

ANALYSIS 7

PLUG
THE LEAKS

MONEY 8

PENALTY WAIVED FOR NON-COMPLIANCE WITH QR
CODE PROVISIONS FOR B2C TRANSACTIONS

SPORTS 11

'PLAYING FC CRICKET GIVES
US ADVANTAGE IN TESTS'

VIJAYAWADA, TUESDAY DECEMBER 1, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer



AMRITA RAO: EARLIER
TALENT WAS IMPORTANT,
NOW THERE'S TALENT
MANAGEMENT

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TOP NUCLEAR SCIENTIST KILLED BY WEAPON MADE IN ISRAEL: IRAN

Iran's English-language Press TV said on Monday that the weapon used in the killing of a prominent Iranian nuclear scientist last week was made in Israel. "The weapon collected from the site of the terrorist act bears the logo and specifications of the Israeli military industry," an unnamed source told Press TV. Speaking before the Press TV report, Israeli intelligence minister Eli Cohen told radio station 103 FM on Monday that he did not know who was responsible. Fakhrazadeh, who had little public profile in Iran but had been named by Israel as a prime player in what it says is Iran's nuclear weapons quest, was killed on Friday.



AASHIQI STAR RAHUL ROY SUFFERS BRAIN STROKE, CURRENTLY IN ICU

Actor Rahul Roy, the star of Mahesh Bhatt's 1990 hit film Aashiqui, suffered a brain stroke while shooting for his film LAC - Live The Battle in Kargil. According to an Indian Express report, the 52-year-old actor was brought back to Mumbai and is currently admitted to the Nanavati hospital, where he is in the ICU. "It was extreme weather conditions that caused the stroke. He was rushed from Kargil to Srinagar and then to the Nanavati Hospital," Indian Express quoted a source as saying. Meanwhile, the actor's brother Romeer confirmed the news and told Indian Express that Rahul Roy is "recovering."



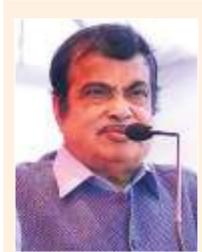
30 CRORE PEOPLE TO BE VACCINATED BY AUGUST 2021: HEALTH MINISTER

Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan today said that up to 30 crore Indians would be inoculated against COVID-19 by August 2021 according to the central government's plans. However, he also reiterated the need to follow appropriate protocols to fight off the disease. Distributing masks and soaps at the Old Delhi Railway Station today, the minister, who is also Chairman of the Indian Red Cross Society, said the vaccine will be available before the middle of next year in India. "In the first 3-4 months of next year, there is a possibility we will be able to provide vaccine to the people of the country. By July-August, we plan to provide vaccines to around 25-30 crore people and we are preparing accordingly," he said.



SENA ATTACKS CENTRE; SAYS ED, CBI SHOULD BE SENT TO BORDERS

The Enforcement Directorate and the CBI "should be sent to the borders" to tackle terrorists entering Jammu and Kashmir, the Shiv Sena said in its latest attack on former ally BJP. Criticising the Centre's treatment of protesting farmers near Delhi "who are called terrorists", the Sena also said it was "cruel" to use water cannons on them in the cold wave sweeping parts of north India. In an editorial in its mouthpiece "Saamana", the Shiv Sena referred to the giant statue of Sardar Patel and said the first Home Minister of India had led many farmers' agitations against the British.



Gadkari confident India will get Corona vax as 'early as possible'

8



Maya: Reconsider anti-conversion law

5



BJP poised to upset KCR's appecart in GHMC polls

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Naidu, 13 TDP MLAs suspended for creating bedlam in Assembly

TDP supremo squats in front of Speaker's podium after microphone is cut off

SNV SUDHIR
VIJAYAWADA

As expected, the winter session of the Andhra Pradesh Legislature began on a stormy note and high drama on Monday, with Members of both the treasury and opposition benches exchanging heated words, forcing the Speaker to suspend the TDP MLAs from the House for the day.

Before he was suspended, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu went to the extent of squatting on the floor near the Speaker's podium. Naidu said that he was being denied an opportunity to speak about the premium to be paid to insurance companies by the government for the farmers to avail their farm claims.

For the first time, Naidu sat on the floor near the podium along with his party colleagues, prompting an angry reaction from Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, who pointed out that no Leader of the Opposition had ever behaved like this in the House. Jagan and the YSRCP Members dubbed Naidu's actions as "drama" to hog the headlines and divert public attention from the good the government has done for the farmers and the farm sector in the last 16 months.

However, the TDP Members claimed they were protesting against the ruling YSRCP for not allowing them to speak on important issues, including the relief payment to distressed farmers, who suffered heavily due to floods and cyclones in recent months. The pandemonium prevailed for almost half an hour after.

This pandemonium began during a short discussion on agriculture in the House after Agriculture Minister K Kannababu made a statement.

Five-day session begins with homage to Pranab, SPB

The winter sessions of the state Legislature will stretch over five days during which discussions on at least 21 issues would be held.

This was decided during the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting that was held before the session began on Monday morning.

The BAC meeting is traditionally held to decide the agenda and the business that has to be transacted in the House during a session.

During Monday's meeting, it was also decided to dispense with the Question Hour. While ruling party members



TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, left, gesticulates angrily while Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy retorts in the Assembly on Monday.

proposed five days of the session, the Opposition Members in the BAC insisted that the House would sit for at least 10

days to enable them to raise and highlight people-centric issues. The ruling party however put forth 21 issues before

the BAC, including Polvaram, decentralisation of governance, TIDCO Houses etc while the Opposition proposed 11 issues, including alleged corruption and irregularities in new sand mining system, land acquisition for distribution to poor etc.

As the sessions began after the BAC meeting, the House condoled the demise of former President Pranab Mukherjee, popular playback singer SP Balasubramanyam and former Members of the Legislature who passed away during the intervening period of the sessions.

Crops in over 6.6L hectares damaged by Nivar, Kannababu informs House

Vijayawada: Cyclone Nivar last week caused extensive damage to crops in over 6.59 lakh hectares in different districts of Andhra Pradesh, Agriculture Minister K Kannababu said on Monday. Initiating a short discussion on agriculture in the Legislative Assembly, he said complete enumeration of the crop losses would be completed by December 15 and input subsidy distributed to affected farmers by December 31.

"The Chief Minister conducted a review meeting this morning and directed the authorities to procure even discoloured and sprouted paddy and rescue the farmers. The Agriculture Department and allied departments are working on that," Kannababu said.

"There have been bountiful rains this season because of which all reservoirs in the state are filled to the brim. Even drought-prone districts like Anantapur and Chittoor received heavy rainfall. Unfortunately, there have been floods and cyclones that caused heavy loss to the agriculture sector," he said.

The Minister said the state government distributed Rs 306.9 crore as input subsidy to 4.20 lakh farmers who suffered crop damages due to natural calamities since May 2019. Similarly, 1.16 lakh horticulture farmers were paid Rs 102.24 crore as input subsidy. The Minister said the state government paid Rs 1,030 crore in 2019-20 towards crop

insurance. "We are going to set up AP State General Insurance Company, which will cover crop insurance to farmers who registered under e-Crop," he added. Claiming that the YSRCP government's top priority was farmer welfare, the Agriculture Minister listed out various measures initiated in the last one and a half years.

A sum of Rs 11,981 crore was credited into farmers' accounts under the PM Kisan-YSR Rythu Bharosa scheme, he said. Another Rs 4,607 crore was spent through the Market Intervention Fund for procurement of various agricultural produce so as to ensure remunerative prices for the farmers.

Crucial Bills introduced on Day 1

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Minister for Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries Seediri Appalaraju on Monday introduced the Andhra Pradesh Fish Feed Bill in the State Legislative Assembly here.

Besides introducing the Andhra Pradesh Fish Feed (Quality Control) Bill 2020, the Minister also introduced the AP Aquaculture Seed (Quality Control) (Amendment) Bill 2020, the AP Fisheries University Bill, 2020 and AP Animal Feed (Regulation of Manufacture Quality Control Sale and distribution) Bill 2020.

Relief as 'Burevi' changes course towards Sri Lanka Pg2

Assembly ignores Council, clears PR Bill

The State Assembly on Monday passed the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill 2020 by a voice vote even as the opposition Members staged a walkout in protest. Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy intervened when the bedlam that

ensued after the Opposition raised objections while Panchayat Raj Minister Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy was tabling the Amendment Bill and explaining its salient features.

"The Bill was earlier passed by this House and was sent to the Council which returned it

with some changes. This is the second time the Bill is being tabled in the House and it is a mere formality to clear it. There is no reason on part of the Opposition to make it an issue," the Chief Minister said.

"There is no scope for again negating the Bill. What was decided by this House by the

majority of 151 will prevail and the Bill, in its original form, is before the House for consideration and passing remains a formality. The Opposition is acting as if the Bill has been just introduced and is unaware about it," he added.

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Karthik & Krishna Paksha Panchangam
Tithi: Pralipada: 04:51 pm
Nakshatram: Rohini: 08:31 am
Time to Avoid: (Bad time to start any important work)
Rahukalam: 02:50 pm - 04:13 pm
Yamagandam: 09:19 am - 10:42 am
Varjyam: 02:36 pm - 04:21 pm
Gulika: 12:05 pm - 01:28 pm
Good Time: (to start any important work)
Amritakalam: 01:03 am - 02:48 am
Abhijit Muhurtham: 11:43 am - 12:27 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Partly cloudy
Temp: 30/19
Humidity: 68%
Sunrise: 06:30am
Sunset: 05:40pm
Current Weather Conditions Updated November 30, 2020 5:00 PM

Discoms propose waiver of monthly charges for homes

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

The Andhra Pradesh Discoms have proposed waiver of monthly minimum charges for domestic consumers and bringing of the group housing societies and apartment complexes under high-tension (HT) 1 category with energy charges of Rs 5.95 per unit.

The three electricity distribution companies in Andhra Pradesh— APEPDC, APCPDCL and APSPDCL submitted the ARR (Aggregate Revenue

Requirement) and proposed tariffs for retail supply business for the FY 2021-22 to the AP Electricity Regulatory Commission on Monday.

The Discoms need to submit their revenue generating and retail tariff proposal to the regulatory commission to get approval.

According to the proposal, instead of monthly minimum fixed charges, fixed nominal fixed charges of Rs 10/KW/month will be levied on contracted load.



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy participates in Gururupurab, marking 551st birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak Devji, at a Gurudwara in Vijayawada on Monday.

Moderna says vax 100% effective in severe Covid cases

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

US firm Moderna said it would file requests for emergency authorisation of its Covid-19 vaccine in the United States and Europe on Monday. "Vaccine efficacy against Covid-19 was 94.1 percent; vaccine efficacy against severe Covid-19 was 100 percent," the company said in a statement today.

"We believe that our vaccine will provide a new and powerful tool that may change the course of this pandemic and help prevent severe disease, hospitalizations and death," said the company's CEO Stéphane Bancel.

If the US Food and Drug Administration agrees it's safe and effective, the first of the drug's two doses could be injected into the arms of millions of Americans by the

middle of December.

American pharmaceutical Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech applied for similar approvals last week, and their vaccine could be greenlit in the US shortly after December 10.

The Moderna vaccine, which was co-developed with the US National Institutes of Health, is being studied in a clinical trial with more than 30,000 participants across the United States.

An interim analysis announced earlier this month was based on 95 patients who fell sick with Covid-19.

The final analysis was based on 196 cases, 185 of which were observed in a group assigned a placebo versus 11 who received the shots. Thirty people had severe cases -- all of whom were in the placebo group -- which also included one person who died.



Nani attacker faces attempt to murder case

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Badugu Nageswara Rao, the mason who attacked Transport and I&PR Minister Permi Venkataramaiah (Nani) on Sunday, was on Monday charged with attempt to murder and booked under 126/2020 under Section 307 IPC. The mason was produced before court and remanded to judicial custody for 14 days, till December 14.

Earlier, the police filed a memo with the court, seeking custody of the accused. Machilipatnam DSP Ramesh Reddy said that they will take the accused into police custody and conduct a thorough investigation.

Nani escaped unhurt after Nageswara Rao attacked him with a trowel at the former's residence in Machilipatnam.

Bail to cops in Salaam suicide case cancelled

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A Nandyal court on Monday revoked the bail granted to Circle Inspector Somasekhar Reddy and Head Constable Gangadhar in the Abdul Salaam family suicide case.

The court, which heard the arguments of Additional Advocate General P Sudhakar Reddy appearing on behalf of the Government, agreed with his contentions and issued an order revoking the bail, under Section 306 of the IPC.

Nandyal Third Additional District Judge M Suvarna Raju directed Somasekhar Reddy and Gangadhar to appear before the district court by December 2.

Abdul Salaam (45), his wife Noor Jahan (38), son Dada Khalandar (10) and daughter Salma (14) committed suicide by jumping in front of a goods train in the first week of November.

Abdul Salaam and his wife Noor Jahan's selfie video came to light days after their suicide and it was revealed that they took the extreme step due to police harassment.

4 cheat 2,500 investors of Rs 7 crore, arrested

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

A gang that duped 2,500 investors by promising high returns on investment to the tune of Rs 7 crore in just over two has been busted by Cyberabad Cyber Crime police.

The police arrested four members of the gang, all hailing from Andhra Pradesh.

According to the police, Nanda Kishore, Chittam Reddy Anand and Tulluri Srinivas Rao completed their intermediate while Bhumireddy Avinash, who designed the website and mobile app that helped the

gang commit the fraud, has completed his diploma in Computer Science.

Cyberabad Police Commissioner VC Sajjanar said, "The accused developed a website and an app to attract gullible citizens to invest in their fraudulent investment schemes starting from Rs 10,000 to Rs 1 lakh and assured return of five percent per day from two months onwards. The accused also assured a 10 percent referral commission to those who got news investors to join the scheme."

BJP poised to upset KCR's applegart in GHMC polls

TRS president K Chandrasekhar Rao, who has enjoyed an unchecked run thus far, appears all set to taste a bitter pill with the BJP poised to upset his applegart in the GHMC polls.

The BJP has launched a no-holds-barred attack on the TRS for its inefficiency in tackling the floods and widespread corruption. Going by the way he has targeted the BJP in a meeting at the LB Stadium, it seems KCR has accepted defeat even before the votes are cast.

In his speech, he never spoke against the Congress but lashed out at the BJP stating that the latter had brought a horde of national leaders and that he was being targeted by the saffron brigade. With his utterances, KCR virtually

agreed that the BJP is the main opposition and the party's success in the GHMC polls is a foregone conclusion.

The recently concluded Bihar elections proved that people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari have accepted the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, thanks to his good governance and the BJP's ideology. The secret behind the BJP winning election after election is the fact that the fruits of governance are reaching the people. The opposition has lost the trust of the people while the Prime Minister has won their confidence with his development work.

KCR consolidated his position after Congress leaders moved to fight for the Telangana cause and continued to fight for power till the

The recently concluded Bihar elections proved that people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari have accepted the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, thanks to his good governance and the BJP's ideology. The secret behind the BJP winning election after election is the fact that the fruits of governance are reaching the people

last minute. After bifurcation, the Congress has failed to keep its flock intact. KCR managed to lure scores of Congress MLAs and weaken the grand old party, thereby denting its prospects beyond repair.

KCR has so far been enjoying an unchecked run at power and there was no one questioning him. There are whispers that he has made money from construction of

irrigation projects and it's an open knowledge that he has been keeping aloof from the people by confining himself to his farmhouse.

He has been acting like a dictator, trampling those who raise his voice against his anti-people policies and has even put curbs on the media.

KCR, with tacit understanding with the AIMIM, has been indulging in anarchic



Y SATYA KUMAR
BJP National Secretary

rule. His government has failed to come to the rescue of people whose houses were submerged. Normal life came to a standstill due to heavy rains that inundated the low-lying areas. The Chief Minister, who pays visits to console the bereaved families of leaders and film personal-

ities, did not meet the people in flood-affected areas who were waiting for government help.

When scores of people died due to the Coronavirus pandemic due to lack of amenities at the Osmania and Gandhi hospitals, he failed to respond. KCR, who had come to power stating that he would give one lakh jobs, miserably failed to fulfil the promise. The leader who claims that his government is providing graft-free, people-friendly governance and maintaining law and order, should take back his statement as crime is on the rise across the State.

The Chief Minister should release a white paper on development during his six-year

rule. KCR, who attributed his party's victory in the previous GHMC polls to himself and KT Rama Rao, should realise why citizens now prefer the BJP over the TRS.

People voted for the TRS in previous polls assuming that KTR would transform Hyderabad into a global city but their hopes were dashed as it is dotted with potholes, overflowing sewage and frequent traffic snarls. Lack of basic amenities is the order of the day.

In a heart-rending incident, a woman who came to apply for compensation to the people residing in flood-hit areas breathed her last at a Mee Seva. In this backdrop, the BJP is being seen as an oasis in the desert as the people

are waiting for an alternative, which they can rely upon for good governance and corruption-free administration.

Not only people of Hyderabad, but also the entire Telangana is waiting for a right opportunity to teach a befitting lesson to the government.

KCR in his speech stated that the people should live in harmony like flowers in a bouquet, but people across the country have been living peacefully, irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Thirty percent Muslims in Lucknow, Meerut and Bhopal, 14 percent in Bengaluru and 22 percent in Mumbai are living in peace. Leaders who chanted secularism have been rejected by the people and KCR too will join their bandwagon soon.

TRULY SPEAKING

Cyclone 'Burevi' changes course towards Sri Lanka, AP to get rain

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

In major relief to Andhra Pradesh, the tropical system in the Bay of Bengal which is very likely to turn into a cyclonic storm Burevi in the next 24 hours has started moving towards the South of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

Earlier, the projection was that the storm would hit Tamil Nadu-Puducherry coast bringing heavy rains to most of the places in South AP.

