence to corporates, the RBI must ensure a robust and fool-proof regulatory oversight architecture which it clearly lacks now



GOVIND BHATTACHARJEE

The nationalisation of banks in 1969 effectively ended the corporate dominance in the banking industry, with the Government taking control of 90 per cent of the total banking business in India. Now corporate houses may once again be allowed to enter the banking arena if the recommendations of the Reserve Bank of India's Internal Working Group (IWG) for reviewing corporate structure of private sector banks are accepted by the Government. The suggestions are rather sweeping and it is questionable if all the risks have been weighed carefully. There are two major recommendations; the first is to allow large corporate and industrial houses to own banks by amending the Banking Regulation Act 1949, and the second is to allow large non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) with 10 years' track record, including those owned by corporate houses and with an asset size of ₹50,000 crore and above, to convert themselves into banks. The recommendations are open for comments till January 15, 2021.

Some of the biggest industrial houses already own large NBFCs bigger than many medium-sized banks with more than a decade's track record. Besides HDFC with assets worth ₹5.6 lakh crore, there are Bajaj Finservice, Sriram Transport, L&T Finance Holdings, Indiabulls Housing, Tata Capital, M&M Finance holdings, Cholamandalam Investment and Finance Company, Muthoot Finance and Aditya Birla, which fulfil the twin criteria. Their total assets would exceed ₹14 lakh crore (FY 20). There are also Government-controlled NBFCs — for example, the one led by PFC with assets of ₹6.6 lakh crore, followed by REC with ₹3.2 lakh crore assets, LIC Housing Finance and HUDCO — which also fulfil the criteria; their total assets amount to around ₹14 lakh crore. For a COVID-battered and capital-starved banking sector reeling under mounting NPAs, such huge capital from private cash-rich companies could just be rejuvenating, a consideration which probably weighed with the IWG. Private players were allowed into banking after 1993 and since 2016, NBFCs have also been allowed, but so far their responses have been tepid. One reason was the small cap of 15 per cent on the promoter's stake; this is



now proposed to be raised to 26 per cent in the long run over 15 years. But as Rajnish Kumar, the former chairman of SBI, said: "It will only work well when the system has three things in place — strong ring-fencing for business interest, high-quality corporate governance and resolution framework for banks and finance companies." This is where the recommendations raise serious worries and have attracted widespread criticism, including from ex-Central bankers Raghuram Rajan and Viral Acharya, who called it a "bombshell" dropped by the RBI.

Historically, the RBI has always been cautious about issuing banking licences to corporates on account of the inherent conflicts of interest and poor corporate governance. The last two licences to IDFC First Bank and Bandhan Bank were given seven years ago after licences given to the Kotak Mahindra Bank and YES Bank, of which the YES Bank has now gone bust due to crony capitalism and ineffective regulatory controls and had to be bailed out like all others.

The global financial crisis had made the developed nations very cautious. In response to the 2008 global financial crisis, the US had adopted several measures, including enactment of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, which introduced a raft of measures to regulate the financial sector and protect consumers. The Act amended many existing legislations, like the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to create an Investor Advisory Committee, an Office of the Investor Advocate and an ombudsman. It instituted regular reviews of conflicts of interest within investment firms by newly-created over-

sight institutions like the Financial Stability Oversight Council for identifying and improving systemic risks and especially to monitor designated Systemically Important Financial Institutions, which are deemed "too big to fail." Even these may not be sufficient guarantee against future malfeasance.

Nothing of that sort happened in India. Satyam happened in 2009 and we were in deep slumber. An attempt to strengthen corporate governance and give it a statutory authority was made only in 2013 in the new Companies Act by incorporating some key provisions of Clause 49 of SEBI's listing agreement. That these are hardly effective is evidenced by the unending series of frauds and scams, which have since broken upon the Indian banking scene, the regularity of which no longer surprises us. The weaknesses of the regulatory and oversight institutions and the multiple conflicts of interest along with crony capitalism have wrought havoc in the financial sector time and again. The IL&FS fraud dealt a body blow to NBFCs in India, exposing the risks a large NBFC poses to our financial system. Much of our NPAs have been the creation of super-fraudsters like Vijay Mallya, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi, Rana Kapoor and their ilk who could manipulate the system with active support from important levers of power. In all these cases, the RBI's supervision has been lax and ineffective. Of course, the RBI was not alone to blame; the statutory auditors, often from the big four, and the credit rating agencies equally contributed to bypassing controls, throwing caution to the winds.

If the growth of banks and NBFCs continues unchecked

without an effective framework to correct asset-liability mismatches, the financial sector will remain vulnerable to risks and accidents, dragging the economy in a downward spiral. The continued failure of banks — the latest being the Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) — points to the gross inadequacy of the RBI's regulatory architecture, including its prudential norms. Even in the developed world, entry of large corporates into the banking sector is discouraged. The IWG has itself admitted that "the prevailing corporate governance culture in corporate houses is not up to the international standard and it will be difficult to ring-fence the non-financial activities of the promoters with that of the bank"; all the experts it had consulted, save one, on this issue had disagreed with its recommendations.

Before allowing large NBFCs into the banking space, the RBI must ensure a robust and fool-proof regulatory oversight architecture which it clearly lacks. The urgency being displayed by it to complete this process, therefore, legitimately surprises many and raises many unnerving worries.

The biggest concern of the RBI has always been to prevent connected lending and exposure between the banks and other related financial and non-financial group entities. It allowed large industrial houses to set up their own payments banks for the first time during 2015-16. Many like the Tatas, Birlas, Ambanis and Mahindras had applied for licence. Of the 41 applications, only 11 got in-principle approval, and seven started operations by 2018. But the banking landscape in India is undergoing significant transformation, with all public sector banks to be consolidated

into only half a dozen large banks with balance sheet size of ₹10 lakh crore each, besides a handful of large private banks. Hence there may be better avenues for raising capital rather than putting the stability of the financial system at stake.

Indeed the stakes are too high to treat the matter so casually. First is the enormous risk in connected lending. As Rajan and Acharya have correctly noted, "The history of such connected lending is invariably disastrous — how can the bank make good loans when it is owned by the borrower? Even an independent committed regulator, with all the information in the world, finds it difficult to be in every nook and corner of the financial system to stop poor lending." Besides, the unintended consequence of concentration of economic and hence political and lobbying power in such corporate houses is likely to follow, giving a further boost to crony capitalism. Second is the excessive competition likely to result from the entry of corporates into banking, leading to erosion of profit margin of the existing banks and forcing them to lend to risky ventures and businesses, thereby further weakening the financial system. Ultimately, it is only the small investors who pay the price, as we have seen in the cases of Sahara, DHFL, PMC Bank, Yes Bank and LVB. Corporate governance is weak even in the largest private banks, as the case of ICICI Bank has demonstrated.

The Indian financial landscape is littered with a highly complex web of numerous shell companies, front companies to big corporates they can lend to, opaque onshore and offshore ownership structures of companies and incestuous financial transactions between corporate entities, who can easily form a cartel to evade regulation and oversight. The RBI still does not have the institutional capacity to enforce regulation and exercise effective control — only recently it has introduced a separate regulatory and supervisory cadre to monitor systemic risks arising from the growing sizes and complexities of an intertwined and interconnected financial sector. The question to be addressed before embarking upon any such misadventure is whether the regulator is adequately equipped to monitor millions of transactions taking place via the internet, traversing every nook and corner of the globe, and follow the monetary trails of illegitimate deals.

(The author is a former Director-General at the Office of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India and an academic)

SOUNDBITE

The farmers are in trouble. They are forced to shiver in the cold. Let's help them during the Bharat Bandh.



Delhi Environment Minister —Gopal Rai

As the two biggest economies and permanent members of the UNSC, China and the US should enhance dialogue and ties.



Chinese Foreign Minister —Wang Yi

I love Divine. He is one of the most phenomenal artistes in India. I am looking forward to doing a song with him.



Singer —Armaan Malik

If I look back at how we played then in 2014 and how we play now as a team, I feel we have come a long way and have grown stronger.



Hockey Forward —Lalit Upadhyay

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stand by the girl child

Sir — This is with reference to the article, "Girls please, not brides", published on December 7. The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 is only on paper. In practice, it is talked about more in breach than in observance and is scarcely followed due to the crippling poverty in the country.

Now, the pandemic has worsened the situation for millions of underprivileged living in rural India and they are marrying off their girls early due to poverty and job losses, unmindful of the impact it will have on their lives, development and health. This abuse needs to stop, not just through the strict implementation of the Act but also by creating awareness and lending a helping hand to the poor as a community.

Moreover, our girls should be given free food in educational institutions so that the parents have one less mouth to feed. They should be given education free and trained for a vocation till they are financially independent. Now, the legal age of marriage for girls is likely to be revised from 18 to 21 years. It is a good idea. However, it will only work well in practice if our girls

Govt should assure farmers

The objective of the Bharat Bandh called today (December 8) by the farmers' organisations is to mount pressure on the Modi Government to repeal the new farm laws enacted as part of its single-minded pursuit of neo-liberalism. The Government has made "corporatisation" its watchword. The new farm laws and labour laws are evidence that it is more interested in pursuing the interests of corporates than the interests of the farming community and the working class. However, the laws aimed at dismantling the State-regulated agriculture sector to pave the way for its monopolisation by corporate behemoths have met with stiff resistance from the farmers. Their protests are gaining traction among people cutting across political boundaries with each passing day. The Government should think more in terms of how to ensure a reasonable standard of living for those who really drive the economy — ordinary, decent, hard-working people — than how to help the privileged rake in more profits. It should occur to it that food growers are wealth producers of the country in their own way and cannot be denied protection and left in the lurch.

