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VIJAYAWADA, SUNDAY DECEMBER 13, 2020; PAGES 12 ₹3



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IN BOOK, PRANAB BLAMES SONIA, MANMOHAN SINGH FOR 2014 DEBACLE

At a time the Congress confronts unrelenting in-house criticism of its top leadership after multiple election defeats, the final volume of Pranab Mukherjee's memoirs, out soon, may deliver more home truths. The former President, appears to blame Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi for the party's 2014 defeat. "Some have theorized that, had I become the PM in 2004, the party might have averted the 2014 Lok Sabha drubbing. Though I don't subscribe to this view, I do believe that the party's leadership lost political focus after my elevation as president. While Sonia was unable to handle the affairs of the party, Dr Singh's prolonged absence from the House put an end to any personal contact with other MPs," he writes.



IRAN EXECUTES OPPOSITION FIGURE WHO ENCOURAGED 2017 PROTESTS

Iran on Saturday executed Ruhollah Zam, a former opposition figure who had lived in exile in France and was implicated in anti-government protests. The broadcaster said the "counter-revolutionary" Zam was hanged in the morning after the supreme court upheld his sentence due to "the severity of the crimes" committed against the Islamic republic. Iran's Revolutionary Guards announced the arrest of Zam in October last year, claiming he was "directed by France's intelligence service." State television said he was "under the protection of several countries' intelligence services." Zam was charged with "corruption on earth" -- one of the most serious offences under Iranian law -- and sentenced to death.



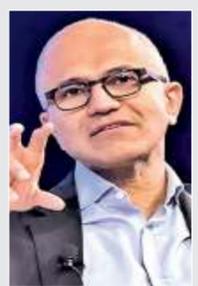
MOST RAPE COMPLAINTS FILED AFTER BREAK-UP, SAYS WOMEN'S BODY CHIEF

Rape cases are often filed by women once consensual relationships turn sour, the chief of Chhattisgarh's women's commission has said, triggering controversy over the hot take that risks discouraging survivors in a country where a vast number of rapes are believed to go unreported. "If a married man lures a girl into an affair, she must understand whether the man is lying to them and whether he will help them survive or not. If that is not the case, both of them, mostly the women, approach the police," Kiranmayee Nayak said. "In most of the cases, girls have a consensual relationship, a live-in setup and then file an FIR (First Information Report) for rape after separation," she added.



LALU YADAV'S KIDNEY FUNCTIONING AT ONLY 25 PERCENT, SAYS HIS PHYSICIAN

The physician treating jailed RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, Dr Umesh Prasad, on Saturday said that the leader's kidney is functioning at 25 per cent and the situation can deteriorate at any time in future. Dr Prasad has updated the authorities of RIMS, where Lalu Yadav is admitted, in writing about this situation. "I have said earlier also that it is true that Yadav's kidney is functioning at 25 per cent. And this situation is alarming from this logic that his kidney functioning can deteriorate anytime. It is difficult to predict exactly when," Dr Prasad said. "The rate at which his disease is getting worse and since he has diabetes for the last 20 years, his end organ is damaging in an escalating manner," he added.



Public institutions, pvt sector can help overcome pandemic: Naidella

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BJP backs single capital for AP, blames Jagan for all ills

PNS ■ TIRUPATI

The BJP Andhra Pradesh's new executive committee mounted a scathing attack on the YS Jaganmohan Reddy government, accusing it of pushing the state into a deep economic crisis and jeopardising development while indulging in large-scale corruption.

The national party demanded that Amaravati be continued as the sole capital of Andhra Pradesh and render justice to thousands of farmers who gave up their fertile lands for the new city.

A resolution to this effect was adopted on the first day of the two-day meeting of the

BJP sends signals to Pawan with meeting

Tirupati: The state executive of the Bharatiya Janata Party met at Tirupati on Saturday, ostensibly to take stock of the political situation in the State. The meeting began with a no-holds-barred attack on the YSRC government, with the BJP leaders accusing it of having ruined the administration in the state. However, the very fact that the BJP state executive met at Tirupati is being seen as a signal

and a host of leaders addressed the meeting. The political resolution adopted on the occasion expressed serious concern over the state's economy as the incumbent YSR Congress government has been resorting to indiscriminate borrowing in the name of welfare.

"The YSRC is bothered more about its political survival than the state's wellbeing. In just 18 months, the government borrowed more than Rs one lakh crore, which was unprecedented. If the same situation continues, the state will become bankrupt," the BJP warned.

new executive that began here on Saturday.

Union Minister of State for External Affairs and party AP in-charge V Muraleedharan, former Chief Minister of

Chhattisgarh Raman Singh, Rajya Sabha member GVL Narasimha Rao, BJP state president Somu Veeraj, general secretary S Vishnuvardhan Reddy, MLC P V N Madhav



When will Indians get the first jab?

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Venkaiah takes stock of mystery illness in Eluru

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan and joint secretary Lav Agarwal on Saturday briefed Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on the health situation in Eluru where the outbreak of a mysterious disease left many hospitalised.

More than 600 people have fallen ill in the area. They had reportedly suffered from dizziness, fainting spells, headache and vomiting.

The Centre had rushed a three-member team of medical experts to Eluru on December 8 after Venkaiah Naidu spoke with Health Minister Harsh Vardhan regarding the situation there.

The health secretary briefed Venkaiah Naidu on the pre-

liminary findings of the central team that visited the affected areas in Eluru, an official statement said.

The official said that a detailed report will be prepared on the central team's return to Delhi and necessary advisory will be issued accordingly.

The Vice-President was told

that the number of new cases in Eluru has come down sharply with only two new cases reported on December 11.

Venkaiah Naidu asked the health secretary to keep a watch on the situation and take all necessary action, the statement said.



KCR meets Modi, discusses pending state issues

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrababu Naidu called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday to discuss the long-pending issues pertaining to the southern state.

In a 40-minute meeting with Modi, Naidu raised various state issues and appealed to the prime minister for the release of pending funds, according to official sources.

Later, the PMO tweeted, "Telangana CM K Chandrababu Naidu called on PM @narendramodi today."

KCR's meeting with Modi after a year comes at a time when the former has announced that he will play an active role in national politics.

Farmers up the ante, to go on hunger strike from Monday

Nothing short of repealing three farm laws would do, assert unions



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sticking to their demands, farmer leaders on Saturday said they were ready to hold talks with the government, but will first discuss repealing the three new farm laws, and announced that representatives of their unions would sit on a hunger strike during a nationwide protest on December 14.

Addressing a press conference at Singhu Border here, farmer leader Kanwalpreet Singh Pannu also said that thousands of farmers will start their 'Delhi Chalo' march with their tractors from Rajasthan's Shahjahanpur through the Jaipur-Delhi Highway at 11 am on Sunday.

The distance between

Shahjahanpur and Delhi-Gurgaon border is around 94 kilometres.

Spelling out their strategy to make the agitation even "bigger", the farmer leader announced that their mothers, sisters and daughters will also join them soon, and that arrangements for their stay are being made at the protest sites.

Farmers' move to further intensify their agitation comes on a day Prime Minister Narendra Modi assured them that his government was committed to their welfare and that the three legislations were aimed at giving them alternative markets to boost income.

Country fed up of your lollypops: Cong to PM

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi assuring farmers that his government was committed to their welfare, the Congress on Saturday hit out at him, saying the farmers want pro-people governance not flowery speeches and urged the Centre to accede to their demands.

In a tweet, Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala attacked Modi for his remarks at an event on Saturday that the agri reforms will be beneficial for the farmers, saying the "whole country is fed up of your enticing lollypops".

Farmers backing new laws warn of protests

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid an ongoing protest against three farm laws, a delegation of 29 farmers from Haryana met Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on Saturday to extend their support to the new legislations and threatened to stage a protest if those are repealed.

The delegation, led by Bharatiya Kisan Union's (Mann) Haryana state leader Guni Prakash, submitted a

"letter of support" to Tomar on the farm laws passed by Parliament in September and demanded the government to continue with these legislations.

"We will also protest if the government repeals the laws. We have given a memorandum to all districts," Prakash told reporters after the meeting.

He also sought to know why the previous government did not implement the recommendations of the

Swaminathan Commission till 2014.

"Everyone has a right to protest. They have, so do we. We are in support of the three laws, but this protest is being led by Leftists and those who are violent," he said.

Claiming that the ongoing farmers' agitation is no longer a peasant movement, the BKU leader said, "It has taken a political colour. Farmers will get real freedom through these three laws."

TODAY

ALMANAC

Month & Paksham: Kartik & Krishna Paksha Panchangam

Tithi: Chaturdashi: 12:44 am (Next Day)

Nakshatram: Anuraha: 01:40 am (Next Day)

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

Rahukalam: 04:17 pm - 05:39 pm

Yamagandam: 12:10 pm - 01:32 pm

Varjyam: 07:40 am - 09:07 am

Gulika: 02:55 pm - 04:17 pm

Good Time: (to start any important work)

Amritakalam: 04:18 pm - 05:45 pm

Abhijit Muhurtam: 11:48 am - 12:32 pm

VIJAYAWADA WEATHER

Forecast: Mostly sunny

Temp: 31/19

Humidity: 67%

Sunrise: 06:33am

Sunset: 05:41pm

Current Weather Conditions

Updated December 12, 2020 5:00 PM

VANTAGE POINT



103 kg gold in CBI custody 'goes missing'

PNS ■ CHENNAI

The CBI on Saturday said that it has initiated an "internal inquiry" after 103 kg gold worth Rs 43 crore, seized and sealed by it eight years ago, was found to have gone "missing".

The CBI statement came a day after the Madras High Court directed the Tamil Nadu Crime Branch-CID police to probe the case of "missing" gold, which left the country's premier investigating agency red-faced.

The gold is part of 400.47 kg in bullion and ornaments con-



fiscated by the CBI when it carried out searches at the office of Surana Corporation Ltd in Chennai in 2012.

During the hearing on the matter in the high court, the agency lawyer submitted that

"an internal enquiry is being conducted by the CBI in this regard".

"When this Court expressed its opinion, as to why no FIR was registered for theft, the learned Special Public Prosecutor submitted that an internal enquiry is being conducted by the CBI in this regard. He requested this Court to give a direction to the CBI to register an FIR for theft and conduct investigation. He even suggested that this Court could direct the CBI of the neighbouring State or the National Investigating Agency to con-

duct the investigation," the high court bench said.

"Had any property been lost either from the malkhana (property room) of the Court or from the malkhana of the CBI, what should have been done? The answer to this question is obvious.

A regular FIR for theft should have been registered in the jurisdictional police station and the police investigation under Chapter XII of CrPC should have been conducted", the high court noted.

Reactor blasts in Hyd, eight injured

DURGA PRASAD SUNKU ■ HYDERABAD

Panic gripped the IDA Bollaram area after a series of explosions ripped through a chemical factory on Saturday afternoon.

At least eight persons were injured in the blasts that took place at Vindhya Organics Private Limited in IDA Bollaram.

EC takes opinion of parties on expenditure limit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission has sought views of recognised national and state parties on what should be the limit of expenditure for candidates contesting Lok Sabha and Assembly polls.

In a letter sent out on December 7, the Commission asked parties to send their "views and suggestions" on what should be the ceiling limit of election expenditure

for candidates for Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in the future.

The parties have been asked to send their views to the nodal officer of the Committee that was set up in October to revise the expenditure limit.

While there is a limit on candidates to spend on their elec-

tion campaign, there is no such cap on political parties.

The Committee was tasked to examine the issue of revising the expenditure limit for candidates for Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in view of the increase in number of electors and rise in the Cost

Inflation Index.

Expenditure limit for candidates was last revised in 2014. For Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the limit was enhanced in 2018.

"In last six years, the limit was not increased despite an increase in electorate from 834 million to 910 million in 2019 to 921 million now. Further, the Cost Inflation Index during this period has increased from 220 to 280 in 2019 to 301 now," the Commission had said in

October while announcing the constitution of the panel.

The committee will assess the change in number of electors across states and union territories, and its bearing on expenditure.

It has also been mandated to assess the change in Cost Inflation Index and its bearing on the pattern of expenditure incurred by candidates in recent elections.

'ALL AND SUNDRY'

After promising indications that Covid-19 vaccine may be released early, India is lagging behind developed nations in rolling it out. Britain has begun giving the job to healthcare workers and the elderly as have Russia and China, while the US is on the cusp of rolling out Pfizer's vaccine this week.

With so much buzz about the advanced stage of vaccine trials, regulatory approvals and speculation over dates of its release, people are waiting for an official announcement of a firm timeline which is, however, not forthcoming. After lockdowns and other restrictions since March, fatigue seems to have set in because fewer people are wearing masks or maintaining physical distance.

When will Indians get the first jab?

The huge expectations on the vaccine's release are natural since global pharma players are actively collaborating with manufacturers in India, largest producer of vaccines in the world. These hopes have been fuelled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's whistlestop tour of Hyderabad, Pune and Ahmedabad and the visit of 64 foreign envoys to Bharat Biotech and Biological E.

In reality, it will be weeks before the first jab is given, according to Dr. V. K. Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, Pune-based Serum Institute of India (SII) and Hyderabad's Bharat Biotech have applied for emergency use authorization, followed by Pfizer India, enthused by its parent company securing clearance in the UK for its mRNA vaccine, whose efficacy is over 90 per cent.

Easily the frontrunner, SII,

A bit of cheer is the nod given by the Government to Gennova, another Pune-based company, supported with funds from the Department of Biotechnology, to start human trials on India's first mRNA vaccine, considered an ideal choice to tackle the pandemic. All this is fine, but the question crying for an answer is: when will the vaccine reach people



S NAGESH KUMAR
Former Resident Editor,
The Hindu

which is producing the vaccine in collaboration with pharma giant AstraZeneca and University of Oxford, received a mild setback when it was asked by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) to furnish more data for emergency authorisation.

It may take two months (that is until February) after licensing for producing large volumes of Covishield, going by SII's

CEO Adar Poonawala. So far, it has produced 5 crore doses and much will depend on DGCI on their release. Bharat Biotech too has made considerable quantities, but is yet to complete Stage III trials on the booster dose for nearly 25,000 volunteers. A bit of cheer is the nod given by the Government to Gennova, another Pune-based company, supported with funds from the Department of

Biotechnology, to start human trials on India's first mRNA vaccine, considered an ideal choice to tackle the pandemic. All this is fine, but the question crying for an answer is: when will the vaccine reach people.

Undoubtedly, a big task lies ahead in not just rolling out the Covid-19 vaccine at the earliest but sustaining the momentum well into 2022.

Developed countries, with 14 per cent of the global population, have already purchased 50 per cent of the vaccine with Canada booking enough doses to vaccinate its entire population five times over. Ninety six per cent of Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine and the entire doses of Moderna have already been purchased. The Indian government has yet not purchased any vaccine, though it plans to administer 30 crore doses by July-August 2021 due to the confidence it reposes in SII.

Another crucial test will lie in providing logistics by ensuring a cold chain of 2-8 degrees C (Pfizer minus 70 deg C) from the factory to the vaccination site as the existing 27,000 cold chain points may be insufficient. A lesson or two could be drawn from the successes of the

Pulse Polio programme for administration of oral vaccine in controlled temperature to all children under 5 years through rapid, simultaneous action.

The Centre has been quick-footed in piling pressure on States to furnish lists of healthcare workers and eliminating fake names, creating implementation mechanisms at the State, district and block levels. Even the guidelines have been laid down for arrangements at each vaccination site such as ceiling of 100 jabs a day. Prioritising the beneficiaries is essential to ensure that healthcare workers, frontline workers, the elderly and those suffering from morbidities are not left out and to prevent squabbling about entitlement for getting the first jab.

When Covid-19 turned into a pandemic, N95 masks were in high demand, leading to shortages not only in India but even in the United States. Doctors who needed them most were found using the less safe surgi-

cal masks, while the rich and the powerful, political leaders, their minions and security personnel sported N95 masks. This should not be repeated. Bullying by influential sections or creation of artificial shortages will bring disrepute to the government. Above all, the vaccine should be affordable. To avoid these hassles, the vaccine should be administered free of cost as promised by several parties, though it may cost the exchequer Rs.1.50 lakh crore depending upon which pool of vaccines is purchased.

The PM's exertions in visiting vaccine plants and monitoring the whole exercise will be wasted if transparency is not maintained in distribution. Charges of discrimination will fly fast and thick as 2021 will be an election year in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Assam; and in Uttar Pradesh next year. Utmost integrity and speed are needed to see that people receive the vaccine in time because Covid-19 is not going away in 2021.

BC body upsets HC with plea on teacher transfers

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

A petition filed by Andhra Pradesh BC Welfare Society seeking directions to carry out the transfer process of teachers in a particular manner invited the wrath of the State High Court, with the judges questioning the Society about its role in transfer of teachers.



that they failed to understand what the BC community had to do with teacher transfers. "There is no subjective relativity to each other," the bench said and asked the petitioner to explain.

When the petitioner failed to answer, the bench was shocked. The judges clarified that these matter of transfers would be taken care of by the Government.

The petitioner was told that the teachers would move court if they felt that anyone had been wronged in the matter of transfers.

The petitioner was warned against interfering in government affairs in the name of community and wasting the valuable time of the court.

With little option, the petitioner withdrew the plea.

academic year as the standard. It may be recalled that the State Government had announced that it would soon affect transfers of teachers. State Education Minister Adimulapu Suresh had also announced that there the exercise would be taken up 'soon'

Nagender Reddy, counsel appearing on behalf of the BC community, asked the court to direct that the teacher transfer process be in line with the strength of students enrolled in various schools during the last academic year.

The judges however said

BJP backs single capital for AP, blames Jagan for all ills

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BJP sends signals to Pawan with meeting

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The party accused the YSRC of following the same corrupt practices of the previous TDP government because of which there was no industrial growth.

"The new industrial policy brought in by the present government has not attracted any industries but has resulted in job losses," it said.

Lakhs of construction workers were on the road without work due to the faulty policies of the Jaganmohan Reddy regime.

More than 3.50 lakh teachers of unaided private schools were languishing without wages because of the stand adopted by the government.

"We demand that the government pay Rs 10,000 each to the private teachers and pull them out of misery," the resolution said.

Non-implementation of

The BJP, after achieving phenomenal success in the recent GHMC elections, is now eyeing to repeat its performance in Andhra Pradesh as well in the Tirupati elections. The party is also organising a massive show — Shobha Yatra — in Tirupati town to make its presence felt in the temple town.

It may be recalled that Janasena Party chief Pawan Kalyan and PAC chairman N Manohar flew to Delhi to meet BJP senior leaders and later claimed that the trip was for discussing about Polavaram project and not Tirupati seat. Manohar kept silent while Pawan Kalyan was active in road shows and bike rallies and meeting the flood victims after their Delhi trip.

reservations for economically weaker sections among upper castes was depriving jobs and higher education opportunities to thousands of eligible youth. The government should open its eyes at least now and implement the 10 per cent EWS reservations, the BJP demanded.

Lashing out at the YSRC government for "hurting the

sentiments of Hindus," the BJP said it viewed the growing attacks on temples and Hindu religious institutions and forcible conversions seriously.

By depositing the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams funds in private banks, the Jaganmohan Reddy government was seeking to raise loans and also divert temple funds for other purposes.

Country fed up of your lollipops:...

Continued from Page 1

He said the farmers want pro-people governance not flowery speeches, and the people in the country want cheap ration.

The opposition party also cited a media report to claim that 11 farmers have died in the last 17 days while protesting the new agri laws, with former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi asking how many more sacrifices will the farmers have to make to get the legislations repealed.