However, the latest forecast is heavy rainfall for isolated places over south Coastal Andhra Pradesh during December 2 and 3. IMD has issued a red alert only for Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

According to the weather experts at IMD, depression



over Southeast of Bengal moved WestNorthWest wards and lay centered over the same region, about 680 km east-southeast of Trincomalee (Sri Lanka).

The system is very likely to intensify further into a DD

during next 12 hours and into a CS during subsequent 24 hours.

Once the system intensifies into a cyclone, it will be named 'Burevi' as per the naming guidelines set by the World Meteorological Organisation

(WMO).

Unlike Nivar, Burevi may not turn into a very severe cyclone as the Bay of Bengal lacks the energy to feed the system further. However, the system is likely to reach a maximum intensity of 60-70 kmph

gusting to 80 kmph and bring very heavy rains across southern Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka.

The depression coupled with a cyclonic circulation is pulling away from the Nicobar Islands. The system will progress west-northwestward toward Sri Lanka and cross the island country's coast by Wednesday night. It will travel over enough warm water to become a cyclone and start to influence Tamil Nadu coast from Wednesday onwards bringing isolated heavy rain and thunderstorms.

Burevi will be the fifth cyclone over the North Indian Ocean this year, after Amphan, Nisarga, Gati and Nivar. It is expected to be the least destructive of all if the projections hold true.

Five-day session begins with homage to Pranab, SPB

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Immediately after the House assembled, Speaker Tammineni Sitaram read out the names and their contribution and the House observed two-minute silence as a mark of respect to the departed souls.

A condolence motion moved by the Speaker said, "This House places on record its deep sense of sorrow at the demise of Dr Pranab Mukherjee, former President of India and conveys its deep sense of sympathy to the members of the bereaved family members."

The services of multifaceted Pranab Mukherjee were recalled during his five-decade

public life under various capacities. The country's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna was conferred on him besides international Awards and he had a place in international agencies IME, World Bank, and other such institutions, the House observed.

The House also expressed its sorrow at the demise of SP Balasubrahmanyam, famous Indian singer who won six national awards and was a singer par excellence in various facets of cinema and conveyed its deep sense of sympathy to members of the bereaved family.

The House also expressed its sorrow and conveyed condolence to the family members of

Tirumala Srinivasulu MLC besides former members of the legislature Janardhan Tatraj (Kurupam), Dr Ravindranath (Bapatla), K Venkatachandra Mohan Rao (Pitapuram), P Manikyala Rao (Tadepalligudem), D Rajagopal Reddy (Darsi), P Ammi Raju (Kadiyamp), B Narayanaswamy (Tekkali), K Veeraraghavendra Rao (Penugonda WG), B Durgaprasada Rao (Gudur, who was also elected to Tirupati Lok Sabha in 2019), P Mangapati Rao, Dronamraju Srinivas, Smt Mocherla Johar (Achanta), K Sivananda Reddy (Kadapa), YT Raja (Tanuku) and DA Satyaprabha (Chittoor).

Crops in over 6.6L hectares damaged by Nivar...

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"The Andhra Pradesh government has become the third largest buyer after it procured 12.93 million kg of tobacco at a cost of Rs 120 crore this year. Likewise, the government has agreed to bear the transportation cost, from field to ginning mills, on cotton since the Cotton Corporation of India has a restrictive purchase policy," Kanna Babu said.

"Through micro planning, we are doing many things like building necessary infrastructure not only for procurement but also marketing the farm produce.

We are setting up Janata Bazaars, bulk milk chilling centres, cold storages, multipurpose facility centres at a cost of Rs 10,000 crore in over 9,900 villages across the state. This will expand marketing opportunities for farmers," the Minister said.

Naidu, 13 TDP MLAs suspended for creating bedlam in Assembly

Continued from Page 1

TDP deputy leader Nimmala Ramanaidu was allowed to speak later but he faced constant counter attack from the treasury benches. Reacting to Ramanaidu's criticism, the Chief Minister lashed out saying the TDP members were resorting to "rowdiness" in the House.

The TDP legislators were speaking without any comprehension of issues, he said.

Jagan said the government was determined to distribute input subsidy to affected farmers by the end of December.

Naidu sought to counter the Chief Minister but was denied any opportunity.

The YSRCP members prevented the TDP chief from talking, following which the opposition legislators started protesting in front of the Speaker's podium.

Speaker Tammineni Seetaram requested the opposition members to return to their seats but to no avail.

As the din continued, Legislative Affairs Minister Buggana Rajendranath moved a motion for suspension of the TDP MLAs from the House for a day and the motion was carried by voice vote.

Earlier, Agriculture Minister Kurasala Kannababu opened the discussion on the agriculture sector, as agreed in the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) meeting, stating that the Chief Minister had taken many historic decisions for the welfare of the farming community. To this, the opposition members accused the state government of not paying the premium to the insurance companies.

While the Agriculture Minister asserted that the

Government had already paid the premium amounts, TDP's Payyavula Keshav said that he had information that was sought under RTI which revealed the premium amounts were not paid. At this juncture Naidu sought the opportunity to speak on the issue. However, as soon as he began speaking, his mike was cut.

Furious over this, Naidu raised his voice and with an aggressive posture, rushed to the Speaker's podium and squatted on the floor accusing the ruling party of muzzling his voice denying his party the opportunity to voice people's issues.

Naidu's charge led to TDP members raising slogans for some time. Kannababu said that never in history has the Leader of the Opposition behaved in such a way and thereby lowered his stature

and dignity. He condemned Naidu's behaviour, stating it as uncalled for from a senior politician like the TDP chief.

Kannababu said there was a need to change the rules and norms of the Assembly so that no member in the future behaves in such a way. YSRCP Members K Parthasarathy and Ambati Rambabu also condemned Naidu's act.

Jagan said that despite the Covid situation, the Government had decided to hold the winter session as there are some important Bills needed to be passed for the effective functioning of the government. He deplored and condemned Naidu's behaviour for obstructing and disturbing the smooth functioning of the House. The Chief Minister reminded that due to Covid, even the winter session of Parliament was not being conducted.

Discoms propose waiver of monthly charges for homes

Continued from Page 1

The proposal urged inclusion of all group housing societies, apartment complexes/buildings (townships, colonies, gated communities, villas and bungalows) under HT 1 Category with energy charges of Rs. 5.95 ps/unit.

It sought removal of the existing fixed charges of Rs 100/KW/Month for function halls to discourage usage of diesel generators.

The Discoms proposed shifting of poultry hatcheries and poultry feed mixing plants, aqua hatcheries and aqua feed mixing plants from Agricultural category (low tension-V(C) and high tension-V(C)) to industrial category (LT-III (A) and HT-III(A)).

Change of morning peak TOD (time of the day) timings from 6 am -10 am to 4 am to 8 am in line with the incidence of agriculture loads was proposed.

4 cheat 2,500 investors of Rs 7...

Continued from Page 1

The Cyberabad police chief said that the accused had meticulously planned the fraud to gain the confidence of the investors they named the website as Stemocor Maxhedge, displayed the pictures of foreigners as directors and team members, used two virtual UK numbers for communicating with customers, showed the address of the company as "Sobell Leisure Centre,

Hornsey Road, London N7 7 NY, United Kingdom".

Investigation revealed that the accused maintained the company only for two months from July 2020 to September 2020 and duped around 2,500 people to the tune of more than Rs 7 crore.

They closed the firm as they got scared that the huge money flow into their bank accounts might land them on the radar of officials, Sajjanar said.

Farmers protest impacts supply of vegetables, fruits from other states

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The supply of vegetables and fruits to the city from other states has been impacted and it has been halved at Azadpur Mandi, one of Delhi's largest wholesale market, owing to the protest by farmers at the Singhu and Tikri border points of the national capital for the last five days.

Vendors in other parts of Delhi said due to curtailed supply, the wholesale rates of seasonal vegetables has gone up by Rs 50- Rs 100.

They said the roadblock at Singhu and Tikri border has impacted supply of vegetables and fruits from Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

The arrival of vegetables and fruits to Delhi's largest wholesale market at Azadpur has been reduced by half due to the closed borders, said Adil Khan, chairman Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee at

Azadpur.

"During normal days, around 2,500 trucks of vegetables and fruits used to arrive at Azadpur Mandi from other states. The number has come down to around 1,000 trucks now and if the borders remained closed for a few more days, the situation will worsen," Khan said.

He, however, said the rates have not registered any significant rise so far because local produce and stocks are being sold.

Some other vendors said the wholesale rates of seasonal vegetables has already gone up by Rs 50- Rs 100 due to the short supply.

They said due to obstructions at the border, the trucks are finding it difficult to reach Delhi and those somehow managing to do so are getting delayed by several hours.

"The supply and rates will have further impact if the borders are not opened and traffic is brought back to normal,"

they said.

Gopal, a wholesale commission agent of green pea at Azadpur market, said supplies have drastically reduced.

Normally 40-45 trucks of peas from Punjab's Amritsar-Hosiarpur belt would arrive on a given day in winters but it has reduced to 15-20 trucks now, he said.

"The rates have gone up due to reduced supply and hike in transport charges that have increased by around Rs 10,000 per truck," he said.

The trucks from Punjab carrying fruits and vegetables that would normally take around 9-10 hours for a trip to Delhi, now takes 12-14 hours due to closure of Singhu border, said another wholesaler.

The reduced supply has also pushed retail rates in the markets of the city. The rates of potatoes, tomatoes and onion that were already high, have relatively been less affected, said the wholesalers.

VIJAYAWADA BULLION RATES

GOLD	₹ 48,760 (10 gm)
SILVER	₹ 63,300 (1kg)
₹ 330	↓
₹ 1400	↓

CHICKEN RATES ₹/KG

Dressed/With Skin	₹184
Without Skin	₹210
Broiler at Farm	₹127

EGG RATES ₹/100

VIJAYAWADA	444
HYDERABAD	434
VISAKHAPATNAM	435
RETAIL PRICE	₹4.44

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Our govt stands by farmers: Jagan

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy has asserted that the rural landscape of the state was changing with the welfare schemes being rolled out for farmers and the State has shown sincerity by delivering welfare schemes on time like never before while the Opposition stooped to low and tarnished the image of the House.

During the discussion on agriculture, the Chief Minister on Monday apprised the Assembly that the government had been paying input subsidy in the same year and was taking up crop insurance to safeguard the interests of the farmers, like never before.

"Our government has taken the responsibility of supporting the farmers at any cost and brought a free crop insurance scheme, without levying any



burden of premium on farmers. As the premium amount has been surpassing the insurance claims, due to disputes between farmers and insurance companies, the government has taken up the issue to benefit farmers and process the claims in fast-track mode," he said.

The government had reviewed the crop loss and

had taken precautionary measures to reduce the damage and also took decisions to support the people in the hard times. All the people in relief camps were given Rs 500 while returning home irrespective of their age, and an ex gratia of Rs 5 lakh was immediately given to the kin of the deceased. Seeds will be supplied with 80 per cent subsidy to the farmers in affected areas.

The crop loss enumeration would be taken up on a war-footing and would be completed by December 15 and compensation would be paid by December 31. The power supply was restored in majority of the areas and works were going on in the remaining.

As far as the damaged crops are considered, the government has given orders to purchase decoloured and germinated grains, to ensure that no farmer suffers loss.

Compensating the Kharif loss due to natural calamities between June and September, the state government had paid Rs 143 crore on October 27 and similarly paid Rs 132 crore in November towards crop damage due to rains in October.

The Chief Minister said that the previous government had never paid the input subsidy on time. The loss in 2014 was compensated in 2015 with just Rs 690 crore and further delayed the 2017 compensation by two years and totally skipped to provide input subsidy of Rs 2,194 crore for Kharif and Rabi in 2018.

Jaganmohan Reddy stated that over 50 lakh farmers were credited with Rythu Bharosa of Rs 13,500 in three spells, which will be of Rs 67,500 in five years, while the previous government only cleared Rs 12,731 crore in their five-year regime.

Naidu wants stern action against Bharat's killers

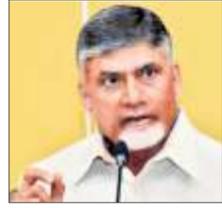
Arrest culprits and restore peace in temple town, says TDP chief; consoles kin of slain party leader

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday strongly condemned the murder of Bharat Yadav, a relative of TDP in-charge for Tirupati Parliamentary constituency Narsimha Yadav.

He demanded that stern action should be taken against the culprits involved in the murder to ensure that peace and harmony be restored in the temple town.

Naidu alleged that the activists of the ruling YSRCP attacked Bharat Yadav with knives last night and wounded him badly. He breathed his



last while undergoing treatment at a hospital.

He expressed anguish over the death of Bharat Yadav and expressed condolences to the members of the bereaved family.

The TDP chief alleged that

attacks on the opposition leaders have increased in Tirupati.

"It is the fifth murder after the YSRCP came to power. Tirupati. The otherwise peaceful and spiritual town has turned into a battleground and place for political rivalry. The YSRCP activists are resorting to attacks time and again on them, he fumed.

Naidu expressed deep anguish over the conversion of peaceful Tirupati into a factional political arena.

The assassination of Bharat Yadav is clear indication of the total failure of law and order in the temple town, he said.

CM has no respect for Assembly, oppn: TDP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP Chief N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday launched a blistering attack on Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy, saying that the YSRCP Government had thrown all traditions of the Assembly to the winds and did not care to take up a meaningful debate on the woes of the cyclone-hit farmers in the State.

Naidu called Jaganmohan Reddy a 'fake CM' who was spending his time by making meaningless and empty statements without any commitment to the people who had fallen for his trap and gave 151 out of the 175 MLAs in Andhra Pradesh.

Addressing the media persons, the TDP chief said that he never thought this day would come when he would enter the Speaker's podium in the Assembly to eventually face suspension from the House. "For the first time in my

long career, I faced suspension. I faced this for the sake of the farmers who were suffering greatly on account of severe crop losses. Crop losses were there in over 20 lakh to 25 lakh acres in the past one and half years. The inefficient CM was making empty laughs in the Assembly but not taking any steps to help the farmers.

Naidu expressed surprise that a Constitutional institution like the Assembly was also forced to wait for CM Jaganmohan Reddy to arrive and the House was not started as per the established conventions.

The Assembly or the Parliament would not wait for any leader as they were above individuals and they have a Constitutional sanctity of their own. Like a deranged person, the CM was laughing and cracking objectionable jokes at Opposition deputy leader Nimmala Rama Naidu on the floor of the House.

House seeks action against Naidu

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The State Assembly on Monday adopted a resolution seeking action against Opposition leader and TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu, who had staged a sit-in in the House protesting that he was denied to talk on farmer's issues.

Legislative affairs and finance minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy moved the resolution and the house adopted it. However, Speaker Thammimineni Seetharam reserved his ruling.

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy and other members took strong objection to the conduct of Naidu and a resolution was adopted seeking action against him.

During the discussion on agriculture, Naidu rushed to Speaker's podium and staged a sit-in. His body language also was highly objectionable and threatening which irked other members of the House.

The CM said that we have agreed to have a discussion on

agriculture, but the TDP supremo has come to the House by design and staged a sit-in at the podium just to hog the headlines. His body language has been objectionable, he added.

It is unbecoming for a leader of the Opposition to behave in such a manner and that too for a person who claims to be one of the most experienced politicians in the country. "Even I was the Opposition leader in this House and I never disrespected the House in such a manner," Jaganmohan Reddy said.

We are sending a wrong message to other members and to the society by such behavior. It has been his habit to somehow create ruckus in a bid to hog the headlines in his friendly media and he tried the same trick even now when every farmer is waiting to hear about the measures the government has been taking. He has given threatening looks to our member from Kurnool and has spoken foul language, he added.

The Chair has suspended the TDP members for the day

for their unruly behaviour.

Ethics Committee Chairman Ambati Rambabu said that such conduct by a person with 40 years in public life is highly objectionable and steps should be taken to prevent such scenes in the House in the future.

After the Chief Minister explained about the initiatives taken by the government for the welfare of farmers, Minister for Legislative Affairs Buggana Rajendranath moved a resolution seeking action against the objectionable conduct of Naidu. This kind of situation should not repeat and a strong message should be sent out, he said while moving the resolution. The resolution was adopted and the Speaker reserved his ruling. "It is unfortunate that such a situation happened in the House. The Leader of Opposition seems to be in confusion. Every member should follow the rules. The resolution is adopted and will be considered at an appropriate time," the Speaker said and adjourned the House for the day.

Don't politicise murder attempt on Nani: Uma Devi

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Krishna district TDP vice president Badugu Uma Devi on Monday expressed shock over the murder attempt by her brother B Nageswara Rao on Transport Minister Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani) on November 29.

Appealing to people and political parties not to politicize the issue as she is the only member in the family who was in politics, Uma Devi said that Nageswara Rao was a mason and does not belong to any political party.

She agreed that what Nageswara Rao did was a crime and that he should be punished as per law.

She said none of her six brothers were habituated to bad habits except Nageswara Rao who sustained a head injury in a road accident a year ago. Since then he was addicted to liquor and even minis-

Uma said that her brother had no intention to harm anyone and that he will be at the forefront to solve any issue

ter Nani had stated that he knew Nageswara Rao and has no criminal back ground.

Uma Devi said that her brother had no intention to harm anyone and that he will be at the forefront to solve any issue in the family.

"He was proactive in raising issues of building workers and masons after YS Jaganmohan Reddy took over as the CM. He lost livelihood due to shortage of sand and had no work at hand," she disclosed.

Uma Devi further said that Nageswara Rao studied till Class VII and was TDP polling agent during elections.

Ramesh Babu's interrogation begins

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The three-day interrogation of Dr Pothineni Ramesh Babu, the MD of Ramesh Cardiac Multi-Specialty Hospital, began on Monday.

He is being in quizzed in the fire accident that broke out in the Covid Care Centre that was set up in Swarna Palace hotel where in ten patients died. The questioning continued from 10 am to 5 pm in accordance with Covid rules in the presence of his advocate as per the High Court orders.