The corporate-controlled media's scarce coverage of the protests does not make them any less momentous and historic and its vain attempt at rationalising and validating the laws doesn't make them any better. The farm-



ers' agitation, which is assuming the proportions of a people's movement, is an assertion of people's power seldom seen in post-Independent India. We fail to see the logic behind the proposition that the Opposition's support to the farmers' agitation against mortgaging agriculture to big agri-businesses will weaken it. The Government should remove its corporate blinkers and look at the farm laws afresh with an open mind to realise the truth of the farmers' cause. It should empathise with the farmers and factor in their concerns gracefully. There is honour and no loss of prestige in making a gesture towards public opinion and rectifying the situation.

G David Milton Maruthancode

are well-protected by free education, food and job support. Girls should be taught martial arts too, so they can be safe in the public and private space. Above all, the Women's Reservation Bill, which is all but forgotten, should be

revived and translated into law. Sravana Ramachandran Chennai

Save our girls

Sir — A pertinent point was raised in the article "Girls please,

not brides.' We, as a society, may be against child marriage but do we do anything concrete to stop it? How can we just expect the law enforcement agencies to prevent child marriages and not do anything to help the keepers of

the law in any way? The least we can do is help the underprivileged educate their girl children so that they can become financially independent one day and lead a more fulfilling life and contribute to the nation's economy. The hand that rocks the cradle indeed rules the world, but that hand has to belong to a self-reliant, educated and financially independent woman, not a minor deprived of food, freedom and education.

Rohit Roy, Noida Let Central Vista be

Sir — Glad to read that the Supreme Court expressed anger over the way the Centre is "aggressively" going ahead with the construction work of the Central Vista and directed that no construction, demolition or felling of trees shall take place there. The people of the nation do not want the Central Vista to change and this project must be stopped, due to emotional, historical and environmental reasons.

R Ragu Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

Who will the star pair up with?

In all probability, Rajinikanth is bound to have a secret or open understanding with the BJP as both need each other



KALYANI SHANKAR

Will the BJP be able to rope in Tamil superstar Rajinikanth, who has announced plans to launch his much-awaited political party in January 2021? The actor is a phenomenon and will be a major factor in the forthcoming Tamil Nadu Assembly polls, scheduled for April-May 2021. He has chosen this time to make his political debut because there is a huge vacuum in the State after the demise of two former Chief Ministers and political heavyweights, M Karunanidhi of the DMK in 2018 and J Jayalithaa of the AIADMK in 2016.

"It is the need of the hour. If it is not done now, it will never be done. For this, I urge the people to stand by me. Together we will bring change," the star-turned-politician tweeted this week. There has been speculation that he is inclined towards the BJP, though Rajinikanth has been rather coy about discussing his plans. The problem for the BJP is that if Rajinikanth's party decides to go it alone and contest all 234 seats, it will eat into the BJP's ally, the AIADMK's vote share more than that of the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam). Rajinikanth's entry comes at a time when the incumbent AIADMK-BJP alliance, the DMK-Congress-Left Front, and another superstar Kamal Haasan have already firmed up their alliance. With the BJP's ambitious plans to expand in the South, is it possible for Rajinikanth to join the BJP-AIADMK combine? Have the elections become a game of arithmetic?

The megastar had been putting off entering politics since 1996, when the Congress first offered to make him its chief ministerial candidate to counter the then Chief Minister J Jayalithaa. Since then, the Congress as well as the BJP have been wooing him. "The time to rewrite Tamil Nadu's destiny has come. There's a great need for change... it's now or never. Voted to power, we will change everything," Rajinikanth promised this week. Failing repeatedly to gain a foothold in Tamil Nadu, the BJP had been trying to goad the actor into entering politics, but he had resisted the party's overtures so far.

The BJP is handicapped, with no tall leaders at the State level, and would like to use him as its mascot. Being a megastar, he has the advantage of being a known face and has a huge fan following and clubs. He proposes to launch a spiritual party as opposed to the atheist Dravidian parties. It will be advantageous to the actor too, as the BJP is a disciplined party and has both manpower and money. The BJP would also help facilitate other things like registration of his new party and so on. So both think that they are natural allies.

Second, Rajinikanth does not have time to build a party before the polls. His fan clubs alone will not be enough. Though he had asked his followers to register their names on his website, you need teams for booth management and door-to-door campaigns and so on. The BJP has already loaned Arjun Murthy, head of the State BJP's intellectual cell, as "chief coordinator" of the new party, indicating what is to come. While the BJP has welcomed his entry, Deputy Chief Minister and AIADMK coordinator O Panneerselvam has also hinted at a possible alliance with Rajinikanth's party. Addressing a meeting in Theni this week, he said: "We welcome great film actor Rajinikanth's decision to enter politics. In politics, anything can happen. If there is an opportunity, an alliance will be formed."

Rajinikanth, too, has some challenges to face. First of all, the field in Tamil Nadu already has two strong Dravidian parties — the DMK and the AIADMK, who share a combined vote bank of 50 per cent. The other, smaller, but significant regional players such as the PMK (Paattali Makkal Katchi) and actor Vijayakanth's DMDK (Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam) are in the line-up too. Second, the star has some health problems as he had undergone a kidney operation and might not be able to withstand a rigorous election campaign. Third, so far there is no clarity on whether his party will fight next year's Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu independently or strike an electoral alliance. Fourth, in a caste-ridden State, forward castes, such as the Mudaliars, have divided their loyalty between the two Dravidian parties for long. As for the dominant castes, the Gounders have Chief Minister E Palanisamy of the AIADMK, the Thevairs have O Panneerselvam, the Vanniars have Dr Ramadoss and the Scheduled Castes have the VCK (Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi). Vijayakanth's DMDK, the Vaikole MDMM (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), the two Left parties and actor-turned-politician Hassan's Makkal Needhi Maiam share the caste groups. The minorities go with the DMK or the AIADMK. Parties such as the CPI (M), the CPI, the VCK and the MDMM are aligned with the DMK coalition.

In all probability, Rajinikanth is bound to have a secret or open understanding with the BJP as both need each other. The problem for the actor will be who to attack during the campaign, the Centre or the State Government? Many indications are that the star will lean towards the BJP.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

WE WILL WIN THE ASSEMBLY POLLS WITH PEOPLE'S SUPPORT AND WILL BRING A HONEST, CASTELESS AND SPIRITUAL POLITICS TO TAMIL NADU.

—TAMIL MEGASTAR
RAJINIKANTH



ANYBODY CAN JOIN POLITICS. LET RAJINIKANTH LAUNCH HIS PARTY FIRST AND SAY WHAT IS HIS POLITICAL POLICY. THEN I WILL COMMENT.

—DMK PRESIDENT
MK STALIN

Checks and balances

Crony capitalism has also happened in public sector banks. There is a dire need to strengthen regulatory oversight to guard against irregularities in running all banks



UTTAM GUPTA

The recommendation of an Internal Working Group (IWG) set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to allow industrial houses to own banks — if they meet the criterion — has invited strident criticism from experts, including the former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan. Asking how a borrower could also be a lender, they have debunked the idea, stating that this would lead to misdirected lending, mostly to entities belonging to the industrial house that owns the bank. This apprehension is valid but the misuse of public money can happen in any bank, irrespective of the ownership. For instance, in Public Sector Banks (PSBs) till now, businessmen patronised by the ruling establishment managed loans on considerations other than merit. In private banks, too, the situation is no different, as amply demonstrated by the failure of Yes Bank, which is not owned by an industrial house. There is a dire need to strengthen regulatory oversight to guard against irregularities in running banks. The IWG recommends allowing promoters to hold 26 per cent equity stake in a steady state or after 15 years (up from the existing norm of 15 per cent) from the start, when it should be a minimum of 40 per cent of the equity for the first five years. It suggests taking a sympathetic review of whether industrial houses should be allowed to own banks if they meet the criterion. And considers allowing Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) with assets of over ₹50,000 crore, and in operation for over 10 years, to convert to banks, whether or not they are owned by industrial houses.

These suggestions need to be read in a certain context. Already, after a prolonged tussle, the banking regulator had allowed promoters of the Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited (KMBL) to maintain their stake at 26 per cent despite the 15 per cent norm (originally named Kotak Mahindra Finance Limited, it was the first NBFC in India to convert into a bank in February 2003). This prompted promoters of other private sector banks, who had lowered their stake to 15 per cent, to demand that they, too, should be allowed to increase it to 26 per cent. For instance, the Hinduja Group of IndusInd Bank made the appeal. Therefore, by allowing promoters of all private banks to have 26 per cent stake, the IWG has taken the logical step forward.

The 15 per cent threshold was anomalous, as with a marginal stake, the promoter won't have the desired skin in the game. Hence, the much-needed seriousness and commitment would be less. As a result, the management and governance of the bank could suffer. A study by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), India, shows that this may well be the case. An analysis of old private sector banks done by the BCG illustrates that "boards, where equity ownership is diversified, can take control of a bank and start to direct its operations in a less than optimal manner. The Catholic Syrian Bank and the Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) are good examples of this. In fact, 12 old private banks are laggards in respect to technology and risk systems and have not grown their share from four per cent of the assets of the system."

Even so, for a promoter to initially start with 40 per cent shareholding as per the existing guidelines and then bring it down to 15 per cent (after the efforts during the initial difficult phase have borne fruit and the operations have stabilised), relegating him to a minor player, is unfair. No wonder, the KMBL promoter pleaded with the RBI to allow it to retain a higher shareholding, which the latter agreed to. The apex bank should implement

INDIA NEEDS MORE BANKS WITH ADEQUATE CAPITAL BUFFER TO MEET THE CREDIT REQUIREMENT OF A \$5 TRILLION ECONOMY BY 2024-25 (FUNDING ON SUCH A MAMMOTH SCALE CAN'T BE DONE WITH EQUITY CAPITAL ALONE). IN VIEW OF THIS, AND CONSIDERING THAT THE GOVERNMENT WANTS TO OPEN UP EVEN PSBs TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR, THERE IS A DIRE NEED TO EXPAND THE LANDSCAPE OF POTENTIAL INVESTORS. THE INVOLVEMENT OF LARGE INDUSTRIAL HOUSES COULD BE OF GREAT HELP IN THIS ENDEAVOUR BUT FAIR PRACTICE IS NEEDED



the IWG's recommendation to allow 26 per cent shareholding to the promoter in the long-run.