At least five rounds of formal talks have taken place between the Centre and representatives of farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, protesting on various borders of the national capital for over two weeks, but the deadlock has continued with the unions sticking to their main demand for the repeal of the three contentious laws.

Reactor blasts in...

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The impact of the main blast could be felt over a kilometre, witnesses said.

Four fire engines were deployed to control the ensuing fire that almost engulfed the factory unit.

According to the police, the initial blast occurred at Block-I A of Reactor No. 104. Soon flames came from the reactor, with its top being blown off.

Sharat, employed in a private company which is located within one kilometre radius of the accident recalled site, told The Pioneer: "During our working hours, at around 1'o clock in the afternoon, we heard the first blast and within a span 10 minutes another blast occurred. Overall, we heard three blasts within half an hour from 1-1:30 PM. Due to the impact of the blast, glass windows here were shattered to pieces."

The intensity of the blast was such that tremors were felt five km from the place of its occurrence.

EC takes opinion of parties on expenditure limit

Continued from Page 1

The committee is likely to submit its report early next year to the poll panel.

Considering the difficulties candidates could face in campaigning amid Covid-19, based on the recommendations of the EC, the government had in October enhanced the existing expenditure limit by 10 per cent.

The 10 per cent hike was applicable in the Bihar Assembly polls and various bypolls.

The maximum limit for candidates differs from state to state. While it is more in larger states it is different for smaller states.

After the Law Ministry notification of October, in bigger states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar and Haryana, the maximum expenditure a candidate can incur for campaigning in Lok Sabha polls is now Rs 77 lakh. So far it was Rs 70 lakh.

For Assembly polls, it has been hiked from Rs 28 lakh to Rs 30.8 lakh.

For Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Telangana and Delhi, the expenditure limit for candidates for Lok Sabha polls is now Rs 77 lakh and for Assembly elections, it is Rs 30.8 lakh.

In Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, the new limit is Rs 77 lakh for Lok Sabha elections and Rs 22 lakh for Assembly polls.

For Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Sikkim, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep, Puducherry and Ladakh, it is Rs 59.4 lakh for Lok Sabha elections and Rs 22 lakh for Assembly polls.

Farmers backing new laws warn...

Continued from Page 1

This was the second group of farmers from Haryana that met Tomar and extended support to the farm laws. The first group had met the minister on December 7.

No breakthrough has been achieved during the six rounds of talks between the Centre and the agitating farmers so far, as the farmers have stuck to their demand for a repeal of the laws, despite the government sending them a draft proposal to amend specific issues without abolishing the legislations.

Farmers up the ante, to go on hunger...

Continued from Page 1

Without directly referring to the farmers' agitation, Modi said at the annual meeting of industry body FICCI here that agriculture reforms as part of government efforts are aimed at removing roadblocks, and the new laws will also bring in technology and investment in the sector.

During the press conference later in the day, farmer leader Pannu said that farmers from other parts of the country are also on their way to join the

protesters at camping at various borders of the national capital.

He said the police are putting up barricades to prevent the farmers from heading towards Delhi, but asserted that they will join the protest anyhow and take it to the next level in the coming days.

"If the government wants to hold talks, we are ready, but our main demand will remain the scrapping of the three laws. We will move onto our other demands only after that," Pannu said.

2 boys score 99%...

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The entrance exam was conducted for taking admissions into six-year integrated B.Tech programme and a few diploma programmes offered by Acharya NG Ranga University, Guntur, Sri Venkateswara Veterinary University, Tirupati and Dr YSR Horticultural University Venkataramannagudem for the academic year 2020-21.

The top five rankers in the boys category were — Gurram

Vamsikrishna from Guntur and Pothuganti Jakeer Hussain from YSR Kadapa, Inamala Sivasankarav Ara Yugandhar from Srikakulam, Y Rajesh from Kurnool and M Durga Sai Keerthi Teja from West Godavari.

In the girls category, the top five rankers are — T Shalini from West Godavari, P Mamatha from YSR Kadapa, M Varshitha from West Godavari, K Kalyani from Nellore and G Harshitha Sai Sri from Guntur.

103 kg gold in CBI custody...

Continued from Page 1

Normally, in such a case of missing property, the CBI immediately files an FIR with the local police but even after the case came to the notice of CBI Director R K Shukla in March this year, no FIR has been registered so far.

Senior IPS officer Shukla, with no prior experience in the CBI, was appointed as its chief

in February 2018. His two-year fixed tenure is coming to an end next February.

There was no response to an SMS seeking the response of the CBI Director on the matter. Justice PN Prakash had on Friday directed the CB-CID to conduct an inquiry by an officer in the rank of superintendent of police to be completed in six months, while rejecting the CBI's submission that

its prestige would "go down" if the investigation was carried out by the local police.

The matter relates to a petition filed by the liquidator of Surana Corporation Ltd, seeking a direction to CBI to handover the remaining 103.864 kg gold.

The yellow metal was kept in the safes and vaults of Surana Corporation Ltd under the CBI's lock and seal.

KCR meets Modi,...

Continued from Page 1

KCR had said that he would help develop an alternative political force against the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre.

The Telangana chief minister is in the national capital on a three-day official visit. He

has already met Home Minister Amit Shah, Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Aviation, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri.

He has plans to meet other central ministers, including Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, on Sunday.

Active cases drop to 5,000 level in AP

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

The number of active Covid-19 cases in Andhra Pradesh hovered just above the 5,000 level on Saturday, while 510 were added afresh and 665 patients recovered on Saturday.

The total positives reached 8,75,025 and recoveries 8,62,895, the latest government bulletin said.

In the 24 hours ending 9 am on Saturday, three more coronavirus victims died, taking the overall toll to 7,052.

All 13 districts reported less than 100 new Covid-19 cases each with Chittoor and Krishna topping with 89 and

82 respectively. Seven of the 13 districts added less than 25 fresh cases each to their tally.

For the first time in about six months, a district showed an active caseload of less than 100 with Vizianagaram having only 85 as on Saturday. In fact, Vizianagaram was the last district in the state to report coronavirus cases on May 7.

In the past few days, the district has been consistently reporting very few cases, sometimes less than 10 a day, and added only two deaths in the last 13 days.

In the last 24 hours, Guntur, Kadapa and Visakhapatnam districts reported one fatality each due to the disease.

ECoR carried 6.44 MT freight in December

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

East Coast Railway has carried 6.44 million tonne of freight in the first 10-days of this month registering 12.5 per cent increase compared to the corresponding period of 2019, an ECoR statement said.

In the first 10 days of December, 2019, ECoR had loaded 5.73 million tonne of freight, it said.

Up to December 10 in the current financial year, ECoR has carried 130.16 million tonne of freight including 72.99 million tonne of coal, 17.36 million tonne of iron ore, 11.08 million tonne of iron and steel and 4.87 million tonne of raw materials for steel plants.



The freight also included 4.63 million tonne of fertiliser, 1.98 million tonne of container, 1.76 million tonne of food grains, 1.74 million tonne of petroleum products and 13.75 million tonne of other commodities.

To achieve this loading during the first 10 days of this month, ECoR utilised 177 rakes per day as against 157.9 rakes during the corresponding period of last financial year.

Similarly, from April 1 up to December 10, 2020, ECoR has utilised about 142 rakes per day and aims to load more rakes to achieve the goal, it said.

During the period of April 1 to December 10 this year, ECoR has utilised 40.7 rakes per day in Talcher area, 19.2 rakes in Paradip area, 13.4 rakes in Dhamara area, 13.9 in Vizag area, 8.4 in Gangavaram area, 6.3 in Keonjhar Nayagarh area, 9.6 in KK Line, 14.3 in Steel Plants areas, 6.7 in Aluminium Plants areas and

9.8 rakes per day in other areas of its jurisdiction.

This was achieved despite lockdown and closure as well as reduced workforce in industries and in mineral units under ECoR jurisdiction. To achieve this remarkable performance, it utilised its manpower and rolling stock items with proper planning and coordination with government sectors and industries, the statement said.

Apart from this, the Business Development Units of ECoR integrate innovative policy making with stability and certainty in the logistics sectors by attracting new avenues for modal transit from rail to road, it said.

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Government revises rules to help 25,876 plot owners

CH PRADEEP
VIJAYAWADA

The state government has altered norms for regularising independent plots in unauthorised layouts in Andhra Pradesh. The government's decision would help around 25,876 plots owners to regularise their plots in unauthorised layouts. Many people had purchased plots in unauthorised layout in a hurry, but they are now facing troubles owing to legal hurdles.

The norm of mandatory regularisation of unauthorised layouts has posed a big hurdle to people who wanted to regularise their independent plots. The regularisation of independent plots in the unauthorised layouts would be possible only after regularisation of the entire layout. However, the government has decided to regularise independent plots directly by relaxing the rules. The government issued a circular relaxing the rules for regularisation.

Despite our continuous efforts, persuasion, monitoring and instructions issued time to time, unauthorised layouts keep cropping up, say government officials.

Out of a total of 10,630 identified unauthorised layouts, only 2,628 layouts in Urban Local Bodies (ULB) and Urban Development Authorities (UDA) have approval of the authorities concerned. Further, only 697 in principle patterns layouts were approved by the competent authorities.



Disposal of the in-principle patterns was not progressing as expected due to which the processing of regularising individual plots is getting delayed.

Director of town and country planning (DTCP) issued orders permitting ULBs and UDAs for processing individual LRS applications, irrespective of approval for the layouts.

According to reports, as many as 26,956 applications were received for regularising plots in 13 districts across the state, but only 628 were regularised and eleven were rejected. The remaining applications could not be processed as majority of plots were in unauthorised layouts.

applicants, while 263 applicants failed to submit required documents.

The plot owners regretted about purchasing plots in unauthorised layouts. They blame the developers and promoters for not complying with the government norms while developing the project.

Welcoming the government's decision which paved way for regularisation, they said that the move would provide them an opportunity to construct houses in their lands by availing bank loans.

State Town and Country Planning Department director V Ramudu stated that the government has relaxed rules to benefit those who were facing difficulties by purchasing lands in unauthorised layouts.

He, however, said that realtors were also required to regularise the entire layout and the government would initiate measures for regularisation of unauthorised layouts too.

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Notices were issued to 178

Detailed report on Eluru illness soon, says Nani

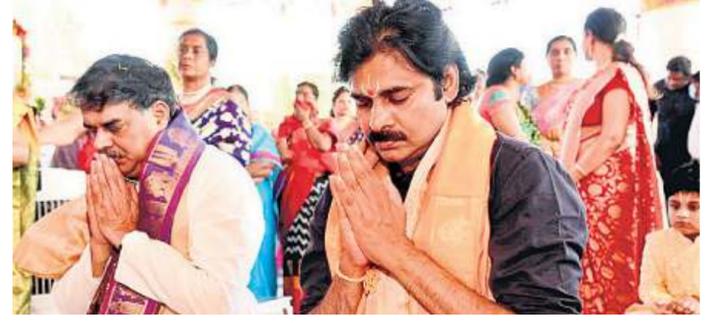
PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Health Minister Alla Nani on Saturday visited the victims who fell sick due to mysterious illness and recovered after treatment in Eluru. He directly went to the houses of the victims in Tangelamudi area in Two Town of Eluru and enquired about their health condition. After meeting the victims, Nani said the situation was now under control and people need not panic. He assured that the reasons for mysterious illness would be ascertained soon and promised of taking all measures to prevent occurrence of such incidents in future. He said that a detailed report on the mysterious illness would take another five days.

After obtaining the complete report on the illness, measures will be taken for a permanent solution for the illness.

At present, the situation is under complete control, said the minister and added that to find out the reason behind the mysterious illness, an investigation is on at the national level and the people need not panic about the present situation.

Two cases of illness have been reported in the Government hospital since Saturday morning. A total of 614 cases have been reported so far and 576 were discharged as health condition was stable, while 35 people were shifted to Vijayawada and Guntur Government Hospitals for better medical treatment.



Pawan delighted over visiting Dokiparru temple

(Top) Jana Sena Party chief Pawan Kalyan and JSP PAC chairman Nandendra Manohar offering prayers at Sri Bhusametha Venkateswara Swami Temple in Dokiparru in Krishna district on Saturday.

(Right) Pawan Kalyan, Nandendra Manohar interacting with Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL) founder PP Reddy at Dokiparru village in Krishna district on Saturday.



PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Jana Sena Party President Pawan Kalyan on Saturday expressed hope that the Sri Bhusametha Venkateswara Swami Temple in Dokiparru, which is flourishing as a spiritual centre in Krishna district, shall soon become famous in the state.

Pawan praised the temple authorities and priests for following vedic traditions and practices on the lines of Tirumala temple. The temple traditions and religious practices being followed here are heart-touching, he said.

On his visit to the temple, he was welcomed by Megha Engineering MD PV Krishna

Reddy and temple Trust Board Chairman Pitchi Reddy along with their family members.

JSP Political Affairs Committee (PAC) Chairman Nandendra Manohar accompanied the Jana Sena chief.

Speaking on the occasion, Pawan Kalyan said: "I had been planning to visit temple for the past two to three years. It gives me immense happiness to visit the temple at the time of Kalyanotsavam performed as part of Brahmothsavam. I thank industrialists Krishna Reddy and Pitchi Reddy for giving me the opportunity to participate on the auspicious occasion. I extend my heartfelt gratitude for them for inviting me to the tem-

ple. Not only the devotional activities, but the facilities provided in the village under CSR funds are laudable. Significantly, uninterrupted gas supply in the village is impressive and I wish these services will reach many other people in the future," he said.

Pawan Kalyan performed poojas at Anjaneya Swamy temple. He also visited other sub-temples - Sitarama, Vinayaka, Lakshminarasimha and Varahaswamy. He offered prayers to Sri Bhusametha Venkateswara Swamy after participating in the Kalyanotsavam. Later, temple priests presented prasadam and offered blessings to Pawan Kalyan.



TTD Chairman YV Subba Reddy takes part in Gudiko - Gomata scheme at Bala Tripurasundari Temple in Eluru on Saturday.

TTD's Gudiko-Gomata scheme to propagate Sanathana Dharma

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

To fulfill the vision of Andhra Pradesh chief minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy of propagating Sanathana Dharma, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam is contemplating to implement the Gudiko-Gomata programme across the country, said TTD chairman YV Subba Reddy.

Launching the unique Gudiko-Gomata programme at Bala Tripurasundari temple in Kakinada on Sunday, the TTD chairman said that worshipping a cow was equivalent to worshipping all Hindu gods.

He said the TTD was pre-

pared to present a pair of a cow and calf to all temples, mutts and veda pathshalas in the country to propagate cow worship, if those institutions came forward by promising their protection and caretaking.

He said the TTD will initially launch the programme in all southern states and later scale it up nationally.

Subba Reddy said that the TTD has decided to build 500 temples in the colonies of SC/ST/BC and fishermen across AP and Telangana states under the aegis of the HDPP. Besides, seeking spiritual interference against pandemic Covid-19, TTD has launched several spiritual programmes.

He said that after consulting 26 pontiffs and Agama sashtira experts, TTD has decided to provide Vaikunta Dwara Darshan to devotees for 10 days from December 25 to January 3. But the devotees have to book their tickets online, if not they can get advance tickets at Tirupati.

He said the TTD IT department had resolved technical snags which had occurred due to devotees logging at once for Vaikunta Ekadasi Darshan tickets.

He further said the TTD will reopen the TTD information centres to provide darshan tickets easily to devotees, once the situation returns to normalcy.

After consulting 26 pontiffs and Agama sashtira experts, TTD has decided to provide Vaikunta Dwara Darshan to devotees for 10 days from December 25. However, devotees have to book their tickets online, if not they can get advance tickets at Tirupati, says TTD chairman

Naidu shoots off another letter to DGP, seeks justice for 'YSRCP attack victims'

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

Alleging that the ruling YSRCP leaders attacked TDP leaders in Thamballapalle Assembly constituency of Chittoor district, TDP chief and leader of the Opposition N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday wrote a letter to DGP Gautham D Sawang seeking justice for the victims. "TDP leaders are being murdered, harassed and there is total turmoil in the state. It is big threat to the democ-

racy," he also alleged. Naidu, in his letter, stated that it appeared that mafia and corrupt forces have taken over the state. He alleged that most unfortunately, a section of police seems to be actively conniving with the ruling party leaders in implementing law and order as per the dictates of the ruling party henchmen.

Naidu said that TD leaders Nallari Kishore Kumar Reddy, Reddappagari Srinivasula Reddy, Gullolla

Sankar Yadav, Dommalapati Ramesh, Challa Ramachandra Reddy, and Maddipatla Surya Prakash and others were on their way to B. Kothakota mandal in Thamballapalle constituency to console the family members of party leaders who has passed away recently. Meanwhile, the leaders were halted and surrounded by around 200 henchmen of the YSRCP at Angallu. TDP leaders rightfully and peacefully protested to seek justice at the same spot.

Naidu alleged that DSP Madhusudanachari announced the imposition of Section 144 on the spot following which, the protesting TDP leaders were arrested forcefully instead of arresting the attackers who belonged to the ruling party. He lamented that similar incidents registered in the recent past in other parts of the state and sought the DGP to take measures for the implementation of rule of law.

JAC plans one-week protest for Amaravati

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA



The Amaravati Parirakshana Samithi JAC (APSJAC) is planning to organise various protests for one week to mark the completion of one year of Amaravati movement demanding that Amaravati be continued as the state capital. Farmers, women, leaders and activists of several political parties participated in the Maha Padayatra (mega walkathon) organised from Vidyanagar to Ambedkar statue at Lodge Centre in Guntur on Saturday. CPI national secretary K Narayana joined the walkathon and demanded that there should be only one capital for the state and that it should be continued in Amaravati only.

He demanded that the Central government should provide funds for the construction of new capital.

Recalling that Vice-president Muppavarapu Venkaiah Naidu played a crucial role during

state bifurcation, he urged Naidu to convince the Central government for releasing funds for capital construction and cancel the three-capital plan.

Stating that Ravanapura and Dhuryodhana perished as they made women cry, he hoped that the YSRCP government would also meet similar fate in the coming days.

Guntur MP Galla Jayadev claimed that capital issue is in the jurisdiction of the Central government and stressed the need to discuss the issue in Parliament.

APSJAC leader Gadde Tirupathi Rao commented that Chief Minister YS Jaganmohan Reddy was not in a position to provide sand for the construction, hence he cannot build three capitals.

He said that they remained silent on Amaravati due to the Covid pandemic and announced that APSJAC would intensify agitation for Amaravati as normal conditions were returning.

Prostitution racket busted in Hyd

PNS ■ HYDERABAD

The Special Operations Team of the Rachakonda police on Saturday arrested a 23-year-old person for organising prostitution under the pretext of body massage on Saturday. The police officials also rescued two women.

On credible information, the sleuths of Special Operations Team, Malkajgiri Zone conducted decoy operation by laying a trap at Radhika Theatre under the limits of Kushaiguda Police Station and apprehended the accused identified as Vadya Ramesh, 23, of Raghavendra Nagar in Borabanda and a



native of Nalgonda district. "Ramesh uploaded pictures of young girls on social networking sites and when cus-

tomers contacted started sending the girls to their place for prostitution. At times he used to take them along with him," said the Rachakonda police.

The trafficker procured the young girls by contacting his sources. Ramesh had brought two women from Rajahmundry and forced them into the prostitution. The accused person was handed over to the Kushaiguda police station Station House Officer for further investigation.

The officials also seized Rs 470 cash, a mobile phone and a two-wheeler from the accused.