According to sources, the doctor is responding to the queries being raised by the police on several issues - sending some patients to the Covid Care Centre set up at Swarna Palace hotel, failing to keep proper vigil on their safety, allegations of overcharging patients, details of agreement between the hospital and the hotel to run Covid Care Centre and others.

4 held for kidnapping to recover loan

PNS ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

Vizag city police on Monday rescued three persons who were held captive for three days for loan recovery and arrested four persons in this connection.

The loaner, along with his team, took the three persons hostage following a dispute in their financial dealings. The loan transaction was in cars and the victims reportedly illegally mortgaged the cars without informing the accused who had financed it. They also reportedly were not paying the installments for quite some time.

The three kidnapped persons were from Amalapuram in East Godavari district and the accused are predominantly from Kakinada in East Godavari.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Aishwariya Rashtogi said that since the victims and the accused were known to each other, the victims had come



to the house located in Sagar Nagar in Visakhapatnam on an invitation from the accused. They were held captive there and physically assaulted.

Based on complaints from the victims' family and following up a MLC report from a hospital, where the victims were taken for treatment after being beaten up, we traced out the kidnap location and rescued the persons, the DCP said.

They were in confinement from November 28 and the police rescued them on November 29.

The cops arrested two persons on Sunday and sent them to judicial remand. On Monday, another two persons were arrested.

WAHE GURU



Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy participating in Gururuprab celebrations marking 551st birth anniversary celebrations of Guru Nanak in Vijayawada on Monday. Ministers Perni Venkataramaiah, Kodali Venkateswara Rao, Government Whip Samineni Uday Bhanu, Women's Commission Chairperson Vasireddy Padma, MLA Kaila Anil Kumar, YSRCP leaders Devineni Avinash, Boppana Bhava Kumar participated in the event.

Boundary walls mushroom along Vizag beachfront

SUMIT ONKA ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

YSRCP-led Andhra Pradesh government's plan to crown Vizag as the Executive capital of the state has apparently turned lands into gold. Especially, the beachfront lands abutting the beach which were filled with bushes and left vacant are now being cleaned and fenced.

From Sagar Nagar to Bheemili beach stretch, activities like building compound walls or fencing with wire on the beachfront lands are a regular affair these days. The land and apartment prices have skyrocketed following the capital city proposal.

Some people in the real estate business said that the trend was to occupy prime lands and take legal course to stay government's decision. The land dispute cases take



years to get final hearing in most of the cases.

"After capital city was announced, many have started constructing compound walls illegally. We have taken up a special drive on them. We are also checking CRZ violations along the stretch," said GVMC

Chief City Planner RJ Vidyullatha.

GVMC is also undertaking a Beach Front Development Project in which the beach stretches from RK Beach to Bheemili will be developed.

Moreover, after the amendments in the CRZ rules, no

development zone limits were reduced and getting the clearance for the construction of buildings close to the beaches has turned easy for new constructions now.

GVMC officials with City Planning said that the construction activities were going

Activities like building compound walls or fencing with wire on the beachfront lands are a regular affair these days

on at a rapid pace following the amendment in the CRZ.

Now, the city comes under CRZ II, a substantially built-up area, project developers can now increase the floor area ratio or floor space index, and build resorts and other tourism facilities.

As the clearances to projects falling in Coastal Regulation Zone - CRZ-II and III- have been delegated to the state-level or Centre with necessary guidance, the local municipal authorities are remaining in dark regarding the permissions.

Jagan releases brochure on '100-day Women's March'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy released a brochure on the '100-day Women's March' in his office at AP Legislative Assembly on Monday. The March, initiated by AP Women Commission, to create awareness on government programmes will be held for 100 days till March 8.

During the March, the women will organize various programmes to create awareness on the welfare schemes being implemented by the state government which include Navaratnalu, prohibition in phases, Disa App and others.

The Commission will hold awareness seminars on cyber-crimes for college students in



Women will organize various programmes to create awareness on the welfare schemes of the state government

all districts across the state for 100 days.

Women and Child Welfare

Minister Thaneti Vanitha, DGP Gautam D Sawang, Andhra Pradesh Women's Commission Chairperson Vasireddy Padma, APIIC Chairperson RK Roja, Agriculture Special Chief Secretary Poonam Malakondaiah, Women and Child Welfare Chief Secretary AR Anuradha and Women's Commission Director R Suyaz were present at the event.

PM: 2020 will be known as year of internal discovery

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore India's national character for the entire world to behold and 2020 will be known as a year of internal discovery rather than of external disruption, according to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Across the world, people have expressed wonder at the way in which Indians, whether poor or rich, young or old, rural or urban, have shown the ability to be responsible, disciplined, focused, law-abiding, patient and composed during a crisis of unprecedented proportions, he said.

"Some may call the year 2020 as a year of external disruptions due to the pandemic. But I firmly believe that 2020 will be known, not as a year of external disruption, but as a year of internal discovery, for our society and for our nation," Modi wrote in an exclusive article in the Manorama Yearbook 2021.

"Adversity not only builds strength but also brings out our true innate character. This global pandemic has brought to the fore India's national character for the entire world to behold, as a resilient and united nation," the write-up titled "Aatmanirbhar Bharat: Transforming India" said.

Many Indian pharma companies are working to develop a vaccine against Covid.

As on Monday, the number of COVID-19 cases in the country crossed 94 lakh and the recoveries' figure neared



Modi asserted that a slew of reforms across various sectors are strengthening the country's development trajectory as against earlier reforms that used to be "hostage to political expediencies".

88,50,000, according to Union health ministry data. The official toll in the morning stood at 1,37,139.

In the article, Modi also said that in the face of trying circumstances, India has not only stayed firm but also helped the world.

"India emerged as a pharmacy to the world, sending life-saving drugs and medicines far and wide, at the same time ensuring no shortage to our own people."

"After the pandemic struck, in no time, our COVID warriors rose to the occasion and

led India's fight from the front. Remarkable efforts on a war-footing made India self-sufficient in PPE production," the prime minister wrote.

Countless unsung heroes, from ambulance drivers to pharmacists, from security personnel to small neighbourhood vendors, kept our lives going even during difficult circumstances, while carefully maintaining social distancing, wearing masks and adapting digital payments, he said.

Modi asserted that a slew of reforms across various sectors

are strengthening the country's development trajectory as against earlier reforms that used to be "hostage to political expediencies".

Highlighting the significance of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, he said it means an India which is more competitive, an India which is more productive and an India which celebrates local talent.

"An Aatmanirbhar Bharat will increase India's role in global supply chains by attracting more global businesses to India to take full advantage of India's policy stability, low taxes and skilled human resources," he said.

Modi also wrote that the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the ability of technology to be a valuable bridge and from multi-nation summits to multi-national companies, everyone's work had to go online. He was of the view that in the coming year, there will be an even greater focus on self-reliance and resilience in technology.

The yearbook is power-packed in 25 sections and has write-ups on post-COVID-19 on the Indian economy, work from home, Indo-Pak and Sino-India relations and attitude and aptitude among other topics, says chief editor Mammen Mathew.

"Looking back at 2020 we can say that we have come through quarantines and lockdowns by maintaining social distancing, self-masking, sanitising, despite disruptions and confinements in our personal space," he writes in the editorial.

TMC will get a taste of its own medicine, says Dilip Ghosh

PNS ■ KOLKATA

BJP state unit president Dilip Ghosh Monday hit back at TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee for calling him a 'goonda' and said the saffron party believed in standing by the people and the ruling side will get the 'taste of its own medicine'.

If being on the side of the people is being a goonda then BJP will continue to do so in "greater measure", Ghosh said.

Banerjee, nephew of TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, had told a rally in South 24 Parganas district on Sunday that BJP's Bengal minder Kailash Vijayvargiya is an "outsider" and Ghosh was a "goonda".

"Abhishek has seen nothing of goondaism so far. We (BJP) will do it in greater measure. They (TMC) will get the taste of their own medicine."

"However, we believe in standing by the side of people. This may be interpreted as goondaism by the TMC as they have lost contact with the people," he said.

Banerjee, who is the nephew of Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee, had also said at Sunday's rally in South 24 Parganas district that no BJP leader, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had the "guts" to take his name and "use innuendos like 'bhaipo' (nephew in Bengali) or 'bhatija' (meaning the same)" to level charges against him.

Commenting on this, Ghosh mocked at Banerjee as "khokababu (young scion of affluent family) who got things on a platter".

TMC to blunt BJP's Hindutva onslaught with 'Bengali Pride'

PRADIPTA TAPADAR ■ KOLKATA

Buoyed by the "positive" response to its 'insider versus outsider' campaign, the TMC leadership has decided to embrace 'Bengali pride' as its main poll plank for the 2021 assembly polls to counter the BJP's aggressive Hindutva campaign in West Bengal.

The Mamata Banerjee-led party, which has often been mocked by opponents for not having a well-defined ideological plank, seems to have finally found its calling in Bengali sub-nationalism, as a section of top party leaders feel only an "inclusive message of regionalism, which the Bengalis can identify with, will counter the aggressive nationalism and Hindutva practised by the saffron camp".

"During the next assembly polls, apart from development, Bengali pride will be our main poll plank."

Bengali pride is not just about Bengalis, it appeals to all sons of the soil. This philosophy will help counter BJP's attempts to import leaders from outside to control the people of the state," senior TMC leader and MP Sougata Roy told PTI.

"The JD(U) in Bihar had talked about 'Bihari versus Bahari'. Even the BJP, which boasts of nationalism, had campaigned on the poll plank of Gujarati 'Ashmita' during the 2007 Gujarat elections. So if we do the same, we think no one should complain about it," another TMC leader said. A senior leader of the Mamata Banerjee-led party, who was a part of a select group of the members that formulated this ideological plank, said "divisive politics and religious polarisation could never be countered with development politics. Only sub-nationalism and regionalism can do that."

Born in the womb of the Congress, the TMC, which rose to power after a long fight against the CPI(M)-led Left Front, had initially adopted the slogan of 'Maa Mati Manush' (Mother, Land and People), carefully blending socialism and secularism -- a powerful concoction that countered the communists and their doctrines well.



Much like the regional parties of Tamil Nadu, which are proponents of Tamil pride, the TMC plans to emerge as the protector of Bengali culture and identity.

The party tasted success in 2011 and continued its winning streak in 2016 assembly

polls. The rise of the BJP in Bengal's political map, however, has made the TMC realise that its socialist slogan was not all enough to offset 'Hindutva', especially at a time when it has been branded as a party "that favours only minorities" by the saffron camp.

According to TMC sources, after the electoral reverses in the Lok Sabha polls last year, and with the emergence of the BJP as a prime contender for power, the TMC initially tried to shed the 'anti-Hindu' tag and embrace 'soft Hindutva', but it soon realised that it could never beat the BJP in its own game.

The party then took a cue from the results of the final phase of the Lok Sabha polls in Bengal, where the saffron party, which, despite its spectacular performance in the previous phases, drew a blank in all nine seats that went to polls towards the end.

UDF to hold virtual rally on Dec 5

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) is organising a virtual rally, in which lakhs of people are expected to take part, on December 5 to expose alleged corruption and 'anti-people' policies of the ruling Left Democratic Front.

Conducted by the state committee of the Front, the online rally was planned to reach the grassroots level of society ahead of the crucial three-tier local body polls scheduled next month, UDF convener M M Hassan said here on Monday.

Leader of Opposition Ramesh Chennithala would inaugurate the one hour virtual rally to be held from 12 noon on December 5, he said.

KPCC president, Mullappally Ramachandran, former chief minister Oommen Chandy and UDF leaders P K Kunhalikutty, P J Joseph, N K Premachandran will take part.

Karnataka gram panchayat polls in two phases on Dec 22 and 27

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka State Election Commission on Monday announced polls to 5,762 gram panchayats in the state in two phases on December 22 and 27.

The results for both phases will be declared on December 30. State Election Commissioner B Basavaraju said the model code of conduct has come into immediate effect with the announcement of the poll schedule.

All the districts in the state will go to polls in two phases, and the decision to this effect was taken keeping in mind the prevailing COVID-19 situation. Out of 6,004 gram panchayats, 5,762 will go to polls in two phases.

According to poll officials, gram panchayats that are not going to polls include 162 whose term is yet to be completed, six regarding whom cases are pending in the court, and 74 that are either com-



pletely (33) or partially (41) upgraded to town panchayats.

The announcement comes after the High Court recently providing three weeks time, had asked the poll panel to announce the dates for gram panchayat polls.

In all there are about 2.97 crore electors who can vote to elect 92,121 gram panchayat members for which 45,128 polling booths will be set up, and over 2.70 lakh polling officials will be deployed.

EVMs will be used in Bidar district and ballot papers will be used in other places.

SOP will be strictly followed for the smooth conduct of polls amid COVID situation, the commission said.

Voting will be held between 7 am to 5 pm on polling days and measures are in place to allow Covid-19 voters to cast their ballot during the last hour.

While the election notification will be issued for first and

second phase on December 7 and 11 respectively, last date for filing of nominations will be December 11 and 16, and

December 14 and 19 will be the last date for withdrawal of nominations. Repolling if necessary can be held on December 24 and 29 respectively for the first and second phase.

Reacting to announcement of gram panchayat polls, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa said these polls are as crucial as assembly and Lok Sabha polls as it helps in strengthening the organisation from the grassroots level.

He said, already five to six teams of BJP leaders, under the leadership of state unit chief are travelling across the state preparing for gram panchayat polls.

"We will take utmost interest in these polls, though candidates will not face this election on party symbol, we want candidates supported by us to win," he added.

ACB books 29 Guj employees in DA cases

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The ACB has registered cases of possessing disproportionate assets (DA) against 29 employees of the Gujarat government in the last 11 months, as per an official release.

Among these employees, three are class-1 officers, eight class-2 officers, while the rest 18 are class-3 employees, it said on Monday.

The cumulative market value of the alleged DA, including land and residential properties, is estimated at Rs 40.47 crore, the ACB said, adding that it has launched a special drive to unearth benami and ill-gotten properties.

Eight of the accused were earlier employed with now-defunct Gujarat Land Development Corporation, the release said.

Other accused were attached with departments of Urban Development, Revenue, Panchayat, Irrigation, PWD, Gujarat Pollution Control Board, Police, Education, Forest and Environment, Health, and Mines and Minerals, it said.

They were booked under provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act and under the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act, the release said.

Meanwhile, the ACB on Monday booked one Kalubhai Ram, a retired class-3 engineer of state Irrigation department, for allegedly possessing disproportionate assets worth Rs 1.38 crore, which are 97.71 per cent more than his known sources of income.

Kejriwal urges Delhiites to extend all help to farmers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Monday appealed to the people of Delhi to extend all possible help to the farmers protesting against the new farm laws at the Singhu and Tikri border points of the national capital and urged the Centre to hold talks with them at the earliest.

Kejriwal wished everyone on the occasion of Gurupurab, also known as Guru Nanak Jayanti, and said AAP volunteers and MLAs are helping the farmers, who have been braving the cold weather to hold the protest, in any possible way they can. Thousands of farmers continued to protest against the new agri laws for the fifth consecutive day on Monday, staying put at the Singhu and Tikri border points of the national capital, even as the Delhi Police enhanced security at the Ghazipur border with Uttar Pradesh as the number of protesting farmers swelled there.

No bail for accused in Rahul Solanki case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A Delhi court has dismissed a bail application of a man in a murder case related to the February north east Delhi riots, saying prima facie he was allegedly part of the 'riotous mob' that had caused vandalism, arson and looting in the area. The case relates to the killing of a local, Rahul Solanki, during the

communal violence that broke out after clashes between citizenship law supporters and protesters spiralled out of control on February 24. The riots left at least 53 people dead and around 200 injured. Additional Sessions Judge Vinod Yadav dismissed the bail application of Sonu Saifi in the case related to the death of Rahul Solanki due to gunshot injuries from firing from the

riotous mob in the Dayalpur area of north east Delhi.

The court noted that though Saifi was not visible in any of the CCTV camera footage available on record, the victim's brother Rohit Solanki, who is a public witness, not only categorically identified the accused by his name but also stated about his profession of being a "welder". The statement of the witness

"cannot be thrown into dustbin", the court said.

The court cannot lose sight of an epochal development in the matter, which is the recovery of a firearm along with four live cartridges at the instance of the accused, it said.

The court also said that as per a ballistic expert's report of the firearm, it was found to be in "working condition".

Digital learning in govt colleges in Karnataka

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka government on Monday said it has decided to implement learning management system (LMS)-based digital learning in government higher educational institutions from the academic year 2020-21.

"Karnataka LMS" would be implemented in 430 government first grade colleges, 87 government polytechnics and 14 government engineering colleges, a press release said.

This would have a progressive impact on the teaching of about 24,000 teachers and learning of about 4.5 lakh students, it said.

'Karnataka LMS' was launched by Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister C N Ashwath Narayan, who is also in-charge of the Higher Education Department.

LMS-based digital learning is said to be a novel and a first of its kind initiative of the state government, a boon to the students of Government Higher Education Institutions, especially those from socially and economically disadvantaged sections of society.

It is a platform to revolutionise the teaching and learning process by effecting changes in delivery of content, access and assessment, the



release said.

It is a comprehensive system which empowers teachers, enriches students and bridges the digital divide, it said.

"It provides access to all, any time, any where," it said. Multilingual e-content in the form of PPTs, videos, quizzes, assignments and e-

study materials congruous with both self-learning and classroom teaching is being developed as per the university-prescribed syllabi of 14 affiliating varsities by the faculty of the Department of Collegiate and Technical Education.

In the LMS, there would be analytics for scientific assessment of various parameters related to academics. Also, there would be scope for ranking of students, teachers and colleges, cumulative performance report, students feedback, content rating, tracking of e-content usage by teachers in classrooms and students and detailed analytical report, it added.