The second major recommendation to allow industrial houses to own banks, after addressing any outstanding issues or concerns in respect to "connected lending" and incorporating safeguards in the Banking Regulation Act (BR Act), needs to be read in conjunction with another suggestion made by the RBI to the Finance Ministry early this year. The RBI had proposed that the Centre reduce its shareholding in six top PSBs, i.e. the State Bank of India, the Punjab National Bank, the Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, the Union Bank of India and the Bank of India to 26 per cent. In the follow-through, the Centre has already initiated the process to reduce its holding to 51 per cent in the next 12-18 months.

Realising that the market may not have the appetite for it, the RBI thought that letting corporates in could help raise the prospects. There are several corporates with deep pockets who can buy the shares of PSBs, thereby enabling successful divestment and at the same time, help the Government garner resources to rein in the fiscal deficit in the current difficult year (it is aiming to garner about ₹43,000 crore). For this to happen, the regulator has to take a policy decision to allow corporates to own a bank. This is precisely what the IWG has done. But this has invited criticism from experts who say that instead of being based on due diligence and assessing viability of the project, the bank will give loans keeping in mind what the owner wants. Put simply, this will be tantamount to the use of public money for unjust enrichment of the corporate. This undoubtedly needs a vigilant architecture. In PSBs, for instance, businessmen with political

clout managed loans and got them okayed. Neither did the banks insist on repayment, nor did the defaulters have any fear, as those who were expected to take action chose not to act. This led to an increase in non-performing assets (NPAs) to an unsustainable level, forcing the Centre to bail them out by using the taxpayers' money.

In private banks, too (albeit those not owned by a corporate house), the situation is quite similar. Merely because an industrial house gets to occupy the driver's seat in a bank does not automatically follow that public deposits will be misused. Abuse or otherwise is primarily a function of the quality of the management on the one hand and supervision by the banking regulator on the other. If, any of these prerequisites are lacking, then, irrespective of who owns the bank, exploitation is inevitable. To handle that, there is a dire need to strengthen regulatory oversight and the RBI should make proactive intervention on "real-time" basis to prevent mismanagement and irregularities — instead of continuing with the present practice of bolting the stable after the horses have fled.

India needs more banks with adequate capital buffer to meet the credit requirement of a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25 (funding on such a mammoth scale can't be done with equity capital alone). In view of this, and considering that the Government wants to open up even PSBs to the private sector (look at the decision to reduce its shareholding in six top PSUs to 51 per cent), there is a dire need to expand the landscape of potential investors. The involvement of large industrial houses could be of great help in this endeavour.

Accordingly, the Government should only consider the IWG's recom-

mendations after incorporating safeguards to address issues of "connected lending" by amending the BR Act. All banks, which have other group entities, should be held by Non-Operating Financial Holding Companies (NOFHC).

The recommendation for a higher minimum initial capital of ₹1,000 crore (up from the existing ₹500 crore) makes eminent sense. However, there is a case for raising the bar even further to say, ₹5,000 crore, to ensure that only very serious entities enter the space.

The third major recommendation of the IWG to allow NBFCs with assets of over ₹50,000 crore, and in operation for over 10 years, to convert to banks is in sync with the RBI's stance all along. The only change mooted now is to permit NBFCs owned by industrial houses to convert to banks, too. The RBI probably went by the fact that there are a number of well-run NBFCs owned by industrial houses who can be good candidates for converting to and running a bank.

The group has also batted for "harmonisation" of various licencing guidelines to ensure that relaxations (or for that matter, tightening of rules) given at different points of time are applicable to all entities, irrespective of when the licence was given to each. Some important recommendations provide for a "clear" and "consistent" definition of holding by a promoter (use of paid-up voting equity share capital is prescribed as the right metric); maximum share holdings of 15 per cent by non-promoters uniformly for all, banks not to carry out any activity permissible within the bank, through a separate subsidiary; pledging of bank shares and so on. The RBI should build in checks and balances.

(The writer is a New Delhi-based policy analyst)

Erratic temperatures spell economic doom

Before climate change delivers the fatal blow, India must respond with effective counter-measures to protect lives and livelihoods



KOTA SRIRAJ

As India experiences a colder than usual winter, public opinion is firmly set on the premise that the Coronavirus-driven lockdown reduced pollution levels, thereby resulting in a season that's more spirited than the previous ones. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has already sounded an alert to the effect that the winter of 2020-21 will be colder than usual due to the La Nina conditions prevailing in the equatorial Pacific Ocean. La Nina is the cooling phase of the El Nino southern oscillation cycle in the equatorial Pacific

Ocean as opposed to the warming El Nino phase. As if confirming the IMD's predictions, Delhi has already witnessed its coldest November in 71 years. But miseries brought on by the cold may be the least of our concerns compared to the economic impact that lies in wait for India in the wake of these erratic temperature changes.

The IMD predicts an uneven distribution of minimum and maximum temperature levels in various parts of India, which could lead to a higher variance between night and day temperatures. This, in turn, would impact farming in the Rabi season. Especially the wheat crop which is the main cereal that is grown in northern and central India.

Other crops that stand to be impacted are soy and corn. In south India, a major cash crop, coffee, which is extremely sensitive to temperature variations, is expected to suffer unduly thanks to these weather-related anomalies. These developments on the agricultural front can wreak havoc in the form of sudden spike in food prices and cause unexpected financial

turbulence for the farming community that is already facing multiple difficulties.

The economy would eventually suffer the ripple effects of the agrarian crisis, the adverse impact of climate change, coupled with setbacks on account of COVID-19.

The latest McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) report has presented unsettling facts that point towards dwindling economic prosperity due to the havoc unleashed by climate change. The report states that there is a risk of \$200 billion to India's GDP by 2030 due to a sharp reduction in outdoor working hours triggered by the increase in ambient temperatures. What are currently considered as unsafe outdoor temperatures to work in will increase by a whopping 15 per cent by 2030, directly impacting productivity and eventually the per capita income of the nation. This is because outdoor work has immense relevance for the economy. As of 2017, it contributed to nearly 50 per cent of the GDP. It drives 30 per cent of the GDP growth and



ensures employment for nearly 75 per cent of the labour force or nearly 380 million people in India. Hence, climate change-driven spike in temperatures can put up to 2.5 to 4.5 per cent of the GDP at risk.

In fact, it is estimated by the MGI report that nearly 160 to 200 million people bear a clear five per cent possibility of being exposed to lethal or fatal heatwaves as early as 2030. As temperatures rise, so do the costs of air conditioning. It is estimated that by 2030, a massive \$110 billion would be

required as capital costs for improving the air conditioning infrastructure. Urgent remedial measures are needed to avert much of the problems before 2030. Although some situations have surpassed the stage of remedy, all is not lost yet. The authorities must have concerted plans in place that are able to mitigate the forthcoming threats. Gradually shifting of outdoor working hours coupled with movement of capital and labour out of the designated high temperature hotspots will go a long way in reducing the adverse economic impact that is being predicted.

Moreover, all the current ongoing infrastructure and developmental projects must have a critical component of climate change adaptation consideration built into them. This sensitivity will reduce the carbon footprint of these projects and will in turn help avert extreme outcomes in the form of spiralling heat output signatures.

Yet another aspect that needs urgent attention while in the pursuit of ensuring a safe climate for the future is the state of our energy supplies. The

average hydel power plant dams that are currently operational in the country are decades old and the constant exposure to the elements, not to mention the ever-present interaction with water, is taking a toll on their structure. The future presents a scenario where rising temperature would mean more melting snows and glaciers, which in turn would increase the water load on these dams. An immediate assessment is required as to how these ageing concrete structures would hold up to this increased onslaught of water and still deliver. This is essential because the need for gradual decommissioning of the coal-fired power plants can no longer be a long-term strategy but is in fact a short-term urgent requirement if the erratic temperatures need to be reined in before 2030. Erratic temperatures are here to stay. But before they deliver the fatal blow, India has to respond decisively with effective counter-measures in order to protect lives and livelihoods.

(The writer is an environmental journalist)



FOREIGN EYE



NO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STILL

Though development along the Lakeside was regulated till the 1990s, the chaotic transition to democracy was misused to construct right up to the banks of the lake in Nepal. The growth of water hyacinth indicated deterioration of water quality. The tourist destination has now slowly realised the urgency of seriously dealing with its self-destruction.

(The Himalayan editorial)

Markets, transport services to remain open today: CAIT, AITWA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Traders' body CAIT and the All India Transporters Welfare Association on Monday said markets across the country including in Delhi will remain open on Tuesday and transport services will also remain operative, notwithstanding the "Bharat-Bandh" call given by protesting farmers.

Thousands of farmers protesting against the Centre's new agri laws for the past 11 days here have called on people to join their "Bharat Bandh" or nation-wide shutdown call on Tuesday in large numbers. Issuing a joint statement, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) and All India Transporters Welfare Association (AITWA) said traders and transporters will not be participating in the Bharat Bandh called on



December 8. "Commercial markets across the country will remain open and business activities will take place as usual whereas the transport services will also remain operative on December 8," the joint statement said. CAIT President B C Bhartiya,

Secretary General Praveen Khandelwal and Pradeep Singal and Mahendra Arya, Chairman and President of AITWA respectively, stated that so far no farmer organisation or farmer leaders have approached them seeking support for "Bharat Bandh".