Jagan's negligence caused Eluru tragedy, says Nimmala

PNS ■ VIJAYAWADA

TDP legislator Nimmala Rama Naidu on Saturday said that Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's negligence was reason behind the Eluru tragedy. He found fault with the government for the manner in which it had dealt with the victims of Eluru mysterious disease and termed it totally unscientific.

He fumed that the YSRCP government was focusing on

filling cases against the opposition leaders and levying heavy taxes on the people, instead of improving the healthcare facilities in the state.

Interacting with the reporters via Zoom app from his residence, Rama Naidu lamented that the government had miserably failed in finding the cause of mysterious disease in Eluru.

Up to 150 people were admitted in hospitals on December 5 and the response came from the Chief Minister only after TDP MLC Nara Lokesh visited Eluru the next day on December 6, he recalled.

He also criticised the Chief Minister for meeting the victims in Eluru while he was on his way to attend a wedding ceremony on Dec 6.

He said that about 600 people fell sick after drinking water from Pumpula cheruvu in Eluru, but the government

could not ascertain the causes for the mysterious disease even after several days.

Rama Naidu found fault with the state government for pressing general physicians into service to treat the victims and suggested that the victims should be treated by urologists.

The government had failed in taking immediate steps like setting up special teams, helplines, control rooms, carrying out sanitation operations and collecting blood samples on a war footing.

He fumed at the state government for not taking any measures to prevent the contamination of water with Covid waste in the Krishna canal.

He asked why the government was not disclosing the tests conducted

by organisations like IICT and AAIMS. Until now, the government has not been able to identify the causes for Eluru tragedy, set up mobile mineral water centres and provide clean drinking water to the people. On behalf of the TDP, Rama Naidu demanded that necessary precautions should be taken to prevent the occurrence of similar tragedies in the state.

He suggested that the officials of health, municipal and other departments should work in coordination with each other to improve the health standards of the people in the state.

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Farmers picket toll plazas in Haryana

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Intensifying their protest against the Centre's new agri laws, farmers took over some toll plazas in Haryana on Saturday, not allowing authorities to collect fees from commuters.

The agitating farmers had earlier said they would picket toll plazas to press their demand for a repeal of the three new laws, which were voted through in Parliament in September amid strong protests by opposition parties.

More than 100 farmers led by Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leaders Malkit Singh and Manish Chaudhry gathered at a toll plaza on the Ambala-Hisar highway, around 15 kilometers from Ambala city.

The BKU activists raised slogans demanding the withdrawal of the farm laws.

The toll plaza employees allowed vehicles to pass through without paying any charge.

A large number of police

personnel were deployed at the toll plaza to maintain law and order.

Farmers also did not allow the collection of fees from commuters at Bastara and Peont toll plazas in Karnal.

While the Bastara toll plaza is located on NH-44, the Peont toll plaza is located on the Karnal-Jind highway.



How many sacrifices will farmers have to make to get agri laws repealed, asks Rahul

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday cited a media report to claim that 11 farmers had died in the last 17 days while protesting against the new agri laws, with former party chief Rahul Gandhi asking how many more sacrifices will farmers have to make to get the legislations repealed. At least five rounds of formal talks have taken place between the Centre and representatives of farmers, mainly from Punjab and Haryana, protesting on various borders of New Delhi for

over two weeks, but the deadlock has continued with the unions sticking to their main demand for the repeal of the three contentious laws. "How many more sacrifices will the farmers have to make to get the agri laws repealed?" he asked in a tweet in Hindi, tagging a media report which claimed that 11 protesting farmers had lost their lives in the last 17 days due to various reasons such as ill health or a mishap. Congress' chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said that despite the 'martyrdom' of 11 farmer brothers in the last 17

In Punjab, toll charges are not being collected from commuters as farmers have been staging sit-ins at toll plazas since October 1.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is suffering a loss of Rs 3 crore per day on account of farmers' protest at toll plazas in the state. There are 25 toll plazas on

national highways in Punjab. The three farm laws are anticipated to bring "reforms" in the agriculture sector by removing middlemen and allowing farmers to sell their produce anywhere in the country.

Farmers worry these laws will eliminate the safety net of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and do away with mandis that ensure earning. But the government says the MSP system will continue and the new laws will give farmers more options to sell their crop.

Farmers from different parts of the country, including Haryana and Punjab, have been camping at various border points of Delhi for two weeks to demand a repeal of these laws.

They have rejected a government offer to amend the farm laws and give a "written assurance" on continuing the MSP system. They have also threatened to block railway tracks across the country and all highways leading to Delhi if their demand is not met.

Can't coerce family planning, Centre tells Supreme Court

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has told the Supreme Court that India is unequivocally against forcing family planning on its people and any coercion to have a certain number of children is counter-productive and leads to demographic distortions.

In an affidavit filed in the top court, the health ministry told the apex court that the family welfare programme in the country is voluntary in nature, which enables couples to decide the size of their family and adopt family planning methods best suited to them, according to their choice and without any compulsion.

The submission was made in response to a PIL filed by BJP leader and lawyer Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay challenging a Delhi High Court order that dismissed a plea seeking certain steps, including two-child norm, to control the country's growing population.



The ministry said that 'public health' is a state subject and the state governments must lead the process of health sector reforms in a suitable and sustainable manner to protect the common people from health hazards.

"Improvement in the health sector can be effectively led by the state government with effective monitoring and specific intervention to control and regulate the implementation process of the guidelines and schemes in a proper perspective," it said.

"The answering respondent no. (ministry) plays a sup-

portive and facilitative role in achieving the health care reforms and outcomes. It is reiterated that the answering respondent no. 1 merely acts as a facilitator for providing accessible and affordable health care through state-led reforms in the health sector," it said.

The ministry said that as far as implementation of the guidelines and schemes in the states is concerned, it does not have any direct role and it is the prerogative of the respective state governments to implement the schemes as per the prescribed guidelines.

The ministry only allocates funds to state governments for implementation of the approved schemes, it added.

The Ministry of Health And Family Welfare told the top court that India has adopted a comprehensive and holistic National Population Policy, 2000, with clearly articulated objectives, strategic themes and operational strategies.

SHORT TAKES

French police hold small but bold protest near Eiffel Tower



It was a small protest, but bold. About 50 police officers gathered with their vehicles Friday at a spot overlooking the Eiffel Tower and blared their sirens to protest President Emmanuel Macron saying it is "unbearable" that people of color are more likely to be stopped by law enforcement than white people. Two unions threatened to stop carrying out identity checks after Macron's remarks a week ago in an interview with the online outlet Brut, meant to capture the youth audience. "We just want to say to the president and politicians that we are neither racist nor violent," one officer said, adding that they are just police officers keeping the peace. He said unions were not part of the protest, "which risks growing if they don't listen to us." Police officers in France have no right to strike or protest so the small but noisy gathering was symbolically significant.

Bollywood actress Arya Banerjee found dead in Kolkata apartment



Kolkata: Actress Arya Banerjee who starred in several Bollywood films, including 'The Dirty Picture', was found dead at her south Kolkata residence, police said. The police broke open the door of her third-floor apartment on Friday and found that the body of the 33-year-old woman was lying in the bedroom. The daughter of late singer Nikhil Bandyopadhyay,

Arya had also starred in 'LSD: Love Sex Aur Dhokha' (2010) among other films. She had also done some modelling assignments in Mumbai. Her domestic help got suspicious as she did not respond to doorbells and phone calls in the morning and informed the neighbours who called the police. Arya lived alone and kept to herself mostly, the domestic help said. Police said that the body was sent for post-mortem examination and a forensic team collected samples from her room.

36 fishermen arrested, five trawlers seized for fishing in Odisha's Gahirmatha



Thirty-six fishermen were arrested for unlawful fishing activity in the turtle concentration zones of Odisha's Gahirmatha marine sanctuary in the Kendrapara district, officials said on Saturday. Five fishing trawlers were also seized as these are banned in the area, they said.

Those arrested are traditional marine fishermen from Balasore, Kendrapara and Jagatsinghpur districts. The fishing vessels had trespassed into the prohibited sanctuary corridors, contravening the provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, Orissa Marine Fishing Regulation Act and other rules, forest officials said. With the latest interception, 76 fishermen have so far been arrested to ensure the safety of olive ridley sea turtles, they said. Twelve vessels were also seized since November 1. The operation to stop unlawful trawling to ensure the safety of olive ridley turtles is being jointly conducted by the coast guard, forest department, police and fisheries department after the marine animals began their annual breeding season in November, said Bikash Chandra Dash, the divisional forest officer of Rajnagar. A seven-month trawler fishing ban has been imposed along the 20 km stretch of Dhamara-Devi river from November 1 in view of the mass nesting of the endangered turtles. The fishing prohibition remains enforced round the year in Gahirmatha as it is accorded the status of the marine sanctuary.

Using Transport corporation employees' stir enters third day



The employees of the state owned transport corporations continued their strike for the third consecutive day on Saturday, leaving commuters stranded across the state. Employees of the Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation, Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation, North West Karnataka Road Transport Corporation and North Eastern Karnataka Road Transport Corporation have been on strike since Thursday demanding salaries on par with state government staff among others. Very few buses of the BMTC and the state transport corporations operated as the transport employees did not join duty and staged protests across the state at important bus terminus in the district and Taluk headquarters. A KSRTC officer said 87 buses operated in Mangaluru, three in Shivamogga, two in Davangere and one in Chitradurga till 8 am. In other divisions, zero buses operated including Bengaluru. The BMTC public relation officer said 94 city buses operated against the strength of over 6,500 buses. Though the protests were peaceful, sporadic incidents of stone pelting on buses ferrying passengers were reported.

Chemical weapons watchdog flays Syria

PNS ■ UNITED NATIONS

The global chemical weapons watchdog criticised Syria for failing to declare a chemical weapons production facility and respond to 18 other issues, while Russia accused the watchdog of conducting a "political crusade" against its close ally, the Syrian government.

The clash Friday came at the UN Security Council's monthly meeting on Syria's chemical weapons, where the director-general of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Fernando Arias, briefed members for the first time since May and was pummeled with questions from Russia's UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia.

Arias said seven years after Syria joined the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, its initial chemical declaration has unresolved "gaps, inconsistencies, and discrepancies" and "still cannot be considered accurate and complete."

He told the virtual meeting that one of the 19 outstanding issues is a chemical weapons production facility that President Bashar Assad's government said was never used to



produce weapons, but where the OPCW gathered material and samples indicating "that production and/or weaponisation of chemical warfare nerve agents took place."

Arias said the OPCW had requested Syria to declare the exact types and quantities of chemical agents at the site, but got no response.

Britain's new UN ambassador, Barbara Woodward, said another unresolved issue in Syria's declaration is the thousands of munitions and hundreds of tons of chemical agents that Syria has not accounted for.

A joint UN-OPCW investigative mechanism accused

Syria of using chlorine and the nerve agent sarin during its civil war, while the Islamic State group was accused of using mustard gas twice in 2015 and 2016.

In April this year, an OPCW investigation blamed the Syrian air force for a series of chemical attacks using sarin and chlorine in late March 2017 on the central town of Latamneh. Arias said in late October that Syria failed to meet a 90-day deadline set in July to declare the weapons used in the attacks on Latamneh and to disclose its chemical stocks.

France, backed by over 40 countries, has proposed that the OPCW suspend Syria's

7 European nations backed action against Syria for the attacks on Latamneh and avowed their support for efforts to collect evidence of violations of human rights, international humanitarian law and abuses with a view to future legal action.

"rights and privileges," which would include its voting rights in the OPCW, for failing to meet the July deadline.

Nebenzia accused the OPCW of backing Western nations who tried "in vain" to topple Assad's government with the help of opposition groups. "And they maintain this anti-Syrian narrative despite all the discrepancies or counter evidence presented by Syria, Russia and independent experts and exploit these allegations in their crusade against Assad government," he said.

Sivagiri to host virtual pilgrimage due to Covid

PNS ■ VARKALA (KERALA)

The annual Sivagiri pilgrimage at Sivagiri mutt here in Kerala, observed annually in memory of social reformer and sage, Sree Narayana Guru, will be virtual this time in view of the COVID-19 pandemic. With less than 1000 pilgrims daily, online speeches and classes by dignitaries and no usual mass meetings and programmes, the 88th edition of the pilgrimage would be celebrated fully in adherence with the COVID protocols and guidelines.

Mutt management sources here said preparations already began for the three-day pilgrimage. "This time, the pilgrimage will be in compliance with the strict COVID protocols. It will be held on December 30, 31 and January 1 as virtual pilgrimage," they said. To avoid heavy rush, only less than a thousand pilgrims would be allowed to enter Sivagiri daily, Mutt officials said in a meeting, chaired by additional district magistrate V R Vinod at the Collectorate, on Friday.

The meeting, attended by Sree Narayana Dharma Sangam Trust general secretary Swamy Sandrananda and district police chief, B Ashokan among others, was held to take a stock of the preparations of the annual event.

The Mutt is the headquarters of the Sree Narayana Dharma Sangham, an organisation established by the Guru to propagate his doctrine 'One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man'.

Located over 50 kms from the Kerala capital, the Mutt used to attract thousands of pilgrims annually during the time of the pilgrimage.

Congress averts shutdown, buys time for more Covid-19 talks

PNS ■ WASHINGTON

Congress sent a temporary government-wide funding bill to President Donald Trump on Friday that would avert a federal Shutdown at midnight and buy time for on-again, off-again talks on COVID-19 aid.

The bill sets a new deadline of midnight next Friday. The short-term measure passed the Senate by a unanimous voice vote without much drama and sent senators home for the weekend without a clear picture of what awaits next week. The House passed the bill Wednesday. Trump was expected to sign it before midnight.

The talks are stalled but there is universal agreement that Congress won't adjourn for the year without passing a

long-delayed round of pandemic relief. An emerging \$900 billion aid package from a bipartisan group of lawmakers hit a rough patch after Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., swung against the effort. Still, negotiations are ongoing and pressure remains intense.

The House has recessed for a few days, with leaders warning members to be prepared to return to Washington to vote on the year-end deals.

Negotiators on a separate \$1.4 trillion omnibus spending bill appeared to be moving in a positive direction, said the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala. This bill would serve as a vehicle to carry any year-end virus assistance.

'Gear up to safeguard nation against external, internal threats'

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Vice Chief of the Army Staff Lt Gen S K Saini on Saturday asked cadets passing out of the Indian Military Academy here to be prepared to rise to challenging situations where they will be repeatedly called upon to safeguard the country's territorial integrity against external and internal threats. He also asked the cadets to keep abreast with technological changes which are perennially on the fast track.

Progress in warfare and technology should go hand in hand, Lt Gen Saini said while addressing them as the reviewing officer of the passing out parade. "It is just the beginning. I see uncertainty, competition and confrontation on the horizon.



You may face situations where you will be repeatedly called upon to safeguard the country's territorial integrity and sovereignty against external and internal threats," he said.

He said that "amid weapon proliferation, non-state actors peddling conflict and expansionist global ideology, we have to strive hard to keep the peace and uphold the rule of law". "I am confident that you will rise to the challenge," he said.

He asked cadets to become knowledge warriors, fully

equipped with digital tools, but remember that the man behind the gun retains his prime importance.

Lt Gen Saini said the high standards of training received at the IMA has equipped them to be effective leaders of men but underlined the importance of character in the profession. "Once a poor character is exposed to the troops there is no second chance to correct," he said and asked them not to give in to vices like anger, arrogance and jealousy.

The Lt General said that the passing out cadets had become members of the world's finest army and they had to uphold its reputation by dedicating themselves to protecting the country's honour with a deep sense of commitment.

Italy's Covid toll poses uncomfortable questions

PNS ■ ROME

Italy could soon reclaim a record that nobody wants — the most coronavirus deaths in Europe — after the health care system again failed to protect the elderly and the government delayed imposing new restrictions.

This wasn't supposed to happen. Italy was the first country in the West to be slammed by COVID-19 and, after suffering a huge wave of death in spring, brought infections under control.

Italy then had the benefit of time and experience heading into the fall resurgence because it trailed Spain, France and Germany in recording big new clusters of infections. Yet the virus spread fast and wide, and Italy has added 28,000 dead since Sept. 1.

"Obviously there needs to be some reflection," Guido Rasi, former executive director of the European Pharmaceutical



Italy was the first country in the West to be slammed by Covid-19 and after suffering a huge wave of death in spring, brought infections under control.

Agency, told state TV after Italy reported a pandemic-high record of 993 deaths in one day. "This number of nearly 1,000

dead in 24 hours is much higher than the European average." Italy added another 761 victims Friday, bringing its official total

to 63,387, just shy of Britain's Europe-leading 63,603 dead, according to Johns Hopkins University. Both numbers are believed to greatly underestimate the real toll, due to missed infections, limited testing and different counting criteria.

Still, Italy could overtake Britain despite having 6 million people fewer than the U.K.'s 66 million, and would trail only the much larger U.S., Brazil, India and Mexico. Italy has the world's second-oldest population after Japan, and the elderly are the most vulnerable to the virus.

The average age of Italian victims has hovered around 80. In addition, 65% of Italy's COVID-19 dead had three or more other health problems before they tested positive, such as hypertension or diabetes, according to Italy's Superior Institute of Health.

But that doesn't explain the

whole picture. Germany has a similarly old demographic and yet its death toll is one-third of Italy's despite its larger population of 83 million. Germany recorded its highest daily number of coronavirus victims Friday — 598 — but has only 21,000 dead overall.

Analysts point to Germany's long-term higher per-capita spending on health care, which has resulted in greater ICU capacity, better testing and tracing capabilities and higher ratios of doctors and nurses to the population. But Germany also imposed an earlier, lighter lockdown this fall and is now poised to tighten it.

"If you can act sooner, even a bit lighter in the measures, they work better than acting harshly a bit later or too late," said Matteo Villa, research fellow at the Institute for International Political Studies, a Milan-based think tank.

Committed to welfare of ryots: Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As farmers vowed to expand their protests over new farm laws, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday assured them that his government was committed to their welfare and that the legislations were aimed at giving them alternate markets to boost income.

Without directly referring to the farmers' agitation, which entered the 17th day on Saturday, Modi said agriculture reforms as part of government efforts are aimed at removing roadblocks, and the new laws will also bring in technology and investment in the sector.

The government, he said, is committed to protecting the interest and welfare of farmers through its policies and actions.

"Reforms will help draw investment in the agriculture sector and benefit farmers," he said at the annual meeting of industry body FICCI here. "The aim of all government reforms is to make farmers prosperous."

The new legislations, which were approved in the previous Parliament session, give farmers an additional option outside of the designated mandis to buy or sell their crops, he said. "Farmers have now options to sell their crops in mandis as well as to outside parties," he said. "While mandis are being modernised, digital platform is also available to farmers to buy and sell their produce." These efforts are aimed at raising incomes of farmers, he said. "All these efforts are directed towards



Recovery faster than expected, says PM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that recovery is faster than expected and economic indicators are encouraging. Addressing the FICCI Annual Convention, he said India prioritised saving lives during the COVID-19 pandemic and the

government's policies and actions were oriented towards that. The Prime Minister further said that India has been through ups and downs in 2020 but things have improved fast. There is a road map for recovery, he added. With regard to foreign capital inflows, he said India has

seen record FDI and foreign portfolio investments during the pandemic. Modi said recent farm reforms will give farmers new markets and access to technology, and help bring investments in the agriculture sector that will benefit the farming community.

improving the farmers' income so that they become prosperous. When farmers prosper, the country will prosper."