SHORT TAKES

Karnataka reports steepest dip in Covid cases in one month



Karnataka has reported more than 60 per cent decline in active COVID-19 cases in the last one month, Health Minister Sudhakar K said on Monday. As of November 29 evening, cumulatively 8,83,899 COVID-19 positive cases have been confirmed in the state, which include 11,765 deaths and 8,47,612 discharges, the Health department said in its bulletin. "Karnataka has reported the highest decline in active Covid-19 cases in the past one month. From 68,180 active cases on 29th October to 24,776 active cases on 29th November, the active cases in the State have declined by 63.6%," Sudhakar tweeted. Karnataka on Sunday reported 1,291 fresh infections and 15 deaths, the health department said. On Sunday, there were zero COVID-19 related deaths in 25 districts of Karnataka; Bengaluru reported 10 fatalities, Mysuru two and Udupi, Tumakuru and Dakshina Kannada one each.

Hope GDP will be positive in next quarter: Amit Shah



Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said he hopes the GDP will be back to positive territory in the next quarter, after two consecutive quarters of contraction. Prime Minister Narendra Modi worked hard for the economic recovery and had also announced a package after the crisis due to coronavirus, Shah said after inaugurating two road over-bridges in Ahmedabad through virtual mode. He also praised Modi for a record FII (foreign institutional investors) inflow to India during the pandemic period. "As prime minister, Narendraji used the time of COVID-19 pandemic to visualise policy-making, keeping in mind its long-term impact on the economy," Shah said. Without wasting a second, he worked on reforms in many areas like farm sector, electricity, industrial policy, to create a system to maintain the pace of development, he said. Towards this end, he offered a package of Rs 20 lakh crore for the welfare of poor people and to give pace to the economy, Shah said in his address via video-conferencing.

Baba Amte's granddaughter commits suicide after family feud



Sheetal Amte-Karajgi, granddaughter of social activist Baba Amte, allegedly committed suicide at Warora in Maharashtra on Monday, family sources said. Sheetal (39) took the extreme step following a recent public spat with other members of the Amte family over the management of Maharogi Seva Samiti, a social service organisation founded by Baba Amte, a recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award and Padma Vibhushan, who died in 2008. Police declined to comment on reports that Sheetal apparently injected herself with a lethal dose. Her body was taken from Warora to Chandrapur, 50 km away, for post mortem. A team of forensic experts from Nagpur has gone to Warora and the room in Anandwan where Sheetal's body was found has been sealed, sources said. Baba Amte's sons Vikas and Prakash and their wives Bharti and Mandakini, respectively, had recently issued a clarification on several allegations made by Sheetal, Vikass daughter, on social media. She was the Samiti's CEO. The clarification from the senior Amtes had read: "Maharogi Seva Samiti, Warora is a leading social service organisation in the country. It provided direction and inspiration to the development of the deprived."

'New farm laws bigger threat than Covid'

PNS ■ SONIPAT (HARYANA)

Amid fears that the "Delhi Chalo" protests by farmers will lead to coronavirus spreading faster, their leaders said the "black laws" enacted at the Centre are a bigger threat than the contagion.

There had been few signs of social distancing as thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana began their protest last week against the three new agro-marketing laws, setting off on a march to the national capital.

On the way, they skirmished with police at barricades and since Friday are massed at Delhi's entry points, many of them sheltering inside tractor-trolleys.

Masks appear to be a rarity and there is little attempt at keeping distance from each other, safeguards meant to prevent the infection from spreading.

But as experts fear that the event could become a coronavirus "super-spreader", farm leaders say there are more pressing concerns before them.

"The new farm laws brought by the (Narendra) Modi government are a bigger threat than coronavirus as farmers fear they will lose their livelihood with the implementation of these laws," Bhartiya Kisan Union (Eka Ugrahan) president Joginder Singh Ugrahan told PTI over the phone.

Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher asked why coronavirus posed a serious threat to life only during the farmers' agitation, and not during the recent Bihar assembly polls. "When Bihar elections took place, where was COVID-19? When any political gathering takes place, where is coronavirus," he asked, in an apparent reference to the elec-



BJP's 'Khalistani-Maoist' charge, attack on Kejriwal

New Delhi: As the ruling BJP confronts a massive protest by farmers who have threatened to block Delhi and sit in on the highway in their agitation against the new farm laws, a "Khalistan and Maoist" link has been alleged by the party's social media chief.

Amit Malviya, the head of the BJP's IT cell, accused the Arvind Kejriwal government in Delhi of first notifying the central farm laws and then seizing the opportunity to "burn down Delhi" as "Khalistanis and Maoists" had stepped in to oppose them. Mr Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) hit back, saying the BJP was "hopelessly trying to divert the attention" of people as it was

tion rallies. He claimed that the issue comes up only when farmers begin an agitation for their rights.

The Delhi Police initially declined permission for the farmers' protest in the city, citing the threat of COVID-19.

On Sunday, Haryana Chief Minister M L Khattar lashed out at his Punjab counterpart

clueless about handling the protests.

Arvind Kejriwal led Delhi government has already notified the new Farm Laws on 23 November 2020 and had started implementing them.

But now that the Khalistanis and Maoists have stepped in to oppose, he sees an opportunity to burn down Delhi. It was never about farmers. Just politics... tweeted Mr Malviya, who was recently also made in-charge of the BJP in Bengal. In response, AAP said in a statement: "The notification by the Delhi government allows



farmers to sell their crop anywhere, including outside the Mandi. Selling of fruits and vegetables was already de-regulated in Delhi many years back. Now this holds for grains too. We have not dismantled mandis and they are continuing. Farmers are not against that. Farmers' demand is that they should get MSP whether inside or outside the Mandi. We support that demand." AAP leader Raghav Chadha said: "If standing by the farmers in this time is politics, we are guilty of doing it. This matter can be solved in one minute by the Centre."

Amarinder Singh, saying he will be responsible if the gathering of farmers worsens the coronavirus situation. Singh has backed the protest.

A spokesperson for the BKU's Haryana unit led by Gurnam Singh Charuni on Monday claimed that farmers are trying their best to keep COVID-19 at bay.

"As much as we can, we are trying to follow the guidelines. But at the moment thousands of farmers are saying that getting the Centre's farm laws rolled back is the first priority as these will anyway destroy them," he said.

He said it is now up to the Centre to accept their demands.

New laws don't stop old system, says Modi amid farmer protest

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday spoke in defense of the farm laws again as his ministers rushed to discuss the mammoth protest against the new laws, which is threatening to cut off the roads to the national capital. Camping at Delhi borders, the farmers, angry over Union Home Minister Amit Shah's conditional proposal for early talks, have spoken of a gherao of the city.

Over the last 24 hours, Mr Shah has held a series of meetings with his cabinet colleagues. Reaching out to farmers -- who have accused the government of

making the new laws for the benefit of corporates -- PM Modi said: "I know that decades of falsehood do put apprehensions in the minds of farmers... I want to say this from the bank of Mother Ganga - we are not working with the intention of deceiving. Our intentions are as holy as the water of river Ganga".

"If someone thinks that the earlier system is better, how is this law stopping anyone, bhai?" he added, in a bid to reassure farmers that the new open market system will not mean the end to the traditional mandis and minimum support prices fixed by the government.

Farmers protest may act as Covid 'super-spreader' event, say experts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The protest by thousands of farmers who have stayed put at various border points of Delhi for the fifth consecutive day on Monday against the Centre's new agriculture reform laws may act as "super-spreader" event for coronavirus infection, say experts. The national capital has already been witnessing a spike in COVID-19 cases post Diwali celebrations and amid rising pollution levels.

Samiran Panda, who heads the Epidemiology and Communicable Diseases (ECD) division of the ICMR, sought strict compliance to protective

When asked if they fear that the infection may spread as thousands have gathered over a large area, he said, "No



and preventive behaviour to curb the spread of the infection.

"A protest is a mass gathering and thus from a public health perspective, I would suggest protective and preventive behaviours against the spread of coronavirus infection falling which a superspreading event might set in.

farmer fears this disease at the moment. All they have on their minds is to get these laws rolled back."



Maya: Reconsider anti-conversion law

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

BSP president Mayawati on Monday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to reconsider the new anti-conversion law as it is full of "doubts and apprehensions", prompting a quick response from the newly elected BJP MP and former head of state's SC/ST commission, Brijlal who claimed that majority of those becoming victims of love jihad belong to the Dalit and backward castes.

"The ordinance on love jihad brought by the UP government in a hurry is full of doubts and apprehensions. There is neither any recognition, nor acceptability to conversion through force or deceit in the country. There are many laws already effective in this regard. The government needs to reconsider the new law," Mayawati said in a tweet in Hindi.

Her remarks come after Uttar Pradesh registered its first case under the new law in Bareilly district based on a complaint from the father of a young woman.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Awanish Awasthi said a case was registered on the complaint by Tikaram who accused a man

Mayawati's remarks come after UP gov't registered its first case under the new law in Bareilly based on a complaint from the father of a young woman

-- Uvaish Ahmed -- of the same village of trying to convert his daughter through "allurement" (bahla-phuslaakar).

In a prompt rejoinder, BJP MP Brijlal in a series of tweets said, "Mayawati ji, do you know that mostly the Dalit, backward and most backward castes have become victim of love jihad? Do these castes not have the right to live with respect? Tell me who are you with?"

In another tweet, he said, "Most of the Dalits, oppressed and most backward caste people have not only lost their original religion but also their existence is at risk. Is it a crime to provide security to these people."

Tractor-trolleys, farm equipment turn into temporary shelters

PNS ■ SONIPAT (HARYANA)

Tractor-trolleys and key farm equipment have turned into temporary shelters for thousands of farmers who have assembled at the borders of the to protest against the Centre's new farm laws. The ongoing protests by thousands of farmers entered the fifth day on Monday, with the protesters threatening to block all five entry points to Delhi. As temperatures have dipped, the farmers demanding that the laws be repealed are spending the chilly nights inside their tractor-trolleys covered with



tarpaulin, which they have turned into temporary shelters. Most of the farmers have brought at least two trolleys

with each tractor with one of them carrying ration and other essentials and the other being used to accommodate the pro-

testers. Stubble or crop residue, disposal of which otherwise becomes a major challenge for the farmers, is also coming in handy as many have cushioned their trolleys with layers of straw and laid mattresses over it to protect them from the cold. Night temperatures over the last few days have been settling in the range of around 9 degrees Celsius. The tractor-trolleys have occupied over a 10-km-long area in this Haryana district which lies along the Ambala-Delhi national highway. Among the protesters are several men and women, some of them aged

over 70 years. Flags of various farmers' outfits from Punjab and Haryana can be seen fluttering atop the tractors, some of which are fitted with loudspeakers and used by the leaders of peasants' bodies to address the gatherings.

The protesting farmers say they will force the Centre to repeal the "anti-farmer" laws.

Having gathered here in thousands amid the coronavirus pandemic, they claim adverse conditions do not affect them as they are used to various challenges anyway while working in the fields.

"If these laws are imple-

mented, farmers will be destroyed," said Trilok Singh, a farmer from Amritsar as he sipped freshly prepared tea with some bread and biscuits. Protesting farmers have said that they have come prepared for a long stay and have stocked themselves with ration, clothes, cooking gas cylinders, quilts and other essentials.

Another farmer Kuldeep Singh said, "When the Centre first brought ordinance before these laws were passed, did they consult farmers at any stage. When farmers don't want these reforms, why are these being thrust upon us?"

INDIA CORNER

Five girl students put 'in-charge' of police stations in Bahraich for a day

To apprise youngsters about the functioning of the police, five girl students were put "incharge" of police stations in Bahraich for a day under the "Mission Shakti" campaign, SP Vipin Mishra said on Monday. Anchal, a class 10 student of Gajadhar area, was given the responsibility of Fakharpur police station on Sunday. Similarly, Mansi Tiwari, a student of class 12, was given the charge of Khairihat police station. The SP said the initiative had been taken to apprise the girls with the functioning of the police force and at the same time, remove the fear of police from the young minds. All the five girls, including Uma Singh of class 11 (Kotwali Dehat), Era Fatima of class 10 (Nanpara) and Tanishka Singh of class 10 (Payagpur) resolved the complaints of locals with the help of police officials, the SP said. One of the five girls Anchal also accompanied policemen to Dujaijura village to resolve a dispute between two brothers.



Tendulkar comes to the rescue of kids

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar has helped in providing treatment to 100 underprivileged children across six states - Maharashtra, West Bengal, Assam, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

This partnership is with a foundation called Ekam, and is targeted at children receiving treatment in government and trust hospitals. Children from underprivileged families,

suffering from critical ailments and those who cannot afford to follow up on their elective medical costs, got the support from Tendulkar's foundation. Earlier this month, Tendulkar had supported Makunda Hospital in Assam's Karimganj district with paediatric equipments.

Tendulkar had also participated in an initiative with UNICEF on World Children's Day, encouraging children to play a key part in shaping the future of the world.

Elderly woman killed in bear attack at Korba

PNS ■ KORBA

A 65-year-old woman has been mauled to death by a bear in Chhattisgarh's Korba district, a forest official said on Monday. The incident took place on Sunday evening when the victim, Phulkunwar Gond, a native of Fulsar village, was attacked by the animal in Kendai forest range, he said. The woman was heading on foot to her brother's place in Hardeva village after going to a weekly market in Korbi area.

Most important challenge facing region is terrorism: India at SCO

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Monday said the most important challenge facing the region is terrorism and that elimination of this threat will help it realise its true potential including in the economic sphere.

In an address at the virtual meet of the council of heads of government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu particularly mentioned about cross-border terrorism and called for combating the menace under a collective approach.

In a clear reference to Pakistan, Naidu said: "We are particularly concerned about states that leverage terrorism



as an instrument of state policy." "The most important challenge faced by us is terrorism, particularly cross-border terrorism," he said. Naidu said that "elimination" of the threat of terrorism will help the region realise its true potential.

India is hosting the meet for the first time after it gained full

membership of the influential grouping in 2017 and it will take place in the virtual format. In another reference to Pakistan, he said it is unfortunate that there were attempts to deliberately bring bilateral issues into the SCO and described it as a blatant violation of principles and norms of the charter of the grouping.

In mid-September, India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval walked out of a virtual meeting of top security officials of the SCO member states after the Pakistani representative projected a map that inaccurately depicted Kashmir. India had slammed Pakistan for the "blatant disregard" to the norms of the meeting.

NGT seeks report against illegal op of automobile unit in Sangrur

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal has directed the Punjab Pollution Control Board to submit a report on a plea against illegal operation of an automobile unit at Ahmedgarh city in Sangrur district.

A bench headed by NGT Chairperson Justice A K Goel did not issue notice to the unit and only sought information from the state pollution control board about the action taken.

"Let the Punjab State PCB furnish a factual and action taken report in the matter. We are not issuing notice to the unit at this stage as we are first obtaining the information from the State PCB about the facts and the action taken in exercise of statutory powers of the State PCB.



The applicant may serve a set of papers on the State PCB and file affidavit of service within one week by email, the bench said. The tribunal was hearing a plea filed by Daljit Kaur against the illegal operation of M/s H S Automobile at Ahmedgarh in Sangrur.

According to the applicant, the unit is being operated in a residential area without

'Consent to Establish' and 'Consent to Operate' under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

The Punjab Pollution Control Board issued notice dated June 16, 2020 pointing out the illegal operation of the unit but no further action has been taken.

PM dedicates to nation six-lane highway

PNS ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday dedicated to the nation six-laning of the 73-km Varanasi-Prayagraj National Highway during his visit to his Lok Sabha constituency.

After the event, he will visit Kashi Vishwanath temple corridor project. The prime minister will



then attend the Dev Deepawali Mahotsav. He will depart from Raj Ghat and view Dev Deepawali celebrations from Raj Ghat to Chet Singh Ghat.

Modi will then arrive at Ravidas Ghat Jetty and pay floral tributes to the statue of Sant Ravidas. Before flying back to New Delhi, he will visit the Sarnath Archeological site and watch a light and sound show.

Free ambulance service for road accident victims in WB

PNS ■ KOLKATA

To help save lives of road accident victims by taking them to nearby hospitals as quickly as possible, the West Bengal government will soon start a free-ambulance service, a senior official of the state health department said on Monday.

Starting with at least 150 ambulances, the state government is at the moment setting up a detailed map of the accident prone zones and the nearby hospitals, he said.

This service will primarily work on the GPS system and



for the same, the state government will have to bear a cost of around Rs 30 crore, the official said.

"This will definitely help us in saving the lives of road accident victims. We are targeting

to take the victims to nearby hospitals or medical colleges or trauma care centre within 15 to 20 minutes after getting calls regarding the accident. This is in a planning stage and we are doing to start it as soon as possible," he told PTI.

There will be two types of ambulances basic life support ambulances and the advance life support ambulances, he said, adding that a toll free number will be given.

The Health department is in talks with the Public Works Department (PWD), police and the transport department, he said.

Cong's State pillars

The party's CMs have kept the farmers' issue boiling, enough for the Govt to take note. Can the leadership build on this?