They said that at a time when talks are being held between the government and farmer leaders, it is not appropriate to hold any Bandh. "We have all sympathy with the demands of the farmers and we call upon the government to resolve the issue at the

Thousands of ryots protesting against the Centre's new agri laws for the past 11 days here have called on people to join their nation-wide shutdown call on Tuesday

earliest and look into genuine demands of the farming community. The farmers, like traders and transporters are an important part of the national economy and therefore immediate steps are needed to resolve their issues," the statement said.

NEW E-BIDDING NORMS

Reliance, others don't need govt nod to fix gas pricing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Reliance Industries and other producers of natural gas will no longer need the government approval for the gas price if it is arrived at using the new guidelines for the discovery of market price, an official order said.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas last week notified guidelines for the discovery of market prices for domestically produced natural gas through e-bidding.

The government has since 2017 given pricing freedom for natural gas produced from all fields other than the old fields of state-owned ONGC and Oil India Ltd in nomination blocks.

Firms such as Reliance Industries-BP combine as well as ONGC (for non-nomination blocks) have been auctioning gas to users. They would typically devise a formula and seek bids from users.

They will continue to devise a pricing formula, but will now have to seek bids on the electronic-platform of five pre-selected agencies, the notification said.

The agencies are SBI Capital



Markets Ltd, mjunction Services Ltd, RITES, MSTC and CRISIL Risk and Infrastructure Solution Ltd.

This follows the Union Cabinet in October allowing marketing freedom for blocks where pricing freedom already existed. Alongside, it approved standardised bidding for price discovery.

The companies "shall design the tender/bid offer, including the eligibility criteria, bid parameters, evaluation criteria, tender fee, salient terms and conditions of Gas Sales Agreement and any other relevant information etc, with a view to encourage wider par-

ticipation from prospective buyers, promote competition and maximise the value of natural gas offered," it said.

ONGC and OIL are also to follow these guidelines for the discovery of the market price of natural gas produced from their fields wherever pricing and marketing freedom has been granted, the order said.

"The existing gas sales agreements, made in connection with contract provisions, would continue till the duration of the agreements/contracts and thereafter subsequent sale of gas shall be subject to these guidelines," it added.

MONEY MATTERS

Zydus Cadila gets nod for clinical trial of novel molecule ZYL1

Drug firm Zydus Cadila on Monday said it has received permission from Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) to initiate phase-1 clinical trial of its novel molecule ZYL1, indicated for use as an inhibitor for inflammation condition 'NLRP3'. In a regulatory filing, Zydus Cadila said "it has received permission to initiate the phase 1 clinical trial of ZYL1, a novel oral small molecule NLRP3 inhibitor candidate. NLRP3 inflammasomes are involved in the inflammation process". This harmful inflammation within the body leads to the onset and development of various kinds of diseases, including ARDS, auto-immune diseases, inflammatory diseases, cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders, Gastro-intestinal diseases (inflammatory bowel disease), renal diseases and CNS diseases, the company added. Pankaj R Patel, Chairman, Cadila Healthcare said: "We will study the safety, tolerability, pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of ZYL1 in this phase I clinical trial in healthy human volunteers. We are committed to developing these pioneering novel treatments to the clinic for the patients in need."



DLF to invest Rs 30 cr in installing new air-filtration technology

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Realty major DLF will invest around Rs 30 crore over the next six months to install new air-filtration technology in its office buildings to provide safe environment for employees of its corporate tenants post COVID-19, a senior company official said on Monday.

The rent collection from its leased office spaces across major cities has been around 97 per cent despite COVID-19 pandemic, DLF group MD-Rental Business Sriram Khattar said.

He said only 10-15 per cent of workforce has returned to its office buildings as corporates have adopted work from home policy due to the pandemic but hoped numbers to increase gradually from January onwards. To ensure safe re-entry of tenants and their employees as well as visitors in its office buildings, Khattar said the company will install MERV-14 range of air-filtration technology to help purify the air in all its office build-



ings across the country. "It will take six months to install this new technology. The total investment will be around Rs 30 crore," Khattar told PTI. DLF has a commercial portfolio, including office and retail assets, of around 35 million sq ft across major cities including, Gurugram, with an annual rental income of over Rs 3,000 crore. DLF-GIC joint venture firm DLF Cyber City Developers Ltd (DCCDL) holds bulk of the portfolio. "We have worked very hard in the last six months in area of wellness to ensure very high-level of safety for

those who are returning back to work," Khattar said. "Indoor air quality is one of the most important considerations to enable a safe return to work," he noted. Recommended by American Society of Heating Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), MERV-14 is 90% + efficient at capturing small particles (1 µm to 3 µm size range), DLF said in a statement. DLF Cyber City Developers Ltd (DCCDL) is a joint venture between DLF and Singapore's sovereign wealth fund.

L&T bags orders for supply of 90 units of Komatsu Mining equipment



Infrastructure major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Monday said it has received orders for supply of 90 units of Komatsu Mining Equipment. "The construction and mining equipment business of Larsen & Toubro... has secured multiple orders for supply of 90 units of Komatsu Mining Equipment from Coal India subsidiaries, leading

Infra companies engaged with the coal sector and customers from the cement and iron ore sectors," L&T said in a BSE filing. The company, however, did not disclose the value of the orders received. L&T MD&CEO S N Subrahmanyam said receipt of these orders from customers across various sectors "is a strong indication of the revival taking place in the mining industry, driven by the progressive and supportive policies of the Government of India." The company had recently won an order to supply 46 units of Komatsu Mining Equipment from Tata Steel. Shares of L&T were trading 0.93 per cent higher at Rs 1,159.90 apiece on BSE.

Hindalco to invest Rs 730 crore to set up new plant in Silvassa

Aditya Birla group firm Hindalco Industries on Monday said it plans to set up a 34,000-tonne aluminium extrusion plant at Silvassa, in Dadra and Nagar Haveli union territory, at an investment of Rs 730 crore. In a regulatory filing, Hindalco said the new plant will



service the fast-growing market for extruded aluminium products in the western and southern regions. Hindalco said the Rs 730-crore project in Silvassa signals a big step forward in Hindalco's downstream strategy as the company revises its long-term downstream investment plan. The company said its intent is to build a larger value-added product portfolio over the next few years. "This investment indicates confidence in the economic revival, which in turn will grow the demand for downstream value-added products," the company added. Satish Pai, Managing Director, Hindalco Industries, said: "We are seeing a revival in the economy, with demand picking in the building and construction and automotive sectors. This has given us the confidence to move forward."

NCLAT stays NCLT order directing ArcelorMittal India to pay Rs 1,300 cr



The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has stayed the orders of Ahmedabad bench of NCLT directing ArcelorMittal India to pay around Rs 1,300 crore as IRP costs in Odisha Slurry Pipeline Infrastructure (OSPIL) for using its assets. Passing an interim order, a two-member bench comprising Acting Chairperson Justice B L Bhat has stayed the order passed by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) over the plea filed by ArcelorMittal India. As an ad-interim operation of the impugned order as regards making of payment by the Appellant to "OSPIL" by 15th December 2020 shall remain stayed till next date of hearing," said NCLAT in its order passed on December 4. The appellate tribunal has directed to list the matter on January 22, 2021 for admissions and issued notices.

Petrol, diesel prices rise for sixth straight day

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Petrol and diesel prices rose for the sixth day in a row on Monday as rates went up by 26-30 paise per litre. Petrol price was hiked by 30 paise per litre and diesel by 26 paise, according to a price notification of oil marketing companies. Rates for petrol in Delhi rose to Rs 83.71 per litre, from Rs 83.41 while diesel price went up from Rs 73.61 to Rs 73.87 per litre. This is the sixth straight day of price hike and the 15th increase in rates since November 20, when oil companies resumed daily price revision after nearly two-month hiatus.

Suitor signs binding term-sheet for Religare Finvest, sale likely soon

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Debt-ridden Religare Enterprises Ltd's (REL) search for a suitor to sell its NBFC arm as part of corporate debt restructuring seems to have come to an end with U GRO Capital believed to have signed a binding term-sheet, and a deal is likely to be clinched in coming months, sources said. U GRO was among the three potential suitors which did the due diligence for Religare Finvest Ltd (RFL), sources said adding the deal investment could be higher than that of Purnendu Chatterjee-controlled TCG

which failed to get clearance from the Reserve Bank for the acquisition of RFL in March. When contacted on signing of the binding term-sheet, number of aspirants who did the due diligence and the time line, a REL representative said "Religare Group and RFL are working with all stakeholders towards its business and financial revival of RFL. We do not wish to comment anything at this juncture given the confidentiality and importance of these matters." The development comes against the backdrop of the Delhi High Court issuing a notice to DBS Bank India on the RFL's plea to substitute refund claims of fixed

deposits of Rs 750 crore along with interest from Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) taken over by the foreign bank. The high court had said that the reply be filed to the application within five weeks and listed the matter for further hearing on February 25, 2021. Once the proposed deal gets RBI and other regulatory approvals following clearance from lenders on RFL's debt restructuring, REL will approach the central bank seeking its removal from the corrective action plan (CAP) framework and the progress appears in line with REL Executive Chairperson Rashmi Saluja's target.

Vodafone Idea CSR arm, Nokia team up

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vodafone India Foundation, the CSR arm of Vi, in partnership with Nokia has deployed a smart agriculture solution that aims to enhance farming practices and improve productivity of farmers in India. Vodafone Idea CSR has deployed Nokia's Worldwide IoT Network Grid (WING) solution to equip farmers in the country with precise and practical data to help them achieve better yields, according to a release. "Deployment of the smart agriculture-as-a-service solution includes soil probes,

weather stations, insect traps and crop cameras to help drive productivity of soy and cotton crops," the statement added. A pilot project, being implemented across 100 locations in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, aims to benefit over 50,000 farmers in the region by enhancing their productivity and income. "The SmartAgri project aims to enhance the livelihoods of small farmers through sustainable farming approaches, deployment of IoT (Internet of Things) solutions and by improving their access to information, using technology," it added.