Hundreds of farmers from states like Punjab and Haryana have blocked some of the highways leading to Delhi borders

for more than two weeks now against the new farm laws which they fear will prompt the government to stop making direct crop purchases at minimum state-set prices, called minimum support price (MSP). They have vowed to

expand their protests across the country until the government scraps the new farm laws.

The government has so far refused to heed to their demand but has promised to continue the MSP-based procurement.

Security at Delhi borders tightened

New Delhi: The Delhi Police on Saturday increased deployment of personnel and placed more concrete barriers at various border points as farmers have announced that they will intensify their protest against the Centre's new agri laws, with plans to block the Delhi-Jaipur highway and the Yamuna Expressway. There is no protest yet on Delhi's borders with Gurgaon and at other points of National Highway-8 that connects the national capital with Jaipur, a senior police officer said. "So far, there is no protest at Delhi-Gurgaon border. There is no disruption in traffic movement. However, we have proper security arrangements in place to deal with any situation," the officer said. Talking to Twitter, social activist Yogendra Yadav, who is part of the ongoing protests, said farmers from areas in Rajasthan and Haryana are assembling on Saturday and their 'Delhi Chalo' march would begin on Sunday. "Farmers' 'Delhi march' on Jaipur-Delhi highway will not start today and it will begin from Shahjahanpur border tomorrow. Today, farmers

from Rajasthan and Haryana will congregate in Kotputli and Behror," Yadav tweeted in Hindi. The increase in security arrangement comes amid thousands of farmers protesting at various areas on Delhi's borders for the last 16 days and demanding that the legislations be withdrawn. The police have made adequate arrangements and these include multi-layered barricading and deployment of personnel. Measures have also been taken to ensure commuters do not face inconvenience at places where protest are being staged, another senior police officer said. The Delhi Traffic Police has deployed its personnel across important border points to ensure commuters do not face difficulties and is constantly updating people about open and closed routes on its Twitter handle. The developments come after farmer leaders on Wednesday rejected a government proposal to amend the new agri laws and announced they would intensify their agitation by blocking the Jaipur-Delhi and the Yamuna expressway by Saturday.



INDIA CORNER

Workers go on rampage at iPhone manufacturing plant in Karnataka

The workers of Taiwan headquartered Wistron Corporation, which manufactures iPhone near here went on a rampage on Saturday in the facility over issues related to 'salary', police said. Quoting preliminary inputs, police said employees at the facility in the Narasapura Industrial Area of Kolar district, about 51 kilometers from here, rampaged through the plant premises overturning cars and damaging furniture besides other things. A police officer told PTI that workers pelted stones, smashed glass windows, damaged vehicles, furniture, computers and laptops in connection with 'salary related issues.'



Col Prithipal Singh Gill turns 100

Colonel Prithipal Singh Gill (retired), a World War 2 veteran who holds the unique distinction of having served in all three defence services, turned 100 with wishes pouring in from several quarters. During his service with the Indian Army, Colonel Gill was posted with 34 Medium Regiment and later went on to raise and command the 71 Medium Regiment. The 71 Medium Regiment sent an officer from Rajouri in Jammu and Kashmir to Gill's residence here with a cake, a trophy, track-suit and a T-shirt to celebrate his birthday on Friday. He was also the commanding officer of the Regiment during the 1965 Indo-Pak war. Gill has the distinction of serving in the Royal Indian Air Force, Royal Indian Navy and the Indian Army in a career spanning nearly three decades, his daughter-in-law Harpreet Kaur told PTI over phone on Saturday.



HC quashes I-Tax proceedings against Karti Chidambaram & his wife

The Madras High Court has quashed the Income Tax proceedings initiated against Karti Chidambaram, son of former Union Finance Minister P Chidambaram, and his wife over alleged non-disclosure of cash transactions of about Rs seven crore following sale of a property near here. The Court, while ruling that the action is "not maintainable and premature", clarified that proceedings may be initiated again if the authority concerned deemed the same is required after proper assessment. The prosecution case was that Karti, the Congress Member of Parliament, representing Sivaganga, and his wife Srinidhi received Rs 6.38 crore and Rs 1.35 crore in cash respectively, through sale of a land owned by them near Muttukadu. However, they had neither disclosed the same in their assessment nor paid taxes for the income. Hence, the I-T department initiated criminal prosecution for alleged non-disclosure of income by them to the tune of Rs 7.73 crore for 2015-16 fiscal.



Not accountable to HM, says TMC

PNS ■ KOLKATA

Senior Trinamool Congress lawmaker Kalyan Banerjee wrote to Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Saturday, saying that West Bengal's chief secretary and director-general of police were summoned to Delhi over the attack on BJP chief JP Nadda's convoy with "political motive", asserting that law and order is a state subject.

Banerjee, the chief whip of the Trinamool Congress in Lok Sabha, alleged that the Centre was resorting to coercive means to intimidate the state administration, and the top officials were summoned at the instance of the Union Home Minister.

"We want to inform you that law and order is within the domain of the state under 7th Schedule of the State list...How in respect of the law and order situation you can call both the officers for any sorts of discus-



sion?" he asked. "It appears that with a political motive and at the instance of your minister, who is a political person belonging to Bharatiya Janata Party, you have issued the said letter.

You are trying to coerce the officers of West Bengal with political vindictiveness. It appears you are interfering with the federal structure," Banerjee added.

He also claimed that a person, who is a convict in a case and named in 59 other criminal cases, was in the convoy of Nadda on December 10 and "made provocative gestures" to the TMC supporters standing on the roadside.

He said that in respect of law and order, the state government is accountable to the legislative assembly "but not to you or to your home minister"

Will hand over matter to MHA: NCW

PNS ■ KOLKATA

The National Commission for Women will submit details of over 260 complaints from West Bengal to the Ministry of Home Affairs for further action if the state administration fails to respond to them within 15 days, its chairperson Rekha Sharma said on Saturday. Sharma was on a two-day visit to the state to inquire into "inaction" on 267 complaints. "The worrisome situation in West Bengal is police don't reply, and no action has been taken on the complaints. Neither the director general of police nor the chief secretary meets me, and this not the first time. They send their subordinates who are clueless about everything," she said. "In the last eight months, there have been more than 260 complaints, and no report has been sent to us," Sharma added. She said that she will write to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, and if the omission doesn't get any response on the complaints within the next 15 days, the matter will be forwarded to the home ministry.

BJP leaders protest against Kerjriwal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP leaders and workers staged protests against the Kejriwal government across the city on Saturday, demanding payment of funds due of the party-ruled municipal corporations.

Participating in the protest in the Burari Assembly constituency, Delhi BJP president Adesh Gupta said the party will not pull back till Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal "gives dues of Rs 13,000 crore to the three civic bodies".

Ghanshyam Tiwari returns to BJP

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Senior Rajasthan leader Ghanshyam Tiwari joined the BJP on Saturday, two years after he quit the party due to growing differences with the state and central leadership.

He joined the BJP at an event held at the party headquarters here. State party president Satish Poonia was also present at the event.

"After a long time, I am getting a chance to speak from this platform. I thank the party leadership which considered my letter to join the party," Tiwari told reporters.

He said he is completely committed to the BJP's ideology and though he had shared the stage with the Congress once, he never accepted its membership.

Before resigning from the BJP in June 2018, Tiwari had been at loggerheads with the then chief minister Vasundhara Raje-led state dispensation over a number of issues including farmers' plight and corruption.

Rajinikanth turns 70, supporters throng his residence

PNS ■ CHENNAI

Superstar Rajinikanth turned 70 on Saturday and his fans thronged his residence here to celebrate while Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a host of leaders extended their wishes.

Many supporters and fans who gathered outside his home, wore T-shirts with brightly embossed image of the actor and his political catchphrases like 'Ippo Illaina Eppovum Illai' (Now or never) as they appeared swept by political fervour with their favourite star's recent announcement of party launch.

On December 3, Rajinikanth announced launch of his political party in January 2021 ending years of suspense and speculation on his political entry. Assembly elections are due in Tamil Nadu in April-May next year.

The jubilant fans cut a cake shouting 'Thalaiva Vaazhga' (Leader live long) and they distributed sweets to the people in many places.

Several fans, including



women who arrived at his home since early morning to wish him personally were disappointed when they were told that Rajinikanth was not available and his absence was confirmed by his public relations team.

Many supporters offered prayers at places of worship and some brought 'prasad' from temples to the actor's home.

"Aatchi Matram, Arasiyav Matram Ippo Illaina Eppovum Illai," (Political/regime change, now or never) and "Thalaivarum Mudalvarum

Neeve' (You are our leader and chief minister) were among the slogans found printed on the shirts of the actor's supporters. The fans stuck wall posters as well hailing him in many parts of the city and in the vicinity of his residence in the upscale Poes Garden area.

On his twitter handle, Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted the actor. "Dear @rajinikanth ji, wishing you a Happy Birthday! May you lead a long and healthy life." Chief Minister K Palaniswami tweeted wishing the actor a long and healthy life.

5-year IT target achieved in 3 yrs: UP Dy CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Government on Saturday said it has achieved a five-year target of attracting Rs 20,000 crore investment and providing three lakh jobs in Information Technology sector in three years only.

UP Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma, who also holds the IT portfolio, said many reputed companies from China, Taiwan and Korea are keen to set up their manufacturing units in state's Electronics Manufacturing Cluster, being developed in 100 acre land in Greater Noida.

"Following the implementation of the UP Electronics Manufacturing Policy-2017, a target of securing Rs 20,000 crore investment and generating three lakh jobs in the IT sector in five years by 2022.

"I am happy to announce that our government has achieved this target in three years only," said Sharma.

Remain firm on ideology: Pawar

PNS ■ MUMBAI

NCP president Sharad Pawar on Saturday said political workers should never compromise on ideology. Speaking at a party function organised to mark his 80th birthday here, the veteran politician said that cre-

ating a new generation of political workers and leaders will help strengthen the state and the country in future.

"It is important for political workers to be firm on their ideology. The progressive ideology of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, B R Ambedkar and Chatrapati

Shahu Maharaj needs to be inculcated among the new breed of political workers," the NCP chief said. Observing that ideology is the philosophy of life, the former Union minister underlined the need to be alert and to be aware while doing social work.

Newly-wed couple shot at in Rajasthan

PNS ■ JAIPUR

A newly-wed couple was shot at in Rajasthan's Sikar district on Saturday allegedly by three bike-borne men, one of them suspected to be the wife's jilted lover, police said.

The incident took place in Neem Ka Thana police station area when the couple was returning to their home from Hemrajpura village after tying the knot, they said.

The three motorcycle-borne accused pursued the car, stopped it, and opened fire on



the bride and the groom and fled away. The groom suffered a bullet injury near the ear while the bride was shot in the face, police said. Neem Ka Thana Sadar Station House Officer (SHO) Manish Kumar said two accused were arrested after a brief firefight with police, while the third one fled the spot.

Active Covid caseload continues to decline

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's total COVID-19 active caseload has dropped to below 3.6 lakh (3,59,819), and comprises just 3.66 per cent of the total coronavirus infections, the Union health ministry said on Saturday.

In a statement, the ministry said the drop has been possible due to recoveries exceeding daily new cases and the low number of fatalities per day.

"India's trajectory of active cases continues to follow a steadily dipping path. The total active caseload has dropped below 3.6 lakh (3,59,819) today (Saturday)," the ministry said. "India's present active caseload consists of just 3.66 per



cent of India's total positive cases. The new recoveries of 33,494 in the last 24 hours have led to a net decline of 3,930 in the total active cases," it said. The rolling average for the

last week shows the sustained decline in the daily cases for the six most affected states - Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, it said.

"India's trajectory of active cases continues to follow a steadily dipping path. The total active caseload has dropped below 3.6 lakh (3,59,819) today (Saturday)," the Ministry said

"The daily new recoveries recorded in the country have been more than the daily cases registered since the last 15 days. The number of daily new cases in the last 24 hours is 30,006. While 33,494 cases recovered and discharged during the same duration," the ministry said. It also said that there is a steady decline in the

number of daily deaths over the last few days. For the last seven days, daily deaths have been below the 500-mark. The total coronavirus cases on Saturday mounted to 98,26,775 and the death toll climbed to 1,42,628 with the virus claiming 442 lives in a span of 24 hours in the country, the data updated at 8 am showed.

Public institutions, pvt sector can help overcome pandemic: Nadella

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella on Saturday said public institutions and the private sector working together can help developing economies to recover from the pandemic and "catch-up growth".

He also emphasised on the need for a "social contract" between the government, private sector and the broad civic society that allows creation of harmony to navigate changes together.

"Having grown up as a son of an Indian civil servant, I think quite a bit about public sector and also the institutional strength of our public sector institutions is so important...how do we get the public sector to the efficient frontier of even technology use." And, this is where I think some of the work that's happening in India, whether it is the ID system or the banking API or the payment API, so it's pretty enlightening," Nadella said during Ficci's AGM. He added that there is a need to ensure that the public sector is being



supported in their modernisation.

Nadella said public-private partnership is helping adopt changes and bring about more ubiquity to that change, which is going to be very important. "That's one way for developing economies to be able to recover from the pandemic."

"But, more importantly, when we've talked about catch-up growth, I think in the next 10 years, catch-up growth is possible when both the public institutions and the private sector are able to move rapidly," he added.

The India-born executive said technology has played a critical role during the pandemic across sectors, and has expanded from just driving future transformation to being at the core of business continuity. "The ability to use digital tools to be able to deal with a tail event, because we can't predict what the next tail event is but whatever that is, I think our built-in infrastructure and capability around digital tech is going to create resilience and transformation," he added. That is the most exciting thing to see, Nadella said.

He cited the example of telemedicine, which has been around but the adoption has accelerated amid the pandemic, and how even small retailers are turning to technology to drive business.

Nadella highlighted the innovation in India around digital infrastructure across fields — from financial services to healthcare to retail — that are driven by factors like availability of computing, use of AI and data capabilities and ubiquity of mobile phones.

"I think the exponential adoption of these three layers is going to change... And, so, the question is what is that social contract we have between the government, the private sector and the citizens and the broad civic society," he added. That allows us to create that harmony to navigate this change together because if any one of us is changing and the others are being left behind, that's going to create more turmoil, he said.

Nadella said an important factor would be how everybody is brought together to "naviga-

te" these exponential curves. Talking about navigating through challenges, he said it is important to keep in mind the sense of purpose and mission of the organisation and the culture.

"Once you have that, you have to get a lot of things right but your chances of getting all those other things right like strategies and tech picking and people picking, becomes so much more easier with these two pillars," he added. He said leaders have three key attributes — an innate capability of coming into ambiguous, uncertain situations and creating clarity; creating energy not just within their teams but overall; and not waiting for the perfect pitch.

"I can't say hey look, I'll perform after the pandemic is done. I mean, you and I and everyone in the room, have to keep working in spite of what the world throws at us. And, that ability to solve sometimes the overconstraint problem is what leadership is all about and driving success," he further said.

'Govt taking steps to make India competitive in global economy'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant on Saturday said the government is taking a series of measures to make India highly competitive in the global economy and stressed that the country must get into the sunrise areas of growth.

Addressing the FICCI Annual Convention, Kant said the government is also working towards bringing down the cost of logistics.

"The government is taking a series of measures to make India highly competitive in the global economy," he said.

Kant further added that the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for 10 key sectors, which the government announced last month, should spur growth in manufacturing in a big way.

"The objective was to provide a major impetus to manufacturing and exports, and this (PLI scheme) is one of the



biggest schemes that the government has come out with to support the private sector in manufacturing.

"It is a USD 26-billion scheme, which provides production-linked incentives in 10 champion sectors and this five years of support should spur growth in manufacturing in a big way," he said.

Kant also said the PLI scheme is a focused scheme, it is not an investment subsidy scheme. "There are sunrise areas of growth where India

must get into," he said. "To make Indian manufacturers globally competitive, we should be able to boost our exports and give rise to economies of scale and we should be able to produce cutting-edge products," he said.

Kant also noted that PLI schemes for electronics, mobile and active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) sectors have already been announced.

"And, the PLI scheme for other sectors is going through the process of approval," he said.

The 10 sectors, for which the government has announced the PLI scheme, are related to advance chemistry cell battery, electronic/technology products, automobile, pharmaceutical, and telecom and networking products.

They also include textiles products, food products, high-efficiency solar PV modules, white goods (ACs and LED), and speciality steel.

Pandemic increased momentum of digitisation: NPCI

PNS ■ KOLKATA

National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), an umbrella body for retail payments and settlement, said on Saturday that the pandemic has increased the momentum of digitisation in the country.

Chief Operating Officer (COO) of NPCI Praveena Rai said that pace of digitisation has also increased due to the regulatory framework and policies of the government and RBI.

Speaking at a seminar organised by XLRI, Rai said digitisation has cut across all sections of the society.

"Digitisation has revolutionized every single aspect of life and onboarding has risen substantially. There has been gradual migration from cash to digital payments both offline and online", Rai said. She said now people, con-



sumers and merchants are preferring to go digital, adding that there also has been a big growth in UPI driven by acceptance of QR.

According to her, there has been rise in digital engagements by giving reward programmes to customers.

Rai also said resolution issues have been successfully handled using artificial intelligence and chatbots.

She said that there has been clear drop in unified payment interface (UPI) adoption during the lockdown, adding that revival has taken place since.

INS to centre: Provide stimulus package for newspaper industry

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Newspaper Society (INS) on Friday urged the government to announce a stimulus package for the newspaper industry as it is facing an "unprecedented crisis" and lost around Rs 12,500 crore in the last eight months.

In a statement, the INS said the Indian newspaper industry has played a vital role in the dissemination of verified and factual news in these challenging times which has been duly acknowledged by the Supreme Court and functionaries, from time to time.

L Adimoolam, the president of INS, has urged upon the government to announce a stimulus package for the newspaper industry, which the INS has been seeking for the past few months, the statement said.

He has pointed out that the newspaper industry is facing an "unprecedented crisis" with its revenue streams, as both



advertising and circulation have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result, many of the publications have either shut down or suspended some of their editions, indefinitely, the INS said.

If this situation prevails, many more will be compelled to close their operations in the near future, it said.

In the past eight months, the industry has already lost around Rs 12,500 crore and the annual loss is likely to be around Rs 16,000 crore, the

statement said.

"One can well imagine, the downfall of the fourth pillar of the world's largest democracy will have severe socio-political repercussions, as well as affect its 30 lakh workers and staff, who are directly and indirectly involved in the newspaper industry as journalists, printers, delivery vendors and many others," the INS said.

The devastating ripple effect of the collapsing newspaper will impact lakhs of Indians, including employees and their families, as well as the larger eco-system of allied industries, printing presses, distribution supply chain including newspaper vendors and delivery boys, etc. who have for decades, been earning their livelihood from these operations, the INS said.

The entire industry is putting in its best efforts to bounce back and now looking forward to the government to provide the much needed stimulus package, it said.

TPDDL wins CII award for first grid-scale BESS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Power discom Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) has won the CII Industrial Innovation Award for developing the country's first grid-scale battery energy storage system (BESS) at Rohini in the national capital, a spokesperson of the company said on Saturday.

The 10 MWh mega inverter set up at Rohini can feed around 2,500 "special customers" providing essential services like hospitals, Delhi Jal Board, Delhi Metro and schools among others, he said.

The stored power through BESS can also be used during



any breakdown or in situations like grid failure, he said.