If Prime Minister Narendra Modi has had to clarify in every public speech within days that the new farm laws are progressive and he is just as protectionist about farmers' interests, then the latter's agitation has worked. If Home Minister Amit Shah is trying to douse the fire and attempting reconciliatory talks after his own partymen are labelling the stir as a Khalistani and Maoist plot, then the *kisan* unions have had their way. And though the protesters have largely stayed away from politicians on principle, the fact that Punjab's Congress Chief Minister, Capt Amarinder Singh, has been consistently pushing their cause, no matter how self-serving that might

be, has given the farmers' campaign a political heft that has blurred the edge of the Centre's unilateralism. In fact, it is the first time that Congress Chief Ministers like Singh and Chhattisgarh's Bhupesh Baghel have turned the tide of national discourse by crusading against the farm Acts and forcing a discussion on consensus politics, something that the central Congress leadership has fallen far short of. Singh's Government has not only brought its own amendment Bills against the farm Acts, Congress MLAs are on a relay dharna in Delhi demanding an audience with the President, who may not entertain a challenge to the Central laws. But at least Singh has given the Congress a talking point at a time when it's languishing by the wayside. Of course, the Punjab Government could have simply brought in its own law to pick up all State produce at Minimum Support Price (MSP), regardless of the Central laws that allow farmers access to wider markets but throw them at the risk of being cheated out of a fair price given the competition. There are fears that the older regulated system, while co-existing, would be weakened by a parallel market and Singh played on these by pushing an amendment to the Central law itself, knowing full well that it was a negative rather than assertive action but would be more politically loaded. The first amendment says that the sale of wheat and paddy (which are the State's cash crops) will be valid only if the seller pays a price equal to or greater than the MSP announced by the Central government and that any violation would be punishable. The second Bill reintroduces the market fees or licences for private players outside the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) *mandis*, which the Central law has abolished. This it says will be used to create a distress fund for small and marginal farmers; hence is populist. The third Bill attacks the central Act that gives unlimited power of stocking essential commodities to traders and reassigns that right to itself, arguing that production, supply and distribution of goods make for a State subject. Punjab is also planning to tweak the definition of a "trade area", where farmers, traders and electronic trading/transaction platforms are given freedom to deal in farmers' produce without any restrictions, to cover its limits. It is impossible for the Centre or food majors to agree to such clauses but Singh has scored over the might of the ruling BJP or any sane argument by crusading with zeal and symbolism. Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and Baghel, too, have pushed amendment Bills but with not as many punishing clauses. But the three have certainly built momentum on an issue that matters across heartland India and have sustained and mobilised a movement around it, strong enough to give the Congress its first cogent tool as an Opposition.

In fact, strategy or not, the three Congress Chief Ministers are not just holding on to their turfs but are articulating positions on national issues. Baghel and Gehlot have been warning against the brutal communalisation of personal freedoms implicit in the proposed "love jihad" laws by BJP-ruled States. Singh has refused the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) entry without his permission. Unless there is a strategy to deflect attention from the central leadership, the Congress chieftains are doing pretty well as the voice of the Opposition on their own. The problem is people still want to hear the central leadership and expect it to steer the discourse. But ever since the Hathras rape-murder case, when the Gandhi scions visited the victim's family amid high drama, they have been silent. In fact, that was a bit of a hit and run given their belligerence as we are yet to hear from them on a follow-up to the case. Contrast that to the Chief Ministers, who have stayed with their respective causes. Also Singh, Gehlot and Baghel have defended the leadership tooth and nail, speaking out against the Congress' dissenters, saying it was more important to coalesce against the BJP on graver issues than fight among themselves or lampoon the leadership. And that "electoral defeats were not the yardstick for leadership change." Question is will the Congress leadership reward this loyalty and bring its chieftains forward or use them for fire-fighting? The fact that Singh and Baghel are more popular than Rahul Gandhi in their home States shows that the Congress does have leaders of merit, who collectively have it in them to revive the party and keep it relevant. The Central leadership has no choice but to devolve power and build a semblance of representational democracy in its organisational structure. In fact, the Congress has historically had strong regional leaders. If only it were to nurture their strengths than making their continuity conditional on doing the bidding of its first family, the party's organisational matrix wouldn't have been lying in shreds across States. Nor would the grassroots workers go fortune-hunting to other parties, fearing their voice wouldn't ever matter. Will the Congress learn to identify its assets first?

Vaccine troubles

What does the case of the volunteer in Chennai tell us about medical trials?



While a 40-year old man, apparently a business consultant from Chennai, has claimed that he has suffered from adverse reactions to the trial vaccine administered by the Serum Institute of India (SII) during the Phase-III clinical trials, we do not know the full details of the case. This is the vaccine developed by Anglo-Swedish pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca and University of Oxford where SII is a partner. For one, we still do not know whether the individual was given the new vaccine or a placebo, which is why his allegations raised by his lawyers are slightly suspect. The instant countersuit by SII makes one suspect whether this was

just an extortion attempt but one thing is clear, the individual involved has little chance of success in court as volunteers to clinical trials for any medication should be fully aware that they can suffer extremely adverse reactions to trial medication and those reactions could also mean death.

The extremely rushed research and development for vaccines to counter the COVID-19 virus, which has devastated the global economy and driven millions across the world back into poverty, might yet be successful but rushing clinical trials will mean that certain adverse effects and even a death or two might occur. Those who volunteer for such trials should be made fully aware of the risks and they usually are. In case this is genuine, and it well might be, the individual and his family should be compensated for his tribulations. The system of clinical trials in India should ensure that those who take upon the civic responsibility to better mankind by subjecting their bodies to such insane risks should be given adequate coverage for the danger involved. Ever so often in India, many trials are highly risky and those who volunteer, often from poorer families, are dumped and left without compensation or recourse if things go wrong. There may be more than what meets the eye in this particular case. But that should not take away from the tremendous risks and troubles that many clinical trial volunteers put themselves through. This also highlights that companies involved in clinical trials, whether they are large, global pharmaceutical firms or small research firms in India, should be more open and transparent about what the volunteers suffer. SII would do well to tell us the entire story lest this becomes a case where the anti-vaccine movement can get a foot in the door in India.

Why Modi still stands tall

The answer lies in his minutiae precision on last-mile micro-management of 269 key projects, down to the district level percolation



BINDU DALMIA

As we enter the last month of a calamitous year, my year-end musings have been pivoted around the key question—What led to a surge in Modi's popularity while the opposite happened to the elected leaders of US and UK? Why did his persona prevail despite the pandemic challenging resources and policies? I would say that he kept the response specific to our reality rather than promising the moon and went in for long-term transformative measures that would equip the nation against any such unforeseen crisis in the future. **Trusteeship paradigm of governing the largest democracy:** At the recently concluded G20 summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for a new global index based on "respecting nature in the spirit of trusteeship of Mother Earth." His collaborative response in sync with multi-lateral institutions to prioritise ESG-centric concerns (based on the tri-pillar of environment, sustainability and governance) commits to a much-needed collective responsibility of all nations in managing the planet's resources.

By the same yardstick, the Prime Minister's post-pandemic management of his own country has paved the way for a new and distinct style of governing democracies on a similar "trusteeship paradigm." When benchmarked against global counterparts, Modi's crises-management places him in the league of the tallest global leaders for coming across as a trustee-head of the nation, who from the beginning, remained visible, accountable, admonishing, nudging and persuasive. At the same time, he was empathetically "shepherding his people, instead of resorting to punitive measures that would have regressed economic recovery."

Democracies, noticeably for the last five years, have mutated their strains, deviating from the original concept of fair, inclusive and participative governance to morphing into illiberal and totalitarian regimes. Viewed in this context, a "trusteeship model of democracy" is in sharp contrast to the ascent of authoritarian leaders, even in the most advanced democracies.

Was the Modi-led Government's response to the crisis financially adequate? This will



remain a subjective question as developed countries had greater flexibility for welfareist measures to cushion vulnerable sections of society. In contrast, injecting four stimulus packages worth 10 per cent of the GDP to fire up the economy was the extent to which the Government could stretch its limits, with the fiscal deficit doubling to 7.7 per cent of the GDP. Were India's containment measures and public messaging of the COVID crisis the best? Certainly not, when compared to Vietnam, Taiwan, Canada, Germany or New Zealand.

Was Modi's early lockdown proactive or premature? Initially, the response to relief and rehabilitation was ad-hoc and knee-jerk. But then the Government swung into streamlining Centre-State coordination for DBTs and food grains reaching 800 million people.

During disaster management, it is impossible to forecast the duration or depths of *force majeure* damages as no leader can possibly see the end of the tunnel clearly when adversities strike. While the US and the UK's health infrastructure is ranked among the best by the Global Health Security Index, India's "mortality rate per million" remained among the lowest.

Modi's popularity: Modi 2.0 in 2020 is a distinctly changed persona, in image, in demeanour, in electoral rhetoric, in elevating the national agenda above narrow political, ideological or populist gains, and in taking the moral high ground

at international fora by demanding the reform of archaic multilateral institutions.

As we enter the last month of a calamitous year, one is compelled to assess just what was it about Modi that he not only retained but exponentially widened his electoral base as seen in the recently-concluded Bihar elections, despite a severely pandemic-ravaged economy? Because 2020 was a year that savagely punished elected leaders for acts of omissions in administering inadequate relief and rehabilitation, while outrightly rejecting Trump for remaining in denial of a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale.

The answer lies in Modi's minutiae precision on last-mile micro-management of 269 key projects, down to the district level percolation. As India approaches the delivery stage of the vaccine, Modi's forward-planning is becoming more job-stepped by visiting vaccine hubs to fine-tune distribution mechanisms, down to assessing the availability of cold storage chains and ancillary equipment like syringes.

India ready for economic take-off? In January 2021, the levers of global growth are expected to rebalance more favourably towards a partial return to globalisation, which is a distinct reversal from the economic insularity of the Trump era. With President-elect Joe Biden taking charge next month, economic recovery is expected to accelerate with the liberalisation of international

trade as America regains its leadership as the primary engine of growth, instead of China, which augurs well for global recovery.

India is now uniquely positioned for a faster climb-back after a contraction of -7.5 per cent, with the grounds being laid to expand economic activity. Optimism for an economic rebound is based on the structural reforms undertaken in 2020, the lowered rate of corporate taxation, a stable currency backed by strong foreign reserves, vibrant FDI flows of \$35.73 billion and the Finance Minister's nudge to increase CAPEX spending by public sector enterprises to drive economic growth. Sustained buoyancy will, of course, depend on the budgetary proposals and the efficacy of the vaccine in controlling future surges.

Going beyond crisis management, the Government needs to scale up human resource capital and find newer avenues for raising capital resources. Second, if we aspire to make India a "Plus One" investment destination, gaps must be plugged for delays in contract enforcement. India takes 1,440 days to implement contracts against 150 days in Singapore. We need to hasten dispute resolution and follow Vietnam's example of allocating large land parcels on lease/rent/ mortgage.

Third, the pandemic forces a relook at our woefully inadequate investment in healthcare, education and labour-skilling,

all of which are State subjects and constitute three vitals of the Human Resource Development index. The Centre and States need to work more closely to incentivise private participation in education and healthcare by not restricting brick and mortar hospitals and universities to compulsory compliance with "not-for-profit agenda," as any prospective investor will look for a lucrative return on capital.

Removing the regulatory restrictions on "not-for-profit" institutions in education will create a facilitative environment for private participation by big domestic and overseas brands, build optimal capacities and bring in technology while lowering costs per-child per-annum.

UNDP estimates that the total financial requirement for India to reach SDG 4 by 2030 is \$173 billion per year, as against the current budgeted outlay of \$76 billion annually for education.

The education sector will see explosive growth if Modi's plan to turn 1.2 million schools into "smart classrooms" is implemented by connecting 60,000 villages within three years with high-speed optic fibre. The Ministry of Electronics and IT is contemplating a public-private business model for this visionary project, which will lower the cost of education per child through e-learning.

In order to evolve as a knowledge-based economy and transit towards optimal digitisation, the Modi Government has made great strides to push brand India into the top 50 countries club in the Global Innovation Index for the first time. Our higher education institutions have improved their global rankings and in the Employability Rankings 2020 Index, India has scaled up to the 15th position globally. However, we need to scale up to skill/re-skill 40 crore people by 2022 in order to match up to the pace of virtualisation which is a key enabler for economic recovery as these measures remain a work-in-progress.

I conclude this analysis by paraphrasing an opinion from *The New York Times*, which lauded Modi's initiatives by stating that he fared "better than many peers because he acted decisively, pre-emptively and relatively early...Modi's success, analysts say, may be more durable. He's widely seen as a mobiliser, not a despot..."

(The author is a columnist and Chairperson for the National Committee on Financial Inclusion at the Niti Aayog)

SOUND BITE

We need to recognise as a society that all of our economies around the world are built on the backs of women's unpaid labour.



American philanthropist —Melinda Gates

Happy Gurpurab to everyone celebrating. May the blessing of Guru Nanak ji always be with us.



Former cricketer —Sachin Tendulkar

Today, our farmers are forced to ask for their own rights! Shame on BJP gov't for putting barriers to farmers in their own country.



Congress leader —Vivek Bansal

India considers SCO as an important regional organisation to promote cooperation in the areas of peace, security, trade, economy & culture.



Secretary (West), MEA —Vikas Swarup

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't blame FBI

Sir — The never-ending, well until January 20 to be precise, denial of the presidential election outcome is getting more extreme each day. However, US President Donald Trump's lawsuits have been failing with his pleas getting rejected in US courts.

The latest bit from a Trump interview — "This is total fraud and how, the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and Department of Justice, I don't know, maybe they're involved" — shows that doubts will always remain around the verdict.

Surely, the FBI and DOJ are beyond reproach as their basic purpose is to protect the US and its way of life. They serve the country and its President, regardless of who is in power.

The 1960s TV series, *F.B.I.*, starring Efrim Zimbalist, Jr, may have been over the top but the good guys are still serving their country by working for the FBI and not against it. Shame on you, President Trump!

A court in Pennsylvania has dismissed a lawsuit filed by Trump's team, observing that "voters, not lawyers choose the President." The judgement came four days after Pennsylvania

Beyond the kitchen counter

Onion, which is a staple kitchen item among others for an average Indian, is an essential ingredient for many cuisines and recipes. From spicy curries to tangy relishes, it is impossible to imagine cooking anything without it. But it also has high medicinal value.

If folk remedies are to be believed, onions could treat cold, cough, asthma and bronchitis. Among other nutritional benefits, onions stimulate growth of healthy bifidobacteria in the colon and help in lowering blood lipids and are thus effective in managing cholesterol levels. The sulfide in onion reduces tumor growth and is being explored as a possible ingredient in the cure for cancer.

The flavonoids in onion help in reducing bad cholesterol while thiosulfinate thins out the blood further. These, traditional practitioners say, reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. Onion also stimulates hair growth because of the huge content of sulphur in it. It stimulates blood flow and produces collagen, which helps in the growth of hair. One can extract its juice, mix it with almond oil or coconut oil and massage it on the scalp; leave it for around 45 minutes; then wash



it with warm water. One can also mix onion juice with lemon juice and massage the scalp with it. This prevents hair loss and dandruff.

In these times of immunity-boosters, we must tap into our plant wealth and heritage and develop a holistic well-being routine in our daily lives. Much of our herbal heritage needs to be recognised and patented for pharmaceutical uses.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

certified Trump's Democratic rival Joe Biden as the winner in the State which has 20 electoral college votes.

Trump told reporters on Thursday that it would be "hard" to concede to Biden, a Democrat. He said he would leave the White House if the Electoral College declares Biden

as the winner but made it clear he was not prepared to "concede" the election.

Dennis Fitzgerald
Melbourne, Australia

Farmers' woes

Sir — In a democracy, it beats reason that its police force wants to

use stadiums to imprison protesters (farmers). It is a small mercy that the Delhi Government refused to grant the police the permission to do so. These farmers have simply been protesting against a law that they don't find favourable. They have as much right to make themselves heard and be invited to negotiations in

the consultative nature of democracy. Cracking down on them with force is no solution.

Given the recent decisions on Shaheen Bagh and other cases, pertaining to protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, this brutal silencing of protest was all but expected.

The discontent of farmers in this country has been growing over the years due to the Central government's careless economic policies. These have debilitated the rural economy. Farmers have experienced a growing mismatch between their production efforts and income under the current regime.

Climate change and its outcomes have already worsened the farmers' condition. The new farm Acts expose them to market fluctuations, hence the insecurity. The community of farmers is thus right in feeling agitated. The Government can try and keep farmers under control but it cannot deny the discontent that is growing among 60 per cent of the country's voting population. They could turn the tide.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

A polarising municipal poll

The GHMC campaign was centred around comments on Pakistan, Jinnah and a Hindu-Muslim narrative, not civic issues



KALYANI SHANKAR

Whoever thought that a civic poll would create so much excitement, passion and polarisation? The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) election scheduled for today (December 1) has become an unprecedented high-profile political event. It is being fought with the same vigour as the Lok Sabha polls by not only the BJP which is aiming high, but also by the other players like the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), the All-India Majlis-e-Itehaadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and the Congress Party. The BJP is ambitious and wants to replace the TRS. This is an indication of what will come in the 2023 Assembly polls. The party has an advantage because the Congress, which ruled the State, for many decades and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which was in power till a few years ago, left a space for the BJP to occupy. The TDP is almost wiped out and the Congress receded to fourth place in the recent Lok Sabha polls.

Eyebrows are being raised at the way the BJP has fielded national heavyweights for campaigning for a municipal poll, like the party chief JP Nadda, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Though he did not campaign, even Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Hyderabad to review the progress of the COVID-19 vaccine clinical research on November 28. First of all, the BJP which surprised everyone by winning four Lok Sabha seats out of 17 in Telangana in 2019, got the momentum and continued with another surprise victory in the Dubbaka bypolls early in November. After the recent stunning performance in the Bihar Assembly elections, the party's morale is high. Second, if the BJP wins the GHMC polls, it means that the saffron party is continuing its winning spree.

Moreover, the BJP is positioning itself to spread its footprint further South. As of now, the party is weak there as it has only one State Government (Karnataka) in its kitty. Third, the BJP wants to cut the AIMIM to size. The Asaduddin Owaisi-led AIMIM has always been strong in the Hyderabad region. Owaisi has expanded his party to Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The AIMIM is quite upbeat after winning five seats in the recent Bihar polls and wants to expand in West Bengal in next year's Assembly elections, too. However, this will cut into the Muslim vote bank and it will be helpful for the BJP to split the Muslim votes. Even though the TRS has always contested against the AIMIM in every election, the former has enjoyed issue-based support from the latter. The two parties tactically announced that there would be no tie-up in the municipal polls in order to protect their turfs.