Xiaomi ramps up smart TV production in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chinese tech major Xiaomi on Monday said it has partnered with Hyderabad-based Radiant Appliances as it ramps up production of its smart TVs in the country.

The move comes ahead of Xiaomi's foray into the premium QLED TV segment in India.

Xiaomi India Category Lead (Smart TV) Eashwar Nilakantan said when the company had launched its smart TVs in 2018, there were two key trends - Internet tariffs were getting cheaper and speed was faster, and there was a proliferation of content.

"Since then, we have already sold over 5 million smart TVs and continue to be No. 1 in the segment. Last year, we started with 4K TVs and that has also seen strong growth. In the pandemic, content consumption has gone up drastically and people are also looking for movie theatre-like experiences at home," he told PTI.



With the QLED TV, Xiaomi wants to offer premium viewing experience to customers, he added.

While Nilakantan did not disclose details of the pricing, he said the first 55-inch QLED TV will be launched on December 16.

QLED (Quantum Light-Emitting Diode) TVs are like regular LED TVs but offer better colour and brightness

than LED. Nilakantan said the QLED TVs will be manufactured in India like its other smart TVs.

"We had Dixon as a contract manufacturing partner for our TVs and recently, we signed up with another partner - Radiant Appliances and this will further augment our capacity as we start offering our 'Made in India' QLED TVs," he added. He, however, did not comment

on the production capacity. He noted that the QLED market in India is at a nascent stage, accounting for about 0.5 per cent (about 60,000 units) of the 12 million units TV market in India.

"The QLED TV for India has been built ground up here, keeping in mind the needs of customers here... We are hopeful that we will be able to double the market of QLED TVs in

the next year," Nilakantan added.

A number of smartphone players such as Realme, OnePlus, Micromax and Motorola have added smart TVs to their product portfolios to compete against giants like Samsung, LG and Sony in the TV segment.

According to Counterpoint Research, shipments of TVs in India grew 15 per cent annually to reach the highest-ever 15 million units in 2019, and the growth was mainly driven by budget smart TVs, with 32-inch TVs the leading segment.

The report had noted that smart TV was the fastest-growing segment, growing 25 per cent year-on-year.

The smart TV market in India was mostly driven by brands like Xiaomi, Samsung, and emerging tail brands such as TCL, Vu and others, which are leveraging their growing channel presence both online and offline to target new users and upgrade users, the report added.

DCB Bank cuts benchmark one-year MCLR by 0.18 pc

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Private sector DCB Bank on Monday said it has reduced marginal cost of funds based lending rates (MCLR) by up to 0.18 per cent across various tenors.

The benchmark one-year MCLR has been cut to 9.67 per cent, the bank said in a release. It was 9.85 per cent earlier.

The one-year MCLR is the rate against which most of the consumer loans are priced.

The new rates will come to effect from December 8, 2020, DCB Bank said. Among other tenor loans - ranging from overnight to six-month, the MCLR are cut by 0.03 per cent each to 8.22-9.52 per cent.

An inborn talent

More than picking references for his roles, actor Arshad Warsi tries and creates his own identity. He tells *The Pioneer* that he didn't want to look caricatured on screen. He prefers to bring out his original style



When it comes to actor Arshad Warsi, we know we are talking about someone who can be congruent in a lot of different roles, believable as a rogue or a lawyer or a goon or just a boy next door. Is there a need to name the films these roles are being listed from? No, right? Well, it's his versatility yet a natural way of expression that ensures his roles are etched in the audience's minds. And now, with his next, *Durgamati*, a horror drama, he is all set to make us believe in him as a politician.

It seems that there wasn't really much to do for him in terms of preparation for the role since he is already someone who has "been there, done that." Warsi tells us that director G Ashok wanted him to look older and like somebody who has a tremendous amount of experience and maturity. For that, he had to gain a few kilos too. "Not too much though as it gets difficult when you have to shed the extra weight," he chuckles.

The film is a remake of Ashok's Telugu-Tamil bilingual film, *Bhaagamathie*. It revolves around Ishwar Prasad (played by Warsi), a powerful politician, who enjoys massive public support. When idols from 12 temples go missing, CBI officer Nidhi Verma suspects Ishwar of the theft. In order to expose him, she recruits suspended IAS officer, Chanchal Chauhan to find the clues. Chanchal goes to live in the ancient Durgamati mansion and soon enough, the ghost of Durgamati takes control of her body and swears revenge on everyone who wronged her.

There has been a lot of mystery built behind Warsi's character and when asked, he wishes to tell us more about it, however, said "Put it this way... If I have done it, there must have been a

very valid reason for me. Other than that, you need to watch the film to find out what's the actual suspense," he says.

A remake certainly sets reference points for the preparation. However, Warsi believes in manufacturing his own identity and prefers to do his homework in his head. And hence, he watched *Bhaagamathie* after he finished shooting for the film. He says, "Personally, I don't do much of a homework. Everything usually happens in my mind. When I hear about a particular role, I instantly start figuring out how one can play with this character, what can be added or, if necessary, removed. More than looking at somebody or picking up different references for my roles to look the same, I try to create my own presence and identity. I have done that with most of my films. I think that's why you like the novelty... I come across as somebody you haven't seen before. So I really like doing that. For instance, Circuit was a tapori role and a character like him has been played by so many other people. But when you saw me doing it, you liked it because it was different from others," he says with confidence gushing in voice from the other end of the phone.

He gives another instance. "When I did *Ishqiya*, my reference point was actually Jagdeep Sahab in Sholay. That's all I have seen of a Bhopali person. I didn't want to look caricatured. I wanted to bring out my original style. So I kept on thinking about it. I have a friend who is from Bhopal and lives in Dubai now. So I called him and asked about the lingo, the language, the slang and swear words that Bhopali people use. I keep adding little things to my character. I did the same with Ishwar Prasad, too. I was told that he's a politician so there's a certain way he would behave. I worked on the body language, hair, sitting and walking postures and the way of talking. To be honest, it's pretty much a figment of my imagination, just like most of my characters. Well, they are a figment of the

writer's imagination, which I bring to life as much as I can with my personal touch," adds he.

For him, when he listens to a script or decides to go for it, it's completely on the basis of - "Would I want to see it?" He says, "Sometimes, I could go wrong and sometimes the decision could turn out right." And he feels that *Durgamati* has all the elements to be called a "good" film. "It's thrilling, keeps you at the edge of your seat and is totally unpredictable. It's not gruesome. There's no blood shed or ugly violence. It simply scares you... the whole environment of it does."

Since horror presents highly fictionalised phenomena, stories are set up in a different background altogether, and do not find any connection with reality. However, from the trailer, it seems like *Durgamati* has been set up in a real world.

Warsi says that it's not the first horror film to be set up in pace with the real sce-

nario. "I saw Anushka's (Sharma) *Pari* and I thought it was very smart of them to show a world that we know and can connect easily. And that is the real challenge — to merge this genre with reality."

Talking about how realism has become a recurrent theme in cinema now, he tells us that he looks at films as a means of "entertainment only." He adds, "Everybody is trying to be politically correct as much as possible. I don't take them seriously, be it fiction or a reality-based thriller."

For Warsi, a film doesn't have to be "necessarily" socially responsible. "We have schools and teachers for that. If everything becomes about being responsible, then there will be no entertainment at all. I can't show a great film to a murderer and expect him to suddenly become a good man and vice versa. It's not possible! I can't expect a good human being to start being violent just because he saw a crime genre. He won't just head out and start killing people. It's never going to happen that way. Either you are good or you're bad. Films can't change your personality. Or else, people would just use that as an excuse," he explains.

When it comes to horror, the genre has not been well-

no less than worshipping my craft. Now, be it of any compartment, it's my duty to do justice to it. In fact, while playing a vamp on screen you are open to all kinds of energies and can do viable variations at any time. No one is going to stop you as that is another vital aspect of a soap opera which complements the protagonist's storyline too. Reading comments on social networking sites like 'why do you behave like this' or 'what's your agenda' or 'you're the ultimate vamp' only strengthen the fact that I am doing the best that I can and it's working on screen," shares Akanksha.

The second series opens with the Modi family missing Ahem on his birthday. Kokila decides to visit her long-lost brother, Praful Desai, who lives in Surat. Praful's family consists of him, his wife Jamna, his sons Anant, Pankaj and Chetan, his daughters-in-law Kanak and Hema and their innocent and hard-working house worker Gehna who is treated very badly in the Desai Mansion. The actress also throws more light on how this season is going to be more melodramatic and how it's not always about the jovial and happy-go-lucky charac-

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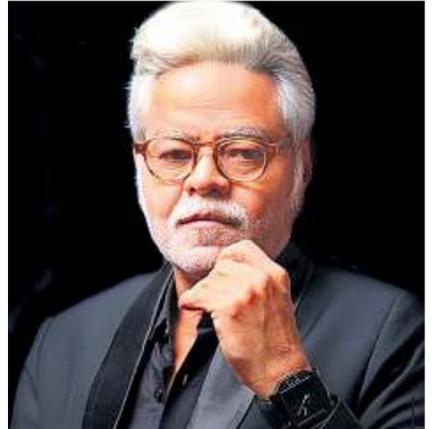
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Sanjay Mishra's next, a film on COVID



Actor Sanjay Mishra embarked on his journey by signing up any and every role that came his way for a living. Now, he'll be seen playing an inspirational role in the upcoming film *Andaman* directed by debutant director Smita Singh. This film is written by Anand Raj who is also playing the role of a protagonist. Produced by 8 Pillars Motion Pictures, the film is indeed an inspirational social drama around a quarantine centre that is built in a remote village.