After Rohini, a similar facility is coming up in North Delhi's Rani Bagh, and there are plans to have similar but smaller facilities in every neighbourhood in the future, the spokesperson said. TPDDL has been recognised in the category of "Top 25 Innovative Company" by the CII Industrial

Innovation Awards 2020 for the development of South Asia's largest grid-scale Battery Energy Storage System in collaboration with AES and Mitsubishi, he said. "BESS is India's first grid-scale battery-based energy storage system, and is playing an instrumental role in modernizing the city's power system and improving grid efficiency," the spokesperson said. Receiving the award recently during a virtual ceremony, Ganesh Srinivasan, CEO, TPDDL, said, "Our path-breaking innovations like BESS can manage peak power demand load during summer and help balance the load curve."

LMW bags 'Most innovative firm of year 2020' award

PNS ■ COIMBATORE

The city-based Lakshmi Machine Works-Textile Machinery Division (LMW TMD) was named as the "Most Innovative company of the year 2020", by CII.

The Confederation of Indian Industry announced its Industrial Innovation Award recently through an online ceremony recently and named LMW as the most innovative company for 2020, a company release said.

Lakshmi Machine Works Limited Textile Machinery Division was chosen for the award for its innovative products.

Diamond jewellery see recovery in demand

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Even as there was a complete shutdown of business in June quarter due to COVID-19 related disruptions, diamond jewellery witnessed sharp recovery from October onwards and the industry is expected to do 70-85 per cent of last year's sales, De Beers India Managing Director Sachin Jain has said.

"I would certainly predict that we will be back to between 70-85 per cent, of 2019. We will certainly be lower than last year, but not to a tune that it is unrecoverable," Jain told PTL. He said it will all depend on how businesses

stayed connected with consumers during the difficult times of the lockdown, he added. Jain said the year 2020 began on a strong note, however, the second quarter was a complete washout due to lockdown to curb the spread of the pandemic. However, from October onwards, the relaxations coupled with the festivals began resulting in a surge of demand.

"We saw very high surge in number of consumers with pent-up demand where consumers came and bought. Also, what's happened is that there's been a change in the way families have been spending in weddings," he added.

'Post-Covid world order offers limitless opportunity'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The post-COVID-19 new world order offers limitless opportunity for India but for the country to be ready to participate in it, there is a need to establish regulatory standards on data and taxation in general, Tata Sons Chairman N Chandrasekaran said on Saturday.

Speaking at the 93rd annual convention of industry Chamber FICCI, he also said that if the idea "that the 2020s belong to India" has to be realised, industry should be bold and start envisioning all projects at scale, while there is also a need a new focus on talent, enable data and bandwidth.

"I see a collaborative role between the industry and the government here...The government should enable this



partnership and to make India ready to participate in this new world, it should ensure that every village has sufficient bandwidth and affordable data," Chandrasekaran said.

He added that the government should also establish the regulatory standards that are required on data privacy, data

residency, data localisation and taxation in general.

Stating that there is tremendous and limitless opportunity for India in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic, he said that in the past, India has often struggled to grow manufacturing as a percentage of GDP.

"We usually highlight issues like power, logistics and labour. We have pointed (out) high interest rates and also have underscored overreach and interference.

"But, in the future, if we put this behind, by visioning our scale we will become a pivot for the new world order," he said.

Chandrasekaran said his years at TCS shaped him in such a way that his roots are embedded in technology, which made him see the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on India on a positive frame of mind.

He stressed on the need to reimagine "the whole technology blueprint nationwide" and make technologies like robotics and AI (artificial intelligence) become part of the mainstay of manufacturing.

"We need to recognise the

fact that tech manufacturing and energy are converging in the creation of new platforms and new ecosystems," he added.

Stating that the coronavirus pandemic "exacerbated global supply chains and clearly outlined a new global world order", Chandrasekaran reiterated that "2020 marks the decoupling of China and the US. What it means is countries and companies will need to de-risk and balance their supply chain" in the future.

If India's first plank for the 21st Century is digital, he said the second plank is a new approach to global value chain.

"India's strength is our largest talent pool, and we can leverage this to become a key player in the global value chain. The vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic, and the new

geopolitical order only accelerates this opportunity and the time is now," Chandrasekaran asserted.

Underscoring environmental resilience as the third plank for India, he said, "Within two decades, nearly 20 new energy sources could likely be powering the global economy."

Chandrasekaran added that "energy efficiency in mobility, solar manufacturing and rethinking our food supply chain are areas to focus as we emerge from the pandemic".

He said the Tata group is not only strengthening on digitising its existing businesses, but it is also spearheading new platforms in areas like tech manufacturing, future mobility, renewable, health and also will work with SMEs to unlock their potential for the economy.

MONEY MATTERS

Exim Bank extends USD 448-million line of credit to Uzbekistan

Export-Import Bank of India (Exim Bank) on Saturday said it has extended a USD 448-million line of credit (LOC) for various infrastructure projects in Uzbekistan. The LOC has been extended on behalf of the Indian government, Exim Bank said in a statement.



With the signing of this LOC agreement, Exim Bank has now in place 266 LOCs, covering 62 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Commonwealth of Independent States and the Oceania, with credit commitments of around USD 26.59 billion, available for financing exports from India, it added. The LOC of USD 448 million to Uzbekistan has been extended for financing various projects in the roads and transport, water and technology and communication sectors in Uzbekistan.

Senate sends Trump defence bill he has vowed to veto



The Senate on Friday approved a wide-ranging defence policy bill, sending it to President Donald Trump, despite his threat to veto the bill because it does not clamp down on big tech companies he claims were biased during the election. The final vote was 84-13, mirroring a similarly overwhelming margin in the House

that, if maintained in both chambers, would be enough to override a potential veto. The Senate vote had been expected Thursday but was delayed after Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky objected to the measure, saying it could limit Trump's ability to draw down US troops from Afghanistan and Germany. Paul's actions had raised the specter of a brief government shutdown if a short-term spending bill caught up in the dispute was not approved by midnight Friday, but that possibility faded Friday afternoon. Congress has approved the bill, known as the National Defense Authorization Act, for nearly 60 years in a row. The current version affirms 3 per cent pay raises for U.S. troops and authorizes more than USD 740 billion in military programs and construction. Trump has vowed to veto the bill unless lawmakers impose limits on social media companies he claims were biased against him during the election.

Britain to end state support for fossil fuel sector exports

Britain said Friday that it is ending state support for fossil fuel industry exports, and shifting government assistance to low-carbon and renewable energy projects abroad. The announcement by Prime Minister Boris Johnson comes a day before he co-hosts a virtual summit with more than 70 world leaders to mark the fifth anniversary of the Paris climate accord.



Britain already declared earlier this month that it plans to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030. "By taking ambitious and decisive action today, we will create the jobs of the future, drive the recovery from coronavirus and protect our beautiful planet for generations to come," Johnson said in a statement. The UK government said it will "end export finance, aid funding and trade promotion for new crude oil, natural gas or thermal coal projects, with very limited exceptions." The policy means an end to government support in the form of overseas development aid, export finance or trade promotion for the extraction, production, transportation and refining of crude oil or thermal coal outside Britain. The same will apply to natural gas, except for some gas-fired power plants and other projects that would be in line with the phase-out of fossil fuels by mid-century laid out in the Paris accord.

SBI will prefer co-origination model of lending to MSMEs: Chairman



State Bank of India (SBI) will prefer the co-origination model to cater to the financing needs of MSMEs and collaboration with fintechs is a good idea as it helps in assessing the risk profile of the borrower in a better manner, its chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara said on Saturday. Pointing out that the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are constrained today in terms of cash flows, time gap in realising receivables, among others and also the level of lenders' confidence in funding them, Khara said collaborating is a better model than lending directly to MSMEs. "The fact of the matter is that today not many NBFCs have come in this space. And of late, when it comes to finding solutions, we feel that apart from lending directly to the MSMEs, there is a way forward in terms of collaborating with these NBFCs along with the biggest fintechs who have the ability to process the structured and unstructured (financial) data to have a better sense in terms of assessment of risk," Khara said.



MAKING STUBBLE CHANGES

Every year, between October and November, Delhi gets choked due to stubble burning in States of Punjab and Haryana and citizens struggle with breathing. Stakeholders tell SHALINI SAKSENA that there are several alternatives available for the farmers if only they would change their mindset

It was a bumper harvest in Punjab and Haryana this year, which meant that there was so much more residue to burn. Stubble burning is not a new problem. Each year, Delhiites struggle to breathe during the months of October and November. Each year, there is a hue and cry on how one can prevent these fires but to no avail.

According to data released by the Punjab Remote Sensing Centre, the State recorded 73,883 incidents of stubble burning between September 21 and November 14, 2020 which is the highest since 2016.

Punjab reported 51,048 cases of stubble burning in the corresponding period last year and 46,559 such incidents in 2018. The number of farm fires was 43,149 in the State during the same period in 2017.

According to the Ministry of Earth Sciences' air quality monitor, SAFAR, the share of stubble burning in NCR pollution peaked to 42 per cent on November 5, when 4,135 farm fires were recorded in the region.

What if there was an alternative for the farmers? What if they had an option to not burn the stubble? What if instead of burning, one could use it to make manure, or even make idols or disposable crockery or even the much needed silica fertiliser? Believe it or not, there are many stakeholders in this sector who are doing their bit to ensure that farmers don't resort to paddy straw burning.

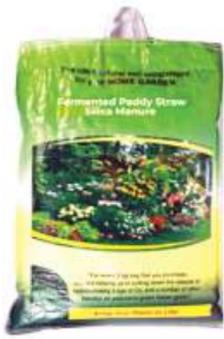
Suvrat Khanna, CEO-Co-founder, Verve Renewables tells you that every year over 30 million tonnes of paddy stubble are burnt in Punjab and Haryana alone. "The idea of pledging to collect 1.5 lakh metric tonne of agricultural waste for power generation in Haryana was initiated with the sole intention of finding a problem of stubble burning which is a serious issue across Northern India," Khanna says.

Using agricultural waste as a source for energy production benefits farmers, bio-energy producers and the environment. Their aim is to collect one million tonnes of agro stubble by 2024 to generate approximately 2,50,000 MW of power.

Studies by Indian Agricultural Research Institute show that crop residue (mainly paddy straw) burning released 149.24 million tonnes of CO₂; over nine million tonnes of carbon monoxide (CO), 0.25 million tonnes of oxides of SO_x, 1.28 million tonnes of particulate matter and 0.07 million tonnes of black carbon. All of these contributed to hazardous levels of air pollution in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and UP.

He tells you that an average paddy field generates two tonnes of paddy straw each season. Khanna, who is in his second year of operations, uses a three-pronged approach.

He looks at compensating farmers to dispose of agricultural waste like paddy straw in a sustainable manner; collects and delivers boiler ready biomass resources that could be used for generation of power by co-generation power plants attached to



THE CENTRE HAS GIVEN A GO AHEAD TO PROMOTE 5,000 BIOGAS PLANTS IN PUNJAB, HARYANA AND UTTAR PRADESH AND PURCHASING THE GAS AT ₹46 PER KG. THIS IS A HUGE SUPPORT. WE TOO ARE SUPPLYING TO THE POWER GRID. IF OPERATIONAL AT FULL CAPACITY, I WOULD BE ABLE TO SUPPLY 1MW WHICH CAN ELECTRIFY FOUR-FIVE VILLAGES

— **SANJEEV NAGPAL, SAMPURN AGRICULTURE VENTURES PVT LTD**



sugar mills and with this looks at alternative uses of stubble for energy production providing an ecological solution to air pollution.

"When we started in 2018, we wanted to tackle the issue of stubble burning, but at that time, didn't know how to go about it. Fortunately, we came across a sugar mill which was willing. We knew that electricity could be generated from paddy straw. We requested if we could provide them with it as an alternative. They agreed. They were extremely forthcoming and made changes to their boiler," Khanna tells you who decided to pursue this since he is from Amritsar and stubble burning is an yearly issue and from a business point of view, it all starts from finding a solution.

"We saw a problem and decided to solve it. We are a bridge between the farmer and the mills. We go into villages and tell them that they don't have to burn, instead once they harvest, we will come and collect residue. We try to involve entire villages since it increases bale collection by the machine," Khanna tells you.

The onus of making the bales rest with the farmers. They are encouraged to buy machines or an entrepreneur steps in. There are two kinds of balers; one that costs between ₹20-₹25 lakh. This makes bales of 20-25 kg. The bigger one that makes bales of 250-300 kg and is priced at ₹35-₹40 lakh upwards. The small machine can work in 20 acres of land a day and the big one 40 acres a day.

"For now, the farmers are not being paid, but there are plans for the same once the system becomes cost-effective. They don't pay us, we don't pay them. But we bear the cost of picking bales up; a win-win for all concerned. Convincing the farmer is not very tough since an individual farmer gets a 40 per cent subsidy to buy this machine; for custom hiring companies, there is a subsidy of up to 80 per cent. We assure the farmer with long-term association. This instills confidence in them," Khanna tells you.

Sanjeev Nagpal, founder, Sampurn Agri Ventures Pvt Ltd, a Punjab-based company, has gone a step forward. Besides setting up a biogas plant utilising only paddy straw as the sole feed, he is converting the same into fertiliser. Unfortunately, his endeavours to mass market paddy fertilisers have run into roadblocks — agriculture policies — he tells you, for now doesn't allow sale of silica fertiliser, a first of its kind. But he tells you that this silica is extremely important for plants. For now, individuals can buy the same for their kitchen garden and that he uses the same in his 300 acres of farmland.

"We are in the process of creating a farmers' group and using this fertiliser, grow high quality foods and market it," Nagpal says.

To develop the technology to convert paddy straw, Nagpal has collaborated with IIT Delhi. "We have developed this technology to process paddy straw, in collaboration with IIT Delhi. We are fermenting paddy straw to produce biogas and manure. We started this project back in 2015. We then had to get approval from Agriculture University for agriculture use in 2017. This is a silica fertiliser and agriculture policies framed in the 1960s, at the time of Green Revolution, doesn't recognise this as a fertiliser. The Food Agriculture Organization has accepted that silica fertiliser is required by plants for sustainable agriculture. Major diseases like cancer, Diabetes are all linked to absence of silica in the human body since they are absent in the food chain," Nagpal tells you.

In fact, this entrepreneur-farmer has already grown *kinnow* using this fertiliser. "The pre-booking response to this has been phenomenal. For now, we will only be supplying to nearby areas like Chandigarh but next year, we plan to increase our reach and try and supply to the rest of the country. We just need to have the logistics in place," Nagpal explains.



He tells you that instead of creating roadblocks and looking at paddy straw as a burden; to look at it as an asset, if utilised properly. India can develop huge agri-exports if it recognises this.

"One can look at exports. But why not use the same for ourselves to produce high quality food and export the same? For now, I have used 50,000 tonnes of paddy straw over the period of five years. But I am utilising my plant at minimum capacity due to the hassles involved. At full capacity, I will require 12,000 tonnes of paddy straw per year," Nagpal says.

He tells you that the Government has given a go ahead to promote 5,000 biogas plants in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh and purchase the gas at ₹46 per kg. "This is a huge support by the Centre. We too are supplying to the grid. If operational at full capacity I would be able to supply 1MW — supplying electricity to four-five villages. For now, I am supplying 3,000 units a day," he says.

Setting up one huge biogas plant is not logistically possible. What is needed is a smaller one per five-six villages. "This will open up employment opportunities as well," Nagpal explains.

Elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh, Singuru Rajesh, assistant Professor Raghu

Engineering College, Visakhapatnam and head of Green Gears, is busy collecting paddy straw as well preventing the farmers in his area to burn the same.

It all started because Singuru has breathing problems. "I have asthma; I knew that I had to look for alternatives, at least in my area. I was inspired from the ageold practices of utilising tamarind and paper to make plates. The farmers in my area are extremely cooperative. We not only use paddy straw, we also use every kind of agriculture waste to make idols, crockery and even panel insulation. The good part is that once the crockery is used one can put it into the soil it turns into manure for plants," Rajesh tells you.

The residue is taken and cooked, pulp is extracted and the same can be used to make a variety of things depending on the mould available. For now, Rajesh is testing the products by giving it to family and friends to use it. But the COVID-19 put on hold his efforts to go for production and supply.

"It will take us a couple of years, before we can supply it across the country. I started this project in 2018. In 2019, I got Nav Bharat Nirman Award and Young Scientist Conference-2018 Award for this work. Once we have commercial viability, we will start paying the farmer as well for the residue. At full capacity, we will end up using a tonne of agriculture waste," Rajesh says.

The problem of stubble stems from the fact that farms use machines which cuts the length leaving a portion in the land. Pulling it by hand is next to impossible. "Traditionally, the field would be ploughed mixing the stubble in the ground adding the nutrients in the soil. But because of the harvester and thresher now being used which leaves stubble and the urgency to sow another crop, the easiest option is to burn the same. But we are now telling farmers there are other options; you can give it to us," Rajesh says.

'Need to completely change agriculture practices'

Living in the Capital comes with many riders — some good some bad. Delhiites know that come October-November and they will find it difficult to breathe — it is time when the farmers in Punjab and Haryana get to burning stubble and get their fields ready for the next cropping cycle. Paddy straw burning is not new.

For the last 60 years, since the push to make the country self-sufficient in food grains, farmers in Punjab and Haryana have been growing paddy. With only 1.5 per cent land, Punjab is producing 50 per cent food-grain for the country. More strange, that the State grows paddy when it is a wheat-eating State.

Umendra Dutt, founder-member and executive director of Kheti Virasat Mission, Punjab paints a dismal picture and tells you that in order to prevent stubble burning there is need to do two things.

The first is to completely change the agriculture system; not overhauling. Overhauling would mean that one has made a few changes here and there. what we need is a completely new model of cropping pattern. In a bid to make India sufficient in food grains, what we have done is totally changed the cropping pattern in the region. This means that the region known for wheat is now growing rice. Can you mean the

damage that this has done here? It is something that can't be changed overnight. While in the last few years, there are people who are coming out with alternatives to stubble burning, there are many roadblocks to these solutions," Dutt says.

He tells you that what is needed is instead of linking cropping patterns with sustainability, what has been done is to link it with production.

"You have pushed the farmer towards mono-culture. Stubble burning is a fall-out of it. The cropping followed today, doesn't suit the eco-system. We followed it for 50 years, but it is not possible to do so anymore. The crop cycle



followed earlier used to provide the much needed nutrients. But then you changed the pattern. You pushed him to produce more; he had to shift to using fertilisers so much so that nobody looked at the long-term issues. Stubble burning is one of the side effects of changing the cropping pattern. There is no holistic approach to farming today. Farmers only saw money and not the fallout," Dutt says.

One is told that because the farmer is in a hurry to sow the next crop — wheat — the easiest thing for him is to burn the stubble in the field. "It also means that the farmer is burning the much needed micro-nutrients in the soil

increasing his dependence on fertilisers. It has become a vicious cycle," Dutt explains.

Paddy straw is a product of mechanised agriculture. Shortage of labour and lack of time means that rice is harvested by a harvester and thresher. This leaves behind stubble. This prevents other machines from sowing wheat. With only a couple of weeks between the rice-harvesting season and the wheat-sowing, farmers burn the stubble.

"The only people who are not burning stubble are those who think that a holistic approach is the key to sustainability, those who are not dependent on subsidy or are into organic farming," Dutt says.

The solution lies in mulching. The Government instead of spending crores on giving machines, should spend money to change the mindset of the farmers.

"Farmers should be encouraged to follow organic farming. He should be shown alternatives. It's not an issue of technology, it is about human psychology, attitude, behaviour and environment. If you change farmer's attitude and are associated with him long-term, he will not burn stubble. Instead of technology intervention, show the farmer environmental psychology intervention. Show him that soil has life as well and it will take care of stubble burning," Dutt says.