The BJP the TRS and the AIMIM have all been generous in spending money and have more than adequate muscle power and manpower to fight this election for different reasons. The BJP wants to spread its wings further in the South. The AIMIM has always won in the Hyderabad region and is protecting its turf. As for the ruling TRS, it is a fight for its prestige. The party, which has been on a winning spree since the State was bifurcated in 2014, made a clever and surprise move by advancing the civic poll by two months. The TRS had won 99 seats in the previous civic elections while the AIMIM won 44 seats, the BJP three and the Congress two.

The BJP is attacking the TRS for its politics of appeasement. Plus, the recent flood relief measures have been inadequate. The Musi River that runs through the city was in spate last month and tanks and nullahs developed breaches and low-lying areas were waterlogged. About 50 municipal wards were affected due to it. The BJP cleverly wants to cash in on this. Interestingly, while the GHMC poll is normally fought on civic problems like water, sewerage, sanitation, roads and other amenities, the campaign showed a polarising trend. It was centred around polarising comments on Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, allegations involving Rohingya refugees and a Hindu-Muslim narrative, not civic issues.

This led to the Director-General of Police Mahender Reddy to warn the parties after a security meeting. "They are trying to incite communal trouble. We are examining the speeches carefully. Action will be taken as per law against those trying to create disturbances," he cautioned. Hyderabad has one of the largest Muslim populations for a city in India; about 44 per cent of the people in the city are Muslim while 52 per cent are Hindu. All the parties have been generous in promising sops to the electorate if they win. The BJP the TRS and the Congress have promised free drinking water supply to the city, while the BJP has promised a free vaccine to tackle the Novel Coronavirus and renaming of Hyderabad as Bhagya Nagar.

The Chief Minister of Telangana, Kalvakunta Chandrashekhar Rao, is threatening to mobilise a non-BJP Opposition front including the Trinamool Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the Nationalist Congress Party and so on, in an attempt to revive the anti-BJP front.

Opinion polls have come up with varied findings, giving the maximum seats to the TRS at 85, while almost all of them see the BJP winning nearly 30 per cent of the votes. The 35 votes of the MLAs and MPs in the region would go in favour of the TRS. However, it all depends on whom Dame Luck favours in the end.

(The writer is a senior journalist)

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THEY (AUSTRALIA) HAVE OUTPLAYED US. WE WERE INEFFECTIVE WITH THE BALL AND DIDN'T HIT THE AREAS.
—INDIAN CRICKET CAPTAIN VIRAT KOHLI



KOHLI IS AN IMPULSIVE CAPTAIN. HE IS MAKING TOO MANY CHANGES IN HIS BOWLING. AND THIS IS AN AREA THAT HE NEEDS TO TAKE CARE OF.
—FORMER INDIA PACER ASHISH NEHRA

Plug the leaks

The Government should stop selling food at a subsidised price through the PDS. Instead, it should limit its role to crediting subsidy directly to the accounts of beneficiaries



UTTAM GUPTA

Since 2014, the Narendra Modi Government has weeded out close to 44 million bogus ration cards by using the Information Technology (IT) infrastructure viz. digitisation, seeding of Aadhaar on ration cards, electronic point of sale machines at retail shops and so on. However, this addresses only a small aspect of the problem and that, too, is unlikely to be rooted out completely with the use of technology alone. Besides, large-scale diversion and black marketing of grain, inclusion of the privileged among beneficiaries, a ballooning subsidy bill and so on will persist so long as the extant system of routing food subsidy through State agencies continues. What then is the way forward? The Government should stop selling food at a subsidised price. Instead, it should limit its role to crediting subsidy directly to the accounts of beneficiaries. When foodgrains at ₹1/2/3 per kg are not available, these maladies will be automatically nipped in the bud.

Under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), the Union Government arranges for supply of wheat, rice and coarse cereals to the beneficiaries at ₹2/3/1 per kg, which is a fraction of the cost of procurement, handling and distribution (eg. 1/15th in case of wheat). Every person whose name is mentioned on the ration card is eligible to receive five kg of rice or wheat per month. In addition, during April-June, to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, the PM Garib Kalyan Yojna added a "free" five kg of rice or wheat per person per month to all 815 million individual beneficiaries under the NFSA. Besides one kg of free pulses per month was provided to every family. These additional provisions were extended for a further five months till November.

The supplies are made by the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other State agencies on behalf of the Central Government, which reimburses to the former the excess of the cost of purchase, handling and distribution over the price charged from the beneficiaries i.e. ₹2/3/1 per kg on additional supplies (during the eight months of the current year, this is zero). This reimbursement or food subsidy is paid from the Central Budget. In recent years, food subsidy has increased to frightening levels. During 2019-20, it was ₹2,19,000 crore. For 2020-21, prior to COVID-19, the likely spend was estimated to be ₹2,53,000 crore. Including the impact of free food during April-November or about ₹1,50,000 crore, this will scale up to ₹4,03,000 crore. In case the free food scheme is extended further, the spend will be much higher.

The ballooning food subsidy is putting a huge stress on the Union Budget. Faced with a shortfall in tax collection in recent years and the over-arching need to contain fiscal deficit, the Centre has been making short payments to the FCI, forcing the latter to borrow heavily to sustain its operations. The situation is so pathetic that since 2016-17, the FCI has been drawing funds from the National Small Savings Fund (NSSF). As on March 31, the cumulative borrowings from the NSSF were to the tune of ₹3,30,000 crore.

The allocation for the current year being ₹1,26,000 crore (₹1,16,000 crore provided in the Budget, plus ₹10,000 crore in the first supplementary demands for grants) against the requirement of ₹4,03,000 crore, the shortfall is ₹2,77,000 crore. If no further supplementary authorisation comes, the FCI will have to borrow all of this from the NSSF, taking its borrowings to a gargantuan ₹6,07,000 crore as of March 2021. Though staying on the FCI's balance sheet, this mammoth debt

“THE GOVERNMENT CAN TRANSFER ₹280 PER MONTH (SUBSIDY AT THE RATE OF ₹28 PER KG FOR 10 KG) TO THE BENEFICIARY'S ACCOUNT TO ENABLE HIM/HER TO BUY 10 KG FROM THE MARKET BY PAYING ₹300 (INCLUDING ₹20 FROM HIS/HER POCKET). THIS WILL STRIKE AT THE VERY ROOT OF DIVERSION, PILFERAGE AND BLACK MARKETING. WHEN FOODGRAINS AT ₹1/2/3 PER KG ARE JUST NOT AVAILABLE, THE VERY THOUGHT OF MAKING A QUICK BUCK WILL BE NIPPED IN THE BUD”



is entirely the liability of the Union Government and will need to be serviced from the latter's tax collections in the future. The core feature of this scheme, or supply of wheat or rice at a price almost close to zero, may be a boon for the beneficiaries but ends up being a bane for the economy. The availability of wheat at ₹2 per kg through the Public Distribution System (PDS) under the NFSA, when the market price is a minimum ₹30 per kg, is a huge allure to all those involved in its implementation. No wonder, there is large-scale diversion of foodgrain from rake unloading points and godowns of the FCI. Trucks disappear on way to the retail sale points. There are millions of non-existent or fake beneficiaries.

There is a clamour for becoming beneficiaries under the scheme even as there are numerous instances of people selling their subsidised quota of foodgrain, say wheat bought at ₹2 per kg, to dubious traders at ₹12 per kg or more. Clearly, there are millions availing subsidised food despite being above the poverty line. The official word on the number of poor in India is no more than 25-30 per cent; yet the beneficiaries under NFSA are nearly over 66 per cent.

Further, since the handling and distribution cost, besides the Minimum Support Price (MSP) paid to farmers, is reimbursed to the FCI and other State agencies on "actual" as food subsidy, inefficiency and inflated cost claims (including bogus) are inevitable. The "loaders" getting away with monthly salary in lakhs easily pass muster under a cost-based mechanism. Reports of disappearance of food stocks in Punjab causing a loss of over ₹20,000 crore to the exchequer in 2016 are still fresh in people's memory. Such inefficiencies and irregularities have also been pointed out by the Comptroller and Auditor

General (CAG) of India. Meanwhile, the most deserving (poorest of the poor) continue to be deprived of their full requirement. This is because supplies under the NFSA at five kg per person per month barely cover 50 per cent of the requirement of a person, which is 10 kg per month, as estimated by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). Having to buy the balance five kg at a very high price, say ₹30 per kg in case of wheat, they are worse off.

Weeding out of 44 million bogus beneficiaries in itself may appear to be a big accomplishment. But seen in the broader perspective, this addresses only a small aspect of the problem and that, too, is unlikely to be rooted out completely with use of technology alone. Besides, other problems will persist so long as the system of routing food subsidy through State agencies continues.

In early 2015, a committee under Dr Shanta Kumar, a senior BJP leader, had recognised the need to deal with non-deserving beneficiaries and restricting subsidised food only to the very poor. It recommended a cut in the number of those eligible for subsidised food from 67 per cent to 40 per cent and restricting the benefit of ₹1/2/3 per kg only to the poorest of poor people under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana, while increasing the supply to seven kg per person. Others should pay 50 per cent of the MSP paid to farmers.

Even as that report is lying in cold storage, its prescription is nowhere near addressing the flaws in the existing system. The way forward is to stop routing subsidy through the State agencies. In other words, the Government should not sell food at subsidised price; instead, it should limit its role to crediting subsidy directly to the beneficiary's account. The Government can transfer ₹280 per month (subsidy at the rate of ₹28 per kg for 10 kg) to the ben-

eficiary's account to enable him/her to buy 10 kg from the market by paying ₹300 (including ₹20 from his/her pocket). This will strike at the very root of diversion, pilferage, black marketing. When, foodgrains at ₹1/2/3 per kg are just not available, the very thought of making a quick buck will be nipped in the bud. As for the FCI *et al*, while they will still be involved in purchase, handling and distribution, they will operate like any other business entity and be compelled to operate efficiently and keep costs low.

With private entities, too, allowed to directly buy from farmers, stock farm produce sans any limit (courtesy, the three farm laws recently enacted by the Centre), there will be plenty of products available in the market ensuring fair amount of competition and enabling low price to consumers.

We will have a scenario whereby the market price of wheat could come down to say ₹25 per kg or even less (from the existing minimum of ₹30 per kg) giving relief to everyone. Ditto for other products. It will have a deflationary impact down the line as all of the processed food will cost less. There will be huge saving in subsidy, which will be restricted only to the poor or about 300 million (down from existing 800 million) even as the Government need not have to pay for any flab such as inflated cost, inefficiencies, subsidy to bogus beneficiaries and so on. This will rein in fiscal deficit and trim borrowings, thereby preventing an unsustainable burden on the future generation of taxpayers.

The outcome of this approach is very promising; however, its adoption will require political courage and a fundamental change in the mindset of our policymakers.

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

A leader who believed in leaving no one behind

Indira Gandhi nationalised private banks, turned them into the biggest public sector banking system in the world which gave people loans for self-employment



EDUARDO FALEIRO

Recently, we commemorated the birth anniversary of the late Indira Gandhi, who has so far remained the only woman Prime Minister of India. She was considered the most popular leader of the masses of Independent India especially among the weaker sections of society. The Congress Party during Indira Gandhi's tenure coined the slogan "Garibi hatao (eradicate poverty)" and she led the efforts for the amendment to the Preamble of the Constitution to include the words, "Socialist, Secular and Democratic Republic of India."

In furtherance of these concepts, her Government implemented the 20-point programme. Its basic objective was to eradicate poverty and to improve the quality of life of the poor and the weaker sections of society. It included removal of rural poverty, health, education and housing for all, justice for Scheduled Caste (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and equality for women.

Indira Gandhi nationalised private sector banks and turned them into the most gigantic public sector banking system in the world, which gave people loans for self-employment. It happened to be involved in the implementation of the 20-Point Programme when I was Union Minister of State for Finance. The banks were instructed to provide loans to the poor and weaker sections of society who wanted to open some small business. As a result, millions across the country got those small loans for setting up their own ventures. The rate of repayment of those loans was as good, if not better, than

the repayment of large loans taken by big firms. For the benefit of the people, the number of bank branches was increased substantially, too.

In Goa, we had branches of the State Bank of India (SBI) and of a couple of other banks in the main towns but not in the villages. During my tenure, in the process of implementation of the 20-Point Programme, branches of different banks were opened in practically every village of our State. Similar steps were taken in all States across India.

Indira Gandhi was much criticised for imposing the Emergency in 1975 which lasted for 21 months. To my mind, Emergency was thought to be necessary at that time in view of the moves of the Opposition to destabilise the Government and the country. The Emergency was imposed on the advice of Sanjay Gandhi and Siddhartha Shankar Ray. Much of the criticism of the Emergency was on account of the Family Planning programme, which was implemented in North India

sometimes in a drastic and brutal manner. Sometime later, Indira Gandhi herself felt that imposition of the Emergency had been a mistake.

In Goa itself, Emergency proved to be beneficial. "Trains are running on time" was then a national slogan and in Goa the Administration became more efficient, black marketing and hoarding stopped and food and other articles of general consumption were easily available, which was not the case earlier. The support of the Goan people to the Government of India during Emergency benefitted the Congress Party, which went on to win the Lok Sabha seat of South Goa. This was the first-ever election victory of the Congress Party in Goa. Until then, the Congress had not won a single seat either in Parliament, in the Assembly or even at the municipality level.

In the general elections held in 1977, Indira Gandhi lost her Lok Sabha seat from Rae Bareilly but immediately thereafter in 1978 she won a byelection from the

Chikmagalur constituency. In November 1978, the Janata Party brought in a motion to expel Indira Gandhi from Parliament. My party, the Congress (U), supported this motion of the ruling party. However, I personally could not support it. I felt that I had won the Lok Sabha election in the name of Indira. I met Yashwantrao Chavan, who was the leader of the Congress (U) in Parliament. Chavan permitted me to oppose the motion. During the debate, while my party supported the motion, I strongly opposed it. Indira Gandhi was in the Lok Sabha during the debate and apparently she never forgot my support to her on that day. In 1980, I was the only candidate in the whole country belonging to the Congress (U) who was also supported by the Congress (I).

After Liberation, there were two opposite points of view on the status of Goa, Daman and Diu. In the first four Assembly elections, the Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP) obtained a significant victo-

ry and formed the Government. The MGP wanted the merger of Goa into Maharashtra on the grounds that Goa identified culturally and in many other ways with Maharashtra. The United Goans Party (UGP) as well as the Congress held that Goa should not merge with Maharashtra. The MGP wanted the matter to be decided by voting on the floor of the Assembly.

This was strongly opposed by the UGP and the Congress. Thereafter, during the premiership of Indira Gandhi an opinion poll (referendum) was held for Goa. This was the first and so far the only ever held in the country. It went against the demand for the merger. Thereafter, the Congress and the UGP demanded statehood for Goa.

My first speech in the Lok Sabha echoed that demand for statehood. However, Morarji Desai, then Prime Minister, was not in favour of small States. In 1980, Indira Gandhi returned as Prime Minister and I moved a Bill seeking statehood for

Goa. Rajiv Gandhi, then General Secretary of the Congress Party, met me and promised that statehood would be granted to Goa. True to his word, statehood was granted to us in the next term of the Lok Sabha during the premiership of Rajiv Gandhi himself.

It was obtained due to the efforts of then Chief Minister Pratapsingh Rane, my colleague in the Lok Sabha Shantaram Naik and other leaders of the Congress and the MGP's Pankar. The MGP brought a resolution demanding Statehood for Goa. While replying to the debate, Shashikala Kakodkar, then Chief Minister said, "In the early years after Liberation, the MGP stood for merger with Maharashtra and fought for it through the opinion poll in a democratic way. The verdict of the poll went against the merger. The MGP accepted the people's verdict because it believes in the wisdom of the electorate."

(The writer is a former Union Minister)

Gadkari confident India will get Corona vax as 'early as possible'

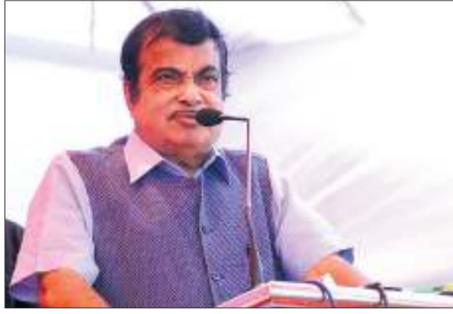
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday expressed confidence that India will get a COVID-19 vaccine "as early as possible" and overcome the pandemic to win the economic war.

The Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and Road Transport & Highways said that currently, "majority of countries are not interested to deal with China"; they are rather interested in India.

He said such a situation is advantageous for the country's manufacturing sector to ramp up its capabilities to boost exports from India.

"I am confident that we will get a vaccine as early as possible and 100 per cent we will win this war against COVID-19 and also win economic war," Gadkari said this at a virtual event organised by Dun & Bradstreet. He said disbursement of loans to the tune of Rs 1.48 lakh crore has been completed so far, out of the Rs 3 lakh crore worth of collateral-free automatic loans for businesses announced by the Centre earlier. "We have already reduced our imports



from China and already our (India's) exports are increasing. The trends are positive and I am expecting good results in this field," said the minister.

He said the MSMEs are doing an excellent job despite facing an economic crisis.

Eligible borrowers for the scheme include MSME units, business enterprises, individual loans for business purposes and MUDRA borrowers.

Talking about schemes for the MSME sector, he said, "We have sanctioned some 93 schemes and more than 100 schemes are in the pipeline. We want to clear them as early as possible."

The minister said emerging areas where MSMEs can work include artificial intelligence, robotics, sustainability, green manufacturing, waste to wealth, development of smart villages, e-mobility and virtual reality based solutions

and village industries stands at Rs 80,000 crore, he said the plan is to increase this to Rs 5 lakh crore in two years.