The film deals with the harsh realities of our society with a great sense of humour which takes away the dice. The shooting of the film took place in Lucknow and other parts of Uttar Pradesh, where Sanjay Mishra will be seen in the character of a saint. "No film or filmmaker is big or small. A film happens to create a large impact only once we are done with its making. So, I'm sure this film will create that spark. I'm doing this film to support a new talent and have seen the hard work put by the director along with the entire team, hence said yes to the project. I really want new talent to grow because they come with superbly

fresh ideas and concepts," shares the actor.

Everybody thinks of doing big projects but Sanjay Mishra believed in making a simple project, a first-class one as everybody doesn't get to be the centre of attraction always. By accepting whatever roles came his way, he happily signed on the dotted line and earn some money out of those. Debutant director Smita Singh on working with Sanjay Mishra tells, "Working with Sanjay Mishra was not just fun and inspiring but it was more of learning especially coming from such an extremely talented and knowledgeable actor. Being a debutant director, the world of cinema is new to me. Despite being a senior actor who's only there to act he guided me through the technicalities. He is so warm, hardworking and genuine which may put fire in hearts of many. I have always been a fan of his acting nature, now after working with him it seems momentous and a comprehending journey in totality." The film is rooted in the daily life challenges of common people in rural areas with tickling humor amidst these gloomy times reflecting on the most challenging times that can pave way for the greatest of transformation!

The 'bad woman' of television

At a time when most women shy away from playing negative characters fearing losing fans, actress Akanksha Juneja is excited to play the vamp in Star Plus' favourite *Saath Nibhana Saathiya*. She talks to *The Pioneer's* SHIKHA DUGGAL about the role, the serial and more

Television actress Akanksha Juneja seems to be all excited about her lead character in the comeback season of the famous melodramatic saga - *Saath Nibhana Saathiya*. The catch is that it is no simplistic lead role that she has bagged, but the main antagonist's one in which she will be seen showcasing the many shades of her grey character. The story is shown to be the future, after the events of *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* 1. We have seen most actors shying away from playing negative roles believing that it would tarnish their image. However, it's not the case with actress Akanksha. While playing Kanak, she ensured she displayed diverse variations for her audience, making them want to return to the next episode to know what Kanak is upto again! While portraying the traits of a rude, prideful, arrogant and self-absorbed person, Akanksha never felt she was portraying an unrealistic or an impractical persona.

The Miss Junagarh of *Saath Nibhana Saathiya* 2 is exploring every day, adding more emotions and realism to her role only to do absolute justice to her. Not to forget that she has garnered endless critical appreciation, helping her cement her place as one of the best in the television, by proving her mettle as a quality actress. She dared to let go of her positive actor image and explored as much as she can, by probing more into a negative being's psychology. "A role offered is



(The film, which also stars Bhumi Pednekar, Mahie Gill and Jisshu Sengupta, is slated to release on December 11 on Amazon Prime Video.)

PARTY

SPOILT FOR CHOICE

Label Love's exciting new on going exhibition at the Hyatt Place, Banjara Hills, saw a carefully curated display of the trendiest designer wear, accessories, home decor, footwear and much more. Visitors can catch the most fashionable looks at the exhibition before it ends today. Shopaholics were spoilt for choice as they browsed through all the prettiest products, and picked up their favourite pieces.



Simron



Reshu



Madhu



Sayeeda



Sowmya



Soundarya

Photos by SV Chary

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



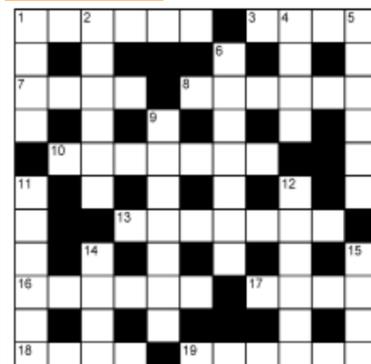
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



NANCY



SUDOKU

	6		4	5	
7	4		6		3
5	1	3			
3			4	5	9
		5	2		
1	7	3			4
			8	1	5
8		1	6	9	
4	9		8		

Yesterday's solution

1	7	3	2	9	8	4	6	5
6	9	5	1	3	4	8	7	2
4	8	2	6	7	5	3	1	9
8	1	9	3	5	6	2	4	7
2	4	7	9	8	1	6	5	3
3	5	6	4	2	7	1	9	8
9	3	4	5	6	2	7	8	1
7	2	1	8	4	9	5	3	6
5	6	8	7	1	3	9	2	4

- Rules**
- Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
 - The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

ACROSS

- Mend
- Very thin metal sheet used in the kitchen
- The line where material is joined
- Murdered
- Tales
- The later part of the day
- Wanting food
- Money someone has to pay as a punishment
- A fruit from a palm tree
- A light wind
- These birds hunt at night
- A climbing aid with rungs
- Birds that fly back home
- Courage
- Shoved
- Ask to come
- A tangle in your hair
- At this place

DOWN

- Have a lie down
- Braided lengths of hair



Alia Bhatt joins *RRR*

In news that fans of *RRR* have been waiting for, Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt joined the sets of filmmaker SS Rajamouli's upcoming Telugu magnum opus on Monday. The actress is paired opposite Tollywood star Ram Charan and essays the role of Sita.

The bubbly actress arrived in the city on Sunday and began shooting on Monday. Pictures of her arriving at the Hyderabad airport went viral on social media, sending fans into a frenzy. A source from the set confirmed the actress joining the shoot and said she will leave after she's done shooting her part, which is likely to take 2-3 weeks' time. The film, which marks the Bollywood actor's Telugu debut, originally was supposed to her shoot in November but was later postponed by a few weeks.

Produced by DVV Entertainment, *RRR* also stars Bollywood superstar Ajay Devgn in a pivotal role.

The film is slated to hit cinema halls on January 8, 2021 and will also be released in Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Malayalam.

The film's shoot, which resumed after 8 months in October, is moving at a brisk pace. The makers of the film recently completed a 50-day major action sequence which they shot without a break, during the nights. *RRR*, which is being made on a lavish budget, will be a fictional story set in the 1920s pre-independent era and will be based on the lives of two real-life heroes and well-known revolutionaries — Alluri Sitarama Raju and Komaram Bheem. Alia Bhatt will be playing the role of Alluri Sitarama Raju's wife Sita in the film.



'It's Tamannah who's carrying the film on her shoulders'

Amid the variety of genres and concepts that the Telugu film industry released this year, a feel-good film is what the audience has been looking for and bang comes *Gurthunda Seethakalam*, a film that will make audiences savour the sweetest memories of their youth and will remain in their minds forever. With an interesting cast of Satyadev, Tamannah Bhatia, Megha Akash and Kavya Shetty, the Telugu remake of the Kannada film *Love Mocktail* by Sandalwood's star director Nagashekar is all set to vow audiences

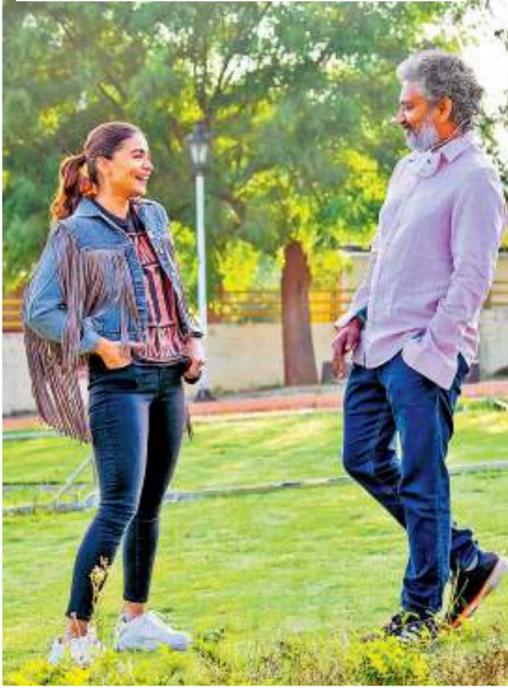
Our teenage and college days are those phases of our lives that one can never forget. Intending to bring back those very memories, director Nagashekar on his banner, is directing the film *Gurthunda Seethakalam* and is also jointly producing it with Bhavana Ravi, MS Reddy, and Chinna Babu. The film that has actors Satyadev, Tamannah, Megha Akash and Kavya Shetty essaying lead roles, has been garnering a lot of attention. The film, which is a remake of the Kannada blockbuster *Love Mocktail*, has already completed its first schedule and shooting for the second is currently underway.

Speaking about the film, critically acclaimed actor Satyadev said, "Though I play the hero in the film, it's Tamannah who's carrying the film on her shoulders. Ever since she gave her nod to the film, the graph of *Gurthunda Seethakalam* went up. Actresses Megha Akash and Kavya Shetty too have done a great job. We welcome Nagashekar to Tollywood, and I hope the Telugu audience will love the film."

Tamannah, who has been

busy with other films and has been reading many scripts during the lockdown, says she didn't want to miss out on working for this project. "It's been a while since I did a romantic drama, and this film is a beautiful feel-good film. I'm grateful and happy to be a part of *Gurthunda Seethakalam*. Satyadev, the talented actor that he is, fits the character so perfectly and I hope Nagashekar will earn a good name in the Telugu film industry too," the actress said.