FAITH IS THE BIRD THAT FEELS THE LIGHT WHEN THE DAWN IS STILL DARK
—RABINDRANATH TAGORE



YOUR WEEK AHEAD



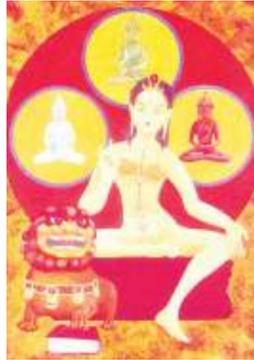
MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week good news is in store for you. For those facing health challenges, a positive attitude would work wonders. If you suspect something is wrong with your physical being, make sure to get medical support. It would help you. Trust your instincts. On the work front, there are happiness and celebration. You are about to see some results for your hard work and efforts. Those looking for a position, will find something that is better than they hoped for. Your efforts are valued and appreciated at work. On the relationship front, your spouse's attitude may be irritating, and you feel depressed and lonely. A feeling of being left out may take over you. Broaden your horizons and try hard to think positively.

Lucky number 12
Lucky colour Yellow
Lucky day Wednesday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

Your health and vitality is strong and robust this week. This is a great time to correct all bad habits, in order to stay in good health. Start with small goals. A daily walk could very well lead you to a healthier and stronger self. Spend time to bring balance in body, mind, and spirit. On the work front, there may be financial loss in business or situation of unemployment. Your fears, addictions, and other harmful impulses may create a negative environment around you. You feel despair and have a pessimistic view of life. Be positive, this is the time to learn from mistakes. On the personal front, your situation is good, especially for an existing romance. Your relationship will move into a lighter and more balanced phase, with treating each other as equals.

Lucky number 17
Lucky colour Magenta
Lucky day Friday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week health needs attention and follow up exercises for those who have serious ailments. You may finally find it within yourself to stop certain bad habits that you may be cultivating. Take good care of yourself, only then would you truly be able to care of the others. On the work front, a good news would bring happiness to you this week. You may get a call letter for job with better perspective, perks and facilities. Those awaiting posting may get the desired destination. For those in business, financial gains are indicated. On the relationship front, things are not as good as you think them to be. You have to make an effort. Put your ideas and views across to your near and dear ones in such a way that those could easily be accepted. Else, you may face rejection.

Lucky number 10
Lucky colour Brown
Lucky day Tuesday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week you will feel light and happy on the health front. You should be full of vitality, hopeful and optimistic about the future. Pay attention to your line of thought. Remember that your mindset affects your health. Maintain a positive outlook. You are in a position now to mentor others and share spiritual insights. On the career front, you are nearing the point where work success and recognition are well within your grasp. Do your best to be organised and productive. This will pay you off. This is not a time to gamble or take risks. On the personal front, good luck will follow you in the matters of heart. If you are already in a relationship, it may deepen and become better and sweeter. You feel emotional contentment.

Lucky number 11
Lucky colour Pastel Blue
Lucky day Thursday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, despite the workload and stress, you remain cool and poised. You have abundance of energy and stamina, that is your support system. You need to use your energy in a creative direction. Health remains good and you have control on your sensory delights too. On the career front, your determination and will power would help you achieve your targets, as there are many hurdles and delays in your work. Your tough decisions will give you the strength to move on and plan well in the moments of crisis. Follow the advice of a senior who is close to you and knows your limitations. On the personal front, you may face opposition of your near and dear ones. Rift and conflicts in the family are likely. Be a little softer and compassionate.

Lucky number 20
Lucky colour Mauve
Lucky day Monday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week, you would find yourself restricted on a health matter. Fear, anxiety and negative thoughts are not allowing you to lead a normal life. You need to bring about balance in body, mind and spirit. Health is affected when thinking is negative or filled with anxiety. Meditate and listen to your body. Half of the problems will get solved by themselves. On the work front, there may be an unexpected fall or injustice in your case. The position which that you have been aspiring for may be given to another candidate with equal calibre. Difficulty to choose whether to remain in the existing one or join the new one will prevail. On the relationship front, ensure that you take out time and effort to stay connected with your partner to keep the spark alive.

Lucky number 22
Lucky colour Grey
Lucky day Friday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week challenges on health front will come to an end. You will realise that health is very important and needs care and attention. Prevention is better than cure. You will attend classes and seminars on healing therapies and apply them to your life. On the professional front, you need to come out of self-made restrictions, which are hampering your career growth. In some matters, you are required to be fluent and quick-witted, but your confusion and duality in mind keeps interrupting you. Curb your expenditure. Keep your eyes and ears open to be aware of the opportunities coming your way. On the personal front, promises are not made to be broken. If you are doing so, you may have to pay in terms of relationships.

Lucky number 10
Lucky colour Off-white
Lucky day Monday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week you may feel depressed and gloomy, as things are not going your way. Some health issues may crop up out of the blue. Do not worry; this is a temporary phase. Your medical tests will come out fine. Stress is a bigger ailment. The professional life would see a rise and so would you. There will be money, prestige and honour in what you are currently pursuing. Those in business could earn good money. Take time out for healing and go for massage therapy. On the emotional front, this is fairly a good week. A new love/romance is on the cards. Married couples must have a concern and try to understand the feelings of the other. Possibly there is a communication gap that must be sorted out. This probably is the root cause of distance and is what is making them isolated.

Lucky number 31
Lucky colour Red
Lucky day Wednesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

Your health situation looks good this week. You will be filled with energy and enthusiasm. But be careful when exercising, there can be minor sprain or injuries. It is important to start a new health regime if you have been laid back and casual in the recent past. On the work front, you may encounter a person of influence and leadership skills, who would like to mentor you. You need his presence to guide you in the right direction. If you have been facing some challenges at work or in business, then this is the time for you to get hold/control of the situation. You will be goal-oriented and very visionary. On the relationship front, this week will be a magical one. This is a time to trust your instincts.

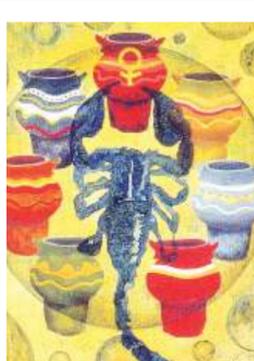
Lucky number 1
Lucky colour Indigo
Lucky day Friday



CANCER June 21-July 22

Your tension will reflect in your work. Follow your intuition, when it comes to your health. If a diagnosis doesn't feel right, do not hesitate to get a second opinion. For those who consume alcohol or drugs, this is the time to avoid and take a break from any kind of intoxication. On the work front, you need to be a more giving and generous. People will look to you for help. A friend or colleague may ask for financial help. This is the time to invest in long term projects. Your generosity and kindness will earn you a good name. On the relationship front, there is agony and pain. For a relationship to survive, both parties must be willing to work on it and talk about it. Keep your communication channels open. This is the time to meditate and introspect.

Lucky number 9
Lucky colour Orange
Lucky day Saturday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week your health will be good if you pay attention. The week starts with the creative energy and you will feel active, agile, and enthusiastic. But as the week progresses, some health issues may crop up. There is a cure for everything. Be positive, everything will go well. On the professional front, if you are not dedicated to your work, you might have to pay for it. People are watching you and giving minute to minute details to the higher authorities. You might be questioned for your irregularities in duties and finances. On the relationship front, this is a highly emotional time. Things can quickly become heated and uncomfortable. Take a break if you need to. Pick your battles and be sure to treat your lover like a friend.

Lucky number 3
Lucky colour Peach
Lucky day Saturday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

On the health front, this week may be tough on you. Panicking at this point in time will only make things worse. After every crisis, there is a promise of a good time. However, it depends on what you do about it. Be positive about your situation and reach out to the others for help. Practising meditation will be a great booster. On the career front, things may not be that great. It may be that you are close to completing a project or task, but are faced with yet another challenge or task at your workplace. You need to be resilient and not be intimidated by others pulling you down. On the personal front, you will find yourself in conflict with others. You need to understand that open communication with your partner can help resolve all the differences.

Lucky number 14
Lucky colour Green
Lucky day Thursday

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ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Fix your habits early in life

Habits die hard. You may strive to get over them, but you won't be able to hold it for long unless you make corrections at the base level. Remember, the root of inherent habit tendencies lie in the thought seeds that are firmly embedded in the inner realms of the mind. As and when they get a congenial ground, they spring into action. Something like a wheat seed, which if kept on a table, remains inert. If it somehow reaches the earth mass, it will sprout into a plant when it has access to water. Someone holding a coveted position in an international organisation fearing loss of job came asking three years back: "My performance at work is commendable, and is duly acknowledged by my superiors. Yet, why do I come under such threat?" "Will I be able to retain my position?" Well, the reason lies in your self-undoing acts. You are primarily an escapist. Whenever you come under negative bind for whatever reasons, your inherent sense of fear and insecurity overtakes your thought plane. To forget that, you get into self-indulgences, which you take to extremes. You, thus, invite your own problem. But given pre-

sent astrological directions, as of now your job is secure." I observed. "Agreed sir. But how could you pinpoint my problem with such clarity?" He asked. "A horoscope speaks of the basic fabric of one's making that throws light on your virtues and attributes; as well as habits and attitudes. Coming as they may as Karmic carryover from the past, they are imprinted in the inner realms of your mind as thought-seeds. Given a congenial trigger, they come into play." I replied. Assured of his job security, he asked: "Suggest me some remedial measures — stone or a puja — that may help me avoid such situations in future." He was given a process, which involved self-reflecting on his thought patterns so as to resolve them through relevant educative inputs that may help get over the past hangups. Also, to train the mind living mindfully in the present. "Why put me under such process? I promise you to overcome my self-indulgences. I am strong enough to hold on to my promise," he then said. "Well, that will not suffice. You need to resolve them from the root level, otherwise, it will erupt in future also." I observed. He did not pay attention to my counsel. No



wonder, he came under similar spell twice in between.

Let us now look at his astrological pointers. He is born in Aquarius *lagna*, a fixed sign, which makes him a stubborn character. The *lagna* lord Saturn conjunct the Sun brings in a sense of fear and insecurity having a hardened attitude. Moon placed adverse to Saturn brings in a negative mind-set. Given an adverse situation, he may become self-pitying. The Sun placed adverse to mischievous Neptune makes him habitually an escapist, who remains stuck to his self-delusory perceptions. He may not acknowledge truth on its first appearance and will rather prefer pursuing his own self-beliefs till pushed to the wall.

Moon is ill-disposed off to Venus identified with sensuous pleasure, which is conjunct *Rahu*. Venus is also involved in exchange with Mars, a planet identified with animalistic instincts. This combination, in the first place, brings in self-indulgent tendencies. Second, he remains vulnerable to unpredictable mood swings. Third, he is too much touchy and sensitive, whereby he gets over-exercised even on trivial issues, over which he keeps mulling for long.

Intelligence signifying Mercury is ill-disposed off to Mars, which makes him restless, irritable and bad tempered. He, thus, given an adverse situation, loses his sense of alert, vital to mindful living. Mercury placed adverse to Jupiter accounts for his insensible reasoning and judgment. What further compounds his problem is his inflated ego, coming as it may with Mars placed adverse to Jupiter. That binds him to his self-defined beliefs and perceptions, not open to look beyond for a reality check. He is averse to listening or counsel. He can't digest anything that is not in line with his perception. If all that would not be enough Moon posited in Sagittarius sign and also adverse to Saturn implies that he will not be able to keep up the promises he makes.

With exalted Jupiter and Moon over the head, the positives in him are strong enough to make him a good professional. But his overpowering negatives would not allow him a free run, unless he resolves them from the root level. The result is there to see.

The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com

WE MAKE THE FUTURE
SUSTAINABLE WHEN WE INVEST
IN THE POOR, NOT WHEN WE
INSIST ON THEIR SUFFERING
—BILL GATES

THE LAST MILE

STILETTOS**MINIYA
CHATTERJI**

For this one time, the country needs to step up its game and ensure that the choice and the correct information for the Covid-19 vaccine reaches the most disadvantaged end of income groups in India

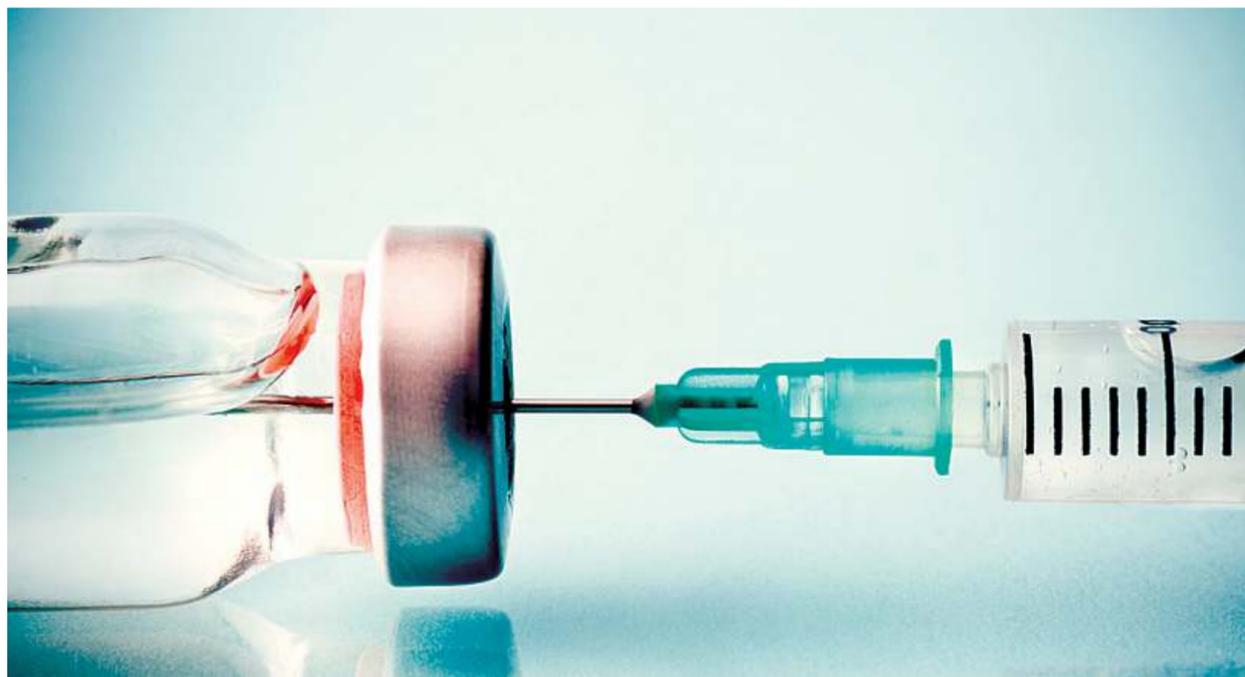
The year 2021 will be the year of the Covid-19 vaccine. It will be the topic of our greatest relief and utmost anxiety. Which vaccine? How to avail it? Will it work? What are the side effects? We will not know the answers to all these questions at once, not even at the time regulatory approval is given for each vaccine.

Choosing the vaccine to use in India's vaccination programme will therefore certainly not be easy as they will each be based on very different technologies, with differing degrees of efficacy and side effects that will likely be revealed with time. Many millions will be vaccinated every week, and perhaps an effective tracking system could help us identify problems with particular vaccines which were not caught in the pre-approval tests.

Procuring the vaccine would indeed be initially difficult but I don't anticipate it to be our greatest challenge in the long run either. India has a large vaccine production capacity. The Serum Institute of India is the largest vaccine manufacturer in the world and it is producing the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine and will also produce the Novavax vaccine. It is expanding capacity to 1.2 billion doses per year, and half of this could be available for India. There are other Indian manufacturers engaged in clinical trials to produce a vaccine, such as Zydus Cadila, Bharat BioTech, Dr Reddy's Laboratories and Biological E. There will undoubtedly be difficulties in this unprecedented situation.

However, funding the programme will be a major challenge and a heavily debated one too. Should the vaccine be free for all beneficiaries or only for some? Will the government pay for vaccines for all? India has a vast spectrum of social and economic inequalities. We have some of the world's richest and the world's poorest, with health care distribution that also mirrors this enormous gap. Without free vaccines provided by the government at least to some extent, we can not ensure that the last mile in rural India are offered the vaccine. We can not ensure that the population left out in vaccinating 70% of India and hoping for herd immunity for the rest, are not the poorest.

We can anticipate two other major hurdles in vaccinating India for which,



I believe, the private sector must step in to help.

First, how will we distribute the vaccine to the last mile? Our existing systems for distributing medicines to the *anganwadis* and rural medical centres are fraught with pilferage. Already we see a black market for vaccines preparing to suck out the vaccines from the system to offer it to those with greater buying power who might want the vaccine at the soonest. How can we then ensure that the vaccine is offered to all individuals in an equitable manner? Some have suggested a lottery system for offering vaccines, but even then how can the lottery winners belonging to economically weaker segments be sure of receiving their vaccine?

Here, the network of the local *kirana* stores and freelance entrepreneurs in small towns and villages who are already

being mobilised by the government for distributing Covid testing kits and masks could be tapped upon. They are the government of India's best last mile connect. This network has been leveraged by the government already and so it can be leveraged for vaccine distribution as well, to be then picked up by the government healthcare workers in villages, slums, small towns. Large companies could include their supply chain and distributors within that network for vaccine delivery. The supply chain of large companies such as Hindustan Unilever Ltd. and others will thus bolster this existing network further — if a Lifebuoy can be delivered to the furthest hut in a village so can the Covid vaccine. Indeed thereafter, the government healthcare workers would be best suited for door-to-door vaccinating. In our experience of

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setting up 11 Covid hospitals and recovery facilities over six months, we leveraged public private partnerships to set up these hospitals and facilities in urban pockets that lacked healthcare facilities, bringing in government healthcare workers to operate them. A similar PPP model can be put in place for vaccine distribution and vaccine administration in rural India.

Second, how do we overcome India's biggest malaise — corruption — in this regard? The black market is picking up already, making *'bandobast'* to get the vaccines out to people with resources as soon as possible. There are even travel companies such as Gem Tours offering Mumbai-New York-Mumbai tickets, 3 night/4 day packages with breakfast and one vaccine dose. Further, even if the *kirana* stores in villages and slum zones

are looped in to distribute the vaccines, there might be cases where they instead sell off the vaccines at high prices. In the case of the latter, the government can not entirely check the corruption and the private sector might be silenced by the fear of losing the supply chain for their own products.

What are ways in which we can preempt this corruption? Communication might be key here. An intensive anti-corruption campaign for vaccine distribution can be planned in order to remind the public of being ethical during the worst global pandemic in history that has ravaged the lives of millions. The public involved in vaccine distribution can be encouraged and named as 'heroes', much as the frontline warriors were referred to as 'Covid Warriors'. The communication on vaccines must cover factual information about the various vaccines, removing rumours and baseless fears. The vaccine cannot be made mandatory, which makes the dispersion of effective and accurate communication all the more important.

In India, since the past three months or so the private sector has already stepped in to assist the government in articulating and dispersing the message around Covid precautions. At times the government pays companies for spreading the message while in some cases companies and even some advertising agencies have stepped up to do so on a pro-bono basis. This trend can be further strengthened towards an anti-corruption campaign for vaccine distribution.

We can not afford to lose the battle to Covid, especially once an effective basket of vaccines arrive. The distribution of anything to the last mile in India is a challenge. This is at least once when the country needs to step up its game and ensure that the choice and the correct information for the Covid vaccine reaches the most disadvantaged end of income groups in India. They can not be left to gain 'herd immunity' while the top 1% get their choice of vaccines. This is the challenge that the government, private sector, me and you need to win in 2021.