At a separate event, the minister said the whole world, including India, is facing the crisis of COVID-19 and the situation is challenging.

"We need to create positivity and self confidence in the mind of the people. Negativity and suspicion will create more complication," Gadkari said this at the Virtual Horasis Asia Meeting 2020.

He also said that on the basis of the latest statistics, "we can say that we are coming to the normal situation".

At the same time in the manufacturing sector also, particularly trade and business, a lot of opportunities are up, he said. Gadkari said that as compared to China, India has got

the huge potential, as the young talented manpower is available in India.

He added that there is availability of raw material in India and policy is favourable. "I feel that it is appropriate opportunity for the investor to invest in India," said. "Presently, we are facing some crisis due to COVID-19. But, 100 per cent, we are now on a proper track. The manufacturing sector is progressing. In the highway construction, we are on the same foot," the minister said.

Horasis Chairman Frank Jurgen Richter said, "Asia as a region is making impressive progress in containing COVID-19, and at the same time is using the pandemic as a means for transformation — to make their respective economies more resilient and sustainable."

Penalty waived for non-compliance with QR code provisions for B2C

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government has waived the penalty for non-compliance with QR code provisions for B2C (business-to-consumer) invoices generated by businesses till March 31, 2021.

However, it would be mandatory for businesses to follow the QR code provisions from April 1, 2021 to avail this penalty waiver.

The requirement of printing dynamic QR code on B2C invoices is being implemented from December 1. Quick Response code or QR code helps users verify the details in digitally signed e-invoices.

Under the Goods and Services Tax (GST), companies with a turnover of over Rs 500 crore have to generate e-invoices for B2B (business-to-business) transactions from October 1. However, it is not yet mandatory for B2C transactions.

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), in a November 29 notification, said the penalty has been waived for non-compliance with QR code provisions for B2C transactions between the period from



December 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, subject to the condition that the said person complies with the provisions from April 1, 2021.

Commenting on the step, EY Tax Partner Abhishek Jain said, "The central government has provided the much required relaxation for the businesses by waiving the penalty for non-compliance with QR code requirement till March 2021 for B2C transactions."

"As many of the industry players were not ready, this waiver would give the requisite time for the industry to be ready for this compliance."

AMRG & Associates Partner

Rajat Mohan said, "Government has waived the penalty for non compliance to QR code provisions if they are complied by April 1, 2021, for default during the period of December 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021. This will be a relief for large taxpayers who were unable to implement this digital change in invoicing system due to the shortage of resources during the pandemic."

Under e-invoicing, taxpayers have to generate invoices on their internal systems (ERP/accounting/billing software) and then report it online to the 'Invoice Registration Portal' (IRP).

Steel firms supply 56K tonne medical oxygen for Covid treatment: Ministry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Steel companies have supplied 56,446.245 tonnes of medical oxygen from their integrated plants to various hospitals across the country till October-end, the Ministry of Steel has said.

To aid the supply of oxygen in the country, Union Minister of Steel Dharmendra Pradhan in September had directed steel plants to start supplying liquid medical oxygen (LMO), which is a crucial medical requirement for a coronavirus patient.

The steel ministry had also made operational a portal wherein plant-wise information regarding availability of oxygen and daily supply by various plants and states to which such supplies have been made is provided.

"Integrated steel plants (ISPs) in the public and private sector have been supplying LMO to meet the requirement of oxygen in hospitals across the country. 56,446.245 MT (metric tonne) LMO was supplied by steel plants to various states during the period from September 11, 2020 to October 31, 2020," the ministry said in an update.

5G connection to reach 350 mn in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

5G connections across the globe are estimated to be 3.5 billion and India will account for 350 million subscriptions by 2026, according to a report by telecom company Ericsson.

India may get its first 5G connection in 2021 if spectrum auctions are held early next year, said Ericsson Head of Network Solutions (Southeast Asia, Oceania and India) Nitin Bansal.

Globally, more than 1 billion people, 15 per cent of the world's population, are expected to live in an area that has 5G coverage rolled out, according to the 'Ericsson Mobility Report 2020' released on Monday.

"In 2026, 60 per cent of the



world's population will have access to 5G coverage, with 5G subscriptions forecast to reach 3.5 billion. In India, 5G subscriptions will surpass 350 million, accounting for 27 per cent of all mobile subscriptions in 2026," the report said.

Bansal said that based on the reported timeline for spec-

trum auction for 5G services, he expects India to have its first 5G connection in 2021.

According to the report, India has the highest average traffic per smartphone user per month at 15.7 gb per month.

"Low prices for mobile broadband services, affordable smartphones, and

increased time spent by people online contribute to monthly usage growth in India. Accordingly, total traffic is projected to quadruple in India, reaching 35EB (exabyte) per month in 2026," Ericsson Mobility Report Editor and Head of Strategic Marketing Insights States Patrik Cerwall said.

The report said LTE (4G) remains the dominant technology in India in 2020, accounting for 63 per cent of mobile subscriptions and 3G is expected to be phased out by 2026.

"In the India region, LTE subscriptions are forecast to increase from 710 million in 2020 to 820 million in 2026, increasing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2 per cent," the report said.

Eight-fold AI raises \$125 m in latest funding round

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Talent intelligence platform Eightfold AI on Monday said it has raised USD 125 million in its latest funding round, valuing the Noida-based company at USD 1 billion.

The series D round was led

by General Catalyst, and existing investors such as Capital One Ventures, Foundation Capital, IVP and Lightspeed Venture Partners, the company said. So far, the AI-powered talent intelligence platform that uses a single solution to manage the entire talent lifecycle,

has raised more than USD 180 million. Eightfold has more than quadrupled its sales since the last round of equity funding in April 2019 and boasts of a customers base that include Tata Communications, AirAsia, Bayer, Capital One and Micron.

Office space leasing by co-working players to fall 58%

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Leasing of office space by co-working players is expected to fall 58 per cent year-on-year to 3.4 million sq ft in 2020 across six major cities due to lower demand of flexible spaces from corporates, according to property consultant Savills India.

In 2019, the co-working operators had leased 8.1 million sq ft office space across six major cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Pune.

In its report, Savills said it "expects 3.4 million sq ft of take-up by coworking players in 2020, recording an 11 per cent share of the total office leasing activity".

The overall leasing activity is expected to reduce significant-



ly in 2020 as against 2019, owing to delayed decision making by the occupiers, the consultant said but expected the numbers to increase steadily over the next two years.

As per the data, leasing of office space by co-working

players in Bengaluru is estimated to fall at 1.1 million sq ft in 2020 from 2.3 million sq ft last year.

In Hyderabad, it is likely to drop to 1.1 million sq ft this year from 2.1 million sq ft.

The Delhi-NCR market will

share in 2021, similar to the 2019 level.

In the year 2022, the number is expected to witness a further 25 per cent annual growth and register leasing activity of 6.1 million sq ft.

"Over the years, shared office space has emerged as a separate asset class, bringing significant cost-advantages to occupiers," Savills India MD, Research and Consulting, Arvind Nandan said. At a juncture when co-working spaces were seeing strong growth, the outbreak of COVID-19 has changed the rules with social distancing and de-densification of workspace becoming imperative, Naveen Nandani, Managing Director - Commercial Advisory & Transactions, Savills India said.

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'OTT IS COOLER WITH LESS LIMITATIONS'

Iqbal Khan, best known for his TV serials *Kaisa Yeh Pyaar Hai*, *Kahiin Toh Hoga*, among many others, was last seen in the web series *Crackdown*, and is currently shooting for an upcoming series. Khan, who started his career with music videos, talks to *The Pioneer's* K RAMYA SREE about his journey into the industry, filming for OTT content, why he refrains from talking about Kashmir, and more

He walked into showbiz with his music videos and stole the hearts of youngsters. Iqbal then worked in several television serials before he made his digital debut with the show *The Bull Of Dalal Street* earlier this year. But his acting journey started at a very young age at school. He says, "I used to be a part of various plays in school. Later, I started modeling in college, after which I moved to Mumbai to try my hand at acting. That's how my first music video happened followed by other good work." Having maneuvered from films to Television to OTT, the actor feels working for the web is cooler with no limita-

tions. "Having worked in TV, films, and the web, I enjoy the web the most, there is absolute freedom. Television has a bit of limitation, just like films. The web is pretty cool that way." That TV industry needs to up its game as far as content is concerned, is a discussion that has been going on for quite some time now. And the actor feels the same. He explains, "The problem with TV is that there are research teams in every channel. There is science and math involved. These research teams do their calculations before making the content. The emotional content has very little space. Now, TV audiences too are declining in number, with each passing day. Having said that, there are decent writers

too, who make good stuff." Speaking about his role in *Crackdown*, he says, "My role in *Crackdown* is just not me. As an actor, I love working on characters which I have to work on wherever homework is required. The guy I play is very cool and the country's primary love. He is a bit of a womaniser, he is harsh and abusive. Playing that character was pretty amazing and it was a nice change." On being directed by Apurva, he says, "It was a bit emotional for me to have been directed by him. We were classmates and we would play cricket as kids. We both have come a long way. I look forward to working with him again, and the get-togethers he hosts, because it is a lot of fun to be around him."

Iqbal was at the receiving end and faced a lot of criticism and hatred online after he expressed his views on Kashmir being a Kashmiri himself. When asked what he feels about the current situation in J&K, he says, "I don't want to comment on this issue, because, whatever I speak now, it's going to become controversial. All I would say is I'll pray that the place is peaceful and very soon everything returns to normalcy and everybody will enjoy the place both visitors and settlers." On being asked what's next, the actor concludes by asking his fans to follow him on his social media handles to get a hint about his future projects as he cannot reveal any of them because of the contracts he signs. So go follow him, now!

"MY ROLE IN CRACKDOWN IS JUST NOT ME. AS AN ACTOR, I LOVE WORKING ON CHARACTERS WHICH I HAVE TO WORK ON WHEREVER HOMEWORK IS REQUIRED. THE GUY I PLAY IS VERY COOL AND THE COUNTRY'S PRIMARY LOVE. HE IS A BIT OF A WOMANISER, IS HARSH AND ABUSIVE."

A CUP FULL OF IMMUNITY

Whether one is happy or sad, a cup of tea always comes in as your best partner. But today, tea can do much more than enhance your mood. BALA SARDA lists teas that boost immunity

Having a strong immune system is more important than ever. With the ongoing pandemic, while there is no proven cure as of now, enhancing the body's immunity plays a very crucial role in maintaining optimum health and keeping the disease at bay. Here are five teas which can play a significant role in boosting and building your immunity the natural way.

Turmeric Tea

Turmeric known as the Golden Son of Ayurveda has been known as one of the healthiest spices of India due to its multiple medicinal and adaptogenic benefits. The Ministry of Ayush has recommended Turmeric for boosting immunity. Make sure you're drinking turmeric tea coupled with black pepper.

The main active ingredient in Turmeric, 'Curcumin' is responsible for its multiple life enhancing properties. Combining black pepper with turmeric is proven to increase curcumin's absorption in the body significantly.

Lemon Tea

There is nothing quite as healthy as a cup of lemon tea. Besides being packed with nutrients that can give your health a big boost, it is a great way to stay hydrated as well, and now with summers already here, this could be an elixir. Lemon tea is loaded with Vitamin C, which can act as a natural antioxidant in boosting the body's immunity.

Pure Green Tea

Well-known for being an abundant source of antioxidants, drinking green tea on a regular basis flushes out the toxins from the body. Abundant in polyphenols and catechins, green tea helps boost immunity. Green tea has long been recognised as having powerful antiviral properties and can go a long way to keep you healthy and well.

Moringa Tea

Moringa is just the superfood we need. The moringa leaves provide a significant amount of antioxidants. It is a treasure house of all essential nutrients including essential vitamins and minerals that are needed to improve the immunity. When consumed regularly, moringa can really strengthen your immunity.

Ashwagandha Tea

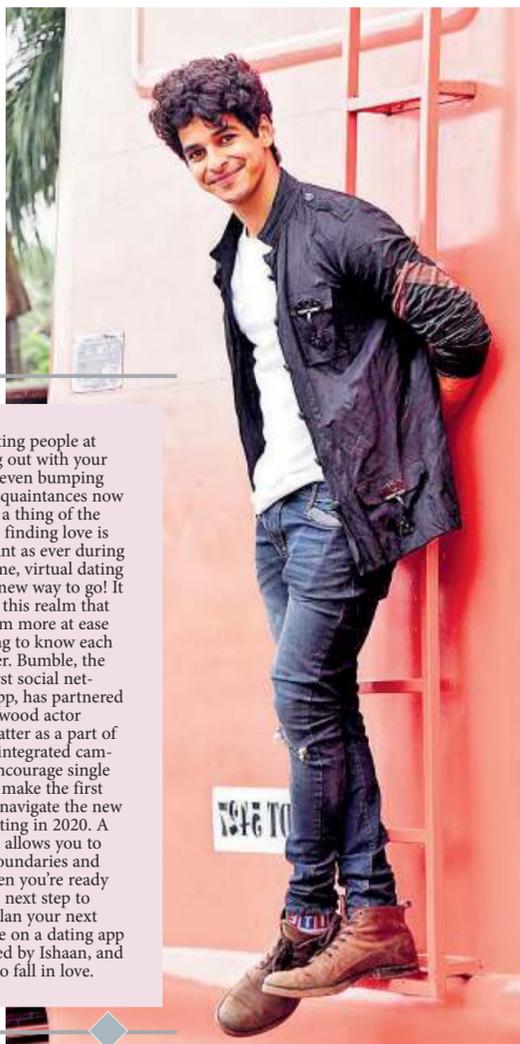
Ashwagandha is an adaptogenic herb, which helps our body to deal with daily stress and balances our body functioning. It also promotes overall immunity, strength, energy and endurance. It's been used to prepare Ayurvedic medicine for a long time. Ashwagandha is not limited to the immune system but offers a lot of other health benefits.

To brew them right and well is also essential. It's very important to note that you should always use freshly drawn water. After it reaches boiling point (100 degrees C), allow it to rest for one minute. This will bring down the temperature to around 80 degrees C, which is an ideal temperature to brew these teas. Steep these teas for between three and five minutes.

Avoid adding milk. You can add honey, stevia or any other sweetener.
 (The writer is a Founder of Vahdam Teas)



Ishaan gives dating tips to his fans



Bollywood actor Ishaan Khatter, who has millions of followers on social media, is known for his crazy female following, especially after his heart-melting performance in *Dhadak*. So it was only natural for him to give dating tips to his fans. The dashing young actor took to his Instagram page to share tips and tricks on how to make a meaningful profile on dating sites through a series of interac-

tive stories. When asked what dating advice he would like to give single Indians, Ishaan said, "I think honesty and communication is the key to any relationship. We shouldn't settle for something that doesn't let us be ourselves. I'm excited and happy. The importance of building meaningful connections has been realised strongly in 2020 and a dating app does such a creative job in bringing people together. Also, its approach of making women the first move reimagines the traditional gender role dictated by society and makes the app uniquely cool."

The pandemic must have changed how we communicate with each other but what hasn't changed is the need for making meaningful connections through dating

apps. Meeting people at bars, going out with your friends or even bumping into old acquaintances now seems like a thing of the past. Since finding love is as important as ever during a tough time, virtual dating like is the new way to go! It is through this realm that people seem more at ease with getting to know each other better. Bumble, the women-first social networking app, has partnered with Bollywood actor Ishaan Khatter as a part of their new integrated campaign to encourage single Indians to make the first move and navigate the new rules of dating in 2020. A dating app allows you to set your boundaries and decide when you're ready to take the next step to meet. So plan your next virtual date on a dating app as suggested by Ishaan, and get ready to fall in love.

"HONESTY AND COMMUNICATION ARE KEY TO ANY RELATIONSHIP. WE SHOULDN'T SETTLE FOR ANYTHING THAT'S LESS."

Pollution, pandemic and pre-term birth

Most pregnancies last 40 weeks; a baby is known as a premature or pre-term when her or she is born before the completion of 37th week. Based on the gestational age, pre-term babies are sub-categorised as extremely preterm (less than 28 weeks), very preterm (28 to 32 weeks), moderate to late preterm (32 to 37 weeks). "Advances in the field of medicine have meant that more than 9 out of 10 premature babies survive, and most go on to develop normally," says Dr Archana Dhawan Bajaj, Gynaecologist and Obstetrician and IVF expert, Nurture IVF Centre. There are several reasons for preterm births, while most happen spontaneously some are due to early induction of labour or caesarean birth, whether for medical or non-medical reasons, she says. "Some of the common causes include multiple pregnancies, infections and chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure; however, often no cause is identified."

economic benefits can be gained through reductions in outdoor air pollution exposure during pregnancy. "Several studies have found air pollution as one of the risk factors for preterm birth. Air pollution is associated with an unfavourable vaginal microbiota suggesting a relationship between environmental and biological risk factors that may further substantiate the risk of pre-mature birth in pregnant women. US Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Centre and the University of Cincinnati carried out studies and identified a 19 percent increased risk, with the greatest risk when exposed to air pollution during the third trimester of pregnancy."



pregnancy or having a stillbirth, says the doctor.

While none of the data indicate that pregnant women are more susceptible to severe COVID-19 infection, nor have studies suggested an increased risk of miscarriage, congenital anomalies, or early pregnancy loss in pregnant patients, however, studies have described an increased risk of preterm birth.

Similar results have been found with another study conducted in Korea which further stresses the point that COVID-19 can be associated with premature birth and sometimes severe outcomes for mother and baby, including death.

Several other researchers in various parts of the globe have studied the effects of the novel coronavirus on pregnant women and its outcome on the new born. They share the same views of pregnant women experiencing a higher rate of preterm deliveries than expected and a British study noted a population-wide uptick in stillbirths during the pandemic.