The director-producer thanked and appreciated the cast and crew of the film. "Writer Lakshmi Bhupal's dialogues, music director Kalabhairava's tunes, cinematographer Satya Hedge's visuals, the amazing cast, and every other person that's part of the film has been putting their best foot forward. Though I'm a big name in the Kannada film industry, *Gurthunda Seethakalam* is my debut film in Tollywood and I hope the Telugu audience will love and bless my work as the Kannadigas have," a hopeful Nagashekar said. Music director Kala Bharavi added, "Director Nagashekar worked hard to make *Gurthunda Seethakalam* a film that'll be forever etched in people's minds. Lakshmi Bhupal (dialogue writer) started working on the film in summer and I joined around the rainy season. With insightful suggestions of the director, we've come up with some of the best tunes for the film."



Nee Kannu Neeli Samudram crosses 150 million views!

Telugu audience have always been lovers of good, meaningful music and so it's no surprise that the lyrical video of *Nee Kannu Neeli Samudram* from the yet-to-be-released film *Uppena* has clocked 150 million views on YouTube! Picturised on Panja Vaishnav Tej and Krithi Shetty, the Javed Ali-crowned number scored by Devi Sri Prasad has been the biggest Tollywood hit song of 2020.

The song was penned by lyricist Shreemani. Raqueeb Alam's Hindi lyrics and

Srikanth Chandra's aalaap have all added to the song turning a chartbuster. Director Buchi Babu Sana is already the talk of the town for his taste in music and for the way he presented the songs. Besides directing, Buchi Babu also penned the story, screenplay and dialogues of the film which was bankrolled under Mythri Movie Makers in association with Sukumar Writings. Kollywood star hero Vijay Sethupathi will be seen in an intense role in the film that also stars actors Sai Chand and Brahmaji in pivotal roles.



Singer Sunitha to tie the knot

Putting all rumours to rest, popular Tollywood playback singer Sunitha Upadrashtha announced on social media that she has been betrothed to Ram Veerapaneni aka Mango Ram, a digital media entrepreneur, who also owns rights of a few Telugu films. The singer, who was married at the young age of 19,

separated from her husband with whom she has two children. The singer, anchor, dubbing artist and actress thanked her parents and children for being thoughtful and choosing her happiness. She also thanked well-wishers for respecting her choice to lead a private life. Her engagement was a quiet affair and videos from the ceremony have gone viral on the internet.



IIT Krishnamurthy set for OTT release

IIT *Krishnamurthy*, a suspense thriller, starring newcomers Prudhvi Dandamudi and Maira Doshi in the Mango Mass Media presentation under the banner of Crystolite Media Creations, is set for an OTT release. The film will see Sree Vardhan's debut as a director in Tollywood. Produced by renowned industrialist Prasad Nekuri, the film is set for a December 10 release on the OTT platform Amazon Prime Video.

The interesting title of *IIT Krishnamurthy* coupled with the recent release of its songs and promos has kept the audience waiting for the release. Star director Harish Shankar had recently released the trailer through his official Twitter account and congratulated the film crew.

Producer Prasad Nekuri said that a lot of passion and hard work went into the making of the film. "Director Sree Vardhan has fine-tuned the script and it came out really well. It is emotional, entertaining, and has a lot of love and sacrifice. All actors did their job well. I'm very happy with the output," the producer said.

Debutante Maira Doshi said that she is excited about the film, and called her role a special one. "I hope the audiences will love my role. I'm grateful to the director and producer for trusting me with the character," the actress said. Prudhvi Dandamudi, another newcomer himself, said, "I'm confident the audience will love the film, they have always welcomed new ideas and I hope the same with this film."

Director Sree Vardhan thanked the team for putting their all into the film and asked people to support new ideas like his. His debut film *IIT Krishnamurthy* is a corporate crime thriller that promises to hold your attention throughout its runtime. Leading comedian Satya, Vinay Varma, Banerjee and others are playing key roles in the film, with Naresh Kumaran composing music for the film.



India target T20 whitewash

PTI ■ SYDNEY

The series pocketed and their confidence restored, India would eye nothing less than a clean sweep when they take on an Australian side significantly weakened by injury blows, in the third and final T20I at Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday.

Skipper Virat Kohli and his main protagonist of the white-ball leg, Hardik Pandya, will feel a sense of *deja vu* given that the script has panned out exactly like 2016 when the team got walloped in the ODIs but came back strongly to rout the Aussies 3-0 in the T20I series.

After a couple of crushing defeats in the first two ODIs, the Indians have turned a corner starting with the final ODI in Canberra.

Even the absence of a white-ball pro like Ravindra Jadeja didn't have an impact during their convincing six-wicket win in the series-clinching second T20 on Sunday.

What will boost the Indian team's morale manifold is the fact that it had the confidence to rest both Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah, relying on a troika of pacers, who between them haven't played even 40 games collectively.

India's new white-ball sensation Thangarasu Natarajan has had a superb initiation in international cricket with Australian batsmen still finding it difficult to read him.

As Pandya so rightly put it, Natarajan's spell and the 10 runs that Australia failed to



score became the difference between winning and losing.

The difference between both teams during the last game was the batting of the two teams during the middle overs.

Australia lost a bit of momentum after stand-in skipper Matthew Wade was dismissed while his opposite number Kohli played some outrageous shots after the Powerplay to up the ante.

Shreyas Iyer's induction in place of an injured Manish

Aus vs India (3rd T20)
Live from 1:40pm IST
SONY TEN 1, 3 & SIX

Pandey also worked well for the visitors.

The only glitch in an otherwise solid show was Yuzvendra Chahal's rare off-day. Not having a sixth bowling option meant that Kohli was forced to have his premier leg-spinner complete his quota.

For Australia, the absence of

regular skipper Aaron Finch, David Warner, Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood did have an impact although three of the five did play in the first T20I that India comfortably won by 11 runs.

D'Arcy Short hasn't looked the part as an opener in the two games and one would expect Marcus Stoinis and Glenn Maxwell to shoulder more responsibility as senior players.

But Australia's thin-on-experience bowlers will have to

play out of their skins to stop the Indian juggernaut which has started rolling.

A 3-0 win would be the perfect booster shot for it before the all-important Test series.

In case of Australia, while a thrashing would impact them a lot but they would try and look at it from a different perspective — most of their Test specialists will not have the scars of a clean sweep when they take on India under the lights at the Adelaide Oval, starting December 17.

Green's ton overshadows Indian bowlers

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Senior pros Umesh Yadav and Ravichandran Ashwin staked strong claims to be included in India's playing XI for the first Test with impressive performances against Australia A, which scored 286 for 8 on the second day, riding on Cameron Green's unbeaten century.

Australia now have a 39-run lead after India A declared their innings at 247 for 9 in the first hour of the second day, with skipper Ajinkya Rahane remaining unbeaten on 117.

With Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah being automatic choices, Umesh (18-3-44-3), fighting for third pacer's slot, certainly looked more penetrative compared to Mohammed Siraj (19-4-71-2) with the new ball.

The 'Vidarbha Express' removed both rival Test team openers Will Pucovski (1) and Joe Burns (4) in his third and fourth over with the new ball to make initial inroads.

Ashwin (19-2-58-2) also did his Test chances no harm.

For Australia A, the giant all-rounder Green continued his rich vein of Sheffield Shield form with an unbeaten 114 off 173 that had 10 fours and a six.

He showed good temperament against the Indian attack while adding 104 runs for the sixth wicket with his national skipper Tim Paine (44) after being reduced to 98 for 5.

Another 49 for the eighth wicket with paceman Michael Neser (33) ensured that Australia A recovered well from a batting collapse.

India started well with the



Australia A batsman Cameron Green celebrates after scoring hundred CA/Twitter

Australia A vs India A
Live from 5:00am IST
SONY SIX NETWORK

new ball as Umesh maintained a good channel outside off-stump as Pucovski trying to cut a back-of-length delivery gave a simple catch to Shubman Gill at point.

Burns edged one that moved a shade away to wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha behind the stumps.

Skipper Travis Head (18) and Marcus Harris (35) then added 55 runs to steady the innings before Siraj got into the act, cleaning up the Australia A skipper in the 21st over.

Siraj, who is also trying to seal a place in the Tests, troubled Harris (35) a lot with semi-new ball before Ashwin ended his stay with Rahane snapping one in the slip cordon.

The experienced off-spin-

ner was again in action in the 31st over when he trapped Nic Maddinson (23) with a delivery that kept straight.

Green and Tim Paine then scripted another recovery act to take Australia A to 186-5 at tea.

After the break, Umesh peppered Paine with bouncers with one hitting him on the helmet. The strategy worked as Paine pulled one only to be brilliantly caught by Prithvi Shaw at backward square leg, ending their 104-run stand.

Siraj then got his second scalp in the 67th over, removing James Pattinson (3) but Michael Neser (33) frustrated India A before being run-out in 80th over.

Green, who was dropped on 24 by Hanuma Vihari in second slip and then on 78 by Wriddhiman Saha, completed his hundred with a four in the 81st over.

Smith will do great job as captain: Wade

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia's stand-in T20 skipper Matthew Wade on Monday said batting mainstay Steve Smith, who has "plenty of say" in how the team is driven on the field, would do a "great job" if he is given the leadership role again.

Wade took over the captaincy reins for the second T20 on Sunday after Aaron Finch picked up an injury in the opening game.

Asked about Smith, who lost the captaincy role because of his role in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal, Wade said the team has a lot of options and they include the batting star.

"We have so many good leaders, I have been given the



captaincy but we have got Smith, we have got Moises (Henriques), who captains his BBL team. We have guys with a lot of experience, there is a lot of discussions among the seniors but we are all working together," Wade said.

"It is not me driving the field, obviously Finchy (Aaron Finch) is our captain and we all work together when he plays well. So Smith has plenty of say, he has been a great captain for a long time and he will do a great

job if he gets an opportunity," he added.

Coach Justin Langer said Australia's T20 against India on Sunday was too early for Steve Smith to regain the captaincy.