The writer is CEO of Sustain Labs and Adjunct Professor at SciencesPo Paris. She is also a columnist and author of the 2019 bestseller *Indian Instincts* — essays on freedom and equality in India

Unpacking climate geoengineering

If it works well, it might be able to protect climate-vulnerable regions by keeping temperatures below 1.5 C while the world is decarbonising, write VINAYAK NAMBIAR, SIJO ABRAHAM & MOHAMMED MOFIZUR RAHMAN

Climate change, or more aptly, climate chaos, is arguably one of the major challenges of the 21st century, and is often considered an existential threat to humanity. It leaves no aspect of life untouched, including the economy, environment, health and livelihoods, regardless of which part of the world you reside. The global community has awoken to the risks involved, and there has been a ramp-up of efforts to mitigate the release of greenhouse gases, including the main culprit carbon dioxide, through a plethora of initiatives such as focusing on renewable energy, creating a circular economy, and even re-inventing what would drive future growth, with 'green' deals being considered by various influential governments worldwide.

However, recent research suggests that no matter how ambitious our efforts are, current emission trends indicate that it is unlikely we will be able to limit the temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This is the warming limit that is supported by the world's most climate-vulnerable countries, with warming above this point leaving us open to more extreme weather events, biodiversity loss on a scale previously unimaginable, agricultural depletion and unprecedented forced migration. The Global South, including the Indian subcontinent, will be particularly hard hit. Climate geoengineering is increasingly touted as a promising solution for this, a blanket term that contains quite a few radical, often controversial and potentially challenging to implement proposals.

Before we continue, we would like to point out that we are neither advocates nor opponents of geoengineering. We believe it is important to have a broader public discussion on a wider spectrum of possible climate options, and our goal in this article is to shed some light on one oft-neglected outside scientific circles, and lay out the unknowns, opportunities and obstacles involved, especially from a South Asian perspective. That being said, let's start with a few definitions.

Under climate geoengineering, there are two major groups of proposed approaches; Solar Radiation Management (SRM) and Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR). SRM proposals aim to limit or reverse the temperature rise produced by higher greenhouse gas concentrations, by reflecting inbound sunlight back into space. The approach that has received most research attention would involve spraying tiny reflective particles into the upper atmosphere to reflect away some sunlight. The effects of SRM would be experienced rapidly, in the order of months after implementation, and this is why it is being researched — it's the only known way to quickly stop or reverse the rise in global temperatures.

However, it is important to note that these effects would last only as long as the programme is maintained. SRM does not reduce the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and there is the potential for disastrously abrupt warming of the global climate with sudden and permanent cessation of a high level of SRM cooling. As it is largely based on computer simulations, there is also significant

uncertainty on what the actual impacts may be, including predicting the change in rainfall patterns and growth of plant life.

CDR on the other hand, involves removing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere by various means, ranging from reforestation/afforestation, restoration of wetlands, burning biomass to capture carbon and permanently storing it, fertilizing oceans to absorb more CO₂ or even direct capture of CO₂ from ambient air. Generally, CDR techniques are comparatively slow-acting and expensive to implement, but are less contentious and have been included in many models for achieving effective climate change mitigation.

What we find worrying is that climate geoengineering research as a whole has predominantly been conducted by Western academia, and in reality, countries in the Global South are often poorly represented in debates about these approaches, even though in many of the cases, those are the same countries that would be the most impacted.

This question of moral hazard surrounding geoengineering has been intensely argued, though again mostly in developed economies. A range of people, from policy makers to activists, have expressed concerns that CDR and SRM might be seen as "get out of jail" free cards that reduce the incentives for countries to move towards a net-zero carbon pathway. This becomes all the more serious when coupled with what is essentially limited research about the benefits and drawbacks of these methods.



Encouraging SRM or CDR may significantly reduce allocation of resources to inclusive and reliable climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, or even lead to total near-term disregard for them, leaving developing countries to suffer the consequences. For example, Global South countries have expressed their concern regarding the uncertainty of Bio-

Energy and Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) methods, which is a CDR technique. These projects may require large land areas, thereby competing with agricultural lands. Additionally, as previously stated, research has shown that SRM would involve tinkering with a complex system and it might have nasty side effects, with countries like India bearing the

brunt if it goes wrong. It may in fact not be in the best interests of northern, developed countries like Norway or Canada too, who may prefer increased temperatures for agricultural productivity and other land uses.

Another cause for apprehension is the lack of an international agreement overseeing climate geoengineering. Currently these

methods can be rolled out by any country independently, especially economically strong ones. This would certainly cause an imbalance of power in global politics, as such a country would potentially have control over the global thermostat, with negative repercussions in certain parts of the world. We first have to understand exactly what the effects of various geoengineering measures would be on a regional basis, and ensure that the needs of all nations are met when and if they are executed. This is an issue with global ramifications, and cannot be treated locally. It is therefore absolutely vital that there is a cohesive strategy that is transnational in nature, with defining principles for governance, research, development and possible implementation of these novel technologies. We urge India and other developing nations to take the lead to ensure justice, and ascertain that any and all measures need to consider the wishes of all stakeholders within these vulnerable regions.

As it stands, climate geoengineering could prove to be a complement to other climate solutions and not a silver bullet. If it works well, it might be able to protect climate-vulnerable regions by keeping temperatures below 1.5°C while the world is decarbonising. But the uncertainty and unpredictability around these techniques may have counterproductive implications worldwide, especially in the Global South. The global nature of these methods mandate a strong need for transparency within all the dimensions of these techniques, safeguarding equity as the central theme. However, it is absolutely clear that climate geoengineering is not a substitute for reducing carbon emissions and our focus must continue to be on weaning our economies off carbon, advocating sustainable behavioural practices and building strong resilience to climate change. By prioritising these pathways, we will hopefully never be pressed to use climate geoengineering to protect our planet.

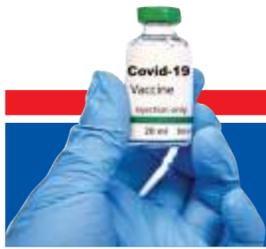
Vinayak Nambiar is Anant Fellow for Climate Action; Sijo Abraham is Anant Fellow for Climate Action; and Mohammed Mofizur Rahman is Instructor, Anant Fellowship for Climate Action

the pioneer agenda

Why is it so difficult to have films seeing the world from women's perspective like 'Thelma and Louise'?
— Son Ye-jin



FROM THE INSIDE



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THINKING URBAN FLOODING THROUGH HISTORY

Indian cities' inability in solving drainage-related problems have economic rather than engineering roots, writes VISWANATHAN VENKATARAMAN as he shares the historical dimensions of this issue

The recent episodes of destructive flooding in cities such as Hyderabad and Bengaluru have once again turned the spotlight on the drainage problems facing urban India.

According to a recent report by the New Delhi based Centre for Science and Environment titled *Why Urban India Floods*, flooding is one of the most predominant hazards facing urban India at present. Experts and commentators who have studied this issue have identified a number of vital causal dimensions to this problem ranging from unplanned urban development, which has led to the encroachment of the natural drainage channels of urban water bodies, to shortcomings in drainage infrastructures which have led to the intensification of the problem.

Missing in much of these discussions, however, are the historical dimensions of this issue. A perusal of these dimensions indicates two things: firstly, urban flooding and the inability of Indian cities to upgrade drainage infrastructures were, in a similar vein to contemporary times, features of urban life even in the British period; secondly, Indian cities' inability in solving these problems in this period had economic rather than engineering roots. Even when comprehensive engineering solutions to these problems were available, at that time they were only haltingly implemented due to the inability of local municipal governments to finance such elaborate schemes on their own. Given that this weakness and institutional structure continues to largely endure in Indian cities, there is a need to provide secure financial backing to local governments for building robust urban infrastructure in the future.

THE INTRODUCTION OF MODERN URBAN DRAINAGE SYSTEMS IN BRITISH INDIA

Modern drainage systems were introduced in the major cities of the world from around 1850 onward as a response to emergent epidemic diseases such as Cholera. Indian cities were no exceptions to this trend as Calcutta, Bombay and Madras city (now Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai) — the three biggest cities in British India — were among the first to introduce these systems there. Kolkata (then Calcutta) introduced its system in 1858, while Mumbai (then Bombay) and Chennai (then Madras) introduced their systems in the late 1870s with the key responsibilities for financing, building, operating and maintaining

these systems lay with the local municipal bodies.

The precise engineering arrangements for draining the cities varied from case to case and was shaped largely by local conditions. Design choice in this period revolved around two modes of drainage — the 'combined' and the 'separate' system of drainage. The 'combined' system transported both stormwater (surface run-off of rainwater) and sewage in a single underground sewer, while the 'separate' system collected and disposed storm water and sewage separately via separate pipes. While Kolkata opted for a 'combined' system due to its topography, Mumbai and Chennai city opted for the 'separate' system guided by the annual rainfall patterns in the city. Since rainfall in the latter two cities were restricted only to a few months in a year, it was felt that stormwater can be separately managed more efficiently. On a similar note, while Kolkata opted to drain its stormwater into a nearby tidal creek by the name *Bidyadhari*, Chennai and Mumbai opted to drain their stormwater into the sea via open drains and channels.

DRAINAGE SYSTEMS IN PRACTICE

Following their introduction, these drainage systems certainly did not have a smooth career and began to develop a number of problems not so different from the drainage problems afflicting contemporary Indian cities. The nature of the problems in each case was strongly conditioned by its design choices. For instance, the cities that adopted the 'separate' system developed practical difficulties in keeping sewage from entering storm water drains and vice versa. This manifested in Mumbai in 1901 when parts of the city's storm water drains had become a public health hazard when a slower uptake of household sewer connections led to the dumping of sewage into these drains. In Chennai city, in the late 1920s, the reverse was the problem as storm water found its way into sewage pipes thereby stretching the sewage disposal arrangements of the system.

While Kolkata's 'combined' system could steer clear of the aforementioned difficulties, it still had to search for new disposal arrangements for its storm water due to the silting up and rise in the bed level of the *Bidyadhari* river by the mid-1910s thereby causing stagnation within the drains.

Furthermore, the carrying capacity of the stormwater drains in all of these cities were

beginning to be overwhelmed resulting in monsoon floods through the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, a national newspaper report from August 1923 complained about Kolkata (then Calcutta) that 'Floods are of daily occurrence, and it is doubtful if this will ever be a thing of the past', while a report on flooding in Mumbai in 1937 noted that 'Flooded Bombay (now Mumbai) streets, are a common sight...' during monsoons. In both these cases, the inadequate capacity of its drainage infrastructure to respond to the rainfall patterns in the city were identified as the most important cause, thus providing us interesting parallels from the past on monsoon flooding in urban India.

HALTING SOLUTIONS

The city governments of that era were certainly not silent spectators as these problems started unraveling from them. They were, as a matter of fact, quite alive to the need to upgrade their respective drainage systems. For instance, Mumbai city's corporation had planned for a project costing nearly ₹1.36 crore to give a comprehensive overhaul of the city's storm water drainage system in 1924, while Kolkata had finalised a scheme to shift its outfall works from *Bidyadhari* river to the river *Kulti* by 1930. But financial stringency facing the local governments in this period meant these schemes were either delayed or suspended or only partially implemented.

While the implementation of Calcutta's (now Kolkata) scheme could eventually commence only in 1935, Bombay's (now Mumbai) scheme for stormwater drainage was not implemented even by 1933. Under the tight financial constraints, the municipal bodies could not go beyond tinkering with the existing system to prevent flooding. In Mumbai, the municipal corporation began to allow storm water to drain off through sewage pipes during periods of monsoon in a bid to reduce flooding of city streets in the 1930s.

This position of financial weakness of municipal bodies is succinctly captured by the following quote from O.J. Wilkinson, who served as the drainage engineer of Kolkata in the mid 1920. He noted that: 'In Calcutta (now Kolkata) we have ... terrific rainstorms to contend with, a drainage problem of unparalleled complexity, a vast conservancy question... Yet the income per head of the population is but a fraction of London or other great European cities. Whereas in London, the rateable value is such that enormous schemes to

meet the growing needs of the community can be financed without much difficulty from municipal funds, in Calcutta (now Kolkata), it is quite impossible for obvious reasons. The drainage question alone is of such decisive importance and so great in extent that the cost of remedial measures may be quite beyond the means of the corporation.'

If this was the case in Kolkata, one of the then richest municipal bodies in the country, then it would certainly not be difficult to fathom what the state of drainage systems in other poorer yet populous cities such as Lucknow and Banaras might have been. Indeed, as of 1937 only 3% of the 517 municipalities across the five provinces of Bengal, Mumbai, Chennai, UP and Punjab had modern sewage disposal systems installed even though the engineering practices behind them had become fairly well rooted in India. Thus, it was not for want of engineering solutions that drainage systems remained inadequate; it was mainly the dire economic conditions that these local bodies found themselves in that prevented the emergence of a functional and satisfactory system of urban drainage in India.

It's now nearly 90 years since the aforementioned incidents took shape. While there are important qualitative differences between the challenges that contemporary urban India faces and what its colonial predecessor did, this article has alluded to some important enduring elements. Chief among this is the economic inability of India's local bodies to build robust public infrastructure for delivering vital services — be it water, sanitation or drainage.

A recent report of the research organisation ICRIER titled *Finances of Municipal Corporation in Metropolitan India* alerts us that the dire financial position of these bodies continues to remain a major stumbling block for upgrading urban infrastructure. While it is difficult to come up with a clear recipe on how to improve urban living conditions in India not the least on the basis of historical work, one starting point certainly could be ensuring greater intervention of central and state governments in providing secure financial backing for these local bodies to build vital public services in our cities.

The author is an engineer turned PhD student with the Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine (CHoSTM) at King's College, London, researching the history of sanitary infrastructures in late colonial Madras city

WHILE IT IS DIFFICULT TO COME UP WITH A CLEAR RECIPE ON HOW TO IMPROVE URBAN LIVING CONDITIONS IN INDIA NOT THE LEAST ON THE BASIS OF HISTORICAL WORK, ONE STARTING POINT CERTAINLY COULD BE ENSURING GREATER INTERVENTION OF CENTRAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS IN PROVIDING SECURE FINANCIAL BACKING FOR THESE LOCAL BODIES TO BUILD VITAL PUBLIC SERVICES IN OUR CITIES



HOME THEATRE

Thriller helmed by women



A CALL TO SPY
Amazon Prime Original
*ing: Radhika Apte, Sarah Megan Thomas, Stana Katic
Rated: 7/10

War-time spy thrillers come with their own nostalgia attached to the sepia shades of a bygone era of conquest and cruelty. *World War 1* stars in such big screen saga in a big way and pretty often but this one comes as a women's special, made even more special by the sterling performances of all the ladies involved — one Jew, the other part Indian and yet another a French woman.

These three women are employed for the first time ever in war territory, by British establishment, and the three of them, guided by a Jewish head of

operations back in London, weave a story that keeps you on edge despite the slow moving events.

Radhika Apte as a sufi signals woman stands out not just because of her exotic looks but also because of her short spunky performance in a role that is small but highly impactful.

The arresting thing about this spy story is the fact that it is helmed by women, unthought of in that era. The story has been spun from a no-nonsense to the bone plot which leaves no space for pauses. So sit tight and enjoy this true story of spies who wore skirts, were courageous, innovative and determined to save the world from Hitler and his dreaded Gestapo even as country after country falls to the Jewish pogrom.

Confusing humdrum

I AM YOUR WOMAN
Amazon Prime Original
*ing: Rachel Brosnahan, Arinze Kene, Marsha Stephanie Blake, Bill Heck, Frankie Faison, Marceline Hugot, James McMenam
Rated: 4/10

This underworld story, not so much about the underworld, but its fallout on the families of criminals, is slow moving, a bit boring and sometimes confusing. In the end, however, it grows on you as the story progresses.

A desperado does shockingly loving things like presenting a child to his wife who can have her own. Then he vanishes, leaving his wife and the little one to go on the run.



The story goes on in the badlands of a 70s America where co-criminals are on the hunt for the wife of this desperado Eddie to find out where he is. The run gets interesting when an ex-wife pops up along with a son and lover who is helping the women be safe.

Not too much of anything to write home about.

Low on scare quotient

DURGAMATI: THE MYTH
Amazon Prime Video
*ing: Bhumi Pednekar, Arshad Warsi, Jisshu Sengupta, Mahie Gill
Rated: 5.5/10

The general premise is that remakes never live up to the expectations of the people. This is because one expects Bollywood to do a better job done by makers from regional cinema. Or it could be that since there are more Hindi speaking audience. But the truth is that if one has already seen something, the copy is never better. The original *Dev Das* was much better or should one say closer to what was in the book by Sarat Chandra. So *Durgamati...* directed by G Ashok, is not an exception to the case in point for those who have seen the Tamil-Telugu version... *Bhaagamathi* directed by him.

This is a tad strange why a director who gave a better version in the original version would fail to evoke the same enthusiasm and not better his fare; that is the whole point of a remake — to make the next one better. More so since it is the Hindi version.

The problem here is not that Bhumi Pednekar has failed to give her best, she has done a great job. The problem here is that there is very little when it comes to the scare quotient. Those that are there don't manage to give you goosebumps. A haunted house, a witch and a folklore steeped in history, all fall flat due to cliches.

Then there is the whole how a politician can never be honest; but here he can't do anything wrong. We have seen enough Bollywood movies that what one sees is not the truth. Hence what happens at the climax is not a surprise. Not good for a crime thriller.

Still all is not lost here if one has not seen the original version. For them, *Durgamati...* is a welcome change. But if one is watching it for horror one will be disappointed.

— Shalini Saksena

Has heart in right place



TORBAAZ
Netflix
*ing: Sanjay Dutt, Nargis Fakhri, Rahul Dev
Rated: 5.5/10

Here is a film that has a lot of promise and after a bit of a shaky start, it manages to suck one into the lives of those who have lost everything and hence hope and chance to pick themselves up and start over in a war-torn country like Afghanistan where the

only hope for the children is to not get sucked into a system that will put them on a path of death and destruction.

Girish Malik's *Torbaaz* takes you on a journey that is full of emotions, has a message, is touching and told from a very different fresh perspective. It is rare for Hindi cinema to tell such powerful stories. But then it has kids, there is bound to be a message and some tears involved.

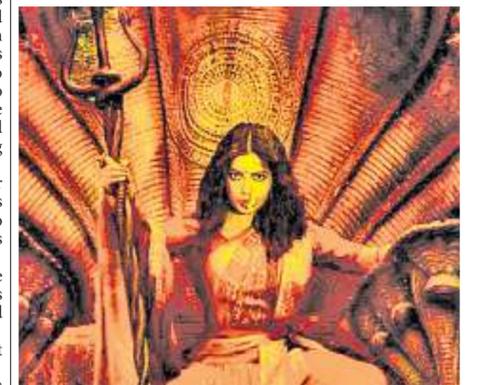
It is good to see Sanjay Dutt play a man who plays the role of an Army man here and despite his personal loss is able to once find purpose when he comes in contact with the children in a refugee camp. His transformation from a man who wants nothing to do with a country where he suffered a loss to a man who is willing to give up his life for the sake of one change for the kids is not without making one sentimental and find a connection— how a parent would do anything to protect his kids and give them a purpose.

Together with the kids who give a stellar performance, Dutt carries the movie on his shoulders rather well. Sadly, Nargis Fakhri doesn't have much to do here. Rahul Dev plays the part of the Taliban well. His body language makes him fit for the role.

The barren landscape is in keeping with the whole idea of how desolate the lives of the people in refugee camps are and how little they have in terms of a good future.

Overall a movie for those who are love good subject and content.