Pollution and pre-term birth

Dr Bajaj explains risk of premature or preterm birth has been associated with exposure to air pollution during pregnancy by increasing toxic chemicals in the blood and causing immune system stress, which can weaken the placenta surrounding the fetus and lead to preterm birth. This, in turn, raises risk of health complications for the baby, both in the short and long term.

"As per estimates, more than 3 percent of all premature births in the US are attributable to air pollution. Furthermore, findings suggest that considerable health and eco-

Another study has found an association with exposure to high levels of small particulate matter with an increased risk of premature birth, she points out. One of the professors in the US said that the decreasing amount of particulate matter in the air below the US Environmental Protection Agency's standard threshold could decrease preterm birth in women exposed to high levels of small particulates by about 17 percent, which corresponds to a 2.22 percent decrease in the preterm birth rate in the population as a whole, Dr Bajaj says.

COVID and pre-term birth

COVID-19 has been spreading far and wide across the globe with devastating effects across majority of population. While it's the aging population which is at a major risk of developing complications from the disease, pregnant women also have a reason to worry as they may face an elevated risk for delivering their babies prematurely, according to new studies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Additionally, they may also be at greater risk of losing the

Summary

Pregnancy is a time filled with joy and happiness for every woman and it is the responsibility of one and all to ensure a healthy outcome for pregnant women and their infants.

While there are several other reasons that can cause preterm births including air pollution and COVID 19 infection, proactive clinical management and dedicated support coupled with adequate safety measures must be adopted to help protect those who are pregnant and their newborns.



Tackle DANDRUFF issue

While we all look forward to winters — sitting in front of the fire, drinking tea and talking about everything under the sun; there are some annoying problems that crop up — dry skin and dandruff.

There are many products available in the market but a few home remedies work just as well with long lasting effect.

If you have dry skin, one of the best remedies is to mix two parts glycerin, two parts rose water and one part lemon juice. Keep this in a bottle. Apply on the skin. Avoid areas where there is a break in the skin. Leave it overnight. Wash with warm water the next morning. One can use this on the face too, the results are amazing.

For cracked heels mix beeswax and mustard oil by heating them together in equal parts. Pour it into a container. Let it cool. Apply over the cracked heels. Wear socks. Wash feet the next

WINTERS ARE HERE AND WITH IT, THE USUAL PROBLEMS OF DRY SKIN, DANDRUFF AND CRACKED HEELS. A FEW SIMPLE INGREDIENTS AVAILABLE IN YOUR KITCHEN CAN HELP TACKLE THE ISSUE

morning. Repeat till you get smooth heels.

Dandruff is another winter problem that many face. Mix orange peel powder and coconut oil to make a mask. Apply this on the scalp. Leave it overnight or at least for an hour. Wash off with shampoo. Do this thrice a week till dandruff disappears.



FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



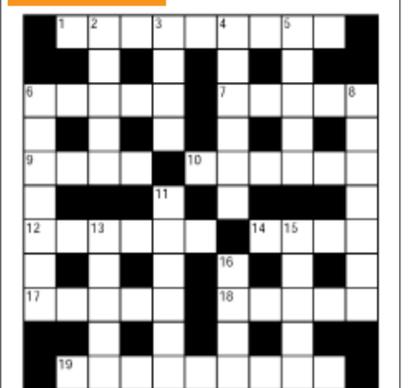
REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- Look at the stars through this
- Naming words
- Memorise
- Awful to look at
- Say again
- A team game with sticks
- Trip over
- A short spell of very wild weather with wind and rain
- Instructions for building houses
- Played make-believe

DOWN

- Of the same length
- A compass direction

- Less hot
- A flat dish
- Zeros
- Stinging plants
- A hard safety hat
- A large group of singers
- Not asleep
- Unlock



SUDOKU

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

Yesterday's solution

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

- 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.

'Playing FC cricket gives us advantage in Tests'

Labuschagne says Australian players will get benefit of playing Sheffield Shield matches

PTI ■ SYDNEY

Australia's rising star Marnus Labuschagne believes that the home team will enjoy a slight advantage going into the Test series against India as most of its top-order players will be coming in after having played a fair amount of first-class cricket.

Labuschagne, who contributed a solid 70 off 61 balls in the second ODI which Australia won by 51 runs on Sunday, has scored two hundreds in three Sheffield Shield matches.

"It definitely helps to have a few games under your belt just to get the pace and the timing of the game from T20s to one-dayers to four-day cricket," he replied to a query during a virtual media interaction on Monday.

The Indian players, who had played IPL and now ODIs, last played red-ball cricket in New Zealand and will only have two three-day games to get into the groove.

"But a lot of these (Indian) players were talking about, they've been doing it for a long time, they're not new to the changes of format. I'd be surprised if they didn't shift back into gear very quickly."

"I will say that it's a slight advantage, four out of our top six have been playing Shield cricket and got that rhythm as a batting group."

With David Warner ruled out of the last ODI as well as the upcoming T20 Internationals, Labuschagne won't mind a chance to open the innings if he is asked about it.

"Certainly, if I got asked to open the batting absolutely. It's

an opportunity that I would enjoy taking. We'll wait and see how our team shapes up for the next game and see the balance of the side, but yeah, I would love doing it," Labuschagne said.

"My role at No 4 is just to read the situation of the game and play my role accordingly," he said.

Asked how Warner is emotionally dealing with the injury setback that happened during

the second ODI, Labuschagne insisted that he is fine.

"He is a strong character and he will come back. Also his absence is an opportunity for someone else."

Steve Smith's form is something that will obviously help Australia in the Test series, feels Labuschagne.

"Cricket's a massive confidence game and even though it's a different format, it still gives you a lot

of confidence when you're scoring runs consistently and the way Steve and Davey (David Warner) are batting currently, I've got no doubt they'll be able to transfer that into the Test summer."

"But right now there's still a lot of games to be played before that, we've just got to make sure we finish this one-day series well and then straight into the T20s where we start really well."

Smith's second ODI hundred is one of the best according to Labuschagne and he called his form scary.

"That was one of the best innings I've seen in one-day cricket, not only from Steve but from anyone," the 26-year-old said.

"I think the way he batted yesterday (Sunday) was superb. It almost felt like he didn't give an opportunity, didn't really take any risk, but he got a hundred off 62 balls."

"When someone's doing that, that's kind of scary."

About his own innings, he was happy to have a partnership with Smith.

"It was really nice to build that partnership with him, 136, it was just nice to keep ticking it over and we were really busy through that middle part when we came together. Then towards the back end, Steve really took the game on and that's how we got 390."

"They're two very big scores in the last two games, thanks obviously to Steve."

Injured Warner out

Short will replace Aussie opener for white ball series; Cummins also rested

PTI ■ SYDNEY

In-form Australian opener David Warner has been ruled out of the remainder of the limited-overs series against India due to a groin injury that he suffered during the second ODI on Sunday, while top pacer Pat Cummins has been rested as part of his workload management.

Warner, who scored 69 and 83 in the first two ODIs, hurt himself on Sunday while fielding at the SCG in the second one-dayer.

The dashing opener has returned home to begin his rehabilitation and will be looking to get fit ahead of the opening Test at Adelaide starting December 17.

"Pat and Dave are critical to our plans for the Test series," coach Justin Langer was quoted as saying by the Australian media.

"Dave will work through his injury rehab and in Pat's case it is important all of our players are managed well to keep them mentally and physically fit throughout what is a challenging summer."

"The priority for both is being fully prepared for one of the biggest and most important home Test series we have played in recent years, especially with World Test Championship points up for grabs."

Left-handed batsman D'Arcy Short, who was the leading run-scorer in two series in the Big Bash League, has been named Warner's



replacement in Australia's white-ball squad.

India and Australia will play one more ODI on Wednesday before competing in three T20 Internationals, starting Friday, followed by the much-anticipated four-match Test series.

All-rounder Marcus Stoinis, who missed the second ODI after suffering a side strain in the opening game, will stay in the squad.

But all-rounder Mitchell Marsh, who is recovering from an ankle injury sustained while playing in the IPL, will not be playing the warm-up game between India A and Australia A starting on Sunday.

He will now continue his rehabilitation and no replacement has been named for him in the A squad.

No captain would give Bumrah two-over opening spell: Gambhir

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former opener Gautam Gambhir feels India skipper Virat Kohli committed a tactical blunder that no other captain would, by giving his premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah just a two-over opening spell in the series-conceding second ODI loss to Australia.

Gambhir, who has been pretty critical of Kohli's tactical acumen as captain, felt that the difference between the two sides so far was how Australian captain Aaron Finch handled his most successful pacer Josh Hazlewood in the first two ODIs that the hosts won easily.

"I find it difficult to comprehend that if you have a bowler of Jasprit Bumrah's calibre and you give him only two overs upfront. It's not a tactical mistake but a tactical blunder," Gambhir said in ESPNcricinfo's show Match Day Hindi.

A five-over spell would have allowed Bumrah and Mohammed Shami to at least try and pick up two wickets upfront.

"...I was expecting Bumrah and Shami to bowl five-over spells each upfront and tried getting a couple of wickets each. So, I don't think there is any captain in world cricket who would give Jasprit Bumrah, two overs with the new ball," Gambhir said as it is.

With all top three Australian batsmen — Aaron Finch, David Warner and Steve Smith — striking form at the same time, Gambhir feels that if any bowler had a chance of getting the trio out, it had to be Bumrah.

"Now Finch, Warner and Smith, the top three are in prime form and who has the best chance of taking their wicket? It's Jasprit Bumrah. ... And you give him 2 overs and bring him after 10 overs, when the ball is a tad old and it gets warmer and you expect him to get wickets in these conditions. He is human too."

He then cited the example of how Finch used Hazlewood in the first two games.

"First game, Finch gave him six-over spell and second game a five-over first spell and six overs when Starc had a bad day. Hazlewood has been the standout bowler."

Gambhir was impressed with how Australia's sixth bowling option (the combination of Marcus Stoinis and Glenn Maxwell in first and Moises Henriques and Maxwell in second) controlled the proceedings.

"It happened in the first match as well. First match, Marcus Stoinis gave some 25 runs in 6 overs that he bowled and that was done by Henriques in the second game. So that's the difference you had."

"So, if your sixth bowler can give 6 to 7 overs, then you don't need to bowl with a front-liner who is having an off day like Mitchell Starc."

"Imagine had Hardik not bowled those overs, what kind of pressure it would have been on Shami and Navdeep Saini," he said.

While Virat Kohli, with close to 11,500 runs and 43 hundreds, has a staggering record, Gambhir feels that Smith for all practical reasons isn't too far behind even if the numbers suggest otherwise.

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Amrita Rao: Earlier talent was important, now there's talent management

Mahesh Babu-starrer *Athidi* actress Amrita Rao says the concept of visibility for an actor has

changed, courtesy social media and talent management firms, as compared to the time she made her debut in 2002.

"Before the era of social media and PR machinery that we are seeing these days, an actor's popularity and celebrity status was a byproduct of his or her talent. When I entered the industry as a teenager and appeared in films like *Athidi*, *Ishq Vishk*, *Masti*, and *Main Hoon Naa*, people noticed me because of my performance, although a film like *Main Hoon Naa* had superstars like Shah Rukh Khan and Sushamita Sen.

These days, actors are becoming popular also because of their presence on social media. I think for an actor, being remembered for a character and film is more important," Amrita said.

She continued, "There is nothing wrong with becoming a popular celebrity on social media, just that there is a huge change that has happened. I entered the industry during the transition period. Earlier, it

was important to have talent and as an artiste, we'd focus on sharpening our skills. Now there is something called talent management. In a way, it is a good cultural change that lets artistes feel more secure with a job opportunity," explained the actress.

Can Amrita recall the moment she felt recognised in the pre-social media era? "Yes, I clearly remember that, because I had a mixed feeling. Whenever I recall, it brings a smile on my face. All of us were entering the venue, and the photographers were there, on the occasion of the success party of *Main Hoon Naa*. There was a group of college students standing out there who saw me and called out 'Sanjana', my character's name in the film. I was so young back then, that I didn't know how to react, I smiled, and covered my face with my palm, that's how shy I was! In my head, it was like 'What just happened? This meant they really watched my film and recognised me!!' It was an over-the-

moon feeling of a youngster!" she giggled.

Despite being appreciated by critics and others for her performance and even being called 'another native-face' girl of Tollywood, the actress was not seen in any other film post that, because of her trials in Bollywood, leading to her loosing up on opportunities here. The actress made headlines last year when she accused Tollywood of using actresses as nothing but glam dolls. She also claimed that she rejected several offers from Telugu filmmakers for the same reason.



RRR wraps up massive action sequence

Director SS Rajamouli's magnum opus *RRR* happens to be the most awaited Indian film. The latest update is that it wrapped up a 50-day massive action sequence schedule. The entire sequence was said to have been canned in night mode.

"Goodbye winter nights!!! Wrapped up a major action sequence schedule after almost 50 days of night shoot...Andddd nowwww..."

Gearing up for a new schedule in some exotic locations :) #RRRMovie. (sic)," tweeted the team on Monday.

Set against the pre-independence era, *RRR* is a fictitious story based on two legendary freedom fighters, Alluri Seetharamaraju and Komaram Bheem. Helmed on a massive budget of Rs 350 crore, the period-drama features an ensemble star cast like Ajay Devgn and Alia Bhatt in pivotal roles.

After the 50-day schedule, the team has now taken a very short break and will get back with their next schedule soon,

in some exotic locales. NTR and Ram Charan have already gone out of town for their break, according to reports, after completing their portions. Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn is in Hyderabad for the shoot of *RRR*, while Alia Bhatt will join the team in December and Shriya Saran has already completed shooting for her part.

A few moments ago, the makers of *RRR* took to their official social handle and revealed that almost 70% shoot has been wrapped up. Terming 2019 as a phenomenal year, they mentioned that the names of

the antagonists and replacement for Daisy Edgar Jones will be unveiled on November 20.

Fans hope the updated release date of *RRR* will be announced once the shoot of the film concludes.



Sampoornesh to groove to Prem Rakshith's tunes

Any news about Burning star Sampoornesh Babu's latest film sends waves across Tollywood fans.

Both of the actor's previous films *Hrudaya Kaleyam* and *Kobbarimatta* have been super hits and his next *Bazaar Rowdy* is being shot at record speed. This is the actor's first film post the lockdown and fans can't wait to get a glimpse of the sets.

The commercial film is being directed by Vasanthi Nageshwar Rao, and being produced by Sandhi Reddy Srinivas Rao under KS Creations' banner.

Actress Mahi is paired opposite Sampoornesh. Apart from the film's content, what's sure to garner eyeballs are the dance sequences in the film, say members of the unit. Noted choreographer Prem Rakshith, who set trends with films like *Arya-2*, *100% Love*, *Bahubali 1,2*, *Ishq* and others, is to get the Burning star to dance to his tunes!

Speaking about the making of the film, director Vasanthi said, "Prem Rakshith has raised the bar of the films he worked

with, and he's done the same with us, we're grateful for him. The song is being shot with Sampoornesh Babu, Mahi and 20 other dancers at Ramoji Film City. We're short of shooting just the climax and two more songs, and then we're done."

The film's star cast includes Shivaji Shinde, Prudhvi, Shashi, Jeeva, Sameer, Naveena, Manichandana and Padmavati. The teaser, first look and other details will be revealed soon.



An unconventional, funny and relatable drama on aha

After giving the audience a festival bonanza this Diwali with five back-to-back successful releases, the Telugu OTT platform Aha is continuing the entertainment ride with yet another new release titled Honeymoon. The web series is an exclusive tale of humorous, relatable and an unconventional take on adventures of a couple after an arranged marriage.

The six long episodic series is exploring the journey after the tag line 'happily ever after' of a newly wedded couple as they discover some hidden facets and unravel the little secrets about each other.

Jointly produced by Sakkath Studio and Kannada superstar Dr Shivraj Kumar, Niveditha Shivraj Kumar under the banner of Shrimuthu Cini Service, Honeymoon brings to the light the expectations and stages of emotions in

a newly wedded couple's life, with loads of humour and emotions. Starring Kannada film industry sensations Nagabhushana and Sanjana Anand as the lead pair, it's going to unwind the magic of falling in love as they continue to deal with the ups and downs. Both the actors have perfectly slipped into their respective roles of Praveen and Tejaswini, and viewers are sure to see themselves as part of this web series, pushing real-life couples to go back to their honeymoon times!

The sensational Payal Rajput unveiled a post-release glimpse on her social media handle and called the show exciting and a fun watch. Every couple has their thing, some want to rappel down the waterfalls, others just want to snuggle up in a private igloo, but this unique couple ventures to the land of coconut trees and houseboats.

Essentially, Kerala becomes their oyster, and it will be fun to see what do they do next!



KGF

producers to come up with another big film



Hombale Films, the Kannada film production company that gave India several big-budget films, including the most famous *KGF -1* and is to wrap *KGF - Chapter 2* soon, has announced the production of another pan-India film that will go on floors next.

After the huge success of *KGF Chapter 1*, Hombale became a name to reckon with, especially when it has to do with big-budget films. Their upcoming film, which the production house says will have a superstar and super director combo, will be a film that will be made across many Indian languages, like *KGF*. Information about the title, cast and the crew is slated to be announced on December 2nd and fans can't wait for Wednesday noon!

Hombale Films is already working on two other mega projects — *Yuvaratnaa* (a Kannada movie with Puneeth Rajkumar), *KGF Chapter II*.

Star comedian as 'Corporator'

Comedian Seshu Shankar, better known by his stage name Shakalaka Shankar is to play the titular role in the upcoming film *Corporator*. Sameepa Movies and A and I Studios are jointly presenting the film that is being produced by A. Padmanabha Reddy and

co-produced by Dr SV Madhuri.

Director of the film, Dr Sanjay confirmed that Shankar's performance will be the main attraction of *Corporator* and it will have a social message. The film also stars actors Sunita Pandey, Lavanya Sharma, and Kasturi opposite Shankar as the female leads.