"Of course, we talked about a number of things," Langer told Fox Sports, when asked if Smith was considered. "We've got so many options. Steve has done a brilliant job in the past. There's probably a bit of a process we need to go through until he becomes captain again. We'll go through that."

Langer added: "When the English crowd gave him a standing ovation at The Oval last year — talk about earning respect... he's doing all the right things to show leadership without a title at the moment."

Concussion & dodgy hamstring may keep Jadeja out of 1st Test

NEW DELHI (PTI): Indian all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja is likely to miss the opening Test against Australia owing to the concussion and a hamstring injury that he sustained during the opening T20I on Friday.

The 32-year-old, who is on the cusp of his 50th Test, is likely to be out for at least three weeks which certainly rules him out of the first Day/Night Test in Adelaide starting December 17.

In case it turns out to be a hamstring tear, it could well rule him out of the second Boxing Day Test in Melbourne from December 26.

"As per ICC's concussion protocols, after any head injury, a player needs to be rested for 7 to 10 days, which effectively rules Jadeja out of the three-day day/night warm-up game at

the SCG from December 11," a BCCI source told PTI.

"Therefore, it is next to impossible that the Indian team management would field Jadeja, without any warm-up game time ahead of the opening Test," the source added.

However, more than concussion, it is understood that the hamstring injury is likely to keep Jadeja out of action for at least one Test if not two.

In fact, one of the on-air commentators, during the second day of the warm-up game between India A and Australia A, said that "news is Jadeja is out for three weeks" due to concussion. However as per BCCI sources, while he is recovering well from concussion, to be fully fit from a dodgy hamstring may just take some time.



Poms South Africa tour called off

Virus outbreak in bio-bubble forced cancellation of ODI series

AP ■ CAPE TOWN

England's ODI series in South Africa was cancelled on Monday after an outbreak of Covid-19 cases at the luxurious Cape Town hotel where both teams are staying.

Both squads have had members infected, while two staff members at the hotel have also contracted the disease.

The decision to call off the series was taken by both the England and Wales Cricket Board and Cricket South Africa, the two federations said in a statement, and was made "to ensure the mental and physical health and welfare of players from both teams." The opening game of the series was scheduled for Friday but was postponed to Sunday after a South African player tested positive for Covid-19 on the morning of the game.

That first ODI was then cancelled completely on Sunday after it was revealed two hotel staff members had been infected with Covid-19, forcing the England contingent to undergo a new round of tests.

Two members of the England group then tested positive for Covid-19, although the ECB said it wanted the tests verified by an independent medical team before making a decision on the remainder of the tour.

Both the ECB and Cricket South Africa had hoped that the remaining two ODI games would be able to go ahead but that was ended with Monday's announcement.

The ECB and CSA said they were effectively postponing the series until a suitable time could be found for England to travel back to South Africa to play the games.

Williamson joins Kohli at No 2

PTI ■ DUBAI

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson on Monday moved up a rung to join his Indian counterpart Virat Kohli at the second spot in the latest ICC Test rankings for batsmen.

On the other hand, West Indies captain Jason Holder conceded his top ICC Test all-rounder's ranking to England star Ben Stokes after an unimpressive outing against New Zealand in the first Test which his team lost by an innings and 134 runs.

Australia's Steve Smith, with 911 points, kept his hold on the pole position in the batting charts ahead of Kohli and Williamson, who hit a match-winning double hundred against the West Indies in



Hamilton. India's Cheshwar Pujara remained seventh on the list ahead of Stokes (8th) and England captain Joe Root (9th) respectively.

New Zealand opener Tom Latham entered the top-10 at the 10th position.

Ajinkya Rahane (11th) and Mayank Agarwal (12th) have both dropped a place each.

Perez races from last to first, wins Sakhir race

AFP ■ SAKHIR

Sergio Perez, who may be out of work next season, took advantage of his rivals' misfortunes on Sunday to drive from last position to claim his first Formula One victory in a chaotic and crazy Sakhir Grand Prix.

The 30-year-old Mexican recovered from a first-lap crash that dropped him to the back of the field in his 190th race.

Yet he benefitted from a shock Mercedes pit-stop tyre bungle and a late puncture for George Russell, who dazzled as substitute for Lewis Hamilton, to secure his maiden triumph.

Perez became the first Mexican victor in F1 since Pedro Rodriguez in 1970, ending a series of races dominated by



Racing Point driver Sergio Perez celebrates with his team after Bahrain GP win AP

Mercedes for whom Valtteri Bottas finished eighth and Russell ninth.

"I'm speechless," said Perez,

who wept through most of his victory lap after taking the flag. "I hope I'm not dreaming... Ten years it has taken me and I don't

know what to say. "After that first lap, the race was gone, but I didn't give up. In the end, my pace was good enough to hold off George."

Perez is being released by Racing Point to be replaced by four-time world champion Sebastian Vettel of Ferrari next year, when the team will be rebranded as Aston Martin.

Perez is without a 2021 race seat, but he is in contention to replace Alexander Albon at Red Bull alongside Max Verstappen who crashed out on the opening lap along with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

Perez came home ahead of Esteban Ocon of Renault, who claimed his first podium finish, and Lance Stroll, his Racing Point team-mate.

Pak squad clears fifth Covid test

PTI ■ CHRISTCHURCH

The touring Pakistan squad has returned negative in a fifth round of Covid-19 tests and will now be able to leave their managed isolation on Tuesday, subject to clearance from the health ministry, New Zealand Cricket said on Monday.

The 53-member Pakistan team was denied the right to train while in managed isolation in New Zealand after eight members of the touring squad had tested positive for Covid-19. "This is to advise the Pakistan squad's fifth and final day 12, Covid-19 tests have all been returned as negative," NZC said in a statement.

"As a consequence, and pending final Ministry of Health approval, the squad will leave managed isolation tomorrow and fly to Queenstown, where they will train ahead of the T20 and Test series against the BLACK-CAPS."

Fans return to Anfield for big win

AFP ■ LIVERPOOL

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said he had "goose-bumps" as fans returned to Anfield on Sunday, roaring the Premier League champions on to a comprehensive 4-0 win against Wolves.

The Reds have not had the chance to play in front of their supporters since they ended their 30-year wait to be crowned English champions in June.

But they made up for lost time, swaggering to a comfortable win as the 2,000 fans permitted to attend due to coronavirus restrictions sang the club anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone".

Wolves showed glimpses of a threat early on but the result was rarely in doubt once Mohamed Salah had given the home side the lead midway through the first half.

Second-half goals from Georginio Wijnaldum, Joel Matip and a late own goal from Nelson Semedo underlined Liverpool's superiority as they



joined leaders Spurs on 24 points.

"The game, the atmosphere, it was so nice I had goose-bumps," an emotional Klopp told the BBC. "They started 'You'll Never Walk Alone' — really nice. I never knew it could feel that good."

"This started in February and we were waiting to get normality back. Normality is good — I don't think we appreciated it as much. It was very, very touching."

The home fans had something to cheer in the 24th

minute. There did not appear to be much danger when Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson sent a long ball over the top into the Wolves penalty area.

But Wolves captain Conor Coady, who used to be on Liverpool's books, got his calculations wrong. The ball came off his chest and Salah nipped in to fire home left-footed.

Wolves were awarded a penalty in the dying minutes of the first half after Mane was adjudged to have fouled Coady. But VAR ruled out the spot-kick

after the TV replay showed there had been no contact.

Wolves searched for a way back into the match in the early stages of the second half and Coady found himself in a threatening position in the Liverpool box before Fabinho whipped the ball away.

Seconds later, Liverpool were charging forward again on the counter-attack, towards the Kop. Henderson played a long ball which Wijnaldum collected before producing a measured, curled finish into the top left-hand corner of Rui Patricio's net.

Liverpool put the result beyond doubt in the 67th minute when Salah's inswinging cross was met by Matip, who headed in from close range. By now the home side were in total control.

Liverpool's fourth goal came when substitute Trent Alexander-Arnold, returning from injury, produced a delicious cross from the right which was turned in by Nelson Semedo for an own goal.

Five clear

Milan slip past Sampdoria to maintain Serie A lead

AFP ■ MILAN

AC Milan kept hold of their five-point lead at the top of Serie A on Sunday after a hard-fought 2-1 win at Sampdoria, while Napoli moved third after strolling to 4-0 victory over bottom side Crotona.

Franck Kessie's penalty on the stroke of half-time and Samu Castillejo's 77th-minute strike were just enough for the seven-time European champions, who were without injured talisman Zlatan Ibrahimovic, to move up to 26 points and keep second-placed local rivals Inter Milan at arm's length.

Ivory Coast midfielder Kessie coolly struck home his spot-kick after Jakub Jankto unluckily handled while challenging for the ball with Theo Hernandez. Sandro Tonali hit the post for Milan just after the break but the away side were on the back foot for much of the



second half until substitute Castillejo doubled their lead with his first touch, set up by a fine pull-back from Ante Rebic.

Stefano Pioli's team were left to sweat out the final minutes after Albin Ekdal's powerful header just escaped Gianluigi Donnarumma's clutches, and their lead at the top of the table would have been cut to three had Swede Ekdal not put another aerial effort wide with the last attack of the game.

Earlier, Napoli are six points back in third after goals from Lorenzo Insigne, Hirving Lozano, Diego Demme and Andrea Petagna earned the

away side a 4-0 win at Crotona.

Insigne opened the scoring with a trademark curling strike after cutting in from the left with half an hour gone, and then he laid on Lozano for the second with a superb long pass that left the Mexican with a simple finish, and Demme made sure of the result with a drilled low strike 14 minutes from the end following a lay-off from substitute Mertens.

Belgium forward Mertens then supplied the pass that allowed Petagna to hammer home the fourth in stoppage time as Napoli temporarily closed the gap between them and Milan.