— Shalini Saksena



TELLY TALE

FACE THE ELEPHANT'S WRATH



Sony SAB's fantasy show *Baalveer Returns* is set to take an astonishing twist as the upcoming episodes guarantee thrill with each scene. After failing to lure Vivaan (Vansh Sayani) into his trap, Ray is planning an attack on Baalveer (Dev Joshi) and Vivaan's society with the help of a Siberian elephant. The forthcoming episodes are ready to take the viewers on an adventurous ride as Vivaan's mother Karuna (Jaya Binju) becomes a victim to a mother elephant's wrath.

After a grand comeback, Baalveer returns to Veer Lok with his original powers. Frustrated with his failed attempt of keeping Baalveer dead, Ray (Shoaib Ali) schemes his next havoc on earth with the help of a Siberian elephant. Ray transforms himself into Vivaan and takes away the baby elephant from its mother. An agitated and furious mother elephant marches to the society in search of Vivaan and destroys everything on her way.

Baalveer tries to stop the elephant, but his powers fall short, and he soon realises the situation is out of his control. The elephant marches towards Vivaan to kill him, but Karuna instantly stands in front of Vivaan to protect him. The elephant instead takes away Karuna along with her.

How will Debu and Vivaan save Karuna and find the baby elephant?

Dev Joshi, essaying the role of Baalveer said, "It was exciting to make a comeback as Baalveer. Playing the ghost was an entirely new experience in itself but I certainly missed wearing my Baalveer costume. The upcoming episodes are exciting and a visual delight in itself. Debu and Vivaan will be in a fix as Karuna has been taken away by an angry Elephant and now their biggest task is to find the baby Elephant to bring Karuna back. But the real struggle is the fact that both Vivaan and Debu have no idea of the baby elephant's whereabouts. It will be interesting to watch how they try to find the baby elephant and if they'll be able to save Karuna on time."

SIKANDAR FINE WITH AUDITIONS

ALTBalaji & ZEE5's recently released *Mum Bhai* has been the talk of the tinsel town ever since the series has been dropped on the leading OTT platforms. Apart from the stylish setting of the '90s, the one factor that has won the hearts of the fans is the enthralling characters of the show. Needless to say, audiences are loving

the look of Sikandar Kher, who plays Rama Shetty, a criminal and on-screen best friend of the protagonist, Angad Bedi, a cop. Depicting the underworld era, the narrative of the show revolves around the friendship between a cop and a criminal, and has become an instant success!

But did you know that Sikandar Kher was almost not cast for the role of Rama Shetty? Kher recently revealed that the makers of the show had almost selected someone else for the show. "I gave the audition for the show and did not receive any confirmation for a long time. Much later, Apoorva Lakshia, a dear friend and one of the creators of the show, called to ask why I did not inform him about the audition. I didn't want anyone to refer me for the role or call people to zero down on



me for the role. They had almost selected someone else for the role, but later chose me for Rama."

Speaking about giving auditions for shows, Sikandar said, "I am an actor, and it is a part of my job to give auditions. Much bigger actors in Hollywood are called for auditions, and they do it graciously. The same goes with me, if I get direct calls for the role and I like the role, I accept the offer, or else, I have no problem in auditioning for the same."

Streaming on ALTBalaji and ZEE5, *Mum Bhai* is a crime drama that dives into the Mumbai underworld. The narrative revolves around the friendship between a cop and a criminal, set in the milieu of Mumbai's underbelly from the late eighties to early 2000.

STUDENTS SPECIAL WEEK ON KBC

The upcoming week on *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (KBC) will welcome some of the brightest young minds from across the country, as they channelise their power of knowledge on the Hot Seat. It comes at a time when live online learning emerged as a key leveler of knowledge in these unprecedented times and helped kids continue learning engagingly. This Students Special Week on KBC will see kids between the age group of 10-16 years take the Hot Seat by a storm! Will the audience get to witness a young crorepati?

Facilitating this Students Special Week, Vedantu, a popular Live online learning platform, conducted V Quiz — a



live Host quiz on its platform. Students who participated in this quiz, played consistently and maintained top scores, qualified to be featured on *KBC*. With a high level of participation and engagement, Vedantu witnessed a two fold increase in its daily active users and nearly five times increase in daily V Quiz attendees. From amongst the ones who qualified, eight students will be seen contesting for the Hot Seat.

KBC has gone beyond its capacity as a show year after year, putting the common man at the forefront and celebrating human virtues of self-belief, patience, perseverance, courage, confidence, optimism and intelligence. This season has been no different with people from various walks of life who considered setbacks as a stepping stone for a greater comeback and won Big! In this season, *KBC* has witnessed three crorepatris already.

EXPLORING LOCALES OF PATIALA

Star Plus has announced the launch of its new serial, *Shaurya Aur Anokhi Ki Kahaani*, which will go on air in December. It is the story of Anokhi Bhalla (played by Debattama Saha) an ordinary, young girl from small-town Punjab who has very ordinary dreams like having a career and becoming independent. However, she faces numerous challenges from the deeply patriarchal and chauvinistic society.

Kararharv Sharma (Shaurya Sabharwal) and Debattama Saha (Anokhi) who will soon be seen essaying lead roles in the show have recently spent a few days shooting the opening episodes in Patiala which is Punjab. The entire shoot in Patiala was conducted with utmost precaution ensuring the safety of the cast and crew members.

Talented actor Kararvir Sharma who shoots for his first outdoor sequence amid the pandemic shares his experience and much more. "We began shooting for the show a few days back in Mumbai although few scenes from the opening sequence were balanced as they were required to be shot in a real location to give viewers an authentic feel. Also since the show depicts a Punjabi background, an outdoor shoot was decided to be held especially in Patiala. My co-star, Debattama, and I along with a small cast and crew traveled to Patiala. We shot for a few days and returned to Mumbai safely. It was indeed a memorable experience."

'It was fun to be part of a teleplay'

From Dev Malik in *Des Mein Nikla Hoga Chand* to Ambar Sharma in *Mere Dad Ki Dulhan*, it is always a pleasure for the viewers to see VARUN BADOLA on screen. MUSBA HASHMI chats up the actor for his teleplay *Wrong Turn*

What is your role in Zee Theatre's teleplay *Wrong Turn*?

I play a man who is caught in a wrong situation. He gets stuck in a snowstorm and decides to take refuge in a bungalow where four friends, who are retired lawyers, play a mock trial with everyone who visits that bungalow. They tell my character that you won't be able to move out from this place till morning because of the snowstorm, so why don't you join us in the game. They do a mock trial and find my character guilty of the murder and try to prosecute me. This is what the whole story is and how the story pans out is interesting to watch. It is actually the adaptation of a German play, *Breakdown*.

How interesting was to be a part of such a story?

It was fun. The interest quotient lies in the way the story progresses. The process of making that character and evolving it over time was also thrilling. We rehearsed for it for 20 odd days. That was extremely fun because it was something we didn't get to do in TV or films. That part was interesting.

What made you take up a teleplay?

The reason was that I wanted to explore this genre as well. It's been a long time since I have been on stage and have performed in continuity. It is different feel to shoot something in one go. That was something that attracted me towards this teleplay. And Thank God that I said to it because it was a fantastic experience.

You don several hats, that of a writer, director and an actor. Where do you find yourself most comfortable in?

There is no comfort zone as such. Every field demands a different amount of dedication. When you are acting, you have to justify your character. Only if you will justify the character, you will justify the story. As a writer, you have to create all the characters, so that the actors can justify them on screen. And as a director you have to see



There is no internal conflict between a writer and an actor in me. Because ultimately there is one brain which is driving both of them. But yes, the writer in me does help the actor in a lot of ways

Is there a conflict between the writer, director and actor in you?

There is no internal conflict between a writer and an actor in me. Because ultimately there is one brain which is driving both of them. So while donning these two hats, one has to be completely bipolar to negate yourself. But yes, the writer in me does help the actor in a lot of ways. At times, while doing TV, one tend to gets stuck. The idea here is not to get technical but find solutions to the problems. Here the writer does help you get out of tricky situations a lot of times.

In all these years of your career, is there a change that you have seen in the TV industry?

Yes. There were times when TV got better, than it saw

How do you define acting?

It is a simple thing. Read what is written, understand it and just do it on camera. That is all. Then comes the interest quotient of course. It is like you have to write ABC only, but it is up to you how fancy you want it to be. It is your choice to play with the fonts and styles. You can keep on beautifying it. The best thing about acting is that there can be hundreds of interpretations of a single situation. One can cry in a lot of ways and laugh in a lot of different ways and each way will portray a different meaning.

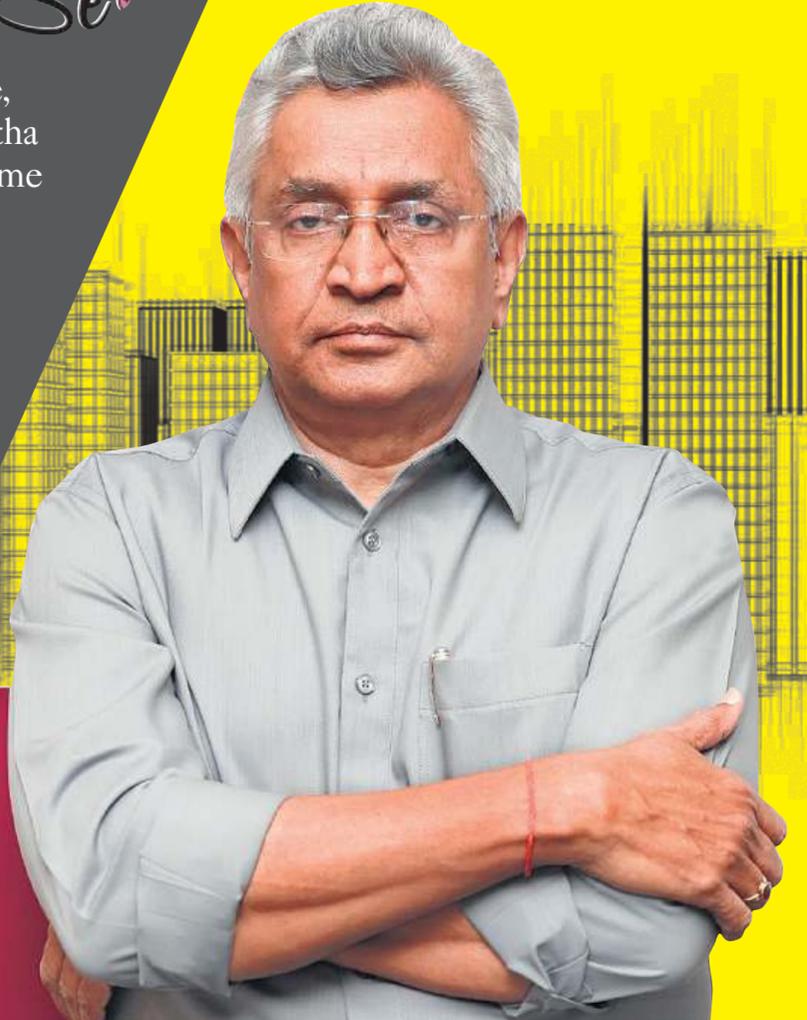
Do we need entertainment for seven days a week? Why not take inspiration from international series and make them time bound?

Like I mentioned before, when we will shift from being content-driven to commercially-driven we will see this happening. The reason is the priority now is to show good content, but to not let go the huge chunk of audience that you have received, even at the cost of compromising on the quality. This mindset needed a change yesterday or even day before yesterday, but we don't let it happen.

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Driven by a desire to make Hepatitis B vaccine more affordable, KI Varaprasad Reddy quit his job as a techie and founded Shantha Biotechnics. Thanks to his perseverance, the vaccine soon became available at a much lesser price. An electronics engineer by education, Varaprasad Reddy has served as a defence scientist for seven years. He was bestowed with the Padma Bhushan award for his contribution in the field of science and engineering. He also received honorary doctorates from Sri Venkateswara University, Gitam University and Vignan University for his pioneering efforts. An ardent lover of music and literature, Varaprasad Reddy speaks to *The Pioneer's* K Ramya Sree about his childhood, the many feathers in his cap, and much more



ENGINEERING A HEALTHY SOCIETY

ROWING UP WITH A COMMUNIST UNCLE...

G I was born in November 1948, and hail from a remote village in the Nellore district. Since there were no hospitals in remote areas back then, my mother was taken to Nellore town where I was born in the St Joseph's Hospital. At the age of 5, I was sent to my maternal uncle's place for my education. I was brought up by my maternal uncle. It was not just the remoteness of my native village; my mother felt that if I grew up in a joint family along with a lot of other kids in the same house, I might lack discipline. My uncle, being a staunch Communist, never married and dedicated his life to the party.

DISCIPLINED, CONTROLLED CHILDHOOD...

With his principles, my uncle trained me and his disciples very strictly. I went to school and college in Nellore. During my Engineering, I moved to Kakinada and then to Hyderabad. In his old age, my uncle came to live with me and spent his last years at my home. My childhood was disciplined, controlled, and Left-oriented. My parents are landlords so they were more or less right-oriented. I was more or less sandwiched between my uncle on the Left and my parents on the Right. I got the best of both points of view, and I learnt where to apply atheism and where to apply theism. I became more pragmatic and they made me believe in humanism.

LIMITED FREEDOM...

My early life was very structured — I had to wake up at 4 am every day, do my exercises, and my studying. I wasn't allowed to watch films as and when I wished. When I was given permission to watch a movie, it was only after thorough vetting, based on the director, music director, and other aspects of the movie, that too only once a month. I wasn't left to grow up in the wild, rather, I was like a well taken care of indoor plant. Everything to do with me was taken care of and petted. I was not given any freedom. Even during my playtime, I had to go out and play whether I was interested or not. I was given dedicated time for reading, listening to music, playing, exercise, etc. I wasn't allowed to eat more than two times a day. With the kind of upbringing I had, there was no scope for jealousy or comparisons. We believed everything was equal. There were no disparities. In this case, everyone is equal and we have to see only the 'atma' in everyone. When you are away from jealousy, anger, comparison, you are always happy. I was always happy as a child and I'm happy even today.



Another proud moment was when the then Prime Minister AB Vajpayee was trying to make peace with Pakistan. He wanted to strengthen ties with Pakistan and was promoting bus service to Lahore. The Pakistanis said "the bus is fine, we want the Hepatitis B vaccine from Shantha Biotechnics for our country". Until then there were no trade relations between India and Pakistan. We donated 1 million doses through the Prime Minister's Office



A BUSY MAN...

I listen to music and read a lot of books if I have any free time. That is my avocation. I don't have any free time. I engage myself in several meetings. I'm always busy as I'm the board member of several companies and I mentor several start-ups. I also go to many schools and colleges to motivate children and to imbibe in them nationalism, our culture, traditions, and the greatness of society. In my opinion, the youth should be told about their past. The country now has forgotten its traditions and systems of education. Somebody has to tell them that they should go back to their roots and that is a mission right now. We should bring back our glorious past.

CONNECT WITH 'MAHANATI'...

I personally know the family of actress Savitri. Her daughter got married to one of my school friends. I used to visit them. One of my friend's daughter, Pallavi, wanted to write about Savitri. I introduced her to the actress' family. She collected a lot of photos, incidents. I got it published and got it launched by Nageswar Rao and others. Later this book was shared with a friend when she visited my home. She shared the same with her son-in-law Nag Aswin. He was inspired by the book and decided to make a film on the actress, based on the book. I was not directly involved in the making of 'Mahanati'. My role ended after the book was completed and published. The makers of the film acknowledged that the book was picked up from my home and they are thankful for it.

BUSY, BUT A TRUE FAMILY MAN...

I'm married to Vasantha, my first cousin. When I used to visit my parents, we would see each other and a natural affection developed. She liked me and I accepted her love and we got married. In a way, it's an arranged-love, love-arranged marriage. I have two daughters — Sangeeta and Sravanthi and both are married. My father, Venkata Ramana Reddy, passed away 14 years ago and my mother Shanthamma passed away three years back. Now I live alone with my wife. Both my daughters live in Jubilee Hills. My elder daughter has twin daughters who are doing their under-graduation in New York. My younger daughter has two kids who are studying in Rishi Valley School. My elder son-in-law is an industrialist and the younger one is a software engineer. My younger daughter worked with me in Shantha Biotechnics for almost 10 years. Since we live far away from the city, we have our kitchen garden, cows for everyday dairy needs, etc. My wife is comfortable staying at home and taking care of everything. We are all well engaged and happy with our responsibilities.

A DOTING PARENT...

My maternal uncle was too strict. He inadvertently killed my childhood pleasures and I didn't want to do the same with my children. That's why I gave them freedom. They enjoyed their childhood. But they haven't gone out of hand. They are quite disciplined as well. They are well-read and well-groomed. The only thing is that they are not achievers. They couldn't achieve what I did, in my life. They did not have those targets. They took everything casually since there were no long-term goals.

ACHIEVING WHAT THE GOVT COULDN'T...

I did what our government could not do. When there was a need for a vaccine, our government could have easily developed it at the state-owned laboratories. Unfortunately, those in power lacked that vision. Indian scientists are at the top of the world. They are superior to any other in the world. But we do not have proper leaders who could inspire our scientists to make a good product. During a crisis when our country was affected by Hepatitis B infection, 45 million people were affected and the government could not do anything positive because of the high expenditure of the vaccine. I ventured to produce the vaccine locally and make it affordable for the common man. What was sold at Rs 840, I brought it down to Rs 50, which is now Rs 23. Even today, it is sold at \$80 in the US. After 11 years of waiting, the Government of India added it to its immunisation schedule and it was the greatest moment for me. It was the best thing I have ever done. Not just in India, the price of the vaccine fell because of what I produced. The biotech revolution has come to India because of Shantha Biotechnics.

BUILDING INDIA-PAK TRADE RELATIONS ...

Another proud moment was when the then Prime Minister AB Vajpayee was trying to make peace with Pakistan. He wanted to strengthen ties with Pakistan and was promoting bus service to Lahore. The Pakistanis said "the bus is fine, we want the Hepatitis B vaccine from Shantha Biotechnics for our country". Until then there were no trade relations between India and Pakistan. We donated 1 million doses through the Prime Minister's Office.

NOT IN THE RAT RACE...

Even today, I enjoy my music and my literature despite my very stressful modern life. I'm not in the rat race the urban world is caught in. I moved away from my bungalow in Jubilee Hills and I am now living in Rajendranagar. I did not like what was happening in the area. You find shops everywhere and it is all crowded. I want to live close to nature. I'm living very aloof with no comparisons and rat race. I'm not in that hurried life. I'm at peace now.

SHORT TAKES:

- ❑ **The latest film that you watched:** I rarely watch the latest films. I watch old films such as Gundamma Katha. My latest watch which I liked was the 'Sathamnam Bhavathi'.
- ❑ **Passionate about:** Life and humour. We bow to nature. We can see things, digest them and we can enjoy the colours. We are indebted to an unknown force. We should pay back by being nice to society. You should be useful for as long as you are living. Humour will give you health.
- ❑ **What do you like to read the most:** Although I read a lot of literature, I don't like fiction. I read biographies and books on people, how useful they are to society. I like humour, music, and biographies.
- ❑ **Your favourite author:** In Telugu, I like Mullapudi Venkata Ramana and Sri Ramana, another legend in humour.
- ❑ **Do you play any musical instrument:** I tried to learn veena but couldn't master it. I have a lot of interest in music. I take time to create music. I request music directors to make some music for me. I got about 300 hours of music composed. I have collected a lot of music. I distribute it to friends free of cost.